

1

Methods of Research

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is important for understanding the thinking and motivation behind the study. Every person has a perception of reality grounded in experiences and knowledge of his/her historical cultural orientation.

Marimba Ani (1994) has provided perhaps the most concise definition of culture in her book *Yurugu*. Culture affects the way we perceive the world, and the way we think and behave in the world. For Afrikan people, as Ani and others show, it is vital to understand the nature of European domination because culture is a critical element that is used as a weapon in domination. For Afrikan and other subject people, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, imposed alien European values and beliefs shape and manipulate behavior to serve the interests of the governing group.

My entry into higher education was triggered by a desire to study the nature of European domination/white supremacy in order to make sense of why and how Afrikan women, men, and children have been persecuted and debased for so long. My involvement as a child and parent in the British public school system led to my

commitment to Black parent and teacher organizations and the development of supplementary schools as a self-determining salvation for our children.

The European answers to questions concerning the treatment of Afrikan people were and still are quite inadequate and illogical for any Afrikan person to accept. However, over centuries of violence and the appropriation of Afrikan resources and energies, Afrikan people have been forced to accept alien interpretations of Afrikan realities. In order to bring clarity to the situation it became critical for me to read and immerse myself in the research and ideas of Afrikan people. Receiving funding and attending university provided me with the time and opportunity to access documentation of the Afrikan experience from our own vantage point. In this light, I have used ideas from this body of knowledge along with my own experiences and that of others to fashion a conceptual framework. These ideas guided my choice to look at the relevance of Afrikan-run, culturally affirming schools to the liberation of Afrikan people, although I already had a sense of their significance because I was involved in the movement. However, I did not know the background of their existence from a historical viewpoint and as I grew more knowledgeable it seemed logical to begin to look at the types of mothers who chose to use these schools.

It is not unique for Afrikan people or any people to wish to reproduce their culture. This is how any people survives. However, it is extremely difficult for Afrikan people to see the need to reproduce Afrikan values and beliefs while living under the supremacy of a European cultural collective that debases and devalues Afrikan people in every area of social reality. Eurocentric beliefs of this nature imply that a return to values of the Afrikan past has little or no relevance to the present. How then could these mothers see outside the European construction of Afrika and her people and understand the importance of culturally affirming schools to the emotional, spiritual, and academic development of their children?

In reality, the retention of Afrikan cultural forms has been an important feature of Afrikan survival and resistance against the continuing Maafa. These forms range from the spiritual to the material. In this way, Afrikan people have held onto notions of justice and humanity from an Afrikan-based morality. These ideas have been the bedrock of the struggle against injustice perpetrated

by the aggressor. In other words, the struggle for liberation is based upon Afrikan ideas of social reality, not on European ideas of progress.

Important research on cultural retention has been carried out by Ani (1995), Asante and Welsh-Asante (1985), Diop, (1959/1990), Herskovitz (1958/1990), Holloway (1991), Richards (1980), Tedla (1995), and others. In this light, the task of Afrikan-centered thinkers is to reclaim, reconstruct, elevate, and dignify Afrikan cultural values and beliefs as a mode of resistance to life under white supremacy. Afrikan-centered or Afrocentric¹ ideas and knowledge are significantly different from those that elevate Afrikan people as a racial/genetic group while at the same time derogate Afrika and her culture or fail to see the importance of Afrika.

For the purpose of building a liberationist agenda, there can be no separation between Afrikan people wherever they live and their cultural link to Afrika. In reality, Afrikan people are still wrestling with alien concepts of humanity, spirituality, male/female relations, and family values. This has had a pervasive and insidious effect upon the Afrikan psyche. W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1969) brought this to mind when he spoke of "double consciousness" as reflecting a state of being when, the Negro looks at herself through the eyes of others. This imposed condition has, to a degree, successfully undermined the ability of Afrikan people to reproduce our values and beliefs on a consistent basis.

Using Diop's cradle theory (1959, 1990) and his concept of cultural unity, one is better able to define the nature of European domination (white supremacy) and its effects upon Afrikan people. Diop theorizes the development of two distinct cradles of civilization that created modes of societal structures almost antithetical to each other. The Southern cradle, Afrika, where humanity began, produced matriarchal societies. Over time, the migration of peoples to the colder climates of the northern cradle produced patriarchal, male-centered societies. Quite simply he attributes matriarchy to an agrarian lifestyle in a climate of abundance and patriarchy to nomadic traditions arising from a harsh environment. In time the patriarchal culture would develop, as Diop states,

instincts necessary for survival in such an environment . . . man must obtain his bread by the sweat of his brow. Above all, he

must learn to rely on himself alone. . . . He could not indulge in the luxury of believing in a beneficent God who would shower down abundant means of gaining a livelihood; instead he would conjure up deities maleficent and cruel, jealous and spiteful: Zeus, Yaweh among others. (1974, 112)

Conversely, the concept of matriarchy highlights the complementary aspect of the female-male relationship or the nature of the feminine and the masculine in all aspects of social organization. The woman is revered in her role as the mother who is the bringer of life, the conduit to the spiritual regeneration of the ancestors, the bearer of culture and the center of social organization. Thus, according to Diop, to speak or behave inappropriately in front of a mother is tantamount to committing sacrilege. It is believed that such behavior will be known in the ancestors' realm and the repercussions will fall upon the families of the perpetrators. As a result of her powerful role, the mother wishes to use her power wisely and will often be a tolerant person toward her children and her partner (Diop 1990, 70–71). In the context of western patriarchy this tolerance may be exploited and viewed as a weakness rather than a strength.

The role of motherhood or mothering is not limited to mothers or women even in contemporary Afrika (Tedla 1995). Motherhood depicts the nature of the communal responsibilities involved in the raising of children and the caring of others. However, while the role of women and mothering in the process of reproduction is critical to the continuation of any society and culture, in a patriarchal society this role is not ascribed with the value that it bears in a matriarchal society.

In antiquity, as Diop (1990) explains, the European or Indo-Aryan woman is considered little more than a burden that the man drags behind him. Beyond her function of child-bearing, her role is nothing. As a person of less value, she must leave her clan to join her husband, unlike the matriarchal custom, which requires the man to join her family (p. 29). The differences that arise from these two cultural orientations may be viewed as significant. The debasement of women in one culture and the respect for women in the other, mark important distinctions that should not be ignored when analyzing the contemporary difficulties for Afrikan people, especially Afrikan women living in western-oriented societies.

There is plenty of evidence to show that Afrikan women in antiquity and even after the last major European conquest of Afrika,² held key positions in the political, legal, spiritual, agrarian, economic, and health arenas. Researchers like Diop, Ivan Van Sertima, Barbara Lesko, Merlin Stone, Charles Finch, David Sweetman, Hazel Carby, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Filomina Chioma Steady, Ifi Amadiume, and others bring clarity to this reality. This is a critical part of the Afrikan woman's cultural heritage. What does today's subjugated Afrikan woman have to contend with under European cultural imposition? She not only suffers as a woman, but she suffers first as an Afrikan person, degraded primarily by her color, features, and hair texture.

The racialized dynamics of her experience may also be attributed to European culture. From Diop's cradle theory (1959/1990) and Ani's understanding of Yurugu (1994), the xenophobic (fear of foreigners) behavior Europeans exhibited during the conquest of the world's peoples may be related to the imbalance of the feminine and masculine principles. The unequal power relationship between the male and female coupled with the fear of the "other" may be considered significant in the development of hierarchical and unequal power relations among European ethnicities. These inequalities later provided the basis for defining the social positions of other cultural groups. It is possible to view the inequalities exhibited in today's western-oriented societies as reflective of this condition.

The concept of race has been constructed to differentiate and measure the value of humanity in accordance with the moral structure of Europeans. From an Afrikan-centered perspective, it has played a critical role in falsely dividing humanity, according to European notions of inferiority and superiority, using genetic characteristics based on color distinctions. This concept has enabled Europeans to unite as "white" people in the fabrication of "white" supremacy over the "Red," "Yellow," "Brown," and "Black" peoples of the world.

Within the western world, the ideology of "white" supremacy has developed in concert with the conquest of Afrika and her people. The Afrikan woman has been constructed as a woman of the "Black" race and all the negative connotations that Europeans have attached to that definition. Conceptually, she has been separated from her cultural base, Afrika. To facilitate the authenticity of this

belief, Afrika and her people have been debased. The process of deculturalization has played a vital role in constructing this ideology. Now the Black woman can be manipulated into thinking that she is a "Black" Briton, U.K. "Black," "Black" American, "Black" Brazilian, "Black" German, and so on. As a citizen of these places, not only does she not have the same human rights afforded her as her white counterparts, she is also viewed as not deserving them. As a Black citizen, she fights for the right to exist as a debased European national. Ironically, she will always be perceived by Europeans as an Afrikan in the most negative way whether she understands this or not. Culturally affirming schools serve to nurture the belief in Afrikaness as a critical component in humanness and personhood from an Afrikan-centered or Afrocentric perspective. This knowledge has the possibility of helping the Afrikan woman to connect with her proud cultural heritage.

Diop's research (1959/1990) suggests that when the European and Afrikan cultural groups met, the xenophilic (love of people) attitude of Afrikan people versus the xenophobic (fear of foreigners) of Europeans may well have been Afrika's downfall. In effect, it is possible to view the values and beliefs of Afrikan people and European people as standing in direct opposition. What was considered a strength in one civilization was viewed as a weakness to be exploited by the other. Subsequently, European ethnicities under the auspices of "white" supremacy were able, as a cultural entity, to undermine, annihilate, and subjugate those who exhibited the values of matriarchy.

Diop's concept of cultural unity (1959/1990) addresses the ability of any cultural group to reproduce itself through the intergenerational transmission of its values and beliefs. In this way, the contemporary societies of these two major cultural groups, the European and the Afrikan, can be seen to demonstrate many of the same values as their ancestors did thousands of years ago. A focus on the distinctions between European patriarchal and Afrikan matriarchal cultures provides the basis for understanding the contradictions between these value systems. Their in-built moral systems are, to their creators, perfectly justified, neither appearing morally deficient. However, the severe ramifications for Afrikan women and men as a result of patriarchal morality is a continuing

matter of life and death. In reality, we are dealing with a clash of cultures and therefore a clash of moral systems. By using the clash of culture as a paradigm, we can more easily make sense of some contemporary conditions. In this war of cultural domination, the mothers who send their children to culturally affirming schools may be perceived as warriors conditioned to understand the nature of the war.

Background

Contextualized by the Southern cradle origins of the herstory of Afrikan women, my project presents a new model of analysis that looks in-depth at reasons for the choice that Afrikan mothers have made to send their children to culturally affirming schools in the United States and the United Kingdom. The major questions relating to their decisions are:

1. Why do these mothers, in the face of the debasement of Afrikan people, perceive Afrikan culture to be of any relevance to their children's lives?
2. What types of women have made the choice to send their children to culturally affirmative schools?

I interviewed twenty-one mothers, thirteen in the United States and eight in the United Kingdom. Of the thirteen mothers in the United States, eight mothers sent their children to a full-time independent Afrikan-centered school called Sankofa. It was the first full-time Afrikan-centered school to operate in a northeastern city where over one-third of the population is Afrikan. One mother was the head teacher³ of Sankofa and her children, who attended the local university, assisted her when she needed their help. Three of the remaining four mothers sent their children to public schools and the fourth sent her child to a private European (i.e., western-oriented) day care center. The eight mothers interviewed in the United Kingdom sent their children to culturally affirming supplementary schools. Supplementary schools are part-time schools, run by Afrikan people, usually operating on Saturdays and after state school hours. Just as

not all independent Black schools in the United States are culturally affirmative Afrikan schools, so not all supplementary schools in the United Kingdom are culturally affirmative Afrikan schools. Of the eight mothers in the United Kingdom four mothers sent their children to Queen Nzinga School and four to Marcus Garvey School. Both schools are situated in London.

The model that I have designed as an analytical tool suggests reasons why these mothers send their children to culturally affirmative schools as well as why the four U.S. mothers chose not to send their children. In both cases my goal was to find out whether there is a more personal experiential reason for making these decisions in view of the significance of what a culturally affirmative school represents. I was also interested in the nature of their respective choices. In this context my objectives were to determine:

1. Whether their choice to send their children to an Afrikan-centered school can be construed as part of a resistance movement against racism in the public/state system.
2. Whether their choice not to send their children is indicative of a level of consciousness concerning what they perceive to be the effects of racism on their children or themselves.

These questions overlap and interrelate in the analyses of the lives of the twenty-one women involved in the study. On one hand, some parents who send their children to culturally affirmative schools may not be fully cognizant of the devastating effects of racism on their children. On the other hand, parents who do not send their children to these schools may be fully cognizant of the effects but may have reasons for not sending their children that pertain to some perceived shortcomings in the schools themselves. Since the majority of parents in the United States, and the United Kingdom, do not send their children to these schools, what makes these parents different? The exploratory look at the backgrounds of the four parents who do not send their children to culturally affirmative schools provide some insights that may be useful in helping to define some of the differences. This information may also provide

some ideas about how or whether Afrikan-centered schools can be made more appealing. However, the major focus of this work is on the life herstories of seventeen mothers who committed themselves to supporting the schools for reasons that relate to the levels of their consciousness concerning the broader struggle of Afrikan people. It is clear that while these women come from diverse backgrounds ranging from the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Afrika with a variety of survival experiences, in general, they are not only consciously aware of the state's attempt to falsify information about the his/herstory of Afrikan people but are also aware of the impact of this miseducation on their children's lives.

This work is influenced by two earlier studies, one carried out in the United Kingdom and the other in the United States. The first study focused on the use of supplementary schools by Afrikan people in the United Kingdom (Dove 1990). These part-time schools, administered by Afrikan people, mainly Afrikan Caribbeans, emerged from the 1960s as a result of the large numbers of Afrikan-Caribbean children placed in "special" schools better known as Educational Sub-Normal (ESN) schools. The study was intended to give credence to parents as intellectual resources whose voices are given little validity in the planning and policy development aspects of state/public schooling.⁴ Furthermore, the study viewed the development of these schools as an act of Afrikan resistance against the racism inherent in the state/public school system.

The second study carried out by Joan Ratteray and Mwalimu Shujaa (1987) was an investigation of parental perceptions about their involvement in independent neighborhood schools. The report from this study, *Dare to Choose*, focuses on the development and use of full-time independent schools, which like supplementary schools have arisen as a result of parental dissatisfaction with public schooling. Not all the schools in these two studies can be considered to be Afrikan-centered schools. However, all the schools constitute Afrikan-run alternatives to state/public schooling and thus involve serious considerations made by parents to use these schools. This applies whether they are part-time schools as in the United Kingdom or full-time schools as in the U.S. study. I reanalyzed the data from these two studies to contextualize the ideas for the present study.

Rationale and Method

This study builds on methods of interviewing developed during my previous supplementary school study done in the United Kingdom (see Dove 1990). In the current study I also focus on parental perceptions regarding the effects that racism in state schooling has upon their children. However, I believe that in-depth interviews undertaken for the present study look more deeply into reasons why parents have chosen culturally affirming schools. Rather than looking solely at the impact of schooling on their children, I look at the herstories of these mothers and try to make links between their experiences, and their understanding of racism, to their decisions about their own children's schooling and education.

I have been greatly influenced by the models used in three important studies carried out by Afrikan women about Afrikan women living in the United States and the United Kingdom. Influenced by their experiences as scholars, their approaches moved away from European-centered concepts and perspectives regarding the relationship between the researcher and the people who share information with them. One approach was developed by Joyce Ladner, whose sociological study *Tomorrow's Tomorrow*, carried out in 1964 in St. Louis, Missouri, and published in 1971, looks at the lives of young Black women growing up in an impoverished Afrikan community. Describing the significance of her study, Ladner wrote:

Few authorities on the Black community have written about the vast amount of strength and adaptability of the people. They have ignored the fact that this community is a force which not only acts upon its residents but which is also acted upon. (Ladner 1971, xv)

She shows the strengths of these young women who were living and raising children in family structures infected by white supremacy with low levels of life expectancy.

The second study, *The Heart of the Race*, published in 1986 and authored by three Afrikan women living in the United Kingdom, Beverly Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe, is based on herstories of contemporary Afrikan women whose ideas and actions illuminate the critical role that women exercise in making social

change in the United Kingdom. As researchers, they have set the context for Afrikan women to speak for themselves because these voices have been ignored or not clearly represented. Without this perspective, the story of Afrikan people is incomplete. With this in mind, they speak of the cultural significance of the Afrikan woman's experience:

Our African origin is the cornerstone of our lifestyle and our perception of the world, the internal dynamic which has enabled us continuously to resist new assaults on our way of life. In responding to these assaults, we have had to create and recreate new definitions of ourselves as a people. As such our culture has become subversive, for through it we have always had to challenge, combat and find new ways of winning. (p. 183)

The third study, *The Habit of Surviving*, published in 1991 and written by Kesho Yvonne Scott, contrasts the lives of five "successful" Black women born in the United States in the 1930s. This model emphasizes the personal herstories of these women. These life stories were acquired through in-depth interviews that focused on the techniques invented by these women throughout their lives as victims and survivors.

I could begin to see that we as black people (and especially black women) had some good habits and some bad habits, and that both played a role in our survival. I could finally make a theoretical leap from survival by means of group practices in every day life (and in my own life) to the design of an oppressive society to exert control over not only the material world but the hearts, minds and spirits of oppressed people, especially black women. (Scott 1991, 10)

I have transposed these designs into the model that is molded by my own theoretical framework, which highlights, in particular, the cultural context of the Afrikan woman's experience from antiquity into the future. At the same time it is apparent that the ideal Afrikan family cannot exist under European control and that its deficiency is a characteristic of the cultural war being waged against

Afrikan people's potential to strive toward spiritual, mental, social, political, and economic self-determination. This study highlights women who not only act against their oppressors but hold a vision of a future within which being Afrikan provides the basis of a new world order.

The focus on Afrikan women as parents is related very much to the fact that women are the vanguard in both the development and use of Afrikan culturally affirming institutions. Their involvement in this process defines them as warriors and leaders, who, as I have previously explicated, have for centuries been the backbone of resistance movements against European control and domination. As Afrikan mothers, women have always played the central role in building the family and in nurturing and helping in their children's growth, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Historically and of necessity, the family has been under siege under white supremacy. For this reason, Hazel Carby importantly views the Afrikan family as the site of struggle and argues that

[w]e would not wish to deny that the family can be a source of oppression for us but we also wish to examine how the black family has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression. We need to recognize that during slavery, periods of colonialism and under the present authoritarian state, the black family has been a site of political and cultural resistance to racism. (Carby 1982a, 214)

It is Carby's contention that the survival of Afrikan people has been predicated on the strength of the family and its ability to challenge the injustices of white supremacy.

The role of women and men in the establishment of the family has been severely debilitated by the continuous attempt to subjugate Afrikan people through political, economic, psychological, and spiritual means. This systematic effort has had an impact on the development of the family and, therefore, the Afrikan child's growth. It is compounded by the ability of the father to provide the economic resources for his family and especially in relation to the access of the prospective mother to proper health care, schooling, employment, housing, marriage and human rights even before she conceives. Moreover, the obstacles that Afrikan women and men

face in being raised in, and raising children in, white supremacist patriarchy is devastating, as the works of W. E. B. Du Bois, Robert Staples, Robert Hill, Andrew Billingsley, Antonio McDaniel, Harriette Pipes McAdoo, James Stewart, Niara Sudarkasa, K. Sue Jewell, Wade Nobles, Asa Hilliard, and others show.

Under European domination the process of deculturalization has had serious ramifications for the thinking and behaviors of oppressed peoples, especially those whose cultural values are grounded in matriarchal belief systems. Difficulties in the face of patriarchy, especially for Afrikan people, center around the ability to maintain the family, venerate the woman, revere the role of motherhood and fatherhood, and respect the integrity of girls and boys as the wealth and future of the society. As a mother, the Afrikan woman must contend with the racism that devalues the humanity of her people as well as the sexism that devalues her womanhood and therefore her status. As bearers of culture the Afrikan mother's responsibility for retaining cultural unity has been beset with myriad dangers. I have therefore tried to show the resilience of some Afrikan mothers who, in the face of such tremendous obstacles, are able to see the value of their Afrikaness and knowingly transfer that understanding to their children.

For this study, I view those supplementary schools that focus on cultural affirmation in their pedagogies as similar to Afrikan-centered schools in the United States. Moreover, I believe that in both cases, Afrikan-based institution building is rooted in the attempt to challenge the immorality of European supremacy. The women who have chosen to build these schools have made a decision about the types of influences they wish their children to be exposed to. This sets them apart from other women who send their children to state/public schools or to other private schools. To believe that an Afrikan-based cultural emphasis is important to their children in the face of the derogation of Afrikan people and culture is a reflection of the ability of Afrikan people to maintain their values even under the most extreme attempts at deculturalization.

The U.S. school in this study is tuition based. This means that these women and their families must raise the finances to send their children. If they are unable to do so, they can participate in the school and exchange skills for the finances that they are unable to provide. They may teach part-time, watch the children during

lunchtime or playtime, or help to carry out administrative tasks. In this regard, the critical questions are: Do the fees dictate and determine the type of women who build these schools? Does the financial situation prevent more women from making this decision?

My earlier U.K. study (Dove 1990), coupled with data from the U.K. parents involved in the present study, goes some way toward answering these questions. In the United Kingdom most supplementary schools are free or charge minimal fees (Dhondy 1982; Jones 1984; Best 1990; Dove 1990). However, the majority of Afrikan parents, whether rich or poor, do not subscribe to these schools. So, I speculate that the fee-paying aspect of the Afrikan-centered school may not entirely account for why some parents do not use this school or other schools like the one in this study. In the U.S. city where the Sankofa School is located, there is a substantial Afrikan middle-class. However, overall and in the main, middle-class parents are not the main users. Generally, if they use private schools, they send their children to western-centered schools.

In the supplementary school study (1990) with the use of questionnaires, I asked parents if they would send their children to these schools if they became full-time. An overwhelming majority of the sixty questionnaires returned showed that they would. Furthermore, half of the parents said they would be prepared to pay for this service. This is interesting because the majority of parents who use supplementary schools in both the 1990 study and the present one are poor. It may be true to say that more parents would send their children to fee-paying Afrikan-centered schools if they could afford to do so. Given the London findings, it is also reasonable to argue that the parents who send their children to culturally affirming schools constitute a minority of parents who, I believe, have made a radical, political decision.

The history of supplementary schools in the United Kingdom developed out of the movement among Afrikan Caribbean parents, in particular, who were dissatisfied with the racism of state/public schooling. The commitment of parents to send their children to these schools relates to their awareness of the racist dynamics of the state system. As Faroukh Dhondy (1982) states when describing the conditions surrounding the establishment of the early supplementary schools:

The State, itself aware that a powerful political base could be built through the Supplementary schools, used police and education officials to harass them. Pressure was put on owners and caretakers of the buildings used. Parents were visited by the police and questioned as to whether they knew their children were in the hands of Black Power fanatics. The children themselves were harassed by the police who would frequently visit the schools and question what was taking place. (1982, 33)

Discrimination of this kind did not end with police harassment. Parents have confided that their children suffer discrimination from mainstream teachers if it is known that they attend these schools. This is one reason why some parents do not use supplementary schools. In the United States Afrikan-centered or culturally affirmative institutions pose a similar threat to the establishment in the sense that such schools also offer a powerful political base for Afrikan activism. Parents, who therefore make a commitment to send their children to schools administrated by Afrikan people appear to take a militant stand. I would argue that although parents pay tuition for their children to go to Sankofa and schools like it, their commitment goes beyond the financial aspects of obtaining a private school education. I believe that the eight Afrikan women interviewees who chose to send their children to an Afrikan-centered school and the eight women whose children attend the two culturally affirming schools in the United Kingdom have taken a radical stance and made a radical choice. Based on their interviews, their choice has less to do with money and more to do with helping their children navigate this world with Afrikan principles and philosophies to guide them.

Evaluating My Respect for My Sisters

The question of trust in Afrikan people as educators is an important factor in the decision to send a child to a culturally affirming school, particularly in the climate of the debate about whether these schools are segregationist and developing anti-white sentiments. When I went to the United Kingdom to begin this study, this work was in

reality a continuation of my earlier study of 1990, carried out when I was a student. I visited some of the same schools and met some of the same mothers that I had been involved with. Thus, I did not have to undergo much of my earlier experiences. However, it is important that you understand some of my earlier experiences from 1990 so that you may see how I was able to build upon them.

In 1990, the trust factor was extremely important given the history of harassment towards the development of supplementary schools as a challenge to the racist state school treatment of Afrikan children. Parents were aware of the hostility felt against them both by the public/state school system and the community at large. In my case, when I went to interview the school directors, parents and children, I was aware of the climate of mistrust. As a school co-director and educator, I was leery of persons investigating these schools. As Afrikan people we have a tradition of encountering agent provocateurs whose mission is to destroy Afrikan unity that appears to challenge the ideologies of the dominant group.

In fact, the first school I visited was one of the first supplementary schools founded in London. I was refused access to parents by the board of directors because of a prior investigation carried out by another student whose study challenged the credibility of supplementary schools. Although I was hurt at the insinuation, I fully understood the feelings of suspicion held against "outsiders" carrying out "investigations" about the school.

Thus, for this study, it was important for me to present myself as a credible person in looks, dress, and carriage. Even before providing a personal explanation of my research after the phone and letter contact, I felt that I had to present myself as mature and competent enough for the work. For seven years prior to this investigation I had grown my hair in "dreadlocks." Although I had cut my hair a year earlier, I had allowed it to grow back without locks and I kept a color rinse in it to look younger. For this investigation, I allowed the gray to show through. I felt that being natural, as an older woman, I would be far more acceptable as a serious and conscientious person. Not only that, I also felt that looking older would remove the idea that I was a novice or entirely new to the arena.

Interestingly, five of the parents from this 1990 study became interviewees for the herstories of the present study. These inter-

views with the U.K. mothers took place in London in November 1993. I was invited by the administrator of Queen Nzinga School to speak to interested parents and teachers from all over the country about the development of full-time Afrikan-centered schools. My intention was to carry out the interviews during my one-month stay. Before my arrival, I informed the administrator of Queen Nzinga School of my intention to interview mothers. She had spoken to parents and they gave me permission to approach them. At the same time, I made contact with Adoaha, a mother from Marcus Garvey School who had introduced me to three mothers from my 1990 study. These four mothers had helped me to pilot my study of that time and advised me on my questionnaire categories (see Dove 1990). Adoaha spoke to them about my research and they agreed to be interviewed again.

In the United States, as a founding member on the board of directors of Sankofa School, I became acquainted with the parents and their children on my visits to the school. Some of the parents that I interviewed were also founding members like myself. Therefore, I was very familiar with them as colleagues before the interviews. I believe that these relationships had a bearing on the interviews because trust had been established earlier. My role as a founding member gave me some credibility as a researcher with those parents who did not really know me. Thus, my role as an active member of Sankofa School enabled the parents to feel that I had no interest in undermining them or the school. To my mind, as an Afrikan woman whose allegiance lies with my people, it was not possible to attempt to interview women who I viewed as sisters and activists, with objectives outside those that I felt obliged to reveal.

Arrangements were made to interview parents at Sankofa School after the board had granted permission for me to carry out my investigation. I called parents and notified them of my intention to carry out this study. In both the United States and the United Kingdom my approach was one of genuine humility and respect because I felt honored that these women would be prepared to trust me with private information about their personal lives. As an Afrikan woman growing up in the West, and a single parent with a history of little or no financial stability, I felt that I could identify

with the participants on any level as a sister. In fact, there were moments when I felt emotionally overcome with either the joy or sadness produced by some of the experiences that were narrated. Indeed, some situations reminded me of my own experiences. In some strange way, when one is relating one's story to another it provides a time of reflection and analysis as one sees where one has come from and where one is. It is generally rare that an opportunity arises when one can look at one's self. Reflecting on the Afrikan struggle generally, and the injustices meted to our children, often, there are many moments of sadness.

There were different depths of information given and I can relate this to the closeness of my relationship to the interviewees. For instance, I was privy to some very sensitive personal information. I related this sharing of life experiences not only to the trust built up during the interview but also to the context of the relationship prior to the interview. I did not press any person to tell me anything that she felt was too personal. I allowed each mother the freedom to choose what she wished to speak about after laying out the types of things that I wished to find out. Thus my questions were open-ended but structured in that I was looking for specific kinds of experiences.

The U.S. interviews at Sankofa School took place in February and March of 1992. The U.K. interviews at Queen Nzinga and Marcus Garvey Schools took place in November 1993. Prior to the interviews, each mother was briefed on the objectives of the interviews and the methods that I would use. The interviews were taped and ran from one and a half to two and a half hours. I followed up interviews with phone calls if anything needed clarification. Before the recording, I introduced myself and established the questions and the types of information that I wanted for the study. In this way, I wanted to create a reasonably relaxed situation in the context of the seriousness of the interview.

I believe that my questions dealing with the experiences of growing up as Afrikan women and experiencing the racism and sexism that this entails were profound. All of the women who sent their children to the culturally affirming schools, took their decision seriously and the interviews themselves were thoughtful. During the course of the interviews, I tried to elicit ideas from the women that

reflected their own political feelings about some of the critical issues going on in the Afrikan community. The interviews were therefore not generally of a happy-go-lucky superficial nature, nor did I want them to be. My study was to focus on the gravity of growing up and raising children in this society.

My Credibility as a Researcher and a Sister

Although the interviewees and I acknowledged that we as Black/Afrikan women could come together in understanding the experiential similarity of living in western society, we were different in the sense that our origins and language were rooted in other places. Moreover, learning to become an academic in the Eurocentric system of higher education has required that I develop a level of proficiency in the English language in order to understand the subtleties of its uses especially concerning Afrikan people. My continental Afrikan roots and European experience must have played a part in my communication with the sisters.

When I arrived in England from West Afrika, in the early 1950s, I was six years old and could speak two Nigerian languages, Igbo and Yoruba. Within a short period of time, these languages lost their validity in an English context. As an isolated Afrikan child growing up in England it became critical that I understand the oppressor language and speak it as well as I could, as soon as I could. I learned the language as a necessary part of a survival technique. Understanding the meanings of the oppressor's language enables one to present an argument or case to defend or fight for the rights of self or others. My work in the state school system has required that I also understand the language of "education," which excludes those who are not of the teaching profession. Thus, understanding has helped in the challenge to, and struggle against, racism in the schools, as implicated in the processes that undermine Afrikan teachers, students, and parents.

Having lived in Brixton among predominantly Afrikan people from Jamaica, I learned to understand that language especially well since I was once a member of the Twelve Tribes Rastafarian organization. Each of the Caribbean islands has its own distinct

language that has developed out of the colonizers' languages. The language of the Afrikan American is similar in that it has arisen as a way of communication that is used in the interests of Afrikan people who have designed it. These languages maintain characteristics of speech that came from Afrika. Moreover and importantly as Herskovitz (1958) showed, many of the words used by Afrikan nations, which replaced European words in the construction of Afrikan-based languages under European domination, were in fact very similar to the English words. As a result, early Eurocentric scholars believed that Afrikan people were mispronouncing European words when they were in fact using Afrikan words. For example, the Mende word *suwango*, "to be proud," was seen as a mispronunciation of the word *swagger*. The Wolof word *lir*, meaning "small," was viewed as a corruption of *little*. The Twi word *fa*, "to take," was seen as a mispronunciation of *for* (p. 277). Ignorance of this type has served to invalidate Afrikan speech within the public school system (see the Oakland School District's debate on Ebonics).

Although I speak the "downpressor" language in the style of the oppressor, I have subverted its use so that it can serve the interests of the oppressed. New languages or dialects that arose out of oppressive power relations are used to undermine the oppressor. At the same time, I believe that the language of the oppressor can itself be subverted. After all it would be ridiculous to believe that to speak the language of the conquered necessarily means that the user is actively trying to change oppressive social conditions. Similarly, it would be nonsense to believe that people who speak the language of the oppressor work to support oppression or are themselves oppressors. However, to preserve a language, in the face of the continued attempt to impose standards as a way of inferiorizing that language, must be considered an act of subversion. While language is an integral part of culture, we who have learned to exploit it have the potential to reconstruct meanings to suit the values that pertain to our Afrikan cultural orientation.

In the context of these interviews, the women with whom I communicated did not appear to have a problem with the fact that I am an Afrikan who speaks like a European. They spoke English in a similar manner, although for some English was a second language. Though I must have missed some of the subtleties of communicat-