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ARTICLE

Situating Our Racialized Beings in the Race Talk in the U.S.: African-born Blacks, Our Experience of Racialization, and Some Implications for Education

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Abstract

Racial discourse in the U.S. has traditionally been represented by a dichotomous paradigm of White/Black. Additionally, discourse on the existence and practice of racism has focused on uncovering personal, systemic, and symbolic structures of inequity in education, business, law, health, and society. Critical race theory has been used to generate such inquiry. As variant and inconclusive as research has been and as much as race continues to be very divisive, I propose a reexamination of understandings and theorizing on race and racism through a reinterpretation of racialization. Both substantive literature and the findings from a study on African-born women faculty will be used as data in this discussion as some new perspectives are offered.

Introduction

This discussion begins as a questioning and a revisiting of several fairly well-accepted views on race, identity, and educational attainment (Bomer, Dwornin, May, & Semington, 2008; Collins, 2001; Ferguson, 1998; Fryer, 2006; Ogbu, 1990; Ullucci, 2007). However, there is less an attempt to refute all foregoing understandings as to initiate a way forward. It almost seems as if discourse on racial disunity and hoped for racial harmony in the U. S. is at a standstill, and this essay is therefore an attempt to reconcile the “stalled” progress on race talks from a different perspective. Using the lenses of critical race theory, I both acknowledge and deconstruct racism. Yet, in so doing, when the same theorizing is overlaid on the concept of racialization and the African’s experience of it in the U.S., these two seemingly contradictory goals yield new perspectives that should give us a way to forge ahead. We may have to start from the personal and particular, but end in more universal, systemic, institutional truths. We may start from small interpersonal race relations but end in systemic changes in how we educate our children.

While critical race theory has been typically used to uncover racial behaviors and stereotypes that a dominant group may have in relation to marginalized and silenced people, it may now be necessary to use the same lenses to examine the process by which people acquire racial understandings. In this sense, *Whiteness* has been analyzed as centered and dominant, even authentic (Subedi, 2008). Consequently, in accepted understandings, Whiteness does not get racialized; other non-centered, marginalized ethnicities do. From a numerical point of view and with changing demographics, Whiteness is becoming less centered and less dominant. The arguments have been made that, regardless, the changing demographics have not shifted the power relations between Whiteness and others. In any case, racialization is discussed in the context of the marginalized and minorities. I restate a previous question, albeit differently, with increasing numbers of ethnic minorities: The power relationships between and within these minority groups may offer a different way of understanding the dynamics of the process of racialization and, consequently, of racism. Specifically, the racialization experiences of African-born Blacks in the U.S. counter a number of such understandings.

The purpose of this dialogic rhetoric is to demonstrate how the yielding of counter stories from racialized minorities, as supported in the framework of critical race theory, yields new awareness about race and racism in the U.S. Using mostly some findings and counter stories from a qualitative study of African-born female faculty (Ifedi, 2008) and literature on racialization, it is my intention to use this framework to deconstruct the dichotomous meanings and applications of racialization, and in so doing, appeal to a reframing on the conversation on race and forge new platforms for change.

The path of this discourse is in itself challenging. The dilemma I face in making this proposition will run counter to accepted beliefs and even research on, for instance, underachievement of Blacks in education. Another dilemma is how to present such data without creating further marginalization. In a very literal sense, when counter stories are presented that disrupt accepted *truths*, be it in the public or academic discourse such as this, the presenter(s) may become marginalized. Nonetheless, it is an ethical endeavor that has to be made, and I believe that more research will be elicited in this regard and surface a more positive view of racial relations.

Acknowledging and Deconstructing Race

The story of race in the U.S. is extensive, difficult, sometimes ugly, but becoming more hopeful. It is one that has been dominated by the language of divide, segregation, inequities, and dichotomy. In a sense, the conversation seems to have always been framed in a dichotomous paradigm: between Black/White, victims/victimizers, and oppressed/oppressors. Much research has been directed to explicating race, racism, its signifiers and the like (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Corrin, 1999). Equally, some effort has been put forth to delineate a non-binary construction of race (Allen, 2008; Morris & Monroe, 2009; Subedi, 2008). The question of why race still continues to matter remains the subject of much inquiry and research (Collins, 2001; Dyson, 2007; West, 1999).

Rather than rehash that line of inquiry, and because it is the goal of this discussion to reexamine, it serves us better to turn critical race theory not on proving and uncovering *old* racisms (the classical White domination), but to use it to uncover *new* racisms (Back & Solomos, 2000; Blue, 2001; Collins, 2001; Johnson-Bailey, 1999). Citing Balibar and Wallerstein (1991), Collins (2001) acquiesces to a distinction between external and internal racisms. For external forms, she cites examples of genocide and xenophobia, where dominant groups try to maintain their space and power by excluding others. And for internal racisms, space is maintained but subordination is effected; she cites the examples of “maintaining social hierarchies through racialized group identities” (p. 6), as with apartheid or segregation. Conversely, Johnson-Bailey (1999) identifies inner racism as occurring within a broader racial category in intra-group differences. Either way, one of the main goals of critical race theory is to uncover racisms in all its forms. When stories or counter stories disturb, they do so to awaken one’s sensibilities to recognize racist behaviors or speech that one may not have been aware of. Ladson-Billings (1999) describes this as the “jar[ring] of dysconscious racisms” (p. 16). When a person from the dominant group (White) makes a remark that may be construed by the minority group as racist, dysconscious racism is uncovered. Such dysconscious racisms exist not only on the personal level but also on systemic, material, symbolic and structural levels.

The question of applying critical race theory in the context of racialization shifts the discussion from the binary of dominant vs. non-dominant groups. We bring this theorizing into the context of diverse minority groups, intra-group differences, and internal racisms. Critical race theory, therefore, can be equally useful in uncovering underlying and silent patterns of racial inequities underlying the processes of racialization. That is the second goal of this discussion. Some of the tenets of critical race theory that support this analysis are reemphasized and are as follows: Critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 2003)

- supports people’s ways of knowing;
- supports counter storytelling;
- uncovers racial inequalities hidden under so-called objective or neutral lenses;
- removes racism in all its forms (inter and intra);
- supports voicing;
- challenges norms, accepted beliefs, and stock stories.

One kind of these new racisms is identified as *inner* racism (Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Collins, 2000; Swaminathan, 2004). In other words, within racially categorized groups –White, Black, and Latina - there exist internal differences that delineate the groups as not totally homogenous. These intra-group differences have been identified and equally show the socially constructed nature of racial categorizations.

What has made this problem even more glaring is the growing plurality in the U.S. As racial categories take shape and are reshaped, they are also collapsing (Jones, 2005). For the first time in U.S. census history, respondents were asked in the 2000 census to self identify, if they wanted to, by more than one category. Consequently, of the 281.4 million people in the United States, 7.3 million, or 2.6 percent, identified themselves as belonging to more than one race. The census offered the choice of six racial categories as follows: White, Black, or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN), Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHPI) and Some Other Race (SOR). This categorization in itself demonstrates how racial categories continue to be evolving, socially constructed, and open-ended. Additionally, the fact that the Census recognized these six categories with the ambiguous SOR, plus the fact that 57 different combinations could result for the more than one race identification is highly significant (qualitatively, not statistically) (Jones, 2005). Finally, the percentage of people identifying as more than one race was nearly 24 percent foreign-born compared to the nearly 11 percent foreign-born in the general population. The foreign-born numbers have continued to increase: growing 57 percent from 19.8 million in 1990 to 31.1 million in 2000 (Malone, Baluja, Costanzo, & Davis, 2003). In the light of these new categorizations, are there new forms of power relationships that require examination and unearthing? The answer is yes, as there now appear to be newer forms of struggle, of identities, entitlements, and nationhood among re-categorized and even yet to be identified racial minorities. Research is minimal but growing as some scholars have sought to bring to

light the resultant and inevitable tensions (Allen, 2008; Kim, 2004; Taylor, 2009; Zhou, 1998).

Collins (2001) points out, for instance, that there seems to be increased internal racism due to increased migrations from Africa and the Caribbean. She also delineates a form of this struggle in the juggling between ethnic minorities for what she terms 1st class citizenship. The triangle of citizenship privileges places White people at the top, with African American and Native American people at the bottom. As new immigrants come into America, they struggle with those at the bottom of the triangle for 1st class citizenship. Other authors have also addressed such inequities that are the bane of immigrants overall, the intersections of immigration, citizenship, assimilation, the politicization of Latina/o minorities, and the false or incomplete depiction of racial minority stereotypes (Huber, Lopez, Malagon, Velez & Solorzano, 2008; Manrique & Manrique, 1999; Morris, 2003).

Another point is that while there is a tendency to try to recognize these new realities, the language of multiculturalism and diversity fails to capture the essence and tensions underlying the categories. This is one of the reasons honest dialogue and action must not be compromised in race talks. Illustrating this, Raby (2004) critiques the official/institutional approach in its over-reliance and oversimplification of the language of diversity or multiculturalism. She rightly points out that the normalization of such multiculturalism may only hamper real and true diversity efforts – a point that makes the reexamination of racialization even more useful as in this discourse.

A Deficit View of Racialization and Racialized Minorities

In a sense, much of the literature and research on racialization has been from a deficit perspective, how it creates unequal relationships, interpretations and language. In other words, when concepts or people are described as *racialized*, the descriptor carries with it a burden of negativity and deficiency. In making a case for housing and poverty reduction, Lipman (2008) points out that culture and intellectual strengths are negated by racialized policies meant to tackle poverty. The work of Ruby Payne has both been lauded and critiqued for its racialization of poverty, with its correlate to educational achievement for minority children (Payne, 2001). Racialization has been shown to render *otherness* among Latinas, Hispanics, Asians, and immigrant populations in general, be it in research, politics, housing, education, or economics (Ali, 2006; Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005; Brett, 2005; Diamond, n.d.; Morris & Monroe, 2009; Subedi, 2008).

Diamond (n.d.) describes the education terrain as racialized, to mean unsuitable, inequitable, and unwelcoming to those marginalized, specifically Black children. Schools are said to be racialized to the extent that links can be made to the residential patterns and low quality schools for minorities (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005; Morris & Monroe, 2009). Ascher and Branch-Smith (2005) show how even within Black suburbs, the realization of equity in achievement and educational attainment is still a myth for African Americans. From this view point, geographical relocations, including desegregation and busing, have not solved the problem of racialized schools. Of course, others disagree, citing the importance of race and place in redirecting research (Morris & Monroe, 2009); Yet some others believe that desegregation policies must continue to assure the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) (Orfield & Lee, 2007; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2008).

In general, the term *racialized* has been variously, sometimes vaguely, defined and understood as acquiring racial meanings. Omi and Winant (1993) defined racialization as the assigning of racial meanings to previously non-racially defined person, group or events. I added, by way of the findings in the study, that racialization is “the process whereby a person progresses from a personality that lacks race or color consciousness into a personality with the awareness of the differences in race and color, with personal and societal implications” (Ifedi, 2008, p. 171). With this latter definition, and for the rest of this discourse, I make an appeal to the fact that becoming racialized may involve some episodic event of culture/identity shock (Ojo, 2004; Oliver, 2004); a process of being and consciousness; and a recognition of personal and societal (or institutional) ramifications. For this discussion, I will concentrate on the racial minority of Africans and African-born for whom there is minimal literature or discussion on this topic.

The Experience of Racialization for Africans in the U.S.

In the study of nine African-born female professors teaching, working, and living in the U.S., the experiences of racialization were retold in very poignant ways. Especially for those who did not come from already racially segregated societies, becoming racialized involved not only an episodic, disorienting experience but also a learning and schooling in race and what it implies. Some of their comments belie their racial innocence as they moved into the U.S: “I had not been schooled in the whole notion of discrimination,” “Everything was about race”; “I was not a part of the race they talked about” (Ifedi, 2008, pp. 150 – 151).

Accordingly, the nine participants offered counter stories that first reaffirmed the existence of racial stereotypes. On the one hand, they felt undermined as their skills and qualifications were challenged in academia. Other writers have identified such undermining with other ethnic minorities too, which references the understanding/myth that anything that is non-White is inferior (Subedi, 2008; Zhou, 2003). White professors, colleagues, and students excluded, challenged, and undermined their abilities in a classical racist paradigm.

On the other hand, the African-born faculty's counter stories went further to question current understandings of racism as a Black/White concept. In other words, experiences of racism occurred both with Whites as well as with American-born Blacks. In voicing experiences about being doubly discriminated, in being treated differently by African Americans, the unearthing of unequal relationships was achieved. More importantly, some of them recognized and voiced unfair treatment of African Americans by the African-born immigrants. In fact, the African-born, probably because of racialization and this experience of double discrimination often received less discrimination from Whites. The latter often seemed more helpful to African-born than to American-born Blacks. It is important to note that previous explanations about immigrants distancing themselves from native-born Blacks do not account for these experiences. However, racialization does in that the events and process of being racialized imbue the racialized with enough consciousness to recognize contradictory yet multiple experiences with race and racism.

Furthermore, the different studies that have sought to explain this counter-intuitive finding and response by some racialized communities to Whiteness fall short of explicating this phenomenon. Of course, the multiple contradictory responses to race/racism run counter parallel to all the beliefs about White dominance (Buriel, 1993; Raby, 2004). In interviews with 12 teenage girls in Toronto, Canada, Raby (2004) asked them about their beliefs on racism. According to her findings, since the girls mostly downplayed the presence of racism in their communities/schools or even denied it, she concluded that re-education was needed. I note that the researcher described them in her profile of participants as Black or White even though Table 1 in her report details their ethnicities as follows: Caribbean/Anglo, Anglo, Caribbean, Anglo-Jewish, and Jewish (p. 369). Why were these distinctions necessary? In expecting clear "Yes, racism exists" or "No, it does not," the researcher failed to see where the girls' racial minority status may have affected their views on race. Instead, Raby (2004) construed her participants' ambiguous views as almost false and unrealistic.

Many prevailing explanations of the decentering of Whiteness by immigrant populations, as I earlier stated, fail to see the power and benefit of racialized communities or peoples. There have been, therefore, other explanations such as "desirability of distancing from Blackness" in order to get closer to White privilege, and acting White, which have been used to explain poor academic achievement of young African American children (Allen, 2008, p. 35; Fryer, 2006). It is not that some of these explanations have not been refuted (Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon, 2007); we just need new language, expression, and voicing to explain and understand the unhelpful deterring behaviors and beliefs and begin to work for change.

Several lines of questioning could be applied here: Does the person who experiences something have a say in describing and explicating what is experienced? If we applied the tenets of critical race theory to deconstruct and uncover racism in all its forms, then would these tenets not apply within these seemingly homogenous groups? Who is to assign the weight of a lived experience, albeit of racist behaviors, even when these occur externally or internally between and within groups? Since critical race theory recognizes the experiences of people of color and supports their voicing, then these experiences of racialization must be recognized and evaluated.

Another consequence of the racialization for the African-born professors was that of identity struggle and shifting. Even as some of the participants claimed that the label of African American did not speak to their lives and experiences, two of them particularly said they were the real African Americans. As their race and ethnicities are questioned, so are the identities of marginalized and non-dominant groups. Indeed, the resultant patchwork of racial/ethnic identities existent in this nation and the multiple realities of diversity have to be confronted and utilized in reframing the conversation on race today. The finding on identity was profound, unexpected, and significant. The significance of this finding is to say that we no longer describe our realities in a dichotomous language of White or Black. The realities of our diverse and multiple identities are so different, yet so powerful. Admitting to these complexities ultimately helps us not to choose oversimplified answers as the only right ones. It engages us to be deeper in our appreciation of one another, in recognition of seeming differences, in awareness of contradicting counter stories, and, ultimately, in reconciling and accepting our different realities. Therefore, when Eric Holder, the Attorney General of the U.S. in the Obama administration, called out a "nation of cowards" to face its racial conversations openly, he was in my opinion making a valid proposal. The varied responses to his unusual request only confirmed exactly what he was proposing: the need for open dialogue.

The process and findings on racialization demand a shift in the conversation. The African-born have found themselves in a

unique position and must step out to either complicate this conversation or simplify it, depending on how one looks at it. Until we come to the realization that we should not structure oppression in hierarchies (Brah, 2000) nor quantify superiority, the dismantling and deconstructing of race will continue to be a half-hearted superficial engagement. Seeking understanding is not synonymous with essentialism. Counter stories are a way of setting forth a different story, not to establish another hierarchy but to understand and be understood.

Accordingly, racialization highlights and explicates intra-group differences and in so doing offers a way of recognizing and acknowledging those differences as well as understanding why they are what they are -- not in a hierarchical manner but in a textural context. Instead of examining difference in a vertical or linear manner, we should examine it for qualitative aspects. Only then can we stop demonizing difference but accept and even understand it. We surrender binary and stratified oversimplifications for more textured arguments. When, for instance, Morris & Monroe (2009) offer historical and cultural lenses with which to shatter the binary paradigm of the South as a nexus for place and race, they still offer the South as a place for transformation in its having a number of intersections (race, immigration, ethnicities, economic power) that should affect positively the outcomes for Black underachieving students. So even as I agree with Collins (2001) that racial identity differs from a sense of nationhood, with varying perceptions of social reality, some more dismissive than others, and that the lower class may be silenced, I also agree that more authentic research, as called for by Morris and Monroe (2009), will bring us closer to equity. If Allen (2008) pointed out the need for Black immigrants to distance themselves from native-born Blacks through 'acting White,' he also acknowledged that these perceived differences remained barriers to racial harmony.

Claire Jean Kim (2004) points out that the official recognition of multiple diversities through policies yet fails to acknowledge and address them adequately. Consequently, underlying tensions persist. She rightly cautions against "triumphalist narratives" (p. 995) that give an illusion that things are getting better without accompanying and persistent actions. I cannot fault that analysis, and I see the point of being cautionary with success stories such as President Barack Obama's victory. I see the caution and restraint to be exercised with official/government initiatives, however well intentioned, which calls to mind the Clinton Era's initiative in seeking racially equitable practices and understanding (One America, 1998). However, I question only the assertion and belief that we can never do away with hierarchies.

Racialization recognizes race consciousness as a learned behavior; therefore, the implication is that race consciousness can be assessed, evaluated, and even unlearned. If so, racialization could be viewed not just as a negative concept but one that may offer hope for retooling race relations and racialized understandings. We may have to replace the binary or triangle of citizenship, for instance, with one that is more transnational, fluid, and responsive to local and global communities. Similarly, we may come to a place where there will be no need to struggle for space and entitlements. In fact, the collapsing of structural inequities (in whatever shapes they come--triangles, hierarchies) may come about through the collapse of personal and symbolic structures of racial categories and identities. It is noteworthy that Latinas, because they traverse racial categories, are a model of what racialization can achieve in outlining differences while conveying common and just understandings. That is exactly one of the knowledge claims being made in this discourse.

The Case of Barack Obama: A Case Study of Racialization

The election of the first African American president of the United States has been cited as a truly historical event of this century. The questions have been asked, "Who truly believed this was possible in this time? Who saw it coming?" Yet, his election could not have happened without the actions and willingness of millions of Americans to switch out of their pre-established understandings. Americans traversed divides of denominations, religion, race, ethnicity, gender, age, politics, and geography. The result was a coalition consisting of multiple realities that put President Barack Obama transparently and unequivocally into the office. His patchwork heritage appealed to the patchwork of our diversities for a winning combination.

In recognizing the power and appeal of Obama's diverse heritage and identity, Allen (2008) cited his previous work and described Obama as one of the "children of globalization [as] the offspring of these new colonial immigrants -- the racialized, transnational children of globalization" (p. 32). Allen continued that he saw their positioning as agents of change for the future. Finally, he attested that this growing section of our nation with "intersectional identities can be a powerful source of energy that can drive cultural creativity and social activism" (2008, p. 33). I add that even though many people viewed him as only Black or not Black enough (Ifedi, 2008; Swarns & Pacifici, 2007), his counter story demonstrated that he was racialized enough to understand and accept difference, to be a unifier rather than a binary divider. His legacy is continuing to spur on more inquiry and discussion in other areas of fulfilling racial harmony and educational attainment and success. As I reiterate the caution voiced earlier, we cannot deny the symbolism and promise

that Obama's presidency offers.

The Next Frontier: Racialization in/of Education

Research is continuing on the various reasons behind the underachievement of young Black children, especially boys. Achievement gaps have been attributed or linked to factors such as culture, values, poverty, and curriculum (A Plan to Close, 2008; Diamond, n.d.; Dudley-Marling, 2007; Ferguson, 1998; Fryer, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Oakes, 1990; Ogbu, 1990; Owens, 2007; Payne, 2001; Taylor, 2006; Taylor, 2009). Diamond (n.d.) points to the fact that the problem lies not with oppositional culture, negative peer pressure and similar explanations but to a "racialized educational terrain" (p. 5) – a terrain that presents Black students with material and symbolic costs for being Black. Points about inequitable schools, less qualified teachers, low academic tracks/classes, high special education enrollment, lower expectations, even sometimes of intellectual capacity are all significant enough to stay on the table for discussion and analysis. I do agree that we need more research that investigates the heterogeneity of students' cultural responses to inequities they perceive or encounter.

However, there exists a need to reassess and check our bearings. In the light of racialization experiences in the U.S., there is yet a counter story to be examined. In brief, the roots of high value of education are planted in African-born people from very young ages (Allen, 2008; Ifedi, 2008). In the study on African-born women faculty, the foundational value translated and extended into later years of success as undergraduates, graduates, and Ph.D. students and into their roles as faculty members. To be confronted with the problem of underachievement of minorities in the educational systems in the U.S. was therefore an assault on everything they knew of themselves as Africans who loved and appreciated education.

On the surface, when such data are presented about African American underachievement, it could be oversimplified or overgeneralized. Some research counters the underachievement story by showing that many immigrant minority children seem to have better school success, especially in their persistence to excel in spite of language and cultural limitations (Zhou, 1998; Zhou, 2003). This appears to be the case with African immigrants, either native-born/first-generation or children of African-born parents. Referencing a study conducted by some professors at University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University, which reported an overrepresentation of Black immigrants in selective universities, Brown and Bell (2008) reiterated that the native-born Blacks were being denied admissions. At the 14th National Conference on Diversity, Race and Learning where they presented, these researchers framed this information as an entitlement issue and therefore called for a revisit of affirmative action, a restructuring of admission policies, and a reexamination of ethnic differences (Brown & Bell, 2008). Having been present during this conference presentation, I charged the presenters with possibly finding better solutions for the problem of American-born Black children who do not take the opportunity to attend college. Rather than creating policies to exclude non-first generation college-bound and bi-racial students, should we not be looking at ways to build coalitions to solve a dire problem?

That being one side of the story, other research counters the story of model minorities and shows that even though the children of immigrants appear to be high performing, their progress also appears to diminish with subsequent generations. Again, this is evidence of intra-group differences and the fact that immigrants are not a homogenous group (Buriel, 1993; Klineberg, 2005; Zehr, 2009; Zhou, 1998). Working together to find answers through authentic research and honest dialogue is invaluable (Cozza & Mbugua, 2000; Glassman & Roelle, 2007; Jackson, 2007; Ulluchi, 2007). To that end also, Brown University hosted a conference in March 2009 titled, "The Immigrant Paradox: Is Becoming an American a Developmental Risk?" to investigate and elicit more studies in this area. The Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, the Center for the Study of Human Development, the Center for Race and Ethnicity, and the Education Department were collaborators in this endeavor.

The global competition pitting the U.S. behind many other developed countries cannot be ignored. In an online chat I was engaged in through *Education Week*, a question was raised on possible characteristics or factors that make these other countries outperform United States students. I was not too surprised to hear two of the answers I expected: Those societies seemed to value education and respect teachers much more than we do in the U.S. In this regard, Africans bring a counterintuitive perspective: With the lack of resources they still excel. Consequently, even though highlighting their over-representation in elite colleges in the U.S. has provoked some controversy (Roach, 2005), there may be something to be gained in researching the issue further. The African-born immigrants may just bring some positive things to the table for educating all Black children.

The Next Steps: Moving Forward

Racialization of African-born and Constructing Global Communities

The transnational realities of the African-born in the U.S. could be situated in such a way to effect change, not just in race relations, but also in education and in correcting inequities in their countries of birth. As many of the African women faculty in the study explained, racialization imbued in them a transnational consciousness. As they traversed more than one culture/world, they saw themselves still attached to relationships in their countries of birth and yet connected with their local communities. There exists an understanding of almost contradictory views of space and race, of belonging and disconnect, of being one with others, yet separate. Again, the implications were multiple; they were in unassigned roles as ambassadors, to tell the rosy as well as the not so rosy stories about African countries, to educate others about their countries of birth, and to remove the stigma of Africa.

The implications of being racialized granted them, on a personal level, the ability to be self-reflective and centered. Yet, it was a centering that was psychological, identity-forming and geographically transnational. They could affirm that Africa has been maligned, but they could also give voice to the foundational things they gained from being raised in Africa: values for education, respect for elders, relationships to build community, and how Africaness centers them. Again, it was a centering that grounded them mentally but not geographically and did not prevent them from living out their transnational identities. The latter also aligned to the idea of community as neither solely geographic nor solely ideological. Instead, community is understood as fluid, shifting, and global. Sergiovanni (1994) makes the distinction between communities of place, kinship, family, and that of the mind. Many forms of these are in existence, transforming those who belong to them. In professional circles, we are seeing more professional learning communities, for instance. There's a heightened sense of performance and accountability within these communities that refuse to be bound by restrictive ideologies or geographies.

Conclusion

Acknowledging Deficiencies

If critical race theory is truly focused on exposing unequal relationships, I use it to further explicate one of the related findings on racialization: a multiple contradictory consciousness. For instance, while on the one hand, the African-born female faculty in the study could attest to experiences of racism from Whites, they could equally give credit for the help and support of well-traveled faculty and mentors. Similarly, while some of them questioned their African American identity, they could still attest to being fully engaged in work and communities near and far. Such complexities yield authentic perspectives rather than simplistic perceptions of race and racism. In fact, the multiple consciousness resulting from their racialization seemed to have equipped them with a candor for admitting to deficiencies wherever they exist, within themselves ("I have holes in my development"), in their communities ("the African Americans see everything as race...") and in their far communities ("Tell the not so rosy stories about Africa") (Ifedi, 2008, pp.101, 168, 212).

Indeed, the foundational values in education, relationships, and community seem to be serving the African-born well in the Diaspora, while their far communities remain ravaged by wars, poverty, and the ineptitude of political leaders. The Africans' high value in education has not translated well to their home countries overall. In a study conducted annually in the Houston area, Nigerians were reported to be the most highly educated group (69% with college degrees and 35% with post-graduate credentials), surpassing the previously labeled model minority – Asians (Casimir, 2008; Klineberg, 2005), which fact probably intersects not only with the value for education but also with immigration realities. Consequently, while on the one hand, the African-born faculty engaged in shaping the minds of students here in the U.S., they agonized over the worsening conditions of schools in their far communities of birth.

Personal Reflection

As Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2003) state, we refuse to "hide behind cloaks of alleged neutrality" (p. 169). I have found Africana feminism (Lewis, 1997) especially useful in much of the discourse I engage in. I find common ground in its focus on the lives of Black women as stratified, marginalized, yet transcending nationhood, socioeconomics, and gender boundaries. In other words, even as I use critical race theory to deconstruct White hegemony, I welcome the transnational realities of the human experience as affirmed by Africana feminism.

The need for us all as Americans to become more deeply reflective and honest in this regard is essential. As we become more courageous in our conversations, we will not fail to see where we have all been victims and oppressors at the same time. It is time to move forward and build coalitions for the common goals of racial harmony, equitable justice, liberating

education, and responsible global citizenship.

I believe that to move towards these goals, we need to consider certain implications of this discourse:

1. Too much concentration on systemic racism denies individual agency in also eliminating racism. The personal I believe is even now more important and essential in deconstructing race. Not to totally discount legal and policy issues, but it is people that make those policies (Rizvi, 1993 as cited by Raby, 2004).
2. A reconsideration of solutions proffered has to be ongoing. How do we approach the resegregation of our communities and schools? Do we need to desegregate in our minds, and beliefs while we aim and work towards spatial desegregation?

There is work to be done. There are challenges for the African-born transnationals like myself in the U.S.: of accent, stigma of Africa as a dependent needy continent full of numerous negative conditions of poverty, illness, AIDS, political turmoil, uncaring leaders, and challenged children. It is a truth of contradictions concerning our lives from a continent that is yet in the dark room, still developing. Nevertheless, the racial minority of Africans in the U.S. have been racialized with some positive consequences. Born and raised mostly in Africa, with foundational roots and contemporary experiences as global citizens, we must let our voices be heard in strategic ways. The academy must encourage its members to facilitate and lead such efforts if it is to live up to its role as a place of transformation and of knowledge creation. We must be strategic with our research agenda, teaching, and service in honest and authentic ways to forge new conversations, spoken not with disdain or arrogance, but in truth, courage and love about our conditions, whether about race, education and inequity in America or about our lack of accountability, leadership, and education in African nations.

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