Utilizing African Oral Traditional Storytelling to Counter Racist Pedagogy

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The pandemic and the so called "post-truth era" (McIntyre, 2018) have exposed the dark realities of racial dynamics in the U.S. and across the world. The centering of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement as well as White supremacists and anti-immigration movements in the national discourse expose the cracks in a nation that identifies itself as the *land of the free*. The resulting national discourse reminds us of the importance of critical theory and counter narratives in decentering grand narratives regarding the social and political worlds and dismantling the structures that privilege Whiteness and that marginalize people who are culturally different (Martinez-Aleman, 2015; Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017).

Because schools by their nature create the space for people of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to meet, it is in that same space that racial transformation can and should occur. Therefore, the role of school is to unpack through culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy the unequal distribution of power and privilege by positioning the cultural and linguistic worldviews of students of color as integral to their education (Gay, 2018; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). "[U]ntil we [educators] begin to carefully examine the way race and racialized thinking influence our work, we will continue to perpetuate destructive thinking about the capabilities of learners based on race" (Ladson-Billings, 2012, p. 115). The stories shared in this article, derived from the theoretical foundation of decolonization (Chilisa, 2017; Waita, 2014; Smith, 2012), join in the above calls towards anti-racism by including the voices and lived experiences of African peoples in the U.S. educational system, employing a methodology that is rooted in an African tradition of shared knowledge. As a call to anti-racism both in schools and within the university, the stories challenge teachers and educators to sensitize and educate themselves on the needs and experiences of African students and their families in their classrooms and on culturally inflected modes of communication so that they can contribute to disrupting colonial narratives by using African students' counternarratives.

I share narratives of the lived experiences of an African immigrant family of Zimbabwean Shona heritage as they navigate racialized experiences of their children

in the U.S. educational system in the Midwest. The collaborators in these shared narratives are the Farisais[1]—Baba (father), Amai (mother), Ruwa (son), and Aneni (daughter) —who have been living the in the United States Midwest for about 8 years. These narratives, centered in the linguistic and cultural worldviews of the tellers, recount how these experiences continue to influence decisions they are making towards retaining their African cultural identities and their concerns about transmitting culture in this anti-immigration and racialized era in the U.S. The narratives also show how immigrant parents take on the role of educators as they travel through linguistic/cultural continuities and discontinuities and the racialization of their children in the interest of supporting and witnessing their children's experiences. Berry (2017) aptly articulates this,

> The notion that the world is global, cosmopolitan, and complex would naturally be fluid music for the ears of curriculum scholars. This is especially true for those of us whose work and identities are connected to the African diaspora. Our histories are, indeed, filled with rich narratives of struggling for more just and equitable curriculum thought. They are full of powerful and empowered struggles, many of which are routinely denounced in mainstream discourse, hidden from it, or both. If curriculum thought is to be truly globalized in ways it was initially intended, then our discourses and actions must be connected, interexchanged, and become inextricably tied to the project we call education (p. 53).

These narratives that Berry (2017) discusses—echoed in the narratives of the Farisais— highlight opportunities for culturally responsive education and the practical experiences with anti-racist negotiations that teachers and educators often avoid, either due to fear, white fragility, or lack of training on how to create a culturally inclusive environment for all students. Yet these are the scenarios that could lead to a culturally responsive pedagogical moment that engenders the cocreation of a curriculum that is responsive to the instructional and cultural needs of the families (Sachs et. al., 2017). Therefore, as an approach towards anti-racism, the narratives shared take up space for varied linguistic, cultural, and philosophical perspectives of African peoples through oral storytelling, centering alternative perspectives in mainstream research process and discourse. These stories "enable reclamation of cultural or traditional heritage; a decolonization of the captive and colonized mind and thought; protection against further colonization, exploitation…; and a validation of indigenous (African) practices and worldviews" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 96). Below, I discuss the methodological framework that I developed for this study. This is followed by a brief introduction of my collaborating family and their storied experience. Finally, I discuss what the framework achieved through storying African

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[1] Pseudonym

immigrant experiences and the implications these experiences have for the curriculum and identity conceptualizations.

Theoretical Foundation and Methodological Framework

The stories of lived experiences shared here were birthed from the development of the African Oral Traditional Storytelling Framework (AOTS Framework) as a culturally, ethically, and philosophically situated approach to understanding African peoples' experiences (Osei-Tutu, 2021). The framework was developed as part of my dissertation for the study of African peoples and stemmed from my interest in understanding African immigrant experiences in relation to the retention of their heritage language, and cultures, as well as the transmission of these to their children. Drawing on my own and other Africans' experiences living in the U.S., I sought to find out what decisions the families were making: Are African immigrants even considering the maintenance and transmission of their heritage languages and cultures in their desire to survive and live comfortably in the U.S.? And if they are, what would it take to make this retention possible? However, as I considered how to approach this study and the methodologies that were available, I realized that I needed to approach this study differently—find a way to engage with my community about this issue from our own perspectives. A way that underscores the historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of collaborators[2] as essential to understanding their experiences. Beyond that, the desire was to live the culture and use the language while doing it—thus reinforcing the focus and the need to Sankofa[3].

Thinking through African oral tradition, narrative inquiry seemed to be an approach that was akin in terms of using stories as a way of understanding lived experiences. Yet narrative inquiry does not reflect how utilizing indigenous (African) approaches to understand indigenous people's experiences can get at meaningful and relevant understandings of those lived experiences. Kim (2015) clarifies that the choice of narrative design varies based on the researcher's paradigm, research topics and purposes. Thus, the social dimensions of experience are vital in understanding the phenomenon. Therefore, "you could choose a narrative study that can work as a model, but you will quickly find it limiting because your research idea is not exactly the same as the model study that you have in mind" (p. 296). With that in mind, Kim encourages *all of us to have strong foundational knowledge on narrative inquiry and build*

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[2] "Collaborators" instead of "participants" because research in the AOTS Framework is with a communal learning and knowing together approach, where collaborators are part "owners" in the study. They are not "participating" in their own lived experiences (that is, collaborators are not taking part in a study about their lives); they are privileging the researcher by sharing their knowledges and experiences with them.

[3] Sankofa: An Akan word which translates literally as "go back and get it". It is represented by bird with its head turned backwards, feet facing forward, carrying an egg. It symbolizes a reaching back to the past to reclaim knowledge that will pave way for new paths in the present and future.

our own narrative research skills, knowledge and phronesis (wise judgement)" (p. 296, emphasis mine). Additionally, Smith (2012) advocates and makes a case for the adoption and utilization of indigenous methods and knowledges in research, especially with research about indigenous people. So, while narrative Inquiry brought me close to what was needed for this study, there were still a lot of questions to address: approach to gathering stories, what is done with the stories, how stories are shared, what meanings are derived, and who determines what understandings are derived from those stories.

In order to work towards meaningful research with African peoples, African researchers need to develop alternative methods for studying our realities instead of sticking to western oriented epistemologies (Tuwe, 2016; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013). This means including African ideologies and worldviews in the research since methods of investigation need to be informed by peoples' histories, cultures, and worldviews. This is also important because indigenous knowledge and methods are often ignored or not taken seriously (Waita, 2014; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013; Elabor-Idemudia, 2002). Thus, building on postcolonial and decolonial theory as foundations, focusing on scholars that push for the use of indigenous knowledges (Chilisa, 2012; 2017; Nteane, 2009; Nakhid-Chooter et. al., 2018; Wilson, 2001) and African oral traditions and storytelling through "By the Fireside" (Cancel, 2013; Finnegan, 2012; Okpewho, 2003; 1992) and the centering of African worldviews and perspectives in the entire research process, I set out on a journey towards the birthing of the AOTS Framework. The design of the framework addresses the "Story Gathering" and the "co-telling and Co-meaning making" process. In the next sections, I connect two major design features in the AOTS Framework for research (the Story Gathering and Co-telling and Co-meaning making process) with African oral traditional storytelling.

Story Gathering
The Story Gathering process takes place in *By the Fireside*. *By the Fireside* or *Fireside* is a communal gathering that occurs when a group of people come together (with or without food and drinks) to have conversations about life and events happening in the community, and country. These three attributes of the Fireside (i.e., communal, public education, and storytelling) make it an appropriate place to go beyond its communicative and social role to frame gathering, sharing and analysis. The concept of Story Gathering is utilized instead of data collection as one cannot "collect" people's lived experiences but only have the privilege to share and bring together those lived experiences when one is centering the framework in the African's communal cultural spaces.

Many years ago, these gatherings would usually include the telling of folktales, hunting stories, and other lived experiences of the time. Cancel (2013), Finnegan (2012), and Okpewho (1992, 2003) all discuss the ways in which various African communities and cultures gather to share stories about their lives, cultures and

worldviews. More recently, such gatherings create an environment for sharing experiences and perspectives about life, politics, and any other events happening at the time—there is not much folktale telling even though one may find such instances when visiting very remote African communities. Nonetheless, "By the Fireside" today remains a vital space for African oral traditional storytelling—a form of communal space to discuss issues within the community and a space for public education.

By situating the AOTS Framework in the African oral traditional avenue for learning, teaching, and understanding the cultural experiences of the society, "By the Fireside" brings about a new orientation to the research process. First, it engenders a culturally centered redefinition of the relationship between researcher/gatherer and collaborators based on the understanding of knowledge as communal. This approach stands in contrast to the western-dominated paradigm wherein knowledge is treated as an item that can be found or created and owned by an individual (Nakhid-Chatoor et al., 2018; Wilson, 2001). It is noteworthy that communal does not mean a monolithic congenial place where everyone agrees and believes the same things; rather it reflects the consensus within the Fireside, which involves acknowledging dissent with respect. Secondly, the concept of structure in such a space is fluid and open. Though there are norms that inform participation in the storytelling, digressions are common. In African oral traditional storytelling, when the teller begins the storytelling, anyone in the audience is free to contribute their part in the storytelling either through songs, questions, or chants. And the teller is ready to make room for such contributions as each telling begins with an invitation to the audience to be part of the telling. These norms of participation reflect the communal nature of storytelling.

In the story gathering scene, I therefore recommend this approach: Establish a mutual power structure in which the collaborating researcher leads the conversation with a story of their own—this could be a brief overview of the topic of interest—and inviting the collaborators to talk about their own experiences. The gatherer/researcher, in this case will have a say in "re-directing" the story in line with the plot should there be a digression. Because the gatherer/researcher is a part of "By the Fireside", there is a redefined researcher-researched role that reduces the power structure in the relationship, allowing for a more open conversation about the topic and even leaving room for the collaborating researcher to challenge certain preconceived perceptions or ideologies. That is, to the extent that the collaborating researcher/gatherer understands the norms of the conversation and follows them. The gatherer must, therefore, embark on a postcolonial ethnographic[4] learner/collaborator approach to knowing together about the oral culture, traditions, and worldviews of the

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[4] This kind of ethnographic relationship is centered on African communal and knowledge sharing worldviews discussed in the story gathering process—learning through participating and engaging with the community.

collaborating community to fully engage in the story gathering, telling, and sharing processes.

For example, in my conversation with the collaborating family about why children may not be interested in learning about their cultural heritage or speak the language, the Farisais (whose stories are shared in this study) pushed back against the idea that heritage/native languages are used by African parents to criticize and rebuke children resulting in children's lack of interest in identifying with their African selves. Instead, they explained that lack of parental pride in their own Africaness and social experiences are major contributory factors. The collaborative structure of the AOTS, built on the reoriented power dynamic in the research process accounts for this openness. In other words, when collaborators are invested and have a say in how their experiences are shared, they are confident in sharing earnestly as the final voice is theirs and not that of the researcher. Additionally, because the AOTS seeks to revitalize and center African languages, cultures and identities, collaborators share not just to push back on certain perspectives but also to speak to the community about loss, resistance and pride in Africaness.

Finally, in relation to obtaining consent for "By the Fireside", "the African context embraces cultural beliefs of consensus, respect, and uplifting of one another" (Nteane, 2009). This means that obtaining consent requires a consensus that comes from the community of study/collaborators and this, in turn, requires attention to culturally relevant modes in establishing consent even if it means challenging the signed IRB informed consent protocol (Ellis & Earley, 2006; Chilisa, 2009; Nteane, 2009). Even though the "By the Fireside" approach could not be used in gathering the shared stories due to COVID-19 restrictions, the collaborative ethos of the approach was fundamental in shaping the conversations with collaborators.

As culturally centered relational acts, all phases of a research relationship should be seen as dependent on the community one is studying with. In the case of my Shona collaborators, for example, consent entailed both the IRB and the sharing of *Shito* (a Ghanaian hot sauce) with the family, centering the cultural foundations of the framework. The study of the experiences of Ewes using the AOTS Framework will be centered in the Ewe oral traditions even though the story gathering process will take the form of the Fireside approach. For even though the Fireside gathering is an oral traditional phenomenon that cuts across the continent (Finnegan, 2012; Okpewho 1992) (though Firesides have given way to different forms of gatherings in contemporary times), specific ethics and practices may vary between the Ewe of Ghana and the Ewe of Togo, and further differences will have to be taken into account when the study involves the Akan, Shona, Yoruba, and any other group of African ethnicities.

Co-telling and Co-meaning making
The co-telling and co-meaning making process affirms African ways of knowing by prioritizing the histories, contexts, and lived experiences of African peoples. It relies on African oral tradition of storytelling techniques in chronicling the experiences of African peoples. These may include songs, proverbs, African worldview or etiology, African names, repetition, ideophones, digression, ceremonies, African languages, imageries and metaphors rooted in the African culture. Any aspects of the specific African cultures, languages and worldviews can be centered in this approach. Imperatively, Afrocentricity/African centeredness is paramount as "Indigenous [African] people need to do Indigenous [African] research because we have the lifelong learning and relationship that goes into it" (Wilson, 2001, p. 179). However, this does not mean that perspectives from Western and other cultures cannot be utilized—if those perspectives help the collaborators to articulate and make meaning of their experiences.

The meaning-making and knowledge sharing process in the AOTS Framework can entail both storytelling and discussion of the ideas within the stories. Research and researchers should reflect collaborators' "ways of seeing reality; ways of knowing, and their value systems which are informed by their indigenous [African] knowledge systems and shaped by the struggle to resist and survive the assault on their culture" (Chilisa, 2012 p. 30). Accordingly, creating understanding and meaning of the experiences of the collaborators in the study means co-constructing and co-meaning-making the stories that are shared with the researcher. In the study with Shona collaborators, discussion of their experiences as Africans living in the U.S. draw on their worldviews, cultures, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives using African oral tradition of storytelling. The stories constructed primarily employ the language the collaborators used in sharing their experiences. Since discussions and questions draw on the interpretations and meanings that these families are making of their experiences, the telling and constructions of the stories may be exactly as it was told by the collaborators. The constructed stories are shared with the group (in this case, the Shona family), allowing them to make edits, add and actively participate in the meaning-making process. By doing so, "you are not just gaining information from people; you are sharing your information. You are analyzing and you are building ideas and relationships as well" (Wilson, 2001, p. 179), while establishing the fact that "research is not just something that's out there: it's something that you're building for yourself and for your community" (Wilson, 2001, p. 179) or the community you are "knowing with".

What the AOTS Framework Adds to Qualitative Research
The AOTS framework is an emergent space of community practice that integrates and centers African indigenous knowledges right at the onset and throughout every step of the research process. There are essential elements that are foundational in the use of the framework. For one, the framework must be seen as an arable land that is not

selective in growing varied linguistic, cultural, and philosophical perspectives of African peoples in research. African thought and ideas must be included right from inception through completion to the implementation of policies arising from the research. The framework relies on oral traditional narrative and literary techniques that are shared across the continent in the co-telling and co-construction of stories, making it adaptable to the various ethnic oral traditions.

Another important characteristic of the AOTS Framework is the approach to meaning-making and understanding. Storytelling through oral traditional techniques and African worldviews constitute "analysis" in the framework. This does not mean that discussion cannot take place based on the stories; discourses, however, must be specifically rooted in the cultural values, cultural practices, and worldviews of the African community. By so doing, the goal of the AOTS Framework to build and develop non-dominant epistemological, ontological and axiological perspectives in research is achieved. Finally, it is also essential for the co-telling and co-meaning making process to involve the collaborators in the study and lead to a new enrichment, revitalization, redefinition, retention, negotiation and/or resistance in the light of African cultures and the global world.

Storying

The stories shared resulted from a two-part dissertation study. One part of the dissertation focused on the development of the AOTS Framework, and the second part was an example of how the framework could be used. The example study conducted sought to understand how African families navigate usage and retention of their native languages and cultures, as well as passing it down to their children. As a member of the community I was studying with, the journey to these stories began with personal-collective stories and experiences of African families pursuing graduate degrees in the U.S. Therefore, in Spring 2019, I gathered three sets of semi- structured conversational data centered on the experiences of two African families, the Farisais and the Opokus, as a pilot to begin to ascertain how these families utilized and maintained heritage languages within the contemporary, postcolonial landscape of the U.S.

The focus of the pilot study, therefore, was the exploration and understanding of the lived experiences of African families in the U.S. who are rooted in their specific African languages and cultures and employed the following questions: What experiences inform the decisions African immigrant parents make concerning maintenance/transmission of native/heritage language and culture for themselves and their children? How do these experiences (historical and present) influence the decisions these parents make regarding teaching children their heritage language and cultural practices? Also, what roles do globalization, sociocultural and political issues/experiences play in the decision-making process? How do parents navigate their decisions in the context of their own schooling and that of their children?

Both families had come to the U.S. seeking higher education and were interested raising their children to know about their heritage and cultural backgrounds as Africans. The Farisais are a Shona family from Zimbabwe and had been in the U.S. for five years at the time. Baba, the father, was nearing his final year in a PhD program and his wife, Amai, was (and still is) a nurse. With two children in elementary school, they had in various ways had to navigate situations that tested their resolve and decision-making related to the above questions. The Opokus, with similar interests, are an Akan family from Ghana who had been in the U.S. for nine years at the time. Agya Opoku, the father, is an Engineer and his wife, Maame, is a nurse. They have two kids who are also in elementary school.

Each session was recorded with three audio devices in an effort to make sure no data was lost due to a malfunctioning of any of the devices and, additionally, to corroborate deciphered unintelligible statements or phrases. These recordings were then transcribed and shared with the collaborators. This stage was important to help with statements in Shona and Akan. After the collaborators provided feedback on the transcriptions, the transcribed conversations were then storied using conversational, narrative or monologic performance approaches situated in the Shona and Akan oral cultures of storytelling. It is important to mention here that but for a few proverbs and edits added to develop continuity and flow in storying, stories contain the exact wording and phrasing of the collaborators. In this process, an important factor related to language is the challenge of translating certain pieces, poems, and proverbs or wise sayings into English. Some of the untranslated pieces in Shona and Akan remain due to the importance of maintaining the essence of meanings being conveyed (i.e., they either do not translate well into English, or their meaning is weakened) and also because they serve as statements of resistance and hope for the collaborating community. The s/he translation in *Hey! Black Boy!* for instance was done to address the non-gendered pronoun that is used in the proverb. The stories were then shared with the collaborators, who once again provided feedback and edits and completed edits were sent back to them for final agreement. Also, all the collaborating families have a copy of all stories gathered/developed. As earlier mentioned, the stories below were both shared by the Farisais family (out of about 18 stories responding to different aspects of the research questions above) in response to experiences that have affected how they navigate their decision to retain their native language and culture in the context of their own schooling and that of their children.

Hey! Black Boy!
Baba: It was the day we had all been waiting for. We woke up in the morning, knelt by our bed, and proclaimed Waita zvako Mwari [5] . Ruwadzano was starting Kindergarten. Our Elders say that when a child learns to wash his hands well, s/he can eat with the elders. Ruwadzano was ready to eat with the growing young men

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[5] Thank you, God.

and women at the elementary school in the county. He was so excited, partly because he had had to wait a year because his birthday was later in the year. And as is the custom of the county, he could not go to kindergarten with the children he attended pre-k with. But now, he's a little older, a little wiser and more prepared for the new environment. Dressed up and ready to start the new chapter with hope, Ruwadzano got on the bus. And as Baba and Amai wave blessings and good will for the day, life at school begins.

Amai: When he got back home from school, we were excited to hear the adventures of his first day at school. But Ruwa was not very happy. We asked him about it, and he was *like oh … it was good*. But we could tell something was off. Second day, same thing. Third day, and then he goes *mom, there is this guy in 5th grade. He pushes me around and he tells me you black boy go and stand in the back. You can't be in front of a white boy!* And I was really aggravated. I'm like I'm coming to your school tomorrow (laughter). But as our elders say, patience is the mother of a beautiful child, and so after some prayers and just unoziva[6], sitting down to think about it, we sat him down:

> We were like uhm the next time that guy (let's call him 5th Grade) talks to you like that, look him straight in the eyes. Tell him *you are not going to talk to me like that. You have no right telling me where to stand and uh I am a child of God; you are not going to treat me any different.*

So, he took some time practicing saying it, and then, the following day he went to school. It was time again to line up to head out to the cafeteria for lunch. Students in the upper grades are usually asked to help with the younger ones as they settle into their new environment. But for Ruwadzano, the first few days had been tough. He was ready. By crawling he has learnt to stand and so when 5th Grade showed up "Hey Black boy!"

> Ruwa stood. He looked him straight in the eyes and told him, "you are not going to talk to me like that. You have no right telling me where to stand and uh I am a child of God; you are not going to treat me any different." 5th Grade was taken by surprise. Then, he apologized.

Amai: And I had actually written a note to the teacher, who said uh … cause I asked him, did you tell your teacher about it? And he said yeah, I did. And I said what did your teacher say? And then the teacher had said, *just ignore him*. So, I wrote a note to the teacher and the teacher then realized that it was something that was very serious. And they stopped 5th Grade, because he was supposed to be a kindergarten helper – they stopped him from going to the classroom. Probably changed, classrooms. But he apologized to Ruwa, and he's been fine.

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[6] A Shona word that translates as "you know"

However long the night, the dawn will break.

Yuck and I

Hi! I am Aneni. I came to the U.S. a few months ago. It is a new country, a new place. But I have been enjoying it so far. ForthAlien, where we live, is a cosmopolitan community. It has so many people from different countries and backgrounds. You could smell all the different cultural dishes that were being prepared in the various homes. It was different, some made your mouth water, others… well. Families living at ForthAlien took their kids to the same school, and since the community had been here for so long, it seemed to us that they knew how to sensitively navigate racialization and anti-immigration sentiments. I was, therefore, eagerly looking forward to school. I loved school back home, especially the food Amai makes for lunch. Back home, lunch time was fun, we ate our food, and some were even jealous of the food Amai made for me. I have had to share a couple of times but that only made me happier. In Zimbabwe and in our Shona community, food always brought people together. As our elders say, war is not porridge (A Gikuyu proverb). On that faithful first day of school, Amai packed my lunch. It was our normal Zimbabwean food. I didn't even think about it for a second until lunch time at school. In my class, I found it strange that some kids did not want to sit by me. Why was that? Is that what children here do? I saw the teacher talking to the students and trying to get them to sit by me at the reading corner, at the group table, etc. It was all turning out to be a not so good day. But I wasn't going to let that happen. Usapedzera tsvimbo kuna vanamakuwe idzo hanga dzichauya[7].

> But it was lunch time… oh lunch time! We were all sitting around the table, oh lunch time!
> I opened my lunch bowl, oh lunch time! (the thought of the food made my mouth water. When Amai was making it, I couldn't wait to eat it at lunch time)
> The sounds that came was loud and it took me by surprise
> *Oh yuck!!!!!what is that you're eating?!!*
> It had finally happened…
> I just closed my bowl, oh lunch time
> And did not eat all day… oh lunch time!
> The drums playing in my stomach, could not make me dance
> Home. Food. Peace.

Amai: She came home hungry and she told me "I don't want to take my food anymore. I will eat school lunch" And we had not known about application for free lunches or anything like that. Then, that's when we actually discovered we could do that. So, we

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[7] Literally, "Do not use up sticks on go-away birds while the guineafowls have yet to come". It means do not waste your time or substance on trifles.

did. But Aneni also did not like the lunch, because she was not used to the food. We therefore set out on a journey to discover what other kids brought to school and she ended up just getting a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. And she had to work through it and we actually taught her that, it's nice to be nice, unoziva, even when people are not nice to you.

Yeah, it was a very emotional transition into school.

When we went for the parent-teacher meeting, that's when we asked the teacher about the situation. The teacher was really nice [however, is being nice enough? (Nieto, 2008)]. She talked about these issues, and she actually acknowledged that, yeah, some kids are just like that, but they try to neutralize it and to express to them or impress upon them that, unoziva, we are all the same.

Forging New Paths

Using the AOTS Framework in storying the lived experiences of the Shona family accomplished three main objectives. First, it has created a place of resistance by engendering a co-telling and co-meaning making process that centers the Farisais' Shona identity, language, culture and worldviews in spite of being racialized and discriminated against for those very reasons. Secondly, the stories make visible the strengths of the families—their courage, resourcefulness, knowledge, and wisdom in not just confronting the issues but also teaching their children to stand up and speak up for themselves through their experiences. And finally, by using African oral traditional storytelling techniques (proverbs, imagery) in the storytelling and sharing process, the framework reveals how the complexities and challenges that these families face is filtered through their Shona cultural lenses. Again, by including marginalized voices and perspective in the academic space, especially in chronicling African immigrants' experience in schools, a case is made for recognizing African cultural and linguistic identities in multicultural education discourse. "Such a new perspective will manifest itself in a greater awareness of neocolonialism and other western social practices that harm [African peoples]" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2014, p. 7) and push towards some tangible transformation in knowing.

The experiences of the Farisais family reflect how insidious colonialism is. It is a slow burning colonialism, where a boy makes a statement about someone being Black and therefore not deserving to be ahead of a White boy. In that 5th Grader's mind, what is conspicuously missing is the import of the history and trauma behind the Black and White dichotomy. Like many others, 5th Grade has become an imperialist ideological vessel who makes immigrants feel like they have to acquiesce or assimilate even in situations as simple as a line in school. This *micro-colonization* illustrates the contexts on which social justice work must focus. Again, there is a need to go beyond the classrooms to make such mundane situations into objects of focus in the curriculum

to take advantage of such pedagogical moments. Moving beyond the classroom means acknowledging the influence that state and national rhetoric have on how students engage with each other in schools and finding avenues within the curriculum to have conversations aimed at respect for diversity. In the case of Aneni, going beyond the classroom would mean lifting up such incidents that occur in the classrooms for the purpose of exposing students to the world outside the monolithic culture they are used to.

A curriculum of *de-micro-colonialization* will therefore constitute a relocation of the curriculum in different ways that tackle how pervasive and persistent these incidences are in order to move towards decolonizing educational spaces. By creating room in the classroom for stories like the Farisais to be shared, teachers are exposed to the nuances that Black and African children traverse in the school community and what families must work through in their attempts to give their children the best education. Through these culturally centered narratives, teachers, educators, and school administrators "will come to know of the extraordinary knowledges and resources—material, spiritual, cultural, pedagogical—that are the wisdom of Black people" (Dillard, 2020, p. 698).

School administrators and principals can also use these stories and spaces created to share them as opportunities to build and strengthen relationships with students' families and the community. Following from this, teachers can be encouraged to examine what it means to prepare for the presence and participation of African children in their classrooms and schools. A major question that teachers could ask is how do I, as a teacher, take action by using shared narratives of my African students and their families to create opportunities to resist micro-colonization? A commitment to answering this question is the willingness to understand African/Black heritage, history, languages, and culture, to develop new conceptions of what teachers know about Africans, and to change their minds and those of their students about the cultural and social brilliance of African peoples (Dillard, 2020). Drawing on these strengths as "defining pedagogical characteristics … teachers [are] able to think about their classrooms [and school spaces] and what they want to change" (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2006, p. 5).

As an approach to antiracist pedagogy, teachers at the cafeteria might use Aneni's story as a genesis for a conversation on different types of food that people eat given that food, which is a cultural tenet, varies from culture to culture. Opportunities for such conversations will engender learning spaces that are welcoming for all races and ethnicities. Thus, by reflecting on our arrogance in thinking we know better than people in other cultures and by learning to appreciate how much other cultures know in their own terms (McDermott & Varenne, 1995), we address the imperialist ideologies that perpetuate anti-racist tendencies in our classrooms and students. Learning about African families and their experiences will also lead to developing

new practices in the classroom that can connect culturally based racial experiences of students and their families with experiences of the same in school—that is *de-micro-colonization.* There should be an ethical choice to take these issues up instead of ignoring them. We need to inhabit these spaces as homes for these difficult, but important, conversations to take place. Creating such spaces in the curriculum—potentially through Fireside approaches with students and families—may bring greater clarity regarding how these lived experiences lead to such polarizing spaces during the current era in the United States.

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