

Subtexts in the Construction of Xenophobia and Racism: A Narrative Epistemological Approach to the Cultural Adjustment of an Immigrant in the United States

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Ethnography as a field of qualitative inquiry unearths varied understandings of communication phenomena. Narrative ethnography is an epistemology, a way of knowing, and a tool with a range of forms and styles for discovering meaning, and communicating it through stories (Goodall, 2008). This paper reveals the cultural dissonance of an immigrant residing in the United States, expressing the dissonance in narratives. It contextualizes the narratives within benchmarks of the native culture and in studies done on ethnicity, race, coping and acculturation. It identifies the barriers to the immigrant's assimilation after 30 years of living in the United States.

Introduction

I can hardly believe that it has been thirty years since I stepped off an Air Jamaica aircraft, and herded with the crowd, hustled into the unknown of the Baltimore Washington International airport and the United States of America with its televised mosaics of wonderful much about itself. I was going through a

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divorce and needed to get a graduate degree and earn money to pay off my bills. My debts were in Jamaican currency, so the calculation was simple—one United States dollar was equivalent to twelve Jamaican dollars. I obtained a student visa, purchased an airline ticket, and came to the United States voluntarily. According to Berry (2006), “voluntary immigrants” are those who leave their countries by choice in search of employment, economic opportunities, marriage, or to join family members who have immigrated previously. In my case, it was an economic decision.

Reflecting on my status when I came to the United States, I was just a Jamaican woman with a toddler. I cleaned floors at an on-campus restaurant to earn an income, and a limited teaching assistantship from the university along with a merit-based scholarship from the Organization of American States covered my tuition. Since then, I have been morphed into Non-Hispanic, Black, Female, and Naturalized American* (*My reminder to expect the question “No, where are you *really* from?”)

From demographic indicators, I seem to have accomplished modest success. My toddler is now a lawyer. I have earned a Master’s and a Ph.D. from a research university, and additional training at an elite university. I am a tenured full professor, have taught for 30 years, and have served in senior positions in higher education administration for 15 years. I led or participated in national organizations focused on higher education. I live a fairly peaceful and comfortable lifestyle. Demographics aside, I have had to take a hard look at how I *really* managed to navigate the new culture, being centered in the tension between the transplanted cultural me, and the cultural paradoxes of the host culture. In other words, I had to find the right perspective to contextualize, interpret and respond to my experiences.

“How do we learn to see things in one way and not another? Where does our capacity for critical interpretation of experience come from...the answer to all these questions turns on issues of representation that center on perspective. We learn to see things in one way and not another because we are born, reared, and acculturated in a particular way and not another. How we learn to see and interpret the world is therefore a product of where we come from and who we are. As a Western white heterosexual of a certain age, child of relative privilege, and product of an elite education, I have a perspective shaped and informed by those accumulated facts of my life. I am... “raced, classed, aged, gendered, and abled,” and where I “stand” in relation to all that I see, feel, know, and experience is shot through with those markers of cultural and biological identity” (Goodall, Jr. 2008 p. 24).

So where do I stand in relation to all that I see, feel, know, and experience in the United States? At my cultural core I am Jamaican—a word that summarizes not just the country of my birth, but my belief system; my outlook on life; my position in relation to others; my attitude towards education; my work ethic and self-reliance; my sense of humor; my performative culture; my love of spicy

food; my love of the rhythm in our music; my respect for role relationships; my love of the sea, the beaches, the sunset and the sunrise; my sense of shame; and, my love of the country—the source of my pride.

I grew up in a culture that valued self-reliance, pride in achievement, individual agency, and optimism. These values were taught in homes, schools, colleges, universities, and public spaces where governments fashioned them in Emancipation art, and also in monuments representing nation building service of Jamaica's National Heroes—Nanny of the Maroons; Sam Sharpe who led decisive slave rebellion; Paul Bogle and George William Gordon who led the Morant Bay Rebellion; Marcus Garvey who kept the importance of Africa alive; Norman Manley, the Chief Minister of Jamaica and founder of the Peoples National Party; and Alexander Bustamante, Jamaica's first Prime Minister and founder of the Jamaica Labor Party. At the same time, politicians on both sides of the aisle in Parliament exhaled fiery rhetoric of Jamaica's sovereignty and wagged fingers in the face of the International Monetary Fund when they disagreed with the terms of a loan. On the other hand, reggae artists led by Bob Marley kept the nation dancing with songs like "Three Little Birds," "Exodus," and "Redemption Song":

*Old Pirates yes, they rob I
Sold I to the merchant ships. Minutes after they took I
From the Bottomless pit
But my hand was made strong
By the Hand of the Almighty
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly
Won't you help me sing
These songs of Freedom
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption Song
Redemption Song
Emancipate yourself from mental slavery
None but ourselves can free our mind... (Bob Marley, "Redemption Song")*

Jamaica

Jamaica is the largest island in the English-speaking Caribbean. It is 146 miles long and 51 miles wide. It has a population of approximately 2.7 million people. Under the watchful eyes of the Taino Indians who lived on their island Xaymaca, (land of wood and water) a European, Christopher Columbus, invited himself to Xaymaca on May 5, 1494 and claimed to have "discovered" Jamaica, the "*fairest island that eyes have beheld: mountains and the land seem to touch the sky...all full of valleys, and fields, and plains*" (visitJamaica.com). Little did the Taino people

know that they would be robbed of their land; that their simple ways of living would be turned upside down; that they would be forced into slave labor to plant sugar cane; and, that they would all perish from back-breaking work as well as the diseases with which they had been infected by the Europeans.

One hundred years later, the British fought against the Spanish and captured the island.

Jamaica became a jewel in the British crown producing excessive margins of economically profitable sugar—a product crystalized from the sugar cane, planted, tended, harvested, and processed by unwilling Africans, gutted from the bowels of their Motherland for the heinous transformation of Man, Woman, and Child to bipedal livestock. Slavery was the African Holocaust. Jamaica had its fair share of beheadings of runaways, floggings to death, dismemberment, and burnings alive. Those who were spared, like little girls as young as nine, were raped by white men and could be flogged if they refused. “Sex with white men was compulsory for enslaved women [...] submitting to the rape of a white man of even low standing could mean [...] kinder treatment [...] If the woman had a Black male partner he was obliged to endure the cuckolding without protest” (Zoellner 2020, p. 23).

Yet, in spite of the atrocities, enslaved Africans from Benin, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria and elsewhere in West Africa, bonded themselves together and resisted the onslaught of evil. They were resilient. There is the story of an African that a white man was trying to make a public example of by burning him to death. “The wretch that was burnt was made to sit on the ground,” wrote Bryan Edwards, “and his body being chained to an iron stake, the fire was applied to his feet. He uttered not a groan, and saw his legs reduced to ashes with the utmost firmness and composure; after one of his arms by some means getting loose, he snatched a brand from the fire that was consuming him and flung it at the face of his executioner. Through what must have been extraordinary pain, the nameless rebel demonstrated not only a final act of physical defiance, but also the characteristic Jamaican slave practice, so unnerving to the whites, of going into death with remarkable composure.” (Zoellner 2020, pp 73-74)

This characteristic of physical defiance led a group of slaves called the Maroons, to resist slavery and fight fiercely against the British until they won their right to establish their territory as free men and women. In addition, under the leadership of an African, Samuel Sharpe, enslaved Africans ignited several plantations across western Jamaica, setting in motion weeks’ long firestorms that consumed life and property, and contributed to the ending of slavery.

Slavery ended for the bloody nation. “Along with independence came an urgent need to create a sense of nationhood...a new sense of Afro-Caribbean pride encouraged a recasting of the island’s history away from a British version founded exclusively on racial categorizations, forced labor, and systematic oppression toward one more focused on self-reliance, pride in achievement, individual agency, and optimism.” (Zoellner 2020, pp. 274-275).

Categories

On my arrival in the United States, I went to the university where I had to complete paperwork. On one of the forms there were some boxes that I had to check. The boxes included White, African American, Hispanic. Experiencing cognitive dissonance, I wrote in the small space on the paper “Jamaican.”

Up to that point, I had never thought of my ethnicity as anything but Jamaican, notwithstanding that Jamaica had its own history of a violent racial past founded on created subhuman categories to justify slavery. “...ethnicity has become an integral aspect of the process of acculturation and migrant reception—where ethnicity refers to membership in a group that holds a specific heritage and set of values, beliefs, and customs.” (Phinney, 1996 in Schwartz et. al 2010.) McFarlane (1998) used the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992) to examine whether Jamaican immigrants identify with a particular ethnic label. “67% of the respondents identified as Jamaican, 3% as Black, and 2% as African American...classifying a Jamaican immigrant to the US as African American may be a simple labeling process for the researcher, but that term may severely misrepresent the respondent’s self of personal identity...” (Ramkisoan and Branche, 2007 p. 5.)

The checked box was my first clue to the subtexts in the construction of xenophobia and racism. I would have to stay on top of them. This would be no problem. I was coming from a country where we dismiss matters that we have dealt with, will deal with, or do not care to deal with, by saying, “No problem, man.” The “Jamaica, No Problem” mantra is used extensively by the tourism industry as it woos visitors to enjoy the beauty and carefree lifestyle of the island. Xenophobia, racism and any other form of discrimination I would face would be no problem, man. As far as I was concerned, people with warped minds had nothing better to do than to figure out how to make the lives of others miserable, if they let them. I was in the United States for a reason, and nothing would deter me from accomplishing my goals.

Narrating Experiences

What would be my *contexts of reception*? How would I be received by the host culture while I was laser focused on accomplishing my goals? “Receiving society members may [...] have different attitudes toward [im]migrants from different ethnic groups, migrants from different socio-economic brackets, and migrants who migrated for different reasons [...] sociologists and anthropologists have referred to this dynamic as context of reception [...] it might be hypothesized, for example, that migrants from ethnic, religious or national groups perceived as unwanted would experience more discrimination than those whose groups were not perceived in this way—but that match or mismatch between a given

migrant's practices, values, and identifications and those that the local and national communities find most desirable in newcomers would either modulate or increase the extent of discrimination that that migrant would experience or perceive," (Schwartz et al, 2010 p. 15). The researchers posit that contexts of reception help to elicit specific responses from migrants.

While I have experienced positive interactions with different cultural groups over the years, many others have not been so. Several contexts of reception and my responses to them come to mind, but for the sake of efficiency, I will mention a few in three broad subtexts: Academia, Church, and Community.

I: Academia

Go Home

I was a teaching assistant in the department in which I was earning my Ph.D. One day I was in the department's office copying class notes for my students when an African American female student walked in and told me bluntly to go back to where I came from "because you foreigners always come here!" In a split second my mouth opened to let forceful words tumble out, but in the next split second I closed my mouth, remembering why I was in this country in the first place. "Sumtime yu haffi tan pon crucked fe cut straight," was my mother's proverbial caution in the Jamaican dialect, filling my head. (Sometimes you have to stay on the crooked to cut straight).

The student stood at the copier as if expecting a reaction from my wooden face. Receiving nothing, she walked away, her awkward gait suggesting ill-fitting shoes. In any event, she had not spoken for all the African Americans in the department. My professors were some of the kindest people I have met.

Threat of Violence

I was at the chalkboard at a university when a middle-aged white male student who had walked into the classroom with a portfolio in hand, asked me to define the word "theory." I noticed he was eyeing me with an almost scornful expression. I was fresh out of graduate school and recited Littlejohn's definition. He scoffed: "You don't know what you're talking about!" I repeated the definition and gave him an example of a theory. "You still don't know what you are talking about!" he retorted in disgust.

I stepped forward from the board and said to him:

"Sir, your problem is that it is difficult for you, a white man, to sit there and be taught by a Black, foreign, woman. But let me be clear. I am the instructor, and you are the student." He started walking menacingly towards me. Immediately, the African American male students in the room, about 10 of them, rose up in a unified force, and encircled me. The white man turned away and walked

out of the classroom. The Black men knew the violence of racism. It was their lived experience.

The Supervisor

I was at a time an academic dean at a university. Once I was in a meeting with my supervisor, who was an African American with a contagious laugh. He bypassed the meeting agenda and asked me why I had bought a house, my home. I did not expect that question. When I asked him why he wanted to know, he simply repeated it. I moved back to the agenda, in disbelief at what I had just heard. He was my boss, not my friend. I could hardly wait until that night to call my mother in Jamaica to tell her what had transpired. She knew of him because I had told her a story about him in the past.

A few months before, I had discovered that my supervisor and I were both living in the same apartment complex as I would often see him walking ahead of me while on my early morning walk. I would maintain a safe distance so as to avoid him. It was daylight saving time and the mornings had gotten a little darker. But ahead of me, I saw him walking briskly along the path in front of a row of apartments. A man, appearing to be Asian, came out of one of the apartments with a shovel. The handle was wrapped in plastic. He leaned the shovel on the side of his car in the parking lot; then, patting his pockets as if he were searching for something, went back in the apartment leaving the shovel still propped up on the side of the car. To my amazement, my supervisor sprinted towards the car, grabbed the shovel, and disappeared in a deer's flash across the common ground! He did not know that anyone had seen him. The man who seemed to be Asian, came back out of the apartment and began walking around the car in disbelief. The shovel was gone.

That was the story I had told my mom, and she re-named my supervisor "Shovel". When I called her after the meeting with him, I told her that Shovel asked why I had bought a house.

"That thief," she snapped. "What does he think? Does he think that because you are a foreigner in their country you shouldn't have a place for yourself? You should have told him that you bought the house with your money you worked for. You didn't steal it!"

Invisible

A group of faculty members and I were discussing various issues affecting student retention. A white colleague said one problem was that they could not find qualified African Americans to teach and serve as role models for the minority students. An African American said another problem was that there were just too many foreigners at the university and the students could not understand their accent and culture. The discussion flowed. Eyes in heads on swiveling

necks, rolled around the room with popping expressions of agreement. None of them saw me. I did not qualify as an African American, and I was one of just too many foreigners.

I would continue to teach my students and do the best I could to help them graduate.

Visible

I walk into a classroom full of students on the first day of class.

Me: "Good morning, class!"

A student: "Where are you from?"

Me: "I'm from Jamaica."

A student: "Do you smoke marijuana?"

Me: "No, but I hear that you cultivate it here."

II: Church

No Qualified American Wanted It

I was one of three persons riding in the church bus on our way to Sunday School. An African American male teacher was driving and his wife was in the passenger seat next to him. The conversation turned to building a wall at the border to keep immigrants out. The teacher said that because every homeowner has a right to fence their yard to prevent trespassing, America should build a wall to keep foreigners out because all they do is come and take away jobs from Americans. I reminded him that I was an immigrant, and that the first job I got in the US as an Assistant Professor was in very rural America where people used outhouses. The university administration was thrilled that I accepted the job because they said they were unable to get qualified applicants such as myself to relocate from the big cities to small rural towns to fill low paying positions. I let him know that I took the job not because all the circumstances were favorable, but because it was *an opportunity* for me to work in the country for one year in practical training approved by Immigration and Naturalization Services. The university was pleased with my work ethic and productivity, and by mid-year of my contract, invited me to stay permanently in the country. The administration filed a petition to adjust my status from international student to Permanent Resident.

The teacher expressed shock, that he had no idea. We continued the journey in silence. The elephant had left the room and was now in the bus, I thought.

In the months to come, the teacher asked me how I had come to the United States with less than \$100 and accomplished so much in such a short time. I explained our work ethic and that it was not too late (in his forties) for him to

go back to school. I walked him through the process and he is now in community college. He is the first person in his family to go beyond high school.

Shameful

The white women and I were all seated in a semi-circle in the music room, about 20 of us. I was new to the predominantly white church and was attending the women's Bible study group that night. After prayers, one woman started crying. Ripping Kleenex after Kleenex out of the small box on her lap, she bawled for prayers—her white daughter was pregnant and a Black man was the father. She was distressed and did not know how she would be expected to face her neighbors, friends, and society with a Black baby in the family. Obviously uncomfortable with the outburst done in my presence, the Christian women said not a word, but exchanged glances nervously. As soon as the weeping lady calmed down a bit, I interjected, to the amazement of all, that I understood how she felt. Hopeful, she glanced up at me. I said I had a teenage son, and if he were to bring home a white girlfriend I would be devastated, not because of who she is, but because of how she would “fit” in my family in Jamaica. There are sun-burnt white Jamaicans on the island, and interracial relationships are common, attracting no attention. But, as a white American, her adjustment to the culture and the culture's adjustment to her would be very challenging. Besides, I would have to be on alert to tactless family member asking her questions such as, “What is wrong with your skin?” or, “Do you know how to cook oxtail?” (a popular Jamaican dish).

Relieved, the women sighed collectively and began to interject that cultures differ and we have to get to know people individually. As I was new to the church I did not know the woman who had cried. However, in the months to come I got to know more about her, so I hired her to clean my house.

III: Community

Surveillance

I moved into a white community where the neighbors to my left were a young, blonde state trooper, his wife, and children. He had come over to my house and introduced himself the day my son and I moved in. He attempted to be nice, asking me questions about myself and Jamaica. He asked me how often I visited and I said two to three times each year, but definitely at Christmas. He asked me to give him the dates of my next visit. The night I returned from my first visit to Jamaica since moving to that community, he walked from his house to meet me at my door. He offered to take my bags inside. He sat at the table and asked me to show him what I had brought back because he wanted to see what Jamaican food stuff was like. It was the classic case of the Jamaican proverbial saying:

“Back a dawg, a dawg; in front a dawg a Missa Dawg,” meaning, I could be offended and I could think the worst thoughts as much as I wanted, but standing defenseless in front of him, he was “Mr. Dog”—a white police officer in my house after midnight, (possibly with hand cuffs hidden), doing a drug bust. I played the fool.

There were no drugs to be found on that or other times he came over. I do not use drugs. Finally, he asked a favor of me: if I would let him take care of my lawn because he needed extra money. The caveat was that I could not tell anyone that I was paying him as it would be a conflict of interest for him as a law enforcement officer. If anyone saw him mowing the lawn, we would say he was “helping me out” as I was a single mother.

He stopped by one afternoon to pick up his check from me. Then he drove away in his crisp uniform, and in his vehicle marked “State Trooper.” He drove through the neighborhood, across the highway, and around the winding road where it accidentally overturned and killed him. When his body was pulled from the wreckage, the check I had paid him for his labor was still in his pocket.

The Pool

When you are an immigrant you go wherever the opportunities are available. A white realtor found me a house in a white neighborhood that had a good school system. An African American professor in my graduate school had confided that if I needed my son to get a good education, I would need to send him to a private or white school. She said Black schools were under-resourced. I moved in to this community to access the school system.

The day my furniture was being delivered, the white neighbor to the right of my house came over and invited my son and I to her house two days later. I went, thinking it would not be a bad idea to meet my neighbors. When I got there, it seemed like the entire community had assembled around the pool and on chairs elsewhere waiting for me. Everyone was white. The only black faces were mine, my son, and that of the dog swimming in the pool. Everyone greeted me with a variation of hi, hello, welcome. A man with a cane in hand began to talk about the war in Iraq, trying to engage me in conversation. This went on for several minutes. The woman next to him apologized to me: “Oh, you have to forgive my husband. He has a master’s degree so he will talk...” “That’s no problem,” I responded with the flair of my Jamaican culture, “I have a Ph.D. so I can talk to him.” There was absolute silence from the crowd that had been assembled to ascertain my legitimacy in their community. I think even the dog stopped swimming. “Oh, so what shall we call you?” was a question interrupting the awkward “Doctor. Doctor would be fine.” I left. No introductions had even been made.

About three months later, an all-knowing neighbor let slip in the teller line at the credit union that the woman (who had invited me to the pool party) had “finally” left the husband. “Y’all know he would punch her in the face?”

Number One Meal

I was working in a rural community. One day, I drove to McDonalds and ordered a Number One meal at the drive through window. A chorus of wild laughter blared through the speaker. "Say that again?" said a voice, clearly in shock. "A Number One meal, may I have a Number One meal, please?" I repeated. The laughter continued loudly and uncontrollably, so I drove around to the cashier's window. Over her shoulder, a sea of white faces was staring at me, as if I were an exotic animal in a zoo. I pulled forward and collected my meal from a young man who was laughing so hard that tears were streaming down his white cheeks. I do believe that my accent had amused them, but it was fair to assume that they had never traveled outside of the community or had met others different than themselves. For the most part, the people in the community were so poor that many walked bare footed, even when going to the sole grocery store that discounted pork necks and chicken feet.

When classes started at the university, I saw the young man who had been laughing so hard that day at McDonalds that tears had streamed down his face. Today, he was sitting in the middle row of the class I was about to teach. This time, his face was red.

I Don't know Who You Are

I live in a predominantly white community where less than 1% of the homeowners are Black. I try to take a walk every morning. One morning, a white woman stopped me. "Hi there, she said. "I've seen you walking about in the community and I don't know who you are."

"How long have you lived here?" I responded. "Oh, five years, five years!" she uttered confidently. Five years was indeed a long time. "Well, you have lived here for five years", I remarked, "but I've lived here for twelve. Who are you?"

Probably she had seen me more frequently than the other Black women coming into the community to care for the elderly, so my permanence required some kind of explanation.

We became walking buddies. In her answer to my "who are you?" question I learned that her husband had drank himself to death; that she was sad that he passed, yet not so sad, not really. She was glad, though, that she had had her wits about her to hide her savings from him.

Aunt Jemima — The Image of the Black Female

I was across the street talking with one of my white neighbors. She was very kind to me when I had surgery. She collected my mail and would pick up items for me at the grocery store. While talking to her, I was on the lookout for the workmen who would be doing some repairs in my house. Two white men drove

up in separate trucks and parked in front of my house. I walked from across the street towards my house and greeted them. One responded appropriately, the other looked at me and said nothing. Perhaps he thought I was the maid going indoors to let him in.

However, a white man not responding to me was not an entirely strange behavior. One who had come to remove a fallen tree in my yard did not answer me when I spoke to him. In fact, he barely even looked at me. I asked him questions, he glanced in my direction, then cocked his head towards his co-worker as if asking him to interpret. His co-worker interpreted, so I assumed the man was deaf. Their supervisor drove up, and as I was about to ask her the question to get the answer I needed, the man I thought was deaf, shouted at me from the corner of the yard "Don't worry, I'll take care of it!"

Therefore, not hearing a word from this man who had come to work in my house was not entirely strange behavior. When they came in, the one who had responded appropriately was wearing his mask. The other was not. I asked him to put it on because Covid 19 was contagious. He did, but barely. He kept it falling below his nose. I reminded him again to secure it properly. It kept falling below his nose. When he was about to leave that morning, he took the mask off, put it in his truck, and came back in the house, mask-less to tell me the work he had done and would be doing the following day. We both understood his dare.

That afternoon, a gentleman who thanked me for being kind to him and his wife in the nursing home, brought me flowers and a Mother's Day cake. I would keep the flowers. The next morning, the mask-less man returned to complete the job. He had a surly disposition as if he resented being there. The mask was beneath his nose, resting on his chin.

I am a Black woman and all that its stereotype represents. I was expected to be angry.

But I am a Jamaican, and nothing was going to stop me from getting the job done. I had something else in store for him.

I had received both doses of the Moderna vaccine, was fully vaccinated and wearing my mask. This time, I did not ask him to pull his up. Instead, I asked: "Would you like a cake?"

"A cake, oh yes. My six boys would love it!" His eyes sparkled and he grinned.

"Thank you," he said, and pulled up his mask. He worked the rest of the morning with his mask in place. This was all about keeping the main thing the main thing—getting my job done. My grandmother was right. You catch more flies with honey (and cake).

Of Course

I was moving into a townhouse when the white neighbor whose house adjoined mine walked up to my car to let me know that her house was not her “primary residence.” I did not even understand the context of what she was trying to say, or why she should make such a statement to me. She had not even told me her name. Nevertheless, I rebounded with: “This is not my primary residence either. My primary residence is in North Carolina and I bought this house for my son.”

A year or so passed, and she told me she was moving. She had sold the townhouse she had been living in for 15 years, and was moving to another that she had bought in the same community.

“But, I just wanted you to know,” she added, “that my moving has nothing to do with you.” (Of course, why would it?)

Subsequently, she stopped by again. But this time with exciting news:

“I read about you in the newspaper! I didn’t know that you are a dean down at the university and you’d done all those things? Geez. I didn’t know that!” (Of course, why would you?)

Mitigating Factors

Schwartz et al (2010) write that [im]migrants may perceive discriminatory acts that go unnoticed by members of the majority culture—and migrants may also perceive typical receiving society behaviors (such as unfriendliness towards neighbors) as discriminatory. The experiences of discrimination introduce the migrant to her or his role as a minority group member, and to the reality that his or her ethnic group is regarded as unwanted, inferior, or unfairly stereotyped in the receiving society. In addition, Schwartz et. al (2010) refer to a set of moderating variables for a migrant prior to acculturation. It could be argued that these variables affect the pace and quality of the immigrant’s acculturation. These variables include age, gender, education, pre-acculturation status, migration motivation, cultural distance, and personality characteristics.

As previously stated, I am a voluntary immigrant to the United States. When I arrived, I was in my mid-thirties, was divorced, and had been educated in Jamaica. In order to graduate from my two hundred and seventy-seven year-old high school founded in 1774 by British colonialists, I had to pass subject based final examinations set, proctored and mailed back overseas to England to be graded by the University of Cambridge and the University of London. Then I earned a Bachelor’s degree, with honors, from the University of the West Indies which was established in 1948 as an independent external college of the University of London.

My personality characteristics to which Schwartz et. al refer as a moderating variable, included a strong sense of shame instilled in me by my parents and teachers—shame if I were wasteful of opportunities, foolish if I were not paying

attention to what mattered, or wrong in my decisions. If students failed an exam in our high school, or were seen doing anything such as eating on the street while in their school uniform, the Principal called us by name and shamed us publicly at morning devotion.

According to General Colin Powell, son of Jamaican immigrants and retired Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, a sense of shame is not a bad moral compass. Therefore, I could not bear the shame of leaving Jamaica for the United States for a specific reason and not accomplishing what I came here to do. My family, friends, and everyone who knew me *expected* this of me. I was only seven years old when my late dad took me for a ride on the bus he was driving. He showed me the University of the West Indies, and he said that I should go to college, because if I did, I could go anywhere in the world and interact with anyone. This grounded me with the knowledge of the power of education, thoughts, attitude, and hard work, helping me to grow up without a sense of inferiority. In fact, (Zoellner 2020) writes that a white planter observed Jamaicans as a “people without the consciousness of inferiority or suffering” (p. 71).

Lacking a sense of inferiority was just one of the many cultural tools at my disposal in the new culture. I exercised a sense of discernment of the “who” was the source of discrimination. For the most part, the players were (are) those with a warped, elevated, or diminished sense of self. I found them to be irrelevant, with actions causing me instead to engage in reactive ethnicity-- holding even more strongly to one’s cultural heritage. (Rumbaut, 2008). I kept focus on whatever goal I was trying to accomplish. I remained true to myself in every context, and never tried to assimilate. For example, my accent was different when I arrived in the United States, and 30 years later the cadence remains the same. I have never tried to sound or be like an American. Over the years, I have maintained a very close relationship with other Jamaicans, Caribbean people, and Africans. Further, I have called my mother often to share many jokes about people trying to discriminate against me. For more than ten years I wrote letters entitled Dear Jamaica, in the Jamaican dialect, and published them in the Jamaican newspapers circulated to Jamaicans and other immigrants in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The letters narrated in a comical way the experiences of living in the host culture. The letters were well-received by immigrants who said their experiences were similar to mine. What I found to be an effective psychological tool was to remember that two opposing things can be true at the same time: One: I could accomplish what I came to do. Two: Xenophobia and Racism are real elements within the US culture.

Conclusion

I can hardly believe that it has been thirty years since I stepped off an Air Jamaica aircraft, and herded with the crowd, bustled into the unknown of the Baltimore Washington International airport and the United States of America with its televised mosaics of wonderful much about itself. But it has been. It has been thirty years of a wonderful contract between myself and my adopted country. I came here wanting to work to pay off my bills, and to earn my graduate degrees.

In order to help meet its critical shortage of qualified faculty, this country entered into a contract with me. It invited me to remain, changed my status from international student to US Citizen, and paid me to teach its young people and help to provide them with the opportunities to compete with the rest of the world. I accepted the offer.

In turn, over my 30 years of combined teaching and administration in higher education, I have taught and helped to educate hundreds of students who have taken their productive places in the Arts, Humanities, Science, Engineering, Education, Technology, and the Professions. I have received my paycheck for my labor, sometimes, once per month, and at other times twice monthly. From each paycheck I have paid social security, federal and state taxes every month for the past 30 years. I have paid property taxes when due and have contributed to community development initiatives. *I have never filed for unemployment.*

I am not ashamed, because I kept my focus. I have accomplished what I came here to do, and I am grateful to the United States for the opportunity to have done so. My contract with this country that has naturalized me as one of its own, remains active. My culture, instilled in me by the country of my birth, is more robust now than ever, providing context, interpretation, and response to my identity negotiation in this land of growing outcries for white supremacy.

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