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Gather in my Name, my Skin, my Everything...

('Gather in my Name': Maya Angelou, 1974)

I dedicate this paper to my Mum, whose love, outlook on life and feminist thoughts and strength have guided me into safe waters.

The title of this article, 'Gather in my Name' has been borrowed from Maya Angelou (1974), whose 'tilt n' lilt' on spoken words from her life experiences and observations have reached out to me on so many occasions, helping me to reflect on my own experience. The title has been chosen to illustrate how a name can be 'gathered' by a person and begin to affect the way in which their lives are shaped or indeed from which angle they may be perceived within society, whilst exploring the 'contradictory intersections of personal and cultural standpoints' Orbe and Boylorn, (2014:15)

Within this paper, I intend to critically analyse sections of my personal lived experience of being a Black woman who has been loved, cared for and raised by a white Mum, and explore the borders on which we teetered, purposefully stepped within, and crossed, both with confidence and fear. All of which we have been both restrained and liberated by, based on our gender, class, identity, and skin colour. Parker and Song, (2001:3), allude to the interest and reactions from the historical and current perspectives on mixed race relationships and families, stating;

'Few social groups have evoked such dichotomous reactions, while simultaneously lacking a clearly articulated and self-defined social identity'.

In exploring this conversation between Mum and daughter I intend to bring to life the undercurrents of the personal and social understanding of belonging and its impact on individuals. This lends itself to the concept of positioning, and borders which consider belonging on many levels; 'geographic, historical, social, economic, and educational terms, as well as place within society based on class, gender, sexuality, age, and income. It is also about relationality and the ways in which one can access, mediate or reposition oneself, or pass into other spaces given certain other circumstances'. Boyce Davies, (1994:153)

These are obviously my personal reflections, and I do not intend to account for or identify with people in similar situations, rather I hope our conversation ignites discussion between others about their lived experiences and leads them to delve further into how Black feminist theory, can assist them in understanding their experiences. Throughout this piece, I will be using the name 'Mum' in my writing, as opposed to Mother, as this is the word that feels most familiar and comfortable to me as write, this is the word to me, which depicts the warmth of our relationship. During my journey and learning from my reading of Black feminist writing, I have recognised the importance of 'speaking out' with the familiarity of words, pertinent

to oneself or one's community and the recognition of 'owning' these words, politicises them. There is an additional element, which comes from personal experience and then writing about this and how you perceive it, which goes way beyond the linking of theory to practice, or any qualitative research project I have been involved in before, it is as if you are forming another layer to the research.

The methodological approach which I have adopted is supported by autobiographical methods, which evoke an opening up of voices, with the confidence to express oneself as part of the warding against the silencing indicative of racist and patriarchal structures, such as the houses of education, some of us work within. In the title of one of Lorde's, (1984) speeches, 'The Master's Tools will never Dismantle the Master's House', she provides us with the starting point of how we begin to dismantle, such structures, by moving away from the narrow and constrained structures created by the majority, to enable us to have a much wider lens from which to choose the picture which we strive to paint.

The article is born from a conversation that has already taken place, back in 2012, which my Mum and I were very privileged to take part in together. The conversation presented at the Feminist Conference, Femigra, in Barcelona, considered our life journey together as women, mother, and daughter, Black and white. Joined together, we explored our identities within this relationship and its boundaries from the inside out and the outside in. The response from the audience at the international conference was heart-warming, where it became evident that our words touched others and were understood fully by other mothers, daughters, sons, and fathers. It was this that gave me the impetus to discuss this further.

My intention initially was to split the conversation up to analyse it further for the purpose of this article, however, having pondered over this, I have now decided that the conversation must be read as a whole in the first instance, as in this format it is powerful and demonstrates the patterns of our lived experiences, from the expected to the unexpected. This of course depends on your personal experience as the reader, some may have experienced this, witnessed this over time, whereas other people may never even consider that others experience such treatment and that what can be said in a moment, can scar for a lifetime.

Gather in my Name

I say...

'This performance will give you a synopsis of our lived experiences, the title has been borrowed from Maya Angelou to illustrate how a name can be 'gathered' by someone and begin to affect the way in which they live their life.

An example of this is when someone 'speaks our family name' their view of my Mum changes.... We can't count the amount of times her Nigerian married name has created interest and discussion. We could almost turn the title 'Gather in my name' around to say, 'Gather in my Skin' as our skin, our 'envelope of colour' is what determines how we are perceived in the public space, and in the eventuality, that we might migrate across a variety of borders.

This is a performance of a conversation between my white mother (Joyce) and myself, Gabi. We will begin to deconstruct and discuss with you the complexity of the term 'intersection' or 'intersectionality' which are the words used to describe when multiple oppressions intersect. Together, these cause a greater impact on an individual than if considered 'side-by-side'. The concept of multiple oppressions combined, layered and working against an individual at the same time, clearly equals a greater impact, than when 'received' singularly. There are many dynamics within the concept of 'intersection', migration, gender, racism, sexism, disability, sexuality and class, however, within the time constraints of this performance we will be focussing on aspects of these which encapsulate the space and place within the dynamics of our relationship.

The performance also uses the idea of 'migration' and 'borders' as metaphors to explore what Carol Boyce Davies describes as the 'in between space that is neither here or there'. (1994 :1). This 'in between space' is interchangeable; as we as black and white women, related, migrate between the borders we choose to be in, or find ourselves in, by the definition of our chosen relationships. This also applies to the relationship between my Mum and Black African Dad. By this we mean that even though the individual's 'space and identity' remains intact, the borders that each of them travel through will be shaped by their connectivity and also as an individual will be perceived differently in each 'space'.

If you can..... try to appreciate the inner coping mechanisms required to adapt into each 'space'.....this would be dependent on many aspects of your identity; such as class, sexuality and disability.

Mum says...

An example of this is when I was recently at the swimming baths watching my grandsons with my son-in-law, Dave, who is also white. Afterwards a woman

approached me and said, "Are you Dave's mum?" I said, "No I'm Gabi's mum, and she replied "Oh, I wouldn't have put you two together".

This is a classic example of Race being the all-encompassing factor, which overpowers logic and reason and allows for oppressive comments to be made freely. This woman's identification and her belief that she had the right to question who I was – on the presumption that the colour of one's skin almost determines one's lineage. By this I mean that age, other identifying features, and characteristics do not appear to be relevant or even considered---- Race takes the place of all reason.

I say...

This is just one more of the many similar experiences which we have travelled through. Just picture this.....my mother being questioned by a complete stranger... Being questioned about her link, her relationship, her history with her daughter? Mum who has travelled through the conception, the nurturing of me in her womb for 9 months, safely supporting me across the entwined borders that run between us as a White Mother and Black daughter for 43 years, only to arrive into yet another 'space' in the 20th century. The same 'oppressive gaze' was again being used as a tool of regulation through inconsistent processes of recognition and misrecognition. Here, I am reminded of Sojourner Truth's (1851) words which transport me to the numerous times I have had to assert, 'ain't I my mother's daughter and my mother had to repeat, 'ain't I the mother of my daughter'.

Mum says...

In late pregnancy, I visited a close cousin, who told me that she didn't want me or my future child to visit her anymore...the racism that I had already experienced by being in a relationship with Gabi's father already told me that this was due to me carrying a Black child. Here is a clear example of borders 'entwined' between my daughter; my new born daughter at that. Siyad,(2011) says;

'There is always a kind of doubleness to that experience, and the more places you have been to, the more displacements you've gone through, as every exile does'.

It could almost be considered as 'a dual intersection' - not only am I surrounded by the oppression faced because of my gender but also from 'within', within my body, my being, my child. As, in this moment, in my cousin's house I experienced exile; the combined effects of my own and my unborn daughter's oppression reminded me of the words of Trinh Minh-ha (2011) come to mind,

'But their country is my country. In the adopted country, however I can't go on being an exile or an immigrant either. It's not a tenable place to be. I feel at once more in it and out of it. Out of the named exile, migrant, hyphenated, split self'.

This was my body, my womb - my daughter's home, and yet it was constructed as an untenable place.

I say...

It is through our discussions and work on this performance that we have come to recognise that my Mum was displaced – she was neither in the place of the white woman or the black woman. Let me explain this to you – the envelope of my Mum’s ‘whiteness’ was now tinged, and in the ‘gaze’ of her white cousin, ‘dirtied’ with Blackness. The pregnancy represented a betrayal of whiteness. The conceptual lens of intersectionality, indeed multiple intersectionality comes to life..... sexism twice..... racism twice..... class oppression twice. The location of intersection is the exiled womb, skin, placenta, and umbilical cord – in other words the two in one body.....and let me be clearthis has nothing to do with biology!!! Being a Black female... a mixed-race woman... also known as a ‘Mulatto’, which in itself carries its own oppression and which dates back to slavery. At this time slave owners could demand a higher price for their slaves depending on how ‘light’ or ‘dark’ your ‘mulatto’ was and encouraged multiple rape of Black women by white men in order to produce ‘lighter skins’. My Mum and I intersect in the space of racism - because of her role as a mother to a black child she treads a particular border of racism. During our discussions to create this performance it became apparent that there are similarities and differences which were shared in our position on the border. Doing this performance has given us a space, a platform to draw on, and share as mother and daughter with you the audience our lived experience, and allowed us to re-trace the steps we have walked together and individually. Using the standpoint of our ‘subjugated knowledge’ Patricia Hill Collins words, have enabled our lived experience to form the basis of an academic presentation in an International Conference.... and for that we thank you.

Gather in my name emerged from my reading of Black feminist theory. Black feminist theory is built on the foundations of giving voice to the minority or the silenced and it makes no apologies for using such familiar terms. It is these familiar terms that have forged me to read on and encouraged me to find the words which echo my own life experiences in what I write. The use of such words has enabled me to connect with Black Feminist theory pushing me forward to continue and grapple with such complex ideologies. I must point out, that the term 'familiar' does not mean I view these words as lesser, less academic, or less theoretical. Indeed, to write and create theories which speak out and allow people to recognise themselves within them is complex and must be applauded. Updike (2009:19), explores the role of the writer in this task beautifully, in his quote of Pascal;

‘When a natural discourse paints a passion or an effect, one feels within oneself the truth of what one reads, which was there before, although one did not know it...for he has not shown you his own riches, but ours.’

Pascal captures the moments when my Mum and I discovered and recognised ourselves when reading about the theory of Intersectionality, which Crenshaw (1989) first shared with us. I am fully aware that in the academic field my thoughts around this way of speaking to, and writing of, material which is familiar, may be viewed as not being 'academic' or indeed 'non-theoretical', in that it transgresses formal and traditional representations and constructions of what is 'legitimate' and

viewed as academic writing. Here I challenge this concept of the 'ownership' of words, with what I now recognise to be the 'white patriarchal' ownership of words, the movement which didn't accept or rather tried to prevent Black feminist theory from emerging, and so I choose to re-claim them back.

The need to be able to use words which we feel comfortable with is crucial to freedom in its entirety. To be able to use one's name freely, without judgement or oppressive gaze, is not a given to all. The power of a given name can transcend human rights; by creating difference, division, and the presumption of one's identity and their emotional or intellectual ability, all used to formulate distance between people. Add to this 'other elements' such as difference of skin colour, age, hair type, sexuality and the presumption of one's perceived social and economic status the power begins to enact and limit the choices of particular individuals and /or groups, which if not acknowledged or challenged can dangerously become the norm. The writing of *Gather in my Name*, began with discussions around our name and the 'mystery' of a Nigerian name belonging to a white woman and encouraged my Mum and I to begin to comprehend what we had been experiencing for decades, but didn't have the theoretical knowledge or the language with which to express our thoughts, nor did we realise why this was happening. This wasn't to say that we were uneducated, rather that when you experience oppression, discrimination and racism, the mechanisms of these are indeed to make you believe that you are at fault and have caused this yourself and so self-blame is often intrinsically linked to the lived experience without even being aware of it.

Mirza, (1997:4), discusses the importance of names, in the context of a 'place called home', where she describes Black feminism as a 'spontaneous yet conscious coalition... a meaningful act of identification. In this 'place called home' named Black feminism, we as racialized, gendered subjects can collectively mark our presence in a world where Black women have for so long been denied the privilege to speak; have a valid identity of our own, a space to 'name' ourselves'.

As mentioned earlier, this article is based personal experience and my understanding that along life's journey, the chore of carrying the load of the intersecting components of being a Black, mixed race woman working in Black feminist scholarship and what additions they may bring to our identities is complex and can be arduous. Nayak, (2014:9) names this as the 'unexplainable weight' in relation to '...racism and those other weights of oppression that press down on Black women'.

My rationale for writing about this is simple; Black Feminist theory has provided me with concepts to begin to understand my lived experience. The words which I have read relating to these theoretical concepts have awakened the knowledge of the 'invisible weight' which we carry within ourselves, that is sometimes hidden because we do not have the words to explain, we just continue to cope. hooks, (2000) describes the 'coming to consciousness', as the recognition of oneself. For us this was unearthed through my reading of Black Feminist theory, followed by discussions to share this new knowledge with my Mum and reading together. The process was

long and emotional, and deepened by the performance and acceptance and agreement from others and now from writing this article.

The exploration of our lives, has unearthed what could be described as the 'untouched' segments of our lives, segments, which were buried by their association with hurt, shame and the heavy weight 'silencing the truth'. Black feminist theory has enabled us together to open this discussion up, allowing me to further reflect on this with my Mum. Norris, discusses the benefits afforded to those who use Black feminist theory and are 'often marginalised [and] are provided with a platform in which they have their voices heard and 'amplified', which enables their individual experiences to be captured, while moving away from a monolithic perspective'. Norris, (2013:92)

Black feminist scholarship has provided me with the theoretical framework to support the reflection of my biographical memories. It has also provided me with what can only describe as a warm familiarity, in terms of recognising myself, which then gave me the prompt to explore and delve into our lives further, without feeling the need to 'fit' with what is expected, but to have the courage to explore anti-racism in the context of our lived experience. Orbe and Boylorn, (2014:15), expand on this further;

'I am free to be able to express the '...lived experience of a presumed 'Other' and to experience it viscerally.'

The methodological implications of performing a personal relationship could be questioned by some in research. However, the process of discussion which included the production of differences in terms of each of our experiences as Mum and daughter helped us both reflect and cement our memories and experiences. In other words, our sharing of memories and analysing them openly and honestly with each other, and then communicating this to others, made the recollection of the memories a purposeful, an experience that I can only describe as a re-claiming of power, over our own lives, which we now know was so important for us to do and I think enriched the performance. The reality of living the research gave us inner confidence, our social transformation became an integral part of the research. There was the added strength of having each other alongside as I spoke so openly about my life and she about hers. However, the realisation that others recognised these differences was a central part to this research. Knowing that within the audience there were people who were transforming as we spoke, recognising the implications of their actions to others, and what they may have experienced unfold and so recognising themselves and others in what we shared.

Updike (2009) resonates the importance of this;
'We must write where we stand;
wherever we do stand, there is life;
and an imitation of the life we know,

however narrow, is our only ground.'

Here Updike's words help me to recognise my own experiences. Linking the 'writing where we stand' to the speaking out where we stood that day in Barcelona, where there was life. I now see that speaking out contributes to the transformation required and helps make the process so much more meaningful as well as being powerful, it can be life changing.

At the beginning of the conversation we begin to describe my families space and place, when my Dad arrived from Nigeria to the U.K. in the 1960s to study at a time when it was widely accepted that there was a need for reinforcement in the U.K. in terms of supporting the workforce. Whilst the 'welcoming' of migrants across the borders was thought to be beneficial to the re-building of the labour market during the economic crisis, the welcome was not extended 'on the ground'. By this I mean that his presence may have been welcomed, (by some), in terms of possible employment, but the expectation was not for him to form a relationship and have a family here, this is where the 'segmentation and differentiation' was evident. His inclusion in the U.K. workforce, was not extended into the U.K. society. This meant that the hostility he faced was experienced externally from society, based on racist presumptions, and internally from within his 'adopted' family, my Mum's family.

My Mum, a white working class woman, had evolving values, in terms of mixed communities from her work with overseas students and her travel abroad. Her experience, was in some cases a complete contrast to that of her friends and colleagues who followed the route expected of some women back then. These experiences were not familiar to the way in which my mum was raised by her parents, who were very traditional and working class and who had never travelled out of the U.K. These were the values she was expected to hold. Of course, tradition and social expectations can sometimes stand in the way and conflict with the values we are raised with. My Mum's family and my grandparents, who could be classed as the members of society who were threatened by Black people entering the U.K. the threat heightened even more so, with the concern that Black people could infiltrate not only the boundaries of their Country, but also the boundaries of their families, when they began relationships with their (and the nation's) 'white' daughters. This is a difficult thing to write and admit, as my Nana and Grandad were wonderful and truly loved my Mum, my sister and I, and supported us all during my childhood, I have fond memories of them. However, I now know as an adult, and through the unspoken words that my Mum finds difficult to 'speak', that at times their love for her and their intolerance of my Dad may have been suffocating for her. My sister and I, living the experience of the 'mixed relationship creation', that being 'not quite white and not quite Black', teetering on the line of inclusion and exclusion within our society, not knowing where we belong or if we 'fit'. This, alongside my Mum, who was also trying to 'fit in' to her new role as the white Mum to Black children, and dealing with the different treatment from her own family, given the changes. Boyce Davies, (1994) describes this as 'Migratory subjectivity', the 'translation of the process of inclusion and exclusion across the borders of oppressive social constructions'.

My exploration of the concept of, 'subjugated knowledge' within the conversation provides me with the understanding of our lived experience, the feeling of one being unable to 'breathe' the words of one's experience, let alone say them, that feeling of being 'squashed', unable to be heard. This combines well with the 'matrix of domination', an ideology which links closely to intersectionality Crenshaw, (1989) by its exploration of oppression and its individual components such as race, gender, class, which are all presumed to be interconnected. Within the journey of discussion and later the preparation of our conversation, my Mum and I began to deconstruct and discuss the complexity of the term 'intersectionality'. The concept of multiple oppressions combined, layered, and working against an individual at the same time, which together, equals a greater impact, than when considered singularly. There are many dynamics within the concept of intersection, migration, gender, racism, sexism, disability, sexuality, and class. Crenshaw, (1989)

Boyce Davies, (1994:1), discusses the interchangeable 'in between space that is neither here or there', which the women in our family found themselves to be in. How we were viewed, was dependant on what space we were in, the margins we found ourselves on, and the space we occupied together or alone depended on the experience we had. (hooks, 2000). Having had the pleasure of meeting Carole Boyce Davies at a recent conference and reading her new book *Caribbean Spaces: Escapes from the Twilight Zones* I was comforted to read in an interview she gave on the book, the importance which she links to the 'particularities' which are specific to one's own experience of migration and the history of it. Boyce Davies (2014) states, 'These have to be reconnected as family stories remain isolated unless we are able to bring back some of those connecting narratives and memories into the contemporary realities that we continue to create'. I could easily recognise myself and my Mum in what was being said and how our reconnection had strengthened our relationship and placed our past in our present.

The relationship between my parents, my white British Mum, and Black African Dad was at the time more uncommon, but this has steadily increased within society as the borders have become more entwined. However, it is important to me that the impact of being a child within a mixed relationship is recorded repeatedly, no matter how familiar the mixed-race relationship becomes within society, so as to 'connect our narratives and memories' and explore the uniqueness of our lived experiences. It is this connection that clarifies that even though the individual's 'space' and 'identity' remains intact, the borders that each of them travel through will be shaped by their connectivity. Also as an individual they will be perceived differently in each 'space'. The connections made between the years, brings about an element of strength and survival between a group of people who are perceived as different. Hill Collins touches on this when she talks of 'Additive models of oppression [which] are firmly rooted in the either/or dichotomous thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought. One must be either Black or white in such thought systems - persons of ambiguous racial and ethnic identity constantly battle with questions such as "what are you, anyway?" Hill Collins, (1990:221)

“If you can..... try to appreciate the inner coping mechanisms required to adapt into each ‘space’, this would be dependent on many aspects of one's identity; such as class, sexuality and gender”.

“In our family experience, the notion of the ‘white supremacy’ is the tool which is used to regularly override the role of my Mum's identity and that of her Black children.”

As mentioned earlier, throughout my childhood it became a regular occurrence for my sister and I to observe people not believing that our Mum was our Mum, they used to presume that she was looking after us, never believing that we were linked together, let alone, come from her body. So much so it became an unspoken joke, I use the word joke in a basic 'coping' sense rather than as it's literal meaning. Again, can you consider how this felt for us as toddlers, children having to regularly see and hear their mother having to present and re-present her identity as our mother on numerous occasions, this indeed was no laughing matter. I recall as a child we used to use humour as a coping mechanism, I recall my sister and I playing games and pre-empting, how long it would take us to convince the person on the reception desk of my mum's workplace that we were in fact their colleagues (my Mum's) daughters! It intrigues me that at this young age we had already learnt that we wouldn't be believed that our Mum was our Mum, since we were Black and she was white.

“No, I'm Gabi's Mum”, my Mum replies, “Oh, I wouldn't have put you two together”, replies the stranger”.

‘Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices’ Lorde, (1984:3)

Here Lorde asks us to not only challenge racism and oppression, but to face it. To dig deep within oneself and to ‘see whose face it wears’. In other words, small comments made such as the one made to my Mum above, are just as powerful and hurtful as the notion of Apartheid, the racial segregation used and accepted for centuries to separate Black and white people- yet delivered with what is presumed to be accepted subtly.

Deegan, (2008:108) draws attention to William's analysis of the 'inbetweenness' of being mixed race and her experience of 'being unacceptable to both races' and how

she 'experienced the paradox of being "betwixt and between" white and black groups'. This comment exemplifies this analogy, of 'not belonging' to either or.

"This is just one example of the many similar experiences which we have travelled through, which we will continue to travel through, which we will no doubt always have to explain. The repetitive questioning by complete strangers is one dimension of our lived experience, which others [Parents and their children] may never have to contemplate based on their skin colour and/or name. Our links, our relationship, the history of mother and daughter, questioned rather than accepted."

I refer to the additional 'load' I mention at the beginning of this piece, a load which contains the emotion one goes through when dealing with this on a regular basis throughout your life, the painful and oppressive load, that affects and shapes our lived experience.

A book which resonates with me in the visualising of the lived experiences of mixed race partnerships is Jackie Kay's book *Red Dust Road*, (2010). This was about Kay delving into her own history of her birth father and her parents mixed race relationship. In her review of Kay's book, Forna, (2010), explores the oppressive and racist complexities from the 'other side'. Touched to hear the honesty and sadness in the words Kay (2010:6), chooses to depict her feelings when she meets her birth father for the first time in Africa, "I am sitting here... evidence of his sinful past, but I am the sinner, the living embodiment of his sin". The concept of the 'living embodiment' intrigued me and I can see the transference of this concept to our situation the 'result' of the partnership of my parents and my sister and I as the living evidence of this both 'embodied' by the negative representation of Black skin. Looking up the meaning of the word 'embodiment', Roget, (2009) the words found which are linked (*in italics*) begin to formulate and develop external representations of us and our situation. My Mum's '*appearance*' as a white woman, her '*shade of colour*' noted as the 'norm', that is known as white. However, her '*establishment*' her body, forms a '*shaped*' and '*moulded structure*', which tells others, those close to her, as well as strangers, that she is pregnant with me. However, they are not yet able to see what is within and beneath as the '*moulded structure*' (her womb, her skin) shields me, so others are unaware of my '*appearance, my cast, my shade of colour, my arrangement of cells*', those which collectively present me as being Black. As demonstrated within our conversation, those who knew my Mum, could make their feelings well known and did so, as their rights to do this at the time were condoned within practice, legislation and enshrined in history as acceptable.

"In late pregnancy, my Mum was informed by a close family member that she didn't want my Mum or her future child to visit her anymore, not an uncommon conversation in the day. The racism that my Mum had already experienced by being in a relationship with a Black man had already prepared her for the fact that this was due to her carrying a Black child."

“My Mum's experience could almost be considered as ‘a dual intersection’, not only is she surrounded by the oppression faced because of her gender but also from ‘within’, within her body, her being, her child - Me.

As, in this specific moment, in a family members home, someone who was supposed to be celebrating the soon to be arrival of her first new born child, my Mum instead experienced exile; the combined effects of her own and her unborn daughter’s oppression.”

Barriteau, (2006:10), discusses the power of Black Feminist theory here;

‘Problematizing race and exposing how racist practices complicate all other social relations of power is a central organising principle of black feminist theorising’.

With the added complication of not being fully accepted within my father’s ‘Black’ family, this became an additional complex intersectional layer and could indeed therefore become sexism thrice.... racism thrice..... class oppression thrice and with the pregnancy representing a betrayal of Blackness. This transcended into everyday life as we grew up, a moment my Mum recalled was many years ago, when she was at work, proudly showing photos of her daughters and her manager looking at the photograph and saying; “aren’t they beautiful, I love picaninnies”.

“The location of intersection is the exiled womb, skin, placenta and umbilical cord – in other words the two in one body.....and let me be clear ...this has nothing to do with biology! “

My Mum and I intersect in the space of racism - because of her role as a Mum to a Black child she treads on the borders of the experience of racism. During our discussions on this aspect of our lives it became apparent that there are similarities and differences which were shared in our position on the border. Yet, this appears not to be considered or indeed accepted to be discussed so I put the question out there; Can a white woman experience elements of Black racism which are linked to her connection with her Black children? I know this question will be one of contention, as I am also aware and agree with Butterworth’s, (2007:231) view, ‘whiteness is privileged as the cultural norm; it goes unmarked. I argue that these examples of racism lived and felt are relevant and can and should be named as such, given that these are linked to race, identity, and skin colour, just as the racism which I have experienced as a Black woman. However, I think that there is that addition of an added layer which still exists today, that of white women and Black men, which is another area of discussion for another day.

Whilst I am fully aware that my Mum’s lived experience as a white woman, will differ to mine as Black woman, I am conscious of Nayak’s (2015:69) interpretation of Boyce Davies’s (1994), ideology on the topic of how experience is crucial to theory and

where she states... 'using experience not to displace, but to interact with theory, thereby using experience as a vital element in the process of formulating theory, rather than positioning experience in the place of theory. Here, Nayak is stressing that the experience of life, need not disrupt the foundations of current theoretical knowledge, rather it can only enhance or widen concepts within the field. This allows writers the freedom to explore difficult or undiscovered concepts, freely

Since the beginning of this journey, writing and then delivering the initial performance I have been led to and assisted in the consolidation of personal reflection. The need to consider this has become more apparent and is echoed by hooks (1993:2), when she discusses the empowerment of Black women who 'by necessity [have] threatened the status quo'. The personal recognition of the destabilisation of the 'status quo', has been illuminated to me, in the realisation of the elements and experiences of being a Black woman with a white Mum. I feel that I am privileged on the one hand, growing up in a household of three women where my speech was encouraged. Boyce Davies, (1994:22) discusses how 'speech and silence are central...to writers coming to voice as Black woman writers'. However, it is only in my self-development that I have realised the ability to express my physical and lived experience as a mixed-race woman. I knew it was different to that of my Mum as a woman, however I didn't have the words. I find it interesting that my Mum has had a different experience to that of her 'white' friends, being married to a Black man and having Black children. This combined with the fact that through this journey together we have realised that our experiences have been different and we have been open to the acknowledgement of this through our discussions in terms of how racism can infiltrate people's mindset. By this I mean that my Mum didn't have the knowledge or experience of the additional layer which I faced as a child and still face now as an adult. In other words, if she walked down the street alone, she blended in and her colour did not determine what people registered first as part of her identity. The judgement made at this single moment in time was 'accepted', viewed automatically as the 'norm', very different to my experience where my skin colour is used to 'place' me in a certain light, as a 'filter' which allows people to judge me before I even begin to speak.

On reflection, I think my Mum and Dad faced the near impossible in the hope that their relationship could succeed against the pressures they faced together and I applaud all those in mixed relationships who stood the test of time at the 'costs' of what they may have experienced. My personal feelings are that my parents 'parting ways', was almost expected before their relationship began with the pressures of the societal messages, that Black and white do not mix. They both struggled to continue to battle against the internal and external expectations of each other, their families, and cultures, which is not an expected ingredient used in the making of any relationship, which is hoped to stand the test of time. I must include the other oppressive gazes, that surrounded us later in life too, that of single-motherhood. This combination of single-motherhood plus white woman plus Black children creates another layer within this label. The intersection, of a woman who has no partner, was presumed as bad enough back then within the British society and the cultural norms.

However, being a white single mother to Black children, was the living proof of why Black and white should not belong together! This vision emulated the very essence of why one should not cross the cultural borders. Although, at the time we may not have had the words to express these experiences, we certainly know how they felt. I now know that these experiences, strengthened us, cemented us and made us more determined, as women together facing the world.

My Mum and I have had the opportunity together to share the realisation that I had different life experiences based on my ethnicity and identity and that no matter how much love my Mum had for me she could never have altered how others perceived me. As a parent, I now realise how hard this must be to comprehend, with the additional knowledge that other parents do not have to consider this extra layer because their children are not Black. You don't receive a book on this topic, in your 'goodie bag' from the hospital as you leave - who prepares you for this as a white mum to Black children?

During our discussions, I have had the opportunity to critically analyse and reflect on my understanding that as a young person I didn't realise that my Mum had walked a different path. Her experience of not only protecting my sister and I from the 'external' racism we faced because she was the Mum of Black girls, but also the 'internal' racism that she had faced being shunned from the moment her family knew about her relationship with my Dad alongside the non-acceptance of my Mum from my Dad's family, no matter how hard she tried to become accepted.

Writing this piece has helped me to understand the complexities which my family faced growing up together. Orbe and Boylorn (2014), note how 'auto ethnography or narrative ethnography, [is] a bridge between... cultural curiosities and personal lived experience'. hooks (1993:189) illuminates this further, by highlighting that the journey of self-discovery is not without its drawbacks, and that in fact to 'speak out about certain pains is to remember them'. This is true, an emotional but important journey of recognition and I am so pleased that we have had the opportunity to wander through our history, together.

'For thinkers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the emergence of mixed race children was an ominous portent of the genetic deterioration of the nation, and indeed human race itself'. Parker and Song (2001:3)

This is a powerful statement, which speaks of the 'dilution' which Black people are viewed as bringing to society, in their co-parenting with white people, known in some parts of the world as miscegenation, a notion which still to this day, 'hangs heavy' on the shoulders of mixed race people, adding to the 'load' already being carried, based on difference.

The need to discuss this early on with young people is crucial to preparing our society and equipping the young to understand the complexity of being mixed race. I was overjoyed to see the concept of intersectionality being explored in Azzarito's paper, (2009) and it being related to young people and their education. However, at

the same time I was saddened, that we as educator's still do have the choice and power about what theoretical lens is used to consider and explore education through and having this choice can limit the education delivered to us and omit certain versions. This theoretical insight would have helped shaped this part of my identity much earlier on, and I think should have been present in my education. My reflection of this is linked to what hooks (1996) describes as 'internal rage', a rage which fuels my writing and helps me make sense of my lived experience through this piece.

Black feminist theory has helped to make sense of the 'lived experience'. Lack of knowledge can encourage self-blame to seep in and linger throughout one's life, turning the questioning and the blame inward, rather than outwards. One of the solutions which has been discussed over the decades is the need for children to be equipped with the tools to understand life. Children naturally question, asking the questions, who am I, where do I belong and where do I fit in? These are questions which need to be answered honestly and with the opportunity to be given answers from varied sources, not just the majorities, to enable them to move forward. This notion of moving forward to understand oneself is illustrated by hooks, (1995:133), where she states;

'To transgress I must move past boundaries, I must push against to go forward. Nothing changes in the world if no one is willing to make this movement ... to transgress we must return to the body'

Being able to have the freedom to discuss such topics in a safe environment is crucial, as being a Black woman we must 'theorise in order to live'. Allegranti (2013:394) considers the use of multiple feminist approaches; 'biological, phenomenological, post structural, psychoanalytical, and post humanist and performative scholarship' in her study of the complexity of sex and gender and suggests that, 'These discourses contest nature/nurture, male/female, Body/mind dualisms, and take the political and ethical view that bodies are not neutral; that sex and gender, being a woman or a man are both socially and biologically constructed forms of identity (similar to class and race) that are acquired and learned through socio-cultural regimes of discipline and inter-subjective bodily practices'. Here Allegranti, demonstrates the physical changes within how we perceive the body, which links directly into the underpinning mechanisms of Black feminist theory. The body is not just born Black, it is then shaped and categorised into what is expected of Black body to represent; its function, expectations, movement, past experiences shape all predications. Therefore, we need to ensure the communication of our 'lived experiences' are discussed and shared and negative concepts challenged through writing and speaking out.

I hope this paper has given you, the reader, thoughts about the complexity involved in what has been shared. My intention is not to generalise the experience of mixed race individuals or families, my hope is that our experience resonates with those who may recognise elements of themselves [or another] within the words read. The

personal experience of one's journey has been enlightening, reading words which aid in the recognition of self- identity, providing me with the required knowledge to understand my journey and to equip me with the tools to continue, with a deeper insight into what I have and am experiencing. If just one other person, could gain some further understanding from what I have shared, then this would be amazing as I truly believe it makes you stronger, providing a second layer of skin, supported, and pitted with knowledge, which helps to prepare you to face what comes your way.

It's learning how to take our differences and make them strengths.
Lorde (1984:2)

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