DECOLONISING LEADERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

One black life: one perspective

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I certify that all material in this thesis, which is not my own work, has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.

Signature ……

ABSTRACT

This study articulates the journey, across more than six decades, of one black woman from birth through schooling to international school leadership. The purpose of the study is to open a debate about the challenges faced by women of colour in leadership roles in international schooling to be seen and heard. This is necessary firstly because it is only in the last decade that women of colour have started to be deliberately seen and heard in these roles, and secondly because the matter of colour and gender has largely been invisible in the decolonisation of leadership within international schooling. This act of invisibilisation undermines the perspectives of black women. It can therefore be argued that if such perspectives remain absent from the discourse, the decolonisation of leadership in international schooling cannot begin.

This study introduces the reader to the role silence and invisibility play in international school leadership. Using the methodology of autoethnography, I am able to explore decolonisation through personal and professional narratives and show how these narratives uncover the role of silence and invisibility in a life led and attempts to illuminate the drive to decolonise international schools, from the perspective of one woman of colour. The narratives that are structured across the four phases that cover four distinct periods:

1. Colonial period and early life in Guiana (1956-1968)
2. United Kingdom: student and early career (1968-1981)
3. International career in schools and beyond (1981-2010)
4. Return to Europe and beyond (2010 -2021)

CONTENTS

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DEDICATION

To my daughter, my mother,
my grandmothers, and our mothers before them.

To *Oshún,* my orisha, the goddess of rivers,
femininity, love, and laughter.

INTRODUCTION

"I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken and made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood." (Lorde, 1984:40).

Silence and invisibility

Black women are absent from texts on leadership, administration and even pedagogy, in international schooling. It is not only that there is a failure to acknowledge our existence, simply there is no mention made of this vacancy in the discourse – until there is some tragic occurrence that brings this violent act into the media spotlight. Race, then emerges as external. The countries, their geographies, students, staff, parents, ideas, thoughts, personal stories all remain in the blind spot of international schools. There is little attempt at an inward gaze and I was unsure of what I would find if I embarked on this practice – looking inward through autoethnographic narratives.

During the writing of this study, from the time I set out to discuss silence and invisibility in my experience in international education in 2018, participation in leadership roles in international schools is becoming more visible and audible, but this is very recent. The Diversity Collaborative as part of the International Schools Association, was established in 2017 and the Association of International Educators and Leaders of Color (AIELOC) in 2020. Both organisations have their roots in the USA with little representation from those who do not identify themselves as US citizens. Women and men of colour are slowly beginning to claim a presence and voice, but this may more be an expression of exclusion and mask a lack of belonging. Akomfrah highlights the difference;

> "…there seems to me a difference between participation in something and having a stake in something, that is, of owning it." (Akomfrah, 2018)

Even less so, are the spaces in which women of colour in international schools are able to hothouse ideas[1] through online engagement, international education

[1] AELOC (Association of Educational Educators and Leaders of Colour) has

seminars, workshops, and collectives of international school educators of colour, cultivate theories and seed ways of seeing that work towards the decolonising of international schools (AIELOC, 2021). These spaces are yet to be created in which women of colour will enter into dialogue and exist as subjects of educational leadership. First of all, we must be considered as subjects. The autoethnographic narratives, within this study, hope to move the reader towards that consideration.

Silence and loneliness are, everywhere, still part of the black female experience in positions of educational leadership and the creative arts. Black female classical music composers of the 19th and 20th centuries have had their music rarely performed and there exist a plethora of black writers, not published, scientists and mathematicians forgotten even as their creative minds made the USA's first space missions possible, as in the case of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughn and Mary Jackson of NASA (Saner, 2016). When black creative minds move out of the spheres often associated with their race, and even then, there are huge obstacles at every step, it remains difficult to get recognition and a space to be seen and heard.

One of the early challenges when embarking on this work was procuring accurate historical data on the gender and ethnicity of international school leaders. The data seems to be glaringly absent except in a few cases and I wonder could it be that the few ethnic minority non-white female principals and directors of international schools made the collection of this data too evident an omission or, perhaps, there is no deliberate omission; black women in international leadership remain in the blind spot of many school leaders, boards, and international organisations. That is, tragically, until the brutal murder of George Floyd in the USA in May 2020 and the rise in visibility of the age-old racist politics and far right-wing governments in the USA and Europe. Racism, white-supremacy, and the call for the decolonisation of education have become a matter of urgency for the Euro-Western democracies that remain.

Forty years ago, however, Tyack and Hansot were not so generous in their reasoning. Their study of school managers in the USA, alone, between 1820 and 1980 reveals an alarming void in the data on women and men of colour in education

within those 160 years. They conclude that the absence is “a conspiracy of silence [that] could hardly have been unintentional.” (Tyack and Hansot, 1982:xx)

It is not surprising that research into leadership of international schools represents the research of white males, since women of colour make up such a small proportion of those in post. In 2000, women of colour represented only 1.1% in the roles of superintendents, assistant and associate principals, principals, or deputy superintendents in the USA (Glass et al., 2000). Five years later, it was noted that still only 7% of senior school administrators in the USA were female and it is unknown if the percentage of women of colour had risen much above the 1.1% previously reached (Grogan and Brunner, 2005). By 2011, 21.7% of the school superintendents in the USA were women (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011:29). The data is not completely comparable but does suggest an increase in women’s representation at a leadership level and it is probable, that there is also a relative increase in women of colour. My position, therefore, in international education is occupying a minute space in its leadership. LaGrace Pruitt (2015)[2], in her doctoral thesis explores this underrepresentation. Skrla, Reyes and Scheurich point to the need to conduct research that includes:

> “…empathetic dialogue that provides a comfortable place for women to tell stories of successful professional work, interwoven with acknowledgements of their own silence.” (Skrla et al., 2000:71)

Brunner and Grogan (2007), through their research, discovered that women in leadership have normally spent more hours in the classroom than their male counterparts and focus their work more closely on teacher instruction, development and thinking. If this is the case, this opens up greater possible implications for women of colour in international schools and our potential influence in the development of thinking and learning about the wide diversity of humankind in the world.

Brown and Irby (2005) presented a paper on the importance of increasing gender equity in educational leadership, at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Montreal, Canada. At the time they concluded that, as reported by Grogan and Shakeshaft:

[2] unpublished doctoral thesis

> "The more we know about women in leadership roles, how they obtain their positions, and how they have become successful, the greater the likelihood of increasing their numbers it the field." (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011:34)

There is no wide scale data on black women in international education. Indeed, data that includes women at its source is almost non-existent when compared with the volume of data we collect (Criado Perez, 2019). And the reason is quite simple, for the most part, men are in charge of collecting the data on which they want to conduct research into society, manufacture products, create policy or pass laws. Criado Perez (2019) demonstrates the invisibility of women in the collection and interpretation of data. Needless to say, black women and other ethnicities are not even considered. Although it would be relatively easy to produce initial data on the number of black women in international schools and their role in these institutions, there has been little forthcoming (ISS/Harvard study, 2018).

There have been studies of women in educational leadership, but these do not generally include the specific experience of women of colour. Outside the realm of fiction there are even fewer experiences of women from the English-speaking Caribbean and their work/life in the diaspora. Bernardine Evaristo, in her interview with the Guardian, on being the first black woman to win the Booker Prize, 2019, speaks to the paucity of published black female voices, particularly in nonfiction. *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* is one of the very few exceptions. It was first published in 1985 and re-edited in 2018 (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 2018). More recently, *A Kick in the Belly: Women, Slavery and Resistance* provides another example of the non-fiction Evaristo refers to (Dadzie, 2020). Toni Morrison is, *par excellence,* the author who uses literary discourse to engage us with the historical, political, and social lives of black women.

> "The ideological dependence on racialism is intact and, like its metaphysical existence, offers a historical, political, and literary discourse a safe route into meditations on morality and ethics; a way of examining the mind-body dichotomy; a way of thinking about justice; a way of contemplating the modern world." (Morrison 1993:64)

The silencing strategies used in international schools, serve to further establish and re-establish the power structures in place and to ensure conformity and the continued re-invention of white supremacy, clearly evident in the racial dominance

in heads of schools and those in senior leadership positions. In reaching, through the labyrinth of pathways, most barred to me, to the coveted status of head of school, all manner of personal barricades had been erected for this not to happen; these barricades are exemplified in the narratives in Chapter 4.

Why the silence exists

Loneliness and silence in the teaching profession are not new for women teachers. It is well documented that often women in education have to juggle the life of wife, mother and domestic together with that of school (Lortie, 1975; Steedman, 1987; Theobald, 1999; Tamboukou, 2000). Furthermore, Berry writes of the silences, encouraged through the church, that exist to support the unquestioning of the racist, gendered, and oppressive socio-economic systems that remain largely unquestioned as the believers strive for absolution in heavenly life. There remains a void, a hollowness that Berry refers to, that the white man dares not fill; “and thus avoid the pain the recognition of the humanity of an oppressed people” (Berry, 2010:19).

The racialised discourse in international school leadership is produced through its ability to completely erase race from leadership. This provoked a need for me to invent myself in the role of a black woman in international school leadership so I am interested in understanding how knowledge about oneself in the various socio-political environments can offer revelation and choice. I experience a connection in my reading of Toni Morrison and her keen understanding of what the silence and evasion mean for black women and men everywhere. I explore this through the narratives in Chapter 4. In international leadership black women have had a “shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body” and “the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference.” (Morrison, 1992:10)

Antonio Guterrez, Secretary General of the United Nations, on 18 July 2020 delivered *the Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture*, in New York. In his speech on structural racism and systematic injustice he clearly placed the blame on “two of the

historic sources of inequality in our world: colonialism and patriarchy" (Guterres, 2020). Recognising the need to dismantle colonialism and patriarchy from international schooling is still a long way from the consciousness of many within our schools and may lie hidden in Morrison's reference to the practice of liberalism embedded in many of the mission and vision statements of schools today (Morrison, 1993). Within this liberal approach also lies the silencing experienced by educators of colour in my case often, but not exclusively, self-imposed thereby further eroding the need to speak and be heard above the encountered injustices.

Irigaray's work highlights the linguistic differences between women and men, girls and boys and the gendered nature of discourse in academia in which the voice of women has been excluded or, at best, little explored (Irigaray, 1985, 1993; Irigaray *et al.*, 2008). In order for women to use a voice in academia that speaks to the specific gendered experience, Irigaray writes that it would still necessitate "operations as yet non-existent, whose complexity and subtlety can only be guessed at without prejudicing the results." (Irigaray, 1985:139).

Her work supports my exploration of the silent, inner voices, thoughts, ideas, and beliefs towards a discovery of self. She refers to the connection between the body and the mind as an important act of discovery with the 'who I am and how I think' and this resonates with me as I began to explore this topic of silence and invisibility and her cautionary reminder of the importance of both the individual and her thoughts.

> "Furthermore, we are unable to open ourselves all the time to others different from us. We need to return to ourselves, to keep and save our totality or integrity." (Irigaray, 2008:54)

The following chapters form the main body of work of this study into the silence and invisibility of one black woman in international education and leadership in international schools.

CHAPTER 1: ADDRESSING THE SILENCE IN CONTEXT

Autoethnography/biography

Teachers or those in leadership who pursue further education and advanced degrees do so for many reasons. Tamboukou (2000) and Walkerdine (1990) offer several wonderings as to the reasons why teachers may engage in advanced degrees and further study.

> "Is it their desire to become better professionals? Is it their ambition to climb the hierarchical pyramid of education, by gathering more qualifications? Is it their feeling exhausted and used up in the classrooms? Is it what Walkerdine (1990) has defined as the schoolgirl's fiction, this performative part of femininity that always leaves women with a sense of incompetence and unfulfilled goals in life? Or is it a sign that women seeking to reinvent themselves, find in education the transitional space that is essential for reflection upon themselves and their lives?" (Tamboukou, 2000:46)

In the 2020s, international schools find themselves at a point of emergence where different forces are at play at this point. We have the continued force of domination through Euro/American white culture, the English language as the main language of instruction, learning and thinking with all the linguistic biases this entails; racism and racist practices within schools at all levels, anthropocentric practices and colour blindness. These are some of the glaring forces I have experienced in the four decades I have been part of this system of education. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has further revealed the inequities in access to health, housing, employment, and education. In January of 2021, the African continent remains the only one in which the Covid-19 vaccine had not been delivered and the roll out in the vaccination programme will take years to have any effect on a continent already affected by the divisive geopolitics at play. My hope lies in the brave female heads of state and leaders emerging in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Namibia, and Gabon; a small contribution to the 54 nation states in Africa.

In my efforts to try and find myself in the mosaic of roles I choose and those chosen for me in the different spaces I have inhabited I have found that in the educating of other people's children, I have changed my perspective of education itself, and questions arise around, what is it all for and why should it even matter.

I have experienced all that Tamboukou (2000) describes but most acutely the idea of transitional space. These are spaces that lie in between the professional and personal. A space eked out to pursue a higher degree, for example, whilst trying to conceive of oneself, differently. It is in this space as a learner/writer that I grasp at this transitional space that is only for me, inhabited only by me and enjoyed exclusively. It is in this space that I feel untethered and freed from the qualifiers in my life; international school leader, administrator, director, student, mother, grandmother, lover, wife. Moreover, I am a woman, I am black, I am a feminist and I write; these identifiers are not tied to another. bell hooks describes this positioning as a transgression towards an autonomy of self (Ashcroft et al., 2003).

In my experience of the transitional space, I have often felt myself as the fulcrum that supports my life in the balance. It has not brought me comfort or a truth I can live with. It is the very pivot that brings imbalance, shakes, and disquiets my life so that the disturbance, sometimes even the violence and chaos in which I have lived, allow me to speak and be seen. This work is my attempt to contribute with a life lived “not the fractured or fragmented life of black society but the layered life of the mind, the imagination, and the way reality is actually perceived and experienced” (Morrison 2019:436).

As a black woman who moved into international school leadership, I became ever more conscious of how the white gaze had subverted my life and continues to do so. I have been so schooled in its vista on the world, on my world, that I find myself too often ensnared, caught in its web of lies about me and those to whom I feel a racial and gendered connection. I am often filled with self-doubt even though the evidence points me in a different direction, one of strength and courage. The white gaze sometimes seems to lodge too close, often looking through me to a space somewhere beyond the one I inhabit, and the muted invisibility returns to silence the voice inside.

In my experience of international schools, the social and private spheres of teachers, and those in leadership positions are in constant flow. They overlap and intertwine. Anomalously, in the Euro/American-centred international schools I have worked in, I have tried to protect my private life and, in doing so, silenced the fears,

emotional strains and political beliefs that I felt might jeopardise my position and my role in these schools, and often lived a parallel life. There were, however, a few spaces and places I have lived and worked in which this was not always to the case. My professional and private life in Havana were open and exposed in the very politically charged and carefully vigilant life lived there which, paradoxically, allowed for a freedom hitherto never experienced. My aim in this study is to bring these two together in a way that can provide the insight and understanding of silence and invisibility through the exploration of autoethnographic narratives.

Much of my silence and invisibility has been self-imposed with the result of being overlooked, figuratively and literally. There are also codes that lie deep within the subconscious; unspoken codes that have been handed down through generations. The look from a grandmother to granddaughter that says 'Not now. This is not your turn. Hush!' The explanations, not given by mother to daughter of why it would not be advisable to enter here, to go there or be seen now. The result of generations of slave masters who went to inhumane lengths to silence their chattel through brutalisation of the black body, creating iron contraptions, metal bits and cages for those who dared to speak out against the tortuous conditions to which my ancestors were submitted. These, and others, have been graphically illustrated by those who are now our present day "War Photographers" and woven into the novels like Morrison's *Beloved.* Sethe, in talking to Paul D wants to know why he said nothing as he saw what her husband had done to her.

> "…and he said he couldn't because he had this thing in his mouth. And eventually she asks him to tell her not about what she's feeling about her husband, her ex-husband, but what that must have been like for him…She already knew about it, had seen it time after time in the place before Sweet Home. Men, boys, little girls, women. The wildness that shot up into the eye the moment the lips were yanked back." (Morrison, 2019:464-65)

Toni Morrison (2019), when reconstructing this particular image of the past that includes one's relationship to the ancestors, describes them thus:

> "…they are my entrance into my own interior life. Which is why the images that float around them – the remains, so to speak, at the archaeological site – surface first, and they surface so vividly and so compellingly that I acknowledge them as my route to a reconstruction of a world, to an exploration of an interior life that was not written, and to the revelation of a kind of truth." (Morrison, 2019:356)

It is this example of a silencing and invisibility that I trace back, long before I was born to a colonial slave era that has been handed down over time, when it no longer became necessary as a form of survival and no longer enforced in the way Morrison describes.

The Atlantic slave trade, of which I am a product, was practiced for over 300 years and generations of black Africans funded the industrial revolution of Western Europe and the USA, creating an economic system that persists today. There is no evidence, so far, as to how this may have affected the DNA of people of colour, but it certainly has been responsible for the transmission of trauma that continues to be experienced today.

The great Ethiopian filmmaker, Haile Gerima, in an interview with Lee Thornton (2008) on the Research Channel about his work, talks about the importance of storytelling, reaching back into the experience of slavery to exorcise the present. Gerima states; “telling stories, however irrelevant society thinks, if it’s resonating in you there is some force wanting to tell it” (Research Channel, 2008; 4:52-5:05)

It is only through my life’s work, in trying to understand racism in its varying contexts and levels of abusive power, that I have begun to understand my own life; as a child, a student and professional. Our education structures and the practice of cultural transference continue to exert power over the lives of others, maintaining a racialised ideology. To be European or American is to be white, everyone else is hyphenated, even after centuries of residence within these continents and including the original peoples. We are all separated by the dash. We are therefore, African-American, Caribbean-British, Native-American, Black-British and the list goes on.

In all my working environments, I have encountered the striated spaces of Deleuze and Guattari (1988) that are reminiscent of schools; hierarchical, rule-intensive, strictly bounded and confining. Yet, what I have sought, in my life’s work and through social and political spheres, is the opportunity of transformation and for light and space; encountered in my privileged childhood in Georgetown, growing up in the 1950s and 60s. The political spaces through intense negotiation and separation as we moved from colony to independently governed nation, opened possibilities for

ideas and socio-political projects to gestate and turn away from those of colonial rule. Tamboukou (2003) draws our attention to Deleuze and Guattari (1988) warning of what happens in these transitional spaces, and this will be further explored in Chapter 4.

> "After all, gender and education is a theoretical and political field *par excellence* where *striated* and smooth spaces are continuously traversed and translated into each other, a site of intense struggles and antagonistic relations at play but also an open space continuously creating conditions of possibility for *deterretorializations* to occur, lines of flight to be released, events and nomadic subjects in their vicinities to emerge." (Tamboukou 2003:16)

I have spent a lifetime, so far, more often having to conform, as social science research has had to, in order to be taken seriously, intelligently and with strength. This perceived need I felt to conform led to me to seek out alternative trajectories for others with whom I work. So, I have tried to live a life in service of the young; taking them seriously, being playful, recognising each as intelligent beings, full of surprises, living complex lives that are vulnerable yet strong, easily hurt yet resilient and full of passion, albeit, mostly hidden.

In trying to separate my personal from my professional life I have unconsciously enabled the focus to centre on my being employed for what I can potentially, "do", my performance, completely removed from who I am. This focus on my life as a teacher with an emphasis on pedagogy seemed an easier way of avoiding the gender/racial dilemma I found in my early career in the white racial east end of London. I became invisible in order to render myself viable in this environment. It also made it easier for me to be employed in posts for which I was overqualified.

It was at this point I began my teaching career, in 1979, and my professional persona developed in parallel within the political, socio-cultural environment of black working class in which I lived. Over the next 40 years I became the professional; teacher, lecturer, student, director and finally principal in a series of international schools across continents. No one questioned who this person was. This study aims at reversing the focus to explore an area of silence and invisibility that is at the root of my experience in international education.

My political, social, racial, gendered experiences of who I am were not considered relevant or applicable, they simply disappeared from view. I became the disembodied international school principal who is charged to bring forth the positive educational potential in the lives of those who work and study in the institution, conforming to the expectations of the profession, leaving my life, my lived persona elsewhere (Rose, 1993). The busyness of my professional life did not lead me to encountering myself, and my truths, as beautifully and powerfully created, to be read and received in order for me to enter into other dialogues, other truths, and other experiences.

The idea of writing this dissertation came many years ago when, as a fourth-grade teacher in Santiago, Chile. I was also doing a series of lectures as part of a large government initiative to provide on-going professional development for targeted teachers and school leaders throughout the country. This was part of a joint venture with the University of Chile's Pedagogical department and the Education Department of Warwick University, where I had recently attained my MA. At the time, I was also the University of Warwick's representative in Chile for prospective Chilean students, supporting their applications and advising them on programmes of study. I had attended many international workshops in Latin America, the USA and the UK and encountered few other women of colour in leadership positions that were prominently visible and being heard. I wondered whether I too was becoming invisible and where my own voice might be lodged.

At the time I was an active and founding member of the Association of British Schools in Chile (ABSCH), the International Association of English Language Teachers (IATEFL), I ran professional development courses at the British Council in Chile and had attended two summer schools at Johns' Hopkins University in Baltimore and was a teacher at a large international school in Santiago. At none of these institutions was I working with any other women of colour. I worried that as a classroom teacher, I would not be able to develop my creative ideas outside of my own classrooms, that my direct influence on international education would remain at student level or at most, among my close colleagues. I had experienced the synergy that a group of professionals within a school could engender, and I wanted to be able to seek out the creative leaders with diverse perspectives from backgrounds similar and different from mine. Santiago, Chile seemed a long way away from

reaching those possibilities. In the 1990s we were still feeling the effects of 17 years of dictatorship and the silencing that brought to many professionals. Exposing one's ideas about pedagogy and the freedoms this could bring through engaging with ideas and a variety of pedagogical perspectives seemed daunting and still dangerous.

My colour, gender, nationality, language, and my home all placed me in a vulnerable and exposed position. Silence and invisibility allowed me to be the lightweight foil, bending so as to lessen the impact my presence may present. In the rise of black female voices, through literature, music and media visibility, my own voice fell silent, and my thoughts turned inwards. The practice of 'erasure' took root in my professional life in which neither my blackness nor my gender was acknowledged or thought to be an important aspect of my identity, and I developed greater resilience and vulnerability in my personal life. My choice to explore the dissonance perpetuated in my professional life as a black woman in international schools is to 'unsilence' through remembering my past to generate a different and more vocal present/future.

It is not that there is a problem in the discourse on the intersectionality of race and gender in international school leadership and teaching faculty; there simply is no discourse. I do not exist. I am not seen. I have become invisible. The International Schools Services (ISS) in its Spring Newsletter 2019 has begun to raise the question of discourse and the lack of research and discussion around what diversity means at all levels of international schooling (Duffy, 2019a, 2019b). We are ignoring the absence of diversity through the colour blindness that prevails in our international education systems even as we profess diversity without real attempts to embrace it.

I also chose to explore what it means to be caught in a dual consciousness; being at one with your family and close friends of colour and being the black female principal of a white only leadership team, board, and faculty in which you are perceived to "change skin". You become not quite yourself but not quite the "other". More than 100 years ago Dubois (1903) wrote "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois, 1903:2).

I feel this duality deeply and it is often unuttered and unwritten but kept closely guarded through language, stance, dress and all the silences that stand in between. Over the years these are crushing, debilitating, and defeating. They do not help one rise up, nor do they let you fall. You remain like an elephant on a tight rope to nowhere. I retain a reminder of this imagery created in a beautiful pastel drawing by a 10-year-old whilst working in Havana. I often wonder if she saw, what I could not see at the time.

Moreover, for black women, those from ethnic minority backgrounds and those for whom an identified gender is irrelevant, climbing that ladder is a very lonely endeavour. To be the only woman of colour, at conferences, in board rooms, at university seminars, in professional development planning groups, on a school leadership blog posts, at recruitment fair round tables and important evening mixers at the bar, save the hotel cleaner, the waitress, or the receptionist, is to breath air devoid of oxygen, that can suffocate and turn one inward and away from the huge advantages social encounters play in professional growth and mobility, not to mention the chance of mentorship, empathy and solidarity with peers in an increasingly demanding and often times, demoralising role played out in schools.

At the start of my career, I had become outwardly comfortable using the codes and language of ideas that Bourdieu et al (1994) write about that is artificial, male, culturally and socially class specific, that exclude the ways in which the black female voice can be heard. Beard (2017) forcefully states in her manifesto on *Women and Power* how much women have been silenced throughout western history and our voices made a mockery. Moreover, those of the colonial and pre-colonial Caribbean remain, largely silent and absent.

Addressing the silence

I choose the study of silence and invisibility as an exploration of the idea of transgression, entering another world, away from the terrestrial world to metaphorically board a canoe into the waters of a river or sea leaving the tranquil shore, as I do through the narratives that I have developed in order to reveal myself and be seen and heard.

> "The river is another world, which means that one's senses and reflexes must begin to live another life." Berry 1968:4

This other world offers a break from silences, evasions, and distortions as those lived in life. It offers the possibility for me to engage with the past, my life, and make it understandable; disentangle the knots and lay bare the events. These events are not representational but more molecular lines in my life. In Deleuzean terms they lay inside of what has occurred in my professional life, often lived internally without merging into one; without becoming one fulfilled life. My professional life is not lived in a binary way. It is not the black woman among white colleagues, although this may have been overwhelmingly true, but more a series of complex micro-events inside larger socio-political conditions. Deleuze and Guatarri (1988) describe this as as *deterretorialization* of the self.

This began at a very young age for me. It is both a physical *deterretorialization* of a life in vastly different physical spaces across territories together with a *deterretorialization* in my mind – the struggle to become in flight from specific spaces and inner imagined and real journeys to places in the specific time frames outlined in this study – a contradiction and complexity of self.

The impetus for writing this thesis was to embrace the subject of the shame of silence and invisibility. There is an immediate unease with the word shame. Whose shame? Surely not mine? In the act of writing and researching the work, it became more about forgiveness and less about shame. The kind of forgiveness we encounter in Morrison's *Sula* (Morrison, 2004) in which betrayal and forgiveness define the relationship between two childhood friends, as does my relationship with myself in which shame and silence coexist. Although not intended, forgiveness, in this autoethnographic narrative has become a necessary act for me. Other black women educators may also find themselves reflected within the narrative that is autobiographical and personal.

In revealing what was lacking or missing in my own experience of educational leadership, in some of the international schools I have worked in, thus far, I have found myself in positions as the only black female when this was not actively sought by the schools. I have also certainly not always been the one favoured candidate. What I have been guilty of in the process of moving into these positions, however, is

not being more consciously critical of myself, through greater knowledge of who I am and how I could better serve the people in the institutions I have worked or been associated with, from my gendered and racial self. This study offers the possibility to do just that and may also pave a way for others to engage similarly. It is not representative of an historical period but offers a representation of a time in which I was unseen and unheard but seeing and hearing and experiencing the moment over six distinct decades in four specific periods outlined in Chapter 4.

> "… those of us who arrive in an academy that was not shaped by or for us bring knowledges, as well as worlds, that otherwise would not be there." (Ahmed 2017:9-10)

I offer this autoethnographic narrative, as a way of fertilizing my reality, through stories or anecdotes that offer a perspective and relevance to the silence and invisibility of a black woman in international schooling and leadership. Gallop (2002) uses her own anecdotes to both inform and develop theory in, sometimes, playful ways and she has termed this a practice of anecdotal theory. This study uses the narratives as an interpretation of a life in education from the perspective of a black feminist, born in colonial Guiana, influenced by, and having an influence on the practice of international school leadership. Within me is the need to seek a borderless existence that respects non-patriarchal ways of being and does not rely on the disempowerment of others to be empowered, through privilege and advantage (hooks, 2006).

I recognise that this study falls prey to the white gaze inherent in the language I use to write. I have tried to be true to myself and recognise what decades of British education, reading in the English language, and being exposed to the British academy has done to my mind, the language I use and the ways of seeing in the world. However, I write conscious of this mis-formation in dealing with the past, recognising how it arrests the future. It is an attempt at validating the experience to allow for a future in which I get to choose. Choice comes with knowledge and representation. Toni Morrison (2019) does this so beautifully in her work where she has had to:

> "…disassemble the gaze … to manipulate the Eurocentric eye in order to stretch and plumb my own imagination." (Morrison 2019:425)

On reading an essay by Ng'endo Mukii in Bright Magazine, which unfortunately closed in July 2019, I felt even more convinced of my choice for this autoethnographic study (Mukii, 2018). Mukii's comment on the apology from Robinson's for its racist depiction of black and brown people around the world for over 130 years makes it even more important that people of colour continue to counter racism and gender bias wherever it exists and through whatever means we have available to us (Goldberg, 2018). My contribution is lodged within this autoethnographic study. The struggle is everywhere we turn from Robinson jam's gollywogs to the *Mail online*, that continues to support a white supremist editorial and is strongly supported by British Conservative Party; a political party that has instituted some of the most racist legislation during my lifetime, and before. In his TED talk, Rob Orchard, the co-founder and editorial director of *the Slow Journalism Company* and champion of the slow news movement against the current corrosive media culture confirmed that "the Mail online is the world's single most read English Language newspaper website. It has just under 190 million unique visitors every month" (TEDxMadrid, 2014).

With this kind of journalism in place, my choice of topic and methodology may seem unlikely to make any difference. My aim is to, at least, impact the reader and contributes to further study on the invisibility of women of colour in international school leadership, although my hope lies beyond impact. I also believe that to do nothing is to remain silent and invisible and my decision has been no longer to do so as a black woman in my role in international education.

Every conference, Zoom, book launch, academic course, or study I have engaged with during the course of writing this thesis, I have reached out to the small group of other black women I see. Most of the time, however, I have been the only member of that specific group. It has been encouraging to witness this small group increasing between 2018 and 2020. More women of colour are entering international schools although many with whom I have talked feel their isolation, invisibility, and silence in their own places of work. As a minority around the world, we are drawn to one another; the table of five at the cafeteria among hundreds, the two at the symposium, the three or four at the recruitment fair. I had not found any other authored text on international education or international schools that has collected data on women of colour in its institutions. It took the Black Lives Matter

Movement, which began as a hash tag movement in 2013 following the murder of Treyvon Martin, to create an impetus for ISS together with Harvard University to begin a study on leadership in international schools from a race and gendered perspective.

However, for me, it is not only a question of numbers but more about how we construct our identity as women leaders of colour in international schools. There is a cautionary reality from Grogan and Shakeshaft; the majority of studies on women in leadership are done by women. Most of these studies remain as unpublished dissertations, reaching a limited audience with little real contribution to the field of peer-reviewed research.

In choosing to uncover some of the silences and invisibility of my professional and personal life, leading to my work in international schools, I also consider the other side of the shine (Mignolo, 2000; Andreotti 2012; Inayutullah and Blaney, 2012). The flip side or shadow of international schools recruiting brave, strong women of colour, leading together, in the field of international education, providing greater resources and occurrences of mentorship with new teachers in international schools. The clamour for diversity, inclusion and freedom within schools can become a reality, a sustainable reality. There is, I believe a shadow to the shine. International schools around the world and particularly schools where large numbers of students don't see themselves reflected in their institution's leadership, may consider themselves as unimportant and of little valuable to the larger society. I have chosen to make a contribution to reduce this deficit.

International schooling from a historical perspective

International education and the birth of international schools in the 19th into the 20th century were more concerned about international understanding as a precursor to world peace, rather than the more practical mission of developing global citizenship. This can clearly be seen in the language of mission/purpose statements. The International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) which offers curriculum programmes across all ages in international schools has the following mission statement from the IBO's website states:

> "The International Baccalaureate® aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.
> To this end the organisation works with schools, governments, and international organisations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences can also be right." (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2021)

The shift in many schools now, is clear for me, from a mindset that seeks to understand and embrace humanity to a new *other;* the student who speaks multiple languages, has travelled widely, is part of a group of peers from many nationalities and shares a common experience of schooling, internationally. This group of peers is now more homogeneous, maybe less tolerant of those living and working in the host country and may have a greater focus in leveraging entry into the global employment markets to become leaders in their field of interest - the new millenniums of international schools with power and privilege. Gardner-McTaggart (2016) points to the increasing middle class of the globalised 'South', in which international education and its curricula, particularly the IB with its four programmes now dominates in over 5,300 international schools around the world (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2021). The International General Certificate of Education (IGCSE) from Cambridge University together with Fieldwork International education with the International Primary and Middle Years programmes are all vying for a place in very lucrative market of international education today with over 12,000 schools worldwide teaching around 6 million students from the International Schools Research organisation (ISC Research, 2021). I have also witnessed an increasing numbers of these schools in the global 'South' serving a predominately local population over the last 35 years in which I have worked in international education. Few of these schools do more than pay lip service to the more profound responsibility to humanity of schools set up in India, Germany, and Switzerland over 100 years ago.

Sylvester cites the "lack of historical treatment" (Sylvester, 2015:13) in the research available on international education despite the work of Brickman, Scanlon and Shields or Hill (Brickman, 1950; Scanlon and Shields, 1968; Hill, 2001). We still lack research that analyses the growth, shift in philosophical pedagogy and impact of widening markets, particularly in China, on international schools and the altruism on

which international education was founded in the mid-19th century and continued into the interwar years of the 1920s.

One of the difficulties surrounding research into international schools is that many of the long-standing schools, still in existence today, were created from a variety of ideas that included; peace education, education for a multi-cultural world, programmes of exchange, global citizenship. These were the ideals on which the UWC (United World College) movement was born under the leadership of Kurt Hann, an exiled German Jew from the Second World War when he established the UWC of the Atlantic in Wales. Michael Stern in 1963, on the other side of the world in what was then Swaziland, built Waterford Kamhlaba in direct opposition to the apartheid regime in South Africa in which this small kingdom is located. Other international schools' focus was on preparing English speaking children in the global 'South' for the return to their home countries; similarly for the French and German international schools abroad. Many of these schools, outside of Europe, are in former colonies/protectorates of one or other former western colonisers. They provided access to a curriculum, resources, and materials similar if not identical to those found in their countries of origin. The lofty idea that forming a subculture of schools, internationally, would mitigate against the destruction of the wars waged in Southern Africa, the Middle East, Western Europe, and Asia now seems delusional.

Brickman's seminal work on a century of international education from 1850-1950 charts both the theory and practice of international education in schools around the world, albeit without a common definition of what this is. Since 1950, there has been little interest in continuing the historical treatise over the next seven decades. Stoker (1933), Scanlon and Shield (1968) and later Sylvester (2015) have made attempts to document the publications as a resource for research into a historical lens of international schooling.

The 1851 Universal Exhibition in London included a conference on international education practice at kindergarten level with the representatives from countries in Western Europe and the USA. Later, at the 1855 Universal Exhibition in Paris the focus for the conference was primary education at an international level. By 1863 a system to include the pioneers in international education had already been established. In 1873 the Exhibition moved to Vienna and international education

was again a conference theme. The Japanese also wanted to be part of this movement and sent representatives to learn more about the developments in international education in the USA and Europe. In 1876 the conference was held in Philadelphia and included 13 member countries from outside of the USA. However, all these efforts appear to focus more on strengthening national systems of education through greater understanding of a common pedagogy for world peace. A kind of later-day version of the turn of the 20th century Finnish experiment following the favourable OECD and PISA reports from Finland.

It was Herman Molkenboer's 1885 pamphlet professing the benefits of an education that focused on developing peace and understanding and reached "several hundred subscribers from 17 nations" (Sylvester, 2015:15) that carried weight in the development of international education in many education systems worldwide and created the impetus for schools to open in many parts of Europe.

It was not until 1892 that women became protagonists in debating, writing, and presenting at the International Kindergarten Union and at the 1893 Universal Exhibition in Chicago. Andrews (1948), assiduously documented meetings, congresses, and missions she initiated, presided over, or attended during her lifetime's work in favour of international approaches to education for peace in her memoir, *Memory Pages of My Life,* published just before her death in 1950. Interestingly, the participants at this conference were, for the first time outside of Western Europe and the USA, notably, Japan, Chile and Uruguay and continued to be protagonists in experimental and internationally minded education throughout the 20th century, save the interruption of war and US backed dictatorships. Women's presence came to the fore at this conference, linking themselves to the progressive nature of international education movement founded in 1921 by Elisabeth Rotten with Beatrice Eisnor as president.

Two years later, in 1923, over 50 countries were part of an International Commission to establish the International Bureau of Education in Geneva. At the same time, Rabindranath Tagore set up a school in Calcutta that later became known as the International School of Calcutta, the seeds of which had already been sown by Tagore in 1901 in Santiniketan (the abode of peace), India where he had established a university and school with a philosophy rooted in the early Sanskrit

verse meaning: “Where the world meets in one nest”, (Kriplani, 1962; cited in Sylvester, 2015:16).

The development of international schooling continued and spread throughout the 20th century. Women’s role in these developments lessened as male dominance was strengthened. One theory I offer is that in both post World War years, men reclaimed their role as head of household. Additionally, was their quest for travel and exploration which went hand in hand with the exploitation of the Commonwealth countries and other colonies outside of the USA, Canada, Australia, and the UK offering men a fresh start somewhere outside of Europe. Notable exceptions were F. Fern Andrews in the USA and Beatrice Eisnor in the UK.

Andrews, in 1908 in Belgium, formed a movement of educators whose mission was to promote peace, through education in schools, and Eisnor in 1920 founded *Education for a New Era: An International Quarterly Journal for the Promotion of Reconstruction in Education.* Andrews continued her work until she became disenchanted with the successive political powers in the USA. She worked across the national, racial, and linguistic borders of the time in an effort to promote international education as a vehicle for peace and the notion of “world citizens”, establishing *The International Bureau of Education* in Geneva in 1910. She continued, however, as a goodwill ambassador for peace and understanding through two successive World Wars when there was a massive expansion of the exploitation of lands under the British Commonwealth in Africa, India, Asia, and the Caribbean. No less so, however, was the stronghold of the USA on South America and later the Far East whilst France, Belgium and the Netherlands held fast to their own colonies worldwide. Andrews published a bulletin entitled *The Holy Land Under Mandate* in 1931. This was followed by, *Education of the Jewish and Arab Population,* in 1932. Interestingly, in the USA, since Andrews’ adopted her home as a Canadian national, there seems little attempt to incorporate the idea of peace and justice, where Blacks and Native Americans were relegated to the worst housing, poorest schools and jobs in a country which also kept the masses of white farm and factory labourers in poverty. It always seems an anathema to peace and equality when in one’s own home violence and exclusion reign (Penniman, 2018).

The first international school, documented as such, was to be founded in Germany in 1910, at the time of the rise of the Nazi ideology. *Odenwaldschule*, established by Paul Geheeb was influenced by the great thinkers in education of the time, coming out of the 19th Century; Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Herbart, Montessori, and Dewey. *Odenwaldschule* was an ambitious experiment in international schooling, aiming to create a microcosm of a society that embraces cultural plurality and internationalism; nationality being considered a place of birth rather than an identifying feature of the individual student. However, with the onset of WWI, Geheeb fled to Switzerland. The school continued under a succession of heads until its demise in 2015.

However, as early as 1805, we see the beginnings an international school with the establishment of the Yverdon School, a boarding school catering for local and international students. This school represented Pestalozzi's experiment in a liberal education, with continued instruction within and outside its walls, during the day and evenings and at weekends. There was seemingly no distinction between the school day and the rest of the time students studied there.

The International School of Geneva, still in existence, was established under the Hermann Jacques Jordan Plan to offer an international curriculum for children of the members of the League of Nations, in an attempt to promote an international mindset, and understanding of others across national boundaries. It was the first of its kind, having approached the Institut J.J. Rousseau in 1925 to engage support for these efforts. However, in the 1920s, the narrow concept of "world" that centred on European dominance was very different from what it is now with 193 independent countries recognised by the United Nations Organisation. This was a time in which the ruling nations dominated the use of raw materials and labour markets, and to large extent continue to exert their control, albeit in more subtle ways. The official abolition of slavery 70 years earlier, the practice of racial segregation, white male supremacy and a gendered leadership in international schools could not, at that time, entertain a woman of colour in that position. The furthering of peace, understanding and goodwill did not envision the possibility for someone of colour, and particularly a woman, to head any of these international establishments that were rapidly being created, and more so after WWII.

The post-WWII era saw a great expansion of international schools. The United Nations International School in New York was founded in 1947 by UN parents to provide an international education for their children, much the same as most early international schools in the Anglophone countries.

The dual aims of the international schools, pre-WWII, fall glaringly short of world or international. On the brink of WWII, in 1938, support for international education came from the USA once again, from Caroline Woodruff who presided over the National Education Association's annual meeting in which she stood to promote world citizenship, putting this idea firmly on the agenda, once again. A following meeting like this was not held until after WWII, in 1949 (Sylvester, 2015). This time convened by UNESCO in Paris to which 15 school supporting international mindedness, none of them this time from outside of Europe or the USA. A very different meeting from that of 1893 of the Universal Exhibition in Chicago, previously cited, that attracted countries outside the USA/European contingent and included the voices of both women and men. It is Brickman's (1950) seminal work, that charts the rise of international education and international schools for over a century, that remains as a historical work on the subject. Seventy years on, there are now at least 12,000 international Schools (International Schools Research, 2020)[3].

It is difficult to imagine a world that is inclusive from an exclusive form of education. However, the early international schools of the turn of the 20th century and moreover, after the end of the WWII, were schools founded on the principles of peace and 'tolerance' (which became 'acceptance', in the IBO mission statement) of difference. These schools promote the possibility of global mobility for families, with their children, without compromising their English medium education within a framework of an international curriculum that is transferrable around the globe. These international schools offer students and their families the possibility to learn a host country language/s, develop an international perspective on the world, including the idea that each student can make a positive difference, and be a lifelong learner and contributor. The other group of international schools are those rooted in the US system of education allowing students with their families the

[3] Online data from International Schools Research (ISR)

mobility globalisation demands, whilst preparing students to move into the elite universities in the USA on graduation in Grade 12.

The International School of Peace, established in Boston in 1910, had in its mission statement the following:

> "…to educate the peoples of all nations to a full knowledge of the waste and destruction of war and the preparation for war, its evil effects on present social conditions and the well-being of future generations and promote international justice and brotherhood of man." (Scott, 1912; cited in Sylvester, 2007)

This was on the precursor to the experience of the 1914-1918 World War and on the heels of great interest in education beyond national boundaries present at the first of the World Fairs held in London in 1851. Interest in experimental education grew in the 1920s with bi-annual conferences between the two world wars, 1921-1936, after which became known as The World Conferences on Education. These conferences attracted major figures in education on both sides of the Atlantic; Carl Gustav Jung, Jean Piaget, John Dewey, A.S. Neill and Jean-Ovide Decroly of Belgium (Brehony, 2004). International schools, as we know them today grew from this early interest in experimental education to bring together nations and children of worlds that had previously been isolated in their own pedagogical approaches. East and West, North and South were all contributing to the philosophical dialogue seeking the creation of schools internationally that were founded in the philosophical and pedagogical debates of what could be termed idealists of the time.

The end of WWII brought together, in Geneva, the creators of what was to become the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO). Key thinkers who influenced the development of the programme were those of the interwar era; Dewey, Neill, Piaget, and Bruner. The IBO's mission remains one that echoes the early schools at the turn of the 20th century.

> *"The international Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect."* (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2021)

The IBO is one of the three main curricula in place in international schools today, the other two being the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) and the Cambridge International Curriculum. The US State Department also sponsors international schools around the world and these usually follow the US Core Curriculum. Many schools also run local adaptations to the above and may also offer a parallel curriculum with the host country where these countries dictate this for nationals attending international schools. Learning a foreign or host language/s is also part of the international nature of these schools.

International schools seeking to foster international mindedness, at all levels, and especially through a challenging curriculum comes into conflict with the environment in which this education is taking place. By environment I do not refer particularly to the physical, although walking into any international school, one is struck by its own, exclusive environs. The conceptual challenges of a rigorous curriculum, and the preparation for the world of further study and work beyond schooling, is not mirrored in our international schools; a world that may be better represented as one in which "all walks of life interact on a daily basis either directly or through the tapestry of connections that ultimately brings us into contact with one another" (Lockhart, 2013:79).

This tapestry is not one in which there is now a core responsibility and "brotherhood" as described by the early 20th century international schools, but one that may have a more global purpose of bringing together like-minded individuals towards an emerging global ruling class. We are moving a long way from the early international schools with utopian ideals like that of the International School for Peace first established in Boston.

Brown and Lauder offer a geopolitical perspective on the rise of international schools from around 300 in the 1960s to over 12,000 schools in December 2020 (Brown and Lauder, 2011; International Schools Research, 2020)[4]. These schools (K-12) educate some 6 million students, employing approximately 572,000 staff with an annual income of US$54 billion in fees. New international schools, far from the influences of the civil rights movements in the USA, postcolonial proposals in Europe and the newly independent states of the 1960s and 1970s, now offer an

[4] Online data from International Schools Research (ISR)

education seated in economic, not social, policies, promoting leadership of the global networked economies of a neo-colonial, neo-liberal class that differ little in their *raison d'être* from any private fee-paying school that prepares students for the ivy league colleges of the USA, Oxbridge and the top 100 universities of the world. The globalisation of the economy may now be at risk with the rise of China and India into a hitherto, western dominated global economy. It is also now in China and India that we see the greatest rise in the numbers of international schools with increasing numbers of nationals entering the student body to override the international make up of students. The word "leaders" now replaces "contributors" to the world in many mission statements of newer international schools.

There is a growing discussion around the role international schools now play in fostering students' allegiance to globalisation over internationalism, favouring the expansion of transnational economies. There is a danger that students from these prestigious international schools, whose fees range from approximately US$6,000 - US$85,000, adopt positions and understandings in relation to the globalisation of economies and the rights and responsibilities of the non-transient masses around the world whose lives are lived under very different circumstances (MacDonald, 2006). The massification of international schools, especially in the new global economies of China, the Middle East, India and isolated financial hubs around the world, privilege this increasingly global student body and the ideals of peace, justice and equity appear to lose ground over the last 30 years to an elite class of young people. International schools now seem to offer the diverse group of children around the world a common fit for a globalised mission rather than an international vision in which each student has a part to play.

Parents, their children and teachers, two decades into the twenty-first century, may note little difference in pedagogy or practice between international schools or national private education systems for the elite around the world. Greater mobility and the globalisation of corporations have created a boom and expansion in the demand for schools internationally. For many schools, the aim is to provide the possibility for children with their parents, to move easily across the globe bringing a commonality to an ever increasingly diverse population of student. Are there other possibilities we could consider, for instance, a move from a global vision of the future to one in which diverse international perspectives offer a future of greater

acceptance and understanding and a need to be inclusive in order to create a more peaceful, sustainable, and innovative world.

International educators often perceive school as the preparation for life and work, as if we all had a clear understanding of what that future holds for our youngest inhabitants of the planet, instead of viewing their 15 years of schooling as life itself. Pearce poses a question for international schools to consider as they embark on the journey of education with their youngest students, and this is whether what is being offered to these children is for them to fit into a single, uniform, and ideal world – the globalist mission – or for a peaceful world of many nations – the internationalist vision? The latter would require a totally different perspective on international education to include teachers with leadership from very different socio-cultural roots. Teachers with ideas, a willingness and conviction to offer an alternative form of pedagogy that is developmental and innovative in an uncertain present in which compassion, creative thought and diversity override an imposing colonisation of western Anglo-centric education practice in international schools world-wide.

International schools, for all the altruism within their statements of intent, remain distant from a more international leadership or inclusion of a disruptive pedagogy that challenges and is responsive to culture, race, and gender and to those who work from the borderlines of otherness.

The body of work

The process of decolonising education involves unlearning systems of unquestioned ideological supremacy and acceptance that have, over centuries, been imposed as acts of conformity and assimilation of western definitions of education. The work involved in decolonising education will require the construction of creative spaces that promote dialogue in which inquiry and engagement with other ways of knowing, of leading and of being also draw on our indigenous knowledge and understanding that is not western referenced. In my case it is a process of unhinging myself from a colonial past and co-creating new ways of being in education that do not yet exist.

In the act of decolonising international schools, their leadership, education policies and practices, with specific reference to the inclusion of women of colour in leadership, I am mindful of the messiness, the chaotic nature, and the contradictions inherent in some of the proposals I make.

Even withstanding all this, I have chosen to explore the decolonisation of leadership in international schools through autoethnographic narratives to uncover my own silences and invisibility in order to contribute to the debate.

One aspect that played into the choice of topic is that it has taken black professional women a long time to be visible and it is therefore important that we remain in the field of vision and that we hold fast to our ideals of leadership in the “old boys’ network”, still strongly in place, particularly, although by no means, exclusively, in international schools.

This study, however, is not just about the number but is more about the journey of one black woman through schooling to international school leadership. However, that journey is not travelled alone, and I suspect other women of colour, would welcome the company of like-minded souls and those unlike ourselves so that we are challenged, supported, and can look to models and ways of leading differently. Forty years ago Audre Lorde describes the importance of seeing ourselves and our contribution to society in order to “identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference” (Lorde, 1984:123).

This work also represents an ontology of the past/present that is future oriented, seeking to understand how this singular experience, my experience of schooling internationally, was constructed in silence and invisible in order to examine some possible alternative existences.

CHAPTER 2: THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH: WAYS OF DOING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY.

Beyond Eurocentric autoethnography

Writers and scholars have always told their stories; representing a world through narratives. As we read the stories of others, we have the chance to interpret these though our own lived lives. The 1990s brought some measure of acceptance of auto-ethnography within the academy and into the realms of the social sciences and the humanities as a respected form of scientific study, worthy of finding a place within the annals of university theoretical review. Adams et al. (2017), however, date the origins of auto-ethnography to the 1970s with references to ethnographic studies that include 'self' in the process (Heider, 1975; Goldschmidt, 1977; Hayano, 1979). So, the methodology has evolved and has been used in a wide range of disciplines.

One way I engage in autoethnography is through the revelation of the layers of truths that "strip away the veils that cover people's practices, by simply showing how they are, and where they come from, describing its complicated forms and its countless historical transformations" (Tamboukou, 1999:209).

Through this auto-ethnographic narrative, I present a way of theorizing that is not solely governed by the northern academy, but a pathway to inquiry from the south. The narratives represent a contribution from the global south, the Atlantic Caribbean, and my engagement with the institutions of the global north. An ethnographic representation that has not been interpreted, analysed, or critiqued by researchers from the global north to claim ownership and authorship.

Contrary to the imperialist historians who are more concerned with fragmenting the past, autoethnography, in its many different forms, also supports engagement and contribution by linking events from the past to historical eras that can continue to move us from our pasts to the present, connecting differently with each new understanding.

There is no one epistemology of auto-ethnography as a methodology, although its use has often maintained a ‘eurocentrism’ in the practice of study and writing at doctoral level (Amin, 1976). There are multiple ways of approaching autoethnography and some have used a wide range of artistic expression, both performative and creative, as described below.

The methodology enables one to dig deep into the complexity of a life and consider further examination into the past and the histories lived by our ancestors that continue to be part of the lived present in all of us. The enforced transportation of black women, men, and children from the African continent to the Americas did not affect only the enslaved but it has had an immeasurable impact on the lives of all human beings everywhere. A study that uses exo-autoethnography and autoethnography provides a way to, initially, reveal oneself, but secondly to reference one of the most significant acts of barbarity from one group of humans on another, based solely on race.

> “Exo-autoethnography is the autoethnographic exploration of a history whose events the researcher does not experience directly, but a history that impacts the researcher through familial, or other personal connections, by proxy.” Denejkina (2017: Abstract)

Denejkina’s peer reviewed and published work, as she researched the experience of soldiers fighting in the war in Afghanistan and the transgenerational transmission of trauma, has made it possible to present another way of conducting research into a transgenerational past that uses exo-autoethnography.

Autoethnography, although criticised for its lack of scientific rigour (Stivers, 1993; Salzman, 2002; Sparkes, 2002; Holt, 2003; Anderson, 2006) belies the contradictions that continue to plague scientific research in which economics (Raworth, 2018), politics (Hudson *et al.*, 2012) and bias (Criado Perez, 2019), too often interplay with data to make it appear reliable to the social sciences. I do not think, particularly when examining the experience of leadership in international education from the perspective of a black woman, and given the paucity of existing data, using any other methodology could examine, in the way I have done, the experience of silence and invisibility in this study. Ellis and Bochner (2000), Ellis et

al (2011), Holman Jones (2005), Denzin (2014), Denejkina (2016), Adams and Manning (2015) and Joseph (2016), all offer a disruption to the binary theories around this positionality in the research, the arts in the form of autobiography and memoir and the sciences in the form of quantitative data analysis and interpretation to create theory. I have, therefore, used this methodology to offer a way of documenting a life over a period of time since it provides "a novel approach to get access to longitudinal data. The relative ease of access to one's own personal memory is among a key advantage to autoethnography" (Eriksson, 2013:28).

There also exists criticism against autoethnography pointing to the paucity of fieldwork, development of theory through analysis and hypotheses, and more generally its seemingly narcissistic tendency (Stivers, 1993). I would refute that this study is any of the above. Writing personal socio-political lives as autoethnography bridges the scientific rigour, theory, and analysis with the aesthetic. This non-binary methodology can be used to evoke some of the complexity of life itself; if we live in and with the world (Biesta, 2017). The belief that what autoethnography is not, is often used as a justification for not engaging with the methodology. This is to deny the possibility of engagement in life itself. LeGuin offers another view, "People crave objectivity because to be subjective is to be embodied, to be a body, vulnerable, violable" (LeGuinn, 1989:151).

Lives as stories

Autoethnography, through narratives, provides a way to access experiences, make them visible and connect them to the socio-political moments in which they take place. It provides a methodology to articulate an issue, in this study, one of silence and invisibility in which the researched narratives give:

> "…greater access to previously marginalised minority populations who, in turn, championed the need to give voice to silenced narratives and marginalized groups and communities; and a growing commitment to use research to make a difference personally, emotionally, politically, and culturally." (Bochner and Riggs, 2014:201)

Feminists Barad (2007), Haraway (1988) and Butler (2005) have argued for inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary methodological approaches to the study of any

subject, acknowledging these methodologies as vulnerable, open, and responsive to themselves and the world in which they operate. I have used autoethnography as it allows me to consider my silence and invisibility through the lens of race, feminism and coloniality.

Derrida, although not normally associated with autoethnography, highlights an important consideration in the use of this methodology when describing the past from the present stance and especially those that use memory to delve into one's own life, as is this autoethnography, as "a 'past' that has never been present, and which never will be, whose future to come will never be a production or reproduced in the form of a presence" (Derrida,1982:2).

Moreover, the work of MacIntyre (1981) and Taylor (1989) opened up the narrative in social science research as a way into the lives of others, recognising that we each have the ability to interpret ourselves. Bruner (1990) theorised the narrative as acts of meaning, a form of inquiry into others or oneself. Storytelling, as a way of expressing one's experience was also being explored as a research methodology by Ellis (1995) and Bochner (1997) both together and separately they opened a way forward for us, as researchers of self, to be recognised in the field of social science research. Bochner argued that "If we experience our lives as stories, then why not represent them as stories?" (Bochner, 2012:157).

One of the many forms of autoethnography research includes five distinct parts as outlined by Bochner (2012).

Autoethnography is:

1. written in first person
2. a set of generalisations that focus on one case over time
3. in the form of a text that represents a story and is similar to a novel or biography with narrator, characters that interact around a storyline
4. research that often includes a disclosure in the narrative that would not otherwise be revealed
5. a narrative which is written in episodic form with relationships and experiences represented and connected over time

I have used the above to frame the way in which I have approached the narratives in this study, which form the main body of this work.

In the narratives that follow, I suggest that I have done all of the above. Chang (2008) also reminds us of the need to be systematic in the approach to autoethnographic research in order to mitigate against the vicissitudes of memory that can blur truths and reveal gaps. Truths will be blurred, and gaps will appear because “memory selects, shapes, limits and distorts the past. Some distant memories remain vivid while some other recent memories fade quickly, blurring the time gap between these memories” (Chang, 2008; cited in Eriksson, 2013:14)

Parrhesia and diffraction

Complexity theory (Biesta, 2017), narrative inquiry, (Bruner, 1990), genealogy (Foucault, 1988) and the ideas of Freire (1994) and Hall (2017) have all influenced this study and provide ways into autoethnography that is not singular. The use of methodologies and ideas that converge is one of the ways of engaging in autoethnography that I find rich and revelatory, allowing the researcher to use a methodology that mirrors the complexity of life itself.

In writing this auto-ethnography, I recognise the danger this presents to me, in the telling of my truth, in speaking out and being seen. I put myself in danger of continued criticism from myself, and others. Autoethnography allows one to engage in discourse that is not motivated by self-interest or praise, nor by an intent to expose a criticism of self, or others. Instead, the methodology offers a way of breaking the silence and absence of self, through a discovery of the past and present. It could be termed a form of parrhesia:

“The one who uses *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiaste*s, is someone who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse.” (Foucault 1983:2)

I have tried to do just this, so that the narratives that follow in Chapter 4 represent an opening of my heart to the reader with the inherent danger that it will be misunderstood or worse, disregarded as self-indulgent. It is the risk I take.

There are many other risks inherent in using parrhesia, as a process of reflexivity in autoethnography. One simple risk is not to be believed or that this revelation, seeing and revealing a truth, will further diminish, by association, the value placed on the individual within a professional context. The validity of this truth lies in the courage to engage in the telling.

> "Reflexivity, like reflection, still holds the world at a distance. It cannot provide a way across the social constructivists allegedly unbridgeable epistemological gap between knower and known, for reflexivity is nothing more than iterative nemesis: even in its attempts to put the investigative subject back in the picture, reflexivity does nothing more than mirror mirroring. Representation raised to the nth power does not disrupt the geometry that hold object and subject at a distance as the very condition for knowledge's possibility. Mirror upon mirrors, reflexivity entails the same old geometrical optics of reflection." (Barad 2007:87).

I support the notion of continued reflexivity in order to invite and include the possibility of other thoughts and ideas, theories, and ways of being. This has been a continual process throughout this study and is essential to autoethnography if it is to be authentic and relevant, believable, and able to be replicated by others, as a methodological approach to self-study.

Barad's dismissal of reflection and reflexivity as a methodology is to favour diffraction. Her inspiration for the term comes from the phenomena in physics of which she is a scholar, and brings an understanding and way of interpreting my experience of the world, giving focus to a new possibility of "seeing". She describes this as when two stones are dropped into water, they each create their own waves and ripples, these overlap and form new waves and patterns, the coming together of these waves and patterns she terms diffraction and the resultant new waves or ripples a diffraction pattern. Barad's theory is that diffraction would allow "reading

insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations and difference and how they matter" (Barad, 2007:71).

This is yet another way of approaching autoethnography, and one I lean into in the final chapter. I refer to this as a way of envisioning, with others, a distinct form of international schooling. I also use diffraction in order to weave together episodes in the narrative that continue to re-form myself, and the choices I made.

Striated spaces

The narratives use autoethnography to explore the striated spaces and places of my life, as does the artist Frank Bowling[5], in his oeuvre, as he depicts the striated spaces in colonial Guiana.

Riessman (2008) emphasises the need to position oneself as a researcher of narrative inquiry and similarly, by implication, autoethnographic researched inquiry. My position as researcher from a black, feminist educator's standpoint in a male, white dominated environment is a juxtapositional stance; one of outsider/insider. The external cultural socio-political, racially charged environment of this black woman from colonised Guiana, living and working in international education that is located in, what is for some, a post-colonial environment but is in fact one I see as an aspirational state that has not yet become a reality; a postcoloniality of hope. I straddle the two, seeking a position of acceptance from the outside yet experiencing a lived reality, differently, from the inside. Being critically aware of the influence of my past, and being committed to engage in creative dialogue within the present, towards a more just future in education. This is my struggle; to understand and contribute to a more just praxis of education, that is self-reflective, emancipatory and, therefore, postcolonial.

My positionality in this research narrative is clearly from an insider/outsider and the journey I have taken to get there. This longitudinal study of over more than six

[5] Sir Richard Sheridan Franklin Bowling, OBE RA. Born in Bartica, Guyana. He is known as Frank Bowling and uses colour extensively in large abstract format that is bold, layered and experimental.

decades includes the study of the socio-political environments lived in from colonial, postcolonial, neo-colonial, African and European experiences and provides a unique way of approaching longitudinal studies that an external ethnographer would not be able to do in the same way. Most researchers do not have 65 years in which to conduct inquiry.

Self-reflexivity and complicity

This autoethnographic narrative could be deemed fiction as a form of experimental/experiential truths intentionally constructed in order to engage in a transformative relationship with the world. In my case, that is, as a black woman in international education. The function of this narrative could be read as diagnostic – towards an understanding of my present through alternative interpretations of the past with the potential to affect future interpretations. However, I have not chosen this methodology of autoethnography to retell the end of a personal story or journey, but rather to represent a series of moments in particular time, space, and place. The study is subjective, it is born out of my own beliefs on gender, race, and ethnicity as I have experienced these in my personal and professional lives, and where these have become interwoven or separated. This chapter will explain my choice and the rationale for an autoethnographic approach.

My choice of methodology provokes self-reflexivity and exposes my possible complicity in maintaining a racialised and gender-biased system of international education. The absence of women of colour in leadership positions in these schools is juxtaposed against internationalism, multiculturalism and, more recently, anti-racism, diversity, and inclusion in many international school documents. This masks the deep-seated divisions existing therein that are political, racial and gendered and lie deep and imbedded in the curriculum. These have, until recently, largely been silenced, invisible and suppressed remaining hidden within the school walls and unspoken by students and staff of colour in international schools until social media and world events brought the discussion to the forefront of many international schools around the world. Students and staff of colour in these schools have created waves of discontent and public outcry, particularly on social media, that will not be ignored or swept under the carpet as individual, isolated ‘incidents’

happening somewhere else, but brought to the fore as forms of systemic racism that is brutal, ugly and painful. Increasingly, there is a call for educators to engage in decolonisation of our curriculum and systems that maintain the oppressive nature of education in many of our schools that are based on European models of curriculum content and delivery and assessed through international examination systems that feed into equally modelled tertiary education.

The autoethnographic approach

Ellis and Bochner's work in Finland in 2003/2004 brought a significant realisation of the value the methodology of autoethnography in academia, as scholarly work, adds to the artistic and humanistic work of the practice (Gariglio, 2018). As a practitioner of education and a woman of colour, my life and those of others' find their way into fictional narratives, political essays, and the scant biographies of black women's lives. Using this methodology makes this life more visible and part of the academy. Since our histories are colonial, mostly written by dead white men, it is even more important that the professional lives of black, female educators be told by those who live these lives and, in academia, autoethnography provides a way.

Being able to bring a literary perspective into the work I present is intentional. It is a way of creating relationships between the cultural history of the times explored and the life I have lived thus far. In support of this I refer to the words of Ellis in her conversation with Gariglio (2018) in which she emphasises the hope that the uses of autoethnography as a methodology will create "good literary writing that evokes readers to care, feel, empathize and react, possibly doing something on behalf of social justice" (Gariglio, 2018:557).

I begin by describing and interpreting my experiences within the socio-political constructs of exo-colonial experiences. These are experiences that have often been traumatic, lived before me but still have an influence on my colonial and post-colonial existence. As with Khawaja and Lerche Mørck (2009), their comments on the ethics of researching Muslims, or any other marginalised group in Western and Anglo-centric societies and the danger that lies in objectifying the subject, I am, thus, aware of my own positioning within the research, as subject. There is a

“constant awareness of and reflection on the multiple ways in which one’s positioning as a researcher influences the research process” (Khawaja and Lerche Mørck, 2009:28).

In choosing the topic of silence and invisibility in my experience of international school leadership, I am acutely aware of this position as subject/researcher. My voice, from this inquiry, links the personal to the theoretical and so provides some insight into a life within an historical, socio-political, and educational background. When the telling of the story provokes an emotional response through the value of the writing itself, Gergen (2015) and Patton (2002) argue, then the research method meets the criteria it set out to achieve and begs to be evaluated as such. I have chosen the methodology of autoethnography to offer a way of observing myself, retrospectively, whilst thinking forward as I frame the present into the future, being mindful that the methodology does not reinforce the idea of recursive mimesis (Butler, 2005).

Through this work, I also want to attract a wider audience than those whose lives are lived within academia. The polarities between analytic and evocative autoethnography do nothing to raise acceptance of autoethnography as a methodology but further fuel its categorisation (Stivers, 1993; Chang, 2008; Manning and Adams, 2015; Gariglio, 2018). My interest, here, is not in categorising a field or methodology in which there is much overlap.

I have adopted autoethnography as a methodology through which I explore the notion of silence, invisibility, and the loneliness within the specific cultural environment of a black woman in international educational leadership. I situate myself as researcher and subject. I am the inside participant and the prime data researched.

Bruner (1986) and Bochner and Ellis (1987) first developed a theory around autoethnography narratives as bringing to life, personalising, and emotionally engaging with researched autobiographical experiences that were found to be lacking in anthropology and other ethnographic research. Towards the end of the twentieth century, Church (1995), Denzin (1996) and Ellis and Bochner (1996), all upheld the narrative in autoethnography as a valued and valuable research

methodology in the social sciences and one that could give meaning to this form of scientific inquiry.

Autoethnography and performative writing confer authenticity and value to this form of research writing and the importance it has in the social sciences (Denzin, 2003). One aim of this form of narrative inquiry into my own lived experience is to provide meaning for the reader, to provoke the senses, to "attract, awaken, and arouse" (Bochner, 2012:158) interest in the position of other black women in international educational leadership I hope this methodology will start conversations and further research into the lives of women like and unlike me in the context of international schooling so that the professional lives of black women in leadership roles in education can be further explored, valued, and begin to contribute to racial justice, equity, and inclusion in international schools.

Autoethnography as an act of social justice

I recognise the responsibility associated with adopting autoethnography as a research methodology, together with the numerous disciplines and scholars across clinical psychology and psychiatry, history, social geography, gender and race, communications theory, and education. The methodology permits a variety and range of inquiry, in all these areas (Adams et al., 2017). I employ, what Geertz (1993) describes as 'thick descriptions', found in my personal narratives and link them to my understanding of the socio-political experiences, that include gender, slavery, coloniality, international schooling and racism, in which these narratives are situated, (Boylorn, 2014; Speedy, 2015; Bochner and Ellis, 2016; Richardson, 2016; Adams et al., 2017). I also accept that autoethnographers are continually challenged by the academy and accept that:

> "…self-study researchers inevitably face the added burden of establishing the virtuosity of their scholarship within and through the writing itself; lacking established authority each researcher must prove herself as a methodologist and writer." Bullough and Pinneagar, 2001:15).

Using this methodology, I am able to uncover the socio-political influences that connect me to my ancestors and their traumatic past through exo-autoethnography

to meet my own past and the present I inhabit in which the research leads to a new understanding and knowledge around a little researched subject; that of black women in international schools. The professional lives of black women from the Caribbean and Guyana, outside of the USA, have only recently been of interest within the UK, despite attempts at illustrating our passage through time in the literature available (Busby, 1992, 2019; Candlin and Pybus, 2015). Autoethnography helps situate human lives within the academy and engage with them in ways that can change perception, deepen understanding and provoke action.

> "Autoethnographers view research writing as socially just acts; rather than a preoccupation with accuracy, the goal is to produce analytical accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better." (Jones, 2005; cited in Ellis et al., 2011:11)

I also draw on the thinking of Butler (2003) and Luxon (2004, 2008) and their work on Foucault, since they offer an interpretation of his work that is relevant to auto-ethnography; speaking one's truth as an ethical, political, and critical being. The truths I refer to here, are embedded within the political, historical, gendered, and racial power relations through which I define myself.

I therefore turn to Foucault to help frame this work as an act of truth telling. In doing so, the journey has been a painful one and may, indeed, be injurious to the reader. My relationship to truth is through the narrative that is situated within distinct socio-political periods and explores this black woman's relationship to these, as gendered and racialised. The study also explores the relationality of power and knowledge, one being contingent on the other, and the ways these have played out in my role growing up in British Guiana, schooled in racial London, my early years as a teacher and later working internationally. The study also represents an experiential truth that allows me to see myself having been transformed by the act of truth saying or Foucault's parrhesia, and gives way for a more creative and imagined future. It has reconstructed the relationship I have with myself, in and with the world. This could not be achieved without the use of autoethnography as its methodology.

Autoethnography as an act of liberation

The study sets out to unsettle a truth, and not only challenge the authority and power within myself. In itself, this auto-ethnography has become an act of liberation. One in which I can be seen and heard through my spoken truth representing an act of resistance and reconstruction; liberation to be seen and heard differently because I am distinct.

Knowledge and understanding of the violence caused by Western Enlightenment[6], colonisation, slavery and how these histories have influenced the normative epistemology of racism has been important to this auto-ethnographic narrative and the alternative futures I may create.

The normalising of Western Enlightenment, particularly in the language used to describe these norms, promoted the expansion of conquest and colonisation, the forcible removal of raw materials at unfathomable human cost, principally from the Americas, Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and Oceania. This privileging of the West, established the touchstone from which all other humanity would be measured, thereby establishing the Western ethnocentric hegemony that continues to be normalised.

Liberation, for me, comes in the act of autoethnography that allows me to reveal layers of myself so that I come to a greater understanding of my present in order to act in ways that sit well with who I am now and in the future: in my black skin so that the white mask can finally be removed. This is a continuous process and begins with the end of this thesis. It is a journey with myself, and others, in order that I may create a truth that is long lasting in its impact with self and others.

Autoethnography, and particularly the narratives, do not remain hostages of a lived past, but continue to evolve, are nurtured, and grow within, remaining open to

[6] Theories developed in the 17th and 18th centuries by John Locke, Charles Montesquieu and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in which reason, not religion, became the prime force for governance. These ideals, later, fuelled the revolutions in France and America in which liberty and the beginnings of democracy were prime motivations for the separation of State and Church so that man could forge his own destiny. This was not, however, transfered to the lives of the enslaved and peasant classes, whose liberties continued to be denied.

examination and contemplation within the present. This chosen form of writing blends into the landscape of my life and can be observed and discovered through the act of unsilencing “reflections on those experiences, ideas, events and memories from the vantage point of someone who has lived them, as it were, from the margins” (Hall 2017:10).

The shared narratives include the use of exo-autoethnography, a methodology, to help reveal the influence of traumatic historical events or systems of the past, in this case slavery, on the lives of individuals even though they have not had direct experience of its systematic brutality. Its legacy remains deep within the psyche of millions, including my own. Exo-autoethnography, as a methodology, is the only way I can ensure that my past, in which black women and girls were forcibly removed from their homes, undergoing the most cruel and long-lasting regime of enslavement and brutality ever endured in the world’s history, is examined through the lens of silence and invisibility. Exo-autoethnography allows me to include the influence of this past, not personally experienced, and to recognise the weight of the invisible shackles that still render me immobile, and the rod that prods away at my ribs from time to time, lest I forget. I also experience this past in the literature, music, dance, sculptures, and paintings available to me, to remind me of my inclusion in the “more than three quarters of the people alive today [who] have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism.” (Ashcroft et. al., 2003)

The significant contribution people in the British colonies made in World War I and World War II, and the deception the colonial peoples felt post war, created a stronger impetus for independence from Britain during the post war decades of the 1900s. Mid-century saw a greater demand from the Commonwealth countries to form their own independent governments and nation states. Our lives post-independence, I would argue, are still being shaped by colonialism, since the Euro-Western model of the 16th century, under which the rest of the world was dominated now affects, among others, even the smallest of islands in the Pacific, the large mostly uninhabited continent of the Antarctic, and the diminishing indigenous communities of the Amazon. Few have escaped its grip.

Not the other: Expressions of self-authored, subjective voice.

The narratives are not to be seen, however, as a proxy or representational of the experience of the collective of black women in international school leadership or elsewhere, but an exploration of how this particular autoethnographic researcher experienced growing up in colonial Guiana, studying and working in the global north and south. This is not a representational discourse of 'other' as in Spivak's 1994 essay (Spivak, 1994). This study does not 'stand in for' or propose a commonality of experience, hence the use of autoethnography. This is a self-authored, subjective voice.

The 'other' or subjective self, as conceptualised by Levinas, is not a group, class, or shared affiliation. It is about the critical self and in which the singular takes responsibility for oneself. In doing this research it does not attempt to absolve the collective of any responsibility for racial, gender or any other form of systematic cultural violence, nor do I make a claim for this.

Individuals in the artistic world have examined self, through a variety of genre, equally autoethnographic in their methodology. The body of work in the images produced by Njaimeh Njie in her photo essay mounted in Pittsburg, *Defying Erasure and Misrepresentation of Black Womanhood*, or Roshini Kempadoo, documenting Caribbean communities, events, rights and issues through her camera lens, or earlier, the Nigerian/British photographer, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, whose work explores desire, diaspora and spirituality, are all genre that evoke a desire and pathway to being heard and visible (Njie, 2017; Kempadoo, 2021; The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, 2021).

This clamour for acceptance, for visibility, to be listened to, feel valued and connected to, exists and is common among all peoples from the margin.

> "Many people who have been discriminated against or persecuted want to be accepted, not just as a member of humanity or for their singularity, but in the same terms under which they had previously been rejected." (Bernasconi, 2001:290)

Autoethnographic narratives further open other pathways of observing diverse ways of thinking and being which, as an educator, furthers the discovery of the ethnocentric lines along which educational leadership has developed and been dominated by a Euro-Western perspective in which the white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant male still retains greatest influence on how leaders in international schools lead.

Grogan and Shakeshaft, point to the need to conduct research that includes "empathetic dialogue that provides a comfortable place for women to tell stories of successful professional work, interwoven with acknowledgements of their own silence" (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011:34).

When Ellis is asked what she sees as the future for autoethnography, she talks about seeing this pushed into the public arena and not remain in academic journals and textbooks, unpublished university doctoral studies (Gariglio, 2018). Global and postcolonial auto-ethnography may provide the challenges needed for feminist auto-ethnography in helping understand the present through knowledge of a past that was never recorded in its time. The work of Denejkina (2017) on the presence of the Holocaust on the lives of the descendants of its survivors, Ege (2018) on the life and work of Florence Price, a little known black female classical music composer whose work has had a strong influence on the career and pedagogy of Samantha Ege in international education, the lives of black women in Britain, (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 1985, 2018) and the lives of black female slaves of the Caribbean and their effect on who we are as black women hundreds of years later, are all important contributions. The lives of my ancestors, their pain and their struggles continue to live on in my own life and I am thankful to those ethnographies, autoethnographies, exo-ethnographies and biographies being published now that help explain and project a better future.

The ethical implications in writing autoethnographical narratives, that attempt to define a space in the literature on women of colour in international school leadership, is that they also open reputational licences in ways not revealed by other methodologies in ethnography. I have, therefore, taken care not to compromise the integrity of any person or persons alive, nor identified any institution in which I have worked within the body of the study since I am cognisant

of the liability I may incur in referencing people or institutions in the process of writing. I clearly understand the requirement of this dissertation; that it contribute to filling a space in knowledge and understanding, within the existing literature on women of colour and international school leadership and the debates about decolonisation.

Rationale for the autoethnographic approach

My rationale, therefore, for choosing this methodology is two-fold; to remove the silences surrounding my life and professional career and be visible, and to use this autoethnographic narrative inquiry to explore ideas as perceived through time. The methodology offers me a pathway and "access to sensitive issues and inner-most thoughts (making) this research method a powerful and unique tool for individual and social understanding" (Ellis, 2009; cited in Ngunjeri, et al., 2010:3).

I have chosen to write, using the methodology of the autoethnographic narrative, to discover and reveal the paths taken in my life and contribute to the academy in a way that lays bare the complexity, contradiction, shame, courage, and strength of one individual to become visible and heard. This comes at a time when diversity of experiences, perspectives, educational backgrounds, race, ethnicity, and gender are presently absent from many of our Euro/western-centric leadership teams in international schools.

> "We will be pleased if narrative inquiry continues to situate itself within an intermediate zone between science and art, self and others, big stories and little stories, and is understood and regarded as a meeting place for storytellers that promotes multiplicity and diversity where head and heart go hand in hand, a rigorous and creative body of scholarship that is passionate, political, personal, critical, open-ended, enlightened, pleasurable, meaningful, useful, and sufficiently evocative to keep the conversation going." (Bochner and Riggs, 2014:216)

CHAPTER 3: MY APPROACH TO AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STRUCTURE OF THE NARRATIVES.

Silences and invisibility

Through the narratives that comprise this thesis, I explore the experience of colourism and its impact on perceptions of my black female self in international school leadership. The empirical research highlights some of the ways this is felt at the same time I consciously and sometimes unconsciously try to justify my position in schools that promote diversity, internationalism, and cultural plurality, often totally absent from its leadership teams. Margaret Hunter's article first published in 2007, *The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality*, has been an important contribution to my thought and decision around this choice of topic (Hunter, 2007). Her work provokes a thinking that delves deep into spaces I have avoided and forced me to question my role, my stance and lack of voice when it was, perhaps required and needed.

Mary Beard's, *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, passionately charts the historical role of women in the West, from the ancient Greeks and Romans to the present day, in which women have been silenced or have silenced themselves for over six thousand years. Beard refers to her mother in the preface to her book, herself a primary school head, who "was well aware that the further up the career hierarchy she went, the fewer female faces she saw" (Beard, 2017:1).

In my attempt to examine my own silences and invisibility in my role as a black woman in international schooling, I was drawn to the idea of examining the world that I inhabit through these autoethnographic narratives in order to shed light on how the awareness and examination, where possible, of the world in which I live can support a greater understanding of self and reaffirmation of the limits of place and space. Familiarity with one's own life can obscure the possibility for insight and critique needed to uncover assumptions, whether they be causal, presumptive, or emanating or differing world views (Brookfield, 1995; Andreotti, 2011). I have

attempted, however, to rethink these assumptions retrospectively, through the narratives.

This autoethnographic study supports the desire first to be and inspires an idea of what is possible in the world. The answer to questions I explore in the narratives will remain incomplete as the quest to fully understand one's identity is one that continues throughout life (Cavarero, 2000). The desire, however, is to explore the experience of silence and invisibility, as a black feminist educator, through the development of these narratives. I do this drawing on the socio-political contexts existing at the time recognising that I continue the creative journey beyond the scope of this work. I embarked on a nuanced form of reflexivity that is further explored within the narratives. The relationship a reader may have to this work, the ethical and moral stance taken, will influence the extent to which these narratives continue to open up conversations about the racial and gendered experience of international school leadership. An understanding of this, I hope, is not a precursor to judgement.

The narratives that follow explore gender, race, class, and education in my life. The colonial environment into which I was born is indelible, giving rise to the silences and invisibility I experience. Hall explores this complex psychology as one, also, from the 'colonies' thus:

> "And, perhaps most damaging of all, these psychic imperatives generated silences, unconscious evasions and disavowals, the self-deceiving double-talk of colonial discourse itself, which so often masks its hidden presences with absences, gaps and silences, making them simultaneously both knowledgeable and unspeakable for those living them." (Hall, 2017:21)

There remain contradictions, embedded in the experience of colonialism, and its act to distort and alienate, subjugate, and violate, that are juxtaposed against those of race, class, gender, colour, and the experience of schooling both as a student and one as an educator in international schooling. There are hierarchies within each of these that further classify but they continue to be measured against the white Anglo-Saxon male. This remains true today even as I recognise all the progress made in seeing and embracing otherness in those unlike oneself. One's identity at birth charts a possible trajectory in life. My professional and personal life has been constantly placed along this yardstick that awards differing values on what it means

to be human. This experience has given rise to a sense of *deterretorialization* (Deleuze & Guattari,1988:9), a sense of not being of a particular place, time, or space and this had led to a disruption in forming my own identities; never a singular construct or voice in the quicksand of life.

It has been challenging for me to find the language I have needed to use to write a researched narrative about experiences that were not previously written or spoken, for the most part. They had remained experiential and formative. Language came into being once the memories were recorded in written form or spoken aloud. Since the *raison d'être* for this study was to break a silence and become visible – language has also provided the visibility of self.

Colonisation, de-culturalisation and decolonisation

I acknowledge that what the reader finds within the narratives is fragmentary evidence of silence and invisibility. There was no predesigned path in life and movement from one country to another, shifting environments and consequent adjustments to the acceptances and rejections faced, creates voids and empty spaces that are difficult, if not impossible, to fill. I firmly identify as a black woman whose ancestors hail from either side of the Atlantic and where the political, the social, the economic, and moreover, race and patriarchy from colonial Britain have created hidden spaces that continue to lurk in the shadows of the fallen empire into which I was born.

This gives rise to the multiple oppressions, micro-aggressions, strength, pain, and a constant questioning of one's worth. The narratives in this study also explore personal agency and bold decisions that I hope will serve to highlight the complexity of being a black woman in international schools today. None of this is to exemplify but to document and offer nuanced vistas in which I challenge the understanding of race and gender in international school leadership today and in the final chapter, offer some other approaches to race and gender in the experience of international school leadership, and its recent strivings to decolonise. These narratives, as does this entire study, represent those of a singular international school leader who is black and female.

I am drawn to the process of reflexivity as a way of exploring the past. It has uncovered a profound loss of cultural and social identity. The realisation that the colonial and postcolonial life lived has rendered me not only stateless but more profoundly culturally deprived and, at the same time, equally culturally influenced.

I am the product of a successful de-culturalisation in order to adopt the culture of the coloniser that Bhabha refers to as mimicry that is almost synonymous with mockery (Bhabha, 1994). Vanessa Andreotti explains one aspect of this, thus:

> "This ambivalence (where the colonizer sees the colonized as possibly equal, but necessarily inferior) produces ambivalent colonial subjects who produced "translated" copies of the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions, and values." (Andreotti, 2011:26)

Using the methodology of autoethnography has allowed me to uncover the extent to which Andreotti's thesis on the role of colonisation is shared and where this differs.

The colonial administration in British Guiana, as in the rest of the world colonised by the British, was extremely efficient in effecting a binary identity in the minds and souls of its people founded on a deficit view of 'other', essential to the identity of the European. Andreotti quotes Loomba thus:

> "If colonized people are irrational, Europeans are rational; if the former are barbaric, sensual and lazy, Europe is civilization itself, with its sexual appetites under control and its dominant ethic, that of hard work". (Loomba 1998; cited in Andreotti, 2011:21)

Bhabha's work clearly identifies colonialism as the subjugation of the racialised 'other' in order to justify the brutality of the system and to further dehumanise the other and in order to exert greater political, economic, and cultural superiority. Colonialism in effect re-wrote history, geography, science, language, and the arts with its Eurocentric knowledges. Everywhere else was, and still is, measured against this touchstone in academia. In order to exist, to be and become through an understanding of self and my own genealogy, I have had to become European – to the extent that this is possible, so that I can begin to unshackle myself and discover who I am. At my core is the racial, gendered identity that is both mine, and 'other'. These narratives, in each of the four distinct periods of my life explored, represent a process to release the constraints imposed by self and others.

Methodological processes

I have not included the traditional literature review in this study although I have referred, throughout, to research that has contributed to my own autoethnographical approach. I draw on the research around colonialism and autoethnography and weave this into the narratives to offer a distinct presentation that I hope draws the reader into a distinct world of international school leadership.

There is pain and struggle in autoethnographic narrative research. There is also joy and peace. There is subjectivity, there are emotions, contradictions in expressed thoughts and actions, decisions in action, reaction, and non-action. I do not want the experiences I have had and lay bare in this autoethnography to be analysed, abstracted and typologised as an anthropologist may. I have selected memories from distinct political periods I have lived through to seek an understanding of the reasons I may have become silent and invisible. Some are conscious selections because they either illustrate or are illuminated to me through the unfolding social history in which I live. However, all speak to a dissonance between the life I have lived and the world in which this life transpires.

Much of what I write has never been verbalised or alluded to in my professional life although, like everyone else, I carry my whole life with me everywhere I go. I am silent about most of it and the doubts, insecurities, and errors, common to all of us in leadership are rarely expressed or shared with colleagues. Tomkins exposes the dilemma thus:

> "You can't talk about your private life in the course of doing your professional work: you have to pretend that it's epistemology, or ontology, or phenomenology, or metaphysical something "more exalted" then merely personal, something separate and separated from what's happening inside your heart or your personal life, something that potentially could embarrass or humiliate you in the presence of your colleagues." (Tompkins, 1987:169)

There are no pedagogical or didactic reasons for my embarking on this methodology, but more a contribution to a way of thinking about a life lived. I trust this may support other black women in leadership to see how their own lives, not

mine as an exemplar, fits into their socio-political world. This is my attempt to tell my story and not someone else's. An experience too often encountered in ethnography or socio-political anthropology, thereby resisting:

> "…colonialist, sterile research impulses of authoritatively entering a culture, exploiting cultural members, and then recklessly leaving to write about the culture for monetary and/or professional gain, while disregarding relational ties to cultural members." (Ellis et al., 2011:2)

Epistemology & theoretical influences

This dissertation offers a way into epistemology and theory in ways that have been intentionally diverse and to offer the academy an opportunity to understand one individual's experience of gender, race through six decades and recognise the work as a valid contribution to knowledge and understanding.

The narratives represent my truth but are not necessarily *the* truth. From an epistemological perspective, I have been guided by the work of Foucault (1983) as explored in the previous Chapter 2. The narratives that follow are not an absolute truth but they are how I have interpreted my own life within the specific socio-political spaces and places in which it has occurred.

So too have there been many black feminists scholars who have had, and continue to have, an influence my life and work. Moreover in coming to write this dissertation I have realised the extent to which I have clung, throughout my life, to the theoretical models of bell hooks (1989, 2006) with her outspoken and wide-ranging body of literature on culture, gender and race; poetry and prose, academic papers and, towards the end of her life, her attention to the emotional aspects of sisterhood. Her recent death in December 2021 has highlighted even more how much her work has not only been influential but also how much I have been influenced by the elders. All of these strong black women have helped me bring together my own thinking and understanding of the experience of gender, race and place. The work of these elders has been cited throughout this dissertation; Toni Morrison (1992, 1993, 2004, 2019), Maya Angelou (1969), Audre Lorde (1984a, 1984b) and Paule Marshall (2015).

I have drawn on a rich body of literature that is both academic and literary in the case of Audre Lorde and Toni Morrison, cited above. They have addressed race, gender and coloniality from the personal, in the case of Lorde and from a literary stance, in the case of Morrison. I have admired Toni Morrison's ability to write unapologetically about the lives of black people in which the white man is absent. The focus is always on the women and men, their lives, their way of working and loving, their births and deaths that are never measured against those who are racially other. Vanessa Andreotti's (2011, 2012) emphasis on the role of indigenous knowledges in offering other ways of being as we attempt to decolonise our lives and enter into an understanding of one's own identity, to belong and find oneself through strength and courage has been particularly empowering during the writing of this work. Busby (1992, 2019), Dadzie (2020) and Butler (2005) helped me understand the value and importance of stories, *herstories,* our individual stories as historical accounts. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) have shed light on women in educational leadership today as we take on these roles and are increasingly more present in international schools.

Constructing narratives

I have adopted a four-phased approach to the narratives that allows me to research the socio-political time frames in each phase, situating memory within the researched past. I sought out literature written about the distinct periods of my life, historic documentation, personal photographs, letters, and personal diaries to help me relive the memories of a time past. Although there is a chronology to my life's events that parallel a series of socio-political events, the impact of the latter on the former may be experienced or processed much later in my life and much of the impact has come in the writing of this study. This clearly demonstrates that life is not a series of events but a complex working of the mind to understand the significance of these, towards a much deeper understanding of self.

The subject of the place of women in power relations in education, has been explored by few writers (Stanley, 1992; Tamboukou, 2010, 2016; Hyden, 2016). I have, however, explored these power relations by placing them within the autoethnographical research narrative approach used. I continue to attribute

different interpretations, over time, to that which has been experienced in the past. Life is constantly being influenced by, and exerts influence on, my personal and professional environments. I exemplify this as I look back at ways in which I interact with my environment now with a different lens to that used at the time the event or events took place. I use some of these moments for self-reflection within the socio-political context in which they were produced. I sketched out all the places I have lived and worked in, the type of international school and location in which I have worked, the key events in my life; young life, schooling, university and early professional work, my trajectory towards positions of leadership and specific events that occurred as I moved out of the classroom teaching environment into roles in which my leadership affected a larger group of people in international schools. I drew a parallel with my personal life and the political environment in which this was taking place. I then explored the lines that traversed all three areas, selecting those that spoke to these three where I could identify ways in which I had become unseen and unheard.

> "Experience-centred research stresses that such representations vary drastically over time, and across the circumstances within which one lives, so that a single phenomenon may produce very different stories, even from the same person." (Andrews, et al., 2013:6).

I look towards a possible black feminist diaspora in which one can free the soul and allow for a new kind of thinking about the possible experiences and futures in international schooling. It could be that 40 years on in international school leadership I find myself in the Paris of Richard Wright[7], that place in which, as a black woman I can become my diasporic self. I can write from the outside as an inside member.

> "It is when you are outside, but can take part as a member, that you see differently from the ways they see, and you are able to write independently." (James and Anthony, 1969:80)

I communicate, through the stories and experiences that are believable and are accessible, because they are identifiable but not normative or exemplary. Moreover, I discover and rediscover, uncover truths that are made visible, and promote self-

[7] Richard Wright author of and *Native Son (1940)* and *Black Boy (1945)*, among other works, written during his time living in Paris.

knowledge though engagement and identification with the inquiry. Relating the past is always within the context of a changing present. Perspectives on past experiences are shaped and informed by a present that is continually evolving.

There are small stories within this study, the stories of experiences that were fleeting that, when accumulated, give one a sense of being whole, and support a continued self-creation. What Bamberg (2007) calls the mundane stories of our lives, the small stories, through which our identities are negotiated and perceived by others and by ourselves. These small stories are often interpersonal and grounded in everyday interactions. To others they demonstrate who they think I am. They create an identity of me in the minds of others.

The narratives draw on historical data to support and explain the contexts in which I lived through the following four distinct phases of my life. The reflections reveal an understanding of my present by an examination of the experience of the past (Cohen, 2015; Paule, 2015; Allan, 2018).

The historical socio-political context

The selection of narratives in the chapter that follows has meaning and is relational within its historical socio-political perspective. It represents my truth as I remember the past and feel it to be so in this present. I examine the significance of the narratives to me, at varying times and what they may represent or say to this black female educator. Unlike imperialist historians that are about fragmenting the past, I am aspiring, through the narratives, to take a post-colonial approach to seek out events that connect with each other to explain my present. These autoethnographical narratives recognise the complexity of my life; any life is multifaceted and in constant construction. It provides the way of linking the past, lived experiences with those of the present and possible futures.

I make extensive reference to the experience of slavery to exemplify the use of exo-ethnography as I think that there has been little attention made of the psychological, symbolic, or cultural legacy of slavery in the Americas and the Caribbean. Guyana is no exception. Furthermore, there has been little attention paid to the role of

women in the resistance of the forced transportation of slaves from the African continent to the Americas, their continued role in the frequent uprisings and subsequent endurance during torture and punishment, through to their role in the abolitionist movements of the mid-19th century, their fight for eventual emancipation in 1833/34 and access to education during the height of the British Empire (Dadzie, 2020).

None of the large slave trading countries of England, Portugal and the Netherlands has been forthcoming in the scale of recognition and responsibility needed, nor has slavery been recognised as ‘a crime against humanity’ and therefore there is even less interest in discussing reparations. Some small groups and individuals have brought the discussion around slavery and its impact on the Caribbean around the time of independence in the late 1950s and 1960s, when many of the countries in the region prepared for independence from Great Britain, the Netherlands and France. One exception to this trend has been Haiti, the first country in the region to abolish slavery through the revolutionary action of the enslaved, led by General Toussaint L’Overture, his men and women.

Exo-autoethnography, as a methodology, taps into this period of slavery and although not experienced personally, its effects are all around me. Moreover, I am, and I exist because slavery existed. It continues to cohabit with me and its manacles, thankfully different from my foremothers, are always there.

The legacy of the enslaved from Africa, and the indentured labourers from India, created the cultural and ethnic identities we see today in Guyana and the Guyanese diaspora. Geographically, slaves were set to work along the coastal plains, along the riverbanks nearest the capital where the sugar plantations were situated, latterly rice plantations, and coexisted along the low-lying coastal plains, flooded by numerous rives that were dammed though small channels and sluice gates called kokers, constructed under the whip of the Dutch colonisers. Those of African and Indian descent fed the colonisers in Britain, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal with rice and sugar, the latter important in the production of chocolate for which both the Dutch and British are famous. These divisions are etched into our psyche and for the most part separated those of Indian and African descent. This division, fuelled by the white colonisers in order to exploit both groups, maintained the

colonisers stronghold in the country and created a clear racial divide that predominates today (Despres, 1969; Moore, 1999; Thompson, 2006; Williams, 2013). Guyana's economy is still predominately agrarian although mining in the interior has grown, since the mid-1950s and more recently, the discovery of crude oil off the Atlantic coast is now changing the landscape of the country.

During post-colonial rule, Guyana made some effort to recognise this period of slavery and the role black Africans played in their resistance. Unfortunately, for the most part these were divisionary ideas to pit Guyanese of African descent against Guyanese originating from the Indian sub-continent through political allegiances to one or other of the two dominant parties: the Peoples National Congress (PNC) under Forbes Burnham and the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) under Cheddi Jagan. Burnham, an Afro-Guyanese created the Cooperative Republic of Guyana in 1970 to commemorate the Cuffy (alternative - Kofi) and Damon uprisings of 1763 as revolutionary acts against slavery.

Philosophy and more on analysis

I lean towards Denzin in his caution against an overly analytical approach to autoethnographic narratives in which pre-determined categorization of narrative inquiry predominate and the narrative, or story, can be lost in this process (Denzin, 1996). I move the narratives into a chapter on their own to make them central to the study, as they constitute the researched body of work. I concur with Bochner and Ellis in the expectation of an ontology, an encounter with the experiences and a relation to what Brady (1991) calls 'artful science' and Richardson (2000), 'creative analytic practices'. I try and work against exemplification of experiences and move towards a conversation and contribution in which the readers:

> "…enter into the experience of others, usually as empathetic witnesses. By putting themselves in the place of others, readers, listeners, are positioned to reflect critically on their own experiences, to expand their social capabilities, and to deepen their commitment to social justice and caring relationships with others." (Bochner and Riggs, 2014:206)

The narratives are also my attempt at also locating myself in Gramsci's philosophies of praxis as explored in Thomas (2015). There are many interpretations of

Gramsci's seminal work in the form of the Prison Notebooks written between 1929 and 1935. I am using the term 'philosophies of praxis' not to signal a Marxist approach or interpretation but one less associated with the term; that of contradictions, situated firmly in their historical, cultural, and political context, with reference to the different phases in which the Prison Notebooks cited in Thomas, 2015:98. The ideas around the reworking of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis during his years of imprisonment can be found in the work of Gianni Francioni to whom Thomas makes reference (Thomas, 2015). It is the contradiction of self and as writer, within the contradictions of the narratives themselves, and the inseparability between my thinking and the experiences that I refer to in referencing Gramsci's philosophies of praxis.

Often the busyness of my professional life has not always led me to encountering myself, and my truths, as beautiful and powerfully created, to be read and received, in order for me to enter into other dialogues, other truths and other experiences. These narratives are my contribution to reversing this. As Bochner states, "the call of these stories is for engagement within and between, not analysis from without" (Bochner, 2001:xx).

I make generalisations within one life-episode and not across different, albeit similar experiences. In order not to exemplify the episode but to illustrate it as one, and only one contributing factor in the complexity of life. In the future, these episodes described in the narrative may not continue to have the impact they have had as I have come to explore and situate them in my present life. I do not attempt to exemplify or transpose my understandings across to those of other black women in international leadership. Like Bochner, Ellis and Waugh on the general *raison d'être*, I too would hope that this autoethnographic narrative will "attract, awaken, and arouse […] inviting readers into conversations with the incidents, feelings, contingencies, contradictions, memories, and desires" (Bochner, 2012:158).

Memory

As relational human beings our past is not completely recoverable, through the reflexive process of memory and the account of the socio-political history in which

we were formed. In self-questioning I put myself at risk, a vulnerability I find difficult and particularly so for teachers whose very existence as such is bound to that of knowing. It is this openness with which I engage that I hope will make this work resonate beyond, and into the lives of others, offering the possibility to engage in reflective practices and different ways of thinking.

I have reconstructed events in my life, using empirical resources, and memory, as the '*sin qua non'* condition to the narratives. Memory is explored as a vehicle through which I construct and reconstruct meaning both to myself and to present this to the reader. I recognise that the re-interpretation of these events from past, into the present, is a selective process but this is intentional in order to provide the opportunity for critical dialogue.

The narratives also explore the concept of multivocality, in which there will be a plurality of voice that is sometimes contradictory in the perception of self (Mizzi, 2010). Examples of this plurality is experienced in the roles I inhabit, that of leadership in an international school setting, juxtaposed with that of my personal life lived outside of that public role. The contradictions faced between the public voice in my professional life and that in my political or personal life are also dependent on the socio-cultural environments in which I have lived and worked. These contradictions continue to be present and will be evidenced in the narratives.

During the time of writing these narratives, I have questioned my present and what genealogy represents for me and think of the concept as the method through which I have been able to raise questions about the nature of these autoethnographic narratives. I do not follow the Foucauldian theory of genealogy in which I would attempt to critique and reconceptualise the narratives through this process in order to come to some positioning statements about my life. I have drawn on Foucault to explore and reveal, speak, and be heard, write and be seen; a modern-day Tolfink[8], a notch-maker during the slave trade from Ghana, or a braider of hair from Demerara.

> "Doing genealogy has therefore been about following broken lines and often drawing new ones to keep going, searching, excavating, unearthing." (Tamboukou 2003:207).

[8] Tolfink was a medieval, now termed 'graffiti writer' who wrote on the walls of a churh – « Tolfink was here »

The writing of the narratives becomes the discovery, in retrospect, that has sometimes brought pain and wonderment and understanding of the way race, gender and ethnicity play into who I have become. It is also an exploration of the present, opening to a possible future. Memories become a reconstruction of the past as if they were being lived and not exact re-inactions, in the mind, of past experiences since no exact retention of experiences from memory is possible (Muncey, 2010; Eriksson, 2013). This process is messy as I grappled with knowledge that is emotional and not primarily cognitive (Denzin, 2006).

This researched autoethnography excavates into the experiences of life as a black woman in a particular historical period and in a career in which those like me are mostly absent. I explore the concept of autoethnographic narratives, my stories, through these lived experiences, my ideas, and my proposals from a forward stance with many backward glances. In doing so, I invite the reader of this study "to contemplate the possibilities and limitations we encounter when we attempt to become authors of our own stories" (Bochner and Riggs, 2014:203).

LeGuin, (1989) in bringing to mind the twelfth century carving on a Welsh church wall, translated, "Tolfink was here", reminded me of the impact I felt when reading the notches wrought in the stone cells I witnessed on the Gold Coast of Ghana, holding pens for those ancestors of mine before being shipped across the Atlantic and similar also to those found on previously sunken slave ships. My footprints as a young child made in the soft cement under my home in Anira Street, to modern day blogs, Instagram posts and tweets, all call in evidence the human need to be remembered as having once existed.

> "The past is always open to revision and so, too, are our stories of them and what they mean now." Ellis (2009; cited in Bochner and Riggs, 2014:209)

Ethics and vulnerability

I frame specific experiences within the cultural-political context in which they occurred because they have continued to have an impact on my present. However,

in doing so, the question of relational ethics becomes a very important consideration and offers a complexity that I have to be mindful of in all that I write as family, friends, institutions, and communities are all implicated (Ellis, 2007, 2009). These relational concerns are not only critical to the understanding of the study, but vulnerable and in need of protection in order to maintain the relationships safe and private, whilst maintaining the reliability and validity of the study (Ellis et al., 2011).

I have used a variety of data sources, apart from my own memory. These have included letters from and to my mother, siblings, father, teachers and friends. During my stay in Sweden from January to December of 1995, I wrote more than 360 letters to my mother, which she kept. I have used family artefacts such as photographs and transparencies (diapositives), school reports, drawings and maps. My mother, in the year before her death, began a memoir on tape, some of which has been transcribed. I have used her anecdotal memory, reworded, to draw on a past of which I have no personal memory. There have been countless conversations with various family members and access to their blogs and social media that recount times in Guiana before independence and gatherings in our different places of residence in North America and Europe. I have also shared parts of these narratives that follow with family members for their corroboration and/or correction.

I recognise that the experiences retold, are personal. In the act of retelling a past, there is interpretation that may alter, for another, the validity or reliability of retelling the event. All events are retold as I perceive them retrospectively, even the most recent of them. I claim credibility only as far as in recounting the researched events, I hope that the reader renders them believable, coherent, and illuminating in the light other events; people, places, and their histories as I have described them in my recounted experiences.

> “Readers provide validation by comparing their lives to ours, by thinking about how our lives are similar and different and the reasons why, and by feeling that the stories have informed them about unfamiliar people or lives.” (Ellis, et al., 2011:10)

As I make reference to institutions in autoethnographic research I am cognisant of the ethical challenges, in relation to family members, institutions in which I have

worked and friends, both alive and dead (Medford, 2006; Ellis, 2007). In exposing myself in this autoethnographic narrative, pain, loss, regret, and shame are all evidenced, as is love, bravery, morality, humour, and wonderment. At all times, I am vulnerable and exposed, unlike other ethnographic methodologies of research that often shield and protect through the need to distance researcher from the those researched, and the data uncovered, often using qualitative and phenomenological approaches. The vulnerability of autoethnographic research "not only enables researchers to access personally intimate data with ease but also to reach readers with their vulnerable openness" (Ngunjiri, et al., 2010:9).

Exploration

What remains for me is the mirror I hold towards myself in this study and a rationale and purpose for these autoethnographic narratives. What follows in the next chapter is a series of short narratives, although structured in a linear way, have affected my life in a non-linear fashion and differently across time. In these narratives, I communicate relationships in both my private and public life within the socio-cultural environments in which they take place.

What follows is an exploration of dissonance and conflict occurring within knowledge and understanding of self that has been acquired from a social location and structure but is epistemically constructed by the colonial power systems in which I have lived and been schooled, and how I navigate these through autoethnographic narratives that traverse the four distinct phases I have chosen in my life. The Jamaican, Stuart Hall, understood this well in his biographical work, *Familiar Stranger*.

> "Contrary to common-sense understanding, the transformations of self-identity are not just a personal matter. … Only by discovering this did I begin to understand that what black identity involved was a social, political, historical, and symbolic event, not just a personal, and certainly not simply a genetic one." (Hall, 2017:16)

Each generation, wherever they may have been born, has been systematically influenced by the hegemonic knowledge and power relations embedded in Euro-Western epistemology. There is no escaping this relationship and its continued

dominance in every aspect of our human and non-human lives at this time. Narrative autoethnography supports an examination of what that is and the possibility of moving towards and understanding of how one can move away from the hierarchies that dominate the world systems towards a form of global decoloniality.

The following chapter contains narratives that are structured across the four phases that cover four distinct periods of my life:

- Colonial period and early life in Guiana (1956-1968)
- United Kingdom: student and early career (1968-1981)
- International career in schools and beyond (1981-2010)
- Return to Europe and beyond (2010 -2021)

CHAPTER 4: AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES. SIXTY-FIVE YEARS IN FOUR DISTINCT PERIODS.

"If we experience our lives as stories, then why not represent them as stories?" Bochner (2012:157)

CHAPTER 4A: COLONIAL PERIOD AND EARLY LIFE IN GUIANA (1956-68)

In this chapter I narrate my experiences in relation to my childhood specifically through an historical perspective of the trauma of slavery, and colonialism. Although I did not experience the former, my life has been irrevocably influenced by both slavery and colonialism.

I was born into a generation of parents whose grandparents were born before slavery was abolished in the Caribbean, and our lives were directly affected by the silences that trauma created in colonial British Guiana and Barbados where my paternal grandmother was born. The economic and political supremacy of Great Britain in the mid-19th century was achieved through centuries of exploitation of black Africans. Emancipation of slaves occurred in 1834 in Guiana and was swiftly followed in 1838 by a system of indentured labourers, initially from India, who were brought into Guiana to work on the plantations where rice was introduced as a cash crop.

Free people of colour in the new British colonies of the eighteenth century, including Guiana, were mostly women who had bought their own freedom and those who had been freed upon the death of their owners. An example of this was Grenada: "So great were the numbers that by 1783, free people of color on Grenada were 53 percent of the total free population. The majority of these free colored people were women." (Candlin and Pybus, 2015:17)

The presence of free and manumitted[9] black women in the British colonies were in numbers and wealth that allowed for a new generation of educated black women, men, and children of former slaves (Candlin and Pybus, 2015). This was not an anomaly within the region and may also explain why there is an absence of reference to slavery by my grandmother, Eloise. As a young educated black woman she was brought over to British Guiana from Barbados, which, in the 1800s, had a large white population and many well-educated freed black men and women. Eloise married Fortune Angoy from Berbice, a successful chemist in New Amsterdam and there they raised a family. In the years my paternal great grandfather was alive, referencing the records of the time, there were approximately twice as many free black inhabitants in the colony of Guiana as white colonists and slave owners and at the time of emancipation in 1834. Before this date, slaves had been brought into the colony in large numbers to develop the cane fields and sugar plantations along the coastal region before the paddy fields were established, later, in parts of Demerara and Berbice.

> "The demographic story of the Caribbean from 1795 to the end of slavery is the story of the free colored people; there is no getting around or ignoring them." (Candlin and Pybus, 2015:30)

Guiana, when aggressively colonised by the British in the late 18th century, was also attractive to former slaves. The mainland colony was no exception among the southern Caribbean islands, and land was contested among the Scots, English, and free coloured people.

> "With women of color manumitted at a much greater rate than their male counterparts, and therefore a much greater presence in the freed community, it was the free women of color especially who seized the moment, she and their children would be in the forefront of this brave new world." (Candlin and Pybus, 2015:31)

All this came as a surprise to me, during my research, as I cannot remember hearing stories of slavery throughout my childhood. The colonial presence was, however, everywhere; street names, place names, flags, language, and my identity were all classified through colonial rule. I was born in Queenstown, Georgetown in

[9] Manumitted slaves were those whose freedom was granted by their slave owners, during the time of slavery. Often they were women who had borne children to the slave owner or both men and women who had developed a particular skill or ability that was recognised as more valuable to the slave owner.

honour of the Queen and King of England. The street where I was born, Anira, appears to have Spanish/Arab origins and by the time Queenstown had been established under British Colonial rule in 1831, emancipation was almost on the horizon.

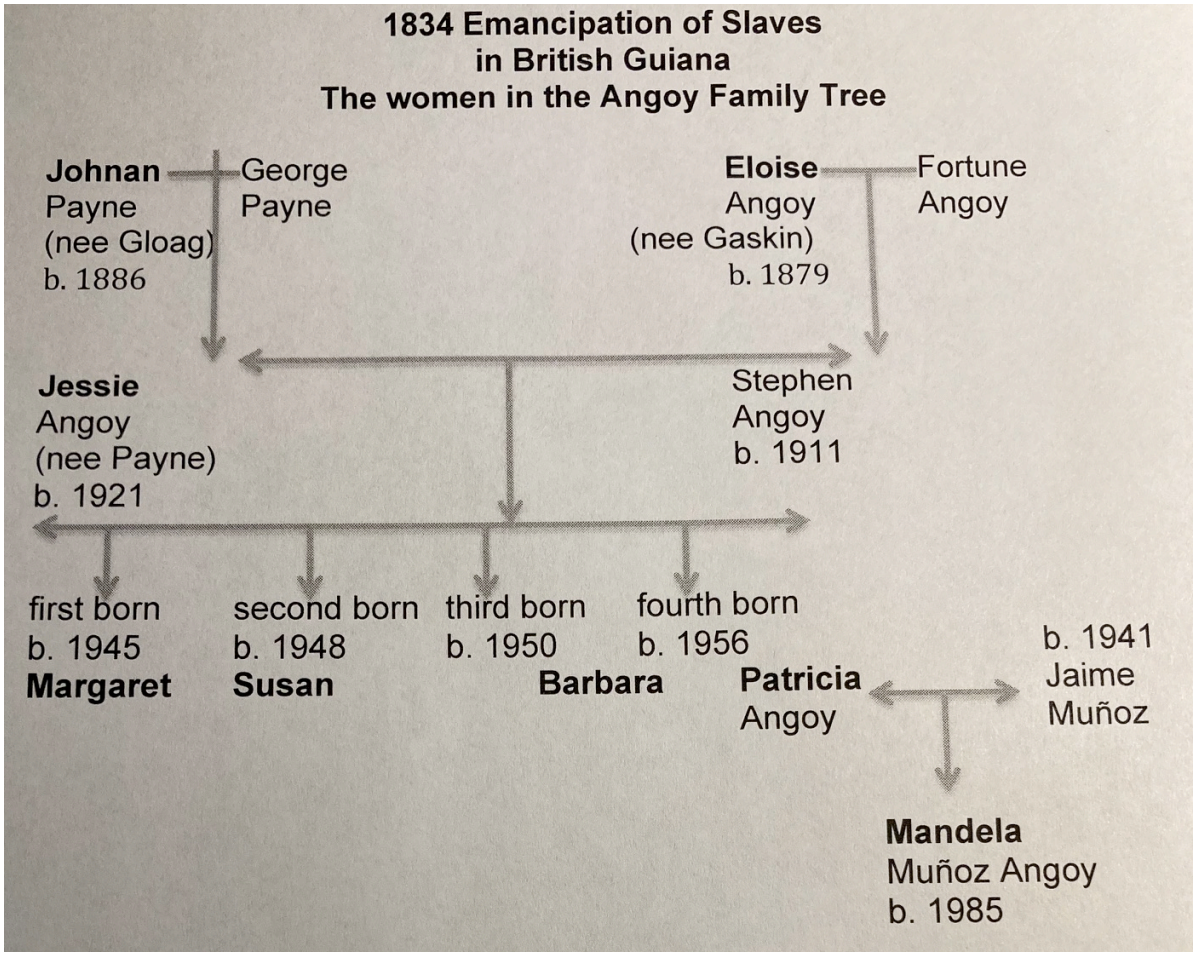

Image: Angoy Family Tree of Women

My ancestry and their experience of slavery, including many others of colour in the Caribbean, differ greatly from that of the Afro-Americans, of the north. The colonisation of the British Southern Caribbean was contested among the Spanish, French, Portuguese, and the Dutch. The racial balance and the presence of a significant proportion of freed blacks gave root to a Guiana in which I was born, one that demanded respect from whites whilst cognisant of the colonialists' economic and geopolitical stranglehold on the country.

My paternal grandfather had died long before I was born, but his grandparents would have known slavery in Berbice, one of the three main divisions along the Guiana coastland following the large rivers that carry their names; Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice. Talk of 'long-ago', was often privy only to women, in the late

afternoons, after all work had been done, and there was time to chat in the rocking chairs or relax in the Berbice chair in the cool galleries with jalousie windows that let the breeze in but kept the heat of the day out.

My great grandmother may have been born enslaved but could also have been part of the line of manumitted women or those who had bought their freedom, given the fact that my own paternal grandmother was born in 1879. My maternal grandmother born in 1886 in Edinburgh, Scotland, one of 11 children, knew of hardship and struggle. Johnan was born the same year as Helen Cruickshank, poet, suffragette, and Scottish nationalist. My grandmother Johnan Gloag would be known today as a strong headed, courageous, and fierce anti-racist feminist had those descriptors been available in the latter part of the 19th century. Each grandmother born on different sides of the Atlantic, who grew up in very different households, through the marriage of their children, came to know and respect each other. Both experienced racism and the effects of enslavement in the Caribbean, Great Britain, and the USA, differently.

My maternal grandmother went to find fortune in the USA before WW1, having left an abusive husband and child in Edinburgh. She sailed across the Atlantic in the first decade of the twentieth century, first to Ellis Island and then to Detroit, Michigan. At the same time black men and women were making their own ‘Great Migration’ north, away from the lynchings of the repressive southern states (Wilkerson, 2017). Her decision changed the course of her life forever. She knew that her probable future as a poor white woman, subjugated to the whims of a man, equally poor, was not one she was willing to accept. She would go on to make many more significant decisions, but silence was never one of them.

Johnan, my grandmother, a Scott, was white with auburn hair, musically talented and gregarious. On her return to Edinburgh, she met my grandfather who was studying medicine at the University of Edinburgh at the time, reportedly, whilst she was walking across Princess Gardens. Once he had qualified, they married and after a brief time in the city of London, where my mother was born, they returned, as a couple, to a penal settlement in the Essequibo, so that my grandfather could begin his career as a young doctor. She shared his taste in the music of the 20s and 30s, from the black musicians of the USA and those who toured Europe in the

inter-war years. She played the banjo and my grandfather the piano. They sang, danced, and entertained a majority black Guyanese group of friends when resident in the capital, Georgetown.

My grandmother had no time for racial slurs, abusive comments, and the injustices she experienced with her husband. She called out all those in whom she perceived discrimination on any grounds. She knew where she had come from, was generous, hardworking, and direct. She had a wide range of acquaintances and was fiercely loyal to her husband. Her close friend, until their deaths, was a white Irish woman from a similar working-class background who married a black Barbadian professor of French who, on his return from Oxford University, taught at the prestigious boys' school, Queen's College of Georgetown.

My paternal grandmother was a child born out of wedlock whose father must have been of mixed race as she too, was light-skinned with hazel brown eyes my own father inherited. There was never any open discussion in our family about our heritage, but the secrets remained part of my family's unspoken past. My paternal grandfather, born in 1872, was a well-respected professional. With my grandmother, they had 7 children, 5 grew into adulthood and all lived long lives well into their 80s and 90s except for my father who died at 72.

The abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean in the mid-1800s, pushed women into the home and men became, in their eyes, main breadwinners. However, the wages of men were, and still are, never enough to maintain a whole extended family hence women have always sought other sources of income. Within the womanhood of the Caribbean middle-classes, women have always voiced their opinions on all manner of subjects from cricket to politics, as have men. However, on the subject of race and gender, their voices were less vocal. When my mother announced her intention of getting married at 21 years old, she was no longer able to keep her government job at the Treasury. This was the work of single women. However, she continued to work outside the home, in the private sector and I perceived a shared financial responsibility with my father. I also sensed a gendered subjugation that, with it, brought a profound silencing that was long lasting.

I was born at a time in history when subtle distinctions between race, colour and social class were constantly at play. I was never sure where I belonged as the social environment of place and space were constantly shifting in the pre- and postcolonial setting of the Caribbean. My colour and gender always located in my 'field of vision', to use a term borrowed from Jacqueline Rose (2005), and I juggled between and within the environments I inhabited, which created a sense of misplacement and loss within. I became my own palimpsest, rewriting myself over layers of my own being. In doing so, it rendered me silent, unspoken and unseen.

Social class was the defining factor in the mid-50s in Georgetown. A structure I later embraced, for it opened doors to opportunities in education. My middle-class status was one I wanted to disassociate myself from as I became more aware of the cost and shame of privilege.

A couple of months after I was born my father developed pleurisy with a collapsed lung and I was shipped off to the interior, up the Demerara River to Bartica. My uncle was the District Commissioner for the Essequibo region and my aunt, with her two sons, looked after me so that my mother, herself a mother of four, could care for my father in the Seaman's ward, built in 1838, at the Georgetown Public Hospital. It was a gruelling time for my mother who had gone back to work after her third child. Caring for a seriously ill husband and a new baby is evident in the few photographs of us together. The prognosis was grim, and it was not clear for the doctors that my father would live. Medical care was good but postoperative care was – and still is, heavily dependent on families. I had been born in the newly constructed addition to the hospital, Lady Thompson's ward, now demolished.

Even at birth, colonial Britain was never far away. The hospital, which was the hospital, 30 years earlier, that my grandfather had run looked pretty much the same, in all those years. The wooden floors, the cool wooden shuttered windows, the long open corridors, and the sea breeze not far away. The undertone, however, was the always political. The fires that swept through the wharfs, the riots on the streets, the calypsonians[10] who sang of the split between the two parties and the independent

[10] Calypso is the Caribbean's political commentary set to music and song and those who sing it are called calypsionian, *The Mighty Sparrow* being most famous.

movements in Africa and the Indian subcontinent, all had their bearings on this small British enclave in South America.

At three years old I attended an Anglican convent school in Georgetown because it had just opened a new Montessori kindergarten and my parents thought this would give me a unique educational start for their youngest of four girls, and it did. My father never set foot beyond the school gates, where he waited for me each lunchtime to take me home. He was patient and I, on the other hand waited impatiently for the name “Angoy” to be shouted out by the school’s gatekeeper. My father never attended a play, prize-giving ceremony, or parent meeting in all my school years. He took a keen interest in my schoolwork, encouraged me but was never intrusive or demanding. He clearly understood that my world was the epitome of a colonial upbringing that he fought against as he fervently supported our end to British rule, internal self-government and finally, independence. He had met with Seretse Khama in the 1950s when in London, he admired him and followed his political career as Botswana won its independence from Britain, a few months after Guyana, in the same year, 1966.

My father wrote well, spoke with passion, deliberately choosing his words. He used irony and metaphors liberally. He argued forcefully and was compassionate and thankful. He never raised his hand to any of us, although physical punishment, as a legacy of slavery and colonial rule, was common in homes and in schools in Guiana. Paradoxically, he maintained a cane that hung beside his bed, together with a riding crop and walking sticks. I always wondered about the cane and whether it was more a reminder to him rather that to us children of a cruelty experienced as a child and still existent in Guyana; one that maintains power through the subjugation of one human being over another.

Race and gender were ever present in our household. Strong matriarchal women were present on both parents’ side of the family, inter-relations between the blacks and whites went back at least three generations but it was our Afro-Caribbean heritage that we all held onto. In pre-colonial and colonial times, we were negroes. The Pan African movement, the movements for independence in the countries of the Commonwealth and the strength of intellectuals and political activists at trade union and university levels gave rise to a growing pride and an urgency to connect

with our roots, to understand where we came from and to forge a way forward that no longer tethered us to the Crown.

I became aware, early in my primary education, that my location was not historically rooted in Guyana but that I was a product of two locations, with very different geographies and painful histories. One produced by the forced migration of slaves across the Atlantic to Guiana, and the other migration from the British Isles across the same ocean some 400 years apart with the arrival of my white grandmother from Scotland with her new husband, a recently qualified black doctor with a toddler of two, my mother, in her arms.

It seemed to me, as a young child at school in Georgetown, that my family had been always from somewhere else. They had been traveling for over 100 years when I was born, a century after the official abolition of slavery in the Caribbean. Both my grandmothers and grandfathers had been born towards the end of the 1800s. Both my mother's and father's grandparents would have known slavery and the emancipation. Likewise, I know what it is to have been born in a colony and to know what the transition to an independent nation felt like to a young girl just going into secondary school. It is these geopolitical histories that have impacted in different ways and at different times in my own trajectory as a daughter, a student, a feminist, a teacher, a school leader, a mother, wife, lover and above all else, a black woman.

Beginning the process of schooling in my English *Convent of the Good Shepherd*, in Georgetown, British Guiana in 1959, I unknowingly entered into a racial contract in which a relational value had already been attributed to me, other students, teachers and the curriculum (Mills, 1997). At the age of three, I formally came into contact with a power structure and the racial contract was white. All attempts to think otherwise are smoke and mirrors.

I clearly recognise the historical context of my primary education in Guiana. I was aware, even then, of my erasure, the omission and absence of anyone who looked like me or had experiences that I was having, as a child; nowhere was I visible in the books I read, the stories I was told or the illustrations around me. There were no

people like me, who lived my life, nor those of my family and friends, in the present or decades and centuries before me to be found in any school textbook. However, the questions in my head were never spoken or made audible. I accepted that I was invisible in all contexts of primary education, but I did not understand why.

Colony White, Muscovado, Yellow Crystals and Demerara sugars were only four of the many types of sugar I was used to seeing in our kitchen, growing up in Georgetown. From dark brown to the artificially rendered, white. Even the names of the sugar on which Guiana was built, were reinforced for me as a sign of progressive quality from dark to white. In the same way, people were categorised according to their colour and value to society. Colour was everywhere reinforced and defined who you were as people, as race, as gender and ethnicity.

The late 1950s and 1960s were transformative years, not only for me as a child growing through my primary school years but also as a nation, struggling for its independence against a rapidly forming backdrop of racial unrest, political battles and the old colonial rule that continued its stronghold, running deeper than that belied in all the paraphernalia of the transition and independence. My own silences and lack of visibility seemed to be always punctuated by important historical events. I sensed that I was inextricably linked to my environment and felt the weight of its impact on me, a young black woman from the British colony of Guiana born in the middle of the 20th century. I had to become something from the education and investment made towards my future.

It was only in the months leading towards our independence and the flurry of preparations at school did I feel that we were on the brink of something new, something tangible and good. There was excitement everywhere, a new national anthem to learn, a flag to draw and understand the significance of each colour and a coat of arms that embodied a nation. I was born into that nation but never understood its beauty, its bounty, and the symbolism it represented for others, and should have truly represented for me. At ten years old I felt I was at last part of this great celebration of nationhood, its birth. There was a renewed urgency, among the nuns at my convent school that we remain thankful to Great Britain, the mother country. I wondered, at the time, what I needed to be thankful for since all those who worked to feed me, to clothe me and give me a home were all black women

and men with whom I shared a greater commonality than with the nuns or the archbishop who arrived once a month to cane the boys.

I felt I needed to be thankful to the workers who built and repaired the roads and bridges after the rainy seasons when the tarmac was washed away and small rivers became torrential currents, taking the wooden structures that spanned their banks with them. I felt I needed to be thankful to the cane cutters on the sugar estates, those who worked in the paddy fields, the shop assistants, the police, the army, and civil servants. All of them people of colour and all working for our country. I look back now and feel angry at having been made to hold onto things that, in retrospect, diminished me (Ahmed, 2017).

I remember clearly getting ready for church in my white dress, white ribbon in my braids, white turned over ankle socks and white or black patent leather shoes, a scented handkerchief tucked into my puffed sleeves with some small change in a tiny pouch ready for Burns' Memorial Church on the corner of my street, just two houses away. We sang the hymns loudly in Sunday school, "*Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so…"* followed by a reiteration, in case our lived lives told/showed us otherwise that "*Black, yellow, brown or white, we are all equal in His sight.*"

However, our daily lives and those of my proud black father told a different story. Perhaps his wisdom, his experience that was never fully shared but, fleetingly, made reference to in my life with him, demonstrated that the bible, the scriptures, the bold preaching of men were all earthly lies. I cannot remember him ever entering a church in my lifetime although I still have a single photograph of him leaving one on his wedding day. He was a non-believer, his term, but having been brought up in a strict Methodist household; he maintained a distant respect for those who did.

In any form of colonisation in which power is exerted over a truth, that which allows one group in humanity the subjugation of another group to be enslaved, there will always be resistance. Foucault (1997) draws us to the relationship between power, truth and resistance and its inevitability. The political environment in the 1950s and 1960s in Guiana, when I was a child, exemplified this power relationship that was

taking place between Guiana, under the Crown, and the political clamour for independence from both the PPP (the People's Progressive Party) and the PNC (People's National Congress), the main political parties of the time: the former a Marxist, mainly Indian political party, and the latter a centrist, mainly African heritage party.

Simpson's article on Foucault allows one to theorise this phenomenon, as we experienced it, in the years before independence in 1966, thus:

> "…knowledge and power are contingent and reversible and, given the relational nature of power, there are always fractures and disjunctions within relationships that give rise to resistance(s), tensions, and instabilities. For Foucault, power is not only intertwined with the production and continuance of truth, but also resistance." (Simpson, 2012:103)

The struggle between the two political parties, as the nation was on the brink of independence, unleashed a racial tension and hatred, abusive power relations and a country that moved from one despot to another. The legacy of that era produced mass migration out of the country, particularly of young professionals. More Guyanese now live outside the country than within its shores.

My father recounts a meeting with the then Governor of Guiana, Sir Richard Luyt, and the British Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Fred(erick) Peart, in 1965; the year before Guiana's independence. At this meeting, they discussed the reclaimed land from the sea and the project of desalinisation to provide an extension to the paddy fields along the coast. My father was the only black speaker. His opening remarks were, "I have been asked to add some colour to this colourless meeting." He was always aware of who he was, where he had come from and his purpose, within a gathering of white folk. This is an example of what Bhabha calls "mimicry" which is never too far from the mocking tone, also employed by the coloniser and known to him, only too well. Bhabha refers to this as "at once a resemblance and a menace" (Bhabha, 1994:86).

These two men later became colleagues and they visited and corresponded, on a personal level, but I suspect, remained somewhat distanced by colonialism. There may have been a greater depth of understanding, through direct experience, of

what colonial rule does to the black man's soul. Sir Richard Luyt[11] later became Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, where he was born, and ruled against the apartheid directives within the university, maintaining an open policy on race. As I moved into international schooling, my father's words continued to be part of my inner discourse and have paved a way forward, as did all other black women and men before me.

British Guiana gained independence against a backdrop of a colonial empire that had, by that time, reaped the country of its natural resources. A consortium of companies which began in Scotland then to Canada and the USA had mined and processed Guyana's bauxite at MacKenzie[12] from the 1916 through its height of production during WWII and shortly afterwards until independence in 1966. DEMBA (Demerara Bauxite Company), on the East Coast Demerara, was reported to have one of the largest reserves of the ore in the world, at 350 million tons (guyana.org, 2021). Having exploited not only the mines, but also its workers who toiled a 10-hour day for six days a week with miserable wages and the country, DEMBA became nationalised as the price of the ore fell together with production. The newly independent state acquired a mine, which it had to buy, that was already producing ore to falling market prices and unable to process the mineral in country, continuing its dependency on foreign capital.

This is just one of the many examples in which the colonisers raped a country, its land and with it valuable natural resources in timber, particularly hard woods, gold, and ore. By the time we became an independent nation, we were more dependent than ever on the perceived benevolence of the 'motherland'. The efforts of the non-aligned nations could not counter the economic stronghold the USA, Canada and the Great Britain had on this small, but richly endowed country on the northern shores of South America.

[11] Sir Richard Luyt was in the forefront of South African vice-chancellors who fought to protect these freedoms. He also vigorously objected the banning orders and detention without trial of students and staff who protested against apartheid. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Luyt accessed 4 September, 2020

[12] MacKenzie changed its name to Lindon to honour the Prime Minister (later President) Lindon Forbes Sampson Burham. He ruled Guyana from 1964-1985, when he died whilst undergoing throat surgery)

This was the country of my childhood, on the one hand, one as full of hope and promise as I was when the Union Jack was lowered and the Guyana flag raised for the first time at midnight on 25/26 May 1966 and on the other, I perceived the rumblings of discontent within my family together with the political divisions and the scrambling for political power within the government of Forbes Burnham. The two were entwined, as I was to understand, when in less than two years I found myself far away. The shielded existence of my Anglican convent school, the freedom to roam my neighbourhood bare-footed and the security of family and friends began to crack.

Jan Carew, a Pan-Africanist writer in Guyana of the 1960s was a strong influence on the works being performed at the Guyana's Theatre Guild, of which I was a very young member and actor. In anticipation of our independence from Britain in 1966, a fervour of local talent was performed on stage, recitals given by Guyanese poets, visual arts exhibitions in the National Library, music and dance staged around the country spoke, for the first time, to the richness of our national heritage not hitherto recognised or supported. There was, also, a measure of pathos, in our thirst to try and encounter a past that had not been valued, recorded, or performed for us to feel that it belonged in our DNA. We scrambled, as a people, to recreate our history that had been brutally repressed. This diverse racial mix of displaced peoples was evident all along the coastal plains of the country. Carew recounts what he observed in the village of his birth along the banks of the Demerara River close to the capital, Georgetown.

The village of Agricola, originally consisting of 177 plots of land, surrounded the existing Plantation Rome (un.int/guyana, 2016). These plots of land had been bought, in 1834, by newly freed slaves following emancipation in the same year. The original street names of Agricola echo those of the plantation at the time and still remain today as Brutus, Remus, Romulus, Caesar, Cato, and Titus. The village was a successful experiment in social, economic, and cultural life of Georgetown's hinterland and so attracted people from around the county of Demerara and the region.

> "Agricola was a place of polyglot races – Creoles, Africans, Highland Scots, Amerindians, Sephardic Jews and English, Dutch, French, Maltese, and Azorean castaways. Then, there were Chinese, East Indians, Hindus, Shiite

> and orthodox Moslems." Carew was blessed, he claimed, with "the bloods of the most persecuted peoples on earth." (jancarew.com, 2021)

This mix of rich tapestry was being felt everywhere. Agricola was not an exception. Georgetown, the nation's capital, was living proof as you walked down Main Street under the shade of the flamboyant and albizia saman trees, there evident and among us, our lives woven into the colonial fabric of Guiana. Did we come together at independence in 1966 as one rich melting pot of ideas, religions, ethnicities, and language? No. Independence gave way to division, political struggles for power and hate, built on an indoctrination fuelled by 400 years of slavery, indentured labour, and colonial rule. This had been clearly orchestrated over many years and no effort was made to support good governance, a robust labour and health service and economic independence.

The cultural theorist Stuart Hall explores the idea of "hybridity" as in post-colonial discourse and cultural fragmentation (Hall, 2017). This was what defined me in my social sphere. Class, race, gender, and educational status were interwoven with colour, the depths and shades giving rise to an illusion of mobility within the hybrid culture. We all came from somewhere else but presumed ourselves to be of our birthplace. Later migration allowed for other identities to take root and yet others to be uprooted.

Hall remarks on the conception of blackness and some of the reasons why, in the 1940s and 1950s, when I finally came onto this world, the term had not only become stereotyped but also carried with it, deeply rooted, degrading connotations that altered my psyche and confusion around my own identity. As a child, I just could not understand why being a girl of colour could provoke such hostility, rage, violence, and complete dismissal or as I came to understand erasure through silence and invisibility. It was difficult for me to understand the perceptions of others, of me, and of themselves. The slogan in 1966 of *"One People, One Nation, One Destiny"* on our newly created coat of arms was not my experience of Guyana as it turned its back on Great Britain to try and forge a new identity. People of colour surrounded me, yet my very existence always seemed to be in question. This experience, in some environments created self-censorship and, in time, silence, inaction and isolation, the protective encasement so as not to be further wounded.

> "Blackness had been so remorselessly stereotyped – so degraded and abjected, its negativity so built into social attitudes, so embedded in common sense, so negatively reinforced at an unconscious level, so connected to unresolved psychic knots and defences – that it was perpetually visible. But at the same time, within the terms stipulated in the dominating social matrix, it remained unspeakable." (Hall, 2017:87)

At that time, I could not envisage ever leaving Guyana. It was my home. I had been awarded a full Guyana scholarship to Bishops' High School. At the time it was the most prestigious girls' state school in the country. Many of my teachers were women of colour, this new generation of Guyana scholars who had returned from the UK to contribute to this newly independent nation. I admired them for their intellect, their confidence, and their determination whilst the white wives of colonialists began returning to the motherland. During my time at Bishops', I was able to witness the first black Guyanese headmistress in its history. I felt my privilege and, with it, a desire to contribute and become a citizen of this new nation.

Global economic powers transformed the postcolonial Caribbean diaspora into the '*Rest'* when juxtaposed against the '*West'.* It is this relationship, so evident in the early 1970s, which continued to maintain the newly independent islands and mainland around the Caribbean subordinate to the global interests that began to shape the economy of the latter half of the 20th century. Language, ethnicity, and racial heritage lay bare what has remained constant in me. They have dominated my sense of self, however nationality remains blurred, uncertain and without roots, wherever I go. The Euro-American domination still holds true in independent countries that were once colonies like Guyana. The impact is not only felt on the economies and culture complicity of the dominated but also on identity.

When Burnham proclaimed the Cooperative Republic of Guyana on 23 February 1970, commemorating the Cuffy (Kofi) rebellion, which he called a revolution, his back turned against the importance of independence from Britain in May 1966. This represented a break with the past, a break with Britain and a date to remember the Afro-Guyanese experience of slavery. Later, in 1974, Walter Rodney, a leading intellectual in the Caribbean, the UK and East Africa, a Pan Africanist and Marxist, returned to Georgetown but was prevented from taking up his position at the University of Guyana. He formed the Working People's Alliance (WPA), a political party whose ideal was to politically unify a divided country and create social,

economic, and political reform that would move the country forward as one united front. Walter Rodney was assassinated in 1980 by agents of Forbes Burnham's PNC party before elections could be held. His assassination was finally corroborated, 34 years later, in the report of the Commission of Inquiry of 2014 into Walter Rodney's death (Abayomi, 2016).

Soon I would find myself on a boat, sailing towards Southampton docks, never to return to live permanently in my home. Like many Guyanese, nostalgia fills my memories and often distorts a reality hidden from children of the middle classes in Guyanese society. Again, like others before who had left Demerara, Berbice and Essequibo, the inhabited regions of my childhood, I try and put my dispersed life together which reveals itself to me in piecemeal discoveries among shared old photographs and half-whispered stories at gatherings; baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

The contradiction in needing to belong in the new place yet yearning for the familiar is a common experience with forced or self-selected migration. It is, however, when the inferiority imposed by the north on those from the south, through the exercise of the white gaze that culture, history, and one's very existence is put in the balance and its relevance and worth, judged.

As a Guyanese away from the homeland, slavery, colonialism, struggle, independence, and pseudo-freedom has left me grappling with the need to continue to understand the present, the silences, and the invisibility of a black woman in international educational leadership.

CHAPTER 4B: UNITED KINGDOM: STUDENT AND EARLY CAREER (1968-81)

This chapter explores a second phase, covering my move with my family from Guyana's post-independence to the moment I left the United Kingdom, after completing my first degree in education and culminating in the Brixton Riots of 1981.

I was a Guyanese until I came to school in London in 1968. I then became *an immigrant;* one of the unwanted Black immigrants from the West Indies. Being part of the West Indian diaspora of the 1970s and 1980s places all the dysfunctional aspects of migration at the forefront of one's dynamic sense of intellectual, and emotional self "the uneasy traveller between conflicting symbolic homes" (Hall, 2017:172). In my case these symbolic homes were many, as I later moved from one international school to another, from one continent to another and from one language to another. I became what Bhabha refers to as the "in-between", W.E.B Dubois as the person of "double consciousness" and Edward Said as, "out of place". I have never found my home or my place in any of the locations I have lived to date. It happened that 1968, although I did not know it at the time, was my final leaving from a home with which I still identify but no longer embraces me.

My maternal grandfather died in 1970 when I was 14 years old. I lived in his house with my extended family. In the same year my father left, one Friday afternoon that winter, and never returned to live with us. He left London, away from the lights of the West End, theatres, galleries, restaurants, and bars, also was home to the Department of Health and Social Security at the Elephant and Castle, where he worked as a junior clerk. Vestiges of WWII remained exposed in areas around Alexander Fleming House. Empty plots, where once whole streets had existed, remained having been bombed 30 years before; the wasteland of war within the city. The dirty underground maze of walkways, below the large circular roundabout, always smelled of urine, soot and poverty. Buskers stood with their guitar cases open, hoping for some coins. The open offices of Georgetown in the Ministry of Agriculture where he was Permanent Secretary, the warmth and light of old colonial wooden buildings, whitewashed against the red gravel driveways, lined with

oleander and bougainvillea bushes were now a long way away. He was defeated. Migration to the United Kingdom was a harsh reality for many and for my father, almost 60 years old and at the peak of his career, this was the last crushing blow. His job, a few stops away on the Northern Line Tube, ate away at his sense of self, and left nothing more to give. He took to a life away from his family and friends, living in Rome and returning occasionally for Test cricket and home cooked Guyanese meals that my mother prepared for him on sporadic visits.

A few years later, a great aunt came to visit our home from West Virginia, USA to a pay her respects to my grandmother on the loss of her husband. She was born in the USA and had met my great uncle after World War I. He was also a doctor and had served in the US Air Force. On his return, as a demobilised high-ranking officer to his home in Virginia, he was met with the same racial segregation he had experienced before 1914 but foreign to him in his country of birth, British Guiana. Like some bright young men at the turn of the 19th century in the British colonial Caribbean, his parents had made enough money as shopkeepers and entrepreneurs to pay for their two sons to study medicine, one in Edinburgh and the other who joined the US Air Force and went through his medical training there. Both brothers had married, one a white Scottish woman, divorced with a child from her first marriage, the second a black woman from the South. However, it was not until the 1967, just before my grandfather's death, that the criminality of interracial marriage was over-ruled in Virginia. I was shocked, therefore, to learn at age 14, that the slavery laws in the USA, still in place and upheld during my lifetime, had affected the possibility of two brothers being reunited in my great uncle's home in West Virginia.

The legacy of slavery entered the room that day, sat down with us and played around with our psyche. I felt physical pain in thinking of all my family before me, all the women and men, their children who remain separate and distanced, denigrated, and oppressed by laws that continue to allow the use of force, power, and race to subjugate one over another.

Whilst still at school, I continued to live in my grandparents' home and I volunteered to work with disaffected black youth who were, in the main, boys in an evening supplementary school project. I became angry, confused, hurt, and more resolved

to try and understand racism as it affected us all in a plethora of ways and was experienced in its multiple facets within the black community of South London.

> **"**It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity… two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." Dubois (1903:2)

Racial trauma has long-term effects, and these are physical, psychological or both (Wise-Rowe, 2020). The impact is felt consciously, subconsciously, or unconsciously along with shame. It comes in multiple forms but remains as such. One example of this occurred on my way home from school. In my mind I felt anger but also disbelief. I questioned – is this really happening to me? The physical stain at being spat at in the intersection of a major road, outside my home in London and told to "go back home" is just one example of the many aggressions felt during my years at school, university and as a newly qualified teacher. No car stopped. No one noticed. No one asked. At that moment, I became invisible. It was years before I could admit to my family what had occurred and over half a century before I document this incident here. This is just one of the countless racially ignited acts experienced in life. When this is added to those of my family, those I have come to love, those of my race, my ancestors, a whole people, the trauma runs deep and the wounds remain, surfacing with each recount of racial abuse. These acts of physical and emotional aggressions have accumulated over decades.

> "The sin of racism affects us severely and deeply, yet we remain silent or in denial, a response we have learned from our ancestors for whom silence meant survival." (Wise-Rowe, 2020:10)

In reaching back into the past I have realised how often I have questioned my worthiness of the positions I held, my intellectual capacity and moreover, my right to be there. At the all girls' grammar I attended in London, undermining was constant. When I complained about the school dinners, I was told that was what English people eat. When I wanted to follow science subjects at "A" level in order to pursue a career in zoology, the response was that it might be better to follow a career in nursing, more fitting to people 'like you'. When promoted into a higher-level mathematics class, I was accused of cheating after the results of the first test were

published. How could I possibly have achieved the score I received? When I questioned a narrative on my report card, I was told that I shouldn't be concerned about that, even if it was a mistake, it really would not matter in the end. At break time my short "afro" hair was ridiculed, pulled, yanked from its roots in skirmishes on the schoolyard. These interchanges always peppered with racists insults; the micro-aggressions were endless.

As the only black student during my time in secondary school, together with my only school friend of Chinese heritage, we bonded politically and culturally. Although born on opposites sides of the globe, we shared cultural similarities in our upbringing and ideas around the value of education. She was an avid reader of Gramsci, Marx, Engels and the Bible, as an historical novel, whilst I read James Baldwin, Richard Wright, WEB Dubois, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Frantz Fanon and Albert Camus. But I also enjoyed the Bronte sisters, Mary Shelley and e.e. cummings. We shared a love of language but not of music. The Supremes, Ike and Tina Turner, the Marvelettes, Marvin Gaye and Aretha Franklin accompanied me when I was supposed to be studying. My school friend went on to become a barrister, having been told, at school, that she was too much of a rebel to "fit in" anywhere. We met 30 years later in London, and surmised that she probably went into law, initially, just to prove our teachers wrong. In later life, she stepped down from the Bar and now provides free legal advice for those who are unable to afford it in Southeast London.

School did not provide me with either the intellectual challenge nor the social environment for me to grow and understand the power and warmth I felt in my own home, among the women and men in my life, their friends, and our relationships. I did not encounter myself at school so looked elsewhere for a space in which I could belong. I found it in the theatre. The group met quite a long way from my home, and I had to travel back late at night alone on the over-rail train into London. One winter evening, arriving late at the station and just as the whistle blew, I got into a single carriage. At the following station an older black man stepped into the carriage and closed the door as the train left the platform. There were no other stops until we slowly crawled into Waterloo station. The man opened the door for me to step out after him. As I got off the train, our eyes met and he said, "Girl child, never get into one of these carriages alone again." In 1972 in the United Kingdom, I knew exactly

what he meant. There was no need for any further explanation. I recognised my grave mistake in not assessing the potential danger. I have always been thankful for the lesson.

Whilst at school, I met the editor of Longman Caribbean at the Spanish Institute where we were both learning the language, towards the end of Franco's long rule as the Western European dictator of the time. She gave me a copy of *The Sun's Eye: West Indian Writing for Young Readers* that had been published in 1968 (Walmsley, 1968). I devoured the small book that evening and felt immediately transported back to Guyana, where I had left only a few years earlier. It was the first time, in Britain, that I had met someone outside of my own family and circle of close friends, who saw me, recognised me, and gifted me something that spoke to me. I still have the signed copy.

Like many other young black women and men, I felt rage, insult, vulnerability, and a huge sense of naivety for having even thought that living in London could have been different. That somehow, I could be seen as an equal. The children's story books I had read by authors like Enid Blyton, A.A. Milne, Kenneth Grahame, and Beatrix Potter where children who looked like me were totally absent, and the sketched character of the friendly policeman on his beat, always there to help a passer-by, was the lie I had swallowed as a little girl growing up in Georgetown, British Guiana. The reality, as a teenager and young adult told a very different truth.

The SUS[13] laws, re-enacted from *section 4* of the *Vagrancy Act of 1824*, not only allowed, but endorsed, the police in the UK to stop and search on "suspicion" (UK Parliament, 1824). My first conscious experience of racial profiling by the British police erased a childish notion I entertained at the time. I was later to have many encounters with the police on the streets of London. The National Union of Teachers' strike, the miners' strike, protest against the SUS laws, protests against the new immigration laws and the continued and increasing harassment by the Metropolitan Police.

[13] Sus Laws: UK slang for 'suspected person'. This allowed the police to stop, search and arrest solely on the suspicion of being in breach of section 4 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act.

During the entrance interview for Goldsmiths' College, where I studied for my teaching certificate, I was refused my first two options, English, and Geography, and given PE as a main subject, "because you have the build and such long legs", I was told on inquiry. I refused the offer and asked to speak to A.V. Kelly, who was then Dean of Education at the time. Vic Kelly spent some time interviewing me and said I would have to consult with the head of the geography department although he saw no reason why I shouldn't at least see what I thought of the course during the first year. What followed was my introduction to life at undergraduate level at university. Few times have I been received with such a condescending tone, in a hallway between two offices, by an academic in a British university. I was told by the then Head of Department that I didn't understand the rigour required, that I would be among students of secondary education, that I was wasting her time even asking and that I would have to prove myself beyond any doubt that I was capable. I made it my business to become the very best student I could be and passed the course with merit.

I gloated with pride as my first professor of geopolitics and economic geography, lauded the merits of education in British Guiana, where he had visited earlier in his career. He not only knew my country personally but had positive things to say about its schooling. He handed out cigarettes and peppermints during our term exams but was later given his letter of thanks and with early retirement when Goldsmiths' no longer offered a certificate programme in education. The teacher training colleges were amalgamated into the university and lecturers on the B.Ed. programme without university degrees were no longer required, despite their decades of teaching, pedagogical experience and development of theory and practice in curriculum development together with published textbooks and peer-reviewed articles.

The white gaze, in which anything I thought, any action I performed or any path I sought to carve out for myself was frequently tempered with spoken comments or gestures denying the possibility of success. *It* followed me through university and into my first teaching position on Hackney Downs, in the East End of London; a racially volatile community in the late 1970s. The school was in a catchment area in a predominately poor white neighbourhood of high unemployment in Hackney. The racial, ethnic and gender divides in these communities was palpable.

Unemployment, crime, poverty, incarceration, homelessness, and displacement, coupled with the growing tensions from the effects of the new immigration laws and the way they played out in the press, heightened the differences people of colour felt at all levels of institutional relations. As an educated, middle class, homeowner, employed by the London County Council's education department in a tenured position I was acutely aware of the racism and the gender biased society I lived in. I felt marginalised at best but more often, threatened, and vulnerable.

These were difficult times for a young black woman in a white racist part of town. However, I concede that mine was infinitely safer than that of a poor black woman without formal education and unemployed with perhaps a young family to support. The National Front was never far away and lurked even within my classroom as I found out one day when the door burst open and three skinhead[14] lads entered. They accused me of having touched their brother, a 7-year-old, who at the time was cowering in a corner of the classroom. I would have to pay as they shouted and approached, threatening to "*fucking kill*" me. The students, a multinational mix from many corners of the world, could not believe what was happening. It may have mirrored the lives of some, but school was supposed to be a safe place. The headmaster, realising that the youth had come onto the school premises, interrupted the classroom, and promptly accompanied them off and out onto the street below. The head decided from that day onwards that he would walk with me to the bus stop at the end of each day. There was no further comment nor any follow up. Both the incident and I were silenced in the same moment. I continued to teach the little boy and my class continued to fear another such threatening situation. The white gaze as often referred to by Toni Morrison as that through which white folk judge those of colour. It is the touchstone from which some seek to compare all others that are not white. Black folks' art becomes craft, our religion becomes witchcraft, the great thinkers and philosophers becomes folklore and medicine becomes black magic. However, the white gaze was soon no longer metaphorical, it was literal, and my safety depended on the protection the head of school, this ex-army officer who had fought in Aden during WWII, could give me.

[14] White power skinheads were a group of racist, neo-nazis , mainly located in the East End of London in the late 1970s. Many had affiliations to the National Front and the ideals of Enoch Powell and the conservative party.

My probationary years, as a newly qualified teacher in Hackney were both a wonderful opportunity to learn and grow into the profession and a daily battle in the classroom, the hallways, on the playground and on lunch duty. The worst of all, occurred in the staff room. As the only black woman in the school, I was relieved when a supply teacher came to work there briefly in my second year. We had a different discourse and she too, surprisingly for me, was also a Guyanese. We didn't openly talk about the racism as it operated in the school. We both had already learned to silence ourselves in their company. We enjoyed rich and fulfilling personal lives outside the institution.

In 1979 there was still the freedom within the classroom to develop curriculum, our own units of study and create our own resources. I made sure that my students' own lives, all of them, were reflected in the thinking and learning we engaged in, every day. The white gaze remained, and I felt I always had to prove myself above and beyond everyone else who was going through their probationary year in the borough. As newly qualified teachers we met once a week, off site, at the Teachers' Centre in Hackney to exchange experiences and collect resources for our teaching practice. I was not in competition with the others. I only wanted to be seen for who I was, a dedicated learner who was eager to gain some form of mentorship and support. I was, however, unable to flick the white gaze off my shoulder as the great Toni Morrison has done through her own writing.

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison was first published within the decade I started teaching. It was one of the 'required' reading texts in OWAAD[15], coming out of the USA from black female writers who were not silent about the effects of slavery and racism on women, their children, and men. It was a revelation for me to read the depths motherly love could reach, the way society of the southern states attempts to dehumanise the spirit and the body, and the importance of seeing myself in the literature I read, so as not continue to be unseen and unheard. The wave of brave black women writers, the closeness I felt to the black liberation movements around the globe and the urgency for self-reliance and further exploration of Third World feminism, was, in one, a balm and abrasion (Herr, 2014).

[15] OWAAD : Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent.

My participation in OWAAD exemplified, for me, the huge chasm between the white feminist movement and the black women's movement. Ours was not an anti-male movement. In fact, we welcomed and depended on our brothers to be supportive of, and engage with, our own political, social, and gendered lives alongside the struggle we commonly faced in the world.

The work of W.E.B. DuBois, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin, on a second reading, brought new meaning to me. I was intrigued and looked on in admiration of the Black Panther Movement in the USA and held a reverence for Angela Davis. I learnt about Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X anew as a mature and more experienced reader. I re-encountered the work of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and C. L. R. James but I was missing something; language and stories that spoke to me and my Caribbean/Guyanese experience or, at least, those around me as migrants to the UK. So, I entered into the poetry of Derek Walcott, Louise Bennett, Andrew Salkey, A.J. Seymore and Grace Nichols. I could remember the flamboyant and jacaranda trees, I could smell the rotting fruit and I could revisit the language and its cadence, the sights and sounds of my childhood, many years previously. John Agard, Beryl Gilroy and Paule Marshall all provided a new template that was very different from that with which I had engaged with Wordsworth, Shelley, Shakespeare, and Milton at school. My 'afro' grew and has changed little over the last five decades. Angela Davis remains for me the fiery, articulate and hugely intelligent woman I saw on the cover of her seminal work, *Women, Race and Class*. She continues to break ground in the USA and has never compromised in the political struggle. I still have the same copy I bought then. It has travelled with me over three continents and six countries and four decades since it was first published in 1981. Davis gave me a theoretical understanding of racism and its criminality and has often been the touchstone I seek to inspire me in the work that I do. She has a gentle strength, a warm laugh and a generous spirit that continues to astound me.

Through the identification of the intersectionality of gender, race, and class in the black women's groups of the 1970s and 1980s in the UK, we were able to embrace sisterhood and a presence within the trade union, writers' union, and other working-class groups, including religious groups with a presence and voice that was different from those represented by white feminist groups in the mainstream press, literature,

social and economic spheres. However, it was Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen,* that provided the first work of literature, based on Emecheta's life in the UK, that opened up a new window on the lives of black women in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, and mirrored the lives of the black women I worked and lived with in London. It was clear to me that our struggles were different from those of the white feminist movement of the time, represented in magazines like *Spare Rib*, *Cat Call*, *Women's Report* and *Revolutionary and Radical Feminists*. These 1970s women's collective magazines were very different from OWAAD's Newsletter *Fowaad*, produced by the black women's collective. The movement became more urgent and compellingly important for me.

The growing street violence and brutality in the treatment of black youth by the police and white neo-fascist inspired movements, fuelled by the discourse of prominent politicians of the far right, the conservative press culminated in the police riots of the early 1980s in Brixton and Southall in London, Handsworth in Birmingham, Chapeltown in Leeds, Toxteth in Liverpool, and St. Paul's in Bristol.

The *Scarman Report of 1981,* which was commissioned by the then Home Secretary, William Whitelaw, concluded that the Metropolitan police was institutionally racist and made a series of recommendations that were, mostly, ignored. Margaret Thatcher, then Prime Minister, dismissed the findings of the Report in which unemployment and racism were found to be prime factors contributing to the violence that erupted among police and the younger black urban population suffering 55% unemployment in Brixton in 1981. Furthermore, Thatcher denounced the black community by issuing a statement to the press stating that "nothing, but nothing justifies what happened" and dismissed the evidence found in the report.

If I had been in any doubt of who I was or where I was from, it all that became irrelevant as the escalator at Brixton tube station slowly made its way to the surface and I was met with the bared teeth of police dogs, batons, and riot gear. This was late April of 1981.

I resigned from my tenured position at the end of the month from the Primary School I was working in and had left the country by June of 1981. I have never

returned to live permanently in the UK since, bar short periods of postgraduate study in the 1990s. This marked a turning point for me, a watershed in my life. Bob Marley died the year I left the Britain and his *Redemption Song* on the album *Uprising* was as true then as it is now. I wasn't sure how I would follow the lines of the song but I knew I had to try.

> "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds". (Marley, 1980)

It was a time of huge uprisings, the battlefields were blazing, and black women and men were bleeding and dying on the streets and in the prisons in the UK, in France, in Belgium and across the Atlantic in the USA. Everywhere, the resistance of people of colour in Africa, Asia, the USA, the Caribbean and Latin America was being felt. The horrors of Pol Pot in Cambodia and his final downfall in 1979, the end to of the Shah of Iran also marked the rise of the Ayatollah Khomeini, the Polish Pope John Paul II, Mikhail Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher, and Ronald Regan. Latin America was in turmoil as the dictators used ever more sophisticated means of torture, learned from the military in the USA and Israel before their export to Central America and countries of the South America.

In the rise of black female voices, through protests, literature, music, and media, so my own voice fell silent, and my thoughts turned inwards, and the practice of erasure took root in my professional life and resilience and vulnerability in my personal life.

I did not know it at the time, but my years in London prepared me for the experiences lived in Santiago, Chile within the same decade. I knew in an instance that, like many of my working class 7-year-old students of all ethnicities, race, and colour, where I was a young teacher in the East End of London, we were all second-class citizens, marginal, excluded and definitively, other. I did not acknowledge my own avoidance, my own fear of continuing to face teaching in a working-class British state school, being surrounded by colleagues with whom I shared no political history or common ideals. Nor did I acknowledge my own struggle. It was internal. At the time, it seemed easier to stand beside those who were unlike me in their political history, ethnicity, and language. I was quickly

embraced as a different other; the black sister, the political ally, the foreigner who, because of my colour, could surely understand, empathise and be compassionate.

CHAPTER 4C: INTERNATIONAL CAREER IN SCHOOLS AND BEYOND (1981-2010)

This third phase centres on my professional career as I moved from the role of classroom teacher into leadership positions in international schools in Chile, Togo, Cuba, Ecuador, and Luxembourg. I not only lived and worked in various countries of the world but also adopted the Spanish language in my social and family life, further separating my professional and personal life. With the exception of a short stay in Togo, and then in Luxembourg, in which French was my language outside of school, Spanish predominated and masked my blackness and my heritage whilst I adopted the culture and social norms of my environment, allowing me to enter into the inner circle of international school leadership. This further rendered me invisible and silent as a black feminist.

The United Kingdom I had left of the 1980s was engulfed in race riots and Black Britain and the Black British were there to stay. There was to be no “return”. Many of the children and young people in schools had been born in Britain and most had never set foot in the Caribbean or West Indies as it was referred to at the time. They had and still have as much right to be in Britain as anyone else. This was an uneasy and inequitable co-habitation.

Across the Atlantic and in the then referred to Third World, there was little possibility of highly qualified young teachers making their way into international schools. Assimilation into the white British, US or Canadian pedagogy abroad was the route few took or were even given the possibility of choice. There was no mention of diversity, inclusion and the benefits of a leadership team that reflects the multi-ethnic, racial, and gendered classrooms of the time. The 1980s and 90s may have been post-imperial but they certainly did not look or feel like post-colonial times in international education for this black woman teaching in schools. “Diversity” denotes and is a polite word for ‘difference’ and different I felt (Hall, 2017:196).

After four years working in Ecuador on various development programmes that included women’s health and education I boarded a plane, with all the belongings I

could carry and my 5-month-old baby strapped to my chest, south to Santiago, Chile to join my husband. He had gone back to Chile, briefly in early 1986 to visit his mother and pave the way for him to return and for us to set up a home there, as a family. We had recently had a child and I wanted a home in which to raise her. Guyana did not seem to be an option at the time, I did not want to return to London and there were, seemingly, interesting openings towards a return to democracy in Chile. As a young family we wanted to be part of this struggle for change. Our initial plans were thwarted. My husband on trying to leave Chile, for us to move back with our family, was prevented from doing so since there was an order posted at the borders for his immediate arrest. There was only one other possibility, that I enter Chile and work as a teacher whilst we, collectively, contributed to the struggle. The plan was a lot easier than the reality of life and work as a black educator in a country ruled by a military dictator under General Augusto Pinochet in his German fashioned army uniform.

I had only a notion of what international education was, and as an English language teacher, I thought this would be a way of supporting my family whilst we all worked towards a return to a semblance of normality; a 'normality' which was delayed four more very brutal years to the end of Pinochet's rule. In the meantime, I decided to look into the possibilities international schools in Santiago could offer and what followed was the beginning of a career that has lasted to date and has now occupied more than 30 years of my life.

My introduction to international schooling, life, and leadership in this unique niche in education began very differently from the majority in leadership positions and particularly those who are black and female. Chile, Santiago and more specifically, '*la Pintana'* a sprawling shantytown on the outskirts of the city was my introduction.

It was along this same long road I travelled every day to school, stretching 25 km from the south, through the poorest areas of the capital city's periphery, that I would often witness the brutality of the dictatorship. Men stripped down to their underpants in the cold winter mornings before the sun was up, searched, beaten and humiliated spread-eagled along the soccer field fences by uniformed and armed special forces, their faces covered in boot wax so that they could not later be identified. At other times men and women would be lined up against the walls in presumed

identification searches as my bus slowly drove past, packed with construction workers, gardeners, and maids, all destined for the city and uptown Santiago.

At times, standing on the last step into the vehicle holding on to a rail until the bus emptied as we got nearer the city, I could get a very close look at the young faces of those whose work it was to maintain the fear and uncertainty that seeped into the lives of many Chileans, every day. This was the backdrop, the staged scenery, on my way to teach at a British private school located two hours from my home. There were many journeys to and from school, through the dirt and poverty, when I thought my colour had protected me from the overwhelming horror that living in Chile during Pinochet's final years of desperation, and using every means available to him to intimidate, to humiliate and to subjugate. My race and accent on the very rare occasions when I spoke on these journeys, separated me from what I lived, each day.

My difference meant that somehow my fellow passengers knew that I posed no threat, I was just there, holding on just as they were. Occasionally I was given an inside space which further protected me. The smell of the *poblaciones callampas*[16] was everywhere. It seeped into my coat, my hair, and my hands. I also felt strengthened and enclosed in this environment with its sense of purpose that someday this would be different, and I would not feel as alone, as I always felt when I rode those buses up and down the Santa Rosa Avenue to and from my small dwelling with its outside toilet and shower. During the years I lived in this shantytown I was known as "*la compañera Patricia*"; Patricia, the comrade. I was not affiliated to any political party but supported my husband, a paid-up member of Allende's socialist party and many millions of other Chileans who demanded an urgent return to democracy.

Unlike my experience among the very poor in Chile where I felt protected, accepted and to some extent, ignored, that of teacher/librarian to the children of the very wealthy, I was never accepted and always treated with some suspicion; purposefully and openly ignored. There were few exceptions. One significant difference came from my head of department who gave me the job and took a chance on this English-speaking black woman who turned up at the school, seeking

[16] *poblaciones callampas*: mushrooming shanty-towns

employment. He was a very private man who welcomed me into the group and allowed me the freedom to teach using materials and resources without question. There was an unspoken complicity between us as I later learned of his affiliation to the growing movement of citizens on the left demanding a return to democracy. There was always, however a self-imposed silence around one's political affiliation, ever mindful of the '*gusanos*'[17] who were always close by and would denounce you to the police if they had an axe to grind. It will take more than the generations who lived through these brutal years to loosen the guard. As in all dictatorships, one carefully navigates the language, nuances, and references to remain safe before you enter into some semblance of confidence with another.

I maintained a false address, since I lived in a shantytown on the 'wrong' side of town and in an area that was openly resistant against Pinochet's dictatorship. With my false address I created a family and group of friends that did not exist in order to protect my own family and particularly my husband who was in hiding at the time. I was teaching in a school where my students were the sons and daughters of high-ranking officials of the *Junta* – the Chilean military government. I would never have got the job I desperately needed support my family if I had revealed who I was and where I lived. I had to secure continued employment in order to survive.

In the years I lived this double life, only one colleague ever came to my home, and she was the only other person of colour in the school. She came from Portuguese colonised Goa and without ever speaking openly about our experiences as women of colour in this classist and racist environment at the time, our stories remained untold to each other for many years. We accepted each other and there was an unspoken support that was felt in kind. We talked about our childhoods, lived in different but connected worlds through the experience of colonial rule, even after India's independence in 1947 and Guyana's nineteen years later. Our respective age differences meant that we shared a common understanding of the complexities involved in the transitions from colonial rule to independence in our countries of birth and the multiple ways we still maintain vestiges of this period and our own contradictions. Finding ourselves in Chile during the mid-1980s was strangely unifying.

[17] Those who informed on people and activities viewed counter to Pinochet and the dictatorship. *Gusanos* translates as *worms* in English.

I lived the final years of Pinochet's dictatorship through the transition to democracy in 1990. There were numerous times my double life would force me to make choices that at the time seemed so easy and without question. I would later be forced to reckon with myself. One such moment came in 1989, unexpectedly, in which my decision was to be seen and heard.

I did not plan to stand face to face in front of a tight wall carabineros[18] in the Plaza de Armas in Santiago, when a silent group from the Movimiento Sebastian Acevedo[19] filled the fountains of the main square with red dye in homage to all those who had died under torture during the dictatorship. Enraged, I was tired of seeing many, and most particularly myself, become accustomed to the protests of those brave enough to face water cannon, tear gas, possible arrest, brutality and even assassination, and remain silent. I had participated in many protests, met my husband clandestinely, since he was in hiding in a safe place at the time. I had pasted pamphlets on the walls of the city during curfew in the middle of the night, attended the funerals of those assassinated on 8 September 1986 by the secret police (CNI)[20]. José Carrasco, a prominent journalist, was among four political activists who were removed at dawn from their homes. José was found with 14 gunshot wounds, 12 of them in his head. My husband assumed his position on the Metropolitan Journalists Union following José's assassination and I continued my double life.

Still teaching at an international school in Santiago, living in the main Plaza de Armas, married to a political journalist who was writing and reading the news for a clandestine radio station at the time, I came face to face with what, for me, was the enemy. There is a moment when enough is no longer possible. I shouted and screamed and voiced my rage. It was time to stop shedding the blood of innocent

[18] *carabineros* are the Chilean police*,* established in 1927 to maintain order and safety within Chilean territory. The name is derived from the gun they carried, *the carabina*.

[19] The Sebastian Acevedo Movement Against Torture was a movement established in 1983, in honour of Sebastian Acevedo, to defend the physical and psychological integrity of prisoners detained and tortured under the military dictatorship in Chile (1973-1990)

[20] CNI: *Centro Nacional de Informaciones* –The National Information Centre – political police responsible for the persecution, investiagion, capture, torture and murder during the military dictatorship of General Pinochet.

victims. In an instant I knew I could have been arrested and perhaps even expelled from Chile. I was a mother, a daughter, a sister, and a wife. I was black and easily recognisable. Nothing happened, I was ordered to move on. I stood my ground and the police and the protesters moved away. Everyone moved on. The water fountain returned transparent within a few hours and the busy Plaza de Armas continued alive, almost immediately, to its buzz of shoppers, visitors, lovers, and people gazers of a typical Saturday afternoon.

I finally walked across the open space, up to our apartment and cried at the dining room table at the loss of those I did not know and my own stupidity in thinking I could make a difference to anything or anyone, except perhaps, myself. I was also angry with myself for possibly endangering others I love and am grateful that did not happen. I did not know of Sebastian Acevedo[21] at that time, nor did I know of his two children Galo and Maria Candelaria. Over 30 years have passed, but I remember the moment clearly and the emotion I felt. However, as I look back at that visible and vocal 33-year-old, I wonder at the silence and invisibility that returned as if from a distance. When I embarked on this thesis, I came to realise what I have ceased to be. There are moments when I see myself in a backward glance, and admire the courage, strength, and tenacity I had to face the challenges life threw my way and those I reached out to grasp.

At the age of 40, I decided to study for a postgraduate degree in education. As a mother, wife, and daughter in my family of four, I was the prime economic support. I found funding for my studies away from Chile and become financially responsible for two homes, by cashing in my pension fund and through a small grant I received from the British Council in Chile. In part fulfilment of that degree, I worked on several ideas, one of which was to use Richard Adam's *Watership Down* as an analogy of Pinochet's dictatorship in teaching English to young learners within the setting of a British international school in Santiago, Chile. In retrospect it was a bold move, but I did not think so at the time, writing a series of lesson plans, drawing

[21] Sebastian Acevedo died on 11 November 1983, by self-immolation suicide, in protest of the arrest and disappearance of his two children. Before his death, his daughter was momentarily released to see her father in hospital, he died hours later. Acevedo's son remained detained, and his daughter was re-arrested. 15,000 people attended his funeral in Concepcion, during General Pinochet's dictatorship.

parallels and connectives between the social organisation of the rabbits in *Watership Down*, the elements of flight, restraints, torture, freedom, joy, despair, hope through territorial transitions, solitude, and community. I imagined the discussions around the boundaries, imposed in Chile at that time, of gender, race, language, enclosed and open spaces that were natural and fabricated.

This period of intense work, produced in a reduced time frame and completely away from a life I had grown into, back into my own language environment creating an unfamiliar familiarity of residential university life, gave me the space to explore some of who I had become. I completed the MA in 8 months whilst working part-time as a supply teacher in a local education authority in the Midlands and embarked on a PhD, which I later abandoned.

Returning to Chile I was tired of being the only black female in predominately white Anglo-international school leadership. I began thinking about what had led me to my present juncture in my professional and personal life. I was confused and lost. It seemed to me that I had traded one colonial upbringing in Guiana for another neo-colonial professional life in Chile. I wanted to understand more about the choices made and the possibilities over the next 25 years of my professional life, before retirement. I decided to leave Santiago, leave Chile, and continue to support my family from a different part of the world. I arrived in Havana one very hot evening. The skies opened to a torrential tropical downpour. The earth seemed to reach into my nostrils and the sound of the tropics filtered through my ears. I felt I had come home.

Living in Cuba, for several years, was a very different experience. One aspect of my life in Havana that brought me joy was my learning and engagement in being an audience. I had not realised my ignorance and the western capitalist experience of what it means to be an audience at any performance but more specifically that of classical ballet, opera, music, and theatre. The distance between the stage and the audience was felt and respected, not only in its physical sense but also emotionally. My experience had always been of an exterior control that is often a performance in itself; dress, seating, applause, drinks at the interim, people-gazing, programmes, and an overall hushed silence as one moves around the theatre. Havana was to change this.

For three years, I transported groups of women, usually older than I, to the theatre on a weekly basis. This was in exchange for a seat at the Gran Teatro de La Habana*,* in Havana. As I entered the imposing entrance and walked towards the wide marble staircase, I became a '*Cubana'.* My Cuban friends taught me how to look for subtle movements of the ballet dancers and appreciate the levels of difficulty in their interpretation through the exacting choreography, I learned to anticipate the pause, the force, the depth of emotion in the music performed on stage and when movement, music and the voice came together in the opera I was often moved to tears. I was introduced to a connoisseurship from those who truly understand beauty, virtuosity, exactitude, joy, pain and the emotional response to western classical dance, theatre, and music that I could never repay. As the driver of a VW 13-seater van in Havana, with women friends who had access to the greatest musicians, ballet dancers and opera singers alive in the world at that time, I too became the Cuban who entered the Grand Theatre, at the equivalent of about 2 cents to the US dollar per seat.

One Saturday afternoon I took the ferry from the Muelle de la Luz, very close to the Plaza de San Francisco in Old Havana, across the bay to Regla. The ferry sits low in the water, paint peeling, rust, and the sound of creaking boards echo Alejandro Carpentier's *Ecué-Yamba-O,* his first novel and master study on Afro-Cuban life in which he describes the crossing as "the magic carpet leading to Regla" (Carpentier, 2018). My experience also brings to mind the magic-realism of the late Gabriel Garcia-Marquez as the five-minute boat ride transported me into an unexpected emotional experience in which the spectator and member of the audience I had previously experienced in the Theatre of La Habana, became that of a child returning to a place that had birthed my mothers of centuries before.

I walked through the streets of Regla to find the *babalowo,* the priest of the *orishas* or divinities, to try and encounter my own. Hundreds of *orishas* exist in West Africa but about twenty can be found in Cuba. They established themselves on the island when brought from West Africa through the middle passage to the Americas. My orisha, I was told would protect and guide me through life's troubling waters. The orishas are more commonly grouped into the practice of Santería as they became syncretized with the Roman Catholic saints. This connection to the Africa of my

ancestors through the orisha brought me closer to a restoration and balm that has been my quest as a woman of African origin. Through a series of rituals, offerings, chants, and prayers by candlelight in a small, cool, shuttered room near a low alter, the *babalowa* became the conduit between past to present. Bells, shakers, and his gentle touch connected me to *Oshún,* my orisha, that of love and laughter. What remains from those few hours in Regla, are a peacock feather, some small rocks from the riverbed and a mirror, the symbols of my orisha*, Oshún.* For a few moments, then, I was able to reach a sense of place and belonging, beyond that of my birth.

I was privileged to experience an overwhelming sense of joy that I have not known since. As I get older, having women friends who have lived longer becomes more complex and difficult to maintain. As a black woman in international education, a whole new world opened to me in my years on the island and I embraced it with both arms, held it close and squeezed hard. My leaving the island in July 2006 was one of my most difficult partings.

In exploring my own experience, I question if the cultural purpose of international schools mirrors that of politically correct, white middle-class households. If this was the case, does a knowledgeable, passionate, strong black female leader find this culture too difficult to penetrate without having to compromise – I have often asked myself this in relation to my own silence.

My professional years in international schools have transpired in the aftermath of independence and within the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, within schools that have oftentimes reflected my own past education and are almost anachronistic. They could be, however, the modern diaspora, Hall's 'emergent space of inquiry'

> "… by which cultural formations co-exist and interconnect, drawing one from another, which is one of the consequences when peoples with very varied histories, cultures, languages, religions, resources, access to power and wealth are obliged by migration to occupy the same space as those very different from themselves, and sometimes, to make a common life together" (Hall 2017:143)

Half a century later, my experience in international schools resonates as an anachronism as I, too, enter a staff meeting or social gathering, walk through a

crowd of students with their parents or attend a Board meeting, confidently invisible, bracing myself against the hidden gazes even when no hostility was intended, waiting to hear someone call my name, to include me, acknowledge my existence.

The recognition of English language as a driving force for liberal education of the masses was not without its allies in the missionary schools established in all the colonies at the dawn of the 20th century. The establishment of English as the cannon for study immediately placed music, oral stories, and other expressions of unwritten literature and art practiced by the colonised in an inferior and debased place. Edward Said has written extensively on the influence of the English language and the colony schools set up throughout the 1900s in all the areas of the British Empire, to school the local elite in the ways of the English to become, "more English than the English", a phrase commonly heard throughout the Caribbean and beyond. Ashcroft, Griffins and Tiffin refer to Said thus:

> "This was a process in Said's terms, of conscious affiliation proceeding under the guise of filiation (Said, 1984), that is, a mimicry of the centre proceeding from a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed. It caused those from the periphery to immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become 'more English than the English'." (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2003)

However, I have found myself to be in the world of international schooling but not of that world; not an insider nor an equal participant or true protagonist. It remains a new form of colonialism, that of the mind. The environment of international schools is one that, indirectly, excludes those of colour but does at the same time, as Stuart Hall's experience, feel the *familiar stranger* as he felt during his time at Oxford. He describes the elements of this culture as:

> "…these things were embedded as much in the minutiae of daily life, in facial expressions or in body language, in what was left unsaid, as they were in what was spoken. They were evidence of the tacit knowledges which underpin cultural practices, the shared codes of meaning which those who belong unconsciously bring to bear to make sense of the world." (Hall, 2017:205)

It is a similar 'otherness' I have felt in international leadership that shapes a sub-culture which silences and isolates. It is not overt and even, sometimes, self-imposed. However, it is always present. They weave into the unspoken stories that

draw me in together and at the same time separate me from a full voice within leadership of international schools. I recognise the fault lines. These fault lines become contextualised in the daily experience of this black woman in leadership and are often not completely conceptualised since their origins run deep in the psyche of both the black woman and her white colleagues. The exploration of my beginning and my journey through my own formal education to becoming a leader in international schooling has been the *raison d'être* of this autoethnography and the subject of this study.

The oscillation between the singular is set within a social, political, and ethical identity, interrupting one another but leaving both intact. Race, gender, and the identities constructed by these two are both singular and collective in the discourse on my experience in international school leadership; its silence and isolation.

CHAPTER 4D: RETURN TO EUROPE AND BEYOND (2010 -2021)

This final phase charts my return to Europe after almost 40 years. It was an attempt for me to find a home in which my family could all be together as I had done in 1986 in my move to Santiago, Chile. I had thought that I would have the opportunity to reconnect with my political roots in North London and be closer to a wider range of family and friends.

I was met with another, almost more alien existence than that experienced in Latin America. In Europe there remain complex forms of exploitation that continue re-colonisation, through systems of capital that further dominate and segregate, creating racial geographies, globally. These are being felt more acutely in the twenty-first century as technology, global pandemics, ecological disasters, and religious fanaticism polarise our humanity. The displacement of millions through conflict, economic exploitation and global climate change has created a more sophisticated form of post-colonial, transnational capitalism affecting everyone, everywhere. Black women and their children have not moved much further from the bottom rung in their climb up an ever-lengthening ladder towards stability and fulfilment. Impoverished rural farmers, women abandoned in war zones by their fathers, spouses, and sons as they seek exile away from conflict, low paid jobs, under and unemployment have all left women of colour living ever more precarious lives. Against this unfolding poverty in the world, and particularly in the large urban cities that move billions of dollars in goods and capital, international schools continue to emerge and with them, a mirroring of what is happening in society.

Micro-aggressions, those every day derogatory comments and indignities that are received by those who are perceived as inferior or marginalised continue to be part of life. It is not surprising that having returned to Europe, acts of racial and gender exclusion follow me and appear in, sometimes, unexpected places and spaces. Once again, I am reminded of who I am within the racial and gender hierarchy. At times it feels like being on the battlefield, constantly alert and at the same time fatigued from the vigilance. I retrench, disappear, and become silent in a false effort to lighten the burden. Over the years, and in every leadership position within the international schools I have worked, I continue to be surprised. Small acts of deceit

from those I have trusted, supported, and often defended. When given the opportunity, a betraying comment, a slip of the tongue or worse, the absence of action or understanding. The silence of my white colleagues also silences me. The refusal to acknowledge what is evident makes me once more, invisible.

Micro-aggressions are often difficult to confront at the time they occur, many times due to their subtlety and situational surprise. In processing my immigration papers and residency in one European country, I was foiled.

Standing in line outside the Immigration Office, with other non-nationals, I waited for my appointed time. I was politely ushered into the empty hall and told to go to one specific booth. On reviewing my papers, I was asked to go to another section as they would deal with me. My photograph was taken, index fingerprints electronically recorded along with my signature. My request to prolong my residency had already been granted for another 10 years. I was pleased on receiving the letter and made a mental comment about this generous and benevolent state, so was somewhat surprised at each delay in the physical processing that afternoon. At the request that I check the personal data that would then appear on my residency card to be issued, I noticed that my country of birth was incorrectly recorded. I had not been born in Great Britain but in Guyana. When I brought this to the attention of the officer she said, “So you mean Guinea”. When I repeated my country of birth, she replied, “Yes, Equatorial Guinea”, as if I were a 3-year-old who wasn’t quite sure of my country of birth. I then went on to explain that Guiana had been a British colony when I was born but after independence retained its name with a change in spelling to Guyana and that there were, in fact, three Guianas in the past. She left me in the booth and returned three or four minutes later to say, “Nice try, just sign here”. When I asked what she meant by “nice try”, her supercilious smile, so familiar to me as a teenager at school, every time I questioned an adult, came to the forefront of my memory; years of not being believed. She continued to repeat “nice try” and ushered me out of the booth.

I could have made a scene, I could have asked to see her manager, I could have risked having my residency revoked, I could have been asked to leave the country once my employment contract was up on my 65th birthday. I could have done many things that would have provoked public shame and humiliation. I quickly realised

this is not about me. It is worse. It is about my whole race, over and over again and the continued enforcement of white supremacy, lest I forget.

As I get older, returning to Western Europe to live and work, I experience more of these less openly racist acts. Yet without my activism, without my refusal to accept and without me calling out, nothing will change in me. The need to reclaim the rebellion within, the importance of sisterhood and a social and political framework to engage with is the only way I can be seen and heard. It will take imagination, stamina and, moreover, bravery to continue to counter racism and thrive.

I attended *The 2018 Women of Influence in Education Conference* held at the United World College in Singapore and was struck by the inclusive, diverse and albeit small group of powerful women who are leading in education and other institutions, some with experience of and in international schools (Anon., 2018). They show humility, honesty, and a genuine interest in furthering the hopes and dreams of all of us who work in schools where educational freedom and student advocacy are high on the list of our priorities. There was an important discussion around the role of male leaders in international schools in supporting and advocating for, mentoring, and understanding the multiple roles we play, that may be ignored by our colleagues, unwittingly. During the seminar, there was a conscious intent to amplify the voices of women in international schools so they can be heard above the racism and sexism at play, creating a space for women of colour to be comfortable in our own skin; this, not in spite of but because we are black, women and leaders in international education. During a seminar of this kind, it was not difficult. Returning to our own workspaces was a lot more daunting.

In feminist literature there is little mention of the positive role men can play in supporting women's journey through both the experience of schooling and that of leading. On returning to work in Europe I have been struck by the slow progress made in the role men play in furthering the work of women and I am further surprised to see how much of politics, industry, commerce, the arts, and sciences are still male dominated. For example, as of January 2020 only 12/193 countries in the world are women head of government or state (UN Women, 2020). This represents only 6.2% in the world, far from the balance projected at the Beijing Declaration of 1995 at the World Conference on Women in the same year. Moreover, when women take lead roles they are often immediately criticised,

compared to their male counterparts and a deliberate effort is made to downplay the role by commenting on their dress and hairstyles, their marital status, and other trivial but visible differences. Rarely is their position lauded as one that has, thankfully, finally arrived or that their perspective is one the institution is eager to support, or that it is just the right thing to do.

Audre Lorde's five-page essay[22] resonates with me even more loudly today than when I first came to know Lorde's *oeuvre* in the Black Women's Group of Haringey, North London in the 1970s and 80s. I had not experienced life then as I have now and *Age, Race, Class and Sex* have now come to take on new meanings for me (Lorde, 1984a). As I have aged through my professional work, race, class, and gender remain as urgent as they were when I began my teaching career and I am often concerned that the veneer of physical wellbeing, financial stability, and position within a leadership role in international education has been gained at the expense of the anger and defiance that I felt on entering teaching in North London. I have become too complacent and have chosen the battles I want to fight. I am no longer on the streets and outside the government offices. Life provided few choices then and I have wondered to what extent those in the board rooms, at the mixer evenings at the recruitment fairs or the breakfast meetings of international school heads, still provide me with a narrow range within which to make my voice heard and my presence acknowledged. At no point, however, was I fooled into believing that I ever formed part of this elite leadership group as described by Lorde as "white, male, slim, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure" (Lorde 1984:116).

As a black woman I would always lie outside this mythical norm. It might not be politically correct at a meeting of heads of international schools to harbour thoughts of superiority but my experience at these meetings tells a very different story. I have found myself remaining silent preferring to eat alone in my hotel room, rather than the lounge bar where the real networking, exchange of favours and jostling for positions takes place. There is an international school language, exchange of anecdotes, name-dropping and shared experiences that bring the select group into the fold of school heads. I have remained in its peripheral vision. Lorde points to

[22] Age, Race, Class and Sex : Women Redefining Difference delivered by Audre Lorde in 1980 at the Copeland Colloquium at Amherst College

what might be required in order to maintain a presence, be heard, and seen so that one no longer remains in the shadow.

> "For in order to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as American as apple pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manner of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection." (Lorde, 1984:114).

The simplistic, oppositional Western European view of society epitomises the very existence of international school education. The very idea that one would want to be part of this elite, roaming clan of international, but on the surface, fairly homogeneous group, also finds its way in into its leadership teams; Lorde's mythical norm. All Black women of colour, therefore, lie outside this carefully guarded group.

We are all complex human beings and our environments, and it follows that our school environments are also full of complexity. To think that we can deliver a set of practices to a range of people in leadership and serve them in their work, borders on the delusional. Examples abound in Leadership textbooks offering a 'catch all' in our international school leadership offices; *7 Habits, Leadership 2.0, 9 Simple Practices, 5 Levels of Leadership, Leadership in One Minute* are just some examples. Authors, and those who are recommended, are almost without exception, WASP[23]. The idea of the master narrative[24] in leadership in international schools is the white male narrative (Morrison, 2020). How could this possibly speak to the black woman in international schools; she is never the same person who walks into a room, as those mentioned in the texts on leadership mentioned in above. My trajectory, as a member of a leadership team, making numerous decisions on a daily basis that exert more or less effect on the experience of schooling for students, staff, and the community of the international schools in which I have worked, are the result of the complexities and years of white male domination within the teams I have worked.

As a woman of colour, I have often been called upon, erroneously, to represent the lives of children and their parents who look more like me than other members of the team. These are students and their parents who may share a common language, knowledge of religious practices and ways of interacting that are not common within

[23] White Anglo Saxon Protestant

[24] "The master narrative is whatever ideological script that is being imposed be the people in authority on everybody else." Morrison (1990) in Morrison 2020:36

the predominantly white adults with whom I work. I too find that as non-white females in international education we seek each other out, across the playground, at parent seminars, in meetings about our students or when disciplinary measures are being applied. There are many reasons for this, and I often see this as, predominantly, one of self-preservation and empathy.

This calls into question a constant challenge I, and other people of colour, face in being expected to educate colleagues about the lives of other women and men of colour. Placing the responsibility on the female colleague of colour and not accepting their own responsibility to gain greater depth of understanding and acceptance. This was particularly evident in 2020. In the wake of George Floyd's murder on 25 May in Illinois, USA there was a scrambled rush to examine racism in schools. People of colour in their own institutions were sought out and asked to be on diversity, equity and inclusion teams or anti-racism groups springing up at lunchtimes and after school. Kendi's book on *How to be an Antiracist* became a popular title in the reading circles and I was asked to meet with a group of self-proclaimed 'sympathisers' to tell them what they had been doing wrong, if anything, and how I could help them become better antiracists (Kendi, 2019). My initial reaction was to laugh out loud and then to be angered and insulted. I wondered how long the yoke of racism would, within another guise, have to be borne. I found myself again looking to Lorde to help me redefine my role and focus.

> "There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for alerting the present and constructing the future." (Lorde 1984:115)

I felt myself longing for a different relationship with my colleagues. Not one that was subordinate or dominant, nor equals but one that really examines that difference, it's historical roots in slavery and colonisation, empire, and nationality. I wanted them to, at the very least, begin to educate themselves about the distortions that race, gender, and class have produced and the effects they have had on our relationship to one another. I also, in my final year, felt the weight of not having had a mentor, a black woman with whom I could share my day-to-day experiences, in order to examine them as one would a plant in its natural environment. Getting close to it and using all my senses to explore the silences and find the voice and the language to understand and make some sense of the messiness and chaos that can sometimes ensue in order to reject tokenism and a refusal to remain silent. It is

impossible to effect lasting change in yourself when you have no one in your midst that has walked in your own shoes. In the same way I look to being surrounded by others, who also seek me out, who also want to learn and understand the complexity of leadership in international education.

My experience in educational leadership has always been textured. There are overt experiences like one I was subjected to in a very expensive restaurant in a South American city. I sat across from the director who was hosting an accreditation team at the end of their visit. He had invited them to "typical" meal from the region, a taste of the *creole*. The menus had been distributed and I chose a small vegetarian side dish, since there were only meat-dominated dishes on offer. I had just finished my request when a rolled white cloth napkin came hurtling my way and guffaws ensued from a slightly tipsy head of school after which I heard – "That's what I love about Patricia, she's such a cheap date". I wonder if he would have said that had he not perceived me to be somehow easy to poke fun at. On another occasion, when I was being offered a possibility of a position in my own country of origin, I heard a loud voice echo, "No, you can't have Patricia, she's ours*"* – to which I replied that, as far as I was aware, slavery had been abolished and I was no longer "owned" by anyone. The following day I invited the head of school to meet me in the middle of an interior courtyard of the school, surrounded by all the administrative buildings to let him know that no man had spoken to me in that way before and that I expected him to cease immediately with his tone, gestures and comments. I never sat to eat a meal at his table and spent no time in social gatherings with him until my last day of school, a year later. At the whole school staff gathering he proclaimed to all, and with tears in his eyes, that I was "the principal he had had the greatest honour to work with". I know, without any doubt, that no one in the audience believed him. These are overt examples in which the reality of race and gender make for a doubly vulnerable experience of 'otherness'. However, there are other more subtle and less tangible ways in which there has been an effort to silence or ignore my present by being offered no place at all. We met several years later at a recruiting fair in Europe, and I reminded him of these incidences. He was very apologetic, but it came too late.

Working in international schools in which, often, the only visuals of black women, men and children are those depicted as poor, dirty, and living in vulnerable situations in which the call for charitable acts is evoked as a means of ameliorating

the plight of the individual. These posters and framed photographs are not only damaging for the individuals “on display” but for me as I walk along these corridors or go into classrooms. My request to have these images removed has often been viewed as being ‘oversensitive’ or met with responses such as ‘well we’re not thinking of you, Patricia, but an opportunity for our kids to understand their privilege’. These images continue to hide and silence the real stories of women, children, and men of colour. Those who allow us to live the lives we live without any consciousness of our co-responsibility.

Towards the end of her essay, Lorde writes with hope and urgency. It is an urgency that has not changed over the last 40 years but also cannot wait another four decades. As teachers, educators and women of colour who exercise some power within our schools, our collective future cannot wait and is dependent on, my action and those of women and men and those differently gendered, of all races.

> “The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion.” (Lorde, 1984:123)

Having reached, if by label alone, a senior leadership position in an international school, where one is unique, by gender and colour, there is a sense of urgency and responsibility that walks beside me, always. The responsibility is not only to my race and gender but also to humanity. I recognise that there is also nostalgia in thinking that I once belonged somewhere, I came from some place, and I am here because of those who went before me in a long and strong line of my African heritage. Someone, somewhere way back, and probably through violence, gave birth to my last name that has no African roots and could be French or Spanish or both. I should know I am never alone, although I often experience a sense of solitude. Every day I go to work, every moment I walk through the doors of the international schools I have worked in I feel this legacy. I feel the presence of those who have ceded their space for me to have my own and with this space, the responsibility to own it.

Gender, race, colour, and class constitute an intersectionality that many battle with as school leaders of colour. One that does not have each of them seated easily,

together, at the same table, but is moreover messy and unpredictable, dependent on shifting environments like the sand dunes and beaches along which I ran as a child and on each morning swim presenting themselves newly formed. The international school environment of this study is one such location.

Now on the brink of retirement, after six decades in education, first as a student then as a professional, I began this study of a series of connected experiences that have created convergent and divergent thinking about a life as a black, female educator born at a pivotal time in my country's colonial history. These are the landscapes of my life, not a whole experience, but drawn from one. What now remains is to make a final effort to reveal where silence and invisibility may have warped the soul and clouded the mind.

CHAPTER 5: THE END OF A JOURNEY

"The main interest in life and work is to become someone else you were not at the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for love relationships is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end." (Foucault,1982; cited in Martin et al, 1988:9)

When I began the journey into writing this autoethnographic narrative inquiry, I wondered with what morality I would be coming to this research. I questioned the ethical viability and virtuosity in making myself, a black woman in international school leadership, the main source of data for this longitudinal study. It was only through an examination of the methodology, through the act of writing and researching, and an interpretation of selves did I come to respect and understand my 'moral' dilemma and to encounter my own truths; these truths tainted in self-doubt and comparison to others. It has been a professional life in which white, male supremacy had played a large part, tempered, and encouraged by strong and courageous black women who continue to walk beside me and within me. It was also a realisation of the power and strength that lies within and from living a life alongside others within the social, political, and racial contexts of the four distinct periods described as I sought answers and ways forward and away from the silence and invisibility I have experienced in my professional career.

There is always risk involved in using the methodology of autoethnography; the risk of being misunderstood. This is the risk I take. It is the risk every writer takes since the reader necessarily creates only one reading, amongst many possible interpretations, of the written word. So too, in the reading of my lived experiences there is no singular interpretation or deconstruction of events, of actions and reactions located within the historical, cultural, and political landscapes explored.

My journey, in writing this auto-ethnography and narratives has been similar to that of the walker's journey through untraced paths; like the geology of the United Kingdom, I studied as a young woman at Goldsmiths' College, the only black student on the geography course that year. Chalk, silt, water, peat, gneiss, granite, limestone, roots, ice, snow, flint and sometimes, even quicksand. McFarlane

describes a walker's journey thus, "a mixture of excitement, incompetence, ennui, adventure and epiphany" (MacFarlane, 2012:31).

It is true that there are now more women of colour in positions of power leading schools around the world. The scepticism in me wonders if this trend may give way to further silencing women of colour within international schools, as we become part of a liberal acquiescent leadership that loses its power and resistance to the continued exploitation, patriarchy, elitism, and continued colonisation of education. Perhaps we can all begin to redefine the roles black women in international schooling are prepared to take upon ourselves and continue to challenge the system towards a decolonisation of leadership in international education at all levels. I often question whether I am making any inroads to support the dismantling of all forms of oppression through my presence and work in international schools. The process of writing this thesis has contributed to my being more mindful of this as I have now begun a new journey in international education.

The effort needed to construct non-hegemonic identities that are gendered, racial, social, and political within the present organisational structures of international schooling will require a movement that is not only transformational but revolutionary, drawing on anti-racist and decolonising pedagogies in order to overturn more than a century of educational practices in international schools. Thus far, I maintain, that black women in international school leadership can be like rainwater on limestone, making new and different causeways into the soft stone by the action of the acid within the rain to make way for others to course through the limestone of international schools. It is a metaphor I have taken from Robert McFarlane's[25] description of his visit to Ramallah to track the 'preferential pathways', as he walked through the Arab West Bank, that allow others to follow then make their own paths:

> "With each rainfall, water-drops are sent wandering across the surfaces of the limestone, etching the track of their passage with carbonic acid as they go." (McFarlane 2012:228)

I believe a black feminist praxis, that is heard and seen within international schooling, would engage with the act of de-colonialisation as a global practice. I see this thesis as a small part that I play in this work. This is particularly important when

[25] Robert McFarlane went to Ramallah in Palestine to walk the limestone pathways of the occupied territories with his friend Raja Shehadeh, a human rights lawyer.

drawing on non-western feminist positions and the experiences, memory, power, justice, relational engagement, accountability, and solidarity within the global experiences of women, not dominated by Euro/American intellectual feminism (El Saadawi, 1983; hooks, 1989; Adichie, 2014; Dadzie, 2020).

> "We cannot overestimate the need for conscious self-reflexivity about the complicity of intellectual frameworks in politics, in the fact that something is at stake, in the very process of reauthorizing and mediating inequalities or regressive politics of different kinds." (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997: xviii)

I recognise that countries in the global south have made huge strides over the last decades of the 20th century and into the 21st but this is not enough. We are not moving forward with half the world's population of women and girls (Radalet, 2016). It is true that there are more children and young people in education, for example, according to the figures from *Our World in Data*, 65 million girls were out of school in 1998 compared with 32 milion in 2014 although the recent Covid-19 pandemic has seen 168 million out of school (Roser and Ortiz-Ospina, 2016; UNICEF, 2021). However, I question whether this alone will serve them in this century of huge advancements in technology and the need for us to problem solve, question and not merely recall the answers we already know to old-age questions that do not further understanding. The various world crises and pandemics affecting peace and a sustainable future for all to thrive in, provoke and offer an opportunity to create new and different forms of belonging and the possibility of being in and with the world in a new paradigm (Biesta, 2017). This is, like every moment in history, the moment to make a new story and a more equitable and inclusive future.

To avoid the dominant Western-Eurocentric biases that are exploitative, patriarchal, white, elitist, and colonising, to good choices that play into our decision making, I think it is vital that we include the voices of many to weigh in with gendered and racialised options available across the generations. Storytelling is part of the process of decision-making, and it is my hope that we include the stories of our students and staff into our processes in education in order for us to better understand the needs and desires our communities to make decisions that are in their benefit rather than those of a few. Women of colour in educational leadership must also be involved but cannot be if we are not present. The walls that have been built around our international school leadership must open up to be gender, racial

and culturally diverse, reflecting the students and staff within. At this time our unique 'otherness' is juxtaposed against a white, male Euro/American culture of leadership.

Opening international schools to women of colour in leadership positions alone will not erase the biases that exist in international schools. Actively promoting, discussing, and taking affirming action on questions of diversity, inclusion, equity, and access should influence the decisions made in the architecture and governance in schools; reflecting the complexity, challenge, risk, and possibility of failure. As racial paradigms are deconstructed that have been existent for centuries, colonial power structures are revealed, and experience shows that many times they may be consciously or unconsciously perpetuated in international schools. I recognise that I must not hide behind the veil of silence but act to co-construct a more just and equitable future.

At the beginning of this third decade, international schools are making conscious political statements about the role education continues to play in the maintenance of power, especially in their transnational, pan-global reach. ISS, which manages the recruitment of more than 800 international schools has set up a diversity collaborative group to interrogate diversity in international schools and provide continued professional development around the importance of creating diverse teams to lead schools (ISS, 2021). Many of the new schools are increasingly less about a meeting of ideas and practices on equal footing to forge a better future for all, and more about retaining and re-enforcing neo-colonialism as a force, gathering momentum and often expanding economic dominance that is also cultured, gendered and racial. This practice continues a process of erasure of non-western cultural history and the silencing of individuals within schools. Through omission or by default, recruitment and enrolment practices deny the possibility of a more layered and rich tapestry of thought in these schools.

Recruitment in international schools is increasingly in the hands of a few large agencies whose databases are filled with predominately Anglophone, Euro/American centric white teachers whose training and experiences are similar, maintaining the dominant centres of economic and cultural powers in the world. En masse, international schools do not actively recruit outside these spheres to include a wider and more representative international, intercultural, inter-racial and multi-

gendered staff and leadership. As referenced earlier in the section on international schooling, schools continue to recruit teachers from a limited source of recruitment agencies and through word of mouth from other international school leaders. The pandemic caused by Covid-19 has shifted this slightly as schools have had to reach out through other means such as social media, local newspapers, connections, and universities to reach a wider pool in the absence of the big job fairs around the world.

Tegiye Birery in her contribution to a publication on commemoration of 65 years of the European Cultural Foundation publication, comments on the fact that Europe, and I would say the global world, is a long way away from an ideal that education be decolonised, democratised and autonomous (Birey, 2019). Later in the same publication, Katherine Watson encourages leadership to seek out a working relationship with others in tackling the big, important 'urgencies' so that solutions can be found and implemented collectively (Watson, 2019). In a more inclusive society, the following would be common practice in all international schools:

> "Leadership includes rather than excludes voices. It is about listening, and beyond listening – about hearing and responding." (Watson, 2019:131)

Women's rights as human rights is a western neo-liberal movement, that appears to transcend, race, class, nationality, colonialism, religion and gender orientation except it hides the specificities of women from the global south, and locates us all under one banner, not specific enough, nor nuanced enough to embrace women everywhere (Herr, 2019). Similarly, Sedou Herr warns against the possible transformation of women's rights as a human rights movement and yet another neo-liberal individualist struggle, masking the judicial fight for gender justice. I accept that there is no easy commonality or solidarity with women across class, race, gender orientation, beliefs, and faith. Our struggles are not all common through the north-south divide nor do we hold the same priorities as individuals or a collective. The idea that solidarity across cultures can be embodied in the women's movement, for me, is an aberration. It was during slavery in the Caribbean that the black women's struggle for economic rights and structural change allowed them to buy their freedom, become independent of both black and white men, even during slavery in the South Atlantic/Caribbean in regions such as Demerara, where I was born. As discussed in Chapter 4b, ex-slaves were then able to buy their mothers,

sisters, brothers, and extended family members as slaves and, over time, have them manumitted (Candlin and Pybus, 2015). Understanding how freed slaves could then go on to buy slaves, may be difficult to accept for some. In the Caribbean and Demerara, these acts by women of colour in the 1800s was probably what paved the way for a different experience for me, as a black girl in British Guiana in the 1950s, than those in Atlanta or Alabama in the southern USA at the same time in history.

One important way in which I have attempted, and it is only an attempt to straddle the western culture in which I studied and qualified and the affinity I have to the influence of the places and spaces of my ancestry and birth is to pursue a leadership position in the global south. In doing so, perhaps I can articulate a more pluralistic, non-liberal stance to counter some of the colonial, racialised cultures that inhabit the mushrooming growth of international schools, upholding strictly western cultural values whilst operating in the global south.

As this thesis has shown, this new journey is not without its snares and surprises as I have found in the country where I now work. Colonial legacies are juxtaposed against the traditional ancestral culture that holds fast to a past that lies deep in the souls of its indigenous peoples. I do not forget that I am a victim who has also benefited from the structural racism in international schools. The manumitted women who had been enslaved in Demerara and the southern Caribbean understood that the road to freedom was long, and complex but it could be achieved, and I am grateful to their foresight.

The Black Lives Matter movement, the voices of LGBTQ+ around the world, prominent politicians and intellectuals are raising their voices and beginning to influence and force the discussions that will support a redefinition of our schools. The Council for International Schools (CIS) Director openly admitted her lack of understanding, knowledge, and sensitivity to people of colour working in schools and, moreover, working within her organisation. Jane Larsson in her candid and open admission of omission was interviewed by one of the Council of International Schools staff on the lack of response from the organisation on the murder of George Floyd (Larsson, 2021). These are conversations we must continue to have and not wait for another inhumane act against people of colour to engage in our

decolonisation processes both within our schools and ourselves. We will continue to redefine ourselves. The United World College (UWC) movement of schools and colleges, through its Chair Musimbi Kanyoro, pledges to address racial injustice, neo-colonialism, and manifestations of white supremacy where they exist.

The practice of racism in international schools will continue until there is first a beginning of self-study, self-regard towards an understanding of self and how all of us who work in these schools operate to sustain the oppression and power divides. This body of work is not about self-flagellation but more about honesty and the pursuit of a moral and ethical truth. It is about an understanding of what we fail to do, rather than what we do. Since the racist and gender constructs under which we all operate are human constructs, it will take humans to deconstruct these.

The invention of the lie that the white man's legislation brought about the abolition of slavery, colonial independence, national liberation, and equal opportunities at work, continues. It is not the remembrance, through statues, plaques, entries in school history books, of the continued global myth of the white men like Wilberforce and Lincoln that should be on the tongues of those who rejoice in the signed declarations but the thousands of anonymous women and men whose lives were given for everyone, irrespective of race or gender to enable liberation, abolition, and independence to take place. Every freedom denied is a collective responsibility and their liberation, a collective benefit to humanity. This does not remain in our past but continues, as I hope this thesis demonstrates.

Similarly, in present day 21st century, it is the workers in the sweatshops making cheap clothes, the packers for global online shopping, the frontline workers during the pandemic of the second decade of the century, and those who provide cheap genetically modified food for the chain restaurants and supermarkets alongside hundreds of millions of other workers and migrants who don't enjoy the benefits from the aforementioned international agreements signed under the premise of nations united under a common purpose that I owe this thesis. Black Lives Matter does see itself as a human rights movement; simply to be considered human. The women who started the BLM awareness did not do so as gay, trans or straight but as a movement of those who are prepared to fight against racist policies and practices, particularly in the USA and wherever they exist.

I recognise the need to create non-binary terminology in the 21st century and not continue to make reference with the racialised epistemology of north/south, third world/first world, developing/developed, industrial or post-industrial/agrarian, core/periphery to describe peoples and locations in the world when the reality is much more complex, more nuanced, more difficult to categorise, if indeed it should be. Gender and race, within any of the fore-mentioned automatically positions the black woman and reproduces the language of oppression, English, to describe ourselves; a language that is racialised and gendered (Andreotti, 2011; Beard, 2017; Morrison, 2019).

Many indigenous and black women reject western feminist ideas on gender and equality but seek rather to draw from historical and cultural traditions to promote collective rights and a community's self-determination over the individual rights of women. However, as our individual rights continue to remain important so do those of the collective and are not mutually exclusive but that in the pursuit of human rights justice, individual and collective rights are also upheld. As Mary Ellen Turpel reminds us, gender equality is based on the rights and opportunities of white men (Turpel, 1993). Albeit slow to make significant change, especially where the law and justice does not actively accompany women at a local level, it is still imperative that "to promote gender justice across the globe, local solutions to gender discrimination that empower women in their communities must be encouraged and supported" (Herr, 2019:133).

Rights to self-determination are about the political rights of nation states but also about the political rights of those who feel oppressed. Although in later times, the right to self-determination was borne out of Third World countries and the struggle for independence from colonial rule. However, self-determination involves the relationships between people and those who govern, at all levels, including international schools (Thornberry, 1993).

The 21st century has seen even greater displacement and movement of people across the globe than the later two decades of the 20th century when civil war and dictatorships ravaged countries in Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. The

socio-political policies and practices that have been consistently implemented against non-whites, and particularly ethnic minorities, for centuries coupled with the distorted experiences of what it means to be in the world, even before we begin school, have all contributed to a racial and gendered order in the world.

> "…it will take imagination, invention and a strong sense of responsibility and accountability [to] help us all try to figure out what it means to be human in the twenty-first century" (Morrison, 2019:56-57)

The challenges are now. Farsighted decision-making that embraces complexity and risk should permeate all areas of our society and this includes international schools, often operating on the margins of national and international tension. We can take these decisions, including the possibility of failure, if we, in international school leadership, are bold.

Toni Morrison writes of the trauma of racism in the USA. Her books, with strong female characters, flawed human beings, beaten and downtrodden women and men, those thought of as less than human, but always with truth. Recognising how women and men, young girls and boys deal with this very differently she states, however, with reference to herself:

> "I always looked upon the acts of racist exclusion, or insult, as pitiable, from the other person. I never absorbed that. I always thought that there was something deficient – intellectual, emotional – about such people. I still think so." (Morrison, 2020:86)

I cannot make such a general statement about my own experience of racism but know that my mother's response, as she described it to us girls, was that her way was to make note, file it away in her memory, as you would an important document, and retrieve it when there was enough emotional energy to deal with the profound pain caused by racial abuse. Throughout her long life, she was able to maintain her dignity and integrity. This was not expected of her daughters, but it was certainly respected by them.

How we heal from the trauma of racial and gendered oppression whilst actively resisting and forging a different path in the world is necessary question for me, and one that inspired the writing of this thesis. Racial and gendered oppression still

festers within society everywhere, making any attempt at healing difficult if not improbable at this time. However, it may lie somewhere in this revelation of the truth or, at least some form of truth with which I, and other black women can be strengthened through our understanding of who we are, and where we come from. In the interim, however long this may take, there is work to be done in engaging with our past, in the present. One path lies in leading a creative process within, to disassemble the experiences black women face in leading international schools, and in my case, to reassemble them differently.

I will let this thesis inform the work I do in international schooling as the United World College movement, of which I am a part, is determined to dismantle racial and gendered bias where it is met and co-construct education with young people and adults where we are all seen and heard. My hope is also that this body of work will encourage others to seek out their own pathways and through autoethnography, as a methodology. Amidine, over thirty years ago, suggests that scholars from the global south turn their academic voice northwards through an ethnography and anthropology of the West, with a southern gaze.

> “It can be argued that because of our plural and multicultural backgrounds as a result of the colonial heritage, Third World Women are best qualified to carry out comparative studies and make generalized statements about women’s positions in their societies. We are, therefore, waiting for invitations and grants from organizations in the West to study Western women, so that we can begin to redress some of the imbalance.” (Amidine, 1987; cited in Pailey, 2019:737)

There is huge human capacity in the global south, in women and in education. Being marginalised, placed in the periphery, silenced and rendered invisible creates a space for resistance (hooks, 1989). The marginal communities of the south are proving hooks to be right. The diaspora continues to produce critical writers, female filmmakers from male dominated Iran and Afghanistan have risked their lives to illustrate the ordinary lives of girls and women, painters, sculptors, scientists, politicians, and lawyers forge forward in demonstrating the important role women play in creating peace and justice in the world.

The authors of *Sex and World Peace* clearly demonstrate the link between national security and democracy and the absence of violence against women in the home (Hudson *et al.*, 2012). Countries with low levels of violence against women enjoy higher levels of peace and equity. Rwanda, a country that in 1994 saw some of the most horrific examples of genocide in which women and children suffered most, is now led by a majority female parliament (the highest percentage in the world at 64% representation) and a correspondingly firm stance against domestic violence. International Schools are well placed to support a more equitable gender and racial leadership thereby contributing to a vision of what is possible at a global level.

The result of a life that is silenced and ignored, wherever this happens, is rage. It is built within the human frame and is sometimes reflected inwards as self-doubt and underestimation. At other times, this rage is projected outwards, within family and among loved ones or friends. When rage becomes collective, through constant assaults, however, the decision is to be silenced no more. This is where I find myself, now. My hope is that this work, a black woman's experience of international school leadership, can begin to reveal the negative, as a photographer does in a dark room. I am drawn to the notion of contribution, seeking this out and bringing this forward without binary judgement. I am struck by Toni Morrison's affirmation that life is big, our lives are big and that the individuals within can often be written in diminished terms.

> "We've been cut down to screen size, and to short articles. Dwelling in the life of a complicated person, over a complicated period … is not in vogue." (Morrison, 1987; cited in Morrison 2020:26)

There is often a discomfort that the white, predominately male, leadership of international schools confronts in response to the rage, violence, and murder of black people. This violence, in the hands of those unable to conceive of anything other than white supremacy in the world, has come at time in history when the liberal phrases of, 'equity and inclusion', so common in the mission and vision statements of schools around the world are now being openly challenged. There is a consciousness-raising among leadership in schools that has manifested itself in new discussion items on agendas aimed at addressing the 'race problem', as if talking about the white response could, somehow, assuage the 'problem'. Slavery,

neo-colonialism, and the continued economic domination of the white nations of the world prevail and are, indeed, strengthened even in these times.

Berry (1989) and Di'Angelo (2018), almost 40 years later, use the white voice to address white people about racism. Although effects of erasure, gender bias, violence and domination have been clear and direct warnings to our society by politicians and academics, writers, and activists; Baldwin, Morrison, Rodney, Hall, Davis, and Achebe, among many others have not provoked the change needed. It is evident in the 21st century that the struggle is now at the forefront of our institutions and will not be ceded, and this includes international schools, often operating on the margins of national and international tension.

I am drawn to Andreotti's thesis of a co-constructed society in which knowledge is produced without imperial, colonial, or other cultural supremacy as it "opens possibilities and offers an invitation for signifying, narrating and relating otherwise." (Andreotti, 2011:18).

It is this opportunity to live differently that is also clearly envisioned by Bhabha;

> "What is crucial to such a vision of the future is the belief that we must not only change the narratives about our histories but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and historical." (Bhabha, 1994:56)

The multiplicity of my understanding of how culture has differently influenced who I have become has been part of this journey using autoethnography as a methodology in the creation of the narratives within the study.

I work with, and within, the international global elite. The deconstruction of self, in order to find a voice and be seen within this Western Eurocentric educational structure, has also required a recognition of the inherent complicity and complexity of my position in international education and the need for me to consistently engage in hyper self-reflexivity and deconstruction towards an ethical encounter with staff, students and their families in the international schools in which I find myself located (Spivak, 2004). There is also within me a constant effort to learn with and from those with least power and purposefully engage with:

> "…a suspension of belief that one is indispensible, better or culturally superior; is a reframing from thinking that the Third World is in trouble and that one has the solutions; it is resisting the temptation of projecting one's self or one's world onto the Other". (Spivak, 2002; cited in Andreotti 2011:50)

As with International Relations, international schools present us with complexities that cannot be simplified through the lens of polarities, rather, they present us with contradictions that embrace a wide range of positions (Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004). It could be that a greater representation of black women leaders in international schools, brave enough to bring these contradictions into the discussion around education, freedom, inclusion, and diversity would break some of the silences and empty spaces that currently exist and move towards a more collective construct of education in the international arena. This discussion would also include those in the national systems of education in which international schools operate, wherever possible; a construct that would include those within schools and those outside of the school systems. A less autonomous, individualistic approach to education and one that requires attention to difference, diversity, and disruption in order to be courageously creative and sustainably interdependent.

It is difficult to construct an identity as a black woman in international school leadership when there are so few with whom one can identify. Many of the studies by women on women in leadership remain unpublished dissertations, reaching a limited audience as Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) remind us, thereby limiting their real contribution to the field of peer reviewed research.

The research existing on leadership and change as it affects international schools contributes to the understanding of a predominately white, male, middle-class leadership style and does not offer an understanding of the experience of black women in leadership positions in education. I see the need for new, inclusive understandings to emerge through empathetic studies of women from within the cultural and racial diversity of our international schools. This will provide the insight needed for international schools to work for social justice, peace, and sustainability in our world. The call from Grogan is long overdue. This body of work is my contribution to the study of women from the global south in international school leadership:

> "It is reasonable to imagine that because women's lived experiences as leaders are different from men's, new theoretical understanding of leadership that is premised on social justice might emerge." (Grogan, 1999:533)

I believe that black women in international school leadership can offer role models that, by their very existence, engender changes in the way we examine leadership, and the role diverse perspectives play towards in society today. There are dangers in the 'single story' as Adichie[26] signals (Adichie, 2009). This thesis is one contribution to the story of leadership in international schools.

So too, small, sustained efforts by black women of colour in international education looking to models of leadership, creativity, and sustainability over time, will and can lead in education towards the same commonly shared ways of being in and with the world. If educational leadership continues to be guided by those in multi and transnational companies, models that have brought societies to their knees, a singular economic system and a rise in fascism, totalitarian, and sectarianism, then education and our futures are on a rapid path to self-destruction.

Tyack and Hansolt (1982) describe WWII as the 'golden age' for women in education leadership, albeit white women in educational leadership, since many of the middle leaders were off fighting. These were middle level leadership positions commanding little public power but gave experience that allowed for women to grow. The androcentric world of international school leadership continues. However, the experiences of these women are not researched or recorded. There is a chance, now for academia to seize the moment and be informed by the lived lives of black women in international schooling.

Women of diverse ethnicities lead few NGOs, UN organisations, countries, and states but the numbers are slowly increasing. For the most part, however, leadership remains sadly white, majority male, overridingly western, if not in origin, then in ideology. My lack of resistance, some of it self-imposed, and some of it imposed by others can be perceived as a silenced inaction or an unspoken voice within our international schools. Herein lies the danger and risk that when the resistance is difficult, complex, or harmful, colonisation in education persists.

[26] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a TED talk in October 2009 entitled 'The Single Story' been viewed over 8.5 million times.

The result is in a very dangerous situation in which black women leaders in international schools become absorbed into the mainstream of white consciousness and would cease to exist as such. The resistance would continue outside the world of international schooling, and on the outside, which is no existence at all. To exist in and with the world would be to continue a dialogue. The experience of this struggle for self creates the conditions Biesta describes as one, “where what I *do* matters, how I *am* matters, and where *I* matter” (Biesta 2017:15).

However, at the turn of this new decade of the 2020s fresh winds begin to blow as black women in schools begin to use voice and become more visible. One small example is that in the United World Colleges in just 12 months, within 18 schools, 3 heads of school will be women of colour. In the previous 60 years of existence, there have been no black women in senior leadership roles. The struggle for voice and to be seen moves from the broader rationale for the topic of study to that of the importance of researching the experience of black women in international education, the ecological being to one in which I consider self, much more closely. It is a desire to relate to myself as an educator and school leader and confront the resistance and acquiescence I have experienced. I am not only conscious of this but daily navigate myself in this ecology in which some form of resistance continues to be necessary. The sense of belonging and the use of *we* or *us* is never achieved. There are multiple masks and pseudo-language that I adopt whether in the boardroom, dining room, in public speaking, writing, or in my interactions with students and staff. Mostly however, I continue to exist and not be rendered invisible or muted.

The exploration of the subject-ness of this black woman in international school leadership does not pretend a centre stage of a matter of existentialism, but rather the subject-being as theorised by Biesta (2017), Meirieu (2007) Arendt (1958) and Sartre (1946). Stuart Hall’s work as a retrospective perspective and the relationship of power within the Caribbean/Metropole conjuncture has resonated with me. Engaging in study, life and work outside of my place of birth transcends into the present and future and represents a choice of topic in which the subject/object is one. I can sit comfortably with those, like me, who find ourselves unhinged, in part, wrenched from a more distant African past through the slave and creole

experienced lives by those lived before us. This study is my attempt at constructing my gendered experience from an unknown past, through cultures and histories that are politically, economically, and racially rendered.

As one coming from a place that still battles to find its own identity within the Caribbean, albeit located on mainland South America with its own Hispanic legacy, I too carve out my new present from very different historical and political pasts to those of my peers. Political thinkers, writers and artists forged links with their counterparts in India, East, West and Southern Africa and Cuba. I too inhabit this third space that Bhabha defines as unstable and uprooted (Bhabha, 1990). I believe, however, that it is in this third space and not the binary concept of core-periphery, that I find concepts of culture that could offer international education and its leadership new and exciting pathways and spaces.

In the 1970s, I became a teacher, qualified by the University of London, one of only three black women in my cohort. This was the decade in which I realised that my colour *was* my identity, in white racist Britain. It was also the decade in which I became politicised by joining a group of black feminists in OWAAD[27] who embraced me in my confused self as I began to feel the solitude and self-imposed silence as a black woman in the school system of the UK and later, internationally. It was a time to get comfortable with being uncomfortable in with words of Luvvie Ajayi, but I didn't. I became silent, continuing to read Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Maya Angelou; none of whom spoke to my experience.

It was only later as a teacher under Chile's military dictatorship, did I explore the poetry, plays, children's stories, political writers, and visual artists from my own geography; Beryl Gilroy, John Agard, Grace Nichols, Martin Carter, Roy Heath, Walter Rodney, and Aubrey Williams. I found I was more able to connect to myself in a place that was linguistically and politically, culturally, and socially very different from my own. I want, now, to use a language and literature that is more familiar to me, the English language, and an academy to which I had access to explore this silence and invisibility I have experienced as an international educator who is black and female. This autoethnography is my attempt to complete the break in my own silence.

[27] Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent

Vanessa Andreotti's invitation, in the introduction to her book on postcolonial theory, to consciously envision other identities and break away from the Western indoctrinated ethnocentric thought practices through a simple, yet powerful metaphor of the corncob (Andreotti 2011). What is often envisioned when, in the mind, we peel back the overlapping leaves that encase an ear of corn are the unified yellow kernels. Instead, however, we could and, indeed, must consider the indigenous corn in its hundred and perhaps thousands of colours and varieties grown together in the highlands of what are now Peru and Ecuador. Such variety existed and, thankfully, there continues to be a wide range of colours, sizes and shapes of corn growing on the high Andean slopes, despite the action of the global seed and chemical industries. So too, I compare the corn to the global hegemonic, ethnocentrism in place that does not enable the imagination to see leadership in international schools differently; from a non-western humanity and equally valid. This study exemplifies one such variant of humanity that is black, female and working in international education.

I reach the end of this journey, using autoethnography as a methodology to break the silence and invisibility I have felt as an international school leader and to connect the experience of schooling to the wider socio-political context of the last six decades. Writing has located the rage I have felt into a place where it can be explored and understood. The narratives, and the language I have used, situate my perception of self and my place in the world. In the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o:

> "Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world." (wa Thiong'o, 1985:15)

The power and privilege I may experience as a black woman in international school leadership has been superseded by the invisibility and silence that brought me to this place. I have walked within the long shadow of coloniality, conscious of its weight and influence.

The study serves to open up a dialogue and not limit the experience of black women in international schools to a single story. There are multiple ways of telling the same experiences. I have chosen only one form of deconstruction of the

personal within a cultural and political framework. The experiences retold through the narratives serve to not only disquiet and reveal but also to challenge the self to recreate responses that are different, through an acknowledgement of the past.

This exploratory thesis serves, in small part, to fill a vacancy that exists with regard to black women in leadership in international schools. It signals an existence of the subject by taking up a position, a stance, a visibility, and a voice, and no longer a ‘graceful, generous and liberal gesture’, as Morrison (1992) describes the interpretation of race in this time and place. This is a transitional space that reveals strength and purpose as I embark, one last time, in international school leadership on the African continent. This is my ancestral home into which I bring together layers of my life into one whole; a life that was always present.

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