BACK TO AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE CULTURAL RECONNECTION EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

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This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled:

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Dedication

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of 18 African American women who went to Kenya, East Africa as part of a Cultural Reconnection delegation. A qualitative narrative inquiry method was used for data collection. This was an optimal approach to honoring the authentic voices of African American women. Eighteen African American women shared their stories, revelations, feelings and thoughts on reconnecting in their ancestral homeland of Africa. The literature discussed includes diasporic returns as a subject of study, barriers to the return including the causes of historic trauma, and how Black women as culture bearers have practiced overcoming these barriers by returning to the ancestral homeland. The data revealed that Cultural Reconnection delegations created an enhanced sense of purpose and a greater understanding of their roots and themselves. Participants further experienced a need to give back, participated in womanism, and gained a greater spiritual connection to their ancestors. Stereotypes and myths were dispelled. Leadership skills were improved. Participants gained a clear vision of the next step in their personal lives, an overall greater understanding of themselves. This dissertation offers significant insights into the nature and benefit of ancestral returns, and the cultural components of leadership and change, especially for diasporas who were involuntarily stolen from their native lands. The electronic version of this dissertation is available in open access at AURA, Antioch University Repository and Archive, http://aura.antioch.edu/ , and OhioLINK ETD Center, http://etd.ohiolink.edu

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Chapter I: Introduction to the Study

> Tonight my friends I find in being Black a thing of beauty; a joy, a strength, a secret cup of gladness; a native land in neither time nor place – a native land in every Negro face! Be loyal to yourselves; your skin, your hair, your lips, your southern speech, your laughing kindness—are Negro Kingdoms, vast as any other! Accept in full the sweetness of your Blackness—not wishing to be red, nor white, nor yellow, nor any other race or face, but this. Farewell my deep and Africanic people be brave. And keep freedom in the family! (O. Davis, 1961/1989, p. 81)

This research examines the lived experience of African American women who participated in Cultural Reconnection delegations that included a visit to and social interaction with people who reside in their African ancestral homeland. Cultural Reconnection is an initiative based in the Pacific Northwest and centered on organizing visits by African American women to Africa. This initiative was grounded on a set of culturally centered principles applied while exploring cultural identity and commonality with people of African descent. The culturally centered principles that actively guide the process of Cultural Reconnection are: cultural specificity, collective action, ongoing shared dialogue, and ancestral acknowledgement. In the decade between 2000 and 2010, the process was replicated several times with 73 participants who traveled to Kenya; this experience may inform the kind of healing and reconciliation that addresses generations of cultural disconnection. Cultural Reconnection is meant to provide a methodology for returning to the ancestral homeland when people who come from multiple African origins face cultural disconnection generations after ancestral removal.

Kenya, East Africa was chosen as the geographical location of the Cultural Reconnection because of the author's familiarity with the nation and surrounding areas. Preexisting relationships with families and communities both in Kenya and the United States enabled me to function as an organizer and event facilitator. It should be noted that we could have entered any country on the African continent and considered ourselves having returned to the ancestral

homeland. Africans were affected by the slave trade regardless of where they lived in Africa, as Africans were abducted throughout the continent (Kuryla, n.d.). While the majority of African Americans may originate from those abducted to the Americas, a much longer history of enslavement stretched to the east in Asia and across the Sahara to North Africa and beyond. the trade and its impacts truly spanned the continent (Klein, 1990).

This study explores the significance of the Cultural Reconnection experience and its role in building personal, local, and global capacities. As an African American woman, I chose to use an emic perspective to my research. Black women have exemplified leadership in both mainstream multicultural society, and in their homes and communities (Collins, 1990; Hine & Thompson, 1998; Reagon, 1986). Strengths prevalent in African centered culture include leadership that has shaped African American communities (Azibo,1991; Hilliard, 1998; Kambon, 1992), largely due to Black women's socialized and inherited cultural tendency to work in highly relational and collective ways (Steady, 2007). From Sojourner Truth to Dorothy Height, African American women have been utilizing relational strategies to access skills and resources and thrive successfully within the mainstream. I was inspired by W. Joye Hardiman's lecture, *From Ancient Kemet to Tacoma: Sisters Holding Up Their Part of the Sky*, presented at the 8th annual Kemetic Studies Conference in Tacoma, Washington in August, 2013**.** Hardiman specifically, stated that her research including ancient Khemet, Ethiopia, Kenya, Brazil, Cuba, Senegal, and Gambia shows that there is longevity in Black women sisterhood and leadership.[1] Dr. Hardiman's research reminds us of the cultural commonality and inherent connectedness that Black women share globally. This reminder caused me to consider the strength of comradery and relationship building between women of African descent wherever they may exist in the world.

[1] These remarks are paraphrased from notes I took at this session.

The presupposition in organizing Cultural Reconnection delegations was that women professionals have increased expendable incomes and a desire to travel and are committed to realigning with the roots of their cultural identity. Hence, this study is about the impact on women who chose to initiate an inquiry into their cultural identity and who later agreed to reflect on that process for this dissertation research.

Further to the concept of sisterhood as connectedness among women of African descent, I was inspired by the idea of *womanism,* a term coined by Alice Walker (1983) in *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*. Hudson-Weems (1997) substantiated the concept further when she pursued a description associating,

> a true Africana womanist [with] (1) self-namer, (2) self-definer, (3) family-centered, (4) in concert with males in struggle, (5) flexible roles, (6) genuine sisterhood, (7) strength, (8) male compatible, (9) respected, (10) recognized, (11) whole, (12) authentic, (13) spirituality, (14) respectful of elders, (15) adaptable, (16) ambitious, (17) mothering, and (18) nurturing. (p. 66)

Dillard (2006), in her explanation of endarkened epistemology, reaffirmed my experience that for African American women, womanism is an embodiment of the authentic leadership they demonstrate. In addition, I was inspired by the concept of *self definition* advanced by Dillard:

> Self-definition forms one's participation and responsibility to one's community . . . Through such praxis, an alternative ideology and cultural meaning for research is articulated, one that reflects elements of both traditions, a both/and standpoint (Collins, 1990) deeply rooted in the everyday experiences of African American women. In the narratives, even with the variability that was articulated in the unique individual versions of who we are as Black women researchers, coherence is realized in our collective refusal to be reduced to someone else's terms: To give voice to silenced spaces as an act of resistance. (pp. 18–19)

It was the concept of sisterhood (Reagon, 1986) that led me to appreciate the insight and familiarity in the culture that addresses the gender dynamics where women are known to have a uniquely enriching experience in the absence of men. As a result, cultural reconnection intended to examine the cultural strengths of women. While I believe that men would benefit

tremendously from a cultural reconnection practice, the focus on women in a gender specific study may offer unique cultural insights of discovery and reckoning.

Here in Chapter I, I share a personal account of experiences that led me to work on the Cultural Reconnection delegations and the organization now known as African American Kenyan Women's Interconnect (AAKEWO). I then review the purpose of the study; describe the rise of research and practice about the returns of diaspora[2] populations globally; and focus on returns to Africa, including a section about the special dilemmas for return by those who left the homeland against their will and by force. Next, I identify the core research questions; describe the significance and implications of the research, including its limitations, and finally, I outline the chapters planned for the dissertation.

Setting the Stage: My Own Cultural Reconnection Journey

Cultural reconnection is a journey that began for me in living for more than a decade in Kenya, East Africa. Later, in 2000, I organized a process of reconnecting African American women with Kenyan counterparts whom I had met over the years, while practicing cultural work in Kenya. My intention was to lead them to their ancestral homeland to gain a deeper understanding of their ethnic reference as African Americans. Participants were exposed to a culturally relevant looping process that was built from modest beginnings in ways that Kolb (1984) describes: learning by being facilitators of their own and others' learning cycle.

At a kick-off luncheon that was held in honor on our first visit, a Kenyan elder was trying to understand where we originally came from in Africa. She assumed that we had been able to trace our roots, as author Alex Haley (1976) had famously done. I explained that very few

[2] In this dissertation, I make the word *diaspora,* lower case when referring generally to any "dispersal of a people from its original homeland" (Butler, 2001, p. 189). Upper case is used when reference is being made to a particular population so dispersed, as with the African Diaspora or Greek Diaspora.

African Americans would be able to trace their roots to their exact families and clans, due to inaccurate records that do not identify family lineages. “Oh,” she exclaimed, “you must be the stolen ones! Those who went missing in our family history and we mark the absence of.” This elder was telling me that not only did they look for their loved ones who had been stolen, but they missed their loved ones and kept them in their memory over centuries and generations. She explained how vulnerable families were, who did not know where or how to look for their loved ones. They remember the Stolen Ones when they are recalling their ancestral lineage (Arunga, 2010).

During the debrief that night, I recalled that before that moment, I had not heard such accounts from those who remained in the African ancestral homeland regarding the events of the exile. The vulnerability over the loss of loved ones was strong; those who remained in the African ancestral homeland had passed down accounts of the events surrounding the exodus. They were confirming that my ancestors were missed.

I often consider how this information came from the oral tradition of the people and was not seen in most history textbooks in the United States. I grew up under the pervasive assumption that my ancestors were sold off as slaves in a commercial transaction with the collusion of and without any compunction by Africans who remained there. That the families left behind grieved the loss of the disappeared I had not realized. I now reflect on how ludicrous it was to think that Blacks, Negroes, or Colored people could, by removal from their ancestral homeland, be transformed into a new race or ethnicity distinct from being African! My life was profoundly impacted by this elder’s story and I could see that she was processing these insights at the same time.

Sadly, many African Americans in the U.S. assume that being sold into slavery was merely trade for profit and that no one back in Africa cared that their loved ones were gone. Later in this chapter I will pause over the disquieting words of Richard Wright (1954) on this subject. This assumption is a source of misunderstanding that distances the African homeland from her Diaspora. Even the reference to the Stolen Ones bears a heartbreaking nuance of acknowledging the tragedy that created a disconnection between Mother Africa and those taken from her (Arunga, 2010).

The numerous slave trades, including those through the infamous Middle Passage and subsequent atrocities that have been inflicted on African Americans ever since, is referred to as the *Maafa*, a Kiswahili word for a great tragedy or the African holocaust (Ani, 1980/1994). The remembrance of the Maafa is an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of a series of continued atrocities that resulted in the disenfranchisement and the violent disparagement of people of African descent.

Previously, I did not have the language to explain my African identity in the Diaspora, other than through my obvious phenotype, the skin and the hair. Through this episode of recognition from the Kenyan elder, and many others experiences in Cultural Reconnection, I have come to understand where I fit in the greater African family. S. Hall (1990) recognizes cultural identity work as "an ongoing production" (p. 223) and defines cultural identity as being of "one shared culture, a sort of collective one true self . . . people with a shared history and ancestry" (p. 223). Nobles (1972/2000) and Zahan (1979) discuss the African concept of extended self, which is particularly illustrative of the Afrocentric spiritual/material ontology at work. Self in this instance includes all of the ancestors, the yet unborn, all of nature and the

entire extended community. This is consistent with African-centered thought known as *Ubuntu*: "I am because *we* are, therefore I am." (Mbiti, 1970, p. 141).

With time in Africa, my extended self was no longer defined by a racial skin and hair phenotype, but by a cultural connectedness to a shared ancestry. The Cultural Reconnection process may fill a void analogous to when some adopted children search for their birth parents and discover to their surprise that they are welcomed, cherished, and have been missed (cf. Gladstone & Westhues, 1998). Of course, there will be awkwardness in the initial meetings. But with both sides willing, the reconnection is an opportunity for reconciliation and healing for both. For me, tribal affiliations and vernacular languages held less significance than the sense of ancestral memory and the place of belonging that was articulated by the elder's story.

The Maafa brings out the remembrance of shared ancestors during their horrific sojourn since the exit from the African ancestral homeland (Ani, 1980/1994). *Sankofa* is an ancient Andinkra symbol of the Akan people of Ghana, whose accompanying parable advises: to know where you are going, you must look back to and understand your past, where you have been. These symbols are widely used in the African American community and are ones that have resounded my beliefs, spirit, and actions throughout my life's journey. The personal transformation that I experienced, embodied with these symbols of my cultural past, are best conveyed in the opening quote of this chapter, from the fictional African American orator, Purlie Victorious Judson, in Ossie Davis's (1961/1989) eponymous musical play.

In 2002, after our first cultural reconnection experience, I convened a Vision and Planning Team. Members of the team concurred that this experience was important enough to continue and extend our work of cultural reconnection. We decided to replicate the model for at least a decade, as part of an ongoing inquiry into the most optimal ways for a diaspora to conduct

a return to the ancestral homeland, particularly centuries after forced removal. Our connection with Africa was as an interconnector, transcending invalid and erroneous demarcations of geographical borders, languages, and tribal affiliations.

It became apparent that participants returned from the ancestral homeland transformed, just as I had been in my earlier times in Kenya. This seemed apparent in the galvanization that took place in their local communities and the role they played. They may have learned from participant observations and interactions that informed relationships built from the cultural reconnection experience. They may have been inspired by the small doable acts they observed in local African settings. Out of a community that was inflicted with the phenomenon described by Essed (1991) as everyday racism, this meant applying new ways of relationship building that offered hope for restoring self and collective efficacy. By relationship building, I am referring to productive ongoing conversations, shared experiences and modeling leadership between the women we traveled with as well as the women we met that inspired capacity building in both our communities. We thanked our Kenyan counterparts for the knowledge they shared, as well as for having preserved the ancestral homeland, and most of all, for welcoming us. In turn, our gratitude grew through substantial fundraising initiatives and the establishment of a 501c3 nonprofit called African American Kenyan Women's Interconnect (AAKEWO).

The Cultural Reconnection process definitely affirmed my self-efficacy as a woman of African descent, a visionary leader and a culture bearer. It enhanced the ways that I raised my family and embraced my extended family. It gave me the courage to be the cofounder of Cultural Reconnection delegations, and to convene the Vision and Planning Team. The experience changed my self-perception and gave me confidence as a practitioner of intercultural communications, collective action and collaborative processes. Also, retelling the story in my

book, *The Stolen Ones and How They Were Missed* (Arunga, 2010), published since our first delegation, has given me agency and enabled me to hone my skills as a paradigm shifter, story teller, and author. Comparing lessons about the collective trauma caused by the Maafa, helped to build sustainable capacity and opened the way for continued healing and reconciliation.

Cultural Reconnection participants experienced being the holders of collective cultural memories through engagement in ceremonies and symbolic representations that are felt in the heart and soul of the experience (Dillard, 2006). While I am just beginning to note the impact of Cultural Reconnection in how I built my personal local and global capacity, I can say undoubtedly, that my participation in the process has significantly impacted me. This motivated me to explore whether this was the case as well for other participants.

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the usefulness of returning to the ancestral homeland and what impact such journeys may have on one's life trajectory. As well, it examines the challenges to reconnection especially as these arise from the backdrop of racism and internalized oppression. Finally, the identification of strategies for healing and reconciliation has been explored. This study sought insight in the stories drawn from in-depth interviews about a culturally centered process. Stories may be used to process knowledge construction in culturally congruent ways (Champion, 2003). Through stories brought out in a narrative inquiry process, insights into the lived experience may empower participants and others to reach their fullest potential as they are shared with their ancestral relatives after so many years and centuries of separation.

Through the Cultural Reconnection process, I was able to find a proactive identity model based on cultural strengths rather than being reactive to oppressive forces. I am interested in

capturing the essence of the cultural strengths that were sparked as a result of the identity work that is emerged through the Cultural Reconnection process.

Research on the Practice of Diaspora Returns

In multicultural societies, people in search of a deeper understanding of their cultural origins may turn to their ancestral homelands for insight. This is what my work for the past 30 years—and this dissertation—are about. The literature notes the striking diversity of peoples who seek to return to their ancestral homeland as a way of strengthening cultural identity. Personal efficacy and empowerment may be gained by returns ranging from permanent repatriation to brief holidays, and even through virtual visits to the imagined homeland through art, film, and literature. All are considered return mobility (Christou, 2006). Tsuda (2009) defines the "ethnic return . . . when the mobility involves the second and subsequent generations, including historically remote ancestral returns" (p. 452). The present unprecedented level of human migrations (Bongaarts, 2009), including displacements from war zones and environmental refugees—those who in ever greater numbers flee rising sea levels and more and more severe weather due to climate change (N. Myers, 2002)—suggests that, for the present century and beyond, the need for reconnection will only grow. Thus, practicing and learning how to do reconnection right might change from an occasional privilege of a few, to a vital necessity of the human experience.

In reviewing the literature, I was struck by the number of ethnic groups from the United States who established a regular system of return to their ancestral homeland. The notion that one can move to a new homeland and then maintain allegiance to two nations appears to be widespread. I considered examples of return movements among a number of different ethnic groups. One, described and analyzed by Christou (2006) was the Greek American movement to

and from Greece. Christou describes this as an ever-varying dynamic in light of the changing immigrant populations in Greece. More recently, the experience has become more a multicultural and cosmopolitan exchange than a mere nostalgic return to the old country. Christou states:

> I use the term "return migration" to refer to this relocation process although in reality the migrants are not 'returning' to Greece since they actually never left in the first place. They are the American-born descendants of the first generation, the primary group that first migrated from Greece to the United States. (p. 833)

Such diasporic returns are found among many other ethnic groups who have emigrated to the United States, whether the trip back is made for nostalgia, genealogical investigations, or a deeper drive to reconnect with their lost identity. These reconnection travels have been seen among descendants of Armenian refugees (Crowley, 2013), Irish émigrés (Hughes & Allen, 2010; B. Walker 2007), Jews in relation to Israel (Kelner, 2010), among the Scottish Diaspora (Basu, 2001, 2004), and with Ukrainians (Khanenko-Friesen, 2015), to name but a few examples of what Newland and Taylor (2010) refer to, in their book title, as "nostalgia trade."

The desire for diasporic return can work both ways. Many countries, whose people left, often under duress of famine, poverty or social strife, now want to stay connected with their lost relatives. Lim (2012) refers to these home country sponsored efforts as "birthright journeys," (p. 59), describing how, in 1925, the San Francisco-based Japanese language newspaper *Nichibei Shimbun,* sponsored a three-month all-expenses-paid American study tour for *Nisei* (second generation Japanese) to Japan, a program known as *kengakudan*.

In January 2011, the government of Israel approved 100 million dollars in funding for birthright journeys over three years, enabling the nation to bring half of the world's Jewish young adults to Israel by 2013 (Lim, 2012). The Israeli government appears to have benefitted from this program in many ways. First, the state was able to inform Jewish people firsthand about the culture and lifestyle of Israel. Gradually building a sense of ownership and allegiance

to Israel showed that one really can have an allegiance to more than one country and develop fluid transnational ties that strengthen both homeland and resident countries. It appears that birthright is more amorphous and symbolic than overt. Lim further describes the Taiwanese government's "Love Boat" study abroad program for second, third and further generation Taiwanese students. In effect, the key to the program's value for the host country lies in the feelings of connection it creates between the homeland and the other participants.

An especially challenging demographic situation underlies Iceland's version of birthright journey support, the *Snorri* program. It is estimated that the North American Icelandic Diaspora greatly outnumbers those remaining in the aging population of Iceland itself. The director of Snorri states, "Without this program, the connection will eventually fade out. . . . You have to connect people with people to keep the relationship alive" (as cited in Lim, 2012, p. 61).

Just as Europeans and Asians have found it useful for both descendants and the home countries to see a return to their ancestral homeland, so too is it crucial that Africans in the Diaspora practice returns to their African ancestral homeland. To this —the special challenges of reconnection faced by a diaspora that came to be because of the long-ago involuntary emigration through kidnapping and enslavement, we now turn.

The African Returns

The focus of my work is about the cultural reconnection of African American women to the continent of Africa. An African American return and reconnection to the African ancestral homeland has long been advocated (Du Bois, 1903/2010; Shepperson, 1960). The dream and, sometimes, even the reality of return to the African homeland by its Diaspora, has existed for centuries, though severely impeded by the harsh barriers of colonialism, slavery, and White supremacy upheld by global hegemonic structures. Africans in the Diaspora have returned to

Africa since the 1700s for a variety of purposes: missionary work (Seraile, 2002), education, medical, diplomatic activity and, in a few cases, as intentionally permanent returnees. The resettlement of former slaves by Britain occurred in the late 18th century drawing Black colonists from the so-called "Black Poor" of London (Braidwood, 1994) and from freed Black loyalists after the American Revolution and also from Nova Scotia, as recently dramatized in the novel, *The Book of Negroes* (Hill, 2007). The founding of Liberia by African Americans is a well-known and ethically complex story (Clegg, 2004; Everill, 2012; Zuberi & McDaniel, 1995), but it is unambiguous evidence that African Americans, from the earliest days of the Middle Passage to well into the 20th century, have yearned for and attempted returns to escape the brutality of life under the grip of racialized terror both in the years before and after emancipation.

Numerous travel programs have taken people on tours to their African ancestral homelands through pilgrimages, study abroad and service learning programs. For example, Dawson (2000) began her travels to Africa as a student. Her first visit was part of Operation Crossroads Africa, a then 42-year-old program originally designed to promote understanding between homeland Africans and the African Diaspora through cultural exchanges. Years later, Dawson led many more student exchanges to Africa and considered more intentional ways to effectively take African Americans for cultural enrichment. Likewise, as the Peace Corps launched its humanitarian effort of international service, African American presence grew. Zimmerman (1995) notes that he "identified roughly 200 [American] Blacks who served as volunteers or administrators between 1961 and 1971" (p. 999).

In the last two decades, visiting Africa became a way to explicitly look at the tragic circumstances of the slave trade (Richards, 2005). Perhaps the most famous recent pilgrimage

was that of the first Black president of the United States, Barack Obama and his wife Michelle, which included a visit to the infamous "Door of No Return" in Senegal (Slack, 2013).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has established 16th century slave castles as World Heritage Sites as part of its Slave Route project (Schramm, 2007). Africans from the Diaspora are actively encouraged to return and visit these sites—and bring much of their foreign exchange currency into the country. Similarly, in relation to such efforts, have been initiatives like Ghana's Joseph Project, intended "to reconcile and unite the African peoples" (Ghana Joseph Project, n.d., para. 2). The project will be considered in more detail below, in discussing the legacy of Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah. Clearly, the drive is strong in Africa and its Diaspora to reconnect against the backdrop of what has been an intentionally obscured heritage, a journey racked with cultural amnesia, one that is far from easy, given the emotional costs of standing on the shore's edge where one's ancestors apparently suffered so!

The Special Dilemmas of Return

There is a need to pay close attention to the particular dynamics that surrounded the exit of Africans to the Diaspora when considering their descendants' return to the ancestral homeland. This was a forced emigration that served the economic purposes of the transatlantic slave trade, based on the robbery of Africa's most precious resources, her able-bodied people. The severe conditions of American slavery meant a protracted cultural disconnection from ancestral practices and homeland that was intentional. Memory did not erode but was purposefully destroyed. Hilliard (1998) presented six historic and widespread steps used to oppress Africans:

- African history and culture were suppressed and distorted.
- Practices of African culture were suppressed.

- White supremacy was taught in the schools, churches, the mass media, etc.
- All African social institutions within the larger society were categorically controlled by Western businesses.
- Systematic steps were taken to ensure that wealth could not be accumulated by Africans.
- Africans were physically segregated from Europeans. (paraphrased from p. 50).

I will discuss these strategies in more detail in Chapter II. Suffice it to note that the above description pertains to people of African descent both in the ancestral homeland as well as in the Diaspora. African Americans became part of new racial identifications whose origins rested almost entirely on American soil. Yet, as Huang, Haller, and Ramshaw (2011) point out, 99% of the total American population has an ancestral homeland elsewhere; even the most assimilated African American must acknowledge that their origins are from elsewhere.

It seems that the evolution of racial designations from "Negro" to "African American," have brought African Americans closer to a literal connection with Africa, and compelled them to re-think, reclaim, and associate their racial selves with a distinctive cultural identity. Depending on the time frame in US society, African Americans are also referred to as Black Americans, Afro Americans, Negroes and Colored people.

At this juncture, it may be appropriate to acknowledge the imposition of enslaved status, where African Americans were subjected to the incorporation of multiple ethnic mixtures through government sponsored practices that included controlled breeding using multiple ethnicities (especially European) while the dominant African ethnicity continued to be tracked using the legally imposed designation of the 'one drop rule' (Hollinger, 2005). Despite the fact that African Americans comprise multiple ethnic mixtures, in this research I am interested in the part of the person that is Black, which is considered the dominant part, based on the one drop

rule. Therefore, for purposes of this study, a disaggregation of the African part of one's identity is a major focus.

Longer standing has been the advocacy of reconnecting at least in mind and imagination. On the American side of the Atlantic there have been the movements of advocates like Garvey, and even before him, in the 19th century Back-to-Africa Movement (also called *Black Zionism*: see Jenkins, 1975). By 1911, Marcus Garvey who led the United Negro Improvement Association, was perhaps the most prominent leader to create a global movement for return to the ancestral homeland (J. Clarke, 1974; Martin, 1984; Rogers, 1955). While Marcus Garvey was born and raised in Jamaica, his Back to Africa movement made no distinctions among the Africans in the African Diaspora whose settlement resulted from the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Garvey's charismatic leadership awakened the Diaspora to a desire to associate, uphold and possibly return to their African homeland. Even though this movement was short-lived and a return did not actualize, it ignited in Africans of the Diaspora, hope of reconciliation. However, this international movement was historically significant and the inspired the further practice of return through our Cultural Reconnection delegations.

In 1976, Alex Haley wrote about his link to his African homeland family through lineage. This book, *Roots* (Haley, 1976) launched a massive movement of people in search of their ancestries. This even came to be known by the designation of *roots tourism* (Handley, 2006). One of the strategies that has been used to reconnect, short of actual travelling, has been DNA analysis, aimed at tracing African Americans' origins to particular areas, perhaps even villages of Africa (Salas et al., 2004). Numerous ancestral links between African Americans and enslaved descendants throughout the Western hemisphere that have African origins have been mapped through mitochondrial DNA matches showing definite and specific patterns of migration (Salas

et al., 2004). Yet, even when people are shown to be linked by DNA, what kind of relationship is prescribed after years of cultural amnesia? Cultural reconnection was motivated by the possibility of building upon established networks that would empower communities and build global capacities of common interest.

Healing and reconciliation was called for in 1952 for Africans in the Diaspora by Kwame Nkrumah, who was soon to become the first president on the continent of the first independent sub-Saharan African country, Ghana (Nkrumah, 1957). His comments can be seen as marking the beginning of self-determination for a post-colonial Africa. On the occasion of the independence of Ghana in 1957, Nkrumah again called for the return of the African Diaspora in order to "lay rest the disturbed spirits of our ancestors who have never known peace" (as cited in Finley, 2006, p. 17). Nkrumah spent much of his presidency working toward reconciliation of Africans both on the continent and in the African Diaspora. Indeed, there was a longstanding desire for reconnection on both sides of the Atlantic long before Nkrumah's call to return, that he awakened rather than created.

The Imagined Homeland

> I am not African because I was born in Africa, but because Africa was born in me. (Kwame Nkrumah, 1966, as cited in Animasaun, 2016, para. 8)

For African Americans, the ancestral homeland that I refer to is an *imagined-homeland*. This is because the ancestors were removed from whereabouts that cannot be confirmed specifically, allowing for a reconstruction of memory and of the past (Powers, 2011). For African Americans, the ancestral homeland is constructed by memories and commitment long before any intention to return. The work that is conducted in the ancestral homeland is less about imagining a past, than building meaningful interactions with present live women who are considered professional counterparts. That said, there is an assumption of shared ancestry as

purported in the principles of Cultural Reconnection that is based on history and what we know about the ancestors' exit. Nkrumah's above saying is posted as our mantra on the Cultural Reconnection delegation brochure. It embodies the essence of what Cultural Reconnection means when there is an inherent feeling of being mentally and emotionally tied to the ancestral homeland as a place of lineage, even when linguistic and tribal affiliations and relatives are not known by name. The late poet Maxine Tynes reflected on the understanding of identity in the African Diaspora. From her experience in Nova Scotia, Canada, she recognized familiar expressions of the African in Diaspora:

> I cannot possibly say to you that I am a woman descendent from the people of the plains —the Serengeti, of Kenya, of Ghana, the Gambia or of Zaire—the heartland. I can only look to the vast expanse of Africa, that Black mother continent, and say, that is who and what and where I am. (as cited in G. Clarke, 2012, p. 168)

The notion of the imagined homeland is tied to cultural traits that are considered epistemic links to African indigenous practice. Asante (2005) posits:

> That something of the African backgrounds of Black Americans survived is not difficult to argue despite intense efforts to prove that Blacks were incapable of cultural retention because of slavery. No displaced people have ever completely lost the forms of their precious culture . . . It is my contention that Black Americans retained basic components of the African experience rather than specific artefacts. (p. 67)

Observable linkages can be found in the substantive social fabric of language behavior— proverbs, riddles, dozens, call-and-response (Hale, 1982). These become not only banks of knowledge about historical anecdotes, but possible methodologies for how to live, approach conflict, and organize the people (Reagon, 1986). The combination of communicative styles and folkloristic modalities constitutes an approach to understanding language as a culturally epistemic base. It is in this sense of language that African Americans are uniquely more African than European (Asante, 2005).

J. Jones (2003) described Black culture in terms of five dimensions: time, rhythm, improvisation, oral expression, and spirituality. Reagon (1986) notes an example of cultural dimensions seeping out of the African tradition: “Continuance or expansion of the structure was always done through singing” (p. 78). Another commonality is in the broad cultural epistemology of collectivism, as opposed to the individualism dominant in Western culture. This trait is also evident in other indigenous cultures including South and Central America, Africa, and Oceanic cultures around the world (Greenfield & Cocking, 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995).

Rituals found on both sides of the Black Atlantic include the pouring of libations, and the application of African languages and symbols used during Kwanzaa; both are shared adoptions and cultural retentions (Pleck, 2001). Much of the symbolism that has been adopted in the African American community is taken directly from indigenous cultural practice originating from African as well as Native American cultures (L. Myers, 1992).

Asante (2005) stated that African-centered pedagogy and curriculum must be focused on solving the problems of African people. Carruthers (1999) advocates the reconstruction and preservation of African history as well as developing counter hegemony, including engagement in transformative nation building; positive constructions of African womanhood and manhood; the study of power relations; the integration balancing of technical, moral, and spiritual dimensions of education; and the incorporation of the learning styles of African children. Recognizing indigenous practices as coming from their place of origin may invite people of African descent to be more comfortable in their cultural disposition.

Commander (2007) observes a temporal element with which the Diaspora must grapple when thinking about the ancestral homeland. There are questions that still arise in the dawning of

the reunion. How would the returner and receiver confront the paranoia and animosity expressed in the sentiment of so many African American people toward their Ancestral homeland? Author Richard Wright (1954) long ago posed the dilemma:

> Africa! I repeated the word to myself, then paused as if something strange and disturbing stirred slowly in the depths of me . . . What would my feelings be when I looked into the face of an African, feeling that maybe his great-great-great grandfather had sold my great-great-great-grandfather into slavery? (pp. 3–4)

Such questions can drive a serious wedge in the fluidity of reconciliation. For people of African descent this holds perhaps more so than for other returners to other continents, who, no matter the duress that led them to emigrate, mostly did so of their own choice. The question raised by Wright (1954) is, I believe, based on a perception that Africa sold her own people away from her homeland and no one cared that they were gone. Unanswered questions and collective explorations that have fostered animosity and paranoia in the past, surface in compelling dialogues that struggle for clarity between returner and receiver in the African ancestral homeland.

Africans in the Diaspora were challenged with the task of carving their place and sense of belonging in their ancestral homeland while grappling with historically traumatic events and subsequent relegation to globally inferior status. Yet, there seems to be a strong emotional attachment, perhaps largely dormant until the return to the ancestral homeland, that invokes an unexpected memory or sense of belonging. These, in sum, are the challenges in the face of an attachment to a homeland from which they were severed (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). These are challenges which the current study probes as part of grasping what the participants in Cultural Reconnection each faced. Stories can be mined; fragments of truthful accounts are, I believe, more meaningful and even more reliable than hegemonic historical records.

While the devastating impact of colonization and enslavement conducted by the Western world brought two thirds of the world to its' knees (Hilliard, 1998), perpetrating cultural annihilation (Carruthers, 1999), people of African descent, both on the home continent and across the Diaspora, persist in the quest for reconnection—which is the lived experience this dissertation explores.

Definition of Terms

The meaning attached to words referring to culture and identity are often subject to contestation. Each of the following terms, frequently used in this dissertation, has a particular history and ideological connotations. Taking a pragmatic approach, however, I simply provide a description of what I mean by these terms:

African American: "Americans who are descendants of . . . enslaved people [who originated in Africa] "or people who identify with a common ethnicity of African American or Black" (Jefferson, 2015, p. 10).

African Diaspora: All who are of African descent but who have lived away from the ancestral homeland.

Black: Is a reference to racial and cultural pride. It encompasses people of African descent wherever they were born in the world.

Jim Crow: as defined by the Constitutional Rights Foundation (2016) is:

> A derisive slang term for a Black man. It came to mean any state law passed in the South that established different rules for Blacks and Whites. Jim Crow laws were based on the theory of White supremacy and were a reaction to Reconstruction. In the depression-racked 1890s, racism appealed to Whites who feared losing their jobs to Blacks. Politicians abused Blacks to win the votes of poor White "crackers." Newspapers fed the bias of White readers by playing up (sometimes even making up) Black crimes. (para. 5)

Maafa: term coined by cultural historian Marimba Ani (1980/1994); a Kiswahili word for great suffering inflicted on African peoples by European and Arab invasion, conquest, colonization and plunder of African lands and the physical and mental enslavement of African people.

People of African descent: anyone who has African ancestry and was born either in the ancestral homeland or the Diaspora.

Research Questions

The overarching research question is about the lived experience of African American women who engaged in a cultural reconnection process that culminated in the collective return to the ancestral homeland. The focus is on factors leading to the choice to reconnect; the actual experience of the reconnecting visit; and the possible impact on their life in the United States. Three secondary questions divided into those themes of before, during, and after the Cultural Reconnection process were used to operationalize the overarching question and to guide the methods to illicit information about the lived experience of African American women who chose to reconnect with Africa:

- Before the Cultural Reconnection process: What motivates women of African descent to want to return to their ancestral homeland?
- During the Cultural Reconnection process: What did participants learn about themselves during the Cultural Reconnection process?
- After the Cultural Reconnection process: What have been the experiences of African American women who returned to their ancestral homeland?

As I shaped the inquiry, in large measure through what I personally experienced prior to the formal development of the Cultural Reconnection program, these questions became key in focusing the participant interviews.

Significance and Implications of the Research

The proposed study aims to explore how reconnecting with Africa affects African American women leaders, both in terms of personal growth and healing and in their effectiveness within their communities in the US. It will speak to the field of African American women's leadership (e.g., Byrd, 2009; Parker, 1996; Stanley, 2009) reaffirming the significance of Black women as the "shining thread of hope"—the title of Hine and Thompson's (1998) book—in their communities, both traditionally and contemporary. This research is intended to contribute to new knowledge in the fields of diaspora studies, Women's Studies and Africana Studies. It investigates the Diaspora influences in the African homeland based on active and ongoing interactions. Studying the learning in Africa, and the subsequent work of Cultural Reconnection participants, enables an exploration of the optimal experience of how to enter the ancestral homeland.

Acknowledging that there has never been a time in recent history when so many people are on the move (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, 2015), this study speaks to a rapidly growing field of inquiry on the nature and significance of diasporic returns to ancestral homelands. African American reconnection with Africa is itself a distinctive Diaspora experience because of the involuntary nature of the original separation and the brutality of subsequent oppression aimed at systematically erasing cultural identities and memory. The experience of Cultural Reconnection joins this discourse with a especially insider and constructive account of experiences and changes resulting from journeys of return.

Findings will be used to improve on what has been accomplished in the Cultural Reconnection process. I believe this study will result in lessons of significant interest to others, who are committed to the exploration of African American people connecting to their ancestral homelands. Such initiatives are the continuation of cultural identity work with women based groups, study abroad programs, apprenticeships, internships and service learning projects that take place in the ancestral homeland. Also, this study will be of interest to the general empowerment and wellbeing of Africans in the Diaspora. I review this literature in Chapter II to show in more detail the similarities of my work to this movement, as well as what I felt were unique and promising aspects, yet potentially transferable learnings from the Cultural Reconnection work.

Limitations of the Research

This research will analyze the lived experience of 18 women from the Cultural Reconnection process. My own experience will be used not so much as data but as a means to frame the questions and discussion in interviews. As is so often the case in qualitative research the small sample and personal nature of the author's engagement mean that statistical validity and formal generalizability are not attainable (McMillan & Wergin, 2010)—nor is it sought. However, transferability is possible. Creswell (2007) explains that in qualitative studies, transferability can be enhanced by the researcher giving a detailed account or thick description of the context and assumptions central to the research. This dissertation sought to deeply and thoroughly understand a single, particular setting. Providing a thick description yields enough information for a person who wants to transfer findings to other contexts, to determine if this is appropriate. Findings will be used to improve on what has been accomplished in the Cultural Reconnection process.

The exclusion of males from this research may limit the transferability of findings across gender—but cultural reconnection with Africa by women is an important subject in and of itself. At the very least, cultural identity explorations by men may be stimulated by lessons here about the short and longer term effects of this kind of program on African Americans.

Organization of the Chapters

This chapter has introduced cultural reconnection as a way of returning to the old country in order to redefine or reinforce cultural identity. For African Americans, this process is complex due to the nature of the exit and to the lack of information about their lineage and family ties. Cultural reconnection may be essential to how marginalized people approach the challenge of healing and reconciliation with people of shared ancestry, after centuries of separation.

Chapter II is a review of the current literature on returning to the ancestral homeland, known as diaspora, heritage, ethnic, and roots tourism. Barriers that have prevented a fluid return are identified. The chapter will also consider alternative strategies that may facilitate a more fluid return to the ancestral homeland.

In Chapter III, I present the methodological approach to be used in my dissertation. It begins with an epistemological positioning, conscious culturally-centering in selecting my methodology and moves on to fully describe the planned approach. I will rely on biographical and narrative thematic research methods that seek to analyze my findings in culturally respectful ways.

Chapter IV contains an analysis of my findings based on the narrative interviews with 18 participants in Cultural Reconnection. Participants' reports of the lived experience, before, during, and after their journeys revealed emerging themes of the process, relevant to the African American Diaspora and other similar movements of return.

Chapter V addresses interpretation of findings in detail and presents a thorough discussion that links the findings and literature review. This chapter also contains conclusions, reflections, and implications of the study for future research aimed at developing the most optimal return approach to the ancestral homeland for African Americans and other diasporic populations, especially those whose ancestors emigrated under extreme duress.

Chapter II: Literature Review

For this review of the literature relevant to cultural reconnection, I identified three main topics (see Figure 1.1). In the first section, I discuss returns to ancestral homelands, as both a rapidly increasing phenomenon and a topic for study. All around the world, descendants of long-ago emigrants are looking more deeply into their past and sometimes do this by traveling to ancestral lands from generations back. The discussion in the first section will be on: Diaspora returns as a subject of the study, value of returns of Diasporas, and case studies of returns.

The second main section of this review discusses challenges of returns, aspects of why it can be so difficult to reconnect with old homelands. Here, I bring up, in summary form, the traumatic nature of being enslaved and transported across the ocean from home and then moved to reviewing literature on the lasting consequences of this ordeal, building on Joy DeGruy's (2004) concept of *post-traumatic slave syndrome* as well as similar writings connecting today's problems with historical and intergenerational trauma. The section ends with literature on problems and issues returnees faced on their pilgrimages to lost homelands. Notes are made of the challenges that arose for the hosts and the long-lost relatives or descendants from those who did not leave. In summary, the second section is structured in terms of historical trauma, post-traumatic slave disorder, and accounts of problems faced by returnees.

In the third and final section of Chapter II, I discuss literature relevant to overcoming barriers to returning, which ultimately brought us to the present study on Cultural Reconnection. The section is presented in three parts: historical activism for returning/reconnecting, the praxis and examples of returns, and Black women as cultural bearers—and, therefore, as a rightful focus for efforts at cultural reconnection to lost homelands.

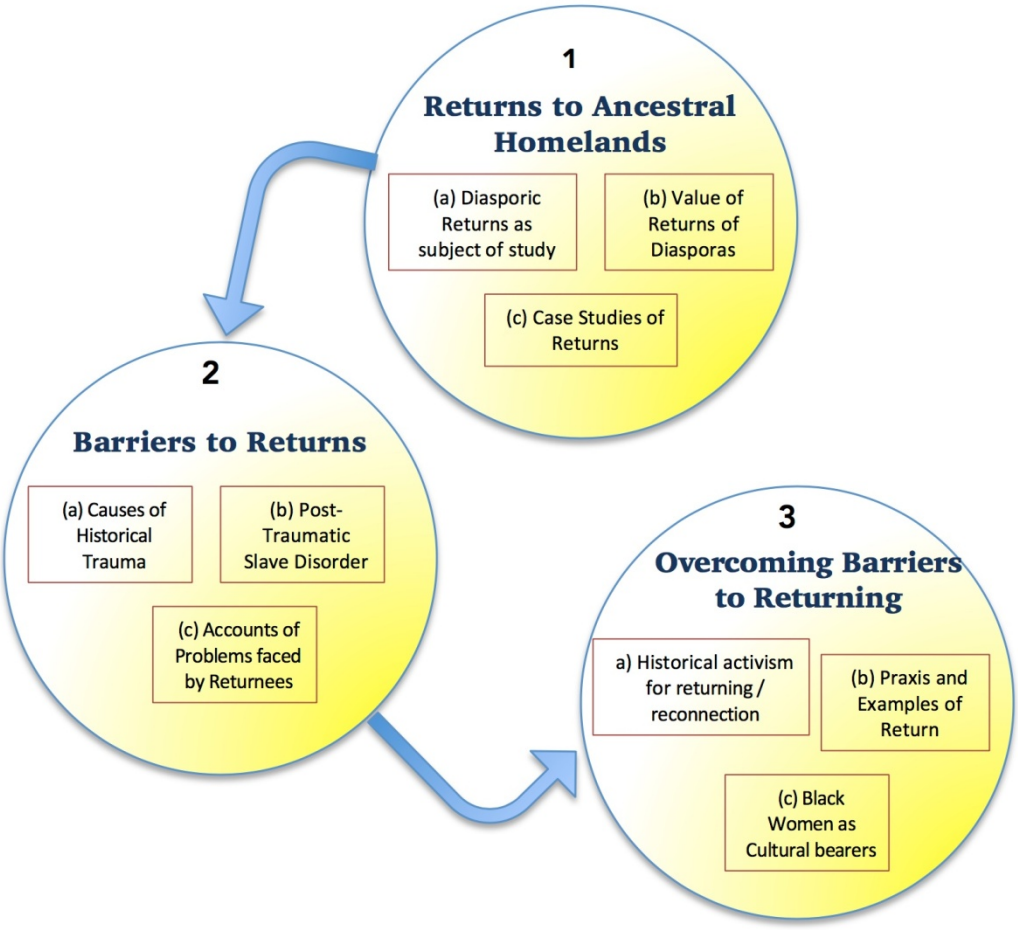

Figure 1.1. Topics and flow of literature review.

Returns to the Ancestral Homeland

In this section I examine the phenomenon of returns to the ancestral homeland as a widespread practice with travelers from distant homelands. I discuss the value of returns especially for those who live in multicultural societies and risk losing their cultural centering by being removed from their homeland for an extended period of time, including several generations. I introduce published accounts of cases and stories of such visits, a phenomenon known variously as heritage tourism, roots tourism, and diaspora tourism.

Diasporas and returns to homelands as subjects of study. Before I look into the increasing frequency and global phenomenon of diasporas returning, it would be useful to briefly consider just what a diaspora is. The word is from Greek *diaspeiran* “to scatter about disperse” (Diaspora, n.d.). For many centuries, the term was used primarily to describe the situation of ancient Jewish people who went into captivity in Egypt, Babylonia and eventually were dispersed as punishment for rebelling against Roman rule (R. Cohen, 1997). Today, the word is widely applied to any other peoples who live outside their traditional homeland. Some academic controversy has been about whether all people who are descended from ethnicities of cultures that are far from their current home should be called diasporas, or whether additional criteria ought to distinguish what some call the “real” diasporas. Safran (1991) disagreed with the very simple definition given by Walker Connor, “that segment of a people living outside the homeland” (quoted in Safran, 1991, p. 83). Safran went on to suggest six criteria:

1. They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign regions.
2. They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements.
3. They believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it.
4. They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate.
5. They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity.
6. They continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (p. 83)

R. Cohen (1997) suggested an even larger array of common features for authentic diasporas:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions.
2. Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade, or to further colonial ambitions.

3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements.
4. An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation.
5. The development of a return movement that gains collective approbation.
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate.
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group.
8. A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement.
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (p. 26).

These demanding lists of criteria could be argued about point by point, but it is more useful to use them to hold in mind the many ways in which African Americans (and other African Diasporas in all parts of the world) fit most of the key features that Safran (1991) and R. Cohen (1997) have separately listed. Standing out for me is Safran's third point about not being accepted and Cohen's seventh about the "troubled relationship with host societies" (Safran, 1981, p. 26). For African Americans these are truly understatements!

While Africa and African Americans are my focus, before concentrating on these, it is important to be aware of the rapid growth of the study of diasporas more generally. Little attention was paid to a long tradition of returns to the ancestral home practiced for generations by European Americans who go back to Europe and scramble around looking for vestiges of the country and towns their ancestors left generations before. The emerging field of diaspora studies provides a lens to this traditional and contemporary practice of returning. Pilgrimages to the ancestral homeland have been helpful in strengthening identity development (Huang, Haller, & Ramshaw, 2013; Lev-Ari & Mittelberg, 2008; Shuval, 2000) and in building a sense of belonging in the world (Anthias, 2006; S. Hall, 1990; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Nationalities that see themselves as diasporas include peoples from most European countries. In fact, one of the earliest studies of the connections that are kept between immigrants and the ones who stayed behind is a classic study: *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by Thomas and Znaniecke (1918/1958). Other European immigrant populations that have come to see themselves as diasporas and have been studied include Bosnians (Stefansson, 2004), Germans (Schulze, Skidmore, John, Liebscher, & Siebel-Achenbach, 2008), Greeks (Christou, 2006), Irish (Hughes & Allen, 2010), Italians (Gabaccia, 2013), Portuguese (Klimt, 2000), and Scots (Basu, 2007). Nor is it just Europe, diasporas are identified and studied across Asia including: China (Lew & Wong, 2005; Maruyama, Weber, & Stronza, 2010); India (Jayaram, 2004); Japan and Korea (Tsuda, 2009) or among particular ethnic and religious groups like the Sikhs (Tatla, 1999) and the Sri Lankan Tamils (Fuglerud, 1999). Given the ever-increasing factors that attract or force emigration these days, it is not surprising that to search in an engine like Google Scholar for almost any nationality or ethnicity and the word diaspora, will yield at least a few references.

Relevancy of racial and ethnic identity on participation in returns. Why go back to the land of one's ancestors? To answer this question, I took a close look at ethnic and racial identity models. The models of Cross (2003), Kambon and Bowen-Reid (2010), and Phinney (1993), help to explain racial and cultural identity illuminate the identity process in African American cultural identity. The Phinney Model combines several identity models that are triggered by encounters. Categorically, theories presented begin from a standpoint of self-hate and distancing from the core of the self-identity in order to assimilate in the multicultural society in which they live, in particular the United States. For example, the frame provided by Phinney is in concert with the life span and the point in which people experience an encounter, making them starkly

aware of their racial differences and the negative implications that exist in the context of a multicultural society.

In the racial identity development model, Cross (1979, 1991) asserts that the encounter phase raises the awareness of the inescapability of racial and ethnic differences and grapples with it by immersing the self into a probing stage known as immersion-emersion. Emersion implies that the individual begins to reconcile their racial differences and self-induced inquiry begins to wane into a more integrated approach of acceptance. The acceptance of one's predicament in a race-based society impose certain challenges to the self-concept that are nurtured by stereotypes found in the mass media and other social institutions.

There is an assumption of self-rejection in a race based society that glaringly points out racial differences is presupposed as disadvantaging African Americans. Cross (1991) describes the immersion stage as igniting an inward and personal transformation of inner searching that may lead to increased participation and social mobility. Later, the emersion stage enables a new level of awareness about how to navigate within a society with less self rejection and find ways to fit into society rather than being maladaptive.

The problem with these models is the presumption of self rejection and that this is self inflicted based on the race-based society in which one resides. Yet, in a racist society, the system of advantage is exacerbated by race and does not offer insight regarding the whole human being, especially living in a challenging socially marginalizing environment. Unfortunately, even when the individual is at their optimal function, it is only in relation to how to fit into a socially disadvantaging society.

Phinney (1993) and Cross (1979, 1991) summarize identity models derived from scholars of various racial-cultural backgrounds, most of which begin with the individual of color

experiencing self-hatred on the basis of racial difference. Kambon (1992) calls these models *pseudo-Africentric* in that they offer an understanding of the African American personality in the context of navigating survival in a race-based American society. While these models create awareness of the dilemma of the maladaptive nature of the African American identity in a racist context, Kambon and Bowen-Reid (2010) argue that they can also misrepresent African Americans by failing to go to the root of the self-conscious personality:

> The Pseudo-Africentric Models, on the other hand, represent those theories of AA personality developed by AAs and others of African descent (Fanon, 1967) who manifest a seemingly unwitting allegiance to the basic paradigms of Eurocentric Psychology and behavioral science as their basis for interpreting the self-concept, identity and motivation of Black people. (p. 87)

Theories of self-rejection and self-hate go back to the widely-publicized doll test by Clark and Clark (1939), in which Black children's preference for White dolls over Black dolls was interpreted as a reflection of their own self-hate. This study led me to postulate that Black children were not necessarily acting on their own self-hate, but rather they could navigate and project the social cues that were given to them in society. While this experiment went on to aid in the landmark Supreme Court decision of Brown v. Board of Education (Benjamin & Crouse, 2002), it did not really establish that Black children naturally grow up with self-hate. I suggest that the strength of the experiment confirmed that self-hate was the beginning point established in American society for African American children when they were engaged in the Eurocentric survival thrust as their starting point.

In Kambon's (1992) Africentric model, cultural strengths would not be considered maladaptive, but centered on the optimal cultural strengths that support survival including ways of knowing, resiliency, creativity, adaptability, that keep the lineage intact and enable African Americans navigate the inherent racism in the society in which they live. Thus, the introduction of African centered models demonstrates a divergence that does not start from a position of

self-hate: the Africentric model takes into account the "African survival thrust" (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010 p. 97) that may enhance developmental ability, countering the mis-orienting "European survival thrust" (Kambon, 2003, pp. 72–73) that occurs for African Americans who develop completely unaware of their identity, unknowingly oppressed by European cultural immersion.

Kambon's (1992) African Self-Conscious (ASC) model is an African centered one whose beginning point acknowledges the African American personality as one that is whole, and not maladaptive. It is useful to consider models whose beginning point does not presuppose the African American personality as maladaptive, but intact. Kambon and Bowen-Reid (2010) describe the Africentric model:

> They utilize traditional African philosophical-cultural values, beliefs and behavioral norms for formulating/constructing the psychological traits, dispositions and behavioral patterns that are used to represent normal and natural AA personality as distinguished from maladaptive, abnormal and dysfunctional AA personality. (p. 95)

Kambon (1992) places the African American at the center of the model, the cultural core of awareness. He introduces four launching points that affirm and support one's survival, enabling them to thrive as fully human beings. These models seem to combine a structural, dynamic and functional emphasis framed on the African cultural reality within the American socio-cultural context and beyond. Some of their overlapping emphases are as follows:

> (a) emphasis on traditional African culture in terms of values, beliefs and behavioral practices that have persisted in the AA psychological makeup forming the psychological infrastructure core of normal-natural AA personality;
> (b) emphasis on the structure, organization and dynamics of the core in thrusting AA behavior and functioning toward collective/cultural-affirming outcomes;
> (c) emphasis on the psychosocial nature, dynamics and outcome of the interaction between this normal-natural African-centered thrust or striving and the European American cultural reality in which the historic and contemporary AA personality finds itself. These theories then clearly make a positive and proactive assumption about the basic energy driving the African/AA personality system in its interaction (conflict, adaptations to, and coping) with the imposing, ever-present and hostile European American cultural reality. (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010, p. 96)

Kambon and Bowen-Reid's (2010) paradigm is well supported by Yosso (2005) in her re-examination of the cultural survival and the definition of wealth extending beyond Eurocentric notions of economic wealth. Yosso realistically shifts the "research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color" (p. 69) to explore the propensity, not only to adapt, but thrive. According to Yosso, the African cultural influence on America has been understated. Rather, rediscovering and re-textualizing the origins of African American cultural capital may open new ways of thinking about the contribution of human groups using categories that include additional forms of wealth such as "aspirational, familial, navigational, linguistic and resistant capital" (p. 77). Curiosity and yearning for positive re-interpretations of African American culture have underpinned much of the Cultural Reconnection project as it came into being as well as supporting the broader advent of tourism by African Americans back to Africa.

While all forms of tourism have shown an increase since World War II (C. M. Hall & Page, 2014) and travel to heritage sites, particularly so, it is not surprising that people may especially be drawn to a place where they have some ancestral connection. This may be because of nostalgia, curiosity, or perhaps part of a hobby of genealogy. However, the rise of such overlapping notions such as roots tourism (Mensah, 2015), diaspora tourism (Coles & Timothy, 2004), pilgrimage tourism (Reed, 2014), and nostalgia tourism (Dann, 1998), indicate the deeper purposes for this travel: a strengthening of cultural identity and understanding that fosters a sense of belonging in a world where disconnection and anomie affect so many.

Basu (2004), points out that "people grown up in the Colonies . . . reach middle age, or toward old age and they desperately want to pass to their children 'roots' foundations beyond the modern worlds they live in" (p. 35). Guyot (2011) made reference to a long term and

cross-generational desire to return best summed up in what has been called the Hansen Law, which is that "what the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember" (Guyot, 2011, p. 144). Whether travel to the ancestral homeland is by children, grandchildren, or much longer-separated generations, all may be motivated to spark mnemonic spatial and temporal recall (Huang et al., 2011). A longing by people to return to their ancestral homeland is about trying to recover a sense of continuity against the discontinuity. If rootlessness is widespread in diasporas, and especially a problem among African Americans, roots tourism that reconnects with personal ancestry seems a logical treatment.

Cynthia Dillard (2008)—whose praxis of return, involves reconnecting African Americans to Ghana—recognizes how memory works:

> And as human beings, we have an unlimited capacity for memory, all kinds of memory. Sensory memory, of things touched and felt, sensual and alive. Physical memory, of pleasure and pain, of bodies stretched and moved in ways we had not thought possible . . . research must also undertake an often unnamed, unrecognized, unarticulated and forgotten task that is important for individuals who yearn to understand ways of being and knowing that have been marginalized in the world and in formal education. (p. 289)

Basu (2004) found, the monuments on which roots tourism is often centered are "where great names and great deeds are legitimatized" (p. 29). He suggests that visits have a durable benefit for those who, in the Diaspora may feel rootless. Referring to experiences of immigrants in Canada, Basu notes that, "hyphenated Canadians are people likened permanently to their culture even when they are four generations" (p. 33). Similarly, when it comes to negotiating group identity in the experiences of visiting home, the Chinese Americans who journey back to China find a sense of belonging, emotional attachment pride and acceptance as normal attitude symbols and behavior of the group (Maruyama et al., 2010).

Memorials and commemorations are especially important ways visitors from diasporas connect to ancestral heroes in the context of their cultural axiology according to Basu (2007).

Piecing together small bits of information may lead to valuable discoveries, even a recognition for the very first time of how one's self is shaped by previously severed connections to the old country. Intergenerational memory has a powerful ability to elevate romantic instances of connecting people to their original location and creating a sense of identity and belonging. Memory that has been passed on through cultural transmission is conveyed in different ways that may be a clue to their connection with an ancestral homeland. Rituals formulate so much more than a familiarity with traditions, but as a way of regaining ones' human center.

Examples of returns—other nations. This subsection turns to a few examples of returns that invoke emotional encounters that are life shaping. The emerging field of diaspora studies includes theory and practice about returns (Basu, 2001; Butler, 2001; Palmer, 2000). For example, visits by Jewish children are intended to fortify a belonging and allegiance to Israel, thus increasing the possibility that they will "make *Aliya* to [resettling in] the 'promised land'" (E. H. Cohen, 2011, p. 615); Chinese students have experiences of return (Maruyama et al., 2010); Basu (2004), in the article, "My Own Island Home The Orkney Homecoming," referring to the islands off Scotland, finds examples of transformative experiences on the return. Falzon (2003) stated, the cultural heart is not a place but refers to where the people connect. The cultural heart then, is not a physical center, but the gathering of the people.

Yamashiro (2011) discusses the racialized national identity construction in the Japanese ancestral homeland. There, people are distinguished by the cultural knowledge they possess about Japanese society. The differential treatment tourists receive, warrants noticing cultural distinctions. There are clear assumptions about cultural knowledge that a Japanese citizen would be expected to have, for example, fluent in the Japanese language. There is an inherent assumption about class and upbringing where cultural knowledge is an identifier.

Basu (2004) suggested that the hearts of the long-ago uprooted Scottish "are restless till they [ancestors] find their rest in thee" (p. 33). They anticipate a true homecoming that is associated with the archipelago called the Orkneys.

Everyone has a right to know about their ancestral homeland. On building a sense of identity, Basu (2004) asks "who is to say that Scotland ancient monuments were not erected by the ancestors of those Diaspora visitors who now gather around them?" (p. 40). The return to the ancestral homeland contributes to a sense of identity that longs to be fed especially in a multi-cultural society where the group in question has a history of being discriminated against (Huang et al., 2013; Timothy & Teye, 2004).

The Challenges of Returns

This section of the literature review is about the barriers of returning to the African ancestral homeland (with some comparative literature from other diasporas). While on the surface such return journeys seem to be undeniably good for the descendants of enslaved ancestors, we must remember that these travels bring up some of the most painful ghosts in human history. There are challenges as well as risks that need to be considered and have been to a limited extent in the literature. The section begins with accounts of the psychological challenges that still haunt African Americans and obstruct homecomings, ones which, in fact, our Cultural Reconnection programs have had to face.

The first part of this section, "Historical Trauma," is about the many powerful and negative forces that have caused generations of African Americans, individually and collectively to be traumatized. The discussion then shifts to literature on the idea of "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome" (PTSS) a concept implicit in many works on the lasting effects of centuries of

bondage but brought out as an explicit condition by Joy DeGruy (2004, n.d.), a social work researcher and professor at Portland State College.

Historical causes of trauma—the Maafa. From the 1440s to the 1860s, millions of people were shipped away from Africa against their will by Europeans (Eltis, 2000; Inikori, 2003). Curtin (1969) originally reported an estimated 8 million, but later considered this to be underestimate. Though hard to determine with any accuracy, if the average life span was roughly 30 years (Eltis, 2000), then the 10 million slaves were produced over five lifetimes. DeGruy (2004) estimates the number of people captured and transported during those 430 years to be between 20 and 30 million (p. 49).

Histories and personal accounts of the traumatic nature of the Maafa—the centuries of abduction, slavery and its aftermath—are both familiar and almost countless. To really understand, as much as modern people ever could, what it felt like to be enslaved in early America, best are the many first-hand accounts written by those who were born into slavery in what was or became the United States. In the 1930s alone, some 2,300 slave narratives were collected and now exist in the archives of the Library of Congress (n.d.). Foster (1979) put the number of these narrative forms at over six thousand. These accounts, almost always written out after the narrator was somehow freed, are themselves journeys; though not literal returns to Africa, they are often rediscoveries of African identity, a way, as Fleischner (1996) said, of "mastering slavery" (her book title). Several of the best-known slave narratives include Frederick Douglass's (1845/2014) autobiography; Sojourner Truth's (1850/1997) narrative; Harriet Jacobs' (1861/2009) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; and, Solomon Northup's (1853/1970) *Twelve Years a Slave.*

As one might expect, when writers, both academic and not, recount so long and terrible a phenomenon, strong debates arise and, in many if not most cases, remain unsettled to this day. So, for example, there is a huge gap in the literature on just how many slaves were taken from Africa to the Americas: Miller (1989) refers to the resulting debate as the "'numbers game' . . . a favorite event in academic jousting over the Atlantic slave trade" (p. 381). For purposes here, precise numbers do not matter. Inaccurate though they may be, when considering "those who perished in the stockades and on the cargo ships . . . the total may well be between sixty and one hundred million" (Holloway, 2005, p. 18), all violently ripped away from African homelands. For sure there were millions of abducted ancestors and descendants in the tens, if not hundreds of millions.

There are many books on the inconceivable sufferings, some of which have spurred years of follow-up analysis and much academic controversy. I can do no more than mention some of the best-known of these, many of which continue to spur further research and endless arguing. Stampp's (1956) examined the "peculiar institution"—a phrase that had been used by mid-19th century opponents and supporters of slavery to reject what was then taken as the natural way to view slavery—a kindly well-intentioned practice almost as good for the slaves as for the masters. Stampp described the horrors, but also the resistance by Africans to their bondage. This did not put an end to abhorrent claims of how slavery was really not so bad, a viable business that brought good to Blacks as declared by Fogel and Engermann (1974) in *Time on the Cross*. This mainly quantitative study brought down another avalanche of books and criticisms including Gutman (1975) and Kolchin (1992).

A very different book with a much greater impact came out close to the same time as *Time on the Cross*, Alex Haley's (1976) *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. While mainly

fiction, or what Haley called *faction* (i.e., facts mixed with fiction), *Roots* depicted the personal experience of Kunta Kinte being taken from his family and transported in chains to America, placed into slavery, and then the hardships throughout his life—down through generations to contemporary times. When the book was turned into a successful TV mini-series (Margulies, 1977), not only did *Roots*, educate both African Americans and others in America about their common history, in its final pages it came across with the idea of returning to Africa as a search for both ancestors and yourself.

There are many individual wounds associated with lost identity and the psychological-medical aftermath of enslavement and persecution. Historical trauma represents mistrust that is prevalent as a result of multiple generations and cultural disconnection (Akbar, 1996; DeGruy, 2004; J. Jones, 2003). The effect of the slave trade as witnessed on American soil enforced a dehumanization process that was unprecedented in a slavery practice. DeGruy (2004) alluded to the people of Africa being brought to the United States as chattel goods and sold to the highest bidder. This became such a successful business that the United States, one of the world's wealthiest national economies, came to be literally based on the labor and sweat of these subjugated individuals (Baptist, 2016).

In order to turn whole human beings into chattel property, there had to be a seasoning process that maintains ever-present institution of racism (Akbar, 1996; DeGruy, 2004; Hilliard, 1998) thereby disinheriting them from their homeland. As a result, people of African descent were relegated to an inferior political, social, and economic status. Structural systems of White supremacy are firmly in place (Billings, 2016; Essed, 1991) to uphold the peculiar status.

Essed (1991) described the process as consisting of three components: containment, marginalization and problematization. Generational cycles of this process can derail the

self/group efficacy of a racialized group by projecting onto them their confinement within national borders to neighborhoods, as well as psychologically, by denying the dehumanization taking place and by repressing resistance. Once so contained, it is easy to marginalize the group from their geo-social positioning as well as the demonizing specific social characteristics (Fanon, 1952/2008). When this is the prevailing assumption, reinforced by the media and surrounding institutions, a dehumanizing process of problematizing the victims, results; or as Du Bois (1903/2010) posed the question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" (p. 1)

I turn to examples of how trauma is experienced in the African Diaspora and where unanswered pieces of the past have harbored generations of mistrust (Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011) and resentment (Angelou, 1986/2010) about the exit from the ancestral homeland. With the haunting, debilitating and stressful nature of the thought processes including the suppression of memories, there is a need to cross a threshold to dialogue between returner and homeland receiver. Until then, old suspicions permeate the relationship as exhibited by Richard Wright's (1954) comment (see Chapter I above), and in Angelou's encounter in Africa. She asks:

> Were those laughing people who moved in the streets with such equanimity today descendants of slave trading families? Did that one's ancestor sell mine or did that grandmother's grandmother grow fat on the sale of my grandmother's grandmother? (Angelou, 1986/2010, p. 47)

Grappling with challenges that are often insidious can present problems in a fluid African return due to generations old misinformation that has been passed down inter-generationally, from the ancestors to yet unborn. Cycles of trauma have carried on from generation to generation and their threads not easily unraveled. Harlem Renaissance-era poet, Countee Cullen (1925/1995) captured the inner turmoil of conflicted feelings towards Africa in his poem "Heritage," including reverence as well as anger, suppression, and resentment. Asking the question that most any African American must—"What is Africa to me? (p. 674)—his response

is a struggle between his "stubborn heart and rebel head" (p. 674) while knowing that he is irrevocably "civilized" (p. 674). In potent imagery that so many of us have more wordlessly felt, Cullen tries to keep out the sound of ancestral drums by plugging his ears—to no avail.

Cullen's poem brings out the many and conflicting emotions of attachment, detachment, and forced, but incomplete, loss of memory. The longing for Africa, latent in the psyche, without being resolved, is emotionally and psychologically hurtful. Economic interests of oppressors, using hegemonic coercion subdue memory and spirit. Yet, the people persevered despite this disconnection. Cullen's words remind us that amnesia can be a temporary condition based on the traumatized experience, awakened by certain signals and triggers.

Understanding the depth of trauma affecting African Americans is best realized by considering the hegemonic structures that keep global racism in place (Steady, 2007). The predicament of a racially stratified global order, sustained by economic and geopolitical positioning only perpetuates historical imperialism and colonization that, in turn, birthed and spread White supremacy. This perpetuation is seen in how European style hegemonic power that still reigns in international arenas today, notably through globalization. Hilliard noted, the devastating impact of colonization and enslavement conducted by the Western world, that "brought two thirds of the world to its knees physically and politically through cultural annihilation" (Hilliard, 1998, p. 50).

It should also be realized that the Maafa*,* comprising all the atrocities committed since the transatlantic slave trade, brought generational harm to not only its direct victims, but also the homelands left behind in Africa (Klein, 1990; Lovejoy, 1989). The situation has not changed. In fact, many challenges confronting modern times are rooted in the imperialistic past that still reflect biases (Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011).

To be sure, the continent-wide domination of Africa was brought about most prominently by the intense period of physical colonization that occurred in the late 19th century. The "scramble for Africa" as Chamberlain (1999) titled her book, was carefully planned in a congress of imperialist European countries in Berlin in 1884; quite deliberately, they divided up the continent of Africa so that each could have what was then called a "fair share" — of what was not theirs. On top of the earlier theft of millions of people to satisfy plantation slavery, this European grabbing for their fair share of Africa's land and natural resources enforced another round of cutting through tribal and cultural affiliations, severing communities from each other and reinforcing trauma. Ngugĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) posits:

> The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces that potentially stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, collective death-wish. (p. 3)

Additionally, the hegemonic powers needed to maintain a cultural disconnect between ancestral homeland and Diaspora, "Because people who are cut off from their heritage and culture are more easily manipulated and controlled then people who are not" (Ajamu, 1997, p. 79). Calling this "intellectual colonialism," (p. 77). Ajamu suggests that this form of power could sustain enslavement and colonialism at the same time. There was an arduous process of mind-control in place to keep Diaspora Africans disconnected from their roots, values and beliefs (Carruthers, 1999; Hale, 1982; Hilliard, 1998; Shockley, 2013). The need for cultural reconnection may be best understood by examining the factors that led to cultural disconnection.

When thinking about the transatlantic slave trade, we consider the atrocities that devastated African soil; the people who remained experienced the trauma and the colossal loss of human and natural resources (Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011). Contrary to wide beliefs about the transatlantic slave trade occurring solely along the Gold Coast, countless African people were taken from their homes from far into the interior of the African Continent. No territory on African soil was left unchanged. The impact of human, social, political, and economic loss was severely felt Africa wide. According to Inikori (2003): "Demand for slave labor [in the Americas] completely dwarfed all trade in humans ever recorded in history, especially during the plantation revolution in the Americas between 1650 and 1850" (p. 170).

The negative effects of the slave trade and subsequent history were not only upon those ripped from their homelands but on the peoples who remained in Africa as well. In their article: "The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa," Nunn and Wantchekon (2011) assert:

> Initially, [Africans] were captured primarily through state organized raids and warfare, but as the trade progressed, the environment of ubiquitous insecurity caused individuals to turn on others—including friends and family members – and to kidnap, trick, and sell each other into slavery. A cultural of mistrust may have evolved, which may persist to this day. (p. 3221)

Cultural amnesia prevails when it comes to the details about who benefitted from the transatlantic slave trade; but contrary to everyday assumptions about African chiefs enriched by selling off other Africans, it is clear that Africa as a whole suffered colossal damage as evidenced in the current African economy (Lovejoy, 1989; Whatley & Gillezeau, 2011a). The numbers of people taken away from the homeland during the transatlantic slave trade included 25% children (Vasconcellos, n.d.), one-quarter of any society's most important endowment. And, quite possibly these were an even higher proportion of the most able bodied people, the ones who could survive so harsh a voyage. A number of scholars have probed and shown the

negative impacts Africa suffered from the slave trade including overall economic harm (Eltis, 2004; Lovejoy, 1989; Rodney, 1972; Whatley & Gillezeau, 2011a), demographic impacts (Klein, 1990) and a lasting increase of inter-ethnic strife and mistrust (Whatley & Gillezeau, 2011b). It was the destination countries of the departing Africans whose economies boomed, spurred by the free labor of those enslaved. To see the total depletion and domination of resources and self-determination of the African homeland, in contrast to the burgeoning of the American economy into what became and remains a superpower, is to see just "how the West underdeveloped Africa"—the title and focus of Walter Rodney's (1972) book on this tragic and lasting crippling of an entire continent.

The relegation to inferior and subdued global position as a colony in the British, or other European empires and colonial conditioning encouraged cultural amnesia. The details of the events of the brutal exit of Africans from their ancestral homeland, were not carried in the memory of descendants. To be fair, the amnesia is experienced among Africans both in homelands and Diaspora. It was exacerbated by a time and distance along with gross misinformation regarding the circumstances of the exit.

As is too well known, the traumatic forces of slavery and the racism that went with and exacerbated slavery did not suddenly disappear with the defeat of the Confederate states in 1865 and the Emancipation proclamations. After the brief relief of Reconstruction, during which time freed slaves actually voted and experienced success in state and federal houses as elected representatives (Alexander, 2012; Du Bois, 1935/2013), the harsh backlash struck. Jim Crow laws across the states sprung up to legalize complete social discrimination that would last at least until the Civil Rights struggles of the mid-20th century (Litwack, 1999). During those unimaginably hard decades, violence against African Americans was widespread and even a

president like Woodrow Wilson who seemed so progressive to Whites and the rest of the world, has been called an "open bigot" for systematically removing Blacks from the federal civil service ("Guest Contributor," 2015; Dotinga, 2015). By the 1980s the so-called War on Drugs created a new way for the descendants of slaves to be put back in chains. To this day, mass incarceration is a major tool for keeping bigotry alive and well in America, what Alexander (2012) called the "New Jim Crow" and is really also the new slavery.

The impact of slavery: Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome. The women who have gone on the Cultural Reconnection journeys who are the subject of this dissertation are all resilient and thriving in diverse and different ways that empower their African American communities and organizations. This section is about the many personal and communal problems African Americans face in their lives—and also in themselves— as imposed by the historical traumatic factors described in the literature review. I have found useful and powerful the idea originated by DeGruy (2004) of a unique condition: *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (PTSS). She provides this definition and explication of PTSS:

> P.T.S.S. is a theory that explains the etiology of many of the adaptive survival behaviors in African American communities throughout the US and the Diaspora. It is a condition that exists as a consequence of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants resulting from centuries of chattel slavery. A form of slavery which was predicated on the belief that African Americans were inherently/genetically inferior to Whites. This was then followed by institutionalized racism which continues to perpetuate injury. (DeGruy, n.d., para. 2)

DeGruy was by no means the first or the only to suggest that slavery's impacts endure to this day in the hearts and minds of African Americans. Na'im Akbar used the idea of *psychological slavery* to describe how, long after the last Black person was enslaved in the United States, descendants remain oppressed, not only by continuing, everyday racism (Essed, 1991) but by their own mind set:

> Slavery was "legally" ended in excess of 100 years ago, but over 300 years experienced in its brutality and unnaturalness constituted a severe psychological and social shock in the minds of African-Americans. This shock was so destructive to natural life processes that the current generation of African-Americans, although we are five to six generations removed from the actual experience of slavery, still carry the scars of this experience in both our social and mental lives. (Akbar, 1996, p. 3)

In turn, Akbar (1996) cites the work of Cedric Clark who had argued (in Akbar's paraphrasing) "that slavery, more than any other single event, shaped the mentality of the present African American" (Akbar, 1996, p. 3). These views, of course, build on much earlier writings by W. E. B. Du Bois with his concept of *double consciousness*: "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1903/2010, pp. 9–10). They also echo Fanon's psychoanalytical work (1952/2008) on how Blacks worldwide suffer from internalizing the ways that Whites perceive them.

In her concept of PTSS, DeGruy (n.d., 2004) built on a solid and long recognition of the Maafa, that slavery along with the horrors that followed it after emancipation, left deep wounds that continue to afflict and stigmatize African Americans. She identified points of historical events that mark PTSS due to the enslavement experience in the United States. While resisting as much as possible, "the stifling effects of chattel slavery" (DeGruy, 2004, p. 17). African Americans adapted to the traumatization of a subjugated life. For more than 240 years, slavery rendered Black men and women impotent with regard to keeping their families together. Imagine the impact of generation after generation after generation of familial disintegration. After emancipation, African Americans became more able to build their families. During the enslavement period, it was illegal to read and write, to marry, to travel beyond your homestead; and, according to the verdict in the landmark 1896 discrimination case, Plessy v. Ferguson, Blacks, "had no rights that a White man need [needed to] respect" (as cited in T. Davis, 2012,

p. 87).

Cultural disconnection was reinforced through violent and punitive measures in place to ensure sustained enslavement. Slavery meant many restrictions that damaged and tightly restricted individual, family and communal mental health: systematic separation of families, suppression of indigenous African languages, prohibition from gathering in groups without the presence of a White foreman, no food sovereignty, no legal right or regard for marriage and much else. DeGruy (2004) points to trauma of fear from the devastation of continuous lynching in the United States, numbers that while hard to estimate ran to tens of thousands between emancipation and the 1960s (Ginzberg, 1962). These were nothing less than state sanctioned acts of terrorism (Litwack, 1999). The advent of Jim Crow laws that legalized and enforced substandard and segregated public services for African Americans—from restricting water fountains to textbooks—meant that inequality was a government supported practice. Relegation to an inferior status appeared to be a hopeless predicament difficult to reverse.

DeGruy (2004) further notes that the effect of racism is "related to trans-generational adaptations associated with the past traumas of slavery and ongoing oppression" (p. 13). She argues: "At the end of slavery little changed in dispelling the mythology. Since the abolition of slavery, such notions have continued to infiltrate all aspects of American life" (p. 143).

Doucet and Rovers (2010) indicate that trauma is transmitted from parent to child. Trauma in Native American communities has been widely studied (Brave Heart, 2003) and the results are relevant to the wounds of America's other "original sin" (Wallace, 2016, p. 33), slavery. There appear to be similarities to the African American experience in Native reports of their historical trauma leading to such issues as rampant substance abuse in the Lakota tribe (Brave Heart, 2003). In his article on historical trauma, Denham (2008) quotes Brave Heart who

stated: “Historical trauma is a cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” (p. 396). Brave Heart and, now, numerous other Native American scholars have raised awareness of historical and intergenerational trauma, to the point where public policy and specific therapies are widely recognized outside indigenous communities (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, & Altschul, 2011; Duran, 2006).

Such work on African American intergenerational trauma is also becoming a field of applied health practice. J. Jones (2003) examined this type of trauma through the lens of health disparities, the medical and psychiatric effects of internalizing inferiority. The long-term impact of traumatic conditions spoke directly to physical and mental medical conditions that are considered life threatening. Williams-Washington (2010) summarized work in this area, covering both the pre- and post-emancipation traumas African Americans have been subjects to. She advised clinicians to undertake work that brings out client awareness of the problems arising from their traumatic ancestral history. Again, the work of Akbar (1996), as well as DeGruy (2004), must be emphasized as important lead-ups to thinking not just about therapy, but about reconnective travel as antidote for the loss and suffering created by slavery and racism in America. Cultural reconnection travel can build on centuries of resilience in the culture and a sense of originality that is characteristic of the African American spirit. It is wrong, as Cross (2003) argues, to think that the legacy of slavery somehow fates African Americans to lives of addiction, poverty, crime, and incarceration. Historical trauma has had devastating impacts, but its legacy does not doom slavery’s descendants to fail. A spiritual presence and ancestral acknowledgement commands hope in the African American worldview. People are informed through spirit (Dillard, 2008) and through those ancient, learnable, ways of knowing (Azibo,

1991; Kambon, 1992); they can help transcend social challenges and personal hardships in the societies they live.

These survival mechanisms, bravely maintained and passed on in the face of slavery, Jim Crow, and the continuing everyday racism African Americans encounter, are brought out intentionally through the Cultural Reconnection process. In such projects as I have been involved with, we build on the amazing strength African Americans relied on in centuries of endurance.

Cases of return. Going back to a long lost ancestral homeland seems like an unambiguously peak positive experience. Like other visitors coming "home" from other diasporas, (e.g., the Scottish-Canadian Diaspora described by Basu, 2004) African Americans are drawn first to the most historic sites and monuments, like the castles and gates of no return in Western Africa (Mensah, 2015; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Tillet, 2009); they come for, and expect to be caught up in happy and tearful epiphanies. But such profoundly emotional experiences are never going to be as joyful and easy as expected. For both the visitors and the visited, tragic history intrudes and many a problem arises as long suppressed tensions come to the surface.

The accounts that I cover here represent the common sentiment of suspicion, and mistrust that was prevalent as a result of multigenerational cultural disconnection. Though there is a surprising amount of literature on how diasporic returns can be disturbing for both the tourists and the hosts (see Handley, 2006, for a review mainly about West Africa), I am focusing here on three specific examples of problems that roots tourism can lead to. The first was a roots tour to Ghana, sponsored by the burger chain, McDonald's. The second was a program by Ghana government officials calling home the Africans in the Diaspora through what was called the

Joseph Project. The third example involves the many issues and disputes around visiting of former slave forts and so-called castles as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.

McDonalds brought out the strain in relationship between the homeland and Diaspora with their corporate sponsored returns called “McMemories,” which was undertaken twice and involved celebrities, including family members of Alex Haley. The corporate dollars used to sponsor the return, though intended to be seen as an act of good will, were soured by capitalist and opportunist implications. According to Maruyama et al. (2010), the McMemories tour was “a stark illustration of the tension in the roles of returner and foreign tourist” (p. 4). No matter how well meaning the corporate intention, McDonald’s’ formidable presence weakened the connection for returning to the African landscape. The sponsorship by McDonald’s meant that Africans, whose ancestors were brutally taken from their ancestral homeland due to huge economic interests, were now reconnected with Africa ironically through the agency of one of today’s most powerful multinationals. To many, myself included, this seemed a devious commercial guise of ostensible corporate generosity that may be mostly due to McDonald’s and other fast food chains’ popularity with many of America’s least well off people and neighborhoods (Block, Scribner, & DeSalvo, 2004).

Paulla Ebron an African American scholar who went along on the 1994 tour, though not personally sponsored by McDonald’s, pointed out the tricky balance of having a global “symbol of U.S. imperialist commercial domination . . . become an enabler of minority cultural identities” (Ebron, 1999, p. 911). No matter how involved the mostly African American participants of the McMemories tour became, the gesture appeared opportunistic and the sacredness of the return, superficial-seeming, “destroyed by the sponsors’ commercialism and tourists’ identity as western corporate puppets” (Finley, 2006, p. 4). Finley posits: “African Americans must return to African

spiritual identities in order to escape the grip of Western materiality and commercial greed, such as McMemories" (p. 19). It seems that there are implications to the ubiquitous transnational relationships that draw the world closer, but also open up a set of problems suggestive of past exploitation. Ebron (1999) observed:

> Key to the problem . . . is the ironic fact that the very success of certain culturally oppositional formations of African American identity has become the basis for a consumerism tied to commercial (rather than political) critique and commentary. African American appeals to traumatic collective memory and to sustaining ties to African culture originated in the context of opposition to U.S. national narratives of belonging . . . Today, however, those appeals are most obviously seen in mainstream television and in magazine advertising. (p. 911)

The second example of a problematic return experience is the state-sponsored Ghanaian Joseph Project (Commander, 2007; Finley, 2006; Pierre, 2009, 2012; Schramm, 2009). Initiated in 2007 on the 50th anniversary of Ghana's independence, the project was "a series of activities, actions and interactions being spearheaded by Ghana to re-establish the African Nation as a nation of all its peoples, capable of delivering on the promise of God to Africa and the African peoples" (Ghana Joseph Project, n.d., para. 6)

According to Ghana's Minister of Tourism, J.O. Obetsebi-Lamptey: "We want Africans everywhere no matter where they live or how they got there, to see Ghana as their gateway home. We hope we can help bring the African family back together again" (as cited in Finley, 2006, p. 24). In 2007, the Ministry for Tourism and Diasporan Relations launched the Joseph Project, to "celebrate African excellence and to welcome the Diaspora back home to Ghana" (Commander, 2007). The project name was an allusion to the Biblical Joseph whose brothers sold him into slavery. After his enslavement, Joseph became a member of the noble class and forgave his kin for their disloyalty to him. The biblical link was also made to Solomon's "Song of Songs" with the very fitting reference to Blackness and women:

> I am Black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem . . . I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me. My mother's sons were angry with me; and made me work hard in their vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept (Song of Solomon: 1, 5-6, as cited in Ghana Joseph Project, n.d., para. 7)

In response to this opportunity, many Africans from the Diaspora made a pilgrimage to their ancestral homeland excited about what they would experience. African American pastor and entrepreneur, Sharon Minor-King (2013) recalls her own experience during the Joseph project, when, at every turn people were apologizing to her. She found that the apology was superficial and there was no meaningful conversation to engage in a deeper understanding of the historical events. Later, Minor-King was struck when her ancestral homeland friend concurred, saying, "quite candidly: why was an apology necessary?" (p. 2). Instead of apologies, ongoing, shared dialogue could assist in noticing the atrocities that victimized both returner and homeland receiver. It was a missed opportunity to investigate the lasting personal impact of the slave trade that was experienced on both sides.

The final example of troubled homecoming to Africa is seen in relation to the World Heritage Sites designated by UNESCO, which aimed at the preservation of over 50 slave forts built by Europeans for imperialist interests in Africa. While World Heritage sites are seen as the common heritage of all humanity, these "dark tourism attractions" (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011, p. 1410) are often justified on the value of having Diaspora Africans reconnect with the last places their ancestors saw Africa. There is also an optimism that returners to any heritage sites will help to generate transnational economic activity beneficial to the old homeland (Christou, 2006; Newland & Taylor, 2010; Schramm, 2004, 2008). But these are broad hopes while the actual experiences are not so straightforward and almost always are filled with the emotions and problems that can be expected when survivors have to face up to a terrible past, both distant yet personal.

The literature on historic site visiting reflects that mixed audiences have various perspectives of how they see features like the slave castles when visiting Ghana and other African ports of departure. Apparently, and not a surprise, intense feelings of pain and anger are evoked for those who make the journey to their long-ago homeland (Ebron, 1999; Kemp, 2000; Richards, 2005; Timothy & Teye, 2004).

Yankholmes and McKercher's (2015) study on dissonant and dark heritage sites raised issues about how experiences contrast among those from drastically different positions of history and power. Local people who take advantage of the tourism to add to their own often low income situation are in stark contrast to the Diaspora returner, usually more well-to-do and on a very personal experience of sacred healing. The site becomes a contested space with potential conflict of interests and perceptions "whose meanings are not static but can be rewritten" (Bruce & Creighton, 2006, p. 234). Issues swirl about the repurposing of such sacred yet horrific sites of slavery, which MacGonagle (2006) captured so well in the title of his paper: "From Dungeons to Dance Parties: Contested Histories of Ghana's Slave Forts."

Yankholmes and McKercher (2015) concluded that planning for and debate about "slavery heritage tourism . . . invariably fails to appreciate the subtleties, power relationships and various contestations that are at play in both the presentation and consumption of former Transatlantic Slave Trade (TAST) sites" (p. 233). The lesson from the designation of heritage sites is to be careful not to turn these sites into mere heritage commodities. Visiting historical heritage sites in Africa can be an opportunity to re-live the events of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade exit. As mentioned above, many sites are now promoted to bring much-needed foreign exchange. Before too much misguided commercialization takes place, questions should be considered among Africans about strategies for cultural reconnection and reclamation. Restoring

severed relationships as a deeper purpose must be carefully considered and planned for.

In summary, the visits to Africa by descendants of slaves are often full of the same confusion and hurt that their ancestors may have felt when they left—though of course, not anywhere near so painfully. For sure, reconnecting with an African cultural sense of identity and feeling, often for the first time in their lives, does happen. For the hosts, the descendants of those who were not stolen from Africa, there may be economic prospects, the more that Diaspora returners visit. Development experts are ready to seize on diaspora tourism as mainly an opportunity for less developed African nations to bring in some much-needed foreign currency (e.g., Newland & Taylor, 2010). But the experiences discussed above, especially the McMemories episode, show that it is not easy to reap the benefits of reconnection without degrading the very experience people came for in the first place.

The Cultural Reconnection participants, whose experiences are the main focus of this dissertation, have undertaken an alternative kind of return, conscious of the challenges of such reconnections yet resolved to overcome them. This leads to the final section of this chapter in which more positive experiences and what is needed for successful fluid reconnection were reviewed.

Overcoming Challenges to Returning

This final section of this review chapter shifts away from barriers and identifies more positive possibilities for returns, and the underlying strategies needed to achieve these. The literature, as we have seen, presents a host of challenges for all diaspora returnees (Mazrui, 2000; Safran, 1991; Schramm, 2004; Timothy &Teye, 2004). The focus here is on the arduous effort of people in past generations from the African Diaspora in continued communications and strategizing toward reunification (Du Bois, 1903/2010; Matory, 2005; Shepperson, 1960). This

earlier but very "live dialogue," (Matory, 2005, p. 93), is the subject of the first part of this final section of the chapter. In the second part of this section, I visit the phenomenon of memory, identity, and belonging that was reflected in the advocacy for a physical return through the experience of African Americans. The final part places emphasis on the strength of African American women and their demonstrated record of collective and self-help initiatives.

Historical activism of returning. The African Diaspora has long experienced historical activism focused on reconnecting, not in spite of but due to the long struggle with oppression and involuntary origin of the migration. At least since the 18th century, there has been an ongoing dialogue about, and the search for ways of returning to ancestral homelands. Summarizing the myth of disconnection and the reality of constant contact, Matory (2005) observed:

> When Africa is regarded as part of the cultural and political history of the African Diaspora, it is usually recognized only as an origin—as a past to the African American present. . . . Yet, in truth, the cultures of both Africa and the Americas have shaped each other through a live dialogue that continued beyond the slave trade. (p. 93)

Shepperson (1960) and later Matory (2005) traced the varied and rich experiences, some successful and some not, of African Americans who advocated that only back in Africa, could the wounds of slavery be healed. Shepperson noted that although emancipation was a huge step forward in this "Back-to-Africa" movement, strong Black advocates even preceded the 1860s.

It is significant that President Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of an independent Ghana, spent time in ongoing, shared dialogue with African Americans, as well as Blacks in the Caribbean, while teaching at an historically-Black, Lincoln University. It was no accident that he would invite many African Americans to be a part of the independent Ghana, including Du Bois who, in 1957, traveled to Ghana, just after his passport was reinstated by the U.S. government. Du Bois explained what this return meant to him in the poem, "Ghana Calls"—which was dedicated to Nkrumah. His words resonate with many of today's African American pilgrims to

Africa. He expressed in this poem the feeling that, at long last, leaving America for Ghana would sound "the Voice that loosed/ the Long-looked dungeons of my soul" (Du Bois, 1962/1982, p. 53)

It is in Ghana, where Du Bois passed away, that his tomb is located at a cultural center named for him. His African American wife, Shirley Graham Du Bois continued to be a player in the government and cultural life of Ghana after the passing of her husband (Angelou, 1986/2010; Finley, 2006).

Through the centuries, ongoing shared dialogue fueled the independence movements that began with Nkrumah self-rule in a post-colonial Africa. At the time of Ghanaian independence, President Nkrumah invited Africans in the Diaspora to return home (Finley, 2006). He called for the return of the African Diaspora that he hoped would "lay to rest the disturbed spirits of our ancestors who have never known peace. . . . It is the continued disturbance of their spirits that stops us from coming together as one reconciled people" (as cited in Finley, 2006, p. 17). People from many parts of the African Diaspora sought refuge in Ghana. Many Africans from the Diaspora heeded the call to return to their homeland in hope of reconciliation.

This discussion barely scratches the surface of recounting the long history of African America's connections to Africa in body and spirit. In the 1960s, with the Civil Rights Movement and the decolonization of Africa going on separately but nearly simultaneously, many further connections were to occur. Stokely Carmichael, a leader of the United States-based Black Panthers eventually emigrated to Guinea and changed his name to Kwame Touré, in honor of both Nkrumah and then Guinean president, Ahmed Sékou Touré (Carmichael & Thelwell, 2003). Clearly, African American travel and participation during the decolonization era was important. As Shepperson (1960) said, "time should not obscure the role that Negro Americans" (p. 312)

played in the political resurgence of African nations and nationalism. This statement sets the stage for the more contemporary and women-led reconnection of Africa and African Americans. While historic return movements have traditionally been male-dominated, an emerging voice that relies on collective action, inter-generationality and culturally centered foundations that can be instilled in the family, primarily through children. This may be best initiated by women. We turn now to contemporary returns and the unique ways the presence of women in the movement continues to forge bonds with the ancestral homeland.

Contemporary praxis of return. Against the background of ceaseless efforts by African Americans to reconnect somehow with Africa, I turn now to the literature on the praxis of more recent returns. The accounts are not just about positive successful reconnections; on review, it seems as if there is no such thing as an easy and completely fluid return to the site of historic crimes against a people. In this section, I emphasize how virtually every account is entangled with striving to reconnect with their ancestral homeland.

Tillet (2009) reflected on visits by African American photographers Carrie Mae Weems and Chester Higgins who each subsequently expressed their perspective with photo exhibitions of slavery related sites, both including the infamous "door of no return." Tillet finds the differences in how these two African American artists saw and captured these sites full of import for understanding how others from the Diaspora must feel in the presence of such deep and symbolic history.

Jemima Pierre, an African American anthropologist at UCLA, has used her numerous visits to West Africa as departure points for reflections on how both the Diaspora and their African hosts understand experiences of returns (Pierre, 2009, 2012). Recognizing that for both visitors and hosts, there are many "processes of identification such as ethnicity, nationality,

religion, gender, and class" (Pierre, 2009, p. 63) at work; her main focus has been on the way that racial issues affect both visiting and being visited in roots tourism. She points out that although both the Ghanaians and the African Diaspora live in still racialized aftermaths, for the former, the oppression of recent colonization rather than slavery is the most prominent of painful collective memories. Pierre sees as very promising an informal networking event that happens monthly called "First Fridays" in which young Ghanaians and young Diaspora visitors meet and mix:

> Clearly, this First Fridays Accra event is the place where people from all over Africa and the African Diaspora converge in the making of a modern Black cosmopolitanism in Ghana. This Black cosmopolitanism represents an important reality of postcolonial African societies that comes into play when we explore the issues central to this essay: the dynamics and politics of the interaction of Diaspora Blacks with contemporary Africa. (Pierre, 2009, p. 60)

But as Pierre is very much aware, this socializing and the moments of seeming reconciliation are participated in only by upwardly mobile young Ghanaians, leaving well documented misunderstandings and even hostilities between visitors and Ghanaians still in effect (Bruner, 1996). I see a major contribution of Cultural Reconnection and my research work, as bringing together a wider socioeconomic group of Africans and African Americans where understanding and reconciliation can be explored in metropolitan centers, hungry for cultural understanding.

Work that brings positive lessons in the diasporic return also comes from African American college professor, Nancy Dawson (2000) who gave an account of taking students on an Africa study tour to Tanzania: "For most it was unthinkable. To others, it was just a dream," she wrote (p. 124).

One of the most thorough and self-analytical of African American scholars who have written about her repeat journeys to Ghana is Cynthia Dillard (2006, 2008, 2009). Her work is

joined by an increasing array of scholars, mostly African-American, examining aspects of African Diaspora homecomings (Bruner, 1996; Commander, 2007; Dawson, 2000; Essien, 2010; Schramm, 2004, 2009). While location visits and other trip details vary, all described the ways in which the African Diaspora is getting closer to the possibility of healing and moving forward more whole. And it is not only people who see their work as that of the scholar, but also other African Americans who probe this journeying. I refer to the late Maya Angelou, poet and activist, for the understandings of what Africa can mean to Blacks everywhere. While references to reconnection to Africa come up over and over in her work, her autobiographical *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986/2010), set when Angelou lived in Ghana in the early 1960s, is especially relevant to my work. Long before the current ever increasing number of visits and returns to Africa, she intricately and beautifully probed the nature of her own love for Africa, as well as the typical "delusions" (as cited in Lupton, 1998, p. 154). I will come back to more about her critical, loving, self-accepting observations on this, below.

There are several other important works by African American women about their journeys to Africa, which emphasize the fluid, fragile but essential identity work that motivated them to return. Hartman (2008) attempted to trace and follow the slave route of her ancestors in her book, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route.* Again, as seen in many of such accounts, this quest brought her to Ghana. She contrasted her approach to the bestselling faction (i.e., part fact, part fiction) memoir, *Roots*, (Haley, 1976):

> I had not come to marvel at the wonders of African civilization or to be made proud at the royal court of Asante. . . . I was not wistful for aristocratic origins. Instead I would seek the commoners, the unwilling and coerced migrants who created a new culture in the hostile world of the Americas and who fashioned themselves again, making possibility out of dispossession. (Hartman, 2008, p. 7)

In other words, she went to Africa to locate the new world self she never had understood. This paradoxical idea of leaving where you (and many generations before you) are from, for an imagined homeland where your ancestors once lived, is central to the mission of Cultural Reconnection, the initiative in the foreground of this dissertation.

Finally, I would note a dissertation by Harden (2007), *Identities in Motion: An Auto-ethnography of an African American Woman's Journey to Burkina Faso, Benin, and Ghana*. She also found that the most important aspect of the experience was breaking out of the identity she had as a slave descendant in America's still much racialized society. Instead she came to understand, through her travels, "the transformative nature of African American identity and . . . the understanding that African American identity is fluid, multifaceted, and heterogeneous" (p. ii).

Working through prolonged intergenerational trauma in the midst of return journeys to Africa requires close attention to the crossing of temporal-spatial borders (Dillard, 2006). Generations of past, present and future need to engage in an ongoing shared dialogue using rituals to tap into the geographical separations of the present and the temporal separations of forebears and descendants. The African American who returns to ancestral lands also faces a disjuncture away from so-called factual histories—largely compiled by non-Africans—with unwritten but deeply felt memory, expressed if at all, primarily orally. Nora (1989/2004) discusses the difference between memory and history:

> A process of interior decolonization has affected ethnic minorities, families and groups that until now have possessed reserves of memory but little or no historical capital . . . The end too of ideologies that prepared a smooth passage from the past to the future or that had indicated what the future should keep from the past—whether for reaction, progress, or even revolution. (p. 235)

Dialogue among returnees and between them and Africans, is only partially an activity of the here and now. All who make such journeys are reaching back using a way of knowing which, unlike what they have learned in history books, acknowledges the presence of spirit as a source of information, something inherent in African American epistemology (Dillard, 2008). As they travel and see monuments and long-lost kin, information is solidified into a restored sense of identity and belonging through memory.

The literature varies greatly in what is taken as most critical when describing meaningful returns of Diaspora Africans. It goes back time and again to identity, belonging and memory as critical. The returner moves in and out of eras to take what she needs, even what she may not have been aware of before reaching African soil. Without ongoing dialogue, a sense of belonging could not be established, made firm and lasting. Angelou (1986/2010) recounted the wisdom she heard in a conversation with a Ghanaian elder who observed, “But your people . . . they from this place, and if this place claims you or if it does not claim you, here you belong” (p. 928).

The African Diaspora’s dialogue with Africans has not ceased, despite centuries of separation; it has been continual and available as soon as we, the stolen ones, are ready. Africans in the Diaspora are compelled to explore their cultural identity at developmental stages where significant encounters in the life cycle are experienced (Cross, 1979). The intentionality of the return is embedded in the cultural transmission of memories that implied Africa as an ancestral homeland. The commitment to the homeland takes place in one’s heart long before the ticket is purchased and the bags are packed. An example of this is shown as Angelou (1986/2010) recounts: “We had come home, and if home was not what we had expected, never mind; our need for belonging allowed us to ignore the obvious and to create real places or even illusory places, befitting our imagination” (p. 901).

In my research for this dissertation, I gleaned from the analysis of Cultural Reconnection participants' lived experiences, this sense of real and imagined learnings. I saw in narrated experiences how participants embarked on the return to the ancestral homeland and what was found in terms of a sense of belonging when for the first time, they went back to Africa.

As will be discussed in Chapter IV, rituals allow participants to sort through deep layers of their individual and collective past to process old and new information. UNESCO has designated several sites of enslavement as heritage sights in West Africa including the Island of Goree in Senegal (Tillett, 2009) and coastal Ghanaian slave castles and dungeons (Schramm, 2009). To begin the healing process, local residents took the initiative to establish sacred ceremonies for memory and reflections that are particular to the African diaspora point of exit. In this kind of visit a temporal and spatial ancestral memory is invoked while in the ancestral homeland. Schramm (2009) reported how an elder in Ghana directed the experience for African American returners, stating:

> So when we go down in the dungeons we ask those who are not of African descent to give us that moment. Because when we were down there, there was no one down there but us. We had to lean on one another, we had to answer one another's question, we had to support. (p. 14)

In this, a collective memory is being re-established by forging a sacred bond between those who shared the experience from both sides of the Atlantic. The words of African elders who spoke to Angelou (1986/2010), displayed, I believe, an underlying intention of reversing some level of collective trauma. Additionally, Dawson's (2000) report on an African American student on a study visit to Ghana, who described his return where transformation took place:

> There is nothing in this or the next world I would trade for my experience because in Ghana everything is magnified. The trees seemed bigger, the clouds seemed lower the water looked bluer, the fruits taste sweeter and the clothes looked more colorful. (p. 127)

Once again, the temporal-spatial nature of transcendence is invoked by calling out the names of ancestors in Dawson's (2000) account about one student on that voyage. The student recalled vividly later how silence fell over the dark room they were in when students called out their long-departed relatives' names. For the student, this was his ancestors' starting place.

The rituals described above seem to invoke a specific memory in the slave dungeon of Ghana. Whether or not participants' actual ancestors were present in that dreadful place, visitors could summon a spiritual connection and use memory to create sacred space. In one recollection on Dawson's (2000) study tour, a student reported to be "the first in a family to return to the ancestral homeland" (p. 127). He expressed excitement about representing his whole family in his return to the ancestral homeland. "I lavished in the thought that I was the only person in my family who had made this pilgrimage back home to the motherland" (p. 127). Implicitly, he also represents his ancestors—those enslaved, those not—and thereby changes the course of a very old intergenerational family narrative. By returning to the ancestral homeland, collective identity has upheld and impacted cultural transmission, as a family value. Dawson relays several such accounts and speaks of the benefit of the tour in terms of "metamorphoses" (p. 126).

Memory that informs one's identity may be individually and collectively experienced. Feeling forced to decide whether one's identity was severely altered by ancestral enslavement or endured through the resilience of one's original culture, is a repugnant and false dichotomy. Asante (2005) states:

> That something of the African backgrounds of Black Americans survived is not difficult to argue despite intense efforts to prove that Blacks were incapable of cultural retention because of slavery. No displaced people have ever completely lost the forms of their previous culture. . . . It is my contention that Black Americans retained basic components of the African experience rather than specific artifacts. (p. 67)

The benefit of collective action is tremendous in creating a sense of belonging through the shared experience. A bond that begins with all who experienced together, past and present, is reminiscent of the Sankofa symbol to "go back and fetch" (Temple, 2010, p. 127) the past. From the language of the Akan people, it can be seen as principle advice and methodology urging reconnection, just as the bird moves forward (from the present into the future), but sustains itself by looking back to the past. It shows the "necessity to look back to the past in order to move forward. Roots-seeking African American visitors to slavery-related sites . . . practice Sankofa through place identification and existential search, actively appropriating the past into the present" (Lelo & Jamal, 2013, p. 31).

People in the Diaspora who successfully reconnected with Africa, really do go back and fetch it; they recover their place in the past-present-future continuum of ancestral ways and homeland. This allowed them to become a part of the ongoing shared dialogue within and between generations. Sankofa as a practice and methodology, leads to mental and spiritual reconnection to the ancestral homeland, past and present (Temple, 2010).

Memories shared through ongoing dialogue enable the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and values. The lived experiences of multiple generations seem to overlap in Sankofa-like sharing of memories of hope. Shared remembering (Dillard, 2008) is pertinent to the African American practices of rituals that tie returners to the memory of the ancestors in a profound experience.

The return to the ancestral homeland is an educational learning achievement intent on pushing visitors to an ever-deeper understanding of questions that first led them to the journey. In this sense, the experience resembles what Argyris and Schon (1974) call *double-loop learning*, learning through which long-held personal values, beliefs and strategies, are knowingly

subjected to self-critique and change. Similarly, Dillard (2008) posits that the scholar-traveler must seek beyond the commonly seen and easily recognized present:

> The knowledge, wisdom, and ways of our ancestors are a central part of everything that has existed, is existing, and will exist in the future, then teaching and research must also undertake an often unnamed, unrecognized, unarticulated, and forgotten task that is important for individuals who yearn to understand ways of being and knowing that have been marginalized in the world and in formal education. Simply put, *we must learn to remember the things that we've learned to forget.* (p. 89)

Earlier in this chapter I reviewed the discourse that still divides the African Diaspora about their African identity. The question that Hilliard (1998) poses, whether or not we are African, reappeared at a crossroad under the coercive influence of hegemonic structures. The probing of cultural identity enabled people of African descent to face this predicament. In this way, bits of information are pieced together, as the analogous use of water signified in Countee Cullen's (1925/1995) poem, *Heritage* (see above).

The return to the ancestral homeland in the African context must be acknowledged as part of a continuum, standing on the shoulders of thousands of people who had longed—and an ever-increasing number who actually got there—to return to the ancestral homeland to initiate ongoing shared dialogue in the interest of recovering a lost part of themselves.

There is a Kenyan proverb—Until the lion can tell his own story, it will be always be told by the hunter. People of African American Diaspora are beginning to utilize ongoing shared dialogue and collaborative collective action with Africans, that grows from their roots-visits, to find empowered and self-determined voices and, like the lion who finally can relate his memories, they tell their own stories. I hope my dissertation can be an important part of this.

Black Women as leaders and culture bearers/workers. Cooper (1892/2016) stated: "Only the Black Woman can say when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my

womanhood without violence and without suing or special patronage then and there the whole *Negro race enters with me*" (p. 12). In this final part of the chapter, the focus turns to the role of Black women, for they are the travelers and participants for the Cultural Reconnection work I have facilitated—and now have studied. Black women have exemplified leadership in both mainstream multicultural society, and in their homes and communities (Collins, 1990; Hine & Thompson, 1998; Reagon, 1986). Strengths prevalent in African centered culture include leadership that has shaped African American communities (Azibo, 1991; Hilliard, 1998; Kambon, 1992), largely due to Black women's inherent and inherited cultural tendency to work in highly relational and collective ways (Steady, 2007). Peterson (1998) in reviewing the role of African American women through the great changes that happened in the 19th century, called them "doers of the word" using the idea of Black women as "cultural workers in the fields of abolitionism and racial uplift" (p. 89). Included in her book are chapters about Sojourner Truth, Mary Prince, Sarah Parker Remond, and many brave others who used their gifts of literacy to advance longstanding values that came over, unwritten, from Africa.

Black women who practice leadership use outlets alternative to the mainstream such as community organizations and church work. This has been a welcome alternative to the exclusionary tactics, behaviors, and beliefs that overpowered previous generations in Black communities. These women leaders have created internal venues for African Americans to exercise voice and live supportively and supported. It has been a matter of finding one's voice to allow others, no matter their age or gender, to do likewise.

Collins' (1990) perspective of standpoint theory is helpful here. Black women, she writes, have a standpoint to view the world based on our unique experience, and deeply affected by the historic denial of their voice. Denied access to the podium, Black women have been

unable to spend time theorizing about alternative conceptualizations of community. Instead, through daily actions African-American women have created alternative communities that empower.

The literature on the oppression of African American women from times of slavery on to the present is massive. Scholarship and other writing continue to grow on the powerful resistance and community sustaining work of women during hard and changing times (Collins, 1990; Finkelman, 1989; Gaspar & Hine, 1996; White, 1985). Recent dissertations at Antioch University by African American women have likewise brought out new yet continuing facts and ideas on the underappreciated leadership work of Black women in the history of early post-Emancipation (Ferguson, 2015), civil rights (Bell, 2015), and contemporary higher education (Shockley, 2013). I envision my work as continuing on this path of leadership studies by and about African American women.

Fostering trust between communities across Africa and the Diaspora may rely heavily upon the lived experience of Black women as they interact globally. Reagon (1986) advanced the concept of Black women being cultural workers as she built on her cultural origins rather than turning her back on them, to excel in the American mainstream. “When I began to understand that I already operated out of a Black American cultural context, I began to look to that source for patterns of analysis and theory that I could use in my investigative research” (p. 78).

Black women continue to be culture bearers and cultural workers, both carrying and educating their families and communities. Karla Holloway stated: “Black women carry the voice of the mother—they are the progenitors, the assurance of the line . . . as carriers of the voice carry wisdom—mother wit” (as cited in O’Reilly, 2004, p. 12).

As expendable income improves for women of African descent, they are increasingly able to travel to the ancestral homeland, providing them renewed energy and updated African cultural knowledge. This is carried back to America in the unending tradition of women's cultural work and transmission. I have mentioned, in addition to the initiatives of Cultural Reconnection of which I am a co-founder and continue to practice, the work of Cynthia Dillard who, in addition to her publications, facilitates what she calls "Full Circle Retreats" (Full Circle Retreats, n.d.). Her description of the origin of these retreats is worth quoting at length:

> The story of Full Circle Retreats is an interesting one. And it struck me that when any person of African ascent returns to the knowledge and motherland of Africa, we have by our very return come *full circle*: How powerful it was to recognize that even the doors of no return cannot keep a people away from our original homes, the place of our original breath! (Full Circle Retreats, n.d., para.1)

As yet, Dillard has not subjected this venture to academic analysis, although the idea of return to Africa as a full circle appears as a final chapter in her book, *On Spiritual Strivings* (Dillard, 2012). The phenomenon of African American women organizing ongoing educational and cultural tours to Africa can be seen in the list compiled on the lifestyle website for Black women, *Madame Noir*. One article overviews 11 mainly women-led organizations that do these "Back to Africa" tours (Madame Noir, 2011). A different website, "African Diaspora Tourism" similarly summarizes and provides links for visiting various African nations from the Diaspora (Must-Visit, n.d.). With the huge growth of such opportunities and, in light of the critical historical role of Black women as culture bearers and cultural workers, my dissertation can begin to theorize and analyze the inner workings of returns, what the lived experience and the impacts on African American women are, in going back to Africa.

The words of Anna Julia Cooper (1892/2016) resonated throughout the 20th century and served as foundational thinking for the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), the

National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) Standpoint theory. Standpoint theory flows from Black feminist thought. Collins (1990) defined standpoint theory in this way:

> A social theory arguing that group location in hierarchical power relationships produces shared challenges for individuals in those groups. These common challenges can foster similar angles of vision leading to a group knowledge or standpoint that in turn can influence the group's political action. (p. 201)

Women subscribing to womanist perspectives (Hudson-Weems, 1997) present an opportunity to consider the values that one holds dear, while embedding universal principles. Audre Lorde (2007) posits, "the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us" (p. 122). Or as Toni Cade Bambara succinctly states, "Revolution begins with the self, in the self." (as cited in Collins, 1990, p. 6) The self-interrogation of the oppressive conditions that Black women face is a prerequisite for authentic transformation and empowerment.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology used in this qualitative research study African American women returning to their ancestral homeland. The overarching research focus is on the lived experience of the African American women who engaged in a cultural reconnection process that culminated in their collective return to Africa. Three research questions were used to operationalize the overarching focus as well as to reflect on how the practice of cultural specificity, collective action, ongoing shared dialogue and common ancestral acknowledgment impact their learning and praxis. Primary data consist of information gathered during interviews of participants where they shared stories and reflections before, during, and after the Cultural Reconnection experience. Because I took part in—actually organized—the journeys and stayed in touch with some of the women after, my own experiences of Cultural Reconnection are used in understanding their experiences. My own memories, when relevant, served as secondary data.

Philosophical and Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, I outline several inter-related ways of thinking about research into the worlds of those descended from the victims of massive historic injustice who still live with the impacts of ancestral forced exile and subjugation. To paraphrase the dramatic subtitle of Behar's (1996) *The Vulnerable Observer*, I used qualitative research because it not only gets to the heart of lived experience, but, when done sensitively is necessarily heart-breaking. I accepted and even embraced such risks as I was seeking ways that do not debilitate but, rather, empower the participants and the researcher.

It is important to note that there are many books and articles on people of African descent that reside in America. There are many theories that use African American, Blacks, or people of African descent. In truth, they are all making reference to the same people. No matter which term

is used, it evokes powerful emotions. Because of this, I chose to use African American, Blacks and people of African descent who reside in America interchangeably in this dissertation.

The Choice of Narrative Inquiry

Sale, Lohfeld, and Brazil (2002), in their review of the "quantitative-qualitative debate" (p. 43), stated that unlike quantitative studies, qualitative ones recognize "multiple realities or multiple truths . . .The emphasis . . . is on process and meanings" (p. 45). Thus, for studies involving groups and individuals who have been oppressed and, with that, silenced, a qualitative approach seems intrinsically more likely to establish a restorative relationship between researcher and those who are researched. Study of the experiences of African American women who journeyed to Africa, reveal common patterns and similarities of experience that are important; but even more so it showed the unique ways individuals experienced rediscoveries of old homelands and old and new selves. The qualitative, and narrative approach was most appropriate.

One a priori reason for this in the context of my research was the fit between these relatively new social research methods centered on narrative and the ancient African centrality of story-telling and storytellers as a tradition that survived the Middle passage over to America:

> Storytelling in the African American community traveled a long way from Africa to the US. In West Africa, storytelling was one of the cultural and social practices that Africans participated in during various aspects of their daily lives. The art of storytelling was both used to teach and to comfort members of the community. Storytelling helped to preserve history—of one's self, one's family and one's ethnic group. (Champion, 2003, p. 1)

Banks-Wallace (2002) suggests that African American storytelling serves a higher purpose than simply conveying information or responding to a question. She outlined four central traditional folklore themes, which still come up in contemporary African American stories in her field of health research:

> (a) survival against all odds; (b) an unshakable communion with and faith in God/Spirit; (c) true wealth defined as loving relationships with family, friends, and the larger African American community; and (d) the triumph of goodness, justice, cunning, and/or wisdom over money, strength, or political power. (p. 418)

In looking at the learning and changes of reconnecting to Africa—the lived experience of journeys back to Africa that were filled with listening to and telling stories—I saw the prominence of such themes. I encountered variations and elaborations on them during the interviews of participants for my research.

Thus, overall it seemed very appropriate to root my methods in the long tradition of African American women, sustaining one another through storytelling, which has been essential for their survival under the trying conditions of centuries in bondage and oppression (hooks, 1993). I strived to continue in this tradition as I conducted the data gathering and analysis for this dissertation. Each time we tell a story, it is an opportunity to feed another person's spirit and plant the story's wisdom deeper into our own souls.

In addition to this cultural and historical fit, there are other related reasons why research using narrative as data are appropriate here and have grown widely in the last few decades in many areas of social research. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) advise, "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them and write narratives of experience" (p. 2). Similarly, Brand (2015) asserts that what she calls the "looking glass space" (p. 516) of stories breaks through to what can be a very hard-to-get knowledge of the inner self. In the constructivist world, she states, "The act of acknowledging, telling, and sharing stories promotes personal and professional growth by creating a different looking glass space in which to safely view and reflect on our personal and professional stories" (p. 523). In ways that indicate the general worth and specific

application of storytelling data in my study, Brand reflects on the seminal work of Jerome Bruner regarding life seen as narrative:

> [Bruner] suggests that people make sense of their past, present, and future lives by the roles they see themselves playing in the unfolding storylines of their lives. A constructivist worldview suggests that these "stories" are not fictions (in the sense that they are untrue) but rather constructed accounts of key life events and our interactions with others . . . I began to wonder: if life is lived through the stories we tell, then it must also potentially allow individuals to adapt, shift, and modify their stories, transforming their lived experiences. This goes to the very heart of the power of story, a vehicle with the potential to (re)order, (re)structure, and (re)direct one's life in more meaningful and integrated ways. (pp. 517–518)

The importance of this transformative "power of the story" was exactly what was needed to respectfully work through the meaning and impact of what the Cultural Reconnection participants lived and experienced.

Using biographical methods of narrative inquiry, I sought to hear and learn from the collective voices reflecting on my research questions. I looked for common as well as individually distinct themes that emerged in the experience of cultural reconnection. For African Americans, getting to the essence of one's own origin is an act of liberation, a challenge to one's inheritance of haunting, wounding history. Thus, I also relied on the empowering framework of ideas advanced by Smith (1999) in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*. She asserted: "To indigenous people, research is a dirty word" (p. i). I feel that not only indigenous but any historically oppressed people share that feeling, the vulnerability of being studied. Previously, I thought this was because so often the researcher comes from outside the community and just examines, but is not part of an oppressed and struggling community. Now, my work has led to the realization that a person even from the inside of the community can cause harm by imposing a value system that is not authentic to the community in question. In the final section of this

chapter I revisit some aspects of inadvertent risks of research in my context and how I worked to avoid those risks.

In addition to engaging in a culturally attuned and decolonizing form of research, my approach committed to a particularly African way of envisioning the role of the past and of research participants reflecting on their past, both personal and shared. Hotep (n.d.) notes how research that brings out the role of personal and cultural memory reflects the ancient African symbol of Sankofa*: "*For 21st century Africans, Sankofa is the first step on the road to mental freedom" (para. 15). Sankofa, the symbolic bird that signifies the idea that to go forward, you must understand your past, was discussed in my literature review (Chapter II). Researching the individual memories arising from Cultural Reconnection journeys, reflects the central place that that backward-gazing bird has in appreciating the role of the recent and long past in African and African-American reconnections.

Dillard (2012) suggests:

> When we begin to move beyond race, ethnic, and gender as biological constructions to more culturally engaged explanations of being human, and when we seek to examine the origins of such knowledge constructions as to the very nature of how reality is known (its patterns of epistemology) we will find that what constitutes knowledge depends profoundly on the consensus and ethos of community in which it is grounded. (p. 2)

Tillman (2002) adds:

> It is important to consider whether the researcher has the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences of African Americans within the context of the phenomenon under study . . . can facilitate the cultural knowledge of both the researched and the researcher. (p. 4)

This is consistent with the need for the presence of the spirit in African American research. Both Dillard and Tillman see how stories work through metaphors at the subconscious level to bring about healing. They create a safe space, which was central to the goal of Cultural Reconnection journeys and now, to what I aimed for in research work with the participants.

Background to Cultural Reconnection

To explain the specific choices of narrative inquiry I undertook, it is necessary to briefly describe the context. The Cultural Reconnection program and the work of African American Kenyan Women Interconnect (see Cultural Reconnection & AAKEWO, n.d.). Working with others, I developed this program between 2000 and 2010 (and have continued to experiment and improve it since then). In 2000, I invited and coordinated the first group of African American women who traveled to Kenya to visit their ancestral homeland as part of a participatory action research study. The purpose of that study was to explore what occurred when African American women travel to their ancestral homeland and to see what effects this travel had on their cultural understanding. Since 2000, I have taken 80 people on a cultural reconnection delegation.

Participants were asked to reflect on what they learned about themselves during this experience. We had found that American scholars had conventionally gone to Africa to study African people, as if they were mere objects. Cultural Reconnection, by contrast, was a subject study of—and by—African American women within the African setting.

The objective in researching the return to the ancestral homeland at that time, was to see what changes would occur in ourselves, as a result of the voyage. After more than a decade the question now deepens, in my dissertation research, to exploring the essence of the discovery process: what led a significant number of participants to make this commitment to the Cultural Reconnection process? What has led some to return to their ancestral homeland repeatedly? And what have these travels meant to them as they resume living and working back in America? My focus is on the entire cycle of these voyages: how they participate in the travel planning; how they choose to be a part of an intense self-identity probe as a part of the African Diaspora; and

afterwards, what they do to consolidate and use what has been learned back in communities and work settings in North America.

As background in the dissertation, specific details on the structure and four founding principles that guide the Cultural Reconnection program are presented in brief form and should be born in mind when reflecting on the travel experiences. The following are drawn from personal notes and understandings with references following each that elaborate on the ideas behind each principle:

> Principle 1: *Cultural specificity*—Participants come together on the basis of shared historical and ancestral commonality. Cultural Specificity was intended to address the reversal of cultural disconnection and works through parts of the trauma/amnesia (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002).
>
> Principle 2: *Ongoing shared dialogue*—By hearing each other throughout the process, we observe and process our response to the itinerary and its events, Ongoing shared dialogue means naming the experiences from one's own critical standpoint (Dessel, Rogge, & Garlington, 2006; Zoller, 2000).
>
> Principle 3: *Collective action*—It is through group cooperation we experience moving within unknown places together and come to rely on one another (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Ostrom, 1990; Steady, 2006).
>
> Principle 4: *Common ancestral acknowledgement*—With the acknowledgement of the commonality as people of shared ancestry, there is an expectation of participation in practices considered to be indigenous to the African setting, enabling participants to get acquainted with their Africanity. (Ani, 1980/1994; Hilliard, 1998; Shockley, 2013).

Practice of these principles is followed in every delegation. This helps participants to turn the mirror of critical thinking onto themselves as they experience the long-awaited return to the

ancestral continent. This section shall explain generalizations about the standard preparation of travel itinerary.

Considerations in planning cultural reconnection travel. The Cultural Reconnection travel itinerary was a two-week cultural immersion that began on arrival in the large active metropolitan city of Nairobi, where there was an official kick-off event hosted by Kenyan women who had organized women's groups, leaders, and activists to meet and welcome us. We then would move into counties located in Western Kenya (Lake Victoria). Usually first events there would be in large towns, much smaller than Nairobi, but still, urban areas. From there we continued on to a more remote realm of villages and rural areas of the countryside. The African villages were what the majority of Kenyans refer to as the "ancestral homeland," as they are still configured by extended family, clans, and tribes long predating urbanization. In villages and rural areas there remain strong cultural traditions and customs that characterize the African landscape. Many of the final burial rites of those who have moved to or even grown up in cities are still conducted in the ancestral homeland.

During the first delegation visit in 2000, we scaffolded the exposure to remote locations in the itinerary to lessen the (possible) shock of entering a drastically different environment. Our intention was to expose delegates to the full scope of the African natural and cultural landscape, beginning with a location that is roughly similar to familiar urban American cities. In this, we felt that delegates would tend to see the commonalities shared with African hosts, rather than dramatic and glaring differences as fueled by Western stereotypes.

The itinerary involved participant observations as well as formal and informal interactions through workshops, seminars, luncheons and home prepared meals, official courtesy calls, and visits to previous sites where earlier delegations' collaborations continue. We also

sprinkled in elements of tourist attractions that included animal safaris and wildlife orphanages, rainforests, sacred sites, museums, and even night clubs. While the itinerary began with a rigorous schedule, we tempered it over the years, bringing a balance of enjoyment and hard work. But we always were clear before leaving the United States, that this was a working visit and not a vacation.

Following the return of the delegation, debriefs were held to share initial reflections. Discussions were often about what more people could do to stay in touch with their hosts. They pursued ideas that would help with the predicaments that were noticed while in the ancestral homeland. In addition to debriefs, we held educational forums, about what they experienced, as well as the emerging projects they planned to conduct in collaboration with African homeland sisters. In short, reflection on and for learning has always been built into the overall experience. This current study extends that, rather than introduce a whole new kind of activity for the participants.

Data and Interviews

The data for this study mainly consist of the words and stories of African American women who have been on Cultural Reconnection visits. My own personal recollection of the kind of experiences they described was helpful to the process of both interviewing and analysis. I was deeply engaged in activities surrounding this study—which had benefits as well as drawbacks to be discussed below. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) remarks were kept in mind in terms of the opportunity for me to witness: "The narrative inquirer may note stories but more often records actions, doings, and happenings, all of which are narrative expressions" (p. 79). But, to be clear, it is the interview, the participants' narrated stories, not mine or my prior knowledge of their lived experience going to Africa, which comprise the principal data.

Research questions. The overarching research question focused on the lived experience of African American women who engaged in a cultural reconnection process that culminated in the collective return to the ancestral homeland. Further questions were divided into before, during, and after the cultural reconnection process:

- Before the Cultural Reconnection process: What motivates people of African descent to want to return to their ancestral homeland?
- During the Cultural Reconnection process: What did participants learn about themselves during the Cultural Reconnection process?
- After the Cultural Reconnection process: What have been the experiences of African American women who returned to their ancestral homeland?

Interview approach. The interviews followed K. Jones' (2004) "minimalist passive" (p. 19) approach in narrative interviewing which starts with a few nondirective, general questions to get things going, and then allows the natural story telling of the participant to take over and drive the interview. These starting questions—presented in full in Appendix B—were:

- Before the return to the ancestral homeland. Thinking back. . .

  What was it that led you to want to come on this trip?
- During the return to the ancestral homeland. Thinking back. . .

  Please tell about a time when you were called upon to stretch yourself and felt affirmed while in the ancestral homeland.
- After the return. "Looking back" to today. . .

  What have you told others about your experience? Would you recommend it? And what influence do you think the experience has had on your role in your community/workplace?

Interviews: Numbers, Selection, Recording, and Transcription

The sample. The participants who were approached for interviews all were delegates in Cultural Reconnection between 2000 and 2010. All were American women of African descent, most of whom reside primarily in the Pacific Northwest. Some of the alumnae of past visits have relocated elsewhere in the United States and abroad or have passed on. Participant selection was restricted to the Pacific Northwest, primarily, Washington State to allow for ease of arranging face-to-face interviews.

I initially contacted 40 potential participants and the first 18 to respond were accepted into the study. As expected, this size proved to be sufficient to reach a point of saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Morse, 1995), where additional interviews did not add new information. Fourteen of the 18 interviews were conducted in person.

These interviews were emotionally charged and yielded rich and vivid information about the experiences of the participants. I was able to observe their body language as well as hear the sound of their voices. The emotions observed and shown by these participants clearly indicated how profoundly touched they were by the returns. The other four interviews were conducted by phone. These were emotionally charged too, but were not as rich as the in face-to-face interviews. The vividness of all interviews yielded thick descriptions of stories and of particular situations that each participant/story teller wanted to emphasize.

Participants' characteristics. Short biographical profiles of the participants were drawn in part from the archives of delegate brochures, prepared for the Cultural Reconnection journeys between 2000 and 2010 (Appendix C). The profiles are also based on information provided during the interviews. The participants are women of distinction, representing a cross section of the overall body of delegates. I use the phrase *women of distinction*—as long used in describing

African American women leaders (e.g., Scruggs, 1893)—because of their education, incomes, jobs, businesses, and homeownership demonstrate stability, independence, and relative success in their lives. For example, 90% (15) are homeowners; 50% (nine) are business owners; 80% (14) are gainfully employed (either self or other employer); and 20% (four) are actively retired. This group is considered to be high achievers, especially in the African American community, with 22% holding medical or doctorate degrees; 17% holding Master degrees; 33% holding Bachelor degrees; and 28% being high school graduates. Additionally, many are civic leaders and community activists. Four are involved in permanent relationships and 14 are not currently married. The participants range in age from 35 to 88 years. All participants are currently engaged in global activities. Participants were representative of middle income African American women.

Interview order. In the African tradition, elders of the delegations were interviewed first. Members of the Vision and Planning Team, who are the core organizers, were interviewed next and all other participants were interviewed last. Participants were provided an opportunity for a final debrief to correct or expand on their voices in the report and give me an opportunity to undergo double loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974) in the listening and research process. By this I mean it gave me an opportunity to reevaluate and modify my thoughts and actions in relation to the whole Cultural Reconnection process and dissertation.

As the leader of each delegation between 2000 and 2010, I knew the majority of participants before they joined. I took seriously Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) caution for researchers engaged in narrative inquiry, to be aware that "the research participant relationship is a tenuous one, always in the midst of being negotiated" (p. 72). Thus, I was attentive to the feedback provided by each narrator and held debriefings at the end of each interview to obtain feedback about the session.

Recording and transcription. I audio-recorded all interviews, subject to the concurrence of participants. This was discussed on first contacting interviewees and included in the written agreement. This document also covered the scope, purposes, and limits of the participants' role in reviewing transcripts and analysis.

Following Chase's (2008) recommendations, I kept brief notes during each interview on any notable non-verbal behaviors (sighs, shrugs, tears, etc.) as well as any other events during the interview (background sounds, interruptions etc.) that occur during the interview. Chase argues that knowing when these occur in the interview sequence may shed light on the verbal record as it is later analyzed.

Taped interviews were professionally transcribed verbatim, including both interviewer and interviewee statements. This is important to maintain accuracy and validity of a relatively unstructured interview process (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). All interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after each interview session and then read by me to ensure good recall.

Relationship Between the Researcher and Participants

How easy it is to pollute the relationship between two people in search of agreement on experiences and insights when one is the researcher and the other is what used to be called the subject—but was much more, the object! Huisman (2008) quotes a paper that captures this worry about the changed relationship, namely "'the danger of participants' lived experiences (*capta*) becoming our *data*, grist for the academic mill that become commodities of privilege to improve our status in the academic worlds" (p. 381).

Sinclair-Bell (2002) noted that "the deliberate attempt to seek out the voice of women and other marginalized groups carries with it the inherent risk that serious research will be

dismissed for its failure to conform to previous research standards" (p. 211). Being fully aware of the inherent risks involved in research with people that I had a previous positive relationship with, I was accountable to the integrity of the lived experience of women. A lot of what happened and how I honored friendships while keeping the research quality high, had to be learned by doing. I maintained faith and mindfulness of complications and was also fully open with the participants about the dilemmas and challenges. There were a fair number of studies that helped show the way particularly when the researcher and participants are friends (e.g., Brewis, 2014; Huisman, 2008; McConnell-Henry, James, Chapman, & Francis, 2010).

It was also important not to take a stance of defensiveness and reject critical feedback. As an insider to the Cultural Reconnection experience, I had the challenge of not assuming that I knew what would be said in advance by participants, which meant alertness as to not to give the impression too soon that I assumed that I understood what they were talking about, but to ask for explanation, listen carefully and patiently. I made sure that I read every transcript in full. Emerging themes were highlighted and grouped in pertinent categories.

Data Analysis

This section briefly describes gathering the narrative accounts of participant experiences and pulling the evolving themes from the rich content of their stories. These accounts were then viewed from the multi-varied theoretical lenses that were presented throughout the literature review and designed to interpret the continued exploration of the African part of their cultural identity. This was essentially an examination, not of their complete identities, but of their constructions of how the Cultural Reconnection experience reconfirmed the African part of being African American. Keep in mind that this analysis acknowledged the multiple identities and ethnic compositions that are characteristic to African American women, but placed particular

focus on the experience of being part of the African diaspora. Steps used in the data analysis process:

- Reviewed all notes taken as interviews were completed;
- Used reflective notes made during interviews and during review of transcripts;
- Made a list of words and phrases that commonly occur;
- Reviewed data, and commonly occurring words and phrases, and developed priori and inductive codes including:
    - Developed subcodes;
    - Refined and defined codes as necessary;
    - Reused codes as necessary;
    - Kept master list of codes.

After reading the stories of each participant, I engaged the assistance of two social research professionals who independently coded emerging themes arising from the raw data. I conducted a similar independent coding process, following Charmaz (2006), in which similar emerging themes provided a basis for the headings. All three of us checked the coded phrases that were incorporated as potential themes. All common themes were collectively identified, crosschecked, and discussed. Initially, we came up with 72 themes. I broadened and reduced the three initial ones which guided the interviews—before, during, and after the Cultural Reconnection experience—and further qualified the main themes with 22 subthemes or codes by creating definitions, combining multiple codes, and eliminating codes as appropriate. The themes are further elaborated and discussed in Chapter IV.

Addressing Ethical Concerns

This research was preceded by a review of ethical concerns through the Institutional Review Board of Antioch University (Appendix C). I subsequently adhered to these guidelines. I also adhered to the principles of justice, beneficence, autonomy and respect during the conduct of this research and while interacting with the participants. Participants had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time by letting me know of their decision. Participants had my contact information and were free to use it, as needed (Appendix A).

Autonomy. Information regarding the proposed dissertation was shared with each participant. They were given an opportunity to decline participation and ask any questions they desired about the research. Participants were given information about the benefits of participation in the study; not coerced into participation; were mentally stable; and provided informed consent. All participation was voluntary. Codes were used in place of participants' names to protect their identity and unauthorized use of their names and information, following the approach laid out by University of Washington School of Medicine (2014).

Beneficence. I did not foresee more than minor risk of harm to the participants, if at all. However, emotions are difficult to predict and gauge, so I made accommodations for potential emotional distress. The Cultural Reconnection process was full of joy and the pleasures of discovering roots, but there were some other darker emotions because following the principles were not always easy. At times, it is as if the experiences of slavery and oppression suffered by the ancestors may come back to haunt descendants. The suffering of post-traumatic slave syndrome (DeGruy, 2004), discussed in Chapter II, was kept in mind during the Cultural Reconnection experience and the return of memories that came as a result of my interviews. I made provisions for a counselor to assist participants if needed, and I checked on the participants

after the interviews. Earlier in this chapter, I outlined some of the ethical challenges that could possibly have been unavoidable because the participants and the researcher have had a close, friendly relationship. I remained mindful of the challenges and openly and fully shared them with the participants throughout the process (University of Washington School of Medicine, 2014). Key to the overall study was the fact that long before, during this study, and after it was completed, the participants are my Sisters in the context of a Sisterhood. There was a shared opportunity to use a mostly happy and profoundly emotional travel experience, to uncover deeper insights.

Limitations of the Research

The participants and I have shared friendships and experiences long before the research began. This raises issues about the validity of the data because of the problem of participants' trying to guess what I want to hear. I reminded the participants to remain as authentic and objective as possible in giving responses. Friendship can be both a strength and a limitation.

The data was self-reported. There are no means to ensure accuracy of the data in this respect. Such data can be biased. For example, recall bias which may occur when participants give accounts of the past.

I am a member of the African American community which is the community of study, very much what is referred to as an *insider-researcher* (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010) This positionality can be both a strength, in terms of access and contextual understanding, and a limitation, as when insider-researchers feel constrained about what they can ask people who they are already close to. However because of the nature of the study, especially the overwhelmingly positive feelings about Cultural Reconnection journeys, I believe this was more of a strength than a limitation.

There is also the inevitable issue that any quantitative researcher would raise about the small sample size. But my purpose is not to come up with generalized hypotheses; it is more to probe the uniqueness of each experience as well as what they had in common. As stated above, applying the idea of saturation (Morse, 1995) is an appropriate guide for the number of interviews and participants used in qualitative social research studies.

In spite of any such limitations, others who study or who plan reconnection travel, will be able to use my results to form general expectations about what might happen using various strategies to lead diaspora tourists to ancestral homelands in Africa or elsewhere. If my work is successful, others may be inspired and know more about the kinds of problems and benefits that could come out of these travels.

Chapter IV: Findings

This study was initiated to explore what impact the Cultural Reconnection (CR) has had on the lived experience of African American women who reside in the Northwest region of the United States. In this chapter I closely examine the essence of the experiences of participants who returned to the African ancestral homeland through the CR process. All of the participants are women of African descent—I use the phrase, *of African descent* to suggest a broad reach of participants' place of birth not only in the United States, but of shared African heritage. Narrative methodology, enabled participants to delve deeply into thoughts and past experiences to examine the cultural identity process that led them to return to the ancestral homeland, and engage in shared dialogue with Kenyans and each other. The latter allowed for design and undertaking of collective action. Participants and Kenyans were able to share ancestral acknowledgements presented through social interactions in the culturally specific environment of Kenya.

Presentation of Data

The overarching research question was what was the lived experience of African American women who engaged in a cultural reconnection process that culminated in the collective return to the ancestral homeland. The data were organized under the three secondary research questions around the main themes−accordingly the experiences before, during, and after the Cultural Reconnection event.

The *Before the CR* subtheme comprised codes and content related to the participants' decisions to join the delegation. This included how they perceived their cultural identity and who influenced and supported them to navigate this process. The second subtheme—*During the CR*—represented the content of lived experiences in the ancestral homeland. The third

subtheme—*After the CR*—related to the impact the return had on their life trajectories once the journey had been completed. Subsequent codes for each theme listed above are listed in Table 1 below:

Table 4.1

Main Themes and Codes Derived From Interviews

BEFORE THE CR: LIVED EXPERIENCES	DURING THE CR: LIVED EXPERIENCES	AFTER THE CR: LIVED EXPERIENCES
• Cultural identity and ancestral lineage • Influence of Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) • Naming one's cultural identity • Name change to reflect African heritage and identity • Culturally transmitted activism Africa • "On my bucket list" • Challenges	• Orientation: When and where you enter • Homeland security • Stay open—things might happen • Eldership • Self-determination • Womanism: Don't leave the men behind • Faces of AIDS / Poverty • Global transactions	• Family and parent leadership modeling • Women's work • Eldership • Empowerment and liberation: Lessons learned, discovery, realization • Where are they now

The results of the interviews are arranged in a manner that allows each research question to be responded to with limited duplication of experiences of stories. Where appropriate, only the part of a participant's statement that supported or answered a research question was used. I still could not eliminate all duplication because many of the comments made during the interviews are appropriate responses for multiple research questions. The responses below were arranged in the order of the main themes and subcategories.

Before the Cultural Reconnection Lived Experiences: What Motivates People of African Descent to Seek a Return to Their Ancestral Homeland?

In this section I discuss several themes from the interviews pertaining to the participants' lives before they joined Cultural Reconnection. These addressed the question of experiences and prior knowledge that motivated the return.

Cultural identity and ancestral lineage. The following section characterizes the participants in terms of how families of African descent intentionally planted seeds for understanding cultural identity in future generations. Their stories suggest that 16 of 18 participants' families planted seeds about the experiences arising from family lineage which paved the way to Kenya with intentional patterns of reconciliation.

Participant A (88 years old) lives in a remote part of the Pacific Northwest, but is originally from Newport News, Virginia. She is faculty emeritus at a state college and founder of one of the campuses. Participant A recalled that her father was a very powerful man. "He was a Garveyite" she stated with pride. "All of the men in my family were Garveyites." Participant A recalled how her father navigated segregation on their behalf. She stated, "We lived in ways that the children were shielded from the horrors of segregation." She continued, "My daddy would make up stories about why we should not go to movie theatres, celebrate Santa Claus and other symbols of White superiority as a way to make us free in our own world."

Participant A carefully watched both her father and mother teach. At times, her mother would "teach out of her kitchen window" as there were no school buildings, so kids gathered outside the house around the kitchen window for school.

At the time of her delegation, Participant B (over 70) was the director of Early Childhood Development Center at the community college where she worked for more than 35 years. Currently, she is the assistant to the President at the same college. As a person of mixed heritage, Participant B was always clear about her native ancestry. Her mother who was Native American was always the clearer side of this participant's identity. She explained:

> My paternal grandfather side . . . I knew that is where my Africanity originated. As a little girl as I saw pictures of him I always wondered where he came from in Africa. He was a slave in Kentucky who went on to become a college president. Dark in skin color. I often wondered where he came from and was moved to go to the homeland.

Participant C (over 60) grew up with a single parent, and was always clear about her heritage. She credited her uncle's contribution to shaping her identity. She stated that she was blessed as a child to know him.

> Due to the fact that Grandfather taught about assimilation . . . this is the way that we were raised in our home with my mother as a single parent. Uncle Bill had a strong understanding of the connection to Africa. Uncle Bill sent articles and messages about African ancestry. When my children were born, he sent a book about lineage.

She is a past president of the board of a health foundation, and currently a special assistant to the mayor of the growing city where she lives.

Participant D (over 60) grew up in Southern California as an only child and has lived in Seattle for at least four decades. She asserted that she lived a life unaware of her cultural identity until she went to college. It was not until her college days, beginning in 1969, that she was exposed to Black writers. This was when she took a conscious leap into an immersion-emersion process as defined and described by Cross (1991). She credited her friendships in the Seattle area for furthering her consciousness. She became part of a well-known African-centered Saturday school collective. Participant D holds a Master's degree and taught high school special education until her retirement.

Participant E (over 60) is a nationally known consultant, trainer, inspirational speaker and president of her own consultant firm for almost 30 years. Prior to that, she was the Director of Staff Training and Development at the local state university for 15 years. She noted that she grew up in the home of her grandparents, who she referred to as "race people." She continued:

> Call it what you will—Colored, Negro, etc.—they were always taking up the baton for someone's cause. Their pride and service suggested the reimaging Africa from a different perspective and left a positive impression. I knew to pass that on.

Participant F (over 60) is originally from New Jersey, and has lived in the Pacific Northwest for over three decades. She was elected to the State Legislature for two terms and has

her own non-profit organization in Educational advocacy. She credited her parents for raising her with a strong Black consciousness. “My super pride about Africa came from them,” she asserted in the interview.

At the time of the delegation, Participant G (under 60 years) was involved in entrepreneurial projects and had two young children. She was a computer software engineer at Microsoft where she worked on the development of products like Word, Publisher, and Interactive television for a global software industry. Participant G’s mother is from Puerto Rico and her father is from South America. She believed this background gave her a more advanced global perspective about the world than her peers. She stated: “We didn’t have any of that perspective of, ‘only the White man can do this or that.’”. Her family had concerns that were all over the world.

At the time of her delegation, Participant H (under 60) was the diversity development specialist in the Human Resources Department of a large U.S. Company. She was responsible for recruiting potential external candidates, facilitating career development for internal employees, and conducting diversity and sexual harassment prevention training for postal managers and employees. Participant H was also the co-director for a national association dedicated to Black culture and heritage. She stated: “One thing, family [members] on both sides of my family passed on was hard work; segregation caused self-sufficiency.” She credited segregation with sustaining strong social bonds that enabled her parents—a postal worker and teacher—to help build the “Black middle class.” She continued: “Earning a living and feeding your family was a value. We weren’t rich . . . and I never knew we were poor.”

Participant J (over 60) was based in California and a member of the core faculty at a premier college. She asserted, “I am from an upper class family—Mother, a PhD, and father a

dentist. Mother taught communications and Black history." She further described herself as the great granddaughter of freed African slaves. Her grandparents were taught from the early years, to see education as a tool for liberation. With hard work and persistence, they became professionals who lived and worked within the Black community of a city in New Jersey.

At the time of her delegation, Participant K (over 60) was a member of the faculty at a local community college. She was raised in the Pacific Northwest by her maternal great aunt, her grandfather's sister. "These kinship ties were deeply rooted in matriarchal African values. She said that we came from Africa."

Participant L (under 40) is a licensed Massage Practitioner. She also has a background in social services and spent over a year studying medicine in Cuba. She recounted how her great grandmother, who was a Garveyite, along with her great grandfather, passed on the value of returning to the ancestral homeland. Her grandmother arranged for her whole family to move to Ghana, by ship and plane. They arrived 11 days before Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown. They spent several years in Africa. This story illustrates that for some of the participants, there is a family legacy of returns.

Participant M (under 60) stated:

> Mother made dashikis [colorful garments widely worn in Africa] and 80% of our clothes. She wore dashiki and a hat while we were growing up. My uncle made African art. Uncle taught us African drum, ceramics painting the figures Black brown. The household was affected by the Civil Rights Movement.

Participant M knew that she would be a dentist at an early age. She stated: "It came from seeing my mother struggle. I made up my mind at a young age I would not be poor. In high school at a career class I found dentistry, but service is more than the profession."

Participant N (under 40) is an insurance broker. At the time of the delegation, she was a board member of a community organization concerned with the support of families who are victims of incarceration. She asserted:

> My mother is Black, my father is Black and Native American; I had the premium of light skin and good hair. As a Black woman in my Mother's family the native piece was praised. The Black part did not seem to be as appreciated. But I am not a Native woman from a cultural standpoint. It was at Howard University where I learned that being Black was important. I learned to say that I am really just a Black woman. I used to put on forms native and Black—eventually I put "Black."

Participant O (under 60) was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, but now resides in the Pacific Northwest. At the time of her delegation, she was a locally celebrated professional singer, and was employed at a local museum. On understanding her cultural identity, she stated:

> I come from a people who hold strong to family values. I knew that as Black people, there was richness in our bodies that most of the world wants to imitate. They want to embrace it but it brings up jealousy. It came from just watching my family.

Participant P (under 30) was born in Kisumu, Kenya and moved to the United States when she was four years old. At the time of her delegation, she was enrolled at the Academy of the Arts University and was contracted to film the delegation as part of CR's archival report on a decade of work. She left Kenya as a young child and, though she went back there a few times during childhood, was apprehensive about returning and seeing her ancestral homeland through the eyes of Cultural Reconnection. This would be the first time that she was to reunite with her father and his side of her family who were part of the Kenyan national counterparts. She described being nervous about returning as an adult. Also, having been contracted to document a film for the delegation made her feel pressure to represent them well.

Participant Q (under 60) is a director of Community and Constituency Engagement at an organization for family programs. She served as the executive director of a Washington council,

a governor's appointment. Participant Q described her mother's encouragement when she reflected:

> In many ways, Mother led her life through my activism . . . Mother didn't want us to forget who we were. She had shown support for the Black Panthers, but she led her life through my activism. In 1975 I was dropped off at the Pan African Congress meeting after her memorial, because I knew she wanted me to be there.

Participant Q is a charter member of a foundation of perpetual donors for a girls' school in Kenya.

Participant R (under 60) was born and raised in the Seattle area by very proud and strongly identified Negro, Colored, and Black parents in a mainly homogenous White neighborhood. She stated: "I had incredible and joyful experiences being a part of a Black community." At the time of her delegation, she owned her own community organizing consultant practice and had just exited an extensive career in AIDS prevention and management for people of color.

Participant S (over 60) retired from a public career as head of the office of civil rights. She attributes her ancestral consciousness and identity mainly to her late husband and friend with whom she raised her family. She was a pioneer in establishing annual Kwanzaa celebrations in the local community, as well as running one of the first African-centered Saturday schools. She has now retired and settled in a Southern state to be near her grandchildren.

Influence of historically Black colleges and universities. Six of the 18 participants attended historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). These institutions have long provided adult learning that appears to be essential for building the consciousness of African identity for many of this study's participants.

Participant H attended Spelman College in Atlanta, after growing up in the Pacific Northwest. She was convinced to attend this school by her parents. Of this she stated, "I did not

know I needed this experience." It was at the school that this changed and where she built up her Black consciousness. She took two classes that powerfully impacted her cultural identity:

> Black Sociology . . . one major section [of this] course was to think about what we have in common [such as] time; CP [colored people] time or sun setting versus where the sun is in the sky. . .Love for music and rhythm was the first introduction being made.

Participant J spoke of a time when she had to use her voice in collective action along with other students to change the curriculum at Howard University. She stated:

> When I entered Howard University there were no Black history courses. We were the rowdy bunch that fought to do away with Latin and Greek courses in exchange for all of the cultural attributes of Black power during the 70s.

Participant N narrated how she found Black history courses at Howard three decades later and how this helped her to understand her cultural identity. In the same vein, Participant H recalled an HBCU having a major impact on her cultural identity. She asserted, "Spelman College . . . woke me up to my Black identity." Participant A went to Virginia Union University. "This is a private school where I receive my BA. Morehouse preachers came to Virginia Union. You had to always be prepared to perform. You never knew when you were going to be called on. You were always prepared!"

Some participants singled out inspiring teachers who were of African descent and who went through great pains to teach students about their Black history. Participant E stated, "Thelma Hall was a teacher who taught African history . . . in her class we were constantly hearing all of that and I knew I had to go to Africa." Participant B similarly recalled the impact that educator Asa Hilliard III had on her cultural identity.

This section has presented the narratives that participants referred to before they joined a Cultural Reconnection delegation that resulted in the collective return to the ancestral homeland. From the themes of interviews, the next section will address the narrative content that referred primarily to their experiences during the return to the ancestral homeland.

Naming one's cultural identity formation. Fourteen of the participants shared information around their cultural identity. Initially in this study, reference to one's self as Black, was expected to be an overall category used by all participants. However, as the interviews proceeded, I realized that all participants do not refer to themselves that way. There are many different epithets African Americans use for self-referencing. Definitions as "African Americans" may also not inform whether the participant was actually born in the United States. Two participants were born elsewhere. While some people do not use the term to express their African lineage, they understand African to be part of their ancestral make up.

Participant Q said it well:

> I felt I was from Africa and I didn't hear any of that nonsense rumors [no hotels, bad food, disease, etc.] about Africans. My super pride about Africa came from my parents . . . I knew I was African. It was not based on personal affinity, but cultural affinity.

Similarly, Participant G deeply considered how a conscious perspective of her identity came to be, and noted that Africanity was woven into everyday life. "We never heard any of that negative nonsense about Africa." Likewise, Participant R had incredibly inspiring and joyful experiences in her Black community. The love of being Black was foundational. How to actualize that was an influence. Her notion of who she is brings a global location to identity, one that emerges in many of this generation of thinkers. She noted: "The way I identified was as a person of African descent. Influence by the notion of people from the Diaspora reconnecting. I was working on that prior in the Diaspora." Participant R described herself as located in a global world, as both an African in the Diaspora and as a person of African descent. This global view is not confined to the United States borders; to repeat, she saw herself as "existing in the world."

Participant L observed that in her family culture, there were clear definitions about who she was as an African child and that these were not challenged by her peers. She stated: "We

wear African clothes, head wrapped—people talked about my hair, twisted, Afro—that was who I was."

Participant N stated: "It was going to college at Howard University where I learned that being Black was important." Participant S observed, "I knew I was of African descent." Even when participants lacked clarity about the words to use, they were clear about the difference and what was not known. Participant S explained, "[Though] I knew I was of African descent; I did not understand that there was a hole there." The hole that she was referring to is the unwritten history and acknowledgement of African Americans in textbooks and other media; so many do not understand their African past or how cultural aspects were retained over such a long period since their ancestors' departure. Lack of knowledge presented in history textbooks requires that participants search beyond the classroom for information. American systems failed to connect the past with the present. A lack of understanding about cultural gaps that explain epistemological and axiological differences may cause confusion and uphold assumptions about the dysfunctional cultural practices in African Americans.

Participant O noticed that whoever she was in terms of identity was admired and imitated by others. She stated, "I knew that as Black people there was richness in our bodies that most of the world want to imitate, but we are not always aware of it." The lack of key information about cultural differences that others tried to imitate informed participants that their culture was special because it inspired others to imitation, proverbially the highest form of flattery. This got their attention.

Participant A stated, "My life came from the *National Geographic*." All she knew of Africa were the primitive people shown on the cover of *National Geographic*. Participant A's perception of the typical *National Geographic* magazine's stereotyping portrayal of African

lifestyle, was not uncommon among most who grew up in the United States. Pictures of naked women dominated popular images of Africa in such magazines (Florence, 2011). Participant A argued that "perspective adjustments" were needed, based on this distorted information about Africa, mentioning Tarzan and "jungle bunny" images. It was unnatural, she said, "to embrace and identify with that." Regarding the stereotypical information she was exposed to in her early years, Participant A observed:

> I knew that I was Black but did not think about it in connection with the jungle and the trees. . . . there was a process of discovery about African culture that led to the shift in perception about the depth and richness of culture that counteracts those early messages. . . I learned [instead] that this is a piece of fabric that came from Ghana and this piece came from Kenya, etc.

It was through such positive African associations that strong emotional connection developed. Participant A further reflected that the exposure to African fabric as an ancient tradition of quality, caused her to consider the possibility that Africa had an intact culture, contrary to the widespread image of being uncivilized and backward. Instead, seen in the fabrics, African culture was both elegant and valuable. Later dialogue, she noted, "turned my initial assumptions around and created a strong emotional connection that caused me to shift my understanding of myself and Africa."

Name change to reflect African heritage and identity. The fact that name changes play a significant role in determining an individual's African American cultural identity, is worth mentioning here. More than 20% of the past Cultural Reconnection delegates have officially changed their names to reflect Africanity. Even though only two of 18 participants in this study had made such name changes, the act of self-renaming by African American women, is a sacred and takes considerable forethought. For Participant Q, the name change was a bold step and she expected to get attention because of it. She stated, "I officially changed my name knowing that I would stand out. The name change took place 28 years ago." Participant R appears to have

changed her name as part of a life shifting initiative that came about when she was 40 years old. She then underwent a further name change in 2000, a ceremonial process that involved two elders naming her. She also had quit her job and launched her own practice that utilizes community organizing. She believed that the love of being Black was foundational and this would be expressed in her new name.

Participant R noted the affirmation that came from her father when he told her that he liked the way her "new name sounded." Other family members of Participant Q, have since given the same name to their children, as a tribute not just to the fact that it is a researched African name, but also the admiration felt for the "self-knowledge" demonstrated in this bold initiative. Clearly both individuals were prepared to make the permanent choice of a name change as a public declaration of self-knowledge well before they became part of Cultural Reconnection.

Culturally Transmitted Activism

The theme of activism that arose from being amidst African American culture, emerged as some participants began to piece together how they learned their culture. Five of 18 participants shared information on culturally transmitted activism. As they spoke about how they came to understand culture, they generally referred to older relatives who modeled activism in their communities. There was a culturally transmitted value of resistance and acting on injustices. This brand of activism was also a part of the family legacy. In particular, grandparents and elders appear to set an example of activism in their communities while participants, as young children were witnesses.

Participant B recounts how her father appeared to model activism after his father who, she explained, had been considered,

> at the bedrock of the Civil Rights . . . [he was] the chair of Urban League, had listened to the Black Panthers and was present with Rosa Parks. . . . My grandfather took my father to Africa and my father told stories about his experiences. My father was a visiting professor at University of Accra, when I was a senior in high school, 1957. He was a guest of DeClerk as a visiting Sociologist. From the time I saw him at the pyramids and sitting on a camel in East Africa I knew that this was a place I wanted to visit. Knowing my father had been there.

Participant B pieced together the construction of her family through skin color. She credited her paternal grandfather for where her family knowledge in Africanity originated: "Dark in skin color; where from in the homeland." Like a badge of honor, fathers and grandfathers were watched making attempts to return to their ancestral homeland made profound impacts on their daughters.

Participant M recalled:

> A race riot on our street and it started with our family. This was a mixed neighborhood. An aunt worked at the VA hospital. The white people had a party. Someone blocked the driveway. They called everyone over an insulting name. The family and neighborhood came to a riot. Mother had a gun. There were guns and fire!

In Participant S's family reunion, she discovered that her grandfather went to get on the boat sailing to Spain as a Garveyite. There were stories, she explained, "part of a rich oral tradition of passing on specific messages that build heroism in the family lineage about attempts to return to Africa."

As the reflections continued about how they learned their cultural identity and who taught them this information, 13 of 18 participant interviews revealed significant learning passed on from fathers to daughters, (including other father figures in the extended family). Participant H noted how her father instilled certain work ethics that were a key to her success: "Father encouraged(?) me to work. Stay self-sufficient for money and well rounded." This helped facilitate her financial stability and being able to afford to go to Africa. For Participant G, the fact that her father was called to the ministry shaped her life and sense of duty.

All of these features in the relationship with men and their daughters (or nieces) indicate modeling that inspired their daughters to achieve high performance and to stand for social justice.

"Africa—on My Bucket List"

Life-long desires to see Africa came up repeatedly during the interviews. Twelve of 18 participants indicated that going to Africa was on their "bucket list" (referring to something one hopes to do before passing away, or "kicking the bucket.") Participant G expressed that going to Africa had been on her bucket list. This sentiment, though expressed in this and different words, resounded with other participants as a requirement to fulfill during their lifetime. "When the opportunity came up and seemed appropriate," said Participant J.

Participant R notes:

> Before the Cultural Reconnection invitation, there was nothing life changing happening in my orderly life. I was ready for a new life. CR came at a great time for me. I needed to know for myself because I wanted to know how much I had quit my job and was doing [her consultant name].

Participant J explained how she had previously travelled the first time she had an opportunity. She stated, "I longed to go to Africa. The chance presented itself in 1979 with Operation Crossroads and I was invited to help build roads, and wells, things of that nature." A number of participants used very similar language when speaking of why they made the journey, summing it up basically as "I wanted it *for me*."

Participant M recalls:

> I always knew I was going to Africa. In the 2nd grade I colored a picture of African culture; I read about Black inventions and museums; I was introduced to African Egyptian art at University of Penn; I met Garveyites meeting in Pa; that is when I first traveled to Egypt with Dr. ____. My mind was free.

When she made the decision to go to Kenya, it was out of overwhelming grief she felt for a series of losses in her family. She participated in saving her stepfather's life through natural remedies. She stated,

> I was in need of a break after losing my step father to cancer, when I was so actively trying to save with natural remedies. It broke my heart when he died. I needed to get out. I was in a place of having the desire and means to do it. The right person; the right moment; the right everything! Money is always an issue but not a barrier. I remember being excited and didn't have any . . . I didn't know what it was going to be like.

Like a significant number of other delegates, Participant A found her curiosity for Africa grew from encountering, Seaweed International, which was a Seattle clothing and accessory store I operated. Participant A recalled:

> When Seaweed was in Seattle, there was learning taking place. I learned that this piece of fabric came from Ghana, and this piece came from Kenya, etc., a strong emotional connection occurred through this dialogue. Seaweed took me back to the *National Geographic* [a reference to the images of Africa in that magazine] and moved me to the glamour.

Participant C remembered the first "Ladies' tea" that was held in honor of Phelgona, a Cultural Reconnection cofounder, while visiting the Pacific Northwest. She recalled:

> As an adult, I wanted to connect with Africa . . . [I] came to a Tea for Phelgona. Phelgona stood up and invited us [to go on a Cultural Reconnection visit]. I told Marcia to make this happen and we will go!

She was motivated by the chance to have meaningful conversation about the experience, firsthand, with someone from Africa, rather than rely on the lens of European Americans who had so dominated much of what she had grown up when thinking about the so-called Dark Continent. "This lens [was] not always intentional, but we are diminished as a people." Autonomy was already there in her spirit and feelings, so timing could not have been better. Participant C recalled how Phelgona (who was visiting from Kenya) stood up and invited us. "I asked [the local hostess] to make this happen."

Indeed, it was out of this moment that the first delegation was arranged and carried out. Phelgona committed to the management of the delegations at a high quality. With affiliation to Cultural Reconnection activities (being the child of the co-founder), Participant D was regularly involved in the process, "but at an unconscious level," she recalled. "In 1998 I was present for Phelgona Okundi where the CR was conceived at the initial Tea. I packed supplies and helped to serve food at the [Send offs] as a child in the community." Even though Participant D was born in Kenya, she felt only a remote connection to her country of birth. She had last visited while still as a child and did not feel close. She describes:

> I was contracted in 2008 to document a film for a Cultural Reconnection delegation. This was 20 years after leaving [Kenya]. Now trust was placed carefully in me, but it still made me nervous. This was the first time I would go as a delegate.

In all, the bucket list item of going to Africa, as an enduring intention, has been a motivator for many who wished to see their ancestral homeland in their lifetime.

Challenges

Many stereotypes and myths about Africa create challenges to visiting Africa. Stereotypes and myths perpetuated on a country and its people can be cruel, demeaning, and marginalizing. They create fear and preconceived notions about a country, especially when people believe them to be true. Four of the 18 participants expressed hearing that females were not treated well and about Africa being an unsafe place to visit because of poverty, widespread disease, bad food, and domineering males. Participant H stated:

> Upon arrival in Nairobi late at night, I found out that the hotel was a hotel . . . The food was outstanding. Familiar foods—greens, tilapia, fruits, [and] vegetables—done *their* style. Contrary to my original fears, I never had a problem eating.

Participant N added:

> I [while in Africa] saw a balance of male female power, and cooperation in their relationships. Having a baby was a source of pride. There is such a stereotype about

> African men being over their wives and dominant, and were over everything. That was not my experience!

The Cultural Reconnection team worked to alleviate the fears, stereotypes, and myths of the participants from the opening orientation through to *kwaheri*.[3] The realization that these preconceived notions were not an accurate depiction of Africa as a whole, is addressed in the next section.

During the Cultural Reconnection Lived Experiences: What did Participants Learn About Themselves During the Cultural Reconnection Process?

In this section I present interview themes and observations arising during the preparation for travel to Kenya as well as the experience of Kenya. This section answers the question: In what ways did being in the ancestral homeland impact participants' understanding of themselves in relation to Africa?

Orientation: when and where you enter. A great orientation was key to the success of Cultural Reconnection. The phrase, "when and where we enter" comes from Anna Julia Cooper's (1892/2016, p. 12) in reference to Black women entering a different environment after Emancipation.

The return of Cultural Reconnection delegations to the ancestral homeland began with a 16-hour orientation over four sessions that were scheduled in the preceding months. This beginning was intended to help participants start to internalize the exploration and probe of their own cultural identities. From the interviews, this early part of the process appears to have been vital for positioning themselves globally. In the words of Participant L, "The orientations and reading materials connected a lot of dots for me where we were then and where we are now." Five of the 18 participants expressed the benefits of the orientation. For them, this was an

[3] Literally means "goodbye" in Swahili. Here it refers to a farewell ceremony.

opportunity to get acquainted with each other, learn facts versus myths which helped to alleviate their fears and anxieties, and gain a greater understanding of the planned visit.

Participant J noted that the orientations were about centering and examination. She explained that the orientation was,

> about the way that we return to Africa . . . Orientations introduced us to the idea of asking. Through this inquiry we asked, who Africans are and what we African Americans need. We know so little about ourselves in the world.

According to Participant N, the orientation helped her to understand the broad range of people and places where the delegation would have interactions: Kisumu, Mombasa and Nairobi. She pointed out how it helped to break away from old National Geographic-style stereotyping. "The initial experience was during orientation. We talked about the original perception of kids with flies and big stomachs."

Participant H reflected that orientation was for getting in touch with the issues. Her anxiety had been generated by the nurses at a travel health clinic where she got immunizations. The assumptions about Africa as a dangerous destination, she indicated, are pervasive in society, discouraging and not affirming to the traveler. The nurses offered her pills for her anticipated stomach problems from the food. Participant H was apprehensive despite her attendance at the orientations where we tried to present a more moderate and realistic preview of disease possibilities. She noted that the orientations were a place where she could get out her inhibitions and fears. Of the arrival in Nairobi late at night, she declared as if very surprised, "I found out that the hotel was a hotel. A real city [like the ones in the United States that] I am used to!" The orientations were the place to feel and work through this understandable anxiety. Participant H recalls, "We did not know that we needed the orientations. Some things . . . needed to be pointed out, such as basic vocabulary, advice to not give individual money out, etc."

Participant P stated, “Most of my orientations were done on the phone. I was away at school. When the morning came to travel, I flew from San Francisco and awaited at the departure gate.” Even though she was familiar with some of the delegates by telephone, she described the first time that she met the whole delegation:

> By the time of arrival to the gate, some of the women I had grown up with all of my life, others I had not known. By the time we got to Kenya I was inserted into the group of my younger peers and by the end of it I had a full squad behind me!

The orientation was also an essential part of the preparation because it involved bonding as a group and learning to rely on each other as well as the benefit of diverse and intergenerational perspectives that enriched intra-group identity.

“Homeland Security”

This theme—which somewhat ironically came to be referred to as homeland security (given the above-mentioned fears)—emerged as it became apparent that almost immediately, the participants felt comfortable and at home in Kenya. Five of the 18 participants expressed this. Part of the reason was that they were able to allay their fears and assumptions once they arrived. It seems that they were pleasantly surprised at the urban nature of Nairobi where they landed. Moreover, the welcome that they received from their Kenyan counterparts appeared to be genuine and family-like. Some noted that the welcome was overwhelming and undersold. Soon, family emerged as an overall theme for participants to invest in this kind of travel.

Participant Q asserted, “the orientation did not prepare me for the unexpected outpour of kindness. Being treated like royalty . . . [I] cannot explain how our people embraced us.” A local chief even sent security guards to escort the delegation adding to the unexpected feelings of being safe and at home. Participant Q continued, “Just show out and show up. Cultural Reconnection totally undersold the welcome!” Participants recognized the relational way of being together and becoming friends that happened almost on arrival. In a similar vein,

Participant O explained, “It was sisters talking; It was mothers and aunties.” The extended family network that was familiar to African American women through lived experience, quickly sprung up in the environment they were in. Participant O went on to state, “We walked into someone’s home and [it was] just as if I was walking into my Auntie’s home in Guyana.” Participant Q added, “A maid in the hotel looked like my niece—I don’t need ancestry.com to confirm that this is blood!”

Participant N expressed her surprise at the nature of Kenya’s urban centers. She stated: “The fact that Nairobi was turned up like New York, had never crossed my mind” She also observed, “Nairobi looked like a portion of Baltimore—I say Baltimore because I have been where it was *really* Black in the United States.”

Participant B noted that the commonalities were very clear. “This is why we were dedicated to extended family. People from the Diaspora are connected. The commonalities were made clear through the treatment of participants as family members.” The relational nature of welcoming family based on a pre-established network was satisfyingly familiar to participants. Participant A observed that she “never saw any hostess hide anything because people were coming to steal. What is mine is yours.” There was this trust factor where everyone relied on each other from this moment forward.

Participant E asserted: “Inside [the] home [of] families [there was] person to person relationship. [The same] meeting and talking with people outside in the rural areas, Kanyamfwa, Julia’s village. In these places and even in Kisumu, we had no distractions.”

The theme of this very different kind of homeland security, assured not by forceful institutions but by hospitality and kinship, continued to emerge in all stops the delegation made as it became apparent that everywhere participants felt comfortable and at home in Kenya.

Participants whom I interviewed continually stressed the sense of welcome that had not been expected. The kind of painful and ambivalent reaction, seen in those words from Richard Wright, first noted here in Chapter II, may have been a secret fear by participants but if so disappeared immediately. The statement was:

> Africa! . . . something strange and disturbing stirred slowly in the depths of me . . . What would my feelings be when I looked into the face of an African, feeling that maybe his great-great-great grandfather had sold my great-great-great-grandfather into slavery? (Wright, 1954, pp. 3–4)

Instead, as Participant P stated: "There was a lot of family! After eight years, I saw my father, aunties, cousins, who I was able to reconnect with. Still felt like I was on the American side of myself."

Further strengthening the feeling of homeland security in the ancestral homeland, was a hard-to-describe bond within the group itself, a "safety blanket," as several participants referred to it. Participant Q noted, "No one could have prepared me for the unexpected outgrowth of kindness that I witnessed. It was like being treated like royalty. I cannot explain how our people embraced us."

Participant Q was one of the charter Ombogo Donors—a group of women organized by our late Vision and Planning Team member, Zakiya Stewart—that provides a perpetual scholarship, awarded every year to a delegate. Every charter member is given a tree with a plaque to mark her visit to the school. This is the place where Participant Q decided to bury her mother's ashes. She recalled, "planting the tree with the ashes of my mother was like saying 'Mama, we're home!'"

This is reminiscent of Participant R whose father would tell people "You know my daughter has been back to the Continent." There was a sense of accomplishment on behalf of forbears who did not get to return to their ancestral homeland.

Stay open—things might happen. Being fully open to the novel experiences of the ancestral return was another theme that arose from the interviews. Nine of the 18 participants shared information related to this theme. Participant E remembered the cofounder saying to new delegates, "If you stay open, you never know what is going to happen. We treat this itinerary as a draft itinerary."

"Indeed," noted Participant E, "unexpected things happened all the time! Such as when the Mayor of Mombasa invited us to accompany him on a 'meet the people tour.' He even assigned us our own body guards." She continued:

> When the Prime Minister shows up at the airport and stops his entourage to give us warm welcome and greetings, while holding up the line at the local airport, as if we were State visitors. When does that happen? Never!

She recalled the stature of women who came to meet us—the wives and widows of the first decision makers of the country after independence. She finished: "This is how we knew we were important."

Participant D pointed out:

> At debriefs, people got to explore their intergenerational learning sharing however we could despite our inability . . . [We] got to process and also hear experiences. Saw how deep the trip was on so many levels. The debriefs were so crucial.

In the interviews, there were many stories of the unexpected that occurred along the way offering spurts of learning to individuals and to the group. Participant K recalled:

> When there was a storm occurring in the village at Kanyamfwa, the women got very nervous. We looked to the Kenyan women and they continued to read. Julia continued to read. She wanted her voice heard. If you really are a Christian, say 'Peace be still!'

Some unanticipated things that happened by staying open included events that made participants think about their own families. On raising children and addressing her

self-consciousness about being a single parent, Participant K reconsidered her role as a mother. She recounted:

> I remember that several places they would say what they did, but go on to say what their children were doing. I always felt like having a child was not a source of pride. At the end, people in the group started introducing themselves as "[their daughters' names] Mom." Other people in the group started talking about their children. "Yeah, I am a single mom and I also do this."

Participant L recalled her incident with a man who wanted to court her. She said:

> In Mombasa, I had to go to the Department of Health. He offered a private tour. Flirting happens in the polite ways. We took a picture and later . . . an embroidered dress was sent from Mr. Nasir. Later, Mr. Nasir was at the hotel with an 18-inch lobster. And a necklace. I wondered, don't you have a wife and kids? [Another delegate] said I think it's time to bury the lobster! This became an inside joke.

Participant H recalled that once, along with her roommate, they convinced the bartender to serve drinks past the closing time. It was there she noted a conversation that immediately connected her with a tribe in Kenya. "While having a drink, the waiter tells me that I looked like a Kamba." A Kamba is one of the 42 tribes in Kenya. She continued, "He described Kambas as beautiful, good dancers, very loyal, possessive and witches!" The mention of these attributes convinced Participant H that this confirmed a spiritual connection with this tribe. She stated:

> I knew then he was right about this. My husband calls me a witch all the time. [According to her husband] I help the Seahawks win, I make bills mysteriously get paid, et cetera. I knew then, that I was home even if it was [conjecture]. That night, I found out I *was* a Kamba.

Also, Participant H discovered that her fear about the food was unfounded. She was ashamed of how quickly she had given into the paranoia encouraged through her interactions at the travel clinic. She stated: "The food was outstanding. Familiar foods, greens, tilapia, fruits, vegetables, done their style. Contrary to my original fears, I never had a problem eating."

Participant G remembered how she began to envision her invention of solar reading lamp kits—an enterprise pursued after she returned as will be discussed below—for innovative

creations in the remote nonelectrical environment of the African bush. Regarding a visit to the ancestral homeland village affectionately known as *dala* (a Luo word for home or homestead), she recalled, "Dala is my favorite. The rural setting feels more comfortable there. At first I thought, how am I going to live without my iPad? I was concerned about the lack of power after 6:45 pm!" She considered kerosene bad for health. But then, thinking deeper about life in that remote environment, she contemplated to herself:

> I got into solar energy development right there. I thought they have great sun every day; they are located at the equator, so this would be conducive to solar energy. Matching with counterparts in this case, engineering, with more men than women. I am more used to dealing with men. In college, in 1982, engineering was still not common [for women]. I had competencies that were male oriented and gravitated toward the men who run the businesses.

Participant G was accustomed to having professional conversations with men; so it seemed natural that she would engage with them first in Kenya. She recalled, "The first discussion was with a group of men at the bar. We had a three-day discussion about solar availability costs. They looked at me like, 'little girl, you don't know what you are talking about!'" It was then that she realized that there were women who had been closer to the problem, given that they and their families populate the rural areas where the predicament of lacking sufficient night-time light for reading was long, firsthand experience. She recalled:

> I had made the assumption that the men ran those businesses. But women ran these businesses, not the men. The women could reason [with her] because they grappled with the problem first hand. I saw a purpose for my expertise and this made me feel like I belonged there.

Participant P remembered her ancestral homeland fondly. She recalled: "I kissed the ground. I wanted to kiss the ground too. I was in dala for the first time ever."

She was filled with sentimentality for her birth place. She explained:

> There is a Luo saying that "Kisumu dala wa / Kisumu pacho—Kisumu is the heart of home." Referring to this being the place where she was born, but also a predominantly Luo population, the town is full of cultural pride.

Considering that this was her birthplace, she went on to clarify her statement about seeing the country for the first time:

> I had been there before, but the difference was that there was a mission behind it the whole time. Nothing as intentional as when going on a CR trip. History, dialogue, landmarks, tribes—are intertwined into our every step. That is why I say it was my first time being in Kenya. Dala is actually my ancestral home, but I learned more about it, the community and what kinds of things community was doing. Community came to sing to welcome, to announce the library, to have dialogue. I got to pour libation at the grave of Grandfather and Grandmother. The community was there with us too. Children did not all speak English. But I met a young boy named _____ [after one of the male patriarchs] who was my grandfather. I made a connection with him. At night, the kids came to eat with me and we talked for hours exchanging stories informing me about school. I will always able to be with the group and my own sense of belonging could go into my pocket.

Participant P clearly found a sense of belonging and was able to allay her apprehension about returning to her ancestral homeland. Because of her age, she was able to relate to a variety of ages, especially children. Participant A expanded on this:

> One of the most special times was when we sat without lights, in the dark, writing poetry. We wrote and these are the poems of the culmination of experiences we had. This was the real truth! The testimonies! That virtually collective piece of poetry was the epilogue of the culmination of experiences.

Participant F said:

> I loved watching all of these secretary birds, our DNA! I got so much from them. *These Negroes* were majestic. The baboon had confidence. I never saw a broken-down animal. Even the billy goats who knew they were going to be executed did so with honor!

Participant A stated:

> My life came from the National Geographic, so I was fascinated by how we learned from the animals. Looking out of the window at the giraffe spreading his legs, showing Black men how to spread their legs was when I saw football [quarterback], basketball, all in the animals. They are our first sport teachers. It was part of an episode in a series of journeys. I saw it as a play. My National Geographic days faded out and now I am very comfortable with who I am today.

Participant L pointed out, “I was the first to see the water buffalo. Joye was giving a presentation. That water buffalo was going to be eaten. Maxine said it had low self-esteem; [like]

a million of us." Participant A said, "At the Hotel lodge in the game park, when the lions tore up the wildebeest in front of us!" Participant P remembered, "So fun, so thrilling, bouncing around Kenya embarking on something different every day."

It is interesting to note that the animal safaris had been considered as just a break from the itinerary, a time to decompress and sightsee. Yet again, to the participants' surprise, these wildlife encounters constantly provided insights into the cultural identity process.

Eldership. In Africa, the role of the elder is highly esteemed. There is a conspicuous absence of elders in contemporary American lifestyle due to ageism, stereotyping (Nelson, 2004) and increasing institutionalization of the elderly Also, mass migrations took place away from the old Southern/African traditions of maintaining families that once held a respected and dignified role for the elders. These were once prevalent among African Americans but, now have become but a distant memory (Wilkerson, 2004).

Four of 18 participants were elders or emerging elders and commented on eldership. The first elder who elected to join our delegation was initially resistant to playing this role at first, but soon understood its advantages in the African setting where she received deference. She quickly became accustomed, stating:

> My life was in the back of the bus. I can tell you about senses. My senses were restored in Kenya. Complete restoration! I am older now. Through my travels, life is not about events. I am happy that the design allowed for the flexibility of an elder. I name this life: "Before Kenya"— BK and "After Kenya"—AK!

This elder was noticing more and more her Kenyan counterparts and began to gain insights:

> Mother Sarah [Obama's grandmother] can sit there being alive. Just being there, whatever she did for Obama . . . I learned to be patient. I had to learn to roll over potholes and adjust my body to the road. I learned that this was the true pilates and yoga. Just go to Kenya! Arthritis, hypertension? [older] people are out there selling bananas. I am learning to live! Live with inconvenience. It will cause you to live or you will die.

This elder, Participant A, believed that inconvenience was necessary in the delayering process. She recounted, "cramped my behind on a bus to crawl up in a corner. Paying for my own ability to be uncomfortable, all the while delayering myself." She went on to explain that the delayering occurs in a circle formation which is a natural formation of chairs in most Kenyan homes. Her reference to the circle is about a natural formation of most Kenyan households. The chairs in the living room often form a circle for group conversation and thinking. This was noticed by many participants as a significant formation that created an atmosphere of trust and immediate comfort. She noted,

> Here were two colonized minds trying to meet eyeball to eyeball, forcing us to delayer rapidly. It felt natural to sit in a circle. Missionaries got us out of the circle to f___ us up. The dozens were about putting your mother in the circle and ridiculing her.

Instead of referring to churches, others spoke of the colonizing approach to be giving up circles for

> theatre style—where one can only see the back of your head. You cannot build trust that way. When everyone is looking at each other, then you know who they are and what they are doing with their eyes and hands.

Self-determination. This section demonstrates the building of awareness about self-determination that participants experienced on their journeys. The idea that emerged was that people can use their own ingenuity to create or invent and satisfy their needs. This is a development that may have required that people leave their everyday environment to see themselves and their possibilities from new and different perspectives. Four of 18 participants shared stories and information related to self-determination.

Participant G pointed out her discovery: "We can function without White people!" She saw this as a learning and not a natural occurrence. She also noticed that there were people who found this difficult to believe. This is an indication that removal from the everyday environment enabled participants to see from different and more liberated perspectives.

Participant P remembered being "unapologetically Black on that trip." Participant C recalled the first delegation entering the country at a time when Kenyan women had strong voices through their national organizing efforts in a non-profit organization called Maendeleo Ya Wanawake. This group has a "mission to improve the quality of life of the rural communities especially women and youth in Kenya" (Maendeleo Ya Wanawake, n.d., para. 1) Phelgona, the Cultural Reconnection co-founder whom many had met in the United States, was the national vice-president. Participant C had noted, "autonomy was there; so, the timing could not have been better." At the same time, participants grappled with the meaning of being self-determined while on the journey. While Participant G reported that she "learned that we can function without White people," she went on to say, "I experienced surprise from others about that. It was not a surprise to me. The freedom to test your personal ingenuity is an autonomy that seems unavailable in the USA's exclusive systems."

On raising children and addressing her self-consciousness about being a single parent, Participant G reconsidered her role:

> I remember that several places they would say what they did, but go on to say what their children were doing. I always felt like having a child was not a source of pride. At the end, people in the group started introducing themselves as "[her daughter's name]'s Mom." Other people in the group started talking about their children. "Yeah, I am a single mom and I also do this."

Womanism—don't leave the men behind. The meaning of womanism comes alive in the narrative stories about how the Kenyan women the participants interacted with appeared to have thriving lives. Seven of 18 participants shared information related to womanism. I am focusing here on comments from two participants in this section. The relationship that Participant R witnessed changed the way she saw activism. She said, "That you could be thoughtful and loving and loved and a powerful woman at the same time! The role of a woman who loved family—I had not known that." She provided examples from her host family:

> I saw a balance of male female power, and cooperation in their relationships; Benita and I would be sitting there and Phillip would say "no no!" And she would be saying "yes, yes!" Either you have to be strong, a go-getter woman without men, or women who were B___ verbal.

Participant R pointed out that her prior understanding of feminism used a harsher approach to gender relations. Her time in Kenya had compelled her to conduct further research and reflection on the nature of womanism.

> [In Kenya] we meet with women who ran their own world. We were very insulated . . . We got to see not just empowered women [but also] the men who supported them, not just to make a good wife but to be fully determined.

While on the journey, she reflected on how she could apply these lessons in her work and in her own household back home. Kenyan people in their homes who were so welcoming, Participant J stated:

> [They] made to feel at home, we were greeted by people who surrounded us, embraced us, coming home like a family reunion, lovingly contained. In all of their generosity, I wondered who they thought we were. I have to ask, what is the condition of the people who I was stolen from? Masters and powers at be have done everything to keep us down and still we rise! Still we rise! (Drawing on the words of a poem by Maya Angelou)

Faces of AIDS/poverty. Three of the 18 participants expressed discomfort in witnessing severe poverty. We visited neighborhoods where abject poverty was glaringly present. While there was a diversity of social and economic classes that delegates were exposed to in Kenya, they could not help but being affected by the poverty they saw. Participant M said she could see the extremeness of poverty in the faces of the women, "I saw a hardness; they worked very hard." Despite research she undertook before the journey, she admitted to being "not aware of HIV AIDS and how it impacted people of Kenya." The high incidence of orphans and the crying need for orphanages was striking.

Participant B took another view of this topic. She stated:

> Unlike the US, the face of poverty in not uncommon. For example, if you live in the coal mines of Kentucky, the living condition are the same as in the deep rural areas of Jamaica! The faces of poverty are the same. Haiti, Dominican Republic, you name it.

Participant R reflected:

> I was asked if would I be willing to say something about HIV/AIDs. At the break, I asked another delegate to do that . . . [but] CR challenged me to come out of that. The women are incredible people versed at what they do. Sometimes I sit back because I know that these are the sisters who know.

Participant M also spoke about the disease and its effects. She was admonished for telling a story about how HIV/AIDS was a laboratory disease. She stated:

> It was important to share. They got me thinking how serious the HIV was. By the time I got to Mombasa, then I saw a little girl I wanted to adopt. We were hanging with the rich guys. I was disgusted by his maids who were poor. This is slavery! The dichotomy, the haves and the have-nots. We went to dinner at the Fort Jesus. I was in conversation and had an out of body experience. I was wandering in a deep breathing meditative state. And this happened to me in Mombasa. The spiritual message was it is time to stop coming to Africa as a tourist. Having tropical drinks.

Global transactions. This theme emerged in the interviews as two of 18 participants pieced together the global predicament that delegates were witnessing first hand in the Cultural Reconnection journey. Situations that arose there forced the delegates to grapple with how to approach sustained relationships. Participant G was reminded of when gifts could be turned into a source of conflict and misunderstanding. Referring to gifts that the delegates had brought with them for Kenyan counterparts, she observed:

> Books kept under lock and key. Things that were brought for the children were used by the adults. Through a Western lens, it almost looked like people were stealing things from the children. Kind of have to let go . . . How do we come and dictate? I was disappointed over this [the gift giving] there were sometimes discussion about whether to take action. It may be a question about the idea of equals. Sometimes we witnessed a greater need there, but we were not in position to judge that! It smacks of arrogance and paternalism! Looking at grown women as children. That took a different sense of ownership. It was arrogant, but I did not see it as much with us because of the orientations.

Participant C recalled the importance of institutional infrastructure and credited the Kenyan women with adhering to certain practices that made this sustainable. She reflected on the Duonga women who worked together to build houses and obtain training to become water tank masons, and then selling the water and putting the funds back into the infrastructure to support hospitals, and other infrastructures in their village.

> I thought of how little we [women in the United States] had done in contrast with what they had done. [That is, about] women groups, domestic violence, water, education. Duonga women built a house for the widow. Chickens had died so they shifted focus to water. Duonga women were the brunt of the village joke. . . . Some of the women were water tank masons. They filled 16 to 18 water tanks [per day]. Seeing what these women were able to do and what had prevented us from building in the same way?"

The key point of Participants C's and G's comments lies in the demonstration of how people began to see themselves as global visionaries where their small bits of information help them to consider the best ways to set up and maintain the intercultural relationship. It was important to Participant G to know when an object, given as a gift, is no longer yours.

After the Cultural Reconnection Lived Experience: What Have Been the Experiences of African American Women Who Returned to Their Ancestral Homeland?

In this section, the themes that emerged when participants talked about their impressions and the impacts of the journey after their return are presented. By this point, participants had now had the benefit of storing memories that were significant to them. The process of remembering is very specific in piecing together the memories that were long stored away, but are now summoned as pertinent to their cultural identity exploration and its impact on who they have become. Some of the factors that surfaced speak to how participants adjusted their perspectives to the (American) environment where they live, after they returned. They described the mental discovery process and its varied impact.

Attention is given here to how participants returned to their residences and what difference the Cultural Reconnection journey has made in their lives. Kambon and Bowen-Reid

(2010) propose this part of the African Self Consciousness (ASC) model as participation in African cultural institutions and their perpetuation in specific reference to African Americans.

Family and parent leadership. The role of parenting has been linked to the co-care giving role that is assumed in the education system and day care programs that have largely taken over the responsibility for child development in our society. This is the single most responsible role that transitions the child into adult life. Three participants shared stories of their experience related to what they saw in terms of parenting in Africa. Participant O described her epiphany after being in the African setting:

> I found out that you have to be chosen out of the village to attend this level [National] school, I said that you would have to prepare that child, nurture that child to get them ready for this! When we heard about the orphans, and families who had lost loved one, those who had died . . . I was thinking how precious this was.

In other words, she linked the two realities seen and experienced in Kenya: the collective valuing of and village role in education with the tragic widespread conditions of having so many orphans and/or childhood mortality. After returning and, based on this epiphany, Participant O decided to change the way she related to her own grown children. She stated:

> I came back to count my jewels—my own children who are a blessing. If you don't treat them as blessings then who will? Returning to the ancestral homeland made me see that there was more to loving children then than being stern . . . that wasn't all of it.

Participant R reflected on a decade after her return with the predicament of raising children and instilling fortifying confidence and values:

> The things we believe about ourselves we pass to our kids. Raising Black children in this society is no joke. What I am most afraid of is that they will lose their soul that is their connection with African people. That has to be grounded so early and so intentionally in a society like this.

Participant N who began her journey returning from college with a baby, was deeply moved—and changed—as she so often heard women in Africa introduce themselves as parents

of children. This impacted her so deeply until she began to introduce herself in the same way. By doing so, she feels that she saw her role as mother in a deeper way. She stated:

> I am a better mom now. I shifted to the fact that I need to be a good mom. No longer trying to overcome a deficit of being a parent. I don't have to overachieve or overcompensate for the fact that I had a kid when in college.

After Cultural Reconnection, Participant N now connected colorism and the stereotyping of ancestral Africa, a concept that she does not want to pass to her child, to her new mother's pride. She stated: "My mind changed about the premium of being Native American. Now I am affirmed to see that the image [before the Cultural Reconnection trip] of Africans is just not factual. It is about intentionality."

Women's work/empowerment. Five of the 18 participants, shared stories related to the work of women and empowerment. The relational nature of the ways people of African descent relate to each other is a non-verbal affirmation that is reminiscent of the concept *Ubuntu*. This is a South African word that has roots that are recognizable in many African languages. It is an unspoken sense of camaraderie and supportiveness that assumes working in collective and bonded ways (Ramose, 2002). This is the spirit in which Participant C noticed womanism that included the men. She noted: "It is always about building something, getting advice—Ubuntu! They left no one behind. The men were brought in. We are a collective people." Participant O stated: "The worthiness that comes from building the confidence; I can do this. When we do it long enough we begin to believe it! Before all of these organizations there were no schools. Today, I am modeling; I'm their teacher."

Just as it had been a primary theme for what participants took in during their reconnection journey, reframing their sense of what *women's work* means, took place back in America. Participant N reflected:

> When you show people just the wholeness and confidence of being in the world, the humanity and even some sense of entitlement—and entitlement is not always bad—they really respect you. You begin to set your own parameters. That is what I do in the workplace.

Participant R reconsidered feminism as practiced in America, which, she said, is "sometimes [just] villainizing men." She felt that this was not so much African American as merely derived from White feminism.

> Even in my own household I am working on standing strong without cutting the men in my life down. Because I do hold to the moral values of our people. I am the dispenser of that as a woman in my family. Brothers can't do what we are doing right now, they are on another journey. I am not going to be mad at that right now. We love them though!

Participant E pointed out, "This Women's Ministry at my church is my way of doing God's work, which is social activism. I am working on our relationship with each other to show the connection for understanding Africa."

Participant E saw this as,

> the worthiness that comes from building the confidence; I can do this. When we do it long enough we begin to believe it! Before all of these organizations there were no schools. Today, I am modeling. I'm their teacher Kanyamfwa, Rosalea and the kids— I fell in love with my kids, Derek and Natalie [orphans who were sponsored by participant E] I left Dala [the ancestral homeland in the village] and went to the private school. I heard her [Natalie] scream from the window: "Mama!" And we sat and talked. I needed to see her.

Natalie felt that she had somebody to support her, not so much financially, but someone that was a part of her overall support system. Participant E went on to say:

> While we were not there as donors, I am not going just to teach something but I need to be doing something too. One regret was at Kibera, a community school, John [a young student] wanted to pay for his test. Trying not to seek to help. But that is just my way of being.

Participant C adds, "I came back healed and whole and affirmed no doubt in my mind that I was a very important person. A stronger person!"

Eldership. Again, we see themes that arose for three of the18 participants emerging as areas of change for them after they came home to America. In Africa, the role of the elder was highly recognized and revered. African American children and teens in the Pacific Northwest do not often have extended families in their lives. The elderly are often seen institutionalized or in need of help. It is possible that without witnessing elder leadership, the voice, wisdom and knowledge is lost. The near invisibility of elders in many contemporary American families was now unmistakable after witnessing the very different role in Kenya.

The perspectives of different generations are appreciated from different viewpoints. In observing and preserving the role of the elder, it is necessary for younger generations to foresee the quality of life in adult and elder years. A sense of hopelessness in young people not looking forward to longevity may be the result of not interacting with more able-bodied and wise elders. The presence of the elder presents the possibility of achieving a quality of life in old age. Participant A did not feel she was an elder in the beginning of the delegations. This role grew over time and now it is important not only to her and the newly emerging elders, but for all who see them in the community. It is important to young people to know that there is an older life full of wisdom and respect to refer to and to also look forward to. Participant A stated:

> Eldership is not there to give permission to speak, but to give permission to redeem the human condition so that others can fly. I have lived too long and talked too much talk and no longer need to share information. Now I need to teach wisdom . . . The role of the elder is not to give permission to speak, but permission to redeem the human condition so that others can fly.

Emerging elders are beginning to take note and step into the role with more ease. Participant C spoke of using her eldership as an approach for brokering relationships with young African Americans, enabling the benefit of her access to high places. Participant D stated:

> One has to see value in themselves as an African or Black person. The trip changes how they see [and] changes who [they] are; not an immersion, but to see different facets of women's lives. From organizers to farmers, how they were living as women.

Participant A reflected:

> Kenya was my first time seeing smelling tasting touching and hearing with all of my senses operating at one time . . . and they were bombarded. Sharpened! All of this made me the last chapter of the National Geographic. I could be with royalty now.

So going to Kenya created a new life. Participant S reflects on her return and what this has meant to how she operates in her community today. As one who considers herself an emerging elder noted that since returning she noticed the following changes in herself: "I saw young people differently. I saw more possibility. With opportunity support and praise. It made me stop and back up and say how we relate to our own young people. This is an important connection."

Empowerment and liberation: lessons learned, discovery, realization. In keeping with the list of lessons that emerging elders learned through this process, it seems logical to register the empowerment and liberation along with lessons learned, discovered, and realized that all participants experienced through the process of the return. Every participant shared lessons of empowerment, liberation, discovery, and realizations. Because of this, I did not divide this section into separate topics, but kept one general topic or title, which captures the essence of this segment of the reflections.

Participant S had acknowledged the respect she had gained in her work for establishing Saturday school and Kwanzaa, but after the Cultural Reconnection visit she came to the realization that she had a new appreciation. She stated:

> The return made me realize the critical work of Delaney Saturday school and appreciate Kwanzaa, the effort to live by your principles, and their implementing them in your daily life. Anyone [everyone] should go to back to the ancestral homeland. Be a seeker and

> open. Say they come from this or that background. [People] have to see the value in being African or a Black person.

Participant R was not sure of what she was going to do next in life, but "turned a new leaf" during her Cultural Reconnection journey. She stated: "I was able to clarify the path I wanted to be on. The thing that brought me joy was my people." Participant M had planned to close her dental business prior to her Cultural Reconnection visit. She stated:

> The Cultural Reconnection experience came at the end of the first 5 years of my nonprofit [dentistry business] so the license was coming up. When I returned, I set in motion the steps to renew rather than my initial plan to let it go. It totally shifted me and what I was doing. It was meant to be. It saved my nonprofit.

Participant M was empowered during the Cultural Reconnection visit. She discovered that she wanted to keep her dental business open and expand to do some work in Africa.

Participant D noted: "I learned to ask questions. I am more curious about Africa as an ancestral homeland. I have a desire to travel. It definitely turned back on the love. The tools I learned, I take with me everywhere."

In relation to the Cultural Reconnection visit, Participant E commented:

> It has helped my growth in leadership development for sure. I get that there are different ways people express themselves. But if you are not able to think in this way, it is hard to evolve your thinking. I know that we had that struggle in the village.

The Cultural Reconnection visit empowered Participant G and gave her a sense of purpose. She stated:

> My story cannot be told without Cultural Reconnection because birthing the solar lights occurred during a CR delegation. My way of doing business has shifted. It is connected to a lot of what I have manifested in my life. Cultural Reconnection gave me a sense of purpose.

Participants A and Q were empowered to be more patient and pay less attention to time. In essence, they metaphorically learned to taste and savor the wine. Participant A stated: "I

learned to be patient. I had to learn to roll over pot holes and adjust my body to the road. I learned that this was the true pilates and yoga. Just go to Kenya!" Participant Q stated:

> I used to be a stickler for time. Since I returned from the ancestral homeland, I stopped wearing a watch. What is time? I am not as manic as in the past. Time definitely has its place, but should not drive us. Leading people you never know what you are going to get. You have to know what it is you are about.

Participant E says she came back from Kenya trying to change even in small ways. She remarked:

> I stopped letting the water run. I became more social. I arranged my living spaces in circles, so we could have real conversations. What it means to welcome someone into your home. [In Kenya] I would see people who appear to have little . . . [yet] these people feed you! It opened my eyes.

Participant B is remembered every day of her the rich discovery of being part of the African Diaspora. She stated:

> I never forget that I am a member of the African Diaspora. It has impacted me every single day of my life. There is a cowry shell on me every day. I fly the Kenya flag in my office. It has impacted my campus [where she works] and my house [both contain] symbols: Sankofa bird on the table, a Kenyan plate, a sculpture all help me to touch the dirt of my homeland and the stillness of that beautiful forest reserve.

The Cultural Reconnection visit to Africa made participants feel connected and liberated. Participant H stated: "I feel more connected to the planet, now that I went home. I feel bad that they, my husband and sons, cannot see what we could see."

Participant E asserted:

> It has helped my growth in leadership development for sure. I get that there are different ways that people express themselves. But if you are not able to think in this way, it is hard to evolve your thinking. I know that we had that struggle in the village.

The Cultural Reconnection visit empowered Participant M and made her more determined than ever and gave her clarity in her life's mission. She stated:

> Cultural Reconnection gave me the clarification that I needed. I clearly see what is going on in Africa now. I took off my rose-colored glasses now. I am in the rabbit hole now.

> Kenya is the challenge and Africa is the prize. We cannot stop until we develop that network [dental network].

Participant E reflected: “Lessons come in increments; It takes six times to learn incremental lessons and make a total commitment to do something.” Participant A added, “Any time you avoid your own execution, it is worth it!” Participant F recalls how she went on to author a book about perspectives by which European Americans see Africa versus the way African Americans on a Cultural Reconnection delegation see Africa.

Participant R summarized: “CR was not about going to Kenya for a few weeks. It was building blocks of living another kind of life and to a larger work. I appreciate that our work is on the path of Marcus Garvey and others.”

Where are they now? This section connects to the part of Kambon’s (1992) ASC model that describes engagement in combined practice of these competencies in striving to achieve self and collective empowerment in one’s family, and local and global communities as a healthy achievement of success. This section indicates how participants have built more specific moving parts to their local and global projects. Table 4.2 below contains a list of activities the participants are currently participating in.

Table 4.2

Engagement—Where Are They Now?

Participant	Activity	Participant	Activity
A	Retired/Holds monthly eldership meetings	K	Practicing eldership
B	Licensed massage therapist	L	Launched food travel tours in the diaspora
C	Practicing dentist	M	Leads an international Sister City Association; dental missions and business endeavors to Africa
D	Took part in African Sister City delegation	N	Raising her daughter; leading Insurance broker
E	Co-president of African Sister City	O	Has full time music career; corporate travels in international arenas
F	Travels yearly to Kenya to collaborate	P	In Africa with family
G	Founded a company to promote her solar lights	Q	Have many namesakes
H	Retired/ Has a real estate business	R	Home schools her son Established a school
J	Primary caretaker of her mother	S	Retired elder

Cultural Reconnection may be assisting in the development of returns to the ancestral homeland, in ways that greatly enhance participants' contributions to their communities. The pervasive experiences generating engaged citizens is consistent with the fourth part of Kambon's ASC model that indicates an engagement of combined practices of the competencies that lead to self-affirming and self-determining and self-fortifying practices (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010). The goal is to identify where the thrust of the African American personality's basic striving for collective self-empowerment. Participant M narrated this story about how she is spiritually led to do this work.

"The spirit told me it is time to do the work. For every disease, there is a natural remedy. [The] RA [right answer] came through while sitting under the coconut tree. I said I get it!" Participant M further asserted:

> I am spiritually driven . . . we are here to serve. I knew that in High school. It came from seeing my mother struggle. I made up my mind at a young age I would not be poor. In high school at a career class I found dentistry, but service is more than the profession. I was going to lose the status and it was not something I had considered important. I decided to get my nonprofit back. I returned to Kenya with herbalists and a coconut press machine. Mr. Emeka said you heal from AIDS the same ways you heal from cancer. . . . We bought a machine . . . We got a grant and went to Kenya for a clinic. We decided to expand the clinic. We added a dental and maternity clinic. The new governor came and now we have a municipality connection.

Participant M, having been spiritually guided, has taken the initiative to return to Kenya and begin manufacturing coconut oil.

Participant A has fully embraced eldership and is now holding monthly gathering called "Conversation with the Elder." In these meetings, she imparts wisdom and models the art of eldership. Participant E is the co-president of another African sister city. She recently organized a visit of African Americans. Participant D was part of the African Sister City delegation.

Participant R confirms the decision to home school her son. She established the Black Star Line Parent Collective. She attributes the establishment of the school to her lived experience in the Cultural Reconnection process. Participant G now has a company that promotes her invention of a solar study lamp kit. Participant M has led dental missions to Mombasa, and is the president of Seattle Mombasa sister city.

Participant P returned to renew relationships with her family after many years of absence. She initiated her own study abroad to Egypt where she studied Arabic language and lived re-bonded with her father who served as Ambassador to Egypt from Kenya. She also returned with her siblings as part of an engagement with young adult co-ed artist network. The film she

made of one of the Cultural Reconnection visits was completed to deadline. The different events of Cultural Reconnection to view; talk about the film, hold conversations enhance even further her passion for Cultural Reconnection. She states: “I was able to see myself in a whole different light. And most clear being validated about my beauty. This had not happened in Seattle or San Francisco.” She reflected on her transformation as follows: “I know that somewhere in this world I am beautiful and that has never changed since. I gained more confidence. Found a new me that I love because of that.”

Participant L is launching a food travel tour in locations in the African diaspora. Participant S renews her regard for the previous work of Delaney Institute and Kwanzaa. All of these institutions continue to be built on the shoulders of those before. She is also retired and practicing eldership.

Participant F continues to travel annually to Kenya to collaborate with friends she has bonded with; there, she advocates for local vulnerable children’s education. Since her name change, Participant Q has found many namesakes in her family lineage; this is clearly due to the bold self-knowledge that has grown since her Cultural Reconnection journey.

Participants are widely engaged in global travel whereby they continue to connect with people of African descent in the Diaspora and homeland. This is consistent with the Kambon ASC model (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010) in which participants continue in the combined practice of these competencies for self-affirming, self-determining and self-fortification thrust of the African American personality’s basic striving for collective self-empowerment.

Chapter Summary

Chapter IV has comprised the findings, presenting the data, analysis of data, and the research themes that emerged. The overarching research purpose was to examine the lived

experience of African American women who engaged in a cultural reconnection process. The data from interviews were organized in three main categories: before, during and after the Cultural Reconnection.

This chapter provided a detailed picture of the experiences and activities leading to participants' decisions to travel to Africa, how they were involved in while in Africa, the lessons learned, and what they are engaged in now. Some data analysis was provided in Chapter IV, but Chapter V will add greater detail. It will also address limitations, recommendations, conclusions and reflection on this study.

Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

I undertook this qualitative narrative inquiry to determine what impact Cultural Reconnection (CR) had on the lived experience of African American women of returning to the African ancestral homeland. This study further examined the role Cultural Reconnection played in building personal, local, and global capacities.

Data was collected from 18 African American women who had previously participated in a Cultural Reconnection (CR) delegation that took place over the duration of six to nine months per delegation. Participants who were among delegations between 2000 and 2010, were asked to be a part of the study. In words and stories, they shared their perspectives and perceptions of their inhibitions and discoveries; the importance of cultural reconnection; and lessons learned. Participants were engaged and eager to participate in this research. They provided rich, interesting, and vivid stories about their lived experiences with CR. As well, they shared stories related to African American history and identify drawn from experiences of their parents, grandparents, children, family members, and of life-long friends who had influences on individual cultural identities. An analysis of the findings is contained in the sections that follow.

The overarching research question concerned the lived experience of African American women who engaged in the overall six-month cultural reconnection process that began with an orientation of several months before travel, a two-week visit to the ancestral homeland and a debriefing within a week of getting back to the United States. The data, presented in Chapter IV, were organized temporally: participants' lived experiences before, during, and after the Cultural Reconnection process. In this concluding chapter, I look at the themes and lessons that have come from each of these phases.

For each of the three time periods discussed in the interview, overarching themes emerged. In regard to the "before phase", participants shared how they had been influenced by parents, grandparents and teachers in their formative years. They spoke of how adult figures affirmed for participants, when they were young, their identity as people of African descent. This had resulted in their feelings of acceptance of their cultural identity. The participants also spoke of their education and work experience and the degree to which it reflected positive cultural understandings. Some also pointed out less positive aspects of their background including exposure through media and day to day experiences, to negative imagery about Africa and African identity.

In the second time period discussed—the "during phase"—participants felt fortified by the application of the fourth principle of Cultural Reconnection (see Chapter I): acknowledgement of ancestral commonalities. This, they reported, arose almost continuously in preparing for and especially in making journey, which involved a focus on the part of their cultural identity shared with their Kenyan hosts. Unlike the search, seen in conventional tourism, for the exotic, the ways in which the place and people visited are unlike one's self, CR experiences emphasize commonalities not obvious contrasting differences. This led to a sense of belonging in Kenya and familiarity that guided and shaped most of their experiences while in the ancestral homeland. Growth spurts occurred on both continents.

Thirdly, in the "after phase," upon return from the ancestral homeland, participants reported having felt a lasting sense of agency and empowerment to be able to continue to travel internationally, communicate in their personal and professional lives with increased confidence and to incorporate inclusive organizational skills that are dialogic and collaborative, much as they had experienced in Africa.

Let us look in more detail at the learning that was experienced before, during and after the Cultural Reconnection journey. In this discussion, I will be connecting, as appropriate, these learnings and experiences to the four principles that underlie the Cultural Reconnection program. By way of reminder these principles, as outlined in Chapter I, are: cultural specificity, collective action, ongoing shared dialogue, and ancestral acknowledgement.

Before Cultural Reconnection

Culturally transmitted activism. Within the before phase, a subtheme I refer to as *culturally transmitted activism,* emerged as participants began to piece together how they had learned their culture in their lives previous to involvement in Cultural Reconnection. What brought them through their lives to the desire to reconnect with Africa? Their views were generally consistent with Kambon and Bowen-Reid's (2010) principles on such construct formation. As participants spoke of how they had come to understand culture before Cultural Reconnection, they generally referred to older relatives who modeled activism in their communities. There was a culturally transmitted value of resistance and acting on injustices. This brand of activism was also a part of the family legacy. In particular, grandparents and elders appear to have set an example of activism in their communities while participants, as young children, were witnesses. The family history of activism resonates with the experience of African American activists of the long past seeking ways to go back to "Black Zion" (Jenkins, 1975), the lost homeland (see also J. Clarke, 1974).

"Africa on my bucket list." In interviews, 12 of the 18 participants spoke of having long desired and dreamed of traveling to Africa. They yearned to connect with the homeland while they were alive, able to learn, and enjoy the experience. This longstanding desire was perpetuated by a deep need to connect, and see the homeland and the people of Africa

themselves. The Cultural Reconnection visit was one mechanism for participants to get to Africa and realize their dream.

Intergenerational memory is powerful in making the connection to ancestors and in passing on a sense of identity and belonging. This cultural transmission came through to participants in different ways: from being with the organizers and making the commitment of time and expense to initiate the journey, to the strongly connections made, almost immediately, with living hosts, and by journeying through the landscapes and village of the ancestral homeland. The participants were able to experience ancient rituals first hand, which, the interviews indicated, appeared to evoke memories of long before the present. Rituals formulate so much more than a familiarity with traditions; they can be a way of regaining one's humanity or human center. In some countries, the efforts to preserve culture have been government-funded programs that ensure the systematic returns and contact with their Diaspora.

Ancestral acknowledgement. Of 18 participants, 16 said they felt quite grounded in their cultural identity and ancestral lineage long before they took part in the Cultural Reconnection process. Some of this had been brought about through the culturally transmitted activism described above. However, two participants said they had not been taught about their African ancestry. They said they gained their sense of African identity while attending HBCUs. Other participants said that their sense of African identity was reinforced in such institutions. Culturally transmitted activism helped shape family values and customs that were and will be passed down from generation to generation through both written and verbal stories and cultural activities, and the resulting practices before they returned to their ancestral homeland.

Across America, many families of African descent intentionally plant seeds for understanding cultural identity and ancestral lineage in their children and, thereby, in future

generations. This is evident in most reports from this study's participants about their upbringing. Elders, mothers, and, notably, their fathers, paved the way for seeking intentional patterns of reconciliation. Almost 90% of participants indicated they grew up with a clear sense of cultural identity. S. Hall (1990) indicated that such cultural identity work is continuously undertaken between people with common histories, passing them to the next generation with initiative and intentionality.

As noted, even for the two participants whose family and previous generations did not purposively instill Black pride, this was reinforced by attendance at a HBCU. For example, Participant D reported growing up unaware of her African American heritage and cultural identity. But while attending a HBCU, where she took classes related to Black heritage, and participated with other African American students, she said she gained understanding and embraced their African ancestral legacy. Participant N reported similarly. These experiences are consistent with what has been reported in the literature on racial identity formation and enhancement of self-esteem among students at these institutions (Allen, Jewell, Griffin, & Wolf, 2007; J. E. Davis 1998; Kim & Conrad, 2006). I see this as a huge testament to the benefits of HBCUs. Six participants had attended HBCUs. The stories of participants D and N clearly illustrated the positive influence of attending an HBCU on African Americans' recognition of their African ancestral heritage, especially for those whose upbringing did not fully provide such strengths.

Further information was shared by 14 of 18 participants on forming their cultural identity well before they engaged in the Cultural Reconnection experience. During the interviews, all participants identified as Black, African American, or both. Two were not born in the United States, but also clearly saw themselves as being of African descent.

There were various ways participants identified with Africa as children and growing up. Most reported being comfortable with African adornment, including clothing, hairstyles; some had changed their names to ones that reflected their African heritage. Often the decoration of homes and offices included art and objects associated with Africa. Participants often said that they had long practiced adornment as an expression of their African heritage and pride. The idea of a name change in the African American community is a permanent step toward self-determination. Two of the participants indicated that they had changed their names to identify more with their African heritage.

Participants felt fortified by learning to recognize and interrupt the flow of falsified information about African history and cultural identity within family and intergenerational networks. This is consistent with Carruthers' (1999) basic guidelines for the counter hegemonic education of African American children via transformational and authentic learning, as discussed in Chapter II. These were:

- engagement in transformative nation building;
- positive constructions of African womanhood and manhood;
- the study of power relations;
- the integration balancing of technical, moral, and spiritual dimensions of education;
- the incorporation of the learning styles of African children.

CR participants reported earlier experiences along these lines, prior to involvement in the program. Most reported having been empowered by their families and intergenerational networks to reassess old myths and replace them. The participants appear to have been impacted by attention to the same kinds of guidelines advanced by Carruthers (1999).

In essence, there was a general acceptance that cultural identity for the most part is deeply rooted, often unconscious, environmentally-centered, and "directs or focuses the system towards the fulfillment and maintenance of African survival, affirmation-empowerment" (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010, p. 98).

During Cultural Reconnection

It is to be reiterated that the "during phase" includes both the preparations for travelling and the journey to Kenya itself. Analysis of the interviews shows that the four principles of Cultural Reconnection as described in Chapter I, all play a significant role in the transformative experience of the participants during their experiences directly with Cultural Reconnection. These were:

- cultural specificity,
- collective action,
- ongoing shared dialogue, and
- ancestral acknowledgement.

Cultural specificity. The visit to the ancestral homeland allowed participants to "see value in themselves as an African or black person" (Participant C). Participant O noted that

> a storm was brewing in the village of Kanyamfwa when participants seemed nervous, but the Kenyan women continued to read and one of them said to the participants, "If you [have faith in this cultural reconnection} say 'peace be still.'"

As stated by Participant C, "It was always about building something, getting advice—Ubuntu! They left no one behind." Nobles (1972/2000) and Zahan (1979) described Ubuntu as the African concept of extended self, which is particularly illustrative of the Afrocentric spiritual/material ontology at work. Self in this instance includes all of the ancestors, the yet unborn, all of nature and the entire extended community. This is consistent with African-centered thought, Ubuntu: "I am because we are; therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1970, p. 141).

Ubuntu is an unspoken sense of camaraderie and supportiveness that assumes working in collective and bonded ways.

Comments made by participants about their experiences during the Cultural Reconnection process reflected how the journey helped to instill pride and courage, provide lessons, and lend insight into the cultural identity formation process. Participants also learned the meaning of what it is to be African within that cultural context. The Cultural Reconnection process encouraged participants to see for themselves what Africa is like; each can now tell her story while dispelling myths, stereotyping, and tales that have been passed on for years. People are informed through spirit (Dillard, 2006) and through those ancient, learnable, ways of knowing (Azibo, 1991; Kambon, 1992); they can help transcend social challenges and personal hardships in the societies they live. The Cultural Reconnection process has aided both African American and Africans in building on and, as needed, replacing the knowledge they had acquired prior to the experience.

In Chapter II, I argued for the relevance of Kambon and Bowen-Reid's (2010) model which asserted that the African Self Consciousness (ASC) core is defined operationally by four basic components or competencies:

- Awareness-recognition of one's collective African identity;
- Priority value placed on African survival, racial-cultural self-knowledge and positive development;
- Participation in African cultural institutions and their perpetuation;
- Practice of resolute resistance against all "anti-African" forces.

Pilgrimages to the ancestral homeland have been helpful in strengthening an awareness of identity development (Coles & Timothy, 2004; Huang et al., 2011; Lev-Ari & Mittelberg, 2008;

Shuval, 2000) and in building a sense of belonging in the world (Anthias, 2006; S. Hall, 1990; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This is consistent with Kambon & Bowen-Reid (2010) whose first component is based on awareness-recognition of one's collective identity. Collective movement in the Cultural Reconnection framework further helped to sharpen the sense of calmness that combats internalized inferiority arising from social differentiation within an American setting. Participants were able to recognize subtle assumptions about what Blacks could and couldn't achieve, limits that had arisen from the "everyday racism" described by Essed (1991) who argued "racism must be combatted through culture as well as through other structural relations of the system" (p. 295). This cultural combat very peacefully took place in Kenya for the participants, as it had for me personally in my earlier experiences there that originally led to the creation of Cultural Reconnection.

Five participants expressed the benefits of the orientation, the beginning of the Cultural Reconnection process, which begins before the trip itself. Participants were oriented to expectations, alleviation of fear, and ritual. This was necessary: during this time, participants began to internalize, explore and probe their own cultural identities, some building on the foundations developing since they were children, but others for which much of this was new and unfamiliar. Participants said that this early part of the learning process had been vital to positioning themselves globally for the journey. The Cultural Reconnection process placed value on African Americans as well as Africans and their survival. It reinforced and promoted racial and cultural self-knowledge and positive development. This is consistent with Kambon and Bowen-Reid (2010) fitting well with the component of African Self-Consciousness (ASC) Model, which states, "priority value placed on African survival, racial-cultural self-knowledge, and positive development" (p. 98).

Collective Action. While in Africa, participants became more aware of their collective African identity through observations of their environment. This is consistent with Kambon's ASC model, with its third component, "participation in African institutions and their perpetuation" (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010, p. 98). In Kenya, participants were not merely looking on as tourists do, but actually became engaged in ongoing activities and projects of the hosts. Working within such settings, participants observed and, with their hosts, practiced activism and autonomy while in Africa. As a people, Blacks have often not had enough opportunity to function in terms of self-determination and autonomy in their familiar American settings. Participant G illustrated her very different Kenyan experience stating how she "learned that we [Blacks] can function without White people . . . The freedom to test your personal ingenuity is an autonomy that seems unavailable in the USA's exclusive systems." This discovery emerged as a result of the robust dialogues and activities that took place in which participants noted they were able to process their observations on the ground.

Seven participants made observations and thoughts on womanism while in Africa. The Kenyan women, who were our counterparts, were of economic means and appeared to have thriving lives. They were thoughtful, loving, and loved. Yet they were very powerful women at the same time. Several participants observed this mentioning a specific case—when these women built a house for a widow, obtained a water system, handled domestic violence situations, and managed farms.

Strengths prevalent in African-centered culture include leadership that has shaped African American communities (Azibo, 1991; Hilliard, 1998; Kambon, 1992), largely due to Black women's inherent and inherited cultural tendency to work in highly relational and collective ways (Steady, 2007). Participants observed that the African women who hosted them,

worked collectively along with the men. In dialogue after witnessing and experiencing this, participants felt warned not to leave the men out in their own work back home. They came to recognize that the men in their lives need to grow alongside women, to grow together.

Ongoing shared dialogue. Participants were encouraged to stay open to new things that were not on their agenda. They were struck by the hospitality they received. Nine of 18 participants shared information about the experiences they had that were not on the agenda. Participants were often surprised at the sheer beauty of what was before their eyes: the greetings and welcoming into homes and by political figures; the outpouring of kindness; the safety and security they felt, which they called homeland security; the good food; the cultural institutions such as the game reserve; the children; the families'; and the similarity of cities such as Nairobi visibly looking much like New York. Participant O remarked of a conversation with one of the homeland women, "It was sisters talking." People had heard about the Cultural Reconnection journey, but it did not become real until they actually made the journey. Participants showed strong emotions and attachment to the old homeland, feelings which, according to Timothy and Boyd (2003), were probably dormant until they reached their ancestral homeland. This relates to the fourth principle of Kambon's ASC model: "the practice of resolute resistance against all 'anti-African' forces" (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010, p. 98). In the African setting, participants engaged in seeking to understand African cultures without censuring these with "anti-African" doubts, long ingrained in their lives in America.

Acknowledgement of shared African ancestry. Participant B stated, "The commonalities [African Americans and Africans] were very clear. This is why we were dedicated to extended family. People from the Diaspora are connected." The commonalities became apparent through the treatment of the Cultural Reconnection participants as if they were

family members. This is consistent with Kambon's ASC cultural identity model's third component, "participation in African cultural institutions and their perpetuation" (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010, p. 98). No institution is so direct and immediate as being within a family and the fact that Kenyan hosts, according to the participants, made them feel not like visitors but like family members was clearly a key to the enhancing participants' African connection. Commonalities at a personal level, the surprising close connection between a participant and her host family, strengthened a broader and deeper sense of African identity.

The practice of all of the four principles facilitated an awakening for the participants. Cultural and spiritual connections became stronger. Some participants experienced a huge sense of belonging. Some spoke of epiphanies, clarity, and patience as a result. Some continued to see new or wider commonalities between African Americans and Africans. Some grew from cultural insights into leadership. Almost all reported gaining a greater understanding of themselves, their children, and others. At least one participant said she had found a renewed sense of direction. They became far more aware of their culture and attuned to sounds, smells, and sights such as animals. This Cultural Reconnection process was culturally specific for African American women.

In Chapter II, based on the review of literature, I suggested that Africans in the Diaspora were challenged with the task of carving and reshaping their place and sense of belonging in their ancestral homeland, while grappling with historically traumatic events and subsequent and contemporary relegation to a totally inferior status. However, this is not consistent with participant perspectives as seen in the interviews. In contrast, participants felt they did not need to carve their place and seek a sense of belonging once they reached Africa; these feelings were immediate and seemed instinctive.

After the Cultural Reconnection Journey: Integrating Lived Experiences

Traveling to Africa and getting acquainted with the homeland impacted the lives of the participants in various ways. Participants were exposed to a culturally relevant "double-looping" process (Argyris & Schon, 1974, p. 18) that was built from modest beginnings in ways that Kolb (1984) describes: learning by being facilitators of their own and others' learning cycle. The four principles of Cultural Reconnection continued to offer a methodology for building capacity in both intra and inter cultural communication. The themes that are reported by participants confirm that categorical benefits occurred through cultural reconnection.

Table 5.1.

Summary of Key Themes From the Three Phases of Cultural Reconnection.

BEFORE CR	DURING CR DELEGATION	AFTER CR DELEGATION	LONG AFTER CR – *where they are now*
• Cultural specificity and ancestral acknowledgement was present in early teaching	• Orientation and experiential travel practices all 4 principles. • Established a sense of belonging and community	• Reflections on the lived experience lead to a protracted sense of agency and empowerment	• Demonstrates clarity about cultural identity, personal and local capacity, and how to make a difference in the world

Where are they now? All participants are currently engaged in various activities that can be related to the Cultural Reconnection process and, especially, to the visit to the homeland. A substantial number have become differently engaged both locally and globally since their Cultural Reconnection visit to Africa. For example, four participants were elders at the time of the interviews, but three are now practicing eldership with one participant holding monthly meetings where she imparts wisdom and models eldership. One participant was planning to close her dental practice, but instead elected to take her work to Africa to attend to children's teeth.

This participant is also manufacturing coconut oil in Africa. One participant is now president of another African sister city program. Yet another participant came home and invented a solar light for use in remote areas of Africa where there is no electricity. One participant continues her work at a community college, and now displays artifacts she collected while in Kenya as part of her teaching. Another has relocated to Kenya to work on a high stakes global venture. Still others report they continue to be more engaged in their local community than they were before their Cultural Reconnection journey. Table 5.1 highlights activities participants have or are currently engaged in since returning from the Cultural Reconnection visit. These activities are consistent with Kambon's ASC model that indicates an engagement of combined practices of the competencies leads to self-affirming, self-determining, and self-fortifying practices (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010). When the cultural reconnection principles are applied to the experiential learning and discovery process then personal, local and global capacities can be built.

Practice of the four principles of Cultural Reconnection builds capacity. Before the delegations were formed, we found that people came to the group with some background of cultural specificity. Participants were clear about their cultural identity and could identify individuals in their family and schooling who made an impact in their cultural efficacy. While the recruitment of delegates was based on word of mouth, such networks attracted people who trusted the group setting. The facilitation of 16-hour orientations assisted in getting on the same page by recognizing the multiple ethnic identities that comprised our backgrounds, but requesting delegates to place intentional focus on the Africa part of their ancestry and identity. This enabled us to begin our inquiry with common questions and explorations. The orientation allowed for us to form group norms and become acquainted with each other as a team.

During the Cultural Reconnection travel to the ancestral homeland, all four CR principles were put into practice and resulted in establishing a sense of belonging and community. Participants were able to practice the four principles and built levels of confidence and reliance on both intra and inter group communications. After the return from the ancestral homeland and the cultural reconnection experience, participants reflected on their lived experiences and have made decisions to incorporate into their families and communities. They have become empowered by improved organizational skills and confidence in continuing leadership in their communities based on what they have practiced, experienced and observed. Finally, the creative actions that participants have demonstrated through continued group and individual explorative travel, technology development, community and global leadership is a demonstration of healthy and robust capacity building.

Benefits of the Cultural Reconnection Process

This study showed the Cultural Reconnection process to be beneficial for those seeking to return or to know more about their African ancestral heritage. It allowed the participants to take a deep dive into experiencing Africa not as a tourist but as part of the community. Cultural Reconnection contributed to the lived experience and learning of participants by the following demonstrated actions:

- Participants came back eager to share their new knowledge.
- Participants' cultural and spiritual connections became stronger with some experiencing a lasting and heightened sense of belonging, epiphanies, clarity, and patience.
- Some of the myths, stereotypes, preconceived notions, inhibitions, and concerns were dispelled as false.

- Participants were able to see community relationship building in practice.
- The Cultural Reconnection process helped to instill and reinforce pride and courage in participants.
- Participants gained greater insight into the cultural identity process. It further helped to sharpen their senses and gain a sense of calmness.
- Knowledge, a sense of belonging, a sense of affirmation, and commonality, connectedness, new found pride, and cultural identity were gained by participants. This aligns with positive identity theories of African American personality (e.g., Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010).
- Through the Cultural Reconnection process, healing and reconciliation can be fostered through acknowledgement; celebrating our [black] lives, successes and losses; sharing, conversation; honoring; accepting; revisiting the homeland; and self-determination.
- The Cultural Reconnection process helps in connecting people with their ancestors.
- This Cultural Reconnection process study show that much of the fortification of children came from parents who instilled values of Africanity through stories passed down about ancestors as well as unrelated hero figures.

The benefits of cultural reconnection are still unraveling in many ways that continue to be revealed in the life trajectory. What follows is an examination of sustainability made possible by intentionally transmitting the significance of the return to the African ancestral homeland into the lifecycle of the next generation. In addition, strategies of self and collective efficacy may best be explained through positive identity theories.

Significance of the Lifecycle

This work has been about the importance of stages of the lifespan that can be fortified to realign and strengthen the cultural identity of black women. Attention to aspects of childhood, adulthood, parenthood, womanhood, and eldership may open the way for optimal realignment with self and group identity consciousness. Memories shared through ongoing dialogue enable the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and values. The lived experiences of multiple generations seem to overlap in Sankofa-like sharing of memories of hope. Shared remembering (Dillard, 2008) is pertinent to the African American practices of rituals that tie returners to the memory of the ancestors in a profound experience. This is consistent with the thoughts and expressions of the participants as they observed parenting in Africa. In America, parents need to teach children early on about their heritage in connection with the homeland. This helps them become grounded in their cultural history. Participant R expressed that she is "Afraid they [Black children] will lose their soul, which is their connection with African people." She feels these connections "need to be grounded so early and so intentionally." Participant N heard how women introduced themselves in Africa, "as parents of children." She now introduces herself the same way, and sees her role as mother in a deeper way. Another participant decided to change the way she related to her grown children. "I came back to count my jewels – my own children who are a blessing."

Three of 18 participants commented on being elders or emerging elders. One elder resisted being an elder and did not see herself as one before the trip; but after seeing it modeled in Africa and understanding the status an elder holds, she returned to the United States and has now taken on her eldership role with great pride and a sense of accomplishment. She stated, "It

[elder status] is not there to give permission to speak, but to give permission to redeem the human condition so that others can fly."

Participant C uses her eldership as an approach for brokering relationships with young African Americans, enabling the benefit of her access to high places. Participant S considered herself an emerging elder and stated she sees young people differently, with more possibilities to support and praise. In Africa, the role of the elder was highly recognized. In America, such leadership, wisdom, and knowledge is lacking because of the glaring absence of elders due to institutionalization (Wilkerson, 2004). Holloway remarks, "Black women carry the voice of the mother—they are the progenitors, the assurance of the line . . . as carriers of the voice carry wisdom—mother wit" (as cited in O'Reilly, 2004, p. 12). Holloway's comment was consistent with the finding of this research. Almost all of the elders who participated in the Culture Reconnection process appear to be actively embracing eldership.

Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) perspective on standpoint theory is helpful here. Black women, she writes, have a standpoint to view the world based on their unique experience, and deeply affected by the historic denial of their voice. Intergenerational dialogues give African American women an opportunity for their voices to be heard especially by the younger generation who have not had the exposure to elders that we had a few decades ago as compared to today with more elders being placed in retirement and nursing homes versus remaining with the family as they did many years ago. Clearly, participants were emotionally touched by their experiences in Kenya, by the environment and social interactions they encountered. They learned lessons and made self-discoveries as well as empowered, liberated, and compelled to give back. The exploration of cultural identity is key to the continuation of cultural reconnection will be transmitted to the next generation, much of which was passed to the generation before them.

Significance of Positive Identity Theories

Africans in the Diaspora have demonstrated resilience and creativity when navigating the complex societies where they reside. In the United States, large city populations comprised of people of African descents report a predictable and categorical pattern of everyday racism evidenced by health disparities, criminalization, educational failure rates, low rates of home ownership and lack of access to entrepreneurial success. Yet, in societies where Black people use creative measures, they continue to rise to the top of their fields. They make life shaping decisions that are full of courage and integrity. This is where the benefits of cultural reconnection are evident. By leveraging positive resources, creativity and relational strengths they may be able to access their extraordinary selves (L. M. Roberts & Creary, 2013). Positive identity theories may well describe the process of moving from one's reflected best self to their extraordinary self. Participants demonstrated that they could go beyond striving and surviving in the marginalizing society to excelling to their extraordinary selves after practicing the 4 principles.

This study supports Kolb's statement, particularly so with the elders who participated in the study. L. M. Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, and Quinn (2005) describe this kind of dramatic change as a "jolt" (p.1) growing from "socially embedded resources that provide optimal conditions for positive affect, positive interpersonal relationships, and personal agency" (p. 1). This may lead to a different and better life trajectory. A jolt, in L. M. Roberts et al.'s terminology is a message that can be good or bad, and that propels a person forward and inspires them to grow to a next level of action through self-efficacy and empowerment. A jolt may result from having been removed from the environment of everyday racism that led to a desire to reconnect with their culture. L. M. Roberts and Creary (2013) suggest that the jolt may cause "a deeper understanding of dominance, submission, oppression, victimization, voice, silencing, and

differential access to resources" (p. 92). The act of shifting to a focus on positive relational identities according to L. M. Roberts and Creary, would require: "Tactics for navigating the self that promotes shared growth, enhancement and empowerment, as individuals within a relationship come to view themselves and each other as more virtuous, worthy, evolving, adapting, balanced, and coherent" (p. 91).

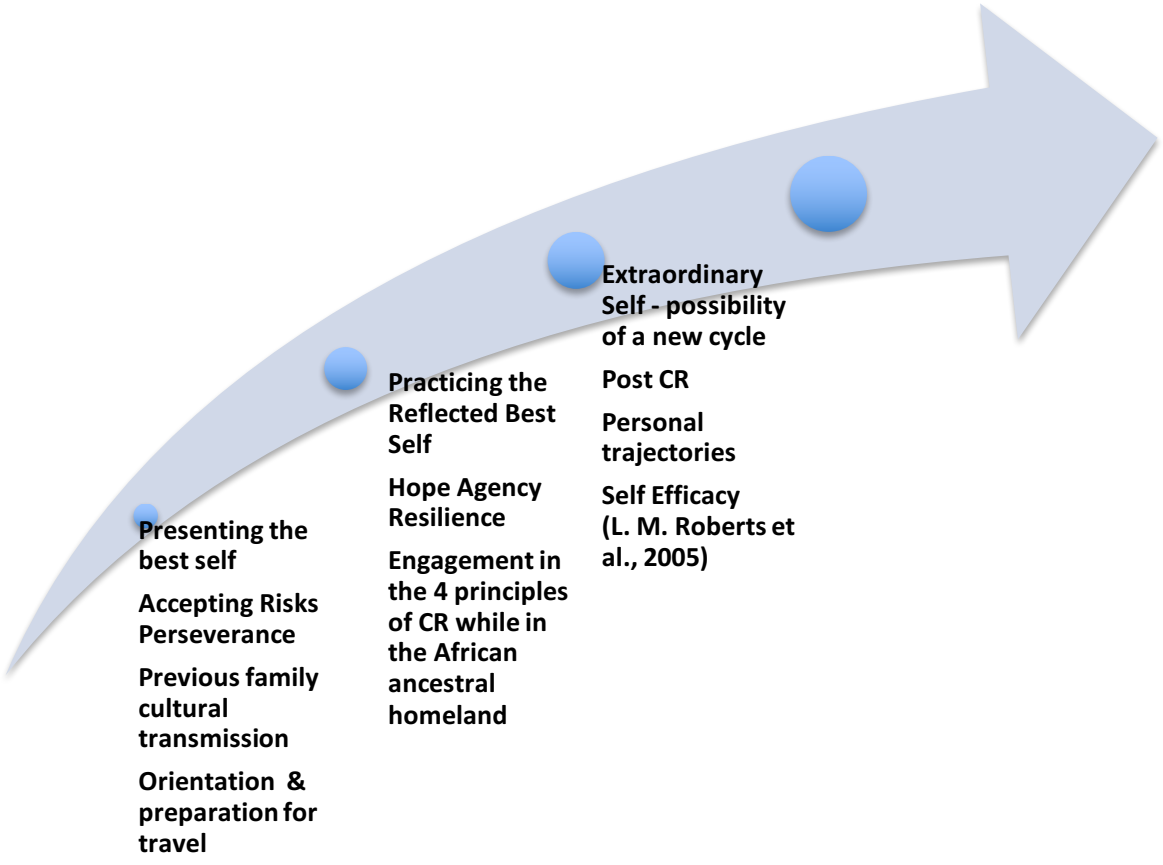

Figure 5.1. Cultural Reconnection in relation to L. M. Roberts et al.'s (2005) steps.

Once participants experienced their extraordinary selves in action, they reported being able to access this self, more regularly even against the backdrop of everyday racism (Essed, 1991) that they faced on returning from Kenya. Indeed, the Cultural Reconnection process was consistent with what L. M. Roberts et al. (2005) described as a "trio of psychological and

physiological resources— (1) positive affect, (2) a sense of relational connection, and (3) personal agency" (p. 721) that moved participants from their reflected best selves to more regulated practice of being extraordinary. Figure 5.1 depicts this trio as a progression, indicating the specifics of the CR experience in relation to each of L. M. Roberts et al.'s steps.

In addition to fostering optimal approaches to group travel and experiential learning, the Cultural Reconnection principles may be an applied methodology for achieving the following:

- Transforming from the best self to the extraordinary self;
- Changing social consciousness from the local self to the global self;
- Expanding intercultural communication and collaboration; and
- Developing culturally centered organizations.

My findings suggest that if Cultural Reconnection principles are practiced, African American women can collectively travel from the Diaspora to their ancestral homeland and enter a transformative journey of discovery. The important and positive changes in their life trajectories reported by participants long after Cultural Reconnection are consistent with participants' positive identities reaching their extraordinary self.

Next Steps

This study, centered on interviews with 18 participants in Cultural Reconnection, affirmed that the model produced success in terms of personal, local, and global capacities. The continuation of this model can build on a decade of work while holding to the foundational principles. Having a Vision and Planning Team who are committed to the replication of the Cultural Reconnection principles has been and will continue to be vital. In this, the team will be helped by this present work comprising archival data now accessible to future delegates who can

thereby benefit from almost two decades of experience since 2000. Replication is possible by building upon our existing archival data.

Based on this study I believe it is now timely for revitalization is of the Cultural Reconnection Leadership Institute that manages the continuation of all activities. The Institute was established in 2010 with the primary purpose of creating an institutional memory. It was to house all existing archives, narrating more than a decade of delegate reflections and activity. In part because of a dearth of systematically compiled archival information, the Institute remains a commitment rather than a reality.

Revitalizing the Institute to become the central operating body that introduces the four principles and reinforces them in established orientations is a logical progression of the research that I have now done.

The continuation of the CR delegations should also be expanded to comprise a student advisory service that can better prepare potential travelers for what lies ahead. This also would rely archival data for gaining understanding of the breadth and depth of the return.

Personal Reflections

The question that I raised about my own cultural identity that led me to engage in cultural work was: “What part of me is African and what part of me is American?” After conducting this inquiry and holding the mirror of others, while reconnecting experiences to my own, I conclude that I am an African, with multiple mixtures in my DNA and a particular lived experience in the Western hemisphere. I recognize that dominant part of me and that people of African descent are severely marginalized in the diasporas where they reside, despite achievements and contributions made to the world. At the same time, I recognized commonalities that I share with those in my African ancestral homeland. The global assumptions that are widespread about the African

homeland have been profoundly negative for too long. This negativity has not only been seen in systemic in brutal racism and everyday racism, but to varying degrees has been internalized within Black people's psyches as recognized long ago by Du Bois (1903/2010) in his concept of "double consciousness," (p. 5) and later in the work of Fanon (1952/2008) in *Black Skin, White Masks*. I am a witness to the counter stories and am positioned in a unique place in the universe, able to be a bridge builder, aware of the barriers that impede our consciousness on both sides of my community. I have not understood these resources and this role so well until I had the privilege of listening to the participants tell of their experiences in a journey I cooperatively designed and facilitated through Cultural Reconnection.

I too share accounts of the significant teachings and cultural transmission from my parents. I found a particular role between father and daughter that resounded in other participants in my research. I recall how my father instilled in me a particular love of being Colored /Negro/ Black/African American. He was a proud African American man with strong southern roots and a profound love for family. It was through his strong cultural style of family continuity and group efficacy that I recognize African retentions.

My childhood memories of my grandfather's annual visits from Louisiana to the Pacific Northwest were big productions of family gatherings, food, children's performances, singing and dancing. I grew up hearing heroic stories about how both of my grandfathers defended themselves and stood up to racism. I believe that these stories and the deference that was shown to elders in the family were in part, responsible for my strong efficacious foundation. Despite growing up in a racially hostile environment in Northern California, my mother boldly declared her Africanity without apology. On her bedside stand I found my first images of Martin L. King addressing crowds in magazines, and books like *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. As in reports

of participants in my study, my household was the platform for family debates that were informally practiced and sharpened our critical thinking skills. I recall as a young child at an early age my mother warning me: “When they tell you that Africa is a backward and uncivilized place, don’t believe them!” She was the first delegate and elder to travel on a Cultural Reconnection delegation in 2000 which for me, brought her teachings into full circle. It was clear to me that I was part of a family lineage that provided a safe place to launch my life trajectory.

The critical family dialogues that were held in my family instilled critical thinking skills and perhaps more importantly, creative thinking skills. As mother, nurturer, and teacher, I am intentional about my children embracing their African ancestral homeland both as ancestral homeland and birth place and in turn they expanded their participation as world citizens. I celebrated their creativity and encouraged an appreciation for the cultural foundations they learned to respect and preserve. Based on their example of practicing cultural reconnection principles, a successful cultural transmission has occurred and is likely a significant factor in my demonstration of leadership.

I aspire to incorporate the voice and role of the elder who brings hope and goodwill to longevity. At some point in our lifespans, we need to be more intentional about what this role entails and, as we begin to emerge as elders, this may require training that ensures successful models. It also makes room for the cadre of those who take responsibility to inform, mentor, and support those behind them.

Once, while marveling at the beauty of Africa, meeting warm people, the lush lands of rich soil and green vegetation, it occurred to me that the Africa I have the privilege of seeing is not the same pervasive image shown on television. The sense of belonging that occurs when seeing Black people everywhere in many capacities cannot be adequately described. The warm

and caring hearts of people demonstrated through dialogue, dance, laughter, and a show of pride went against the dangerous warnings that we often hear. With the kind of confidence I found through my interactions in the African ancestral homeland, I began to trust a sacred ancestral connection to my song and dance, wherever I was in the world, feelings which previously felt out of place. Cultural Reconnection enabled me to begin to follow the threads that connect us to our understanding of our African selves. I felt compelled to share a different picture that young African American children could see and be proud about. I believe that all of our humanity will be immensely enhanced by this understanding. It is my hope that anyone who lives in a diaspora can glean information for their own cultural reconnection.

As a cultural worker, I have considered myself as both a scholar and a practitioner. I am aware that there must be some balance in both of these roles. To be a practitioner and not a scholar is to miss the "big picture;" To be a scholar and not a practitioner is to be a mere spectator, without practice and confirmation through practice. To be trusted and welcomed into both communities in different places in the world and life span is profound. As a cultural worker, I hold a place for cultural practice and preservation that involves both practice and scholarship.

My next steps are to continue to tell the story of the lived experiences in creative ways where communities may benefit from the learning about Black women took initiative to travel to their ancestral homeland. First, I want to interact with communities throughout the United States and African Diaspora, sharing the wisdom of Cultural Reconnection. Second, I have seen the importance of generating history and retelling stories. More literature must be shared about the resilience and self-determined actions more widely in young people to empower them with more literature resources. I intend to continue writing stories, such as *The Stolen Ones* (Arunga, 2010), gems found along the cultural reconnection journey that shed light on our cultural identity.

Finally, it is timely to continue enriching my lifecycle with intentional legacy building for the generations that are behind me. It is my hope that my community and far beyond, will find benefit. I continue to draw on servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) by lending moral and physical support to efforts that are engaged in the following categories of work:

- Continued Cultural Reconnection delegations that engage in life long cultural identity by returning to the ancestral homeland, while practicing the four principles of cultural reconnection will keep people grounded in their self and collective empowerment;
- Deeper commitments to family and cultural acknowledgement are vital to the connection between the ancestral past and the yet unborn, and the key to a healthy and remembered heritage;
- Continuation of technological inventions such as the Taya Sola Lantern Kit, books written and new spin off organizations that continue where continued travel, whether individual or collective, traveling to a different environment is an opportunity for growth and transformation; and
- Incorporation of the Cultural Reconnection guiding principles as a methodology for creating inclusive climates in other organizational settings where inclusivity is a goal and value.

By placing focus on the lived experience of the people and their communities, the four principles may continue to create space for personal, local and global capacity and expanded relationships.

Limitations of the Research

Range of perspectives versus a collective story. In any study of how subjects or participants respond to what experimental scientists would call “the treatment,” there can be a

concern with results that are almost all positive and similar. It will be observed that the stories that came from the CR participants seem in some ways to be a collective one with an unusually high degree of consistency. Of course, the purpose of this research was not to seek criticism of, or improvements in the CR program but to portray, in the participants' own words, its impact on positive, African American (female) identity.

I began this work as co-researcher in a Participatory Action Research that concluded in my Masters' thesis (Arunga, 2002). Over the years Cultural Reconnection become a methodology and approach based on a particular perspective on engaging in cultural identity inquiry to enrich the self and empower the community. It was never an experiment but a program constantly modified in small and large ways to make it better and better.

Thus, participants reported that intra-group dynamics created an expanded network in which African American women continue to enhance their work and practice in building personal, local, and global capacities that positively impact their lives and their communities. Narratives have shown that the participants' initiatives to return to the African ancestral homeland are grounded in the cultural transmission from previous generations. Cultural transmission includes parental and family influences as well as intergenerational community networks as opportunities to further engage cultural identity.

The stories of returning to the African ancestral homeland were centered on the lived experience of the participants. The words were captured from their responses to a set of open ended questions, in which they were free to recall a story that impacted their learning and discoveries. Even when I was a witness to the situation being described, there was no need to correct the details of the story or realign the story because the lesson the participant took from their story is their lived experience. Key interpretations come from the story which adds to the

data. The focused questions did not have need for collective recollections, as the narrative inquiry welcomed the valid voice of the narrator as the owner of the stories they told.

In terms of the relation between collective narrative and individual experiences, I have reflected on the use of the relational approach in building CR that brought together a community of somewhat like-minded thinkers. Generally speaking, there was a willingness to comply with logistical arrangements that tend to offer low levels of privacy. This was considered a normal practice in a cultural environment where there is close quarter space. While participants may have been accustomed to more privacy in their daily lives, they were receptive to practicing collective action in ways that challenged them to stretch. Also, participants seemed to be predisposed to group work. Because of this practice, feedback and ongoing, shared dialogue about intimate subjects surrounding cultural identity continued to be a fluid exchange within the group. The continued conversations among alumni of the CR in Kenya but also upon their return to the US, may have enhanced the development of a collective story of sorts.

Positionality and bias. In Chapter I, I discussed my positionality. As a founder of CR and someone whose prior experiences reconnecting in Kenya shaped the program whose participants I have been studying, there can be little doubt that I came to this dissertation fully expecting that participants' accounts would support my own very positive feelings about and enthusiasm for Cultural Reconnection. To repeat, I was not evaluating that program but rather, gathering stories that would speak to the importance of African American women reconnecting directly to Africa and its peoples today. I had had life-changing positive experiences myself in the years that preceded the creation of CR; the program built on this as eventually did my research on that program. It is unavoidable that my commitment meant coming to the work and the interviews with an affirmative and optimistic view. However, the open-ended nature of

questions (see Chapter III) in which I made sure not to "lead" the participant helped to avoid introducing my own attitudes and hopes. There was no secret about who I was nor of my long investment in making CR into an important ever-improving site for cultural identity reflection. I believe, along with many contemporary qualitative social researchers, that the most important knowledge is not discovered but constructed and this is true for researchers no matter how objective they claim to be (Charmaz, 2006).

As discussed earlier, handled carefully, having a positionality of deep and long term engagement within the setting being researched, has countervailing advantages in comparison to a neutral, distanced researcher, including ease of access to one's sample group, shared understandings that make more detailed discussion possible, and sensitivity to participant feelings in discussions of emotional issues—which for CR organizers and participants are common (Chavez, 2008; Huisman, 2008).

Why Kenya? Sometimes in describing Cultural Reconnection to others, some pointed questions have been raised about the choice of Kenya as a location. Most African Americans are more familiar with sub-Saharan West Africa as the origins of ancestors taken as slaves. Elsewhere in this work, I have indicated that while West Africa was probably the numerically most significant origin point, slave trading and its impacts covered most of the continent. As noted, Cultural Reconnection grew from my personal experiences in Kenya where, as a young African American woman, I emigrated to and lived, including marrying and raising children. I understood the depths of positive change in my own cultural identity quite aside from exactly where my ancestors came from—routes that are not readily traced.

In growing the program, my intimate familiarity with Kenya was a vital resource. Cultural Reconnection practices social interaction where meaningful cultural exchanges of

dialogues occur between the returner and the receiver. This is a cultural endeavor that uses a relational and insider approach that tourists may never encounter. The most treasured interaction that occurs in the ancestral homeland is through the social exchanges between people. When the cultural nuances that are commonly recognizable from within the exchange, moments of shared recognition that piece together cultural information become transformative. The relational networks that were previously built through my involvement in women's empowerment and strengthening family networks as part of my lived experience. I came to know many of the original counterparts through my involvement in Women's activism over the decade of living in Kenya.

Like any region of Africa, there are undoubtedly aspects of being there that are unique including a slave trade by colonizers from the Arabian Peninsula starting in the 4th and 5th centuries and which did not end until the early 20th century (Romero, 1986). British occupation went on until the 1960s and that period included one of the most violent periods in colonial Africa, the so-called Mau-Mau uprising in the 1950s, during which the tradition of activism, we encountered decades later among Kenyan women, was strongly awakened (Presley, 1992). Thus, there are unquestionably unique aspects to Kenya that strongly affected both my early years of living there and, more recently, Cultural Reconnection.

Kenyan women who were hosts had established strong leadership out of their work in organizing the end of the United Nations Women's Decade Conference held in Nairobi in 1985. Women participated in grass roots organizing, stretching beyond the urban areas and reaching into the ancestral homelands positioned in remote villages. Organizations such as Maendeleo Ya Wanawake—the Kiswahili phrase for women's empowerment of today—gave license to

organize women in ways that added dignity to village life, specifically the lives of vulnerable women and children who are the majority in the villages.

I lived and participated in this movement, including plenary sessions of the UN conference in 1985, and also performed a one-woman-show. I subsequently joined women's organizations, and collective helping circles, aimed at empowering ourselves, families and communities. The Kenyan women involved in creating these movements were our counterparts and new generations have emerged that were influenced by that era.

The Kenyan women were excited about the return of the Diaspora women and treated them like family to a homecoming with preparations reeling in the air. More and more, creative measures were used to communicate effectively in these meaningful exchanges. Kenyan women were saw themselves mirrored in their Diaspora sisters, and treated them as long lost relatives, rather than a lens of blame, difference and shame. It was this foundation that deepened relationships. The change indeed begins in the kind of liberating dialogue discussed by Freire (1972).

Recommendations for Further Research

Looking for ripple effects of the journeys. As noted above, one area of worthwhile further research would be to continue to trace the ripple effects of our Cultural Reconnection travelers into their family, community, and institutions back in America. These impacts are likely to be many but also often subtle and it may take several years for positive effects to be recognizable. To sustain Cultural Reconnection, we rely on the existing archives to gain wisdom of the best practices. However, the model is still to be studied and analyzed through what are existing archives and the lived experience of those who have undergone the whole process,

especially between the years 2000 and 2010. The delegations during that decade were carefully replicated and participants were routinely surveyed and interviewed.

Global comparative studies of returns. An area for future research concerns the impact of cultural reconnection in communities of interaction while on the African continent. In the massive growth of heritage or roots tourism that has happened from many ethnic diasporas, focus has often been, as it is here, on the travelers and what they learnt from their returns to ancestral homelands (e.g., Basu, 2001; Christou, 2006; Dawson, 2000; Huang et al., 2011, 2013; Schulze et al., 2008). This includes African diasporic returns (Lelo & Jamal, 2013). It is time that this global phenomenon of cultural reconnection is itself connected through research and meta-analysis. Of special interest would be to compare and contrast other contemporary educational programs of returns to Africa other than to Kenya.

Research on hosts' lived experiences. There is also an increasing need for consideration of what it is like to be hosts to diaspora returnees (Handley, 2006). What is the impact on them? Most existing research about host communities focuses on overall economic and social impacts (e.g., MacGonagle, 2006) especially the benefits to what are quite often poor communities (Newland & Taylor, 2010), as well as some of the tensions that can arise when they, arguably like their ancestors, have financial gains from what is for the returning diasporas, profound and tragic unearthed memories (Tillet, 2009; Yankholmes & McKercher, 2015).

To follow up on the unique experience of Cultural Reconnection with a sensitive ethnographic personal level inquiry into the hosts' lived experiences would be a major step forward in getting the whole picture of these important reconnections. I foresee research that those Americans most intimately connected to the Kenyan hosts could themselves undertake asking, broadly, "how was this experience *for you?"* Parallel to the before, during and after

format used here, the hosts could be invited to discuss, in a storytelling style as opposed to formal interviews,

- What led you to want to be part of this and how did you foresee and plan for this travelers (before)?
- What were the memorable moments and learnings that you experienced while Americans were with you (during)? and,
- What are the impacts that remained well after the visits were over (long after the delegation experience)?

Gender and studies of men returning from the African Diaspora. The CR experience was grounded in gendered styles of communication, relationship building, and creative application of development ideas that are peculiar to women and their families. The program and my research have aimed to apply ideas such as Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), Byrd (2009), and hooks (1993) Through gender an epistemic lens is applied to the life stage of generativity where a maternal sense of hope for reconciliation is envisioned. There is creative energy between women that generates new patterns of efficacy out of ongoing shared dialogue. This is compatible with feminine communication styles (Tannen, 1994) where women come together in sisterhood (Reagon, 1986), womanism (Ladson-Billings, 1996; A. Walker, 1983) and endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2008). This cultural identity process was specifically designed to investigate the women's role in cultural reconciliation with the African ancestral homeland. Many groups, of various ethnicities, religions, classes, and genders, may glean relevant and fruitful data that is applicable to them.

That said, one of the most repeated significant learnings from the Kenyan hosts, as reported by our participants was not to leave men out and this can and should be the subject of

both CR-like programming and appreciative research. What would it be like to have this kind of program for a delegation of African American male leaders or, for a mixed gender group? I am unaware of any such programs at present centered on learning about culture and ancestors in intense and experiential ways; but I would strongly encourage African American men to embark on their own cultural identity inquiry to discover divergent styles and outcomes that are culturally and gender specific. They may or may not find this model replicable—and that would itself be a worthwhile in understanding gendered dynamics of cultural self-discovery and self-recovery.

Autoethnography and autobiography. As the co-founder of Culture Reconnection and the leader of the delegations, I utilized my emic perspective to understand the motivation and depth of the identity inquiry that participants experienced. Narrative inquiry was an excellent method for me to honor the literal stories which I was able to analyze after they had been professionally coded. This enabled me to engage in collection of the data and analysis of the data without interfering or imposing my interpretation of events discussed. Yet, the reader will have seen that my story, the history of the program, and the stories of the remarkable women who participated in this study, have been entwined. Among my hopes for future research is to write again from a primarily personal voice, extending on the briefer sections in this dissertation to a full autoethnography. A number of African American women (e.g., Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Griffin, 2012) have used this kind of inquiry whereby the researcher becomes the lens for examining broader social phenomena (see Ellis & Bochner, 2000). But much of the work by African Americans so far has been about adjusting to racism and being a minority on White educational settings. To my knowledge an autoethnographic account of a positive cultural

learning experience for African American women, by African American women has not yet been undertaken.

Implications for Leadership and Social Change

We have seen how the Cultural Reconnection journey built on the participants' personal strengths and their varying degrees of cultural identification with African culture and values. Of course, it was a priority for Cultural Reconnection organizers to do whatever could be done to make these journeys enjoyable and worthwhile to the individuals; but the mission behind these experiences has always been to have individual learnings radiate out into American society as a counter-balance to racism and to introduce more intentional pathways for cultural reconnections for future generations. The information obtained in this dissertation indicates a good start at this wider purpose. Tracking the spread of more positive cultural identity for African Americans and those they work with, is one of several areas of future research to be considered.

Although it was not an aspect that I have looked at in detail here, a few remarks can be made about the relationship between hosts (the Kenyan women) and the participants in terms of leadership. It is easier to see these relationships in terms of sisterhood. If we were to look at the relationships more as one with no followers but in which each side saw themselves more in terms of equal servant-leaders (Greenleaf, 1977) or in Heifetz's (1994) idea, as leaders "without authority," (p. 181), the results point to an importantly different kind of mutual leadership. In this, the relationships between the hosts and the visitors take on qualities that go back to some of traditional values of indigenous African peoples: being conversant with ongoing dialogue, caring, reciprocity, mutual empowerment, and division of labor (see Idang, 2015)—as a strength of communities, including within the new if temporary communities of CR hosts and diaspora returnees.

This study centered on the experiences of African American women who play significant roles as leaders and change agents in their families and homes; in learning and other social institutions; in their neighborhoods and communities; and in enterprises that may offer economic gain to African Americans and others. There also have been tangible steps taken in giving back to the Kenyan hosts and their communities in terms of a dental health project and micro-enterprise.

In Conclusion

It is common for those who have undertaken doctoral research and written a dissertation to describe the experience as a journey (e.g. C. M. Roberts, 2010) Here, the topic itself is about literal journeys made by many African American women through Cultural Reconnections to Kenya. It is also about the continuing journey of 18 of those women who have graciously shared their stories with me as a researcher and also as one of the guides who organized and facilitated the process. Each one has told about their cultural experiences leading to the decision to go to Africa—what I have referred to as *before*; they have described the breakthroughs of insight and of relationship of mutual learning and assistance with African hosts during the visits; and they have portrayed key changes and new capacities experienced after coming back to America. Finally, for me as researcher, this also has been a figurative journey, a return to rethinking lived experiences on my decade in Africa and later, as organizer of others' returns.

As I conclude my reflections on this study, I assert this work is a small contribution to furthering Garvey's call to the millions who joined him in returning to culturally reconnect with the African ancestral homeland. It is my humble opinion that this work could be considered a new chapter that builds on the insights of Marcus Garvey, who ignited in the African diaspora, a love and desire to reconnect with the ancestral homeland. While Garvey illuminated the

possibility of self and collective determination, Cultural Reconnection delegations have actualized the return to the ancestral homeland and turned it into a transformational methodology. Garvey's movement was among the first lessons in establishing a global presence of Africans. He ignited the innate desire to go back to the root, to build personal, local and global capacity. This study is the continuation of that movement. Therefore, it is fitting that I close this study with Garvey's reminder of the importance to continue the work:

> Look for me in the whirlwind or the storm, look for me all around you, for, with God's grace, I shall come and bring with me countless millions of black slaves who have died in America and the West Indies and the millions in Africa to aid you in the fight for Liberty, Freedom and Life. (as cited in Newkirk, 2009, p. 341)

Appendix

Appendix A: Consent Form

Dear Potential Participant;

You are being invited to participate in a research study on your experience with cultural reconnection and cultural identity work that you conducted during 2000 and 2010.

This research will require about 60 minutes of your time at a location of your choosing. During this time, you will be interviewed about your experiences with cultural reconnection. The interviews will be conducted wherever you prefer (e.g., in your home), and will be tape-recorded.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. The person interviewing you, however, can give you the name and telephone number of some counseling and/or mental health services, if you wish this information.

You may also find the interview to be very enjoyable and rewarding, as many people who experienced your participation in a cultural reconnection delegation that culminated in a collective return to the African ancestral homeland. Your contribution to this study may help us understand what it is like to experience the African ancestral homeland and it's possible impact on your life trajectory.

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity. While the interviews will be tape- recorded, the tapes will be destroyed once they have been typed up. The typed interviews will NOT contain any mention of your name, and any identifying information from the interview will be removed. The typed interviews will also be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the

All information will be destroyed after 5 years time.

In addition, as author of my PhD dissertation I reserve the right to include any results of this study in future scholarly presentations and/or publications. All information will be de-identified prior to publication. You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without your job being affected.

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact me at [redacted]

If you have any ethical concerns about this study, contact Philomena Essed, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change, Email: essed@antioch.edu. This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Antioch International Review Board (IRB), which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, contact Dr. Philomena Essed.

I have been invited to participate in an interview about my experience with cultural identity before, during, and after a Cultural Reconnection experience, that culminated in a collective return to my African ancestral homeland. I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

To be filled out by the researcher or the person taking consent:

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent_____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent_____

Date _____
Day/month/year

Appendix B: Interview Questions

- Before the return to the ancestral homeland. Thinking back. . .

  What was it that led you to want to come on this trip?

- During the return to the ancestral homeland. Thinking back. . .

  Please tell about a time when you were called upon to stretch yourself and felt affirmed while in the ancestral homeland.

- After the return. “Looking back” to today. . .

  What have you told others about your about the experience? Would you recommend it? And what influence do you think the experience has had on your role in your community/workplace?

Appendix C: IRB Approval

From: <e[redacted]@antioch.edu>
Date: Wed, Apr 27, 2016 at 8:54 AM
Subject: Online IRB Application Approved: Dissertation qualitative research study: Back To Africa in the 21st Century: Cultural Reconnection Experiences of African American Women
April 27, 2016, 11:54 am
To: [redacted]@antioch.edu, [redacted]@antioch.edu, [redacted]@antioch.edu

Dear Marcia Tate Arunga,

As Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for 'Antioch University Ph.D., I am letting you know that the committee has reviewed your Ethics Application. Based on the information presented in your Ethics Application, your study has been approved.
Your data collection is approved from 04/27/2016 to 04/26/2017. If your data collection should extend beyond this time period, you are required to submit a Request for Extension Application to the IRB. Any changes in the protocol(s) for this study must be formally requested by submitting a request for amendment from the IRB committee. Any adverse event, should one occur during this study, must be reported immediately to the IRB committee. Please review the IRB forms available for these exceptional circumstances.

Sincerely,

Dr. Philomena Essed

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