ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

RENEGOTIATING SPACE AROUND THE MULTICULTURAL
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH TABLE

TOWARDS THE INTENTIONAL INTERCULTURAL INCLUSION
OF ETHNICALLY-MINORITISED WOMEN

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requirements of Anglia Ruskin University
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ABSTRACT
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Title: Re-negotiating space around the multicultural United Reformed Church table.
Subtitle: Towards the intentional intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women.

by Tessa Dale Henry-Robinson

The research question asks: How might space around the multicultural table be renegotiated in a way that facilitates the intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women? This involved analysing: what Black/ethnically-minoritised women in two United Reformed Church (URC) congregations think and feel about their positioning within the URC; ascertaining how the significance of what they say can be teased out in light of womanist practical theology; and uncovering what this says to the contemporary URC.

A discussion ensued on the possible impact on the denomination, and on the women themselves, of being absent/missing. Sheppard's womanist practical theological perspective which urges dialogue "between psychoanalytic and womanist perspectives" that "presupposes the valuing of inner life in womanist thought" (2011, p.76) assisted this discussion. Exploring the historical experiences of the women's social, cultural, psychological realities substantiated the need for employing embodiment thinking as an appropriate undergirding. An inductive case study approach obtained qualitative data using observation techniques in two URC congregations, and questionnaire-interviews with twelve Black/ethnically-minoritised women in those settings.

Utilising memoing as an analytical tool, four issues emerged: (1) fear of being ignored and left-out (2) desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves (3) need to be seen as fully human, and (4) intention to challenge the 'White' world environment. The issues were subjected to a womanist theological analysis, as God's Word was recognised as being the highest source of authority for both the women and the denomination. The issues were further explored considering womanist biblical interpretation of Old and New Testament figures of – Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman.

From this discussion emerged a new theological framework—'A womanist embodiment theology'. Arising from this theological development, I introduced the concept of *insiders-without* for the context of present research*, which provides an identity categorisation/social location framing, inspired by but different from Collins' (1992) coined *outsiders-within* identity location. On this understanding, I offer practical conclusions for the URC to consider.

Keywords: ethnically-minoritised; raced; womanist practical theology; embodiment; intersectionality; constructivism.

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APPENDIX i. Henry-Robinson. T. 2011. Paper 1–Listening to the Voices: Why are Black women presently not visible in leadership roles in the wider URC?

APPENDIX ii. Henry-Robinson. T. 2012. Paper 2–[A] Qualitative Account of a Relationship Story between the URC and BME women. This work was later published (See below).

Henry-Robinson. T. 2014. A Qualitative Account of a Relationship Story between the URC and BME women, in the *International Journal of Black Theology.* **12**(1), pp.58-79.

APPENDIX iii. Henry-Robinson. T. 2014. Paper 3–The Proposal entitled Renegotiating Space around the URC table; beyond good intentions towards intentional inclusion of BAME women.

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Submitted to Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology (DProf).

I declare that, except where others are attributed explicitly, the work presented in this thesis is my own work.

Word count 59,000 (including Abstract, diagrams and tables but excluding appendices, and reference list).

ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS

BP	Black Power
BBP	British Black Panther
B(A)ME	Black (Asian) Minority Ethnic
CoG	Cascades of Grace
CofE	Church of England
CRCW	Church Related Community Worker
GA	General Assembly
GA Mod	Moderator of General Assembly
GIM	Global and Intercultural Ministries
GS	General Secretary
MC	Mission Council
Mod	Moderator
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RJIM	Racial Justice Intercultural Ministry
RJMM	Racial Justice Multicultural Ministry
RCL	Resource Centre for Learning
TeamURC	Together, Ethnic and Minority URC
Trinbago	Trinidad and Tobago
URC	United Reformed Church
Vision2020	URC Vision for the Year 2020

PREAMBLE

In this thesis, I avoid using Black (Asian) Minority Ethnic (BME and/or BAME) which are widely used in the United Kingdom (UK) to describe those who are marginalised/racialised/othered and viewed or treated as outsiders because of their ethnicity. While these descriptions/acronyms appear in my three already examined Stage 1 papers for this Doctorate in Practical Theology (DProf), the questionnaire, and various appendices for this thesis at Stage 2, I have come to see them as problematic labels which support positions of dominance and privilege.

I embrace and use the description 'Black' and employ ethnically-minoritised throughout. These are political terms used not simply to state that minoritised voices need to be heard and taken seriously. I use them to address social, psychological, cultural and historical issues of groups, including the women at the centre of present research, who are effectively minoritised by others and by 'the system'. Young, whose expertise is gender studies, assists an understanding of this position in her article 'Amid the "Altar Call"' (Young, 2019, [online]), and states that:

> the practice of identifying minorities and minority groups is essentially the same as creating minoritized subjects and subjectivity. Such practices of organizing human existence into distinctive categories produces fundamentally unequal and certainly hierarchically arranged relations that in turn produce differently valued human populations and individuals.

I also use the word 'raced', which signifies this practice, as extensively employed by Sheppard (2016), whose work provides the basis for my theological thinking. In her contribution to *Conundrums in Practical Theology* entitled 'Raced Bodies' Sheppard wants to know "how are practical

theological scholarship and practice implicated in the invisibility of lived raced bodies?" (in Mercer & Miller-McLemore, 2016, p.220).

The concepts of praxis and agency are introduced in relation to the subtitle 'towards intentional intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women'. That is, praxis linked to the denomination's intention of intercultural inclusion (cultural and social) in negotiating space around the multicultural URC table. Agency is linked to embodiment of the realities of the women at the centre of my research (psychological experiences and historical influences), related to the significance of their participation and roles in the denomination.

At times I refer to "a seat at the table" (Chisholm, 1968) to mean participation, peer equality and inclusion in decision-making and leadership of the denomination at General Assembly (GA), Mission Council (MC), Synods, Synod committees and the Church meeting. GA is the denomination's fundamental decision-making body responsible for committees that manage "communications, education and learning, discipleship, mission, safeguarding, ecumenical work, global justice and church and society" (About us–urc.org.uk). In the URC, decisions are made in a conciliar fashion, and MC is the executive decision-making body responsible to GA. Synods are administrators of congregations and Synod committees represent congregations in their Synod (to MC) as the church meeting is also a decision-making body.

Throughout this thesis, I use words to which I affix 'ness' to indicate particularity, for example: 'womanness'—particular way of being a woman; 'humanness'—particular way of being human; 'beingness'—particular way of being in the world. I use the NRSV and at times refer to the NIV.

SECTION I
Research Interest

"No call could be detected." These words, although simple, launched both an introspection and an exploration which has inevitably led me to a thesis topic of significance to the future growth of the United Reformed Church (URC). For the URC, a call is "something personal and very special". The denomination proclaims "that God lovingly calls us, each one, into the community of the church" (Nature, Faith & Order, p.3). As a human being involved in any process, I want to understand and be understood, and I cannot ignore feelings of being misjudged and rejected. Hearing those five words alongside the fact that I felt a strong call to serve God through ministry, and being the only Black woman present where all of the assessors were White, caused me to feel profoundly misunderstood. While I am not questioning the decision reached, I wondered if the combination of what I embody historically, culturally and socially made me unsuccessful.

In her article 'Womanist Theology', womanist ethicist Townes, states that "womanist theology evolved from the life and witness of Black women" (2003, p.160). I knew that the panel could either accept me for training or not, but it was the sum of my experiences that caused me concern. My witness is to how and what I felt in the process, which is that the human beingness that I embody and the possibility that I possess the requisite pastoral disposition, or even a genuine calling, felt overlooked.

I had begun studying theology and training for lay ministry in the denomination before entering the candidating process. However, in the months and years following, I was frequently called upon to lead worship and participate in development projects in the denomination. Then, was this call I kept hearing, to ordained ministry? This dilemma created a disorienting cognitive dissonance in terms of understanding the strength of my emotional response and the cognitive regulation of this emotional response (Festinger

1957, vi–vii).

Consequently, I wanted to identify what was happening, discern God's purpose and vision for me, reorient myself, and act. My experience is my witness, and I am able to recognise it as being a practical embodiment of a Black woman's experience, which calls for the critical analysis of womanist theology.

CHAPTER ONE

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Situating the Research

Introduction

This thesis is grounded in practical theology which offers my research the opportunity to address the everyday practice and life of the Church (Latini, 2011). Since the 1960s, practical theology has developed into an academic discipline within theology that is concerned with how people live out their faith on a daily basis. Bennett (2014), practical theologian and former Director of the DProf programme in the Cambridge Theological Federation, explains that: "the research conducted by candidates is not something detached from their lives" (Bennett & Lyall 2014, p.196). As a DProf candidate I am conducting research in which I am invested on both professional and personal levels (Bennett & Lyall, 2014).

In this chapter, I begin by recalling my feelings of being misunderstood and rejected at the assessment stage of my first candidating (for ministry) process which led me to want to find out what was happening with Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the URC. Since I identify as a womanist theologian, my womanist theological commitments caused me to reflect theologically from a womanist perspective, on what I witnessed of the process, in my Stage 1 papers for this DProf (Appendices i-iii).

Additionally, I obtained information from the denomination's department for Racial Justice and Intercultural Ministries (RJIM) which deals with matters of racial and intercultural justice (now Global and Intercultural Ministries (GIM)). The information revealed that at the time of my candidating, Black/ethnically-minoritised membership (particularly women) was increasing significantly; that while White women were rapidly increasing at the table of leadership positions, decision-making, and ministry, this was not the same for Black/ethnically-minoritised women (Appendix i).

In this thesis, I seek to discover how raced bodies are impacted by their experiences. My focus is on women whose backgrounds might be theologically and ethnically

diverse, and who bring with them their cultural and historical influences, social and psychological complexities and their particular womanness. The phenomenon being discussed is a complex one because the people I perceive to be missing are minoritised on more than one level. I immediately recognised that I would need to negotiate my womanist commitments and the practical grounding of this thesis, to begin to interrogate the problem of the absent/missing women.

Before summarising, I present—Looking backward-moving forward; My context; Research question and focus; Key aims; Not using—"the master's tools"; Formation; Rationale; Investigation; Thesis structure and layout; and Professional path.

Looking backward—moving forward
Given the denomination's well-documented concern for inclusion and equality, I look at who have been present at the table of leadership and decision-making in the URC. Successive URC yearbooks reveal the participation of women in the denomination's leadership and decision-making apparatuses. The 2020 yearbook is no exception; it confirms a more than fifty percent presence of women in ministry in the denomination (Appendix iv). This is cause for celebration. But what does the leadership apparatus look like?

The denomination has a General Secretariat which oversees three departments; Administration and Resources; Mission; and Discipleship. The Secretariat is led by a General Secretary (GS) who is White male. Two of the three secretaries are White women, neither of whom are ordained, and the third, both outgoing and incoming, are White males. With regard to the posts of Moderator of GA (GA Mod), and Synod Moderator (Mod), since the URC's 1972 formation, the GS has principally been White male with the exception of one White woman (2008-2014). Regarding GA Mod, this role has been served principally by White people which includes six White women. At the time of writing, the GA Mods (lay and ordained) are male and female—both White. One visible minority male served from 2012 to 2014. Thus far, no ethnically-minoritised women have served in any of the aforementioned roles.

As documented in the 2020 URC yearbook, the total number of stipendiary and non-stipendiary, retired, semi-retired (retired but still active) ministers, is 1731 (women

outnumber men). This includes current church-related community workers (CRCWs), and current ordinands in their final year of training to become ministers of the Word and Sacraments in the URC. Fifty-one, which represents 2.9% of the total, are Black/ethnically-minoritised ministers and CRCWs—ten women, and forty-one men. Of this forty-one, thirty-one entered into URC ministry from partner churches abroad (Appendix iv). The most recent survey was carried out in 2011 by then RJIM. It revealed that over ten percent of URC membership are ethnically-minoritised people, this included neither children nor adherents (See Appendix v).

My context (roles and interests)
Between 2009 (when I first candidated) and the present, four ethnically-minoritised women have successfully gone through the URC candidating process; three have been ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacraments and one commissioned as CRCW. Having been encouraged by colleagues, family and friends to again try to answer the call to ministry I continued to hear, I then re-candidated in 2014 and was successful. Hence, I am among that additional three women of ethnically-minoritised backgrounds in ordained ministry, ministering in a declared multicultural denomination on "an intercultural journey", which seeks to embrace "a range of opinions about theology and church life" (Multicultural Church, Intercultural Habit, 2020, p.5).

Upon reflection, the difference in my first and second assessment experiences is that at the first one, everyone (assessment panel, Church House, College Representatives and Chaplain) was White. Second time around, the Chaplain and one of the assessors were ethnically-minoritised people. In pointing out the differences between the first and second assessment panels, I am not suggesting that only other ethnically-minoritised people can discern the calls of ethnically-minoritised people, nor that we/they hear and express calls differently. I am simply indicating that there was that difference.

When I started this DProf, I was a lay preacher seeking ways to understand and serve God. Now as minister since 2018, I am responsible for a four-congregation pastorate, having been through four years (2014-2018) of ministerial training. Additionally, I served on Ministries sub-committee which is responsible for accreditation and

maintaining the roll of ministers (Clergy and Office Holders, 2020). I also performed the role of coordinator responsible for organising the racial and intercultural justice work in Yorkshire Synod.

Since 2010, I have been a member of an annual gathering of lay and ordained racially-minoritised members called TeamURC who meet to address challenges that affect the lived experiences of ethnically-minoritised people in the URC. Responding to a need to find ways to encourage and empower the denomination's Black/ethnically-minoritised women, the following year, RJIM/GIM appointed five women to the task from the TeamURC gathering, including me. To do this work, we founded Cascades of Grace (CoG). Overall, I am interested in the empowerment and progress of women who possess raced bodies in particular, marginalised people in general, and the denomination as a whole.

This is in-keeping-with the womanist theologian's primary concern for, and commitment to, Black/ethnically-minoritised women and girls, and the whole humanity (Walker, 1983). Novelist, essayist and activist, Walker, developed the term "womanist" which appeared in her 1979 essay 'Coming Apart' later published in Lederer's 1980 anthology. One of Walker's characters used "womanist" to describe herself, and when questioned about the meaning, explained that a "womanist is a feminist, only more common", which Walker footnotes as meaning "instinctively pro-woman" (1980, p.100).

In her 1983 book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Walker further developed the term to mean Black feminist, curious, grown up and serious, amongst such other things as "[W]womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender," and womanist is "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (pp.xi, 2). Womanism, therefore, is a perspective that is concerned with survival, empowerment, and helping to reframe the narrative of Black/ethnically-marginalised women and people's lives, reconstructing old ways of thinking, and constructing new knowledge. Following this thinking, my concern is for the denomination to attain its future vision to develop an intercultural habit, which is interested in identity inclusion, diversity, hospitality, justice and peace. All of my roles and interests in the denomination involve working across cultures.

My commitment to the URC with its united, reformed, multicultural-intercultural identity is both personal and professional. One aspect of this is with the denomination's mandate to move towards an intercultural habit, while recognising that it is multicultural, as part of its future mission (Vision2020, 2011). I am committed to serving God through my ministry and the denomination. However, while my faith and service are carried out through the denomination, I believe in the existence of a God who reaches beyond denominations and faiths and has no boundaries. My commitment also extends towards the empowerment and inclusion of the marginalised in the denomination. Most of the work I do towards this intention is in consultation with GIM, which is concerned with global conversations and intercultural relations.

Research question and focus

My research question is: How might space around the multicultural table be renegotiated in such a way that facilitates the intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women? The URC declared itself multicultural in 2005, but the term "multicultural church, intercultural habit" was coined in 2012 for URC use by then GIM secretary and postcolonial theologian, Michael Jagessar, to describe the denomination's way of being and how it proposes to function going forward (Appendix iv). Alongside ministering in four congregations, I work in ways to assist in the development of projects and workshops aimed at inviting diverse people to share their stories and experiences.

I am particularly committed to the work of empowering bodies and voices, especially those of Black/ethnically-minoritised women, to participate alongside those that are usually present and speaking. In order to answer my research question, I ask: what do ethnically-minoritised women in two URC congregations think and feel about their positioning within the URC? I also ask: how can the significance of what they say be teased out in the light of womanist practical theology? And, what has this to say to the contemporary URC?

In addressing the research question, I connect the individual epistemologies of both womanist and practical theologies to approach an understanding of how experiences that Black/ethnically-minoritised women and girls embody in their social settings through praxis, impact their whole bodies. Sheppard's (2011) developing womanist practical theological perspective will assist me with this undertaking. I want to know how absence from the table positions ethnically-minoritised women, not just physically but psychologically and socially, and how this positioning affects the way the denomination functions.

Respectively, I engage with passages from Genesis 16:1-16; 21: 9-21, and Mark 7:24-30 in a way that allows me to revisit, reimagine, revise, and retell the stories. These are embodiment stories which explore how the women at the centre of each experience their womanness. In different ways, both Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman are insiders who must navigate the environments they embody psychologically and socially, as perceived outsiders. While the expectation of this thesis is on practice as it is grounded in practical theology, these biblical stories are being called upon to assist me to invite a fresh interpretation of the problem of this thesis and expand the discourse.

Although I engage with both the OT and NT biblical readings, my principal focus will be on the OT story as it presents for womanist theologian Williams (1993) a blueprint or model of God's activity and God's revelation in the world. Through this model, the womanist theologian is able, in this pericope, to see Hagar's story "as a resource for social, personal and religious issues" that includes "motherhood, surrogacy (in both pre-and post-Civil War periods), ethnicity (particularly a focus on color), and wilderness (as it parallels Hagar's life in the wild) in contemporary Black woman's lives" (Townes, 2003, p.168, referencing Williams, 1993).

This model places less emphasis on men's authority and gives more power to women. With this in mind, I bring into the frame, the Syrophoenician woman's encounter with Jesus at Mark 7. It causes me to consider the situation of the Dalits in India who are categorised as the lowest in the caste system and who continue to fight to be seen and heard. I am drawn to

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Nelavala's (2006) Dalit perspective, from where she argues that "in the way the Syrophoenician woman obtains what she beseeches" coupled with the way Jesus responds to her, allows Nelavala to see, emphasised in this pericope, that 'liberation will be completed only when the oppressed and the oppressor work together' (p.64). Manchala (2011), editor of *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-First Century*, reviews work by Dalit theologian Rajkumar (2010) on liberative praxis. Around the story of the Syrophoenician/Canaanite woman, Rajkumar holds Dalit praxis as "subverting the politics of the "othering"" along with "Jesus' learning from the woman as a liberative praxis, in her refusal to be "othered"" (Manchala, 2011, p.129).

I anticipate that reading these biblical stories using womanist biblical interpretation for enquiry and analysis, paying attention to how minoritised women embody their social and psychological experiences, will help to expand the discourse, and invite a fresh interpretation. Also engaging with other lenses through which these stories are read — as I do in this thesis — will shed light on the contemporary situation of ethnically-minoritised women's place in their faith and within their denomination.

The OT, also referred to as the Scriptures and/or Hebrew Bible (HB) was Jesus' source for information and inspiration. It concerns "the ways in which the texts and all that is related to them—their beliefs, characters, ideas, motifs, stories, underlying traditions—have been understood, used, transmitted, translated, interpreted, expressed, and retold within any medium since their conception"; these ways are still evolving (Gray, 2016, p.405). The OT "provides a crucial historical and literary context for understanding the NT" (Smith & Kim, 2018, p.41). It forms the story of the early acts of God, while the NT is written to be the charter for God's people in the in-between time of the first and second comings of Jesus (Wright, 1991).

Key aims
This study is animated by key aims which are to examine URC goals about inclusion of diverse voices in leadership and decision-making in the denomination. It looks at three of its ten Vision2020 mission statements, paying attention to Statements 2, 5 and

9 focusing on local, Synod, and assembly indicators, to derive from two congregations what is happening locally with members who are women of Black/ethnically-minoritised backgrounds (Vision2020). Additionally, it aims to undertake an analysis of the findings from womanist practical and biblical perspectives to try to understand how the women's experiences in the denomination impact their human beingness, in relation to how they live out their faith.

Statement 2 is about "Identity" and engages my focus on renegotiating and repositioning with regard to identity, belonging, invitation, intercultural inclusion, and to promote self-reflexive questioning, such as: who am I? and to what do I belong? In terms of local, Synod, and assembly levels, indicators in this Statement include, but are not limited to, respectively: "offering a warm space, warm coffee and warm welcome to people from any background"; "demonstrating clear links between policies and plans and 'who we are' as a denomination" and "demonstrable support to Synods to nurture and develop their own regional and national identities" (Vision2020, p.2).

Statement 5 is about "Diversity and hospitality" and helps me address the question of what it means, in practice, to be an inclusive church open to embracing diversity in hospitable ways. On the local, Synod, assembly level, indicators include, but are not limited to, respectively: "the number of members who have undertaken 'training' about diversity and inclusiveness"; "the number of churches who regularly monitor their membership and eldership to ensure inclusiveness"; and "representation and participation of all minority and excluded groups (as spelt out by our Equal Opportunities policy and the Equalities Act 2010) on key councils, committees and task groups" (Vision2020, p.5).

Statement 9 is about "Justice and peace" and points me towards discovering what justice and peace should look like. On the local, Synod, assembly level, indicators include, but are not limited to, respectively: "integrating justice issues within worship in a planned and regular way"; and checking the "number of churches actively participating in a Synod or Assembly—promoted activity or campaign addressing an issue of justice" (Vision2020, p.9).

Working with these Statements and indicators provide me an opportunity to answer the research question and contribute to developing knowledge in the field of womanist practical theology through what might be revealed about patterns of behaviour, feelings, and perceptions. The aim being, to especially concentrate on my third sub-question: What has this to say to the contemporary URC?

Not using—"the master's tools"

From Walker's "womanist" was derived womanism and womanist theology, as theoretical and theological vantage positions. In her book *Deeper Shades of Purple; Womanism in Religion and Society,* womanist ethicist Floyd-Thomas (2006) identifies four tenets of liberative thinking pertaining to minoritised women which are central to this thesis. She thus expands on the definition of womanism, which Walker outlines (1983). Floyd-Thomas identifies 1. "radical subjectivity", 2. "traditional communalism"; 3. "redemptive self-love" and 4. "critical engagement" (2006, p.72-74). Respectively, these tenets can be applied to women who find themselves minoritised on the basis of culture, ethnicity/race, as they necessarily involve using appropriate tools to challenge dominant social norms and values.

This, Floyd-Thomas (2006) detects in Walker's (1983) reference to Black/brown women and girls' outrageous, courageous, audacious and willful behaviour, and their desire to acquire knowledge. It also necessitates loving the Black/brown, woman/girl self, despite how those bodies are portrayed, which Floyd-Thomas argues is what Walker perceives as being committed to the whole people. This requires unconditionally loving the self and handing down kindness towards each other and to the self, as healing strategies. Floyd-Thomas (2006) finds that acquisition of knowledge is also an important tenet in how Walker portrays womanism. This knowing is not just for self-development but for the benefit of the whole community. The fourth tenet finds Floyd-Thomas (2006) reasserting that critical engagement for Walker, involves treating with systemic issues that undergird the intersections of race, sex and class oppression.

The term womanist was derived from the term "womanish" which is used in parts of the Americas and Caribbean including my nation of birth, Trinidad and Tobago (Trinbago). I grew up understanding the term as playfully attributed to girls and young

women who are perceived as acting older than their age, or curious beyond their years and/or perceived abilities, who possess a will to develop their own ways of knowing. Diverse women have the capacity to develop new knowledge and will do this differently. Womanist thinkers operate diversely as ethicists, theologians, biblical scholars, researchers, and so on, and use different approaches to seek deeper knowledge.

For womanist theologian, Thomas (1999), we all have a responsibility to develop approaches that could design new materials and tools that have the capacity to tear down or destroy. Black feminist, writer, civil rights activist, Lorde, argues that these approaches ought to be able to dismantle what seems like indestructible knowledge that has been designed, built, constructed and disseminated with those original materials and tools (1984, pp.113-114). These tools and original materials to which Thomas (1999) and Lorde refer, are identified by Lorde as "the master's tools" (1984, p.114). This refers to constructed norms that have laid the foundations which build the framework for western societies to thrive, such as slavery, colonialism, empire, and so on. Thus, a new approach is needed to penetrate and dismantle those constructs that restrict, constrain, and oppress minoritised women. Hence, Lorde's caution that "the master's tools" are not capable of dismantling indestructible constructs, is duly noted (1984, p.114).

In terms of power dynamics at play in the URC, while there are published policies (Vision2020); (Basis of Union), crafted to address inclusion there are few outward signs of inclusion pertaining to the positionality and praxis of ethnically-minoritised women in the denomination's leadership and decision-making. That to date these women are missing from or are not visible at the multicultural URC table has implications for their situatedness and positioning and what others in the URC hold to be true about them.

Given that I seek to understand the impact of URC praxis on the denomination's Black/ethnically-minoritised women, this thesis is submitted for a DProf in practical theology, which is amenable to attending to these problems. Practical theologian, Miller-McLemore (2016), in her own contribution to *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, describes practical theology as not without its limitations, and cautions that

practical theologians in various ways find themselves located as "outsiders within" (2016, p.211). Miller-McLemore uses the term "outsiders-within" to describe practical theologians as practitioners who are "only partially belonging", yet who understand "a great deal from the margins about the complexities of theological knowledge" (2016, p.211).

Formation

In terms of historical and structural issues, the URC is situated firmly in the tradition of religious nonconformity. In a document entitled A brief history of the United Reformed Church, nonconformity is described as "a history of 'second-classness'", which in essence suggests an inclination towards defining itself as – "not Anglicans, not 'establishment'". However, some nonconformist denominations were beginning, by the time the First World War broke out in 1914, to prefer "the more positive title of Free Churches. That in itself was indicative of a shift of identity" (A brief history, 2016, p.7). The URC came into being decades later, in fact its history recalls that the union began with "the English Presbyterians" who, in 1963, renewed "conversations with the Congregationalists", the result of which was that in 1972, the URC was formed. Then in 1981, "some Churches of Christ congregations joined" and finally in 2000, the Congregational Union of Scotland joined (A brief history, 2016, pp.4-5).

Notwithstanding its mainly nonconformist identity, the URC bears marks of its predecesors' identity, what pastor, teacher, writer and consultant Roxburgh (2015) calls "Euro-tribal churches" (p.3). These churches, according to Episcopal Canon, priest and author, Spellars (2021), carry "cultural tendencies of its forebears" (p.14), of colonialism, patriarchy and whiteness, linked to an European empire mindset. This was in evidence at the denomination's inaugural service at Westminster Abbey in 1972 which was overwhelmingly led by White men. Today, this persists with the absence of ethnically-minoritised people, women in particular, at MC and GA gatherings. This mindset has impacted negatively on the lived experiences of people of diversity.

From around the 1940s to the 1970s, people from various former colonies in Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa relocated to the UK. A large number arrived on the MV Empire Windrush to take up new jobs as invitees of the state, others for education, or to take

advantage of the economic and then-considered privileged status of colony and the much-vaunted better quality of life that the UK claimed to possess as a colonial power. Many came from British 'colonies' and automatically flocked to churches to which they belonged or were acquainted "back home"; largely the Church of England (CofE) which solicited membership in their countries. Christian socialist, Leech (1988), in his book *Struggle in Babylon*, explains that women were very present and if not in leadership roles, were very visible, respected, and active as elders and leaders of teaching and worship within their communities. But, as new arrivals who came expecting to be embraced within those congregations as children of God, they were rejected on the basis of racial/ethnic discrimination (Leech, 1988, p.45).

In a 2018 article entitled 'Riding the Windrush tide' published online at *Women and the Church* (Watch), Clarke and Thomas describe their experiences of being "incoming Anglicans" of the CofE as "utter rejection" which "left a bad scar". Having constantly heard "you are different from us", these twin sisters who did not succumb to the rejection and instead clung to hope for something better, are now Anglican priests. They recall their disbelief "that the church, a place of worship and spiritual support was capable of such prejudice" (Watch, 2018). Biblical scholar, Lay Canon and former Bishop's Advisor for Black and Asian Ministries in the CofE, Barton, explains that because Black people are able to envision and thus cling to a better future, their humiliating present can be endured (2005, p.30).

Many founded churches and some found homes in nonconformist/free denominations such as Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregational/URC (Rajagopalan, 2015). Hence, members of the URC have come from other denominations and geographical locations (UK and abroad), thus bringing into the denomination a wider variety of theological and cultural backgrounds. Yet, despite the early presence of ethnically-minoritised people in some URC congregations, Black/ethnically-minoritised women have largely been absent and missing from leadership and decision-making in a denomination that started its life with a presence of Black/ethnically-minoritised people. Ironically, the CofE is further ahead in having a presence of Black/ethnically-minoritised women in leadership and decision-making roles, including high-profile appointments such as former House of Commons

chaplain, Rose Hudson-Wilkin who became the first Black woman Bishop in that denomination (The Guardian.com, 19.Nov.2019).

Rationale

The implications for the denomination's Black/ethnically-minoritised women's positionality, agency and praxis are of concern in this thesis. Where Miller-McLemore's (2016) use of the term is epistemological (concerned with theologian's ways of knowing and learning about social reality), for Collins (1992) it is ontological (referring to people's ways of being; that is, existing in the social world and assumptions about people's existential realities). I recognise Collins' (1992) need for coining the term 'outsiders within' which provides a conceptual development that courageously identifies the existence of an imbalance of power in the US context.

However, there is a difference in the UK experience, in that Black/ethnically-minoritised people came largely from British 'colonies' with a sense of belonging and were 'insiders' although without the sense of being home. By contrast, in the US, Black and brown/ethnically-minoritised people are home, many having been born there, as descendants of slavery or migration. However, they have persistently been pushed to the margins as outsiders, while in a constant struggle to situate themselves as insiders with a right to be treated fairly (i.e outsiders-within). Both approach identity differently; this notwithstanding, UK and US brown, Black, and ethnically-minoritised people are unified by the shared experience of slavery and imperialism, leaving both groups with historical and psychological scars.

However, the imbalance of power Collins identifies is real in both contexts. It incorporates the negation of Black/ethnically-minoritised women's experiences in church and in society, at the intersection of race, gender, social standing and class. In the URC context, although women are increasing in number in leadership positions and decision-making roles, the women who have led and still lead are White. An ex-GA Mod in the URC speaking on a BBC radio programme aired on 22nd August 2017 entitled 'Woman's Hour' alongside a woman from the CofE, talked about the impact on women in the denomination today, of the first woman, Constance Coltman, ordained 100 years previously in the UK reformed tradition. The ex-GA Mod

explained that being a woman in leadership was complex amidst the large number of retired male voices "presumably giving advice" (BBC, 2017). When asked whether or not there are people still being marginalised in the church, both cited institutional sexism as one of the reasons that women were still being marginalised. There was no mention of institutional racism. This stood out to me as a missed opportunity to acknowledge colleagues whose raced, gendered bodies are absent thus missing, perhaps overlooked, and who are invisible in their church settings.

In Paper 1, I found there to be no real sense of solidarity in the relationship between ethnically-minoritised and White women in the URC (Appendix i), and proposed that:

> claiming sexism is not as straightforward for Black women as for White women. For us, sexism is bound up with culture and identity, which raises up the ugly head of racism. So, while sexism might exist as a concern for women generally in the URC, Black women experience it differently (p.16).

But is the problem a lack of solidarity; an embodied lack of recognition, or both? This, I believe, is down to the question: what attributes and values make us visible human beings? It appears that present operating dynamics and embodied assumptions might actively be placing Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the position of *insiders-without*, who are disenfranchised, unnoticed, and or invisible, even though they belong via membership. However, I want to hear what ethnically-minoritised women in the denomination think, feel, and perceive, particularly as the denomination's plans for building intercultural relations, as stated in Vision2020 document, are designed to include all.

Investigation

Thus, my investigation is concerned with the realities of existing in physical and non-physical spaces, as well as with institutional praxis, positioning, and the everyday practices of ordinary women. I have chosen this kind of investigation because the way people are positioned determines their view of the space they inhabit, and how they position themselves can determine their perspective and how they use their voice—

collectively and individually.

In this endeavour, my primary theoretical dialogue partners are womanist and practical theologians. Womanist theology provides the themes and perspectives (theological and hermeneutical) that shape my work. The movement towards womanism as an ethical discourse came into focus alongside its critique of a White female-focused feminism, and Black theology's lack of consideration for Black women's layered context.

Although my hermeneutical strategy is a womanist one, I use the framework of practical theology as a means of undertaking my research. While practical theology provides the theological method, it is in need, as Sheppard argues, of taking "raced bodies seriously" (2016, p.231). This is important because I am engaging with the lived realities and experiences of Black and other minoritised women and not merely theorising. If practical theology is to be effective, it must turn towards those people, communities, and bodies with which it purports to be concerned.

Womanist practical theology is a combination of both—it is interested in ordinary people, especially women, seeking freedom from oppressive constructs and from their perceived denial of agency, because this impacts negatively on them. Notwithstanding this, people construct their understanding and knowledge of the world, and this happens through their experiences and how they perceive those experiences.

In moving forward, I include the concepts of agency and praxis. Treating with these in a study that is rooted in practical theology involves taking into consideration raced, gendered bodies and the conscious and unconscious states and constructs that might be at play. That is to say, I must consider the constructs that Black/ethnically-minoritised women and their communities embody and must navigate socially and psychologically alongside the policies, plans and practice of the URC. They are the people at the centre of this study, ordinary women whose raced bodies, opinions, attitudes, experiences and reflections I will take seriously because the focus is on the impact of being missing and of the reality that absent raced bodies mean absent raced voices.

According to practical theologians, Bennett and Lyall, at the heart of the epistemologies of practical theology is critical subjectivity (2014, p.198); that is, a psychological process, or philosophical position on what can be said to be true, although it is deeply connected to both. It pertains to possessing consciousness about the self, but at its core, critical subjectivity implies awareness that there are different versions of what is deemed to be real or normative. It is a tool to challenge the false knowledge of any constructed and uninformed way of thinking about reality. This means that subjective experiences are important and are not to be repressed, but because all knowing is derived from people's perspectives, we ought to be aware of our biases and deliberately seek other perspectives that could help us amend, rethink and/or challenge our own.

Like Sheppard (2016), Floyd-Thomas (2006) believes that it is important to take Black and brown/ethnically-marginalised women's raced bodies seriously. She sees this as being the most critical vantage position for discussing issues that affect these women's own lives. Floyd-Thomas submits that "[k]nowledge is no longer interpreted in light of the gaze of racist and misogynistic 'subjectivities' that masquerade as human normativity, but rather taking into consideration a new 'Black-woman consciousness'" (2006, p.2). What Floyd-Thomas is saying is that the White masculine gaze which is received, or assumed to be universal, can no longer be viewed as universal. Other individualised gazes need to be brought to the centre if to treat legitimately with their lived realities.

However, while acknowledging womanist theology as an appropriate epistemological starting point, Sheppard (2011) recognises that it is in need of going further and taking the psychological and cultural aspects of Black women's experiences into consideration. Thus, I propose the combined perspective of womanist practical theology that Sheppard (2011) is developing, which she explains is trying to attend to those two shortfalls. Hence, Sheppard's (2011) combined womanist practical theology, although still newly developing, feels very much like an appropriate tool.

This developing perspective appeals to me because based on my research focus, I am required to call into question and into action, the URC's own leadership and praxis, to begin to understand what is at the heart of the situation in which the denomination,

and ethnically-minoritised women in it, find ourselves. This involves observing the impact of the women's absent/missing bodies on both the women and the URC as a whole. I am caused to reflect on the absence of ethnically-minoritised women (apart from me) from my first candidating for ministry experience which comprised approximately 30 people. Included in this number are ministerial candidates, assessors, faculty from three URC Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs), staff representing the departments of Education and Learning, and Ministries, and the Chaplain.

Given the concern of Sheppard's womanist practical theology for taking historical psychological and lived cultural experiences into consideration, an avenue is paved to explore the term "embodiment" in light of the experiences of the women in this study and the denomination's multicultural and intercultural context. Thus, it seems apt to undergird the thesis with embodiment thinking from the perspective of womanist practical theology, to focus on the raced bodies of the women at the centre, which I explain in Chapter 4. An exploration of the women's particular experiences of womanness and their psychological and social well-being, will highlight questions of identity and diversity, such as: who am I? To what do I belong? These will be considered in light of the URC's call for hospitality, justice and peace.

Stage 1 papers, layout and thesis structure
My professional work which began with what I encountered as an issue in the process of candidating for ministry, has informed my professional practice in the URC, and inspired my interest in researching this topic.

In Paper 1, entitled 'Listening to the voices', I wanted to know if 'BME' women were visible and audible in the wider denomination. The conclusion was that while membership of ethnically-minoritised people, particularly women, was increasing in local congregations, unlike their White counterparts who are increasingly present and visible in decision-making and leadership roles in the denomination, they are invisible—absent or missing.

In Paper 2, entitled 'A qualitative account of a relationship story between the URC and "BAME" women', I undertook inductive research that focused on what members

of CoG said in light of the story of the Syrophoenician woman in Mark's gospel. The conclusion was that the URC cannot be a truly inclusive body if "BAME" women are invisible and inaudible in the wider denomination.

In Paper 3, entitled 'Renegotiating space around the URC table, beyond good intentions, towards intentional inclusion of "BAME" women', I proposed the work of this thesis at Stage 2, to discover the impact on minoritised women's bodies of being invisible:— absent, inaudible, and missing from leadership and decision-making. I proposed to discover how the practical experiences of "BAME" women in the denomination reflect the intentions of the church's inclusive policies, focusing on the denomination's vision for the year 2020.

The three papers led into this Stage 2 thesis, prompting the need for further research to understand the impact on Black/ethnically-minoritised women of what they are experiencing in the URC. The thesis comprises 10 chapters in four sections:

The *Preamble* is followed by Section one—*Research Interest,* which contains Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 is entitled 'Situating the Research', in which I outline and explain the title and subtitle and present the research question, follow-up questions, layout, and thesis structure. Chapter 2 is 'Reformed theology and the Bible', which looks at the URC's reformed identity and the importance of the Bible to such an identity to both the URC and ethnically-minoritised women. I also deal with the multicultural and intercultural nature of the URC.

Section two—*Conceptual Framework* contains Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 3 entitled 'Theological Perspectives', the tenets of both practical and womanist theologies, alongside other liberation theologies, are explored. I demonstrate that while these perspectives have wisdoms to contribute to my research, they are not sufficient individually. However, the combined womanist practical theological perspective with embodiment thinking accommodates addressing specific concerns that relate to Black/ethnically-minoritised women's lived-experiences, church praxis, and its psychological and social impact on the women. In Chapter 4,'Embodiment Thinking', perspectives from multiple disciplines are used to assist my understanding of embodiment thinking from a womanist practical theological lens in order to better

address the situation of ethnically-minoritised women in the URC. The emerging concepts influenced the design and research undertaking in aiming to understand the impact of the constructs embodied by participants.

Section three—*Methodological Framework* contains Chapters 5 and 6. At Chapter 5, 'Epistemological Orientation', I introduce constructivism as my epistemological orientation which draws on embodiment thinking from womanist practical theology, from which the methodology takes shape. In Chapter 6 'Research Design', I present the research design and detail why research instruments and methods such as Observation and Questionnaires were used to gather data from two URC congregations and twelve willing participants.

Section four—*Findings, Analysis and Discussion* contains Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10. At Chapter 7 'Findings and Embodiment Analysis Using Memoing', case studies with the two participating URC congregations, and questionnaire responses are presented. I present my memoing of the data, followed by my interpretation of the memos. At Chapter 8 'Engaging the Literature, Analysing the Issues', utilising womanist practical theology and embodiment thinking, the issues are presented under the subheadings: fear of being ignored and left out; desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves; need to be seen as fully human; and, intention to challenge the "White" world environment. At Chapter 9 'Biblical Analysis and Discussion', the issues are again discussed, this time via womanist biblical interpretation—analysing, deconstructing and linking the biblical stories of Hagar at Genesis 16:1-16; 21: 9-21, with that of the unnamed Syrophoenician woman in the Gospel of Mark at 7:24-30, and linking those to the contemporary story. Chapter 10 'The Conclusion' presents my contributions to knowledge, the URC, my professional practice and ethnically-minoritised-women in the denomination. It outlines possible limitations to the research and indicates areas in which further research might be considered. It answers the research question.

Professional path

My professional path within the URC is in focus in this study. I began this thesis seeking to address a problem while seeking to discern God's movements in my life. The practical and theological nature of this study is amenable to this. Not to be

overlooked is that Black/ethnically-minoritised women are central to my research, which seeks to understand the impact on the women and on the denomination of their missing raced bodies. Being myself a Black woman writing from a practical, social location who identifies as a womanist theologian, I cannot neglect my womanist commitments to the well-being of my community and the empowerment and support of Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the URC, in particular (Weems, 1988; Williams, 1993; Cannon, 1998; Thomas, 1999; and Townes, 2003). In agreement with this, the lenses and tools I use must reflect this.

Hence, my thesis points to an existing phenomenon within the URC, that the raced bodies of women of Black/ethnically-minoritised backgrounds are missing/absent and might even be displaced and/or relegated to invisibility, inaudibility and/or are silenced, where leadership and decision-making are concerned. I carry out this research aware of the importance of placing women of Black/ethnically-minoritised backgrounds at the centre, ultimately aspiring to keep their presence and voice central to the research. The aim, moreover, is to demonstrate my recognition of the importance of the women's contribution to any emerging issues that might affect their lives, their positioning in the denomination, and their experience of, and, in it. Looking reflexively at what it means to be minoritised women in this reformed denomination is critical if to be able to discern how our histories and contexts, namely our embodiedness of these, impact our relationships/relations with, and in, the denomination.

I engage throughout with a range of methods that practical theologians pursue. They take a practical turn which places practice over theory in similar fashion to sociology and anthropology. This practical turn involves practitioners in centring their focus on the active involvement of ordinary people and communities. Ganzevoort, Ruard and Roeland describe practical theology as making "the turn away from institutes and (cultural) texts to the everyday social and cultural practices of ordinary people" (2014, p.93).

Summary
In this chapter, I situate my research within the context of my professional practice in the URC. A womanist hermeneutical strategy using the framework of practical

theology is presented as a means to carry out this research. This involves attending to the various conscious and unconscious constructs and related issues that underlie church praxis and leadership, gender, race, identity, culture, and so on. The aim is to understand the impact on the lives of Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the wider workings of a denomination that prides itself on diversity and inclusivity.

The following chapter will be critical in bringing to the discussion what the reformed identity and the Bible means to both the denomination and the women whose raced bodies have been rendered invisible, absent, minoritised, voiceless and inaudible. Thus, the URC's reformed, multicultural-intercultural identity forms a critical part of the conversation in Chapter two. The Bible/scripture is critical to the agenda of the URC and ethnically-minoritised women in the denomination. Hence, biblical stories from the OT and the NT, which feature Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman are introduced. The stories involve the women in challenging their silencing and "invisibilisation" (my term) and reforming the table to make room for more voices to participate in decision-making.

CHAPTER TWO

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Reformed Identity and the Bible

Introduction

This chapter engages with URC praxis within the wider and deeper context of a reformata (reformed) and reformanda (reforming) agenda. It provides why scripture is introduced and how the terms multicultural, intercultural and space (at the table) are used. This outlines what the multicultural URC, which describes itself as being on an intercultural journey, says about itself as part of the denomination's plans for future growth in the light of its reformed tradition. The URC's explicit self-identification as multicultural in 2005 was to declare that fact, and to raise awareness of the need to embrace other cultures.

With thirteen Synods across England, Scotland and Wales, the URC not only operates in a context of cultural and theological diversity, it is also an ecumenical union committed to being reformed. The proof is in the Basis of Union—a constitutional theological document adopted at the formation of the URC and amended at GA after a comprehensive consultation process, which states: "together we are firmly committed to 'God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. The living God, the only God, ever to be praised" (The Manual, 2015, p.5). This statement continues:

> we would listen to what other Christians have said and still say, as well
> we would listen hard for the witness of our own experience and to what
> our own thinking and puzzling suggest—but God's Word in the Bible is
> the first source of wisdom for us and we would turn to it (2015, p.5).

In keeping with its reformed identity, the URC delights in scripture and holds "God's Word in the Bible" as "the highest authority" that informs what it believes and does (Statement of Nature, Faith & Order, p.1). Similarly, as womanist ethicist Cannon attests, "the Bible is the highest source of authority for most Black women" by which, arguably, she means Black and other ethnically/racially-minoritised Christian women (cited in Russell, 1985, p.149). The URC depends on the Bible, as do ethnically-

minoritised Christian women, whose desire to know more (Walker, 1983) is necessarily extended to how they read and interpret the Bible. As a Black woman, I bring myself as 'I' to this research, that is, as researcher/URC member for whom the Bible and my reformed identity are important.

Finding meaning in the biblical stories

I posit the stories of Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman as embodying the lives of diverse women. The interpretative process I employ, of revisiting, reimagining, revising and retelling these stories will offer something important to the reformata, reformanda agenda, in terms of identity, agency and praxis. In different ways, both women had had to insist on being seen and heard. I employ womanist biblical interpretation to these biblical women's complex navigating (Hagar) and negotiating (the Syrophoenician woman) at the intersection of ethnicity, class and cultural difference.

For decades womanist and other biblical scholars have likened Hagar to Black women today who they agree are oppressed on various levels (ethnicity, gender, social standing and so on), and who, despite this, have created a space for themselves (Genesis 16:1-6 & 21:1-21). Williams posits that these women have created space in their 'wilderness' experiences (spiritually, emotionally and psychologically) to commune with God to bring them through these difficult times (1993, pp.xxi & 24). Barton (2005) referencing Barton (1999), describes Hagar's wilderness experience, essentially, as a transforming/transformational event. It is one, she argues, that causes us as readers of the story, to "become more open to God" (Barton, 2005, p.17). This implies that going through an experience of wilderness is about our becoming and moving from one way of being to another. This, Barton argues, "is the mystery of God and of our human existence" (2005, p.17). In essence, Hagar embodies the life and suffering of women, in particular Black/ethnically-minoritised women.

In the NT story, according to biblical studies researcher, Asikainen (2018), the Syrophoenician woman "is an exceptional figure because she is the only person in the Synoptic Gospels to best Jesus in a dispute" (p.111). Jesus acknowledges this with the words at Mark 7:29, Διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον, ὕπαγε which means "because of these words, go" (Douglas, 1990, p.148); and the

woman's λόγος (word), not her πίστις (faith) causes Jesus to heal her daughter.

This woman's faith determined what and how she responded to him, and it was by λόγος and πίστις that she began to construct a way to Jesus. Her actions in seeking Jesus, having only heard about and believed in his healing abilities despite not ever having seen for herself, established her faith and caused her to respond in the way she did. Thus, her encounter with Jesus occurs in the context of having to negotiate her request with the rejection she receives, and in her determination to be heard she chose to cling to her faith.

On different levels, these stories are about embodiment of agency, positioning or making space for self either to take up space at the table or construct a new table. They also provide glimpses of different forms of praxis. For womanist biblical scholar, Smith (2015), agency is about resisting and acting in order not to become a sitting target. Embodiment of agency does not just involve superficial or passive change; it is about the habit of developing praxis - the capacity to resist, act differently, and most importantly make a difference (Giddens, 1984).

Reformation

Being reformed (as claimed by the URC), "rests not on doctrine or a singular theme, but in discerning a pattern of 'habits' or 'traits' to a Reformed outlook", and this outlook includes "organizing the church for the care of souls" (Jensen, 2016, p.10). The Latin phrase "Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda" ("The Church Reformed, Always Reforming"), describes the reformed way of being and doing. This is shortened from the motto "Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est secundum verbum Dei," which means the Reformed church must be always reforming according to the Word of God. This motto is often attributed to Swiss reformed theologian Barth who *popularised* the phrase (Mahlmann, 2010). However, scholars have traced its origins to a 1674 devotional book written by Jodocus van Lodenstein, a Dutch theologian who considered Dutch Christianity to be a dead orthodoxy and encouraged a heart and head approach (Godfrey, 2014).

My understanding of being a member of a reformed denomination is that it requires me to read the social and political climate. It also necessitates that I look for the

movements of God in my encounters and recognise what is working and what needs to change, so as not to perpetuate practices that are dehumanising and spiritually damaging. I find the motto helpful as it talks about continuous transformation and change. I understand it as a motto that should form a critical part of our identity as URC members, as an ongoing practice and habit of the mind. It requires careful reading of scripture in order to demonstrate the challenge to change. Hence my appeal to scripture in this thesis.

Black reformed theologian Carter, says that "[R]eformed theology is intensely biblical theology" and supports this observation by recalling Spurgeon's (19th century Baptist preacher) reference to it as "a nickname for biblical Christianity" (2003, p.19). Carter's opinion is that it "maintains a high view of Scripture and the need for a consistently God-centered approach to interpreting Scripture" (2003, p.19). Yet, his dilemma is that he believes reformed theology "is one of the richest theological traditions produced by the church", and notes that "it considers within its lineage such theologians as Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, B. B. Warfield, Francis Schaeffer, [and] James I. Packer" (2003, p.69).

However, with all of these important figures, great preachers and hymn writers the tradition has produced, it is not implausible that Carter is unable "to identify culturally with [those] who stand as its magisterial architects" (2003, p.70). This served to hamper his ability to connect with Reformation history, and he thus recognised a need to combine "the richness" of Black and reformed theologies, "to maximise" his "Christian experience" (Carter, 2003, p.70). Carter combines theories, as have I, to include his embodied vantage position to strengthen/heighten his experience. For him, reformed theology is biblically and historically consistent, and not antithetical to the practical Black Christian experience (2003, p.72).

Reformed identity, and the Bible
The year 2017 marked 500 years of the Reformation, and with 2021 already here, it is now time to look at the way the URC understands its reformed identity and the approach it intends to take towards it. The denomination believes that "faithful people", whether reformed or not, "have not always read with wisdom and insight". It sees, for instance, "how some Reformed Christians in South Africa believed that the

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Bible taught them authoritatively that apartheid was God's will" (What is the United Reformed Church, [no date], p.4). In trying to be true to a reformed way, the denomination promotes "reading the Bible in a prayerful spirit and with God's help" as being integral to helping to discern what the denomination "should believe and do" (p.5). This clearly demonstrates what Carter (2003) describes as the intense biblical nature of reformed theology.

My womanist biblical interpretations of the named Hagar and the nameless Syrophoenician woman, lead me to locate them among the very first reformers. In different ways, they transformed their experiences; one woman was silenced by her experiences until her transforming wilderness encounter with God. The other woman refused to be silenced in her encounter with Jesus which was transforming for Jesus' ministry. These stories are compelling as both women were positioned alongside dominant biblical figures, voices and characters in the passages which they appear.

Using my womanist biblical interpretative lens, I can see that Hagar is objectified in the narrative, not only as gifted to Sarah, but in what is later expected of her. Sarah could not conceive so she would lend Hagar to Abraham for the purpose of conceiving an heir, and through these dynamics, Hagar bore Abraham a son, Ishmael. By centring my gaze on the voiceless, subordinated Hagar, I discover her voice and her agency through her experiences of hopelessness at the hands of Abraham and Sarah and hopefulness in her angel/God encounters in her wilderness experiences.

In terms of the Syrophoenician woman[1], she is described by race and nation—as Syrophoenician and as "a Greek (i.e., gentile) woman" and not by name (Zerwick & Grosvenor, 1981, p.129). This particular story, according to biblical scholar Burkill, "recapitulates a primitive Christian controversy" which is "apparently based on a tradition having an import contrary to the general significance of the pericope as it now stands" (1967, p.161). A popular reading of the Syrophoenician woman's

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[1] While other versions of the Bible present a Gentile/Jewish dichotomy in the story of the Syrophoenician woman, the NIV does not – it describes a Greek woman, born in Syrian Phoenicia who found Jesus although he did not want to be found, and insisted on getting him to take notice of her need, inferring a dichotomy of difference but not of religious conflict.

encounter with Jesus is that she took a different approach from what is perceived to be the norm for women in her day.

Womanist Hebrew scholar Gafney reads a Jewish/Gentile dichotomy into the text, for her this unnamed woman is at once "the image of the faithful Christian petitioning her Lord–though from the Israelite and Jewish perspective, she would have been considered an idolater" (2017, Wil's blog). Feminist theologian Hicks (2005) offers two interpretations of this pericope; one being that the woman was likely widowed and poor with no male relatives to send on errands. Hence, she would have known the value of crumbs and thus understood Jesus' reply in a context where the crumbs are sufficient (Hicks, 2005). Her other interpretation is that the woman's Hellenistic history and Greek identity coupled with the setting near Tyre, suggest that she was an urban elite who might have been amongst the presumed exploiters of lower status Jewish people. These underlying power dynamics alongside the metaphor that "bread goes first to the children of Israel would be understood by early listeners as a reversal of the reigning order" (Hicks, 2005, p.57).

Gafney understands Jesus' explanation that "[A]ancient Israelites and Jews in the first century and rabbinic period despised dogs", as him implying scorn/loathing, which she believes the woman would have realised (Wil's blog, 2017). Yet, the woman replied "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:28). My reading of the story is that despite their differences, the woman recognised the strength of Jesus' ministry as potentially having a wider constituency and understood his reply as an invitation. Hence, she chose to seize the opportunity to cross over/break into Jesus' space, seemingly undaunted by his response to her request for help for her daughter: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27).

In different ways, these pericopes inspire conversations about women (outsiders, and insiders who are treated as outsiders), culture, and intercultural relations. Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman went on to transform and create space at the table not just for themselves but also for their offspring who represent the missing: voiceless, silent, unwell, rejected and banished. But in referencing Hagar and the Syrophoenician

woman, my intention is not to subordinate the normative historical figures in reformation history. I do not start with the assumption that people's experiences, including those of my participants, can only be validated by biblical writers/scribes.

As Wright explains: "we mustn't belittle scripture by bringing the world's models of authority into it. We must let scripture be itself, and that is a hard task" (1999, p.18). I note the intentional equivocation in Wright stating, "let scripture be itself", for he then goes on to reason that it "contains many things that I don't know, and that you don't know; many things we are waiting to discover; passages which are lying dormant waiting for us to dig them out" (1999, p.18). For scripture passages to be relevant and helpful, they need to be read in the context of the changing times and people's existential realities. That is, not to impose people's realities and meanings onto the stories, but to allow the hidden in any story to be discovered.

Intention and inclusion

It is difficult to imagine why in 2021 Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the URC still need to negotiate a space to position themselves around the table, when by the time of its formation the denomination already had ethnically-minoritised people within its membership. This is particularly difficult, given its documented commitment to a journey of cultural diversity, which is interested in living out God's love in the world through God's Word, with a focus on justice, hospitality, and peace. The URC states that:

> We aim to grow through supporting one another and taking decisions together. All tasks and posts are open to women as fully as to men. We are an intercultural church where people with varied ethnic roots enrich each other's Christian living (MulticulturalChurch/Intercultural Habit, 2020).

One of the ways GIM tried to facilitate its mandate to foster an intercultural habit was by publishing an edition entitled *In Our Own Words* and offering it as a URC resource. Ethnically-minoritised ministers, CRCWs and lay members were invited to share unique stories which highlighted curiosities, observations and celebrations encountered in serving through the denomination (Jagessar, 2016). Although the take-up across the denomination was disappointingly low, the book was published in the

spirit of enriching the URC.

It is fifteen years since the URC declared itself multicultural, nine years since the church made a commitment to begin seeking to develop an "intercultural habit", and we have now passed the point when Vision2020 was supposed to become a reality. By placing ethnically-minoritised women central to my research, I am recognising the importance of our voices, bodies and experiences to church praxis.

Multicultural, intercultural
In the 1990s, sociologist and cultural theorist Hall led the call for continued interrogation into the term multiculturalism, to begin to understand its effect on Diaspora, cultural entanglements and cultural transruptions (Hall, 2000). Hall (2000; 2001) was hoping to direct the understanding of multiculturalism away from the notion of disparate ethnic groupings of people competing for hierarchy and resources, towards one that slides with ease and translates well between differences.

The URC is a declared 'multicultural church', made up of multiple cultures, ethnicities and theological perspectives. However, the problem with multiculturalism is that it can act to subsume the reality of the experience of marginalised groups. I agree with Jagessar that it overlooks "our hybrid history" and denies intersecting cultural links "that tie people together in ways we tend to forget" (Jagessar, 2015, p.259). However, I do not concur when Jagessar then suggests that ethnically-minoritised people *locate ourselves* as "black and ethnic minorities" (2015, p.259). I would argue that in the UK and by extension the URC, minoritised is where ethnically-minoritised people find ourselves placed by others. As several friends, colleagues and family members would attest, it is not where we locate ourselves.

For Christian ethicist Chaplin, multiculturalism has a critical contribution to make; he believes that we need "to get inside each other's distinctive understandings of the world" as a critical exercise (2011, p.20). However, the critical exercise for the URC is developing an intercultural habit, as this indicates an aspiration to be proactive and intentional about promoting relationship-building (sliding and translating) between differences (of culture, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class). This awareness urges "[A]n intercultural way of being and living [that] is premised on the abundant

generosity of God made real through Jesus Christ" (Intercultural, 2020). The denomination commended "the multicultural church, intercultural charter" as part of the Vision2020 framework, stating that in embodying or modelling a habit of generous lives, the URC "will work intentionally towards mutuality in giving and sharing, for all of us are in need and all must be mutually inconvenienced for the sake of the other and the gospel" (Vision2020). The URC also articulates its commitment to "the constant habit of self-examination, life-long learning, and reflection through on-going education, training, monitoring and evaluation of our intercultural engagement" (Intercultural, 2020).

Developing an intercultural habit is about erecting a space for fresh and new ways of being and living in a diverse world. However, what this space would look like (per Vision2020), will, in part, depend on what my participants say their experiences are, which I will aim to discover via examination of the data, and what analysis of the findings reveal about these experiences. For instance, are the women familiar with the URC's developing plan for the inclusion of all people, catering for "a range of opinions about theology and church life" as documented in the Vision2020 framework for empowerment of all?

By uncovering and analysing what the participating women in this research say, I can contribute to the shape of new developments in keeping with the aim to be "fearless about change" in a denomination that delights in the Bible and endeavours "to run our churches in ways that take everyone's insight and contribution seriously" (About us, 2020). Interculturality is an important part of being reformed; it hints at the need to make space for new developments based on new knowledge.

Tablespace
I use the word 'space' in the thesis title to talk about the environment and the thinking that is embodied in that setting. It is also related to absence, which points to the invisibility and inaudibility of Black/ethnically-minoritised women. In this context, *space* is fluid and reflexive. Rather than being places, positions and identifiers that are allocated by the dominant insider-group, or to which women's raced bodies are relegated, *space* can be renegotiated by Black/ethnically-minoritised women. It is imagined in terms of action, suggesting a stance that one takes up—such as

positioning the self at the table. It is less about where the person is positioned and more about where or how they position themselves or their thinking, and how they negotiate the room they carve out for themselves at the table.

As far back as 1968, Chisholm, a Caribbean-American civil rights activist and one of America's first Black congresswomen urged Black and brown women to bring a folding chair if they are not given a seat at the table (Chisholm, 1968). Fifty years later, Walfall, Intercultural Observer from Jamaica to the 43rd General Council to United Church of Canada (UCC) (one of the URC's global partners), advised that we need to know who we are at the table (Broadview.org, 27.07.2018).

I want to know what needs to be renegotiated, what already exists and should be intentionally made available effectively to include the women's raced bodies at the URC table. The aim being, in 2021, to understand what is involved in the URC's commitment to promote an intercultural habit. Walfall explains, if I am a guest at your table, then I must take whatever you give me. My hope would be that you consider my needs, but you actually do not have to. But if I am there as a member of the family, a responsible adult, then I have a right to participate not only in the eating of the meal, but also in creating the menu and preparing the actual meal (Broadview.org, 27.07.2018).

We have arrived at 2021 and would have expected the folding chair to have long since become a well-used, well-worn armchair. For ethnically-minoritised women in the URC, it has not.

The self, the URC and ethnically-minoritised women
In carrying out my research, the use of the embodied 'I' is helpful to demonstrate openness, and further shows that I am relinquishing the "security of the anonymous third person" and taking responsibility for my views (Ethrington, 2004, p.24). Understanding the embodied self is important in carrying out research from a womanist practical theological viewpoint in which "embodiment is integral to the epistemological positions we take" (Sheppard, 2011, p.14).

As a professed member of the African Diaspora, I was born just after Trinbago gained independence from Britain. I was raised in the era of heightened Black consciousness and was influenced by the goals of the nation's 'Black Power' movement, which later effected some social change in the freshly postcolonial environment. I lived in the UK and the US in the 1980s and again in Trinidad from early to mid-1990s, taught in Brazil until 2000 when I returned with my family to resettle and teach in the UK. My blend of conscious and unconscious embodiedness, of where, what and who my influences are and have been, is a necessary part of the process. Essentially, I employ embodiment thinking from the perspective of womanist practical theology. In simplest terms, it is a combination of womanist and practical theological perspectives that focuses centrally on the whole being—mind, body, emotions and spirit.

As a URC member, minister, and theologian who is a Black woman with concern for women in general and Black/ethnically-minoritised women in particular, I read scripture, conscious that gender, race/ethnicity and social status are all constructed. I understand that I must be intentional about recognising what is present as well as what is hidden in the stories and lived experiences I encounter therein. I must also recognise that Black/ethnically-minoritised women's varying psychological, social, cultural and historical influences would determine how they read and interpret scripture. This would likely vary among themselves and be different from how the dominant groups in the URC read and interpret it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my thesis engages with what having a reformed identity entails. The denomination's united, ecumenical, reformed identity of being biblical and of being fearless about change is certainly a reminder to members to read the signs/times and do what is needed in light of biblical understanding. This would mean intentionally listening for the absent; that is, the invisible and inaudible, and seeking to discover why these bodies are missing and voiceless. In keeping with a reformata, reformanda ethos, I use the Bible in a way that would allow me to read the signs and/of the times and discover the missing, the voiceless and the invisible. This requires me to centre my gaze onto URC women who are in possession of raced bodies, and to find meaning – or a point of contact – through biblical stories where women's experiences and voices are made known, such as Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman.

These biblical stories provide some insight into what the Bible and God's Word in the Bible mean towards understanding what is involved in creating space where identity, diversity and hospitality, justice and peace can meet. It is important to understand the signs of cultural, social and psychological particularities that might arise from having to seek to be present, seen, visible, audible, heard and listened to, especially in an environment that has stated intentions to be inclusive and intercultural. While for Black/ethnically-minoritised Christian women, the Bible has historically been used to oppress, it is liberating when it is read and understood in context. This enables them/us to see them/ourselves in the minoritised, marginalised and problematised bodies and voices in the texts.

For the unseen, missing, inaudible and minoritised bodies who seek visibility and audibility or not, but are invisible at the URC's table of decision-making and leadership, the denomination's reformed, multicultural identity, linked to its intention to be seekers of justice and peace as per Vision2020 Statements 2, 5 and 9, should offer hope. For these declared identities and stated intentions suggest that everyone's insight and input are taken seriously and will be met with hospitality and justice. But is the URC reading the sign/times fearlessly, while also being intentional about hearing and seeing the missing/absent where inclusion of Black/ethnically-minoritised women is concerned?

SECTION II

Conceptual Framework

This research is located in womanist practical theology, and embodiment thinking rooted in social psychology, undergirds the study. I expand on this in Chapter 4. This layered conceptual framework was central to focusing the research on Black/ethnically-minoritised women and their lived experiences (Saunders et al., 2015). Concerning the process of forming concepts, researchers Ravitch and Riggan (2012) suggest that there are three elements of conceptual framework:

- " personal interest" (p.10)–dealing with what has driven the researcher to the research, such as curiosities, biases, usual and viable knowledge which are embodied by the researcher;
- "topical research" (p.11)–dealing with the 'what', with empirical focus on the nature and severity of the problem under study;
- "theoretical framework" (p.12)–dealing with the 'why 'and 'how', utilising formal theories from scholarly works fashioned for present study, to be applied to the topic.

The concepts are gathered up into a framework to sharpen the focus on the raced bodies of the women, and the variables involved in renegotiating for a space at the URC table (Sheppard, 2011). Saunders et al. argue that the researcher can combine "concepts into a concept model or framework" as these represent "how the concepts and information relevant to the research are likely to be connected, in providing a guide upon which theory might subsequently be built" (2015, p.3). The term conceptual framework, according to social researchers Miles and Huberman, is written or visual and "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied–the key factors, concepts, or variables–and the presumed relationships among them" (1994, p.18).

Embodiment and constructivism

It is important to consider "the ontological and epistemological assumptions and previous research upon which the model (the concepts and their interrelationships) is built" (Saunders et al., 2015, p.3). The problem of being absent/missing from the table points to the obstructive nature of constructs and societal structures such as racism, sexism, imperialism and so on, embodied by the minoritised woman's body. Hence, it is a constructivist epistemology utilising embodiment thinking.

Constructivism is a branch in philosophy developed by developmental psychologist Piaget (1953) and philosopher-psychologist Dewey (1938; 1966) who focus on the ability to learn, and on the learning experience, respectively. However, although constructivist theorists Brooks and Brooks would acknowledge that constructivism "is a theory about knowledge and learning" they argue that "the theory defines knowledge as temporary, developmental, socially and culturally mediated, and thus, non-objective" (1993, p.vii).

These two concepts (constructivism and embodiment) drive the analysis and discussions on the historically embodied psychological, social and cultural effects that meet at the intersection of racism, sexism and other disadvantageous harms. Critical race theorist, lawyer, civil rights activist and philosopher, Crenshaw, coined the term "intersectionality", which shines light on the embodiment thinking and constructivist epistemology of this research (1989, p.5). The women's whole being is simultaneously impacted by operating influences that they embody. For instance, psychological influences manifest as internalisations and/or inner scripts (Sheppard, 2011). Social influences manifest in relationships and relations (how the women relate, and how they are related to) in social groups, gatherings and settings. Cultural influences manifest in how people identify themselves and others, their habits, customs and social behaviour (Sechrest, 2018). Historical influences such as slavery and imperialism impact socially, culturally, and psychologically (Johnson, 2017).

"Intersectionality" names the oppressive influences that simultaneously impact Black and other ethnically-minoritised women, on the basis of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989, p.5). At times, discrimination is experienced by Black women and White women in similar ways, and also at other times in similar ways to Black men (Crenshaw, 1989). However, very often Black women are impacted by "double-discrimination" (race and sex) and sometimes simply by virtue of being Black women (Crenshaw, 1989, p.149). All forms of oppression embodied by the Black/ethnically-minoritised woman's body operate and impact simultaneously.

Embodiment and constructivism are tools to analyse experiences of a particular group of women in the URC, and the denomination's praxis. Engaging the embodiment concept of agency (women's collective and individual) and constructivist concept of praxis (the URC's) is critical to discussing the dismantling of unhealthy, harmful and destabilising constructs. It assists in re-imaging and rebuilding. These concepts drive the present study towards focusing on women whose entire being is impacted internally and externally at the intersection of psychological, social, cultural and historical influences (Sheppard, 2011). They treat with the daily internalisations, or "inner scripts" as Sheppard also describes it, of the women, which are as detrimental and disadvantageous as the external structures and constructs that shape them (2011, p.76).

A constructivist epistemology, in a context where there is no singular embodied reality, endeavours to understand the research participants' subjective interpretations of their feelings, emotions, perceptions and thinking (Drew, 1989, p.12). From this flows an understanding of what attributes these women bring to their realities, constructed through interconnectedness with others (Diagram 1 follows).
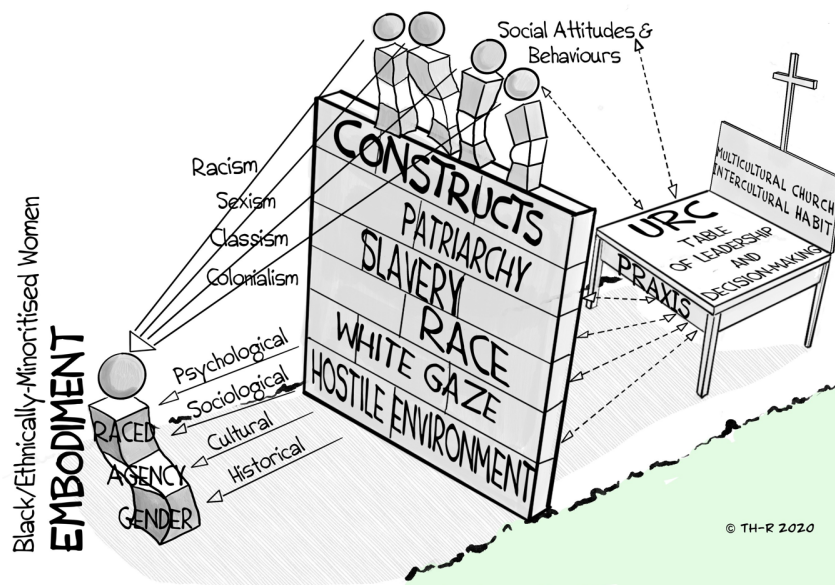
Diagram 1—Conceptual Framework Diagram

Demonstrated in this diagram is that Black/ethnically-minoritised women possess raced bodies through which they have navigated slavery and colonialism and continue to encounter constructs such as patriarchy, the white gaze, race, and the hostile environment. These constructs are barriers to the women's true expression and exercise of their agencies (especially in terms of their faith), as historically they have psychologically, socially, and culturally impacted the women's bodies. Such constructs were built on the type of knowing that depends on normative whiteness for its development, which continues to feed social attitudes and behaviours, and this operates as a dividing wall to genuine inclusion. The influence of these attitudes and behaviours continues to position negatively and impact the women's bodies at the intersections of race, gender and class.

The multicultural/intercultural space envisioned by the URC which on the one hand calls the women to serve God, operates a praxis at the table of leadership and decision-making which informs and mirrors attitudes and behaviours in society. On the other hand, there is little appearance of being genuine about inclusion at the table. The space, therefore, needs to be renegotiated to include Black/ethnically-minoritised women's participation and contribution. Both the wall and the table need to be

dismantled, reimagined and rebuilt in the image and likeness of intercultural practice (Intercultural, 2020).

The two chapters in this section are intended to offer the framework of concepts and theories for this thesis, and to apply it to identifying a possible gap in knowledge. Chapter 3 examines practical, womanist, feminist, Black and womanist practical theologies. Chapter 4 discusses the undergirding of this thesis, which is embodiment thinking, considering how historical constructs have impacted the women's present cultural and social realities and their whole psychological being–body, mind/emotions and spirit.

CHAPTER THREE

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Theological Perspectives

Introduction

In this chapter, I engage practical and womanist theologians, ethicists and biblical scholars in conversation with Sheppard's developing womanist practical theology to illuminate my research question and sub-questions: How might space around the multicultural table be renegotiated in such a way that facilitates the intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women? What do ethnically-minoritised women in two URC congregations in the UK, think and feel about their positioning within the URC? How can the significance of what they say be teased out in the light of womanist practical theology? What has this to say to the contemporary URC?

I begin by looking at what practical and womanist theologians/biblical scholars and practitioners are saying, engaging the key voices of Mercer (2016), Fowler (1999), Lartey (1996); Grant (1989), Weems (1988), Williams (1987; 1993), Cannon (1988), Etienne (2017) and Coleman (2007). I invite into the conversation feminist theologians Fiorenza (2001) and Hicks (2005); and Black theologians Cone (1975; 2006) and Reddie (2012). My aim is to construct a framework of concepts and theories to give theological depth to this research and enable theologically informed discussion of the data.

My argument in this chapter will be constructed in a way to highlight why womanist practical theology is appropriate for tackling the key questions. Notwithstanding the fact that the other theological perspectives invited into the conversation are not singularly appropriate to be employed as the key theological drivers, they have important contributions to make to the whole. I conduct my discussion under subheadings to assist the process of the argument in the following order: Practical theology, Womanist theology,

Neglects and commitments, Other voices, Feminist theology, Black theology, Womanist practical theology, and Towards Embodiment thinking.

Practical theology

Practical theologians have different ways of expressing what they believe practical theology or the doing of it involves, and they also have different beliefs. In this light, I chose to look at Mercer (2016), Fowler (1999) and Lartey (1996) who speak from different contexts and times and who themselves have different beliefs. The most recent of these is Mercer who states in her essay 'Interdisciplinarity as a Practical Theological Conundrum' (Mercer & Miller-McLemore 2016, p.173), that:

> when practical theologians talk about what constitutes our work and how we define our field, the term interdisciplinary arises. Practical theology, with its focus on the lived practices of persons and communities within their social contexts, is inherently interdisciplinary, since this kind of work necessitates not only knowledge of theology but also of human personhood alongside social and contextual knowledge.

What I understand by Mercer's (2016) statement is that practical theologians are disposed to using multiple disciplines to understand the social context of people and communities' lived practices in order to identify the best method/s to address the problem. Thus, for Mercer (2016) and some other practical theologians, practical theology is characterised by interdisciplinarity.

Fowler (1999) argues that there are four dimensions of a practical theological approach which overlap. He offers an understanding of practical theology which illuminates my research questions and concerns. These manifest as: 1. empirical-analytical which is grounded in the human experience; 2. hermeneutical which he urges is a "dialectic of interpretation" that "lies at the heart of Practical Theological work" (Fowler, 1999, p.295); 3. a pastoral-theological outlook (which is similar to

Lartey's (1996) thinking three years earlier); and 4. a political-critical approach as used in liberation theology (Fowler, 1999, p.295).

Of these, my research can be located in ethics; the empirical-analytical-human experience; the hermeneutical; and praxis of religious institution, all of which are congruent with liberationist approaches. These approaches invite practitioners to become aware of how to interpret situations they encounter, their pastoral practice, and how they advance their concern for, and reflect on, the particularities of the oppressed. These are key to my research question because the objective is to get to the truth about the women's experience in relation to the praxis of the denomination, which impacts psychologically and socially; it is about ethical leading towards liberation/freedom.

There are a number of ways in which practical theology has been identified, understood and employed, and Lartey believes that it "can be characterised into three distinctively different streams, although at times they flow into each other and extend relative influence upon each other" (1996, p.21). He identifies these as: 1. branch—locating practical theology as a discipline that is dependent on other disciplines; 2. process—which is about method, reflection, pastoral cycle; and 3. "way of being and doing"—which is about theological engagement and social context (Lartey, 1996, pp.21-25). While linking doctrine and lived experiences is an important responsibility of practical theology, for Lartey, the concern is "to relate faith (doctrine) with practice (or life) and to do so in ways that are relevant and useful" (1996, p.25).

Although these practical theologians' work span 20 years, they point to the need to relate doctrine to practice, ground it in the human experience and work across disciplines, with which I concur. Mercer describes the work of a practical theologian as "deft engagement of multiple fields of knowledge and methods of study to address the complexity of practical theology's aims" (Mercer & Miller-McLemore, 2016, p.173). Thus, it is critical to analyse issues that relate to church leadership and religious praxis in light

of the embodied experiences of the people on the ground; that is, including those women whose voices and bodies are absent/invisible because they are invisibilised, missing, silent/silenced from the wider discourses.

However, practical theology can only demonstrate and address these commitments authentically if its concern is with understanding the particularities of the persons and communities affected. Thus, critical social analysis is an important issue, and Sheppard (2016) agrees that practical theologians need to engage in critical social analysis, otherwise their professional advancement will happen at the detriment of raced bodies. There are benefits of focusing on raced bodies (Sheppard, 2016). However, Sheppard cautions that "practical theologians still act as if race is an ontological reality, something unchangeable and set in stone" (2016, p.221). She thus proposes that if the practical theologian is committed to the lived experience of raced bodies for instance, then "practical theology will more thoroughly inhabit its identity and aims" (Sheppard, 2016, p.226).

Womanist theology
Womanism as a social theory to which womanists subscribe, emerged by way of two progenitors, Ogunyemi (1985) and Hudson-Weems (1993). In 1985, Ogunyemi published a story entitled 'Womanism', and in 1993 Hudson-Weems published *Africana Womanism*. From these two works emerged African and Africana womanism respectively, both based on Walker's early description of womanist as being "instinctively pro-woman" (Walker in Lederer, 1980, p.100). I now discuss, briefly, some US voices that are central to womanist theology and UK voices that bring a new dimension to it.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, womanist theology has been constantly looking at new ways to give attention to serious issues that concern minoritised, Black women and girls in the world. It is an epistemology that challenges and seeks to alter or replace existing patterns of thought. It places focus on the raced bodies of marginalised women in particular. Essentially, this genre of theology emerged to address issues that came up as not being

addressed in terms of the marginalisation of Black/ethnically-minoritised women from mainstream and other theological discourses.

In 1979, the first article espousing a womanist theological perspective entitled 'Black Theology and the Black Woman' was written by womanist theologian Grant, who in those days identified as a Black feminist theologian. As early as 1985, Cannon used the term "Black womanist" to describe the theological genre that she was beginning to develop, and later dropped "Black". But it was on March 2, 1987, that the term "womanist theology" first appeared in the title of a paper written by Williams. The year after Williams' 1987 paper was published, Weems (1988) urged womanist theologians to turn their gaze towards the space where Hagar is located to begin their interpretation of the text, as Hagar's story in Genesis offers a way into a biblical discussion about "the lived experiences of women of the African diaspora" and descendants of enslaved people worldwide (p.17).

Through the waves of womanist theological thinking, the aim has been to respond to narratives and discourses (biblical and otherwise) in a way that includes a multitude of voices in a fresh way, and its concern has been to address issues of belonging. In the first wave, Weems (1988), Cannon (1988), Grant (1989), and Williams (1993) began developing a womanist theology that is committed to Walker's (1979) womanist way of being. This way was further developed by Walker in 1983, as concern for Black women and girls interested in the wholeness and well-being of African diaspora community, male and female. Overall, Williams aims to challenge those oppressive impediments to "black women's struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life", that "is conducive to 'freedom and well-being'" (1993, p.67).

Meanwhile, in the first publication of her book *Black Womanist Ethics,* Cannon (1988) uses her own experiences of being a woman, and being Black, as the thrust for a woman-focused theological model of survival. She sought to discover the moral agency of Black women from slavery to the time of writing and identifies them as having the virtues of "invisible

dignity", "quiet grace" and "unspotted courage" (1988, pp.6-7). These early womanist theological works identified the need to challenge and address the normalised dominant approach to doing theology, to understand and reclaim moral agency, and challenge multi-layered constructs which serve to oppress, exclude, silence, discriminate and marginalise. For instance, the women who joined the Black Power (BP) movement in the Caribbean and the British Black Panther (BBP) movement were very vocal in challenging the status quo. They transformed the narrative of resistance into visible and outspoken dignity and grace and participated courageously in the struggle for empowerment and liberation. They also suffered the same consequences as the men:- surveillance, brutality, arrest, and imprisonment.

The second wave of womanist theology was developed during the 1990s by theologians, ethicists and biblical theorists who proposed a shift in thinking and God-talk. For example, Thomas describes womanist theology as "critical reflection upon black women's place in the world", a world "that God has created and takes black women's experience as human beings who are made in the image of God" (2004, p.38). She also proposes that "the harmful and disempowering dimensions of the institutional church, culture, and society directly affect the social construction of black womanhood" (2004, p.38). Thomas (2004) builds on first wave thinking and recognises that God takes Black women seriously, suggesting that this happens even though social constructs work in a dangerous way to destabilise Black women's womanhood.

Townes, in developing second wave womanist thinking, explains that "womanist theology employs materials by and about Black foremothers as resources for contemporary reflection that provide a conscious background for God-talk" and in time "points us to the largeness of God and the various ways in which human beings often seek to confine God" (2006, p.1165). In this is an acknowledgment of the embodiment and constructivist nature of thinking theologically, which Townes (2006) agrees involves considering human, social, psychological, historical and cultural contexts. When women are silenced or invisibilised in their society, their situations oftentimes

render them so undermined that they need to seek help or find rescue/escape, and often it is in these times that they begin to develop a relationship with God. For instance, women have turned to God when systems fail them (ecclesial, medical and scientific), or when their family circumstances (social inaccessibility due to poverty, disease, violence, poor education/knowledge) become unbearable, or they fear for their children's health and safety.

Thus, second wave womanist theologians, ethicists and biblical scholars centre their focus on raising consciousness by engaging with foremothers who have wisdom to impart. They expanded their focus out into the world, in order to learn about women's experiences of escaping oppressive behaviours and constructs which impact and marginalise them in their own contexts. They use global forums to articulate the relationships that Black/ethnically-minoritised women have or can develop with God especially as they negotiate their own lived realities towards justice and fullness of life.

Third wave womanist theology, in which womanist practical theology is emerging, began to surface in the 2000s and continues the call for new tools to reframe and reshape the narrative. New discussions are happening in various places (the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, UK and so on) on wider issues. Reflecting on using race, class and gender analytically, in the future development of womanist theology, religious ethicist Mitchem charges that (2008, p.53):

> The changes of the times demand new tools of scholarship. One route by which new tools have been developing happens when womanist theologians enter dialogues across the African Diaspora. These dialogical processes create new strands of discourse in the broader contexts of globalization, and as a result, gender, class, and race take on new meanings. The uses of gender, race, and social class as tools of oppression were not imaginary inventions of women and

people of color.

The UK voices, where my research was conducted, offer new discussions in which the intersection of gender, race and class have new and different significance as tools of oppression. Adding to this wave of discussions is a womanist theological approach developed by UK Baptist minister, Coleman, in her 2007 article 'Another Kind of Black' published in *Black Theology; an International Journal.* Coleman employs métissage (French (métisse) crossing of races) and mestizo/as (Spanish (mixed blood)), which she explains "are related to the theme of creolization, which has traditionally been applied to the process of intermixing and cultural change that has produced "new world" societies, in particular, the Caribbean and South America" (2007, p.279). She finds that the women in her study have naming strategies and identity formations that go beyond rigid demarcations such as Black, African, Asian and so on. Thus signalling that ethnically-minoritised women in the UK understand their identities as complex. Coleman looked specifically at one group of people, and discussed possibilities for anthropological reflexivity with regard to Black British Christian women.

Womanist researcher, Etienne, has done important work in the field of Black feminist epistemologies, thus embracing the portion of Walker's definition of womanist that is "black feminist or feminist of color" (Walker, p.xi), and utilising Brazilian educator and philosopher Freire's philosophy of education, as espoused in his (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to critique the UK education system. In her 2017 book *Learning in Womanist Ways*, Etienne concerns herself with promoting the transforming power of learning for first generation African-Caribbean Black women in the UK. This occasions encouraging the unlearning of old ways, learning negotiating skills, and overcoming imperialistic notions of who can legitimately be counted as educated. Etienne is interested in empowering older African-Caribbean women living in the UK to navigate learning, even as they recognise the obstacles they face at the intersection of age, race, gender and class.

Overall, these new discussions seek to challenge the embodied rootedness of feelings, thoughts and social experiences, which are wrapped up with a UK-specific mentality of empire-building and domination. A particular instance of this mentality came to the fore as recently as 2018: the *hostile environment* policy instituted by the British government against "illegal" immigrants. In its extreme manifestation, this policy erroneously and inexplicably targeted the Windrush generation, many of whom are offspring of the Caribbean invitees to post-war UK to fill labour shortages such as nurses, mail carriers, train operators, bus drivers, who had been living in the UK for decades (Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, 2020). This type of behaviour has been instrumental in imposing an invisibilising combination of historical gender, race, culture, class biases and collusive behaviour, which have their own particular psychological and social impacts on Black/ethnically-minoritised women's bodies.

Neglects and commitments

In terms of womanist biblical interpretation and womanist theology respectively, biblical scholar, Junior, whose focus is on the links between gender, race and religion in the Hebrew Bible, warns that womanist biblical interpretation will have limited impact in the biblical studies arena if *womanist* continues to refer to the individual scholars rather than the work of the scholar (Junior, 2015). Asian patristics scholar Lien-yueh Wei argues of womanist theology, that it neglects "invisibility in itself" in five ways, even though it originates from invisibility in other theologies. One of the five ways he indicates is "racial invisibility" whereby other ethnically-minoritised women are not fought for because womanist theology is, in his reckoning, exclusively concerned with women of the African diaspora (Lien-yueh Wei, [no date]).

I bear these criticisms in mind, even as I recognise Smith's urging that womanist theology "continues to strive to be an inclusive theology interested in the health and welfare of the whole community" (2015, p.209). Womanist theological and biblical perspectives came into being in the

1980s to address a lack of attention to the multi-layered oppressions of women of the African diaspora by mainstream, feminist and Black theologies. However, the aim now is to move it on to embrace and address a wider audience. Those experiences that brought the genre into being, now happen and are understood in a broader global social context (Mitchem, 2002).

Floyd-Thomas sums up that "womanism is a movement with multiple voices, cultures, and experiences, rather than a school or a canon that prefers one voice, culture, or experience of 'woman' or of 'the Black woman' over others" (2006, p.7). The commitment is to taking it further, and focusing on the empowerment of Black, brown/ethnically-minoritised women/girls' whole being in a way that does not neglect how the layered expressions or intersections of racism, sexism, classism and other harms impact globally on the womanness of minoritised girls and women.

The reality of life in church communities, especially those located in contexts historically disadvantaged by constructs and mindsets that enabled slavery, colonialism, racism, sexism, and intersectional fallouts, is that certain voices dominate. These various constructs and discriminations have locally and globally enabled divisiveness to be interjected in religious praxis and have been the cause of the positioning of those who are deemed to be outside of the norm, as not belonging. To draw focus on oppressions that operate systematically, Fiorenza adopts the term "kyriarchy" to name a constantly-changing pyramidal system in which social structures intersect and impact on women who live at the bottom of the pyramid (2001, pp.1-14). The Church, as an institution, has not escaped the kyriarchal operating system. This is evidenced in the need for liberationist biblical readings and understandings of Scripture, such as Black, feminist, womanist, Mujerista, Asian, Dalit, Latin-American Liberation, and so on.

Feminist theology—support, activism
Feminist theologians hold views about Christian theology which range from orthodox to post-modern, and work from different vantage points. They

offer a framework for developing liberationist conversations, or as Althaus-Reid puts it, they do the hidden work of producing "in anonymity", discourses of liberation theology that break "with the tradition of authority at social, political and religious" levels (2000, p.21). Just over three decades ago, Grant (1989) cautioned that while feminist theology claims to be based on the experiences of women, it invariably displays a lack of attention to the lives of women who have experienced the fallout of chattel slavery and the civil rights movement and continue to do so. I am interested in those feminist theologians who today focus on support and activism for dialogue related to women across cultures. As Althaus-Reid argues, such liberation discourses "have a value which comes not from their textual force, but from the realm of human activity, that is, from the rebellious people" (2000, p.21).

For instance, Hicks (2005), in her analysis of the Syrophoenician woman story, like Cannon, emphasises moral agency in relation to the historical power dynamics. Her focus, however, is on the "historical constructions that highlight ways our assumptions about first-century gender and political economy shape the verbal exchange" (Hicks, 2005, p.45). She thus applies the analogy of border-crossing as a starting point to describe the actions of one who stands between communities of interest. Hicks references Anzaldua (1987) and Giroux (1992) who like Coleman (2007), both appealed to border-crossing to represent characteristics of marginalisation, mestiza/multiple identities; and as being the symbol of postmodern cultural production respectively (2005, p.48). Thus, she argues that when we meet communities of difference, we can imagine our lives with regard to border crossing (Hicks, 2005, p.49).

Black theology—naming, renaming
Black theology commits to the liberation of people whose daily experiences are of oppression and injustice, focusing on racial discrimination. In carving out a Black theological discourse, Cone (1975) bases theories on the Black experience of oppression, namely racism, systemic prejudice and injustice in a post-civil-rights context. In terms of Black theology, there are

important interconnecting issues to do with naming, renaming, framing, reframing and claiming truth, which are important for this thesis.

For instance, Cone offers a very important insight, he sees God-talk as being about God "calling his people into being for freedom in the world" and "about the liberating character of God's presence in Jesus Christ" (1975, pp.7-8). Thus, he urges theologians to be "exegetes of Scripture" and recognise that the Bible is "the witness to God's Word as a primary source of theological discourse" because truth "cannot be separated from the people's struggle and the hopes and dreams that arise from that struggle" (1975, pp.8,16). Cone (1975), like Thomas (2004) and Sheppard (2011; 2016), underlines the importance of having freedom to hope, urging that to fight for that freedom involves naming truths that arise from that fight.

Certainly, truths are relative to the struggle/fight, and Thomas (2004) argues that Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the world need to name truths that are robust and bold enough to affirm and/or critique positives and negatives of the Black community, the Church and wider society. Yet, in Black theology, the intersections of these women's particular struggles have not always been visibly reflected nor vigorously articulated and advocated. Grant recognises this, and in her essay 'Black Theology and the Black Woman' as published in Guy-Sheftall's 1995 anthology, she searches for and cannot find Black women in Black theology, but this was twenty-five years ago. Over a decade later, womanist ethicist Riggs (2008) proposed that the misuse of scriptures has sexism to blame as it is responsible for limiting the role of women and perpetuating a male privilege that is often present in church settings.

Hence, the argument persisted in the 2000s that Black theology has not always challenged hierarchical constructs of men's privileged maleness that positions them advantageously over women. Cone (2006) later appears to become alert to Black women's particularisms and wants to know how long it would be before men, in particular from disadvantaged communities, begin to pay attention to the particular oppressions suffered by their Black

sisters. From the British context, Reddie (2012) aims to be inclusive of Black and other oppressed communities in his naming the truth about the situation. He essentially argues that oppressed people represent the majority who are relegated to the world's margins merely because they are Black. Thus, he urges that "the word 'Black' comes to represent God's symbolic and actual solidarity with all oppressed people" (Reddie, 2012, p.10).

What these liberation perspectives have in common is a concern for people who have historically been marginalised in one way or another, inviting them to highlight their particular experiences/truths. Black, feminist, womanist, practical and other liberationist theological thinking have, in different ways, been focused on freeing those with whom they are concerned, from what is dehumanising, demeaning and oppressive. The telling of truths takes us a step further and "involves us in naming and renaming reality" (Bush Jr, 2006, p.86). Hence, minoritised, marginalised and oppressed people must name their realities, find and give expression to their voices and new truths gained from their experiences. That is, even when these truths are dissimilar from what has been received as the norm and treated as unfamiliar.

Womanist practical theology
Womanist practical theology is different from both womanist theology and practical theology (Sheppard, 2011). The former (womanist theology) is an important subset of the latter (practical theology) because of its greater attention to the religiosity and faith formation of ordinary Black and disenfranchised women, looking intently at their practices and lived realities. In the way Sheppard describes it, a combined womanist and practical theological perspective enables increasing "attention to black women's bodies", which explains its relevance to this thesis (2016, p.223). These two theologies combined offer both pragmatic and pastoral liberationist approaches to understanding and raising awareness of oppressions, discriminatory practices, and systemic injustices that are particular to marginalised women.

Womanist practical theology will provide me with a multilayered lens through which to see how the intersectional layers of having to renegotiate for a space around the table of leadership and decision-making in the URC might impinge upon the women's situatedness. As well, it will enable me to discern how their experiences impact on their faith walk in a denomination for which the highest authority that informs what it believes and does is God's Word through scripture. In developing this theological perspective, a dialogue about the psychological and holistic liberation of Black/ethnically-minoritised women, is necessary; as there is "a psychoanalytic concern" to be considered "with the relationship between race, gender, and culture in womanist practical theology" (Sheppard, in 2016, p.223).

The overall objective of employing a womanist practical theological lens is to get to a place where I am able to create a liberating and ethical response to the issues that arise from how women of Black/ethnically-minoritised backgrounds are positioned in the denomination. Womanist practical theology is concerned with social issues that psychologically and socially impact the women who are not visible at the table, against the backdrop of how the URC describes its intention for leading the denomination. The URC advocates for "all" being invited to the table, which links to Vision2020 Statements 2, 5 and to some extent 9 about identity, hospitality and diversity, and justice, focusing on who is at the table, observing whose bodies are invited and asking why some bodies are missing (Collins & Anderson, 1992; Walfall, 2018).

Yet, making space for all is about developing a mindset that involves actively preparing, engaging, interacting, hearing and listening to what the diverse voices are saying. The marginalised have always been among those whom Jesus has invited to break bread with him. In this thesis where the table is being renegotiated, invitation, hospitality, presence, visibility, identity and inclusion; that is, impartiality and attentiveness play important parts. This links to mission Statements 2, 5 and 9 and is reminiscent of Luke 24 which reports at verses 30-31: "when Jesus was at the table with them he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their

eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight"; thus implying the influence of the habit of hospitality.

Sheppard is not the only theologian who has combined her practice with womanist theology. Walker-Barnes (2014) has combined her work as psychologist with womanist theology as demonstrated in her book *Too Heavy a Yoke.* There is also Crumpton (2014) whose work in pastoral counselling, family systems and theological methodology places her in good stead to combine pastoral counselling and womanist theologies. She presents this combined approach in her book *A Womanist Pastoral Theology Against Intimate and Cultural Violence.*

As evidenced, the strand of womanist practical theology that Sheppard (2011) is developing uses the method of incorporating Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory which he began to develop in 1896 to focus on how healing and insight could be gained, by transforming unconscious thoughts and motivations to conscious ones (cited in Jung, 1948). Psychoanalysis is important for how Sheppard (2011) is developing womanist practical theology. She is concerned with making unconscious hidden memories and experiences such as historical race and gender oppressions and cultural assumptions, conscious, to then get to a place of being able to assert an identity that is free of repressive influences.

My preferred tool of analysis, however, is embodiment thinking, drawing from across disciplines to assist me to develop my womanist practical theological thinking. Since my focus is on the whole body, using knowledge gained as the whole embodied self to challenge experiences, thoughts, attitudes and remembrances, with a view to discontinuing historical race and gender oppressions and cultural assumptions, is critical. The aim is towards becoming intentional about preparing the whole self and the environment for a flourishing future.

Towards embodiment thinking

Thus far, a small amount of work has been done in the area of womanist practical theology. Sheppard acknowledges this and cautions that the "lack of attention to black female embodiment has implications for the trajectory of womanist practical theology and beyond" (2016, p.222). This provides me with an opportunity to make a contribution to this perspective.

In my research, I focus on embodiment thinking which is aimed at enabling analyses and discussions on how constructs that are linked to collective as well as personal historical experiences such as slavery and colonisation can be challenged. Employing embodiment thinking to undergird this thesis allows me to expand fully on how the women's marginalised and often missing bodies are understood as sites of resistance and marked as objects in the gaze of White patriarchal power. It is also on how ethnically-minoritised women's cultural embodiment can be realised in interactions in their social environments and work settings. In other words, the focus is on what the women embody, whether consciously or unconsciously, and how that shapes their behaviour, attitudes, perceptions, and helps them to reconstruct their knowledge.

However, in reconstructing knowledge, Black/ethnically-minoritised women would need to recall, revisit, rethink and challenge historical and contemporary harms that have impacted their lives, in order to assist their survival. Collins is helpful here, in joint work with Andersen entitled *Class, race and gender* she suggests that there is an important question that needs to be asked when reconstructing knowledge; that is: "Who has been excluded from what is known and how might we see the world differently if we acknowledge and value the experiences and thoughts of those who have been excluded?" (1992, p.1).

Given that womanist theology uses scripture to critique the system and empower Black and other marginalised women, the stories of Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman are appropriate as both stories deal with how the women are positioned, and how they have actively navigated and

negotiated space. The women are at the centre of these stories, and are made visible and audible by their actions, in that, they cross borders: move/mobilise themselves from locations to which they have been relegated or are assumed to be occupying. Both women possess bodies which are nurturing, borne out of the need, not only for their survival but also the survival of family and community; both were concerned about their children's welfare.

Interpreting texts involves paying attention to the context, reality, and freshness of change. For people who have been written out of wider theological stories and narratives by oppressors, dominant voices and unfair systems, it is also about embracing God, seeing God anew or being seen by God. In Chapter 9, I engage more deeply with the biblical texts of Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman.

Conclusion

Womanist theological thinking through its waves has aimed to respond to narratives and discourses, biblical and otherwise, in a way that includes a multitude of voices in a fresh way and its concern has been to address issues of belonging. However, its concern is not only predicated on Black and other ethnically-minoritised women and girls, it is also on praxis that takes seriously these women and girls' daily embodied experiences of womanhood.

Womanist practical theology, a combination of womanist and practical theologies, offers both pragmatic and pastoral liberationist approaches to understanding and raising awareness of oppressions, discriminatory practices and systemic injustices that are embodied by Black/ethnically-marginalised women. Jointly and severally they provide a varifocal lens to see the various layers of how such experiences of having to negotiate for a space at the table of leadership and decision-making in the URC might impinge upon how they navigate relationships in the denomination. This combined theological perspective, which is also interested in the women's psychological embodiment, is not widely written about, nor broadly known.

This presents an opportunity for me to build upon the womanist practical theological discourse.

This discourse points to the need for embodiment thinking from the viewpoint of womanist practical theology, which calls for personal and social transformation, asking how these relate to God-talk. This perspective offers an important tool for my research. It points, also, to the need for a new way of thinking about the social environment that the women embody. Thus, I am challenged to go further in understanding the women's psychological emotional, embodied selves and social experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR

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Embodiment Thinking

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the constructs that Black/ethnically-minoritised women embody**,** and attempt to understand how these might position them/us in their/our settings. Embodiment thinking offers a framework in which to structure and analyse my research and will help me form a discussion of the results. In an article published in *Topics in Cognitive Science 4*, Meier et al. (2012) offer that embodied theories came into use in social psychology in the 1990s and have since been used to address a range of issues on how people feel, think and what influences them "inside their bodies" (p.706). Meier et al. present the theory that those same thoughts, feelings and behaviours are influenced by "motor, sensory and perceptual processes" (2012, p.707). These are central to our human beingness; in other words, these processes are what make us human bodies.

My aim is to address issues to do with race/ethnicity, gender and so on, which have historically been psychologically, socially and culturally embodied, to provide myself with material for a framework to interpret or analyse the data. These intersecting considerations underpin embodiment thinking from the perspective of womanist practical theology which is intrinsically interdisciplinary. I draw from across disciplines to assist this trajectory, bringing voices from various fields into the conversation.

The diverse voices in conversation across disciplines and contexts with Sheppard's developing womanist practical theology are: practical theologians Graham, and Goto; biblical scholar Sechrest, social psychologists Meier et al., theological anthropologist van Huyssteen, theologian, philosopher and ethicist Wildman, social theorist and activist DuBois, womanist theological anthropologist Copeland, Black theologians Pinn, and Beckford; and URC ministers Campbell and Robinson,

contributors to *In Our Own Words,* earlier described as a collection of stories from minoritised voices (lay and ordained) in the URC, edited by Jagessar. In engaging these voices, I aim to obtain a deeper understanding of what the women in my study might be experiencing in their local congregations and the wider denomination.

Embodiment across disciplines

My embodiment thinking is that people experience externalities through mind, body and spirit simultaneously; otherwise we would be incapable of a unique experience because it is what makes us distinct human bodies. The prefix 'em' in the word 'embodiment' gives substance to the body, encompassing senses such as feelings, thoughts and emotions that reside within. This implies something intangible which is experienced in a tangible way, such as racism, sexism and other forms of oppressive systemic harms. These remain present in UK society and are generally dangerous for Black/ethnically-minoritised communities, girls and women in particular.

Diverse arguments have been presented to give meaning to 'embodiment' and its implications for us as human beings. Agency, inner scripts, internalisations, identity inclusion, repressed memories, sexuality and faith are some of the issues and themes with which Sheppard (2011) works, within the framework of embodiment. Accordingly, embodiment thinking is an important aspect of developing a womanist practical theological perspective (Sheppard, 2011, p.39). However, although for van Huyssteen (2006), embodiment theory is a necessary conduit, he views the word 'embodiment' as presenting problems, because it suggests "en-fleshing a soul that is non-physical rather than acknowledging that there is a soul and a physicality present within" (p.207). For him, the word appears to depict disregard for the inner being. The *problematic* aspect of embodiment is also expressed by Graham who sees it as being a "necessary, if problematic, aspect of women's passage from subordination to selfhood," which she believes "is more than an 'issue' exciting our compassion" (1999, p.113).

As van Huyssteen's and Graham's thinking implies, it is through our bodies that we enter into relationships, build communities, develop habits and understand God. In the URC context, the *insiders-without* location that Black/ethnically-minoritised people embody, mirrors the social picture. In her article 'My Journey to "Here"' (in Jagessar, 2016), Campbell realises in her years growing-up in London that people in British society "wanted Black people to 'go home'". She then adds, "but England was where I had been born and raised – I was already 'home', wasn't I?" (p.79).

In the same publication, in Robinson's article 'My Path' he talks about returning *home* to the UK where he was born and being the first Black URC minister in the Yorkshire Synod, which he then follows-up with: "I cannot call the UK home in any genuine way. […] I do not have a sense of belonging because I am always seen as 'other'" (p.4). Other Black/ethnically-minoritised colleagues across the denomination also attest to this disorienting absence of a sense of home and belonging, despite which they embody "a radical confidence in God; and God-talk that delights in employing mind and heart, spontaneity and imagination – in response to the offer of full life for all" (Jagessar, 2016, p.ii).

Although Sechrest (2018) speaks from a US context, she is helpful in her observation that African Diaspora faith communities uniquely experience a holism about their faith, which came out of the slavery experience. However, I would include people of other ethnically diverse backgrounds and geographical contexts who have had colonialism, imperialism and other forms of domination as their experience. To reinforce her observation, Sechrest cites Shelton and Emerson (2012), who, albeit broadly, state that there exist differences in how Black and White people embody what they believe is important for their spirituality. These authors are not suggesting that all White people or all Black people think alike; they are alluding to the understanding that people's cultures and histories help shape the way they are. The inference is that people's cultures and history provide the contexts through which we think, believe, understand the world, do theology, practice our faith, and make ethical decisions.

Human uniqueness

By extension, not all people of Black/ethnically-minoritised backgrounds in the URC are the same or think the same; we each have very different and unique experiences, with very different personal, social and cultural aspirations. van Huyssteen (2006) assesses that a dialogue between Christian theological affirmations and scientific understandings on the topic of human uniqueness is an important way forward. He made this assessment having witnessed the impact of human behaviour *in all of its ugliness* in apartheid South Africa, which allowed him to see the dangers of claims on uniqueness. He thus points to the existence of "esoteric and baroquely abstract notions of human uniqueness" which human beings embody, as being made in the image of God (van Huyssteen, 2006, p.207).

For him, the bodying of human uniqueness is largely underestimated in theological traditions, which put forth a description of human beings' unique claims on being made in the image of God, which he acknowledges can be dangerous (van Huyssteen, 2006). My perception is that such a description of human beings is more of an accurate description of God's vision for humankind, and not a true description of our uniqueness. The argument is that human beings' ability to respond religiously to the world depends on the cognitive, imaginative and symbolic aspects of the mind.

Wildman (2007) agrees that these observations are correct, but, as I do, he sees them as restrained and somewhat limited. Thus, he posits that "the human species embrace wide variations in cognitive abilities, in relation to language, sociality, and understanding" (2007, p.349). In that case, does the collective, cultural, historical reflexive embodiment of slavery, imperialism, colonisation which locates Diaspora people as apart, shape their cognitive self-awareness? Wildman argues that human beings are interrelated, whether or not we are emotionally, psychologically or intellectually differed (2007). Knowing that "there is no basis for decisive cognitively-based separations among us", allows people to challenge cultural assumptions and rigid binaries often connected to gender, ethnicity/race and sexuality (Wildman, 2007, p.349). Not having this knowledge can lead to a

variety of discriminatory practices, which would be difficult to recognise and challenge.

It is these cultural assumptions and rigid binaries that are so often applied to Black/ethnically-minoritised women, who Sheppard argues "are singled out as problematic conduits of 'cultural' and/or 'racial traits'" (2011, p.13). This correlation of assumptions and identities can be projected onto Black/ethnically-minoritised women as being fit only for arbitrary tasks such as helping out at coffee mornings, cleaning etc, and as not fit for decision-making and leadership roles. It is these assumptions that Sheppard describes as "malignant stereotypes" that sap any energy the women might have had for living in creative ways (2011, p.13). The problematic cultural and racial traits to which Sheppard (2011) refers are expressed similarly by Wildman (2007) who alludes to them as being easily assumed in which their cognitive insights are imagined to be absent or useless. This is owed to racist imagery and labelling of Black/ethnically-minoritised people as having a so-called propensity for being uneducated, lazy, promiscuous, evil, criminal, and deemed inferior and sub-intelligent (Sheppard, 2011).

Over a century ago, DuBois (1903) recognised the onslaught of this thinking on the most marginalised in US society. These unfounded, problematic, malignant, and unfair assumptions become embodied, directly impacting the body physically and emotionally, causing "twoness" or "double consciousness" to be experienced (DuBois, 1903, p.2). That people's social and cultural lived situations influence the perceptions of their lives, and manifest, as DuBois submits, as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (1903, p.2), rings true today for Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the UK. The inference is that people shoulder separate identities depending on the situation and or circumstance with which they are faced (DuBois, 1903). This can result in a disconnect from what is experienced physically and what impacts psychologically, which could present difficulties for understanding how to navigate the psychological self within the social world. This is what makes it extremely difficult at best, or impossible at worst, to always present the authentic self.

Over a century later, Beckford reinterprets DuBois' "double-consciousness" and "twoness", visualising them as "gifts", "double blessings" or "second sights" that can be advantageous for navigating difficult experiences because it is through the whole identity/body that meaningful reframing and renaming occur (2011, p.45).

Being self

Given these problematic considerations, what would the advice "just be yourself" mean for women who want to be valued as productive contributors within their congregations, or those candidating for ministry within the broader church? If *being yourself* has already been hijacked by unpleasant stereotypical assumptions that render Black/ethnically-minoritised women as *other*, then what? Goto understands this dilemma and responds definitively that "[T]he assumption that we just need to "be ourselves" suggests no awareness of how truly futile it is for those who are racially labeled as 'other'", especially women (in Mercer & Miller-McLemore, 2016, p.12).

Embodiment thinking is critical to womanist practical theology as it is intrinsic to how womanist theologians understand themselves and the surroundings in which we/they live (Sheppard, 2011). The focus of womanist and practical theologies is not solely on the knowledge of theology; it is also on human personhood, other social understandings and on people's existential realities. This presents twoness or double-consciousness that DuBois (1903) argues are experienced by people who continue to be oppressed; that is, not only on the basis of race, but also on gender (Crenshaw, 1989).

To gain an understanding of the women's historically embodied experiences and get a sense of how and to what extent ethnically-minoritised women have been impacted by them, demands engagement across disciplines. In Cannon and Pinn's insightful foreword to Copeland's (2010) book *Enfleshing freedom*, they acknowledge that liberationist theological perspectives "give attention to embodiment" in ways that

"centre on the conditions, such as sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia, that impinge upon humanity's ability to experience life as full and fruitful" (p.xi). This suggests movement between theological and practical aspects of suffering, salvation and healing, which are evident in the experiences of both the Syrophoenician woman and Hagar and are part and parcel of Black/ethnically-minoritised women's embodied lives.

This perspective allows focus to be directed specifically at understanding how the women are positioned or placed, and at the spaces they are allowed to occupy. It serves to provide a framework for coping with the effects of combating the negative embodied social constructs that occur as a daily experiment. This is because these social constructs will have effects upon the actions expected of their raced bodies, and also upon the variety of meanings attributed to these bodies (Berquist, 2002). The struggle is against objectification, for acknowledgement that their raced, gendered lives matter, and securing a place of value in society. Although Pinn estimates that embodiment "does not entail a body theology in a formal and systematic sense", he sees it as a necessary combination of social and theological practices (2010, p.68). However, when used in the context of attending to human beings embodied with their gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity and psychological personas, it operates to offer an understanding of the total person.

The essence of embodiment is captured by social researcher, Nagata's "bodymindfulness" (2006, p.137). This refers to "the process of attending to all aspects of the bodymind–body, emotion/feeling, mind, and spirit–in order to grasp the holistic personal meaning of an internal event and to use the resultant understanding to communicate skilfully" (Nagata, 2006, p.137). It captures embodiment thinking from the standpoint of womanist practical theology, which as a lens in this study, entails "an interdisciplinary thought experiment" or "complex subjectivity" (Pinn, 2010, p.68). This relates to human beings' desire to understand their existence and improve their lives in a quest to embody more than they are assumed to be and move beyond stereotypes.

My context

Alongside ministering to a four-congregation pastorate, empowerment of Black/ethnically-minoritised women's value through CoG and addressing unjust practices with TeamURC are important goals for me. Yet, even with this responsibility to find ways to enable absent bodies and voices to emerge present and audible, I am also among the largely absent bodies and missing voices. I acknowledge that even the name 'Cascades of Grace' is not an exact representation of the work involved in empowering ethnically-minoritised women and girls to become visible and audible in the denomination. Is the name suggesting collusion in the invisibilising and silencing of the URC's Black/ethnically-minoritised women and myself? Does it need to be renamed to reflect its purpose and identity?

A significant amount of energy is spent navigating and negotiating issues and obstacles that are particular to my being a woman who is Black, whether it is in the denomination, the world, or writing this thesis, in which I can only call on God to see me through. In my mind, the characteristics which Walker (1983) attributes to Black/brown women/girls, of courage, will, confidence, audacity, outrage and curiosity underscore what it means constantly to have to find ways to treat with the manifestations of oppression in whatever forms they are meted out.

Sheppard understands this concept and puts forward the notion that in "Black women's embodiment, the psychological and social converge in provocative ways" (2011, p.13). As a Black woman in the URC, I need to think meaningfully, and creatively develop ideas on how to navigate my particular situations by engaging the various parts that make up my whole true/authentic identity. This entails remembering that my history/culture, gender/ethnicity make up my whole being (or bodymind) and being intentionally aware not to collude with my own marginalisation or, not to, as DuBois (1903) puts it, look at myself through the eyes of others.

Bodies matter

Embodiment thinking puts emphasis on how we understand the social role of the body in the world. At the very core of embodiment thinking from the perspective of womanist practical theology is that human beings are in fact human bodies seeking freedom from social harms. This is an important concept to consider in this research because it speaks of a future of possibilities, and begs the question: what if all human bodies in all of their diverse ways of being were all truly seen as having legitimate contributions to make towards being legitimate parts of Christ's body, to theology, and to the URC?

Interestingly, biblical Hebrew scholar Berquist proposes that "[B]bodies are pure, and bodies are dangerous; the interplay of the categories means that bodies are the location for society's production of boundaries" (2002, p.10). This leads me to think about the production of boundaries in relation to the significant lack of Black/ethnically-minoritised women in leadership and decision-making roles in the wider URC denomination. I want to know who produced the boundaries, what the boundaries look like, and where they are located. Looking inwardly, I ask myself, where, when and why do I include or exclude my body, or other people's bodies, and reflect on the reasons I give myself.

The URC's Vision2020 language is that the denomination is multicultural and embraces diversity; therefore everybody's experiences should be valid and equally important. But, as Goto explains, the language of embracing diversity "assumes that God's image, captured in the richness and variety of humanity, can be witnessed and experienced first-hand and without contradiction" (in Mercer & Miller-McLemore, 2016, p.121). This compelling statement holds importance for women such as those in present study who might feel objectified, their richness and variety rendered obsolete.

When someone is treated as an object, every human aspect is stripped away, and they no longer have an opinion or a voice. In fact, they are rendered

disembodied from what is deemed to matter, and part of the struggle is finding ways to become visible and audible. It is only in coming to terms with the reality of the impact on the body-emotions, spirit and mind, that transformation towards reshaping and reconstructing their existential realities can happen. For instance, pronouncing that Black lives matter is intentionally to recognise the lives that have been sidelined, minoritised and disregarded. Until Black/ethnically-minoritised lives are seen as worthwhile and equally important, the reality is that all lives do not matter (Black Lives Matter, 2020).

Black women's bodies

Black/ethnically-minoritised women and girls, by virtue of the embodied difficulties they experience linked to both gender and ethnicity, must embody being willful, audacious and courageous alongside having to navigate being sidelined, minoritised and disregarded. This happens simultaneously and in spaces that are not always safe. Copeland describes these embodied experiences as an "incarnate spirit refusing to be bound," which she further suggests is free or freed to love self, family, community and God in spite of the constructs that bind it bodily (2010, pp.46-47). Freeing the incarnate spirit is the coping mechanism that Walker's (1983) women and girls use with outrageous will, courage and curiosity for liberating the self from daily experiences that render them voiceless and bind their bodies psychologically, emotionally, and socially.

Bringing the inner-body and the outer-body experiences into focus in a meaningful way is critical to how Black/ethnically-minoritised women/girls deal with a desire to be taken seriously and valued. But simultaneous navigating of embodied experiences can be exhausting and debilitating, as I can attest from personal experiences (candidating, and navigating this doctoral programme), and from women's shared stories. This calls to mind the description of malignant stereotypes that sap energy (Sheppard, 2011), thus making creative living and working difficult at best.

Embodiment is concerned with the study of the body from within (the psyche) and without (historical, sociological and cultural constructs) which motivate and demotivate (Meier et al., 2012). From a womanist practical theological viewpoint, it is concerned with recognising the realness of how cultural, social and psychological experiences impact on Black/ethnically-minoritised women's bodies, and its theological implications (Sheppard, 2011). As such, it is a lens that focuses attention on understanding the social role of the body through the experiences and well-being of actual bodies. Meier et al. argue that there are central presuppositions in "the developing field of embodied cognition" that are a distinct match with how social psychologists' approach "the study of how the presence of others affects thoughts, feelings, and behaviors" (2012, p.706). These social psychologists are willing to consider that "the notion of embodiment" deals with the theory "that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are grounded in sensory experiences and bodily states" (Meier et al., 2012, p.706).

In terms of the psychological impact on their bodies, how Black/ethnically-minoritised women understand their social, political and psychological environment is critical to what has become interwoven in what they have come to accept as their own experiences (Sheppard, 2011). From the perspective of embodiment thinking from womanist practical theology, central to the women's experiences is the impact their environment continues to have on their bodies socially and psychologically. Directing the focus on their bodies is therefore critical because the women's histories are contained and carried within their bodies, and it is as bodies that Black/ethnically-minoritised women think, reason, become aware, and understand God's movements in their lives.

Copeland's (2010) insight is helpful here; she argues that bodies contain their everyday experiences and interactions, which determine and shape who the owner of the body is. Copeland (2010) also proposes that there is much to learn from the experiences of Black women's bodies because they bear marks of their own identities, as well as the marks of what is embodied daily. It is these marks or demarcations that enable cognisance of the fact

that each has her own stories and narratives that she embodies. Each will also have stories and narratives that mirror what others have experienced (Sechrest, 2018; Sheppard, 2011; Copeland, 2010).

The marks show in their stories, and all stories are authentic to the broader narrative. In my thinking, it is only through participation in the broader narrative as received insiders and not as perceived outsiders to the narrative that the women are genuinely going to give voice to their stories and be listened to. Being able to voice their views is a very important dynamic as it presents opportunities to also be seen, heard, and counted as present.

Conclusion

Working across disciplines assists a better understanding of the body from the inside out, recognising that our cultures and histories are contained within us, thus they influence and affect our lives. An interdisciplinary approach to embodiment thinking provides my research with the facility to choose more appropriate tools to adapt, to reshape and reconstruct particularities. Having awareness of this is useful for considering what it would take to understand the impact on the denomination and on the women themselves, as insiders-without who are absent, missing, or just invisible at the URC table space. It would encourage consideration of ways in which ethnically-minoritised women within the denomination can become present, visible, heard and recognised in the mode of leaders and decision-makers with all that their/our embodied selves have to offer and teach.

The voices in conversation in this chapter demonstrate how meaningful employing an embodiment thinking undergirding is for this study. They focus on the body in their different approaches and affirm the importance of directing the gaze away from White male (and White female) norms onto Black/ethnically-minoritised women's bodies in a way that deeply considers and embraces their embodied lives. Centring focus on the women's bodies visibilises them as fully human participants, thus better

positioning me, as researcher, to listen attentively to the articulation of their thoughts, perceptions and experiences.

Embodiment thinking encapsulates the idea that Black/ethnically-minoritised women's humanness, which they embody internally, also emerges from and is shaped by external lived experiences encountered collectively and severally. Are the social embodied assumptions (patterns of behaviour, attitudes, feelings and values) that surround and affect these women able to be sufficiently debunked so as to afford them/us space to position them/ourselves at the table of leadership and decision-making? Who, what and where are the boundaries and barriers to Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the denomination's presence and voice? Against the backdrop of an "intercultural" agenda of diversity and hospitality, these are questions that require urgent answers.

SECTION III

Methodological Framework

This section contains Chapter 5: Epistemological Orientation, and Chapter 6: Research Design. Chapter 5 provides a constructivist epistemological orientation which is—committed to "the idea that the development of understanding requires active engagement" with the researched (Jenkins, 2000, p.601). My constructivist epistemology is committed to embodiment thinking from the lens of womanist practical theology. This is "an analytical and reflexive process" which is focused on how internal and external experiences impact and influence ethnically-minoritised women and girls and their communities' social and cultural experiences (Sheppard, citing Parker, in Mercer & Miller-McLemore, 2016, pp.222-3).

In Chapter 6, the research design is presented in which the accompanying methodological approaches–Observation and Questionnaire–are employed as appropriate for inductive research. The aim is to address the research question: How might space around the multicultural table be renegotiated in such a way that facilitates the intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women? My research is concerned with using tools that will assist my understanding of the impact of URC praxis and its vision for future growth on ethnically-minoritised women in the denomination.

CHAPTER FIVE

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Epistemological Orientation

Introduction

This chapter presents my epistemological orientation, which is the interpretive stance taken in my approach to this research. It is a womanist theological epistemology undergirded by embodiment thinking that engages in a constructivist way. This perspective is based on the understanding that knowledge is gained through engaging with Black/ethnically-minoritised women's experiences of how social constructs impact their whole beingness. In this regard, I initiated a study of twelve women from two URC congregations in London with a high percentage of people of ethnically-minoritised backgrounds, located in areas that are diversely populated. Further details follow in Chapter 6.

Stringer (2007) posits that all stakeholders, that is, those lives that are affected by the problem under investigation, should be participants in the investigation processes. I regard myself as a stakeholder as I am also affected by the problem under study. Bennett and Lyall (2014) and Sheppard (2016) are among those practical theologians who recognise that considering knowledge, which is acquired through people's embodied experiences both internal and external, is the very definition of critical subjectivity. Still, Sheppard goes further to argue that womanist and practical theological perspectives can only claim to be critically subjective if *raced bodies* are taken seriously (in Mercer & Miller-McLemore, 2016, p.231).

In aiming to address the research question, it is critical to consider the participants' social, psychological, cultural and historical contexts with serious intent. This involves looking at past events, such as how slavery and colonisation impact, both internally and externally,

people's present realities. Such experiences shape and influence what people come to know and comprehend. The impact on the women of being absent/missing, silent/silenced at the multicultural, intercultural URC table of leadership and decision-making needs to be understood. Although multicultural and intercultural are theoretical ideas, I also deal with them as being visionary calls to members to stem inactive intentions and become aware of who is not at the table. Having and treating this knowledge, is in keeping with the concerns of embodiment thinking from a womanist practical theological perspective.

Lorde's urging that it is more important for people, especially Black/ethnically-minoritised women, to dismantle knowledge that oppresses and dehumanises them because "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1984, p.110) is well taken. New tools are certainly needed for the reconstruction of fresh and life-affirming knowledge. However, even more important is recognising that there is no longer a need to depend on old tools and constructs of knowledge, learning methods, voices, taught ways, and established systems. These cannot do the job of reconstructing fresh and life-affirming knowledge.

People construct or make their own knowledge actively and the learning derived is determined by their existential realities (Elliott et al., 2000, p.256). As researcher, I seek knowledge based on participants' experiences and what they think, feel, and perceive about their situations and realities. The present inductive research looks for meaning in the complexity of peoples' lived experiences, searching for a coherent and faithful understanding of the whole being–body, mind, emotion, and faith development of ethnically-minoritised women in the URC. Hence, I employ case studies aimed at gathering data qualitatively which will then be interpreted utilising embodiment thinking from a womanist practical theological perspective.

In the present research, the overall aim is to gain three types of information: participants' factual responses, perceptions and attitudes toward experiences and encounters. "[T]the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (Merriam, 1998, p.6). Leading practical theologian, Swinton, and co-author/researcher, Mowat, argue that researchers need to be intentional about focusing attention on how they go about constructing and bringing freshness to a "shared world" (2006, p.34). Nagata asserts, too, that when "researchers understand the deep meaning of their research, they can be explicit about the story behind the story of their work" (2006, p.137). Although it might be said that this is neither the only likely narrative nor even the only likely interpretation of the material, it still provides a realistic and credible account of the current situation as demonstrated by the research data (Creswell, 2007).

An embodiment constructivist epistemology

I am adapting an embodied reflexive approach, recognising my part in the broader story as I see myself as a case whose interest in this research topic was awakened by my part in a shared experience. However, in a shared world, although people bear similarities with each other, psychologically and socially, we are unique. We embody an individual uniqueness and so too does everyone else. Knowing that our unique stories and narratives belong to a shared life story and broader narratives is especially important for one who experiences the issues identified in this investigation and hopes to benefit from change in whatever form that needs to happen.

My approach is less focused on how knowledge is acquired and more focused on the impact of knowledge and learning derived from cultural, historical, social, and psychological experiences on the whole body. In his pioneering work, constructivist theory of knowing, psychologist Piaget (1953) focuses primarily on how the acquisition

of knowledge happens, but not on the social impact or role of the learning or knowledge acquired. However, I am constructing a methodological approach, which considers that people are influenced, and acquire knowledge through internal and external experiences (past and present). But how does this paradigm challenge and critique more normative forms of epistemology? The nucleus of constructivist theory is that human beings construct knowledge (Boghossion, 2006). Thus, knowledge is constructed in the process of tackling and addressing problems; and as a process, knowledge is a product of knowing (Glasersfeld, 2005).

I am using an inductive methodology that aligns with a constructivist epistemology in which exists objective and subjective truths. However, while I believe in an objective truth of God's being; that is, believing that God exists (whether or not this is believed by all), I recognise that human beings' attempts at theology (God-talk) are contextual. Our truths about what we believe are subjective as they are based on our existential realities. The truths we hold extend only as far as our knowledge permits. Hence, there is no objective theological truth that we should all live by that should bind us to God's truth (Vanden Auweele & Vassányi, 2020).

This is highly contested as some Christian researchers believe in divine revelation. For instance, Swinton and Mowat argue for a constructivist understanding of social reality, yet constructivism seems problematic for these authors (2006). They warn that constructivists take for granted that knowledge and truth "perceived by human beings and human communities are, to a greater or lesser extent, constructed by individuals or communities" (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p.44).

Swinton and Mowat see qualitative research as taking a particularly skeptical view of being able to access truth with any degree of objectivity (2006). They challenge that if practical theologians work

effectively and authentically with qualitative work, then the existing tension between constructivism and deconstructing (i.e. analysing, interpreting) "will need to be resolved" (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p.34). While I am not proposing to ignore that truth accessed through revelation is subject to interpretation and is therefore subjective truth, to Swinton and Mowat:

> [human beings'] behaviour and understanding are seen to be an active process of construction and interpretation in which human beings together endeavour to define the nature of their particular social situations and encounters and in so doing make sense of and participate appropriately in their social, psychological, physical, and spiritual environments (2006, p.35).

For these authors, this bears an "uneasy tension with the theological assumption that truth is accessible through revelation" (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p.35). Swinton (2007) goes some way to embrace constructivism in human matters, but he does not believe that theology is substantially a human construction (in Bennett et al., (2018). He seems to suggest that this *uneasy tension* can be negotiated by realising that truth accessed through revelation is subject to interpretation, and that divine revelation is subject to human interpretation (in Bennet et al. 2018). In later work, Swinton consents that "the embodied nature of the knowledge of God allows us to see things that we might not otherwise see" (BIAPT 2020, p.168). Thus embracing the notion that the embodied ways we know God will feed into, and shape our thinking.

Espousing a womanist ethicist way of thinking, Cannon critiques human domination "in its entirety from the vantage point of the experiences and the empowerment of" Black/historically minoritised women (2006, pp.135-136). Following this thinking, my constructivist epistemological viewpoint is committed to the values of

womanist practical theology that places women of Black/ethnically-minoritised backgrounds at the centre. Floyd-Thomas sheds light on this when she argues that womanist epistemology:

> was not a "hand-me-down" perspective that was founded upon and validated by the normative gaze of white supremacy and patriarchal domination. Rather, it sought to deal explicitly with moral, spiritual, and political purposes of constructed knowledge to dismantle rather than support the White and patriarchal powers that compromised Black women's integrity and self-determination (2006, p.3).

Since for the womanist practical theologian, there is no singular reality, the gaze is focused on women of Black/ethnically-minoritised backgrounds, who present and own their womanness differently, yet who hold the Bible in high regard. The nuanced yet complex intersections of this research, involve for instance, trying to understand what it means for the Bible to hold this weight for Black/ethnically-minoritised Christian women, and for the URC that unlike some other denominations has no mandate to recite a creedal statement. Instead, the URC declares that scripture informs what it believes and does, because there is no higher authority than God's Word (The Manual, 2015).

Knowing

The argument holds among some researchers that all knowledge is situated and that the state of embodiment is a privileged position for knowing. In the social construction of knowledge, groups share understandings and constructions (Vygotsky, 1988) and embodiment thinking is concerned with what they embody. Postmodernist and feminist Haraway (1988), argues that a subtle understanding of perception and (en)vision(ing) demonstrates that objects of sight and knowledge are empirically and conceptually inseparable from an

embodied point of view. These are integral to the epistemological positions taken by diverse people and how they occupy, use and understand the space.

This way of thinking proceeds from an embodied constructivist epistemological concern that sees lived social, cultural, psychological, historical experiences as contributing to the knowledge base. Essentially, it provides an opportunity for me to discover what motivates the participants as the very nature of this research speaks to particular experiences of a group of women. It involves how they see themselves positioned and how they position themselves within their professional practice and in their multicultural denomination that is seeking an intercultural habit as part of its Vision2020 agenda.

Positioning

How a person positions themselves and how they are positioned are two different things. The former is internal and suggests agency–less reliant on someone else's gaze and more focused on their own human aspirations based on self-knowledge. The latter is external and suggests lack of agency; more concerned with the image people have of them which is oftentimes based on assumptions, preconceptions and stereotypes. In this research, the aim is to get information from the women themselves to be able to draw conclusions, not from what I (or anyone else) believe I know about them, but from what they share as their individual lived experience. This position agrees with Floyd-Thomas' (2006) and Sheppard's (in 2016) who see it as important and necessary to interpret Black/ethnically-minoritised women's raced bodies as a critical vantage position for discussing issues that affect their own lives.

Thus, Floyd-Thomas writes "[K]knowledge is no longer interpreted in light of the gaze of racist and misogynistic subjectivities that masquerade as human normativity, but rather takes into consideration a new 'Black-woman consciousness'" (2006, p.2). Embodiment

thinking from a womanist practical theological perspective is appropriate for taking the psychological and cultural aspects of Black women's experiences into consideration and challenging and critiquing existing normative constructions that shape church life (Sheppard, 2011).

This research is focused on enabling analyses and discussions on how constructs linked to personal and collective historical experiences, such as slavery and colonisation, can be challenged. It is also aimed at understanding how the cultural embodiment of the twelve ethnically-minoritised women in my study can be realised in how they interact and take up space in their social environment. Being able to generate or stimulate new norms in this context would involve understanding the positioning of Black/ethnically-minoritised women; namely, how they position their embodied selves and how this impacts the denomination's functioning.

Towards constructing knowledge
Womanist practical theology draws substantially from womanist theological thinking in a way that takes Black/ethnically-minoritised women's bodies seriously and takes psychological and cultural aspects into consideration (Sheppard, 2011; in 2016). In terms of the construction of knowledge, it is more than just a theology that focuses on the racialised othered. Womanist practical theology interrogates the situation from the perspective of the women's raced bodies which illuminates the situation for all involved.

This is crucial, especially as I aim to take the result and interpretations of my findings into the whole denomination from grassroots level of being a Black woman who serves God through, and is a member of, the denomination. Being strategic in how I offer feedback to the denomination will also be crucial. In terms of who gets to participate in sharing, representing and disseminating knowledge, as Jagessar intimates in a URC podcast interview, the denomination is not yet at the

stage where it consistently lives up to its intention to be inclusive. Jagessar argues that "there is a distinction between how we move from intention and how we make things real" (Towards an inclusive church Podcast, 14:13). He continues:

> I would want to say that the URC tries its best to ensure that a variety of people are included in its work and committees, but there is a challenge to all of this. Even though we try to find representation that would indicate the diversity in the church, where we fall down is our inability to enable minorities to participate (13:15).

Focusing on Black/ethnically-minoritised women's bodies to illuminate the situation for all, means positioning myself reflexively to get a better understanding of the participants' lived and embodied realities. This involves, as womanist theologian Coleman argues, gathering data about how the women exercise (or not) their individual and collective agencies and make "a way where there is no way" (2008, p.12). This is also critical as it broadly articulates the relationships that Black/ethnically-minoritised women have or can develop with God as they negotiate their own lived realities towards justice and fullness of life.

The limitation of constructivist thinking is that we are not always able to identify and recognise what we do not already know. As such, we run the risk of unintentionally presenting our own biases (Merrill, 1991). However, this research works with the notion that a womanist constructivist epistemology, for which deconstructing (analysing) data/texts in this way, is of utmost importance, just as rereading and reinterpreting them from the social realities of the reader is also critical. But into my interpretation, I bring my reality. I bring my way of being a woman, my Blackness, and my locatedness as *insider-without*, being a denomination insider who is, on many levels, perceived as an outsider. These identities are not isolated from context, as they are connected to my social, cultural and historical experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, an embodiment, womanist practical theological constructivist epistemology was presented. It deals with the intersectional issues of racism, sexism and colonialism and so on, that affect Black/ethnically-minoritised women on various levels. This implies the need for an inductive and qualitative research approach to collecting data, which is identified as the best process for discovery. Engaging the different aspects is an intersectional constructivism.

My embodiment of the situation is not to be overlooked as research practitioner who is a Black woman located both inside the denomination as a member who is perceived as outsider, as well as an outsider to the two participating congregations. This calls for embodied critical reflexivity which involves being conscious that intersectional constructs of race, gender and the historical, cultural and social status that I embody will influence my own understanding.

In the following chapter, I present my research design to discover participants' experiences and undertake a deep analysis of their responses.

CHAPTER SIX

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Research Design

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design and explains the rationale for identifying specific methods and procedures for collecting data. It then locates the empirical work within the field of inductive research by employing qualitative case-study methods. The research question is: How might space around the multicultural table be renegotiated in such a way that facilitates the intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women?

The present study is perceived through the lens of embodiment thinking from the perspective of womanist practical theology in examining the impact on ethnically-minoritised women, for being absent/missing and invisibilised at the table of decision-making and leadership in the denomination. Thus, it is not only concerned with theoretical perspectives. The research is also interested in learning how recognition of the lived experience of individuals can influence positive change by informing future policy and practice, as suggested by the subtitle 'towards intentional intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women in the URC'.

The key research instruments employed are observation and questionnaire. Observation is always qualitative, whereas, questionnaires are normally used in quantitative research. It was not my intention to employ the use of questionnaires. I had planned to conduct face-to-face interviews as part of the initial research design. However, practicalities in the research process, as I discuss in this chapter, meant that I used questionnaires qualitatively by treating them as written interviews. Geographical researchers McGuirk and O'Neill (2016) recognise that there are limitations to using

questionnaires to gather and analyse data qualitatively. However, they point out the following strengths:

> First, they can provide insights into social trends, processes, values, attitudes, and interpretations. Second, they are one of the more practical research tools in that they can be cost-effective, enabling extensive research over a large or geographically dispersed population. This is particularly the case for questionnaire surveys conducted on-line where printing and distribution costs can be minimised. Third, they are extremely flexible (2016, p.310).

In terms of qualitative research, researchers Fossey et al. (2002), situate it as being "a broad umbrella term for research methodologies" that helps make sense of a "person's experiences, behaviours, interactions, and social contexts without the use of statistical procedures or quantification" (Fossey, 2002, p.717). Thus, for them it can be used to analyse data in order to draw conclusions.

In present research, qualitative methods were used to analyse the feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and noted encounters between the participants, their congregations, and other persons or structures within the URC. The participants comprise twelve Black/ethnically-minoritised women in two URC congregations in London but belonging to two different Synods, who are central to this research. They were chosen because they are members of congregations with a high percentage of people of ethnically-minoritised backgrounds, located in areas that are diversely populated.

The following table explains the rationale for undertaking a qualitative study.

QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE
Achieving generalisable results - valid beyond the situation in which they were measured.	Grasping the subjective meaning of issues from the perspectives of participants.
Emphasising measurements because these can be transformed to numbers.	Focussing on latent meanings of a particular situation.
Seeking answers to predefined questions for which there are a number of predefined answers.	Describing social practices of the life world of the participants - less concerned with testing what is known and more about discovering new aspects of the situation being researched. (Flick 2011, pp. 10-12)

Table 1

Case studies

This case study research is inductive precisely because it endeavours to grasp the meaning people make of their experiences—what they think, feel, or perceive is happening in their situations and as such its conclusions will necessarily be subjective. Here I refer to the subjectivity of both the participants and the researcher. Subjectivity, according to cultural psychologist and qualitative methodologist, Ratner (2002), affects objectivity and oftentimes qualitative researchers counterpoise the two. Objectivity causes the observer to become "a passive recipient of external information, devoid of agency. The researcher's subjectivity is said to negate the possibility of objectively knowing a social psychological world" (Ratner, 2002, p.2). This is in agreement with Swinton (2020) who posits that we tend to see and talk about our values, hence, they shape what we know, even though life in the world exists beyond these values.

In her essay 'Interdisciplinarity as a practical conundrum', practical theologian Campbell-Reed cites case studies as "instances of research focusing on a particular person, group, or situation over a defined period of time" (in Mercer & Miller-McLemore, 2016, p.35). These are shaped by clear boundaries and are set within historical, theological and socio-political contexts, and "are based in a distinct set of research questions" (Campbell-Reed, in 2016, p.35). Apart

from being about the embodiment of behaviours, emotions, feelings, and experiences, this research is about social movements, organisational praxis, and cultural occurrences (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). Hence, inductive rather than deductive approaches are better suited to these case studies.

However, case studies are not synonymous with qualitative research, as not all qualitative research are in the form of case studies (Swanborn, 2010). Extensive and intensive are two approaches to conducting case studies, which extract nomothetic and idiographic knowledge, respectively. Extensive approaches involve collecting "information about the relevant properties of a large number of instances of a phenomenon", then arriving at conclusions "by putting together all the information and calculating and interpreting correlations between the properties of these examples" (Swanborn, 2010, p.1). The intensive approach, however, focuses as present research does, solely on "one specific instance of the phenomenon to be studied, or on only a handful of instances in order to study a phenomenon in depth", and to then present an opinion or interpretation (Swanborn, 2010, p.2).

The intensive case study approach is oriented on investigating each case in a similar way (Swanborn, 2010), and case studies should be able to provide sufficient proof to position your argument convincingly (Thomas, 2011). They refer to the study of social happenings, and are not the same as experiments because they offer a "rich picture with many kinds of insights coming from different angles", including observations, interviews, journaling, and looking at statistics (Thomas, 2011, p.21). Swanborn (2010) laments, however, that the term may be too broad a definition as it is used for many purposes, which in some instances have no connection to actually carrying out case studies.

Notably, social scientist Yin (1994), who is well-known for his work on case study research, did not highlight interpretative issues as necessarily being characteristic of case studies. His concept of case study research, is that it is "a form of social science" which is "a form of empirical inquiry" (Yin, 1994, pp.18-19). Twenty years later, Yin positioned the case study as a separate and all-encompassing method with its own research design. His unyielding approach to case study is from a "realist perspective" focusing on "maintaining objectivity in the methodological processes within the design" (Yin, 2014, p.21). Yin's (1994; 2014) constructivist paradigm basis recognises the individual subjective nature of how human beings create meaning, thus, it hinges on a claim that truth is relative.

Inductive research—Qualitative methodology
Employing qualitative methods in conducting an inductive study encourages dialogue between disciplines, and a broad approach to investigation. Employing a broad approach and engaging in dialogue across disciplines questions any presuppositions of objectivity in inquiry and views all research as interpretive and reflexive.

Both congregations have significant Black/ethnically-minoritised populations. In these congregations, I engage with people over the age of 18 who have given their consent to be observed and interviewed, using observation techniques and questionnaires. In conducting these two case studies, I expect to be open to gaining knowledge by listening, engaging and hearing the stories of several people.

My aim is to pay attention to how a cross-section of people in both congregations process their social and personal experiences of their local settings and how they view themselves in the wider denomination. This is knowledge generating and helpful for practical theologians, who Goto intimates "regularly take measures to guard against ignorance" (2020, p.139). In essence, knowledge is

constructed based on what meaning people make of their situations; hence it is "constructed rather than discovered" (Stake, 1995, p.99).

Swinton and Mowat make a distinction between three types of knowledge, citing knowledge of the "other"; of "phenomena"; and "reflexive knowing" which they say happens "when researchers deliberately turn their attention to their own process of constructing the world, with the goal of saying something fresh and new about that personal (or shared) world" (2006, p.34). These three are aspects of qualitative research that can inform practical theology (Swinton & Mowat, 2006). However, Swinton and Mowat describe constructivist thinking as being "in distinction from the epistemology of the natural sciences that assumes a more fixed, stable, and external reality", which, according to them:

> does not assume that reality is something that is somehow 'out' there, external to the observer, simply waiting to be discovered. Rather, it presumes that 'reality' is open to a variety of different interpretations and can never be accessed in pure, uninterpreted forms (2006, p.35).

Constructivist thinking is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.3). It is reflexive knowing.

Why and how I chose my research instruments
— Observation —
I began with observation which is a tool for data collection that inspires the creation of fresh research questions and operates to teach researchers to understand participants in their "natural settings" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p.10). My observation proceeded with no planned questions and involved my listening, looking, and other senses in a structured and meaningful way (McKechnie, 2008). As a

researcher conducting inductive research, giving attention to my participants' voices as a priority and listening attentively to what they say and do is clearly paramount.

As Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) submit, "voice can mean not only having a real researcher–and a researcher's voice–in the text, but also letting research participants speak for themselves" (p.123). By observing the two congregations and then listening to what the twelve participants reveal via questionnaire interviews, I am collecting reflexive data that pays attention to their unique situations and to what they say about their circumstances, to then be able to address the research question.

Focusing my observation on how participants feel, perceive, and think of their experiences in the denomination, my intention was to remain open to engaging with anyone (who gave consent) who wanted, at any given time, to engage. Werner and Schoepfle (1987) propose that there are three steps to observe, which are: (a)*"descriptive observation"* which involves observing everything (p.262). This is where the researcher assumes no knowledge and where nothing is taken for granted; (b)*"focused observation"* where some things are ignored, prioritising well-defined observables; and (c) "s*elective observation"* which is when the researcher's focus, similar to mine, is on observing something specific in a general way (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987, pp.263-264). For instance, my focus is specifically on what a sample of the URC's ethnically-minoritised women members' feel, perceive and experience, to begin to understand their positioning, and how they access or not, the denomination's table space generally.

In the social and behavioural sciences, Adler and Adler identified observations as being a "fundamental base of all research methods" particularly when the occasion is to construct a framework that maps out the real experiences acquired through people's embodied

experiences (1994, p.389). While conducting this research from an embodied location as a researcher who is a URC member and visitor to the participating congregations, I recognised the need to observe; see and learn in context, because settings and people vary uniquely. Individuals and congregations bring their differences, shared culture, and ways of being in their own space, to the context. Each congregation treated my presence differently; one engaged with me more openly than the other.

—*The questionnaire*—

Some of the questioning via questionnaire (Appendix vii) was aimed at discerning whether or not the reality of Black/ethnically-minoritised women being absent from the denomination's decision-making entities and apparatuses was of concern to participants, and to discover if they were even aware of this. Similarly, I wanted to gauge participants' perceptions of having a seat at the table and discern whether or not they believed positions of leadership and decision-making are attainable for them as Black/ethnically-minoritised women in their local congregations and/or in the wider church. Hence, the three mission statements Identity, Hospitality and diversity, and Justice and peace, were considered when conceptualising the questions.

Most of the questions were open-ended. However, where questions such as 1 and 2 could likely have elicited a one-word response, I offered clear instructions for respondents, such as: If not, why? Please explain, and so on. For example, Question 12: *In terms of the wider church—have you had any opportunities to make decisions; namely, sit on national committees and or participate in decision-making roles in Synod council or the denomination's mission council? If yes, how did this come about? If not—is this something you would welcome doing;* and Question 13: *How important is it for BAME women to be part of the decision-making and leadership of the URC? Please explain.*

Clearly worded questions allowed my participants to be self-reflective about positioning, visibility, and leadership in the URC. It allowed them to consider who the women identifying as leaders in the wider church and participating congregations are; identify themselves; share their experience of hospitality and welcome; and reflect on their development within the URC. Being aware of the importance of focusing on their raced, gendered bodies, I posed questions in a way that would, based on their responses, enlighten me on how the women's embodied experiences and contexts inform this complex study. Then, to keep what they shared about their experiences, perceptions, and/or feelings central to my research, it was important to ensure that my questions were accessible to the participants. Bell and Waters (2014) agree that getting the wording right is important to avoiding questions that are ambiguous, leading, confrontational, offensive, and make assumptions.

Although the questionnaire was my primary instrument for collecting data, it was a second choice. My first choice was one-on-one semi-structured interviews/meetings, as most interviews, whether structured or unstructured, allow flexibility (Bell & Waters, 2014). To enable a fluid conversation, questions tend to be open-ended face-to-face (physically) or one-on-one (telephone) conversations in which information is transferred from participant to interviewer as is chiefly done in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). In recent times, given the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown/social-distancing mandates, face-to-face interviews have increasingly been happening via videoconferencing rather than physically.

In the present research, however, face-to-face interviews were rejected, and questionnaires were administered as replacement interviews via email to a designated person who would forward it to their six participants. This was the instrument used to collect the data drawn from twelve willing participants in each congregation. The

process of questioning in qualitative studies is a critical part of understanding what is happening in people's lives. Questions should change "during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem" (Creswell, 2007, p.43). The need to add such necessary clarifications, as "if so, please explain" also changed the interview format. In making this change (of format, adding questions and clarifications), I seized the opportunity to obtain new knowledge by engaging with participants' embodied experiences to yield a holistic type of data, not lead their thinking.

Questions in qualitative research need to be integrated into a theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2006). Embodiment and constructivism in which agency and praxis are implicit should recognise participants' current needs based on the constructs they embody. In preparing the new questions, it was critical to ensure that they neither made presumptions nor were directing participants' thinking. With regard to my approach to gathering data, I employed methods that would do justice to their experiences and perceptions as well as their insights and reflections on their encounters.

Research instruments
Fifteen questions were presented to each of the twelve women across the two congregations to get a sense of their experiences within the church. This is in-keeping-with questioning in inductive research which is concerned with understanding how to interpret the world, and consists of "the search for the meaningful relationships and the discovery of their consequences for action"; it is neither disorganised, naïve, nor random (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.9). Actually, it is necessarily systematic and rigorous whilst also considering the unpredictability of human reality in a process that Gillham describes as "detached honesty" (2000, p.8). This refers to how the words and actions of people reflect their social and personal contexts, where the researcher must consider the behaviour, attitude, and language of the participants (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2013).

Corbin and Strauss (1998) concur that qualitative research is most appropriate when the methods correspond to the personal, cultural, social, and psychological lived experiences of the researched and the researcher, as in this present research. However, the word *qualitative* tends to be unsettling for some people because, as Gillham argues, it is one of those words that students during exams sometimes use with only a "hazy" notion of their meaning (2000, p.8). This haziness is also evident even in leading research.

A qualitative approach enables a situation to be viewed in context (social, cultural, psychological) and acknowledges that both researcher and participants bring their own presuppositions and biases to the work. This whole study can be seen to be from the perspective of identities (the voiceless, absent, silent/missing and invisible in their own denomination) and listening to and analysing participants' views on the situation.

However, there are two distinct constructivist elements here that are interconnected. Firstly, there is constructivism implied by the terms "othered", "raced", "marginalised", and "minoritised", and comprises "hand-me-down" constructs of race, gender, and us-and-them assumptions. Secondly are the "constructs" my participants offer, and which I further construct by analysis and interpretation of the experiences of ethnically-minoritised women in the contemporary (multicultural-intercultural) URC.

Participants
In a previous study for Paper 2, I interviewed CoG to get a sense of the relationship between ethnically-minoritised women and the URC utilising womanist biblical interpretation. But for this thesis, my aim is to engage the women in their local settings. I chose not to gather groups and instead interview individuals selected from congregations in-keeping-with the goal to hear from the women (in their environment)

about their experiences, bearing in mind womanist practical theology's urging to centre the gaze on Black/ethnically-minoritised women at the margins where they are located (Sheppard, 2011; Floyd-Thomas, 2006). The participants in this study are from two URC congregations in London selected based on their geographical locations and demographics to reach the intended sample of the population which are Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the URC.

Invitations were sent to six URC congregations in London and Birmingham where there is a high population of ethnically-minoritised people. Initially, three congregations had accepted my invitation, two in London, and one in Birmingham which later opted out citing that elders and members doubted they would benefit in any way from participating. The other three declined due to 1. unwillingness of both elders and members to be interviewed or observed at the time; 2. because it would be unfair to the incoming minister; and 3. that it was not a good time in the life of the congregation to participate in this research.

The leaders (in one case a minister and the other, a secretary) of the two London congregations were contacted and sent consent forms and participant consent forms which were all completed and returned to me. My invitation met the approval of their respective church meetings. Both congregations agreed to observations being conducted in their locations and registered that there were people willing to participate in recorded interviewing. Hence, working with two congregations was opportunistic based on their willingness to participate.

Researchers tend to overestimate the numbers of participants that are willing to participate, who are eligible and even available (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014). However, the opposite scenario was true for me as I had initially proposed to have five participants per congregation (Appendix iii). However, with the questionnaire as the new tool, it gained the interest of six women from each congregation from diverse backgrounds: African, Caribbean, British and so on. Diversity among

participants in qualitative studies is intended to contribute broadness in the perspectives they share, to add depth to the data collected (Stringer, 2007).

Twelve ethnically-minoritised women across two congregations will have a say, which would ultimately give me, the researcher, an opportunity to correlate their responses with important concepts derived from my observations. Thus, I reasoned that twelve participants are not likely to present any significant anomalies, that they were as manageable a number as ten, and that their responses would give additional weight to the data. This is appropriate for identifying and applying embodiment thinking and the practical, cultural, and psychological tools of analysis of womanist practical theology, as well as womanist thinking.

Changes

My initial aim was to separate participants into leaders and members and ask questions to gain a sense of the impact of the URC's stated aspirations, which is developing an intercultural habit. My expectation was that these questions would lead to follow-up clarifications. I was proposing to ask five questions to participants as well as leaders (Appendix iii, p.18). In accommodating the changeover to the questionnaire, I necessarily increased the number of questions from five to fifteen and reframed some to keep the women central. I remained mindful of the need to obtain a sense of whether participants were aware of the URC's stated aspirations for inclusivity, and how (if at all) they are impacted by them in their local congregations. This is in line with a womanist practical ontological framework, which emerges "from a position of loving the entire black self", centring my gaze on the women, and wanting to do what is right for the community (Sheppard, 2011, p.72).

The fifteen questions focused on the women as central to the research question (not separated into leader/participant categories as

proposed), as it is their bodies that are absent and invisibilised and their voices that are missing from the wider URC table. Of the fifteen questions, numbers 10, 11, and 12 solicited more than one response. However, while my line of questioning was unlikely to get a direct answer to the research question, the impetus was to acquire knowledge from the participants that shed light on the problem through their feelings, perceptions and experiences of it.

Reflexivity and embodiment

In analysing the data derived from 'observation', I need to demonstrate the level of reflexivity, which Bennett and Lyall say "is a means of understanding" which "yields cognitive disclosure" (2014, pp.197-198). They use the term reflexivity, as I do, to mean specifically looking thoughtfully at one's own self; at what I am like, or at how I see what is outside of myself, or at how I affect it, or how my own vision of it affects how I present it. Some scholars, Katzman (2015) among them, use the term 'reflexive' as being embodied and as an avenue to accessing "unique knowledge of individual practitioners, developed through embodied professional experience" (p.157). This may be a notable concept in terms of "making tacit or invisible embodied knowledges more visible" (Katzman, 2015, p.157). This way is incorporated into my use of the term.

Data collection

Although the questionnaire is generally used as an instrument for quantitative data gathering, in the present research, I adapted to using it as a qualitative research instrument in the form of a written interview. Qualitative methods of collecting data were thus employed, which depended on the existential realities of the women at the centre of this research, obtained through observation and their interview-questionnaire responses. The whole process of observing, reflecting on my observations, preparing, distributing, and then receiving completed questionnaires was aimed at getting a wider picture.

Analysis and discussion of findings were aimed at understanding the participants' stories about experiences in their congregation. This, towards discovering what sort of environment is being created within the URC framework to inspire and support mission and future growth for the women within the denomination's multicultural/intercultural agenda (Vision2020, 2011).

The questionnaire which was sent out before the end of May 2017 via email was then collated and returned to me by the end of July and mid-August 2017 respectively. The entire process of sending out and receiving was done electronically, which is not necessarily a new way of doing things. And while Dray et al. (2016) argue that electronic submissions are not always well received by everyone, my participants completed and returned questionnaires without voicing any problems. Additionally, I did not have a major job of transcription and this turned out to be a helpful practicable alternative to face-to-face interviews.

Data analysis
Thematic analysis is the tool I used for analysing the collected data and if its theoretical position is well-defined, this works "to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.9). Memoing is a tool of thematic analysis which is the technique I use to treat, and to assist in drawing concepts from the data that explain the research problem in context. I discuss this in Chapter 7. It is recognised as a force in qualitative research and is a broadly used qualitative method for analysing, identifying, documenting patterns, and highlighting themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79).

In most cases, memoing is the initial stage of analysis which is then followed up by several other stages. However, I wrote memos which enabled me to "reflect", "unpick" and "unravel" pertinent issues and bring out idiographic data appropriate for a qualitative study (Braun

& Clarke, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1998). I separated and categorised the data into distinct parts then thoroughly examined and checked for differences and similarities in order to discover what problems are reflected in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p.102).

My memos were then categorised to highlight what they represent to this particular research and, as Richards and Morse suggest, to "get 'up' from the diversity of data to the shapes of the data, the sorts of things represented" (2007, p.157). This involves placing data into context to ensure that things are appropriately defined and given their due consideration.

Limitations

While I adapted to using the questionnaire as a qualitative research instrument in the form of a written interview, it is likely less yielding than face-to-face qualitative data-gathering. In terms of the subjectivity of the research, essentially, the data I gather will almost entirely be composed of subjective material given the level of my reflexivity, interpretation, and reflection.

A problem encountered

When one congregation opted out of face-to-face recorded interviews, my immediate reaction was disappointment. I wondered if trust was broken and was afraid that I would have to begin a new process with a different congregation to obtain willing participants. This would have meant considerable time expended on this additional unanticipated activity.

My first move, however, was to reiterate their right not to continue with the research and reaffirm my appreciation of their willingness to participate. Not long thereafter, the second congregation opted out of face-to-face interviews and requested questionnaires. This was again unexpected, and I needed to understand what was happening. But I was determined to embrace this unexpected challenge to move

forward with a more proactive attitude on how I could use the situation in the best interest of the participants and to the study itself.

The situation might have been caused by a misreading of my status–was I an insider or outsider? If I were viewed as an insider, as participants of one congregation viewed me, it is likely that they would not have felt comfortable sharing their thoughts/feelings about their experiences with me. I was an outsider to the congregations, but a URC insider. My insider status was welcomed, but when it came to participants having to share potentially sensitive information face-to-face, my insider status might have been perceived as a potential obstruction (Collins, 1999).

My status was constantly being negotiated. This dilemma was real for participants, as in this research, as Råheim et al. (2016) argue, the researcher's positionality (how I am positioned), what it means to be an insider or outsider in any setting and my status as researcher, are constantly negotiated throughout the processes.

Ethical procedures
Once I received ethics approval from the Faculty of Arts, Law and Social Sciences' Research Ethics Panel at Anglia Ruskin University, I conducted my research from the beginning of May to the end of July of 2017. Before getting the approval, I had received confirmation of the two congregations' willingness to be observed, and they welcomed any opportunity to participate in face-to-face recorded interviews. I explained that my data gathering would be strictly confidential and that individuals would remain anonymous, to which I firmly adhered.

Those participants who agreed to participate in the recorded interviews were confident enough to request a more comfortable mode of engagement for themselves and were thus content with the questionnaire. In accommodating participants' request for a changed

process, I was able to maintain the code of ethics and not compromise my research. By accommodating participants' requests for a different means, I was able to offer them the assurance to trust the process and be confident that they have a voice in the findings. The data will continue to be stored within a dropbox account that is password protected, accessible only by the researcher, and not shareable with any personal emails or anyone else's dropbox space. It will be securely deleted one year after submission.

I remained aware that the embodied human experiences I have in common with my research participants, while they afforded me a voice in my research, did not speak for my participants. Participants would speak for themselves. They could decide what is acceptable or unacceptable for them. I recognised that my behaviour and socialisation were in focus and that the raced, gendered body identity I share with the women at the centre of my research also made me an insider in that respect. I was also mindful that this should not compromise my role as DProf researcher in which I had to adhere to the parameters of professional practice, ethics, and objectivity. The same applies when conducting interviews whether face-to-face or by questionnaire, because collecting data is a critical part of research and it needs to be conducted with integrity.

As researcher, my priority was to ensure that I foster a relationship in which respect, confidentiality, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence are prioritised (Mauthner & Birch, 2002). I have a duty to behave responsibly and not compromise the professional research relationship. These should be reflected in the methods and approaches I used.

The study population was interested in participating without a financial incentive and the participants were informed that individually, they would remain anonymous.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I laid out the research design and the steps taken to ensure, while being at times necessarily subjective, that the research was carried out taking into consideration that I needed to be objective in my performance and delivery of it. The research was designed to facilitate a study that investigates the impact on ethnically-minoritised women of being absent/missing and invisibilised at the table of leadership and decision-making in the denomination.

This work is grounded in practical theology, which employs womanist theological thinking undergirded with embodiment thinking in which the conceptual framework brings agency and praxis into conversation with constructivism. The aim is to gain insight into what the women say their experiences are in the denomination. Observations were conducted in two congregations and interviews were carried-out with 12 women using questionnaires which were sent and received via email. This inductive research used the qualitative methodology which draws upon both embodiment and constructivist thinking for epistemological focus. The aim being, to arrive at conclusions in a way that is consistent with the convention of womanist practical theology.

The context of the present research implies limitations of the use of questionnaires in qualitative investigating, while also pointing up its strengths. A description of my role as researcher and the influences that this has upon the research acknowledges the subjective nature of my involvement in my own research. It also underlines the suitability of the subjective voice of both the researcher and the research cohort.

I demonstrate keen awareness of my responsibility and consider the importance of my situatedness in this research. The reality of intersectional influences of my position cannot be ignored. I am also affected by the problem that I am studying as a Black woman in the denomination, so it is critical that I am intentional about considering

my distinct, but not discrete, personal, historical, and professional context. I also need to remain conscious that what I embody, including my presence, my historical experiences, what I bring, and what I have to say, can affect the research.

On the basis of the epistemological position in Chapter 5, I have shown in Chapter 6 how I designed research that will yield the knowledge I am seeking. Key elements of the research design position me appropriately to answer my research question.

SECTION IV

Findings, Analysis and Discussion

Section four comprises Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 in which the data is interpreted, analysed and fleshed out by way of theological, biblical and theoretical discussions via embodiment thinking from the perspective of womanist practical theology. Chapter 7 is pivotal as it identifies the overarching issues emerging from data derived from observations and questionnaires. These issues then structure the rest of the thesis, and the aim is that it clearly connects back to the findings in Chapter 7.

Using the issues as subheadings in both Chapters 8 and 9, I engage the literature of embodiment thinking and womanist practical theology in Chapter 8. Then I interpret the stories of Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman in relation to the contemporary story in Chapter 9. My conclusions in Chapter 10 draw the material that has been derived from the issues to respond to the research question.

CHAPTER SEVEN

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Findings and Embodiment Analysis Using Memoing

Introduction

In this chapter, I deal with the first sub-question: "what do ethnically-minoritised women in two URC congregations in the UK think and feel about their positioning within the URC?" I present observation and questionnaire findings from both URC congregations, and submit my observations, using pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. My experience was different with each congregation, and participants handled their questions in varied ways. My objective as an observer was to get a sense of the context of participants' positioning in their local worshipping spaces. I present snapshots of my observations, followed by the questionnaire findings, and I undertake an analysis of the data thus compiled. The overall aim is to derive three types of information: factual responses, participants' perceptions, and a picture of the women's attitudes towards their experiences and encounters.

Background

Congregation-A is situated in Brockley in the Borough of Lewisham, in South East London. Brockley is home to different blends of ethnicities, religions, and faiths, and can be described as a lively and energetic community (Local Stats, 2019). The church secretary whom I will call Sylvia, explained that the worshipping congregation now stands at around 80% Black/ethnically-minoritised backgrounds and 20% White. She further explained that most members are British, although some also refer to themselves as Caribbean, African, Indian, English, and so on. Congregation-A has a legacy of one that has undertaken considerable outreach work. It was a community hub for young people through its after-school clubs, mothers' and toddlers' groups, youth groups of different age ranges, and elders' clubs; in addition, it hosted and organised family church outings on a regular basis.

On its website, Congregation-A describes itself as a community church that is "welcoming, caring, faithful and learning, with a vibrant congregation of all ages" (URC Congregation-A, 2020). There is a regular Sunday service with one family service per month and a communion service on Tuesday mornings. Sylvia explained that in the last 8 to10 years, there had been a notable decrease in the number of activities taking place through the church. This, she further explained, was due in part to changed leadership engaging different priorities as well as government funding cutbacks. These activities were all overseen by the previous community-oriented (according to Sylvia) White male minister who had served for over 30 years. Three years after his ministry, a White ministerial couple arrived from the US and remained for three years. Congregation-A was their first UK responsibility. But that ministry ended two years prior to my process of observation so, at that time, they were without a minister.

Congregation-B URC is in Ilford within the Borough of Redbridge, East London. It is a growing multicultural community. The minister explained that given the number of non-Christian families that have moved into the community over the years, there is strong emphasis on interfaith relationships and dialogue. Congregation-B describes itself as being over 60% Black and other minoritised ethnicities and boasts a co-ed diverse eldership. Some describe themselves as English and others as relative newcomers to the area.

The congregation's website revealed that the last census done was in 2001 and put the population of South Ilford where Congregation-B is located at 47,740. While "40% of the population claim to be Christian, [this is] not reflected in the attendance figures at local churches" (URC Congregation-B, 2011). The congregation's description of itself as an "intercultural church that welcomes all people", continues:

> We are a group of ordinary people from all walks of life who
> believe that Jesus changes lives, bringing forgiveness and a new
> beginning to all who call on Him. We are very much a family

Church and enjoy the rich diversity of gifts and talents that
come from young and old alike. All are welcome to share the
gifts God has given them whether it is in worship, or in service
(URC Congregation-B, 2011).

The congregation holds several worship and get-together community
activities: Sunday service every week; a family service the first Sunday of
every month; at least two midweek meetings, including a monthly gathering
of elders past and present called 'Wednesdays at Eleven'; and a quarterly
Saturday morning fair.

Observation findings
— URC Congregation-A and Congregation-B —
I arrived at Congregation-A on the first Sunday in May 2017. The service
was led by a young woman of Black/ethnically-minoritised background,
probably in her mid-thirties, who I will call Amelia. She spoke to a
congregation of approximately 75 people, and in her sermon she described
her journey towards becoming a lay preacher. She joked that she did not
anticipate becoming a lay-preacher and explained that although she in fact
had given it thought, was daunted by the time and energy the previous long-
term minister gave to the congregation and community. She offered that she
did not understand her capabilities until the opportunity presented itself
through the recent ministerial vacancy. Amelia's sermon was engaging. She
noted that the sheer presence of a woman in the pulpit motivated her
interest in preaching.

I was unable to engage Amelia in further conversation as she hurriedly left
after the service. However, several people came to talk to me, including
some women who appeared to have leadership roles in the congregation.
Ethnically-minoritised women were clearly the greater number in that
setting, so most of the conversations were initiated by them. Interestingly,
there was not much commentary on the service except from one woman
who remarked that Amelia was much improved.

During refreshment people shared with me that a call process was underway. Congregation-A were actively seeking a minister. There was passionate discussion about the ministerial/leadership qualities they hoped for and I listened as people expressed how they felt about potentially having a new minister. Some were optimistic, cautious, excited, others were sad to be needing a new minister, unsure, looking forward, still others felt that it was time for a new minister.

There was an air of friendliness; people sat at tables with those whom they seemed comfortable (my conjecture). The sixteen or so White people present that particular morning sat at three long tables with people of Black/ethnically-minoritised backgrounds. Tea and biscuits were served efficiently and swiftly, and as soon as someone appeared to be finished with their cup, it was swooped up by someone on duty. There was loud chatter and I had a sense of being welcomed back. This was a significant factor as I had only visited Congregation-A for a handful of special services when my husband worshipped there twelve years prior.

At the Tuesday morning Communion service, there were fifteen people, all of whom can be described as of ethnically-minoritised backgrounds: two men and thirteen women. Before the elder (male) who presided at Communion arrived, I looked on with interest at preparations for the service and noticed the care and reverence with which one woman placed the Bible on a small table covered with a white cloth. She bowed to the Bible. When he arrived, she proudly described the care she had taken in preparing the space.

Watching the people enter, it was clear that they belonged to that place; they moved about with confidence. They were all welcoming and there was a strong sense of being welcomed back to a place where, somehow, they believed I once belonged. Again, the ongoing call process for a new minister seemed to be occupying minds on that Tuesday morning. This was very evident in their conversations before the Communion service, in their individual prayer offerings, and in conversations after the service.

The following Sunday, Sylvia led the service and the notices and prayers were again taken up with calling a new minister. She cautioned the church that I was there to conduct academic research, not as a representative of the wider denomination or as a potential member. An elderly woman of West African background (her description) articulated her pride in my conducting research at Congregation-A because, for her, it was not usual to see Black women doing anything in the wider denomination.

Like the Sunday and Tuesday before, I remained after the service. I approached a group of six elderly members of a mix of backgrounds, two of whom introduced themselves as being among several families who have been worshipping at Congregation-A for over five decades. One explained that it was a Presbyterian congregation when they joined. Again, I was drawn into conversation about past and future ministry of Congregation-A.

One ethnically-minoritised woman reminisced that almost the entire congregation attended my husband's ordination, and many expected him to return as their minister. It is likely that Congregation-A kept drawing me into conversations about potential minister/ministry because they saw me as "one of them", and as connected to URC ministry. Even being seen as an insider, there was some hesitation because of this perceived connectedness to them. I realised the need to remain conscious of these aspects in the moment of conducting the research. I was there as a researcher which begged the question: "Is it really possible to separate the way I am perceived from the way I want to portray myself?"

I was again drawn into casual conversation with another mixed group: five women, one of whom was White, and one Black man. The topic was the denomination. One of the women suggested that they have never really done anything with the wider church, nor have they ever seen anyone except for the interim moderator (contact person between the church, the Synod, Synod Moderator, and prospective candidate/s). The interim moderator at the time was a White male who had visited the previous

month to introduce a potential minister. One middle-aged woman suggested that the church secretary might be working with the wider church because she was doing a URC course with people from other congregations. Adding to the discussion, an elderly White woman offered that Congregation-A is sometimes sent ministers from other congregations but that she had never given much thought to where they came from.

A group of women of ethnically-minoritised backgrounds who had been serving coffee and were now eating, drinking, and chatting among themselves invited me to join them. They spoke variously about how they came to be in leadership in their congregation and the roles they have been exposed to in the wider congregation. One woman explained that when the last ministers left, the secretary asked for help and that was her way into her present leadership role. But for her, this did not translate to real leadership in the denomination because as a congregation she did not see theirs as being engaged with the wider church. Another woman talked about having done teas and coffees for ten years and said that nowadays she even makes the order when supplies run out. She described her previous role as having been unofficially in-charge of getting scripture readers and noted that such was Black people's enjoyment of reading the Bible, that if the wider church wanted readers, they could come and ask. This comment elicited laughter from all present.

One ethnically-minoritised woman explained that she does the gospel reading whenever she is asked because scripture is the most important part of any service. She believes that this willingness has caused her to be asked to take charge of the After-School Club but remarked that extra activities stopped with the arrival of the American ministerial couple. She then suggested a disconnect between the wider denomination and the local church, suggesting that the URC and Congregation-A are parallels. One elderly Black man offered that when he joined thirty years ago, there were fifty-fifty membership Blacks and Whites, but now the majority of members are Black, mainly from Jamaica, and Africa especially Ghana. He explained that even when numbers of White attendance dropped to about

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seventeen or so, White members still led most, if not everything, and seemed more comfortable asking African members to help. He spoke a bit about what he believes was the exclusion of Caribbean people and added that Black people of both African and Caribbean descent seem to manage most things these days; sometimes even the flowers.

In mid-June 2017, I arrived to start observations at Congregation-B's "Wednesdays at Eleven", which is a gathering of the congregation's elders. At Congregation-B, there are twelve elders, eight of whom identify as White and four as Black. Those present comprised eight active elders past and present and the minister (who I will call Paul), a White male in his mid-sixties. Apart from Paul, all present that morning identified as White women, including Selma (as I will call her), who appeared to be of mixed heritage.

I was welcomed in that space where it soon became apparent that Selma oversaw preparing refreshments, and where the minister conducted what felt like a mini church service. Hymns were sung and Paul read and reflected on scripture. Before Paul finished, Selma excused herself and returned when 'the service' was over with tea, soup, and sandwiches. This event is clearly minister-led and directed, and I wondered what it would look like if Paul were not present. A conversation began on the topic of newcomers to the church. I listened as elders talked about the changes in demographics in the neighbourhood and how this impacted the congregation. They also talked about helping the minister prepare the church, prayers and choose Bible readers for Sunday worship, organise events to mark the seasons in the life of the church, and their duties regarding the church building, and accessories (curtains, carpets, tablecloths etc.).

Paul clarified that the elders present on that Wednesday were all retired and typically attended without fail, unless they were ill. All of the absent elders were Black/ethnically-minoritised people. Calling them by name, Paul listed what he believed each might be doing at work at that time. He

explained that they were usually unavailable on Wednesdays, adding that they usually do not miss the bi-monthly Saturday bazaars. Feeling somewhat unsettled, I wondered to myself, if the "Wednesdays at Eleven" gathering were only convenient for some, why not hold it on one Saturday a month? But I restrained myself from verbalising those thoughts, being conscious of the need to properly represent myself so as not to jeopardise my interaction with the congregation. After the event, I stayed a while to chat and the conversation turned to women in leadership over the years. Selma hinted that she has always been in leadership and has never experienced any kind of discrimination in church or in the workplace.

At Congregation-B's Sunday service, in attendance was a fairly even balance of people from Black/ethnically-minoritised and White backgrounds, approximately fifty. On that Sunday, I could not tell who the leaders were because everyone seemed to be responsible for tasks. But it was interesting to observe that several people were trying to get the minister's attention for one reason or another. Tea and coffee after the service did not seem like an organised event, some people chatted on the paved outdoor areas; very few seemed to be gathering in one formally designated area.

Paul's talk on that Sunday morning was directed at parents about getting their youth to summer camp. This, as he later explained, is a project that he and his wife plan and deliver together every year. I silently wondered what chance someone else could have to lead, plan, or deliver the event and what possible opportunities for leadership and skill development could be opened up as a result.

After the service, Selma approached me and spoke about having migrated to the UK from Jamaica with her sons after her husband's death twenty-five years prior. But she wanted to discuss the notion of women being paid less than men, because this baffled Selma. She wondered if her experience had been different because she is White. Selma's identification of herself as White belied her appearance.

Moments later, I was drawn into conversation with two elderly White women on the topic of leadership roles. They talked about roles they have had in the wider church which turned immediately to them reminiscing about when the first "BME" family came to the church, and the sort of welcome they afforded that family. One of the women remarked that they do not welcome people in the same way anymore, explaining that new people simply make their own way around. She then lamented that they never really had time to do any leadership things in the wider denomination because they were busy accommodating new members. They offered that, at Congregation-B, there are always tensions about who could or should lead and who should make decisions.

This was echoed in conversation with a young woman of Ghanaian background (her description) who suggested that there are some members who have issues of belonging. She pointed inwardly at herself, saying this is who I am, and this is what I look like. She intends to break down barriers in her church so she could peacefully practice her faith and help develop people's thinking in the URC. She reiterated that there are underlying issues around what real leadership should be and who should or should not lead; and that she did not get a sense that some leaders in the congregation genuinely felt that they are real/authentic leaders.

What she explained was apparent in Paul's later lament to me at the following week's 11AM meeting. He realised, after making some enquiries, that several ethnically-minoritised leaders in his congregation were generally not comfortable identifying themselves as leaders. Paul appeared surprised to hear that questionnaires were already delivered and that completed ones would soon be returned to me; and delighted (his description) that he did not need to remind and prompt participants. The turnaround took approximately one month, but all questionnaires were completed and returned to me.

Observation findings

The key points that emerged from my time observing are:

Congregations

- In both places, there was visible leadership representation of women of ethnically-minoritised backgrounds.

- At Congregation-A, there was a strong sense of belonging to their congregation where it was lacking at Congregation-B.

- At both congregations, there was a general disconnect from the wider church, and lay leadership appeared not to translate into authentic leadership.

- At both congregations, I encountered two cases of what I call ethnic fluidity, in which as Croll and Gerteis (2017) explain, racial identities shift according to social location. Ting-Toomey (2015) describes this fluid, transient, or situational way of identifying as 'Identity Negotiation Theory' (INT).

- The Bible is featured at both congregations. It is the most important part of any event, it is revered. One person bowed to it, another remarked that Black people enjoy reading it, and it is an important feature of midweek events, meetings and services, not just Sunday worship.

- For both congregations, reading and finding scripture readers are viewed as very important exercises for every occasion.

- Both congregations asserted their agencies in determining how the individual information gathering was going to be conducted.

Researcher

- I remained conscious about how I portrayed myself at both congregations.

- My location, even though I am a member of the denomination and had in common the intersectional identity as Black, as a woman, and as being among the invisibilised and minoritised, primarily I was there as observer/researcher.

Memoing

In this inductive research where thematic analysis is employed, memo-writing is my tool for analysis. The memos helped to capture the essence, and identify arising themes (which I refer to as *issues*) with the aim of discovering, via interpretation, what the research participants reveal about their situation. The questionnaire findings are presented via memos for clustering or categorising the data, taking into consideration all responses. Memos explain and elaborate categories making sense of patterns, ideas, and themes/issues in the data. They can be a sentence, a paragraph, or several pages, and are based on the data with some conceptual elaboration (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used memoing as an analytical tool, which according to Lofland and Lofland "is to develop what one hopes will eventually emerge as an interrelated set of memos that form a coherent analysis" (1995, p.193). The memos capture the essence, identify arising issues, and get the general gist of the data, with the aim of discovering, via interpretation, what the research participants reveal about their situation.

My approach

I created two separate tables in which I collated all the data. The tables are an exact copy of each other. I provided eight columns across and fifteen down. The questions are presented in the first column vertically 1—15. The eight columns across have headings beginning with: Name of Congregation (Congregation-A, and Congregation-B), Respondents 1—6, the final column is Column 8 which is headed Memo-ing. The memos I wrote at the end of each column captured and relayed important bits of information, and these were principally short phrases designed to summarise my thoughts in a sentence or a paragraph (Appendix ix). However, these can be different types and sizes, such as a collection of words, comments, a sentence, or paragraph, which when put together, become understandable and begin to explain the process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I then sorted my data into familiar clusters, having been drawn to Miles and Huberman's observation on memoing, which they say do not just simply report the data, but is "primarily conceptual in intent" and "tie together

different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster, often to show that those data are instances of a general concept" (1994, p.72). However, recognising what to analyse was not easy; in fact, there are researchers, among them Strauss (1987) and Lofland et al. (2006), who challenge that all recorded fieldwork ought to be considered, and there are others who do not see the need to analyse all of the data. But for Saldaña (2009), the contention is not so much that some data should not be analysed, but about the amount to analyse. He contends that a "related issue with which qualitative research methodologists disagree is the amount of the data corpus" that should be considered. Saldaña urges, however, that "[P]ostmodern perspectives on ethnographic texts consider all documentation and reports partial and incomplete", and that "the argument for maintaining and coding a full or reduced data corpus seems moot" (2009, p.15).

I analysed all the data and made memos to familiarise myself with the full data corpus. I then categorised my memos to highlight what they represent to this particular research and to discover new information from the qualitative data about my participants' experiences, opinions, views, knowledge, or values (Richards & Morse, 2007). This involves placing data into context to ensure that things are appropriately defined and given their due consideration.

In writing up memos, the intention was to demonstrate openness, to consider the research question, and to be self-reflexive, which are necessary steps when processing qualitative data. However, Saldaña (2016) urges that it is more than just our approaches to qualitative inquiry (case study, ethnography etc.) and the methodological, epistemological and ontological issues involved, that influence our research decisions. He argues that we come to the process with our biases, partialities, subjectivities, personalities, and idiosyncrasies (Saldaña, 2016). This goes well with an embodiment thinking undergirding in which the whole being, what makes us fully human or bodyminds, is critically important.

Roulsten adds that "theoretical assumptions underlie every aspect of a research project", and that "theoretical memos provide an important record that researchers may use as a source of information, impetus for reflection, and record of analytic decision making" (2012, p.2). Accordingly, I present the data, aiming to then interpret what emerges from the participants' responses and analyse them qualitatively. I remain mindful that the questions were designed to solicit three types of information: factual, participants' perception, and their insights and reflections on their local church and wider denomination experiences. Therefore, critically important is interpreting individual responses to some of the questions, especially where they relate to identity, hospitality, diversity, justice, and peace. From the thirty memos, the following issues emerged:

- There is a demonstration of fear of being left out of the wider denomination. Locally, in one case, there is no genuine sense of belonging to their congregation, and in the other there is a strong sense of belonging.
- A question arises about who or what is perceived as a leader or in leadership—authentic versus inauthentic leadership. In the wider context, ethnically-minoritised women are not seen in leadership, although general awareness of women in leadership exists.
- Despite the willingness and enthusiasm to give of their time, skills and capabilities, ethnically-minoritised women find little enthusiasm in the denomination to receive their contribution. Participants have the capacity and ability to offer important contributions to the church if given the opportunity. However, they believe that fear (of them) is causing them to be left out.
- Some respondents conform to describing/labelling others BAME/BME but have different ways of identifying themselves.
- Participants' ways of identifying themselves include biographies, geography, Diaspora, and nationality, and some identities are transient/negotiable/moveable.
- There exists familiarity versus unfamiliarity, belonging versus no strong sense of belonging.

- In terms of diversity, welcome, hospitality, empowerment, and power dynamics to do with attendance and leadership, the consensus amongst participants is that they detect no ethnically-minoritised women in leadership in the denomination.
- There is a general understanding of the denomination as having the potential to be inclusive, but often falling short.
- The denomination is viewed as diverse, yet not hospitable and not intentionally inclusive. However, there are times when the local congregation is conflated with the wider denomination. The general feeling is that there is room for improvement.
- Participants perceive that their contributions are not wanted, yet there is a strong sense of their willingness to serve the wider church and a longing to be included.
- Participants perceive the need for ethnically-minoritised women's leadership and youth voices on decision-making committees and councils.
- Overall, a longing to be included is very important for my research participants.
- The perception is that there is a systemic flaw in leadership and there is an undertone of wanting to challenge this.

Interpreting memos and findings

Memoing as a tool offers an appropriate framework for identifying pertinent issues. This is what Gibbs (2007) describes as thematising the data—as recording or identifying passages, texts or images whose themes and ideas resonate with each other. It, thus, involves identifying a process that allows the researcher to index them into categories. This enables researchers to build a framework of thematic ideas about the data (Gibbs, 2007).

With a view to understanding and dealing with the particularities arising from the data, I turn again to Saldaña who advises that researchers should "understand that sometimes you may group things together not just because they are exactly alike or very much alike" (2009, p.6). Memoing allowed

me to work with concepts and raw data. This is in-keeping with embodiment thinking from a womanist practical theological perspective. I was able to work reflexively with the emergent information, which takes my being part of the story into consideration. Memoing is how I add my reflexive voice.

My intention in using *issues* rather than *themes* is to denote something that naturally emerges (issues forth) from the data. The word "theme" is oftentimes used interchangeably with "category", "domain", "phrase", and "unit of analysis," amongst other words (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). For DeSantis and Ugarriza, pinning down the word "theme" as it is used in qualitative research, to mean "an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent [patterned] experience and its variant manifestations," is a solution (2000, p.358). They further state that "a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (2000, p.362). However, in using "issues" I am looking for arising concerns that need to be resolved. In discussing the issues raised by respondents, it is critical to understand what is particular about these women's embodied experiences, that is, as they pertain to the wider literature of womanist practical theology.

What participants revealed

At the outset, identity is important to my research participants (who take pains to identify themselves) but I focus firstly on how they identify their environment (Appendix ix, Transcripts). I extracted instances of how they used the description "White" in the context of the multicultural denomination. Instances from Congregation-B were: "White-organised and led", "White-dominated"; "White world". In terms of how they experience their multicultural church, the response that captured the sentiment of all Congregation-B respondents is: "we are different people from different places; we are multicultural".

I repeated this exercise with Congregation-A data, and demonstrated in these responses were perceptions of the denomination as being

"multicultural"; as "kind of doing intercultural"; as having "only had white ministers"; as having "only seen White faces visit from the wider denomination"; as being a place where "the Whites nominate each other for roles so it seems like we operate not as people working together". One respondent described herself as "White in the Caribbean and Black in the UK".

They recognise themselves as operating in a system that seems to see them as apart and different; that is, a system which, in its wider context, holds them at a distance and does not always appear to be as intentional about being inclusive and intercultural. What participants revealed shows that ethnically-minoritised women feel left out of leadership and decision-making and are thus skeptical about the true intention of the denomination. However, even with these feelings, there exists a willingness by most of the respondents to contribute to the decision-making apparatuses of the church. They assert that they are confident that what they have to offer is sound and worthwhile and would be helpful to the growth of the church.

I was able to capture juxtapositions in Congregation-B responses; for instance, there is a sense that they embody a rich cultural diversity, held in tension with a question as to the authenticity of the voice and of the leadership that comes out of this rich mix of cultures. Additionally, while there is willingness to participate in leadership in the wider church, some participants are hesitant about whether Black/ethnically-minoritised women's input would be welcome. It is apparent that significant thought has been given to this aspect, and the result is that respondents believe that there are many layers of positives their presence in leadership and decision-making roles in their denomination could and would bring to the church.

Notably, respondents also believe that their presence would enable other members to see other minoritised women members in a different light, indicating to me that this is about being seen and how they are seen. This further implies that they believe that they are presently viewed in a way that does not match who they know themselves to be. It was also noted that the

presence of Black/ethnically-minoritised women would be good for the younger people, especially girls and younger women looking on, who, like Amelia, need a model from which they can draw confidence and assert their own agency.

On one hand, there are Congregation-B respondents for whom there is willingness to belong but no strong sense of belonging to their congregation. On the other hand, respondents at Congregation-A appeared to have a profound sense of belonging. I apply the term "a sense of belonging" as a common issue, albeit derived from different circumstances. One does not possess it and the other possesses it strongly. However, where the wider church is concerned, lacking a sense of belonging is a common issue for both.

Overall, the respondents possess a varied understanding of the URC's strapline "multicultural church, intercultural habit". From the data and my observations at Congregation-B, they appear to lack a strong sense of leadership, even as they are confident in the knowledge that they can be effective leaders. From Congregation-A responses, there is a strong sense of leadership and an understanding of themselves in their roles as leaders. Notably, respondents in both congregations seem to be empowered women in their own right who are willing and confident to share their skills and abilities with the wider church. Yet, although one group feels empowered in leadership roles in their local congregation, members seem to value ordained ministry overall, meaning they presume that being ordained marks that person as entitled to be seen as the leader, and as authentic. That is, even as lay members step up to significant responsibilities and shoulder leadership roles daily. Meanwhile, the other group oftentimes, feels disempowered in their congregation, even when their minister sees them as having leadership roles.

Responses to questions overall are, in different ways, about identity. In the case of the research participants, articulating who they are, identifying the uniqueness of their congregations or the denomination, and how they

identify with these; their roles: whether or not there are women in leadership and decision-making in the wider church; or if any of the women in leadership are from ethnically-minoritised communities. The questions also afforded an opportunity for respondents to identify how they became members of their congregations and by extension, the denomination. As human beings and members of the denomination who participate actively in various ways in their local churches, their understanding of how unique they are, is evidenced in how they identify themselves.

For instance, Question 5 which asks respondents to describe their gender and ethnicity seems to have provided an opportunity for Diaspora; geography, biography, and gender converge in an interesting way as identity descriptors. See table 2 that follows:

VINE	ST. ANDREW'S
African in a White world; trying to understand, take some aspects on board, without letting go and compromising my identity as an African.	Mixed, I am White in the Caribbean and Black in the UK.
BAME African origin	Caribbean woman with British citizenship.
Mixed	Black African Caribbean woman
Black woman	I describe myself as a Black woman of dual nationality. Coming to England in the 50s...
Black female	I am a woman who is UK Black

Table 2—Responses to Question 5

Their responses reveal something very significant across both congregations. Not only are the responses a demonstration that respondents acknowledge and appreciate their rich cultural mixtures, they are also a realisation that ethnically-minoritised women's identities are part of a series of stories and narratives that the majority want to tell. Arguably, applying labels or categories such as BAME or BME could actually serve to limit and silence these stories and narratives. For Young (2019), such practices are akin to organising people into categories of inequality, thus positioning them in order of hierarchy according to how they would be valued.

Overall, responses show that respondents' embodiment of ethnicity, Diaspora, geography and gender is part of an assertion of agency. By this I mean that there is, in most responses, a sense of their willingness to be themselves as fully as they could. They demonstrate the importance of self-identifying in a denomination they perceive to be unaccommodating of their identities, despite being declared multicultural and seeking to develop an intercultural habit. Baptist minister Coleman (2007) in looking at *métissage* and possibilities for anthropological reflexivity with regard to Black British Christian women, finds that they have naming strategies and identity formations that go beyond rigid demarcations such as Black, African, Asian and so on. This signals that ethnically-minoritised women in the UK understand their identities to be complex.

Looking overall at responses to Question 4 *Is the ethnic makeup of the congregation predominantly BAME, White, or is there an even mix?*, almost all respondents reused the label 'BAME' to describe other ethnically-minoritised women. I note that while these respondents identify fully who they are, they readily resort to the social labels accorded their ethnicity, thus demonstrating that the social construction of identity is also embodied by these women themselves. This brings to the forefront an underlying question "how do these embodied beings experience and exercise their agency/ies in terms of the different ways they identify themselves, the ways they are identified, and the different ways they understand their belongingness?" For example, responses to Question 6, *what brought you to your congregation and when did you become part of it?,* yielded a variety of reasons.

Except for one at Congregation-B, the two overarching responses were that they either moved to the area or migrated to the UK less than a decade ago. This was opposed to having grown up or been in the UK for many decades, as have Congregation-A respondents. Most of the Congregation-B responses revealed that they are relative newcomers to the UK and some of the participants from Congregation-A have been in that community for generations. A wider view across the two congregations highlights several

different places of origin in the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and the UK. The difference in length of time in the UK may account for the difference in outlook of the research participants from the respective congregations. The ones from Congregation-B could be experiencing a UK that is changing demographically and attempting to accommodate the attendant changes. Congregation-A seems more seasoned and historically aware of how the UK in general, and the churches in particular, have engaged with the Black and ethnically-minoritised people in their midst.

Responses reveal that they are grappling with their sense of agency, juxtaposed with a need to be empowered to break through and be present in the wider church. A cursory glance reveals that there is an imbalance in how respondents exercise their agencies. In some instances, there is willingness to embrace their uniqueness even when the environment is one that does not appear to understand or is consistently unfamiliar with this uniqueness, and in other situations this appears to hold them back. Overall, these arising issues begin to focus my mind more sharply on what lies beneath or behind experiences and perceptions. For in any research project there are divergences and subtleties that may only alert the human observer, and that observation may prove to be more important than mechanically produced data, such as algorithms and computations (Saldaña, 2009, p.66).

Again, there appears to be ethnic fluidity or INT as espoused by Ting-Toomey (2015), which is a concept of identifying, where for instance, one participant at Congregation-A identified herself as "White in the Caribbean and Black in the UK". I juxtapose this with the way Selma at Congregation-B described herself as having never suffered discrimination because she identifies as White, that is, despite her ethnically-minoritised appearance. Ting-Toomey finds that "human beings in all cultures desire positive identity affirmation in a variety of communication situations" (2015, p.4). However, I note that what constitutes positive identity affirmation will be varied, and only negotiated according to cultural context and disposition. Ting-Toomey further explains that identity negotiation;

is a meso or middle-range theory because how immigrants or refugees evolve their cultural-ethnic and personal identities in an unfamiliar environment are based on the degree of macro host national reception and structural-institutional support factors, and also immediate situational and individual factors of identity adaptation-change processes (2015, p.4).

Identity is the property of social relationships (Stone, 1962). In essence, people are identified with others, while also being different from them. Sociologists Croll and Gerteis argue that "racial identity may be much more fluid and complex than previously believed, individuals may shift their racial descriptions as a result of life experiences (both positive and negative) and social location" (2017, p.59). In that case, identity and how we identify can actually be variable. Selma may well be exercising her agency in continuing to identify with the privileges afforded within the constructs of whiteness. But interestingly, my first thought was, 'is this misrepresentation hurting/harming Selma, the congregation, or anyone for that matter?' I reasoned that Selma's identification of herself is not necessarily a misrepresentation, and it was not harming my research. But above all, I recognised the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of what lies beneath and beyond the surface of people's lives.

Pointing up the data
As Saldaña (2009) advises, it is possible to whittle down the number of issues for discussion if, as demonstrated below, there are recurrences and overlaps. The issues from my memoing have been derived from commonality based on differences (where leadership is common for instance, the difference is how it is experienced or received). What emerged surprised me as I was expecting tangible issues to arise. However, the types of issues that emerged are driven by or fraught with emotion and or motivation. These include being ignored/left out, seeking recognition, breaking through barriers; being or not being heard and seen as fully human; authentic/ethical leadership; sense of belonging; importance of self-

identifying linked with situated/negotiable identity; power/value and empowerment or the imbalance of it.

Understanding what it means to be multicultural and striving towards interculturality, yet be a White-organised, led, and dominated world in which White members hold positions from where they nominate each other for roles, links in with concepts and concerns of embodiment thinking from womanist practical theological perspectives. The way Sheppard (in Mercer & McLemore, 2016) describes a problem that "raced" bodies face in practical theology, helps me to articulate what respondents reveal as aspects of behaviour within the URC. Sheppard provides this example:

> The struggle to take bodies' experiences seriously on their own terms, has been documented. The problem is twofold: those doing the theorizing have tended to be those in the majority and, despite all our theorizing, scholars who are the subjects of that theorizing often remain absent (in Mercer & Miller-McLemore 2016, p.220).

The multicultural nature and good intentions of the URC have been declared and documented, but the subject/s of these good intentions remain absent thus silenced. The issues that emerged overall and the number of times each issue appeared are listed below.

strong sense vs no sense of belonging	11
power/value and dis/empowerment	9
being/not being heard and seen as fully human	8
seeking recognition	8
in/authentic, ethical leadership	7
importance of self-identifying	5
negotiable identity	5

Table 3—Emerging issues

From the data, I gather that participants are motivated by the emotion of fear; that is, the fear of being excluded and not being seen as belonging or recognised. There exists a tension between feeling valued and empowered and being disempowered due to not feeling valued, and this manifests as participants' fear of being ignored and left out. Fear leads to a desire to overcome fear. The desire to be or do something is a promising value, it implies something hoped for, emerging as a desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves.

Whenever there is fear and desire there is need, either the need to fulfil our desires or curb our fears; hence, theirs is a need to break through barriers and be seen as fully human. Need suggests that something is missing, and this moves us to have intention to either replace, fix or challenge what is missing, broken, or lacking. It is this need that can be used to mirror the URC's intention to become transformed by 2020. Therefore, according to what the research participants say they experience, theirs is an intention to challenge the "White world environment".

Out of the data, four issues emerged. These are: 1. fear of being ignored and left out; 2. desire to be seen as fully human; 3. need to break through and participate as their authentic selves; and, 4. intention to challenge the "White world" environment. My observation provided me with a mini example of what people are experiencing, their perception, and how they embody these experiences in living out their faith. It provided me with glimpses of the data that emerged from the questionnaire. I have a responsibility to consider all aspects of my inductive research, acknowledge and reflect on what I encountered, think about the information I received, remain focused, and avoid making assumptions about people's lives.

Conclusion

From the questionnaire responses, it became clear that participants recognise that the denomination is a declared multicultural one (made up of multiple cultures) but are less than convinced that an intercultural habit (relationship between cultures) is in place. Yet, despite this, the women

exercise their agencies in articulating confidently that they have the capability and willingness to contribute their skills and abilities to serve God through the denomination. From both my observations and participants' questionnaire-interview responses, there is apparent skepticism about the denomination's interest in recognising that the women are called to serve, as well as being willing to serve. It recalls those five words that described my first call experience: "No call could be detected".

Overall, identity is important in the data I gathered. Observation and questionnaire responses demonstrate that members exercise their agencies in their identifying strategies by ensuring that they classify themselves their way. They tend to use identity descriptors that bring multiple genres together and tell a mini story about their lives in the Diaspora. Yet, they embody social constructs in how they use labels such as BAME and BME to describe other ethnically-minoritised women.

Awareness was raised of the complex fluidity of lifestyles, gender, ethnicity, and of the realness of Ting-Toomey's fluid INT, which seem to operate in accordance with what status or culture fits best. I acknowledge that there are different ways to self-identify. This was interesting to observe and has the potential to be a good research topic.

There was a general perception that the three Statements (2, 5, and 9) of Vision2020 were not being well represented in the denomination. But research participants were somewhat more affirming about how these statements are representative in the local congregation setting; although for some, church beyond the local congregation is irrelevant. In terms of lay leadership in their local church, some embraced their leadership roles more than others. However, across the board, although the women are leaders in their own right, there is in one location a strong desire to be led by ordained leadership, as it appears that this is seen by participants as more authentic. In the other location, however, the existing dominant style of ordained leadership is less well received.

In the next two chapters, I analyse the emerging issues. 1. fear of being ignored and left out; 2. desire to be seen as fully human; 3. need to break through and participate as their authentic selves; and, 4. intention to challenge the "White world" environment.

CHAPTER EIGHT

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Engaging the Literature, Analysing the Issues

Introduction

In this chapter, I address the second of my three sub-questions: How can the significance of what they say be teased out in the light of womanist theology? Hence, I will be engaging the issues that emerged from my analysis of the data in the previous chapter, which are: fear of being ignored and left out; desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves; need to be seen as fully human; and intention to challenge the White world environment. These issues are not necessarily mutually exclusive and have the potential to transform thinking and practice. Hence, it would be important (a) to locate the issues in a broader perspective than the literature currently allows; (b) to show the importance of tradition and culture in my participants' perception of their own realities; (c) to point up specific aspects of the issues; (d) to identify areas in which my research, which is particular to the UK context, can contribute to the development of a womanist practical theological discussion.

The UK is a context in which its colonial and imperial dominant history tends to obscure slavery as an "off-site" issue, where racism is not readily acknowledged, whereas these are more explicit in the US context. This obscuring of people's existential realities is evident in a recent report published by the UK 'Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities' (2021). An extract of this report states that the UK is not "yet a post-racial society which has completed the long journey to equality of opportunity", but "has come a long way in 50 years and the success of much of the ethnic minority population in education and, to a lesser extent, the economy, should be regarded as a model for other White-majority countries" (Sewell, 2021, p.9).

The findings run contrary to large numbers of accounts by ethnically-

minoritised people of poor/debilitating treatment and widespread lack of opportunities that others take for granted. This is the context in which the URC operates. Hence, it is hardly surprising that in analysing my participants' responses, disparities of belonging and power occurred most frequently. This, at the hands of the education, judicial, healthcare, socio-political, economic and immigration systems. These disparities seem rooted in relations in which fear, desire, need, and intention were entangled with emotion.

Philosopher/historian/writer/activist Foucault (1988) says about power that if "I feel the truth about myself it is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exercised over me and which I exercise over others" (p.39). I agree with geographer and philosopher Antonsich who goes beyond Maslow's (1943) thinking that belonging is more powerful than safety and basic survival needs and argues that it should be analysed as an intimate, personal "feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness)" (2010, p.644). In my estimation, it is also a right, which concurs with Antonsich's reasoning that it is a "discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)" (2010, p.644).

Insiders-without

Participants' emotional states of fear, desire, need and intention are connected to the power dynamic of being insiders-without wherein they have a right to belong but are yet to experience that sense of belonging. Critical is Sheppard's proposal that a dialogue is necessary between understanding the inner conscious, unconscious repressed conflicts and fears of the mind (psychoanalytic), and womanist theological thinking which, she argues, "presupposes the valuing of inner life" (2011, p.61). Philosopher and educator Healy's thinking, that to integrate our sense of self and our worldview is to become an essential part of a system or community, concurs with Sheppard's (Healy, 2020).

I expand this thinking by engaging with two other aspects, need and intention. In-depth analysis shows that my participants are aware of the neglect of their culture and tradition by the leadership apparatus which, they perceive, is determined to cling to its own culture of power. Sechrest (2018) sees culture as being informed by historical experiences which then informs habits, beliefs, and characteristics of groups, communities, family units, workplaces, and so on. She thus understands culture as being shaped by historical events and collective embodied experiences which influence people's individual and collective stories and situates them.

Distinctive cultural traits can be recognised among all peoples through such things as music (how rhythms are interpreted and how we express our identities bodily/musically/vocally); language (how we speak, our accents, how we express our diverse realities vocally/physically, and understand our unique psychological and emotional selves); religion/beliefs (how we pray, how we think, and what we believe); and food (how and what we eat and our approach to preparation, sharing, and hospitality). However, it is the desire to appreciate and share culture and tradition among people that could be seen as the basis of the URC's stated desire towards being intercultural. I want to analyse how the statement of actually being multicultural allows some in the URC to see the way forward to the intercultural habit to which the denomination aspires.

Social psychologist, Parrott, who employs a constructivist approach that depicts emotions as born from a matrix of meanings, identities, and relationships supplied by a culture, argues that such embodied experiences or traits of emotion "promote different attitudes, values, reactions and self-conceptions" (2001, p.2). This suggests that people's emotional development is linked to their identities and relationships, and this is driven by how they emotionally, psychologically, socially, politically interpret their cultural environment (Parrott, 2001). Following Parrott's argument, I link need and intention as being wrapped up with emotion and motivation, and since these communicate people's perceptions and intentions and are influenced by cultures, I see them as cultural.

In the ensuing discussion, it is noted that critical to womanist practical theology is recognising that, like other human beings, ethnically-minoritised women are emotionally and psychologically complex people who embody complex experiences and are motivated and demotivated in diverse ways, for varying reasons.

Fear of being ignored and left out

Historically, fear has been the tool used in perpetrating and perpetuating unjust and dehumanising practices. People rely on instilling fear to maintain the status quo by imposing their ways of being upon others. This makes for ignoring the realities of individuals, groups, and communities and preventing them from participating in the centre or so-called norm. Thus, I concur with Jagessar (2015), who intimates that we not only need to identify our fear, we need to bring it to the surface, address its source, understand what keeps it alive, and consider how to deal with it.

Fear acts in different ways, there is fear that debilitates and fear that motivates. A debilitating outcome is sought by oppressors and oppressive systems to enforce/compel/ignore/manipulate and impose ways of being that infect people's internal expressions. Those external impositions become internalised and, in turn, influence external actions. These "inner scripts"/"internal narratives", are external harms embedded into the inner lives of Black/minoritised women, which engage with real human experiences (Sheppard, 2011, p.19). My participants unconsciously embody being ignored and left out.

However, it is reasonable to see that where there has been a history of hostile rejection, brutality, unwelcome and marginalisation, the fear of it continuing or re-occurring is constant. Fear, like other such emotions as desire and hope, identifies the work of an embedded psychological reality, and recognises that the complicated history of people of the African diaspora means that the impact of their history needs to be explored (Sheppard, 2011). Hence, racialised people possess an instinct for fear linked to their past that impacts their present (actions and reactions) which,

in turn, become intermingled with their dispositions (Sechrest, 2018; Sheppard, 2011).

Black/ethnically-minoritised women's experiences of fear, need, desire and intention which are linked to hope and a dynamic of change, will necessarily be manifested in very different ways. My participants say they experience exclusion from the very systems that have called them to their roles and nurtured their faith. For instance, at both congregations, when I asked at Question 14: *Do you believe that you have something important to contribute to the wider URC?,* there were two "Yes buts" from Congregation-B questionnaire participants, but responses overall were affirmative. However, when these affirmations are juxtaposed with other responses such as "there are no BAME women in leadership", or "I have not seen any", or "I have seen one BAME woman in leadership in the denomination", these are indicators of recognition and lament that ethnically-minoritised women are missing from leadership roles within the URC (Appendix ix).

The affirmative responses to Question 14 are further conflicted in view of participants' perception that while the wider denomination is multicultural, it is not inclusive of ethnically diverse bodies and input, and further evidenced in one participant's response to Question 11a *Looking at the [above] 3 out of 10 Vision2020 mission statements, in your opinion, are any or all of the 3, representative of your experiences in your local church? If not, explain why not? If so, tell me how so:* "Well it is a church trying to be hospitable but not sure about embracing equality" [sic] (Appendix ix). This suggests a perception on her part that the denomination is one that has its own fear of diverse bodies and of embracing equality.

Fear is a human place to begin to understand that change is needed, and justice must be sought (Smith, 2018). Hence, in this type of context, it is critical to put mechanisms in place to assist in mustering courage to challenge and overcome what is feared, which for my participants is of being ignored and left out. Thus, for ethnically-minoritised women,

developing embodied attributes to deal with their fears, such as outrage, audacity, courage, willfulness, and wanting to know more, which Walker (1983) assigns to Black/ethnically-minoritised women and girls, is extremely helpful for challenging external forces of embodied injustice. For instance, if a person is willfully audacious or wants to know more about their situation in the face of fear, this encourages a willful and courageous spirit, which serves to empower them to become outraged and fight for belonging and inclusion.

Hence, fear is not always debilitating; it can also motivate people to fight for justice/their rights. Although the participants have not explicitly used the word *fear*, their perception is that the URC operates its own inner script from a history of fear of 'the other' which has become embedded into ecclesial and social histories. This particular truth about the denomination's fear is revealed in the following responses to Question 10: "The United Reformed Church describes itself as being a multicultural church with an intercultural habit". c. *Is the identity multicultural church with an intercultural habit evident in your local church or in the wider URC? How so?*

One participant said:

> No, things are done according to the old (White) people's ways. Some were born in that church, now mainly 80+ - stuck in their ways; they don't want change. Anyone bringing change is seen as a trespasser - attitude is 'my church' not 'our church'. They are not open to suggestion…I have hope for the wider church, not the local. Only experience of the URC this (local) [sic].

Another participant said:

> No I did not know but it is very clear that we are a multicultural church at the multicultural events in Birmingham, but the funny thing is that we see lots of Asian, African, and Caribbean but

not many white people attend the event. If we get there, it will
be good [sic].

These participants chose to be honest about what they perceived to be the cause of the power imbalance and "speaking truth to power" as womanist theologian LaBoy would attest "is speaking the truth of one's convictions to the more powerful and privileged" (2018, p.86). They aim to move the church "from otherness differentiation (i.e., "me v you") to unity ("us")" (LaBoy, 2018, p.87), but from a position of fear of being left out or ignored, this requires courage. This same courageous spirit was evident when they declined to be interviewed face-to-face and chose a different approach, and in their desire to contribute to, and be present in, a wider context of leadership and decision-making, even as they perceive the URC platitudes of "peace", "trying to be hospitable" and "embracing the poor" (Appendix ix) to conflict with their being ignored and left out.

That Black/ethnically-minoritised women are not present in leadership and decision-making in the wider church, even as my participants reveal their willingness to participate in leadership and decision-making roles, highlights a problem of conflict/discord in the relationship between these women and the denomination. They could see the importance of being not just included but integrated into the macro-unit yet feel pushed towards "concealed gatherings" (Westfield, 2001, p.80). Westfield (2001) sees these needs as a disjunction between how minoritised women find, encourage, and develop a sense of their womanness when they are together in their smaller micro-units but much less so when engaging with the wider context of White-run society. It is fear that drives people into micro-units where they can find a place to share experiences and encourage each other.

Concluding
Fear of being ignored and left out
There are two sides of fear at play—participants' fear and the denomination's perceived condescension and disregard. My main points come via engagement with Jagessar, LaBoy, Walker, Westfield, and

Sheppard's embodiment thinking. These key voices offer the tools I need for analysis of my participants' *'fear of being ignored and left out'*. These theologians and theorists introduced concepts of listening to our embodied internalisations, which is where we begin to understand our belongingness (of place); and belonging (as a spacial right). Yet, the distinction caused by the denomination's perceived disregard of 'the other' and the women wanting to be integrated into the macro-unit in the face of their fear, has the potential to cause a separation between the women and the wider church (Westfield, 2001). The key points that arose for my participants:

- Fear is a lived reality and is culturally/historically/psychologically embodied into participants' internal narratives. Although fear is a real emotion, it is not necessarily a sign of weakness or a demotivating element (Westfield, 2001; Sheppard, 2011).
- Fear is linked to past history which impacts present actions that become intermingled with dispositions/inclination (the denomination/participants) (Sechrest, 2018; Sheppard, 2011).
- Fear can be a motivator in overcoming the realness of negative cultural influences. Acting to transform their fear increases the women's agency (Jagessar, 2015). However, when fear is imposed, it is debilitating/disadvantageous.
- The fear of being ignored and left out is experienced as pain and struggle which has been sustained from engaging in a silent battle against the very system in which they work/worship/express their faith. The pain has come from the lack of welcome/recognition of their presence and capabilities. The struggle is to be equal partners in contribution to the denomination. Identifying their cultural alienation within the church is recognising the need to confront the truth (LaBoy, 2018; Westfield, 2001).
- Employing attributes of outrage, audacity, courage, willfulness, and wanting to know more (Walker, 1983), is a helpful mechanism for dealing with fear, challenging external forces of unwelcome/injustice and speaking truth to power (LaBoy, 2018).

Desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves

Desire manifests as a longing to be free from forces (usually external) of injustice that cause suffering and pain, motivating the person to long for someone, or for something to be transformed; it is about needing change. Two definitions of the word *desire* accessed on 2.12.2019, are: "a strong feeling of wanting to have something or wishing for something to happen" and "a sense of longing or hoping for a person, object, or outcome" (Lexico, 2020). This indicates that desire arises out of lack and is an emotional reaction to things and/or people that cause pain, such as suffering/distress/hardship/unrequited love, unjust and undesirable experiences.

Sheppard's (2011) articulation of the desire that exists alongside the pain, longing and need for love that are compelling forces in the lives of Black/ethnically-minoritised women, adds to this. It is the same desire that the research participants expressed for representation and recognition within the URC. They were willing to offer their gifts and service but felt there was no mechanism by which this could happen. Their desire to break through and be their authentic selves could at once be empowering and painful. This speaks of something desperately hoped for, fueling a need to break a perceived border/mould/norm/structure to get to a position/place which seems constantly beyond attainment.

If participants consider that there have been opportunities for them to break in and participate as their authentic selves, this is evident only in small measure. Question 12 reads *In terms of the wider church—have you had any opportunities to make decisions; namely, sit on national committees and/or participate in decision-making roles in Synod council or the denomination's mission council*? *If yes, how did this come about? If not, is this something you would welcome doing?* One of the twelve participants indicated that she received invitations that led to opportunities to participate in making decisions on core URC committees; another gave no response, and responses from two participants left me wondering if they pertained to the first or second part of the question. However, the other eight responses

uncover a perceived lack of invitation for ethnically-minoritised women to participate in the denomination's leadership apparatus.

This was also addressed by one ethnically-minoritised woman at Congregation-B who voiced a desire to develop her faith as her authentic self and assist the denomination to do better. In answer to Question 13: *How important is it for BAME women to be part of the decision-making and leadership of the URC? Please explain.* "If we don't get to be decision-makers and leaders, we will always be led and we will always have something to complain about" one participant lamented, "because I see already every week I see [sic] that we are not the ones that people are thinking about and our ideas get put to one side easily".

This desire to break down perceived borders to occupy emotional, bold, psychological, physical spaces where a sense of welcoming and hospitality are apparently absent or are not understood, brings space, identity, and hospitality into conversation (Sheppard, 2011; Nayak, 2015). But these are not one-dimensional, they constitute "a deliberate transgression of fixed, theoretical, and disciplinary borders to attempt a space of emotional and 'intellectual hospitality'" (Nayak, 2015, p.19). Notions of space and hospitality arise when participants describe their authentic selves with which they want to break through the perceived borders and participate.

From their responses, if they are to effect this breakthrough, the space would need to be a hospitable one, which would accommodate their authentic selves. This is because it is in this social and psychological embodied content of the whole identity that research participants' experiences occur, which is where the desire to participate as self in an authentic way takes effect and can be most affected. Breaking through and finding opportunities to participate freely as their own selves are not futile exercises, especially for those who are minoritised/racialised, but it requires the help of allies who are interested in justice in general and equality in particular (Goto, 2016).

Williams is helpful here. In her book *Sisters in the Wilderness* (1993), she speaks of suffering and survival as being linked to the whole identity of Black/ethnically-minoritised women and describes suffering and survival as the source/reason for desire. However, in the face of suffering, survival is not enough; the desire extends to the need to thrive, because participants also referred to a lack of opportunities for thriving. In 2019, this same idea was expressed by the Duchess of Sussex in an interview after touring South Africa with the Duke of Sussex, who said: "it's not enough just to survive something, right? That's not the point of life. You've got to thrive" (ITV News, 2019). However, a person is not likely to thrive if they lack support, encouragement and the ability to be and to participate as their authentic self. For instance, a desire to thrive or to overcome is an inevitable outcome and an external/internal second nature response to experiences of pain and suffering (Williams, 1993).

When desire and transformation are linked, the outcome is positive change as "transformation touches the desire for different and better outcomes" and offers the "gift of resistance" (Johnson 2017, p.104). Nevertheless, it takes physical and mental effort and a will to develop this gift to renegotiate, reposition and begin to steer the operating apparatus towards change (Johnson, 2017). Thus, an examination of the emotional/psychological content linked to social and cultural contexts is likely to constitute an effective way for Black/minoritised women's experiences to be understood, because social contexts seep deeply into psyches which impact bodies (Sheppard, 2011, p.19).

However, research participants reveal that it would be important to be aware of how emotions influence the way they imagine their bodied selves and decide whether they actually believe it is possible to participate fully in all authenticity. The URC's "Multicultural Charter" indicates that the denomination has a desire to model a "habit of generous lives" (Multicultural Church, Intercultural Habit, 2020). This desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves is a direct response to the absence of ethnically-minoritised women in a denomination which wants to

emulate the *habit of generous lives*. To develop generosity, according to the URC, the denomination "will work intentionally towards mutuality in giving and sharing, for all of us are in need and all must be mutually inconvenienced for the sake of the other and the gospel" (Appendix vi). However, while I understand the sentiment of *mutual inconvenience*, it is perhaps not the correct way of describing the imbalance of the inconvenience of the subjective group as opposed to the dominant group.

The research participants' desire for breaking through and participating as a mix of ethnicities and cultures that reside in the UK (Black, Asian, African, Caribbean, Korean and so on), is a recognition of their commitment to equality and justice. However, their assessment is that breaking through and participating as their authentic selves might be achieved with recognition and resistance to what is holding them back. It will be seen in the next section how this points the way to action. Smith makes the observation in her book, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*, that "Individuals who are oppressed, especially those who are unaware of their own oppression, do not or cannot fight for the liberation of communities, at least not in helpful and healthful ways" (2015, p.117).

It is arguable whether there is any Black/ethnically-minoritised woman who is not, to some extent, aware of her own oppression. My participants desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves is a recognition that their sense of longing is due to something lacking. Although they are not touting academic skills and abilities, this does not take away from their intellectual awareness. This awareness pushes me as a womanist theologian to begin to adjust my positioning of them as research subjects towards an appreciation of the authenticity of their own intellectual input into my academic project.

Concluding
Desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves
The emerging issues of desire provide a point of view that involves longing, resistance, and interpretation of the space, with the recognition that

breaking into any space to participate as authentic self is a conscious exercise. It is not only cerebral, but also involves praxis. Only then can we appreciate the dimensions of the need for introspective analysis by institutions such as the URC. Yet, there still exist institutions that are struggling to adjust to the introduction of women with raced bodies around the table. Theologians and theorists Sheppard, Nayak, Johnson, Smith, Williams, as well as the URC's Multicultural Charter are key voices in this section. They offer the tools for analysing and discussing participants' desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves.

The key points that came out of participants' desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves when their intention was analysed through womanist and embodiment literature, were:

- Desire and transformation are linked because together they gift resistance to the pain and suffering that participants experience (Johnson, 2017); and serves as a motivator to strive for something different and better.
- The participants do not just wish to develop endurance to their experiences of pain and suffering; their desire is to transform their experience in order to thrive (Williams, 1993).
- For Black/ethnically-minoritised women, operating as their authentic selves would be an essential part of their contribution to a truly intercultural habit, because social contexts seep deeply into psyches which impact bodies (Sheppard, 2011).
- The knowledge which my participants derive from their layered identities and cultures is critical to enabling authentic participation (Sheppard, 2011; Nayak, 2015; Multicultural Church, Intercultural Habit, 2020).
- They know that their desire to break through can result in actual change, while recognising that change can be dangerous. The outcome can be flight, if the fight to be included is neither constructive nor attainable (Smith, 2015).

- Claiming space, expression of authentic identity, and hospitality (emotional and intellectual) go hand-in-hand with my participants claiming agency.

Need to be seen as fully human

A person who is in need is seeking to nourish themselves with knowledge or tangible necessities in some way to enable their human flourishing. Need must not be misconstrued for needy which alludes to something lacking in the human being instead of in their social situation. In essence, need is "urgent want, as of something requisite" (Dictionary.com, 2020). This points to lacking something that is needed in order to thrive, which can result in social, psychological or even physical suffering. My research participants identify a need to be seen as fully human and this overlaps with the previous issue: desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves. Participants allude to feeling invisible or not seen, or at least that their presence is not acknowledged or recognised in the wider church.

Not being seen even though you are present, implies an intentional 'invisiblising' of the person or people who are not seen even though they are present. This is a phenomenon experienced by the minoritised and marginalised based on race/gender/status/economics and so on. People see according to their perspectives and it seems evident that this phenomenon of not seeing someone who is actually present comes from being taught or conditioned not to see. Psychologist Skinner (1938) described this as operant conditioning; that is learnt or intentional behaviour that is modified and developed through social/political/emotional/psychological reinforcement.

However, "when we begin to make black women's lives visible, we immediately confront the complexity and diversity of their social locations, relational configurations, and the dynamics of their psyches" (Sheppard, 2011, p.61). Hence, critical consciousness, or "conscientization" as Freire (1972) puts it, which involves awareness and understanding of the social

and psychological environment, is necessary. Lack of awareness of the women's presence speaks to the heart of what participants have described in reference to what they perceive to be their experience in the denomination.

That ethnically-minoritised women are absent/missing/invisible in leadership and decision-making roles in the denomination to which they belong raises questions about the value that is placed on ethnically-minoritised women's humanness. Their willingness to serve God in the same denomination is evidence of their humanity, and although they know that they are fully human, to have this recognised is to become visible/audible to the denomination. While there is an overall optimism that is being portrayed in their having the audacity to need to be seen as fully human, they perceive that this risks further marginalisation.

From the data and from my observations, it is evident that participants generally perceive that devaluing of their bodies contributes to the lack of genuine invitation to the table of leadership and decision-making. One participant said: "Anyone bringing change is seen as a trespasser" [sic]; and another said: "I remember a BAME woman talking at the multicultural event about a group for helping to empower (I think) BAME women and I said to my colleague 'that is nonsense'". Another participant articulated that she is comfortable and confident to volunteer her time to the wider denomination, "if it's something I feel I can do and if anyone asks or follows up my offer". But she is reluctant based on past disappointments, so she is "not confident of being followed up". One other participant said that while she does not have "lots of self-confidence" she will offer to contribute because her efforts are "needed and appreciated" (Appendix ix).

The perception amongst participants is that because the denomination does not seem to see their contribution and commitment, they are being overlooked. Yet the beauty is that what they bring and can offer is part of who they are. As Lorde insightfully observes "[I]it is learning how to take our differences and turn them into strengths" (1984, p.112). In multiple

examples in the gospels, Jesus sought to empower disenfranchised voices and validate their full beingness by letting down barriers often through dialogue. Jesus was conscious of the beauty of their humanity. Beauty, for Copeland, goes hand-in-hand "with human performance, habit or virtue, with authentic ethics"; and seeing beauty in others "is living up to and living out the love and summons of creation in all our particularity and specificity as God's human creatures made in God's own image and likeness" (2018, p.18).

This is reinforced in philosopher, researcher and womanist theologian Beckles-Raymond's point that a love ethic enables Black/ethnically-minoritised people, or those "racialized as black, to reframe how we navigate" moral and social dilemmas (2019, p.34). This comes alive for my participants in the beautiful, complex and informative way they reference their culture, history and geography when describing themselves in the Diaspora (See Table 2). My participants' self-descriptions contain the ethos of self and community love which begins to express how they navigate these ethical and social dilemmas and flourish as fully human. In this, it is apparent they possess a profound recognition that their being cannot be authentic without everything that has shaped their 'bodyminds', past, present, and the current environment/system.

However, womanist ethicist Turman (2013), cautions that the type of determination and importance that Black/ethnically-minoritised women place on self-love and loving their whole communities, is not only to be achieved when White colleagues and institutions stop being racist and sexism ceases. Turman is describing a willful, courageous love that persists against the odds, to which Walker in Lederer refers as "redemptive self-love and critical engagement" (1980, p.100). My participants' eagerness to participate in a denomination that they do not perceive embraces their authenticity, speaks volumes about their will, courage and readiness to love the whole denomination. Hence, it is therefore not surprising that it matters to them that they are seen as authentic and fully human. For it is because they see, recognise and love their full humanness, that operating in a non-

reciprocative environment, can be debilitating. If they are to penetrate inaccessible spaces and issues that need to be challenged, circumvented, and overcome, then persistence, courage, audacity and willfulness are required.

It is argued by womanist theologians and theorists of embodiment that full humanity is only present when recognised and allowed to flourish within any system and context. However, some powerful arguments are also made about what constitutes human integrity. For example, if a person is degradingly imprisoned, this does not stop them being fully human. But in terms of human flourishing, Westfield observes that "strangers are recognized and loved" when they share bread, and this recognition and love enables human flourishing (2007, p.83). Then if we are to be seen as fully human, we need to access and share space at a table that expands and moves in a way that accommodates the diversity and fullness of humanity that should make up the voices and ideas that contribute to reshaping the existing table space. Nayak explains this as "not only the thinking of hospitality" and points to adopting "the thinking as hospitality" (2015, p.19), which suggests developing an active responsibility which is embodied and lived.

Needing to be seen as fully human demonstrates the need to extend hospitality indiscriminately that opens our eyes to other people's humanness, differences, and suffering. Even though women occupy leadership and decision-making roles, as my participants acknowledged, URC leadership and decision-making are perceived as male-dominated. So, for ethnically-minoritised women, accessing leadership will entail a willful act of resistance to the norm. This would involve occupying and making spaces habitable, and being intentionally present and vocal in them, recalling Chisholm's (1968) wisdom "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair".

Concluding

Need to be seen as fully human

The need to be seen as fully human has everything to do with the social and psychological experiences that are embodied by my participants. That this happens in the setting which they belong but oftentimes feel outside, points to cognitive dissonance which according to Festinger (1957), is disorienting. Interestingly, however, this does not appear to diminish their self-love and sense of their human beingness. Understanding their embodied circumstances to get a better sense of what they have experienced, offers a clearer picture of why being visible, present, and getting the system to see their full humanity is important to the participants. My key theologians and theorists in this section offer the tools I need to analyse and discuss my participants' *need to be seen as fully human*. The key points which came out, when analysed through womanist and embodiment literature, were:

- Participants possess *redemptive* self and community love which they demonstrate even when it is unrequited, and despite not being recognised (Walker in Lederer, 1980; Turman, 2013), which they can use to leverage their navigation of intricate and complex dilemmas (Beckles-Raymond, 2019).
- They perceive that important links exist between seeing beauty in others and seeing their full humanness, which they do not explicitly express. Their need to be seen as fully human is a call for transformative and healing strategies because not being seen/acknowledged is a psychologically disempowering experience (Copeland, 2010).
- Their full humanness is demonstrated in their love ethic; it makes their lives visible, and helps to confront the complexity and diversity of their social locations, relational configurations, and the dynamics of their psyches and which contributes to recognising the full beingness of each other (Copeland, 2010).
- Their need to be seen as fully human demonstrates a further need to extend, indiscriminately, the type of hospitality that opens our eyes

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to other people's humanness, differences, and suffering (Nayak, 2015).

- They want to experience an active and lived hospitality that goes beyond prescription, so that they can experience other people's acknowledgement of their humanity (Westfield, 2001).
- They recognise that only when they make themselves visible, they can assist in changing the dynamics of how they are seen, and begin to foster an active, lived, embodied responsibility.

Intention to challenge the White world environment

Participants point to the need to challenge the URC's White world environment, which they experience as a system of dominance that they perceive benefits White colleagues. In various ways, they refer to the denomination using the word 'White'. This perception, when set alongside the knowledge that the denomination considers itself as seeking a habit of interculturalism, suggests a lack of cohesion. Their social locations, that is their experience in the localised setting, and the wider contexts of the denomination are parallels. This lack of cohesion with the wider context appears to be a factor in the dearth of ethnically-minoritised women's presence, voice, and contribution in the perceived White worldness of the denomination's decision-making apparatus. Reddie critiques this lack of cohesion and identifies that White people have created norms that form the basis of their own White Eurocentrism; he thus proposes the importance of "redefining the norm" (2003, p.38).

Critically important to Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the UK is redefining harmful and imperialistic norms. These norms are very particular to the UK context. Etienne's (2016) urging to the older ethnically-minoritised women in her study, that a necessarily new consciousness develops from unlearning old White dominated ways, and learning negotiating skills is meant to open to them new ways of understanding the self, and enables them to visibilise themselves to each other. My

participants' complex identifying and naming strategies which include biography, geography, diaspora affiliations, brought this to the surface.

That ethnically-minoritised women bear the marks of their own identities, as well as carry the marks of the powers that be (Copeland, 2010), deepens my understanding of the perceived indelibility of my participants' experience of the denomination, which they say, is amongst other things, White-world, White-led and dominant. Consequently, the URC table of leadership and decision-making which is steeped in UK colonial and imperial history, is being perceived by my participants as an inaccessible space for their racialised bodies. From what they say and from my own experience, being left outside the system is painful and this pain is exacerbated by having to fight the very system on which their spiritual, emotional, and physical energies are spent.

However, I am not sure if pain from fighting the White world environment/system over their right to exist and live fully as God's beloved and as called by God into those places, can ever be healed. In fact, I wonder if the spiritual homes to which Black/ethnically-minoritised women and girls seek to belong to find peace, bolster courage, and serve God could ever be hospitable spaces. I view this as a dilemma of fight (for the right to belong) or flight (lack of a sense of belonging). The irony is that the URC sees itself as being on the side of the marginalised, as a denomination which has "had considerable political impact as those who spoke from somewhere else than the 'ruling' class" (Statement of Nature, Faith & Order, 2020).

In responding to the idea of the White world environment of the URC, what was revealed is participants' perception of the duality of engagement, as both insiders in their local church (situational identities) and perceived/positioned outsiders by others (social locations). Collins argues that social locations and border spaces occupied by groups of unequal power "cannot be assumed by anyone at will" because these are linked to particular histories of social injustice (1999, p.86). Collins' outsider-within

social location/border spaces categorisation is appropriate in the context in which she uses it.

However, my participants' identity and social location occurs in a different context than that of Collins. It happens in the UK in an ecclesial context that is a declared multicultural environment seeking to develop an intercultural habit from the perspective of being a dissenting voice, yet perceived by participants as a White world environment. Hence, I appropriately articulate their identity, space and claiming agency and propose to use the term *insiders-without* going forward. Notwithstanding this new framing, I am not seeking to modify Collins' *outsiders-within* social location and identity category. In fact, I am recognising that my participants' and Collins' stakeholders' social and identity categories are not the same even though there is a shared experience of a history of enslavement.

Concluding

Intention to challenge the White world environment

In this section, the key contributing voices help me identify the tools I need for analysis in this section. In the context of UK society as a whole and by extension, the URC, I propose that my participants are, in fact, insiders whose being and agency have been removed from the centre, having been consistently pushed to the outside or the periphery, due to hostile constructs, reinforced by a consistent lack of hospitality which result in being ignored and left out. They are insiders-without and Etienne (2017), Copeland (2010), Sheppard (2011), Reddie (2003) offer clear thinking on the importance of identity and identifying (naming and learning strategies) for how Black/ethnically-minoritised women must negotiate and navigate the environment which they find themselves positioned; which was borne out by my participants' responses.

When analysed through womanist and embodiment literature, the key points that came out of my participants' *intention to challenge the White world environment,* were:

- Participants perceive that they are excluded from leadership and decision-making because they possess raced bodies in a White-led and dominated setting (Copeland, 2010). Navigating this type of environment can be psychologically disempowering.

- Participants seek to challenge this type of dominant setting towards bringing Black/ethnically-minoritised women bodies from the margins to the centre (Sheppard, 2011).

- They recognise the need to position themselves to redefine the normalised White worldness (Reddie, 2003), and deconstruct false and misdirected narratives and labels that restrict and repress (Etienne, 2017). How they identify themselves in the wider denomination is important in this regard.

- Participants are insiders who feel themselves to be regarded as outsiders as they find themselves without agency. They perceive that they are operating in two spaces in the denomination—as insiders in their local church and as people without a sense of belonging, in the wider church context.

- They are insiders-without who are grappling with a dilemma: is space/place/positioning in denomination that is stubbornly holding on to harmful colonial ways/mindsets, worth fighting for or fleeing from? (Reddie, 2003), (Etienne, 2017).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed and discussed the four key issues arising from my data in the light of womanist and embodiment literature: fear of being ignored and left out; desire to break through as their authentic selves; need to be seen as fully human; and intention to challenge the White world environment. The process of case study investigation in collaboration with the analysis and discussion I undertook has enabled me to produce new knowledge. This process has enabled me to understand what place the micro picture has in the macro story/image.

In this section, assisted by the work of theorists and theologians across disciplines, I concluded that my research participants experience being ignored and left out as pain and struggle. This has been sustained in their battle against the very system in which they express their faith, work, and worship, which causes them fear. Theirs is a lived reality and if they are to move beyond their fear towards healing and to hope, the root cause needs to be confronted.

This battle for healing is both internal and external, as a system of fear has developed out of a history, with negative and manipulative impact and outcome. This manifests, for the participants, as a desire for presence and justice, which needs to be addressed in the denomination, proactively and actionably. The hope is for equality of contribution, inclusion, and to prevent future experiences of feeling ignored and left out, which is an internal struggle that they outwardly express. Hence, they want to counteract the pain and suffering caused by not fully participating as people who belong, and be embraced in all their authenticity. They desire positive transformation, a space to thrive, and to contribute in a meaningful way in building a relationship with the URC towards enabling the denomination to truly realise an intercultural habit.

My participants' recognition of themselves as fully human, although not explicitly expressed, is evident in their need to be seen as such. Transformative and healing strategies are required to enable this to happen because not being seen, recognised or acknowledged are psychologically disempowering, often traumatic, experiences. Their desire is in-keeping with the vision the denomination has for itself, to be visible in an environment where cultural awareness is claimed to be prioritised. The aim is to transform embodied experiences of historical objectivisation into active expressions by others to seek and embrace their contributions and input.

Finally, I concluded that participants perceive that they go unnoticed because they possess raced bodies and, because of this, are excluded from

leadership and decision-making in the wider church. There is a real danger of flight due to being overridden by the largeness of the White world environment in general, and the established URC culture, in particular. They also have the option to stay and fight for the right to belong as legitimate members, and foster a sense of belonging. Self-identification is important to them because this involves acknowledging their complexities, diversity and authentic agency, and it is empowering in a battle to be seen and heard. This is part and parcel of the positioning of ethnically-minoritised women not just in the church, but in society as a whole.

Elements raised by participants about boundaries/space, identity, hospitality and power, merge into questions about the URC table of leadership and decision-making. Among these questions are: whose table is it? What is it for? Where or how can I create space to position myself at the table? Do I really need to be at this table? Should I stay and fight or should I go/take flight? Meaningful responses would involve highlighting what it means to be an insider, identifying what the space to which they want to break through represents to them, and what accessing space at a table in that environment would mean to their faith story. Then, if there is worth in it, proceed to redefining and re-imaging an inclusive intercultural space and table to position themselves as having a legitimate right to belong at the table.

CHAPTER NINE

Biblical Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, I return to the issues which arose from my data, seeking to do a second round of analysis and discussion on two embodiment stories in the Bible. Womanist theologians, ethicists and biblical interpreters look consciously for the demographics, or the ethnic, gender, geographical and social contexts of those with whom we identify in scripture. This has to do with "examining the values of those readers and the corroboration of those values by the text" (Weems, in Felder, 1991, p.59). The Bible is central to the meaning-making identity of the women at the centre of this research. That Black/ethnically-minoritised people link their stories to the Bible and create identities that are shaped by the Bible is reinforced by Christian educator Streaty Wimberly in her 2005 book *Soul Stories*; this she refers to as "story-linking" (2005, pp.3-6).

The issues as restated are: (1) fear of being ignored and left out (2) desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves (3) need to be seen as fully human, and (4) intention to challenge the White world environment. For those like me, who seek to address the minoritising of women and ethnically-minoritised women in particular, Hagar and the unnamed Syrophoenician woman are central figures. Womanist and feminist biblical interpreters alike are concerned with amplifying women's voices in biblical narratives. But for the womanist biblical interpreter, according to Smith (2015):

> fervid, if painstaking, searches for women's voices must
> proceed not only with reference to women in the biblical
> narratives, but also with a concomitant concern for all of those
> who by virtue of race, class, or other anthropological referents,
> have been historically marginalized by the biblical traditions

and/or writers themselves, and by interpreters of those traditions (p.30).

Smith (2015) is always careful to demonstrate womanist concern not just for women of the African diaspora, but those communities and peoples who have historically been marginalised and not just by biblical writers, but also by interpreters of biblical traditions. Further, in terms of biblical interpretation, "Not all of the suppressed voices and androcentric texts can be intoned in a feminist key" (Smith, 2015, p.30). I bring myself into my interpretations boldly as a woman who is a member of the African Diaspora, reading attentively for something or someone with whom I can identify, and also aiming to find and restore what, for me, is neglected and missing.

There are three strands here: firstly, searching for women's voices in the text while discerning which women's voices are important for this task; secondly, making identifications between contemporary women's identities and the identities of biblical women; and thirdly, revisiting and reconsidering the texts, revising practices and traditions, and interpreting them in a way that empowers and liberates (Cannon, Townes & Sims, 2011). From this lens, the reader is enabled to cast their gaze away from the centre out towards the margins, to see hidden humanness and identify those voices that are silent or silenced within. It lends itself to making it easier to link the texts to contemporary situations.

Arguing for the inclusion of Black/ethnically-minoritised women's bodies and lives, womanist biblical scholars Byron and Lovelace, say that these bodies and lives "cannot be left outside of the interpretive process. Likewise, the bodies and lives of all interpreters are integral in the interpretive process" (2016, p.15). Then Black/ethnically-minoritised Christian women can identify with hidden stories and silent/silenced voices embedded in the sacred texts because within these we/they can find our/their own humanness.

Fear of being ignored and left out

Smith talks about the imposition of fear, explaining that the slave "master" who recognises, but fears the strength of the enslaved, delivers violence and fear to undermine their intellectual capacity and resilience (Smith and Kim, 2018). She points out that God is always depicted in the Bible as urging "do not fear" (2018, pp.47-50), which suggests that we take comfort in laying our fears aside. In Isaiah, we hear that, "the fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure" which is "an abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge" (Isaiah 33:6), and at Psalm 9, the "fear of the Lord" is "the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 9:10). This apparent ambivalence in the Bible can be understood by deciphering the difference between fear in its own sense and fear of the Lord. In line with womanist biblical interpretation, I have found that both Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman lived with embodied fear of an existential nature, psychological/emotional/physical and not the biblical fear of God. Albeit in different ways, both women embody a type of fear that is related to their individual existential realities.

While I see that Hagar's existential fear arises from her position as slave, surrogate, and as an Egyptian in a foreign land, there are three occasions that she catches a glimpse of the power of her own body. Firstly, she mustered the will and courage to escape to the wilderness while pregnant with her son Ishmael and was asked by an angel of God where she was going. Secondly, Hagar profoundly realised that God actually sees her, when in response to her pleas for direction God's angel relayed God's direction for her safe return to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 21:16-19). Thirdly, when she was later banished into the wilderness by Sarah, and in her despair about her son's survival, became sufficiently emboldened with courage and audacity to name God (Genesis 16:13-14). Professor of Hebrew Bible and History of Judaism, Frymer-Kensky (2009), explains in her online article, 'Hagar: Bible' that God speaks directly to Hagar. Thus, she is able to forge a relationship with God, independent of God's relationship with Abra(ha)m.

Hagar exclaims "thou art a God of seeing" at Genesis 16 verse 13, and she names God (El-roi) אל ראי, which Hebrew scholar Hertz (1973) explains means "the one who sees me" (p.57). Both point to her growing faith in God, which is the second kind of fear; fear as knowledge/acknowledgement of the power of God. It points to the idea of a God, who Hertz suggests "takes notice of the plight of his creatures and sends them succour in the hour of their need" (1973, p.57). God notices and sends Hagar help in a place that is reportedly abandoned by God (the desert/wilderness), which one can attribute on Hagar's behalf, to an all-seeing God who will search for and find even one lost sheep as far away as it may have wandered.

Here, I am advancing the womanist treatment of the story of Hagar. My interpretation looks at emotional, psychological, and spiritual transformation. Hagar moves from slave-woman, to surrogate mother, to exiled (Genesis 21:10). God's angel refers to this as her "affliction" and I agree with Hertz that this is an indication of "the Divine disapproval of Sarah's treatment of Hagar"(1973, p.56). It is in the naming of her son that Hagar learns of the God who hears: "and thou shalt call his name ל יִשְׁמָעֵא (Ishmael) meaning 'God heareth' because the Lord has heard thy affliction" (Genesis 16:11), (Hertz, 1973, p.56).

Williams (1993) views the historical affliction on Black women's bodies as mirroring Hagar's in the Bible. Hagar was thrown out into the wilderness and had to learn to survive without support. Williams suggests, however, that for Black people, their faith emphasis is not on hopelessness and pain as much as it is about how God responds to their circumstances. For it was in the midst of Hagar's fear that she recognised God. With this new alliance with God, Hagar is then furnished with a plan for survival (Genesis 16:12). It is this vision of God involving Godself in Hagar's and Ishmael's present survival situation and future promise (Genesis 21:20), that links to the way Black/ethnically-minoritised women interpret their relationship with God. This suggests that their faith rests on their interpretation of God as equipping them for their own survival and future promise (Williams, 1993).

As with Hagar who was banished into the wilderness, my research participants (evidenced in their responses which appear on subsequent pages) are almost unanimous in their fear of being ignored and left out (Appendix ix). The perceived imbalance of power between them and the dominant culture exacerbates their sense of marginalisation. Participants say they have important contributions to make, such as their own voice, culture, self, skills and gifts, which most are confident to offer. While there are women of ethnically-minoritised backgrounds in some leadership roles in local congregations (apart from one participant who was unsure), all reported that they have seen no other Black/ethnically-minoritised women in leadership in the wider church. Hence, they need to construct a path away from the fear of being ignored and left out.

The pain caused by this experience was immediately evident in two responses to Question 1–*What is the name of your congregation? Please explain what you do.* While ten responses were concise, two responses went further and highlighted fears of being ignored/left-out/marginalised, citing being patronised; not being treated like a leader; not being understood; not wishing to offend; and of roles and funding being discontinued. One participant said:

> I am in charge of the office. I read the Bible in worship if one of the usual people for some reason can't because absent or something. I collect offering and prepare tea. People were surprised when they discovered I could read and be understood. They came to congratulate me—patronizing! As a Black woman in a White world, I got involved in these activities because another Black woman member of the church asked me to let us get involved. Not a leader though to be a leader you have to be treated like one [sic].

The other participant, who has a prominent role in her congregation's quarterly 'Fellowship Tea', said:

I volunteered to sing, been asked to lead 'worship time', but have declined – they're not used to 'my style', I don't want to offend! Used to manage the cleaning rota until my role was somehow taken away! Had prominent role in long-running Fellowship for the Disabled now closed (Served as escort on transport bus, generally assisted during sessions) [sic].

These responses suggest an imbalance of power, which is a strong indication that the kyriarchy pyramidal system (of intersecting oppressive structures), is in operation (Fiorenza, 2001). In this system different forms of oppression are at work where minoritised women are presumed to be at the bottom of the pyramid of advancement. This concurs with a system of fear of the other and manifests as patronising. Coleman (2008) reasons that salvation begins with fear when she suggests that "a construction of salvation" comes from fear of not having energy to make a new way towards the benefits others have long possessed and take for granted (p.12). This impacts at the intersection of their ways of being in relation to class/ethnicity/religion, and not just gender.

Using Hicks' (2005) border crossing analogy, for this unnamed woman of Syrophoenician heritage to find and meet with Jesus at the intersection of hope for healing, wanting to belong but different, and possible rejection, essentially unearths in her a sense of agency, which challenges the assumed/perceived constraints of early Christian audiences. Essentially, she constructed a new path when she showed up at the border between Jesus and the possibility of healing for her daughter. In that space between her norms and the unfamiliar, at Mark 7:27, she comes face-to-face with her own fear of rejection in Jesus' words "[L[et the children be fed first"; her fear of being unfamiliar, "it is not fair to take the children's food"; and the fear of not being welcome/included, by his painful suggestion of throwing the bread to the dogs.

Conceivably her understanding of Jesus' teaching is revealed in her saying that the dogs under the table also eat the crumbs (Mark 7:28). However, we

have no prior or later knowledge of this unnamed Syrophoenician woman of Greek origin. What we know of her is through her encounter with Jesus at Mark 7, and as Canaanite woman at Mathew 15 (21-28). Whatever the scenario or context, throughout his ministry, Jesus poses questions challenging his interlocutors to reexamine the validity of established norms. In this case, by crossing the border and vocalising the value she recognises in Jesus, in herself, and seeing the value Jesus recognises in her, the Syrophoenician woman became the catalyst by which Jesus' ministry expanded. Her story empowered women who have come face-to-face with need and have had to travel a new path towards healing, to recognise the value of being different, yet able to express their own value and belonging in their (spacial) context.

My research participants perceive themselves as having three viable options to transform their present situation, either to: 1) leave for the unknown, as Hagar did, because not being seen is tantamount to not being respected or viewed as fully human; 2) keep trying to engage in dialogue until the situation is transformed, as the Syrophoenician woman did; or, 3) form a different worshipping community—withdraw and develop safe spaces or micro-units where they can thrive in their faith. Barton recounts a period of overt racism in the Anglican church when several Asian Anglicans chose to become "semi-independent" by forming their own congregation but opting to remain attached to the Anglican clergy (2005, p.62).

This, however, meant giving up their right to be on the church's electoral roll and discontinuing payment into the Common fund. Barton recalls that this shift happened at the same time "African and Caribbean people were resisting racism" by leaving the Anglican church altogether (2005, p.62). While the third option is specific to that institution and particular to that community, it shows that there are various ways to resist. On the subject of resistance, I agree with Smith's argument that if we act/create/speak/resist despite fear, we free ourselves from what enslaves/restricts/limits us, so we are no longer a sitting target (Smith, 2015).

Concluding

Fear of being ignored and left out

Confronted with the fear of being a single homeless mother, Hagar, outside the scene of her enslavement, recognises that God sees her (Genesis 21:15). Self-knowledge, and a developing fear of God gives Hagar confidence to find a way to survive the historical predicament of Black/ethnically-minoritised women. My key theologians and theorists in this section dealing with *fear of being ignored and left out* offer the tools I need for analysis of this particular issue. What is happening in this text demands a fearless, radical reading that liberates, which is critical to the womanist biblical interpretation (Cannon, Sims & Townes, 2011). The key points which came out in this section when subjected to a womanist biblical interpretation of the texts, were:

- The participants are interested in the empowerment of women who, like Hagar, need to confront their fear and recognise their own need to thrive in the face of systemised forms of fear of the other (othering) which fosters an imbalance of power (Fiorenza, 2001). This type of fear can undermine their intellectual capacity and resilience (Smith & Kim, 2018).

- Hagar's story reinforces that God speaks directly to us in our wilderness encounters. This enabled Hagar to transform the fear she experienced in her social situation, and helped her develop a relationship with God (Frymer-Kensky, 2009).

- The importance of freeing the self from what enslaves and restricts was highlighted as helpful (Smith, 2015). It is possible for my participants to free themselves of their fear and proceed to carving out a worshipping space for themselves (Barton, 2005).

- In the face of fear, participants recognise the importance of exercising their agency, mustering the courage to escape, or to recognise their own importance that God actually sees them (Genesis 21:16-19). Becoming sufficiently emboldened with courage and audacity to name their situation in the way Hagar

names God, is hugely empowering for Black/ethnically-minoritised women (Genesis 16:13-14).

- Hagar's recognition of the sense of empowerment she derives from God hearing and seeing her, contrasts with my participants' fears of being ignored and left out, which render them feeling disempowered (Barton, 2005; Williams, 1993).

- Border crossing uncovers the agency that exists in the Syrophoenician woman story. It gives meaning to the limitations of early Christian audiences and highlights the benefits of crossing from the fear of being rejected and excluded into courage to make her request anyway (Hicks, 2005).

- In the contemporary story, the women's need to overcome their fear of being ignored and left out, mirrors the situation in which the unnamed Syrophoenician woman found herself on her way to Jesus (Matthew 7:24-30).

- It is not difficult to see in the contemporary and biblical stories that the women's fears drive them to side-step societal/cultural norms and expectations and operate outside the norms and expectations that are appropriate for their contexts.

- In both biblical stories the women were driven as mothers who feared for their unwell children (Williams, 1993).

Desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves
I have been addressing what it means to be authentically a woman of Black/ethnically-minoritised background. From participants' responses, the main features of their authentic selves relate to culture, geography, biography, Diaspora and so on. These point to each woman having a desire for an individual identity (Walker, 1983).

In revising, revisiting, and reading radically, I can see that there is a problem, however, about the idea of the women carving out spaces for themselves and their communities. This is mainly because I would interpret their desire to break through and participate as a desire to belong, which is

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the antithesis of separate physical space. This presents a clash with the notion of concealed/safe/separate gatherings (Westfield, 2007). It is in the tension between the two ideas that I begin to address this desire.

Participants indicate a desire to have a sense of belonging, which the denomination envisions in its Vision2020 plans as part of its identity. So, it is in light of identity/difference and sense of belonging that I revisit the Genesis text. The reality of this narrative of desire is to break into the already existing space which would necessarily result in change of some kind. The recent public example of an "othered" person, who by love and marriage, broke into an institution of long standing came with an expectation that a new dynamic would be introduced. Instead, she abandoned it, choosing the freedom to thrive.

In this OT pericope, Hagar moves from slavery towards selfhood. Sarah first referred to Hagar as her handmaiden and later, "this bondswoman" (Hertz, 1973, p.72). The NRSV has translated this bondswoman as "my slave girl" (Genesis 16:5-6). In Hagar's time, enslavement was par for the course. But what slavery entails and still implies is disembodiment which can be described as negation of the enslaved person's rights over their own body and a sense of not belonging. Also implied is a system of dominance that affects the lives of the dominated to the detriment of the sense of self and, in every context, it implies denial of agency. Thus, the desire for freedom remains a constant for people who have been enslaved.

While this pericope emphasises a strong relationship between Abraham, Sarah, and God, and there are many interpretations of this story that focus centrally on them, in my womanist biblical interpretation, Hagar is my central figure. Her pain and suffering resonate with my participants' experiences, and it is to her desire that I look, which I discern through the actions of the other important characters. In fact, womanist scholars identify Hagar as Black not necessarily because she is ethnically identified as Black, which is not to suggest that she is not (she is Egyptian), but to identify with her experiences (Weems, 1988). It is also a starting point for descendants of

enslaved and colonised peoples the world over who are minoritised people (Weems, 1988; Williams, 1993).

Sarah is in a complicated position because Abraham's tribe had been covenanted by God as God's special people. The passage reads "God brought him outside" and said, "look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them" (Genesis 15:5a). Then God said to him, "So shall your descendants be" (Genesis 15:5). Her infertility therefore detracts from her status and perceived duty as matriarch and from Abraham's ability to produce a son and heir. Sarah's assumption of ownership of Hagar's body was not outside the norms of Babylonian slavery hence her ready instruction to Abraham to: "go into my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her" (Genesis 16:2a). This command was made not only to ensure the survival of Abraham's tribe (Weems, 1988, p.56), but to exercise power over Hagar's fertility.

However, Sarah's exercise of power and her longing to bear a child and her determination to stake a claim on a fertile matriarchy renders Hagar unable to exercise her authentic selfhood. In all of this lack, Sarah might have forgotten how to be generous. If the church were Sarah, Hagar is positioned at the hands of Sarah's lack of generosity, and this resonates with how my participants see/perceive themselves being positioned, stifled of agency due to power imbalance. Their desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves to obtain what every member of the denomination is entitled to, is not farfetched. Yet, the perception, based on their own experiences, is that it is not extended to them.

Every story has more than one perspective and for my participants, investment in their faith and the reality of missed leadership and opportunities to contribute (due to being marginalised) are stark elements of this narrative of desire to break into the space and show that things can also be done differently. Hagar was denied this by virtue of Sarah's inability to see her as anything but enslaved and owned, and Hagar's desire to change her circumstances gave her courage to flee into the wilderness when she

discovers she is pregnant with Abraham's child. Yet, in this risky move, seeds of change are planted in her life. She found much-needed headspace, away from her painful/harmful circumstances, to develop a relationship with God (Genesis 16:6-12). Hence, the importance of carving out a separate space for oneself amid odds and risks.

However, for my participants, meeting separately to address the very issue of being left out of the decision-making and leadership of the denomination, even as it has the potential to sow seeds of change for them, may well be a hindrance to their desire to participate as their authentic selves in the wider URC. It is likely, too, that they might be seen as trespassers and agitators of the status quo.

Riggs, referencing Townes' argument/analogy, suggests that it is a praxeological disaster and a danger to community to limit women's possibilities and roles, that this is often present in the church setting (Riggs 2008, pp.65-66), and happens on various levels. The participants' desire is to occupy a space where their bodies can be visibly in conversation with the denomination, and received as their authentic selves (Riggs, 2008). For instance, when the women members of TeamURC (which formed CoG) expressed their intention to form a separate meeting space where the women's voices, stories, and experiences could be heard, the male members objected. The men vocalised their desire to keep things "normal" even though TeamURC was formed, in the first place, to address a situation of perceived marginalisation in the wider denomination, which was anything but normal. CoG's desire to be free of the so-called *normal* was important for the women, as normal did not necessarily equate to visibilising or safe to live and operate as the authentic self.

From what participants in this present study say, I discern that the leadership, decision-making space they desire to break into, needs also to be safe and worth belonging to, where authenticity as "rightful heirs" can be brought into the mix. I wholeheartedly agree with Westfield (2007) that "concealed gatherings" can be valuable encounters in which diverse women

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can lift each other up, affirm each other's humanity, and offer each other the hospitality that is otherwise lacking (p.38). However, I can also see that such gatherings, because they are concealed, do not always enable an authentic breakthrough to happen. Since those who are relegated to meeting in separate spaces are not visible to the wider context, by virtue of being concealed. This is potentially harmful to intercultural development and authentic participation. From the general trend of my participants' responses, they do not regard themselves as having inherited a legitimate sense of belonging to the wider church, reminiscent of Hagar's (and Ishmael's) alienation and disinheritance (Genesis 21:10).

In the spirit of advancing the URC's multicultural identity and stated desire towards an intercultural habit, the inclusion of women who possess raced bodies in leadership and decision-making within the denomination should also be championed by their White sister members. Sisterhood support for ethnically-minoritised women in negotiating their position around the table, would serve to affect a breakthrough and claim space for recognition and participation as their authentic selves. Although the situations experienced by minoritised women in the URC (highlighted by my participants), might not be as extreme, dangerous, or obnoxious as Hagar's enslavement and exploitation, they are blatantly exclusionary and oppressive. This is contrary to the values expressed in Vision2020 Statements 2, 5, and 9.

In Weems' reading of Hagar's story in *Just a Sister Away*, she calls attention to the situation between Sarah and Hagar in which each bears a responsibility (Weems, 1988). The denomination would be Sarah and ethnically-minoritised women would be Hagar—two sides. Sarah appears to lack goodwill towards Hagar and is disinterested in creating a space of sharing with Hagar to alleviate the latter's situation. In terms of enabling the latter's desire to break through and participate, can the former, in essence, gain common ground with the latter in appreciating that sharing the table is for the benefit of all, their faith, the denomination, and the wider community?

In such a space of acknowledgement, can the latter expect genuine opportunities for accessing a place at the table? This is a challenge for women (minoritised ones in particular) and the reality of the responsibility to a broader constituency when fighting for a space and voice for oneself. Still, remaining passive may not be a viable option to attain their desire when identity and faith are at stake. As Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman demonstrate, making a stance, however risky or unpopular, can produce results that have wider implications.

Nonetheless, desiring to be a legitimate insider when the experience is often that of being unseen, unwanted, and merely tolerated is difficult work that can be made easier through recognition and advocacy. Metaphorically speaking, in Sarah's case, neutering her superiority and sharing her privilege would in turn legitimise Hagar's desire for selfhood and, in effect, strengthen the household. At stake for the two sides is acknowledging that with participation comes a responsibility to be hospitable. At stake, also, is bringing into the mix ethnically-minoritised women's authentic bodies, the claiming agency and the responsibility to be agents of change.

Concluding
Desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves
The issue for this section is the deeper understanding of the desire to advance towards participating as one's authentic self, offered by a womanist reading of the two texts. Answers rest with my research participants who recognise that the denomination is multicultural and desire an intercultural flavour in which their authentic selves would be embraced, and which can accommodate their participation. This highlights the urgency of a careful balancing act between breaking through and participating in a way in which authenticity is not lost.

The key voices offer me the tools that are necessary for my analysis of the participants' *desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves*. When subjected to a womanist biblical interpretation, the key points

were that participants have a desire:

- to reclaim agency that is denied; for freedom to thrive via participation as their authentic selves because anything other than freedom promotes a denial of agency (Sheppard, 2016).
- for selfhood, which involves having an individual identity, identifying themselves, and not passively accepting identity descriptors (Hagar; the Syrophoenician woman).
- to regard themselves as rightful heirs alongside their counterparts and feel a sense of belonging to the wider church, because they too have something to offer the denomination (Weems, 1988), running contrary to Hagar's (and Ishmael's) alienation (Genesis 21:10).
- to pay attention to the two sides (Sarah as the dominant voice/denomination) and Hagar (as ethnically-minoritised women in the denomination) is to operate in a way that is beneficial to everyone towards building up the whole community (Weems, 1988). The experiences of both women have something to offer the contemporary situation in which my research participants operate.
- By putting limitations on ethnically-minoritised women, the denomination is undermining praxis, thus endangering the whole church (Riggs, 2008).
- Although separate or concealed gatherings can offer a space for affirmation, lifting each other up, and hospitality amidst negativity and hostility (Westfield, 2007), active participation in the denomination is critical.
- They see that remaining passive and inactive can worsen the impact of injustice (Sheppard, 2016). Hence, it is important to empower each other to carve out spaces in their various contexts for breaking through and participating (Westfield, 2007).
- They acknowledge that with participation comes a shared responsibility to be hospitable (Westfield, 2007; Weems, 1988).

Need to be seen as fully human

Whether it is physical or metaphorical, we need to see and be seen, to listen and be heard, to free and be free, to love and be loved. Need can be stronger than want. People need food, water, shelter and so on, to be able to survive, as such, need addresses survival. In his 1943 paper entitled *A Theory of Human Motivation,* Maslow presented his hierarchy of needs in a pyramidal diagram. He articulated that:

> human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency. That is to say, the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need. Man is a perpetually wanting animal. Also, no need or drive can be treated as if it were isolated or discrete; every drive is related to the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other drives (p.379).

Self-actualisation is at the top of Maslow's pyramid, and physiological needs at the bottom, as basic. In 2018, Forbes produced a modern list with 75 years of psychology, neuroscience, and sociology research beyond Maslow's list of needs, which focuses on the body (Forbes online, 2018). This includes:

1. Without food, the body begins to waste away.
2. Without water, the body cannot remove wastes nor process food.
3. Without shelter, human skin and organs become damaged.
4. Without 6-9 hours of sleep a day, the body cannot learn or get beyond emotional pain.
5. Without regular connection with others, the sense of well-being, which allows for self-care, is disrupted.
6. Without regular novelty, healthy well-being is lost and motivation wanes.

In everyone's life, there is inevitably a time of need whether or not that person is financially comfortable or mentally well, because need is not

inextricably linked to economic viability or mental stability. Among other things, need is an inevitability and a practical element in human lives. Sheppard adds love to human beings' basic needs. In fact, she sees it as a compelling force in the lives of Black and other ethnically-minoritised women (2011). Lexico online defines the word need as "require (something) because it is essential or very important rather than just desirable" (Lexico, 2020). Therefore, when someone says *I need something,* or, *we need something* (that need has been identified by them), other people must then get involved to rescue or to act alongside them to address this need.

My participants perceive that their humanness is not being regarded because not only do they perceive that their contributions are not needed, they do not see themselves represented in leadership and decision-making in the wider denomination. Responses to Question 9 were revealing: *Based on your observation, are any of these women from BAME backgrounds?* From both congregations there were variations of "no" (Appendix ix). For instance, from Congregation-B, the responses were:

> "No, not one"; "No, the wider church is predominantly white organized and led"; "No, it is a white led denomination"; "None"; "I never saw a BAME woman in leadership in the church" and "No, never seen any"; "Actually no"; "Not seen any BAME women"; "not sure if there is still a BME woman in these positions, but I think there used to be one" (Appendix ix).

From the trend of participants' responses, they perceive that their raced bodies are absent, thus missing. The perception from the observation findings was that those who visit the congregation from the wider church are White. Consequently, this perceived lack of representation in the decision-making apparatus of the denomination's committees, councils, and so on, fuels a need to be seen as fully human.

A need to be seen as fully human plays a part in the relationship between Hagar and Sarah. Theirs is a relationship that embodies an imbalance of power and a lack of love. Although the OT story which features Hagar is often represented as a story about a powerful and godly man whose blessings never end (Genesis 12:6, 13:16, 15:5), it is also a story in which emotions of fear and desire come face-to-face with need. The womanist biblical interpreter is confronted with Hagar's own subdued humanness which becomes visible through her need to escape. She is a dehumanised and exploited outsider who exists within the confines of Sarah and Abraham's lives and an insider who is treated as an outsider. Sarah and Abraham need her, and Sarah exercises this need while seemingly ignoring Hagar's own needs in a way that objectifies Hagar's body, diminishing her human flourishing while fulfilling Sarah's own human need for an heir. Hence, Hagar's need was to be free to feel fully human and her expression of disgust towards Sarah demonstrates that she recognises her abuse.

Feminist and womanist scholars have noted the uniqueness of Hagar's story and experience as an enslaved female. Thus, inferring that if as women we unite in listening deeply to each other we can unearth love in each other's stories, as a liberating and empowering way forward. This particular story provokes the sentiment that all women, whether Black or White, are Hagar's daughters (Weems, 1988, p.17) and that we need each other. Hagar is an important character for womanist theologians, ethicists and interpreters because her life was constantly interrupted with demands for other people's needs to be met by her. Sarah held out hope for Hagar's physical body that she herself could not hold out, and this stripping of any sense of belonging or agency felt like disrespect. The need for love and respect heightens in this type of environment where only bitterness and enmity can thrive.

Whether verbal or physical, abuse involves the stripping of someone's full being the inability to see the beauty of other's humanity, and the absence of love and respect. Sarah telling Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael, Abraham's son (Genesis 21:10), despite the fact that both Abraham and

Sarah orchestrated Ishmael's birth to continue Abraham's family line, is an act of lovelessness. That is not to say that Sarah was a loveless person, but in not recognising the beauty of Hagar's humanity she overlooked her responsibility to demonstrate love. This is the type of scenario/environment that ethnically-minoritised women experience that cause them/us to need to retreat to micro-units where we see each other's humanity, and energise ourselves to renegotiate space for ourselves at the URC table.

Feminist theologian Trible sees Hagar as "wounded for our transgressions"; and "bruised for our iniquities" (1984, p.8). Hagar's banishment into the extremely harsh conditions of the wilderness, where she and Ishmael would end up needing to fight for survival, would certainly have bruised and wounded her. But what did it do to Abraham's and Sarah's household? God alleviated the distress Abraham felt, saying: "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you" (Genesis 21:12). God saw and met Hagar in the wilderness and created a spring to their survival, and when Hagar recognised that God sees her, she is empowered and becomes one of the most resourceful human beings with whom God would have dialogued (Gordon, 2009, p.29). What do we ethnically-minoritised women in the URC need to do in the face of a praxis of lovelessness?

Concluding
Need to be seen as fully human
The perception is that Black/ethnically-minoritised URC women are not seen in decision-making and leadership roles, and that their contributions are not wanted. It is reasonable for participants to conclude therefore, that a redemptive *ethic of love* is lacking (Sheppard, 2016; Beckles-Raymond, 2019), and to come to terms with the recognition that they are presently experiencing the wilderness in their denomination. In this section, key voices offer the tools I need for my analysis of participants' *need to be seen as fully human*. The key points that came from my participants responses on

this particular issue when subjected to a womanist biblical interpretation, were:

- That not having representation as fully human beings, is tantamount to not being respected, seen, supported and this undermines confidence (other people's confidence in them and their confidence in themselves).
- They indicate a need to be taken seriously and to be shown love (Sheppard, 2011; 2016).
- For them, not being seen as fully human reinforces the boundaries that appear to be in place between them and those who might be or who are perceived as different from them culturally, ethnically, and so on (Weems, 1988; Williams, 1993).
- My participants' responses suggest that they are committed to taking back their agency by trying to reclaim their voice, and this also involves being heard, thus seen (Smith & Kim, 2018).
- The participants possess self-love and identify their full human-beingness beautifully.
- Hagar, in her encounter with God, is able to use her own knowledge and understanding to name God and emerges as a resourceful partner.
- To attend to their need, they must first exercise their agencies and command the love that is necessary for thriving (Beckles-Raymond, 2019). Love is a compelling force in their lives, which demands a deeper listening if it is going to cross over from a constant state of unfamiliarity to becoming transformational (Sheppard, 2011).

Intention to challenge the White world environment

Looking at a progression through their fear of being ignored and left out; desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves; need to be seen as fully human; and intention to challenge the White world environment, the developing stories of Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman seen through a womanist biblical interpretive lens, leads to an

intention to act. In both stories, the central figures, Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman, dealt with social/cultural/psychological issues in their very different encounters, and were able to reframe their narratives in different ways. My participants also seek to reframe the narrative of being invisible/missing/excluded, and move beyond having to deal with ongoing experiences of marginalisation, which is continuously devaluing (DuBois, 1903). This devaluation is embodied in various ways—psychologically, emotionally, socially, personally; hence, the need for shared mutuality and love within the reign of God, as the Syrophoenician woman did.

The perceived devaluation of Black/ethnically-minoritised women's bodies has created an environment that feels devoid of genuine respect and Christian love, where one group of women's sense of agency is stymied. Particularly poignant is that Sarah's brutal instruction to Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael when she saw him *playing* with Isaac (the NIV uses *mocking*) (Genesis 21:9-10) was added to her lived existence of interruptions, impositions and fear. This is in tandem with the disrupted energy, which Rajagopalan (2015) finds, has been experienced by descendants of the Windrush generation at the hands of the systematic devaluation of their raced bodies, which ended in deportations and unjustified job loss. Hagar's story in which her body was needed to enhance the lives of those who needed it, even as it was treated without humanity, has resonances with the experiences and perceptions of my research participants whose aim is not to be included as one who is simply accommodated at someone else's table (Walfall, 2018).

Participants are intent on levelling the power imbalance that exists, and achieving more than just inclusion in the wider church. Juan Oliver (in Spellers, 2021), Latino custodian of the Book of Common Prayer in the US Episcopal church, in witnessing to how firmly his denomination has clung to its White culture and power, explained that "[T]he interpersonal dynamics of 'inclusion' always involve an 'includer' and an 'included' (2021, p.68). Like the Syrophoenician woman who clung to her faith in Jesus' ability to alleviate her suffering, my participants cling to their faith in

a denomination that appears to be holding tightly to its White worldness. However, their goal is to reach beyond that life in which fear, need, and desire were constantly intermingling with the intention to live more fully, towards truly being free of the limitations of unjust dominance.

The basis of their intention to challenge the denomination to move towards its vision to be an authentic presence, is revealed in some participants' responses to Question 15: *How confident do you feel to volunteer your time/skills in the wider church?* While there were some reservations registered about whether or not things can/will change, they also registered their confidence and willingness to be part of change: "I am comfortable and ready. I have the energy…not sure I am wanted"; "the mishandling that I talked about makes me not confident. In my opinion has not engendered a sense of justice and peace and neither reconciliation [sic]. The decision-making apparatus is dominated by white males"; "I am willing to do things, providing they are not outside my comfort zone. If I feel called by God to do something, I will do it. If I am needed and called, I will respond, but I would probably not volunteer"; "Confident, if it's something I feel I can do and if anyone asks or follows up my offer. Also, reluctant – I will mention but not confident of being followed up; this has happened in the past" (Appendix ix).

Participants have varied experiences, and this highlights how important it is for fresh voices to speak up in the wider church to inject the system with variety. Smith and Kim articulate, albeit in terms of scripture, that: "we need to pay attention to 'who is speaking and acting?', and who is silenced and rendered invisible?" (2018, pp.24-25). If space is to be renegotiated in a way that facilitates the intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women's raced bodies, then attention needs to be paid to creating an appropriate environment that fosters intentional recognition, acknowledgement and respect for ethnically-minoritised women. Perpetuating a White world identity is to go against this.

There are also descriptions of the denomination that demonstrate participants' hopefulness: the URC was "the only welcoming church to people coming from the Caribbean"; "many more people from other cultures [are] leading and making decisions in the church"; "I have been here for 16 years, and when I first came it was mainly white people leading from the front but more BAME people are leading now"; "I can see that BAME people are being trusted to do more and more, before I don't think the ministers thought we could do anything properly" (Appendix ix).

The biblical stories have taught the contemporary one that there needs to be a conscious navigating of systemic oppressions. It is an absolute necessity to fight for the right to be who we are and to participate as self. What if this fight does not end in inclusion and liberation in a genuine way for those affected? Then Hagar's flight into the wilderness might offer the only solution. Alternatively, if the Syrophoenician woman's persistence on being seen and heard holds important answers, then critically important is recognising that ethnically-minoritised women's individual and collective stories are integral to the larger purpose of the denomination; that is, to God's story, Christ's story, the Church's story, their congregation's story, and their own stories.

The sense of agency that emerged in Hagar's and the Syrophoenician woman's story is meaningful to their context, yet can be extended to the contemporary women in present study. However, to restore balance and reclaim its dissenting voice status of one that speaks from the margins, the denomination needs to begin to understand itself, become reacquainted with its aims and visions, and remind itself of the importance of sharing love; not fearing change; valuing women as fully as they do men; and appreciating the richness that ethnic variety brings to the denomination (www.urc.org.uk/about_us).

Yet, if the denomination is to practice this sharing love ethic in a genuine way and become what it aims to be, then possessing a "spirituality of liberation" is necessary, as Peruvian theologian Gutiérrez proposes. This

type of spirituality, according to Gutiérrez, centres on becoming converted to the neighbour, as "to be converted is to know and experience the fact that, contrary to the laws of physics, we can stand straight, according to the gospel, only when our centre of gravity is outside ourselves" (in Spellers, 2021, p.109). This would involve the denomination in becoming intentionally versed in valuing the experiences of those who have consistently been excluded.

My participants have an intention to challenge the system so that they can freely occupy an authentic, ethical space and have a voice in a denomination that instead places its privilege aside to demonstrate a solid love that dismantles perpetuated harms that have served to silence and invisibilise.

Concluding
Intention to challenge the White world environment
Reframing the narrative offers potential for seeing what these stories might offer in terms of understanding my participants' *intention to challenge the White world environment*. Present research shows that in order to challenge such an environment with any intentionality, a new narrative and way of being church, as demonstrated in the encounters between Hagar and Sarah, and the unnamed woman and Jesus, would need to be constructed. Additionally, it offers a challenge to Christian communities about how people who are perceived to be different are treated whether they are regular church members/colleagues/visitors, and/or seekers of a new worshipping space. My key theorists and theologians offer appropriate analytical tools for this issue. The key points that emerged when subjected to womanist biblical interpretation, were:

- Research participants perceive that an operating system that is keeping them out, exists in the denomination, or at least it is one that does not appear on the ground to be moving beyond just inclusion towards recognition/acceptance, despite plans for the

URC's future development. Participants do not want to just be guests at someone else's table (Walfall, 2018).

- They recognise that the denomination persists in clinging to its White culture and power (Oliver, in Spellers, 2021), and demand better for the denomination. Participants intend to find creative ways to subvert how they have been represented and challenge the limitations imposed on them in order to become present and audible.

- They aim to have their individual and collective stories, which are critically important to the larger purpose of the denomination, recognised (the Syrophoenician woman; Williams, 1993), as they are constantly experiencing the minoritisation of their bodies, which is contributing to devaluing them (Hagar); (DuBois, 1903); (Rajagopalan, 2015).

- They need to employ tactics to be seen and heard (the Syrophoenician woman). Thus, they perceive the need to find ways to arm themselves with courage and audacity in order to free themselves of unnecessary fear and unjust marginalisation, and cross over to where the difference they lovingly bring to the denomination can be met face-to-face and appreciated (Weems, 1988); (Syrophoenician woman), (Hicks, 2005).

- This would involve the denomination in converting from its old ways and becoming one that values the experiences of those who have consistently been ignored/left-out (Gutiérrez, in Spellers, 2021).

- I interpret research participants responses as challenging the system to be authentic, actionable, and sustainable.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I undertook a womanist practical biblical interpretation of the four key issues arising from my data in the light of womanist biblical interpretation—1) fear of being ignored and left out; 2) desire to break through as their authentic selves; 3) need to be seen as fully human; and 4) intention to challenge the White world environment. This was appropriate

as the Bible is an important feature in the lives of Black/ethnically-minoritised women.

The featured biblical women, alongside the data gathered from the participants, have something to teach, and I am offering the URC, out of the fruits of my research, a way to understand their experiences. The aim is to contribute in meaningful ways to the stories of ethnically-minoritised women in the denomination, and to the denomination's story. The rationale is that the women's inner-scripts or internal narratives have been affected by their experiences and perceptions of their denomination, whose own reformed identity is linked to the Bible. The embodiment nature of these biblical stories allows for this. In terms of the women in the texts, these biblical stories are human stories and as human beings we tend to look for people, places, and situations with whom and with which we can identify.

I invited into conversation with Sheppard, key embodiment theorists, theologians and womanist biblical interpreters and, in this chapter, through investigation of the issues in collaboration with biblical interpretation, I concluded that the way my participants identified themselves drew attention to different aspects of identifying, and highlighted that their identities are linked to their fear of being left out. However, they would like to muster courage to sidestep societal/cultural norms and expectations and identify and name their fear, in order to confront and challenge it.

Participants recognise the authenticity of their identities, and in turn would like to participate in enabling the denomination to live up to its identity and the authenticity of its vision for future growth. They find, however, that they need to be embraced and not feared if this is to take effect. Thus, they have a desire for selfhood, which involves having an individual identity. They indicate a need to be taken seriously, and this involves allowing their full humanness to come through in how they communicate and articulate that need, by way of legitimate resistance to adopting the dominant voice.

Participants aim to find creative language and ways to subvert and overcome the oppressive harms that have been imposed. They perceive that it is only through the lens of their authentic identity/ies that the denomination can see them for who they are, beautiful human beings in need of experiencing a denomination that opens up the path to becoming beloved, which is about seeing each other's authenticity. For my participants, not being seen as fully human is unjust and reinforces unhealthy boundaries.

I also concluded that my participants perceive that an operating system is keeping them out, despite plans for the denomination's development of an intercultural habit. This leads to constantly experiencing the loveless devaluation of their minoritised bodies which is constantly disheartening. Accordingly, staying to fight for opportunities to participate and be seen by the URC as authentic, while continually not being seen and heard, can result in lack of investment, a devalued sense of self, and no sense of inclusion or belonging to the wider church. The Syrophoenician woman's persistence in approaching Jesus, Hagar's flight into the wilderness, and Barton's Asian Anglicans all have something to teach the contemporary story.

CHAPTER TEN

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The Conclusion

Introduction

The title of this thesis is *Renegotiating space around the multicultural United Reformed Church table*, and the subtitle is 'towards intentional intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women'. As I proceeded with the study, I developed a womanist practical theological perspective undergirded by embodiment thinking. This proved to be an appropriate lens to treat the women at its centre who are not just minoritised and marginalised at the intersection of race and gender, but also by virtue of how they have been historically, culturally, and socially positioned.

I was influenced by social movements in the 1960s, such as US civil rights, Black Power in Trinbago, which culminated in protests and riots in 1970, and the Hippie movement that carried a flower as its symbol and "Flower Power" as its slogan. The flower represents, for me, a sign of the changing times, linked to "a culture of change and rebirth which welcomed and enabled new and less traditional voices and identities to bloom" (Appendix iii, p.21).

In Paper 3, I introduced a four-petal flower diagram to map the discussion points raised. However, in this thesis I use a seven-petal flower diagram to map out points raised for discussion, investigation and analysis that respond to the research question, as follows.
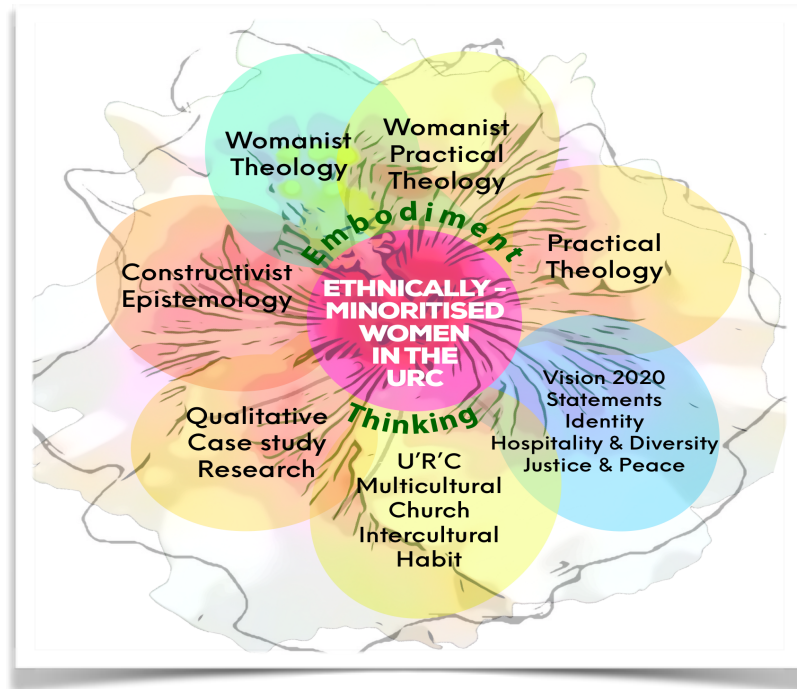
Diagram 2—The Flower

The concepts of embodiment and constructivism applied in this inductive study were fashioned into a conceptual framework which created a bridge between the epistemological orientation and research design of this study. This framework pointed up the intersectional impact of social constructs such as racism, sexism, slavery, and imperialism on ethnically-minoritised women which they embody psychologically, socially, culturally and historically. It highlighted that differently imagined tools and knowledge are needed to dismantle constructs that debilitate, and interrupt the achievement of justice. Using such tools to analyse participants' responses served to begin the process of reconstructing or remoulding the table to include women who are ethnically-minoritised. It also enabled me to make a contribution to knowledge on this and attendant issues.

As a Black woman in the denomination undertaking this research, my embodiedness was brought to the inductive research process in which case studies were carried out with two URC congregations, and twelve ethnically-minoritised women (six in each location), using broadly qualitative approaches—observation and questionnaire interviews. Four

issues emerged from my observation and the women's responses. These were analysed in Chapters 8 and 9 in two ways: through 1. womanist (practical) theological analysis, and 2. womanist biblical interpretation, engaging feminist, as well as other mainstream voices in discussion with the pericopes at Genesis, Chapters 16:1-6; 21:1-21, and Mark, Chapter 7:24-30. I centred my focus on Hagar and the Syrophoenician woman respectively, because for some womanist and Black feminist biblical scholars, these embodiment stories are starting points for discussion.

These two rounds of analysis and discussion shone a light on URC praxis, on my developing professional practice, and on enabling an understanding of how the women at the centre of this research use their agency/ies (individual and collective). This resulted in the following conclusions which will be taken forward as a contribution- to knowledge, to the URC, to my professional practice, and to the URC's ethnically-minoritised women, to include CoG.

Contribution to knowledge
In terms of my contribution to knowledge, womanist practical theology has helped me to wrestle with the dilemmas of the body, because much of its discourse demonstrates that an account of the construction of Black/ethnically-minoritised women's bodies is central. With embodiment thinking from the perspective of womanist practical theology undergirding this thesis, I was able to bring the human bodies of my research participants to the centre, to begin to wrestle holistically with the women's thoughts, perceptions and experiences. My participants championed the cause of those women who are missing from the wider discourses and are therefore invisible, inaudible and unnamed.

As a consequence of my inductive approach, two new concepts emerged which develop theory. First, a new theology surfaced for me that I take forward and name as *womanist embodiment theology.* This theological perspective emerged through my engagement with womanist theology and embodiment thinking. Womanist theology is a framework which revises

and reconsiders biblical interpretation, traditions and practices to empower Black/ethnically-minoritised women and their entire communities. Embodiment thinking places importance on what the women embody socially, psychologically, culturally, and historically in their various contexts. Using this combined framework to analyse the data, I fruitfully brought the psychological and the social together with the cultural and historical.

The second concept - *insiders-without* - supplies, for the context of present research, a different framing from that of Collins' *outsiders-within*, which is an appropriate social location, identity category concept for her US context. I propose a concept that reverses the order of the terms and serves to conceptualise the contribution of my research. It is reimagined for the URC context, which identifies the importance of an internally and externally embodied ethos of love and belonging on various levels in a context different from the one Collins identifies. Critically important is that concerns about the disparities of belonging occurred most frequently in participants' responses, followed by concerns about the power dynamics at play in the denomination. Also important is the need for the women to reclaim agency and use that power to *centre a love ethic* that moves us on from simply being "included" towards reshaping/moulding a welcoming environment that fosters a sense of belonging. As Beckles-Raymond argues, albeit in the context of higher education in the UK, "centering a love ethic" allows us to reconsider how we circumnavigate dilemmas, such as intersectional oppressions (2019, p.33).

The *insiders-without* concept as earlier explained, feels more appropriate for the UK context. Our knowledge about intersecting oppressions and the roles successive governments, individuals and communities play in perpetuating the unwelcome experience of a hostile, overly or covertly racially intolerant environment, according to circumstance and location, can be useful to the URC and ethnically-minoritised women. For instance, there is a disparity in terms of how the women view the denomination, how the denomination views the women and how it identifies itself. The difference

has the potential to be psychologically harmful, and a continuation of it can render the denomination hostile for ethnically-minoritised women.

This will continue to undermine the denomination's vision for its future as a multicultural church with an intercultural habit. To avoid this, the denomination would need to confront and address the four issues raised by my participants, of their fear, desire, need and intention, that emerged from the data; and recognise: 1) that there is an internal battle among women of ethnically-minoritised backgrounds to enable and be guided by their gifts of resistance against fear of being ignored and left out; 2) that these women's daily experience includes being treated as having no legitimate claim to space at the URC table, yet they are counted as members.

Significant learning was derived from Black/ethnically-minoritised women's UK/URC experience in terms of imbalance of power and belongingness. To transcend the dynamics of group-specific power struggles without privileging their experiences, Collins (2000) also positions Black American women's experiences central to her analysis. Knowledge gained by Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the URC, uniquely situates them/us because their/our knowledge is acquired in a wider environment that has been intentionally hostile to Black/ethnically-minoritised people (through, for example, "othering", racism and the Windrush scandal), at the intersection of persistent invisibilisation: absent bodies/missing voices. Thus, the need to recognise their/our need to challenge the *insiders-without* positioning, claim space and reclaim agency is seen as critical. However, this will have implications for whether or not they/we remain to fight for a space at the table, or choose flight. It is also critical for the URC (or any organisation/institution for that matter) to regard what a group of its members are experiencing as an imperative to address.

My research also shows that language, labels and names used in social, literary, liturgical and theological discourses sometimes go beyond the usual androcentrism, and attack the core of people's identities, cultures and

communities (race/ethnicity/gender/sexuality). These discourses have the potential to contribute to psychological, social and spiritual minoritisation, the subtleties of which serve to prevent some from breaking through and being seen as authentically human, rendering them *insiders-without.*

The data shows that while ethnically-minoritised women in the URC are often treated as outsiders and are marginalised to the point of feeling or being without power, they belong. While they lack that sense of belonging, some are claiming it as their right. Belonging is both an internal and external tool for positioning the self or enabling others to position themselves. Having a sense of belonging arms people with the tools to be able to renegotiate, breakthrough, position or reposition themselves or empower other people to dismantle the norms and redesign the table. These issues come from my specific context and small-scale empirical research, and I am contributing them to a wider debate in the literature.

Contribution to the URC
My research indicates that constructs reside within the denomination which are barriers to women's flourishing, particularly women who possess raced bodies. These barriers have caused ethnically-minoritised women to have a fear of being ignored and left-out, and a desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves. Their need to be seen as fully human and their intention to challenge what they perceive to be the 'White' worldness of the (multicultural) URC environment, positions them as *insiders-without* in that environment.

Identity is important to them; in identifying themselves, ethnically-minoritised women embrace the complexities that shape their Diaspora existence, and minoritisation is not desired. Whereas, the denomination identifies itself as intercultural and inclusive, the women experience it as White dominated. The data shows that the denomination feels Eurocentric and stagnant of hospitality and invitation to the women who experience it as being powered by a history of fear of the racialised 'other'. This includes

the women whose embodied experiences meet at the intersection of racism, sexism and other issues that are directly related to their identities.

This intersectional embodiment has something unique to offer to the table. Embracing this uniqueness will help the denomination's intercultural habit to develop and flourish. Yet, Black/ethnically-minoritised women do not have the same opportunities as their counterparts, an imbalance of leadership opportunities renders both sides unequal and at odds with each other. This is neither beneficial to the women, nor the denomination.

Hence, the denomination could benefit from interrogating why these deep, complex issues exist within that operate to keep some people out, even though its stated intention is not to do so. The leadership needs urgently to observe who is missing as this will bring the denomination closer to seeing and understanding the women as fully human bodies who possess an authentic voice and presence, and to work on ways actively to include them/us.

An awakened awareness of ongoing racial/social injustice was sparked by the 2020 killing of George Floyd by a White police officer in the US. Yet, that spark was absent for the 2016 killing of Dalien Atkinson, a Black footballer, who was brutally killed in the UK by a White police officer (Vickram Dodd, theguardian.com). In 2020, Black Lives Matter UK protested that Black British people also suffer racist attacks alongside systemic racism which includes police brutality that often goes unaddressed even as public outcry is loudly condemned, as with the 2011 police killing of Mark Duggan and resultant protests. The denomination needs to recognise and address this collective amnesia, which "contributes to causing epistemic injustice" (Tanesini, 2018, p.10). Especially so, as it seeps into church life.

Creating opportunities for the women to come to the table and share their energies, time, skills, stories, and expertise will assist the denomination to live up to the intentions and vision it had for 2020. Still, to achieve this, a

purposeful commitment to a set of practices is needed, which includes being critically conscious of the women and their capacity to participate fully. For instance, the data suggests that the URC's dealing with women can be problematic for its sexist tendencies, and that it will benefit from uprooting the negative ethnic and cultural stereotyping that add further divisiveness to the problem. Overlooking women who possess raced bodies will negatively affect the table.

The URC's RCLs can offer the denomination space to run forums and workshops, as well as deliver mandatory intercultural and anti-racism sessions, facilitated by women who have experienced these issues, and who are sufficiently competent to address them. This would necessitate the creation of resources and materials designed for sharing ideas, recognising and listening. In turn, this will provide opportunities, where presently none exists in a sustainable way, for Black/ethnically-minoritised women to participate creatively in discipleship, mission, communications, education and learning, towards positive change.

On the basis of my research, shared space and heard voices are critical to having an intercultural habit. To share the space and enable silenced or inaudible voices to be heard, the URC would benefit from entering into truthful discussions about intercultural relations, at GA for instance. Thus, creating opportunities to solicit and engage with the contributions from those voices that are not usually heard within the wider denomination. Additionally, it is not enough for ethnically-minoritised women just to be present as nominal guests at MC, GA, Synod Committee meetings and other decision-making forums, having a voice, namely, the right to vote, is critical.

There are several Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the URC who are highly qualified and fully capable (academically and experientially) to lead, teach, chair meetings, convene committees and run forums and projects. However, their skills appear to be confined to concealed or micro-gatherings. Even the church meeting, which is a decision-making body, has

had no genuine impact on enabling the bodies and voices of Black and other ethnically-minoritised women, in particular, to be present and heard. Yet, being present and heard would help move the women from being seen as unfamiliar, perceived outsiders, to being recognised and received as insiders who are architects of a new type of house that accommodates a table reshaped for all God's people.

My evidence shows that in service of achieving an inclusive environment and intercultural habit, it would be to the benefit of all to address these injustices within the whole denomination. Facilitating events for the sharing of stories and dialoguing across the denomination in an intentional way, although controversial, has the potential to encourage changed behaviour within the denomination's leadership apparatus. However, when this is not followed up with action towards positive behavioural and operational change, the potential for trauma becomes heightened. This is dangerous and will not lead to shedding the traditional acceptance of assumed White hierarchy.

Contribution to my professional practice
Employing embodiment thinking from a womanist practical theological lens highlighted for me discrepancies between the URC's plan to embody an intercultural habit and ethnically-minoritised women's actual experiences. Their experiences occurred in their local church settings and, by extension, in their exclusion from decision-making and leadership in the wider church. My research suggests that I need to centre my gaze on ethnically-minoritised women by developing new resources and tools to encourage URC women, Black/ethnically-minoritised and White colleagues, to challenge the status quo on the subject of ethnicity and gender, with one voice.

The data shows that transformational dialogue and action that demands real change is necessary in this situation and at this time. That is, because at present, Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the denomination, due to emotional and psychological fatigue, could decide to abandon the fight to

remain and make changes and instead choose flight and/or set up a space of their own in which they can practise their faith and 'govern' themselves.

For Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the denomination and for the benefit of the denomination's whole membership, my thesis will be made available (while protecting confidentiality and anonymity) as a resource to help shape the future of the URC as it moves into a new phase as expressed in Vision2020. Thus far, I have presented my work to TeamURC and CoG, and to colleagues and academic peers. My research is already being shared. I have contributed two articles to the *International Journal of Black Theology*, and one joint piece to the *Feminist Theology (SAGE Journal)*, and have become a member of the editorial board of *British and Irish Journal of Practical Theology*. My thinking and practice have been transformed by my research, from the level of everyday things to sharing some of my research with peers at the Council for World Mission (CWM), for example.

My personal development in understanding is in employing alternative terms to the labels BME/BAME which, in my view, support positions of dominance and privilege. Hence, I use political terms such as *Black, raced, racialised, ethnically-minoritised* and sometimes *brown* as do Walker (1983) and other womanist theologians, that powerfully indicate the social and cultural location of the people being identified. However, engaging with/and hearing firsthand how people identify themselves will continue to be important.

Contribution to the URC's ethnically-minoritised women, including CoG
I completed writing this thesis during the year in which the URC's Vision2020 plan was to be realised. I offer to Black/ethnically-minoritised women and to the whole URC, a thesis in which the voices of the women are heard and their stories told, and whereby the latter is only to implement a holistic culture in keeping with its Statements 2, 5 and 9. Through my analysis, I have identified key issues to help to renegotiate a space at the multicultural table, which I offer as a kind of understanding to the URC and

Black/ethnically-minoritised women to move forward with authenticity and intention, towards its goal of becoming truly intercultural, as time has run out.

My participants identified themselves as benefitting from recognising that social constructs are psychologically embodied. This was reflected in how, in identifying and describing other ethnically-minoritised women, they reused, consciously or unconsciously, the socially applied identity descriptors/labels (BME/BAME), which they do not use for themselves. This calls for internal and external reflection, which is a practice that I propose to develop with ethnically-minoritised women in the URC, through CoG.

My thesis offers opportunities to CoG: 1. to consider the pros and cons of meeting in concealed (micro) gatherings; 2. to generate sustainable ways to listen to and enable the voices of Black/ethnically-minoritised women in the denomination; 3. to rename ourselves in an authentic way and reclaim our distinct agency; 4. to avoid colluding in our own silencing; and 5. to see ourselves through our own eyes, not as guests but as architects of the future, and boldly lay the foundation in the wider space.

Limitations of the research

I have offered a view from two very specific locations and this research project has been rich and fruitful. It would, I submit, warrant extension to more communities within the URC.

Possible Further Research

From my research, these possibilities for further research emerged:

- How might the leadership structures such as Synod committees, Mission Council, General Assembly and regional Synod meetings become hospitable spaces for Black/ethnically-minoritised women freely to develop their sense of belonging?
- What is needed for the denomination to reframe itself and retell its stories in order genuinely to inhabit the intercultural habit to which it aspires?

- What form/forum might the spirit of hospitality be articulated so that young (newcomers) Black/minoritised women who want to practise their faith, can experience a sense of invitation and welcome for their voices and contributions?

Reflections

In carrying out this research, I have been poignantly reminded of the Zulu greeting Sawubona which means "I see you." It has a long oral history and it means more than the western traditional "hello"; it is a powerful representation of recognition and belonging. It says, "I see your personality. I see your humanity. I see your dignity and respect". Ngikhona is the response to this greeting, and it means "I am here," but it has a more important meaning. It tells the greeter/s that you have seen and understood her/him/them and that her/his/their personal dignity has been recognised and is respected (Exploring Your Mind, 2018). This leads me into answering the research question: 'How might space around the multicultural table be renegotiated in a way that facilitates the intercultural inclusion of ethnically-minoritised women?', by focussing on *What do ethnically-minoritised women in two URC congregations in the UK think and feel about their positioning within the URC?*

Answering the research question:

Ethnically-minoritised women in two URC congregations feel ignored and left out. Their experience is that their raced bodies (who they are and what they represent) are not seen, and their voices go unheard in the wider denomination. This happens despite having access to a decision-making body (the church meeting), even when these meetings occur in 'ethnically-minoritised' majority congregations. Yet, even though they do not feel seen and heard, they possess a strong desire to break through and participate as their authentic selves at the table. Successfully challenging the status quo necessitates being identified and valued as fully human. Breaking through and challenging the status quo would also entail actively being present and listening to accommodate a diverse and hospitable environment in which other ethnically-minoritised women can flourish. A lack of appreciation of

the strength of value of the denomination's Black/ethnically-minoritised women's contributions and membership would be unjust, and represent to the women a failure to renegotiate a space at the table, and could present the possibility of flight.

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