



Reflections

Personal Reflection: *Weaving in the Thread of Head and Heart*

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At the end of the Transatlantic Writing Workshop (Jamaica), one of the project mentors, Prof. Janice McLean-Farrell, invited us to reflect on the following question: “What are the threads you take back to weave into the other threads of the fabric you are making through your writing?”

In response, I shared that the Transatlantic Writing Workshop provided an intellectual and emotional safe space to engage in authentic conversations among diverse yet similar realities while building community, giving birth to profound insights, understanding, respect, trust, and effective solidarity, all of which are critical in the arena of academic writing.

When I was embarking on graduate studies in theology, a wise theologian counselled me, saying, “Experience is the raw material for academic studies.” Only recently, and with the help of the TWP, did I discover that my interpretation of the notion of “experience” was limited: more precisely, it was devoid of the emotional dimension. The tearful emotional responses of my African colleagues to the visit of the tombs of the enslaved at the Seville Heritage Park, St Ann’s, Jamaica, and the infectious ripple effect on me, reinforced the crucial importance of the emotional dimension of experience in shaping academic writing, giving it further relevance and legitimacy.

The inclusion of the emotional dimension in academic writing is contrary to the trend of our inherited British philosophy of education in the Caribbean. In this cultural context, males are socialised to devalue our emotions, and conditioned to believe that negative emotions, such as fear, are undesirable.

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Thus, the seat of emotions, in an Anglo-Saxon imperialistic mindset, has no contribution to offer to academic research and writing.

However, authentic conversation within the TWP became an unexpected safe space for the marriage of head and heart. This writing project was not for armchair theologians but for women and men actively engaged in the raw historical and contemporary experience of African and Caribbean people rooted in a holistic response to enslavement and colonization, and the mutual desire to engage in repair.

Ritually placing our pens on the graves of our ancestors at the Seville Heritage Park while weeping over the terrible atrocities of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, including the contributions of our West African ancestors,² represented our commitment to using our academic skills to access resources to creatively reconstruct and “re-member” the Middle Passage in contemporary times. For me, the marriage of the head and heart in academic research and writing is the thread I take back to weave into the other threads of the fabric of my writing.

² *Editor's note:* The complexities of these West African contributions were touched on in different ways in the project, including an acknowledgement and apology from the Chief of Cape Coast (Osabarimba Dr Kwesi Atta II, the *Omanhene* [Paramount Chief] of Oguaa Traditional Area, Cape Coast) regarding the participation of some local chiefs in facilitating the trafficking of West Africans; to the recognizable Akan names and acknowledged West African heritage and presence through enslaved West Africans in Jamaica.