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Valentine Malumbila

University of Missouri-St. Louis, vvm14d@mail.umsl.edu

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**A Black African Teacher's Experiences in America: Examining the Lived Experiences of a Black African Teacher Working in a Midwestern Public School**

Valentine V. Malumbila

B. A., Secondary Education UNZA, 1985

M. A. Ed., Urban (Leadership) Education Maryville University - St. Louis, 2009

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Advisory Committee

Matthew Davis, Ph.D.  
Chairperson

Thomasina Hassler, Ph.D.

Timothy Makubuya, Ph.D.

Carl Hoagland, Ph.D.

## Abstract

Using sociocultural theoretical approach, intersectionality of race, Critical Race Theory, and Bakhtin's authoritative and persuasive discourse as a theoretical framework, this study explores the various diversities that I encountered as a Black African working and living in America. The diversity that I, like many other Black African immigrants in America, suffer results from culture shock due to lack of culture capital to comprehend and make sense of my surroundings. The lack of culture capital left me exposed to me some degrees of ethnic profiling, isolation and loneliness, and grieving due to loss of family and things that mattered the most to me. Work and residence spaces were a reminder of how we are all a sum total of our experiences somewhat influenced by the dominant culture. Sociocultural mismatches were so overbearing that they informed my perceptions and actions towards the American fabric of life, dominant or not. My experiences as an African Black educator working in one of the largest Midwest urban schools and community reaffirmed some negative beliefs of Africa and Black Africans in diaspora. The study speaks to the courage and resilience of Black African migrants as they seek to engage with others in America. Considering that Black spaces in America and around the world are not necessarily free spaces, as Black Africans, we are never at home anywhere. Therefore, often there is need for us to prove ourselves to others for respect and acceptance. The spaces we migrate to are completely controlled by white supremacists; Black African infrastructures and sociocultural institutions seem to be for amusement for privileged cultures. As a result, we are rarely considered for inclusion into the world cultural phenomenon. Therefore, our being as Black African only flourishes

within ourselves and that's why our voices are often ignored or silenced. We are treated better when we are seen and not heard because we are for amusement.

## Acknowledgement

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Mr. Esau Malumbila and Mrs. Agnes Malumbila that taught me that life is a journey to be traveled with people, some of who may not be kin to me. They taught me all the virtues of love I needed to survive in a diverse world. They taught me to carry with me the virtues of Ubuntu everywhere I went. The core of the qualities of Ubuntu is the love for humanity. I will always be grateful the cohort of friends that supported me throughout the dissertation journey. The following friends believed in me even when I did not want anyone to believe in me –Dr. ChanTam Trihn, Dr. Veronica Clay, Dr. Tina Hamilton, Mrs. Mickey Sinte, Mr. Thomas Weekly, Dr. Monica Barnes, my Brother Dr. Bruce Green, Dr. Dianna Sumner, Ms. Huddleston, Ms. Caitlynn Ward, Dr. Sean Nichols, Ms. Terri Sellers, Latifah Alhelali, Savannah Harris, Nijah Kemple, Sheila and Stanley Goodwin, and Jonathan Griffin. Dr. Matthew Davis has been on my side throughout the journey. Special thanks goes to my thorough and dedicated members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Thomasina Hassler, Dr. Timothy Makubuya and the Honorary South African Dr. Carl Hoagland. My dissertation chair and the committee saw a tree in me when I was seeing myself as a seed. Lastly, I would like to thank my four brothers and three sisters for their support during this journey. Thank you and I love you all.

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## **CHAPTER 1: Background of the study**

### **Introduction**

The world, in my assessment, is full of knowledge waiting to be acquired. People are exposed to a lot of information. The information is subject to individual interpretation based on prior experiences. People tend to construct the meaning of their world from their immediate surroundings, such as workplaces, homes, communities, and countries (Brooks and Brooks, 1993). According to Brooks & Brooks (1993), knowledge, skills, and concept acquisition occurs over time and in the context of the environment people live in. A deeper understanding of new experiences occurs when constructed learning is unified with lived experiences. Humans are creative enough to exploit tools at their disposal to construct unique meanings of their new experiences to deepen their existing understandings (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). The study sought a deeper understanding of how, as a Black African, I constructed the meaning of my socio-cultural environment in America's Midwest region. The study discussed the blueprint I used to acquire social relevance and cultural capital in America.

The migration of people from their ancestral lands to foreign lands in the twenty-first century is much easier than it was three decades ago. McLuhan (1968) attributes the immigration of people from one country to another to globalization. Technological advancement has accelerated and improved interactions of people with diverse backgrounds, cultures, and circumstances. People with different traditions, cultures, language, and social and economic orientation migrate to foreign lands to fulfill their life goals. Papastephanou (2005) contended that the use of modern-day technology as a universal language has effectively broken down barriers that have separated humankind.

Technology, according to Papastephanou (2005), has created a global village consisting of diverse cultures, languages, and belief systems. Because of the perceived economic prosperity, America has experienced a significant number of skilled and unskilled immigrants, most of whom are from Brown and Black spaces (Pandor, 2005). As a result, immigration, especially of Black and Brown people, has taken center stage in political debates in the U.S. It seems that the current debates about foreigners have somewhat minimized our contributions to the enrichment of the America economy and socio-cultural growth and development. In some spaces, although immigrants are labeled as social, economic, and political irritants, we are a significant labor force in various sectors of the American economy. Pandor (2005) argued that immigrants possess various skill sets and knowledge that could help with America's workforce needs. For example, my skills, knowledge, background, and international exposure as a Black African, if effectively nurtured, could improve the quality of education of Midwest urban scholars. My story as a Black African living and teaching in a Midwest high school started on my thirty-second birthday when I was offered an opportunity to migrate to America to teach at one of the Midwest urban school district. I was assigned to a high school located in one of the Midwest's low-income communities. As a young Black African, I had to consider the ramifications of migrating to America from Johannesburg, South Africa. I wondered what life was going to be like for me, my friends, and the family as well. I told myself to be wary of anything that comes easy, without struggle or little hard work. Out of curiosity, I started doing my research on America's Midwest public school systems. I am a community-oriented person; therefore, I was also interested in finding out the Black Africans' migration patterns, particularly to this part of the U.S.



As a young man living under the South African apartheid system, I learned to analyze various experiences of Black Africans around the world to learn more about different ways we are humanized. Being dehumanized helped me to understand that sometimes it hurts more to be alienated in your ancestral land than it is as an immigrant. Therefore, the idea of being an expatriate in America appealed more to me than staying in South Africa. Moving to America was better for me than to beg for my freedom in my ancestral land. Still to this day, two decades after apartheid ended, South Africa is still impacted by the remnants of apartheid's social, cultural, and economic institutions that politicians of all color are unwilling to dismantle.

Cook (1999) claimed that between nineteen sixty and nineteen eighty, America experienced an influx of voluntary multicultural and multilingual migrants who settled and worked in public school systems and other sectors of the American economy. In 1999, a Midwest school district recruited me and eight other mathematics and science teachers from South Africa. Cook (1999) argued that the motivation for hiring international teachers, like myself, was based on the need for diversity in America's urban school districts. In contrast, the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB, 2001), stated that hiring international teachers was indirectly mandated by the act of Congress, which required the hiring of highly qualified teachers in all public schools that received public funding. Adamson & Darling-Hammond (2011) pointed out that NCLB (2001) was enacted to address the inequitable distribution of certified teachers in American urban schools, especially schools of color.

I accepted the offer to come to the Midwest with skewed knowledge of America and also lacked awareness and culture capital. I lacked knowledge of the American urban school

systems, communities, institutions, cultures, and subcultures. My point of reference was limited to what I saw on television, read in books and stories with different perspectives. The lack of cultural capital became the basis of culture mismatches I experienced in my new environment. Consequently, in my earlier years, I spent much time trying to find ways to recognize gaps between the host and my home culture. With time, the culture gaps started to be apparent and consequently forced me into isolation and loneliness. I was determined to find and seal culture cracks that were apparent to me. However, due to my fixed mindset, mismatches occurred. I wanted to change but was unwilling to alter my mindset. Living in a foreign country was challenging and took a while for me to adjust. On several occasions, I questioned myself and wondered how I was going to navigate through the pressures of living in America. My immediate solution was to silence myself and hindered myself from accessing the customs and cultures of the host community. The experiences, challenges, and struggles of working in a culturally mismatched space gave me the voice, experience, and courage to tell the story of my lived experiences in America.

There is limited research on Black Africans living and teaching in America compared to other international teachers from White geographical locations (Carrison, 2007). Also, there is a significant amount of scholarly work regarding the recruitment process of Black Africans teaching in America as opposed to our contributions and culture shock we experience. (Ng, 2006). Ng (2006) also reported some developed countries such as Canada, Australia, Britain, and America, have focused more on White international teachers' recruitment and their lived experiences in White spaces. These countries have used the findings of White expatriates' experiences to inform their respective urban

education policies. Literature from the named countries was not in its entirety usable to me because the information was not very relatable to Black African audiences and what they are up against in White spaces. Ng (2006) stressed that the historical and cultural backgrounds of Black African teachers are significantly different from those of Eurocentric immigrants who tend to enjoy white privilege. My story demonstrated an understanding of the sociocultural and ethnic orientation of Black Africans living and working in urban America. My story analyzed the challenges and the culture shock that I experienced in America as a Black African man. The study unwrapped a significant amount of information about my lived experiences in America's urban schools and communities of color.

### **Statement of the problem**

With courage, I exiled myself from my ancestral land, South Africa, and migrated to America. Narratives in the study revealed my coping mechanism that allowed me to navigate the social and cultural gaps that I encounter in America using a South African mindset. The study showed how immigrants' innate mindset gives way to a range of issues that arise from migrating to America, the melting pot of cultural diversity. I previously considered America as a melting pot because of her capacity to accommodate a multitude of nationalities, cultures, and ethnicities. Leaving behind my loved ones and adjusting to the American social and cultural life was hard for me. However, my lived experiences presented me with a multitude of opportunities to share with readers concerning Black African's experiences with acculturation into the broader American society.

The representation of Black Africans in America is a drop in a bucket compared to immigrants from other parts of the globe. Therefore, there is scant scholarly work about the challenges we face during inclusion into American society. However, most of the current work on Black African immigrants are typically on the hiring process instead of our lived experiences. There is a need to tell stories as Black Africans so that we can have a voice that speaks to our unique struggles and contributions in foreign lands. For the story to be authentic, a Black African who has lived the experiences must tell it instead of someone else telling our story. Although Black Africans' lived experiences might be unique from one individual to another, my story might be more relatable to prospective Black African immigrants than it would be coming from people without authentic Black African experience in America. My story is remarkable and contributes to the knowledge of the challenges and practices of Black Africans in America.

In this age of technology and globalization, there is a need to welcome Black African migrations into an increasingly diverse world to dispel negative stigmas about Black Africans and Africa. After all, inclusion, and not exclusion, is the key to the survival of humanity in this world. Hopefully, Black Africans' interactions with others will earn us the right to be treated humanely by other cultures that often have no regard for our existence in this world. The study is timely and brings awareness to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and human rights efforts, about the experiences of Black Africans in America because we are at the verge of losing our identity due to pressure from the dominant culture in America. The study is to exposes the neglect, invisibility and the silencing of Black Africans that dominant cultures might not be aware of or have never experienced. Lastly, the study is important because it addresses the neoliberal approach of hiring

already trained labor force without regard for our wellbeing and culture shock.

Neoliberals' practices are tantamount to the commodification of Black African immigrants in America (Jandt, 2004). As a result, often as a Black African immigrant in America, I feel that I did not get meaningful mentoring, emotional support, and acculturation to become productive employees.

### **The Statement of Purpose**

This qualitative study described my resilience in the face of adversities associated with identity, acculturation, African Blackness in America, and socio-cultural mismatches. The study also interrogated coping strategies that I used to gain acceptance in one of the low-income schools in the Midwest City of America. The study was tenaciously designed to examine the process of identification that I experienced as a young Black African man and teacher during my early years of teaching and living in America's urban communities. The study painted-a-picture of the experiences Black African in Midwest urban spaces. The study discussed the snags I experienced while living and working in America. The study also explained some coping strategies I used to navigate culture mismatches I experienced as a newcomer to America. The ultimate goal of the study was to unlock prospective Black African immigrant teachers' mysteries of my living and to work in America. In the study, I provide the readers with a toolbox of strategies to support their acculturation process in America.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Black African immigrants living in the Midwest often experience culture shock and some challenges that impede our process of acculturation into the American social and cultural life. The study meticulously selected a variety of theoretical perspectives and adjustment

models to paint an accurate picture of our lived experiences as immigrants in America. Among the selected conceptual frameworks are Critical Race Theory (CRT), socio-cultural approaches, and Bakhtin's authoritative and internally persuasive discourses.

**CRT:** Race and racism seem to be at the core of the everyday lives of people in Americans. Consequently, I chose two tenets of CRT to describe my lived experiences as a Black African immigrant living and working in America.

1. **Intersectionality of race and racism:** This framework explains how Black Africans in America internalize prejudice, intolerance, and an exaggerated sense of cultural superiority of the host. Shin's (2017) framework of intersectionality is one of the tools used to explain how individuals and ethnicities experience privilege and oppression by dominant cultures, Whiteness. In this study, privilege and Whiteness are understood and described by the way we incorporate cross disciplinary perceptions (Bergerson et al., 2003).
2. **Socio-cultural theoretical approaches:** Socio-cultural approaches, credited to Ogbu (1992) and Fanon (1967), are relevant to my study because they explain how Black African immigrants living and working in America are affected by culture, ethnicity, race, and class (Alfred et al., 2002). Since the study is focused on the process of adjusting to the American socio-cultural life, acculturation models, as described by Jandt (2004), are a critical part of the study. Jandt's (2004) model of acculturation has five phases, a honeymoon, disintegration and difference, reintegration, gradual adjustment, and reciprocal interdependence.
3. The conceptual framework of this study also uses Bakhtin's (1998) two theories used to examine experiences of expatriate teachers with divergent perspectives.

Using Bakhtin's **authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse**, I examined how my unique so-called alien culture was considered subordinate in the U.S. Hodge (2005) stated that aristocratic and mainstream American cultures enjoy supremacy and dominance over the value of others. The second theory advanced by Bakhtin (1998), which is significant to my study, is the recognition that language is a meaning-construction process by which immigrants' identities are constructed and transformed. In the study, I used Bakhtin's theory to examine the impact of host cultures and languages on identity creation of Black African immigrants.

### **Significance of the Study**

The basic tenets of the stories in my study might be used to inform policy and practices necessary for providing meaningful transition and acculturation of prospective Black African teachers in urban American schools. With the support of the host and a variety of local stakeholders in the school community, Black African teachers might open up and share their significant feelings and fears that might facilitate others' smooth transition into the American fabric of life. Wesche (2004) stated that,

In an ever more interconnected world, in which people of diverse nationalities are increasingly called upon to communicate with one another and work together on common issues, it is crucial that the citizens and the leaders of powerful countries have the intercultural awareness and understanding of the world (p. 279).

The story of my experiences as a Black African teacher in the Midwest are significant because of the uniqueness of the adversities I experienced during my transition into American life. This study was designed to unwrap and capture the realities of serving a

community where you have limited culture capital to help in building relationships. The study explored some significant issues of acculturation specific to Black African immigrants such as self-doubt, colorism, classism, silencing, grieving, prejudice, identity crisis, inadequate mentoring, and, most importantly, invisibility.

Additionally, the study explored the nature of my interaction with different American cultures. The information collected, analyzed, and interrogated provides a safety net for new and prospective Black African teachers to America's urban school systems. The information provides a bag of coping strategies for mentors, administration, students, and parents who desire to understand and support Black African instructors with exceptional cultural orientation. The study is significant because it adds a Black African voice to the scholarly work designed to highlight ways to support us during our transition and adversities associated with the recognition and visibility of our culture in the different American fabric of life. Proper recognition of Africa and Black Africans might help to address issues of ethnic identification and commodification and confront the neoliberal approach to the migration of Black Africans to the U.S. Ultimately, and the scholarly work will improve policy on hiring, mentoring, and humanization of Black Africans in the diaspora.

### **Study Delimitations**

This qualitative study used autoethnography to explore the various facets of adversities I encountered working and living in an urban Midwest community. The story explores my lived experiences that contributed to my transitional phases into American life, including identity transformation (Creswell, 2013). Experiences of other Black African immigrants are only used if they replicated the themes I used to frame my experiences. My study



interest-only pertained to my Black African experiences in America. However, white immigrant experiences were used to show the disparities in the manner of treatment and acceptance between White European Black African experiences. The study was done in low-income community schools that are predominantly African American. The criteria of the study included the culture mismatch I experienced living and working in America's low-income communities without much socio-cultural capital knowledge. Pseudo names of Midwest spaces are used to protect people and spaces where the study transpired.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction:**

The study explored issues of African Blackness in Black and Brown America. This study is an autoethnography study of my Black identity as a Black African in the Midwest communities. I experienced culture shock, grieving, identity crisis, discrimination, and social disconnections in the host communities. The stories in the study are a perfect example of what Engels (1976) called the law of the negation. This law explains the struggles and unity of opposites of subdued people.

The literature review of this study sought to demystify the culture and identity challenges of Black African immigrants living and working in urban America. The study wanted to investigate why African Black in the diaspora are shelved in the lowest echelon of the American cultural ladder. That means that our full acceptance as a cultural group is dictated by how well we complied with the norms of the dominant American culture (Dunn, 2011). Dunn (2011) also observed that Black African expatriates' lived experiences in U.S. urban communities are frustrated by the lack of quality acculturation, mentoring, and identification processes. For example, the culture shock I experienced as an international teacher was so intense that I felt the need to lose some of my identity to be understood. I realized, through my interactions with people that things are done differently in America. Although I considered myself a competent adult in Africa, I felt vulnerable in my new location (Ward et al., 2001).

The lack of cultural capital and identity in America placed me between a rock and a hard place. The social and cultural institutions such as American accent acquisition were beyond my comprehension. The literature review I read interrogated my identity and

experiences as they were relative to the existing literature on the challenges and struggles of expatriates in unknown cultural and social spaces. The existing literature provides a framework for the discussion of culture mismatches similar to what I experienced as a Black African teaching in America.

The spatial, cultural, economic, and political wealth I possess is unique to me and in many ways, different from the American context of life. Therefore, the culture mismatches I unraveled in this study exposed the cultural deficiencies experienced in the American context. The study exposed what Oberg (1960) defined as struggles with an identity that people are likely to experience in new spaces Overtime, and the struggles manifested themselves into frustration, confusion, and loss of self-identity. I did not fully understand that every community has norms, practices, and customs that are unique to particular places, groups, regions, and cultures. Therefore, there is a need for immigrants to learn to navigate cultural norms and life patterns of host communities. It was naïve of me to expect an obstacle-free integration into America's urban community.

Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg (1960) defined culture shock as the disrespect shown to newcomers by cultures that perceive themselves as superior to others. (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997) Stated that cultures that tend to assume superior powers tend to consider others as inappropriate, insignificant, primitive, unacceptable, and to some extent, offensive. Various scholars have described culture shock as:

1. Culture fatigue: this is weariness experienced by the immigrant due to the disappearance of cultural identity (Guthrie, 1979)
2. Cross-cultural learning experience: this is when people are placed in spaces where they can gain culture knowledge by actively interacting with different cultures (Adler, 1975)

3. Cross-cultural adjustment stress: this is the day-to-day experience of managing the stress of finding commonality between opposing cultures. Cross-culture has been likened to a persistent cold that can be caught repeatedly in different forms (Weaver, 1986)

4. Cultural bereavement: this is the grief experienced by immigrants removed from their families and native culture (Bhugra et al., 2011)

Both Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg (1960) studied the lived experiences of international teachers using a psychological lens. Bhugra et al., (2010) compared culture shock to an illness with specific symptoms that require a diagnosis, examining, and prescribed treatment. The diagnosis could be in the form of defensiveness caused by what Fennes and Hapgood (1997) called a universal phenomenon, i.e., fear of the unknown. Haydon (2006) argued that immigrants should consider culture shock like a regular thing requiring and facilitating personal growth in life (Weaver et al., 2000A). According to Oberg (1965), sometimes illnesses associated with culture shock have similar symptoms to mental health (Cushner and Brislin, 1996). Therefore, culture shock must be taken seriously to guarantee the mental stability of immigrants like me.

Scholars such as Searle and Ward (1990) introduced a unique facet of culture shock.

They presented culture shock as a binary experience: double culture shock - psychological and sociocultural. Austin (2007) defined psychological and sociocultural as:

1. A sociocultural phenomenon, according to Ward et al. (2001), is when an international teacher figures out survival strategies in the new environment using a culture learning approach. The immigrant learns some coping strategies such as mastering the dominant language, interacting with local people, and other social

resources desirable for acceptance in the new location and space (Ward et al., 2001). Therefore, the sociocultural shock is based on rites of passage into the culture, language, and identity of the host community (Ward and Kennedy, 1996). In my experiences, this strategy required severe code-switching as a survival instrument. The host culture at this time was prioritized over my own, and therefore, my identity became secondary.

2. The psychological phenomenon is based on an individual's level of mental strength (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997). Fennes and Hapgood (1997) argued that people suffering from mental instability have a high probability of experiencing extreme culture shock than those that are sufficiently stable mentally. The social, cultural, and racial experiences are likely to put more demands on the identity and securities of a Black African expatriate than it would on privileged White expatriates. (Fennes & Hapgood, 1997). According to (Searle & Ward et al., 1990), culture shock associated with mental health can be predicted by personality and relationship experiences and how an individual reacts to unfamiliar spaces. However, I feel that to be able to predict mental health, and a person has to mingle and interact with the host culture. I often withdraw myself to avoid judgment and rejection, and therefore, I missed the cue. The more I lived the life of a hermit, the longer the process of acculturation took. I found myself secluded from the life lesson of the ecosystem I needed instructions from.

The primary component of my culture mismatch came from the perceived communication barriers. Based on my encounters with some parents, students, and peers, my accent was often mistaken for the inability to speak the English language fluently.

Therefore, sometimes, I was poorly evaluated and labeled as a bad teacher because of my accent. Students often used my accent as an excuse for work avoidance. The community, though tolerant towards me, was wary of my accent and got frustrated with me because I either had to repeat myself several times to get the point across or vice versa. People often said, 'He does not get it; he never will.' Then I realized that they were tired of repeating themselves when talking to me. I often rely on non-verbal communication and smile and laughed to hide my frustration and pain of being misunderstood and judged (Weaver, 2000A). Oberg (1960) stated that there exist numerous communication cues that people have exposure to. Non-verbal communication is the cue that most people use in life. Through the language of the body, I was able to express my feelings about different emotions, reactions, and mercies. Since learning a new language required culture appropriateness than spoken words, it was hard for me to fully communicate my thoughts, emotions, and particularly my pain (Nicholson and Imaizumi, 1993). Even though I had the gift of speaking many languages, including English, without the cultural awareness to effectively use language, I was in the same culture capital predicament. Ward (2001) stated that without culture awareness, even people that speak the same language are sometimes prone to experience culture shock because of the absence of appropriate culture capital. In short, culture capital, proper orientation, and mentoring could have gone a long way in my acculturation process in America.

One of the dilemmas associated with my inclusion in the American culture was to seek cues to adjust to America. Dunn et al., (2011) advocated for some support of people with experience in both the American life and ancestral cultures. Some scholars disagree with solely depending on co-nationals for support because it has the potential to alienate

expatriates from the culture of the locals (Finney et al., 2002). Black Africans must mingle with both locals and co-nationals for personal growth and development (Ward & RanaDeuba, 2000).

According to Hendrickson et al. (2011), immigrants need support from the host as access points into the dominant culture. I needed the host-native support to combat the culture mismatch gap in the U.S. (Ward et al., 2001). With cultural intelligence and social support, I would have direction and an understanding of my surroundings and the cultural capital of the host community. I would have appreciated balanced support from the natives and co-nationals during the transitioning process into the American cultural spaces (Joslin, 2002). Ward and Rana-Deuba (2000) stated that quality support is essential to an expatriate irrespective of the source. Hendrickson et al. (2011) argued that building genuine relationships matters a lot to people experiencing cultural stereotypes. Exploring close relations helped me with cultural adjustment and empathy, and compassion. I was naïve to think that my transition was going to be smooth because of my prior experiences with various divergent communities during and after apartheid. I minimized how uniquely mismatched the norms, practices, and customs of every community (Oberg, 1960).

### **The commodification of Black African teachers in America**

Globalization has affected almost all facets of human life through a continuous transnational process of interconnectedness and erosion of boundaries (Beck, 1997). In some cases, the erosion of fences and boundaries translated to the creation of uneven forces that disregarded not only national sovereignty but also discounted the cultural boundaries of minority cultures. Disregard of others' cultures is tantamount to the

westernization approach to controlling marginalized people, economies, and their culture. Therefore, the practice bears resemblances to imperialism because it is rooted in the expansion of the global pursuit of economic liberalism. (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004; Tomlinson, 2001). Nederveen Pieterse (2004) and Tomlinson (2001) stated that the fundamental factor of the pursuit of economic liberalism is commodification of humans and human services such as labor, especially of Black and Brown spaces.

The term “commodification” names the process whereby things, services, ideas, and people are transformed into objects for sale in a capitalist economic system. It can also refer to how human practices customarily considered to be outside the market, such as art, religion, or medicine, are being integrated into the capitalist marketplace. Taken more broadly, “commodification” signals the expansion of capitalist processes of accumulation across the globe and into every corner of our lives. Under these conditions, in the words of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, there remains “no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest...” (Hearn, A. 2017, p.109).

The struggles of Black Africans in America are a direct consequence of Neoliberal policies (Jandt, 2004). The policies of Neoliberals lack acculturation plans for Black Africans after hire to work in America. Jandt (2004) called this particular culture shock experience the commodification of international teachers. Dunn (2008) and Meethan (2001) define commodification as the hiring of people for the purpose of catering to needs of the dominant culture. This study discussed how the NCLB (2001) demands highly qualified teachers took precedence over my acculturation and accessing culture capital that I desperately needed. Dunn (2008) confirmed that the acculturation discourse



of immigrants is targeted at the consumption needs of the dominant culture with minimum regard for our welfare. The acculturation process usually has no clear purpose of how to support immigrants in the management of general life processes. Sayers (1999) stated that the acculturation discourse is motivated the need to sell what can be sold instead of selling what needed to be sold. I believe that my experiences with culture shock were deep-seated in neoliberal policies and practices. They ignored the significance of my cultural context as they pursued a hegemonic discourse of globalization (Saltman, 2007). By extension, neoliberal policies and practices contributed to harming students of color by way of me being culturally inept and misinformed about their plight. Dunn (2013) observed that neoliberals advocate for the hiring of Black Africans in the pretext of exposing students of color to global cultures as if to suggest that only students of color need cultural exposure.

Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Wise (2010) indicated that in the era of post-sexist, post-racial, post-injustice rhetoric, it is easy to see how international teachers fit into the picture of White supremacy. Dunn (2013) encouraged us to challenge racially motivated systems designed to exploit teachers of color, destroy Black institutions, and harm children. Dunn (2013) also advocated for the acculturation of international teachers and to be intentional with the training and hiring of more African American teachers in schools of color. Without influential African American teachers in predominantly Black schools, international teachers, especially Black Africans, face cultural and racial capital caveat (Dunn, 2013). In this context, I feel that neoliberals are only interested in cheap human and movable labor irrespective of teachers' cultural orientation. The idea of commodifying teachers is similar to the historical exploitation of Blacks' resources by

providing the labor force needed to advance White privilege, i.e., imperialism, as earlier stated (Dunn, 2013). The essential question for future studies is to explore why the U.S. is not growing enough teachers of color for her urban spaces.

### **Tribal Conflict**

Pew Research Center (2006) stated that some Americans have varying attitudes about the continually growing immigrant population. Esses et al. (2002) indicated that the worry about mass immigration is essential for the following reasons.

1. There is a concern that immigration will influence public and immigration policy
2. There is a fear that immigration could influence people's behaviors and cultures
3. There is a phobia of immigration influencing social and cultural identities and perceptions of who is considered a member of the supreme national group.

Immigrants are somewhat seen as a threat to America's traditional value systems (Pew Research Center, 2006).

The Pew Research Center (2006) revealed that the fear is unfounded because the majority of Black African immigrants are reluctant to assimilate. Most Immigrants would preferably be acculturated than assimilated into the American fabric of life; hence, the culture discrepancy.

### **Profiling/Racial Realism**

Steinberg (2006) defined racism as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism experienced by people owing to the perception that some races are more superior to others. Based on my prior experiences with race complications under apartheid South Africa, I felt equipped enough to recognize discrimination and practices of prejudice in social programs and various institutions or systems. Some of the discrimination techniques I

observed often included, but not limited to, disparities in social services that exist between urban and suburban spaces. Geertz (1974) discussed the theory of sorting people into distinct groups possessing multiple innate capacities. According to Geertz (1974), racism ranks people as inferior or superior based on the oppressor's blueprint. In South Africa, racism created xenophobia, otherness, segregation, cultural ranking, and other negative social phenomena (Geertz, 1974). These are some of the things that immigrants always think about and live with.

Steinberg (2006) argued that Black Africans find it hard to have a meaningful lifestyle due to prejudices and misinformation. We are a product of broken family values, have doubtful academic performance, disorganized, and have dysfunctional subcultures.

Steinberg (2006) stated that Black Africans lack social virtues and the tenacity for quality education, respect, and hiring unless there is a dire need, such as the NCLB mandate.

Additionally, Steinberg (2006) stated that Black Africans have self-destructive attitudes.

They have substandard cultures, savages, and often like to play victims, and self-conscience. Steinberg (2006) observed that dominant cultures are determined to lower the status of Black Africans to the lowest level of the social and cultural echelon or caste system. This, in itself, is the evidence of prejudice and discrimination that immigrants often deal with.

### **Nationalists' Immigration View Point**

For centuries, the United States employment sector has encouraged and relied on immigrant labor force (Yates, 2009). Immigrants from all walks of life have moved to the U.S. to seek refuge or employment. Yates (2009) named the current migration pattern as the third historical influx of immigrants. A lot of the immigrants possess essential

technical skills to get exclusive U.S. visas. The growing number of Black African immigrants has caused concerns from Nationalists who view the newcomers as a threat to the integrity of national culture and a source of decay in the quality of American life (Portes, 2006). According to Yates (2009), Nationalists do not acknowledge the universality of human struggles, hopes, and aspirations around the world. Nationalists disregard the fact that, at one time or another, they were in pursuit of the same mysteries sought by voluntary immigrants (Portes, 2006). Black African immigrants, much like other minorities in America, like the amenities America has to offer, such as education, healthcare, social security, and economic advancement (Portes, 2006). Some Black African immigrants are willing to sell their souls with the end goal of being good citizens of White America to enjoy the amenities. It does not have to be that way.

To conclude, Bobo and Hutchings (1996) contended that the more concessions Black African immigrants make in America, the more Blacks and African Americans get purposely under-represented. Ultimately, some African Americans are perceived to develop negative feelings towards Black African immigrants selling out to White privilege and minimizing the civil rights struggles in America. To sum up, Bobo and Hutchings (1996) stated that negative emotions arise in spaces where there is a scramble for scarce economic resources. The scramble brings insecurities among the locals. Resources in Black neighborhoods are not as abundant as in dominantly White spaces. Therefore, the competition for scarce resources creates tension between Black African and minorities in America (Esses et al., 2001). Esses et al., (2001) named this theory the zero-sum belief, which argues against the theory that more immigrants mean fewer opportunities for African Americans. Some Black Africans and African Americans have bought into the

racist notion of divide and conquer for various reasons and hence, creating tension between the two to weaken them (Esses, 2001).

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction:**

I chose to use the autoethnography method as my study design to investigate and examine my lived experiences in urban American cultures. Ellis (2004) and Holman (2005) defined autoethnography as a research method seeking to evaluate and communicate the experiences of an individual or a group based on their lived experiences. Mitch Allen stated that autoethnography must:

Look at experience analytically. Otherwise [you're] telling [your] story—and that's nice—but people do that on Oprah [a U.S.-based television program] every day. Why is your story more valid than anyone else's? What makes your story more valid is that you are a researcher. You have a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature to use. That's your advantage. If you can't frame it around these tools and literature and just frame it as 'my story,' then why or how should I privilege your story over anyone else's I see 25 times a day on TV?" (Personal interview, May 4, 2006) [8]

I used autoethnography because it establishes the particulars of my personal experiences that contributed to each of the phases of my transition into the American life, including identity transformation (Creswell, 2013). I used the autoethnography approach to explain my viewpoint (Dahlberg & Nystrom, 2008) and to detail the sociocultural challenges I experienced during my transition period. The study also addressed some significant mentoring encounters I experienced during the transition phase as part of my culture shock. The study viewed some of the challenges I experienced as a product of my limited understanding of the deep-rooted American mainstream cultures that are too complicated

racially, even for me, a person who grew up under apartheid South Africa. My challenges were, therefore, discussed using the authoritative and internally persuasive discourses as they played out in the communities where I experienced culture shock. Even with full knowledge of the cultural differences, the study recognized that despite my life experiences with cultural snags and struggles, it was business as usual for everybody else. I was still expected to perform and live life like everybody else. To survive in this new environment, I frequently silenced my voice and disguised my vulnerabilities. I silenced my voice and actions to avoid unnecessary attention brought to myself. The study provided ways American society contributed to the silencing of my voice.

### **Study Methods**

This qualitative study was designed to help answer the what, why, or how questions to the culture mismatches I experienced in America (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). Additionally, the study addressed the attitudes, perceptions, and life circumstances that had the most impact on my life as a Black African immigrant. The study was designed to engage the readers in the analysis of my experiences of teaching in one of the largest Midwest urban school districts. A significant portion of my story addressed particulars of the stressors and emotional experiences endured during my initial years teaching and living in America.

The study also explored some academicians' suggested strategies, practices, and methodologies to engage in Black and White communities, institutions, and educational infrastructures in America (Kumashiro, 2015; Lynn, 2004). Some of the strategies and practices included meaningful acts of courage, kindness, and millennial teaching and working in Black spaces (Dawson, 2013; Floyd-Thomas & Gillman, 2002; Frazier, 2015;

Kelley, 2002). The study also gives some examples and stories of the dehumanization and commodification of Black African educators at the expense of meeting the demands of the NCLB Act (2001). We, as immigrants, have to deal with communities with disturbing distrust of public education, schools, and themselves as a community. The methodology chapter details the rationale for the design of my research and the implications.

Furthermore, my role as the author and participant in the study is explained. The study also explains why I selected the autoethnographic approach as the appropriate methodology for the study. Finally, the study described the data collection and management techniques to ensure that it protected.

### **Autoethnography methodology of research**

Ethnography was selected as a research design to discover and describe the experienced culture mismatches I experienced in America. Since the study was designed to describe, explain and analyze my personal cultural experiences, autoethnography was the best methodology to accurately describe the events as they unfolded in my life as a Black African expatriate in America (Ellis et al., 2010). It is the perfect methodology to characterize the predicaments and dilemmas of navigating a culture different from mine. Autoethnography helped to reflect on the different transformational facets of life experiences as they unfolded (Ellis et al., 2010) in a particular culture.

Autoethnography, in this context, was used as a research method to conduct an inner observation and investigation of my life experiences. The narratives in the study detailed my experiences with fixed interpretation, understanding, analysis, and critique of African cultures and the people of the continent of Africa (Bromell, 2013). These preconceived



judgments of African cultures are presented as stories crafted to engage the reader in a more profound, rigorous and in-depth understanding of my cultural practices, or the lack of, in America (Ellis et al., 2010). The stories were pitched to symbolize the negotiation tactics and survival skills in my unfamiliar cultural and social space. Additionally, the stories were told to paint-a-picture of the day-to-day strategies I used to cope with culture shock stressors (Dawson, 2013; Floyd-Thomas & Gillman, 2002; Frazier, 2015; Kelley, 2002).

### **Storytelling**

Storytelling is another research design I used to pass the knowledge of culture mismatches to educate, inspire, to indoctrinate or convincing people about events of the past, present, and future (Gabriel, 1998). Pentland (1999) identified the essential elements of a story such as the sequencing of events, important actors, and identifiable voices to reflect particular points of view. The story of my lived experiences was told using the stated fundamental components of the story with the resolve to making recommendations in the context of prospective Black African migrates to the U.S. Storytelling is a means to keep alive the cultures and traditions of communities through song, dance riddles and stories connected to transformation of people's sociocultural lives. Mine is rooted in stories connected to open people's sociocultural scope of knowledge.

Long family traditions, religious practices, and spiritual beliefs are passed from one generation to the next through storytelling as a medium of communication. Likewise, storytelling was used as a research design to transmit my experiences with culture mismatch and other adversities in America to prospective Black African immigrants, hiring agencies, and the affected communities. The stories provided could be used by

potential Black African immigrants to America as a playbook to paint a picture of the sociocultural makeup of the communities they agree to serve and live side by side with. In this study, I used memory retention to process cultural production (Giroux, 1994) to excavate the past that shaped my identity and perceptions about the overall American sociocultural temperament. I used stories to break my silenced voice and construct the culture shock story as I experienced it while working and living in America. The stories sought to analyze the anecdotes of my lived experiences systematically and connecting the narratives to a broader American sociocultural and sociopolitical meanings and understandings. The anecdotes revealed some historical, social, and cultural philosophies relative to the construction of my culture shock. The end goal of the stories was to reveal the insights into my grieving life; a life circumscribed in the American algorithms of discrimination, identity alteration, and classism.

### **Storytelling as a Tenet of CRT**

Storytelling is a powerful, persuasive, and explanatory model of transmitting information. Storytelling is one of the tenets of CRT. The dichotomy of storytelling and counter-storytelling is predicated upon the belief that the world is a neutral space where all humans are justly treated. After all, the declaration of the American independence stated that all wo/men are created equal. The treatment of Black African immigrants in America contradicts the idea that all men are created equal because some are created with white privilege. The privilege allows some to enjoy the American freedoms more than others. The commodification of Black Africans is enough proof that people are not created equal. Upon arrival in America for the first time, I was immediately placed in an urban American classroom by myself without orientation or acculturation. My employers did

not consider preparing me enough for my transition. It was what is termed baptism by fire.

Teachers that got hired from Germany in the year 2000 were placed in assigned to magnet schools and visual performing arts schools. Magnet and visual performing arts schools are schools that do not have as many disciplines as comprehensive schools where I was placed. Not only that, magnet and visual performing arts schools have better funding and, therefore, have better facilities than comprehensive schools. Two of the German teachers were brought to my room to observe my classroom for two days before they started teaching at the visual arts school they were assigned to. At least they had some preparation for an urban American school environment. A privilege I did not have.

Also, out of the eight teachers hired with me from South Africa, two of them were assigned to visual performing arts schools. One had East Indian ancestry, and the other was a mixed-race teacher. Both the teachers' skins were lighter than the rest of us.

Therefore, colorism is another factor that Black-dark skinned Africans have to deal with.

It was after my fifth year of education that I was asked if I wanted to transfer to magnet schools. Two of the top schools in the district offered me mathematics teaching positions that I declined. My reason for declining the positions was because I did not want to start all over again in a new environment considering I was still in the process of acculturating.

Another area of concern is that I was hired, not only because I was highly qualified mathematics and science teacher, but mainly because I was an experienced educator with ten years of teaching experience. However, when it was time to negotiate my salary, I was paid at the same rate as a new teacher without experience.

There is an urgent need to acknowledge the contributions of Black Africans and Africa as a continent to world economies and cultures. CRT is the right move to bring global awareness of injustices committed against us as a people. I ask dominant cultures to seriously consider the plight of Black Africans and consider lifting our voices and come out of invisibility to be equal partners in making the world a better place for all who live in it. I call upon CRT to engage in building a strong movement to fight all forms of group-based oppression, especially against Black Africans.

To conclude, I chose storytelling research design to explore the feelings, emotions, and events that evoked the various aspects of my transition into the America professional and social life (Wallace, 1996). Through reflection, I recalled meaningful events that helped me to construct themes for my stories in the study. Giroux (2004) stated that:

A critical approach to storytelling challenges the ways knowledge is constructed, illuminates the relationship between knowledge and power, and redefines what is personal and political so that we learn to rewrite the dialectical connection between what we learn and how we come to define our history, experience, and language (p. 10).

I have used my voice and the knowledge of my lived experiences to explain my access point into American sociocultural life and how, as a Black African immigrant, I constructed meanings of various culture mismatches that I experienced. Britzman (1990) stated that a voice implies that:

The individual's relationship to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual's relationship to the other (p. 14).

**Site/Sample selection**

My community of business used to be the Mecca of successful Black professionals. The school once attracted students/children of lawyers, Medical Doctors, and other high ranking members of the Black communities. The school community started to degenerate due to the flight of middle-class members to suburbs areas of this Midwest City. A major shift in the demographics of the research area came when the court passed restrictive covenants in 1948; the same year apartheid came into effect in South Africa. Highways built allowed middle-class Blacks and Whites to move into suburbs housing with bigger yards and out of the inner city (Major Samsung, Alumni, class of 1969). The flight of middle and upper-class people to suburbs led to the decline in social services, and therefore, businesses started to struggle (Shelley v. Kraemer, 1948). At the time of hiring, the city had a high frequency of homicide cases in the area. I realize that I was going to work in an area with high trauma, and I was not prepared for that. My perception of the community was they were not invested in education, and therefore, students did not view school as valuable as I did as an immigrant from Black African spaces. Since my study used the autoethnography method of research, my lived experiences are at the center of the investigation in this community. Other Black African immigrants with similar experiences as mine in the old Mecca made minimal contributions to my study. My role, therefore, was defined as the researcher of my own lived experiences working and living in Midwest urban America.

**Researcher's Role**

The stories in my study dug deeper into the meaning of my life as an invisible character in a world of conflicted hierarchical and cultural supremacy. In the study, I discharged

my emotions, thoughts, perceptions, opinions, and personal biases (Ellis, 2004) in a way that captured my essence as a Black African teacher in America's urban and low-income families. My stories will take the reader on a rollercoaster of a timeline of events significant to my problems of practice experienced during the acculturation phases of my life. My objective was to make a connection between adversities I experienced and the invisibility of cultured Black Africans in America's Black and White spaces (Ellis et al., 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The stories in the study were designed to express my pain, indignities, challenges, and strengths as a Black African immigrant working and living in a Midwest City in America. Despite the adversities, the study explains how I was expected to perform as well as other experienced peers with culture capital in urban America. The stories and data analysis are designed to demystify the struggles I endured as an African Black teacher and a human being.

Sharing the story of my lived experiences gave me a voice to come out of the shadows of the silence of Black Africans in the diaspora. Voices of Black Africans are silenced, in our ancestral land and abroad, because of the colonization of Black people and the layering of world cultures in a hierarchy of significance to the globe as decided by White supremacists. Autoethnography and storytelling allowed me to fight exclusion by adding my story to a scholarly body of work (Ellis, 2004; Yosso, 2002). My story is crafted to empower others in CRT circles to speak up on behalf of the silenced for equitable inclusion of minorities into a community of world cultures. Inclusion and not pseudo exclusion is significant in the diversification of world cultures.

**Ethical Concerns**

The findings of the study are kept incognito to secure the identity of people, institutions, and communities where the investigations occurred. The characterization of individuals associated with the study is concealed to protect them from being identified.

Additionally, details of events and people are protected and were assigned pseudonyms. Pseudonyms are used to identify places, spaces, and all contributors are only known to me. The recordings containing reflections for the study are secured from unauthorized access. At the end of the study, all recordings will be destroyed to protect the confidentiality of people and places.

**Limitations**

This qualitative research used the autoethnography methodology to tell a story of my lived experiences as a Black African teacher living in the U.S. Ellis (2011) defined autoethnography as a methodology seeking to analyze and communicate personal experiences to grasp cultural experiences. Because this is an autoethnography study, it is limited to self-reflection and, therefore, is designed to explore my personal experiences and connections to a broader cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings of my host environment in America. I acknowledge that the choice of a sample of myself was a tiny representation of a broader sample of Black African immigrants in America. However, the choice of an autoethnography methodology gave me a limited sample size of myself, a small sample, which allowed me to establish a more intimate connection between my voluntarily exiled culture and my experiences with urban American cultures. I am more comfortable with sharing my lived experiences, routines, thoughts, impressions, biases, fears, and coping mechanisms that worked for me. The study is an

informative portrayal of my lived experiences, and therefore, it was able to elicit an understanding of culture shock experiences. To gain a deeper understanding of my host culture, I focused on my lived experiences as a Black man and a South African living and working in America.

In particular, this study demystified some of the challenges and encounters of Black African teachers residing and working in America. My experiences inspired the choice of the study topic with grief, struggles with my identity as a Black South African encountering culture mismatch in America. The stories are tailored towards my personal experiences and may not be replicated by others because no two people experience life the same way.

### **Anchor Stories and Reminiscence**

The elements of my story are anchored in recalled facts, emotions, and feelings as they were lived in America. The selected stories have passed the litmus test of representing my life as it was lived in the Midwest of America and before migrating. Stories were told of the different phases of the acculturation I had to endure as I pieced the American cultural puzzle together. The study explained the grieving and emotional distress experienced because of the lack of cultural capital to function in a culture that looked down on Black Africans and Africa as a continent. I tell stories of survival techniques used as strategies to force incorporation into American culture of dominancy. Even with successes in using survival strategies, there was a danger of being labeled Americanized, a term that is loosely used to classify people that desert their culture in preference for the dominant culture. A Black-on-Black conflict arises from this theory because



Americanized Black Africans are detrimental to the fight against the dehumanization of Black Africans and cultural progress. Black people have made around the globe.

The study also narrates my personal experiences with my love and obligation to the African culture and why African cultures must be considered during the acculturation of Black African immigrants to America (Bromell, 2013). I do realize that my story must be intentional and meticulously written to capture the attention of distractors of Black African advancement in the cultural world where some cultures are deemed more superior than others. The study insinuated that cultural equilibrium could only be attained with the recognition of the existence and importance of minority cultures to the ones that practice them and respect those cultures as such. When all ethnicities start to see disparities in the acceptance and treatment of minority cultures, we will be one step away from helping Black Africans' smooth transition into others' cultures.

Stories in the study were designed to inform readers about the struggles of Black African teachers in America's low-income Midwest schools. I am mindful of the danger of a single story, and that the needs of international teachers vary and cannot adequately represent by experiences of one person. However, there is value in my stories because I lived the struggles first hand. Stories are methodically and meticulously designed also to inform receiving communities about culture mismatches experienced by Black teachers from Africa.

### **Conclusion**

My study is an autoethnography research method and, therefore, is reliable because it is a story of my life and my experiences as a Black African immigrant. The main target of my study is a prospective Black African immigrant to the U.S., so that s/he is informed of

culture shock before taking the journey to America. The study gives immigrants an access point to life as Black African immigrants in America. The study will pollinate information about my experiences during my journey, living and working in America (Taylor et al., 2009). The study will inform hiring agencies and the accepting communities of the diversities faced by Black African migrants in America and, hopefully, inform them of what it is like to experience poor treatment from dominant American culture (Ellis et al. 2010). Through my stories, readers will walk in my shoes and understand some nuggets and nuances of living and working in social and cultural spaces where immigrants' cultures are perceived as inferior and primitive. The study also highlights some things that dominant cultures could do to be more welcoming of Black African immigrants to America. I want readers to gain an understanding of Black African immigrants in the context of enriching American cultures, with respect, to the highest level of diversity.

Autoethnography does not require data collection or analysis. The narratives of this study were a recollection of events as they occurred in my life. Some information pertained to the painstaking and scantiness of the preparation for integration into the American communities. The stories shed some light on the grieving, preparation processes, prior experiences, placement process, identity overhaul, nature, and caliber of mentoring and relationships with my host communities. The stories were painfully at snail's pace because I wanted stories to match my feelings and emotions about culture shock in America. Some of the stories cut so deep into my personal space and life that it was unworthy of continuing to exist in my new environment which, clearly was not respectful of my culture, a significant part of me. I often laughed off my pain to show strength so

that I am not bullied into depression by the various dominant cultures in America.

However, the images of being devalued tormented me so much that they started to affect my performance as an African Black educator. The expression of unhappiness manifested itself in isolating myself and silencing my voice, thinking that if I am not seen or heard, my cultural agony will seize. However, the desire to seek understanding and answers to my dilemmas forced me to self-reflection on the behaviors of others.

## Chapter 4

### Introduction

The findings of this study are presented as stories intended to give a deeper understanding of my experiences with the respective American cultures. Manes (1990) stated:

The point of the phenomenology research is to borrow other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole human experience (p. 62).

The stories demonstrate the importance of cultural capital and the appreciation of others' way of life to Black African immigrants. The narratives reveal unique gems pertinent to the sociocultural understandings of various cultures. They provide patterns of meanings and understandings that various cultures can tinker with to find coping strategies to facilitate positive human interactions. Patterns of cultural awareness revealed strands needed for cultural equity in the world. The interconnection of meanings among assorted cultures could provide narratives to empower Black African immigrants they navigate through the challenges encountered in America. Stories about cultural integration are significant because they form a blueprint for managing our experiences as Black Africans in the diaspora. Some of the critical understandings are:

- Sociocultural encounters stemming from the lack of cultural capital due to cultural differences between
- Unconscious biases against Black African immigrants
- Coping strategies due to disconnection from the host community

Black African immigrants often seek culturally responsive social networks, life resources, and identity markers to complete our dual existence in urban America. Dual existence, the lack of sociocultural capital, and desire to be accepted, is part of the culture shock for immigrants. Immigrants must have the will to survive to live and working in urban America. Black African immigrants and the host must be willing to draw strength from our multicultural experiences, professional traits, and, most importantly, personal attributes. However, a sturdy and well-orchestrated mentoring structure must be established and be inclusive of the needs of all parties involved.

A meticulous approach of both Black African immigrants and the host could yield a useful mentoring program for us. When people value other's cultures, they are likely to embrace them. Support and recognition from colleagues in the host culture have the potential to create positive experiences for Black African immigrants in America.

### **Prologue**

My journey from grass-thatched houses in the village to working and living in America is a story of struggles. The journey had socio-cultural complexities originating from White supremacy. That is the reason why the study challenged CRT to prioritize the plight of Africa and Africans in the diaspora. Raising issues of the treatment of Black Africans as second-class citizens of the world is a serious matter that requires the attention of all well-meaning world citizens. The stories in the study unpacked significant sociocultural mismatches and hallmarks of my life that were significant. The stories shared in the study punctuate how help Black Africans in the diaspora promote our Black African cultures, especially in America, which has a history of human rights violations against people of African ancestry. For me, culture shock came about because of limited understanding of

the everyday experiences of Americans and their respective cultures, the practices, behaviors, mindsets, and attitudes towards one another and others (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001) and vice versa. The stories demonstrated how the lack of meaningful understanding and cultural capital prevented me from being industrious and culturally responsive to locals and hosts. I needed a diverse mindset towards mentoring and acculturation to learn the value sets of the host community. The stories explained how culture shock caused frustration and confusion and how they significantly affected my social, cultural, and personal life. Based on my experiences, culture shock created not only tension and stress but also severe damage to my relationships with the host (Steele, 2006). The study examined the construction of coping strategies that help with my transition into American life. Even with prior experiences with discrimination during the apartheid South Africa, culture hopping and Eurocentric style of indoctrination, I was still deficient in cultural capital in the American context.

### **Exposure to Various African Cultures**

At the age of six, my parents, both teachers at the time, decided to take me to school with them because they did not have a babysitter. While my mother taught her classes, she made sure that I got exposed to the first-grade curriculum. Because I learned a lot that year, I got promoted to the second grade together with the rest of her students. In the location, as we commonly call Black neighborhoods in South Africa, we did not have kindergarten or preschool. Students started school as soon as they turned seven. It was against national education law to enroll students younger than seven in school. Later in my life, I was told that I loved school and my peers very much. From first to fourth grade, mathematics, science, and writing were taught in SiSwati, our clan language. It

was not until fifth grade that school started to ruin my self-directed cognitive abilities and creativity because there was no transitional plan to learn English from SiSwati. All of a sudden, SiSwati was minimized and penalized. The medium of communication and mannerism of students in my community shifted to the English language and culture.

### **Mfecane (Forced Migration)**

One day at supper, my family often gathered at the dinner table like we usually did. We said grace and partook in a tasty meal. However, we all could tell that something was not right with our parents. After supper, we sat by the fireplace outside under the bright moon, and my father started to tell us stories of our ancestors and what great warriors they were. He told us stories of bravery and constant migrations of our fore-parents because of the White man's desire to journey into the inland of South Africa. My father was a longwinded person. If you were not a careful listener, you would miss the punchline. On that day, he captivated our minds as he rambled to the punchline. The punchline was that we had to leave the village before dawn surreptitiously. We had to leave because of his political views and activism against the Afrikaner establishment. In the early morning hours, despite the rain, we got loaded in the Land Rover and drove to the border of South Africa. We then crossed into Swaziland to live with relatives.

That was the beginning of the many family migrations from one community and country to the next — the family fear of persecution. From the fifth to seventh grade, my siblings and I attended five different primary schools. Therefore, from an early age, I was exposed to living among people with different sociocultural norms from mine. Despite my struggles with English, I learned different African languages, cultures, and survival skills. It was easy for me to learn these languages and cultures because I was still young, and the

languages had some similarities. The earlier migrations taught me to appreciate different rituals, customs, and ways of life of different ethnicities in Central and Southern Africa. Despite the academic disruptions caused by early migrations and indoctrination in the various countries we lived in, academic failure was not an option. My parents told us that if we failed in school, they would recall the air we breathe, will kill us. For some reason, we believed that they had supernatural powers to do that. In our house, we celebrated family and academic performance. The exposure to different ways of teaching and curricular approaches came naturally to me because I was not landlocked in any one particular community. Although the various approaches to teaching and learning would later be my strength after I migrated to America, I still needed to learn the culture of students under my tutelage.

### **Dual Education System**

In this section, I describe the duality of the educational structures that prepared me for life in the post-apartheid era. Although education has progressively changed in South Africa in the last twenty-nine years since the end of apartheid, academic outcomes are still weak and reflect the dual education system of apartheid policies. I observed similarities between urban America and Black South African education systems. Those with financial and sociocultural capital have better access to resources. Poor Americans and Black Africans are still suffering from a lack of resources in the post-slavery and post-apartheid age. Township schools experience a bottlenecked supply of resources with the intended consequence of disenfranchising Black people. Even if students are at school, there is no meaningful education-taking place. Students' parents neither have the legal right to school choice nor the geographical proximity to education and jobs. As a



result, people experience limited intergenerational class mobility. Therefore, the duality in the education system has created a vicious cycle of poverty. Young Black Africans are unable to improve their living standards, although they possess high school certificates or diplomas. The ultimate goal of the system of education targets to weaken and deprive Black people of our identities. Depriving people of their identity encourages self-hate and dependency from dominant cultures. The end goal is to deprive Black Africans of virility and to cross-contaminate White culture with Black and Brown spaces.

### ***ALuta Continua (The Struggle Continues)***

I migrated to America in the middle of the fall semester in 1999. I knew that it was not going to be easy teaching in the Midwest especially that I did not start at the beginning of the school year. The first night in my hotel room, I watched the horrific News of television. The first couple of minutes of the news were all about crime in the city. That did not move me because I had just migrated from Johannesburg, the so-called murder capital. Then for a brief moment, they talked about the local school district hiring teachers from South Africa. One of the correspondents interviewed by Channel 2 advocated for higher salaries for teachers to attract locals into the profession instead of spending taxpayers' money recruiting teachers from damn Africa. That brief moment made me think long and hard about the possibility of resentment from the community. I also thought about my safety, considering that the news anchor went on and on talking about crime in the neighborhood surrounding the school district I was hired to serve. Amid fear and despair, I remembered my father's stories of our ancestors' bravery and courage. I imagined my ancestors preparing to go to war against antagonistic African tribes, the British, and the Afrikaners to protect our culture, identity and sovereignty. I

thought about how young high school students in Soweto, South Africa, protested the decision by Afrikaners to make Afrikaans the official language in all schools in South Africa. I remembered living with strangers turned into a family when young overzealous South African police recruits persecuted our family. I carry these experiences with me everywhere I go. The reminisced events reassured me that I had nothing to fear. The spirits of my ancestors were there to guide me through my choices and life.

### **Culture Capital as a cause of Stress**

The stories in the study captured moments of stress due to cultural gaps between the host and myself. The gaps often made my perceptions and attitudes towards the host culture functionally skewed (Steele, 2006). Similarly, my American counterparts often lacked a clear understanding of critical components of my cultural wealth and customs (Steele, 2006), and therefore, they could not meaningfully acculturate or mentor me. Steele (2006) pointed out that people with limited knowledge of different ethnic value sets tend to have a higher chance of experiencing culture mismatch. The lack of understanding of others' value systems could lead to a traumatic cultural collision or culture shock if the acculturation were not correctly executed (Steele, 2006). Additionally, professional expectations demanded that I co-exist with my host for the good and advancement of the dominant community. I, therefore, felt commodified to fill up the teaching space to satisfy the NCLB law of 2001. Once again, a Black African is positioned as a placeholder to satisfy the demands of the dominant culture under the disguise of advancing African customs and cultures.

### **Widening the Culture Gap Due to Housing Location**

The area and location of my residence, away from school communities, further complicated my situation. The school district arranged to house me in a middle-class neighborhood away from my students' neighborhoods. Life experiences of those in my new residential community were dissimilar to those of my students. The location of the house contributed to the knowledge crack and culture gap that existed between my students and me. I had little or no working knowledge of the day-to-day circumstances of my students in their respective communities. Therefore, I did not have an active social or cultural foundation to formulate positive relationships with the students, the school, or the community.

Consequently, both the students and I were unaware of each other's cultural capital or struggles. When I was around my students, we code switched to understand each other. We had to navigate between our school demands and a variety of cultural disconnects. Over time, cultural conflicts started to emerge and threaten our fragile relationships. The culture mismatch I experienced somewhat affected my interactions, engagements, and partnerships with others in my host community. My inability to cope with culture shock caused my students, the community, and myself stress and harm.

### **Shocked by the underrepresentation of Blacks in Schools**

I was shocked at the magnitude of race issues and the underrepresentation African Americans teachers in low-income Black or Brown spaces. Howard (1999) observed that White women out-represented teachers of color in mostly Black urban schools. Howard (1999) further stated that American urban school systems are dismissive or subdue other cultures to protect the White supremacy status quo. For example, during my initial years

of teaching in America, I was assigned a mentor, a White instructional coach, whose focus was strictly on curriculum and instruction, teaching, and learning. I felt that the coach's methodology of teaching did not align with my needs and the unique lifestyles of most Black people. She also attempted to alienate me from other teachers of color. I started to notice some undercurrent force to alienate me from some candid Black teachers in the building. As a result, I unconsciously started to experience a separate but equal type of treatment similar to that of South Africa's apartheid's policies on the majority of people in Black communities.

### **Re-living Apartheid in America**

Just like in apartheid South Africa, it seemed to me that school curricula materials were designed to prepare students of color for invisible and servitude roles in dominant cultural spaces (Irvine, 1990). I was sandwiched between the minority and dominant culture interferences in most of my Black African life and the U.S. Later I discovered that the mismatches between the host community and myself were due to unfamiliarity with the American way of life and the lack of in-depth knowledge about discrimination, and Blackness in the American context. These are some of the things that caused my stress. According to Hilliard (2003) and King (2005), culture tensions are a part of the institutionalization plan by White America to demonstrate disregard, disrespect, and devalue the contributions of minorities in White spaces. I was shocked that some individuals of color also, like their White peers, committed the same acts of disregard and disrespect towards Black Africans and Africa as a continent. By devaluing the existence of Black Africans in spaces of color, it places Black Africans into the lowest echelon of the American caste system. The stratification of people on a cultural ladder

depends on color, ethnicity, culture, and place of origin. This is a demonstration of the divide and conquered algorithm to advance white supremacy. My mathematical explanation of divide and conquer is that people are recursively broken down into sub-groups of the same or related ethnicities to minimize their value and weaken them enough to create internal conflicts, Black-on-Black tension. Eventually, the sub-groups become weak enough to fail to solve their problems. They eventually look to the dominant race for solutions. In South Africa, this is what led to the Afrikaners creating the apartheid system government that presided over indigenous Black people.

### **Generational stereotyping of Black Africans**

Delpit (1995) explained that some conflicts between immigrants and host communities are due to gaps in alignment between cultural capital and responsiveness. Gutiérrez (2008) concurred with the statement that the lack of understanding, misaligned expectations, and the lack of cultural insight of the host communities are some of the significant catalysts to the negative stigma associated with Black African immigrants around the world. However, some scholars neglected to acknowledge the role of the divide and conquer algorithm in destroying the Black family structures and community composition cherished by people of African ancestry.

Delpit (1995) stated that generational stereotyping of people of color has gone unchecked long enough to affect the mindsets of some Black people. The divide and conquer formula might have constructed a spirit of confusion leading to Black people being stereotyped as disorderly instead of studious members society (Delpit, 1995). As part of cultural clampdown, African Blacks in the diaspora are forced to cuddle dominant culture stereotypes because of the desire to belong. Sometimes, due to Eurocentric mindsets,

African Blacks tend to judge each other based on verbal and non-verbal actions, movements, speech patterns, attitudes towards each other, and how much value we attach to material things (Irvine, 1990). One of my core workers encouraged me to find something else to do with my mathematics because teaching was not for me. I was hurt, but I worked hard to prove to myself that I could do better than what I had demonstrated.

### **Lone grief in America**

I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge.

That myth is more potent than history.

That dreams are more powerful than facts. That hope always triumphs over experience.

That laughter is the only cure for grief.

And I believe that love is stronger than death.

----- Robert Fulghum

A few months after migrating to America, I started to grieve a life left behind. The grass I left behind started to look greener than my new pasture. The gravity of living and working overseas away from the next of kin or a natural support system took a toll on me. In spaces with people willing to lend their support for my loneliness, I experienced the loneliness of being away from my protectors, the village. It did not seem like I was going to get over the grief any time soon. Every day I woke up, I had hoped that I had conquered the pain of the loss and I was ready to move on. I lived in my dreams for a very long time. Since I did not know how to manage my grief, I stressed, had a sleeping disorder, felt isolated, and I was a hermit and on self imposed solitary confinement. The

more I restricted myself, the harder it became to manage the grief, which had turned into anger and dissonance.

The grief accompanied me everywhere I went. People saw it through my body language; negativity was apparent. It became clear to others that I had issues or had a negative attitude. As a young man, I grew up hearing that crying was a sign of weakness. In my village, men that cried got emasculated. Well, every day, I cried for my village and the family support left in South Africa. I cried not only because it hurt to be isolated from my village, but also for strength and power to make it from one day to the next. My tears turned into a language, a voice, and a message of deep and overwhelming emotion of love and the desire for spiritual connection with family and friends in my ancestral land. The grieving was so massive that I experienced shame, rage, depression, denial, anger, deep hurt, a feeling that my life was ruined forever. I tried all that I could to fix it, change it, or even to deny the grieving. My prolonged period of grieving scared some of my mentors away. I was beginning to pollinate negative emotions around.

When it occurred to me that grieving was not leaving any time soon, I started to look for frameworks to help me to interrogate my feeling and different ways to live with grief without being hard on others and myself. The passing on of my father did not help me at all. My father died five days after arriving in America for the first time. I only had two dollars to my name at the time I got the news that my father had passed. Through the school district, I got a six thousand dollar ticket to travel back home to bury my father. A stranger came to my classroom to hand me the ticket and a five hundred dollar that the school district gave me for my travels and troubles. That is the only reason I came back to the U.S. after my father's funeral. I was not going to mess it up for the next person. Upon

coming back to America, the grief I experienced got elevated because I skipped participation in the length of African funeral rituals to celebrate my father's life. My mentors had no idea what that looked like to be able to help me. I went into depression and had no desire or motivation to get out of bed to go to work. With time, I started to change my grief to compassion by keeping my mind and heart open and started to make pain my greatest ally in the search for love, wisdom, and truth. God is good. With the grieving of the loved ones, not taking center stage, I started to interact more with my American colleagues and started to learn more about their way of life. The more I interacted with my host culture, the more I started to feel the grief again. This time it was grieving the identity transformation I was going through. The more I interacted with American cultures, the more I started to lose a part of my identity as an African Black man. I had to make some concessions as I sought an understanding of a culture full of misunderstandings.

### **Cultural Dissonance**

Professionally, immigrants face challenges in urban America because of differences in educational beliefs, perceived attitudes, and professional practices. We often experience what Bascia (1999a) described as cultural dissonance in a new western culture. We grew up in school and cultural environments where elders and authority figures are much respected and feared. In America, the same process could work with consistence and respectful relations with young people, the community, and all stakeholders. Immigrants must familiarize themselves with the root causes of disrespectful behaviors of students towards teachers, adults, and school property (Oriaro, 2007). I am one of the teachers that got shocked at the perceived erratic and disrespectful tone from students, staff, and



parents. Some students, staff, and parents made fun of foreign accents and mimicked whatever me to get some laughs from their peers and probably to get under my skin. As a result, I started to avoid public spaces because of self-awareness and self-devaluing.

Staff lounges are the right spaces for networking and solidifying relationships with peers.

However, when discussions start to dwell more on negativity, it helps to have no part of it. Discussions in the teacher's lounge were culturally different from what I was used to.

In my old school, we had productive data and academics conversations aimed at improving the lives of students. Therefore, our conversations were in the best interest of the student, the school, and the families. The teachers' lounge was mostly a personal data-driven professional development based on needs of students.

To build relationships with students in America, I had to be creative and use available resources. I sometimes had lunch conversations with students to discuss real life issues. I did not get offended when they tried to mimic my accent. They solved algebra problems on the board, trying to imitate how I talk. Sometimes I let them use my accent to give each other valuable advice. They usually wanted to answer questions or participate so that they could perfect their African accent.

Although the professional development received in America is of high quality, I learned most of the teaching strategies from my students. I learned that developing relationships and paying attention to student behaviors and conversations gives the teacher some nuggets of student needs. Observing student actions gave me an access point to conferencing with them, counselors, social workers, administration, and their parents about various situations. I always tried hard to create a safe classroom space where students and staff can make and own their mistakes. Students must see that a teacher is

also human and that s/he makes mistakes. Once they started to become comfortable in the classroom space, culture shock turned into teaching and learning opportunities. The curriculum and instruction begin to fall in line after that.

Unlike in South Africa, where a significant number of students read at an appropriate grade level because of screening, in America, an inclusive model of education might have a mixture of students that might be below, at or above grade level in the same classroom. It requires extensive planning to complete the instruction, assessments, and grading cycle in America's urban system where grade-level abilities vary within one class. It is essential to plan, assess, and grade students based on how much progress they are making. Goal setting and differentiation of instruction, assessment, and grading are important in the education of students.

### **Identity Transformation**

If you're twenty-two,  
 Physically fit, hungry to learn and be better,  
 I urge you to travel – as far and widely as possible  
 Sleep on the floors if you have to.  
 Find out how other people live and eat and cook  
 Learn from them – wherever you go.  
 ---- Anthony Bourdain

Although identity transformation turned out to be my worst heartache, it was a blessing in disguise. Through baptism by fire, I realized that my lack of cultural capital caused me the isolation and invisibility I was experiencing in the Midwest. When around Americans, I silenced my voice to avoid attracting too much attention to myself because of my

accent, the vibe, swag, and the lack of rhythm in almost everything I tried to do.

However, I started to come out of my shell as soon as my identity started to drift. The more I acquired American cultural norms, the more I gained my freedom from the shell. Language and accent were the starting point for my showing signs of getting out of my African character.

### **Language vs. Accent**

I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of culture shock I experienced in the American communities, schools, and classrooms, especially problems with discipline and academic problems. After signing the paperwork committing me to work in the Midwest, my mentor, I, and two other South African immigrants went to get something to eat at subway sandwiches – I had never heard of a subway sandwich before. I was unable to make an order because of the communication barrier. Although I missed the cue, later in my teaching career in the Midwest, I realized that part of my culture shock was because of my accent, which was sometimes mistaken for the inability to speak or express myself in the English language.

My first encounter with language and accent encounter was during the first-ever parent conference with a parent of two of my students. The parent was visibly shaken when she found out that both her boys earned failing grades from me in algebra. She called me out of my name and told everybody within the hearing range that I was a lousy teacher. I heard her shouting: "Where did you find this retarded S\*& of a B%\$#@ who don't even speak English and later alone able to teach my boys." She went on to complain to the principal about my teaching. Later in my life, I realized that the mother was confusing my ability to teach to my grading process. The parent also confused my accent for the

lack of fluency in the language of English. And so did most students. The parent's ranting killed my spirit and snatched my soul. My peers, some of my students and their parents, consoled me. They assured me that everything was going to be okay and that they loved my accent.

The principal, Ms. Simms, tried to conference with me and told me not to worry about it and continue being the excellent teacher that I was. At the end of my first year, the parent transferred her boys to a nearby school. In the second semester of my second year, the principal called me to the office. I was afraid because I thought I was in trouble. I took my time going to the office. One of my students in the hallway said to me: "you are in deep s\*&%," and the other one said, "I recognize that going to jail slow walk...take your time my N\*&%\$". I finally arrived at the office, and the principal smiled at me and said: "come in, sir." Only to find the same parent who proclaimed that I could not teach sitting in her office. She was in the principal's office with her two boys, smiling. Are they smiling because they sued me and are trying to get me fired? I thought to myself. The parent had decided to reenroll her boys and asked if the school could assign them to my Geometry classes. The parent apologized to the principal and me for her behavior the previous year. She told me that she moved her students to a nearby school where they got straight A's but did not learn anything. At that point, I started to restore my soul, especially that I had a lousy morning earlier.

The lesson I learned from the parent was that as a Black African migrant teacher, I did not have power over students and parents. Unlike in South Africa, where respect is blended in the profession, in America, I had to build relationships with my students to be able to teach them. I found out that sometimes, students demanded their respect from

teachers first before they could respect the teacher's authority. In America, I figured out that education policies tend to protect students, even in the case of misbehavior in the classroom. That was a significant culture shift from my homeland, where I was in control as a teacher. My inability to discipline my students the way I knew how to, hinder my ability to maximize instructional time. In my previous role in South Africa, my job was to plan how to deliver instruction to students. I was responsible for planning engaging and hands-on activities, plan cooperative learning activities, team building activities, assessments of and for learning, grading, and communicating the grades with all parties involved in the education of the student. The principal and assistant principals handled discipline unless I had to. In South Africa, continuous disruption in class was severe enough for a student to get suspended out of school for at least three days, pending a parental appearance at the school. The main office and administration dealt with tardy students and absences. I could teach because that is all that was left for me to do. Little did I know that in America, teachers assume many different roles. I needed meaningful mentoring and probably certification to effectively perform some of the duties I was required to perform.

### **Classroom Inexperience**

My lived experiences with culture shock in Midwest classrooms and school during the first three years were shocking, appalling, and nightmarish. I experienced the horror of working in a school with "shockingly low academics levels and discipline. Students in my classroom did not pay attention to me. They were very unproductive because they just wanted to talk, walk around, and argue. They regularly indulged in childish behaviors ranging from making and throwing paper rockets at me or snapping at me. Almost every

day they told me: “I can’t be bothered today; get the F\*&\$ away from me; oh, he is African, he is supposed to stink - please buy some cologne sometimes; he is African, he is supposed to be hella black, stupid; I don’t understand, please speak English, no wonder I am not passing this class; here comes Akon; hey Shaka Zulu, what’s up; flipping desks on me just like on the 'movie lean on me.

I started breaking the ice when I started to listen to what they talked about and positively responding to their behaviors or misbehaviors calmly. When I had a desk flipped on me, I said, oh, you just watched lean on me, huh. I did too. It was on BET channel 68. That is when I started connecting with my students and letting them know that I was passing the litmus test, they used to determine whether I was there to stay or not. Some teachers and parents talked to the principal like she was a child. That was shocking to me.

My transition was complicated by the biases and misunderstandings I had of students' relationships with my classroom, school, community, and America in general. I was frustrated and infuriated by my students’ nonparticipation in the lessons that I labored hard to prepare. I realized that my thought process was wrong. I was an expert in mathematics content, pedagogy, and methodology but deficient in knowledge of the students.

In South Africa, staff and students were all required to dress up for work. We all had to have a tie and a jacket at all times on school premises. Students got punished if they did not dress up while teachers would be sent home if they did not. At my new school, only administrators sometimes dressed professionally by my native definition. Some students had their pants so low that they could hardly walk later alone running. I was shocked that even after repeated reminders from the principal, students continued to ‘saggy.’ However,

because I continued with the tradition of dressing up for work, one day, a group of four students was working and talking at the same time. I did not mind them talking as long as they were productive. One of the girls was telling other students, 'a man dressed like this MF came to our house too messy with my family. Now the family is separated. He f\*\*\*\*\* up our family.' The next day I dressed down, and one of the students said that I looked like a regular N\*\*\*\*\* in regular clothes. I started wondering about the implications of my dressing up every day. The students saw me as one of them when I had on a pair of jeans. I paid more attention to what was said and closely observed the body language of my students. I tried very hard to find ways to bond with my students.

One cold morning, one of my students had her head down; she was not asleep, however. She did not have a coat on. In the middle of the lesson, I took my suit jacket off and put it on her. She surprisingly sat upright, answered questions, did all her work, and never had a problem with her the next two years I had her in my classroom. That day she took my suit jacket with her to all her classes and brought it back at the end of the day at two o'clock. After that, a few more students came to me to ask for my suit jacket or something warm whenever they did not have their coats at school. The learned that I needed to pay attention to my students' basic needs. I realized that Maslow's hierarchy of needs was still applicable today as it was in 1943 when Maslow wrote about addressing the basic needs of people as a motivational factor.

### **Belt in Anger**

I started to observe that some students, just like me, came to school with negative perceptions of the school, students, and the community. They carried the baggage of their present and past struggles of their lives. One of my students, named Angela, had to care

for her sick parents and a disabled brother every day after school. In my community in South Africa, that is the job of the village. Angela came to school every day, probably to escape from the life of an adult. One day I had some cookies to reward students that participated well in class. Since it was the first time giving out cookies to reward students in that manner, I had almost one hundred percent student engagement that day.

Towards the end of we do part of the lesson, two students shouted out the correct answer to the question I asked. I only had one cookie left. Before I could decide whom to incentivize, Shawn said, 'Give it to Angie. She needs it more than I do.' Angela went ballistic and slapped Shawn hard. She did it in a slick way too. She got up from the back of the room. With a piece of paper in her hand, she walked towards the trashcan in the front. There is no way I could have predicted what she was thinking. The class went silent, and all eyes were on Shawn. I missed that cue, as well. She suddenly popped Shawn so hard that he lay on the floor motionless.

Since students wanted to see a good fight, they moved in to block me from reaching the phone in our classroom and blocked me from leaving the classroom to get some help. The lesson I learned from this situation is that in America, some people struggle to provide for their children. Angela did not have enough to eat at home, and she confided her situation with Shawn and later with me. Corey told me that it was an issue of betray of trust. He said that in the streets, you get killed for that S\*\*\*. Angela was stressed because of her role as a caregiver.

This was a new phenomenon to me because in South Africa, if students fight at school, it was an automatic out of public school suspension without the possibility of coming back. Also, the village took care of the sick, elderly, and the young so that students could go to



school and enjoy their youth. I also started thinking about the seriousness of mental health. I needed to find strategies to deal with outbursts like the one from Angela. Without much considering about my students' predicament, I wondered what was wrong with them. The thoughts about my students were often grounded in prejudice and judgment. Without a deeper understanding of their life histories, I thought my students care less about their education. I thought they had no regard for authority, and that they were entitled. They acted like the world owed them something. I am not sure what the world owed them. But I knew that I owed them respect and humanity.

### **Learning Tricks of the Trade**

Compared to what their peers in South Africa are up against, I thought that my students in America were in the second heaven. They have transportation to-and-from school, free lunch, free textbooks, and free school supplies. I was unaware of my students' struggles until I started ear hustling and paying attention to details of the coded messages from my students. For example, when students came to class with eyes fixed on one particular student, it was a sign of trouble in the room. Many times, it was a secret code that a fight was about to happen, or it was a bullying situation. I also learned from students that I needed to be tactful in handling situations. I learned to prioritize issues and to involve counselors, administration, and parents. I was determined to make my classroom a safe place of learning.

### **Manna from Heaven**

Manna from Heaven is about an unexpected benefit or assistance that comes at the time when it is needed most. My Manna from Heaven came when I started to interact with three of my students who had shown interest in my life as a Black African man before

and after apartheid in South Africa. They wondered why forty million of our people allowed the ten million Whites to treat us less human. They often skipped lunch to come to talk to me. They started teaching me ways of life in America and how to reach the young, Black, and talented Americans. They taught me ways to talk and communicate with Black youths so that I can get a message across. They taught me many curse words that I did not need. We worked together during lunch to prepare lessons, and I allowed them to present some parts of the lessons to other students during class. The condition for doing that was that they mimic the way I talk, my body language, and other mannerism. We got some laughs here and there during class, but we also got much work done. The permission to 'Do Me' as they called it, helped me to achieve some of the goals I needed to attain.

1. My students laughed with me and not at me
2. My students felt comfortable presenting lessons to others, moving me out of the spotlight. Therefore, students did not have time to abusive or be disrespectful towards me as they did before
3. Students were productive and more willing to receive help from me than they did before
4. Simultaneously, I learned how to say things correctly in an American accent, pronounced words the American way, and was able to reteach lessons when incorrect information was given. I took the role of observer and director of student teaching and learning

Because of my students, precisely six years after my first-day teaching in the Midwest, I was promoted to Academic Instructional Coach (AIC). This position allowed me to work

with teachers, coaching, and supporting them academically. I later became the Assistant Principal of the school. From this experience, I was able to identify disconnections and gaps that hindered students from learning. Planning with my students helped me to design quality lesson plans, assessments, and think about different re-teaching strategies. I heard students' thinking and intervened whenever I needed to.

As a teacher and AIC, I learned from my mistakes and was able to reflect on the harm they caused my students. The most important lesson I learned is that teachers must be able to talk to students instead of talking at them. Teachers must try to learn about the students' world and develop trusting relationships with them. Once I developed relationships with students, the families and my peers started to warm up to me. Some of my peers who doubted my teaching methods started to ask me about effective teaching methods. The more students asked for permission to leave their classrooms to come to mine; the more my peers wanted to know what I was doing in my room. I treated my students with respect.

### **Safety Concerns**

I know that it is hard to believe that the people you look to for safety and security are the same people who are causing us so much harm. However, I am not lying, and I'm not delusional. I am scared, and I am hurting, and we are dying. And I need you to believe Me."

---- Ijeoma Oluo

The elders in my community always talked negatively about the police and their relationships with Black Africans. They told us stories about the police abusing their power. They also told us that police presence indicated that something was not right.

Police activities happened a lot in my community, but my family knew how to evade them through constant migration.

However, when I became of age, at fifteen, our house in South Africa was raided, thoroughly searched, and ransacked by young overzealous police officers. The police pulled all ten of us out of the bedrooms and paraded us in the tiny living room while they searched the house. It was humiliating to see my parents without clothes on and bowing down to young police officers. Some of them looked my age. The incident traumatized all of us. However, as is the case in most African traditions, this incident was not to be spoken of. We treated it like it never happened and moved on with our lives.

Seventeen years later, I entered my new school in the Midwest. I was made to go through metal detectors. The only place I had seen a metal detector in South Africa was at the airport or prison. In both places, metal detectors were used to deter people from incivility. As I emerged in the main hallway, I saw two police officers. I was introduced to them as a new mathematics teacher in the building. We exchanged some pleasantries. At the same time, I was having severe flashbacks and replayed the role of police officers in my community. I kept asking myself, how bad it was in this building that they needed school safety officers and two metropolitan police officers. Then I heard that the previous year, a student was shot by his girlfriend on the second floor of the three-story building. How did she bring the gun in the building with all these officers of the law? I asked myself. Since I was afraid of the police, my safety within the school environment was now a major concern of mine.

The presence of two police officers caused me a lot of fear and despair because of my background. I was even more afraid when I heard stories about the relationship between

the police and Blacks in America. To me, the presence of police officers meant that the school was unsafe. On three occasions during my first year, we had police dogs search student lockers and found some illegal substances. A few students got arrested but came right back to school after a few days. I guessed that things worked differently here in America because where I come from when you get pickup by the police; you are missed for a long time. You came back to the community with severe bruises and battery marks. Two years later, when police dogs were brought in the building to search lockers, it happened towards the end of the period. One of my students threw something in the trashcan in my room and run out. He came to pick it up later and thanked me. I remained silent because I did not want to get in the middle of the loss of contraband and then get drawn into a drug dispute and loss of drug income. I was also frightened that if the police found the drugs, they might think it was mine. The police did not come anywhere near my room.

My conversations with my students about the police indicated that they did not worry about going to jail. Travion told me that any Black man could go to jail for anything and no particular reason at all. While I agreed with Travion, I wondered if Black people have become desensitized to the dangers and injustice around them. Travion told me a story of a young man who stood his ground and did not run when a gun got pulled on him. He said that the young man was afraid, but was not going to take a chance and get shot in the back.

Another frightening incident was when a student vandalized my calculator and threw it at me. He was upset because I called his parents to report his behavior in class and his lack of effort. That same day, the lights went out in the building, and as I was standing in the

hallway to see what was going on, Lamont walked up to me with his hand, balled up like he was going to hit me. He seemed unbalanced. As he got closer to me, I told him that he was on camera. He looked at the camera and walked away. It turned out that the camera did not work.

My wondering is how students function at school or in life, knowing that the odds are against them? The response to the questions to myself has always been to do something different; respect them, love them, and empower them with knowledge and help them make better life choices. Otherwise, I thought that my silence and inaction about the issues of safety, metal detectors, and police activities were tantamount to siding with the oppressor in the destruction of young Black lives. This, to me, seemed worse than apartheid in that during apartheid South Africa, you knew that the Whites had a constitutional right to destroy Black lives. Over the years, I have meticulously mentored many young people as part of my contribution to Black lives.

Misguided Mentoring

A Mentor is

Someone who

Allows you to see

The hope inside yourself”

---- Oprah Winfrey

Mentoring students is one of the many reasons I can comfortably say that teaching is my passion. I enjoy mentoring because I get the highest satisfaction in networking and developing life long and trusting relationships with people. I also love seeing students’ goals and interests become a reality. I am always happy to be supportive of young people.

The love for mentoring is because I am proudly standing on the shoulders of many that believed in me. I am just paying forward the favor from the great teachers and mentors I have had in my life. There is also a side of me that went without proper mentoring and that, I do not want my students to experience.

Twenty years ago, the story of my life took a different dimension. I was in a space that was rich in ideas, strategies, tools, and resources, but I did not know how to access or productively use them. The gap between what I knew and what was expected of me stopped me from taking advantage of the available resources. Mentoring was of high quality but culturally misplaced, given my immediate needs at the time. Despite my ten years' experience teaching mathematics in South Africa, I was required to attend two years of professional development (PD) on the methodologies of teaching mathematics. What I needed was the methodologies or art of teaching students from low-income communities. The quality of PD was very good for beginners and first-year teachers that are familiar with the culture and customs of urban America. I was already an accomplished and established teacher of mathematics for ten years before I was asked to attend these meetings –an experience that was not considered to determine seniority, what I needed more than anything was professional development on how to make sense of my new environment and culture. The nature of mentoring I received was good but not relevant enough for me to create myself in my new environment. The mentoring was designed to create a new image of me in the host culture.

A needs assessment of my challenges and culture shift would have indicated that environmental management would have made a difference in my transition into the Midwest communities. My management style was so weak that it was hard for me to

point at one thing as the root cause of the culture shock that I was experiencing at the time. Poor classroom management meant that I had to deal with such behaviors as graffiti on classroom desks, in their books, excessive profanity, students hopping on the desks, throwing books out of my classroom, and leaving my classroom without my permission. In my ancestral land, students have respect for the community, institutions, and elders. Therefore, they do not swear or slam doors in adults' faces. This was one of the culture shift that I was most surprised about. I did not have any control over my students. The options of what I could have done to get the attention and respect from students and others were limited.

### **Discipline Management**

I held back a lot and suppressed my core professional and human beliefs about sparing the rod and spoiling the child. American education transformed my style of teaching and my attitude towards disciplining students and relationship building. Because the supremacy of the child reigned in America, I was concerned about schools discipline, especially when they had blundered. With the help of my three sympathetic students, I started to plan total participation techniques to help with student engagement and building relations. This marked the beginning of my professional development and growth, and the pursued a negotiated identity of becoming a confident and efficient teacher. From three students, I learned how not to be confrontational and to watch the tone in my voice. Therefore, I started to focus my energy on feeling feelings without becoming the emotion itself. Although I did not have a solution to many problems, I worked hard to find solutions that worked for my students. I learned to be of service with humility for my students and to show them that I was genuinely committed to providing



them with quality education and good citizenship. That is how I found peace within myself in the Midwest.

### **Identification (On becoming American)**

The only true voyage, the only bath in the Fountain of Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see a hundred universes that each of them sees, that each of them is; and this we do, with great artists; with artists like these we do really fly from star to star."

---- Marcel Proust

When I reminisce about my past, I realize that it was naïve of me to think that my identity was not going to be affected. As I explored foreign lands, I got exposed to different people, cultures, and languages, social and political norms, and diverse thinking on issues of race, colorism, mentoring, relationships, interactions, grieving, and generally, the definition of life. For me to reach a level of acceptance of others and vice versa, I had to make adjustments to my perception and belief systems. Some of the adjustments I made to my life demanded a change in the person that I used to be. I had to accept my new identity as I engaged and wrestled with my new frontier of working and living in the Midwest. The host country is set in its ways of life, and so was I. I was not prepared to make adjustments on my account.

Due to the lack of relevant mentoring and the acculturation to understand my new surroundings, I made a lot of assumptions about my host communities. My attitude almost cost me the opportunity to create meaningful relationships with students, peers, and the community. I did not have much time, ample opportunity, or cultural capital to

know how to act in my new environment. Therefore, I defaulted on my Black African way of seeing and doing things. I, therefore, clothed everything in my new environment with a South African mindset as if I was still living there. The real-world examples I used in my algebra classes were out of my students' scope because I draw them from the Black African context. Therefore, I needed to set the stage for my students to understand and appreciate the context. The situation resulted in students getting disinterested in my lessons and becoming disruptive. One day one of my students, Marcus, said to me: You know you always assume that we are all African because you give us examples from Africa. Well, I am Indian, and I cannot relate to your dumb stories. Give us examples like how much profit a street pharmacist makes selling that good sh&%? “

Marcus got some laughs, but despite his choice of words, I chose to consider the context of Marcus' rhetoric and worked hard to cater to student's needs and not my personal preferences. I learned to listen carefully to the message conveyed and not to worry about how that message was transmitted. I addressed the choice of words after I decoded the information. I used his word choice as a teachable moment to help Marcus to convey the same message more respectfully.

Because the only Indians I ever interacted with are the Asian Indians, I asked Marcus if he practiced Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, or an indigenous cult. What does that matter? He asked. If that is your way of asking me what tribe I belong to, I am Mohawk of the Apache tribe. Oh! You mean that Indian, I said out loud. This interaction let me know that I needed to work on cultural sensitivity and how to close the many gaps between my host community and me.

## **On Being American**

Having experienced several other culture mismatches in America, I looked at the universe through the eyes of others, even if mine was invisible to others. Theodore Roosevelt stated that being an Immigrant and being an American was based on assimilating. He said:

In the first place, we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. However, this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet an American and nothing but an American. There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag. We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, and we have room for, but one sole loyalty, and that is a loyalty to the American people.

-- Theodore Roosevelt 1907

While I still did not understand why I had to take Geometry for certification, I now understand the reason why I was made to take the American History course. I had to take American History to become an American in every facet of life. Being South African seemed like an existence to amuse Americans. I should admit that I enjoy the freedoms as outlined in the American constitution at the expense of my own identity as a South Africa under apartheid. As a result, I had to experience some misunderstanding about America to get an understanding that I could be American without losing my African identity.

Therefore, to blend in, I had to assume a Hybrid existence. It is not an existence to be proud of, but, over time, it is an acquired cultural test.

### **Passing on the Wisdom**

In my culture, beliefs and value systems are passed through generations to keep them alive. The part of my culture that defined me and bonded my people together into the Ubuntu community was not applicable in America (Bhugra, 2004). Trying to pass the wisdom of my culture to my students was almost impossible. My students did not seem to show interest in the Black African heritage. Maybe it is the way I presented it. When I tried to pass the information to them, most of my students were disengaged. They were more concerned about making fun of me by asking questions that portrayed Africa and Black Africans as primitive and still living in the middle age period. They rejected my culture and, rightfully so, they could not make a distinction between me as a human being and me as defined by my culture. I tried to make them understand that the rejection of one's culture should not be the rejection of anyone as a person. I tried to explain the separation between my culture, my identity, and my humanity. By this, I meant for people to understand that one can hate my culture without hating me as a human being. After all, we were all made in the image of God. I explained to people how racial, cultural, and ethnic identity are a part of my identity, just like the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are a part of God. The Trinity is composed of three separate Gods under one. But we separate them to make a distinction with each separately performing roles under one God. Therefore, you may not respect my culture but at least respect me as a human being.

I explained to students that their identity and culture were also going to shift if they migrate from their family culture to college culture and then to global culture. If they are not able to adjust to social and political changes and respect humanity, they will remain in the same community with limited opportunities. I explained to them that ethnicity is a community composed of family members with shared cultural characteristics, which may or may not include historical beliefs, set of values, food, entertainment preferences, religion, and language (Bhugra, 2004). I had to use my struggles as teachable moments for people to understand that we may all seem different, but we all bleed red blood.

I came to terms with the idea that my cultural identity was going to be defined by my language, accent, dietary habits, and leisure time in the American context. I went through the rites of passage for my cultural identity to foster a sense of belonging and acceptance in America. The rites of passage allowed me to be more understanding. When my American colleagues wanted to order pizza after seeing a menu at an indigenous African restaurant, I was not offended. I immediately knew that they were not yet culturally ready to accept various African cuisines. I understood that they might have accepted my African culture but not my cuisines. I am glad that they had that clear understanding. In our conversation with my friends, it was clear that their attitude towards African food was not culturally responsive enough for them to be adventurous. They needed acculturation in food testing, just like I needed one in my ways of life in America.

### **Conclusion**

The culture shock I experienced made me understand the complexity of migrating to America. My culture shock severity was in the form of improper social support, perceptions, language and accent, discrimination, and lack of access to meaningful

mentoring, and the inability to smoothly adjust to my new living environment. The grieving and bereavement I experienced was a combination of things that I could not explain or did not understand. It was a mixture of the immigration processes, cultural identity, and cultural congruity, along with things that can best be explained by the person actively living the experiences. I wish my mentors had interventions complementary to the socio-cultural factors aligned to my grieving. I wish the ways of transforming my cultural identity could have helped me with the ability to understand and work through the grieving process.

It must also be noted that sometimes Labor Laws requiring equal pay for immigrants are evaded by Neoliberals. I grieved over ten years of experience in South Africa that I lost when I migrated to America. I did not just lose pay, but I lost some years of service or experience needed to calculate my retirement. Although I got paid at the same rate as my American counterparts, discrimination manifested itself in the non-recognition of my prior experiences. Losing prior years of experience meant that I got paid as a beginner, hence evading the department of labor penalties for underpaying me. This could be a hiring manipulation tactic by recognizing immigrants' foreign academic qualifications but not their years of experience.

After all, immigrants' experience on the job is one of the things that employers look for, alongside the qualifications. The fact that my ten years of prior teaching were silenced and got paid as a novice in my new environment confirms Bakhatin's (1998) authoritative discourse. Bakhatin's (1998) authoritative discourse plays a significant role in immigrants' social setting because it habitually places the Black African immigrant in subordinate rank in America irrespective of our credentials (Hodges, 2005). I advise

Prospective immigrants to seek information so that they do not get boxed in a subordinate situation that they cannot change once they get locked in. After all, culture shock has the potential to ignite mental illness.

## Chapter 5

This study uses autoethnography as a methodology to self-reflect and writes about my lived experiences. My stories connect to the broader cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings of my life in unfamiliar environments and communities of the U.S. The meanings and understandings present culture shock encounters I experienced in the Midwest. Some of the culture mismatches were significantly traumatic to me (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Dumas, 2015; Leigh & Davis, 2015). I decided to pursue a degree in Education Administration with an emphasis on social justice start a conversation about the effects of culture mismatches and cultural neglect experienced by Black Africans living in White controlled spaces of the Midwest. Those that experience the encounters can best understand the Black African experiences in the diaspora. Ironically, non-black Africans are often authors of Black African experiences in the diaspora and in Africa. Therefore, our experiences are misrepresented by scholars write about our experiences with limited knowledge of our struggles in America. The picture they paint of us is mostly skewed and minimizes our challenges with culture shock (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Dumas, 2015). The story of my lived experiences adds value to scholarly work that is crafted to create a global awareness of the dehumanization of Black Africans by communities that enjoy the cultural privilege. The study is a call for the community of nations to protect Black African cultures from extinction. The stories of our trauma and the silencing of our traditions and customs are significant to the goal of cultural equity that we labor to attain (Ellis, 2004). Through information sharing, I seek to network with advocates and supporters of global human dignity and sociocultural



equity (Ellis, 2004). I am optimistic that my story will add value and give a voice to invisible African Black people around the world.

My thoughts, feelings, traumas, and cultural identity were used to inform the themes and core of the story of my experiences in America (Ellis, 2004). Although the study represents my feelings, emotions, identity, and thoughts, I had a hard time articulating my innermost feelings and emotions. These are some feelings and emotions that can only be understood by experiencing my life during culture shock. There is a much more in-depth picture of my trauma than can be experienced in one study. As I gathered the pieces of my trauma to inform the themes of my story, I relived the most painful and emotional moments all over again. I suffered the wounds of the past. The wounds became more traumatic than when they first transpired. The dissertation process rekindled the fire to fight for the recognition of Black African cultures and languages on the world stage. The ultimate goal is for our cultures and our people to use their voice to speak up and be visible and contributors to world cultures. Through autoethnography, I decided to be vulnerable and use my voice to express my feelings, emotions, and the pain of culture shock and inequities against Black Africans. Autoethnography allowed me to piecewise the analysis of my journey into different periods in my life; my voyage through different cultural spaces of the world (Ellis, 2004; Leigh & Davis, 2015). Therefore, a lot of cultural mismatches contributed to the transformation of the original to a hybrid identity in America.

### **Nature of black spaces created**

The essence of a Black African is a complex nature of existence in many ways. My current interpretation of the perception of Black Africans is that we a little part of a more

prominent and privileged world. We are so insignificant that we are often required to internalize other cultures with fidelity. The trauma of culture shock, silencing, and invisibility is insignificant to those that enjoy the dominant culture privileges. Bakhtin's (1998) persuasive and authoritative framework justifies why we often assimilate into the various Eurocentric lifestyles, languages, and cultures. We are often bullied into seeking partial international recognition by either acquiring a hybrid status or complete assimilation instead of complete acculturation (Bakhtin 1998). In the diaspora, we often secretly celebrate our cultures because western cultures underappreciate us. Our feelings and passions in the diaspora are often uncertain and contradictory. We are consumers of western and privileged cultures of the world

The study implies that Black Africans need a meticulous roadmap to acculturation into the American fabric of life. Experiencing culture shock has pros and cons in America. Experiencing culture shock is stressful and can severely transfigure immigrants' identities. However, with proper acculturation, immigrants transition to become global citizens, well placed to fight for recognition and visibility of Black Africans and Africa as a continent.

### **Findings of the Study**

One of the findings is that Black African experiences and cultures is insignificant in America. Although our encounters help us to gain remarkable knowledge of global cultures, our cultures downgraded compared to dominant cultures around the world (Dudley-Marling and Paugh, 2010). Black African immigrants in the diaspora work hard to figure out how to navigate and acculturate into western cultures that care less about ours on a global scale (Freedman & Combs, 1996). The disturbing finding is that we

would instead navigate through their problems of our cultures and us than striving for recognition and inclusion into the world body of cultures. The findings are that Black Africans in the diaspora are too fragmented to challenge the world's cultural status quo and hierarchy that places us at the bottom of the echelon. Because of the cultural status quo, Black Africans are perpetually isolated, invisible, and voiceless. The study saw a need to write about our challenges and narrate them as stories of success and self-determination as a people with rich cultures. We must develop coping strategies, tenacity, and ingenuity that would give us a sense of fulfillment, accomplishment, and acceptance without compromise.

Findings are that for Black Africans to reach a level of acceptance without compromise, we need proper acculturation, and acculturation is inevitable. They are both significant phases of our efforts to assemble the cultural pieces of human safe space puzzle we are in search of in the host country (Berry & Sam, 2006). The dilemma associated with acculturation is two-dimensional: the degree of willingness to conform to the host culture, and the need to uphold the ancestral heritage (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2010).

### **Identity Adjustment/Language and Accent**

The study finds are that Black African immigrants make compromises in the domains of accent and language, identity, and other cultural value systems of the host (Berry et al., 2010). The barrier to a full understanding of the host culture and the phobia of losing the original culture is a stressor for a lot of Black Africans in America and elsewhere (Berry & Sam, 2006). Meaningful acculturation is necessary for immigrants that are willing to undergo identity adjustment in an unfamiliar culture (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder,

2010). The stress of cross-cultural conflicts is called acculturative stress (Berry, 2006). During the adjustment period, immigrants experience ethnic and cultural biases (Arbona et al., 2010). The biases motivated by color, accent, and place of origin make acculturation and culture mismatch and are significant factor of the study of Black African who live in America. The African dialect is often mistaken for the lack of fluency. A black African might have challenges achieving proficiency in the accents of the host country, but might maintain superiority in several other languages and also in the content taught (Trickett & Birman, 2005). The ability to speak another language is one of the reliable attributes of Black African teachers in America. Black African teachers experience prejudices and discrimination from both the dominant and minority societies in America because of the dialect, place of origin, and belief systems. Our accents are often considered primitive by some but are sometimes appreciated for amusement (Trickett & Birman, 2005).

### **Perception**

The study found that the perception of Black Africans by the host is rooted in discrimination and prejudices. The study sought to provide vital information to change the way Black African immigrants are perceived, viewed and acculturated. The changes are usually to benefit the host communities and everybody with interest in the hiring and exploitation of Black African labor. The study found out that school districts that do not have blueprints for recruiting Black African teachers could benefit from the study. The study exposes the Neoliberal shenanigans in the hiring processes. The study findings are that there are discrepancies in the hiring and acculturation of Black Africans. The finding is that their years of service in their respective countries are not recognized in America.

Ironically, during the hiring process, years of experience teaching was one of the major requirements. Black Africans also experience minimal acculturation, orientation, and meaningless mentoring while expecting them to perform as well as their American counterparts. They are held to the same standards with their American peers irrespective of their deficiency in cultural capital.

Globalization has done a great job connecting people from around the world. The next phase in life must seriously consider finding ways to bring cultures together in an equitable manner. I agree with (Redfield & Herskovits, (1936) that when cultures interact, people negotiate their identities and therefore, balance their culture of origin with that of the receiving country. The study established that pressures of acculturation in an ecosystem of American cultures cause conflict and disruption to immigrant families. The pressure incubates from an individual negotiating conflicting identities and cultures while stressing about acculturating into a community that is potentially hostile society to Black Africans (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Immigrants have a choice to give up their ancestral cultures and accept American cultures or go through the emotions of acculturation with an end goal of settling for a hybrid culture. A hybrid culture is a compromise of the host and ancestral cultures. The findings are that when immigrants assume a hybrid culture, they assume the status of the global citizenry and multiculturalism.

### **Hybrid Model**

Berry (2005) advocated a hybrid model where people retain some of their culture of origin as they acculturate in the host culture. The findings of the study are that immigrants need support from the host to simultaneously maintain their identities, norms,

and their cultural values (LaFromboise & Gerton, 1993). The finding is that when people acquire Hybrid status, they can code-switch their identities public spaces to avoid experiencing cultural tension (Kelly, 1971). Berry's (2005) hybrid model demonstrates richness in culture compared to the assimilation models, which disrespectfully dismiss past experiences in preference for the dominant cultures.

The study findings are that immigrants can gain acceptance in America through the following models

1. Integrative - norms, beliefs, or customs from their culture of origin are maintained as they acculturate in the host culture (Berry, 2005)
2. Assimilation - wholly integrated into the host culture without regard to their culture of origin (Berry, 2005)
3. Separation - complete rejection of the host culture and maintaining the culture of origin; attitude, norms, and beliefs (Berry, 2005)
4. Marginalization – rejection of both culture of origin and the host culture (Berry, 2005)

Findings from the study indicated that regardless of the model, Black African immigrants experience culture shock in America. Black African identities are often transformed because of our lack of cultural capital and the selective supremacy of American cultures towards us (Hodge, 2005; Bakhtin, 1998). Black Africans do not have the muscle to safeguard our value systems, neither here nor there. Influence to safeguard our various cultures would give us a road map to navigating our identities Ellis et al., 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Future studies must examine the impact of each of the four

reactions and how they affect the well-being of immigrants who choose either one of the four models.

One key findings of this study is that some ethnicities in America are denied access to state and federal services. It was naïve and selfish of me to think that my culture could automatically earn recognition in America (Stoddard, 1999). I found out that for people to embrace their cultures, they first had to develop trusting relationships with the host. I needed to find allies to embrace and champion my heritage to avoid getting assimilated in the American fabric in totality. Black African immigrants must find that niche within the American cultural habitat to facilitate the process of hybrid identity formation without compromising their identities (Wright, 2002; Geraci, 2002).

The following are some of the phases of acculturation immigrants might be required to experience for a smooth transition into American life.

### **Acculturation Phases**

Jandt (2004) outlined the different excruciating acculturation phases experienced by immigrants in America:

#### **Honeymoon stage**

Jandt (2004) named the honeymoon as the first phase of culture shock. It is when immigrants experience the excitement of living in America. This is also called the tourist phase because immigrants are still deep-rooted into the Black African cultural practices. The reality of living away from the ancestral land has not yet set in. Living in American has not affected the newcomer as yet. The feel of being a tourist begins to wear out when immigrants start to notice cultural indifferences (Jandt, 2004). The grief for home life is waiting in the wings at this point in their lives. This is the transitional stage from things

enjoyed by tourists to things local experience daily. Once the American experience starts to wear out, immigrants' lives begin to fall apart. This is the best time to learn and make sense of the host culture. Without an understanding of the host cultures, immigrants experience differences that could lead to personal disintegration.

### **Disintegration or difference**

This is the stage when immigrants start to notice cultural dissimilarities between the host and African culture rules of engagement (Jandt, 2004). During this stage, immigrants begin to internalize the cultural distinctions as they pursue common grounds for their sanity. Customs and behaviors of the host become unpredictable, unusual, or dislikable. The initial stages of culture shock begin to show in the form of anxiety, anger, and withdraw from local people. Immigrants start to experience an exile mindset. At this point, they are they have a choice of hybrid identity or assimilation, meaning they have to ignore the value of their home cultures (Ashcroft, Griffin, Tiffin, 1998). It is essential for immigrants to remember that withdrawing from their surroundings interferes with the acculturation process into American life. Moreover, being a hermit often increases the stress level and homesickness. It is normal to grieve life experiences left behind, support network, and death of a loved one, it is critical immigrants develop new networks of support in America.

### **Integration**

Developing networks with the host could help immigrants to get integrated into the host community, not as tourists but as members of the community. The integration phase of the acculturation process increases one's ability to operate and function in the new environment freely. Jandt (2004) described the feeling of being a stranger with the desire



to take up residence but also still have a sense of being both near and far, socially, emotionally, and culturally. Immigrants will continue to be frustrated with the American culture despite efforts to integrate into the host culture (Jary & Jary, 1995). However, do not disappear; keep trying, as things only get better. During this phase, perseverance becomes the immigrants' most important virtue that could help to integrate into a different cultural space. Future studies could design a culture free space where all cultures have rules for equitable treatment of value systems of all world cultures.

### **Gradual Adjustment**

During the fourth stage of acculturation, the gradual adjustment phase, immigrants continue to experience ongoing personal changes. They will begin to be critical of both the ancestral and host cultures (Jandt, 2004). As immigrants, try to find a safe identity to assume; you should be searching for a hybrid identity that compliments all the cultures around you. The search for a hybrid culture is frustrating because you have to give up a part of yourself to find common ground with others. Once you find that safe space, you will begin to be more comfortable settling for a transformed identity. You will recognize and predict behaviors and outcomes of culture mismatches being experienced. Hybrid culture helps immigrants with settler identity and state of mind (Jandt, 2004). At this point, you begin to commit to staying in America, by circumstance, and by choice. You might start to see the past as traces of the present, and begin to ignore attributes of the home culture that frustrated your integration into the American fabric of life (Jandt, 2004). This situation is described by Ashcroft, Griffin, and Tiffin (1998) as a settler born in the new space between home and host cultures and borrows from both cultures, hybrid identity. By unifying various cultures to form a transformed identity, you will begin to

assume a hybrid and global identity. However, you must hold on to your culture because you will feel more frustrated if it is completely lost.

### **Reciprocal Interdependence**

The final stage of acculturation occurs when the immigrant starts to experience duality. During this phase of adjustment, you start to experience the interdependence between home and host cultures and feel that you can identify and navigate gaps in both cultures (Jandt, 2004). You start noticing flows in mentoring and acculturation programs and can advise prospective immigrants on matters of culture shock in America. Additionally, you begin to assume the identities of a translator and mediator of cultures. During this phase, you acquire norms and practices, which allow you to achieve biculturalism status (Jandt, 2004). Benjamin (1968) noted that the task of a translator ascertains that the translation is adequately appropriate and conveys a clear representation of the substance under scrutiny. Immigrants that adjust well in America are those that can make sense of their multicultural environments and can translate them to others (Jandt, 2004). You will grow out of the skepticism of other people's professional and cultural experiences. Eventually, you will begin to notice that Eurocentric values and customs are more readily accepted in all spaces in the world while other cultures are not valued. However, do not allow your culture to be minimized during assimilation into American life. To get acculturated into the American fabric of life, immigrants have to go through the stages outlined below.

### **Stages of Acculturation and Black identity**

Cross (1994), outlined some of the identity and developmental struggles Black Africans are likely to endure in America. You will experience a five-step acculturation process to help you to cope with a different identity crisis in America. The acculturation phases of

immigrants consist of the following are the five stages: pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-commitment, as outlined by Cross (1994).

### **The Pre-Encounter Stage**

The pre-encounter stage demands compliance with the internalization of cultural stereotypes in America (Cross, 1994). During this stage of assimilation, there is a feeling of detachment from your own identity to conform to the cultural models of the host (Cross, 1994). There are times when you will isolate yourself from local people to avoid embarrassment and hurt by the differences in cultural orientation. If you succumb to the mainstream American culture, you will experience an identity crisis and compromise the Ubuntu identity (Cross, 1994). It is okay to empathize with others but not to vend your soul (Bonilla-Silva and Glover, 2004; Golash-Boza, 2006). The use of Bakhtin's (1998) authoritative and persuasive framework to force Black Africans to align with particular American ethnicities presents a severe identity argument mismatch that immigrants experience in American urban spaces (Bonilla-Silva and Glover, 2004). Your voice must be heard regardless of the circumstances because it is the tool for getting respect as a Black African working and living in America.

### **Immersion-Emersion Stage**

The Immersion-Emersion timeline conveys an awareness of the dominant culture's bullying tactics of minority ethnicities (Bonilla-Silva and Glover, 2004). You must continue to interact yourself more with others to learn about their cultures because knowledge is power. Parham (1989) explained that this is the stage when you accept the significance and value of the generational struggles of others, especially African

Americans. When you start to actively engage in struggles of Black and Brown people in American and the world, you begin to understand that working with others reduces the magnitude of cultural mismatches experienced.

### **Internalization Stage**

During the internalization stage, you will experience your status as a Black African in America. According to Cross (1991), during this stage, you feel empowered to maintain a connection and establish a relationship with Black and Brown allies. Together with some progressive people, you will begin to see the need to join hands with others in the interest of promoting positive vibes and images of people of color around the world. Cross (1991) defined progressives as individuals in CRT circles who typically advocate or sympathize with marginalized people, irrespective of their country of origin. During this stage in your life, you will develop alliances with Americans from all walks of life. You will establish a connection with your present reality without loss of identity. If you sold your soul to whiteness, this is the time to redeem yourself and reclaim your Blackness.

### **Internalization-Commitment**

The final stage of the identity crisis that you might experience is what Cross (1991), called the internalization-commitment phase. According to Cross (1991), the internalization-commitment stage is when you begin to internalize Black Africanism in the diaspora. You can join hands with other minorities to create a bond that is anchored in uniting Black communities in the diaspora (Cross, 1991). This stage comes with different new challenges. The collection of problems in this phase are perfect for future scholarly work.

## **Mentoring**

Despite the willingness of mentors to help, there is often a fear of receiving a Eurocentric style of mentoring, which is often inadequate for Black Africans. Some scholars have agreed that some of the mentoring must come from co-nationals who have themselves experienced culture shock in America (Dunn et al., 2011). The support from people with duo experiences might help smooth the integration process into a new culture (O'Neill and Cullingford, 2005; Brown and Holloway, 2008; Pederson et al., 2011; Roskell, 2013). However, mentoring could be more beneficial if the village had a voice in the acculturation process of immigrants. Mentors need awareness of how to read immigrants with a deep understanding and be able to interpret their needs verbally or otherwise. If you have difficulties translating your feelings and emotions to your mentor, then your acculturation will be significantly stalled.

Mentoring that does not solicit input from mentees has the potential to promotion negative feelings of the host culture and the idealization of ancestral cultural tenets (Ward and Rana-Deuba, 2000). Both locals and immigrants will fail to embrace diversity. Therefore, it is imperative that mentoring is comprised of the host-cultures, mentees, and co-nationals to avoid total dependence on co-nationals by immigrants (Fontaine, 1986, reported in Ward and Rana-Deuba, 2000). With support and positive attitude, mentoring can significantly improve the integration and speed up the acculturation process in America. Successful acculturation of immigrants occurs when there is targeted assistance that is facilitated by culturally experienced and diverse mentors (Osmani-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2009). To avoid possible complications and a total identity transformation,

immigrants must have a respectful voice to assist with the structure of the mentoring program.

When I moved to America, I thought that the transition would go smooth for me. I was in a state of excitement until I discovered that I did not necessarily belong. I withdrew and covered myself with a hoodie to save myself from culture embarrassment (Cohen, 1977). Like an Ostrich, my head was in the sand to separate and exclude it from the daily activities of the host culture, forgetting that a tortoise eventually comes out of the shell to deal with its immediate environment. I learned that inclusion and not exclusion is a critical component of survival in American urban communities. Separating myself from the host community was more stressful than making a deliberate effort to learn the way of life of others in my new environment.

One of the ways to experience a smooth transition into a new culture is to become a conscious reader of emotions, wishes, desires, and value sets of people (Nussbaum, 1997). It helps to find a trusted niche of people in any habitant that you can allow yourself to be vulnerable with to correctly translate your emotions, wishes, desires, and value sets. Immigrants need to create a cohort of locals that can see the universe through the lens of immigrants and can help others to see what they see in you. That way, others can acquire an aptitude for humanity and a higher capacity for engaging and embracing you, your background, and the experiences you bring to America (Nussbaum (1997).

Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1998) advised that regardless of the historical trends and pattern of immigration, people must rise above the migrant status and forge relationships within themselves and with others.

It is essential to find the access point to the social and cultural barriers affecting the lived experiences of immigrants in America. There must be some unique processes and strategies immigrants can use to navigate social and academic issues in their new environments. Immigrants must also seek unique strategies that complement their characters so that they are not seen in the image of others.

Ogbu (1978) argued that the social and cultural gap immigrants experience could be attributed to the treatment of Black Africans less rationally. This situation makes it hard for Black Africans to break ground into America's low-income urban communities. Ogbu (1978) stated that the mistreatment of minorities by the dominant culture forces people to see little or no value in Black Africans and Africa in general. A smooth transition into urban low-income America requires effort from both immigrants and the host. They must both find common ground and partner with Black people with African ancestry to fight for equity and human dignity.

According to Ogbu (1978), minorities continue to lack access to educational opportunities and resources that are easily accessible to their White and privileged counterparts. Minorities are also familiar with existing inequities in schools, employment, wages, and promotions on based the basis of ethnicity and the lack of educational accomplishments (Ogbu, 1983). Therefore, Black African immigrant teachers must familiarize themselves with structural barriers that exist in host communities. Failure to recognize the challenges of host communities can complicate Black Africans' transition into the American fabric of life. Acknowledging the lack of knowledge of students' everyday experiences is a big part of the culture mismatches encountered by immigrants in America.

Immigrants' lack of environmental knowledge could cause uncertainty, confusion, contradictions, and self-identity that a Black African in America. The stressors experienced by Black Africans in America could be minimized by avoiding self-destruction, creating a self-management plan, and developing unique negotiating tactics to utilize during the acculturation process (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) defined impression management as people's awareness and control of the perception of themselves. The impact of perceptions and attitudes towards others' cultures and ways of life can create negative narratives. Black African immigrants must be practical in their efforts to understand their cultural barriers deeply. They must have the desire to acculturate into the dominant American culture and find meaning and understanding of others' cultures. Immigrants do not have to try hard to be part of the American culture to be accepted, but they must work hard to seek understanding and tolerance towards others' way of life. Always look at your culture and find ways to be understood, as well. In Black Africa, we readily accept immigrants, but Africans are not readily accepted in the diaspora, not even in some Black spaces around the world. A Black teacher in America once told me that I was doomed to fail to teach students because of my accent and the lack of students' culture. Late in life, as an Academic Instructional Coach, I coached him on modern and effective ways to teach students from low-income urban communities in America.

The host culture must attempt to understand and respect foreign cultures in their spaces (Oberg, 1960). The process of acculturation has unexpected adventures that could cause culture shock because the host and immigrants are usually set in their unique cultural ways. Both the host and newcomers must seek knowledge and an understanding of the



world as one global village (Oberg, 1960). Newcomers and the host must make an effort to learn about each other's culture to avoid cultural catastrophe caused by unfounded perceptions and disrespect for each other. The failure to comprehend each other's cultures could result in people feeling fragile, vulnerable, and fearful. That could foil Black Africans' acculturation and professional advancement in America. Fragility, vulnerability, and fear are significant components of culture shock. If not addressed, culture shock could divide Black people in the world.

Immigrants need to be aware of social-cultural structures that shape their identity in the American context. The way of life of Black African immigrants is typically influenced by the current cultural discourse as advanced by cultural supremacy. Immigrants must invest time in tracing common threads that explain the discourses of others and how they shape their identities.

According to Bakhtin's (1998) Authoritative discourse, immigrants are automatically placed outside of the mainstream of the American cultural norms but at the same time are expected to conform fully to the customs of the host. Authoritarian discourse conflicts cause culture dissonance in the lives of immigrants. However, when immigrants attempt to comply with the norms of the host, their culture mismatches become superficial and masked. Instead of displaying negative energy and self-destruction, our experiences must stimulate the desire to learn about each other's cultural triggers. We must tinker with our understandings and use our experiences to inform others about ways to co-exist for the collective advancement of the human race.

The lack of adequate preparation and rite of passage into the America cultures makes it hard for immigrants to synchronize their identities with the host values. Rites of passage

are an essential phenomenon for the acculturation of Black Africans into the world community of cultures. Rites of passage are also a significant part of human growth and development.

Once the human growth, and development has taken place, we would understand the interactions that exist between adults and children in America. Black African might not understand the relationship between children and adults in America because it seems contrary to the Ubuntu philosophy. But when we begin to comprehend the cultural calculus of American communities, the algorithm of behaviors exhibited begins to make sense. Learning the calculus of generational interactions of people in America helps immigrants to navigate life in their new space. However, we must demonstrate ways that other people can appreciate and respect our imperfections as well. People that give respect can demand it from others. Immigrants and the host must have growth and developmental mindsets, and not a fixated mindset, about each other's cultural needs and expectations.

Contrary to Bakhtin's (1998) authoritative and internally persuasive discourses aimed at bullying Black Africans into assimilation, immigrants must never transform their identities to seek acceptance into the American cultures. Immigrants must respectively have a voice to express themselves in a manner that authoritatively or persuasively forces people to see them and hear their voices.

Therefore, it is the master's undercurrent forms of discrimination existing in our world communities so that we can experience a special kind of healing without judgment. We must strive for understanding and co-existence as a roadmap to a smoother transition of Black Africans into the American fabric of life. Likewise, American communities must

seek more than the historical and fiction book knowledge of Black Africans coming to America. The experiences of Black Africans are often that of human suffering and degradation. White supremacy, by way of divide and conquer, has effectively separated voluntary and involuntary immigrants in the diaspora (Vickerman, 1994). This immorality must inform the CRT agenda to bring equity in the voicing and visibility of world cultures irrespective of places of origin.

### **Future Studies**

Although scholarly work has been done to examine the connection between mental health and culture mismatch, more research is needed to find meaningful acculturation that could promote positive mental health procedures and restoration of Black African identities in America (Konerua & Flynn, 2007). More work is needed to explain the relationship between acculturation and individual identities of Black African immigrants because acculturation processes should be personalized (Bhatia & Ram, 2001). Future studies must look at the genetic reason why Black African and nonwhite immigrants are perceived inferior, invisible, voiceless, and less desirable than the white immigrants in Africa and other Black and Brown spaces (Simon & Lynch, 1995). Future scholarly work must explain why dominant American and European cultures consider Black Africans racially, culturally, or religiously inferior even when they acquire mastery in their respective languages, cultures, and religions (Cornelius, 2002; Licata & Klein, 2002). Issues of prejudice and institutional barriers against Black Africans need studying to attain cultural equilibrium (Licata & Klein, 2002). Also, acculturation models of Black African must be studied within the context of ethnicity, race, and the algorithm of hierarchizing world cultures from least to most significant (Rudmin, 2003).

## **Implications**

One of the implications of this study is that the stories will shift dominant people's understanding of Africa and African immigrants in general. The host communities need to understand that Black Africans come to America with their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The stories in the study provide useful information for educators, foreign or local, that struggle with culture shock in American urban school. The information is also suitable for teachers of Black African students in America. The information is about real-life experiences of those that work in multicultural spaces but does not know how to cope with sociocultural disparities that might exist in their schools. The study has a toolbox of tools to equip and prepare them for their teaching journey. The following are some of the implications of the study:

1. Since language is one of the challenges of Black Africans in America, immigrants must gain cultural knowledge along with learning to speak in an understandable manner
2. Learning appropriate social behaviors helps much with acculturation in a new environment
3. Black African immigrants will need to be aware of communication patterns in the host country. Start with basic things such as greetings, manner of addressing people, gestures, verbal and nonverbal behaviors of the community
4. Black Africans must go through all the phases of acculturation but also be aware of their identities and preserve them

5. Because culture has a pivotal role in the acculturation of Black African immigrants, teachers must be mindful of students' cultures and their own. Respect peoples' cultural value sets and without compromising your own
6. Seek meaningful mentoring and motivation to make a difference using your culture as the most important tool you possess in life

In summary, Black Africans need to develop social networks to assist in determining ways to advance Black African culture and language among dominate world cultures. Social networks will help a great deal with grieving the loss of loved ones or the loss of a life left behind. The basic tenets of the stories in my study might be used to inform policy and practices necessary for providing meaningful transition and acculturation of prospective Black African teachers in urban American schools. With the support of the host and a variety of local stakeholders in the school community, Black African teachers might open up and share their significant feelings and fears that might facilitate others' smooth transition into the American. However, the primary objective of a foreign and Black African immigrants is to protect our identities while striving for a hybrid culture. Eventually, Black immigrants will use their influence to fight for equity and policy to welcome Black African culture into the community of world.

### **Recommendations**

Further research could increase the sample size to generalize or make the findings more representative of the experiences of diverse Black African born teachers in America. For example, future studies could expand to include Black African participants from

1. Former British colonies, Francophone countries, Portuguese colonies, and those that were not colonized such as Somalia

2. Perhaps, the study could have a more extensive age range to demonstrate how each age group would cope with culture shock.
3. The study could compare the acculturation process of Black Africans already in diaspora migrating from developed countries to America and compare their results with those straight out of Africa
4. It would be interesting to study the experiences of Black African immigrants in different American regions outside of the Midwest
5. It would be beneficial for future studies to expand the sample size to include the second generation of Black Africans already living in the Midwest
6. Furthermore, a broad and more balanced sample of male and female teachers may be useful to explain the cross-cultural experiences of females versus males.
7. In order to fully understand the cross-cultural experiences from all perspectives, future studies could include experiences and perceptions of students, parents, and the community to see if acculturation would be different

Although the study adopted the autoethnography methodology with me at the center of the research, other voices might have different perspectives, which could alter the status of Black Africans on the world cultural stage. Furthermore, the more people that are lobbying and advocating for the inclusion of Black African culture on the world stage, the better our chance of being heard loud and clear. Eventually, the noise would be so unbearable that the world recognizes our voices, purposely see us as partners in the formulation of a better world for the generations to come. Ultimately, Neoliberals will realize that they cannot defeat Black Africans' call for equity and, eventually, close all cultural and racial gaps that divide people based on historical factors of discrimination

and bigotry. The ultimate goal is to destroy policies and practices that divide people and find the connective tissue that will unite all cultures of the world.

To facilitate the inclusion of Black African cultures on the world stage, all interested parties must collectively develop an intentional and meticulous mentoring and acculturation blueprints. People must advocate for a systematic mentoring program to address the unique needs of a Black African immigrant. Mentoring could help to buffer severe gaps between the mentoring process and the acculturation process. The mentoring program provided must be tailored towards your needs and interests of both the dominant culture and individual identities of immigrants. Mentors must possess clear understandings of the root causes of culture mismatches immigrant experience in America. The mentoring plan must address problems of practice resulting from the struggles with acculturation, mentoring, Black identity, and culture mismatch.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this autoethnography study was to explore storytelling as a strategy to break the silence surrounding African Black migrants and to re-culture our integration into the American fabric of life. Current stories of our challenges as Black African immigrants can be changed to encompass conceptual systems that are essential to breaking down the paradigm of exclusion. Achieving such a goal requires the world to examine the beliefs and assumptions about cultures of immigrant's transition into the world's workforce and life in general. While this strategy may not change the lives of Black African immigrants in a significant way, without making broader structural changes, it will not allow us and the host to respect and accept each other's cultures. The

ineffectiveness of the mentoring and acculturation initiatives are attributed to the lack of fundamental and systemic features of Black African cultures.

Mentoring activities are often designed to change our cultural deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) to benefit dominant cultures. With appreciation and respect for each other's cultures and customs, our knowledge of our ethnicities, grief, and culture mismatches could create a free space to have courageous conversations. But because of the lack of equitable spaces, our heritage and identities are lost to assimilation or misguided acculturation. We are often appalled that very few, if any, of our cultural values, customs, beliefs, and language are seriously considered during and after migrating to America. We usually do not see equity in the dispersion of acculturation as our cultures are often devalued in preference for the dominant one. The rites of passage we experience during assimilation and acculturation usually alter our African Identities to satisfy the host.

Altering someone's cultural DNA can have deadly consequences. However, since we are in a foreign land, we learn to measure whatever is valued and value whatever is measured by the host culture. We usually have to mind what we say and how we express ourselves. Sometimes we just have to endure our post-migration stressors or culture shocks to avoid clashes with the host. The stressors sometimes turn into conflicts, confusion, feeling of alienation and isolation, and depression (Bhugra, 2004). We rely on the powers of our ancestors to guide us in our voyages and existence in foreign countries.

We come to America with our own biases, and therefore, we are often ill informed about life in America. When we begin to experience culture mismatches and prejudices, we understand that we are being introduced to multicultural learning opportunities. With time we become more socially and culturally knowledgeable of how to co-exist with the



host. We start using our already established social networks to relate more positively to spaces with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The more we interact with the host, the more we become curious and become aware of our surroundings. Learning about other people helps to overcome biases and promotes respect for other people's ways of life. I learned that every culture is unique and accepting and respecting people the way they are critical. I am hopeful that our linguistics and culture present in new communities is an opportunity for others to learn about our lives as Black Africans living in America. Through our tenacity, we teach our students not to give up easily. We usually do not give up despite the assault on our personal and professional identities at the hands of the dominant culture. Even when the dominant discourse negates our prior teaching experiences, our teaching methods, and our culture, we carry ourselves with respect and dignity. Enduring through the challenges of living in a foreign and dominant culture helps us to see various cultures in the lens of diversity and global citizenry. Minorities in America must not forget that before we migrated, they were the victims of human degradation and should be familiar with the feeling of being silenced and aggressive acculturation

Language and accent are some of the challenges of immigrants in America, especially teachers (Cheng and Wang, 2006). As discussed in Bakhtin's (1998) authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse, the dominant culture in America is sometimes not receptive to Black African languages. My experiences in America are that it is important to talk like and sound like a native English speaker with an American accent. A lot of my students and peers often commented that I talked funny. Black African immigrants are mindful of vowels that are hard to pronounce; short and long

vowels; what consonant goes before and after? Am I pronouncing words in the manner that students can hear me? Immigrants must think about their thinking and record lessons and listen carefully to sounds and see students will be able to understand.

To give us a voice, we must preserve our languages and accents and use them to express or share our cultural heritage. I learned that only when you take pride in your heritage that the authoritative and internally persuasive discourse can be challenged. Otherwise, we will continue to internalize the dominant cultural discourse. It is essential to acknowledge that language and accent are an integral part of one's proud identity. The benefit of challenging the dominant culture discourse is that immigrants can find a voice and refuse to be silenced or made to feel inferior (Samimy, 1999). I would hate to see us lose our culture, language, and accent to seek acceptance in America. This is tantamount to self-hate and cultural genocide.

To sum it all, as an immigrant in America, I had to internalize some dominant discourses due to repeated exposure to them. I did not stress much about my accent and accepted that I am not a native speaker of the American English language. Therefore, instead of internalizing critics of my accent and culture in a discriminatory approach, I decided to internalize my accent as a resource to increase student engagement and increase conceptual understanding of algebraic models in mathematics. I also tried hard not to internalize some things that devalued my African Blackness. I complied enough to show respect to my host's culture and their struggles in White America. I did this with dignity. Immigrants must go through acculturation stages to prevent culture crashes. The processes of acculturation help immigrants to become global citizens. Through acculturation, immigrants learn to develop social networks to help them with a sense of

belonging. I define a social network as immigrants' families, neighbors, students, and friends in a foreign country. Along with networks of supporters, immigrants must come up with custom-tailored coping strategies that work for them. We have to be creative around conflict resolution with students, parents, and some times our peers. Avoiding conflicts does not help at all. When you do not have the support of your network, you develop the ingenuity to deal with adversities. With time, you get weaned from dependency on finding your solutions to problems. You can rely more on research and students to cope with culture shock. Students will teach you a lot about serenity, being proactive, creative, and being aware of your surroundings, and the virtues you need to solve a challenging situation. Ultimately, students helped me to recognize and appreciate diversity, which, in turn, helped me to understand the importance of creating multicultural learning experiences in my new ecosystem.

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