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Black Lesbians to the Rescue! A Brief Correction with Implications for Womanist Christian Theology and Womanist Buddhology

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Abstract: Foundational Black Womanist Christian Theology has suffered from the focus on Alice Walker's 1983 four-part womanist definition at the exclusion of her 1979 short story, *Coming Apart*. The focus on the 1983 definition and the exclusion of *Coming Apart* has left an invisibilizing effect on the centrality of reliance on African-American lesbian literature and wisdom in womanist Christian methodology. The invisibilization can be corrected, in part, through interpolating *Coming Apart* with the 1983 definition, utilizing a Black Buddhist lesbian Womanist hermeneutic, and additional Womanist engagement in Womanist Consultations. This correction has implications for Christian theologies that may be heterosexist, homophobic, and patriarchal, Biblical interpretation, preaching, and epistemological processes.

Keywords: African-American; black; Buddhism; Christian; ethics; hermeneutics; Lesbian; theology; Womanist

1. Introduction

With much respect, appreciation, and gratitude for our founding Womanist theologians, the early foundations of Womanist Christian theology¹ missed the mark on what Alice Walker Womanism could have meant for Black lesbian-Black straight women epistemological alliances when early Womanist Christian theologians focused on Walker's 1983 four-part definition (Walker 1983) to the exclusion of Walker's 1979 short story *Coming Apart* where Walker first coined the term 'Womanist.' That was 38 years ago. Noticing an opportunity for Womanist and feminist dialogue on heterosexism, Afrocentric Christian Womanist theologian Delores S. Williams wrote in 1993

Among womanists and feminist theologians, heterosexual women and lesbian women can come together for serious dialogue to discover if there are ways heterosexual female culture oppresses lesbian women on the basis of homophobic responses to the question of what is "acceptably female" (Williams 1993, p. 183).

That was 24 years ago. In 2017, this author, utilizing a Black Womanist lesbian Buddhist hermeneutic, is asking if Black Christian Womanist theologians who identify as heterosexual or straight, can rely on Black lesbian literature and wisdom as Womanist methodology, especially in the age of #BlackLivesMatter and the rise of anti-LGBTQ religious freedom to discriminate laws? Williams offers instruction on how to help African-American women thrive in an oppressive society, or what she calls, drawing on the Biblical story of Hagar's daughters, "the wilderness experience." Williams breaks "the wilderness experience" or what she calls the "black experience" into four

¹ By earliest foundations of Womanist Christian theology I am referring to writings in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

components: The Horizontal Encounter, The Vertical Encounter, Transformations of Consciousness, and an Epistemological Process². The Horizontal Encounter is the interaction between Black and White people in society and history. This encounter has led to suffering for African-American people. The Vertical Encounter is the meeting between God and subjugated people. This encounter results in new “sustaining and nurturing cultural forms, like black religion.”³ It also results in “positive psychological and physical states of freedom and liberation.”⁴ Transformations of Consciousness are positive when “oppressed people arrive at self or group-identity through awareness of self-worth and through the appreciation of the value of black people and black culture,” and negative when “black people give up positive black consciousness and identify with alien and destructive forms of consciousness.”⁵ The Epistemological Process is “a special way the mind processes data on the basis of action in the three categories above. The socio-historical context plays an important role in this process.

Williams does not expound on what The Epistemological Process looks like, perhaps because it will be different for every individual or collective, but she acknowledges that one’s ways of making knowledge will change through the wilderness experience. If straight Black Womanist Christian theologians are open to relying on Black lesbian literature and wisdom, the horizontal encounter between heterosexists Black Christian Womanist theologians and queer Black Womanist theologians will have to bend, or become re-queered. Black Womanist theologians who embrace the notion of reliance of Black lesbian literature and wisdom may experience a Transformations of Consciousness through the Epistemological Process that leads to a partial freedom from the anti-LGBTQ wilderness. Freedom from the heterosexist and homophobic wildernesses may be akin to Williams’s Vertical Encounter if working collectively with Black lesbians is closer to God’s will than working individually or working segregated by sexuality. Black Womanist Christian theologians support the belief that universality, or collectiveness, is next to Godliness.

There should be a dialogue between Black Womanist lesbians and Black Womanist straight women because the U.S. still is not a safe place for Black people to live. Black people as a whole continue to face police brutality without justice, and LGBTQ people continue to suffer under “right to religious freedom” initiatives and laws where their fellow citizens still try to segregate them from the rest of society. Black lesbians live with the threat of police brutality without justice and religious discrimination. Many Black people support religious discrimination against LGBTQ people, therefore, some Black sisters are discriminating against other Black sisters. This horizontal encounter can begin to bend and twist when heterosexist Black Christian Womanist theologians revisit Walker’s 1979 short story *Coming Apart*.

Coming Apart was not, and still has not been consistently interpolated, if interpolated at all, into Walker’s 1983 definition, leaving an invisibilization⁶ (Yetunde 2016a) of Walker’s original impulse to include the reliance on Black lesbian literature and wisdom about women as a whole and about the Black community as a whole, in the meaning of Womanist formation and identity. Consequently, the foundations of much of Womanist Christian theology that focuses solely on the 1983 definition is devoid of lesbian sexual identity-influenced hermeneutics due to the lack of cooperative epistemological sisterhood intended for Black lesbians and their straight Black sisters. Although past scholarship cannot be changed, current scholarship can correct the invisibilization of reliance on Black lesbian literature and wisdom as standard methodology with a brief correction: interpolate Walker’s 1983 definition with her 1979 short story *Coming Apart* to re-visibilize reliance on Black lesbian literature and wisdom as central to the identity formation of Black women who identify as Walker Womanists.

² (Williams 1993, p. 154).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Invisibilization is a term I coined while writing my dissertation, “A New Spelling of Our Names: An Exploration of the Psycho-Spiritual Experiences of African-American Buddhist Lesbians.” Invisibilization means making efforts, consciously or unconsciously, to ignore what is and who are actually present.

This brief correction comes, in part, from a Black Buddhist lesbian hermeneutic and has implications for Womanist Christian practical theology and the building of Womanist scholarship and community.

2. The Formation of a Black Lesbian Buddhist Hermeneutic

As a Black lesbian who grew up in the United Methodist church, having inherited the homophobic theology of that church body before my sexual identity was formed, I experienced, to borrow a term of art from First Amendment jurisprudence, the “chilling effect” of homophobia in church and society, as well as the ostracization and hatred by loved ones, based on the same theology I was raised on. In fact my mother (to whom I am eternally grateful for her nurturance as I grew into adulthood), a Black Christian woman who raised me in the church, threatened me with violence and attempted to degrade me in various ways when I told her I was a lesbian. My maternal aunt, a Black Christian woman, wrote that I should go back in the closet and that God would drown me, along with everyone else living in the San Francisco Bay area where I was living at the time, into the Pacific Ocean. Though my mother and aunt expressed their sadistic fantasies⁷ with me, my adoptive maternal grandmother, raised on the same theology, told me that she had always known women who were in romantic relationships—they just weren’t called anything like “lesbian” or “gay.” Sociologist Mignon Moore writes

As Marilyn’s and Marisol’s remarks emphasize, there is nothing new about Black women having a lesbian sexuality: rather, it is same-sex couples openly living and raising children together in African American communities that is a distinct departure from past understandings of lesbian and gay behavior. In the past, lesbian/gay practice was overshadowed by public identities that emphasized racial group membership and deemphasized sexuality. Participation in the private social world of Black lesbian life was accompanied by a public presentation of self that was presumed to be heterosexual; many times, women remained in [heterosexual] marriages or other visible heterosexual relationships while fulfilling their same-sex desires (Moore 2011, p. 185).

My grandmother immediately named the problem—it was naming the nameless and now having to grapple with the name and the named. She cried with me as I told her of my hurt, disappointment, and grief, and as she cried with me, she assured me that she would always love me. She was my primary healer. Ironically perhaps, my secondary healing came in a United Methodist church called Glide Memorial in San Francisco. At Glide, Rev. Cecil Williams and his wife poet Jan Mirikitani, created a multi-cultural, multi-class spiritual community of radical acceptance, liberation, and recovery. My Methodist grandmother’s compassion and lovingkindness in my life, and Glide’s theology and community, demonstrated that United Methodist Christianity can also heal, but my mother’s and aunt’s theology, chilling effect, threats of violence, “prophetic” fantasies of harm and ostracization—all factors in the invisibilizing phenomenon—eventually led me to my positive encounters with Buddhism’s Brahma Viharas (lovingkindness, compassion, equanimity, and sympathetic joy as the highest aspirations), interdependence and dependent origination.

The concept of interdependence is one shared by Buddhists and African-Americans. According to Black Womanist Christian pastoral theologian and A.M.E. clergy Carolyn Akua McCrary, people of African descent have a norm of interdependency. She bases her theory, in part, on NTU, a Bantu-Rwandaise philosophy. McCrary describes NTU as

the unifying force which bespeaks the connecting essence of all that is; and that at the fundamental core, there is an interconnectedness and an Interdependence of being of everyone and everything, trees, rocks, rivers, air, water, animals, birds, insects, time,

⁷ Black Christian Womanist theologian, United Methodist minister and queer scholar and activist Pamela R. Lightsey calls this kind of reaction from Black homophobic people, *bhomophobia*. (Lightsey 2012, p. 344).

place and form, etc. One cannot therefore, relegate someone or something outside one's realm of care and concern (McCrary 1990/1991, pp. 119–47).

A Black lesbian Buddhist hermeneutic might include a “triple dose” of interdependence, or more intensity around the interdependence concept due to the cultural norm, Buddhism, and the hurt of alienation, all of which contributes to the motivation for interpolating *Coming Apart* into the 1983 Womanist definition. In addition, the Buddhist concept of dependent origination means nothing exist independently, that phenomena arise dependent upon other phenomena and gives rise to additional phenomena. As dependent origination is applied to what Womanist means, 1983 Womanist is dependent upon 1979 Womanist and 1979 Womanist gave rise to 1983 Womanist.

3. 1979 *Coming Apart* as 1983 Womanist Prequel

In *Coming Apart* the protagonist, a Black woman married to a Black man, relies heavily on Black lesbian literature and wisdom to protect her ego against her pornography-consuming husband, and intentionally relies heavily on Black lesbian literature and wisdom to provide a means of critique of misogyny, class privilege, Black patriarchy, and White feminism (Walker 2006a, pp. 3–11). Sole reliance on the 1983 definition without the interpolation of *Coming Apart* has, in part, contributed to decades of Womanist Christian theology that has ignored, intentional or not, the integral part Black lesbian literature and wisdom played on the protagonist proclaiming herself to be a Womanist. In *Coming Apart* Walker, herself a Black woman who is sexually fluid, writes her story in a way that demonstrates her protagonist is inspired by the writings of at least two Black lesbians Audre Lorde and Luisah Teish. She is so inspired by these women that she quotes them to her husband as she makes her case against his use of pornography, and even goes so far as to post quotes from Lorde on the cabinet above her kitchen sink for ongoing inspiration and encouragement. As she defends herself and the Black lesbian sources of her support, she does not demean her husband, rather she tries to uplift him using Lorde and Teish as Black lesbian rescuers, protecting the protagonist from a dehumanizing heterosexual marital dynamic and protecting her husband from the ways of White heterosexist exploitation of Black people's bodies, women's bodies and images, and Black women's bodies and images. When her husband retorts he cannot learn anything from a dyke, she asserts that these women are their sisters. When he accuses her of being a feminist or in his understanding, a Black feminist is a lackey for White women, she responds thoughtfully, having reflected on who she is, who she is not, and who she is becoming. She proclaims herself to be a Womanist—in 1979. *Coming Apart* is the short story prequel that provides context for Walker's 1983 definition. From *Coming Apart* alone, with a Black Buddhist Womanist lesbian hermeneutic, womanism can also be understood as:

the willingness on the part of women of all sexualities, to seek out wisdom from African American lesbians on how to create safe spaces for themselves, in the midst of threats to their emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health, and take the risk of sharing that wisdom with their oppressor(s) in a way that does not harm the oppressor(s), with the intention to help the oppressor(s) awaken from ignorance and violence, and to be advocates for African American lesbians in the African American community.

Adopting this definition is part of the brief correction needed to reverse the trend in Womanist Christian theology of invisibilizing the centrality of a Womanist relying on Black lesbian literature and wisdom in the formation of those who identify as a Walker Womanist.

4. Black Womanist Scholars Engage Buddhisms

Black Buddhology (or Buddhist theology) lesbian commentary on Womanist Christian theological scholarship, by those who openly claim the intersecting identities of Black Buddhist lesbian identity,

has been rare⁸. With respect to Buddhism and Womanist thought, Black Christian Womanist A.M.E. minister and scholar Jennifer Leath argues that Womanist scholarship should be broadened beyond Christianity to include Buddhism because in Buddhism there is much to be learned about liberation, praxis, being, and experience, but she makes this claim based on her understanding of Buddhism, not in epistemological dialogue with Black Buddhist lesbians. Leath is a Walker Womanist in that she focuses, for her article, on the dialogue in Walker's 1983 definition of womanism, which states in part, "Traditionally capable, as in: 'Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.' Reply: 'It wouldn't be the first time.'" Canada is the land of freedom to which daughter desires to take Mama, and Mama affirms her daughter's ability to do so. Canada, the land of freedom from slavery, is like Pure Land for Pure Land Buddhists, the ultimate place of freedom. Daughter taking people to Canada is the liberation process. Based on this definition, Leath says the Womanist-Buddhist dialogue must be "qualified by the actions of *walking*—and *taking* others with us."⁹ Are Black Christian Womanists theologians other than Leath willing to be rescued from the slavery of heterosexism and Christian hegemony and then taken to Canada, the Pure Land, heaven even, by Black Buddhist lesbians?

African-American religion scholar Carolyn Medine Jones (who identifies as Catholic and Buddhist) and African-American social ethicist scholar Melanie Harris, engaged in a series of Womanist-Buddhist Consultations whereby other Black women scholars engaged Womanist thought and Buddhist texts. They did their work with Alice Walker herself, a Black sexually fluid woman who has practiced Buddhism. At the consultation Walker said "Womanism and Buddhism are about "self-regard," about "coming face to face with a form of yourself that you have to let go of."¹⁰ Walker could have only derived this meaning of womanism and Buddhism from the phenomenological experience of Buddhist meditation practice. Letting go of form, as it is taught and chanted in many Mahayana Buddhist traditions through *The Heart Sutra*, and meditations and teachings in Theravada Buddhism about self and no-self, is certainly not what most Black Christian Womanist theologians understand womanism to mean. This meaning could have only come from someone practicing Buddhism, not just engaging Buddhist texts and Womanist scholarship. But what about womanism and Buddhism meaning letting go of form?

Jones argues that Womanists and Buddhists meet "in a space beyond hermeneutics, in an ethical space."¹¹ What is that ethical space? The ethical space is akin to Walker's womanism where one let's go of form—Womanists and Buddhists let go of having hermeneutic authority (or form or Right View) over what Buddhism is and what Womanist is. Consultation participants let go of othering their consultation members. Jones writes

Both Buddhist and Womanist ethics might agree that "obligation" means to deploy/display skillful epistemologies through good actions and practices that, then, lead to good ends. These epistemologies shape how we see the "other," are the growth patterns and fixed habits of mind we bring to the other that condition what we can see, whether and how we recognize—read—inter-subjectivity (Medine 2012, pp. 47–55).

Have Black Christian Womanist theologians who are heterosexist engaged in skillful epistemologies through good actions and practices with respect to Black lesbians, by not interpolating

⁸ Womanist scholarship is being produced at rapid rates by many scholars in many places and in many disciplines. I do not know with certainty whether other "out" Black Buddhist lesbians are working with Buddhist analysis on Black Christian Womanist theology.

⁹ (Leath 2012, p. 61).

¹⁰ Whether Walker has always understood womanism as letting go of form, or has come to understand it as letting go of form, is yet to be fully explored in Christian Womanist theology and can best be explored in Womanist Christian-Buddhist dialogue. Should Delores S. Williams enter this conversation, I would ask her if letting go of form is what she feared when she wrote that transformation of consciousness is negative when "black people give up positive black consciousness and identify with alien and destructive forms of consciousness." (Medine 2012, p. 49).

¹¹ Ibid.

Coming Apart? No. Can Black Christian Womanist straight theologians and Black queer theologians, Christian or not, form epistemological alliances that result in the ethical space release of hermeneutic authority and nonalterity? They have, but this ethical space has its limits. Harris writes

The truth is, Womanist scholarship attests to the importance of the self and, more deeply, to the importance of honoring and humanizing the self, even divinizing the self. This is so particularly because of the history of slavery and oppression in the lives of black women, and all people in the African diaspora. We carry with us, in our veins, a living collective memory of being treated as “less than” humans being in the world (Harris 2012, pp. 67–72).

The importance of self and the divinization of self is antithetical to Theravada, Insight¹², Zen, and other Buddhist traditions; however some Buddhists may agree with Harris. (Harris relied on the work of African-American Tibetan Buddhist practitioner and religion scholar Jan Willis). Should there be a lack of ethical space on self/noself, there is no reason for Black Christian Womanist theologians and Black Buddhist lesbian Womanists in dialogue with each other to engage in negative othering. On the other hand, an ethical space can still be created for the re-visibilization of Black lesbian literature and wisdom in Womanist formation if the lack of ethical space cannot be harmonized.

Leath argues that Womanist scholarship has been enslaved by Christianity, but through dialogue with Buddhism, participates in the liberation from Christian hegemony. Jones agrees, but has there been liberation from Christian hegemony? Do Black Christian Womanist theologians want to be liberated from their own power and influence? Are Womanist theologians invested in Christian hegemony vulnerable enough to be rescued from hegemony by Black Buddhist lesbians? Are Buddhists interested in wrestling power from others? Until these questions can be answered, for the sake of a broader scholarship, Womanist theologians would do well by the Black community as a whole to at least keep to the methodological norm of interpolating Black women’s literature and other art into Womanist Christian theology, including literature and art from Black lesbians, because the societal assaults on Black people continue, and because the historical invisibilization or interrogation of Black women’s lived experiences and knowledge about those experiences still continues in the academy. Black Womanist scholars are curators of Black women’s art. Black women’s art is considered by many Walker Womanist scholars as legitimate artifacts on Black women’s lives. Various works of Black female authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, Pauli Murray, Toni Morrison, Ntozake Shange, Toni Cade Bambara, Audre Lorde, and of course Walker herself, are often used as evidence of a homogeneous Black women’s lived experience, but straight Black women and queer Black women do not share the same sexual identity experiences and as such, out Black queer women do not share the same level of societal protection as their straight sisters. In fact, many Black straight women actively engage in discrimination and oppression against their Black lesbian sisters. Would reading together end the discrimination?

5. Implications for Womanist Christian Theology

Most Walker Womanist Christian theologians utilize Walker’s 1983 four-part definition, in parts or in its totality. Walker defined Womanist as:

A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or

¹² Thirty-one African-American Buddhist lesbians participated in my dissertation research project. Five of those women agreed to be interviewed. I asked them six questions pertaining to the Buddhist notions of self and noself, including: What does the self mean to you? Do you have a self? What attempts have you made to preserve self? Where did your concept of self come from? Have you transformed your notion of self? Have you let go of trying to preserve self? One woman, a yoga instructor who has integrated some of the yoga sutras into her spiritual worldview, spoke of herself as having divine aspects. The other four women talked about letting go of self.

nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?” Answer: “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.” (Walker 2006b, p. 19).

The *Coming Apart* interpretation gives interpolated texture to “Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female . . . ” and I would argue that today the commitment also extends to transsexual and non-gender conforming people. How is that commitment to be manifested and by whom? One cannot know from the 1983 definition alone that the impulse for the commitment to survival and wholeness is also inspired by Black lesbians. Also, it cannot be known from the 1983 definition alone that heterosexual women are also responsible for the survival and wholeness of Black lesbians, whose wisdom is often summarily rejected, as the protagonist’s husband rejected Lorde and Teish as dykes who could know nothing about Black people. *Coming Apart* interpolated into the 1983 definition by one large or several small consultations like the Womanist-Buddhist Consultations, models a way forward for Black Womanists across the sexuality spectrum and in interreligious dialogue, to work together and on behalf of each other, for our collective survival and wholeness against all kinds of oppression in the ethical space by creating safe spaces free from dehumanizing each other. The 1983 definition states, in part, that a Womanist is “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female,” but without *Coming Apart* and a Black lesbian Buddhist interpretation of that story, how would one know that the commitment to survival and wholeness also means practicing compassion for our oppressors?

6. Collectiveness is Next to Godliness

The brief correction of interpolating the 1983 four-part definition with the 1979 *Coming Apart* has potentially radical implications for other Biblical interpretations and preaching. For example, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Christians often think of the parable as a story about the goodness of one ordinary man who helped one vulnerable man when more extraordinarily pious men left him to die. The parable has become a cultural trope of what it means to be a do-gooder. A corrected Womanist rendering of the parable might see that the story is about how someone from a marginalized group, considered impure by the powerful, defies their stereotypes by coming to the rescue of a man in need. In this Womanist rendering, what is taught is that stereotyping negatively and positively, blinds us to the true nature of others and their potential for good and evil, and that those engaged in stereotyping actually need those they have deemed impure or disordered, to survive¹³. The Parable of the Good Samaritan, with the emphasis on understanding stereotyping and relational dynamics, becomes The Parable of Our Collective Survival (Yetunde 2016b). If the impure Samaritan can come to the rescue of an injured man, Black lesbians who have been deemed impure or disordered can also come to the rescue of those in need, including their vulnerable straight Black sisters. Womanist preachers in previously non-LGBTQ affirming churches can begin to affirm their Black lesbian sisters from the pulpit if they believe The Parable of Our Collective Survival has salvific merit in the here, now, and beyond. The spirit of The Parable of Our Collective Survival can also be found in a Womanist interpretation of The Book of Job.

One conventional moral of The Book of Job is “be patient and God will restore what was lost twofold.” Job had to repair relationships and re-enter the community that he became alienated from. Only when his relationships were repaired and he had re-entered his community did he have

¹³ The saving grace of a diverse Womanist consultation is that it will be nearly impossible to maintain stereotypes in a working group invested in the well-being of each other.

family and wealth again. A Womanist committed to the survival and wholeness of people might interpret Job as having no chance of survival but for the collective. Black LGBTQ people are part of the whole human collective and the whole Black collective can help the Jobs of our community (including our Black straight sisters) heal.

7. The Parable of our Collective Survival Manifesting as Womanist Theological Scholarly Community

Black lesbians have been attempting to rescue their homophobic Black sisters for decades, if not longer. Attempting to rescue oppressors without the intention to harm them defies negative stereotypes and should be a wake-up call that there is something divine within these rescue attempts where one might say they can learn something about God from these women, as something was learned about God through the Samaritan's assistance to the injured man. What can be learned from Black lesbians about God is what I call Theologies of the "Impure" (Yetunde 2016c).¹⁴ In the Theologies of the "Impure" framework, it is a given that any group of people burdened by others with a negative stereotype, are still human and thus possessing "divine" aspects. As humans with divine aspects, stereotyped people considered "impure" and treated as such can at least educate their oppressors about their own ignorance and sadistic fantasies or actions. Black lesbians involved in the rescue enterprise have had some successes, but from a Buddhist perspective, as long as the samsara (endless round of suffering) of sexual anxiety, sexual identity "binaryness," beliefs about Biblical inerrancy and literal Biblical adherence continue, so will the Black lesbian rescue efforts—for our collective survival. As it pertains to "binaryness," Theologies of the "Impure" as it relates to same-sex and same-gender attractions, as well as transsexual and intersex identities, demonstrates how Womanist theologians who have only sought to identify with women in the Bible, can also begin to identify with men in the Bible. The Samaritan and Job are two men whose stories do not turn on their sex, but on their compassion and suffering respectively. So what is a Black Christian Womanist theologian to do now if she is seriously committed to creating safe spaces, relying on Black lesbian literature and wisdom, committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, loves women's culture, is willing to be advocates for Black queer women in the Black community, and is willing to advance Womanist-Buddhist dialogue? Here are a few suggestions:

- (1) Revisit Womanist articles you have written where you utilized the 1983 definition but not *Coming Apart*. Interpolate *Coming Apart* and revise and publish your article if your conclusions change.
- (2) Read literature and wisdom from African-American lesbian Christian Womanist theologians like Renee L. Hill, Pamela R. Lightsey, Phillis I. Sheppard, Raedora C. Stewart, Emilie M. Townes, and Nikki Young and read them *because* you are willing to rely on their wisdom. These women have been coming to the rescue for some years, and are Christian Womanist theologians one can rely on. Perhaps by reading their works, and getting to know them personally in a consultation group, theologians working on becoming more open to the entire Black community, including lesbians, same-sex loving women, transsexual women, and queer women, will find their common humanity (including common vulnerabilities), need for mutual protection, and strength through interdependence. Christians in the consultation group could ask Buddhists about Brahma, the creator god, who visited the Buddha after his enlightenment, and ask about the varieties of deities in Buddhist cosmologies, to help the Buddhists re-claim (if ever lost), their relationships to spirit worlds.
- (3) Organize a consultation group with Black Buddhists queer women (Cheryl A. Giles, Ruth King, Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, Jasmine Syedullah, and angel Kyodo Williams to name five more),

¹⁴ To understand my development of the Theologies of the "Impure," and the Parable of Our Collective Survival, visit <http://www.stateofformation.org/2016/07/religious-freedom-to-discriminate-unraveling-archetypes-anachronism-and-apartheid-for-our-collective-survival/> for my five-part series of blog articles (Yetunde 2016d).

Black Buddhists/practitioners (Jan Willis, Myokei Caine-Barrett, bell hooks, Alice Walker, and there are many more), and Black Buddhist lesbians to experiment with nonalterity and intersubjectivity, as well as the limits of the Buddhist-Womanist and straight-queer Epistemological Process as honoring the work Delores S. Williams.

- (4) Imagine another consultation group consisting of the likes of Walker, Leath, Hill, Manuel, Lightsey, Williams, Syedullah, King, Sheppard, Williams, Giles, Willis, Stewart, Caine-Barrett, Townes, Young, Jones, Harris, hooks, Black feminist Traci C. West, and others.
- (5) Convene the consultation group, as Jones, Harris, and others did, in a way that eases hegemonic tendencies while also allowing for beneficial distinctions.

8. Conclusions

Foundational Christian Womanist theology, from a Black lesbian Buddhist hermeneutical lens, avoids the importance of Black lesbians to what being a Womanist means and how she comes to be. The consequence of this avoidance has incorrectly left Black lesbian literature and wisdom, and the reliance upon this literature and wisdom, out of the methodological foundation of Womanist Christian theology. The avoidance or absence of Black lesbian literature and wisdom in Womanist Christian theology created the impression that Black lesbians played no particular role in the development of a Womanist consciousness, has no particular wisdom to offer Black women in dehumanizing heterosexual relationships, has no particular wisdom to offer in the area of interpersonal and societal ethics, and leaves heterosexual women without the reliance on Black lesbian comrades in the fight for our collective survival against police brutality and lack of justice, and religious freedom to discriminate initiatives and laws. A brief methodological correction to this problem of Black lesbian exclusion can be corrected through interpolating *Coming Apart* into Walker's 1983 four-part definition. This methodological move is consistent with valuing interdependence, a concept shared by African-Americans and Buddhists, and the Buddhist dependent origination concept that links 1979 Womanist with 1983 Womanist.

Changing the methodology of determining what womanism means after decades of scholarship based on the 1983 definition, is likely to be met with some denial, resistance, and perhaps anger, but in the interest of our common humanity and vulnerabilities, if Womanism is still inspiring or has the potential to inspire Black women, then a change in the methodology to be inclusive of and reliant on Black lesbian literature and wisdom, as well as propounding an ethos of awakening our oppressors from ignorance and violence, will be worth the denial, resistance, and anger that comes from changing long-held views, norms, and practices. Williams's "wilderness experience" for liberation includes Transformations of Consciousness and an Epistemological Process. One Black sexually-fluid Buddhist-practicing woman (without claiming a Buddhist identity), Alice Walker, came to the rescue to help liberate Black women as a whole by coining the terms "Womanist" and "womanism." Shortly thereafter, consciousness was being transformed through Black Christian Womanist epistemological processes. Knowing Black same-sex loving women have been rescuing their Black straight sisters from racism, patriarchy, and homophobia from the start, will Black straight sisters become vulnerable enough to allow themselves to be rescued from heterosexism, homophobia, Christian hegemony, and patriarchy by Black same-sex loving women without becoming completely helpless about participating in the transformation of their own stereotypes? Will Black straight sisters rescue their Black same-sex loving sisters from homophobia, heterosexism, Christian hegemony, and patriarchy by being advocates for Black same-sex loving women in society, the Black community, and Black church communities? If one of the things that distinguishes a 2017 Womanist from a 1979 feminist is her commitment to the survival and wholeness of entire people, then all of us across the sexuality spectrum must stop, like the Samaritan, on our roads to Damascus and the Pure Land, and come to the rescue of each other, with our similarities and differences, when the pious leave us on the road, wounded, grieving, ostracized as impure or in despair. Through our work together we should be able to say we rescued each other because, "We love ourselves, regardless."

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