

Black Feminism, Womanism, and Intersectionality Discourse: A Theo-Ethical Roundtable

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INTERSECTIONALITY EBBS AND FLOWS IN BLACK RELIGIOUS discourse. Double¹ and triple jeopardy² articulated in Black feminisms anticipate Kimberlé Crenshaw's articulation of "intersectionality"³ as a hallmark of Critical Race Theory. Through her initial formulations of intersectionality, Crenshaw clarifies that multiple oppressive conditions often intersect in the lives of Black women and are generally overlooked in the laws and policies that frame procedural justice. The fact that these multiple oppressive conditions happen to be tethered to social identifiers like race, class, gender, and sexuality—and, importantly, hegemonic renderings of these identifiers—is not lost on Crenshaw. She delicately navigates between the *challenge of intersecting oppressions* and the more complex *value of the intersecting aspects of identity* that become most vulnerable to oppressive layering. Such layers of oppression leave individuals and communities erased from the public view and leave their needs veiled from public understandings, buried under a heap of social locations seen through prejudiced lenses. Racialization as Black or of African descent, classification as low-income, gendering as female, sexualization as immoral: any of these characterizations *alone* might result in an experience of discrimination at the hands of an unjust legal and political system for those so characterized; taken

¹ Frances M. Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" (1969), reprinted in Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Random House, 1970).

² Deborah K. King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 42–72, www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/494491.

³ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Form* 1 (1989), art. 8: chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8?utm_source=chicagounbound.uchicago.edu%2Fuclf%2Fvol1989%2Fiss1%2F8&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.

together these characterizations culminate in a death dealing social milieu at the hands of a legal and political system that has not addressed its limitations, mitigated its biases, and pursued internal justice.

Notwithstanding this account of intersectionality's origin, affirmations emerge as those rendered and characterized cut the tethers that bind certain identities with probable or justifiable sites of oppression. These affirmations sound like pride and joy in being Black, woman, of less means, a single parent, and/or part of the LGBTQ community. Celebrative acknowledgements of complex identities, of course, do not excuse procedural injustices that deny individuals and communities rights based on these individual and intersecting identities. However, a culture of proactively asserting multiple social locations develops. This culture exposes another way hegemonic prejudice works: those whose identities have been most tethered to conditions of oppression seem more inclined to assert their social locations than those whose identities have not been most tethered to conditions of oppression—or whose identities have been most tethered to conditions of privilege. The act of asserting one's social location and/or intersecting identities becomes a frontline in the struggle to dismantle hegemonic legal, political, and social systems practiced in prejudice. Those who self-identify play "identity politics"; those who refuse to self-identify feign a morally superior neutrality and objectivity.

As Crenshaw's formulation of intersectionality is taking shape, other theoretical developments are also evolving. On one hand, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has already articulated the historical and contemporary significance of "politics of respectability."⁴ According to the "politics of respectability," notwithstanding *identity*, through social behaviors that qualify (and qualify people) as *respectable*, individuals and communities hope to mitigate legal, political, and social injustices. On the other hand, Cathy J. Cohen builds upon Crenshaw's intersectional framework to expose "secondary marginalization"⁵ whereby "politics of respectability" are rendered impotent—and a politics of deviance⁶ becomes a viable rejoinder to respectability. Whether affirmed and celebrated or not, respectable or deviant, the force of categories of identity tethered to oppressive conditions cannot be overcome through the social behaviors of those

⁴ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁵ Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁶ Cathy J. Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics," *DuBois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 1, no. 1 (March 2004): 27–45.

enduring oppression. Socially locating alone—and insisting that others do likewise—does not dismantle legal, political, and social injustices. Respectable behavior alone does not dismantle legal, political, and social injustices. Deviant behavior alone does not dismantle legal, political, and social injustices. Nor do social location, respectability, or deviance alone establish and/or maintain justice.

Hortense Spillers's notion of "interstices" is a critical intervention that, ironically, fills some of the conceptual lacunae of intersectionality.⁷ She reminds theorists of the gaps that exist between identities, conditions of oppression, and identities and conditions of oppression. There are spaces of unexpected or mediated privilege. There are spaces of silence and unanswered questions where light shines through the lattices. One cannot simply assert that these individuals and this community identified in these ways are *always* oppressed—nor that others are *never* oppressed. A simple revolutionary model of liberation does not suffice. Still, two "intersectionalities" remain: one is concerned with overlapping *oppressions*; the other intersectionality is concerned with overlapping (often affirmed) *identities*.

"Intersectionality" has had a strange conceptual life insofar as it has ultimately been associated with deviance, notwithstanding a respectable impulse at its inception. Crenshaw's intersectionality, at the beginning, advocates for a system that sees the respectability of people who exist at the intersection of multiple targeted identities—and treats these people respectably. However, those intersecting targeted identities never shake the stench of deviance in US popular imagination. And so, the intersectionality that attempts a conscientious dissociation between conditions of oppression and identity, a depathologization of some identities as inferior to others, is cast as a progenitor of deviance. Given *intersectionality's* association with deviance and resistance, it is a consistently important and interesting tool for research and writing as a scholar of Black religion and religious ethics.

Intersectional analysis is essential for thorough, ethical analysis—consistent with womanism's central and guiding concern with Black women's holistic experiences. Intersectionality helps explain the necessity and legitimacy of a particularized moral code for people whose identity and (non-)rights are tethered. Those rendered deviant by virtue of identity—regardless of social behaviors deemed respectable or deviant—must respond to distinct moral claims. Morality and deviance become strange bedfellows in the house of

⁷ Hortense Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Black religion. As essential as it is, intersectional analysis has been deemed false, destructive, and racially biased in dominant, conservative, and supremacist white culture—deviant in all the ways individuals and communities “should not” be. Pejoratively, intersectionality in popular US parlance has become code for all things Black and/or “of color,” code for individual and communal accountability for modern and historic racial injustices, code for *provocateur* of white guilt. Especially considering the ways intersectionality grew in discursive significance in the final days of Trump’s presidency—following the murder of George Floyd and during the Covid pandemic—I argue that it *is* necessary to reclaim the discourse on intersectionality (and intersectional discourse). Now more than ever the tether between identities and conditions of oppression must be cut. Now more than ever intersecting identities must be acknowledged—together with their interstices. Now more than ever respectability and deviance must be rewrought as moral possibilities under immoral conditions—and vehicles toward the moral possibilities of justice. “Intersectionality” must be wrested from the lips of those who would reappropriate it as a dog whistle. Even if this reclaiming of “intersectionality” may also entail a renaming, the work to which intersectionality attends still must be done.

jennifer s. leath

COVID-19 AFFECTED EVERYONE, BUT IN UNEQUAL WAYS. In a report entitled Mapping Vulnerability to Covid-19 in Gauteng” (South Africa)⁸ two themes—namely, “maintaining social distance and preventative hygiene” and “vulnerability during an outbreak or broader shutdown”—exposed the vulnerabilities of poorer communities that reflect existing economic inequalities disproportionately affecting Black Africans including: crowded living conditions, no access to running water, reliance on public transportation, poor health and existing chronic conditions, hunger and inability to save income.⁹ In addition, lockdowns increased levels of gender based violence primarily against women, children and LGBTIQ people. Inequalities were also evident in education. For poorer communities schools provided safety and meals. These communities had little or no access to laptops and data required for online learning while “affluent and middle-class public schools migrated relatively easily to emergency remote learning, because these learners had access to devices and connectivity, as well as

⁸ Julia De Kadt, Graeme Gotz, Christian Hamann, Gillian Maree, and Alexandra Parker, “Mapping Vulnerability to Covid-19 in Gauteng,” Gauteng City-Region Observatory, March 3, 2020, hdl.handle.net/10539/29283.

⁹ De Kadt, Gotz, Hamann, Maree, and Parker, “Mapping Vulnerability to Covid-19 in Gauteng.”

support from teachers and parents.”¹⁰ These inequalities laid bare by Covid-19 demand an intersectional approach to theology and ethics informed by decolonial theories, which make explicit the continued effect of colonialism even after colonial rule is overthrown (coloniality). Grosfoguel describes the status of former colonies as “colonial situations,” that is, “the cultural, political, sexual, and economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racial/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations.”¹¹ Mbembe concurs and states that “a Eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression.”¹² Both these and other scholars like Fanon and Ngugi call for the centering of African experience, particularly “subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies.” Theology and ethics in this context confer epistemological privilege to black, female, LGBTIQ, and other marginalized bodies.

Nontando Hadebe

ON THE MORNING THE *ROE V. WADE* OVERTURNING NEWS broke, I was sitting in a hotel meeting room about to deliver a joint keynote address for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops “Alive in Christ” meeting.¹³ My phone buzzed with push notifications from multiple news outlets about the overturning, and I looked around the room, wondering if anyone else saw the news, but everyone was staring straight ahead and watching the stage of young adults reflecting on historical memory. My head was spinning, and I felt unprepared, though I had four pages of an outline and talking points. I was not in the mood to talk about historical memory unless it was the historical memory of why *Roe v. Wade* was significant and how its loss could place many birthing people in

¹⁰ Lesley Le Grange, “Covid-19 Pandemic and the Prospects of Education in South Africa,” *Prospects* 51 (2021): 425–436, doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09514-w.

¹¹ Ramón Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality,” *Transmodernity* 1, no. 1 (2011): 15.

¹² Achille Mbembe, *Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive* (2015), wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf.

¹³ The meeting was the culmination of the two-year Journeying Together process that convened Catholic bishops, young adults, ministry leaders, and religious educators from different racial, ethnic, and cultural families to reflect on and construct an action plan to deepen the Catholic Church’s diversity and inclusion practices.

danger, particularly non-white birthing people. I sat in front of the crowded room. After introducing myself and acknowledging the land and my ancestors, I invited the room to take a moment of silence to recognize the overturning. For diplomacy's sake, I prefaced it by saying, "Regardless of where you stand on the issue, this is a pivotal moment that will impact the lives of many." I bowed my head and closed my eyes, trying to steady my heartbeat as I thought about the cis women, trans men, and non-binary people who would be affected by the overturning. I raised my head to a room of people with heads bowed and eyes closed, unsure of what anyone was praying for and nervous because I initiated this in a room that could hold more pro-lifers than not. Following my keynote, primarily women and a few men came up to me and, with hushed tones, thanked me for "making space" for the issue. Some of those people were pro-life, others whispered their pro-choice position, and others disclosed nothing, but all shared gratitude for a moment to process.

About four hours after the news broke and the keynote, we were all back in that meeting room together for mass. After the introductory rite, the bishop welcomed us to celebrate the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus *and* the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. He almost applauded, but there was no need for it as a few in attendance picked up the slack for him by applauding and cheering loudly. I was shocked as the cognitive dissonance set in just before the Penitential Rite. As I stood in the room after the cheers and applause stopped, I wondered about the praxis drawn from the moral theology of pro-life.

The Catholic Church's pro-life perspective dates to the first century and in writings such as the second century *Didache*, which states, "You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish."¹⁴ This results in understanding a rigorous moral theology of pro-life that proclaims, "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life."¹⁵ This perspective continues through early church and medieval theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas. If, as the *Catechism* states, human life must be respected and protected, how does that extend to human living when birthing is forced from a bio-theological imperative? This is where I am thinking about the importance of intersectionality in how I do moral theology. I wonder if intersectional analysis and reasoning, not radically distinct from the reasoning that created the theological pro-life position, might construct a third way beyond the pro-life/pro-

¹⁴ *Didache* 2, 2.

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2270, www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

choice binary for moral theologians. I am interested in how using intersectional analysis as part of moral theology might deliver a more humanistic moral theology attending to the particular needs of women and other childbearing people. I contend that in this age, moral theology done without intersectionality, particularly on the issue of abortion rights, preserves moral theology as a theoretical enterprise with no practical heft. Moral theology done *intersectionally* forces the question of how God stands with women often on the margins and constrained to make difficult choices. Moral theology done with intersectional analysis would create an ethical praxis of living, inviting Catholic institutions to take a critical look at how they do and ought to support mothers and childbearing people in a post-Roe world.

As a Black woman who is Catholic and guided by Black feminist and womanist methodologies and epistemologies, I balance the tension of the Church's embedded theological anthropology that often centers on a Eurocentric heteronormative body and my deliberative theological anthropology, which persuades me to focus on the humanity and dignity of Black birthing people amid presently colonizing systems. Here, Nontando Hadebe shines a light on what intersectionality does for theology and ethics. As Hadebe explains, an intersectional approach must be informed by decolonial theories that make explicit the continued effect of colonialism after colonial rule. This helps us name the "colonial situation" of abortion bans in the Post-Roe era as related to the desire to subjugate and control Black bodies. The colonial situation is where they are forced to birth children in a country that barely offers guaranteed protection for Black life from the cradle to the grave. Examining the colonial situation of the pro-life position invites moral theologians to reflect on how enforcing such a position is to double down on practices that suppress the agency and autonomy Black birthing people have over their bodies. It is to throw them back into what womanist theologian Delores Williams categorizes as the "coerced surrogacy" of the antebellum period. Here Black women were forced into roles of surrogacy, such as being the primary caretaker for the master's children, doing the arduous labor typically associated with male roles and, in particular to our current discussion, bearing and birthing children conceived through rape. Drawing a connection to the surrogacy experience of Hagar, Williams argues that there are limitations to divine surrogacy and Black women ought not be compelled to understand surrogacy as their divinely willed lot in life. Instead, they can look at the life of Jesus as one that enables them to resist and craft strategies of survival. I suggest that Williams is constructing a moral theology that thinks intersectionally and decolonially.

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* stands to affect Black birthing people disproportionately and therefore calls for the moral theologian

not to respond along the binary party lines of pro-life or pro-choice, but a pro-living position that theologically, politically, and socially advocates for Black birthing people's bodily autonomy against a default coerced surrogacy. This is where moral theology and intersectionality meet to construct a theology that does not harm Black birthing people. This pro-living politic is framed by a decolonial theory inviting reflection on the historical and contemporary situation of Black birthing people's reproductive futures. The moral theologian cannot turn away from data such as the fact that Black birthing people have disproportionately higher infertility and maternal mortality rates. How can one proffer a theology that requires Black sacrifice more than it offers opportunities to envision the vastness of Black sacrality? Or how does the moral theologian grapple with the fact that although statistics from the Center for Disease Control indicate a decrease in abortions from 2019 to 2020, Black women represent a higher percentage of those receiving abortions at 39.2 percent and that in 2020, Black women were more than 3.6 times more likely to have an abortion than their peers in any other group?¹⁶ The only way, in my estimation, for moral theology to construct just theologies is to engage the complexity of Black and Brown birthing people's reproductive situations.

Catholic feminist theologian Christine Gudorf's theory of bodyright is also instructive in such a time as this. Gudorf asserts that bodyright is a prerequisite for full personhood and moral agency in humans. She says: "Human persons have a moral right to control their bodies because the inability to exercise that control ... seriously hampers their ability to become responsible moral agents."¹⁷ Both my theological anthropology, which centers on Black birthing people, and my ethics of embodiment, which supports women's moral right over their bodies, are within the ambit of intersectional analysis. I believe that intersectionality invites moral theologians to hold the bodies of Black birthing people softly and not as objects of abstract study precisely because it invites an analysis of race, class, gender, and other individual intersecting characteristics exacerbating oppression and marginalization. It also requires using experience as a moral source to be taken seriously, a known contention within the moral theology tradition.

In her exposition on the strange life of intersectionality, Jennifer Leath extends an invitation to not just think about identities and

¹⁶ Katherine Kortsmitt, Michele G. Mandel, Jennifer A. Reeves, Elizabeth Clark, H. Pamela Pagano, Antoinette Nguyen, Emily E. Paterson, and Maura K. Whiteman, "Abortion Surveillance—United States, 2019," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (2021): 70 (No. SS-9): 1–29, dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss7009a1.

¹⁷ Christine Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1994), 161.

conditions of oppression—which sometimes have a first and final order of significance in intersectional discourse. Instead, she suggests we move beyond that acknowledgment and construct a world making plenty of good room for “moral possibilities under immoral conditions.” To be sure, I am not calling abortion an immoral condition. However, I recognize how it smacks against our well-established system of morality and ethics in the Christian tradition. The immoral condition is Black and Brown birthing people in a world that inhibits their ability to determine where and when things exit their bodies and still be understood as morally good. I follow leath in moral reflection at the interstices where Black birthing people sit. In essence, I suggest that intersectionality in moral theology forces more expansive and practical thinking toward an ethical praxis of living, an ethical praxis that does not just yield survival but the possibility of thriving, maybe even flourishing, for Black birthing people.

Nicole Symmonds

HER NAME IS NZINGA CANDACE KING. What’s in a name? She is NZinga, named for the controversial Queen Nzinga of Matamba [now Angola], who courageously fought the Portuguese colonizers, kept African politics in turmoil, yet ironically helped develop the African slave trade in the seventeenth century.¹⁸ She is named for Candace, “a Queen of the Ethiopians” mentioned in Acts 8:27–39.¹⁹ She is proudly “a child of the King” who, for Rastafarians, would be no other than His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I, not some British monarch or cruel enslaver. So, some call her *Princess* NZinga.²⁰ What’s in a hair(style)? As a Rastafarian, for nineteen-year-old NZinga, her locks are/were a source of African identity, a fearsome challenge to the corrupt Babylonian system, and reservoir of personal power.²¹ Yet, as her story unfolded in June 2021, in the middle of the global pandemic, which disproportionately impacted the vulnerable, this poor, young Black

¹⁸ Joseph C. Miller, “Nzinga of Matamba in a New Perspective,” *Journal of African History* 16, no. 2 (1975): 201–216.

¹⁹ Joshua J. Mark, “The Candaces of Meroe,” *World History Encyclopedia*, March 19, 2018, www.worldhistory.org/The_Candaces_of_Meroe/.

²⁰ Imani Tafari-Ama, “Justice Denied: NZinga King Stands Firm after DPP Ruling,” *Jamaica Sunday Gleaner*, Sunday February 13, 2022, jamaica-gleaner.com/article/focus/20220213/imani-tafari-ama-justice-denied-nzinga-king-stands-firm-after-dpp-ruling.

²¹ Anna Kasafi Perkins, “Bad Hygiene and Disorder in Classes: Continuing Propaganda and Stigma of (Dread)locks in Contemporary Jamaica,” in *Hair Still Matters: A Transnational Overview of Afro Hair, Blackness, and Identity*, ed. Marta Mezzanzanica and Benjamina Efua Dadzie (Wilmington, DE: Vernon, in press).

Jamaican Rastafarian princess, was allegedly shorn of her locks by a policewoman on Emancipation Day.²²

NZinga, by her telling, was pepper sprayed by a male police officer, who indiscriminately sprayed the chemical into a taxi in which she and others were traveling, ostensibly to get at a wanted man. Choking from the fumes she exited the taxi and removed her mask. She loudly told the policeman what she thought of his actions. She was subsequently arrested for not wearing a mask and disorderly conduct, for she did not silently accept her mistreatment.²³ Jamaican women very often refuse to be silent in the face of such ill-handling.²⁴ Furthermore, as a Rastafarian, the use of imprecations and curse words against the Babylon System is part of the power of words, which they deploy, in defiance of a state bearing the vestiges of colonialism that criminalizes “bad words.”²⁵ NZinga was charged under the Disaster Risk Management and Town and Communities Acts (DRMA) which, at the time, mandated mask wearing in public spaces; in the aftermath of the mistreatment she suffered at the hands of the male police officer, a video circulated of a slight young dreadlocked woman piling imprecations, threats and curse words upon her persecutor(s) in a police station in full view of an audience. Such behavior was deemed by many as unladylike, rude, Ghetto, low class ... another reason to doubt NZinga’s story.

Assaulted, arrested, shorn, jailed, fined, and shamed. The stories do not match, but the official finding is clear—NZinga’s story contained insurmountable inconsistencies contradicted by witnesses and forensics.²⁶ So there are no criminal charges for the policewoman to answer for NZinga’s shearing or the destruction of her cell phone; no charges for a male officer who manhandled, pepper sprayed, and

²² Tameka Gordon, “Family Upset after Rastafarian Teen Trimmed Allegedly at Police Station,” *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, Monday, August 2, 2021, jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20210802/family-upset-after-rastafarian-teen-trimmed-allegedly-police-station.

²³ Gordon, “Family Upset after Rastafarian Teen Trimmed Allegedly at Police Station.”

²⁴ Anna Kasafi Perkins, “Mother Hagar’s Daughters Will Not Be Silent: A Prophetic Calling for African American and Caribbean Women?,” in *Sisters of African Descent: Connecting Spirituality, Religion, and Vocation*, ed. Lisa Rhodes, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, and Meredith Coleman-Tobias (Acton, MA: XanEdu, 2013), 79–92.

²⁵ Anna Kasafi Perkins, “Blood Clot, Ras Clot, and Bun Bow Clot: Lovindeer Takes on Female Bodily Taboos in Jamaica,” in *Breaking Down Binaries: Tidal Shifts in the Study of the Languages, Literatures, and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean and beyond*, ed. Nicholas Faraclas, R. Severing, C. Weijer, E. Echteld, W. Rutgers, and S. Delgado (Willemstad: University of Curacao, 2018), 63–78.

²⁶ “Full Text: Director of Public Prosecutions Cites Serious Credibility Issues in NZinga King Case,” *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, February 9, 2022, jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20220209/full-text-dpp-cites-serious-credibility-issues-nzinga-king-case. See also Gordon, “Family Upset.”

may have falsely arrested her; no censure for a judge who overcharged in the fines levied against a defendant who did not know her rights. Additionally, as the various officials made their case in the public media, they spoke of NZinga's need for "mental health support." Like too many Jamaican women, NZinga has been subject to sexual violence as detailed in studies such as the *Women's Health Report 2016*.²⁷ Her experience of being jailed triggered her trauma from the memory of having been raped several years before,²⁸ when she was an adolescent. Undoubtedly, this is unhealed trauma for which she requires on-going help. Our patriarchal culture manifests in a rape culture, where rape/sexual violence is pervasive and even normalized given the prevailing societal attitudes about sex, gender, and violence.²⁹ Oftentimes, the victims are blamed and shamed and the impact of rape is downplayed.

The sole official voice responding sympathetically to NZinga's plight, even as they critiqued her obstreperous behavior, was the Office of the Public Defender (OPD), which found that her rights had indeed been violated and the policewoman was responsible for cutting her hair out of revenge and in a bid to show "who runs things," that is, who was really in charge.³⁰ The OPD did not find that her shearing was discriminatory based on her Rastafarian faith. The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), in response, has declined once again to charge any of the parties found responsible by the OPD. NZinga must find a civil remedy for her pain and shame.³¹ Many of us are truly outraged.

Whatever the "truth" of NZinga's encounter with the police, her case highlights the intersecting of several kinds of oppressions centered in her multiple identities as young, Black, female, Rastafarian, poor, and feisty.³² Her story demonstrates the complex way in which relations of inequality cut across several categories such as race, gender, class, and sexuality. Jennifer Leath points to the

²⁷ Carol Watson Williams, *Women's Health Survey 2016: Jamaica*, Statistical Institute of Jamaica, Inter-American Development Bank and United Nations Entity for Gender Equity and the Empowerment of Women, 2018.

²⁸ Tafari-Ama, "Justice Denied."

²⁹ Ramona Biholar, "Discriminatory Laws: The Normalization of Sexual Violence in Anglophone Caribbean Sexual Violence Laws," in *Critical Caribbean Perspectives on Preventing Gender-Based Violence*, ed. Ramona Biholar and Dacia L. Leslie (Oxford: Routledge 2022), 44–64.

³⁰ Office of the Public Defender, *The NZinga King Report*, April 5, 2021, opd.gov.jm/index.php/reports/.

³¹ INDECOM, "INDECOM Awaits Ruling from ODPP into the Complaint of NZinga King," December 8, 2021, www.indecom.gov.jm/press_release/indecom-awaits-ruling-from-odpp-into-the-complaint-of-nzinga-king.

³² Blogger Emma Lewis also adds rural dweller to NZinga's intersecting identities.

characterization as sexually immoral as one that could result in “discrimination at the hands of an unjust legal and political system for those so characterized”; this complexifies intersecting socially shaped identities, which taken together “culminate in a death dealing social milieu at the hands of a legal and political system that has not addressed its limitations, mitigated its biases, and pursued internal justice.” This is exacerbated in a post-colonial context such as the Caribbean or South Africa, where even after colonial rule has been “overthrown,” as roundtable dialogue partner Nontando Habede notes, it continues in various neo-colonial guises. Women in particular, in such postcolonial contexts, suffer from “multiple jeopardies,” as Caribbean feminist theorist Eudine Barriteau indicates.³³

A critical womanist theological engagement with NZinga’s story, as one of many similar stories, calls into question the understanding of the human person which undergirds her painful, heartrending experiences. Indeed, as Jamaican-born womanist theologian Dianne Stewart argues, deploying a womanist theological method provides important tools for scrutinizing the relationship between gender and power. At the same time, a womanist approach foregrounds the importance of intersectional perspectives in the discussion since the nature of the oppressions and injustices that have played out on NZinga’s body-person throw light on the continued need to respond to injustice as it is experienced on multiple levels. In particular, it highlights the continued Anti-Black and Anti-woman ideologies that contribute to social inequalities and specific oppressions, suffered by women and girls qua females across the world, as Habede (South Africa), Symmonds (USA), and leath (USA/Canada) demonstrate in their contributions to the roundtable. It exposes “the multiple, contradictory, and often harsh realities of women’s lives,”³⁴ for ideas about women’s “inherent inferiority” are entrenched.³⁵ In addition, vectors of oppression experienced by African-descended women like NZinga are exposed, reinforced, and exacerbated by the global pandemic, especially as public orders are often disproportionately enforced against the poor and vulnerable.

Jamaica’s national ideology captured in its National Motto, “Out of Many, One People,” suggests creole nationalism and racial homogeneity that blurs racial boundaries and claims no significant cleavages based on race.³⁶ This obfuscates the stratifying effects of

³³ Eudine Barriteau, “Confronting Power and Politics: A Feminist Theorizing of Gender in Commonwealth Caribbean Societies,” *Meridians* 3, no. 2 (2003): 57–92.

³⁴ Barriteau, “Confronting Power and Politics,” 67.

³⁵ Barriteau, “Confronting Power and Politics,” 81.

³⁶ Monique D. A. Kelly, “Examining Race in Jamaica: How Racial Category and Skin Color Structure Social Inequality,” *Race and Social Problems* 12, no. 4 (March 2020): 1–14.

race, evident in society as demonstrated empirically by Kelly in a study which “leveraged multiple measures of race to unravel its complex effects on social stratification” (skin color, racial category).³⁷ Skin color was a more robust predictor of ownership of household amenities and years of schooling than chosen racial category. So, even in societies like Jamaica, where the population is perceived as racially homogeneous, race has an impact on a person’s life possibilities. Unsurprisingly, therefore, by virtue of being dark-skinned, NZinga would be more likely to be born into the working class, which is a conflation of racial category/color and class, leading to unequal and reduced life opportunities resulting in the likelihood of poverty and vulnerability. At nineteen, she was poorly educated, unemployed, a survivor of sexual assault, and the mother of a young child.

The stratifying effects of race are grounded in Anti-Black ideology, which may be summarized in oft-heard statements such as “anything too Black is not good,” used in reference to the perceived misbehaviors of darker-hued Jamaicans. It is also reflected in the continued issues with locks and other natural hairstyles and discourses around beauty. RastafarI embody the rejection of such Anti-Black aesthetics and shearing NZinga was certainly the act of power over identified by the OPD but also a continuation of the shaming tactics used by agents of the state against RastafarI even today. Rastafarians (and Jamaicans alike) believe that, like Samson, their hair is their strength and, therefore, also their weakness, if it is cut off. In the case of RastafarI brethren, to have their hair shorn or touched by dangerous women like the infamous Delilah is deeply emasculating so even in that biblically sanctioned discourse there is an Anti-woman bias. Given the importance of locks for RastafarI, in the past, members of Jamaica’s security forces often intimidated RastafarI by arresting them and cutting their locks.³⁸ The case of the student barred from school because of the narrative that said locks were unhygienic (potentially infected with “junjo [fungi] and lice”) and a potential threat to order in the classroom still rankles many Jamaicans.³⁹

Nowhere in the official discourse on NZinga’s encounter with our justice system was a particularly troubling aspect of her experience as a woman, a young woman, highlighted. It was left to Rastafarian sistren scholar and activist Imani Tafari-Ama to tell another very

³⁷ Kelly, “Examining Race in Jamaica,” 2.

³⁸ De-Valera N. Y. M. Botchway, “...The Hairs of Your Head Are All Numbered: Symbolisms of Hair and Dreadlocks in the Boboshanti Order of Rastafari,” *Africology* 12, no. 8 (December 2018): 20–38; I. Ras Dizzy, “The Rastas Speak,” in *Rastafari*, ed. Rex Nettleford and Veronica Salter (Kingston: Caribbean Quarterly, The University of the West Indies, 2008), 101–103.

³⁹ Tafari-Ama, “Justice Denied.”

singular dimension of her story. While she was in jail awaiting trial, her period came. Like many incarcerated women, NZinga had no ready access to menstrual hygiene products. Even though her mother brought those to her, they were not given to her. She had to face the humiliation of substituting toilet paper.⁴⁰ This is the experience of many Jamaican girls and women, who are “not just poor but bloody poor.”⁴¹

Bostock, in her intersectional commentary on the lived experiences of incarcerated women in US prison facilities, focused on period poverty in prison.⁴² She maintained that period poverty is actually widespread in US prison facilities, where the restriction of sanitary products is a form of bio-power deployed by the state, to gain control over women. Her intersectional approach demonstrates that, while menstrual inequality in prisons reflects wider systems of misogyny and gender-based violence, it is exacerbated by the race and class identity of the inmates. A similar judgment can be made of the prison system in Jamaica, where inmates are supplied by their relatives with hygiene products; otherwise they would often have to do without and be forced to improvise as NZinga did. In NZinga’s case, not giving her the hygiene products brought by her mother can only be read as a deliberate attempt at further humiliating and shaming her as a woman. All of this has been exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic.⁴³

Multiple jeopardies inhere to women, given their multiple identities. While there are unique elements to this experience of women in the Caribbean, the foundational intersectional experiences, especially among African-descended women are very similar as Hadebe, Symmonds, and leath have demonstrated. A critical womanist theological engagement with NZinga’s story uncovers the underlying theological anthropology, particularly the meaning and value of female body-persons, which gives rise to such mistreatment. Writing from the North American post-Roe context, Nicole Symmonds’s call in this roundtable to “balance the tension of the Church’s embedded theological anthropology that often centers on a Eurocentric heteronormative body and [her] deliberative theological anthropology, which persuades [her] to focus on Black and non-Black women’s dignity” finds much resonance with NZinga’s experience

⁴⁰ Tafari-Ama, “Justice Denied.”

⁴¹ Anna Kasafi Perkins, “‘Not Just Poor, Bloody Poor’: Menstrual Justice in Zimbabwe and Jamaica,” *The First*, April 1 (2022), catholicethics.com/forum/menstrual-justice/.

⁴² Jessica Bostock, “Period Poverty in Prison: An Intersectional Commentary on the Lived Experiences of Incarcerated Women in US Prison Facilities,” *Routes* 1, no. 1 (2020): 2–11.

⁴³ International Drug Policy Consortium, Corporación Humanas Colombia, and Penal Reform International, *Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Health on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Certain Aspects of the Right to Sexual and Reproductive Health of Women Deprived of Liberty*, London, June 10, 2021.

and its value as a source for theology and ethics. Symmonds challenges us to broaden the conversations of the experiences that count to include trans men and non-binary people, who still largely remain outside of the discourse in the Caribbean region.

The oppressions and injustices having played out on NZinga's body-person throw light on the continued need to respond to injustice as it is experienced on multiple levels.⁴⁴ In particular, NZinga's treatment by agents of the Jamaican state highlights the continued Anti-Black and Anti-woman ideologies which contribute to social inequalities and specific oppressions suffered by women and girls qua females in the Caribbean. Her identity as a Rastafarian was also an avenue through which she was placed in jeopardy via a contemporary attack against her dreadlocks, a key source of identity and personal power in her RastafarI faith. In addition, the state wields bio-power over incarcerated women by imposing upon them the humiliation and discipline of period poverty mirroring the experience of many women and girls who are "bloody poor."

Such multiple jeopardies are deepened and exacerbated in the pandemic, where enforcement orders are more often deployed by state agents against the poor and vulnerable, among whom are found working class Afro-Jamaican women. Only by continually unveiling these multiple jeopardies and advocating for ways of treating women, trans men, and non-binary persons with dignity can we hope to begin to redress them to ensure a better life for the NZingas of this world.

Anna Kasafi Perkins

IN *SIGNIFICATIONS: SIGNS, SYMBOLS, AND IMAGES IN THE Interpretation of Religion*, Charles H. Long recounts a story in which "Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, and Brer Wolf were experiencing a season of drought," drawn from T. F. Crane's essay "Plantation Folklore."⁴⁵ In the story, the three agree to dig a well to increase the water supply. Brer Rabbit informs the others that he will not help dig because he rises "early in the morning" and drinks "the dew from the grass."⁴⁶ After the well has been dug, Brer Rabbit is caught drinking from the well he refused to help dig. Long tells this story to explain the "trickster-transformer hero" Christ characteristic of the theologies of the opaque. Of course, Brer Rabbit appears to be a model of immorality, until we remember who rabbits are to foxes and wolves.

⁴⁴ Dianne M. Stewart, "Womanist Theology in the Caribbean Context: Critiquing Culture, Rethinking Doctrine, and Expanding Boundaries," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20, no. 1 (Spring, 2004): 61–82, www.jstor.org/stable/25002490.

⁴⁵ Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, Colorado: Davis Group, 1999), 193–196.

⁴⁶ Long, *Significations*, 193.

The brothering “Brer” rhetoric may trick us into thinking that *this* rabbit, fox, and wolf are all actually equal—defying rules of natural law that govern them, overcoming a presumed social pecking order. Or, perhaps, this rhetoric is meant to signify that they are content with a divinely ordered inequality (with which *we* should be content too).

Yet, Katie Geneva Cannon has made it plain: “The cherished ethical ideas predicated upon the existence of freedom and a wide range of choices [proves] null and void in situations of oppression.”⁴⁷ Womanist moral wisdom defies “oppressive rules or standards of ‘law and order’ that unjustly degrade Blacks in the society” and establishes Black people’s maintenance of “a feistiness about life that nobody can wipe out, no matter how hard they try” as the consummate moral good.⁴⁸ A Black people’s strategic deviation from standard moral codes for the sake of this moral good is the right (i.e., righteous and just) that is not right (i.e., traditionally virtuous).⁴⁹ And defying “oppressive rules” exposes the right (i.e., traditionally virtuous) that is not right (i.e., righteous and just).⁵⁰ Deviance, not respectability, is the moral method of the “trickster-transformer hero” and their acolytes. Deviance reveals Brer Rabbit’s vulnerability without compromising his dignity, integrity, and agency. No, deviance is not perfect; deviance may not precisely calibrate intersections and interstices of oppressions and identities. However, deviance assumes complexity and refuses easy answers.

Deviance implies a perspectival deviation from what appears at first glance; deviance enables us to see what others cannot. A deviating glance can perceive oppressions *glocally*: in local and transnational senses; in personal and collective senses.⁵¹ Roundtable conversation partner Hadebe challenges us with this critical question: how broadly will our intersectional analysis extend? And Hadebe insists that our intersectional analysis must extend beyond nation-state boundaries and logics. Such deviance can reveal how new contexts of stress (e.g., Covid-19) create new points of intersection and exacerbate deleterious intersections of conditions that are already in place. New stressors become intersecting factors in everyday life—exposing other stressors that are related to originating stressors. Deviants can see other deviants—“Africanized,” “subalternized,” “marginalized,” and intersected—with a gaze that deviates to take in the bigger picture—while the respectable steadily watch and wait for respectability.

⁴⁷ Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 32.

⁴⁸ Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 33.

⁴⁹ Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 33.

⁵⁰ Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 33.

⁵¹ Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 322–350.

Moral deviance as intersectional methodology affirms the epistemological value of the lived experiences of those who are vulnerable. However, Roundtable conversation partner Symmonds demonstrates the ways that intersectional methodology cannot begin and end with epistemological claims. Symmonds applies intersectionality to a contemplation of moral theology and reproductive choice—especially from a Black Catholic woman’s perspective. She argues that intersectional analysis would manifest in an “ethical praxis of living” that would support mothers and childbearing, a Black woman centering theological anthropology, an ethics of embodiment that prioritizes “bodyright,” and a “third way” for moral theologians that privileges “experience as a moral choice.” Were Symmonds to adopt an intersectional methodology of moral deviance, lived experiences that laid an epistemological foundation (i.e., orthodoxy) could right(eous)ly result in *deviant* moral choices (i.e., an alternative orthopraxy). And deviant orthopraxy might defy natural law—whether through sustained dialogue between a rabbit, a fox, and a wolf or through a rabbit who finds ways to drink her fill (while she can).

Deviance is *seen* for its difference, is *perceived* because there has been a deviation from the norm; in this way, deviance is wholly holy. Those who practice deviance are not only privy to capacities to perceive deviance (and deviantly); those who practice deviance are also, themselves, perceived as “other.” Roundtable conversation partner Perkins shares the “assault, arrest, shearing, jailing, fining, and shaming” of NZinga Candace King, a Rastafari woman whose experience demonstrates the complexities of racial oppression, and multiple jeopardies individuals can endure in a Jamaican context. Perkins presents the task of intersectionally responsible womanist theology and theological anthropology as “continually unveiling ... multiple jeopardies and advocating for ways of treating” women with dignity. When intersectional methodology deploys self-conscious deviance, intersectional analysis exposes truths of subjugation as NZinga did, ensures that others hear truths like NZinga’s, and acknowledges sacred opacity of deviance—where deviance is otherness, is the difference that is set apart and holy, is the way we trick and transform our way to regrown locs—and justice by new names.

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