

SECTION ONE

THE FRAME

Historical lived experience

AND

Espoused theories and theories-in-use

Chapters 1 - 4

SECTION 1 - THE FRAME

CHAPTER 1 - MY STORY: the Caribbean experience

Introduction

The first three chapters of this thesis invite the reader to directly engage with me in a cycle of inquiry. I am undertaking an exploration of my personal history. Firstly, to understand something of the context to my present day experiences and secondly to identify my coping/ survival patterns and to explore how and where they may be rooted in our culture.

Kesho Yvonne Scott writing about Black women's habits of survival (1991) says:

" Habits of survival refer to the external adjustments and internal adaptations that people make to economic exploitation and to racial and gender- related oppression. Such habits, first and foremost, are responses to pain and suffering that help lessen anger, give a sense of self control, and offer hope. They can also be responses to unexpected happiness - ways of keeping "good times" going. They work, so oppressed people use them over and over again to defeat pain and prolong pleasure. People teach these habits to each other, often by example. They become as automatic as dance steps that we practice and perfect. Like dance steps, they provide a social etiquette a way of moving through the world, and 'proof' that we are in control. Eventually the habits cease to be mere responses. They acquire the status of cultural prescriptions. In fact they harden into ingrained attitudes - routines of thought, feeling and action - that over time become unexamined and unquestioned traditions. In the end they become so familiar and seem so deep - rooted in our culture that we say of them it's just the way we do things."

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Fons Trompenaars exploring issues of culture, cultural differences, and the orientations and ways of managing and organising that emerge from different cultures says (1993):

"Culture is nothing more than the way in which groups have organised themselves over the years to solve the problems and challenges presented to them.... The problems of daily life disappear from our consciousness ... and become part of our system of absolute assumptions."

Harriet Goldhor Lerner in her books "The Dance of Intimacy"(1989) and "The Dance of Anger" (1985) considers the paradoxical challenges that occur as women attempt to change established patterns in relationships. She stresses that central to the possibility of effecting change in our relationships is the understanding of the legacy inherited from our ancestors if we are to take responsibility for our actions and to change our behaviour. She says:

" We may know virtually nothing about the forces that shaped our parents' lives as they shaped ours, or how our mothers and grandmothers dealt with problems similar to ours. When we do not know these things we do not know the self. And without a clear self, rooted in our history, we will be prone to intense angry reactions in all sorts of situations, in response to which we blame others, distance ourselves, passively comply, or otherwise spin our wheels."

In this cycle of inquiry I hope to better understand my legacy in order to make sense of my/our reactions to the current situations faced, and to increase possibilities for changing those reactive strategies that undermine our development and growth. I intend to work lightly, not trying to force insight to appear, but to look and listen attentively for the patterns and resonance. I engage in a dialogue with myself, using reflective sense making as my method for generating knowledge.

Introducing the Reflective Sense-maker (RS)

The discipline of reflective sense- making draws on the reflective practice described in Schon's work (1983).

"In real - world practice problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens. They must be constructed from the material of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. In order to convert a problematic situation to a problem, a practitioner must do a certain kind of work. He must make sense of an uncertain situation that literally makes no sense... when we set the problem we select what we treat as the "things" of the situation, we set the boundaries of our attention to it, and we impose upon it a coherence which allows us to say what is wrong and in what direction the situation needs to be changed. Problem setting is a process in which, interactively we name the things to which we attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them".

In this process of retrospective reflection, I am problem-setting. I interact and dialogue with my past, observing ambiguities, surprises, and discrepancies; identifying patterns and from this I construct notions of the problem of institutional discrimination as it takes place in everyday life.

Reflective sensemaking is about interacting and dialoguing with the situation, listening in Schon's words to the "back talk" of the situations, and in Mead's words dialoguing with my "parliament of selves" (quoted in Weick 1995). From a position of both engagement and distance I observe and contemplate the past allowing new

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meanings, insights or alternative perspectives and ways of viewing to emerge. It is a process to which I bring my whole self, acknowledging that perception and cognition resides not only in my mind, but also in all parts of my being. So in this process I listen for and invite to take voice parts of myself that have contributions to make to this process. This dialogue between the different parts of me has been incredibly important to my sense making throughout this research. In many instances the dialogue is not visible and what is presented as conceptual knowledge has actually emerged from dialogue with my 'parliament of selves'.

There is my very adult manager/trainer/wife/mother/daughter/sister/friend self who is dutiful, well trained and extremely skilled and response-able. There is my creative, untameable, rebellious, sometimes a 'little crazy' child self who sometimes thinks the unthinkable and urges actions that she refuses to learn are inappropriate. She is sensitive to the needs of my body, emotions and spirit. Through her I see the trees, feel the wind on my cheeks and smell the flowers. Sadly she has been sat upon and squashed for many years. In recent years I have reconnected with her and learnt how to listen to and talk with her and to value her insights and being.

There is also a very wise old woman self who has lived many centuries and whose memories extend way into the past. I do not know how and where she began, but as I open myself, and as I retreat from the din of twentieth century living I am able to hear her voice and counsel. She speaks the words of the Divine and is the Divine within me. She is not a new connection but to tune into her I must clear the air space and quieten my pulse. She is a voice I am learning to treasure more and more. Then there is the cynical, critical, judging, parent self who knows the system intimately and watches for the emergence of any thought that may trigger actions that runs counter system. She has found my little girl problematic particularly in recent times, as she, the little girl, has been given permission to speak her thoughts and feelings. For so long my judging parent self had dominance and took control, silencing all other voices except hers and the adult's. In recent times she has been struggling to reframe her role. There was a period when I rejected her, however more recently I have been discovering her value, and reclaiming her. I have been facilitating more friendly and equal communications between the judging parent and child selves. They are both me and I need to have them both functioning well. However this is a new and still very delicate relationship. The old struggles for power and domination still occur.

There are two other selves that I have comparatively recently discovered. I found them largely through noticing a gap and searching to find whose presence and contribution was often missing. These are my nurturing parent self and the directing, orchestrating self. Recently I have become aware of the absence of the nurturing parent from many situations. She is not well developed, yet it is this self that takes care of the sensitive child, giving her freedom to take risks, try new things and experiment safely. She gives balance to the critical judging parent self. The directing orchestrating self links closely with the old woman, keeps a watching eye on them all and helps me find positions of poise and balance.

So in this process of reflective sense making I gather information from all sources, as I attempt to know my world and myself better. I am aware that retrospective processes are sometimes misleading - especially when done in a dualistic conceptual frame. In such a frame we must value one set of knowing and deny the other. Weick (1995)

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points out that because sensemaking is retrospective, and it is often an outcome or response, which leads us to detect a possible stimulus, there is therefore a tighter causal link attributed to events. He reminds us, (and I remind myself) that "things never happened the way they are remembered to have happened." Nevertheless retrospective reflection gives another perspective on the same scene, and in this way it allows a broader comprehension of what the picture may be.

I am particularly conscious of this as I recount and tell my own and my parents' stories and see in them things that at the time of living them, or first hearing those stories, were not apparent. Outcomes that might not have been intended, perceptions and interpretations that were not present when those incidents and occurrences were lived, raise questions about truth and reality.

- Is one telling of the same story true and the other false? If so, which is?
- Does the story I tell myself of what I am doing in the present hold a greater reflection of the truth than that which may appear later?

Further questions arise when the story being told and reviewed is not one's own.

- Is it legitimate for me, as observer/ listener to whom the story has been told to make meaning other than that offered to me? If I do whose meaning has greater credibility?
- How do I deal with the dissonance that may occur when the intentions behind the action differ from the observed or reported impact of that action? Whose meaning is valid? Where does truth lie? What is the relationship between the knower and what is known?
- Is the story a prism of reality, with many positions from which it can be viewed and understood and an aspect of truth held in each perspective?

In reflecting retrospectively I do not infer a consciousness of action, neither do I suggest intentionality, that was not present when they occurred. From this cycle of inquiry I hope for the emergence of links, connections and patterns between seemingly random, disjunctive, irrational behaviour. I hope to observe actions that flow from a level below the conscious awareness of the individual and that may emerge from a collective consciousness.

I am using this reflective retrospection to assist me in gaining a better understanding of the past and to illuminate the issues and processes that need attention as we try to create change in the present and the future. In exploring the dynamic relationship that took place between Black people and their environments in the past I hope to create greater possibilities for change. How were their actions and behaviours influenced by those environments and how did they act on, redefine and change those settings? What have we learnt as a result of those dynamic interactions that we now hold so unconsciously? Trompenaars (1993) says:

"From this fundamental relationship with the (natural environment) man, and after man the community, takes the core meaning of life. This deepest meaning has escaped conscious questioning and has become self-evident, because it is a result of routine responses to the environment. In this sense culture is anything but nature... culture is below awareness in the sense that no one bothers to verbalise it.... Over time the habitual interactions within

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communities take on familiar forms and structures ... these structures are imposed upon the situations which people confront and are not determined by the situation itself."

Early years and influences

I was born on the beautiful Caribbean island of St Vincent, in Layou, a small town of around 5,000 people, where every one knew everyone else and where it seemed that every other person was related to me in some way.

My mother came from a family who though poor were connected with some of the more influential and "well to do" individuals and families on the island. My father was a "poor boy done well". He often told stories of the struggle he and his brothers had had to be able to go to school. He talked about having to get up about 4 am to walk to their lands to feed the animals, and milk the cows. He would then take the milk home before setting off on the 2 -3 mile walk to school - without shoes. After school he had to feed and care for the animals. Nevertheless he completed primary school and got an apprenticeship as a carpenter. In line with many young men of his period, prospects for work on the island were not good and economic progress demanded a willingness to go wherever there was work. So he took his trade first to Trinidad (another British colony), and then to Aruba (a Dutch colony) - two very different places in many respects but similar in that they had oil, and therefore work with comparatively high wages.

My father was an ambitious man with a natural talent for managing money. He set himself goals, and always aspired to improve his situation. Within a few years of working in Trinidad and Aruba he had acquired some farm lands and a site in the middle of the town on which he built our home, then he returned to St Vincent to find himself a wife. He chose my mother, who according to his friends was considered to be one of the most eligible and beautiful young women in the area. After a very short courtship and against the wishes of her parents they married. My mother was considered by her friends to have married below her status and for a period was excluded from her friendship circles. My father - aspiring to join those circles - was never admitted.

My mother came from the next town Barrouallie. She was the youngest child of a very large family. Her father had been overseer of the Mc Donald estate, and her father's sister as Mr McDonald's valued housekeeper was a woman of great influence. My Grandmother was the descendent of a Portuguese merchant family, who for reasons unknown to my mother came to St Vincent some time in the 19th century. Early in my mother's life my grandfather was able to buy farmlands from which her father, mother and brothers created a good living for the family. My mother's stories of growing up are ones of school, friends, visits to the farmlands and picnics among the fruit trees while listening to the birds, evenings sitting around Grandpa and Granny listening to stories of their childhood and lots of laughter. Our favourites as children were the stories from the two rather splendid years between 18 - 20 when with Iris the niece of "Cousin Vita" (Mr McDonald's housekeeper), a housemother and her daughter she "house sat" Mr McDonald's colonial house above Kingstown. Their only responsibility was to enjoy themselves, and to open the house and grounds to the public every Wednesday afternoon.

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Growing up in Layou I always experienced myself as being different to, and isolated from, most of the people around me - including my extended family. I lived in a bigger house than most of the other children. I spoke differently to them, and was only allowed to play with a small and specially selected group of children and to visit the homes of an even smaller group. I observed the respect and deference with which my mother was treated, and realised that within the wider family, our father (despite being the second son) was accorded the place normally reserved for the eldest male in the traditional Caribbean family setting. Members of the family seemed to consult him on every decision. As his children we enjoyed a special place in the family.

Prior to her marriage my mother had been a teacher, so it was natural for her to teach us at home, and by the time we started school we were quite advanced. This was another major experience of being different. Upon going to school I was put in one of the infants' classes, but within about a week I was in class two of the main part of the school. I have only a very vague memory of the early classes - of weighing sand and thinking it a fun way to learn.

Most of my memories of school are of being exceptional, and different. It was an experience of being liked by teachers and disliked, hated, and bullied by most children even though for a variety of very different reasons. Some disliked me because I was not allowed to come to their houses or they to mine; others because I had things that they did not have; others because many of our teachers were family friends or relatives. Though these teachers, fearing accusations of nepotism, were often harder on my siblings and myself, the other children did not see it in this way, and some disliked me because though the youngest in the class I usually came first. School was for me about the development of a relationship with knowledge and learning but not with people. My image of myself as a child is of a shy and lonely little girl, confident with books, ideas and exams but very unsure of how to be with people (children and adults) and unaware of my attractiveness as a person and a friend.

My father was a very important figure in my life as a child. Viewed from the perspective of a child, he was an awesome man who set high standards for himself and others. He was my Daddy whom I admired greatly and loved very much and whose love and admiration I craved. I thought that I could achieve that through being the child I thought he wanted. In recent years I have realised the extent to which I spent my life trying to gain his attention and to please him and always experiencing myself as failing to achieve that. I wanted to do with him some of the things he shared with my brother. My dream was to be taken with him on his donkey to the farmlands, and to spend the day among the trees, climbing the rocks and mountains, visiting the animals and eating the fruit straight from the trees. We had many fruit trees in our garden, but it seemed to me that those eaten in the "mountains" would be very special. My dream was not realised, possibly because I was a girl, and certainly because I was seen as "sickly" and "weak". I had a tendency to colds, which was later diagnosed as asthma. My mother protected me fiercely, not allowing me to do anything or to go anywhere that might expose me to a cold.

One day Daddy took me on his shoulders down in to the garden to have a special chat. He told me that he was planning to go away for a period, and that he was doing it for us because he wanted us to have the best opportunities. He explained that in a context

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where state education extended only to primary level, schooling was expensive and he feared that he would not be able to educate us all. He said that had it just been my brother and I it might have been possible for him to manage it, but now that there were four of us it seemed impossible for him to do so without going away. It was his intention to make available to all of us the opportunity to have a university education and he would not be able to do that without going to either England or the United States.

He had chosen England, possibly because he had friends and family there. He said that it was a trial and that if it did not work out he would earn lots of money and then come back home soon. He told me that he was going with his special friend "Uncle Ben," with whom he had been to Aruba. Although I am aware of the content of what Daddy said, that time on his shoulder in the garden remains in my memory a very special occasion. I can still see the vivid colours of the vegetables and plants, I can feel the warmth of the sun, and the breeze on my skin. I can feel the laughter and happiness inside of me - happiness of having my father confide in me and take time with me on my own.

That was the start of what was to be a very major change in the course my life had taken to date. Daddy left us in St Vincent and came to England in 1960 to explore possibilities. The day of his leaving was for me very traumatic. My only memory of the day is one of intense grief and pain, and fearing that I would not be able to stop crying. Recently, I asked my mother about that the day that Daddy left for England I was surprised to learn that he had made it a very special day with a special family meal, and a number of events that should have made it a pleasantly memorable occasion. Still I do not remember any of those things. The memories lodged within me are feelings ones of desertion, aloneness and a crazed searching for my father.

Nevertheless we soon adjusted to being a family without him. We also discovered benefits in his absence. Things were more relaxed, freer, and there was more fun and laughter in our home without him. He had been a very strict father and it was good to be less restrained. We also got to know our mother in ways that we might not have done had we always remained together as a family unit. My mother moved from a shadowy figure to being a prominent figure in our town, and in our lives. She was not afraid of being different, but despite this or maybe even because of it , she was looked up to and respected in her own right. She recognised the need for pre-school education so she turned a part of our house into a nursery school for a period. She was an active member of our church and co - leader of the youth activities in the church. She was friend and counsellor to many young women and men in our town. The visits of young men to our home attracted gossip but there was a need and she was determined to fill it regardless of the talk. She was not afraid to challenge outright, and she was very skilled at moving whispers or innuendoes into the public arena so that they could be openly discussed. She acted on what she believed to be true even though this may put her out of step with the culture. Her parenting of us was certainly against the norm. She believed that children though young had something worthwhile to offer and that adults could learn from children if they chose to listen, and she did not see a conflict between offering firm discipline and clear boundaries and closeness and friendship to children. In the Caribbean culture in which we were growing up adults were surprised, angry, and intrigued by her style of parenting and children were attracted to her, often adopting her as "second mother."

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Despite all of that, it was no easy job looking after four children on her own. She had always stated that she did not believe in placing on older children the responsibility of looking after younger siblings, yet it was inevitable that this sometimes happened. This was the only way in which she could cope. At that time there were no major shops or businesses in Layout. Shopping for household goods, clothes, paying bills, visits to the bank all necessitated a visit to the capital - Kingstown. In the context of narrow, winding mountain roads and a bus that went in the morning and returned in the afternoon each trip was a day's event. Doing business with four children is not easy - she tried it many times and as soon as I was old enough she began leaving me behind to look after the others while she made her monthly visits to the capital. In most other ways and as far as it was possible she protected me from being the carer for the younger ones. However as the eldest child, and a very intelligent child, I was always aware of the pressures on her and felt that I should be doing whatever I could to make it easier for her to manage. I learnt to be responsible at a very early age. This often brought me into conflict with my brother who seemed only concerned with what he wanted to do. As we grew older she found being a single parent more and more challenging, and I became her little helper - sharing the challenges of managing in sometimes difficult situations and problem-solving with her.

Starting Secondary School and anticipating coming to England

About five years after Daddy left he wrote saying that he could now afford the fare for us to join him and that he was trying to buy a house and that when he achieved that he would be bringing us to join him. This was for me extremely exciting news. I dreamt and fantasised about being a complete family again. I anticipated taking up the relationship enjoyed with my father before he left as if uninterrupted. The thought of England seemed very romantic. We had all - particularly my parents' generation - grown up on a diet of stories and songs about England - the Motherland - creating images of green and verdant plains where heroic deeds are done. Stories that reinforced the strong ties between all peoples of the Empire now the Commonwealth, and which caused the coming of the Queen, a Prince or Princess to be an occasion of ultimate importance. So the opportunity to leave Layout, and to go to England at that particular time of my life seemed like a gift from God.

Over the years I had become more and more isolated. By nine years old I had reached the most senior class in a school where many children stayed until they were fourteen / fifteen. The school operated on a system of merit so if you were able to do the work of a certain class you were promoted to that class regardless of age. At nine I was entered for and passed three external exams. The School Leaving Certificate - an exam routinely taken by children in the top class. Success in this exam gave entry to a probationary teacher's training scheme. This scheme represented a route out of poverty for many working class children and families. The Eleven- Plus Entrance Exam -this gave entry to one of the two Grammar Schools on the island. There were very limited places and a place was much coveted. The Island Scholarship Exam - at that time all secondary schools were fee paying and most people could not afford to pay the fees, plus uniform, and books and travel. The government sponsored six places to each of the Grammar Schools. The six boys and six girls who attained highest marks at the scholarship exam gained the privilege of a free education for five years. This system opened up for many poor Vincentian families the possibility of GCE's, a white-collar job, and a ticket out of the poverty trap. At the age of nine,

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despite being too young to take them up the benefits offered by them, and in the eyes of many people in the town not really needing some of those opportunities, I passed all three! My success did not endear me to many of the adults and children of the town! Parents of a close friend advised her that she should stop spending time with me and concentrate more on her studies as I succeeded easily but she did not.

It was thought that the experience of the exam was valuable even though I was then too young to take up the opportunities they offered. Too young to leave primary school I had the prospect of repeating the last year of primary school twice. On a personal level maintaining my sense of challenge was the greatest difficulty. I would not repeat the School Leaving Certificate as this was not an age-related exam, but I anticipated having to do the Scholarship and Eleven Plus exams on another two occasions. Some time during my tenth year we had a new head teacher who took the brightest children out of the top class and coached us for the Eleven Plus and Scholarship exams. A class of about a dozen children was created. I enjoyed this period very much. I found that class challenging and much more competitive, and also it removed me from the bullying and harassment that I experienced for most of primary school. I passed the Eleven plus and Scholarship exams again and finally I was able to accept the scholarship, and started at the Girl's Grammar School becoming even more a target of other children's envy.

On starting my new school I desperately wanted to fit in. I had become very isolated in Layou, and I hoped that a new school in a new town, with children all of whom had successfully passed either the Eleven Plus or Scholarship exams, would be an opportunity to have new friends. I had not counted on the fact that living in the country and taking the school bus each day limited new relationships to school hours. A short period after starting secondary school bullying and harassment recommenced - this time on the school bus. One evening it was particularly severe, and I discovered that a girl I considered to be one of my two best friends was a part of it. I felt betrayed and had a sense of utter isolation. My mother comforted me, told me not to give them the pleasure of knowing that they had upset me, used her influence to negotiate an immediate change to the other school bus and set about acting as if nothing had happened. It was around this time that we heard that we would be immigrating to England. The news seemed such a blessing. It was wonderful to be lifted out of that town and given an opportunity to start again.

Therefore going to England was a prospect laden with many hopes. It presented opportunities for the reunion of our family. A chance to reconnect with the father I had in the absent years deified, family trips and picnics in the green and verdant English countryside; opportunities to gain better economic prospects; and to be educated to University standard; possibilities of new friends with the access to amazing adventures. I was an avid reader of schoolgirl adventure stories!

Reflective Sense-making

I prompted my reflection by asking myself the following question:

What are the patterns and themes emerging, like threads from my story thus far - sometime very faint and at others vivid and distinct connecting lives across the centuries?

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I then mapped the streams of insights that emerged. These were:

- **Constant struggle for independence and self-reliance and autonomy.**

Colonisation resulted in most of St Vincent being owned by a handful of families. The Mc Donald in the Barrouallie area, the Frasers at Layou, and the Punnetts in the Buccament region- so it went on. Colonisation left Negroes though no longer slaves, dependent for all basic physiological needs on the White landowners. As sole landlord and the employer in the area they had tremendous power to privilege (as Mc Donald seemed to have done with my mothers family) or to penalise. There are many stories indicating that Mc Donald was greatly feared by the people around. The owning of land, or the gaining of alternative employment offered independence, self sufficiency and status. Beverly Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe (1985) say:

"We were beginning to demand the right to live free from the tyrannies of the plantation system. We were asserting our right to own our land, culture and way of life. Those of us who could scraped together the means to buy small plots of land. Those who couldn't squatted on the back- lands of the estates, growing enough food to meet day to day needs and trading any surplus for other necessities. Even as we did so, the British Government found ways of hindering our self-reliance. In order to prevent us from acquiring land they introduced land taxes and insisted that any prospective land owners buy a minimum number of acres."

Contrary to the common description of the Black man as the white man's burden, within my own personal history and reflected in our shared history is evidence of continuous resistance to all forms of dependency and a fierce struggle for self-determination and control. In my own story I observe that despite the fact that my mother's family were liked and privileged by the local land owner, as soon as it was possible for my grandfather to have enough money to buy his own lands he did so. My uncles and aunts, all of whom were given supervisory and favoured positions in the management of Mr McDonald's estate and houses, did not stay there but chose to leave and to seek their own fortunes elsewhere. Most of them left the island to look for work on other islands and then, like my own father, to return to buy their own properties and/ or establish businesses.

The island's story is one of many years of resistance. At the time of Europe's adventures into the New World, expanding their Empires, Caribs, and Negroes who had arrived there from shipwrecked Spanish ships, populated St Vincent. News that St Vincent represented a safe haven spread and slaves escaped from plantations in Barbados and St Lucia and sought refuge there. For more than a hundred years Caribs and Negroes joined forces in a determined effort to fight off the Europeans and any capturing of St Vincent was short-lived. The island changed hands backward and forward between the French and the English eventually being signed to the English in a treaty in 1797. An English general was sent to put down the Caribs and the resisters either fled to the less accessible parts of the island or were banished to two other Caribbean islands.

Embedded in all of this seems to be a learned acceptance that survival means engaging in a continuous fight. There is also a strong valuing of independence and self-reliance and a belief that you do not gain anything easily and - as my father always said - "hard work never killed anyone". We have learned to construe life as being about continuous struggle and hard work. This is a key survival strategy that appears many times in our stories. A prime example of this is Mary Seacole, the skilled Jamaican herbalist and healer, who having been rejected as a nurse for the Crimean war, funded herself, made her own way to the front and set up a hotel from which she fed and nursed the sick and wounded. In her story we see a woman determined to use the skills and ability with which she had been blessed and who through inventiveness, determination and hard work was able to make her own uniquely valuable contribution despite the many obstacles put in her way by sexual and racial discrimination. Such stories have been obliterated and masked by the dominant culture but evidence of the

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same determination to succeed and achieve against all odds is reflected in the stories of current day black women (Angelou 1984, Lanker 1989, Emecheta 1983)

- **People whom through their skills, ability and willingness to work hard produced great wealth for others while they remain poor.**

Considering my history I am struck by the huge gap between the tremendous wealth of the white landowners and the poverty of most of the other people around. Despite the fact that until 1797 St Vincent was settled by Caribs and Negro people, and the island could only have known less than forty years of slavery, the pattern of land ownership in St Vincent is similar to that in other Caribbean islands. The early settlers of the island were dispossessed and White land-owners possessed vast areas of fertile land producing many of the most lucrative crops of the time - sugar, cotton and tobacco. The economist Adam Smith quoted by Armet Francis:

"The profits of a sugar plantation in any of our West Indian colonies are generally much greater than those of any other cultivation that is known either in Europe or America."

Sir Dalby Thomas again quoted by Armet Francis stated:

"The pleasure, glory and grandeur of England has been advanced more by sugar than by any other commodity, wool not excepted."

Except for the Portuguese merchants (like my maternal ancestors), most of the people on the island were dismally poor. This is not dissimilar to the current situation where having once again crossed the Atlantic to do the laborious and unrewarding work that underpinned the wealth and health of Britain, Black people still occupy the bottom levels of organisation (Brown, 1984, Torkington 1988). They supply the manual labour, do the menial tasks that are poorly rewarded and are rarely at the senior levels where the profits of that work are enjoyed. Nursing is a prime example. Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe writing in 1985 state:

"The deliberate policy of recruiting Black women as State Enrolled rather than State Registered Nurses effectively limited our career prospects and our chances of returning home. Many of us entered the hospitals on the mistaken assumption that we would receive SRN training. Others were told that only an unspecified period of time spent as an auxiliary would qualify them for proper training ... Over the past thirty years the NHS has got - and is getting still - a huge captive low- waged Black women' labour force. Stories abound of Black S.E.N.'s who were unable to go on and train as SRN's because of the poor references they were given by their seniors. Those Black women who succeeded in overcoming the obstacles and gaining SRN training often found that they were simply extending their period of cheap labour by a further two years. The highly regulated power structures within the NHS served to isolate overseas nurses and to intensify our experiences of racism, at both a personal and institutional level".

A 1987 report by Greater London Action For Race Equality, of a study funded by the Kings Fund indicated that it was very difficult to get quantitative information from many Health Authorities of the position of Black nurses. Of 30 London Authorities they were only able to obtain information from one Authority of the ethnic make-up of their staff. Most had no information. The one Authority with this information - West Lambeth - indicated that a headcount which provided the Authority with a picture of the racial composition of 85% of its workforce identified that they were "concentrated heavily in lower grades and in certain areas - primarily in ancillary and lower nursing grades".

This experience of working hard to no effect must over time create a sense of despondency, despair, helplessness and powerlessness not dissimilar to that experienced so acutely in the Black staff of a Governmental agency some years ago. This story is told and explored in Chapter 9.

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- **Interrelationship of colour and class**

I am struck by the interrelationship of colour and class. Growing up in the Caribbean I was often confused by the class structure. Overtly it is a structure based on wealth yet it was evident to me that this was not so. I had observed that despite the fact that I perceived some members of my father's family to have more money than most of my mother's relatives, my mother was connected into a circle from which my father and his family were excluded. As I grew older I began to understand that a legacy of the historical settlement of the Islands was an inextricable relationship between race and class. We had inherited a hierarchical structure. At the top were the very wealthy white European (British, French, Dutch) plantation owners; and the Portuguese merchants in the middle. The indentured Indian and Chinese workers, brought in to work the plantations at the end of slavery when the Negroes used their main source of power - the withdrawal of their labour - to force change in the system; and the Negroes ex-slaves vied to avoid being placed at the bottom. The presence of the Caribs has not in any way influenced this picture. Though they were the indigenous people and would have therefore been land-owners however, most of them had been successfully banished and those who remained survived by hiding in the bush in the most inaccessible part of the island. Although there is common knowledge of their presence on the island many people would have lived all their life on the island without actually meeting one.

The very evident class structure of the Caribbean is underpinned by an ideology of white supremacy and black inferiority. The higher you are placed in the structure the greater the distance or disassociation from any "taint" of Africa, and the lighter your skin is likely to be. In the Vincentian context, where over the years the various peoples have co-resided in harmony and together created a culture that reflects the mix of people and where there is stronger identification with the Caribbean than with the various cultures from which we originated - class discrimination is often the acceptable face of racism.

Beliefs in the British system as meritocratic - characterised by justice, and fair-play continues despite the lived experience that what counts is family background and connections. Money and education are highly valued but access to circles of influence will still demand the right connections.

The right connection is very much colour coded. Internalised racism together with the strong survival skills of our people produce a concern to produce children with "pretty" (fair skinned) children with "good hair", and a "good nose". Such issues commonly feature in Black women's writings (Dorothy West 1968, Toni Morrison 1981).

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) asserts that we are controlled by these images. She says

"Externally defined standards of beauty long applied to African American women claim that no matter how intelligent, educated or "beautiful" a Black woman may be, those Black women whose features and skin color are most African must "git back"... Race, gender and sexuality converge on this issue of evaluating beauty."

In Britain today, as it was in St Vincent then, class and race are closely intertwined and once again Black people find that personal achievements do not in fact allow them to escape the position of the underclass - a position somewhere below the white working class. It is this interweave of race and class that allows doctors, lawyers, administrative workers, street cleaners to have a similar life experience. It is this interweave that causes my friend and colleague Stephen to be constantly stopped and questioned as he leaves and enters his home in the heart of the West End. It caused another colleague to be challenged by a porter as he sat in his new office; that caused a Police Officer guarding the entrance to the car-park of a Probation Service, to delay access to the Senior Probation Officer (SPO) questioning my presence in her car and to repeatedly ask the SPO if she was OK - implying that she may have been taken hostage by me; and that caused me to be mistaken for the cook as I sat having lunch with a client in their restaurant.

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Essed, 1991 states:

"The traditional idea of genetic inferiority is still important in the fabric of racism (Duster, 1990), but the discourse of Black inferiority is increasingly reformulated as cultural deficiency, social inadequacy, and technological underdevelopment (Rodney, 1982)".

It is this interweave of the ideology of White supremacy with the class structure which produces what bell hooks, 1995, describes a "killing rage ... that can drive one mad". She talks about a growing awareness that Black people who were depoliticized nevertheless suppress the urge to respond violently to racist statements and assaults. She writes:

"Listening to them it was clear that they felt no militant rage about the way white supremacy exploits and oppresses Black people, but collectively they were enraged by the reality that they were not exempt from racist assault. Their rage erupts because they have spent so much time acquiescing to White power to achieve - assimilating, changing themselves, suppressing true feelings. Their rage surfaces because they make these changes believing that doing so will mean they will be accepted as equals. When they are not treated as equals by the Whites they have admired, subordinated their integrity to, they are shocked. Again it must be stated that their rage is not a militant rage at the way White supremacy exploits and/or oppresses Black people collectively. It is a narcissistic rage rooted in the ideology of hierarchical privilege that says 'they' (though not all Black people) should be treated better. They see themselves as more deserving. Unlike the underclass and underprivileged they have a sense of entitlement."

- **Lightening up as a route out of poverty and across the class divide**

Internalisation of White supremacy and Black inferiority, and the lived experience of the inextricable interrelationship of race and class has produced a concern with lightening up many colonised peoples. The Caribbean experience taught us that our life chances improved the lighter you were. This caused many men and women to aspire to having intimate relationships with people who were "lighter" than them. This well-used survival strategy which has caused, and still causes, great conflict among Black people (as it does among White people) is one that is taboo and difficult to speak about publicly in racially mixed audiences.

Over the years there has often been the explicit and implicit expectation (on ourselves by ourselves) that we act politically at all times. The forming of intimate relationships and the having of children has not been exempt. Marrying someone darker than yourself has been the cause of many family and community rifts.

Margaret Prescod-Roberts (1980) says:

"[An] aspect of picking a father was colour, which is something we don't like to talk about much, who's light skinned and who's darker, and the relation of this to wages. In the choice of the father the mother sometimes calculated that a child who's a bit lighter skinned will have a better chance in this world, things will be easier for that child. These women were not fools. When you're functioning in a situation of scarcity and you have to worry every day about how your children are going to eat and how you are going to eat, you think about these things. And you organise your life in such a way as to make sure that you get the money you must have, to make sure you get what you and your children need to survive. "

Another writer (name unknown) says:

As a Black woman

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the bearing of my child
is a political act
I have
been mounted in rape
bred from like cattle
mined for my fecundity
I have
been denied abortion
denied contraception
denied my freedom to choose
I have
been subjected to abortion
injected with contraception
sterilised without my consent
I have
borne witness to the murders
of my children
by the Klan , the Front, the State
I have
borne daughters shot
for being liberationist
As a blackwoman
I have taken the power to choose
to bear a black child
- a political act?

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As a blackwoman

every act is a personal act

every act is a political act

As a black woman

the personal is political holds no empty rhetoric.

There is no doubt that as Margaret Prescod - Roberts and the unknown poet write, choosing to bear a child (dark or light) was, and is, often a conscious act - an act of resistance.

However I believe that this act of resistance, this attempt to ensure our survival and to attain at least personal liberation from oppression, used by both men as well as women was and is sometimes an unconscious act.. We have grown up with rhymes such as:

" If you are white you are right,
If you are light you are all right,
If you are yellow you are mellow,
If you are brown, stick around,
If you were black, step back."

We have learnt from quite early on that to be Black is to be at risk. The valuing of lightening up within the culture is I believe a strategy intended for the survival of the group and of the race, but which proves in practice to be double-edged. A strategy designed to respond to a conundrum, a complex dilemma - a double bind!

- **Stunned by the din of silence**

Why is it that three or four generations away from the formal ending of the slave trade I do not have any personal knowledge of slavery? Where are the stories? I have tried to speak to my mother about this but she appears to have no information about it. Her father had been adopted into another family and did not know his parents, and her mother's family was Portuguese, so initially it appears understandable that she holds no stories of slavery. However on further thought it occurred to me that my grandfather's adopted parents were also Negroes who would have experienced that terrible system. I then thought that maybe in the struggle to survive there was not much time for story telling - but that too does not seem true because we are a people full of stories. Growing up as children we were surrounded by stories - Anansi, Brer Rabbit, stories of people in crowded English cities or on deserted moors, stories in rhyme - Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Cowper, Gray, Campbell garnered from the "*Royal Readers*" on which my parents generation were schooled. There were stories from their own past and those passed on from other generations and an abundance of ghost stories, but no stories of slavery – why not?

I then remembered knowing that in my first year at secondary school we had only recently come through a struggle to have West Indian history taught in schools. This is where most of my knowledge of slavery was gained. Does this mean that my parents and their generation were/are ignorant about the events of slavery? I find this hard to believe - but I am not sure how and where they learnt about it. Carrying these questions in mind I was interested to observe that in a book on St Vincent the history of the island is covered with only a vague reference to slavery.

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"Eight years after the emancipation of the slaves in 1838, Portuguese were introduced from Madeira who quickly collared the shop keeping and small trading business. There followed in 1861 the start of an organised scheme of importation of Indian indentured workers to replace the Africans who fled the dehumanising conditions of the plantation."

Thus is the story of slavery in St Vincent told. (Jenkins and Bobrow 1986)

I am sure that there **are** records of slavery in St Vincent and in the Caribbean, but I am also aware that as I grew up I did not have any knowledge of slavery as a part of my personal history but only as a lesson taught at school. Why were these stories not told and what has been the impact of this silence on us as a people? The Slavery experience was not dissimilar to that of the Jews under Hitler, but the Jewish experience has been kept alive while that of slavery has been suppressed. What is the impact on us of this silence?

- **Great personal sacrifice in the hope of escaping poverty**

As I told my story I was conscious of the personal and social costs of migration on our families and communities. A cost we paid willingly in our determination to break out of the trap of poverty and oppression.

Caribbean families have for generations been broken up and fragmented - firstly by slavery and then by the harsh colonial system which left many trapped in abject poverty unless they were able to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Women have paid in multiple ways. They carried a disproportionate share of the heavy cost of these strategies. As young single women we emigrated in search of education, marketable skills and enhanced opportunities for ourselves, and our families. As married women we either stayed at home to take care of the children while our husbands searched for work abroad often doing whatever we were able to increase the families finances. We farmed, sewed, baked, traded - using any available opportunities to break out of poverty and to create new prospects for our children. Or we emigrated to join our husbands, leaving behind children, parents and our family and community support systems. Older women played their part too. They mothered and nurtured many generations of children. They were willing not only to take care of their grandchildren but some cared for children of friends. Migration was a survival strategy for a community at risk.

The countries from which we emigrated also paid. The impact of emigration on the communities we left behind is another issue that has been under explored. Families and whole communities have had to adapt to living with a shortage of young and middle - aged men, and of young single women. The return of these men and women to their families and communities has never been actively managed. The reunion of families, whether in England or in the Caribbean has often masked deep feelings of loss, abandonment, disorientation, guilt, anger that were acted out in negative, destructive but covert ways - affecting family relationships for years after the event. Rarely was there either permission or appropriate channels for their expression.

In 1997, a Jamaican doctor told me about the problem of severe depression among older women in Jamaica. She said that it appears to be related to the losses these women suffered when children they had reared, for family and friends, and to whom they had become attached were removed. She said that these women were left lonely. There is also the problem of elderly parents, on their own thousands of miles from their children, and in need of care. These are but a few of the dilemmas with which the women of my generation struggle. They are legacies of our efforts to survive in very adverse settings.

- **Education as a route out of poverty**

A connecting pattern across many of the people who were colonised by the British is the tremendous value placed on education by everyone regardless of class (Bryan et. al. 1985, Bhavnani 1994, hooks 1994 among others).

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Meritocracy, fairness and justice are some of the masks of the oppressive system, and they are generally believed by the oppressed. Caribbean people, like other oppressed groups, believed the rules of the system, and therefore set the acquisition of educational qualifications at a premium. There were also enough instances of people changing their financial and social status of themselves and their families to sustain the belief in the power of education for escaping poverty. In the Caribbean where the class system presents itself as being economically based, the belief in the power of education is particularly seductive. In my experience, truancy was difficult to achieve, as anyone of the community would challenge a child who was out of school during the normal school hours. The whole community conspired to ensure that the children of the community were educated to the highest level possible. Despite the poverty of many of the towns and villages, pre-school initiatives (always private ventures) thrived. Also families would if at all possible arrange for their children to be tutored after school and during the school holidays.

Some years ago, discovering in myself great anxiety when I considered reading in public, I had the opportunity of exploring this with my colleagues in the Bath postgraduate group. Through this I discovered that it triggered memories of primary school when the Headmaster would spontaneously take command of a class, and initiate a test. It may have been maths, spelling or reading. Errors were immediately punished with a lash with his leather strap. I was terrified of these events and usually froze in the process, despite the fact that ordinarily I was a very able student. One of my colleagues, skilled in the use of life drama in exploring and re-framing situations, offered to run one for me. Following the life drama, I continued to work on these issues by right and left hand writing, and then by engaging in a role reversal in my diary – more will be said about these techniques in Chapter 7.

From my role reversal with the headmaster, I suddenly understood that the use of the strap in schools, had the complete support of the community for this practice. I began to realise that it was an expression of the community's anxiety that its children acquired the necessary education and socialisation that would permit them to negotiate their way out of poverty.

- **Pragmatism**

Running right across these issues is a theme of pragmatism. We are a people who survived through doing whatever was necessary towards that end. If survival meant 'lightening up' then we did that. If it meant gaining a good education, then we avidly pursued that at all costs. If it meant leaving home and leaving behind children, parents, and spouses or partners and travelling to climactically and culturally cold and unfriendly countries, then we were prepared to do that too. We were a people who did what was necessary to survive.

Maya Angelou, in the concert referred to in the introduction, talked about those women who denied that the mistresses' slap hurt, or learned how to draw their lips across their teeth and make a noise that sounded like a laugh, regardless to what was happening. Such women were indeed displaying the same pragmatism. They learned to suppress their pain, and hide their hurt and humiliation in order to feed and clothe their families and themselves, and to send someone to school.

Of course pragmatism, with its focus on short-term survival goals, may overlook the fact that it sabotages the longer-term goals. Also, it may keep us focused on dealing with the presenting symptoms without considering the bigger and more fundamental source problems.

In our pragmatic response, we see some of the conflicting and paradoxical messages that were sent to our children. In exploring the issue of education, we saw that this was an agenda in which the whole community wholeheartedly participated. It was a total concern, an absolute determination that these children, descendants of slaves and products of the colonial system, would escape. I believe that it was this concern, which enshrined the use of the 'strap', as an essential tool of learning. Children were, through the means of a behaviourist approach to learning, to be taught to acquire the aspects of the system that would allow them to be rewarded in the dominant system. Therefore, they were beaten for being a minute late, for

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poor concentration, lack of attention, for making mistakes, for not being clean or neatly dressed (clothes could be poor but they must be clean and neat) and for poor manners. The 'proper' education and socialisation of the child were the concern of the whole community, so the teacher was always right and given the total support of the community.

In those transactions contradictory and conflicting messages were sent to and received by the child in this process. Messages such as "We are concerned about your well being, so we beat you, regularly and severely if necessary." Within such incidents, we may perceive the process by which the dual relationship of the oppressed with the oppressor, and the colonised with the coloniser is developed. Paulo Freire (1972), the renowned educationalist who dedicated himself to the development of education orientated to the liberation of the oppressed, says,

"At a certain point in their existential experience, the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction towards the oppressor and his way of life. Sharing his way of life becomes an overpowering aspiration. In their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressor, to imitate him, to follow him."

Albert Memmi (1967), studying the relationship of the colonised and the coloniser, from the perspective of the colonised, says,

"How could he hate the colonisers and yet admire them so passionately? (I too felt this admiration in spite of myself)".

Reviewing my history from my personal experience, I could not see evidence of this hatred of the coloniser, the oppressor, mentioned by Memmi. There seemed to be an awareness of being trapped in a tough social system from which it was hard to escape, but this seemed to have been disassociated from the admiration and love of the British. Notions of Britain, as the 'mother country', the teaching of English texts, and history from an English perspective, in schools to people who perceived themselves as British, together with the silence about slavery, probably accounted for this.

We also have double and conflicting messages in the process of immigration that split families, leaving children (sometimes separated from their siblings) behind in the care of family and friends. In this process, children were verbally told "your parents love you and want to offer you the best care" but non-verbally they received messages of abandonment and desertion. These were talked about by a number of women in this study.

I would argue that in our total occupation with designing strategies for overcoming or circumventing the situations which immediately threatened our survival, we overlooked, or maybe we could not afford to give attention to, the fact that we were undermining our future wellbeing and health.

- **Double bind**

Another theme emerging from this short and comparatively superficial review of my herstory, is that of the double bind. Gregory Bateson (1972), working on issues of schizophrenia, uncovered a rather 'screwy' and 'knotty' communication process, which he labelled 'the double bind'. He describes double binding situations to be ones in which

- a. two or more people are involved, and one through this process becomes 'victim';
- b. the victim receives conflicting messages which are reinforced by punishment which threatens survival;
- c. escape from the situation is "made impossible by devices that are not purely negative, e.g. capricious promises of love and the like."

Many of the examples used by Bateson to illustrate this process show a child learning from a parent, often a mother. I am interested to observe that this double binding situation is

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replicated in the relationship between the 'child' –the colonised/enslaved- and its 'caretaker/owner'/mother country. Reflecting on my history, I see double binds in the messages received around the ending of slavery. "You are now free, you can live or work wherever and however you want. However, the only employer available is the plantation owner by whom you were previously enslaved and if you choose not to work for him, you must leave your house and find your own dwelling." To further illustrate the double bind, in the case of St Vincent, the whole island, except for the extremely mountainous north, was the property of six former plantation owners.

Within my mother's story of Mr. Macdonald, and his patronage of my grandfather and his family, lay a further double bind. They were well taken care of by this wealthy plantation owner. All of my mother's brothers had at one time or another held positions as overseers, and her sisters had had opportunities to live in and look after the many mansions owned by Mr Macdonald. Nevertheless, this was a love that nurtured dependency. It was a relationship that did not allow the one to be nurtured to grow up and become an equal. In the context of the island, and its few alternative occupations, escape from the situation was particularly difficult.

One of my mother's oldest sisters once told me the story of her 'escape'. Muthsie was one of the island's first fully qualified Black midwives. Her ambition had really been to be a nurse, but entry into nursing was debarred without a secondary level education. It was, however, possible to train as a district midwife. In 1943, against the wishes of her parents, and already the mother of a young child, she started her training. To qualify she had to attend six months training at the hospital and then have 52 midwifery cases. The hospital was located in Kingstown, about 12 miles from her hometown, with poor transportation over difficult terrain. Therefore, it required that she lodged and boarded away from home for the whole of the period. She was required to provide her own uniform, with white shoes and white aprons. She said that, "Times were hard and my parents couldn't help much, but other nurses helped with aprons. "

She successfully completed her training, but working in the districts over rough terrain often with no roads and the only transport being by boat or on foot, the job of the district midwife was hazardous, in terms of negotiating this terrain. It was also personally dangerous, in that she often got called out in the middle of the night and had to make long solitary journeys on foot. And it was also challenging, as she was often the only medical person with no support, little equipment, dealing sometimes with very difficult cases. However, she completed her story by saying that she felt that she had done well, she had pursued the career she wanted to do, and in that process, she had helped many people. Despite many double binds she seemed to have attained a sense of fulfilment.

Her brothers chose to 'escape' through emigration. Through exploring my history, I began to understand that pragmatic survival strategies were devised to escape the double binding situations. Although my inquiry into other areas of my life indicates that double binds pervade many of our present day situations and relationships, it is also true to say that many of the past situations for which our current responses were initially created, have ceased to exist. Bateson (1972) states that,:

" The complete set of ingredients is no longer necessary when the 'victim' has learned to perceive his universe in double binding patterns. Almost any part of a double bind sequence may then be sufficient to precipitate or panic or rage."

Of course, few of us approach a situation and analytically categorise it as 'double binding' or not. Bateson makes the point that in the mind, there are no *things*. He says,

"There are in the mind no objects or events - no pigs, no coconut palms and no mothers. The mind contains only transforms, precepts, images, etc, and rules for making these transforms, precepts, etc. In what form these rules exist we do not know, but presumably they are embodied in the very machinery which creates the

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transforms. The rules are certainly not commonly explicit as conscious 'thoughts' [...]. As there are in the mind no coconuts but only precepts, and transforms of coconuts, so also when I perceive (consciously or unconsciously) a double bind in my boss' behaviour, I acquire in my mind no double bind but only a precept or transform of a double bind. And that is not what the theory is about. [...]We are talking then about some sort of tangle in the rules for making the transforms and about the acquisition or cultivation of such tangles."

Double binds are conflicting rules and expectations that are 'screwy' and knotty to work out intellectually, but leaves the 'victim' in a 'no win' situation or feeling that they have been 'wrong footed' and seeing no way of being able to correct that position. I would argue that after years of a whole community living in situations which continually 'wrong foot' them, leaving them in no- win circumstances, skills for detecting such situations and survival responses have become embedded in the culture. They are passed on in the invisible ways that culture is normally passed on.

Suzanne Lipsky (1987) and Barbara Love (1987), working on 'internalised oppression' suggest that "Habits of survival" are feelings, attitudes, and behaviours internalised by the oppressed in response to the experience of oppression. Lipsky (1987) takes this further and suggests that these responses are skills, and that every oppressed group receives oppressive conditioning. However she suggests that this conditioning maybe often mistaken as part of Black culture.

The identification and exploration of survival strategies and their link to double binding situations is central to this study, so I will be attempting to identify survival strategies as I go, and I will return to the exploration of double binds in Chapter 8.

Closing Remarks

I am closing this chapter and moving on to consider influential experiences in my life as I emerge from childhood into adulthood, not because the themes from my personal history have been exhausted, but more in recognition of the constraints on this document. The themes considered here appear time and time again throughout the thesis, and are critical to the issues worked on in Section 3.

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