

Absence and Presence – Living the Mystery: A Model of Care for African American Women Using the Theory of Ambiguous Loss

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Abstract

This paper re-conceptualizes the theory of *ambiguous loss* to engage historical and contemporary realities of African American women's lived experiences. *Ambiguous Loss* theory suggests that a family member can be emotionally or psychologically present but physically absent or physically present but psychologically absent. The paper asserts that African American women always have lived with ambiguity and suggests reclaiming tenets of the theory. As a case study, the paper uses the lives of women in Ava DuVerney's *Queen Sugar* and lyrics of the series' theme song to explore the dilemma of expected ways of being ("keep the color in the line") alongside desire ("dreams never dying") and hopes ("taking flight"). The paper encourages African American women to pursue healing while living the mystery while unapologetically reclaiming and reframing what it means to live with ambiguity. It proposes a model of care that centralizes spirit and spirit work, rituals and music and dance, radical socialization, creating a spirit space for inner well-being, using power from the periphery, reclaiming collective memories, and leaving a signpost for the generations to remember.

*"Keep the Colors in the Line, Keep the Colors in the Line.
Dreams Never Die, (Keep the Colors in the Line) Dreams Never Die – Take
Flight., As the World Turns (Keep the Colors in the Line)
Dreams Never Die – Take Flight, As the World Turns, Take Flight – Dreams
Never Die – Take Flight."*

Introduction

These are the lyrics to the theme song for the television series *Queen Sugar*. The lyrics, written by Me'shell Ndegeocello, give an image in verse of how one is expected to live both with life's uncertainty while the world continues to turn, and with the underlying often subversive and controlling message of "keep[ing] the colors in the line."¹

There may be several understandings of the phrase "keep the colors in the line," but the message I propose we hear in this simple and powerful verse is a two-fold reminder expressed in the latter part of the lyric: "Dreams never die." Even as the world is turning, moving in directions we don't understand, we are to continue to "take flight." How do African American women continue to take flight while living with the ambiguity of all that is around them and with the struggles and losses African American women experience?

Oftentimes when there is a loss, closure is expected. After an appropriate time of bereavement, one is urged to be done with the grieving, be over the loss and to move on. This is true when African Americans, and specifically African American women, experience losses. Yet, often, there is no closure. What happens when this occurs? What happens when there are no answers to questions one seeks to resolve? What happens when things don't fit neatly into a box of expected outcomes? How do African American women engage in healing work when life is full of uncertainty and when African American women are constantly living with the consequences of the MAAFA,² the transatlantic slave trade, with the effects of "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,"³ and with the daily "mundane, extreme, environmental stress" (M.E.E.S.)⁴ of being Black in America?

This paper responds to some of these questions by conceptualizing a model of care for African American women using the theory of *ambiguous loss*. The paper proposes care that re-conceptualizes this theory based on the lived experiences of African American women. This author suggests that exploring African-rootedness and engaging in radical socialization will enable African American women, and perhaps all African diasporic people, to live emotionally emancipated and mentally free, as historical rootedness is indeed efficacious for African diasporic people's healing the known (and the sometimes unknown) losses and the ambiguity associated with losses.

This work uses research on grief theory and the womanist ethics of Mitzi Smith presented in her book *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*.⁵ What is proposed is a way forward to fulfill the dreams of freedom, often experienced as denied, yet in reality, they are actually deferred. One remedy for deferred dreams is for African American women to use their determination to confront the systems that attempt to bind them, even if it means coloring outside the line. African American women already know how to do this through living with many unknowns. Making this claim more visible would affirm their way of knowing and normalize their experiences. The embrace of a reframed and reclaimed theory of *ambiguous loss* would, as suggested in the work of Lee Butler, "liberate their dignity and save their souls,"⁶ enabling African American women to live with the mystery.

Ambiguous Loss Theory

This paper grows out of my own lived experience of caring for two parents with dementia – individuals who are physically present but whose minds take them elsewhere making them psychologically absent. Pauline Boss, professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota, conceptualized the theory of *ambiguous loss* based on work with families who had a loved one with Alzheimer's disease.⁷ Boss continued the development of this theory, working with widows whose

military husbands were *Missing in Action* (MIA). Boss explains this theoretical framework in terms of the family having no closure. The theory suggests that a family member can be physically absent yet still emotionally or psychologically present. Similarly, a family member can be physically present but psychologically absent. Accordingly, there is no closure for those experiencing these ambiguities.

According to Boss, ambiguous loss is stressful and defies resolution. It creates confused perceptions about who is in and who is out of a particular family system. Feelings of hopelessness, depression, or passivity, as well as feelings of ambivalence, lead to additional feelings of guilt, anxiety, and immobilization. These symptoms are outcomes of the stress of living with unanswered questions. Tenets of the theory suggest that stresses of ambiguity appears to be greater and more debilitating for individuals and families oriented toward “mastery” and “control.”⁸ Individuals accustomed to having answers, who feel they have the ability to fix situations, and those who believe they have the means to solve problems completely, struggle with the unknowing.⁹ Accordingly, these individuals appear to be less able to tolerate ambiguity. For those who tolerate ambiguity better, the research recognized that spirituality and faith assisted individuals and families in living the uncertainty.¹⁰

Boss and her ambiguous loss team also worked with individuals and therapists in New York after the 9/11 disaster, discovering that healing occurred in formed family group meetings.¹¹ The goal of the family meetings was to normalize family members’ feelings of their unanswerable losses. The families who attended these meetings were encouraged to develop rituals acknowledging the significance of the losses. These rituals were discovered to be essential to the work of healing. Symbols and ceremonies signaled permission for persons to grieve.¹²

The importance of family groups, rituals, and the acknowledgement of losses with symbols and ceremonies, especially with an ambiguous loss, is parallel in many ways to traditional African and African diasporic grief work. As Malidoma Somé suggests, rituals are important for finding powers that heal in African diasporic communities.¹³ His text speaks of the ambiguous place of shadows and light that provide pathways to ancient sources of human knowing. The importance of community also is emphasized.

With the many losses African American women experience, it is important that they, for reasons of health, also grieve, recognizing that even those people, ideas, and dreams that are no longer present still are of importance.

Ambiguous Losses: Queen Sugar as a Case Study

Operationalizing of Ambiguous Loss theory can be observed when examining a

case study, the television series *Queen Sugar*.¹⁴ In the made-for-television saga, we are immersed in the lives of a people and the specific struggle of an African American family system. The program *Queen Sugar* presents the trials and tribulations that people of color often endure in order to retain humanity in the face of an unforgiving racialized American system. In the novel *Queen Sugar*, which is the premise for the television series, the author Natalie Baszile constructs Charley as the main character.¹⁵ DuVerney, the producer of the television series, does not center one individual but shows the complexity and the struggles of all the family members and the many losses they experience.

The Bordelon family wrestles with many questions including, “What is family?” and “Who is family?” In a focus on the women in this family, viewers witness their encounter with many issues related to African American life and life as Black women. Charley Bordelon struggles with her identity as a bi-racial woman born out of wedlock. Where does she belong? She wrestles with her relationship with her mother, her siblings, her husband and son, and even her relationship with money. Nova Bordelon, Charley’s sister also struggles with her identity, specifically the fluidity of her sexual identity and her relationships with lovers and family members. Darla, the girlfriend of Ralph Angel Bordelon, Charley’s and Nova’s brother, struggles in her recovery as an addict and her attempt to be true to herself. Aunt Violet Bordelon, the elder woman in the saga, struggles with living with lupus and the ambiguity of its presence known be the defining marks of the “wolf disease.”¹⁶ Aunt Vi also struggles with a past that includes domestic violence which causes difficulties in developing new, loving relationships.

In one of the story lines, we are confronted with the ambiguity of the paternity of a little boy named Blue who clings to dolls for his security. “Whose child is Blue?” It is not Blue’s proclivity to want to play with dolls that is questioned, but the question is, “Who is Blue’s father?” Is Blue the son of Ralph Angel, or is he the offspring of another man? Darla, the child’s mother, says that Blue may not be Ralph Angel’s son, but Ralph Angel hears otherwise. We are left with the question, “Whose child is it?” In a scene following discussion of the question of Blue’s paternity, Aunt Vi reframes the ambiguous situation. She says, “*That baby, he’s OUR child. Blue will ALWAYS be safe.*”

For decades, African American families in situations of unknowing, especially when it comes to the paternity of children, engage this ambiguous situation. African American families claim children and other fictive kin, individuals who were not actually biological family members, acknowledging them as their own. African American individuals have had other mothers and aunts who help with love and care in what others may see as an ambiguous

definition of family. However, African American families and communities have always embraced a “care ethics for purposes of survival.”¹⁷

In another story line, when Aunt Vi finally reveals her secret of being physically ill, the words of Nova speak volumes. When speaking with Aunt Vi about her struggle with the “ambiguity of life” because of Lupus, a disease that in itself is ambiguous in its attack on the body, especially Black women’s bodies,¹⁸ Nova says, “*It’s okay to NOT be okay. We are all here. That’s the blessing.*”

These two scenes from *Queen Sugar* illustrate some ways ambiguity shows up in the lives of the African American family. With the many instances of uncertainty about who is in the family and who is not, facing the ambiguity of life with the symbolism of the wolf disease lupus that ravages the body, not knowing what organs it will attack, there still is illustrated in the overall story belief that even with all the complexity and ambiguity, dreams never die.

African American Women and Losses: The Dilemma

Keep the Colors in the Line

The lyrics of the theme song of *Queen Sugar* include the words “dreams never die.” African American women have dreams. Their hopes and dreams are like those of all other women – they desire to live with dignity and to live with a sense of freedom to be themselves. But the history of racism and sexism has attempted to rob African American women of their dignity and their sense of self. The expectation that African American women are to adhere to a White normative way of being, sometimes self-imposed by what Hotep Uhuru calls “comfortable captivity,”¹⁹ dims the dream by asking them to “keep the color in the line.”²⁰

Embracing what Patricia Hill Collins has identified as controlling images is another way that African American women have been encouraged to keep the color in the line. Controlling images are externally imposed ideas of how one is defined. These controlling images include African American women being labeled as mammies, matriarchs, Jezebels, or welfare queens.²¹ The result of African American women confronting and sometimes embracing these controlling images is that little attention is given to their inner lives.²² Another such controlling image, the strong Black woman, encourages African American women to bear heavier burdens and to stay within such normative expectations and roles set by the majority culture and, sometimes, imposed by themselves.²³ Regina E. Romero,²⁴ Karla Scott,²⁵ Chnequa Walker-Barnes,²⁶ and Beverly Wallace,²⁷ among others, have written about the iconic imagery of African American women feeling they must uphold the idea of being strong Black women.

Being strong is also an expectation when African American women experiences losses. African American women are expected to disassociate

negative emotions even while grieving. Research is slowly growing in the area of the African American grief process.²⁸ Still the research is limited. Margaret S. Stroebe and Henk Schutt suggest that because of sparse research, there is a lack of applicability of some grief work concepts, especially within ethnic communities. Whether or not the concept of *adaptation without confrontation*²⁹ would be applicable in exploring the African American grief experience still needs to be further explored.

Research does suggest that adaptive skills in confronting loss reduces psycho-social and physical health consequences. Confronting the loss rather than disassociating oneself from the loss is seen as normative. However, as Stroebe and Shutt suggest, the normative expectation of regulation and the disassociation of negative emotions may be, for some cultures, a means and an appropriate adjustment to loss. Disassociation of negative emotions might help maintain high levels of functioning.³⁰ While this may be true, use of this adaptive coping method of maintaining the image and regulating emotions by African American women may only further support adherence to the role of the “strong Black woman” and the embrace of what is called “controlled triumph empathy,” recognized in grief literature as women’s willingness to remain strong in the grief process.³¹

In unpublished research on the study of grieving African American women written by this author, it was found that African American women not only subscribed to “controlled triumph empathy” but they were also influenced by the cultural and societal ideal that it is important for African American women to remain strong.³² This controlling image, wherein society, the African American community, and perhaps even the African American woman herself have bought into the idea of being strong, may prove beneficial for some but may also have the negative consequences of depression and burnout, poor physical health consequences, and even death for other African American women, all situations in which the dreams of a more fulfilling life with burdens shared goes sorely unfulfilled or may die.

Dreams Never Die, But: “What Happens to a Dream Deferred?”

The theme song of *Queen Sugar* suggests that “dreams never die.” Dreams continue to live. In the words of the poem by Langston Hughes, a dream, however, could be deferred.³³ The initial question asked in the poem written by Hughes is answered with an additional provocative questions:

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore —

And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over –
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load?
*Or does it explode?*³⁴

A very important aspect of this query about a dream deferred is the reality that there is still a dream. If dreams are deferred, the dreams may in fact result in the conditions proposed in the responses offered in Hughes' poem.

Controlling societal entities attempt to kill African American women's dreams and imagination. In her essay "Black Feminist Futurity: From Survival Rhetoric to Radical Speculation," Caitlen Gunn writes that White supremacist entities often attempt to kill Black imagination. The goal of killing black imagination, according to Gunn, is to prevent folks from dreaming about liberation, imagining an end to oppression, and engaging in life affirming self-expression.³⁵ There is a need to reimagine the dreams even while living with the ambiguity of life. There may be attempts of killing dreams, but the reality still is the dreams of African American women do not die.

The dreams of African American women and all in the community are those of "freedom." African American women are a diverse community yet universally seek freedom for themselves and for their loved ones. The dreams they hold are the desire to fully use their potential and their agency without hindrance or objection. African American women dream of healthy relationships with significant partners, and they dream of love. They dream of experiencing the universal desire of being respected and living with dignity; of being healthy and whole; and most, importantly, of being regarded as humans as their authentic selves. They dream of freedom for their children, with the hope of them remaining safe, and they desire that their off-spring are destined to be free and have the ability to soar. Yet, as the Hughes' poem suggests, the dreams of African American women are often deferred.

The World Continues to Turn

With these dreams still swirling, and hopes often deferred, the world continues to turn. In the final chapter of her book *Archetypal Grief: Slavery's Legacy of Intergenerational Child Loss*, Fanny Brewster concludes with the words, "We know grief and suffering because it is a defining aspect of being human."³⁶ Brewster is saying that for centuries levels of suffering have been with African Americans. Our foremothers suffered through the transatlantic slave voyage. MAAFA, the horrible experience of entrapment and enslavement, has a legacy that globally impacted African "ascendant"³⁷ folks and continues to do so. The

violence to African American women's personhood has been the source of much dis-ease and discomfort. And still the world continues to turn.

In the introduction to his book *Muntu: African Culture in the Western World*, Janheinz Jahn writes, "everywhere I witnessed the psychic pain of Africans [including Africans in the Americas] undergoing the exigency of uprootedness and transition."³⁸ Looking at African traditional beliefs, thoughts, and values, Jahn understood, as Calvin Hernton in the forward of the book writes, the pain is caused by "the forces of white supremacy and the might of its violence."³⁹ Indeed, African American women experience the forces of the violence on their humanity, their "muntu: – a Bantu word that means human being."⁴⁰ This subjugation of one's being leaves African American women wanting to claim their humanity even while they continue to hold the pain forced upon them. Still, African American women survived and continue to survive with the rupture of their souls that are needing care.

How do African American women heal from such insults to their being? How do African American women become emotionally "free" while contending with the ambiguity of life even as the world continues to turn? Proposing a model of care that utilizes the theory of *ambiguous loss* is suggested. The model acknowledges the existence of ambiguity; normalizes African American women's experiences and their determination to confront systems that attempt to bind them; recommends using African-rooted, radical socialization in order to engage in their own emotional healing; and encourages living their dreams of freedom by means of coloring outside the lines in an ambiguous world.

African American Women and Ambiguous Loss

Reframing and Reclaiming the Theory of Ambiguous Loss

The definition of the term "ambiguity" is, as the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* suggests, ambiguous itself.⁴¹ On one hand, "ambiguity" is defined as vague, unspecified, and uncertain in meaning. On the other hand, "ambiguity" is defined in terms of being context sensitive and of having multiple meanings. Using the former definition, persons who appreciate "ambiguity" are able to live with uncertainty and unspecified meaning. The theory of *ambiguous loss* embraces this definition. However, the theory suggests that those persons who are not comfortable with ambiguity experience confused perceptions, hopelessness, depression, passivity, and ambivalence. The theory also claims that persons who are able to live with ambiguity are those for whom embracing mastery and control are not their principle worldview. Their faith and spirituality assist them in living with the unknowing.

African American women (and men) have always lived with ambiguity, and they continue to do so. They continue to live with the complexity of life and situations that do not fit into what one might call a "normative" pattern of living.

Resolution of difficult situations, inclusive of those related to racism, classism, and sexism often are not concrete or definitive.

Today, African Americans live with this sense of ambiguity. The ambiguity includes wondering whether or not our sons will arrive home safely after going to the store to get a bag of skittles or when they are simply jogging in their own neighborhoods. It includes the wonderment of whether or not our daughters and granddaughters will be “pushed out” of the educational system into the juvenile justice system. With the mortality rate for African American women during childbirth steadily increasing, this ambiguity also extends to whether or not giving birth will cause Black women’s death. This ambiguity further extends to the wonderment of whether African American women will be killed because they are transgendered. This ambiguity also includes questions about whether or not we will simply be heard when our breath is being choked out of us as we call for our mothers and whether or not others will recognize that Black Lives really do matter. This ambiguity in living in the Americas has us wondering about life itself.

During this the current COVID-19 pandemic, the ambiguous nature of whether and how African Americans and other communities of color will live or die is transparently real. Who will contract this disease and who will not? Living with the stress of the not knowing is apparent as communities of color *do* know they are being impacted more than any other group of people in contracting this deadly disease.

Still life is valued. African American women continue and have always lived with all of what might be considered ambiguity, but they also have models of understanding and care that have worked to mitigate times and circumstances of uncertainty. Reframing the theory of *ambiguous loss* would mean both acknowledging the experiences of African American women’s lives and refining more clearly the continued healing work necessary to mitigate ambiguous existence in this oppressive society.

Reframing *Ambiguous Loss* theory through the experiences of African American women means recognizing that engagement in a world with the expectations of coloring within the line, staying within the guidelines of someone else’s expectations and norms for living has not worked. African American people’s use of this theory could be re-conceptualized through a liberative logic, as suggested by Uhuro Hotep, that allows one to interpret data and promote conscious emancipatory activity on the intellectual and practical levels.⁴² Using liberative logic to re-conceptualize *Ambiguous Loss* theory would aid in new understandings by reframing the theory to engage historical African-centered concepts and practices and values and belief systems that enhance the lived experiences of African American women and by extension the African American community. The liberative work of reframing and re-conceptualizing

the theory would allow one to be conscious of and then reinterpret the meaning of living with ambiguity. Alongside re-conceptualizing *Ambiguous Loss* theory, exploring African-rootedness and ancestral ways of being would give clues about how to continue this work toward freedom and wholeness.

African-rootedness refers to engaging those historical concepts, ideals, and moral rules that have been long-term and deeply held African traditional values. Values and virtues in this long history of humanity have centered around the importance of family and community connections. They are inclusive of an understanding of the importance of harmony and justice, truth, order, and balance. The embrace of these MAATic principles have historically allowed for communal understanding, unity and familial health.⁴³

Engaging African-rootedness in the work of reframing and reclaiming the theory of *ambiguous loss* is a call to remembrance. African American folk should remember, for example, the truth that we all have a right to a full existence. The results would have African American people unapologetically reclaim and reframe what it means to live, and even to live with ambiguity. Reframing and re-conceptualizing *Ambiguous Loss* theory would affirm African American women's ability to live with the mystery of ambiguity and would provide liberative tools to explore and develop ways of moving African American women closer to the actualization of their dreams of freedom. Such an exploration would uncover collective memories and those traditions cloaked in silence that, as writer Audre Lorde asserts, may or may not be helpful:

I think of how important it is for us to share with each other the powers buried within the breaking of silence, about our bodies and our health, even when we have been schooled to be secret and stoical about pain and disease. But that stoicism and silence do not serve us nor our communities, only the forces of things as they are.⁴⁴

A Sankofa Move: Reclaiming Our Collective Memories

For purposes of health, there is a need to remember, to remember a life before enslavement. There is a need for African American people to remember who they have been and how they lived. There is a need to remember their African-rootedness and to remember more that we have forgotten. There is a need to reclaim these collective memories. According to Brewster, the experience of African Americans living in the diaspora, unfortunately, has created for many a primal rupture and an erasure of collective memory.

Primordial, collective memory, Brewster says, has failed children of African descent. They have forgotten, for example, the importance of women, including their roles as mothers. Historically, most African traditions placed mothers in relation to ideas of origin. African descendent folks now, Brewster writes, tend to gather around a concept of the “mother-of-forgetting.”⁴⁵

Because of the current patriarchal views of women as non-valued, sexualized persons, the importance of African American women has been devalued. Who were African diasporic women before they were told who they were?

From the beginning of their captivity enslaved African women were treated with disdain. They were raped in African captivity and during the Atlantic voyage. They were used as reproduction females for the economic success and survival of the plantation system. They were used as breeders, without the psychological joy of having been mothers. Their biological children were not their own, but were the property of others. During and even after slavery, African American women were raped with no justice afforded them and lynched when they cried out for freedom. Their bodies were used for the advancement of gynecological practices, their cells used to advance medical research, and regardless of class, education or status they were potential targets of public abuse, ridicule, and mistreatment.⁴⁶ Stereotypes and the controlling images of African American women were imposed and Black women according to some legislators were believed to be the ruin of the Black family.⁴⁷ Yet their wisdom and intellect were used, although hidden, in the advancement of space travel and even in the nurturing and raising of White children.

It is important to recognize that contemporary African American women are the children of these women. By linking the pain and abandonment of the mother to the scene of her rape witnessed by her children, the children can lament their suffering. Although this may be an unconscious lament, the grief from the trauma of rape, the witnessing of lynching, the experience of child and parental separation, the loss of loved ones and, especially, the loss of self remains in the bodies of African American women whose genes hold the memories. There is, therefore, a need to acknowledge the trauma.

Engaging in the practice of Sankofa – going back to reclaim that which we have forgotten – could be a means by which African American women can begin the process of re-memembering, remembering who they were and engaging in the work of healing while defining what healing is to look like. The work is necessary, if for no other reason than to embrace the fullness of one's humanity.

Remembering that Hurt Fuels Us, Then Moving to Rebirth

Grief traveled with them. M. Jacqueline Alexander, in her book *Pedagogy of Crossing*, writes that when Africans people were shipped to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade, "grief traveled as well." The pain of traumatic experiences continues in what DeGruy defines as *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome*.⁴⁸ Lee Butler suggests that the pain and the trauma African Americans experience is, however, protracted traumatic stress and continues to this day.⁴⁹ Resmaa Menakem, in his book *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, also suggests that the residuals from

the traumatic experiences remain in the bodies.⁵⁰ All of this points to the fact that African American women remember the hurt in their minds, in their bodies, and in their spirits.

Yet as Charley says in *Queen Sugar*, “*Hurt fuels us.*” This is not to say that African American women should be hurting, but for many, the hurt moves one to a new place of being and action. In suggesting this, Charley is saying that the hurt pushed her to action. Charley was able to use her wit to work for her future and that of her child. She experienced multiple losses, including relationship losses, while trying to survive within a subjugating system. Yet she was able to work toward securing her own wellbeing and that of her family in spite of the pain. Acknowledging the pain is important. What we do with the pain is equally important. Chinua Achebe and Malidoma Somé suggest some models. In his book *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe suggests that a strong sense of tradition, ritual, and social coherence balances suffering.⁵¹ In his more recently published collection of essays *Hopes and Impediments*, Achebe writes, “overcoming goes hand and hand with eradicating the destructive effects of racism and injustice in western society.”⁵² Somé, in his work, also suggests that “the person hears the pain as creative action connecting that person with his or her highest self, which prescribes an alternative to spiritual death. The pain teaches us something. It is a call to rebirth.”⁵³

Remembering and Radical Socialization

The rebirth can occur when one recognizes their African-rootedness and engages in what is called radical socialization. In his work *The African Unconsciousness*, Edward Bruce Bynum writes, “no matter where we go we will always be Africoid.”⁵⁴ It is in this remembering that African diasporic people know that they are connected to their African roots. With this recognition, one becomes attuned to life and energies and spirit within and around them. They re-member values that have been life-giving and life-producing. They remember, as Jahn writes, “the spoken word, the sounds of the drums, the laughter of the throat, the poem, and the song.”⁵⁵ This remembering, according to Jahn, constitutes the “magical force” (or I would say mystical force) that activates and enlivens one who is human.⁵⁶

Alexander writes, “once they (enslaved Africans) crossed, they graced all things with wisdom – the wind, the sky, the earth, the fire.”⁵⁷ Wisdom is understood by observing nature. During enslavement, engaging this former way of knowing enabled Africans to survive. It re-oriented Africans in a new context to a way of engaging the world knowing that God’s spirit was with them and all around them. Radical socialization helps one to remember. This remembering is necessary in order to assist with healing. As Degruy and others suggest, this remembering is necessary to distill the psychic traumas

produced by the experiences of captivity and enslavement.⁵⁸ The experiences of captivity – of being held and captured as if one was an animal, to be shackled in a bottom of a ship, to endure the voyage, to be separated from family and all that was known, to be raped and killed, to have one's children taken away, and so much more that was horrific – were traumatic and the trauma of these experiences still linger. While remembering the trauma is difficult, going back and recalling a time before the trauma of enslavement would assist in the process of healing. The remembering helps one to recall who they were. The remembering of African rootedness reminds one to recall the use of rituals, a return to the ancient with a plea for help directed to the world of the spirit.⁵⁹ With the use of rituals, lamenting is embraced and the spirit is called, as spirit is primary. It is the spirit and the spirit world that holds the mystery.

With radical socialization, trusting in the spirit and the spirit alone is embraced. Accordingly, when there is an opportunity for people to lament and mourn their losses, using rituals to call on the spirit and the ancestors is a form of remembering that assists in the healing work. Historical rootedness and radical socialization are, therefore, efficacious for African diasporic people's healing, living with the mystery and the unknowing, and with the ambiguity associated with losses. The question is, can one live with the mystery?

*"The ancestors are not dead. They live in the Spirits and in the Community. They are reborn into the trees, the mountains, the rivers, and the stones to guide and inspire the community."*⁶⁰

Reclaiming and Reframing Absence and Presence

Reclaiming of African-rootedness recognizes this belief about ancestors. Ancestors continue to live even when they have died. Those who are Christians recite a similar belief in their creeds. Though they are absent, they are ever present. Although persons may experience the feeling of the absence, that which has been lost is still present and can teach one the way forward. Psychological and even emotional healing can take another shape. Using *Ambiguous Loss* theory, understanding and remembering "absences and presence," leaning on African memory, and engaging in radical socialization reframed for the work of healing historical trauma could help African American women to continue to thrive.

Absence and Presence: Living the Mystery

What is necessary for liberation of the dignity and the souls of African American women in light of "absence and presence"? What happens if one reframes the theory of *ambiguous loss*? What would be the benefit of embracing a reframed

theory and of practitioners bringing African-rootedness into conversation with *Ambiguous Loss* theory? A model of care using the theory of *ambiguous loss* would begin with (in addition to reframing the theory) reclaiming it, and doing so with intentionality, to make the theory applicable to what the African American women have always done.

In the reframing of *Ambiguous Loss* theory, African American women would recognize that they live with ambiguity and that living the mystery is normative and okay. Practitioners could assist African American women in remembering that, historically, they have always lived with ambiguity. African American women would remember those who came before and who survived, even in the unknowing. They would remember there were revolutionaries who made *a way out of no way* even with the ambiguity of life.

Research indicates that racial cultural consciousness and the valuing of one's culture has a healing effect.⁶¹ Cultural adaptive skills appear to reduce negative psycho-social and physical health consequences especially as it relates to bereavement. Stress and levels of depression are lowered. Research also indicates that having higher relationship to cultural values predicts lower mental illness.⁶² This integration of African-rootedness and critical cultural consciousness could potentially assist with and help disarm the sometimes debilitating outcomes of mourning losses that have no closure. Utilizing a reframed version of *Ambiguous Loss* theory could potentially buffer the extent to which mundane, extreme, environmental stress leads to complacency and nihilism.

If one integrates African-rootedness as a component of reframed *Ambiguous Loss* theory, resiliency and positive resistance could be actualized and problem-solving strategies would be further developed. Striving to live into their dreams, while still walking by faith (and not necessarily by sight), would give African American women the power and the ability to act with the courage to continue to dream dreams and engage in spiritual activism acknowledging the potency of living the mystery.

Living the Mystery: A Model of Care

What would a model of care look like using the reframed theory of *ambiguous loss* for African American women? This model of care would be inclusive of the following: creating sacred spaces, defining the losses – known and ambiguous, engaging in radical positive socialization, recognizing moral ambiguity, engaging in spiritual activism, and embracing an ethical principle of leaving a healthy signpost for the next generation.

Creating Sacred Spaces: The model of care would begin with creating a “sacred space,” recognizing that such a space may (or may not) be a physical space – another ambiguity. This model of care would include helping African American

women to create a state of inner well-being by recognizing the importance of and re-storying their experiences in new and healthy ways. It would include the use of music and the use of rituals for the sake of remembering. This would be similar to what Pauline Boss found to be helpful in working with people in New York when family groups used rituals after 9/11.

This creation of space would also be a place where ancestral other lives, those who lived and died who reside in the unconscious can come to consciousness. This would allow one to access truths that live outside of the current lived experiences. The coming to consciousness of these ancestral lives dispels lies that hide the truth of who African American women are. Doing so would provide hope in times of despair, where one would recognize and sustain a will to be well using their creative *asé* to plan alternative healthy habits of being. African American women in this sacred space would recognize too that the sacredness of the space is made by the Spirit herself.

Defining the Losses – Known and Ambiguous: Applying the theory of *ambiguous loss* to a model of care for African American women would include defining the losses, both known and ambiguous. As noted earlier, with the many losses African American women experience, it is important that African American women, for reasons of health, name the losses and grieve. They would spend time with the losses so as not get paralyzed in the avoidance of the hurt even when others expect closure and desire them to move on. Creating the space for and recognizing their losses would give African American women power to engage in their own grief work. They would recognize, too, that their dreams are sacred; though, perhaps, no longer present the dreams still are of importance.

During times of involuntarily captivity, African American women were not given the choice or the opportunity to grieve. They were not given the opportunity to fully grieve the loss of their children, the loss of their loved ones, the loss of their bodily freedom, or the loss of their dreams. These losses remain with the soul of African American women. Brewster calls this *archetypal grief*. When African American women acknowledge this archetypal grief they have the ability change consciousness and influence the emotional state of each individual born into the next generation.⁶³

Today, during the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity to grieve is again compromised. Experiencing the loss of bodily freedom as masses of people across the country and the global society must stay in place and interact with others within the parameters of staying six feet apart, people are again separated from their loved ones. If they are elders residing in nursing facilities, they are yet again separated from their children and grandchildren. When physical death comes, family members are left to die alone without being surrounded by loved ones. We have yet to see the implications of such

separations and of these loss experiences. But we do know that reclaiming the real human reaction to loss is paramount to our grieving and healing processes, and finding new rituals in this new reality is, therefore, necessary. By acknowledging the reality of living with these ambiguities, while not comfortable, one could be reminded that African American folk have been here before and have survived and that the necessary work of engaging in archetypal grieving is to continue.

Engaging in Positive Radical Socialization: A model of care using the theory of *ambiguous loss* would include redirecting energy and engaging in what DeGruy calls, “positive radical socialization.”⁶⁴ As noted earlier, radical socialization is the work of teaching and socializing individuals “how to be Black.” Specifically, it instructs African Americans in understanding the obstacles that are associated with cultural racism *and* how to navigate and survive systems of oppression.

This engagement in radical socialization would assist individuals in breaking free from “a colonial mindset of disembodiment”⁶⁵ and assist persons in engaging in what the *Association of Black Psychologists* is suggesting as one’s healing work of “emotional emancipation.”⁶⁶ Emotional Emancipation as originally defined by Martin Luther King, Jr., works toward psychological freedom from the harmful and toxic stress produced by the experiences of being Black in America.⁶⁷

Emotional emancipation enables African Americans, in general, and, as the subject of this paper, African American women, in particular, to see themselves as beautiful, intelligent, capable, and worthy. The work of radical socialization and emotional emancipation includes remembering the rich cultural history and the history of radical resistance. Emotional emancipation also makes room for spirit-conscious meaning making where, as suggested by the originators of that work, one makes oneself available to the behest of the spirit; living for the purpose of effecting societal justice; acting politically by intervening in situations where inequities of power and privilege are operating, and doing so in effective and creative ways.⁶⁸

This radical socialization could also include wrestling with the ambiguity of the terms that could block alternative ways of understandings such as “truth and knowing.” Womanist biblical scholar and ethicist Mitzi Smith describes the function of truth as a survival mechanism and makes distinctions about types of “truths,” including what she calls “simple truths.” Similar to the tenets of *Ambiguous Loss* theory in regard to some persons’ low tolerance of ambiguity, Smith asserts some people want clarity, certainty, and consistency that enable them to make decisions and label things swiftly.⁶⁹ Smith defines this as “simple truths.” But she also raises the question, “Is this truth?” Simple truths, Smith says, are often embraced because there is no ambiguity. Yet in pursuing simple truths, survival is coopted. Engaging the world with “simple truth” leaves one

unable to live with ambiguity which, according to Smith, often is embraced by those who are weak. The strong, she says, can flourish in ambiguity and uncertainty and do not have to embrace simple truths to know. A more robust understanding of truth, therefore, is necessary. Similar to the concept of “truth,” the idea of “knowing” must also be re-conceptualized. Without the reconceptualization of “knowing,” the ambiguity of the term could also block alternative ways of understanding. Knowing, according to Smith, is a moral validating and subjective study of epistemology⁷⁰ Too often society defines what is knowledge and who engages in this epistemological work. To re-conceptualize this ambiguous term would mean that African American women’s own subjective experiences would be used as evidence of knowledge.

African American women’s lived experiences and the expression of their experiences are in fact authentic data. Their mere existence evidence what is good, and right and ethical and their experiences, grounded in the spirit can be used as helpful information for the necessary healing work. Their interests and ways of knowing, often not honored, shape what they know. This radical socialization of an ambiguous term such as “knowing” would therefore change what is typically understood as truth and would move African American women to embrace a truth that is in fact rooted in the spirit of who they are. This would honor their wisdom, what they know as a truth (and not a simple true) and would recognize their capacity to know, without coopting their survival. Embracing a reframed understanding of *Ambiguous Loss* theory would then encourage African American women to direct their energy in the direction of engaging in a radical socialization where one would not settle for simple truths. Their “knowing” too would be honored and their survival would not be compromised when embracing more authentic truths and their own capacity to know.

Recognizing Moral Ambiguity: The major principle of *Ambiguous Loss* theory is the tenet that there is no certainty or closure. It is also understood that for those who can live with ambiguous loss in a healthy way, their faith and their spirituality assist them in embracing the unknown. Because religiosity and spirituality are important to many African American women, becoming comfortable with ambiguity of religious understandings and ethical mandates would be important to consider in the reframing the theory.

As noted above, some people are comfortable only with simple truths and limited knowing, and are not comfortable with ambiguity. There are also people who are not comfortable with moral ambiguity. Moral ambiguity is the unclear principles and requisites of how to live in the world. Often the moral codes embraced are found in sacred texts. According to Smith some readers of sacred texts are uncomfortable with moral ambiguity.⁷¹ Many African American

women seek to align their lives with perceived and presumed clear and unambiguous ethical commands.⁷² This effort, however, limits women's understanding of the written word and as well as their spiritual connections with their higher power. Embracing moral ambiguity would assist African American women in developing a richer spirituality by asking them to engage in critical womanist interpretations and reclaim their ability to engage in a re-reading of sacred texts with an acknowledgement of the ambiguity in what is being proposed in the ethical commands, especially if those commands are not life giving. Smith suggests doing so by engaging in what she calls "womanist sass," a contextual language of resistance.⁷³ This womanist sass, a "mother tongue," is a subversive form of grown women's speech used by African American women who talk back to systems of injustice and oppression and who own their truths.⁷⁴ African American women would speak to their own liberation as they reach toward their desire for freedom. A model of care using *Ambiguous Loss* theory with African American women would, therefore, recognize moral ambiguity.

Engage in Spiritual Activism and Utilization of Power from the Periphery: Creating sacred spaces, defining the losses, engaging in positive radical socialization, and recognizing moral ambiguity are some of the elements of a model of care utilizing *Ambiguous Loss* theory. In addition to these elements, a model of care for African American women would also include spiritual activism. Spiritual activism includes using and cultivating one's intuitive self and embracing one's power. As noted earlier, talking back to systems of injustice and oppression is within one's power. Recognizing ambiguity would move one to action.

Engaging in spiritual activism for social transformation would be an additional way of reframing truths that are not "simple truths" and engaging in "womanist sass" as Smith suggests.⁷⁵ Such activism also includes drawing knowledge from dreams, nature, and other resources deep within the human psyche. Spiritual activism would recognize the importance of self-actualization, self-determination, and self-definition. It would recognize the importance of being fully who African American women were born to be and becoming the guardians of the "mystery," the unknown, with the power and the ability of recreating one's world, using one's spiritual power to live the mystery.

Using this reframed model of ambiguous loss, inclusive of engaging their African-rootedness, African American women would recognize their power and would employ what is called using "power from the periphery." "Power from the periphery" is the redefinition of one's involvement in an oppressive system by establishing alternative ground rules and accepting the consequences of not doing politics according to system's rules.⁷⁶ In other words, this means coloring outside the line. The use of one's power in this way would certainly include using womanist sass and spiritual activism. African American women,

therefore, would not become less strong but would know how and when to use their strength so that their strength would be an asset.⁷⁷ They would know that their freedom is not for themselves alone.

Leaving Healthy Signposts: Finally, in a model of care that embraces a reframed understanding of the theory of *ambiguous loss*, African American women would remember to leave healthy signposts for the generations that follow. This will allow the idea of ambiguity and living the mystery to be engaged and continued. African American women have been a resilient people despite the many losses – known, unknown, and ambiguous. Reminding those who will follow of these truths and recalling the losses that were experienced and are still within their bodies is essential for authentic living. In leaving healthy signposts, African American women would give encouragement to ignore the notion that one must color within the lines. They would be reminded of the historical virtue Aunt Vi, in *Queen Sugar* recalls, the historical value of claiming our children – the hope of the future. This responsibility of leaving signposts, narratives, and stories, reminding future generations that they are answers to their fore-parents', their parents', and the community's dreams, would signal to those who will follow that even as the world continues to turn, dreams never die. They are to continue to “take flight.”

Summary: Take Flight

In his book *Muntu*, Jahn suggests that human beings have the magic and the power and the intelligence to engage in what Monica Coleman and others call “making a way out of no way.”⁷⁸ African American women have agency and have always made things work. One could also say that they have the ability to fly. In the book, *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales*, a woman Sarah, with a child on her back and who was seeking freedom, asked to be reminded of the words that would enable her to fly. In the tale, the words “kum yali, kum buba tambe” whispered in her ear enable her to soar and enable her and her child to escape from an oppressive situation.⁷⁹

Folktales are full of ambiguity and are ways to express both fears and hopes. They help with collective memory. They remind a people of their historical values and virtues. They remind people of possibilities in places and spaces of the unknown. This folktale in *The People Could Fly* illustrates such a value, an African woman escaping captivity, rising up to fly to freedom.

African American women have always ventured to take flight. They sought ways to free themselves and to take others with them and to survive places they were never meant to survive. During the transatlantic slave voyage, Black women sought freedom and resisted, in spite of their enslavement. Some resisted by throwing themselves over the side of their captors' ships. Some of these enslaved African women were raped by their captors and resisted these

bodily violations. Before the voyage, some were brought up to the top of the dungeon in the hot African sun and their legs were attached to what was called the rebellion ball. While some died, others continued to live. They existed within the bowels of the ship, with the ambiguity of whether they would face life or death. Many survived, and for those who did, their progeny continue to live.⁸⁰

Revolutionary African and African diasporic women, healers and leaders in the centuries that followed, women such as Harriett Tubman, Ella Baker and Ruby Sales, also engaged in resistance work and spiritual activism. They are a part of the long lineage of resisting women living and fighting for life for themselves and their families and for those who would follow. Similar to Harriett Tubman, Nanny the Maroon resisted and inspired others. Suggesting more would follow, Nanny said, “When your sorrow obscures the skies, other women like me will rise.”⁸¹

“They are all gone now – the ones who did these things – gone to their reward. But the afterbirth is lodged in the woman’s body and will not be expelled.”⁸²

Conclusion

It has been said of African American women that “sorrow rolls right off her brow like so much rain.”⁸³ The above quote suggests that African American women have sorrows and many losses in their lives and the afterbirth of the losses still lingers in their bodies. How do African American women survive and attempt to thrive with the rape of their spirits and their bodies and the residuals of the trauma still being left within? Engaging in care, embracing ambiguous loss, reframed in a way that affirms African American women’s realities and historical resistance, is essential. In using the theory of *ambiguous loss*, one could recognize that while some of the many losses are real and certain, some of these losses can be defined as ambiguous with no closure. The losses may have occurred in the past yet are ever present, and should be recognized and honored. It is not necessary for one to forget.

African American women experience lots of losses. They, however, provide roots of strength that their daughters need in order to work through the traumatic history and legacy of being African American and female. African American women’s roots are also entwined with violence, pain, and silence. A mother in recovery, as is Blue’s mother in *Queen Sugar*, still tries to figure out who she is. Whoever they are – whether they are women who have multiple racial identities, as does Charley, or Black women, similar to Nova, embracing their sexual fluidity, or seasoned women, like Aunt Vi, haunted by rape and the violation that causes difficulties in developing loving relationships while also

coping with the complexity of all that wants to continue to ravage one's body, yearning yet frightened to love – African American women experience many losses, many with no closure. The intricacy of the lives of the women of *Queen Sugar* reminds us of these complexities, but it also reminds us that, still, dreams never die.

Recognizing the range and diversity of African American women's experiences is crucial. By acknowledging the complexities of all of their losses, African American women can begin to also acknowledge their pain as well as their strengths, redefined on their own terms, while developing more fully their identities and visions for freedom. African American women can also redefine their strength by reexamining their involvement in systems that benefit from them continuing to adhere to such controlling images as “being strong” or their living in “comfortable captivity.” In understanding ambiguous loss reframed, African American women could, perhaps, redefine strength by claiming womanist sass wherein strength in ambiguity also is honored. Emotional emancipation can take place. African American women can then envision healing, a healing buttressed with a new understanding of what it means to color “outside the line,” with the power to live and dream.

A model of care for African American women in this time of uncertainty and ambiguity would, in fact, mean that African American women will make a “Sankofa move” and claim those elements of healing that worked in the past even in times of unknowing. It would mean radical socialization that embraces the emancipation of their emotions. By recognizing the importance of spirit and spirit work, of ritual and music, of dance and the arts, of creating a spirit space for inner well-being, of using power from the periphery, of leaving signposts for future generations to remember as they move in directions of healing while living the mystery, African American women can reclaim the work, proposed by Lee Butler, of “liberating our dignity, saving our souls,” and recognize, in the words of Nova from *Queen Sugar*, “It's okay to NOT be okay. We are all here. That's the blessing.”

NOTES

¹ Me'Shell NdegeOcello, “Nova,” Youtube, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkM_8FzDoSw&list=RDGGCuv9rOLGI&index=2.

² MAAFA is a Kiswahili term for the great disaster, sometimes also called the Black Holocaust, both naming the loss of millions of Africans killed during the slave trade. More information about the MAAFA can be found on africanholocaust.net.

³ Joy A. Degruy describes Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome as the legacy of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual injury upon African Americans. See Joy A. Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Portland: Joy Degruy Publications, 2017).

⁴ Marie Peters and G. Massey, “Mundane, Extreme, Environmental Stress: The Case of Black Families in White America,” (1983). Published online in *Marriage and Family Review* 6, no. 1 (October 26, 2008): 193-218.

⁵ Mitzi Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018).

- ⁶ Lee E. Butler, *Liberating Our Dignity, Saving Our Souls: A New Theory of African American Identity Formation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006).
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- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ambiguousloss.com/about/person-statement/.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Ritual: Power, Healing, and Community* (New York: Penguin Press, 1993).
- ¹⁴ Ava DuVerney, *Queen Sugar*, “Dream Variations,” Episode 16, Season 2, (OWN Network, 2017).
- ¹⁵ Natalie Baszile, *Queen Sugar* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015).
- ¹⁶ Lupus is the Latin word for wolf, and lupus has been described as the “Wolf Disease” because of the telltale marks on the body of the person who suffers from the disease. This marking is similar to the marking of a wolf. In this author’s research of African American women with lupus, similarities of the wolf’s character are apparent in this disease. Similar to the unpredictable appearance of wolves, where this disease will manifest in the body is not known. More information can be found at www.lupus.org.
- ¹⁷ Lee Butler, *Liberating Our Dignity, Saving Our Souls* (Chalice Press, 2006).
- ¹⁸ See lupus.org.
- ¹⁹ Uhuro Hotep, “Intellectual Maroons” in *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, (2008):1-19.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 5.
- ²¹ Patricia H. Collins, “Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images,” in Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge Press, 2008), 76 -106.
- ²² Evelyn L. Barbee, “Violence and Mental Health” in *In and Out of our Right Minds: The Mental Health of African American Women*, ed. Diane R. Brown and Verna M. Keith (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003), 99-115.
- ²³ Collins, 76-106.
- ²⁴ Regina E. Romero, “The Icon of the Strong Black Woman: The Paradox of Strength” in *Psychotherapy with African American Women: Innovations in Psychodynamics Perspectives and Practices*, ed. Beverly Green and Leslie Jackson (New York: Guilford, 2000), 225-238.
- ²⁵ Karla Scott, *The Language of Strong Black Womanhood: Myths, Models, Messages and a New Mandate for Self-Care* (Maryland: Lexington Press, 2019).
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- ²⁸ Paul Rosenblatt and Beverly Wallace, *African American Grief* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- ²⁹ M. Stroebe and H. Schut, “Models of Coping with Bereavement: A Review” in *Handbook of Bereavement Research Consequences, Coping and Care*, ed. M. Stroebe, O. Hanson, W. Stroebe and H. Schut (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001).
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Moss, et al., 1997.
- ³² Beverly Wallace, unpublished research conducted as part of doctoral work at The University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1998.
- ³³ Langston Hughes, “Harlem,” poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Caitlin Gunn, “Black Feminist Futurity: From Survival Rhetoric to Radical Speculation” in *Feral Feminisms* 9 (2019).
- ³⁶ Fanny Brewster, *Archetypical Grief: Slavery’s Legacy of Intergenerational Child Loss* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 138.
- ³⁷ While the word “descendent” is expected, the term “ascendant” is used to affirm the reality that African Americans and other African diasporic people are rooted in and come from African people. This term was first heard in a lecture by Dr. Marjorie Lewis, former President of the United Theological College of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. Dr. Lewis used the term to stress the positive and life-giving relationships of global African people.
- ³⁸ Janheinz Jahn and Marjorie Greene, *Muntu: African Culture in the Western World* (New York, Grove, 1961).
- ³⁹ Ibid., xxv.

- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Adam Sennet, “Ambiguity,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ambiguity/>.
- ⁴² Hotep, 1-19.
- ⁴³ Theophite Obenga, *African Philosophy* (St. John: Brawtley Press, 2016).
- ⁴⁴ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 235.
- ⁴⁵ Brewster, 41-53.
- ⁴⁶ Lorde, 235.
- ⁴⁷ Robert Staples, “Daniel P. Moynihan: The Tangle of Psychology” in Staples, *The Black Family: Essays and Studies* (Belmont: Wadsworth Press, 1999), 7-17.
- ⁴⁸ Joy DuGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (Portland: Joy Degruy Publications Inc., 2017).
- ⁴⁹ Butler, 123.
- ⁵⁰ Resmaa Manekem, *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017).
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- ⁵⁵ Jahn, xxi.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
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- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 293.
- ⁵⁹ Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Ritual: Power, Healing, and Community* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1995).
- ⁶⁰ Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*, 151.
- ⁶¹ Cheryl Grills, Enola Aird, and Daryl Rowe, Daryl, “Breathe, Baby, Breathe: Clearing the Way for the Emotional Emancipation of Black People” in *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 16, 3 (2016).
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Brewster, *Archetypical Grief*.
- ⁶⁴ DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*.
- ⁶⁵ John Kenney, unpublished lecture, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, 2018.
- ⁶⁶ “Emotional emancipation,” www.communityhealingnet.org.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Ibid., 6.
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 29.
- ⁷⁵ Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back*.
- ⁷⁶ Rosita deAnn Matthews, “Using Power from the Periphery: An Alternative Theological Model for Survival in Systems” in *A Troubling in my Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1993), 92-108.
- ⁷⁷ Romero, 225-238.
- ⁷⁸ Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).
- ⁷⁹ Virginia Hamilton, *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 166.
- ⁸⁰ Gunn, 15-20.
- ⁸¹ Caroline Rody, *The Daughter’s Return: African American and Caribbean Women’s Fiction of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 125.
- ⁸² Michelle Cliff, *Abeng* (Milwaukee: Plumb Press, 1984).
- ⁸³ Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, reprint (New York: Verso, 2015) 107.

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