

THE BLACK ONENESS CHURCH IN PERSPECTIVE

By

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the social, spiritual and political role the Black Oneness Churches play in Black communities. It also provides an anti-colonial examination of the Afro-Caribbean Oneness churches to understand how it functioned in the formation and defense of the emerging Black communities for the period 1960-1980.

This project is based on qualitative interviews and focus groups conducted with Black Clergy and Black women in the Oneness church of the Greater Toronto area. This study is based on the following four objectives:

1. Understanding the central importance of the Black Oneness Pentecostal Church post 1960 to Black communities.
2. Providing a voice for those of the Black Church that are currently underrepresented in academic scholarship.
3. Examining how the Black Church responds to allegations of its own complicities in colonial practices.
4. Engage spirituality as a legitimate location and space from which to know and resist colonization.

The study also introduces an emerging framework entitled: *Whiteness as Theology*. This framework is a critique of the theological discourse of Whiteness and the enduring relevance of the Black Church in a pluralistic Afro-Christian culture.

The data collected reveal that while the Black Church operated as a social welfare institution that assisted thousands of new black immigrants, the inception of the church was political and in protest to racism. Hence, the Black Church is a product of white racism, migration and colonization. The paradox of the Black Church lies in its complicity in colonization while also creating religious forms of resistance. For example, the inception of the Afro-Caribbean Oneness Church was an anti-colonial response to the racism in the White Church. But 40 years later, the insidious nature of colonization has weaved through the church and “prosperity theology” as an impetus of colonialism has reshaped the social justice role of Black Churches.

Acknowledgements

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Proverbs 3 5-6

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As the scripture states: I pray that the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart will be acceptable in thy sight Oh Lord my Strength and my Redeemer. I pray that the Lord is pleased with this work and that he will continue to lead me and open the doors he wants me to go through as I embark on a new journey.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Politicizing the Black Church Tradition

*Praise Jehovah, Praise Jehovah, Praise Jehovah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah
I'm the Alpha and the Omega the beginning and the ending, I'm the Alpha, the
Omega, the Beginning and the Ending.*

For anyone attending a Black Church of the Oneness faith in the Greater Toronto Area, it is immediately apparent that the majority of the membership is individuals of the Caribbean Diaspora. The women are generally dressed in stylish hats and they are attired in conservative dress, i.e. no pants. Conservative Churches that have a specific standard of how women should be adorned, they will be seen with non-processed/natural hair, no makeup, no jewelry as the belief is that they should not change the natural origin of how God made them. Men are similarly clothed conservatively in suit attire and if they hold leadership positions in the church they sit on the pulpit with the roster of Ministers. What you will also likely experience is a full array of musical instruments such as an organ, keyboards, drums, guitars, tambourines to accommodate lively worship styles. You may, depending on the service, hear members speaking in tongues, dancing to music, clapping to the rhythm or echoing after the preacher with an “Amen” or “Praise the Lord.” If you stay long enough, you will no doubt hear the root of their doctrinal beliefs which is you MUST be baptized in Jesus Name for the remission of sins and that there is only One God and his name is Jesus. These practices of “rhythmic hand clapping, the antiphonal participation of the congregation in the sermon, the immediacy of God in the services and baptism by immersion are “survivals of Africanisms” (MacRobert,1988:29) or as Anderson (1991) claims “a reflection of the African religious culture” (p.27).

1.0 A Statement of the Problem

This thesis explores sites of community organizing and political action, namely, the Black church in Canada. The study will unearth how the Black churches of the Oneness faith¹ played a significant role from public meeting places to immigration settlement destinations where Blacks could find a home away from home. Teachings within the Black Church are anchored in the belief in God as the Supreme maker, Saviour and director of all their affairs. It also includes the interplay of their religious beliefs in the private and public realm. There are many Christian denominations that make up the Black Church. According to Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), the Black Church “refers to a sociological and theological reference to Black Christian churches...any Black Christian person is included in ‘the Black Church’ if he or she is a member of a Black congregation” (p.1). Also Carruthers (2005) explains that,

The Black Church is a heterogeneous entity with a composite identity. It spans virtually the full spectrum of ecclesiastical, theological, liturgical, socioeconomic, regional, and other particularities – this being so even within given denomination and confessional associations (p.37).

¹ Oneness faith is used to refer to Pentecostals of the Apostolic faith also known as Oneness Pentecostals. The main distinction of Oneness Pentecostals from other Pentecostal sects are the belief in water baptism of believers by immersion in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as compared to water baptism by immersion in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It also includes the belief of the eternal existence of one true God who manifests as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as compared to Trinitarian beliefs who regard God as a triune being.

The varying denominations can give a different picture of the role and function of the Black Church. Hence, this research is particularly innovative as it taps into the sociological makeup of a specific religious sect within the Black Church, namely the Oneness faith. Most writings on the Black church overlook the discursive practices of faith and how it informs the black experience.

The Black faith community has been under politicized and underrepresented in academic scholarship. This is attributed to the rising dominance of privatized spirituality and subsequent silencing of religious-spirituality. Privatized spirituality² is a personal practice of spirituality that, “makes no doctrinal claims, imposes no moral authority outside one’s own consciousness, create no necessary personal relationships or social responsibilities, and can be changed or abandoned whenever it seems not to work for the practitioner” (Schneider, 2003). And so, the broad objective of this study is to offer an informed understanding of the Black Oneness Church in Canada. To do so, the following key research questions guide the study.

- What role do Black Churches play in tackling issues of oppression and fostering a philosophy of hope for those within and outside of the church community?
- What makes Black Pentecostal churches appealing to its members?
- Some consider the Black Church to be too silent in the sociopolitical arena, how do Black Church members understand and respond to this critique?
- How does the Black church function in the formation and defense of Black communities in Canada, how do they operate as a social, political and spiritual place, particularly for women; and how do they produce spaces of affirmation, affiliation and identity in a White supremacist world?

² privatized spirituality implicitly defines spirituality as a private pursuit for personal gain, where the person is his or her own authority absent from any sacred text or community (Schneider, 2003). As a result, there is an absence of racial conscientization, community and collective consciousness.

To critically engage the subject of the Black Church that fosters anti oppression requires a critical spiritual epistemology, which is applied to revive the holistic nature of how we combat oppression. Spirituality is not an adjunct experience that Blacks from faith communities slip in and out of. Given the current aversion to discuss and/or center one's religious-spirituality in the intellectual arena, we must engage "spirituality" as a legitimate location and space from which to know and resist colonization. This includes resisting privatized spirituality that de-centers the metaphysical realm. This thesis contests the privileging of privatized spirituality and emphatically argues that the anti-colonial formation of the Black Church, where religious-spirituality is practiced, plays a significant role in addressing issues of oppression in the community.

1.1 Situating the Black Church

Most writings on the Black Church in Canada deal with the historical Black Churches in the Baptist or Methodist movements mainly pointing to the groups of Blacks who have lived in Canada for several generations (Hill, 1981, Shadd Shreve 1983, Moreau 1996, and Gillard 1998). Canadian researchers have yet to capture the evolution of the Canadian Black Church of the Oneness faith which grew rapidly following new immigration policies in the 1960's opened the doors to unprecedented number of immigrants from the Caribbean. It was during this era that newer denominations such as Black Pentecostalism were established.

As Blacks settlers in Canada sought to integrate completely into British colonial society ...

“it soon became apparent that Blacks were not to be accorded full equality: some Churches established segregated sections for their Black worshipers” (Walker, 1985:11). Many Blacks attended White congregations. It wasn’t long till the harsh reality of racism in the White Churches forced them to create their own Black Churches, which would have significant influence in the Black community.

The Black Church is unique to Black people given its African heritage and the history of enslavement. Its oral, narrative and indigenous religious culture is a testament to its permanence in the Black community. The Black Church today must be viewed in the context of its past and historical role of anti-oppression in the Black community. Prominent Black leaders such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks were from the Black Church and functioned as agents of change in the civil rights movement. Historically, Black Churches have had a profound concern for the bitter and painful realities of colonization. According to Perry (1998), “the Black Church became the center of the Black community; the predominant venue of self-expression, recognition, and shelter from a cruel, hostile White world; and the only institution Blacks could control” (p.33). The experience of enslavement and the salience of racial oppression of Black people remain at the heart of why Black Churches were formed. The Black Church began as a result of Black people coming together to practice their faith, and over time, it became a surrogate family, a place of connectedness and a conduit for Black survival.

The evolution and formation of Black Churches, however, remain paradoxical. The misuse of the Christian religion is to be blamed for much of the tragedies that Blacks suffered during colonization. Racist colonizers rationalized the enslavement of African people by asserting that it was God’s way of bringing Black heathens into contact with

Christianity, even if it meant a lifetime of enforced servitude (Perry, 1998:8). Interestingly, although Europeanized Christianity was intended to pacify the enslaved and reinforce their subservient status, the enslaved were already acclimated to God and integrated their African beliefs with the distorted Christian faith that was forced upon them. Consequently, a philosophy of hope was appropriated from the oppressor's message to resist the colonizers dogma. The denial of their full participation in White churches forced them to create their own institutions that fostered hope and resilience in the Black psyche. This strengthened their courage and Black people assembled, organized and expressed their faith in a way that resisted the colonizers. The Christian theology they embraced was "not based on ones personal need for salvation but as the voice of hope and liberation" (Paris, 1985:3). As Stewart so rightly claims, "it was the brilliance of Africans that when White masters used scripture to justify slavery, Blacks used scriptures to actualize their freedom" (Stewart, 1999). Herein, lies the paradox: the Black Church was able to recognize the liberatory and emancipatory aspects of biblical Christianity and use it as an anti-colonial tool though Christianity was used as a tool of colonialism by the Europeans who enslaved African people. The paradox of the Black Church and its anti-colonial formation establishes that the historical role of the Black Church emerged as a non-racist appropriation of the Christian faith thus playing a significant role in the lives of Blacks. It also was a form of religious-spirituality for all as its liberatory heritage and politics of faith exhumed from the Christian message served as a political, social and spiritual catalyst for anti-oppression.

1.2 Learning Objectives

This research provides an anti-colonial examination of the Black Church in Canada to examine the social, spiritual and political role the Black Oneness Churches play in Black communities. Conducting research within the Black Church requires a proper understanding of church culture; migration and the interplay of religion and spirituality. This project is based on qualitative interviews and focus group discussions conducted with Black Clergy and Black women in the Greater Toronto Area in the church. To address the aforementioned research questions, the following three objectives have been identified to tease out the broader areas of experience within the black church community.

1. Understanding the central importance of the Black Oneness Church, post 1960 to Black communities
2. Providing a voice for churchwomen of the Black Church that are currently underrepresented in academic scholarship.
3. Engage spirituality as a legitimate location and space from which to know and resist colonization

The first objective that has been identified notes that the centrality of the Black Oneness church for this specific group must be understood in order to appreciate the role the church played within and outside the church community. The second research question acknowledges that there is something about black Pentecostalism that appeal to black people. Therefore, to fully appreciate what this is, church members, specifically churchwomen who comprise the majority population in black churches need a voice to articulate the experiences of Black Pentecostalism. A black [Christian] feminist framework will be used to embrace the specificities and distinctions of churchwomen's identity and politics. Also, as the third research question suggests there is an indictment

made against black churches that they have been too silent in the sociopolitical arena. The third objective of this study is to engage spiritual knowing as a way to assess the church's complicities in context of colonization.

1.3 The Black Church Today

It is important to examine the Black Church in its historical and political context and consider how conditions have and continue to change. Whereas the historical Black Church had an instrumental role during eras of emancipation and civil rights, its influence today in the public realm certainly has changed. For many, the Black Church has been an all-encompassing part of Black culture and identity; however, for others it has been criticized for not fostering integration amongst the races (Winks, 1997). In examining the historical role of the Black Church and its role today, it becomes apparent that identity politics is taking on different forms as new spaces are opening up for dialogue on how we are relating to the social world in which we live.

The origin of the Black Church is not confined to a specific denomination or religious organization (although today there is a large concentration of Blacks within the Baptist and Pentecostal churches). The Black Church represents an aggressive approach to the gospel of Christ and its implications for the lives of Blacks. For the Black Christian church however, which arguably hosts the majority of Black Churchgoers, "the false premise for the slave trade is what has convinced many Blacks today that Christianity is a religion of which they want no part" (Perry, 1998:8). Moreover, the academe generally has over-focused on the negative role that Christianity played in the process of colonization without taking into consideration the actual experience of Black Christianity

and other forms of Black religious expression. As a consequence, the Black Church and its religious forms of resistance have been de-legitimized as fields of engagement. While it is important to acknowledge the colonial role of Christianity of the Europeans, we cannot allow it to obscure the role of the Christianity of those who resisted enslavement, which, I argue, is entirely different.

The proliferation of privatized spirituality has in essence displaced the role of religious institutions like the Black Church. This has resulted in the advancement of a neo-colonial agenda that promotes privatized spirituality that is not tied to social justice advocacy. The privatizing of spirituality is not happenstance but a clear reversal of the role that religious institutions like the Black Church played in advocating social equality. What has changed today is the public presence and influence of the Black Church in broaching issues within its community. Further, the impact of prosperity theology coupled with a false sacred-secular binary in society has effectively shifted the public role of Black Churches. But, despite the discontinuities of its past and those who argue that the Black Church has lost its vision as a social beacon to confront systemic forms of oppression (West, 1999), it continues to fulfill its role as a social welfare institution that is divorced from the public realm. The shifting role of the Black Church today must be examined in context of an aggressive liberal neo-colonial agenda that seeks to dismantle institutions that historically threatened the church's resistance to this agenda.

1.4 Locating Myself – An Entry Point

I set out to conduct this research from the vantage point of my own early upbringing in the Black Church, which have had very broad implications for how I engage the anti-

colonial struggle. The Black Church was a site of affirmation where I was able to negotiate my values, culture and spirituality in contrast to what the White dominant society had dictated to me. Growing up in Ottawa, which at the time was predominately a White middle class city, I was usually the only Black girl and/or women of colour in the classroom. However, the displacement I experienced in the outside world was quickly suspended when I entered the “sanctuary” of the Black Church and coalesced with fellow West Indian friends and families. The Black Church community was a teaching agency that provided me with self-renewal, rejuvenation and a safe place for me to exhale from the cruelties of the outside world. The mothers of the church inculcated a strong sense of identity, spirituality and optimism which provided me with a sense of community, affirmation and wholeness. The liberatory theology echoed in the religious texts and songs was premised upon faith and keeping hope alive. In retrospect, my upbringing in the Black Church allowed me to remain anchored in my Black religious and cultural heritage which was weaved into my every day life.

During my undergraduate studies, I had become severely disillusioned with how anti-racism work was being presented in the academy and found it difficult to reconcile the pain of racism. I grew weary of critiquing the systemic disadvantages of Blacks with the lack of a spiritual emphasis in anti-racism pedagogy. The classroom debates of how to address the systemic issues of the Black community focused primarily on the structural inequities with little or no mention of the religious spiritual histories of Blacks that allowed them to persist and prevail in the past. I practiced my faith outside of the university but within my studies it was unacknowledged. I soon discovered that the silencing of this aspect of my identity within the academy created a profound sense of

disconnect. It wasn't until I began to give space to my faith in my studies that I was able to link my strong religious upbringing in the Black Church as an entry point to address the systemic issues that faced the Black community. In retrospect, this experience made me consciously aware that something is to be said of the relational context of faith and politics and how we can understand the two in context of the Black experience.

As a Black woman whose history is anchored in the African experience, my religious-spirituality is the organizing principle around which my life is structured. In this regard, my religious-spirituality is my platform of faith that provides the vigor to live in contestation and the persistence to ensure that questions about the meaning of faith, spirituality and social concerns continue to be raised. I now refuse to write in a way that perpetuates spiritual de-centering, spiritual ambivalence and the silencing of the Black Church community, which has made vital contributions during and after Black enslavement.

Furthermore, I will not play into the paralysis, which can occur as a result of divorcing the interplay of spirituality with religion in Black life. It is more important to understand, "how people of African descent have drawn on their indigenous resources in creative ways to make life more livable" (Evans, 1997:95). This includes the convergences and divergences of spirituality and religion. It is understood why many would be harshly critical of a religion or a church that is implicated in the process of colonization. However, just as enslaved Africans were able to rearticulate the Europeanized version of Christianity that was forced upon them I also make a vital distinction between European White racist Christianity and the Christianity embraced by Blacks in the anti-colonial struggle. This distinction is a key aspect of this work. Any discussion of Black oppression

and sites for resistance in the Black community must consider the pivotal role of the Black Church.

As a Black educator from the Black Church tradition, I believe that I have a critical role to play in academia - that is, to help bridge the gap that divides people of faith, academics and grassroots advocates concerning issues that affect our collective community. However, in speaking from the convictions of my faith, it is important to say that while I may center my own religious-spirituality in this particular political project, it is important that I consider how another very different spiritual epistemology has been framed to advance a neo-colonial agenda. This will be a focal point of this study. This research engages in a religious-spiritual politics which will discuss the importance of the Black Church and the role it plays in the anti-colonial struggle.

1.5 The convergence and divergence of religion and spirituality

In Dei's book (2006) *Anti-Colonialism and Education The Politics of Resistance* the convergence and divergence of religion and spirituality is made in the chapter "Spiritual Politics: Politicizing the Black Church Tradition in Anti-Colonial Praxis". It is important to establish that in this research the terms religious-spirituality and faith-based spirituality are used similarly to denote religious practices and beliefs that echo from organized religion(s) like Pentecostalism. The terms religious-spirituality and privatized spirituality however have distinct meanings. It is privatized spirituality that is under scrutiny in this study.

Spirituality means different things to different people and it is important to operationalize the use of religious-spirituality echoed in the Black Church in terms of how it is distinct from other expressions of spirituality. Religious-spirituality is the

organizing principle around which one's life is structured (Lincoln, 1990:92) and it is expressed through involvement in a church, like the Black Church where social responsibilities are centered in a particular religious ideal. The community setting of the Black Church encourages its members to engage with their faith not only on the metaphysical realm but the political realm as well. In this regard, religion becomes a "platform of faith" to provide strength to engage the struggle, and spirituality is the operative force or guiding philosophy to give courage to be creative in the face of one's own dehumanization (Lincoln, 1990). In essence, religious-spirituality is the fusion of religious and social justice convictions played out in the social or political arena.

The convergence of spirituality and religious-spirituality can be characterized by the insidious role they play to resist external realities like racism, poverty, feminism and so on. An individual may not necessarily have religious convictions that drive their social advocacy yet their social action is a form of spirituality. Rodgers (2000) explains;

Spirituality is not specifically a religious phenomenon. It is rooted in a fundamentally and characteristically human capacity for being aware of the world through relating to it in a particular way. By extension, the term is used to cover the forms in which this awareness is given expression and the means by which it is fostered.(p. 4)

Rodgers argument addresses the fact that a non-religious person can be a social justice advocate similarly to a religious spiritual individual. Hence whilst spirituality and religion are not the same thing, the terms and/or experiences should not be polarized as conflicting entities. They both can be described as the intellectual and emotional dualism that stimulates social action, which erupts from a critical consciousness that aims to emancipate people from a particular social oppression. For some, spirituality is regarded as a voice calling the conscience to a more balanced attitude to social problems and

issues of injustice. Donnelly (2002) views spirituality as self-reflection and the day-to-day experiences regarding life, surroundings and relationships with those around us. According to Hooks (1999), “spirituality enables the oppressed people to renew their spirits to find themselves again in suffering and in resistance” (p.117). Dash (1997) says “our spirituality must be such that it drives us to build relationships”(p.9). Wiggins (2005) argues that spirituality has come to “denote a religious quest by those who have defected from or resist institutionalized religion, traditional rituals, or theological positions of established denominations (p.3). For others in general, it’s a deep sense and/or acknowledgement of a higher entity, which guides and regulates people’s way of living to make sense of their world. Definitions of spirituality are endless, however, an important point to emphasize which Wane reminds us of, is that “spirituality should not be mistaken or delegitimized as a form of romanticism” (Wane, 1999). Whether it is religious or not, it should involve some method of social advocacy.

The divergence between spirituality and faith-based spirituality however is fundamental to understanding the dual role of the Black Church as a religious institution and a cultural system for dealing with forms of reality within present structures of colonialism. This distinction is controversial nonetheless but the sharp divide that exists today between non-religious-spirituality and religious/faith-based spirituality and the privileging of the former warrants such a distinction. As Taylor (2004) explains,

There is a growing disconnect between religion and spirituality, whereby organized religion and religious participation in general are not viewed as being necessary to achieve a high level of spirituality and for some, individual

spirituality is believed to be superior in terms of its personal benefits and outcomes. (p.164)

Spirituality and religion have distinct meanings. For example, privatized spirituality may include “spiritual techniques” like meditation that is absent from an organized collective gathering whereas conventional religions, generally, is more centered on community gathering in a church. There is, however, a growing tendency for privatized spirituality to become more to do with “feel good” experiences, individualism and White supremacist ideology that privilege western ways of sorting out the supernatural realm. “Spirituality...is not a warm and fuzzy kind of experience. It is a powerful and empowering process-one that involves a liberating encounter, liberating reflection, and a liberating action” (Dash, 1997:94-95). For Blacks and people of colour who have encountered the dehumanizing forces of racism, sexism or other forms of injustice, religious-spirituality “is an escape to sanity” and is the crux to how they have endured hardship, which is anchored in the belief in God and that he aligns with the oppressed. Though there are many spiritual expressions, it is important to insist that religious-spirituality from an African centered perspective is distinct from the Eurocentric spirituality that is paraded in the mainstream. According to Stewart (1999), spirituality from an African centered perspective is an indigenous form of spirituality for Black people as it “represents the full matrix of beliefs, power, values, and behaviours that shape Black people’s consciousness, understanding, and capacity of themselves in relation to Divine reality” (p. 1). As Dirlik explains,

indigenesness is not indigenous ideals as they are reified in New Age consumptions of indigenism but indigenous ideals as they have been reworked by a contemporary

consciousness where indigenism appears not merely as a production of the past, but as a project to be realized. (Dirlik, 1997:18)

Considering what Dirlik states, the Black Christian tradition can be considered as an indigenous spiritual reality that evolved out of the historical conditions of slavery. Hence, despite the multiplicities of spiritual expressions amongst Blacks, Stewart (1999) argues that a firm cosmology undergirds and informs their spiritual practice. According to him,

This cosmology holds that God, the Divine Spirit is the absolute hegemonic, supreme, primordial reality, which orchestrates, governs, empowers, transforms, and infuses creation with a creative soul force that is the basis and power of life. This means that no material reality or society as created, secondary realms of this divine reality can ever exceed or exhaust divine energy and primacy. This also means that no human power, individual or collective, can ever invert or subvert the intimacy of this divine Spirit in the human realm. (pg.8)

Religious-spirituality as expressed in the culture of the Black Church informs the intellectual, emotional and spiritual well being of its members. Spirituality, for Black Church people, is the bond, which keeps them grounded in community, social action and a firm commitment to God as the ultimate Supreme Being in one's life. So, despite the plurality of spiritual expressions, "Black Churches have remained a firm anchor stabilizing the Black experience and giving it meaning through the uncertain eras of change and counter-change" (Lincoln, 1990:398).

Incorporating an anti colonial framework in politicizing the role of the Black Church is useful as it stresses the validity of religious-spirituality. It also promotes community and the wholeness of being which should be included in any anti-oppression work.

Religious-spirituality creates a space for members of the Black Church community to respond to intersecting forms of oppression such as race, gender and religion to name a few. Thus an anti-colonial perspective is central to viewing Black Churches beyond the religious mainstream as it illustrates the intellectual validity of other knowledge that are used in the anti-colonial struggle.

1.6 The Black Church in Context: A Theology of Hope

According to Paris (1985), “at the heart of the Black Church’s theology, is a holistic application of God by which Jesus is viewed in light of the human’s common quest for human freedom, justice and equality of all persons under God” (pg.15). This reveals the churches integral relationship of religion and politics to address the struggles of the Black experience. Felder (1995) explains that “the Black Church’s theology is a process of critical reflection about God in the affairs of Black people, a story, and a contextual challenge to oppressive structures of racism and oppression (p.21). Themes of liberation, hope and empowerment are implicitly stressed in the Black Church’s theology and it has provided Black people with the dictum to navigate in this world and resist the external forces that seek to dehumanize them. The theology of the Black Church is expressed in many ways. For example, its worship practices are a fusion of indigenous African culture revealed through songs, testimonies, narratives and dance. These expressions unite the supernatural and secular realms and relate it to the life beyond and the life in the here and now. For example, consider the Negro spiritual entitled, Encourage My Soul:

Encourage my Soul and Let us Journey On, Though the night is Dark, and I am
Far from Home, Thanks be to God, The morning light appears, the storm is

passing over, the storm is passing over, the storm is passing over
Hallelujah.(author unknown)

This song has dual meanings. It enforces the belief in the afterlife or Heaven (supernatural) and it also reveals the experiences of the enslaved during the middle passage (secular). The description of the “morning light” implies hope and remaining vigilant. The repetition of “the storm is passing over” is indicative of the message of hope that remains central in the Black experience. This song is one of many examples that have underlying themes of hope nestled within the lyrical content of the Black Church. A glance through Black Church hymnals and Chorus books will reveal the enormity of lyrical content and discourse that is shrouded in a sacred and secular theology of hope.

Another example of the Black Church’s theology of hope is the traditional custom of the ‘testimony service’ held in some Black Pentecostal churches. These services are usually held on Sunday evenings/nights where members return to church to give God thanks. The testimony service is an example of ‘free spaces’ where members of the church learn self-respect, group identity, public skills and a vision for tomorrow (Evans, 1997). The ‘testimony’ is a clear illustration of the continuum of liberatory/spiritual practices in the Black Church that help Blacks to cope and celebrate their strengths and accomplishments. The ‘testimony’ is an unrehearsed declaration or a public witness that is made to a corporate body in the church where the individual spontaneously stands in a church and speaks of how they may have made it through a week, how God may have helped them with a situation, i.e. healing, how they may have got a job or whatever positive thing has occurred in their life. In my experience of participating in testimony services, it has offered a space where Black people can come together, express their

victories and struggles in an arena that is supportive and empowering. The testimony service is accompanied with gospel songs that are sung in between the testimonials and are also a part of the indigenous and cultural fervour of the Black Church, which enriches and encourages the individual in life's journey. These practices represent what Perry outlines as the three distinctive features of the Historical Black Church:

- 1) It is Black-led. The historical Black Church was the first institution, and for two hundred or more years the only institution, led and controlled by African Americans. It was the only institution where the leadership of a Black man was embraced. In the rest of society he was looked down on and denied leadership-even in his home.
- 2) It teaches a holistic gospel. The historic Black Church never had the option of dichotomizing the gospel. The gospel was relevant only as it offered physical and emotional freedom, along with spiritual freedom, to its adherents.
- 3) Its worship is heartfelt. Worship in the historic Black Church evolved out of an ethos of slavery and sought to bring hope that was heavenward and earthbound. (Perry, 1998:112).

The theology of hope as expressed in the worship practices in the Black Church have played a counter-hegemonic role in challenging experiences of Black oppression.

However, the revolutionary role of the Black Church which Perry omits is its political edge and capacity to critically engage its members on broader social issues. For example, Pinn (2002) recounts quite clearly how the civil rights movement marked a major turning point in Black history:

the Black Church became a vital factor in the sociopolitical and economic life of the United States. During the turbulent years of 1955-1968 it was believed amongst Black Church leaders that their Christian faith, if applied to social ills, could transform the nation. (pg.17)

The quest for freedom from generations past to the civil rights era revealed the integral relationship of religion and politics in the Black Church. It was the clergy and church members who mobilized the civil rights movement and because the movement rose from the church, it was spiritual in nature, a sacred quest (Perry, 1998:106). The Black Church presented itself as the strongest institution for social reform within Black communities, and church members used the history and insights of this institution to act in the world (Pinn, 2002:17). The political role of the Black Church has had profound influences on social change around the world, i.e. civil rights, Black apartheid. Evans (1997) explains that “politics are simply the power struggles that occur as a society seeks to align and realign itself in its attempt to manage social transitions that have already begun or taken place” (pg. 89). It was the Black Churches that mobilized sit-ins and civil rights marches, it nursed the destitute, it educated and encouraged the trodden and most importantly the faith-based philosophy of the Black Church emancipated the spirit of the hearer to resist the lower expectations that mainstream society had expected of its members. The political role of the Black Church is well established yet it remains a fluid institution. The Black Church is more complex and comprehensive than politics. The political realm of the 1950’s and 1960’s for example certainly created the context for churches to act politically in a public way. However, 40 years later the Black Church today must be situated in its current context. According to Evans (1997) “a spirituality that promises to

reorient us in these days must engage and understand the character of and the deep currents within the massive social changes now affecting contemporary societies” (p.91). This holds true for the Black Church today. To properly assess the identity of the Black Church and to engage the issue of politics, religious-spirituality must be viewed in context of its past, present, and future.

1.7 Significance of this Study – Opening Spaces for religious engagement

The resilience of Blacks to endure centuries of oppression has been fuelled by deep spiritual convictions. For Blacks, then, the struggle has been to centre themselves in a theology of resistance that emphasizes hope that is not merely a theoretical expectation of ‘better days’ but rather a spiritual ethos that maintains their sanity amid the debilitating constraints of oppression. The Black Church is one of the few institutions, which continues to foster a philosophy of hope within a spiritual context. Historically, the Black Church helped Black people to sustain themselves as whole persons within a racist society and culture. It also equipped them with the capacity to confront forms of oppression aimed to destroy their sense of self. In the Canadian context, however, the Black Church has generally been viewed only as a religious institution and has not been critically acclaimed for its significance to the cultural, social and psychological well being of Blacks. Some general trends that seem to be contributing factors to this perspective are attributed to how religion has been pushed to the margins in contemporary society. It is important, then, that academics not succumb to the mistake of polarizing religion in ‘good’ and ‘bad’ camps, which can serve to obscure and/or present inaccurate interpretations of the role that religion played for Blacks (Zinnbauer,1997).

As aforementioned, the paradox of the Black Church lies in its ability to undergo the scrutiny of colonization while creating religious forms of resistance that provided an outlet for Blacks to cope with the trauma of racism.

Today, there are vast numbers of Blacks who are affiliated with Black religious churches in Canada, some of whom are also members of the academy. Thus, there is a critical role for Black academics from the Black Church tradition to play in putting forward a critique which cannot only inspire excluded voices that have not been a part of academic dialogue but also to add critical contributions to an anti-colonial politic from a faith based perspective. The disconnect which exists between the church pews, the academy and wider community suggests that there is not a full understanding of the historical roots of the Black Church and how it has become cut-off from its indigenous past. The Historical Black Church provided a space for Black leadership to embrace a holistic theology concerned with the plight of the marginalized. A particular challenge today is gaining insight into how today's leadership in the Black Church perceives its role at this historical juncture. Affirming the Black Church today, then, calls for a positive recognition of how the Black Church have made vital contributions in the anti-colonial struggle in the quest for social justice to processes of decolonization and in engraining a philosophy of hope/empowerment for minoritized communities. This is not to suggest, however, that the Black religious tradition is a perfect institution that is not open to critique; a theology of resistance poignantly addresses religious/spiritual institutions that have lagged behind in combating systemic forms of oppression.

1.8 A Theology of Resistance

A theology of resistance is an action-oriented praxis of spirituality that exposes power issues and recognizes that the material and non-material world co-exist. In this study, the notion of resistance is evoked to challenge current aversions to explore religious-spirituality in the intellectual arena, which in some respects, is attributed to the blind acceptance of Postcolonial dogma that serves to negate the significant role that religious-spirituality plays in people's lives. Notions of "spirituality" is important in a theology of resistance as it not only addresses the emotional aspect to advocating for justice but it also responds to the structural conditions that negatively impacts the religious, spiritual, physical, and mental well-being of the individual. A theology of resistance is not a missionary endeavour of converting the academy as it does acknowledge that there is a non-religious spiritual dimension to humanity that is concerned with advancing equity. A theology of resistance recognizes that for some, religious-spirituality must be invoked to deal with the structural factors that negatively impact the Black Community. In this study, a theology of resistance challenges the self to address the ways we are implicated in the social structures. It uncovers the theological discourse of Whiteness that is buried within dominant paradigms, practices and resultant inaction. In so doing it turns the gaze on the self, community and religious institutions that should do more in resisting social structures that breed inequity. As Ruck-Simmons (2006) argues, "knowing thyself is critical for those who are invested in challenging and disrupting colonizing knowledge's and systems. Knowing thyself demands that we understand the complexity of our identity" (p. 288). Applying a theology of resistance in this research entails politicizing

‘spiritual ways of knowing’ to better understand areas where we must be accountable, responsible and active in the pursuits of social justice.

1.9 Organization of Chapters

This study is organized in eight chapters and interrogates the Black Church as a site for resistance. The chapters account for the histories of the Black Church that are substantiated by the research findings and the current realities of the subject matter that each chapter aims to build upon. As well, the way colonialism has impacted our world and the way it penetrated institutions is a common theme that is carried through the body of this work. This research recognizes the religious and sociological hybridity of the Black Church in Canada. This is not to negate the importance of other Black spiritual traditions such as Black Muslims and Black Buddhists for example. This research focuses on the Black Christian Oneness church which have specific theological practices from other black religious sects.

This introductory chapter provides a summary of the Black Church the challenges it faces today and discusses my own subject location and entry point to this research project. I attempt to convey that the Black Church has been an overlooked community in Canadian academic scholarship and by doing so I invoke a theology of resistance to challenge mainstream expressions of spirituality that attempts to silence this community.

Chapter 2 specifically focuses on the literature that explores Black Canadian history, Caribbean migration and Black pentecostalism. These themes are identified to provide a broad analysis to understand the conditions that created the evolvement of Black Churches both past and present. The literature also lays the foundation for de-colonizing

the Black Church from a Eurocentric analysis. The above themes present an alternative way to view the Black Church as distinct from its Europeanized orientations.

Chapter 3 introduces new discursive frameworks in order to understand the role of the Black Church and the impact of colonization today. In this chapter, three discursive frameworks are presented to guide the research findings. In deepening our understanding of the Black Church, it becomes apparent that colonialism is taking on different forms, which requires that new epistemologies are invoked to challenge colonialism at its root. The discursive frameworks that are presented in this chapter include 1) the anti-colonial discursive framework which challenges colonial domination and means of resistance (Dei, 2000, Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2000, 2) the critical faith based epistemology which is a discursive framework that is faith centred knowledge, research and praxis Zine, 2004, 3) and a Whiteness as theology framework which applies a faith sensitive approach to unraveling the nuances of the colonial project Brown Spencer, 2006. This chapter discusses the necessity of evoking each framework to understand the theological discourse of Whiteness. A *Whiteness as theology* framework is central to this research as it looks at how spirituality as an epistemology of the oppressed must have a pivotal role in antiracist/anti-colonial work. This framework is informed by Perkinson's (2004) analysis of Whiteness and religion and to the knowledge of the researcher there are no existing works that inform this perspective. This chapter is critical for understanding today's Black Church and newer forms of colonialism that is reframing its historical and political role. An integrative framework helps to ground and interpret the knowledge that will evolve from the voices of members of the Black Church to addresses the issue of

complicity and how Black Churches are relating to its community in the twenty first century.

Chapter 4 deals with the methods employed in this research. The primary method for data collection was the use of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews drawn from a qualitative research design. A discussion outlining the principles and practices of ethnographic research are provided along with the reasons for employing this particular approach. This chapter delves into the ways I negotiated the research process, the process of knowledge production, my role as researcher and church member, the ethical responsibilities that ensued and finally the way critical ethnography helped to anchor the research process.

Chapter 5 is a historical chapter primarily articulating the narratives of Black Clergy during the years of immigration to Canada, their participation in White churches and subsequent establishment of the Black Church. Their narratives help to confirm needed biographical data of the early church pioneers who formed churches as early as 1963. This chapter is dedicated to the forefathers of Black Oneness Churches, by directing the research to account for their historical experiences in the early years of the church.

Chapter 6 addresses the way Oneness Identity can be interrogated from a *Whiteness as Theology* framework. The narratives of the research respondents are applied to review the findings of this study. This chapter discusses how the Black Church interpret their role in society today and how they respond to allegations that it has been silent in the social arena. Here the research provides an analysis of how the church respond to allegations that it has been too silent to determine whether it is complicit or ambivalent.

Chapter 7 mainly politicizes the voices of women in the Black Church using a Black feminist discursive framework. The narrative analysis of the ethnographic data that uncover Black women's voices begins in this chapter. The narratives of mothers of the church over the age of 50, young women ranging from the age of 30 -45 speak to the issues facing the Black Church. This discursive analysis of Black women's voices will be further contextualized amongst the lived experiences of Black 'church' women. Hence this framework will be entitled a Black Christian feminist framework to capture the uniqueness of women in the Black Church and how they interpret their lives, identify strategies while centring their faith within their community settings.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the discussion and provides a brief review of the research finding. I will apply the findings to substantiate the ways the Black Church navigates in a White world and how they relate to the wider community to fight injustice. The chapter also addresses the challenges Black Churches are facing today and provide some future recommendations that are based on the production of knowledge that has been revealed in this research and the implications of this study for further work on the Canadian Black Church. An application of a Whiteness as theology framework help to detail the findings to determine a better understanding of the role the Black Church plays for Black communities in Canada.

Chapter 2
*Literature Review: Selected Themes on Black Canadian History,
Caribbean Migration & Black Pentecostalism*

By and by, when the morning comes, when all the saints of God are gathered home we
will tell the story how we've overcome and we'll understand it better by and by.
(Gospel Chorus)

2.0 Introduction

The Black Church has mostly been described from an African American perspective. Regrettably, there is very little Canadian literature on the Black Church in general. It is, therefore, important to draw on literature that unravels the central importance of the Black Church from a Canadian perspective. To provide an informed understanding of the Black Church in Canada, this literature review focuses on three areas: 1) Black Canadian History 2) Black Pentecostalism and 3) Decolonizing the Black Church.

The section on Black Canadian History will follow Robin Wink's historical account of Black migration that confirms the long standing presence of Black Canadians. The section on Black Pentecostalism parallels Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) study with the 2001 Canadian Census to quantify the size of the Pentecostal movement particularly for Black Church goers. While Christianity generally, and Pentecostalism in particular, represents a variety of sects, Black Pentecostalism has been the denomination of choice for most Black immigrants post 1960-1980. There is a fundamental difference between the ideology of Eurocentric Christianity and the beliefs focused on by members of the Black Church. In immersing myself in the literature on Black Pentecostalism, I found that the theology that Blacks initially worked with was not Eurocentric at all. The enslaved embraced a different Christian ethos that merged hope and faith as a theology of

liberation. The section on Black Pentecostalism follows with an anti-colonial reading of the Black Church that it be decolonized from its Europeanized interpretations. This particular reading of the Black Church effectively energized a new way for me to approach the literature and detail the distinctions of the Black Church in Canada. The section on decolonizing the Black Church is not short on controversy. It includes a critique of a renowned Afrocentric scholar who fails to see the distinctiveness of White Christianity and the Black theology that the historical Black Church initially worked with. Mistakenly, Christianity is indicted as a whole, not in part, for the travesties inflicted upon African people. A critique of this article shows that it is a gross misrepresentation of history which is a critical point of departure of this study. This literature review serves to re-position the way the Black Church has been scripted.

2.1 Black Immigration

A review on Black Canadian history is necessary to address the fact that the arrival of Black people in Canada is not a twenty first century happening. There is a 400-year history of African Canadians immigrating to Canada either by force or free will. The evolvement of the Canadian Black Church has mirrored the Canadian Black migratory experience. Therefore, the Canadian Black Church can no longer be treated as invisible for it has played a significant role as a social welfare agency and an immigration settlement agency. In presenting the literature in this chapter, it is important to keep in mind that valuing the intrinsic worth of religious institutions like the Black Church ultimately challenges colonialism at its root. As paradoxical as this may seem, it will address the “early interpretations of the Black experience, both secular and religious,

[which] have often been depicted in ways which are degrading, presumptuous and/or simply inaccurate (Gill, 1998). These inaccuracies reflect the colonial theological discourse that depicts religious institutions in a particular way. This will be addressed in Chapter 4 where a *Whiteness as Theology* framework will be introduced. Prior to turning to that, the patterns of Black immigration must first be delineated.

Perhaps the most well known study of Black Canadian history can be attributed to Robin Wink's book: *The Blacks in Canada*. This book is a classical yet controversial study on Black Canadian history. Wink wrote this book over 35 years ago and it is a chronicle of the history of Black Canadians and their role in Canada. The book is a landmark account of the historiography of Black Canadians that details in sometimes divisive ways the experiences of Blacks in Canada. Much of the book's content in terms of language and ideas depict the era it was written in and therefore poses some challenges concerning the way Blacks have been depicted. Wink had a narrow view on Black identity which he saw as a melting pot ideology. His views were consistent for his time and one that is reflected in dominant cultural norms. Others even suggest that Wink believed that Blacks themselves, not White racism, were responsible for their unequal position in society (Wink, 1997). In a second release of his book, Wink candidly talks about the criticisms that were made about his book and feels he has been misread since some of the language he used in the seventies were 'politically' acceptable but because of the changing discourse of Black studies today they would be labeled as inappropriate.

Besides his use of language, Wink criticized the Black Church for not mixing with Whites and thus failing to foster integration amongst the races. What Wink failed to account for stands true in any era of Black Canadian migration in that "[Black] Canadians

were not encouraged to mingle with mainstream society (Walker, 1985:22).” This had much to do with the historical record of racism which predates confederation in Canada and remains till present day. In spite of the harsh criticisms that have been made about Wink’s study, there is hardly a book of its scope that has displaced it. Any scholar attempting to learn about Black Canadian history can hardly escape Wink’s book for the volume of detail he provides of the Canadian Black experience. That is not to say that there haven’t been other researchers in this area, Wink’s book is simply a landmark historical study of the Black presence in Canada that is unprecedented. And so, aside from the racist overtures in describing the Black presence in Canada, the book offers some needed data on the influx of Black Canadians that is traced for hundreds of years.

As Mensah (2002) explains, “the forced relocation of Blacks from Africa to the New world started around the early 1600s” (pg. 44). A significant number of Blacks who came to Canada were enslaved and some were free. Blacks arrived from the United States during the British colonial period beginning in 1776 to the period of the American civil war when they came to Canada through the Underground Railroad. Wink explains that during this period there were seven waves of Black migration that occurred in Canada. The seven waves of migration are not exhaustive as Blacks have been immigrating to Canada as early as the 1600’s. Consider Gill’s (1998) reported findings:

Although not a permanent resident, the first recorded Black person to come to Canada was Mathieu d'Acosta, a member of Canada's oldest club- the Order of Good Cheer, and an interpreter for Sieur de Monts, Governor at Port Royal. The first recorded Black resident of our nation in 1628, however, was a Black child from Madagascar, the property of the famous privateer David Kirke, whose sale

of the boy (later baptized as "Oliver LeJeune") in New France was Canada's first recorded slave sale. Since the time of Samuel de Champlain (1567-1635), slavery was commonplace in New France and by 1760, records tell us that New France had a Black slave population which totaled nearly 1,200. (pg.xx)

This record not only proves the early Black presence in Canada, it also substantiates the existence of slavery in Canada. Wink's breakdown of the seven waves of Black migration to Canada adds context to this study as it captures the major periods in Canadian history which saw a large influx of Blacks into Canada.

First wave

The first major influx of Blacks arrived in the Maritimes from 1776-1783. Approximately 3500 enslaved Blacks were brought to Nova Scotia by the loyalist at the close of the American Revolution (Wink, 1997:28). They were considered free Black loyalists who won their freedom (they had been American owned slaves) by joining the British army upon the promise that they would obtain the same rights and privileges as other loyalists (Wink, 1997:8). The rights and privileges promised to them were parcels of land they could use to irrigate and start a new life. To their dismay, "few Black loyalists received land grants and those who did were placed in small allotments in the least desirable regions" Walker, 1985:9).

Second wave

About 2000 Black refugees who fought for Britain arrived in Halifax from 1813-1816 (Wink's, 1997:124, Walker, 1985:9). Thousands of Black American slaves came from

Maryland and Virginia and fled to British protection as they were encouraged by a promise of complete freedom and settlement in the British colonial period. The majority of Nova Scotia Blacks are their descendents (Wink's, 1997:127).

Third Wave

As the institution of slavery continued in parts of the United States and culminated with the passing of the fugitive act of 1850 this resulted in a large exodus of Blacks to Canada. The enslaved were fleeing racial discrimination in the States to Canada where they felt they would experience equality. Many abolitionists assisted slaves to escape into Canada. Ontario's Black population grew to about forty thousand (Walker, 1985:10). This period is otherwise known as the Underground Railroad (1854-61).

Fourth wave

A smaller group of approximately 600 Jamaican maroons were exiled to Nova Scotia by the British government in 1796. These maroons had resisted colonial occupation in Jamaica for years and when subdued by the British military forces they were sent to Nova Scotia. It was feared, however, that their resistance in Jamaica to the colonial forces could transplant to Canadian soil and lead to slave uprisings. Many could not withstand the Canadian climate and died. In 1800 the remaining populace were transported to Sierra Leone in West Africa where some of their descendents still live (Alexander, 1996: 51).

Fifth Wave

The first four waves of Black migration saw Blacks being forced to settle in central and eastern Canada, i.e. Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia. The first Black settlers in western Canada comprised the fifth wave and they came mainly from California towards the end of the 1850s. “These Blacks were not fugitives; they were mostly skilled and literate people dissatisfied with the level of racial injustice that was developing in California” (Mensah, 2002:50). In California, Blacks were subjected to increasing persecution and civil disabilities. This prompted the movement of over 700 Blacks to Victoria in 1858-1859 and “many had acquired skills and business experience and brought capital to invest in new enterprise” (Walker, 1985:11).

Sixth Wave

A subsequent group of Black settlers arrived in Western Canada in the early 1900s. This group comprised the sixth wave. Black farmers moved to the Canadian plains shortly after World War I from Oklahoma. Approximately 1300 Blacks from Oklahoma settled in Alberta and Saskatchewan between 1910 and 1912. Their exodus was due to the deterioration of conditions for Blacks in Oklahoma following statehood in 1907. Their farming technique proved to be useful in the prairies as they settled there (Walker, 1985).

Before introducing the seventh wave, it is important to note that there were smaller pockets of immigration that occurred outside of the United States that is not captured in Wink’s seven waves of Black migration to Canada. For example, as Smith (2006) claims: Jamaicans began to come to Canada in the 1920’s to work in the mines in Nova Scotia. This was the first influx of Black migrants not arriving from the United States. Between 1800 and 1920 small numbers of West Indians were brought from Jamaica as labourers

for the Cape Breton mines and from Barbados to work in coal mines in Nova Scotia.

(Retrieved July 12, 2007, <http://www.jamaicans.com/jamaicansoverseas/>)

As Walker (1984) surmises, migration from the West Indies almost virtually stopped after 1920. As a result, the West Indian population in 1941 was smaller than it was 20 years earlier. Even though pressure for migration from the West Indies mounted, the Canadian government refused to allow any more non-Whites into the country until immigration policy began to change in the mid to late 1950's.

Seventh Wave

The seventh wave as described by Wink's are the West Indians who migrated to the urban centers of Canada post 1960. In the late 1950's to early 1960's Canada began to change their immigration laws to encourage more immigrants into the country. As a result, immigration numbers from the Caribbean began to climb and a huge influx of immigrants from Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana to name a few, entered the urban corridors of Canada's major cities. This period marked the establishment of the Canadian Black Pentecostal Church.

The seven waves of migration categorically dismiss the notion that the Black presence in Canada is a recent phenomenon. As Black people settled in various parts of the country the Black Church played a role in their resettlement. Grasping the tenure of Black migration to Canada and ways they have organized to form cultural enclaves sets the stage for understanding the central importance of the Black Church from a Canadian perspective.

There are two prevailing interpretations in Black Canadian history with regard to the influence of the Black Church (Este, 2004). The first interpretation is a negative view of the Black Church as it was seen as perpetuating racial separation as opposed to fulfilling a role that encouraged assimilation (Wink, 1997). Wink had somewhat of a negative view of the Church as he saw it as having a harmful influence for Black Canadians “by acting as a barrier to the ultimate goal for which the Black Canadians should have been striving – integration into mainstream Canadian society” (Este, 2004). Wink believed that the Church was too exclusionary and failed to make its members address the immediate problems of the day. He believed that the Church should have been focusing on integration rather than exclusion and the assumption that the Black Church was having a positive role and influence in society was vastly misrepresented in his opinion (Este, 2004). Wink’s view of the Black Church is a widely held opinion. The church has been regarded as being too silent in the public arena to address social injustices. The church’s sense of exclusion has been taken up as an abandonment of its social justice role. But its role can be viewed in a different way.

Wink failed to critically interrogate the US historical context of Black migration that varies from Canada. Blacks arrived by force (push factor) to the US as enslaved persons in the hundreds of thousands while the Black presence in Canada was far fewer and was a combination of push and pull factors. There was a much larger concentration of Blacks through the Diaspora in the United States as the experience of slavery (from which Black Churches emerged) has been most pervasive on American soils (Gillard, 1990, Mensah, 2002). Though there are similarities to the Canadian experience, particularly in eastern Canada and southern Ontario where thousands of Blacks settled via the Underground

Railroad, the Black Pentecostal Church which emerged in the 1960's is quite different. This is not to say that the evil of enslavement was not as potent in Canada. What it meant was that the Blacks who settled in Canada included "free Blacks" and enslaved Blacks. This created a different dynamic for "free Blacks" - a more covert nature of political engagement in the Canadian scene. As the Canadian landscape became more multicultural the Black Church emerged to meet the social, physical and spiritual needs of an immigrant community. The unwavering gratefulness and loyalty that the Afro-Caribbean community exhibited toward the liberal government and subsequent deifying of Trudeau for 'letting them in' has transpired into little public opposition to the acts of injustices that many immigrants experienced. This may offer some preliminary explanation as to why they haven't responded as militantly to the racist system that affected their community. Further, with mass generations of Blacks in the US who share a commonality of forced migration through enslavement the experiences of African Americans and how they politically engage will no doubt be different from Afro-Caribbean immigrants who arrived to Canada by choice (pull factors) in the 21st century. For example, the politics of the Black Church in the United States had much to do with the fight for civil rights and equality, whereas Black Church politics in Canada post 1960 functioned as a social welfare institution that assisted the process of migration for Afro-Caribbean immigrants. This suggests that the way the Black Church politics play out across borders actually shifts according to the different migratory patterns. Therefore to understand Black Church politics and the way it engages in the public realm must consider the questions of history, context and migration.

2.2 The Union United Church 1900 - 1940s

The Black Church was always present during the various waves of Black migration to Canada. This is due in part to the importance of spirituality that Black people held and the Black Church provided the institutional foundation for Blacks to congregate. In the late 1800's to the early 1900's the first Black Church in Montreal Quebec was established. David Este is the grand-nephew of Reverence Este who was the late pastor of the first Black Church in Montreal (Email conversation July 27, 2008). In *The Black Church as a social Welfare Institution*, David Este examines the role of the Union United Church which is the oldest Black Church in Montreal Quebec. I will closely follow the arguments made by Este (2004) where he accounts for how the Church was an all encompassing part of Black culture and identity.

Este captures the positive role the Union United Church played to Black communities in Montreal in the early to mid 1900's. Este (2004) explains that

the Black Church provided its community members with basic necessities during a downturn in the economy and social, recreational, and educational activities were organized through the Church to promote a sense of community. He further adds little is known about the African Canadian community and the prevailing issues that confront this population or the strengths of this community as a collective entity. (p.3)

This Church served as a social welfare institution for the period 1907 to 1940 during the establishment of the city's Black community. Este corroborates what other scholars like Gill and Shadd-Shreve have had to say about the positive role the Black Church had in Black communities. Gill states (1998)

Since Blacks were only accepted into White Churches on very unequal terms and many philanthropic ventures failed due to poor management, corruption or tight reigned paternalism, the trend towards the establishment of separate African Christian denominations and Churches continued to develop.

Shadd Shreve (1983) also states:

The cornerstones of their communities were the religious institutions, which ministered to their spiritual needs, performed social and educational functions and supplied most of the administrators. Religion, indeed, was fundamental to the Black experience: in slavery, it was the only consolation; in freedom, it inspired exultation and gratitude. When they were denied full participation in the regular Churches, they were prepared to follow a separate path to Christian salvation.

Reverend Este was the leader of the Union Church and also became the secular leader of the Black community (Este, 2004:16). He spoke on behalf of the Black community and spearhead the Negro community centre (NCC) which aimed to protect the human rights and represent problems that affect Blacks and their quality of life in Montreal (Este, 2004:17). The “NCC proved to be very beneficial to the Black community by increasing community consciousness and socialization (Este, 2004:17). This is evidence of the Churches role in the spiritual and political arena. The racism that the Black community experienced in Montreal was what led them to form their own Churches. These institutions facilitated the development of a strong sense of community consciousness (Este, 2004: 20). It also became the central place where Black identity and culture could be nurtured and preserved. Este (2004) describes two major goals of the Union Church:

the preservation of the Black culture as well as efforts to address the injustices directed against Blacks. The Black Church was seen as helping Blacks to survive in dehumanizing conditions. The Church became a major social institution in the Black community. The mere fact that Blacks were able to survive in a hostile social and economic environment can be regarded as a positive and courageous achievement. (p.21)

Undoubtedly the Black Church as depicted by the Union church has been an all-encompassing part of Black culture and identity. Reverence Este was a great leader and preacher of that time and had considerable public presence and influence in that society. As Este (2004) adds:

Black preachers provided positive leadership and were instrumental in maintaining a cohesive community no matter how depressing conditions became. In addition to its spiritual aspect, the Church served as a social center where they could sing and dance, as well as discuss community concerns. (p.6)

The Blacks of this era were African Americans who were recruited to work as porters in Canada's railroad system. Their history included the harsh realities of racial discrimination in the United States which they experienced once again in their new setting in Canada. The Union church's political advocacy is similar to the US experience where Black Churches participated quite vehemently in the civil rights movement. It was the Union church which helped to form their political activism and as we will see this fared differently to immigrants who arrived from the Caribbean.

2.3 The Black Canadian Church, Post 1960

Before the 1950's, the Black Church was largely represented by the Baptist and Methodist denominations. It wasn't until the seventh wave of West Indian migration that the shift in denominational practices in Black Churches began. In 1960 Canada introduced the West Indian Domestic Scheme. This policy allowed women to enter Canada for a year to work as domestics. "Britain at this time began to tighten its immigration requirements while Canada was becoming more liberal as a result migrants who first chance would normally be Britain began immigrating to Canada" (Henry, 1994: 27). The result was that the cultural, religious and racial composition of the Canadian population began to change as immigrants arrived from non-White countries. The West Indian Domestic scheme was a major shift in Canada's immigration policy as 100 female domestics were admitted each year from Jamaica and Barbados (Wink's, 1997:439). In 1959 the numbers increased to 500 West Indian women that entered Canada via the quota system from Jamaica and Barbados (Wink's, 1997:440). By 1960 the government increased the number of West Indian immigrants significantly. Further, by 1965 over 2700 women of the Caribbean had been admitted. Women who left their domestic occupations due to poor working conditions later sponsored their fiancés and family members to immigrate to Canada.

The point system was introduced in the late 1950's and it had a similar effect like the Domestic Scheme Policy that opened doors to thousands of immigrants from the West Indies. The "point system changed the inequalities of prior legislations where 50 out of 100 points was needed to pass the points test in order to qualify for entry in to the

country” (Henry, 1994: 27). By the mid 1970’s immigration to Canada from the Caribbean reached its peak. Henry (1994) states,

Between 1973 and 1978, landed immigrants from the Caribbean including Guyana represented more than 10% of the total number of landed immigrants to Canada. The largest contingent just under 38% of the Caribbean population in Canada is of Jamaican origin. Only 4 countries Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and Haiti constitute more than 90% of the population. As of 1986 census 13555 Caribbean persons lived in the Toronto area. (p. 28-29)

The Afro-Caribbeans have a strong cultural identity and they did not adopt assimilation practices as its US counterpart. The mass influx of Caribbean immigrants, particularly from Jamaica was a constant feeder to the Black Oneness Church that was already established. When Afro-Caribbean immigrants arrived to Canada they brought with them a sense of gratitude for being allowed into their new setting. It was a type of pilgrimage and exodus from difficult economic circumstances. They also brought with them their transnational religious practices of Pentecostalism which differed significantly from the White churches they initially attended. Their deep Pentecostal roots, no doubt, influenced the way they interacted in their new settings and how they would cope with tough times. For the Afro-Caribbean immigrants, one of the important functions of religion is to provide a sense of direction in secular life (Henry, 1994: 165). Therefore, the Black Church acted as ‘cultural hubs’ to maintain their cultural and transnational religious norms and practices that was fundamental to a Black Oneness Identity.

Transnationalism is a term used to explain the Diaspora for people displaced or dispersed by a variety of reasons and it is becoming an increasingly important way that

immigrants from the Caribbean organize their relationships. Transnationalism speaks to the borderless nation states that are emerging for a growing number of immigrants who have affiliations in two or more countries (Castles, 2003). Meaning, people are migrating between a number of places where they have economic, social or cultural linkages. Caribbeans who migrated to Canada post 1960, generally, were economically motivated immigrants and arrived for similar reasons like earlier generations of European immigrants. African Canadians can claim no such voluntary immigrant experience. Rather, they have a bitter history of coerced importation, enslavement and discrimination (Rogers, 2006:7). The transnational identities of Afro-Caribbean immigrants became pronounced as they navigated between two worlds. This transnational identity is unique for this group as they entered Canada during an era where the government was seen as lending a helping hand to the poor socioeconomic conditions that they were leaving behind. For Afro-Caribbean immigrants, Canada was regarded as a safe haven and a land of opportunity.

Reul Rogers (2006) *Afro-Caribbean Immigrants and the Politics of Inclusion*, is a United States study that addresses whether the Afro-Caribbeans distinctive ethnic background and immigrant status make for differences in how they and their native-born counterparts perceive and participate in the political process (Rogers, 2006:11). This book critiques the transnational practice of Afro-Caribbeans from their native African Americans. Reul Rogers (2006) speaks of the Afro-Caribbeans distinctive ethnic background and immigrant status that make for differences in how they and their native-born counterparts perceive and participate in the political process (Rogers, 2006: 11). This research speaks to the uniqueness of the Canadian Afro-Caribbean experience and

how it diverges from the US context. My own point of departure with Rogers work is to highlight how we can better situate the experiences of Afro-Caribbean engagement in the Canadian political spectrum. This helps us to understand the central importance of the Black Pentecostal Church post 1960 to Black communities. Rogers shares some compelling variances between the Afro-Caribbean community and the African American community that can easily be extrapolated to the Canadian context. The following section will follow the arguments made by Rogers.

The Afro-Caribbeans who immigrated to Canada post 1960 and the group of Blacks who arrived before 1960 share some common history. Both groups have experienced enslavement and racial domination of Whites. Despite these commonalities, however, there are significant differences between the two groups. As Rogers (2006) explains,

unlike their native-born Black counterparts Afro-Caribbeans are voluntary immigrants who claim a distinctive ethnic identity and emigrate from countries that are predominately Black. With their immigrant background, distinctive ethnic heritage and particular home country attachments their lens of their new environment is seen very differently. (p.8)

First generation Afro-Caribbean Canadians do not have the same historical memory of racism as do first-generation Black Canadians (Rogers 2006). For Black Canadians who arrived to Canada by force, they anchor their identities especially their racial group consciousness as a result of their experiences in Canada. As Rogers argues,

Afro-Caribbeans who have arrived post 1960 were voluntary immigrants and this has resulted in a very different perceptual lenses for making sense of their lives in this country. Whereas Indigenous Black Canadians may rely on racial group

consciousness to evaluate their status and confront the challenges of racism, first generation Afro-Caribbean immigrants turn to their home country or transnational identity. (Rogers, 2006:192)

As a result of their distinct immigration experiences, these groups map their identities differently but based on similar racial concerns. As it turns out, this identity furnishes them with a particular way of responding or not responding to Canada's racial barriers.

In Rogers (2006) study, he found that although almost all of the respondents declared they had encountered racial discrimination and believed racism was still pervasive in American life, most also claimed they were not as preoccupied with racism as their African-American counterparts (p. 186). He also found that Afro-Caribbeans were slow to mobilize and were mostly disengaged from formal politics. What must be said of Rogers finding, however, is that the political process is seen in one way. Much of the process of immigration to Canada includes transnational or home country immigrant networks. These networks have developed where the immigrants have carved out their own distinct residential enclaves within larger Black neighborhoods (Rogers, 2006:19). What Rogers failed to account for is that these neighborhoods are not limited to geographical niches within a city but include neighborhoods of spirituality and religion – namely the Black Church. The transnational networks they built were a political process. According to Rogers (2006) Afro-Caribbeans develop their ethnic identity in the context of these neighborhood social networks and they have two distinct effects on Afro-Caribbean identity.

First, they put the immigrants in contact with co-ethnics from all over the Caribbean and thus lead them to embrace a pan-ethnic identity. Afro-Caribbeans

immigrate to [Canada] with their particular island-based identities, and develop a pan-ethnic Caribbean identity as a result of interacting with other immigrants from the region in these neighborhood-based networks. Second, the networks also encourage the immigrants to sustain their ties to their home countries. Afro-Caribbean in these networks typically share news and memories from back home. This ongoing attention to home country activities, acquaintances, and so on, is part of a larger socialization process that gives Afro-Caribbean ethnic identity a transnational focus. (p.192)

Denise Gillard's (1998) writing on *The Black Church in Canada* is a key text, which builds upon the analysis of Afro-Caribbean church members post 1960. Of all the Canadian literature on the Black Church in Canada, Gillard's article was found to come closest to specifically addressing the Canadian Black Church for the period that this research is interested. Gillard is an ordained Baptist minister in Toronto and though she characterizes her research as simply "scratching the surface" for providing a survey of the evolution of the Black Church in Canada, she does an excellent job in historicizing the Black presence in Canada and asking provocative questions concerning the Black Church in Canada. Gillard (1998) claims that

Wherever Christian nurture has taken root among communities of Black people in Canada, the Black Church has found it necessary to separate from the mainstream in order to afford its members the full participation, lay empowerment, leadership development, and spiritual dignity essential to those who unite together as the body of Christ. (p.1)

Gillard similarly shares the view of Henry (1994) that racism was a key motivator for the growth of Black Churches as Blacks were treated unequally in White Churches and the trend towards establishing separate Black Christian Churches evolved. The religious meetings they formed provided a spiritual and social outlet, which helped them to deal with their sense of exclusion of living in a country but yet never fully experiencing a sense of being at home. As a result, the Black Churches were formed as an insular institution, equipping its members to navigate both spiritually and intellectually in the outside world. Gillard presents two important questions:

- 1) are people of colour once again experiencing the exclusionary attitudes and practices encountered when Blacks first attempted to join mainstream Churches in the early days of our common history, or are other factors at work, and
- 2) do people of colour truly feel welcomed and embraced, or are they simply passing time in our Churches, waiting for a real home?"(p.9)

Gillard fails to provide a preliminary hypothesis to her question and this is an inherent weakness in her critique. The notion of "passing time" implies that the Black Church is socially apathetic and silent community members. However, as the literature suggests it may also be a means of resistance to the colonial discursive practices which aims to homogenize cultures, identities, and notions of spirituality into the conformities of the colonial empire.

2.4 Black Pentecostalism

This section on Black Pentecostalism provides some potential reasons why Blacks left White congregations to Black ones after migration. In chapter 5 Pentecostalism will be

described in-depth to more fully appreciate what it was about the Pentecostal movement that created a more insular political praxis amongst Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Lincoln and Mamiya conducted one of the most extensive studies on the role of the Black Church in the lives of African Americans and *The Black Church in the African-American experience* is a widely documented study for proponents of the Black Church tradition. Lincoln used survey research methods to explore the role of religion in African American life and have been found to be a useful and thorough investigation of the historical and contemporary role of Churches in African American communities (Taylor, 2004). The outcome of Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) work serves as a useful source for Black religious scholars in understanding the magnitude of Black Churches in America, which largely shapes the social world of Black Churchgoers. The study outlines the 7 largest Black Church denominations in America, including;

the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) Church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E.Z.) Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church; the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NCBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). (p.1)

Although the numbers reported in the study are mainly in the United States, many of the listed denominations such as Pentecostalism also extend into the borders of Canada. It is believed that:

Pentecostals are widely acknowledged to be the fastest-growing segment of the Black religious family where the Church of God in Christ is recorded as the

largest of the Black Pentecostal groups in the US with an estimated membership of 3.5 million members. (Lincoln, 1990:78)

In contrasting Lincoln's statistic to the Canadian context, there are some interesting parallels worth noting. The 2001 Canadian census reports that for the period 1961-1980 a period where other religious groups were either decreasing in size or experiencing marginal increases in their membership, the Pentecostal religion doubled (Canadian Census 2001). The dramatic increase in Pentecostals can be correlated with the patterns of immigration for the same period as migration from the Caribbean to Canada also doubled. In Toronto, of 61,965 people that report Pentecostal, 40,355 are visible minorities (65%) of which 30,225 (75%) are Black (Canadian Census 2001). Of the 4795 people that report Church of God in Christ, a sub group of the Pentecostal groups, 4570 (95%) are visible minorities and 4305 (94%) are Black (Canadian Census 2001). In analyzing the census data, no other religion reports such a high concentration of Blacks as does the Pentecostal movement. The eruption of Black Pentecostal Churches in Canada shows the establishment of newer denominations outside of the Methodist and Baptist denomination. Lincoln's use of statistics is particularly helpful in terms of quantifying the numbers of Black Pentecostal Churches in the United States, which can be extrapolated to consider similar trends in the Canadian context. It does not however, (as the Canadian Census also fails to do), adequately document the varying sub-groups of Pentecostals like Apostolic/Oneness people, which make it difficult to pinpoint the exact numbers of specific subgroups of Pentecostal Churches.

As the statistics suggests, the Black Pentecostal Churches in Canada today comprise the largest groups of Black Churches. Not only is modern Pentecostalism now the fastest

growing religion worldwide, Tinney (1971) argued that it is “the only denomination of the Christian faith founded by Black people” (p.1). This is what a leading expert in religious statistics has to say about Pentecostalism’s growth:

Pentecostalism in all its varied forms already encompasses over 400 million people. It is by far the largest non-Catholic grouping accounting for one in every four Christians. It is also the fastest growing Christian movement on earth, increasing more rapidly than either militant Islam or the Christian fundamentalist sects, with which it is sometimes confused. (Cox, 2001:15)

Pentecostalism has become closely related to the enormous growth of Black Churches in Black settlement areas. As Hollenweger (1997) argues, the reason for Pentecostalism’s breathtaking growth,

lies in its Black root, which can be described like this: Orality of liturgy, Narrativity of theology and witness; Maximum participation at the levels of reflection, prayer and decision-making and therefore a form of community, which is reconciliatory. (p.19)

Pentecostalism is thus revolutionary because it offers an alternative theological and sociological ingredient not found in mainstream Churches, as it puts emphasis on the role of the spirit as an active and liberating force in the heart of the believer. Meaning, the Spirit is held to be active, alive, and powerful in ways that are manifested within both the invisible and the visible realms of reality. Within the spiritual realm, the Spirit is experienced in intense personal and communal ways. In a real sense, the entirety of Christian life is but the movement of the Spirit, according to African Pentecostals. (Historical Overviews, 44)

The power of the spirit or one's spirituality emanates from an inner communication with God who aligns with the oppressed and indwells within the heart of the believer. The belief in the "Spirit" permeated their worldviews. Everything the believer hoped to be was defined by how the "Spirit" of God would make a way for them. Therefore, they need not rely on their own abilities but the power of the Spirit that would take care of all their needs. As MacRobert (1988) argues,

for the African, the Black slave and the Black American or West Indian Pentecostal religion is primarily about experiencing the power of God. God's presence and power must be felt or revealed in a pragmatic, personal, subjective and even exciting way. (p.14)

MacRobert's book (1988) *The Black Roots and White racism of early Pentecostalism in the USA* can be corroborated with the Canadian experience in terms of the role Black Pentecostalism played for Blacks in Canada. MacRobert (1988) argues that

with the redrawing of the colour line by the White Pentecostals, the Black worshipping community became an ethnic community, as it had been in Africa and during slavery. There the Black person in a racist society could have his humanity and dignity affirmed. There he could find an outlet for the self-expression, creativity and diverse abilities, which were stifled by White society. Self-determination and leadership could develop in an environment, which was not disadvantageous to those who had limited education and a Black culture as well as a Black skin. (p.94)

MacRobert's analysis springs off of Gillard's earlier contention that the Black Church in Canada has also had to separate from the mainstream in order to afford its members full

affirmation outside the dictates of White Churches whose “racism was justified by a heretical Christianity” (MacRobert, 1988:94).

By virtue of the Black Church’s exclusionary stance, the Black Church created an autonomous social world whereby the Black Church was an outlet for resistance, self-expression, creativity and diverse abilities, which were stifled by White society (MacRobert, 1988). In the Canadian context, this was further exasperated by issues such as immigration, assimilation and family separation where Caribbean Blacks sought for “a home away from home”. The Black Pentecostal Church became a community infrastructure which responded to the needs of Caribbeans of the Diaspora. Black Pentecostalism was a way they could express themselves in ways that were indigenous to their worship style and feeling in a home away from home.

2.5 Decolonizing The Black Church

A grave misreading often made, then, is the outright misunderstanding of the role the Black Church plays in Black people’s lives. This is largely attributed to factors such as the Church’s silence on historical issues affecting the community and the negative role of Christianity in African enslavement. Two areas this study hopes to address is the importance of de-colonizing the Black Church from dominant views and second addressing how we can interpret the Black Church’s exclusionary attitudes and complicities on historical issues. There is a key aspect of the project of decolonizing the Black Church: it is about investigating the sites of liberatory politics within the church unknown to dominant scholarship (Dei, 2008). What is meant by de-colonization here is to be critical of how colonization has infiltrated the Black Church and also how

colonization has impacted our negative views on the importance of religious entities like the Black Church that have been inherently liberatory for its members. This is important for Black Churches are being indicted for not playing a central role in fighting issues of inequity. Newer forms of colonialism have crept in which aims to colonize the spirits of the Black mass and undermine the importance of religious-spirituality in the Black struggle. There are ideological factors to consider for why the Black Church has been misunderstood; particularly, the Churches role in current affairs. It is, therefore, important to address the negative role Christianity played in African enslavement as this is often a point of contention in terms of valuing the Black Church as a valid site for resistance.

Mazama's (2002) *Afrocentricity and African Spirituality* is an important article to critique in order to challenge current negative views on the role of Christianity within anti-oppressive studies. Mazama is a well known afrocentric scholar and she is highly regarded as a critical scholar. Mazama (2002) discredits Christianity because of its role in "the descalization of the African spiritual space, that is, of African life, given the paramount importance of spirituality for African people"(p.223). This perspective devalues other critical faith based scholars who take up religious based institutions as sites for resistance. By valuing Christian based organizations like the Black Church, there is a subtle implication that the academic is somehow reinscribing colonialism. There is also an (un)spoken assumption in the academy that it is difficult to be critical, Christian and anti-racist all at the same time and to escape this sense of exclusion, Black intellectuals often suppress their religious identities for fear of being judged. Mazama (2002), for example, asserts that terms such as Afrocentric Christians, are incompatible

for “one cannot pretend to be relocated and defend African agency while at the same time continue to embrace one of the pillars of Western supremacy” (p.223). For Blacks from the Black Church tradition who are engaged in equity studies, the interplay of the spiritual and the secular are inseparable and to amputate one’s religious-spiritual anchor can create “spiritual fragmentation” and a profound sense of hopelessness and paralysis when doing equity work.

Mazama’s Afrocentric analysis mistakenly makes Christianity synonymous with White supremacy with no regard to Black Christian expression, which served as an anti-colonial response to Europeanized Christianity. This oversight is a critical mistake too often made by intellectuals and contributes to the further polarization of faith based communities and the academy in bridging dialogue to issues that we all share. It is also the reason why many Black intellectuals who identify with a particular religious discipline are afraid to “come out” and link their faith with their practice. This creates a spiritual fragmentation which is “the incongruence between one’s personal, moral, religious, and spiritual beliefs in his or her social acts and communal obligations” (Martin, 2002:199). Mazama’s claim that “Christianity, must be understood [as] part and parcel of the White supremacy project, to whose demise Afrocentricity is fundamentally committed” (Mazama, 2002:223) is a clear replica of how colonialism works. No longer is the mandate of colonialism to focus solely on geographical territories. Rather, the new mandate is to colonize and annihilate the spiritual territory of people, particularly amongst people who have a history of resistance, resilience and recovery. It is as serious a mistake to equate Christianity with Western supremacy as it is to equate Islam with terrorism, for example “and it is important that we do not lose sight of our own history

and accept what others say about our identity“ (Tait 2002:23). History records how potent religious forms of resistance can be in challenging imperial paradigms. Mazama fails to recognize biblical Christianity from the perspective of the sacred text; instead, she views Christianity from the perspective of the gross injustices that our ancestors endured in the name of a distortion of that text. Biblical Christianity should not be overlooked as if it has no value for current generations. To be committed to a project that seeks for the demise of Christianity as Mazama claims, is to be committed to the ousting of Black history where Christian Churches were instrumental in helping to achieve Black freedom. Such a commitment desecrates the legacy and heritage of Black abolitionists, resisters, agitators, Church planters, political activists, educators, laymen, and women, all of whom resisted colonial domination with their blood. Ultimately, this creates a limited reading of the role the Black Church played in the anti-colonial struggle.

There is a fundamental difference between the ideologies of Europeanized Christianity and the ideas and beliefs that were evoked and acted upon by the Black Church. Mazama fails to distinguish the difference between the Black Christian Church and the Christian doctrine preached to colonized people. In so doing, she makes a radical mistake in her critique by leaving out how she defines Christianity from the perspective of the oppressed and the oppressor. Black Theology captures the ideas and beliefs that were evoked by the Black Church and addressed the hypocrisy, racism and inconsistencies of Ethnocentric Christianity. As Simms (2000) explains,

During the late 1960's African intellectuals began to openly discuss the ineffectiveness of western Christianity...it failed to address the social, cultural, and religious needs of Black. In response to this situation, Black intellectuals

developed a contextualized system of religious thought, using their life situation to particularize their theology and their humiliation to circumstantiate their relationship with God. (p.180)

Interestingly, they didn't dismiss the validity of Christianity but rather threw out the colonial distortions of it.

Black theology was a sociological response to European Christianized racism found to be unacceptable to the experiences of Blacks who experienced tremendous sufferings at the hands of Whites. It was a tool to uncover racist policies and practices that were buried under the banner of Christianity. It also became as Simmons (2004) argues a "counter hegemonic theory which argued that, according to the scriptures, the subjugation of non-Whites was not God-ordained but was the deliberate creation of wicked men, misrepresenting God and His divine will" (p.178-179). Black theology is a powerful example of how religion can be sites of resistance to injustice and oppression. Religion and spirituality has had a liberating and empowering affect to communities marginalized by the clutches of colonization. It was the Black Church that helped to create a counter hegemonic theory which cultivated the differences between Eurocentric Christianity and the ideas embraced by the Black Church.

The colonial project is largely one of appropriation of both the physical and spiritual aspects of a people and a reversal tactic is being used in modern forms of colonialism. To some extent, where religion was used as a tool of colonization to breed compliance, domination and control over the masses, secularism which advocates the right to be free of religious influence, rule and teachings is the new colonial tool. In other words, western supremacist ideology inculcates a "politics of forgetting", which alienates us from our

cultural and religious experiences, and as a result, it causes us to forget what kept our predecessors firmly rooted in their identities and culture. How best to achieve this by utilizing the voices of those we deem as “critical”? It is patronizing to even suggest (by Mazama’s own implication that Christianity is White supremacy) that the enslaved were not smart enough to understand and resist the teachings and practices of Christianity that was thrust upon them was not biblical principles at all. What distinguishes Black Christianity from Europeanized Christianity is the separation of teachings (sacred text) from practices (colonial dogma, distortions of that text). As Wilmore argues “the [en]slave[d] recognized the gross inconsistency between the teaching they received about the loving and all-powerful God of the White man, and the reality of White indifference to their powerlessness and suffering” (Wilmore in MacRobert, 1988:17). Further, as Johnson so rightly claims “many of the [en]slave[d] were not seduced by White cultic Christianity but were able to accept Christianity, yet reject a White gospel of Black inferiority (Johnson, p.140). This was the premise and foundation to why Black Churches were started. Indeed, there are tensions within Black Christianity and the impact that colonialism continues to have but it is especially important to expose Europeanized Christianity, which has no congruence with the teachings of the sacred text and this is what the enslaved were able to sort out for themselves. Mazama’s claims are laden in colonial posture, which aims to have a race deny their religious and cultural heritage, just as it did in Africa. Although Mazama makes no distinction between the secular and the sacred in African spirituality, her indictment of Christianity for neglecting African spirituality suggests that a distinction should be made. If we are committed to the demise of particular religions, we first should be committed to dialogue with the sacred texts that

are written and then discern whether the practices of colonization, slavery, and terrorism for example are in conformity with the teachings of the religion in question. What must remain clear is that the Christianity of the enslaved was not a re-interpretation of White Christianity but rather an articulation that was based on biblical principles of liberation and inclusion – an essential practice and teaching of Christianity that Eurocentric colonizers omitted from the gospel message.

As Mazama emphasizes, however, we also should not ignore the travesties of our past and the "desacralization of the African spiritual space". Therefore, it is important to expose the White supremacist project which aims to "racialize religion" where people are marked not according to a biological determinant such as skin colour but according to how certain religions have been constructed and used as a tool of oppression" (Brown Spencer, 2006). The perversion of Christianity by White colonialists was a reenactment of White supremacist policies through the most powerful weapon of compliance – religion. "It was the culture of White supremacy, not their faith, that generated ethnocentrism" (Usry, 1996:26). Religion was used to wipe away African religion, culture, language and traditions. Therefore it is important that we historicize Whiteness as a theology and a visible offspring of White supremacy (Perkinson, 2004). By critiquing the correlation of Whiteness as a theological force we can potentially uncover the guise of the White supremacist agenda, where religion is a tool to divide and conquer not just within a physical realm but spiritual as well.

2.6 Literature Conclusion

In all periods of the Black Diaspora, there have always been a group of people who organize within their social, economic, cultural and religious realities despite the tools that White supremacist politics uses to advance its agenda. The Pentecostal denomination experienced the largest growth of Black Churches as people migrated from the Caribbean to large urban centres in Canada. This may be attributed to Pentecostalism's strong African root which Black people generally gravitated to. The role of the Black Church should not be reduced to an anti-or pro religious debate. It is more important to unravel the potency of White supremacist politics which has virtually infiltrated every discourse, religion or secular form that there is. The Black Church needs to be de-colonized when undertaking a historical trajectory of Black history because it has been inherently linked to Eurocentricism. It is important to unwrap the dogma that is associated with this linkage. Indeed, embracing Black Christian religious expression is tenuous given the history of our past. This however does not negate the actual experience of Black Christianity and other forms of Black religious expression in the past and present.

I found the literature to support a main premise of this study, and that is that the Black Church in Canada has a distinct role in the Black community. It, therefore, must be understood by linking the various historical waves of Black migration and how that differs from the US; how Black Pentecostalism shaped the role of the Black Church for that era, and the importance of decolonizing the Black Church from a Eurocentric worldview.

Chapter 3

An Examination of the Theoretical Discursive Framework

Give me Jesus in the Morning, Give me Jesus in the Evening, Every moment of the day,
just give me Jesus. He is my reason for living, he is my source of survival every moment
of the day, just give me Jesus. (Gospel Chorus)

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present a multiple discursive framework that discusses the various roles the Black Pentecostal church plays for Black communities in Canada. A discursive framework captures the emergent theory that evolves from qualitative data as opposed to positivist methodologies that encompasses a particular truth and/or rules that govern how an issue should be examined. As opposed to a theoretical framework, a discursive framework is not constrained by universal theories and grand narratives but rather creates fluid spaces for theory to evolve where communities otherwise regulated by rigid frameworks can be heard in their contexts. Further, it speaks to the general terms within which we think about a particular issue by considering the tensions, contradictions and points of analysis that speak to the specificities of a particular community under study. A discursive framework is simply allowing the voices of those we study to be heard and validated as theory emerges from their lives. This knowledge that is gained helps to form the philosophical and ideological frameworks to a study.

There are three discursive frameworks that will be used in the analysis of this study. These include the anti-colonial framework, the critical faith based epistemology, and a *Whiteness as Theology* framework. A Black [Christian] feminist framework will be introduced in chapter 7 to speak to the experiences of Black women in the Black Church. My decision to reserve a separate chapter for women in the Black Church is not to

marginalize their voices but to fulfill a main objective of this study and provide a voice for churchwomen of the Oneness faith who are currently underrepresented in academic scholarship. Although black feminist thought includes gendered experience, this study did not want to conflate women's experiences with the men. The researcher felt their voices would be best represented in a separate chapter that entirely focuses on their lived experiences as church women.

I have chosen the anti-colonial framework, the critical faith based epistemology, and a *Whiteness as Theology* framework to reclaim other ways of knowing and to broaden the lens of which the data will be interpreted. The three epistemologies that are used have different philosophical groundings yet they are complementary, sharing particular emphasis on interrogating the nuances of the colonial project where issues of religion, spirituality, race and gender pedagogies are submerged. The epistemologies that are discussed in this study are gaining strong impetus in the academy as they present critiques and challenges to western Eurocentric ways of knowing. Such critiques, like the anti-colonial discursive framework demands for an overhaul of the way dominant epistemologies have been reinforced within our society. While there has been the acknowledgement of the exclusion of race, gender and class to name a few, alternative frameworks are also evolving to address a similar exclusion of spirituality. Therefore, it is important to use a multiple discursive framework to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Black Church that speaks both to the role that religious-spirituality plays in Black people's lives and the resultant ideologies that emerge from their experiences. The following section will outline the foundations of each framework and demonstrate why they are important for understanding the Black Church.

3.1 Anti-colonialism Discursive Framework

Applying an anti-colonial framework in this study is an attempt to subvert White supremacist politics. Perhaps the best known theorist to do this and de-complicate the anti-colonial reality in the black community is George Dei. Certainly many scholars have written about the colonial encounter, the enduring presence of colonization and its impacts on marginalized communities. But, it is Dei who in my view has bridged the writings of classical theorists like Memmi (1969), Cesaire (1972) and Fanon (2004) to name a few in the most concrete way to outline a discursive framework that students and scholars can understand and work with. And for this fact, I follow his works closely to describe the main tenets of the anti-colonial discursive framework as the principles of this study are embedded in understandings of indigenous sense of knowledge that ground religious-spirituality.

Anti-colonialism “emphasizes the salience of colonialism and imperialism and their continuing effects on marginalized communities” (Dei, 2001:300). It not only tackles issues of colonial domination but the reality of the re-colonizing processes that manifests in different forms, i.e. religious institutions. The anti-colonial framework refutes the “post” and “neo” colonial interpretations of imperial dominance and rather posits that colonialism has not ended and we need to better articulate the realities of millions of marginalized people who are displaced and/or relocate to improve their well being. The reality of displaced or immigrant communities include issues of poverty, racism, sexism and cultural genocide. However, these realities have been confronted and resisted by a reservoir of knowledge that emerged out of the long term experiences of marginalized communities. It is this knowledge that we call indigenous knowledge system that has

been invalidated by the authority of Western knowledge/discourses. It is the indigenusness knowledge that the anti-colonial discursive framework works with and celebrates as “knowledge consciousness that arises from the colonized presence” (Dei, 2000). The anti-colonial theory, then, is a framework of empowerment that serves to recognize, validate and disseminate the indigenous knowledge and power that marginalized groups possess. For power not only derives from the colonial but the colonized as well who asserts their own power to resist and insert their own intellectual agency. “The indigenous identity continuously confronts the colonial/imperial order, and it is through such a perpetual confrontation that a sense of ‘indigenusness’ is acquired” (Dei, 2001:302).

Indigenusness is a concept that the anti-colonial discursive framework works with and it is an essential starting point to understand the way colonialism is implicated in modern times. “Indigenusness emerges from an indigenous knowledge system that is based on cognitive understandings and interpretations of the social and physical/spiritual worlds” (Dei, 2000:72). It also has to do with the “everyday ideas and cultural knowledge’s of local peoples concerning the realities of living” (Dei, 2002:4). It is the dimension of spirituality in Indigenous knowledge’s that this study works with to validate the central importance of religious-spirituality for Afro-Caribbean migrants. Instead of relying on scientific empirical validation of knowledge production, indigenusness understandings are premised on the emotional, psychological and spiritual cognitions that emanate from human experience. As a Black Christian scholar, I have critical concerns about the way religious discourse is represented in the academy, and have, in the past, shied away from integrating how Black religious expression can be a means of resistance

to dominant epistemologies. The reluctance to explore religious-spirituality in the academe had much to do with the legacy of colonization and the questions of fear and conformity. But, the anti-colonial discursive framework has provided me with the critical analytical framework required for other valid ways of knowing to be reclaimed and applied in this research. Dei (2002) explains:

We must acknowledge the indigenous capacity to exercise intellectual agency and to engage in self-reflexive knowledge reproduction. In this context, exercising intellectual agency mean engaging in a process of recuperation, revitalization and reclamation of Africa indigenous knowledge as a necessary exercise in empowerment. We cannot underestimate the power of ideas in terms of the role of social forces to generate relevant knowledge for collective resuscitation, spiritual rebirth and cultural renewal. (pg.14)

The anti-colonial framework effectively positions alternative frameworks of knowledge as a means to transform the way we undertake knowledge production. This approach has created needed spaces for academics to consider possibilities where communities of faith can anchor their spirituality with their politics when addressing social justice causes. Academics no longer need to rely solely on secular sources of knowledge that don't speak to and/or ignore the realities of faith communities. The consciousness that has emerged from faith communities is what Dei describes as the "intellectual agency of local subjects where they articulate their conditions in terms of their own...spirituality" (Dei, 2001:302).

We have to consider the role of indigenous knowledge in the academy as primarily one of resistance to Eurocentricism; that is, resistance to the dominance of Eurocentric

knowledge as the only valid way of knowing (Dei, 2002:16) That is why I have chosen to integrate the anti-colonial discursive framework with the critical faith-centred epistemology and *Whiteness as Theology* framework given their inherent linkages to spirituality as an epistemology. The anti-colonial framework provides an essential starting point to build upon the other frameworks that are evoked in this study. The attempt to integrate three discursive frameworks is to propose a specific challenge to Eurocentric colonizing knowledge, identify the ways that colonialism continues to manifest in the day to day lives of people, especially Black women and “to integrate spiritually-centred ways of knowing as part of legitimate academic knowledge-building and pedagogical praxis” (Zine, 2004:68). In this vein, colonialism is not considered as a project that has ended but rather as a project that has been transformed. Dei (2001) writes,

The anti colonial discursive framework is an epistemology of the colonized, anchored in the indigenous sense of collective and common colonial consciousness. Colonial in this sense is conceptualized not simply as foreign or alien, but rather as imposed and dominating. Its goal is to question, interrogate, and challenge the foundations of institutionalized power and privilege and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations. (Dei, p.300)

In considering Dei’s definition, anti-colonialism can be considered as an umbrella framework by which profound sites of empowerment and forms of resistance can be birthed and/or revitalized to subvert newer forms of power. It has effectively raised the consciousness of communities to bring awareness of colonial structures that are present. As a result, this has led to the creation of discursive frameworks that effectively speak to

the lived realities of marginal communities concerned with challenging the ever present reality of colonialism.

As I have argued elsewhere, “the anti-colonial project is a form of spiritual practice, not in the conventional sense, but in terms of moving knowledge to the realm of transformative politics” (Brown Spencer, 2006:30). It further addresses the “erasures of spiritual knowledge in academic and discursive contexts [and it] is part of an anti-colonial politics of knowledge construction, reclamation, and inclusion” (Zine, 2004:68). The Anti-colonial project, then, is transformative in the sense that it can be applied as a method of social action anchored in spiritual/religious convictions that aims to resist Eurocentric practices. An anti-colonial politics recognizes the importance of spirituality in equity work. Ruck-Simmons (2006) substantiates this further by saying “anti-colonialism is in effect, a spiritual approach that embodies resistance and a determined focus to facilitate wholeness, healing and opportunities for ‘disordered’ fragmentations to be meaningfully fused” (p. 86). This has led academics to break out of the secular box of knowledge production and subvert colonial forms of power by reclaiming their own religious/spiritual ways of knowing.

The job of an anti-colonial scholar, in part, is to stimulate changing attitudes for the purpose of appreciating indigenesness. Meaning that, where cultural norms, traditions, spirituality and religion, for example, were excluded in the history of the colonial and colonized nations they are valued and (re)claimed for resistance in current eurocentric settings. For faith communities in particular, a critical faith epistemology provides a lens where spiritual epistemologies can be validated as an approach to analyze human experiences as an option to positivist, rational and scientific inquiry that has permeated

research methodology for so long. A *Whiteness as Theology* framework categorically exposes Whiteness theology as a colonial doctrine. These forms of resistance, that have emerged can be imputed to the efficacy of the anti-colonial framework that has created fertile ground to equip academics to resist and challenge Eurocentric knowledge's and reclaim their own. Anti-colonial theory therefore opens spaces to theorize about colonial and colonizing relations that include spiritual/religious identities. The anti-colonial, critical faith epistemology and *Whiteness as Theology* framework validates the importance of faith, spirituality and religion as legitimate forms of knowledge within academia. This ultimately encourages academics to create or reclaim alternate theories that speak to their actual lived experiences. The making of the critical faith epistemology and development of a *Whiteness as Theology* framework is a response to the anti-colonial call to emancipate voices and critically investigate the ways that colonialism serves to obviate other knowledge like spirituality. The following section will speak to the principles of a critical faith-centred epistemology that can be applied to the lived experience of the Black Church community and will follow with a *Whiteness as Theology* framework.

3.2 Critical faith-centred epistemology

Zines critical faith centred framework is a by product of anti-colonial thought as it moves theory anchored in religious ideology into a social justice framework. It extends the anti-colonial project by locating religious identity as a tool to displace hegemonic knowledge and “expose [the] lingering colonial practices and their continuing effects on marginalized communities” (Dei, 2001:300). It diverges from the anti-colonial

framework in that it provides a deeper engagement with the prospect of religious-spirituality as an anti-colonial tool and it openly engages “religious faith’ as a legitimate location and space from which to know and resist colonization. It therefore assists with the learning objective of this study which is to understand the central importance of the Black Pentecostal Church post 1960 and provide a voice for those of the Black Church that are currently underrepresented in academic scholarship.

The critical faith-centred epistemology is an important contribution to academic scholarship, particularly for faith based communities. As Zine (2004) explains, this perspective is premised upon introducing spiritual/religious ways of knowing as an alternative to secularist knowledge that has masqueraded as a universal standard. Zine produced the critical faith-centred approach to “develop a framework that involved the political and discursive goal of creating a space for faith-centred voices to enter critical academic and political debates and dialogues as valid sites of knowledge and contestation” (Zine, 2004:68). The critical faith centred epistemology is founded upon beliefs in a metaphysical reality which provides an alternative lens where faith communities can analyze social happenings. Zine (2004) explains the tenets of this approach:

The emphasis on criticality within this perspective relates to the way faith-centred people can identify, counter, and resist, racism, classism, and sexism from a spiritually centred space that is at the same time attentive to the way that extremist or fundamentalist religious dogmas can become complicit in these construction and the structural relations and circumstances that sustain them. (page 71)

Zines critical faith based framework is particularly applicable to this study as it lays out an important premise in the understanding of human reality, that is, the unequivocal belief in the importance of spirituality/religion in human lives. This is an important premise to build on in order to rightfully appreciate the role the Black Church has had in the Black community. The Black Church has historically provided the Black community with a dictum of hope during centuries of oppression. For many Blacks, spirituality and religion go hand in hand and institutions like the Black Church have been an all-encompassing part of Black culture and identity. Part of the dilemma of understanding the role of the Black Church are attributed to the negative and limited reading of the Black Church and how Christianity is complicit with slavery. What distinguishes the Black Church from other institutions is its dual role as a religious institution and a cultural system for dealing with forms of reality such as racism. Conducting research on the Black Church, therefore, requires a proper understanding of the Black Church as a site of resistance to the colonial system. It also must include an appreciation for indigeneity and spiritual praxis which guides their everyday life. The seven principles of the critical faith based ethnography are foundational to examining the Black Church community. The following section will outline the seven principles of the critical faith epistemology and how it applies to the study of the Black Oneness Church in Canada.

Principle #1:

The first principle of the critical faith based epistemology is “a philosophy of holism, or connection between the physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of identity and identification” (Zine, 2004:75). This principle derives from Muslim ontology but is similarly applied by all indigenous philosophies and Christian beliefs in that people are

made up of body, soul and spirit. This holistic nature of humanity is critical to understanding the multiple ways that humans may interact in life and the many ways they can be understood. To devalue or deny ones religious/spiritual ontology is to negate an intrinsic part of human identity. Therefore, to deny or devalue that place that spirituality has in Black life is to negate the multiple aspects of Black identity.

Principle #2:

This principle asserts that conventional religion and spirituality have had a key role in society. Irrespective of ones religious belief, all types of religious/spiritual belief systems have held a sacred role in human evolvment and therefore “understanding a faith-centred reality means examining the sources from which meaning is infused into the everyday aspects of life...”(Zine, 2004:76). This principle attends to

The saliency of faith and spirituality in framing the worldviews, beliefs, and practices of faith-centred people, and accepts this as a valid way of negotiating an understanding of community, selfhood, environment, and experiences of transnationalism. (p.78)

Historically, “traditions of faith and spiritual practice are part of the hallmarks of human social and cultural development” (Zine, 2004:76). For example, the experiences of Black migration in Canada and the parallel evolvment of the Black Church is an important example of the role that religion has played in this community. In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, the Black Church played an instrumental role in providing for the social, financial and spiritual needs that Black migrants faced during periods of migration. This influenced the way its members negotiated their participation.

Principle #3:

The third principle claims that although religion/spirituality has played a significant role historically as described above, its role did not cease at these historical junctures. Religion/spirituality continues to shape the way people view and organize their world socially, culturally, politically and economically. The renowned Bishop TD Jakes is an example of how the Black Church has pushed the traditional walls of religion to address the social, cultural, political and economic needs of its members. TD Jakes is known to bring together over 80,000 people to attend conferences to cover topics such as sexual abuse, economic empowerment and social justice. These conferences are largely comprised of members of the Black community from all walks of life. It is evident that religion/spirituality continue to shape the way people organize their world as seen through Black Church ministries like TD Jakes.

Principle #4:

The fourth principle addresses the central role that religion and spirituality occupy in the understanding of various academic disciplines and subjects relating to economics, politics, philosophy, gender, culture, education, anthropology, etc. and are valid and legitimate sites for the analysis of social, existential phenomenon (Zine, 2004:81). Therefore one of the goals of the critical faith based epistemology is to create spaces for faith centred voices to enter an arena whereby they can engage in the production of academic knowledge to explain social or other phenomena. The purpose of this is not to displace other knowledge but to impose alternative ways of knowing like spirituality that are transformative and open to critical debates and challenges of how knowledge is

produced and used in society. As Dei (2002) attests, there is a place for spirituality in transformative learning.

Spirituality and spiritual knowing is a valid body of knowledge that can be pursued in schooling to enhance schooling outcomes of a diverse body... Spirituality is a form in which we identify ourselves and the universal and is therefore, an implicit way of asserting ourselves collectively and individually as creators and resisters, and as agents and subjects of change....When educators deny or refuse to engage spirituality and spiritual knowing, their education practices can be destructive of the goal of education to transform society. (p.13)

Principle #5:

The fifth principle acknowledges the paradox that exists when claiming religion/spirituality as part of ones identity. For, while religion may bring comfort it can also be complicit in the way its has been mis-used to oppress others. As Zine (2004) argues for, it is important that there is:

an understanding of how religious and spiritual identities and identifications represent sites of oppression are connected to broader sites/systems of discrimination based on race, class, gender ethnicity, sexuality, and colonialism, while acknowledging that religion has at times been historically misused and become complicit in the perpetuation of these oppressions. (p. 84)

It is important to elaborate this principle in more detail for “while the issues of religious difference and discrimination are central, the analytical approach must remain attentive to how religious difference intersects with other forms of social difference and, some cases, can contribute to the oppression of others” (Zine, 2004:84). Many Blacks identify

Christianity with imperialism, and has blamed it for the rape, murder, torture and theft of African people. Religion was used for economic gain and to usurp power over nations, government and communities through forced compliance, domination and subjugation. During colonization, [Europeanized] Christianity was used as a moral paradigm to ‘conscientize’ the masses, that is, to educate them to appreciate the inequity of their social and political situation’(Simms, 2000:186). Europeanized Christianity played a powerful role in the unfolding of the colonial dynamic and continues to have a significant impact on people today. Blacks lost their language, culture and identity as a result of Europeanized Christian indoctrination and therefore it becomes difficult to tease out the reality of how Christianity was complicit in the unfolding of the colonial empire and its role as a faith for many people today. The enslavement of Africa by Christian colonizers had a catastrophic effect on the Black community. It is an important historical event that can not be ignored in Black studies.

Principle #6:

The sixth principle extends upon the paradox of principle #5 that exists within major religions. The critical faith based epistemology speaks to ways that religion and spirituality can be sites of resistance to injustice and oppression. In essence, while acknowledging that major religions may have been complicit in the oppressing of others, this principle also speaks to the ways that religious movements have been used as powerful platforms for social justice causes. Faith communities have historically resisted Europeanized Christian pacification by turning it on its head to develop an anti-colonial response that expressed Black self worth, Black liberation and Black equality (Simms,

2000). As Zine claims, religion and spirituality has had a liberating and empowering affect on communities marginalized by the clutches of colonization.

Point #7:

The final point of the critical faith epistemology ascribes to a belief that not all knowledge is socially constructed and therefore can emanate from a Divine or spiritual origin. Of all the principles, this point delves into the belief in the supernatural. Despite the competing truths amongst religious ranks, this point corroborates what many of the conventional religions believe today. Dei (2002) reminds us that:

There are significant limitations in our pedagogues, communicative and discursive practices. One such limitation can be the intellectual arrogance of knowing it all. It is important to work with the power of not knowing and allowing oneself to be challenged by other knowledge's. (p.13)

Knowledge that is revealed by revelation is a fundamental aspect of most religions and of indigenous philosophies. In this conception, “knowledge emanates from the Creator and is revealed through intermediaries such as prophets, messengers and angels” (Zine, 2004:96). Zine argues that spiritual knowledge must be open to the nature of the supernatural that is beyond scientific or rational leanings. The beliefs in prophet's revelation, messengers, angels, spirits, jinn, etc., must be incorporated into knowledge production as part of the way faith-centred people read and make sense of the world and their place within it (Zine, 2004:93). Similarly, Black Pentecostals believe emphatically in the role of the supernatural which can be revealed through angels, God's messengers, prayer, dreams and visions. The belief in the supernatural that there is knowledge beyond human comprehension is a taken for granted reality in the Black community. For, when

the institutions that surround them offer no relief to their troubles and oppression it is their faith in God that he provides the means and strength to overcome life's trials. The final section of this chapter will introduce a new framework that I have developed entitled: *Whiteness as Theology*.

3.3 Whiteness as Theology

The merging of the anti-colonial framework and a religious spiritual praxis has birthed a new gaze. In this section, I present a framework that critiques Whiteness as a colonizing theology. A *Whiteness as Theology* framework (W.A.T.) brings a new perspective of how to interrogate the colonial project. This framework pushes the walls of anti-colonial politics to further understand the implications of the colonial mandate today and how spirituality has been used experientially and metaphorically in this historical moment. I will argue that the theoretical tools that critique *Whiteness as Theology* can provide a new methodology by which we can uncover the enduring, pervasive and murderous affects of colonialism that disguise behind ideas of religion and spirituality. Whereas an anti-colonial critique challenges notions of colonialism that has not ended and the role that spirituality can play in resisting colonial domination, a *Whiteness as Theology* framework uncovers the hidden assumptions that the rhetoric of spirituality sometimes masks.

This new framework is entitled *Whiteness as Theology* since the social construction of whiteness as an ideology has a powerful relation to theology in both the secular and religious sense. Meaning, it is an attempt to think critically about how white dominance or colonial dominance insinuates itself into the religious culture of the black community. By virtue of its name, the *Whiteness as Theology* framework sparks many questions and

emotions. It is important to say, however, that my application of this emerging framework is not an attempt to elevate whiteness in the discourse of anti-colonialism. Nor is it positing whiteness as a liberating theology - on the contrary. I am cognizant of the potential of being complicit in the very works I'm trying to interrogate. The *Whiteness as Theology* framework is an attempt to reposition or expose the way we unravel the processes of colonialism. This framework is challenging the limitations of a Whiteness analysis that has not taken up the way colonialism play out in the metaphysical, spiritual and religious experiences. Hence, this framework exposes colonialism as the theology of the oppressor that is wrapped in whiteness ideals.

As mentioned in chapter 2, Mazama draws attention to the importance of not ignoring the travesties of our past and the "desacralization of the African spiritual space". The whiteness as theology framework certainly overlaps with this perspective as it emphatically argues that the African spiritual space is being eroded with privatized spirituality that has become divorced from the sacred. However, this work departs from Mazama's critique as African spirituality must include a myriad of religious perspectives that represent our community. The Christian doctrine as represented by the enslaved was a spiritual practice of resistance to the system of colonization that cannot be discounted. And for this reason, the Whiteness as Theology framework diverges from Mazama's critique as the categorical rejection of Christianity that she makes, in spite of its complicities, is another type of colonial dominance that attempts to desacralize the African spiritual space.

The *Whiteness as Theology* framework openly engages faith as an epistemology to resist colonization. Unlike Zine's critical faith centred framework, it makes a critical

argument of understanding the way colonialism weaves through religious discourse. As Dei states, “the anti-colonial discourse comes out of the realization that a multiplicity of forces, structures, and relations govern human interaction” (Dei, 2001:317). These forces, which Dei alludes to is what this study calls colonial theology. The doctrine of colonialism is imbedded in “an investment of a White/dominant soul and spirit for particular material, economic and political benefits” (Dei, 2008 correspondence). The forces of colonialism seek to govern the way we think, do and feel and this is further exasperated when religion is used as a tool of colonialism to govern human destiny. Conventional discourses of Whiteness is commonly understood beyond notions of religion; however, the Whiteness as theology framework queries the material, ideological and symbolic affects of colonialism from those who claim religion as their centred way of expressing their faith. The silencing of the spiritual and religious realities of minoritized communities calls for a new approach of how “religious bodies” can be read. The *Whiteness as Theology* framework boldly defines what spirituality is not and refutes the concept of spirituality that is divorced from its social justice core. Therefore this framework cautions us that colonialism no longer uses the same tools of the past but instead has appropriated the language within religious discourse to inculcate a theological discourse of Whiteness for the purposes of extending the colonial mandate. The theological discourse of Whiteness, then, includes the process of privatizing spirituality and placing irrelevance on traditional religious institutions that have had a historical role in challenging the status quo. It is important to resist this as religious institutions have been an incubator of indigenous knowledge systems that have been a counter-hegemonic force to colonial indoctrination. Therefore, a *Whiteness as Theology* framework suggests

that we need to recognize the ways that the colonial project serves to weaken social justice consciousness, particularly amongst faith communities. The *Whiteness as Theology* framework, in addition to the anti-colonial and critical faith based framework can help address the fourth learning objective of this study, which is to examine how the Black Church responds to allegations of complicities in colonial practices.

A *Whiteness as Theology* framework has been developed by expanding upon some of the ideas put forward in Perkins book *White theology: outing supremacy in modernity*. (2004) Perkinson's analysis provides an alternative way of viewing Whiteness outside the confines of a sociological and political perspective. He broadens his analysis using a theological critique. Though Perkinson doesn't expressly speak to the views this study highlights, he does make a strong argument that sets the parameters for how Whiteness can be implicated by using a discourse of theology. Perkinson (2004) thinks in terms of the discourse of theology because it specifies the particular kind of religious history and the particular mode of discursive potency that has leveraged racial trauma. For example, the way that religion was misused by colonizers in Africa has had a devastating effect on the African community globally. Therefore, an alternative way of critiquing religions may involve re-examining the way it has been implicated in the colonial encounter. Hence, the theological impetus of the colonial mandate should be examined rather than laying blame on religion alone. For Perkinson, "theology' more accurately designates the kind of power that must be combated than would a more encompassing term like 'religion'" (Perkinson, 2004:2). Focusing on the "theological-ness of Whiteness" rather than religion, can potentially remove us from the camp of blaming particular religions for racial and colonial trauma (Perkinson, 2004). A Whiteness as Theology framework picks

up from this argument but makes a distinction from Perkinson's claims. He focuses on the theological impetus of Whiteness without tackling the hypocritical discourses of Whiteness that silences the religious, spiritual and non-material. Perkinson fails to link the theological-ness of Whiteness thesis to a broader understanding of how colonialism has worked through Whiteness ideals. Rather, Perkinson suggests that we move away from terms like 'religion' but a W.A.T. perspective disagrees and offers another way of critiquing colonialism where Whiteness posits a system of beliefs and values through religion. These beliefs are filtered to both the oppressed and the oppressor. For the oppressed, the theological-ness of Whiteness has impacted the way religious movements have engaged and disengaged from social justice causes through introducing new forms of spirituality that are individualistic and material. For the oppressor, a colonial doctrine and/or a type of colonial religion is disseminated into the philosophies and epistemologies of our time. This doctrine argues that "religion" is irrelevant for today's society and privatized spirituality, divorced from any sacred and social justice core should be enforced. A *Whiteness as Theology* perspective argues that to understand colonialism is to understand the tools it uses to perpetuate Whiteness domination in any historical juncture. In essence, in this point in time, religion is a tool of colonialism to pacify anti-colonial resistance. Considering Whiteness as a colonial doctrine in a W.A.T. perspective turns traditional views of theology on its heads and therefore opens the door to consider how the influence of theology is not limited to conventional religions that are in search of truth, God, or answering questions of the transcendent. This articulation of theology is secular and it works by disseminating particular 'truths' of the colonial

system. Critiquing Whiteness in this way shifts the focus on where it belongs and religion is seen simply as pawns to broaden the mandate of the colonial project.

Whiteness has remained “fundamentally as a structure of denial” (Perkinson, 2004: 175), which should be challenged for its influence in the colonizing processes of today. Perkinson names the problem as White theology thus speaking to White supremacist discursive practices that have found their way into the religious terrain. He argues that “White supremacy is ‘theological’ even when it is secular”(Perkinson, 2004:2). Meaning, Whiteness as Theology needs to be examined as a theological discourse that inhabits our secular lives and ways of doing things (Perkinson 2004). Perkins argues quite vehemently that Whiteness is a type of “salvation”, which aims to impose its values on subjugated groups. In this light, Whiteness is a theological discursive practice that is complicit in religious, economic, political and social exploitation of people. The crux of Perkinson’s argument is that we are to “re-examine White race privilege in relationship to its historical genesis as a modality of ‘lived theology’ and its practical continuation as a habit of secular embodiment” (Perkinson, 2004:3). We ought to consider the influence of Whiteness as a theological temperament that embodies every day practice similarly to how religions influence daily life. The central distinction of a *Whiteness as Theology* framework as a point of departure from Perkinson’s theological-ness of Whiteness is that Whiteness doesn’t stand alone. It is a doctrine of colonialism that works through religious/spiritual discourses. It is the utilization of religious tropes that unravels this phenomenon. Just as theology is applied as a doctrine in conventional religions to inform its teachings and practices, the same process occurs with colonialism. It is, then, important to historicize and critique Whiteness not only as a ‘lived theology’ as

Perkinson claims but rather as the modus operandi of how colonialism advances its agenda in this historical juncture.

3.4 Colonial Soteriology

To delineate the link between Perkinson's theological-ness of Whiteness and this study, using the theoretical tools to critique *Whiteness as Theology* requires an application of religious metaphors and theological discourse to portray the intentions of the colonial empire. Colonial Soteriology unmask the theological-ness of Whiteness. Contrary to what Perkinson suggests, religions must be investigated to draw parallels of how we can expose the reality of colonial soteriology. For example, in most religious sects, there is a doctrinal theology that deals with ultimate purpose, future rewards and the believer's pathway to success. These are explained through doctrines, canons and dogma that become the teachings and practices of a particular religion in question. The propagation of various religious ideologies are found in soteriology which has to do with the study of salvation.

For Christians, it emphasizes on how Christ's death secures the salvation of those who believe and it helps us to understand the doctrines of redemption, justification, sanctification, propitiation, and the substitutionary atonement".
(Soteriology, 2006 <http://www.gotquestions.org/Soteriology.html>)

Colonial Soteriology, however, has to do with 'salvation' of another kind. It includes the process of being 'saved' into the colonial system that occurs with the blind acceptance of discursive frameworks that conceals new strategies of colonialism. The process of salvation is used metaphorically here to capture the systematic permeation of

colonization. For example, as post-colonial theorists have become preoccupied with deconstructing the multiple aspects of one's identity in the new global community – otherwise known as the post-colonial self the soteriological emphasis of colonialism seeks to alienate us from our cultural experiences. The resulting mental colonization has caused cultural amnesia that causes us to overlook and devalue how Black Christianity kept our predecessors anchored and rooted in their identities and culture, and how potent their resistance was in challenging colonial empires. According to Cabral (1970):

The experience of colonial domination shows that, in the effort to perpetuate exploitation, the colonizer not only creates a system to repress the cultural life of the colonized people; he also provokes and develops the cultural alienation of a part of the population, either by so-called assimilation of indigenous people, or by creating a social gap between the indigenous elites and the popular masses. As a result of this process... the urban or peasant “petite bourgeoisie” assimilates the colonizers mentality, considers itself culturally superior to its own people and ignores or looks down upon their cultural values. (p.7)

Although Cabral wrote in context of colonial practices in Africa and national liberation movements, his arguments are relevant for this discussion for “while colonialism in its formal sense might have been dismantled, the colonial state has not.... “(Kelly, 1999:18).

However, the way the colonial state is perceived and interrogated is interpreted quite differently in a post-colonial analysis. Post-colonialism speaks to the history of imperialism and the colonizer/colonized relationship through an examination of the power structures of the West. It has also offered an analysis to interpret issues of diversity and multiple oppressions in ways that were previously undermined. However,

the eruption of the post-colonial consciousness has resulted in meager attempts to dismantle colonial structures and reclaim collective responsibility. It has also focused heavily on the oppression of the self which creates a limited reading of the reality of oppression. Embedded within post-colonial theory is the unsettling phenomenon of the “fragmented self”, secularism and victim hood that does not speak to the realities of Black people generally. By contrast, Anti-colonial theory opens spaces for effective theorizing of the colonial and colonized relations by looking at how the oppressed have fought their oppression in liberating ways. For instance,

whereas post-colonial theorists mainly depend on Western models of analysis conceptualization, and theorization, the anti colonial theorists seek to work with alternative, oppositional paradigms based on the use of indigenous concepts and analytical systems and cultural frames of reference. (Dei, 2000:301)

The key distinction between a post-colonial and an anti-colonial critique is how the colonial encounter is understood. An anti-colonial analysis focuses heavily on the role of the collective in dealing with the reality of colonialism and issues of responsibility and accountability. This creates a powerful and liberating concept that attempts to bring communities together on the basis of valuing indigenous knowledge.

The issues raised by post-colonial theorists are relevant and gives credence to the multiple dimensions of identity faced by those in the West, this mega intellectualizing of the “personal” has resulted in a displacement of indigenuity, denigration of community and the polarization of the material and spiritual world. As a result, the sacred centredness of spirituality is being reframed to identify with and accommodate to the post-colonial rationale. Post-colonialism de-centers people and is based on Eurocentric

concepts of identity which are interpreted in the context of a White supremacist environment. While post-colonialism does emphasize the hybridity of people, (which is a necessary critique in a diverse society), it does so in a way that can create paralysis as the fragmented self can become overburdened with the complicities of identity. This can result in a state of hopelessness and inaction as it could be perceived that there are no solutions to that state of oblivion. The whole idea of the fragmented self is a fabricated problem of the colonial mandate that limits the ability to engage collectively for a common cause. Post- colonialism, then, can be regarded as a discourse of new found power perpetuated by colonial soteriology.

A theological understanding of Whiteness provides resistance to this imposition and as a result *a Whiteness as Theology* framework is a critical point of departure for understanding the dilemma of fragmentation as a strategy to create conformity to Whiteness ideals that do not challenge these ideals. The way colonized people are being dominated by Whiteness as theology and the processes of colonial soteriology requires further research to subvert newer forms of power. Next, the new discourse of spirituality is interrogated using *the Whiteness as Theology* framework. The latter is being used to critique *the Whiteness as Theology* framework as another medium of the colonial project.

3.5 Detangling Spirituality

A *Whiteness as Theology* framework also uncovers the contemporary ways that colonialism continues to dominate in ways that are no longer only geographical but also spiritual. Colonial theology works through notions of spirituality and it is no surprise that spirituality has become a hot topic today. A renewed interest in spirituality necessitates a

critical interrogation of how Whiteness has infiltrated the spiritual and religious realm. The fascination with the supernatural has created opportunities for colonial ambitions to usurp spiritual epistemologies in attempts to colonize the spirit and reshape how individuals express themselves when confronted with the realities of oppression. Using the tools to critique *Whiteness as Theology* requires that we detangle spirituality from colonialism by making the distinction of spiritual epistemologies that are counter-hegemonic.

A *Whiteness as Theology* framework suggests that spirituality be considered a multi-faceted ideology that is used both by the oppressed and the oppressor. For the oppressed, religious-spirituality has been a tool for emancipation and a philosophy of hope. History records how potent religious forms of resistance can be in challenging imperial paradigms. Leaders such as Ghandi and Martin Luther King used religious-spirituality as a way to politicize issues that were important to their respective communities and as result, nations, communities and individuals have become liberated from the clutches of colonialism. Conversely, spirituality that is used by the oppressor has become disconnected from a coherent religious or philosophical framework. It does capture the experiences of the supernatural, wholeness of being and knowledge beyond human comprehension.

However, what is often overlooked is the aspect of this new privatized spirituality that expresses a particular discourse, ideology and/or worldview that suggest aspirations to whiteness ideals. This should be met with critical reception because privatized spirituality suspiciously mystifies an expression of spirituality that has been limited to an individualized experience rather than an experience of the collective. The affects of this

is that it serves to perpetuate the oppressor's silence and obscure the way they are complicit in social problems. As a result, there is little confrontation to systemic forms of oppression and the widespread denial of the way Whiteness is implicated in today's social structures.

King (1998) discusses how spirituality occurs in many different contexts which require that we reflect on the meaning and significance of spirituality within the new contexts of our world today. I will follow closely the arguments made by King (1998) to capture the substantive worth of his critique. King (1998) argues that, "it seems that the increasing growth of interest in spirituality is very much a hallmark of postmodern consciousness and culture which provide a new context for both faith and spirituality" (p. 96). Today, the current resurgence of spirituality raises serious concerns. Spirituality has taken on non-religious forms that are self-mediated and it has caused a heightened interest in the individual's sole quest for meaning. As King rightly attests, "the widespread interest in spirituality is linked to the modern emphasis placed on the subject, on the discovery of the self and a more differentiated understanding of human psychology" (King, 1998, p. 99). There is a clear linkage with the homogenizing of the post-colonial self described earlier and the widespread interest in spirituality described by King. As I have argued elsewhere:

a reversal psychology is being used in modern forms of colonialism. To some extent, where religion was once used to breed compliance, domination and control over the masses, a [de-politicized spirituality] is the new tool of colonialism. (Brown Spencer, 2006, p. 122)

While some could argue that the new discourse on spirituality is the result of the ineffectiveness of religious institutions in meeting the experiential and individual needs of people, a *Whiteness as Theology* framework identifies this as the ever-present reality of colonialism.

It is important that in our quest to center our spiritual practice that we not lose the ability to critically interrogate the nuances of the colonial project. This framework is a work in progress with continuing concerns for advancing equity. Future studies aim to more fully develop a *Whiteness as Theology* framework beyond a colonial critique to include imperialism. This will help to more fully engage institutions beyond religion that have abandoned its social justice component.

Chapter 4

Methodology: A critical ethnographic approach

**Order my steps in your word dear Lord, lead me guide me every day, send your
anointing Father I pray, order my steps in your word, order my steps in your word.
(GMWA Gospel Choir)**

4.0 Introduction

This study examines the lived experiences of members of the Black Church and explores the central importance of the Black Church to Black communities in Canada. It is largely a qualitative analysis of Black Pentecostals in the Greater Toronto area which evolved out of the Caribbean Diaspora after 1960. This chapter summarizes the epistemology guiding the research methods, the data collection process which includes the interview and focus group discussions, my research experience, the organization process and the analysis of the data.

According to James Cone (1984) Black Churches are seen as silent community partners that have forgotten their liberating heritage. Silence in this context means that the Black Churches have abandoned their social justice role. The question of how the church has situated its historical and political role today in the context of how the Black Church has been regarded as being 'too silent' in the political realm is a key area this research hopes to understand. Also, this study hopes to understand how Black Pentecostal Churches "functioned in the formation and defense of Black communities in Canada, how they operate as a social, political and spiritual place, particularly for women; and how they produce spaces of affirmation, affiliation and identity in a White

supremacist world” (Conversation with Kerri 2004). The ambivalent role of the Church in the eyes of segments of the oppressed is indicative of valuing the Black Church as a valid site for resistance.

4.1 Background

Oneness Pentecostals are a small community of Church that are well known to the researcher. This community has a rich history in the Greater Toronto area, yet there is little historical data that describe this insular community. The Black Church represents a site that has been influenced by colonization and it was important that this research exposed the lines between the colonial and the colonized relationship and not reinscribe colonialism on this marginalized community. For example, when conducting research it is often assumed that the researcher should separate themselves from the participants and appear neutral, detached and free of bias from the research process. This study challenged this notion as I used my faith as a platform to create an atmosphere of social cohesion, unity and knowledge building in the research process since my faith was also shared by the participants in the research. It is important that researchers address the inequalities, bias and barriers, which exists within the study rather than assume that through attempting qualitative or quantitative research this is presupposed. Providing a voice for the Black community is not just a communicative exercise it is also political in terms of circumventing traditional approaches to research where the researcher is detached from the process rather than being a part of it. This approach shapes how we may research or speak about a particular community.

4.2 Qualitative Research

A qualitative design was the preferred method in this study as it is commonly ascribed in research where there is an emphasis on gathering information that looks for meanings and understandings of an issue that is not adequately acquired through statistical procedures. Research which aims to emphasize a particular cultural meaning that have been identified but the understanding is limited describes the underpinnings of qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is ‘a direct concern with experience as it is ‘lived’ or ‘felt’ or ‘undergone’ (Sherman & Webb, 1988:7). As Webb describes, utilizing a qualitative approach is key to uncovering data that provide a subjective understanding of human experiences rather than a deductive approach that interprets experiences of others.

A qualitative approach was helpful to capture the social realities that are specific to the Black community as it relates to issues of inequity. Qualitative research “has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it” (Sherman & Webb, 1988:7). Rather than relying on what others outside of the Black Church have to say about them, the methods employed in this study enables the researcher to penetrate this insular community and ground interpretations of the Black Church through careful and systematic observations. Ultimately, a qualitative approach provides the members of the Black Church with the platform to respond to issues that negatively impact the Black community.

This study attempts to challenge some assumptions that are made about this community, particularly how they have been labeled as being silent on responding to issues of inequity. The Black Church has something to say about key issues. This study

offers a forum to counter widely held assumptions about the Black Church to respond to how the Church is being scripted in the public arena. A qualitative approach was the best method for this particular investigation to demystify the misunderstanding of the continuing role the Black Church plays in today's society. The strengths of using a qualitative design is that it requires subjectivity and inductive knowledge gathering by highlighting the realities that are consistent with the day-to-day experiences of members of the Black Church community who represent, in part, the Black community at large.

Ethnography is a qualitative research procedure that was used to solicit information and is a prevalent approach used in educational research. "Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture" (Fetterman, 1998) which can be simply understood as "describing and analyzing the practices and beliefs of cultures and communities" (Freebody, 75 2003). Egan-Robertson (1998) defines ethnography as having three goals:

- To describe in rich detail and interpret the cultural life of particular social groups;
- To contribute to our general knowledge about the kinds of life worlds humans create and the nature of the cultural processes operating to create these worlds, and;
- To help people imagine and create better worlds. (P.5).

The first point is important to this study in terms of detail description and interpreting the cultural processes that occur within the walls of the Black Church. Egan-Robertson further defines three characteristics of ethnography such as: "...holistic, contextual, and cooperative [and] it is systematic but uses multiple, nonstandard, and recursive methods, and it elicits the group members view of reality" (p.5). This study used one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions which offered important theorizing about the

subtleties of Black Church culture since this ethnographic study allowed for multiple interpretations of reality and alternative perspectives.

It is important to point out, however, that although ethnography is a tool used to uncover the holistic and contextual views of participants, within this study, the application of ethnography arose historically as an interest to understand new cultures as people inhabited the western worlds. This can be best described as the process of colonization. The motivation to study the ‘other’ and to understand different cultures and practices was imbedded on steep racial and classist lines. Despite the inherent colonial motivations of studying the “other”, ethnography can be used from an anti-colonial perspective in order to redefine what we consider as a meaningful cultural process that are “holistic”, “contextual” and elicits a group’s view on a given reality (Egan-Robertson).

Auto-ethnography, for example, refers to the “cultural study of one’s own people” and it is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system (Creswell, 1998). It has been politicized as a concept that focuses on righting the ways in which a “culture can be misrepresented and distorted by another that is outside-dominating or colonizing” (McClaurin, 2001:65). Culture in this light can be understood as the way people use language to interpret their worlds which also includes the institutionalized ways of thinking for a particular group. An ethnographic study allowed for the researcher to better understand the ways of imparting knowledge from a hidden community like the Black Church. My own personal experiences as a ‘native’ within the field of this community at both the local and in the Diaspora “reveal[ed] exactly how things stand with the “inner life’ of...[our] communities (McClaurin 2001:71)

4.3 Identification and Accessing the Church- The Outsider/Insider Status

I am a Black female who attends a Black Pentecostal Church in Toronto. Gaining access to the Church was an easy task and this unveiled the insider/outsider dichotomy that exists when conducting qualitative research studies. As Griffith (1998) explains

The insider/outsider debate circles around the researcher's relation to those she studies. Where the researcher enters the research site as an Insider – someone whose biography (gender race class and so on) give her a lived familiarity with the group being researched – that tacit knowledge informs her producing a different knowledge than that available to the Outsider – a researcher who does not have an intimate knowledge of the group being researched prior to their entry into the group. (p.362)

As both a researcher and community member there are certain advantages that came with my outside/insider status. As I shared a vested interest in protecting the community from being exploited and misrepresented, my insider status was a constant reminder of the complexities of both researcher and community member. The researcher did not have to spend time understanding the fundamental rudiments of Pentecostal Oneness theology, instead this foreknowledge allowed the researcher to look for sociological linkages of how the faith of this community was deeply tied to how they respond to issues of inequity. The researcher believes that this critique may have been lost by a researcher who did not have a personal grounded knowledge in Black Pentecostalism and the Jesus-Centric ontology that is shared amongst Oneness believers. I had easy access to the participants, I was able to discern the religious cultural phrases that participants used and I was able to present an authentic understanding of Oneness Pentecostalism from first

hand experience. My knowledge of the Church and its cultural dynamics was an advantage when tackling the research questions. For example, preceding someone's name with Sister, Brother, Mother, Evangelist, Missionary, Bishop, Elder or Pastor is how religious vernacular is used within the Black Church. By referring to members of the Church by these titles is very important as it shows respect for the elders within this community. To downplay these roles would be to strengthen the power dynamic between researcher and participant and colonial and colonizer. This is how I tried not to reinscribe colonial dynamics by respecting the leaders of the Church and not dismiss their influence and power within their indigenous communities.

However, sharing the same faith did have its drawbacks as well. Many clergy used the interview process as a forum to express their dissatisfaction with local Church matters. As a result, the interviews often got side tracked on many occasions, which at times, the interview process became extremely lengthy running off topic in several instances. If the researcher was an outsider, it was doubtful that such intimate Church details would have been discussed. Ultimately, I considered the interview process as a much needed opportunity for some parishioners to 'air out' so to speak. By doing so, the interviews not only enabled the participants to voice their concerns of the sociological dilemmas that face the community but also allowed them to express the dilemma they face as pastors leading first generation Canadians and their view of moral decline which seemed to be a common concern expressed by the participants.

Some of the disadvantages of being an outsider/insider are that "insiders have been accused of being inherently biased, and too close to the culture to be curious enough to raise provocative questions. The insider's strengths become the outsider's weaknesses

and vice-versa” (Merriam & Bailey, 2001:411). It is far too simple to critique the insider/outsider dichotomy according to advantages and disadvantages for both perspectives carry deep complexities. The study of the Black Oneness Church is embedded in understanding how Oneness Pentecostalism has influenced the Afro-Caribbean church community. In a study that includes participants of a religious community, for the insider, they may be more concerned with “the acceptance of religious thought, belief, or practice as it pertains to the cultural group under study whereas for the outsider they may be more concerned with a strict study of religions social, cultural, or environmental impact on landscape”(Ferber, 2006:179). Both distinctions carry a specific politic of how to approach the research and “what an insider ‘sees’ and ‘understand’ will be different from, but as valid as what an outsider understands” (Merriam & Bailey, 2001:415). Both carry a particular lens of how the voices of the participants will be represented in the study.

As an outsider/insider, I was concerned about adequately representing the voices of church members in the study since little has been said about Oneness Pentecostals in sociological research. Therefore, as the research unfolded the ontology of Oneness Pentecostalism as it related to the church members, was included as it was important to talk about the beliefs of the Oneness faith and the unique indigenous spiritual practice it evoked for its members. A strict outsider may not have delved into the religious belief systems I have experienced to be important as they may be more focused on the social aspects of that religious persuasion.

This study provides a sociological gaze on this religious community but it could not ignore the impetus of the Oneness faith on this community. My insider role saw this as an

important correlation of how this community responded to political issues. Perhaps, as an insider who is equally affected by how the church was scripted in the mainstream as being silent community members created the desire to embark upon a deeper analysis that looked for clues of how silence was being invoked. As the data later revealed, Oneness Pentecostalism has had an influence on how church members engage politically. The decision to include an analysis of the Oneness faith could be viewed as a bias or a necessary critique to include a more holistic understanding of a community under study. The over-indulgence with maintaining objectivity in research can lose the unique role that religion plays in cultural communities. Ferber (2006) argues that the distinction of the insider/outsider status of the researcher is an attempt to root out subjectivity and clarify subjectivity from objectivity. He goes on further to say,

The debate over the insider/outsider dichotomy is centered on the concept of objectivity, which in regard to religion is quite a loaded and dangerous term. Still, it is important to note that the entire insider/outsider debate is clouded by the fact that subjectivity and objectivity are the factors by which insiders and outsiders define one another. Outsiders consider themselves to be objective relative to insiders, but insiders do not consider themselves to be merely subjective. Hence, objectivity is present in the self-understanding of both insiders and outsiders.

(p.179)

The studying of the other from an “objective” standpoint has been heavily contested by black feminist scholars who have claimed that most research on marginalized communities have been conducted by outsiders - White male academics.

The Insider status has gained mounting relevance for contemporary works where the voices of the marginalized are being positioned in contestation to “academic colonialism”. I used my role as an Outsider/Insider to disrupt the colonial dynamic that can occur in research as it “provides a more complete knowledge than that available to Outsiders “(Griffith, 1998:363). “The Outsider thesis celebrates the perspective of the “stranger” or “observer” while the Insider thesis claims that knowledge is tied to experience. The detachment of the Outsider allows her to see what others take for granted” (Griffith, 1998:364) and Felder claims that this...”disembodied, unsituated objectivity is entirely inappropriate in any discipline, especially one studying volatile phenomena such as religion (Ferber, 2006:178).

An outsider who doesn't understand the internal makeup of the Church can inadvertently reinscribe the power dynamics that so often occur in research. Given my affiliation with the Church I was not viewed as an outsider trying to ‘survey’ this community. As a researcher attached to the academy, I am an outsider as I am an insider that is part of the Black Oneness community. The Outsider/Insider status I hold is tied to how the participants trusted me as a researcher. My membership at a prominent Black Church reinforced this trust and gave me easy access to speak with Pastors and mothers of the church as they knew my Bishop and respected him highly within the Church community. This trust reinforced my Insider status and deduced the mistrust that comes with being an outsider despite my role as both researcher and community member.

The Outsider/Insider status I held made the fact finding journey I have embarked upon that much easier. But, in different contexts it can also involve a lot of slippage and fluidity. Thus it's best to look at the process of research as how the insider or outsider

manages the access to certain truths beyond the implications of ones social location. What should also be considered in any research is the “biography, political activities, research practices, and the relation between the researcher and the community she studies” (Griffith, 1998:367).

Ultimately, gaining access to the Church was not a difficult task. I attempted to create a meaningful voice for members in the Black Church where they could articulate and express their experiences amongst their community alliances and peers. All of the participants were pleased I had undertaken the study as a church member in academia they encouraged me to continue my work as it was long overdue.

4.4 Sample

This study is specifically interested in talking to Church leaders who started Churches upon immigrating to Canada after 1960. Therefore, the voices of ordinary men, i.e. laity was not captured in this work. Of the 13 Pastors that were initially contacted only 1 officially declined. The role that Black Leaders play in the Church is very important; they offer a wealth of information about the Church’s history and its views on current issues. As West (2002) notes, “Black preachers and pastors are in charge of the most numerous and continuous gatherings of Black people...and they are the leaders of the only major institutions in the Black community that are not accountable to the status quo” (p.121). The sample included pastors of the Black Church who had been in ministry for at least 10 years, with the same Church and who were over 35 years of age. This length of tenure was chosen to capture for experienced, knowledgeable and qualified clergy who could also account for the Church’s history. The names of the participants were changed

to mask the identity of the participants except, for chapter five where the name of the first leader of the Black Oneness Church is documented.

Of the 12 interviewed all worked full time for the Church except for one who held a full time job while fulfilling the role as a full time pastor for his local congregation. It is important to note the title of clergy who participated in the study. There were 7 Bishops (highest ranking order within the Pentecostal Church) and the remaining participants were Elders/Pastors and a “mother of the Church” of a deceased pastor. The differences in title denote the level of ministerial ranking and the responsibility they held in their local church. The sample had several characteristics including;

- a) all were Jamaican or of Jamaican descent
- b) all were a part of the Black Church for at least 10 years
- c) While one clergy had a university education in Canada all clergy were educated outside of Canada.
- d) All but one were male

The methodological implications of having all but one male clergy certainly limited the scope of perspectives. Leadership in the Black Churches is predominately male and this is their preferred structure according to the scriptural teaching and practices of Oneness Pentecostals. Interestingly, it is the women who are the backbone of Black Churches though rarely are they the leaders of the church. As the data will later reveal, a pronounced concern amongst Churchwomen is the lack of men assuming leadership roles in the Church whereby it could ease the responsibilities that are shared by women in the Church. The study was interested in documenting Black women’s voices as they makeup the majority of members in the Black Church. Historically, there has been little said

about them in the Canadian context. As Patricia Hill-Collins (1991) advocates, we must give the voice of ordinary women a prominent place in our research and to do so is an ethical approach to research. Since all but one of the interview participants were men, the focus group was chosen primarily to document the lived experiences of Black women in the Church. The focus group gave a forum for Black Churchwomen to answer the same questions that were asked of the Black clergy and to account for how they view their spirituality and faith in the context of their gender and wider community. The focus group discussions of only women of the Black Church were a good representation of the Pentecostal population in which this study is interested. The ‘mothers of the Church’ that were part of the focus group are spiritual leaders and elders in the Black Church. Their participation in this study realigned the power dynamic in the research process and presented a much needed platform for the elders in the Black Church community to assert their roles.

Upon reviewing a list of approximately 40 Black Churches of the Oneness faith in Ontario, there are less than 20 Churches with the original Pastor. Many of the current Oneness Churches are new congregations (less than 10 years) who have either split from other congregations or have small congregations, i.e. less than 25. My selection process included churches that had been in existence for a minimum of 10 years with the same church leader. This process was to eliminate any church that was created as a result of a Church split (which is an unresolved dispute and/or disagreement within a local congregation that leads to members leaving and starting a new Church). This study wanted to avoid any schisms or “church politics” that may ensue as a result of church

splits participating in the study. The sample criteria were most interested in churches that existed during the time of the mass influx of Caribbean immigrants.

4.5 Introducing the Participants

As a member of the Black Oneness community, I knew many of the participants. This was an advantage as I already had a rapport with many of the participants, including Church leaders. This made the interview process almost seamless and made it easier to motivate individuals to become involved in the study. Each participant in the study brought their own unique perspective on the subject matter. The interview and focus group participants are introduced by their “pseudo” name in order that the interviews took place.

1. Pastor Albert was born in Canada but his background is Jamaican. He was the youngest of the clergy to participate in the study. He has been pastoring a church in Scarborough for the past 11 years. He is one of two Canadian University educated Pastor.
2. Bishop Teddy was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 1961. He is a pastor in North York for over 37 years. He also oversees churches in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec and 3 other churches in the GTA.
3. Bishop Geoffrey was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 1969. He has been a pastor in Scarborough Ontario for 34 years. He believes that the church should prioritize and first cater to its own “Black” community members. Some of his views have subtle concepts of Black theology.

4. Bishop Jonah was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 1963. He is the 1st Black leader of the Afro-Caribbean Oneness Church. He is a well known advocate and speaker in the Oneness church. He played a pivotal part in the Caribbean migratory process as he assisted thousands in their settlement. Today, he has one of the largest edifices in the Oneness churches. Many churches today trace their church lineage to Bishop Jonah as they started with him in the 1960's and 1970's.
5. Elder Raymond was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 1969. He comes from a middle class background as his father was a teacher in Jamaica and his mother was a politician who worked with the Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley. Upon arrival to Canada he attended the Greenwood UPC and remained long after the mass Afro-Caribbean exodus. He later started a predominately Black Church in the 1980's. Elder Raymond had strong recollection of the Jamaican Oneness history that he relates well to the Canadian experience.
6. Elder Nathaniel was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 1967. He was the only clergy that didn't arrive to Canada as an Apostolic preacher. He arrived to better his life and was introduced to the gospel by his cousin who housed him. As a teacher from Jamaica, he offered a philosophical approach to understanding the Black Church. Meaning, he recognized how culture played into the dynamics of the Oneness faith of Afro-Caribbean migrants and how this conflicted with other White church practices.
7. Bishop Leon was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 1966. He has been a Pastor for over 30 years. He recalls being in the meeting where the decision to start the first Black Church was contemplated.

8. Bishop Samuel was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in the 1990's. He is an icon in the Oneness circles of Afro-Caribbean descent. He has been in ministry for over 60 years and is affectionately known as the "walking bible". Bishop Samuel pastored Emmanuel Apostolic church in Jamaica for many years till he migrated to Canada in the 1990's. Bishop Samuel travelled throughout Canadian Black Oneness churches throughout his entire pastoral career.
9. Bishop David was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 1965. He is a respected leader in the Oneness circles. He and his brother had started churches in the early 1970's after defecting from Greenwood UPC. He is also co-founder of St Peters Tabernacle, the first Apostolic Organization. Bishop David passed away in 2009.
10. Bishop Daniel was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 1961. He was an early migrant of Toronto – he arrived in the late 1950's and attended Greenwood UPC. He later joined another church outside the Oneness faith till he started his own church in the 1970's. He is currently suffering with kidney disease.
11. Mother Phyllis was born in Jamaica and came to Canada in 1958 as a domestic worker through the West Indian Domestic scheme policy. After arriving to Canada to work as a domestic she later returned to Jamaica in 1962 to marry and returned to Canada shortly thereafter. She is the widow of Bishop Weston Hall, a Jamaican by descent and he immigrated to Canada in 1962. He was the 2nd leader of the Oneness faith after Bishop Jonah. As a pastor's wife she was an eye witness of the church's role in aiding newcomers to Canada, many of whom she nurtured in her home.

12. Pastor Michael was born in Jamaica and arrived to Canada as a young boy in 1967.

He is the son of the late F.H. McKenzie who served the community as Pastor for over 30 years. Michael is a UPC minister of a predominate Black congregation. He is currently the pastor of the largest Black Oneness congregation in Canada and he is one of two Canadian University educated Pastor.

Focus Group Selected Profiles

- Angie is a first generation Canadian. She is of Caribbean descent. By profession she is a lawyer and struggled with the term “Black Church”. She felt this obfuscated the intent and mission of the gospel of Christ.
- Lydia is a first generation Canadian with Jamaican descent. She has deep roots in the Black Church. As a well known choir director for many years she offered a critical perspective to where the church is going and where it should be. Interestingly, she points out the flaws within the church structure but respects what it has done for her life and quotes “if I had to live my life over again I would still want it the same way in the church”.
- Gemini was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 1991. She listened mostly throughout the focus group and provided deep reflection on the subject matter.
- Debbie was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in the 1980’s. She was a participant of few words and expressed her dissatisfaction with the Black Church in that it should do more. She often compared it to other “non denominational” churches. She spoke of the strengths and weaknesses of the Black Church

- Jill was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in the 1990's. She spoke of the sociological function of the church in terms of what it has done for her as an immigrant from Jamaica who arrived long after the mass entry of Caribbeans in the 1970's. She explains that if it wasn't for the church she doesn't know how she would have coped during her trying years of immigrating to Canada and coping with the birth of a sick son of which the church played an instrumental role in providing her with needed support.
- Terry was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in the late 1960's. She knew a lot about Black History. She seemed to come to the focus group "prepared" in terms of offering historical data on the Black Church, enslavement and how Black people coped. This was observed by the researcher as she often steered participants to refocus themselves to the content that I had shared with them as to the intent of the research study.
- Nancy was born in Montserrat. She immigrated to Canada via England in the late 1960's. Nancy refused the labels of Black women and racism. She believes it is important to work hard but know your limits in the racist society that we live in.
- Esther was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 1989. She was a proud member of the Black Church. She hardly focused on the negatives and rather shared her positive experiences of what the church meant to her and why it is so important.
- Ezra was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada via England in 1963. The focus group seemed to help her articulate what she desired to be improved in her community.

4.6 Data Collection

The research method that was used in this study was in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Both methods were used to examine the lived experiences of the clergy, laity and women within the Black Church. Both techniques have their advantages, but when used jointly they offer a comprehensive disclosure of data that describe the way members of the Black Church live their lives and interpret their worlds or environment.

Interviews

The first research method utilized in the study was individual interviews. An interview method was used exclusively for Black clergy as it provided the privacy and safe retreat where clergy could speak about the Black community. The structure of the Afro-Caribbean Church is hierarchical in nature and a focus group setting wouldn't work well with this existing dynamic. The researcher was cognizant that very few church leaders would probably participate if the focus group was organized by someone who did not belong to the higher hierarchy in the Church, i.e. Bishop, Pastor, or Elder. This was an early observation the researcher was able to make given her affiliation with the Black Church and how it is organized. An interview method in a closed setting was the method that would best offer maximum participation and the unique insight of Black clergy that the research was interested in gathering.

The questions asked during the in-depth interviews were a mix of open and closed-ended questions that followed a sequential pattern and were asked consecutively according to three themes (see appendix). The questions that relate to the 'Challenges' theme was initially informed by the anti-colonial discursive framework since this study

was concerned of ways to resist the colonial scripting of the church that was seen as irrelevant to contemporary times. The anti-colonial discursive framework disrupts knowledge that does not consider the role of indigenously. The challenge questions were central to the overall study as it applied to how the Black Church responds to allegations of its own complicities in colonial practices. It also captured some important data of what Black Canadian preachers have to say about alleged indictments against the Church such as Cone (1984) who argues that the “pie-in-the-sky” religion of Black Churches and the emphasis on a heavenly freedom in the next world have caused the Church to forget its liberating heritage”(pg. 84). In other words, Black Churches are seen as silent community members who have abandoned their social justice role. It was important to consider how the Black Church interprets its own exclusionary attitudes and complicities in order to appreciate such sites of resistance. This is why the ‘challenge’ questions were important as it revealed the indigenous role of the Black Church. The dialogue that ensued from the challenge questions gained some insight from Black Churches on critical issues that face the community and provided the theoretical impetus to develop the *Whiteness as Theology framework* which evolved later in the study.

A question guide was used to facilitate in-depth interviews. The advantage of using an in-depth interview setting helped to strengthen the collaboration amongst the participants and allow them to become a part of a process that could be deemed spiritual. The interviewing process helped me to get to know the personal side of the clergy and their lives that preceded their ‘call to the ministry’. Pastors were contacted to participate in the study and they also were asked to identify other key people who could be interviewed for the study. This is known as a purposive sampling approach which selects

respondents that can give the researcher access to some specialized perspective, experience or condition relating to the research question. It also can provide useful insights and can help steer the researcher to information and contacts of those believed to provide valuable information for the study. Many of the participants recommended that I speak to Bishop Raphael Jones who was the first Black Apostolic Leader in Toronto. This participant was on my list to contact and reinforced the importance of this particular subject to be part of the study.

What became clear during the in-depth interviews was that as the clergy delved into the history of the Black Church oral histories began to emerge. “Oral histories are generally conducted when a historian or researcher is either interested in details of history from a person who participated as an active participant, or how history appears from the point of view of the “common person” (Bogdan and Biklin, 1992). The Black Church represents a community where oral histories are a part of its indigenous oral culture. Therefore, the focus group and in-depth interview integrated well into the Black Church’s traditions. A particular weakness of the Afro-Caribbean Church is the lack of written documentation, publications and historical record of its 45 year existence in Canada. The oral histories that were shared by the clergy did provide a rich recollection of Oneness church history. Many of the clergy were in their 60’s and 70’s and had migrated to Canada over 30 years ago; consequently, they were able to recollect a lot of history during the interviews of which they were eye witnesses. The clergy spoke about the sociological role of the Black Church in terms of how the Churches assisted the large influx of Caribbean migrants in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The degree of oral history that

was shared proved that much work needs to be done to document and publish the histories of the Afro-Caribbean Oneness Church.

An attempt was made to interview 15 clergy but only 12 were interviewed as one declined (that was regrettable as he is currently the oldest pastor in the Pentecostal Oneness Church), another never returned calls and in the case of the other it was recommended by the daughter that an interview not take place as the participant had become senile and couldn't withstand an interview. Regrettably, this latter participant died during the data analysis stage. It was unfortunate that this interview didn't take place as the prospect participant was a female pastor with deep roots in the Black Oneness Church and her input would likely have added depth to the study.

Overwhelmingly the parishioners welcomed the interview with open arms and felt that the study was long overdue. The researcher observed that the warm welcome may likely have had to do with the fact that I shared the same faith and my pastor was a respected and well known Church leader within the Black Church community. In other words, there was a sense of community alliance to divulge information to an insider. The methodological implication of sharing the same faith created a unique perspective. It made the research process much easier as understanding the fundamentals about the Oneness faith and the internal Church dynamic is quintessential to critiquing the important role that the Afro-Caribbean Church has had on the Black community. The advantages of sharing the same faith far outweighed the disadvantages.

The Interview Location

The interviews took place either at the residence of the participant or at the place of worship of the participant. The in-depth interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 1 ½ hours. Three interviews were conducted in the homes of the clergy and the remaining was conducted at the Church location as follows: three in Scarborough, three in North York, and one in Etobicoke and one in central Toronto (where 3 interviews took place) - bringing the total of 11 interview sites. During the Church visits, the interview either preceded or ended with a Church tour. I observed that this was a time where the participant/pastor showed their buildings and were very proud about their accomplishments of building a Church without government support and through the hard work and sweat of the Church membership. These tours included sites where the Church housed banquet halls, daycare facilities, private schools, computer training programs, a basketball court, youth mentorship and feeding programs. The Churches ranged in size to accommodate from 75 to 3000 members and served as an arena for education and religious purposes.

The interviews that took place in the homes of the participant were quite intimate and the question guide was hardly followed in these settings as the devolution of oral histories took precedent over the scripted questions I had prepared. I preferred the interviews in the homes of the Pastors rather than at the church location as it was less formal and candid. During these interviews pastors shared historical information such as pictures of the first Black Oneness Church, pictures of the first Black leader, a copy of the constitution for the first Oneness organization that was created in the 1970's and the most memorable was a historical document of a group photo of about 16 pastors in 1968, some

of whom are presently deceased. This photo represented the trailblazers of the early Oneness leaders who had either begun or would later become pastors of Churches in the GTA. The photo was given to the researcher to copy in anticipation that a book would be written some day on the histories that were shared during the interviews.

Focus group discussions

The second research method utilized in the study was focus groups. As an interview method was used exclusively for Black clergy given the internal dynamics of the Afro-Caribbean Oneness churches a focus group method was organized for women in the Church. Similar to the in-depth interviews, the same question format was used and an additional theme was introduced to facilitate a group discussion amongst Black woman in the Church. In predominant Afro-Caribbean Churches Black woman are esteemed as the foundation of the Church. Therefore, questions specifically relating to women's role in the Church were designed to account for their powerful roles in this community and how they connect their spirituality and faith in context of their gender and race. The questions that were asked of Black Church women and the Black Clergy were the same with the exception of a third theme that was added for the female participants - Black Christian Feminist Theorizing. This latter section was designed to address the thesis question of whether the Black Church has produced spaces of affirmation, identity and affiliation for Black Churchwomen. Question #3, for example, asked Churchwomen "how do you live with the problems within the Black Church both personally and professionally". This question engaged this issue on a practical level as it doesn't presuppose that the Black Church is not open to its problems but rather create for some dialogue to query the internal struggles within the Black Church vis a vis the wider community and how Black

women respond to them. By theorizing the voices of Black women in the Church from a Black Christian feminist perspective we recognize that the Black Church may be considered as a teaching agency where Black culture and identity are affirmed, strengthened, and promoted amongst Churchwomen.

There wasn't a concern of interviewing the women separately as with the clergy since the women in the study were not Pastors and the issue of hierarchy that existed for the clergy was not believed to be a factor. Initially three focus groups were scheduled through word of mouth, email solicitations and invitations that were extended to friends of the researcher who were members of various Afro-Caribbean Churches in the GTA. The first focus group was an overwhelming success extending to over 3 hours.

Focus Group Location

The first focus group was held in the home of the researcher. At its conclusion it was clear that two focus groups instead of three would suffice given the in-depth knowledge revealed during the first group. The second focus group took 2 hours and was held at a North York Church which has been in existence for 35 years and still has the same Pastor. The address of the Church is kept anonymous to mask the identity of the site. The focus groups served as sites of controversy, cultural affiliation and Black feminist theorizing.

The first focus group was a younger group (age 30-45) who attended various Black Churches in the GTA of the Oneness faith. Their professional occupations ranged from a day-care teacher, travel counsellor, lawyer, government worker and a range of other working class positions. This group was particularly poignant in addressing matters concerning the internal makeup of the Black Church and how that is related to the

outside. Some participants had some difficulty connecting the historical role of the Black Church to what it is today and it would appear that some of the younger generation resisted the implication that the Church had a sociological function and thus were trapped in a religious description of the Black Church. This view differed from how the second focus group regarded the role of the Black Church. The younger focus group were children of Afro-Caribbean immigrants who arrived in the 1960's and they hadn't experienced the non-religious role churches played for immigrants of that era.

The second focus group was comprised of women regarded as the "mothers of the Church." They all were over 50 years in age, two worked in the health care field, another worked as a government worker and the rest were all retired. Many of these women have been members of the Church for over 20 years and three held leadership roles of Evangelist or Missionary. Interestingly this group revealed a heightened understanding of Black history and enslavement which they argued still exists today albeit in different forms. This understanding set the foundation for how they interpreted the role of the Black Church and its sociological function. It was often difficult to keep both groups on topic as the conversations often became quite heated as opinions diverged and it was difficult to separate the internal Church dynamics from the research questions that were asked. Both groups were quite candid about their deep commitment to the Church despite its struggles.

Interestingly, the dynamics of the focus group and interview process was quite similar as both settings required the opportunity for participants to 'air out' their concerns. The researcher had to exercise a degree of patience to allow the participants to talk in ways that would unify their causes which potentially could sharpen the way they tackle issues

within and outside of their community. This served to significantly lengthen the focus group time and interviews as aforementioned. A drawback of being a researcher that was also a part of this community is that the line of questioning may have been too focused without going off topic. Nevertheless, the focus group did help to uncover the unique makeup of the Black Church community and allow for a space where they could share and theorize their perspectives in their contexts. Unlike the one-on-one interviews, the question guide was followed more easily than it was with the Black clergy despite the incidences of going off topic. In retrospect, this was due to the fact that the one-on-one interviews focused more on the historical context of the church while the focus groups got more into their identity as Oneness Pentecostals.

An ethnographic approach allowed for the research to evolve according to the subject's responses and opinions. This gave room for the historical content to be included which was an overlooked area in the early research design. The Black clergy steered the interview in a way that revealed the importance that their history and experiences be documented though initially this wasn't an intended aim of this research. This led to a decision to dedicate a chapter on the history of the Oneness churches of Afro-Caribbean descent post 1960. The churchwomen offered a crucial critique of understanding identity politics for church-goers and how they view their role as women of faith in the broader spectrum. Thus, the connections of the focus group and interview process complemented each other in terms of acquiring needed historical data that validated the role of the Black Church during Caribbean migration, women's role in the Church and the sociological underpinnings of the Black Pentecostal Church.

4.7 Field Work Overview

During my field research, I was working under immense pressure to complete the interviews before the arrival of my 2nd child as I was nine months pregnant at the time my last interview was completed. There was a lag in time for this very reason from when the interviews and focus groups took place and when the data coding phase began. On January 5th 2006, I began a five month data collection period of in-depth interviews and focus groups. My first focus group was held with the young adult women and this was followed in March 2006 by a second focus group of ‘mothers of the Church’. The researcher kept notes on emerging questions and/or issues as they came up during the data collection phase. The purpose of this was to compare it with other information that came up during the data analysis phase with the intention to integrate, dismiss or refine the additional data that was collected. This also was to account for emergent themes and dialogue that I anticipated to occur between participants that may become integral pieces of information in the study. It was found however, that the bulk of the data that was obtained, particularly in the individual interviews were historical in nature. As a result, approximately half the time of the interviews was spent taking the oral histories of the participants and reviewing aspects of church history that were shared amongst the Black clergy.

4.8 Data organization

The compilation of data occurred immediately following the conclusion of the interview or focus group sessions. During each interview or focus group I used a digital hand held audio tape recorder and at its conclusion, I would listen to the interview and

focus groups again to replay and rehearse much of what was said during the sessions. This resulted in my deep recollection of information since the information was replayed when it was the most fresh and vivid in my mind.

During the data collection phase, I documented any incidence that required highlighting my data, i.e. quotations and alignment of my themes. For example, one participant was disgruntled that they were not recognized as the first Pastor to start a church. I had to highlight this in my notes to later corroborate what other participants said about this issue. I transcribed all of the data and went through it with a red pen, making notes within the data to prompt the need for flushing out what a particular participant may have said regarding an issue. The data was obtained by focusing, simplifying and transforming the data that appeared in my field notes or transcriptions. One copy of the data remains in my home, and several copies are on disk and several email attachments addressed to three other email accounts that the researcher holds.

Data Coding

The coding of the data helped me to extrapolate re-occurring themes and thoughts that developed throughout the research. The extensive coding process occurred once the data collection process was complete. I decided not to use NVIVO as outlined in my research proposal because I was able to organize the data manually with an excel spreadsheet in a manageable way since there was a bulk of data that was deferred for future works.

To begin, I coded the data manually, using a red pen to make notes and to become familiarized with the information. Then I used three different markers that matched my identified themes. The primary purpose of coding was to organize the data for further

analysis since the researcher anticipated a supplementary study on the Church's history. I used a hard-copy of the transcript and a highlighter pen to identify issues that fell under the themes. Therefore, the data was condensed for the sake of manageability, and it was coded according to the question themes of 1. Background, 2. Spirituality and the Black Church 3. Challenges The Black Church Responds and 4. Black Christian Feminist Theorizing. Pink was used for data that revealed background, blue was used for data that spoke to their faith and spirituality, yellow was used for the challenge questions of how the Churches response to its alleged complicity in social matters –and green was used for Black feminist theorizing data. After sorting and categorizing the data by colour, I printed the data as organized by theme and placed each code in a designated marked folder.

Although an additional research method of 'oral histories' seemed to emerge the historical data was not organized by this theme. The researcher decided to leave coding this data for future works given the limitation of time. This data was evolutionary and became the bulk of the data that was retrieved from the clergy during the in-depth interviews. While the initial coding systems were created and shaped by the study questions, indeed there were a variety of responses that did not necessarily follow the question guide and research interests. For example, some participants spoke about local church matters that had nothing to do with the study.

Data analysis

By applying a critical ethnographic framework, I was able to see knowledge being produced amongst the participants. The data analysis stage commenced as each individual interview or focus group was completed. I brought out important themes that resulted in the creation of new perspectives that were grounded from the participants

lived experiences not from what some grand narrative had to say about this particular cultural group. As the data was being organized many times the researcher was able to pull data to support a correlating theory that emerged. For example, several quotes by the female participants was drawn to support the Jesus-Centric Ontology of Oneness believers. This helped to support a Whiteness as theology theory that the researcher worked with where Black Church members applied their spiritual convictions as Oneness believers to resist the imposition of colonization on their sacred space. Therefore the data complimented the emergent theory and vice versa. Also, the application of the anti-colonial discursive framework as the overarching epistemology helped the researcher to align the themes from a perspective that challenged colonialism from the perspective of the colonized. Church members were viewed as victims of colonization and their Jesus-centric Ontology was positioned as an act of resistance to colonial theology. The analysis of data thus focused on ways that the Church exercised its own resistance in ways that ruptured how the Black Church is perceived in contemporary matters. The discursive frameworks employed in this study along with a critical ethnographic approach helped to articulate an alternative perspective of the Black Church and its historical, current and future relevance to Black communities in Canada.

4.9 Limitation

The researcher set out to interview the older clergy first but it became who was available first due to scheduling restraints. Since 2002, there have been several deaths and long-term illness amongst clergy who represent the forefathers of the Black Pentecostal Church. Many of the clergy who formed Churches in the 1960's are aged and

since commencing this study there have been at least 3 deaths amongst this group. In one case, a home interview was scheduled to accommodate a sick pastor who had kidney disease and his daughter was diagnosed with cancer. During this interview, the pastor's wife and daughter joined the interview and sadly, the pastor's daughter passed away a year after the interview. In another case, the researcher tried to work expeditiously to interview a women pastor but unfortunately was unable to due to her age and dementia. The main limitation of this study is losing out on valuable information that the Late Mother Bryan had as she was the only female pastor of tenure who has since passed on to be with the Lord.

4.9.1 Ethical Considerations – Implications for the Study at Hand

Details of the internal church dilemmas are held confidential for this study and the participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Since I was part of this community, there was information that was shared about internal matters of the Church that I had to keep in strict confidence. It was therefore imperative that all participants were provided with a consent form and confidentiality letter that confirmed their privacy throughout the study, particularly information that was conveyed that specifically relates to the Church which I attend. When researching a community that the researcher is a part of, there are several challenges that are faced. One of the major concerns I had was that I not take on a role of gatekeeper in terms of 'protecting' my community and protecting the data that would be revealed. I had to be prudent to the data which may reveal what the Church may or may not want to hear. For example, one particular dilemma I encountered was interpreting what a participants had to say about

who was the first leader to start a Black Church in Toronto. The majority claimed one pastor in particular while one and only pastor claimed himself as the first to start a Church. The pastor who claimed himself to be the first to start a church in Toronto was somewhat disenchanted by the fact that he was not regarded as the first. I sought to seek clarification from the other subjects as to why there were no claims of this Pastor being the first to start the Black Oneness Church and why he cannot be considered as such. My research had to highlight categorically what was revealed in the data concerning this issue. It is expected that this may upset the participant who may disagree with what the data will say once they read it. I used my insider status as a starting point to gather knowledge that may be more difficult for an outsider to seek out; however, the challenges with this implicit association is the aftermath of this research and how the final product may be read, and consequently, how I may be treated. These are the risks of doing research in ones own community as the expectations are heightened in terms of how the information is presented.

What constitutes ethical and responsible research is minimizing the power differential that exists between the researcher and participants. Embedded within qualitative research practices that follow anti-oppressive principles is a process that empowers the voices of those we study by letting them speak. Too often the researcher becomes the voice for the participants and silences their reality. The researcher was well aware of power dynamics that can ensue in any research design and earnestly contended to relate to the respondents in ways that demystified the hierarchical relationship. In this study, a conscious adoption of a Black feminist framework and anti-colonial framework research approach leveled this power differential. First a community relationship was made possible between the

researcher and participants as I continue to have continued affiliations with the participants outside the interview setting. My varied roles as a sister and leader in the Church along with my race and gender enabled me to substantiate a role of community alliance with myself and the participants. Together, this leveled the power differential between the researcher and participant.

Observational Data Collections

There are important institutional documents that were used to obtain a better understanding of church history. During the research process, certain materials were reviewed to obtain the history of the Black church in general and the Black Oneness church in particular. For example, I was able to briefly review the manual of the St Peters Tabernacle which was the first Black Oneness Church organization. This document was shared during an interview. The manual is approximately 4'6' width and it outlined the tenets of the St Peters Tabernacle and its doctrinal beliefs. This was an interesting document to witness since its origin was hardly mentioned amongst other parishioners within the study. I observed that this aspect of Oneness church history was hardly spoken of other than those clergy who were the founders of this organization. This suggests that this aspect of church history may not be known in the wider church community and although this information was not acknowledged in this study, it is important nonetheless. In future works, a more in-depth look at this organization will be critiqued to formulate an inclusive historical account of Black Oneness History in Canada.

Church hymnals and choruses were also reviewed as it formed an important contribution to this study. Most Oneness churches of Afro-Caribbean descent use either

the Melodies of Praise hymnal or the Pentecostal Hymnal. Both hymnals include a compilation of hymns that date back to slavery and beyond. Many of the songs in these hymnals capture the enduring fortitude of Black Christian worshippers that capture both the spiritual and sociological encounters of the black experience. For example, on page 96 of the Melodies of Praise the hymn: “We’ll Understand it Better” speaks to the trials of this life that are circumvented by the belief in the life beyond this natural world. The chorus of this song is introduced in Chapter 2 and the verse go as follows:

We are often tossed and driv’n on the rest-less sea of time.
Sombre skies and howling tempests oft succeed a bright sunshine,
In that land of perfect day, when the mists have rolled away, we will understand it
better by and by.

This excerpt provides deep historical reflection of how the descendents of the enslaved coped with their predicament. As a researcher and community member I have sung this hymn maybe hundreds of times in my life. In retrospect, my decision to include it as one of the choruses in chapter 2 was made with no prior knowledge of who had written the song. Intuitively I knew the chorus had significant meaning but it was not until I engaged in the ethnographic methodology of this study that its deep meaning was uncovered. C.A. Tindley is the son of enslaved persons who wrote the song “We’ll Understand it Better.” He also became one of the “founding fathers of American Gospel music” (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/596550/C-A-Tindley>).” Tindley wrote over 47 hymnals of which one “We Shall Overcome” became the national anthem of the American Civil Rights movement (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/596550/C-A-Tindley>). Church hymns play an intricate role in black history by expressing the realities of black oppression in song

and how religious-spirituality was used as an anti-colonial tool. My use of hymns and gospel choruses made me think about the contemporary black church and the subsequent erosion of hymns that are being sung in today's Black Church. Many hymns have been written with deep inspiration, meaning and reflection of how to navigate the storms of the black experience. The decline of singing hymns can have a negative effect on the psyche of church goers as it can relay a disconnect of the historical realities of enslavement. It is important to connect with the struggles of the African past to add relevance to the ongoing struggles that face African people of the diaspora.

My experience in observing the data from the perspective of both researcher and community member helped to inform why the church may be having problems mobilizing against contemporary community stressors. The complexities of migration that were juxtaposed with the emergent Oneness identity added challenges to the church's ability to mobilize effectively. My desire to obtain the history of the church was to capture the historical significance of the Black Oneness Church so future generations can understand the importance of preserving the indigenusness of the Afro-Caribbean Oneness church. However, what became clear during the interview and focus groups is that there are internal issues of concern amongst church members that may inhibit them from mobilizing collectively. I observed that these issues had more to do with getting history right and not understanding why the church functioned the way it has. My own experience of learning about C.A. Tindley not only gave me a deeper appreciation of the forefathers and mothers of the Black Church, but it connected me to the suffering and burdens carried by predecessors within our community. This revelation enabled me to critique, in a preliminary way, the inner problems of the church as voiced amongst the

participants. For example, the offence shared by one clergy of not being recognized as the first to start the church was a concern. Notwithstanding what the data revealed, in his mind and interpretation of history, he was the first to start a church. He explained that he and another minister had worshipped at a nearby storefront prior to the first Oneness Church being started. Other participants corroborated this but they explained that he was worshipping with a ³Church of God congregation and never revealed his Oneness beliefs with the church and once he did, he was kicked out! This tale of history is conflicting but his resistance showed that history can be contested. Whereas he may not have been the first leader to officially start the Oneness church in the early 1960's, something is to be said of him defecting from the White church when he had. Interestingly, it also suggests that there were other Black churches of other denominations that preceded the Oneness group. From this I observed that history may not have been adequately documented and passed down in the church. This became clear when I consistency got pulled into discussion where inner schisms amongst churches and between churches were discussed during the interviews and focus groups. This suggested, perhaps, that there were unfinished business and personal issues that needed to be addressed before the church community could effectively mobilize on a grandeur scale. While oral histories play an important part of the culture of the Black community the church will need to do better in documenting and accounting for the various histories that make up the church collective. This can minimize the schisms and concern of whose voices and experiences are being represented in the recollection of history. The inclusion of the sacrifices that the forefathers of the church endured was a pressing matter in this research. It is the

³ The Church of God church differs from the Oneness Pentecostal group. Whereas they believe in glossalia/speaking in tongues, they do not ascribe to the monotheistic teachings of Oneness believers i.e. baptism in Jesus Name.

relevance of history that I observed to be a concern as they wanted successive generations to connect with them perhaps in the same way that I experienced a connection with Tindley's church hymns. The oral histories exposed the complexities of the Black Church that faces both internal and external challenges that can impede its ability to mobilize against contemporary community stressors. My experience of doing the interviews and focus group revealed that more formal space must be given to substantiate the claims that these participants shared. Although this was not intended to be a focal point of this study, the data that emerged from the oral histories will become an integral part for future works on the history of the Black Oneness Church in Canada. I anticipate that the participants of this study will gladly embrace a published documentation of this indigenous community.

4.9.2. Summary

The methods used in this study were chosen to gather data from the pulpit and pew. The benefits of this study far outweighed any risks and ultimately the findings will be used to address the research question and to further form the basis for intellectualizing the hidden community of the Black Church. The direct application of this research is to substantiate that the role of the Black Church is not limited to a religious function only. It carries a sociological role that can only be revealed through investigating the lives of members of the Black Church. Despite the fact that the Black Church is seen as a religious institution, this research was able to penetrate this insular community and tap into the sociological makeup of Canadian Black Churches in contemporary times. Therefore, the application of this research is to recognize sites of resistance that are

overlooked in academic scholarship. As the data reveals, Black Churches played a significant role as an immigration settlement point and caring for the needs of its community within the socio-spiritual realm. The discussion section will further reveal whether fulfilling its role in the broader society has been ignored.

Chapter 5
From White Pews To Black Pulpits

A Brief History of Oneness Pentecostals of Afro-Caribbean Descent

"I am a One God Apostolic, tongue talking, holy rolling, Heaven bound, born again Believer in the liberated power of Jesus Name. I have been washed in the blood sanctified by the spirit and I believe in Holiness and I suggest you do the same. I've been set free by the Spirit at the Pentecostal Altar, Pardon me if I'm not ashamed to be a One God apostolic, tongue talking, holy rolling, Heaven bound, born again Believer in the liberated power of Jesus Name. (Gospel Chorus)

5.0 Introduction

This chapter details the humble beginnings of the Oneness Pentecostal churches of Afro-Caribbean descent. It presents some data and application of the theoretical lens that is used in this research but focuses mainly on the history of the Black Oneness Church by capturing the sometimes lengthy narratives of Black Pastor's experiences in the early years of the churches development. A discussion of the data and analysis will follow in the subsequent chapters.

The establishment of the Black Oneness Church in Canada depended on the will of courageous men and women who resisted the White pews to embrace the Black pulpit in the early years of Caribbean migration. The transition of being a pew member in a White church to a Pastor in the Black Church was no easy undertaking. The sacrifices that were made by these early pioneers must be remembered as they battled the adjustments of migration while establishing Black Churches. Oneness believers of Afro-Caribbean descent possess a rich religious and cultural tradition that set them apart from other Oneness groups in Canada. Their exclusive reliance on oral tradition meant that many of their experiences have been deeply locked in the memories of the Oneness Pastors and ageing lay-members. It is, therefore, important to finally document these oral liturgies in

print to preserve their rich legacy of religious and cultural tradition for generations to come. The following section will provide a more thorough understanding of the history of Pentecostalism along with a discussion that outlines the distinctions of Black Oneness Pentecostals. This will follow with the introduction of the subject narratives where the voices of Black Church members will speak about the arrival of Afro-Caribbean immigrants and their Experiences in the White Church. These narratives will highlight the central importance the Black Churches have played as a social welfare institution in their respective communities.

5.1 Pentecostalism

The scriptural roots of Pentecostalism can be traced over 2000 years ago to A.D 33 on the "Day of Pentecost" where congregants were baptized with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues as described in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles (Holy Bible, Acts 2:1-38). As MacRoberts (1988) explains,

The Pentecostals most distinctive and universal characteristic is the central place they ascribe to the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the individual and the church. The manifestation of the Spirit most often associated with Pentecostalism is speaking with tongues or glossolalia, which is understood by most – but no means all – as the evidence of a person having received the Spirit baptism. (p.2)

Mistakenly, the origins of Pentecostalism has often been connected to documentations of “spirit down pouring” in the late 1800’s and the turn of the twentieth century. These sporadic documentations and eye witness accounts culminated at the Los Angeles Azusa street religious revival which began in an abandoned African Methodist Episcopal

Church led by a Black Minister named William Seymour a son of former enslaved parents who was seeking a new religious experience. The Azusa revival of 1906-1909 is regarded as the birthplace of contemporary Pentecostal organizations and marked the beginning of the Pentecostal movement as a global reality (Reed, 2008: 81). However, it should more accurately be referred to as the birth of modern Pentecostalism that was recognized internationally as a bona-fide religious experience. Pentecostalism erupted from among society's disenfranchised, and it envisioned a human community restored by the power of the Spirit (Cox, 2001:17). Though Pentecostalism was no new phenomenon at the turn of the twentieth century its popularity was a phenomenon that hit the airwaves of the modern world. With the heightened use of media during Azusa, the Black Church emerged from the shadows of 'secret meeting places' to be recognized as the hub of the Black community where Black people are affirmed, liberated and worship in a setting that is owned and operated by Black people. Azusa is most known for its "integrated leadership and congregation and although it was decades before the civil rights movement, it is [argued] that there was an amazing lack of discrimination (Hollenweger, 1997:23). In David Reed's book "In Jesus' Name - The History and Beliefs of Oneness Pentecostals 2008," he provides the most recent scholarly text of Oneness history and doctrine which this chapter will follow very closely. According to Reed (2008)

It was William J. Seymour and the Azusa street revival in Los Angeles that turned a regional movement into a global phenomenon. Its beginnings in a small Black congregation also burst the racial barriers that opened the Pentecostal door to becoming in less than a century one of the most racially diverse traditions within the Christian family. (p. 79)

Further Lovett argues that

While the importance and significance of African religious culture surviving in the New World has been debated by anthropologists, sociologists, and historians, evidence suggests that Seymour was indeed the fruit of Black slave religion, which has its historic roots anchored deep in African and Afro–Caribbean religion. His deep religious yearnings were decisive in the formation of his faith.

Since Azusa, some argue that Pentecostalism is estimated to be the fastest growing religion in the world (Tinney, 1971). This is particularly evident amongst Blacks around the world that ascribes their Pentecostal identity to the Azusa street revival.

The birthplace of Pentecostalism however also offers a different record of history according to ones racial particularities. Charles Parham, for example, was a White Holiness preacher from Kansas who had been seeking the spirit-baptism experience as documented in the Bible in Acts chapter 2. Parham founded the Bethel Bible School in Topeka Kansas and history records that prior to leaving for a speaking engagement in 1901, he instructed his students to study the book of Acts for guidance on the matter of spirit baptism (Reed 2008: 80). Upon his return, his student Agnez N. Ozzman was recorded to have spoken in tongues, and this moment has been marked as the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement (Reed, 2008: 171). Both Parham and Seymour are certainly important contributors of the modern Pentecostal movement but it has been steeply racialized and will be traced with emphasis to either Topeka Kansas or Azusa Street in Los Angeles. Reed (2008) adds emphasis to this point.

White Pentecostals, especially those in the Assemblies of God, have pinned their Pentecostal identity on Parham’s doctrine of glossalalia. Black Pentecostals, on

the other hand, have identified with the Azusa street revival and its witness to racial harmony, temporary though it was. For Seymour, the unity of the races was a greater sign of the Spirit's baptism than glossalalia. (p.81)

The attestation to either a White founder or Black founder of the modern Pentecostal movement reveals the on-going racial tensions that continue to manifest within religious ranks. Following the Azusa Revival, many religious schisms began to ensue, including “unresolved matters of race, organization and doctrine” (Reed 2008:83). The effect was the polarization of the Pentecostal movement along race and doctrine. What was once a multi-racial movement became steeply racialized. David Reed (2008) carefully outlined the rift that occurred in the 1920's which saw Oneness believers formally separate from an organization of Trinitarian believing Pentecostals. Today, Pentecostalism can be categorized by two major groups, namely the Trinitarian camp and the Oneness Camp, the former of which is the largest sect amongst Pentecostal believers. Within these two subgroups of Pentecostals, Trinitarian Pentecostals are largely represented by US based organizations such as the Assemblies of God (White organization), and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) a Black Organization. Oneness Pentecostals are represented by organizations such as the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (1919) (Black Organization), and the United Pentecostal Church Inc, (1945) a White Organization. These organizations represent the majority of Pentecostals worldwide but are not inclusive of all groups. What began as an integrative racial religious experience at Azusa resulted in splintered religious organizations that were defined along the axis of race and Monotheistic/Trinitarian beliefs.

5.2 Oneness Pentecostals

Oneness Pentecostals are a subgroup of classical Pentecostals that believe in glossalalia. The term Oneness and Apostolic are used interchangeably to describe this subgroup of Pentecostals that share a specific religious identity. The main distinction of Oneness Pentecostals from other Pentecostals is its mode of baptism. They believe in water baptism of believers by immersion in water while quoting the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as compared to water baptism by immersion or sprinkling of water while quoting the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Oneness doctrine also includes the Monotheistic belief of the eternal existence of one true God as compared to Trinitarian believers who regard God as three distinct persons or entities, i.e. the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As emphasized by Reed (2008), “The Jesus Name or Oneness paradigm is a radical soteriology constituted by a non-Trinitarian modalistic view of God, the name of Jesus as the revealed name of God, and the threefold pattern for full salvation set forth in Acts 2:38” (p.113).

The Oneness theology is foundational to understanding the distinctions of Pentecostals who ascribe to Trinitarian beliefs and Pentecostal’s who follow a monotheistic understanding which “magnifies the revelation of Jesus Christ as supreme Lord” (Reed, 2008:182). As explained by United Pentecostals, the term "Oneness" is used because they believe that there is only One God not three persons as emphasized in Deuteronomy 6:4 - Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one (UPCA website, manual, article, retrieved June 11, 2008). For Oneness Pentecostals, “the name of Jesus [is] the heart of their Christology but also the distinctive centerpiece of their soteriology” (Reed, 2008: 205). Further they believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is not biblical and it is

crucial for every believer to be baptized only in the name of Jesus Christ and acknowledge that he is Lord and One God. This doctrinal stance was the main premise of the rift that occurred following the Azusa revival that resulted in the Oneness Pentecostal group separating from the Trinitarian Pentecostal organization.

Black Oneness Pentecostals trace modern Pentecostalism to William Seymour's Azusa Street revival, but their doctrinal history of the past 100 years is ascribed to a Black preacher, Gladstone Thomas Haywood (G.T. Haywood) whose "influence on the Black Oneness movement has resulted in over one million Black Pentecostals in the US...nearly half the total Oneness population" (Reed, 2008:221). Haywood was born on July 15, 1880, in Green Castle, Indiana and he is considered the Father of Oneness organizations worldwide. (The Word of Truth Ministries, 2002 by The Truth of God). G.T. Haywood is well known for his publications, hymnals and preaching. An example of his popular hymnals that are sung in many Black Churches include:

O sweet Wonder! O sweet Wonder! Jesus the Son of God;
How I adore Thee! O how I love Thee! Jesus the Son of God.

Haywood attended the Azusa street revival in the early 1900's and he was instrumental in shaping what was then regarded as the "new Issue" which taught the essentials of being baptized in the "Name of Jesus Christ" as part of the new birth experience. Haywood was very instrumental in the spread of Oneness doctrine. The teaching of Oneness theology extended beyond the borders of the United States and into areas of the Caribbean out of which the Afro-Caribbean Oneness identity was birthed.

5.3 Arrival of the Afro-Caribbean immigrants

In 1955 Canada introduced the West Indian Domestic Scheme (Anderson, 1993). This Scheme “allowed eligible Black women who were between the age of 18 to 35, in good health, no family ties and a minimum of a grade eight education from mainly Jamaica and Barbados to enter Canada” (James & Walker, 1984). As a result of this new policy, Canada experienced an astronomical influx of immigrants from the Caribbean. The first wave of immigrants during this era was predominately women who arrived to fill domestic jobs as nannies, cleaners, and nurses. The pressing need for these types of labourers in Canada attracted a steady pool of immigrant women, many of which served a vital role in the early development of Black Pentecostal churches (chapter 7 will elaborate to the important role that women played in the Black Church). The selective immigration policies of this era permitted fewer Black men to enter Canada directly from the Caribbean. Many Jamaican men, for example, arrived either via England or as the spouses of women who returned to Jamaica to get married given the scarcity of spouses in Canada who shared their racial and cultural heritage. In the late 1960s, the Canadian government instituted the Family reunification clause in its immigration policy, which made it even easier for Jamaicans and other groups to bring their loved ones to join them in Canada (Anderson, 1993). Bishop David was a matchmaker of marriages in his time and he recollects the immigration trend that occurred in this period.

Women were the first from Jamaica to come to Canada for they didn't want anybody here but nurses and it was a few years till things started breaking out. I had my photo studio in Mandeville I had come back from England I think and one day somebody just break through the door and when I look it was she and I said what are you doing here and she said I got some time off to come here because I want to marry someone and you can't get anyone for all you can get is women

coming there to do nursing. So I said what do you want me to do? She said she wants me to recommend somebody (Bishop David Interview May 28, 2006).

In this example, this woman was introduced to a man she later married. This man she married became one of the longest serving pastors in the Canadian Pentecostal church until his death in 2004. This church now celebrates over 40 years of existence.

As explained in Chapter 2, the influx of Caribbean immigrants was significant as it was the influence of these new migrants that helped to put Pentecostalism on the Canadian map as the religion that reported the highest number of Black membership. Esther, a 56 year old immigrant of Jamaica who arrived to Canada in the late 1980's talked about the church being a part of her culture and remembered when Pentecostalism wasn't that popular. She asserts that Pentecostalism was once hidden from her community but now has become part of church culture.

I believe going to church is a part of our culture because we were practically born into this thing. And out of the Pentecostal doctrine cause a lot of us coming up from younger days we didn't know anything about the Pentecostal movement in my community it was like Presbyterian, the Church of God and seventh day Adventist so Pentecostal was out of the picture (Focus Group February 2006).

As previously reported, Pentecostalism doubled during the period where migration from the Caribbean was at its peak. Upon arrival, many of the immigrants who sought a church of the Pentecostal Oneness faith attended Greenwood United Pentecostal Church which was then the only Oneness church located at 719 Greenwood, Toronto, Ontario. The Greenwood church is affiliated with the United Pentecostal Church (UPC), a United States religious organization of the Apostolic Faith. It was founded in 1945 and it extends to 143 nations with approximately 4,000,000 constituents worldwide (UPCI website, June 11, 2008). It also represents "approximately one-half of the total numerical strength

of the Oneness movement in North America” (Reed, 2008:221). The UPC organization is predominately a White organization that split off from the Black Oneness Movement in 1924 (Reed, 2008:213). While both sides provide different histories for why they “split” it is well known within Oneness circles that the administration of the UPC religious organization is categorically White.

Experiences in the White Church

Afro-Caribbean immigrants who attended Greenwood expressed dissatisfaction with the style of worship, church practices of adornment and the lack of opportunity for Black men within the church. Elder Raymond, a son of Jamaican politicians, immigrated to Canada in the sixties. Elder Raymond, now in his seventies recalled that the only Oneness Pentecostal church around in the early sixties was from a White perspective.

when we immigrated here... the only apostolic church that was here was the UPC church at Greenwood 719 Greenwood Avenue. This was from the White perspective and of course the culture shock and differences you know with worship and the intensity was a big difference in the White church and what we were used to back home. We were more intense more um more um outreach oriented in reaching people. (Elder Raymond Interview May, 13, 2006)

Elder Raymond makes a distinction between the White and Black perspectives of Oneness Pentecostalism as he lays emphasis on the intensity of worship and their ability to reach out to people. The intensity of worship is a description of the indigenusness of Black Oneness practices.

Similarly, Bishop David experienced first hand what it was like to attend Greenwood. Bishop David is now deceased and he was a great biblical teacher who mentored many pastors and church members. During the early church, he was at one time the sole

marriage officer and he personally officiated the weddings of hundreds of members of varying churches in the GTA. He was a quiet man by disposition but not in character and conviction. He clearly distinguished the difference in worship practices in the White church which was far more subdued than what the Black immigrant attendees were used to. His narrative speaks of how the expressive and loud worship practices of women challenged what the White Church was used to.

And when you go there you can't say hallelujah and praise the Lord they would stop it. I remember one dear sister. She is still alive today God bless her she wanted to say hallelujah she said HALLELUUUUU, HALLELUUU. They are not used to that coming from back home lively church...they sing their hymns they worship the Lord but when it comes to clapping and shouting and rejoicing rule them out. If you want to say amen praise the Lord hallelujah you have to go down stairs to the washroom to say that (Bishop David Interview (Bishop David Interview May 28, 2006).

The forceful worship practices of Black Oneness Pentecostals were not tolerated in the White church and this is where the Black root of Oneness Pentecostalism has been realized. Both Elder Raymond and Bishop David expressed their concern over the limitations they had in the White church. Their worship practices were seen as too extravagant and the Black men who were active leaders in their church in Jamaica were not active participants. Elder Raymond explained that a meeting had been called with the church officials at Greenwood to express their concerns. As he recalled,

they had a meeting with my Jamaican brethren and I said this is not the way to leave a church let's have a meeting with the minister and pastor and tell them what we feel what is happening the things that you are doing. The ministers said well you are from Jamaica and you are going through a culture shock. (Elder Raymond Interview May, 13, 2006)

The concerns of the Black congregants were dismissed and no doubt may have infuriated these immigrants even more to ultimately lead them to start their own churches.

Evidently, the Black Jamaican immigrants who attended Greenwood were accustomed to being active in the church from back home and when they were denied this, many eventually left. Bishop David seriously resisted the limitations of the White churches and he was not afraid to speak about his experiences in the White church and he wanted this to be known. He says:

we left from Greenwood and came out west for no one wanted to stay in that area because you can't do anything there. If you are an elder they don't recognize you as Black. You can't make it ...we had a hard time. So I didn't stay there and after a while I decided I better get out of here. And then we got out and we started drifting little by little. (Bishop David Interview May 28, 2006)

What Bishop David speaks of was the disrespect that the elders of the Afro Caribbean church community had to endure. The traditions and values of African people is to treat the elders with dignity and high regard. However, in this context, Bishop David explains that because they were Black they were not acknowledged and this led to the exodus of many Blacks leaving the Greenwood church. It is important to quote these responses at length to garner the intensity of struggle that these new immigrants experienced. The differences in church practices and limitations imposed on these Black men from Jamaica actually mirrored what was going on in the broader society. Canada had long established itself as a "White settler" Country. Blacks were only permitted entry to Canada during acute labour shortages, and had to endure some of the worst forms of racism and discrimination. Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine the limitations that were imposed on these Black immigrants, who were resigned to the pews. Eventually, they began to defect from White churches and established their own as a result of the racism they experienced and the lack of cultural expression they were use to from back home.

5.4 The Defection - Black Man Can't Start A Church

The Black Oneness Pentecostal church of Afro-Caribbean descent traces its roots to a little storefront in 1963 on 997 Dovercourt Road, Toronto, Ontario. Today the Afro-Caribbean Oneness Pentecostals in Canada can be traced to nine Founding Father Oneness churches in the GTA. They include:

1. Bethel Apostolic Church, established by Bishop Jones in 1963
2. Bibleway Apostolic Church, established by the late Bishop Lionel Bryan in 1965, it is now pastored by son Colin Bryan
3. Bibleway Apostolic Church, established by Bishop Henry Dawson in 1966
4. Mount Zion Apostolic church, established by the late Bishop Weston Hall, in 1967. The Toronto location is pastored by Bishop C.O. Ricketts, Malton Location now pastored by Elder Harper
5. Mount Olivet Pentecostal Church, established by Bishop Roderick Davey in 1968
6. Mount Zion Tabernacle, established by the late Bishop Fulford Davey in 1969
7. Bethlehem United Church Apostolic, established by Bishop Dorant Thompson in 1970.
8. Church of the First Born Apostolic, established by the late Bishop Walter Bond, in 1971, now Pastor Ludlow Miller.
9. Zion Apostolic Church, established by Bishop Ken Lyndsey in 1971.

These churches represent the foundation to today's Oneness Pentecostal churches of Afro-Caribbean descent in the Greater Toronto Area outside of the United Pentecostal Church organization. Bishop Jones was the first to move out and start a ministry and he was followed by the late Bishop Lionel Bryan, Bishop Henry Dawson, Bishop Hall and

Bishop Ricketts. They were the pioneers of the Black Oneness church movement. Many corroborate that Raphael Jones was the first to start the Church on 997 Dovercourt road following the influx of Afro-Caribbeans into Canada. Bishop Teddy is a native of Jamaica and immigrated to Canada from England in 1961. He was a former member of Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic) in Birmingham, England where the infamous Sydney Alexander Dunn was the pastor and founder of the first Black Oneness Church in England in 1955 (retrieved February 24, 2009). Bishop Teddy became part of history once again in Canada, where he witnessed the birth of the first Black (Oneness) Church in Canada. He corroborates,

Um we had a small church in a storefront at 997 Dovercourt road and um that's actually the beginning of the Apostolic church in Canada um Bishop Jones he was then the um Minister Jones was the one who assumed the role of Pastorate...then Bishop Hall. Um the church was a very small group I don't think it was more than about 12 people if we had that and so that is where it all started so but we have developed over the years to what it is today. (Bishop Teddy Interview April, 16, 2006)

Many of the respondents were able to recall the early accounts of Black Church history in Toronto. All corroborated the fact that the church began as a result of being disenchanted about the style of worship and doctrine at the Greenwood UPC. Bishop Jonah, who arrived in Canada from Jamaica in the late 1950's relates how he struggled with the White church when he first arrived to Canada and how he felt regarding the issue of feet washing. With respect to his discomfort with the White Church and their refusal to wash the feet of the saints he had this to say:

I visited [Greenwood] what I saw was not what I was taught and it became very insipid for me to condone what I saw was going on there. For the doctrine is what makes you what you are supposed to be. They were far from being Apostolic they were Pentecostal, they were Pentecostal for I have a difference between Apostolic and Pentecostal for there is a difference. Yes they say they are, but saying it and

being it is different. They refuse to wash the saints feet, ah they refuse to have a mixed group in their choir, got to be White only, (laughing) - they don't believe you are supposed to talk in tongues so I decided that I was going back home. At that time my family was here in 1963. We were on the verge of going back home but afterwards something hit me and said no start a church. Just my family myself and I think it was mother Simpson and ah a family of five actually it was six we started in a little place called Dovercourt (Bishop Jonah Interview May 6, 2006).

Bishop Jonah's recollection of the early church is very telling of that era. The distinction of the Black root of Oneness Pentecostals from the "White" Oneness believers is made clear. According to Bishop Jonah it was the doctrine of Oneness Pentecostalism that essentially energizes who you are and this brought into question the way Oneness Pentecostals affirmed their identity.

For example, Afro-Caribbean Oneness churches interpret the scriptural practice of the Lord's Supper/Communion to include the washing of the feet of your fellow brethren. This is to quash any hierarchical claim, social class and pride that may exist in a person's heart. To stoop to this menial task of washing another person's feet is to demonstrate the spirit of love, equality and brotherhood within the church family. It is also aiming to teach the importance of service in the individual life. The act of feet washing is taken from the biblical passage (John 13:4, 5) where Jesus washed the feet of his disciples during the Passover. The implication of this passage is to express that everyone is equal in the sight of God; therefore, to refuse to follow the example of Jesus is to exalt oneself above Him and to live in pride. For Bishop Jonah, the fact that the White churches did not practice feet washing during communion was an insult and incompatible with the teachings that was taught in Black Oneness churches. Put differently, it was because of racism that they refused to wash one another's feet and have mixed choirs. Although foot

washing is not practiced in many religions, the Black Oneness group have maintained this biblical practice and have taken on the teachings literally which have both doctrinal and social significance. In keeping with their convictions to follow this specific teaching of Jesus, they were well aware that they lived in a world where social hierarchy and oppression was hard felt. Therefore, they required constant reminders that all are equal before God and the act of foot washing exemplified just that. This is an example of how we can draw a distinction between the practices within Black Oneness churches and the unequal social order that is perpetuated by Eurocentric interpretations of scripture.

In addition to the racism they experienced, another reason for defecting from White churches became more of a matter of theological choice and distinction. Bishop Jonah disagreed with the White churches stance on glossalia (speaking in tongues) which he believed to be a distortion of biblical doctrines. Bishop Jonah refused to forgo his doctrinal convictions on issues of tongue talking, communion and worship practices and he resorted to setting up the first Black Oneness church. The Black Oneness church started in resistance to the White church's doctrinal practices. Bishop Jonah's decision to start a church at that time, no doubt, was difficult but it has had an enduring affect on the Caribbean Oneness community far beyond what he may have ever envisioned. His actions speak to the strong liberation theology that encompassed Black Oneness teachings and practices. As history tells us, Bethel Apostolic started in resistance to the White church and though it started with only 6 members this founding father church now boasts an edifice that can accommodate up to 1300 people.

The experiences in the White church as expressed by the Afro-Caribbean immigrants indicated that there was a cultural and doctrinal distinction amongst the Black Oneness

group and the White Oneness group. When asked if the White church was the same or different from the Black Church, Elder Nathaniel, a former teacher of Jamaica recalled:

Well ya the Black Churches were still predominately Jamaican pastors so the West Indian culture was still very strong and mainly Jamaicans to be honest very strong at the time, the White churches were Canadian so culture and language were different. Worship styles again different. As far as doctrine was concerned it was very similar. (Elder Nathaniel Interview May, 16, 2006)

According to Elder Nathaniel, the Oneness doctrine was similar, yet the strong Jamaican culture and varying worship styles did reveal that the schisms they experienced became doctrinal differences that led to a significant number of Blacks leaving Greenwood. Thus, when the subjects were asked “What do you think attracts people to the Black Pentecostal churches?” Elder Raymond summed it up in a few words. “It is the worship, the exuberance, the freedom...”(Elder Raymond Interview May, 13, 2006)

The attractive form of worship to the Black Pentecostal Church is why so many defected from Greenwood but there was also a social component behind the reason for these new immigrants to leave. Pastor Albert is a critical thinker and his narrative uncovers not only the distinction of the music and worship styles and why people are attracted to the Black Pentecostal church but also the social network role of the church.

Oh you hear it all the time, the music, its vibrance its expression of worship... on the other hand people are attracted because the Black Church has provided within the Black community leadership, support in Toronto it served as an integral part when people were migrating from the Caribbean and parts of Europe , England particularly in the mid to late 60's and 70's s the church was a social network for people to be connected the Black Church it has provided a lot of under girding and support for the Black community at large so I think those are some of the distinct things.(Pastor Albert Interview, April 8, 2006)

Pastor Albert corroborates the social role Black Churches played during the mass immigration years of Caribbean immigrants. The church was a social network that

assisted immigrants who sought for a continuity of religious practices on new soil. Their actions portrayed the unfolding of a transnational identity that had taken shape. These immigrants never truly left home behind. As a result of emigrating from a country that had been directly affected by colonization, enslavement and history of White supremacy in Black Churches, it was apparent that these migrants were (un)consciously rejecting what was for them a “White perspective” of Oneness doctrine. Elder Raymond recalled very proudly how the Jamaican former Prime Minister Michael Manley was instrumental in pushing out a White Pastor in a very large Oneness church in Jamaica.

Bishop Reynolds was the last missionary for the UPC church in Jamaica. Michael Manley went to church one Sunday and saw this pastor pastoring all these people and asked you’re the one pastoring all these people? And we didn’t know what Michael Manley was thinking and the next week he revoked his license and that is how Sammy Stewart became pastor (Elder Raymond Interview May, 13, 2006).

Elder Raymond’s mother was very involved in the Manley government and this memory, whether true or not, served as a reminder that these Black men were well aware of Whiteness being entrenched in the religious community. The dismissal of the White Pastor in Jamaica may have been connected to the country’s liberation movement which led to its independence in 1962. Interestingly, the struggle that Bishop Jonah and others had in the White church was occurring alongside Jamaican Independence and the transnational ties may have influenced the way they resisted Whiteness in the church.

When the first Black Church was to be established, Bishop Jonah received opposition from a churchgoer who told him; “Black man can’t start a church in Canada” (Bishop Jonah Interview, May 6, 2006). This statement is indicative of the colonial influence in the church. It speaks to the dominant European imagination that views Blacks in subordinated roles. It uncovers the way Black Church-folk were suspended by a

Whiteness as theology logic that only saw Whites in power in religious institutions therefore making it an illogical or irrational conclusion that Blacks could somehow transcend their subservient status in society and the church. Bishop Jonah defied conventional wisdom for that time and became the first Black leader that started the church. This, in part, was to prove that a Black man can start a church and he did! He went on to become the first Afro-Caribbean leader of the Apostolic Faith that has served 45 years since its establishment. In retrospect, the Afro-Caribbean Oneness Church “was founded on the basis of protest. It was protestation against the false epistemology and false cosmology of Whites regarding the place and person of Black folk in the world (Johnson, p.136).” Interestingly, the man who said that “Black Man Can’t Start a Church” also became a Pastor of a Oneness Church 4 years later and it also exists till this very day.

Between 1963 to 1971, most of the Oneness churches in the GTA were born directly or indirectly from the wombs of the 9 founding father churches previously mentioned. Although the majority of Oneness churches of Afro-Caribbeans trace their roots to the womb of these founding father churches, it is important to note that the UPC organization, though Caucasian in its administration has also been the tutelage to the formation of some Black Oneness churches of Afro-Caribbean descent. Some Black immigrants, like the late Pastor Franklin Wesley McKenzie remained at Greenwood during the mass exodus of Caribbean immigrants. Faith Sanctuary, formally Weston United Church in Toronto, Ontario, was pastored by the late Pastor F.W. McKenzie from 1972 until his death in 2002. His story is quite compelling. For whereas Black immigrants defected from the Greenwood church, the late Pastor McKenzie experienced

a defection of his own. He attended a UPC church in Jamaica, and upon migration, he became a member of a UPC church in the Greater Toronto Area. Pastor Michael, the successor of F.H. McKenzie is a young pastor of Jamaican background who has been inspired by the late Pastor McKenzie's chronicle of faith as a pastor. He gives an eye witness account of this journey of faith.

We ended up at this church called Weston United Pentecostal church. Went there the first Sunday in fact the pastor at the time was just packing up to leave to move to Boston and they had no pastor. Long story short in a short while they asked my Dad if he would consider being the pastor there were about 75-85 people there.

He accepted um um the church at that time had gone in a very liberal direction and they thought my dad would fit into that mould. My father had an MSW also and this congregation was well educated and they sort of figured oh great he would fit in nicely with what we are doing. So they were into a bit of a shock he was as straight and strict and as bible based as can be. They were actually having one service a week a Sunday morning service that was when he started Sunday night Friday night and everybody very quickly decided this was not their cup of tea. Everybody left but one old lady one. So there were 6 in our family and this one old lady. (Pastor Michael Interview May 28, 2006)

As a Black pastor of a predominantly White congregation reasons can be inferred for why these congregants decided to leave. The transnational Oneness identity held by the late Pastor McKenzie was very strong and certainly conflicted with the White membership. It can also be inferred, perhaps, that it was also the result of racism that reflected a history of Black leadership not being tolerated in certain positions, and if they were, it was under the auspices of White control. Pastor Michael continued with F.H. McKenzie's compelling story of courage.

So one day we were coming in February morning bitter cold we were driving in 30 miles from Georgetown my father had just had it. I didn't know that but he said I am going to resign what's the point I have clearly shown that I'm really good at destroying a church. (Laughing) So we drove down a hill to this place there was this little woman she was elderly retired senior standing at the door freezing with four little kids she had paid their bus fare to bring them to Sunday

school. My dad opened the door and went into his office and just wept... he said well Lord if it is just me I will do this. (Pastor Michael Interview May 28, 2006)

Pastor McKenzie was probably moved to tears by this elderly women's sacrifice in bringing the children to church and providing their bus fare. It is an example of the social welfare role fulfilled by lay members of the Black Church who sacrificed for those in need. When Pastor McKenzie decided to continue to pastor the church, it eventually resulted in a large Afro-Caribbean immigrant following who had either been a part of the UPC organization from Jamaica or were newly converted members into the church. Today, Faith Sanctuary is the largest Black Oneness congregation within and outside the UPC organization in Canada (Reed 2008). What was once a church of 7 members now hosts a predominately Black congregation of almost 2500 members. Pastor Michael recalls with emphasis,

[It] taught us a lesson one thing I can tell anybody as far as church growth is concerned it doesn't demand a fire ball preacher it doesn't demand a whole lot of charisma what my Dad had was INTEGRITY, FAITHFULNESS, STICKTOITIVENESS, NO FEAR TOTAL FAITH and that's how we operated, and the lord THE LORD added to his church daily such as to be saved and we take no credit for it. (Pastor Michael Interview May 28, 2006)

This narrative is quoted with emphasis as Pastor Michael spoke extremely passionately about the late Pastor McKenzie's experiences in starting the church. It corroborates that regardless of whether the Black membership left or remained in the White church for a period of time, what became evident is that the Black Church grew alongside Caribbean migration and offered a firm challenge to the White churches.

Grace Apostolic in Scarborough Ontario came out of Greenwood UPC. It is currently pastored by Carleton Rigg since 1987. Pastor Rigg attended Greenwood during the mass

exodus of Afro-Caribbean immigrants and remained for sixteen years. The reason he did not leave when most Jamaican immigrants were defecting was deeply personal. He had some troubling experiences in an ultra-strict church in Jamaica and as a result he had experienced years of discouragement which followed him with his migration to Canada. His disillusionment with the church had impacted him in such a way that his decision to leave Greenwood with the others was premature. While many may not have understood his decision to remain at the time, he openly explained his decision to remain at Greenwood for sixteen years during which he learned the fundamentals about Oneness doctrine.

I was totally restored. I understood the concept of the blood of Jesus, what Jesus truly meant. I understood the concept of justification and sanctification. I started learning truths from the Bible most of the things they were teaching they were not learned. (Elder Raymond Interview May, 13, 2006)

In 1987, after several supernatural visions and pressure from his family he eventually left the Greenwood Pentecostal church and started Grace Apostolic Church in Scarborough at the memorable “Upper Room” location on golf Club Road where he accounts for years of miracles, healings and rapid growth of the church. Similarly to Faith Sanctuary, Grace Apostolic’s church membership comprises a majority of Afro-Caribbean immigrants. The historical account of Blacks defecting from the UPC organization suggests that while many left to form their own Black Churches in the 1960’s and early 1970’s, of those who remained, many eventually left as well and became Pastors or members of predominately Black congregations of the Oneness faith. What started in Topeka Kansas, Azusa and parts of the Caribbean transplanted to the Canadian metropolis where an indigenous Black root expression of Oneness doctrine was born.

5.6 The Black Church as a Social Welfare Institution

As Afro-Caribbean immigrants of the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's sought refuge in the urban corridors of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Black Churches played a huge part in their settlement. The Black Church helped to facilitate the needs of this growing community and has maintained a firm presence in the Black community to address many of the concerns that Black people faced during the process of migration. For example, in Mensah's (2009) discussion of Ghanaian immigrant churches, he found that churches "provide a variety of social services, ranging from English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, marriage counselling, financial and legal assistance, conflict resolution, mentoring, sports and summer school programs for youth" (p.35). Whereas the social, economic and political needs are generally addressed by the state or public institutions, the Black Church functioned as a social welfare institution that catered to the individual concerns of its members. In another example, the Black Church cultivated ethnic enclaves, niches and migration networks to precipitate the process of immigration. As Castles (2003) explains,

Migration networks are sets of interpersonal relations that link migrants or returned migrants with relatives, friends or fellow countrymen at home. They convey information, provide financial assistance, and facilitate employment and accommodation. It reduces the costs and uncertainty of migration and helps to facilitate the process. (p.28)

The migration network of the Black Church has been particularly helpful for new immigrants that arrived to Canada from the Caribbean. As Hunt explains "The West

Indian Pentecostal sect represented a deliberate attempt to create an ethnic enclave, to engender group solidarity, and to construct a refuge from the wider society” (Hunt page 115). The Black Church became an immigration settlement point and an educational resource for Black people to navigate more freely amidst the racist systemic barriers they faced as newcomers. The ethnic enclaves they created were defined and shaped by the church that was part of their day to day lives. This served to ease their transition during the migratory process and “brought an effective religious status for Black minority groups that provided the moral code and community environment which supported them in their alien environment” (Hunt, page 105 in Reed).

The outgrowth of Black Churches is a direct by-product of Black migration. Many Black immigrants didn't immigrate to Canada to set up churches. Rather, like most immigrants, they sought for economic security and opportunities that their country of origin could not provide. Afro-Caribbean immigrants brought their hopes, skills and ambitions to improve their life conditions in Canada and for many this was undergirded by strong religious convictions. Despite the intentions to pursue secular careers, for some, the negative experiences in the “White Church” quickly supplanted this pursuit, it leading to the establishment of the Oneness Pentecostal church of Afro-Caribbean heritage.

The establishment of the first Black Church became an important beacon for many immigrants who arrived from the Caribbean into Canada. The Church became a defense for Black communities during the tough years of immigration. According to Mensah (2009) “the cold reception which often awaits immigrants of colour in Canadian churches is the immediate, if not the main, impetus for the establishment of independent churches...”(pg.39). Bishop Jonah was an influential immigration liaison with the

Federal Government when the large influx of Caribbeans was occurring in the 1970's. He was often called upon to help new immigrants to establish themselves in Canada. His role would be similarly to today's welcome centers or non-profit agencies servicing newcomers into Canada. When asked what role the church played in helping immigrants to come to Canada as an early pioneer of the Oneness Movement in Canada. Bishop Jonah, spoke very candidly about the social welfare role of the church in assisting thousands of immigrants.

Our church you would be surprised we got them in here by the thousands. My wife in those days when they come in and the immigration picked them up my wife and myself we be down there're we get them out by the dozens. (Bishop Jonah Interview, May 6, 2006)

Bishop Jonah was asked about his relationship with the people he helped. The sense of community that existed at the time didn't call for prior knowledge of who you helped. As immigrants with the same ethnic identity arrived to Canada helping them had nothing to do with knowing them. Bishop Jonah shares:

No I don't have to know them. But somebody knows me as the only Black African descendant preacher in the town they sent them to me and it is not only Jamaicans I'm talking all Blacks from everywhere. (Bishop Jonah Interview, May 6, 2006)

Black leaders like Bishop Jonah were well known amongst the community and government. As a preacher from the Black Church, his role included facilitating the immigration processes for Black immigrant that arrived to Canada in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. To be called upon in this way suggests that Black preachers assumed some accountability and responsibility for assisting the immigration processes for church folk

and non church folk. As an example, Bishop Jonah's talks about a brother he assisted that was being deported.

And this brother came well he wasn't a brother when he came, he became a brother – grandson, and um he wasn't landed and he tried and they said no and then they picked him up and locked him in jail to send him home the next morning. We went down there and we asked permission to talk to the immigration officer and we talked to him, Mr. Steel was his name and he says there is nothing I can do for you Reverend he is locked up in jail to go home the next morning. He left we were rejected sad but we left praying in our hearts. And I went to bed, prayed I mean sleep sound because he was on my mind. About 3 o'clock my phone started to ring at that hour and the phone rang and the person said you know who this is? I said no, oh I'm Mr. steel the immigration officer and he said I don't know what you've done but I can't sleep, come tomorrow morning and take your man. He was on the next plane to go home. We went there in the morning they opened up the jail door and he handed him over to us. (Bishop Jonah Interview, May 6, 2006)

Bishop Jonah's narrative reminds us that while the church is often seen as a religious institution alone we must be wary not to ignore the social welfare role of the church. Having an immigration officer call a church leader today in this manner would be considered a breach of protocol but presumably the influential role that this Black leader had broke conventional barriers. The response of the immigration officer which said "I don't know what you've done but I can't sleep" suggests that Bishop Jonah's influential role as a Black minister pushed him to give safe haven for the brother. The strong advocacy role this Minister displayed and commitment to social justice assisted thousands of Black immigrants to Canada. Other pioneers like Bishop Teddy also played a significant role in the relocation and integration of Afro-Caribbean immigrants into the Canadian system. As Bishop Teddy reminisced,

Oh ya we played a great role for the people that we recommended we gave them letters of recommendation being a member of the church and very very very few that we gave a letter and they were recommended has ever been turned down they all got their landing. (Bishop Teddy Interview April, 16, 2006)

Both Bishop Teddy and Bishop Jonah spoke of how the Black Church has “functioned in the formation and defense of Black communities in Canada” by playing the role of an advocate to facilitate the Caribbean influx of immigration during the 1970’s and 1980’s. Many of these early pioneers of the Black Oneness churches served dual purposes. They provided the spiritual and religious outlook which immigrants sought for and they were extremely influential in assisting and defending many Afro-Caribbean migrants to receive immigrant status. Forty years later, the Black Church continues to serve its community; however, it is being scrutinized for not doing enough to address broader social issues. History is important but it is also crucial to understand how history transcends world views of the present day. The next chapter will discuss the Black root of the Oneness Church and how the church responds to critics concerning its role today.

Chapter 6

The Cradle of Oneness Pentecostals in Toronto

*We Shall Overcome, We shall Overcome, We shall Overcome Some Day,
Down in My Heart I do Believe We Shall overcome Some Day. (Gospel Chorus)*

6.0 Introduction

In addition to providing a historical account of the Afro-Caribbean Oneness Church, the teachings of the Oneness doctrine will be interrogated from a *Whiteness as Theology* framework. As already spelled out, A *Whiteness as Theology* framework argues that spirituality is a multi-faceted ideology that is used both by the oppressed and the oppressor. It is used here to interrogate the way Afro-Caribbean immigrants resisted the White church. For Blacks church members, the White church served to undermine the Black root of Pentecostalism. Although Blacks and Whites believed in the fundamental tenets of the Oneness faith, i.e. baptism in Jesus Name, there was a clear distinction that was made between the White church and the Black Church.

This chapter provides an analysis of the church's resistance to Whiteness, its Jesus name identity and how it responds to critics that it has been too silent in the public social arena. The narrative voices of the subjects are organized under three themes. The first theme identified in this study was "Church resistance" because the study found that the way Afro-Caribbean Pentecostals negotiated their identities constitutes a form of resistance to Whiteness ideals. The second theme - Response to Critics was identified since the Black Church has been indicted for being silent in contemporary issues that face the community and this study provided the forum for Black Clergy and laity to respond to this issue. The third theme identified in this study is Prosperity Gospel – the theological-

ness of Whiteness: this study argues that Prosperity theology as an impetus of colonialism has reshaped the social justice role of Black Churches today.

6.1 Church Resistance

It is well established that the Black Church has survived on its social justice legacy. Under enslavement Evans (1992) articulates how the emergence of Black Churches was a counter-attack to the religion that was taught to slaves. It is this revolutionary function of the Black Church that resulted in Black Pentecostalism taking its hold amongst Black immigrants of the Caribbean. As argued in a *Whiteness as Theology* framework the theological impetus of the colonial project is to rid religious communities of its social justice component and a *Whiteness as Theology* framework helps to uncover the way Black immigrants have historically resisted the colonial dynamic in the church. For them, Black Oneness practices had become bastardized in their new settings as Johnson claims, “White western culture seeks to co-opt or bastardize or eliminate any cosmological framework which would depose it. It is within this ideological context that the Black Church exists”. (pg.137) The Black Church, then, exists as a result of its resistance to Whiteness domination and has become that anchor in all periods of the diaspora regardless of the attempts of colonization, slavery and secularism to rid it of its institutional importance. This argument supports the unending debate of the importance that racialized communities are afforded the opportunities to engage their mind, soul and spirit in environments that they dictate. This can only happen when they see racialized bodies succeeding in leadership roles.

While Oneness Pentecostals can be found worldwide and within all races, the Afro-Caribbean immigrants certainly demonstrate distinctiveness. The Black Pentecostal's is reported for the music, freedom and vibrance it offers to the church community. In exploring what attracts people to the Pentecostal Church. Bishop Geoffrey now in his eighties, expressed a certain degree of confidence in noting that the distinct difference lies in the doctrinal belief of Oneness convictions.

I think it is mostly... the importance of the name of Jesus Christ and to acknowledge that he is Lord and um with all the dynamic expression of who God is anybody seeking truth they will go to that for it is something that really brings you out telling you something other than the others. (Bishop Geoffrey Interview April 30, 2006)

Bishop Geoffrey emphasized that there is something different about the Oneness church that other groups don't emphasize. Additionally, he sees the church as a community, a place of opportunity and a place where you prepare leaders. He emphasizes:

In Black Churches you are in something - a choir, in Sunday school and you feel that you are a part of something. Most of the folks who advance in the secular world who sing if you check their background they are coming from the church. The church plays a very important part in a child's life and if you don't have it in the schools the best place for them to have it is in the home so if your parents is not basically a godly person or someone that goes to church than you lose it all. (Bishop Geoffrey Interview April 30, 2006)

Bishop Geoffrey had very clear views of the Black Church and the necessity of the church to cater for its own. His Black focused ideal may have come from his specific upbringing as a native of Jamaica. He recalled that he had never learned about African enslavement in the school system in Jamaica. As Jamaica was a colony of Britain, their history books reflected British values. It wasn't until Martin Luther King Jr. came on the

scene that he learned about the slave trade. For him, this was an eye opening encounter.

On this point, Bishop Geoffrey shares:

In our days we only learn of slavery from documentaries we see on tv and so on and it was marvelous to know that these things were going on in those times. When Martin Luther King JR came up and through his movement we get to learn other things that were happening back then and thank God for a man like that it helped not only the Black but helped the White to understand that people are the creation of God and we should get together in this light. (Bishop Geoffrey Interview April 30, 2006)

This narrative is an example of how colonization has limited the access to history and how a leader of the Black Church, Martin Luther King, helped to de-colonize masses of people who were ignorant of the travesties that occurred globally. The impact of this had a transnational impetus as Bishop Geoffrey was well aware of the social barriers that faced Black people. He regarded the church as a teaching agency in Canada that could help to build strong communities.

6.2 The Importance of the Name of Jesus – Oneness Religious Identity

Black Apostolics are recognized as closely resembling the worship of the Azusa street revival compared to its White Pentecostal counterpart. According to Suurmond, Black Pentecostals close resemblance to Azusa street “is confirmation that quintessential Pentecostalism is to be found in Azusa, not Topeka – Black Pentecostals decades later emulate their origins while White Pentecostals have drifted from these roots into Fundamentalism” (Suurmond, in Reed, p.82). Joseph Howell (1985) also argues that

Oneness development should be viewed as a “counterreformation’ of the Azusa revival,” an attempt to recapture the early Revival’s vitality, to thwart the theologizing of the Pentecostal experience, to reaffirm the eschatological zeal of

the early Pentecostals, and to revive interracial fellowship within the movement.

(Howell p.5, quoted on page 82 in Reed)

Reed also concurs with Suurmond and Howells observation that Oneness worshippers are more characteristically Pentecostal than most Trinitarian Pentecostal bodies. What is implied here is that Black Oneness style of worship and practice most closely aligns with what was experienced at Azusa. This does beg the question, however, as to why this is so? Oneness doctrine and practice may be more compatible to its core with an Afro-centric worldview than with that of non-Pentecostal White evangelicals (Reed, 82). The unyielding conviction of Afro-Caribbean Oneness believers that salvation is only found by taking on the Name of Jesus Christ may be tied to their Africanness and their way of understanding family and name (conversation with David Reed, June 2008). As Levi (1987) claims,

The name played a significant role to Africans. Africans believed that a name could shape a person's character and future behaviour. It distinguished a person from other people and underscored their uniqueness. It acted as a benediction, a wish, a motto and a blessing to the bearer. (p.62)

The emphasis that is placed on the "Name of Jesus" has become a part of Oneness religious identity. The importance of the Name of Jesus is to identify with the family of God similarly to how Africans view names that "tied members of the family, clan, and tribe together which helped to create close community ties" (Levi, 1987:66). This argument can be viewed from an anti-colonial perspective that the Jesus Name mode of baptism is an act of resistance. Oneness identity symbolized the reclaiming of ones identity, power and community which resisted the colonial imposition of being "named"

exclusively and negatively according to one's race, class and gender. An analysis of race, class and gender are certainly important markers to critique the way social structures of Whiteness have marginalized particular communities. However, to "name" individuals exclusively by these markers can also serve to ignore the spiritual identities that shape Oneness Pentecostals in particular. This may be why Oneness pastors and laypersons are so reluctant to be defined by their race. Pastor Albert, a graduate of Tyndale University attests that he can't respond to issues of race and oppression outside of his spirituality. He states,

As a Black male there are certain external situations that I was born into for example like racism or oppression... or you know things of that nature that came from the external. But I can't respond to that outside of my spirituality so how do I respond to oppression is really looking at it from an external standpoint but I don't identify my spirituality with my Blackness. (Pastor Albert Interview, April 8, 2006)

Here, Pastor Albert speaks of the centering of one's spirituality and refusal to be amputated from one's spiritual core. For him, the understanding of race should flow from our spirituality and by doing so can provide a holistic approach to how we come to understand issues of identity.

The modern evolution of the Oneness church as argued by Reed, Howell and Levi was an act of protest and resistance to Whiteness ideals that attempted to rid it of its Jesus centric ontology. Given the value that is attached to names by Africans, being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, rather than in the Trinitarian mode of baptism of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, meant more than what other Pentecostals had contemplated. Members in the early Black Church are descendents of enslaved people, who were ripped away from their homelands and families. Many lost their "name", their "identities" and

sense of community. The loss of your name during enslavement meant that you became disconnected to others in your community as your name was replaced with the colonizers name. It can be argued that the Jesus Name Ontology within Oneness Pentecostalism helped to reconcile their sense of estrangement by giving them a new spiritual name. As Afer (1987) rightly states “for some names are more than mere labels distinguishing one person from the other. They possess inherent powers(pg.350).” The name of Jesus symbolized a liberation theology and the act of baptism in Jesus Name was a form of spiritual adoption that eternally linked the believer with Jesus Christ who aligned with the oppressed. This liberation theology reasons that Christ takes on the position of the poorest and most despised in any historical moment (Harris-Lacewell, 2007:86). This particular theology is unique to the Black Christian experience because of its “specific theodicy which reconciles God’s justice in the presence of human suffering” (Harris-Lacewell 2007:184). It is the Name of Jesus that gave them power to govern their lives despite White attempts to strip them of their spiritual vitality. The Jesus Name spirituality, (unlike privatized spirituality that further estranges the individual through anonymity and isolated practice), reconciles the names of blacks that has been lost in the colonial encounter.

As argued, the indigenous religious ideal of Oneness theology is directly linked to Black Pentecostalism and its Afro-centric root which lays emphasis on the importance of the Name of Jesus. Others have argued that once Pentecostalism became cut off from its “Black root, third World roots...the greater part of the Western Pentecostal movement, has become a typically White, evangelical, middle-class church, politically conservative.

(Reed, 2008:81) A relevant example of this is the prosperity theology that has proliferated in Black Churches. According to Harris-Lacewell (2007)

Prosperity gospel is a constellation of beliefs that are variously grouped under the titles Health-Wealth, Word-Faith, or Name it-Claim it. In its crudest form prosperity gospel teaches that followers who tithe regularly and maintain positive, faithful attitudes and language will reap financial gains in the form of higher incomes and nicer homes and cars. In more subtle forms, prosperity gospel connects God's mission for his people to financial freedom and security for individual Christians. (p.186-187)

Prosperity gospel or theology has gained great momentum in Black Churches since the early 1990's. It is particularly unique to the "mega-church" age where Black Christians have fled from traditional denominational churches to attend more liberal non-denominational churches that house thousands of Black congregants in one church. Harris-Lacewell (2007) provides a compelling argument of how the prosperity gospel has actually supplanted the historical social justice component of the Black Church thus reducing the likelihood of Blacks to engage politically. She argues that recent research has shown that "those who see God through the lens of the prosperity gospel are less likely to engage in political activities. Liberation theology promotes political action while prosperity gospel reduces it" (p.187). The result is a reductionist religious persuasion that individualizes the experiences of God. As Harris-Lacewell (2007) claims,

When the Black Church offers a theology rooted in a social gospel tradition, emphasizing the alleviation of poverty, the advancement of racial and gender equality and the promotion of peace as moral values, it leads to a progressive

political agenda among African Americans. When Black Churches advance a pervasively individualistic conception of the gospel that breaks the link between moral reasoning and structural inequality, it leads to a more conservative political agenda focused primarily on private morality. (p.187-188)

The infiltration of the prosperity theology in the church, then, is suspicious at best. As argued in chapter 4, it is an example of how colonialism works through notions of spirituality to infiltrate the religious realm. Spiritual epistemologies like liberation theology are being rejected and replaced with a prosperity gospel in attempts to colonize the spirit and reshape how individuals respond to the realities of oppression. As said elsewhere “Using the tools to critique *Whiteness as Theology* requires that we disentangle spirituality from colonialism by making the distinction of spiritual epistemologies that are counter-hegemonic”(Brown Spencer chapter 4). Prosperity theology is a privatized spirituality that we should be critical of as it does little to confront systemic oppression and the widespread denial of the infiltrating of Whiteness as implicated in today’s Black Churches. For denominational churches that have a history of engaging in social justice movements, prosperity gospel, has become a tool of the oppressor to strip religious believers of their social justice consciousness, to be replaced with a materialistic world-view. Ultimately, the critical voice of the Black Church over time gets lost.

Pentecostalism has arguably made the most impression and influence amongst mainstream religious organizations who are appropriating the “spirit filled experience” participatory and lively worship services. It is no different from other examples of the appropriation of Black culture and practices. This is because the aura of “tongue talking” has tapped into the dimension of spirituality that brings a conscious awareness of the

possible supernatural aspect of worshipping the Almighty God. Also, the spiritual emphasis of Pentecostalism has bridged the holistic dimension of the human experience – an emphasis of liberation that is more compatible with indigenous African experience and practices. Regrettably, Pentecostalism today has become a heterogeneous religious theology that has been ascribed to many non-denominational religious communities, evangelicals and charismatic movements who practice glossalia or “speaking in tongues”. Whereas the doctrinal features of Pentecostalism may remain in tact, i.e. glossalia, the social component and Black root of Pentecostalism has dissipated over time.

While most Pentecostals believe in the speaking in tongues with varied doctrinal differences, Black Oneness believers are distinct for the emphasis they place on the name of Jesus Christ. Afro-Caribbean migrants who set up Oneness churches in the 1960’s and after have continued with Pentecostalism’s ‘Black, Third World root’. Their “Jesus-centric ontology” has created a shifting perspective of how identities should be interrogated beyond the secular perspectives of race, class and gender that currently prevails.

6.3 Response to Critics

As immigration from the Caribbean has waned, the needs of the Afro-Caribbean community have shifted. Many of the nine founding churches that have been in existence for over 40 years have had to adapt to the changing times following a thirty year preoccupation with immigration settlement and a 2nd generation of “pew babies” (a term used in Oneness churches that refers to the children that are born in the church). The immigration slow down, shifting needs of second generation pew babies and varying

political, social and economic circumstances suggests that the Black Church is not called upon in the same way as it was in the past. Accordingly, this has resulted in religious organizations being heavily criticized for not meeting the diverse needs of its community, becoming apolitical and becoming materialistic. As a result, Black Churches today have become a hidden institution for today's generation.

As Pon (2007) argues, our society is backed by a false sacred-secular binary. Therefore, the church's complicity in contemporary matters must be carefully interrogated. Given the hegemony of secularism that persists and evidence of the limitations imposed on religious communities the indictments that are made against the church concerning its silence must be properly assessed. In the context of the criticisms that have been made against the Black Church then, Black clergy were given the opportunity to respond to critics concerning the allegations that the Black Church has been silent on issues that negatively affect the Black community. It is here that the research will provide an analysis of the church's response.

The Black Pastors in the study seemed slighted by the fact that they were seen as doing nothing. While they agree they could do more there was unanimous agreement that they have not been silent. When asked about whether the Black Church has been silent on issues that negatively affect the Black community the following excerpts provide an overview of some of the responses.

In this narrative, Pastor Albert, a Canadian born father of six spoke about the perils that exist for the Black Church community in his response of whether the Black Church is silent.

It's interesting I would say yes and no. I say no because many people seem to avoid the reality of looking at the lives currently in the church that have been

changed by the church. Young men are pressing into the church every year. They are changing their lives all the time.... What we are seeing in this society are families and the society at large have basically said we don't need the church and have they've looked for help elsewhere they have lived their lives outside of the church so when crisis happens the church is not a recognizable institution for many of those people in one way. I think the church could be out in the community um bridging more gaps reaching more families and things of that nature um so it is a little unfair to say the church is completely silent because the church isn't silent there are hundreds if not thousands of lives that are being changed by the church all the time. (Pastor Albert Interview, April 8, 2006)

This narrative speaks to *Whiteness as Theology* at work. Colonialism has effectively shifted the purposes of historical institutions that could challenge the status quo. If Black Churches are no longer viewed as important in their communities, society will never know the impact they have had in people's lives and beyond. Also, because the church is seen as a private institution that doesn't seek out media attention or government recognition, the role of Black Churches in the twenty first century may go unnoticed.

Pastor Michael, an avid community liaison echoed that the church is not silent but has been recognized as such because of the media.

Um well ah silent I presume means media. But are pastors trying to seek out media for it, no so therefore they are seen to be silent. A big part of that is that pastors realize that media is not our friend. Hum media is no friend of religion and churches um certainly in this city that has been clear. (Pastor Michael Interview May 28, 2006)

This barrier of media not being a friend of the church carries serious consequences for how the church is be scripted in the mainstream; consequences, which can improperly label an institution. The argument put forward by Pastor Albert and Pastor Michael suggests that the church has been labeled as irrelevant for current times.

However, their narrative recounts a theme of resistance and resilience on part of the church despite the media and colonial influences that act as a barrier. When the same

question of whether the Black Church has been silent on issues the younger respondents who were lay-members of the Black Church had a different response to this question. Some subjects agreed that the Black Church was silent politically and this had more to do with the different generations in the church. Angie, a 34 year old professional of Kittitian background did not grow up in the Oneness Church. She became a member while a student in University. She spoke very fondly of her father and the influence he had on her as a Caribbean immigrant and she relates this well to how the church is caught in a generational divide. She explains,

I'm actually thinking that it has something to do with the generation, um, I don't think it is a disrespect to our Elders but I know my father has always put this in me that he is not from this country so a lot of the injustices he has faced he has been more silent about it but he has always told us you were born here and you have every right to anything that anyone else has, you fight, so I think that a lot of the complacency has a lot to do with the alienation and the feeling of not having been here you have not been here from the get go, you are trying to assimilate, you are trying to fit in, you got your Christian aspect, the Black aspect, the male or female aspect all these different issues that you are trying to deal with, and then raising children being in church constantly 24-7 it would seem in some churches... (Focus Group January 2006)

What Angie speaks of is the sojourner mentality as argued by Henry (1994) and the dilemma of navigating the intersecting identities that immigrants experience. This helps us to understand that Black Churches may have become exclusionary and perceived as being silent due to the state of flux of its members where they idealize a return to back-home once they achieve enough resources.

This state of flux becomes perpetuated particularly with immigrant communities who are introduced to the prosperity gospel and are promised financial rewards which in turn could potentially fulfill their desire to return to the homeland. This preoccupation of "returning home" limits their ability to focus on their political will locally. Jill, a 10 year

immigrant from Jamaica adds to this discussion and relates that with all the reservoir of knowledge in the Black Church they could do more than what they are doing.

We can do it, we have so many smart people, so many Black lawyers and doctors in the church but we do nothing we are always so busy and it's just me my family and I we do nothing and we can – no I'm telling you the truth, and we really knock the other society churches but we hear more about them at least they are saying something but we kinda sit too silent...(Focus Group January 2006)

Jill doesn't deny that the church has been silent politically but she strongly believes in the church's ability given the wealth of resources and professionals that make up the church. She concretely identifies the areas of struggle in the church, the fact that everyone is so busy and preoccupied and that they have abandoned their community involvement and instead focused on their immediate families. Indeed, this is an abandonment of traditional African values where community and responsibility are important markers for African people to mobilize and affect positive changes. Jill Continues,

I'm telling you, we don't talk about politics, if we would just focus and maybe if a young brother said I want to go into politics maybe we would say no.....no seriously.....no seriously. We don't talk about politics and this is where it starts from.... we cannot affect something if we are not in it. We just think maybe Christians shouldn't be in politics but it is our children's future. (Focus Group January 2006)

This narrative is a very compelling take on the Church's silence and the lack of political engagement and radical politics. For Jill, the lack of political engagement was a form of silence which links to the argument previously mentioned of why the Afro-Caribbean differs from its American Counterpart. Jill speaks of this generation's attitude concerning the church and lack of participation in the public realm. They want their voices to be heard yet with all the education and middle class members, still the church is not impacting this generation the way it possibly should. The lack of radical politics within

the church suggests that something else is at play for why 1st generation Afro-Caribbean descendents are not involved politically and have become individualistically minded. This brings this analysis back to the impact of prosperity theology which has had a tremendous impact on the twenty first century Black Church.

6.4 Prosperity Gospel – the Theological-ness of Whiteness

The role of the Black Church post Caribbean immigration, has certainly changed. The prosperity gospel of the 1990's has undoubtedly affected the church's response concerning social disparities due to its over-focusing on material wealth and prosperity amidst the grave polarities that exist between the rich and the poor in our post modern era. Prosperity theology is evidence of colonial theology infiltrating the church where individual pursuits of wealth have become dominant and the social consciousness of the church has diminished. Pastor Albert sadly admits that the function of the church has regressed from its earlier purpose in the civil rights era. He explains,

...it's a sad parody because its almost like we've gone backwards because in the 60's and in every other era when there was an enormous amount of conflict the church in the society the church took the forefront the church was at the forefront the civil rights movement many people don't equate it to but it was the Black Church and many church leaders who really led the charge on a political front and many of them were ministers and many were church leaders I think as the society progressed and people became more entrenched influentially and materialistically it sort of grew beyond the church and the church took a back seat... (Pastor Albert Interview, April 8, 2006)

Many of these indictments serve to show that the politicization of the Black Church has lost momentum in the public realm. Prosperity theology has interestingly infected the Black root of indigenous Pentecostalism. Traditional churches who try to resist prosperity theology are often labeled as "the old church" and deemed out of touch with the new

wave of Pentecostalism. As a result, they are pushed to the margins as charismatic Pentecostalism grows in leaps and bounds. Therefore to label the Black Church as silent given the competing factors is not accurate. The factors that have impeded the church's influence on the wider populace in light of the prosperity gospel movement does require a more thorough analysis of the external and internal influences which have limited the church's role in the broader society. For the here and now, to thoroughly assess the church's role today must be premised on the acknowledgement that religion and spirituality are under attack. The theology of resistance that once syncopated during the orations of Black clergy, are now being re-articulated in this colonial juncture. For instance, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, once hidden from the broader political spectrum was brutally silenced by US imperialism when he began to speak out against the tyranny of American politics in international soils. Wright's application of Black theology was to bring attention to the plight of Black Americans and the destructive use of American policy that was affecting the poor and oppressed. Wright's theorizing came via the Black pulpit and his radical theology was nothing new. Black theology has been used in Black Churches since the early 1960's. As noted elsewhere,

Black Theology is a theological movement that focuses on Black liberation for the poor and oppressed. Black theology applies biblical interpretations that are relevant to the daily struggles of Blacks who suffer under the burden of White racism. It [is] also a sociological response to European Christianized racism found to be irrelevant to the experiences of Blacks who experienced tremendous sufferings at the hands of Whites. (Brown Spencer 2006:119)

Black leaders have used Black theology as an anti-colonial tool to expose the underlying effects of Whiteness in society. As the first Black contender for the 2008 American Presidency came on the scene, Wright was quickly put on display to remind the religious communities of the danger of exercising a theology of resistance that was critical of American politics. As the “former” pastor of Barack Obama, Wright was brought into the public arena to be intellectually lynched for the world to see as his use of Black theology was near equated to a threat to United States security. Consequently he was “named” unpatriotic, unreflective of the American mass and destructive to American values. This is precisely how the “*Whiteness as Theology*” reveals it aims, to discipline religious dissenters who speak out or against systems of power. Indeed, our post-modern society tolerates religious expression but limits this to an un-critical mass of religious worshippers that dares not to interrogate the status quo.

This study attempted to focus on the sociological roles of Black Churches but it is important to account for the fact that the religious role of Black Churches remains very strong. For Oneness Churches, the need for salvation remains a paramount goal of the church’s involvement in society and it is difficult to separate its religious and sociological function since engaging politically is tied to its Jesus Name epistemology. The Black Church, then, is a complex institution that has evolved from its role as a social welfare institution, immigration settlement point and an institution that continues to thrive and serve the needs of its community. Therefore, to label the church as “silent” today is misleading given the new challenges it faces as the colonial impetus of the prosperity gospel gains ground. Nevertheless, in spite of the Black Church’s attempts to maintain its rich Afro-centric root and alert upcoming generations of the importance of this sacred

tradition, Black Clergy do recognize its internal problems. They are very concerned with what will be passed to the upcoming generation as they acknowledge the impact and devastation that church splits have created from as early as the 1920's to this present day. Bishop Leon, a founding father of the Oneness Afro-Caribbean church passes on words of wisdom to the younger generation. Bishop Leon candidly acknowledged the dismissive state of the Oneness Church of Afro-Caribbean descent. When asked what words of wisdom he would share with the younger generation, this is what he had to say:

Well to tell you the truth it would be a difficult task because the splintering of their mentality in regards to the church I don't know on God's earth how we will climb that mountain. (Bishop Leon Interview May 28, 2006)

Bishop Leon also offered these words of repent to the young people in terms of the state of the church and rather puts the blame on church leaders rather than the youth.

But then I would actually tell the young people that by right we backslide it is a backslidden situation and that is what we are in. Um what is backsliding? It is to step back from the things that we always believe in and do right. We can hardly but tell the young people anything but to let them know that the church was not like this what it is like now um that is what I think I would tell them now for we have fallen and the scripture said that we should remember for whence we have fallen. (Bishop Leon Interview May 28, 2006)

A somber note to consider. Bishop Leon, an immigrant of Jamaica who arrived in the late 1960's added some perspective to the church's role today compared to the "early days" and he humbly acknowledged the church's limitations and back slidden state. He suggests that church leaders need to be accountable and responsible for inspiring the younger generation to pick up the torch and impact the lives of people far beyond what the early church had done. The call for action that has been inspired by Bishop Leon's narrative implies that the Black Church needs to do more in achieving success for this generation.

6.5 Summary

Like Fundamentalists, Pentecostals built their faith on doctrinal certitude and religious zeal (Stephens, 2009). They were not only convinced of Christ's immanent return but they also believed they themselves would one day return to their homeland. Therefore, their social outlook was often otherworldly and for this they have been perceived as silent community members in the Black community. Though Religious identity has been the catalyst to how many Blacks of African descent has coped with the dehumanizing effects of colonialism the spiritual identity of Oneness Pentecostals of Afro-Caribbean descent presents a unique perspective to how spiritual identity can be considered in an anti-colonial interrogation of the colonial project. The way spiritual identity is demarcated has more to do with valuing indigenous interpretations of spiritual reality that looks beyond and in addition to the lens of race, class and gender. There is a spiritual dimension to social difference that we must interrogate.

As we move forward, the Afro-Caribbean Black Church will need to clearly articulate how it will meet the demands of a new generation and how it will resist the surge of mega churches which bring a new critique to the function and role of Black Churches today. It will also need to strive to foster community within the Black Church and avoid future church splits that serve to weaken the movement. The dialogue with the Black Clergy reveals that more needs to be done to document the legacy of the Black Churches for future generations to come. Further, a deeper analysis of how traditional churches are resisting prosperity theology and whether they are succeeding requires more investigation. All in all, much respect should be given to the founding churches and the

sacrifices made by Black men and women who assisted the largest influx of Afro-Caribbean migration of the mid 20th century.

Chapter 7

Towards A Black Christian Feminist Perspective

I'm So Glad I'm Apart, Of the Family Of God, Washed in His Fountain Cleansed by His Blood, Joint Heirs with Jesus as I travel Along, I'm so glad I'm apart of the Family of God. (Gospel chorus)

7.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the voices of women in the Black Church will be politicized from a Black feminist discursive framework. The narratives of women in the church capture the uniqueness of how women in the Black Church engage their faith within their community settings. It also helps to understand the fourth learning objective of this study that is how church members engage spirituality as a legitimate location and space from which to know and resist colonization. It is vitally important to incorporate the voices of churchwomen as they are the backbone of Black Churches and they possess a different perspective to feminist inquiry. Hence a Black feminist framework captures the voice of those mostly underrepresented in academic scholarship. It is critical to ask churchwomen if Black Churches produce spaces of affirmation, affiliation and identity for Black women since according to Gilkes (2001) they “represent from 75 to 90 percent of [Black Church membership]; yet there is little documentation or analysis of their role in the development of this oldest and most autonomous aspect of Black community life” (Gilkes, 2001:44). Churchwomen hold a particular perspective on women’s identity and faith, as this chapter will reveal the Black Pentecostal Church is a dynamic space which continues to play a very important role in churchwomen’s lives. The narratives that uncover Black women’s voices will be organized by the following themes 1) Spiritual as

Political 2) spirituality, race and hope 3) Salience of religious identity 4) Women's Role in the Church and 5) The Black Church as a free space.

A Christian dimension to a Black feminist discursive framework is necessary to appreciate how churchwomen invoke their religious agency. According to Lerner (2007),

Religious agency is understood as a personal and collective claiming and enacting of dynamic religious identity. As religious identity, it may include, but is not limited to, a received or an acquired identity, whether passed on by family, religious group, or other social entity. (pg 74)

Religious identity, in this light, is a transformative process that is influenced by numerous factors. Meaning, race is widely acknowledged as a marker of identity, similarly, religion is marked in similar ways. The concept of religious agency as described by Lerner, is a powerful lens through which to study churchwomen and to examine the way Black Pentecostalism is reproduced and transformed in their lives. Black Pentecostalism has become a deeply personalized way of life where churchwomen, for example, live out their faith regardless of how others attempt to define Black women's lives. In what follows, the concepts of Black feminist thought and how it lays the foundation for a Christian feminist interpretation of churchwomen's identity and the influence of Oneness Pentecostalism in their lives will be expounded.

7.1 Black Feminist Thought

The various waves of the feminist movement which began with universal suffrage to the canonizing of a "personal is political" feminist ideology have served to downplay the

multiple sites of oppression that Black women face, i.e. race, class and gender. As a result, Black women have historically resisted mainstream feminisms that were silent on “Black” woman’s issues and have built on a Black feminist ideology that conceptualized the subjective experiences of Black women. In doing so, they have clarified the Black woman’s standpoint by including the voices of Black women that have not been considered as intellectuals. Black Feminism, therefore, has revolutionized feminist inquiry by challenging mainstream constructions of feminism.

Black Feminist thought creates context for Black women who are claiming their own discourses through interpreting themselves and self-defining their lived realities (Collins, 1991:222). This has created a paradigmatic shift in how we think about oppression and also has empowered a changed consciousness amongst Black women. Black feminist theorizing is therefore linked to our experience of multiple oppressions, activism and our desire for a humanized community (Collins, 1991:222). By embracing a paradigm of race, class, gender and [religion] as interlocking systems of oppression, Black feminist thought reconceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance (Collins, 1991:222). Patricia Hill Collins and Irma McClaurin provide two useful definitions of Black feminism:

Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women’s reality by those who live it. (Collins, 1991:22).

Further,

Black feminism is an embodied, positioned, ideological standpoint perspective that holds Black women's experiences of simultaneous and multiple oppressions as the epistemological and theoretical axis of a "programmatic activism" directed at combating those social and personal, individual and structural, and local and global forces that pose harm to Black (in the widest geopolitical sense) women's well being. (McClaurin, 2001:63)

Black feminist theory then should be regarded as a fluid theoretical standpoint that cannot be limited to one definition. Rather, it should be considered as a social space occupied by Black women to exercise their power to define themselves. By exerting their power to self define, According to Collins (1991),

Black women question not only what has been said about African-American women but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define. When Black women define ourselves, we clearly reject the assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to interpret our reality are entitled to do so. (p.95)

Black women are therefore "taking their power back" whereby previously unarticulated and devalued voices and perspectives can come forth.

A Black feminist framework has been critical to articulating the powerful expressions of Black woman. There is a critical connection that must be made amongst Black secular feminists and the way churchwomen engage with feminism. Both cater to the varied perspectives of Black women who seek to improve their social conditions. Albeit, church women may have very different understandings of the role of men vis a vis women. For example, churchwomen do not necessarily take the same stand regarding the tyranny of

women that has existed under the idea that men are inherently superior to women. As Gilkes (2001) argues, Black women, at various levels of consciousness, know that the feminist theories and critiques of society do not entirely fit the facts of their existence (p.62). But, they do have some reflective awareness of the objective conditions of their social positioning in the church, particularly as they see it differentiated from men. [Churchwomen] hold their identity, specifically as women, salient (Lerning. 2007). Put differently, churchwomen are very aware of the gender role distinctions and work hard to promote services and programs for women in the church. For example, the women in the study represented 5 major Black Pentecostal churches in the Greater Toronto Area. Each church had either “Women’s Ministries”, “Women’s Auxiliaries” or “Women’s Departments” which catered to the specific needs of women in their local assemblies. This also included a Sunday of the month that was dedicated to the women of the church and they also hosted periodic women’s conferences where they would invite other women from other churches to network, encourage and educate women in the church.

There is a social divide that exists between secular and religious interpretations of women’s experiences which demands that Black feminist theorists don’t replicate the systems of domination that legitimate or devalue the way church women interpret their roles as women. Positivist methods of reasoning particularly in university settings set the conditions of how knowledge is produced and disseminated (Dei, 2000). Black women who have broader experiences of knowledge, i.e. “Christianity and spirituality” that are not reflected in the traditions of rationality and reason are often ignored in academic debate, knowledge production and community initiatives. As a result, the exclusive use of

reason, secularism and empirical assertions creates a sense of disconnect for women of faith.

There is a rich diversity of perspectives among Black women. Black feminist thought does well in creating a collective identity amongst Black women to self define a Black women's standpoint. Furthermore, it adequately addresses the social and historical differences of Black women vis a vis their White counterpart. However, it needs to better extend its doors for Black religious women/scholars to articulate the lived experiences of church women who interpret their world through a multiple lens of religion, gender, race and class. As Lerner (2007) claims

Wo/men's theological silencing and exclusion from the academy is only one side of the story. The other side is the "dangerous memory" of wo/men's religious agency as prophets, teachers, and wise wo/men. Both sides of the story – that of women's dehumanization, co-option and silencing and that of their courage and agency-must be held together if wo/men are to find their intellectual theological voices today. (p. 78)

Further to Lerner's argument, Christian women have much value to add to Black feminist inquiry. The full actualization of Black feminist thought requires the fusion of religious perspectives when discussing Black women's issues. This includes the acknowledgement that religion has been both oppressive and empowering in women's lives.

To address the plurality of identities that exist for women and the subsequent forms of oppressions that Black women experience is part of the Black feminist project. Black feminist thought not only considers the axis of gender and race and how it impacts upon the lives of Black women, it fuses the interlocking of "other" oppressions to consider the

complex nature of oppression which manifests itself in various forms. The intersections of oppressions that a Black feminist framework speaks of are a pivotal entry point for a Black Christian feminist framework. As Massaquoi (2004) argues,

The continued emergence and evolution of the Black feminist subject then requires changes to methodological, political, and culturally-based theoretical approaches in order to allow for the articulation of who we are as Black women in Canada .There needs to be a sound articulation of how Black gendered bodies negotiate their identities and politics across dynamic spaces. (p.7)

The following section discusses a Black Christian feminist framework and argues why it is better applicable for theorizing the voices of churchwomen.

7.2 Black Christian Feminist Thought – “Constructing Church Space”

Black Churchwomen are defining their lived realities and are creating their own histories as it relates to their experiences within the Black Church. A Black Christian feminist discursive framework is a religious gendered epistemology from which we can understand the diverse voices of churchwomen who are active members of Black Christian churches. Black Christian feminism aims to contest the false sacred-secular binary that exists amongst Black women, particularly active churchgoers. It aims to bridge the gap and give voice to churchwomen who are expressing their religious agency in advocating for the important role that religion plays in their private and public lives. The practice of ignoring or obscuring the sacred beliefs of Black women who may be active members of Black Churches serves to inflict an epistemological limit on Black feminist engagement. Presenting a “Christian” dimension to Black feminist thought is to

acknowledge the sacred beliefs held by many Black women in the private but played out by some in the public. There are writers who have written about the role that spirituality plays in Black women's upliftment (Wane 2007, Brown Spencer 2006). However, sacred beliefs and religious practices are often concealed because we often want our theoretical frameworks to appear secular. A Black Christian feminist approach can be as Collins describes "important locations where safe discourse can occur". As the politics and experiences of women continue to evolve across the Diaspora, a Black feminist discursive analysis must ensure that it remains a project of elaboration (Massaquoi, 2004:11). Meaning, it should not reinscribe Whiteness dominance that excludes religious/sacred believers from Black feminist engagement.

In this discussion, it may be questioned how a Black feminist discursive framework diverges from a Black Christian feminist discursive framework? A Christian feminist perspective is not a new theoretical framework for Black feminism, rather it is a challenge to the dominance of secular interpretations of feminism which offers other possibilities of how women chose to live out their lives. Indeed, a Black feminist framework remains crucial to unpacking the variances within Black women's lives so by broadening this political project to include other holistic/religious forms of feminist engagement, i.e. spirituality and religion better reflects the multiplicities of Black women's experiences. The application of a Black Christian feminist framework therefore includes the underrepresented voices of Black Church women.

Christian feminist theorizing adds to the current discourse in Black feminist thought by addressing the religious and spiritual distinctions of Black Churchwomen. The Black Church has served as a "sanctuary" where Black women are nurtured to confront

oppressive social institutions. A single mother spoke about the community of the church and the fact that she could call upon her church sisters to help her in difficult circumstances.

its funny because you know who you can call, you know even if you don't talk to the person for the whole year you know who you can call, you know back in the day who was your prayer warrior , you know who is going to give you the serious and who is going to soften things up for you. And I think that is the community I love and that I was raised with and if I had to do it all over again I would never change it (Focus Group January 2006).

In response to her, a young professional spoke about the distinct discourse of the church that others don't really understand.

You know what I think too – it's the weirdness it's the peculiarity, it is we talk a certain way and we don't realize it. I remember a preacher bringing it out one day and I was like it is so true we say things like God is dealing with you the, spirit quicken me, and you do your shamam shamam. You know this is a way of relating to us that is very valuable that outsiders don't understand. And that's what it is that is a spiritual level nowhere someone else can't tap into that. (Focus Group January 2006)

These narratives are examples of the distinctions of Black Churchwomen and how they are nurtured within its sanctuary. Similarly as Collins (1991) reminds us,

The ideas we share with one another as mothers in extended families as other mothers in Black communities, as members of Black Churches and as teachers to the Black community's children have formed one pivotal area where African-American woman have hammered out a Black women's standpoint. This realm of relatively safe discourse, however narrow, is a necessary condition for Black women's resistance. Extended families, churches, and African-American community organizations are important locations where safe discourse potentially can occur by advancing Black women's empowerment through self-definition, the

safe spaces housing this culture of resistance help Black women resist the dominant ideology promulgated not only outside Black communities but within African-American institutions. (p.95)

Feminism, in the Black Church, is a colloquial term that is not so easily embraced by churchwoman alike. Many churchwomen have had critical concerns about feminism as it is sometimes presented as an attack on their “church culture” and roles they play in the Black Church. However, churchwomen are committed to addressing women’s issues as they seek to raise their social, economic and political awareness, thereby calling for the redefining and broadening of feminist ideologies. For example, the proliferation of Black Religious women’s conferences since the early 1990’s is an example of feminist engagement within the church community. Conferences like the “Woman thou art loosed” hosted by Bishop TD Jakes, has mobilized hundreds of thousands of women of all races (predominantly Black) at a yearly conference to present strategies for spiritual, social and economic upliftment for women experiencing all forms of oppression. Bishop Jakes recognized the tragedies of hurting women who were silently grieving behind closed doors. His teachings were revolutionary in the Black Church as he broke the prisons of silence of Black women’s issues that were historically taboo. Seldom can you find churchwomen who have not come into contact with Bishop Jakes teachings. These conferences host in excess of 80,000 women at one time and it is evidence of a social world that Black feminist thought has yet to capture.

It can be argued that the women’s conference hosted by TD Jakes is a reaffirmation of patriarchal structures usurping and exploiting the female agenda. However, it could also be argued from a Black Christian feminist perspective that these conferences speak to the

power of the church to mobilize, equip and empower women historically oppressed by varying institutions. One of the basic premises to understanding churchwomen is that they generally look first within their internal support systems when confronting difficult life events. These internal support systems are church based and for many Black women, the church has become synonymous with coping and survival. Black Church culture, therefore, is not simply a religious institution that has no relevance to public life. The ingathering of thousands of women in one place is an opportunity for important cross cutting social issues like domestic abuse, economic development and racial injustices to be addressed. The testimonials of churchwomen (myself included), who have attended these conferences speak to the strong internal support mechanisms within the Black Churches. The rise of “women ministries” and international conferences in the Black Church is a repackaged type of feminism and social activism that occurs within its walls.

Black Christian feminist theorizing presents new questions of womanhood, spirituality and religious culture. It also discursively engages the “taken for granted knowledge” that occurs in the Black Church of which Black women assert their roles as mothers, leaders and spiritual activists. This taken for granted knowledge must be problematized in Black feminist theorizing as Black Churchwomen do not necessarily identify with the problems articulated by secular feminist theorist. For example, as the data reveals many churchwomen center their religious-spirituality as a way to construct their knowledge of feminist inquiry. Furthermore, as women generally are highly esteemed in the ranks of Oneness Pentecostal churches, the issue of women’s subordination in the church is not critiqued in the same way as secular feminism, although they cannot deny that female oppression and patriarchy does exist in very violent ways in some religious movements.

The issue for many women within the church is the refusal of men to pursue leadership responsibilities in the church so women can step back from doing so many things in the church. A Black Christian feminist gaze is a preliminary attempt at broadening a perspective on Black women's lives. Black Feminist Thought has opened doors for Black Churchwomen to define their own realities and to fully actualize the concept of womanhood and the politics of identity for Black women today. Black Christian feminist theorizing pushes this further to acknowledge that gendered, racial and religious identities are legitimate spaces and powerful constructions of Black women's experiences.

A Black Christian feminist gaze provides a "lens through which we can see the processes of religious reproduction" (Lerning, 2007:87). It also helps to acknowledge sites that produce spaces of affirmation, affiliation and identity for Black women. The way these women are affirmed in the Black Church and the way they affiliate within it have had a significant influence on the way they identify as Black women from a religious, gendered and racial perspective. A Christian feminist standpoint therefore challenges the ambivalent use of the term feminism and rather focuses on churchwomen's narratives. In essence, then, Black [church] woman's identity politics remains a contested and negotiated arena.

7.3 Spiritual as Political – spirituality defined

In exploring the Black Pentecostal church as a site of community organizing and political action, the study was also interested in finding out how the Black Church has operated as a social, political and spiritual place for women. To unearth this "churchwomen" were asked questions about their definitions of spirituality and the role

women played in the Black Church. This question sparked a lot of discussion. For most churchwomen spirituality had much to do with their personal “every day” relationship with God. Rhoda is a single mother of two from Jamaica and when asked how you define spirituality, she said:

my spirituality is my joy, is my entertainment, is my fun is my everything. I just go from work to church to home that is where I get everything so don't lock me from it because you go to party you go to dance that is where I go for party dance that's everything for me, this is how I define my Christianity to them it means a lot to me so this is why I don't jeopardize it. (Focus Group February 2006)

Nancy, a middle aged immigrant from Jamaica echoed this by saying:

spirituality for me is a personal in-depth relationship with God whereby I can grow and when my trials come upon me I can counteract it is that communicating with God where you can hear that still small voice that also helps you to be able to cope with the everyday situation, you can meet some very angry people in life. I don't care who it is or who she is and you need the grace of God to overcome the plan of the devil. That's what it is. (Focus Group February 2006)

Spirituality as described by these women can be summarized as a relationship with God, hope, unity and the responsibility and accountability of helping another person. The participant's responses gave some insight to how church folk interpret spirituality. There is an apparent perception that spirituality should be action oriented and therefore should not be kept to oneself but expressed by sharing and helping someone else. It was also an experience that was deeply personal. As explained in chapter 4, spirituality means different things to different people and is not necessarily religious. But for church folk, spirituality and religion are deeply intertwined. Lydia is a first generation Canadian and has deep roots in the Black Church. Her narrative connects the importance of spirituality with religion.

when you have Spirituality you are connected with God so what I believe doesn't come into play, it is just between me and the Creator and it has nothing to do with all that other stuff. It just separates it that way so if I have a religion, I believe in this religion if I go to church on the 7th day, it has nothing to do with when I sit one and one with God at anyplace and anytime... I just need to have the connection with the Father. (Focus Group January 2006)

Lydia relates how spirituality and religion are distinct for spirituality is more of a connection to God that is not regimented by a particular belief system whereas religion is a set of beliefs in a particular practice. It is not clear what Lydia means by "all that other stuff." But what it seems to suggest is that spirituality has been presented in a way that tended to have pull us away from the relationship an individual may have with their Creator. This imposition is substantiated when she talks about the linear relationship an individual should have with God. For Lydia, spirituality and God should be in the same equation.

Probably that's why we are hearing so much about spirituality because so many people disconnect with religion now and it is a big thing now whether they read their bible at home, I speak to God, If you hear a lot of people I speak to God, I don't have to go to the assembly I have spirituality because this is what I do on an ongoing basis so it separates the fact that you are going to where this religious group congregates (Focus Group January 2006).

Lydia explains spirituality as a personal experience that is connected to the Divine. It is an important observation she makes which helps us to understand how Oneness Identity is tied to a relationship with God. Lydia also acknowledges the tensions that exist outside of the church and she argues that spirituality can occur outside the contexts of the institutional church as well. This supports the view that spirituality is both religious and non religious.

The question of how women relate their spirituality to their racial identity was the most interesting and unexpected query to this study and shed some insight into how

central the role that Oneness Pentecostalism plays in churchwomen's lives. The literature makes a strong connection to the history of enslavement and the politics of race and religion and how a racialized institution like the Black Church helped Black people cope with the oppressiveness of colonization. According to Dana, a single mother from Jamaica, the Church helped her to resist any internalized racism so that she would not be ashamed of her race and who she is as a Black woman. These words especially come alive for Dana as she has had to cope and heal from the murder of her child.

The whole issue with the Black youths and every time you get up in the morning and hearing about the shooting. Like going to work sometimes I feel away, because I feel that I'm being focused on as a Black person and the other races are viewing you like, you know, cuz somebody at work said to me" what is your Black race going on with" that's what an Italian person said to me and then, really and I kept walking with my head down, and I said no [I] am a child of God, like I'm a royal priesthood, why are you holding my head down, like, you know I should feel proud, so it kind of do give you a boost, knowing God that you know with that kind of pressure, you sorta have that spiritual strength to uplift your self, (Focus Group January 2006)

Dana's narrative speaks of the role the Black Churches play in fostering a philosophy of hope. For Rhoda and Maxine, the church was a teaching agency which grounded their belief in God to overcome life's problems. The Church was seen as a place they could depend on for help.

The Black Church teach us to believe in God how to behave how to function and pay attention to our spiritual and physical needs and that is what most people are looking. When we need help we can get it right here... (Focus Group February 2006)

Rhoda speaks of how the church operates as a social, political and spiritual place. Socially it was a place of connection to meet her physical needs. Politically, the Black Church was a teaching institution and spiritually she was able to grow in her belief in

God. Maxine further substantiates this by identifying the ways the church has produced spaces of affirmation, affiliation and identity.

I am happy for the church. My eyes have been opened to a lot of things through the church especially through prayer fasting and reading the word of God. It has helped me overcome a lot of things. This is why when it comes to my Christian spirituality I don't want nothing to come in between my salvation because it has helped me to overcome a lot of hurdles, things I couldn't cope with but because of the church prayer fasting and the songs we sing I am really grateful to God. (Focus Group February 2006)

For Maxine, the affirmation in the church allowed her to hold unto her salvation and let nothing jeopardize it since it has been her strength to endure difficult times. The affiliation with the church brought her joy, happiness and comfort. She also clearly identified with the church through practices of prayer, reading the bible and singing gospel songs. It became clear in these narratives that the church was a place of comfort, nurture and place where their identity was affirmed.

7.4 Salience of religious identity

Given the history of enslavement and what the literature has to say about the evolution of the historical Black Church there seem to be some disconnect in how churchwomen related their religious identity to their race and gender. For example, Angie, a lawyer by profession identifies as a citizen of heaven first before claiming an identity as a Black woman.

So the way that other people treat you, any injustices you might experience, you know having a faith and belief system in God and that he is the ultimate justifier he is the judge, he will have the final say in your life, he is a provider, a sustainer, a redeemer, saviour, all of those things help you to deal with the outside pressures that come along with being a Black person in this world or a Black women. So that is how see it, so I consider myself as a citizen of heaven first before being a member of any particular race (Focus Group January 2006).

The connection to race in terms of how church-folk centered their identity did not play as significant a factor as the literature revealed. In retrospect, this could be attributed to the way the questions were asked. Churchwomen saw their Christian identity central to the way they interrogate the self and their racial identity came secondary. This was typical of a “Jesus-centric spirituality which has had a strong influence upon early Pentecostalism, including the Oneness movement” (Reed, 2008:43). As Reed (2008) claims “Jesus centrism is concerned almost exclusively with Jesus in his relationship with the believer” (p. 33). Meaning, Jesus is the sole object of devotion for the believer and the way a believer may self-identify will be strongly intertwined with this Jesus-centric faith.

Initially, this observation seemed questionable and resembling a form of internalized racism; however, as the discussion shifted more specifically to Black women in society, there was a clear understanding of how race impacts their every day lives. These women heavily resisted society’s attempts to define them according to their race and gender. The rejection of this characterization was not about disassociating from their race but arguably had much more to do with issues of saliency and privileging of particular identities. Meaning, the salience we attach to our identities is invoked differently depending on the situation. It is established that spiritual identity has not been politicized in the academy to the degree that issues of gender and class have been interrogated. These narratives revealed a very different understanding of identity for church folk and the way they politicized it to argue that spiritual/religious identity can be front and centre.

The discussions with women of the church spoke to the politics of intersectionality where they refused to be seen from a particular lens especially as salient issues were being addressed, i.e. lack of spiritual validation. Oneness Pentecostalism is

quintessentially Jesus-centric which challenges prevailing secular sociological perspectives that limits the politics of identity to race, class and gender to name a few. The Jesus-centric doctrine of Oneness Pentecostalism follows the first principle of the critical faith based epistemology which is “a philosophy of holism, or connection between the physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of identity and identification” (Zine, 2002:75). This philosophy of holism that is enshrined in the Jesus-centric identity is also why many women refused the limitation of being described by their race and gender. Nancy is a no nonsense women and she was quite adamant that she not be categorized solely by her race and gender.

I don't know I don't know if I've ever seen my self as a Black women in a White society and this is where I defy people I am a person there is no White person I am a person... (Focus Group February 2006)

Nancy spoke very passionately about her identity and while on one hand it may seem that she misses the implications of denying the realities of how Black women in society are read, conversely she begs the question of how different saliencies in the matrix of oppression play out. She has a social construction of race and gender analysis where race as seen through a social construct lens reinforces a false reality. If we only view race or gender as a social construct we can inadvertently deny the very real issues of social inequity that arise from ones race or gender. Angie, similarly holds a social construction of race and gender analysis.

I would say that it is more important to be a Christian than to be a Black woman. And when I say that I mean I think that some people get too caught up in the racial issue or their race rather than focusing on being a good Christian. On the other hand, I think Christianity helps you cope with that aspect of your identity being Black in this world. (Focus Group January 2006)

These responses speak to the contentious issue of churchwomen's identity. In both responses, the women did not lay much importance on their gender and race. The importance of a Christian identity, i.e. 'being a good Christian' as the latter participant addresses was a consistent value that was shared by all the responses including Black clergy. The negation of race and gender identities and the salience of spiritual identities that churchwomen speak to is not consistent with a holistic analysis that is anti-colonial. Both Nancy and Angie raise important questions in this study which are inconclusive given that I'm not a complete insider and cannot fully comprehend the disconnection or disassociation that church women expressed concerning their critique of black women and race. Perhaps, in addition to the issue of salience, there are other factors that should be considered for interpreting whether the disconnection of churchwomen and race was present. What these churchwomen do demonstrate is that identity politics can be fluid across spectrums and the religious arena is no exception.

A Whiteness as Theology framework says that we must understand the way spirituality/religion can be used by the oppressed and oppressor. To say that it is more important to be a Christian than a Black woman for example is a theological impetus of the colonial project which attempts to bifurcate identities, i.e. religion and gender. The privileging of the religious/spiritual over other identities is the same old argument of the hierarchy of oppressions which carries an unending and futile debate which moves away from critical interrogation of the colonial project. The churchwomen's disclosure of how they regard their identities in context of their race is puzzling. On one hand, they refuse to be characterized by their race and gender, yet they have a clear understanding of the other barriers that Black women face. Therefore, as churchwomen exhibit, Pentecostal Oneness

identity has had a clear hold on the perceptions and ideologies of church folk. The philosophy of Oneness Pentecostalism with the central focus on the “Name of Jesus” provides a glimpse of why church-folk may be resistant to being categorized according to their race and gender. The “Name of Jesus” philosophy may have transmitted a belief that church-folks identity is tied to the name of Jesus according to the scripture “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (King James Bible, [Ac 17:28](#)). This scripture may have significant implications for how Black Church-folk interpret their self and as result may become disconnected from engaging politically in the public. This hypothesis thus argues that church-folk externalize their racial and gender identity and internalize their Christian Oneness identity as central.

Although it can be argued that churchwomen lack a racial analysis they were not oblivious of the history of enslavement and how it continues to shape Black peoples experience. Nancy’s demeanor became very agitated as she dialogued with other participants concerning the impact of slavery that still holds its grip today:

we are in slavery don’t you kid yourself nobody on earth can tell me otherwise we are in intellectual slavery there are a few of us who escape the wrath of one culture to another huh don’t bother tell me I mean I have a hold host of generation that are educated some are educated till they are mad but it ain’t getting you anywhere. (Focus Group February 2006)

Terry, an immigrant from Jamaica of the 1960’s was well versed in Black History and refuted Nancy’s opinion and said,

Black people are not in slavery anymore first time you couldn’t sit in front of a bus a Black women made it possible for us to do that. (Focus Group February 2006)

Nancy rebuts

Sweetheart you weren't in that trip. It was in America....for you to go and work amongst these people you have to have more than inner strength. (Focus Group February 2006)

This dialogue reveals that the women in the study have an understanding of the social world in which they live and serves as a reminder that colonialism continues to manifest in different forms. Nancy argues that the American experience should not be compared to the American experience as the covert racial discrimination that goes on in Canada must be critiqued very differently from the US. What Nancy implies is that racism in Canada is more exploitive and dangerous since it is not as pronounced or in your face as it is in the US. That is not to say that one is worse than the other but rather to suggest that we must be critical and careful about the way colonialism manifests itself in Canada so that we are equipped to resist it. What is interesting with this particular dialogue is that churchwomen vehemently disassociated themselves from a racial and gender characterization but they have an awareness of how race and gender plays a part in dehumanization.

7.5 Women's Role in the Church

Churchwomen understand that they do have some limitations in the church. When asked what role women play in the Black Church Jill gives examples of how women are positioned within the church:

We are like the backbone, we stand strong, we do everything, and I think we keep the church running basically, because in every aspect expect preaching, we do everything else and we do it well too and stuff like that and we are always there. We outnumber men 10 to 1 but if we were silent what kind of church would that be. We are making our voices heard. (Focus Group January 2006)

Jill talks about the importance of women's voices being heard which ensures the church's survival. She also, however, acknowledges the limitation imposed on women in terms of doing everything but preach. This limitation is dwarfed by the multiple roles women play to keep the church functional. But, as we can see in the following examples it is important to understand whether they view women's role as either positive or negative.

For example, when Ezra a long standing "mother of the church" was asked about women's role in comparison to men's she clearly echoed the teachings of Black Pentecostalism that were reproduced in the narratives of churchwomen:

God created Adam and Eve. The man is supposed to be the leader and Eve is supposed to be like a support to her husband someone there to care for the home and I find that thank God for women, they are compassionate, God gives women wisdom there is a level of wisdom God gives women that they can control herself ...Women is a weight bearer you know they can undergo any pressure, if this building fall on your head trust me a women will lift it off and go on. They help build the church to grow and help those in need. I think all women should have eyes of discernment. (Focus Group February 2006)

This participant captures the multiple ways that Black women may interpret their womanhood. This is resonant of a Black feminist standpoint where women in different social contexts interpret their roles differently. As said earlier, men are considered the head of the household not in terms of an unequal partnership where women are considered as inferior to men but how God has set a particular order for society. This idea of men being the "head" may come into conflict with other feminist readings of women's subordination in society and it is therefore difficult to appreciate this position without delving into the scriptural practices and teachings of Black Pentecostalism. Gilkes (2001) puts it simply:

The religious organizations that they help to form transformed the negative and contradictory experiences for Black women into an aspect of community life that maintained tradition and fostered social and individual change. Women's experience in the Black Church has been part of the larger historical role of Black women, a role that emphasizes independence, self-reliance, strength, and autonomy and that contradicts the dominant culture's expectations and demands of women. (p.45)

Black Churchwomen have invested their time and skills in the early growth of Black Churches in Toronto and they live out their lives in unique ways. Their day to day engagement with the Black Church is reflective of their religious-spirituality which is a political identity they claim and live. When churchwomen were asked about their role in the Black Church when you compare it to men's role there was unanimous consensus that women do the most in Black Churches. Rhoda sums up this discussion:

In almost every church there are more women than men so women have to take up more responsibility than men in the church. For in the Bible it says men should go up and women should be quiet but our church is not like that. Women function in a capacity of a minister, evangelist, and missionary. In the old days in the bible they wouldn't have that kind of position so women in the church play a great part for the upliftment of the church and even the little children they would prefer to come to a woman than a man so I think the role of the women is very important. (Focus Group January 2006)

Rhoda recognizes the oppressiveness of women that occurred historically but she differentiates her church from the others. Women were regarded as playing very significant roles in the church which were similar to that of men and while this may vary from church to church as one respondent puts it, "within her church, women were not kept silent"(Rhoda, 2006). Angie sums up the matter of what role women play in the

Black Church quite succinctly, “aside from Pastor, everything (Focus Group January 2006).” Again, the churchwomen “have a subjective awareness of the significance of their position in terms of the limits and possibilities it poses” (Lerning, 2007:75). Their understanding of such was not taken negatively but an acceptable practice within Black Oneness Churches.

7.6 The Black Church as a free space

The social and economic role that the Black Churches have played is well established (Este (2004), Taylor (2004), Evans (1993), Brown Spencer (2006)). Evans (1997) offers a useful critique for understanding the sociological function of the Black Church and grounding an appreciation of why these institutions play such a critical role in the Black community. As he argues, there are particular sorts of ‘public meeting places in the community’ called free spaces, where people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of co-operation and civic virtue (Evans, 1997). Black Churches are ‘free spaces’ where churchwomen can act with dignity, independence and vision. As aforementioned, the study was interested in finding out how the Black Church has operated as a social political and spiritual place for women. Jill talks about the church as a free space that contributed to her well being.

We have a long way to go but I am glad for where it took me, I am glad that I grew up in church not because it was a club thing where only Blacks were allowed it shouldn't be but on the positive side, it helps me and it kinda keeps me grounded, it is a place to go, to see friends and stuff like that. It educates me too in a lot of things in the word and stuff like that and um it is there to help people, and they are doing allot maybe not enough, but they are helping people...(Focus Group January 2006)

This is evidence of the Church fulfilling its role as a social welfare institution, teaching agency and beacon of hope. The Black Church is a space for Black people to be affirmed by friends who look like you and have a sense of affiliation to keep people grounded. As Jill goes on to say:

...it is a little haven for some other people. Other people have no where to go it is the only time they get to socialize is when they go church, some people are single, live alone, elderly people at my church is what I see, it's like where you know the Chinese and the rich people have their rich club where you and I can't join, the sinners have their club, it's our little hanging out place. It is like a support system for me and my family. (Focus Group January 2006)

Jill speaks beyond the religious function of the church and taps into its potential and necessity for the Black community, i.e. the elderly. As Jill contests the Black Church remains a rich resource of survival and hope in churchwomen's lives. Despite its ambiguities it is a free space and a place of affirmation, affiliation and identity for Black women.

7.7 Summary

The Black Church discussed here is a dynamic space where identities are bounded by Oneness Pentecostal beliefs. The narratives of the churchwomen reveal that in spite of the challenges Black Churches face today, many churchwomen are "intent on staying engaged in institutional expressions of religion even when we might expect them to disengage in view of their individual dissatisfactions or particularities" (Lerning, 2007: 74). Therefore it is important that religious based perspectives are included as part of feminist engagement to create "new" spaces whereby women, of all backgrounds, can contribute to the sacred production of knowledge that occurs within and outside

academia. Only churchwomen can best articulate the Black Christian feminist subject and give attention to the importance of spirituality that governs their lives.

It is also important to note that the claim to feminism is located within a particular history. The outgrowth of Black Pentecostalism was a significant urban phenomenon. The Name of Jesus movement was not a localized experience in Toronto but a world wide revival of Pentecostalism that erupted in the early 20th century. Whereas, the world around the Black Church had been fighting for equal rights and better working conditions for Blacks and women of colour, it was the Oneness theology that captivated the heart of these new converts. Many of these women were domestic labourers and alien immigrants and the church provided a place of nurture and solace for women who comprised the female membership of Black Oneness churches. According to Bishop Teddy,

they came in by invitations...very few people came and they were landed immigrants at the time if you were a nurse or some professional perhaps yes you could apply and then come but most that came they came as visitors and then the privilege was given that you could apply and then they had amnesty and a whole lot of folks that was here got their landed. When we started in 1970 the folks that were landed immigrants in church was late Elder Ted, Elder Willy, Elder Trevor, myself um and that was it out of a congregation of 40 people or so. (Bishop Teddy Interview April, 16, 2006)

The fact that so few had their Canadian permanent resident status in the early years of Black Church's meant that the church was invested in assisting its members to become "citizens". This reality created an inward focus of the church where its members "carr[ied] a living faith, sound contextual theology and a form of organization which presents a model for other ethnic communities" (Gerloff, 1992). The identities of these women were tied to the particularities of Pentecostal Oneness doctrines where Jesus is centered; therefore who they are as churchwomen is deeply reflected in their Christ-centered spirituality.

Denise Gillard (1998) asked an important question: “are people of colour experiencing the exclusionary attitudes and practices encountered when Blacks first attempted to join mainstream Churches in the early days of our common history, or are other factors at work?” In a preliminary attempt to answer this provocative question, it seems that the preoccupation with the process of settlement and establishing Oneness churches may have limited the Black Church’s engagement with feminist and race ideology particularly if feminism may have been regarded as a threat to church women’s identity. Therefore, their exclusionary attitudes may have been an act of resistance to the secular community. As Gilkes (2001) claims,

When pressure to abandon tradition has come from outside the Black community, maintaining tradition has become a matter of political resistance, even though this struggle may take place in parts of the community that typically avoid confrontation with the dominant culture. Religious activity has been the most important spheres for the creation and maintenance of tradition. (p.43)

What Gilkes describes here is the church’s resistance to forces that undermine traditional institutions like the Black Church and how churchwomen invoke their identities differently. Despite the contentious understanding of church-women’s view on identity, the church’s assumed responsibility for reorienting and supporting new immigrants was far more than an administrative task. It was actually a political response to the denial of such support by the White church that was supposed to be “brotherly keepers” of the black immigrants. The start of the Black Oneness churches was politically motivated. The exclusionary attitudes and practices of the Black Church was not about passing time but rather a radical response to systemic racism. The way churchwomen negotiated their

identity speaks to issues of saliency and calls for a redefining and broadening of Black feminist thought. It is for that reason why a Christian feminist framework is so necessary to tease out the way churchwomen negotiate their identities according to specific historical event.

There are other factors at play for the Church's perceived exclusionary attitude. The evolution and shaping of the Black Oneness church was forged out of the experiences of the Diaspora, transnationalism and the revival of Pentecostalism. By virtue of this religious phenomenon that was taking place amongst these new migrants it became exclusionary to those who didn't adopt their practices and beliefs. Black Pentecostalism, then, presents a very different response to the enduring effects of colonization which aims to exorcize a firm religious identity from the souls of the oppressed. Rather than a focus on gender and race, the church's response has been a Jesus-centric spirituality that encapsulates ones identity into Christ. It is this aspect of Oneness Pentecostalism that aids its members to cope with the world around them and also to prepare for the world which is to come.

I have argued previously that religious-spirituality is a quintessential factor in Black people's lives and the responses of these women reveal just that. Thus, although Black women have been effective in addressing the problems of patriarchy, racism and classism we must also fight for the denial and silencing of religious and spiritual identity in women's lives. Women continue to be the backbones of Black Churches today. The women in this study are cognizant of the importance of race and the intersectionalities of oppression Black women face but it is their religious-spirituality that is seen as the most vital and integral component to who they are as churchwomen. Race and gender identity

for churchwomen must be understood in the context of Black Oneness Pentecostalism and an understanding that identities do shift.

Chapter 8

The Benediction

Summary and Conclusion

The Lord bless thee and Keep thee, The Lord Make his Face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee” The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace, in the Name of the Lord, Amen. (Numbers 6:24)

8.0 Introduction

I began this thesis with the aim to provide an informed understanding of the historical role of the Canadian Black Church while also presenting the challenges that face the Oneness community. The Black Church of the Oneness faith exemplifies the continuance and perseverance of African religious culture. A study of this community has uncovered that indigenous practices include the centrality of religious spiritual identity that combats the death dealing forces of colonization. The Jesus-Centric monotheistic identity is a powerful expression of how communities of the Diaspora counter the forces of colonization through a particular politic of identity. Oneness Pentecostals in this study rejected being labeled solely by their race and gender and this brought to light their effort to preserve a strong religious identity and how the salience of identities is constructed across varying social contexts.

This study learned that the establishment of the Black Church was in protest to white racism. Therefore the church became exclusionary as a means for survival. The church became an all-encompassing part of Afro Caribbean culture and identity and the sojourner mentality they embraced further perpetuated their exclusionary practices. Henry (1994) sheds light on this.

Many first generation migrants maintain that they are not here permanently and will return after they make enough money and acquire other resources. This is the “sojourner” mentality. This represents a particular aspect of the migration experience going home is often maintained as a hope wish or fantasy that becomes a form of coping. The many stressors and tensions associated with migration are bared somewhat more easily if the beacon of returning home can be maintained. The sojourner mentality suggests that Immigrants of Caribbean descent are living in flux as pilgrims awaiting their time to return home. This can create a social isolation in terms of how well one integrates into the Canadian cultural mosaic and thus the reason for forming institutions that either sustains the sojourner mentality and/or provides means of coping being in a ‘strange land’. (p. 44)

Henry’s idea of the sojourner mentality suggests that there are broader implications of the migratory experiences for the Caribbean community in terms of their overall political engagement. If immigrants of the Caribbean are in a state of flux they haven’t committed themselves in their new surroundings in the same way as Blacks who have settled for generations. Frances Henry’s (1994) writings on “The Caribbean Diaspora in Toronto Learning to live With Racism” serves to support the findings of this study and the way the experiences of migration have impacted how Afro-Caribbean immigrants have engaged politically in the Canadian setting. For example, Henry (1994) found that many migrants from the Caribbean experienced racism in the white church.

the racism that many of [the] respondents felt and experienced when they attempted to join mainstream places of worship was a powerful deterrent to their

efforts to incorporate into Canadian society. Exclusionary practices and the desire to worship among themselves have led to the establishment of a large and growing number of Caribbean Churches in Toronto. (p. 166)

Therefore put differently, the desire to return home is imminent amongst Afro-Caribbeans and their participation in Black Churches with fellow country men have strengthened this desire and their capacity to cope in an unwelcoming society. This is how the Black Church has been an essential institution in Black life to preserve Black culture and identity since “religion is an extremely important institution in Caribbean societies” (Henry, 1994:148). “Despite[the] hardships experienced [by Caribbean immigrants] their faith provides them with a serene and contemplative approach to life (Henry, 1994:165). The Black Church is a safe haven for Caribbean immigrants of the 1960’s and beyond which helped them to navigate in a White society. In so doing, the evolution of the Black Church post 1960 resulted in a transnational politic to take shape.

This study also found that the politics of the Oneness church was not focused on the external realities of racism and exploitation but rather placed emphasis on the preservation of their transnational identity through establishing strong churches that would nourish and cultivate their culture and religious identity. Thinking through what Rogers says in Chapter 2 about the lack of political engagement on part of the Afro-Caribbean community provides some insight as to why the Black Oneness Church post 1960 has been viewed as being too silent in the political realm. The Afro-Caribbean community has been described as a community that has internalized their experiences of racism since they don’t actively engage in the political process as if this is the only

legitimate course of action to combat and cope with racism. Although the [Afro-Caribbean] Pentecostals did not engage politics directly, their actions reveal political and social protests nonetheless (Stephens, 2009). The strong transnational ties that have developed within this community created an alternative response to the pervasiveness of racism they encountered and they preferred to organize within their own ethnic enclaves of the Black Church. The negative experiences of discrimination that they faced were circumvented by their “in flux” status. In such instances, “the myth of return” or the “sojourner mentality” as Henry (1994) puts it became an option for escape or exit, which coincidentally deflected their attention from other potential strategic responses to discrimination such as collective mobilization or demands for systemic reform (Rogers, 2006:196).

The exclusionary practices of Afro-Caribbean have been viewed negatively, but it was the way the Afro Caribbean Oneness group maintained a philosophy of hope and cultural identity. The Black Church, then, was an incubator of cultural and religious identity that was sustained by the transnational politic of Afro-Caribbean immigrants. The different historical waves of Black migration in Canada have created different political praxis of how the Afro-Caribbean Pentecostal church, for example, relates to the public arena. The Black Oneness Church that formed in the 1960’s have had to adapt to their changing surroundings and facilitate the huge influx of Caribbean immigrants who had not experienced the long history of racism as Black Canadians experienced who were indigenous to Canada. In the US, the enduring practice of enslavement resulted in a more developed and organized political praxis where Black Churches were involved in social

justice movements. In Canada, Black immigrants from the Caribbean arrived 150 years after the large settlements of Blacks began to emerge.

At this juncture, I want to revisit the four main objectives of this study to recap and show in a summary how each achieved objective has been addressed. This will follow with a discussion of some broader themes of this work that I draw upon which include 1) Politics and Silence, which conceptualizes the way the Black Church has been scripted, 2) Black Church and Social Justice which critiques whether the church has fallen short in addressing contemporary problems and 3) Oneness Spiritual Epistemology/The Classroom Educator. This will outline the pedagogic possibilities of including religious-spirituality in our educational curriculum.

8.1 Understanding the central importance of the Black Pentecostal Church post 1960 to Black communities.

This research has shown that following the mass influx of Afro-Caribbean immigrants the church played a vital role in their settlement. The proliferation of Black Churches, particularly within the Pentecostal denomination is directly linked to the role that Black clergy and laypeople played during this time. The Black Church served as a social welfare institution as it assisted black immigrants who sought help in areas that would ease their transition as newcomers. The religious and cultural role that Black Churches played was also a significant factor in the Afro-Caribbean immigrant experience. Many Black migrants who were church goers sought for a church where they would find a continuity of religious practices similarly to what they had experienced back home. They found there were significant differences in the White [Oneness] Church and this lead to

the inception of the first Black Oneness church in 1963. The establishment of the Black Oneness church was iconic as it established the possibility that “Black Men Can start a Church” regardless of the perceived impossibilities of doing so. Racist stereotypes and the preceding history was that Oneness churches were only found in white congregations. Understanding the central importance of the Canadian Black Pentecostal Church post 1960, then, is atypical to how Black Churches have been scripted in most literature.

Generally, Black Churches have been viewed as significant agents of social change but its heterogeneous dynamic begs for an alternative perspective of the other roles it has played in the black community in Canada. The Black Church of the Oneness faith was not an organized religious movement in the public realm to confront systems of oppression and civil rights issues as their counterparts of other denominations were in America. The Black Church of the Oneness faith developed as a result of transnational linkages. It served as a social welfare institution to provide immigration advocacy, education and an indigenous faith that has its root in black/African religious practices. As explained in chapter 2, understanding the uniqueness of the Canadian experience and how it diverges from the US context resulted in Black Churches exerting their roles very differently according to the needs of its members. The central role of the Canadian Black Church which emerged in the 1960’s was to cater to the immediate needs of the black community, which was to facilitate the unprecedented number of black immigrants into the country. The Black Oneness Churches also helped to build a foundation where future generations who resettle in the Diaspora could be supported in their transition while maintaining their strong Jesus-centric beliefs. Although the Oneness doctrine was not new to the Canadian landscape, the way the Afro-Caribbean immigrants centered their

Oneness doctrine within their black identity created a new experience. Amongst the Oneness groups, their Jesus Centric identity was perhaps the most important thing that formed their identity as they canvassed their new experiences in Canada.

Today, there are in excess of 100 Black Churches in the Greater Toronto Area of the Oneness faith where new immigrants can exercise religious beliefs that are similar to their practices from back home. The Black Oneness church thus demonstrates strong transnational linkages between Canada, the West Indies and areas of the Caribbean Diaspora. The establishment of the Black Oneness Church also demonstrated their resistance to the whiteness interpretation of Oneness religious practices.

Overwhelmingly, these immigrants cited reasons for defecting from white churches which can only succinctly be concluded as racism. Understanding the distinct role of the Black Oneness Church offered a richer perspective as to why segments of the Black Church community may not be politically engaged in the same way as its US counterparts. The different experience of black migration combined with a deep doctrinal belief of “Jesus Name” may have re-directed their involvement in the public as they saw the preservation of their religious-spirituality to be paramount.

8.2 Provide a voice, for churchwomen of the Black Church that are currently underrepresented in academic scholarship.

There is an absence of literature that has documented the experiences of Black Oneness Pentecostal church. The interview and focus groups provided the medium for the early trailblazers of the Oneness church to “tell their story”. The rich oral histories that emanated from the subjects of this research prove that there are many stories to be

told about the Black experience in Canada. To finally document the lived experiences of Afro-Caribbean immigrants who set up churches in the 1960's to the 1980's was a historical moment. This study lays a precedent and a challenge to academic scholarship to further consider areas of research that are not given a voice. For example, Black Churchwomen were given voice to redefine and broaden feminism to include a Black Christian feminist critique. This includes a religious gendered epistemology where churchwomen articulate the salience of religious identity in context of the politics of intersectionality. This critique advances the important role that religion plays in black women's lives. The practice of ignoring or obscuring the sacred beliefs of black women who are active members of Black Churches is being challenged with the Black Christian feminist critique and it has offered new possibilities to engage women of all walks of life.

To the knowledge of the researcher and extensive literature searches, the documentations of black clergy and churchwomen in the Oneness Church are the first of its kind and did provide a voice for the Black Church to be articulated in academic scholarship. The institutional documents that were shared such as the 40 year old photo of a group of black pastors and the constitution for the first Black Oneness organization will serve as a memory of the many sacrifices that Black leaders accomplished. Most importantly, the experiences of church members have finally been documented and this will be integrated in a supplementary book on the history of the Afro-Caribbean Oneness Church.

8.3 Examine how the Black Church responds to allegations of its own complicities in colonial practices.

The Black Clergy emphatically denied their silence and complicity in issues that are facing the community. They feel they are alienated by the media and the broader community for its successes, yet blamed when things go wrong. This troubled many of the participants. Also, though some didn't explicitly say it, there seemed to be a sense of ungratefulness they believed to linger in the Black community for not recognizing the many sacrifices church leaders and laity have made for the black community generally. I perceived this to be the case as a shift occurred in the interview process where black clergy wanted to spend time to talk about their experiences in the early years. Upon examining their responses, I recognized that the Black Church is not a monolithic entity. It has been heavily influenced by religious theology, waves of immigration, culture and colonization. Black Churches in Canada have been scrutinized through an American historical lens which should not necessarily be extrapolated to the Canadian experience. This is why we need more literature that speaks of the uniqueness of the Canadian Black experience that is not overshadowed by American centered perspectives.

8.4 Engage spirituality as a legitimate location and space from which to know and resist colonization

As I have argued, while religious spiritual beliefs/convictions do differ from one person to the next, we must be diligent in disproving forms of spirituality that are hegemonic and used as tools of colonization. As said elsewhere (Brown Spencer 2006) while some argue that spirituality is fluid and its definitions are too numerous to define, it is most important that we define and describe what spirituality is and is not from the

perspective of the oppressed. Therefore, it is no longer effective to simply dialogue on the plurality of spiritual perspectives and definitions as this narrow dialogue can lose sight of what spirituality does for the dominant individual and/or social group, i.e. denial of being implicated in oppression. Therefore, it is most important to think about how we can move the dialogue about spirituality from being merely descriptive to being transformative. Refuting certain spiritualities is not to invoke an imperial perspective to spiritual epistemologies, but rather to contest colonial mutations of spirituality that has nothing to do with social justice advocacy. We so often hear that spirituality means different things to different people — and it does. “If there is any area in which African, Caribbean or African-Canadian continuities are manifested by Blacks, it is regarding a sense of spirituality and religion” (Paris 1985). However, a narrow preoccupation with this can serve to hinder us from recognizing and challenging forms of “spirituality” that are oppressive in fear of being labeled essentialist. I mean that if spirituality is considered as one’s identity in the same way as one invokes their race, an argument can be made that spiritual praxis must be action oriented. A post-colonial response may be that this is an essentialist claim. This is why a *Whiteness as Theology* framework is so useful in challenging this new discourse on spirituality as it challenges such essentialist finger-pointing where salient issues are being addressed.

For the oppressed, spirituality that is action-oriented is well established and has much to do with how communities of colour have survived centuries of colonial brutality. Though the Black Church of the Oneness faith may not have had a public presence, their religious-spirituality remains a symbolic and quintessential factor in their lives. Essentially, it was the Jesus-centric spirituality of Afro-Caribbean Oneness believers that

provided the resistance to the effects of colonization in the white church. Despite their lack of public engagement in engaging in social justice advocacy they served the community in other areas of advocacy. Such as, immigration, social welfare provision and a place that nurtured the spiritual, social and emotional well being of its community. As this study has found, spirituality in all its social justice forms must be engaged in the anti-colonial struggle

The following section will discuss three themes that emerged out of the findings of this study and will provide a deeper analysis of the objectives that have been achieved. They include Politics and Silence, the Black Church and Social Justice, and Oneness Spiritual Epistemology /Giving Space to Faith –The Classroom Educator. These themes capture the salient points of this study and provide a better grasp of the Black Oneness Church’s relevance in contemporary matters.

8.5 Politics and Silence

This study primarily focused on the Black Church’s role during the mass influx of Caribbean immigrants and found that the church’s involvement was beyond the administrative task in assisting newcomers to Canada. The inception of the first Black Church was political. The establishment of the first Black Oneness church in 1963 was in reaction to the racism in the White Church. White Churches did not take on the task of helping their “fellow brethren” and when this was denied a radical move on part of the oppressed was born. The radical politics of the oppressed took on the duty to start an institution that took on the responsibility of protecting their people. The establishment of the Black Oneness Church was an anti-colonial response to racism that had formed in the

White Oneness Church community. The early black leaders were opposed to domination and they engaged in politics that was anti-colonial and anti-racist. Their courageous efforts demonstrated the need for oppressed people in the church to exert their agency by starting new churches that would eventually become the hub of the Afro-Caribbean community.

The Black Oneness Church, as an anti-colonial institution, developed the social, psychological, economic and political development of oppressed people/newcomers and provided a sense of belonging. It became a healing fountain for those impacted by racism in society and it was where blacks could find hope, encouragement and upliftment. The establishment of the Black Oneness Church is testament to racism in the church and society.

The study of the Black Oneness Church and the radical politics that was exerted by its members opened up a different understanding of how to engage colonialism from a new lens. For example, spirituality in all its form (religious or non religious) has colonizing implications and is complicit in the broader structures of colonial domination. A *Whiteness as Theology* discursive framework is in its embryonic state but it has been helpful to interrogate the rising dominance of privatized spirituality which has much to do with the lack of political engagement and erosion of radical politics by the church. A *Whiteness as Theology* framework provides new ways of seeing and understanding the processes of colonialism and how whiteness is implicated in religious institutions. By critiquing the impetus of privatized spirituality broadens this study, our understanding of the Black Church and how it has been improperly seen as being silent in contemporary matters.

The perspective that views Black Churches as silent community members is based on a limited reading of how we view their role in context of the American experience. It is, then, needful to conceptualize what silence means and how it can be understood in the context of the Black Church in Canada. Put simply, silence has to do with the absence of sound or the lack of speech. It can be viewed either positively or negatively depending on the reason that silence is being used. Conceptually, silence includes the perspective of the hearer and the perspective of the speaker – both of which can have very different meanings. While one person may hear and respond to a sound another may not – this suggests that what we choose to hear and act upon or what we chose to not hear can be labeled as silence.

Silence can be political as well. Political silence has to do with ignoring other voices and/or choosing not to speak if it is understood that it would not be heard in certain settings. In this study, there was the perception that there are certain constraints against the Black Church in society. Thus, in some instances the Black Church has chosen to act on an issue but not speak out publicly because of perceived barriers. For example, when the first Black Oneness Church was to be established, the black leaders did not contemplate with the white leaders of whether they could go and start churches. They just acted. They became the spiritual custodians of the thousand of Caribbean immigrants who were arriving on Canadian soil. Their action to form churches was an expression of political agency. In another example, Pastor Michael is very critical of the media and the indictment made against the church concerning its complicity and alleged silence. He says he rather act alone where he has more influence over his congregation rather than through the false sense of unity that is being orchestrated by the media.

From a media perspective there will not be a change the churches will not get together to come up with this big ole plan I know that so I don't waste my time trying to do that. But for the place that I have some influence over, one on one let's have that going... (Pastor Michael Interview May 28, 2006)

Today, black leaders in the study categorically deny that they have been silent in the church but recognize that the wider community does not want to hear what they are saying. Pastor Michael adds depth to this critique and his statements embodied the concerns of many Church leaders.

When someone asks the question what is the black church doing um there are a couple of things that immediate spring to mind. First my response against that you know is that you've thrown us out of the schools, there is no religious education there is no prayer you will promote every other lifestyle but a christen lifestyle then the world goes to hell in a hand basket then they ask what is the church doing. (Pastor Michael Interview May 28, 2006)

Pastor Michael suggests that there is a particular cultural norm that looks down upon religious institutions as having no voice in the social or political spectrum. This cultural norm is wrapped in *Whiteness as Theology* where spirituality is relegated to the private realm. However, when things go wrong the Black church is improperly criticized for not addressing community issues and this further marginalizes the church from political engagement. Pastor Michael also talked about the organized prayer vigils that are conducted for the leaders of Toronto City Hall as evidence that the Church has not kept silent.

Once every couple of months pastors gather at city hall in the council chamber, pray GTA is the organization. I have never seen any mention [of this] there are reporters around city hall all day not one mention of the fact that there are pastors gathering in the council chamber and trying to support them in the work they are doing why because it is a biblical mandate and we need to pray for them...so is the church silent – no there is no coverage of any of that and they don't cover it and then say no body is talking about it. (Pastor Michael Interview May 28, 2006)

What right, then, does the public have to say the church is silent if there are constraints impeding this community? Particularly, given the history of oppression in the Black community? The church has acted in spite of colonialism but the festering of colonial domination has governed the parameters of when and how the Black Church has spoken out and become politically engaged.

In context of the actual role Black Churches played for the Afro-Caribbean community, for churchwomen, the church produced spaces of affirmation, affiliation and identity for Black women. Their identity as Oneness Pentecostals took on a new meaning that differed from other black feminist leanings. For example, the classic response of churchwomen in the study was “it is more important to be a Christian than to be a Black woman.” This response connects the issue of intersectionality and salience and speaks to forms of oppression that serve a specific political interest. Churchwomen do not deny their race and gender. The Jesus centric identity they hold unto is a form of religious idealism and legitimacy of the Black Oneness Church that was bred as a result of racism.

8.6 Black Church and Social Justice

Black Oneness Churches did not have a public presence in the same way as did their American counterparts; therefore, to label them as complicit today is flawed. It is best to examine the Black Church in the context of roles they served. Regrettably, this study did not deal with contemporary issues and crisis currently facing the Black Church community. Nevertheless, as a social welfare institution, it is important to question if Black Churches today are abandoning their social justice role in areas such as

immigration advocacy and resettlement, financial help for the needy, housing, health, education, youth violence and incarceration within the criminal justice system. Based on the subject's responses, Black Churches continue to serve their community in areas such as immigration advocacy and resettlement financial help for the needy and education without government resources. Black Churches however seem to lack a contemporary focus in areas of health, youth violence and the criminal justice system. As they are seen as a community based institution that offers social, economic, political and educational activities, in this study, church members and clergy have said little about how the church is responding to certain health care crisis such as AIDS, youth violence and high incarceration rates amongst black men. One area that requires further study in Canada is to find out whether Black Churches are doing enough to address the AIDS crisis amongst black youth.

In McNeil's study (2007) on potential roles of *Black Churches* in HIV/AIDS prevention, 11 Ministers in Black Churches in the US were interviewed to see what they are doing in this area. The denominations represented in the study were 54% Baptist, 27% Methodist and 18% from other denominations (McNeil, 2007, p. 223). None of the churches in the study had a HIV/AIDS prevention program but the majority of the churches had other programs which included health, food pantry, prison ministry and childcare. The health ministries included information on HIV/AIDS prevention. The churches that had the HIV/AIDS prevention program were asked how other churches could get involved. The response was that a pastor-to-pastor approach would work better in pursuing this topic. (McNeil & Perkins 224-225). McNeil did not elaborate on the meaning or intent of the proposed "pastor-to-pastor" approach to deal with HIV/AIDS in

the church. What can be inferred is that the Black Church communities rather work with their religious community partners that share similar church beliefs to tackle these issues. Alliances from the outside may be well received if there is not the perceived threat to church culture and doctrine. This is an area of divergence between community members and religious communities that both have interest in an area yet have different views on how it should be handled.

McNeil's study did find that 91% of the ministers said that their congregants were ready to discuss HIV/AIDS. They were open to this as long as it stayed in accordance with church doctrine, i.e. teaching abstinence before marriage and not passing out condoms. The Black Churches are important community members to promote health activities but as McNeil's study has shown the social and religious values that govern Black Churches do pose a barrier to working with secular alliances that differ on the church's stance on what they deem as moral issues. HIV/AIDS and the Black Church is an understudied area and this study did not ask specific questions concerning this issue. So, it is unknown whether Black Churches of the Oneness faith would be receptive to implementing an HIV/AIDS prevention program or whether these were already in place. What is clear amongst Oneness Pentecostals is that they hold certain suspicions concerning the outside community who fail to recognize their efforts in the black community. This study found that Afro Caribbean Oneness Church hold to strict standards of doctrinal purity and it was perceived that anything that would "appear" to threaten that would be strongly resisted.

The issue of high incarceration rates however brings different questions to the role of the church and contemporary matters. Black Churches as spiritual custodians provide the

spiritual nurture of Black people that statistically are proven to provide positive outcomes. For example, in Collins and Johnson's (2006) study, black youths who regularly attend church services get into less trouble than those who don't attend. For Youth who are members of the Black Church, it has been found to help them to engage positively in their communities and there are less incidences of violence. That is because Black Churches have maneuvered themselves in ways where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence and vision (Evans, 1992).

Historically, the Black Church as a teaching agency and spiritual icon provided the spiritual consciousness where black youth operated from a philosophy of hope that encouraged them daily. As Martin (2002) argues, however, spirituality is no longer the dominant motivating force for Black youths as it was in previous generations. The core value upon which their chief moral decisions and critical life choices are based have changed (Martin 2002). This suggests that with the decline in religious based institutions impacting the youth, you will find a subsequent decline in moral decisions they make.

The Black Church has been named as having a potential role in politicizing equity issues (West 2002, Evans 1992, Gillard 1998). Today we can only ponder and ask whether the Black Church which once served as a buffer to social inequities have lost its relevance to our black youth? Or, are other factors at play? What can be inferred through a *Whiteness as Theology* analysis is that colonization has reshaped the ideals of social protest and interchanged it with religious individualism that is backed by prosperity theology. This has created a fatal distraction on the part of the church from addressing current crisis that are facing the black youth and that require immediate social action.

The Black Oneness Church presents a disappointing picture regarding its role in youth incarceration rates and HIV/AIDS. They seem to focus more on their historical role in immigration advocacy and have lagged behind to address the changing needs of a different generation. Therefore, Afro-Caribbean Oneness churches seem to be “suspended in time” and suffer from a nostalgic presence that has not effectively bridged generations of the old and the new. Instead, it would appear that the Black Churches are reacting to a perceived crisis in the black community through an intensification of Oneness ideology as they attempt to sort through inner schisms to reclaim some relevance to society’s social pressures.

8.7 Oneness Spiritual Epistemology Giving Space to Faith –The Classroom Educator

As a member of the Black Oneness Community, giving space to my religious identity has enabled me to learn about Oneness Pentecostals in a way that I previously did not consider. This process would not have been as effective if the tools to unravel this community did not emanate from new scholarship that offers the legitimacy to explore issues of faith and spirituality (Zine 2002, Dei 2000 & 2001, Brown Spencer, 2006). There is much to learn from the Canadian Black Church from a variety of perspectives. On going studies can only enrich academic scholarship in the Canadian context to address the instructional and communicative relevance to the classroom educator who uses spirituality as a pedagogical tool.

A spiritual epistemological approach in the classroom would be concerned with ways to resist the colonial dynamic. For example, the testimony service that is practiced in Black Churches could be used in the classroom. This would provide the space for

students to express their personal testimonials of what spirituality means to them in context of their schooling ambitions. A culture of advocacy would be spurred on from such an environment where students learn that in addition to anti-colonial and anti-racist ideologies of practice, faith, spirituality and religion could be combined as a form of resistance to the hegemony of secularism that has pervaded academia. It is important to educate the way salient identities are used to interrupt the false sacred secular binary that exists in our educational system.

A faith sensitive approach offers new ways for unearthing the strong affinities of Black culture and religious-spirituality. While there is the tendency to exclude religious institutions from the educational experience direct involvement from Black Churches can help to bridge the gap between spiritual religious communities and secular communities who are interested in similar causes. Ultimately it is important to find ways that the Black Church and educational institutions can collaborate to maximize efforts to combat youth violence, incarceration and the health care crisis that currently exists. Notwithstanding the tensions of doctrinal beliefs and moral codes the Church and society hold unto the Black Church should not be regarded solely as a religious institution. Afro-Caribbean migration and experiences of transnationalism reveals that the sociological role of Canadian Black Churches is clearly established as they functioned as sites of resistance where their community members engaged in an anti-colonial praxis. The classroom educator can teach how forms of spirituality are essential pedagogic tools for the oppressed, particularly the ageing parts of our black communities who strongly hold unto religious faith. Education should encompass the fusing of the mind, soul and spirit and acknowledging how spirituality from a social justice legacy can be an important platform

to engage issues on the social and political front. Faith is important and it is needful to explore how faith can be practiced in today's educational curriculum.

This study of the Canadian Black Oneness Church clearly demonstrates that spirituality must “encompass racial identity, worth and communal action (Martin, 2002:7). The liberatory theology of the historical Black Church represents the capacity of the human spirit to transcend the conditions of racism in both thought and practice. We must recognize the spiritual integrity of activist [Black] churches (Proctor, 1995:16) and the distinctions of Black Churches whose activism played out very differently. Understanding these distinctions can create an open dialogue in our educational settings that is not so quick to label Black Churches as being silent or complicit. The classroom educator that incorporates an anti-racist/colonial approach should also introduce a *Whiteness as Theology* analysis to the students to search out ways that colonialism has shifted its domination in this historical moment which includes the secular and religious arenas. This will keep the student and teacher, colonized and colonizer, oppressed and oppressor aware of the conflicting dichotomies of the colonial encounter and how subjugated voices can insert their agency to resist colonization in all its forms.

8.8 Implications for Future Research

I have been exploring the development of the *Whiteness as Theology* framework to understand the interplay of faith and colonization from the perspective of the oppressed. A *Whiteness as Theology* perspective engages the issue of faith and offers a spiritual epistemology and/or a theology of resistance. In so doing, it critiques why Black Churches in general are seen as silent community members in the black community. This

study looked at Oneness Pentecostals and there are other sects within Pentecostalism to be studied such as the Church of God in Christ, Church of God of Prophecy and The New Testament Church of God. In future studies, I aim to explore other black denominations as described above. I believe that other practices of faith within and outside the Afro-Caribbean community may offer a different perspective to this subject matter. For example, it would be interesting to study the role of the Black Church and African born immigrants who arrived in Canada for the period 1980-2000 and look for points of convergences and divergences with the Afro-Caribbean community. Interestingly, Joseph Mensah's (2009) recent study on "*The Dialectics of Transnational Religious Practices and Identities: The Case of Ghanaian Immigrants in Toronto*" looked at the ways Ghanaian immigrants in Toronto live their religious lives across border and how they assert their allegiance and sense of belonging to both Ghana and Canada (Mensah conversation January 2009 & website <http://www.yorku.ca/jmensah/cv.html>). How Mensah's (2009) study compares to the transnational practices of Afro-Caribbean immigrants is quite similar. However, issues of language that was used in their church was a distinct issue that Ghanaian churches struggled with. This study found that the migratory experiences of the Afro-Caribbean community post 1960 combined with their strong religious practices may have redefined how the liberatory role of the Black Church is practiced. For the Black Oneness Church we find the liberatory role of the Black Church to be more insular and focused on the preservation of transnational ties that were fused by their strong religious Oneness practices. Whether this holds true for other Black Churches of different faiths remain to be seen. The Black Churches in Eastern Canada for example have a rich history that can be similarly compared to the American Black

Church as the waves of migration on the East Coast are similar to the US experience. This is another area worth investigating to see if the Black Churches in Eastern Canada have had more of a public presence in dealing with contemporary issues that are facing the black community.

Investigating the role of the Black Church in Canada deserves more research to grapple with how the church will bridge the gap between the old and new generations to become relevant to contemporary issues that face the black community. For Afro-Caribbean immigrants, they confronted and resisted the practices of the White church, by building its own Black Church and used its strong sense of community to stand up to the tyranny of whiteness. From this perspective, the Black Church gave voice to its community so that the establishment of the first Black Oneness Church became an anti-colonial response to constructs of spirituality that were colonial driven and divorced from black religious traditions.

8.9 Spiritual Ontology

A Whiteness as Theology framework is a spiritual ontology that provides an understanding of colonial theology and how we can resist it. The question may be asked, what would be a spiritual ontology as it relates to the *Whiteness as Theology framework*? How does it address the strengths, vulnerabilities and external pressure that face the Black church? First, a spiritual ontology of the Whiteness as Theology framework is the process of exploring spiritual religious identities from the perspective of the oppressed and how this is transformed to social justice advocacy. For example, the Jesus centric identity held by members of the Afro-Caribbean Oneness Church provided an

understanding of how spiritual religious identities are invoked in this community and how the salience of identities are negotiated. Second, the *Whiteness as Theology framework* is a faith sensitive approach that offers new ways for unearthing the intricacies of a spiritual epistemological project concerned with resisting the colonial dynamic. The findings of this study emphatically suggest that the inception of the first Black Oneness Church was in protest to whiteness. Its ongoing existence is a continued act of resistance to the colonial dynamic.

The strength of the Black Church, though once hidden from anti-colonial discourses is its enduring role in the black community as a social welfare institution. Its vulnerabilities and external pressures come from a new discourse on spirituality that is absent from any social justice core. This new discourse on spirituality is a colonial infiltration that has remapped the social justice core of black churches. In applying the tools that critique *Whiteness as Theology*, Black Churches must respond to this infiltration and renew its legacy of social justice advocacy of the collective rather than a privatized prosperity based theology many churches have embraced. A *Whiteness as Theology framework*, then, is not about elevating whiteness into anti-colonial territory but rather to interrogate the theological impetus of colonialism that seeks to disseminate its doctrine. In summary, the following five components describe the main arguments of this framework and forms what would be a spiritual ontology for the oppressed.

1. The new discourse on spirituality as opposed to Black centred spirituality is a continuance of older forms of colonization.
2. Post colonialism is a discourse of new found colonial power.

3. Religious metaphors and religious discourses can help us to understand the new colonizing processes. Themes such as colonial sotorielogy, colonial theology and the theological-ness of Whiteness are tools to perpetuate the colonial agenda.
4. An understanding of the way spirituality/religion can and have been used by the oppressed and the oppressor is a main premise to understand the theological impetus of the colonial project.
5. The way religion has been interpreted, blamed and implicated in African colonization needs re-examining. Colonial theology best captures the events that lead up to the colonial encounter and thereafter.

8.9.1 Conclusion

The process of writing this thesis has been an empowering experience as this study has provided an informed understanding of the Black Oneness Church in Canada. The Black Church in Canada will continue to have an enduring fascination because religion has had a pervasive role in the lives of black people. The study addressed that the role Black Churches played was a political one. In response to racism, the first Black Church was birthed and it facilitated the largest influx of Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Today we can look at the anti-colonial role Black Churches played as an example of a spiritual epistemology that can be invoked in the classroom to tackle colonialism. My intent has been to argue that “spirituality” that is ingrained in social action and advocacy must be engaged as a legitimate location and space from which to know and resist colonization. A *Whiteness as Theology* framework presents new ways to interrogate the colonial project which has infused a new discourse on privatized spirituality. It is in context of this

new discourse that we can come to understand the challenges such as “prosperity theology” that face the Black Church.

Politicizing the Black Church in Canada beyond its religious pedigree and challenging its ignored status in the academy was the premise to engaging in this research project. This study has ruptured what would appear to be growing anti-religious sentiments that are spawned from white racist supremacy, traces of which are echoed in a new discourse on spirituality. Just as writers from an anti-racist and/or feminist perspective have confronted, critiqued and discarded the works of scholars who ignore these specific oppressions similarly the Black Church has to insist that their voices be heard and this research provided that forum. The spiritual underpinning that has enabled the Black Church to thrive must be balanced with an accurate historical reading whereby its community will not fall prey to dismissing the crucial role that religious-spirituality has played. The Black Church is where Black’s historically could find a place of connectedness and sense of belonging. While the Black Church is not excused from its own perils a critique of all that has gone before it must be repositioned in order to address critical issues that face today’s generation.

The study of Oneness Pentecostalism did offer another side of understanding that indigenusness must also be reflected in the religious realm as well. While there are semblances of Black Churches, there is also uniqueness within subgroups of particular denominations. The Jesus Centric ontology of black Oneness believers provided such a gaze as it was linked to an African perspective on black identity. As we move forward in future research in the black community, it is important that Blacks reclaim our cultural strengths in the context of secularism and colonialism that attempts to cut us away from

that important anchor. My use of gospel hymns/choruses in the thesis chapters is part of uncovering the distinctions and anti-colonial vernacular that is used in the Black Church. The late AME Bishop Robert L. Pruitt said that Gospel has the beat, but it was the hymns and anthems of the church that have theology (Retrieved September 22, 2008). The faith and religious-spirituality of our early pioneers have made their mark. Whereas there are dissimilarities with the Black Church in America, i.e. public presence in combating oppression, there are also commonalities that Black Churches in general have displayed in their respective communities, that is, the act of resistance when confronted with whiteness ideals. Evans (1992) corroborates this final thought.

Throughout black history, the insights and spirit of black religion have remained at the centre of what might be called a culture of resistance that formed an alternative to the values and humiliations of dominant white culture. The existence of places in the slave community beyond the immediate ties of family proved essential for the articulation and development of a language of freedom. Such settings, in the slave environment were preeminently religious. (p.28-29)

Religious institutions played a very important role in the black experience. The Black Church of the Oneness faith is no longer a forgotten community and this study substantiates that religious-spirituality has a place in the academy and within our educational institutions. Bringing perspective to the Canadian Black Church adds to the holistic dimension of how immigrant communities negotiate their identities. It also offers a different insight to how our social justice consciousness in all its forms can be realized.

In closing, the final benediction must be relayed. The benediction occurs at the end of a worship service in the Black Church where everyone lifts their right hand and repeats a

short prayer of invocation. This prayer is to ask God for his blessings and guidance till the church members meet again. This study similarly ends with the benediction that is written at the beginning of this chapter until future works continue to add further depth to the study on the Black Churches in Canada.

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APPENDIX I

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

I am a doctoral student in the *Sociology and Equity Studies Department* at the University of Toronto, working under the supervision of Professor George Dei. I am conducting a qualitative research study that will explore sites of community organizing and political action, namely, the Black Pentecostal churches in the GTA. The study will unearth how the Black Pentecostal churches have functioned in the formation and defense of Black communities in Canada. I am requesting your cooperation as a voluntary participant in this study, which I hope is going to help generate a more in-depth understanding of the Canadian Black Churches in the Greater Toronto Area and how they produce spaces of affirmation, and identity for members within its community.

As a member of the Black Church, I have found that there has been a limited reading of the Black Churches role in contemporary issues. Therefore, this calls for a positive affirmation of the Canadian Black Church, which requires an understanding of its central importance to Canadian Black communities. I have three main purposes to my study: 1) to understand the central importance of the Canadian Black Church to Black communities 2) to better understand the role of the Black Church in the anti-colonial struggle, and 3) to determine how the Black Church responds to allegations of its own complicities in colonial practices. At the conclusion of this specific study I am also interested in utilizing the data obtained in this research to write a supplementary book on Black Apostolic Church History in Canada.

For this reason, I am inviting you to assist me by agreeing to participate in the study. During that time, I will be conducting an in-depth interview that will last about 30 to 45 minutes and will be tape-recorded and/or a focus group that will last about 1-3 hours and will be tape-recorded. The interview will focus on your perspectives on various topics such as Spirituality, faith and the role of the Black Church.

All data generated during this study will remain confidential. Neither your name nor the name of the church you attend will be used in the published study, and only Prof. Dei and I will have access to the primary data. All data, including observation notes and audio cassettes, will be destroyed once the study is concluded. You will be free to raise questions or concerns with me or Prof. Dei throughout the study, and may withdraw at any time if you choose. Please be assured that you are under no obligation to agree to be observed or to participate in an interview.

Although the findings of this study will not benefit you directly, by participating in this study you will be contributing to ground breaking knowledge of the Canadian Black Church which has a critical role in tackling current issues in the black community. You will receive a copy of the summary of findings from the study, and may of course access the entire thesis once it is published if you wish.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me at 416-749-1345 with any concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Elaine A. Brown Spencer
Doctoral Candidate, Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education – University of Toronto

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: BLACK CLERGY

BACKGROUND

1. Were you born in Canada? If not,
 - a. What country were you born?
 - b. Did you attend a Black church back home?
 - c. When and why did you come to Canada?
 - d. Did the Church in Canada help you during this transition?
2. Is this the first church you have been a member of since being a pastor/minister? If not, how is this church different from the others?
3. How did you become a pastor/minister? What was the process?
4. Have you ever been a member of a white church, if not why? If so, how was it the same or different from the black church you now attend?
5. When, Why and How did your church start?
6. What Month and Year was your church established?
7. How many members attend your church?
8. What does the Black Church mean to you?

SPIRITUALITY AND FAITH

1. What does the concept of spirituality mean to you? Is it the same or different from your religion? Do you relate it at all to your racial identity?
2. How do you relate the churches spirituality to the outside world?
3. What attracts people to the Black Pentecostal churches?
4. What would you want others outside of the Black Church to know about it?

5. How does the Black Church promote a sense of hope for those outside of the church doors?
6. What is your understanding of what happened in slavery in the past? What is your response to it in terms of your faith today?
7. Should the Black Church be involved in politics?

COMPLICITIES – HOW DOES THE BLACK CHURCH RESPOND?

1. What needs to be done to tackle issues of oppression that affect the Black community, considering that the Black Church are the largest organizers of Black people?
2. What should be done to help educate our Black youth?
3. How does the church remain relevant to today's generations?
4. What is the Black Church doing to make the world a better place?
5. What is the Black Churches view on community? What does it Mean? How can this be achieved for those who do not believe like you do?
6. Many believe that the Black Church has been silent on issues that affect the Black community in a negative way? Do you agree? If not, why?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS: CHURCHWOMEN

BACKGROUND

1. Were you born in Canada? If not,
 - What country were you born?
 - Did you attend a Black church back home?
 - When and how did you come to Canada?
 - Did the Church in Canada help you during this transition?
2. Is this the first Black church you have been a member of? If not, why did you choose this church?
3. Have you ever been a member of a white church, if not why? If so, how was it the same or different from the black church you now attend?
4. What does the Black Church mean to you?

SPIRITUALITY AND FAITH

1. What does the concept of spirituality mean to you? Is it the same or different from your religion? Do you relate it at all to your racial identity and gender?
2. How should the concept of spirituality be integrated into the wider community to fight injustice?
3. What would you want others outside of the Black Church to know about it?
4. How do you live with the problems within the Black Church both personally and professionally?
5. What is your understanding of what happened in slavery in the past? What is your response to it in terms of your faith today?
6. Should the Black Church be involved in politics?

BLACK CHRISTIAN FEMINIST THEORIZING

1. Do you play a role in the church? If so, how did you get into this role?
2. What role do women play in the Black Church? Is it the same or different from men in the church?

3. Has the Church contributed to your well being? Have you experienced a sense of belonging since becoming a member. If not, why?

4. Given that women comprise the majority membership of the Black Church, do they have the organizing apparatus to positively influence the degree of which the black church becomes involved in the wider society?