

Are we still Shona? An AOTS framework approach to navigating immigration-related identity

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Abstract

Using the African Oral Traditional Storytelling (AOTS) Framework as a culturally centered and responsive storytelling approach to studying with African peoples, this article shares the experiences of a Shona family in the United States of America as they navigate the maintenance and/or retention of their native language and culture as well as transmitting these to their children. Thus, using storytelling as analysis and theory, this article contributes to the discourse on African immigrant identity conceptualization and reconceptualization through a decolonial lens with the aim of encouraging conversations on the gradual linguistic and cultural genocide that continues to plague Africans as we critically wrestle with the lingering effects of colonialism and the lure of global mobility.

Keywords: African identity, oral traditional storytelling, postcolonial, decolonial, African-centered hybridity

Introduction

I have the privilege of sharing the experiences of a Shona family in the U.S. Midwest as they navigate native language and cultural maintenance and transmission to their children while pursuing graduate education. Working within the framework of postcolonial and decolonial theoretical perspectives, the experiences are shared through the African Oral Traditional Storytelling Framework – AOTS Framework (Osei-Tutu, 2021; 2022) as culturally and linguistically centered methodology for understanding the nuanced experiences Africans navigate in the U.S. This article contributes to the conversation on African immigrant experiences with specific focus on identity and heritage as families live the nuances of their colonial heritage, postcolonial present, and imperialist globalization. Additionally, it expands the field of qualitative research by bringing to the fore the importance of centering African cultures, worldviews, languages and identities as theoretical and methodological lenses to understand African peoples' experiences. Working within the space of African oral traditional storytelling, the centering of the voice of the storyteller is paramount as it is the teller's invitation that ushers in the performance and sharing. In that light I briefly discuss the AOTS Framework and my collaborators, to leave room for their voices to be heard.

Theoretical Methodological Framework

We are arrogant to think we know better than people in other cultures, and the second, that we are foolish to not appreciate how much is known by others in their own terms. We can state the anthropological instinct directly: Not only is our wisdom not total, there is yet much to be learned from others.

McDermott & Varene. 1995, p. 325

African Oral Traditional Storytelling (AOTS) Framework is an ethically, politically, culturally, linguistically, and philosophically situated approach to studying with

African peoples. It draws on African oral traditional storytelling techniques as analytical tools for meaning-making, understanding, and knowing with African peoples and their lived experiences. As a framework, it takes up space for varied linguistic, cultural, and philosophical perspectives of African peoples in research. The collaborative philosophical underpinnings of the AOTS Framework rest on the communal and the collaborators' engagement in the study not just as people who provide information, but as co-creators in the narratives, meanings, and understandings that are brought to bear. Therefore, relationship building and communal engagement with the collaborating community is an ethical foundation of the emergent AOTS Framework (see Osei-Tutu, 2021; 2022). Consequently, in this article, I share the experiences of an African family in the U.S. using oral techniques and perspectives centered in their cultural understandings in echoing McDermott and Varene (1995) on recognizing how much our collaborators know in their own terms. Additionally, the article reflects the idea that we do not know better than those who share their stories with us. Hence, these stories reflect the concept of culturally relevant storytelling in the qualitative research discourse.

Collaborators

Collaborators in the study are immigrants from Zimbabwe Dr. and Mrs. Farisais. They belong to the Shona ethnic group and had been in the U.S. for 8 years at the time of the study in 2019. The children are now 15, 12 and 9 years old. This means that the kids were 7, 4 and 1 when they arrived in the U.S. The kids could all speak Shona except for the 1-year-old who wasn't even talking at the time. At the time of the interview, the Farisais stated that the oldest child could still speak a little bit of Shona compared to the younger two who understand but could not speak it at all. It is important to note here that both parents have attained university level education. This is because educational level plays a role in decisions and determinations families make

concerning native language and cultural transmissions for both immigrants and Africans on the continent. Stories were gathered in three one and half hour sessions that focused on their life in Zimbabwe, their experiences in the U.S. dealing with sociocultural and political issues that affect decisions they are making about their native language and culture.

Storying as Analysis and Theory

Chitsva chiri murutsoka¹. Baba Farisais was a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) faculty member at a local university. As policies continued to change, he was required to get a doctorate to continue as faculty. Having worked with the only PhD faculty in his department for his undergraduate and master's, Baba knew it was time to expand his territory by working with a different advisor. Beyond this issue of faculty was the social and economic state of Zimbabwe; *the country was even under U.S. sanctions at the time. We were just coming out of an election and there was so much uncertainty. So, those are some of the things that led us or quickened us to decide to come out of Zimbabwe.* The scholarship and their journey to the U.S. was the leading of God and an opportunity. *We have seen people go out of the country, do things better and faster; then they come back to help make the country better. We felt it was our chance to do the same – go out, come and get something new, different and probably bring it back and better the country.* The Farisais' reasons for immigrating to the U.S. are not that different from many others. The desire for better educational opportunities, financial and educational resources, not just for the parents but for their children, continues to push people out of their homes in search of a future (Allen et. al., 2012; Kigamwa, 2016; Kumi-Yeboah, 2018). Arthur's (2010) observation is apt here as it foregrounds some of the issues that can be identified in the stories of the collaborators in this study:

1 You can get new experiences by moving to different locations (Shona Proverb)

The forces of the agricultural and industrial revolutions, colonial empire building, global schisms resulting in wars, agitation for self-determination in the colonial possessions, frontier and settler expansion, *postcolonial economic growth, upswings in exile cultures, interdependence of the world's economies, global spread or dispersion of capital*, ...and the gradual loosening of national borders are all significant components of the new forms of cross-border population mobility (p. 11, emphasis mine).

For the Farisais, this hope can be brought back home to help develop and change the community for the better. Though the “probability” of going back home becomes a dilemma, the experiences gained and the improvement in human capital become a catalyst in alleviating and solving some of the problems confronting the African region as it relates to economic, social, cultural and political domains (Arthur, 2010). It has, however, become important to engage in conversations around African cultural, linguistic identity retention in migrant spaces. Recently, discourse and tension on how and why this retention can and should be attained continues to grow (Arthur, 2010; Onuzulike, 2017). There is, therefore, an agency on the part of the African émigrés and the collaborators in this study to make a connection between not just themselves and the global community, but also their places of origin or home.

Brief Introduction of Zimbabwe and Shona People

Zimbabwe is a southern African country. It is surrounded by South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana. It rests in the flowing space between the Zambezi and Limpopo. Among their ethnic groups and one of the 16 official languages is Shona. “Shona” is both the name of the ethnic group and the language they speak. According to Matereke and Mapara (2015), Shona consists of a range of related Bantu languages which were

standardized. “Demographically, they constitute the highest percentage of the Zimbabwean population, and some spread beyond the Zimbabwean borders into Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and Botswana” (Materike & Mapara, 2015, p. 198). Despite the linguistic differences between the dialects, there are cultural and linguistic similarities that include worldview, an array of beliefs, proverb (though variant in other dialects) and a comprehensible system of thought (Materike & Mapara, 2009). The term Shona is problematic because of its controversial origin from the Portuguese and Arab traders and also because the indigenous people of Zimbabwe did not coin it as a way of describing themselves (Gwaravanda, 2016). Gwaravanda (2016) explains that it was a derogatory term that was further solidified by the British. Therefore as “an invention of colonialism” (p. 44), Gwaravanda (2016) used the term/name *Shona* under protest in his work. For this study however, this name Shona is used as a reclamation akin to others like Africa and Black. Just like most things on the continent, political, economic, cultural, and even mindset, it can be embraced, redefined and reclaimed for culturally and linguistically productive purposes as it relates to culture and identity. Like most Southern Bantu, proverbs play a vital role in Shona oral traditions, literature, morality, religious beliefs, cultural and linguistic preservation/transmission (Hamutyinei & Planner, 1987; Masaka & Makahamadze, 2013).

Lived experiences and decision making: Navigating conversations around culture, language, and identity

Becoming Black in America is not a decision one makes. Africans and other immigrants of color embody multiple identities and a hybrid consciousness (Asher, 2002; 2003) and they must take on or resist in some form, leading to the development of new identities when they immigrate. These changing identities reflect the continuous pressure by the American societal institutions and governments to place people

in boxes, while leaving certain boxes out. As you go through the various institutions and systems, you are constantly bombarded with questions about your race. Are you Asian, Latino, Black, or African American? I am yet to see a box for African, even though there are several living in the U.S. Thus, in becoming Black in America, many Africans either accept the definition as is, or redefine and reframe the concept of Blackness (Dei, 2017b; Ewoodzie, 2014; Ibrahim, 2017). This reframing of Blackness as a decolonizing process entails a reconceptualization of African-ness and Blackness in its relation to African cultures and identities through African indigeneity, ontology and epistemology (Dei, 2018). It also demands a resistance to cultural and linguistic imperialism by Africans living in the diaspora, and even those on the continent. Within and in the aftermath of the Trump era and rhetoric around anti-Blackness, immigration, Black Lives Matter (BLM), and civil unrest around the killing of Blacks by the police, such issues of identity – African/Black – have been amplified for discourse. So, families like the Farisais, could not avoid the conversation even if they wanted to.

Ehe! We Talk about it All the Time. Yes, We Talk about It.

Ehe! We talk about it all the time. Yes, we talk about it

That we're different, in our skin, in our beliefs. We are different in the way we do things, uh but that doesn't make us superior – that doesn't make us inferior. Uhm, we have taught our kids to value everything about us, as black people, as Africans, as Zimbabweans, and as Farisais. And, I think they are doing a great job because you hear them singing Shona songs, you hear them speak, try to speak in, uh, our language and they can hear anything you say in our language. Which is...we are not doing very well with that because they speak a little bit, or our oldest does speak, but the two younger ones, they don't really know. But we have talked about it. And it's, it's not everything

that you can avoid. Especially with the society. They see it. They see them being pushed in the back. They see themselves being discriminated against. So, they come home, and they have those concerns, so there's no way you can be quiet about it. You just have to talk to them about it.

*Ehe! We talk about it all the time. Yes, we talk about it
haisi sarudzo yaunoita²*

And we are just uhm grateful even for ForthAlien. It is just a unique community, as well as ForthAlien Elements. Because of the catchment area, they are kind of sensitive to diversity. That's like apparent to them. You get to realize that even in our discussions; that really guided us to make them recognize that it's not that you are distinct, but all of you are distinct. So, you really have to notice that these people will act differently, and those people will act differently. Just being in ForthAlien. Let me tell you a story about an experience we had, on our first day: ok... A kid's screaming.... ok I will call 911 on you, and we were like say... ok. If it was back home, this kid will deserve a spanking. But you are in the USA, where you cannot do that. How do you navigate? Your kid is saying, a young kid speaking into your life, which is a behavior or attitude that they've never seen from our culture, from our heritage. Should they adopt to that, how do we navigate that terrain, urikunzwa. As we said, our community back home as much as it is communal, it is kind of closed. There are some things that you don't expect the kid to speak into your life. What we term respect, yes, it's respect but it's also like being in control or being authoritative. You come this side you realize that ok... now kids can actually come and say I don't like that.

*Ehe! We talk about it all the time. Yes, we talk
about it
We are distinct, but we are not superior...*

² It is not a choice you make

Respect... We navigate
Spanking we navigate
Change, still... Black, still... African
Learning to change... changing to stay the same

Yeah... laughter.... I'm not comfortable with that. So, it's really that transition in that, we also realize that it's not only them who are adjusting but we also on a learning process. So, we really had to be wise. I remember like my daughter, the first day, the first week, when she came, she was like closed, my second daughter. Trying to speak, trying to speak... she was overwhelmed. It's not that she wasn't speaking English back home, but now going to play and people are still speaking English. To her English was like at school, yes, but now if I go out and people are playing in English, what does that mean? I want to say this, but I don't have that English language, so it was really a learning process, also even for us. So, our speech had to be wise and guided, otherwise...

Navigating the global, sociocultural and political

Man-Woman: Woman-Man

There are chores that are more inclined to be done by women and there are some which are more inclined to be done by men. And more so with the coming in of modernization, we get to realize that people are trying to embrace some of these new aspects, definitely there's resistance because of our culture (Baba Farisais)

Looking at the role of women through the lens of *ubuntu* as an African philosophy, Manyonganise (2015) explains that the concept of *ubuntu* plays both an oppressive and liberative role for the African woman. Giving examples of some of the proverbs and sayings in the Shona, Manyonganise (2015) shows that the Shona culture highly regards male children as

the ones who ensure the family lineage. Sayings such as *vakadzi ngavanyarare*³ ensures the silencing of women in decision making processes, while *chakafukidza dzimba matenga*⁴ encourages domestic violence and abuse through secrecy. Further entrenched by the Christian moral code for women to be silent in public discourses (Manyonganise, 2015), these patriarchal views continue to encourage “patriarchy and its attendant notions of women’s domesticity and decency” (Chitando & Mateveke, 2012, p. 44). Examining a similar perspective of the Shona woman in light of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Mungwini (2008) explains that the Shona woman’s identity that is taken as a given – “the construction of womanhood...on two elements of being a wife and a mother” (p. 204) – has, over generations, made them vulnerable. Therefore, countering these proprietariness views of the Shona woman, Mungwini (2008) calls for a reconceptualization of the traditional picture of the ideal Shona woman by questioning the “nativistic tendencies” (p. 203) that look at emancipatory efforts as alien and of western imperial origin. But as Manyonganise (2015) shows, within the same traditional cultural perspectives are ways in which women are empowered. For example, the Shona expression *nhamo inhamo zvayo, Amai haroodzwi*⁵ reflects the Shona cultural reverence for the woman. Other sayings like *Baba muredzi mwana kuchema anodaidza mai*⁶ and *Mai musuva usingasehwi mumuto*⁷ all reveal the value of the Shona woman as a haven, a place of rest and solutions. This is because “when a person is in any kind of trouble, whether old or young, mother is the one they all turn to” (Mazuru & Nyambi, 2012, p. 599). The Farisais also tell their story as they look “back-ahead” on ubuntu, genuineness in marriage and togetherness, womanhood, patriarchy and the high levels of divorce among African immigrants in the U.S.

³ Shona saying that means “women must be quiet” or “should keep quiet”.

⁴ Another Shona saying that implies that the secrets of the home need to remain untold.

⁵ Which implies that one cannot send their mother to be married, especially through betrothment because there is poverty in the family” (Manyonganise, 2015, p. 5)

⁶ Which implies that a father is just a nurse; when a child cries it calls out to the mother.

⁷ Implies that a mother is like a morsel which needs no dipping into gravy. Mother is a complete entity and therefore needs nothing else to make her better.

Amai: *I think I really treasure the love... like the genuine kind of love that is there between some family members, where we hold on to each other. Urikunzwa, we fight, and we come back together. Which is something that is ... that I find very difficult to understand here in the States. In the States if a mother fights with the daughter, they part ways and that's ok with them. In our African culture, you fight with your mother, you go and sit down and talk to her. You apologize, or it's more on the younger ones apologizing, but that kind of brings people back together. I think I would attribute that also to the kind of the marriages that Africans do have. It's not like if we fight today, it's ok to go our separate ways. You fight, and then, you come back together. Anger against a brother is felt on the flesh, not in the bone. I think that love, that togetherness, is kind of still holding things together. It's holding families together. If it is done genuinely, which is something that we have to work on – being genuine. Uhm So, I really treasure that about the African culture, urikunzwa.*

Baba: *I would like to add on that aspect of genuineness. Yeah, see there are some trends that you also even discover when you look at the African society in USA. Where now there is a notion that there's so much divorce, within the African society. Yet back home, these are the people who were being looked up to, urikunzwa. So, the aspect of genuineness, I realize that it's kind of, it's not there from back home. We tend to wear artificial harmony and we live with it for quite some time. But the very people when they are translated into a community where you are given room to self-express, unfortunately, we find many divorcing, urikunzwa. So, it also speaks volumes about our culture, that there are things that we should be willing to let go, ...embrace... laughter....*

We laugh, we laugh, we laugh

Leave it behind

Let Go

Zvingani⁸

I have an issue with an elderly person, but it's the younger person who has to go and apologize. But many times, it's the elderly who is wrong. So, I go and say sorry where I should be receiving sorry, urikunzwa. So, what's being deposited in me can be bitterness, it can be frustration, it can be anger. And so we, when you are put in an environment where you have to self-express; then, you hear of marriages breaking down, and people cannot solve the problem or cannot pinpoint that the challenge is something to do with where we are coming from. Where women were being suppressed or where men were stomping on their women and it is considered tradition. But today when it's done reversely, the woman is now stomping me then it's called a tragedy, urikunzwa. Why? Because of my ego, or because of my patriarchal benefit. Which you are like saying: if I do honor my wife but my wife doesn't honor me, her husband, I cannot contain the situation. But because we don't have healthy parameters, to contain it, people find themselves resolving this...kpra kpra kpra...breaking, something that we don't like but it's proven to be an outlet.

⁸ Means: how much?

Colonialism

*Dzidzo naKumutika
Kuparadzwa kweruzivo rwetsika
Asi pAdomaapfudzi emadzitateguru
mazinji, isu takamira takareba
kusimudzira uye kudzidzisa kugogodza
pasuo rezvizvarwa,
uchavhura here?
Mweya wemadzitateguru: chiKristu
Abusua pe adee, Abusua kyiri ka
Vana vangu! Ah Sekuru! Ah tete!
Dzidzisa vana kuchengetedza
Dzidzisa miganhu.*

Colonialism

Education and Shrinking
*Kuparadzwa of cultural knowledge
But on the shoulders of many
ancestors, we stand tall
upholding and teaching, knocking on
the generational door,
will you open?
Ancestral spirit: Christianity
Abusua pe adee, Abusua kyiri ka
My children! Oh Uncle! Oh Auntie!
Teach kids to protect
Teach boundaries.*

For myself, I would say you transmit what the elderly deposited in you. I went into the boarding school life. So, most of my life or my culture, our heritage is not really like something that we are like ok...that's an example. But I'm grateful to God that he's been putting people, even back home, into my life, who speak into those cultural things. A youth who does not cultivate friendship with the elderly is like a tree without roots. So, based on what I learned then, the best way that I've realized is just by practicing. How to exemplify true masculinity to my girls as well as my young man to realize that, ok young man you must value women. And it must toe the line of the truth of the word of God. That's normally how I am trying to transmit some of the things because you get to realize that our culture is so rich, but unfortunately, some of the things were clouded in controversy. I remember like when a pastor friend spoke advised me about the need to pay all my dowry, urikunzwa. You are coming from a situation where you realize that maybe my dad did not. He still owes his in-laws. It may not seem like an issue now, but you are walking into that same situation and in the worst-case scenario I may be responsible for paying that debt, and my son, mine. It is through this conversation that I understood the importance of the advice he was giving. Therefore, I really valued it. And it's something that I am looking forward to pointing to my kids.

When you talk of like the area of sexuality, especially in our communities where girls were vulnerable, urikunzwa. The honor is on me as a father to speak healthily into their lives, in that area, to ensure their protection. Protection is not really in threatening them but in making them realize that, ok... when you say ok you are dancing with your dad, what does that mean to you? And growing up in that environment, where you can play with them is really a great thing, urikunzwa. Back home, they'll say that is the responsibility of an aunt. It's the responsibility of an uncle. However, right now, the most threatening person to my child in my culture is an aunt, is an uncle. Those are the people that they can be raped or abused by. So, if I don't uphold that cultural virtue, but now with transformed or changed like personality, I may be pushing my kids into situations that I will amend of maybe four years down the line. In the end, I would say, it's sad fact that we are finding ourselves having to realize that family is the immediate, urikunzwa. Then, they go out with wisdom, not just because they are there, but because of something that we would have initiated in them. So that when they go to an uncle, they know their boundaries, they know the limits. And then the culture, the heritage is upheld... but in a transformed manner, so to speak.

The worlds of the elders do not lock all the doors; they leave the right door open. Therefore, even as the archer loves the arrow that flies, so too he loves the bow that remains constant in his hands.

Navigating native language and culture

“Traditionally” Christian

The Shona people, like their African counterparts, are profoundly religious. They believe in the Supreme Being known by various names. Common names ascribed to the Shona *Mwari* include *Musikavanhu*, *Nyadenga* and *Deza*. *Mwari* is said to be tremendously awesome and cannot be approached arbitrarily. Contrary to what the missionaries thought, the Shona God is not

totally detached from the people. He is not a remote God who is totally unconcerned with the welfare of his people. He is both immanent and transcendent... Even though the Shona may at times stray from the religious and moral path, they are always reminded through proverbial lore that they conform to the demands of their religion. Therefore, Shona religion is kept at the core of Shona life because proverbial lore that is always imparted to the young ensures permanence of the need to appreciate their indigenous belief systems.

(Masaka & MakahAdomaadze, 2013, pp. 133-134)

Amai

The first thing our kids do when they wake up is thank God, which we find most people do in our culture. They may do it in the traditional way through their spirit mediums. They thank the ancestors for what they have done. Sometimes they pour libation, but that is not daily. But we do not believe in that, but it is something that is done. So, the first thing we do when we wake up is to pray and this is something that we impress upon our kids. It is the first thing you do before you step out of your bed - thank God for the day. Again, as part of our culture, we are supposed to make the place that we live in tidy, especially our beds, and we do that. Every day they wake up, they must make their beds. They must make sure their rooms are smart. And they must take a shower. It is something that we also learn back home. That, that a smart person, a clean person is close to godliness and people will like you when you are smart.

Zuva, Nezuva; Wake up - Thank God - Make your bed - Clean your room - Take a bath.

You never just wake up and just go about your own without finding out how everyone in the house is. After we thank Mwari for the gift of life, you find in our house that the kids must come and

Kids: *ko, ko, ko*

Baba & Amai: *pindai*

Kids: *Mangwanani akanaka*

Baba & Amai: *mangwanani akanaka. Marara sei?*

Kids: *Isu tarara munyasha dzaMwari. Did you guys wake up good/is mommy there? Is daddy there? Has he gone to work? Is he ok?*

So, we try to maintain that oneness, as we go down the stairs together. And we also build oneness through family time. During family time, we pray together, read The Word, sing together, just worshipping, urikunzwa. We also celebrate each other. Like oh Ruwa has this event that's coming up so let's take some time to just encourage him in that endeavor. We also like watching movies together. And we can laugh over it or just like keep talking about it oh... we like that... That story or that play situation where that actor was doing this, and then it really makes us realize that we are a community just doing life together.

Baba

We also stress the importance of helping each other. They must help their little brother get dressed – to choose clothes for him or make sure he has put on Vaseline – that is the help aspect that we grew up with. When we were growing up, we were taught the elderly help the younger ones. And we're trying to teach them to do that. And we are also trying to teach the younger one to be thankful and be grateful and be respectful to the ones that are helping him. And as they go for, for uhm breakfast, uhmm ... we have not been doing very well on the food because of availability. Sometimes we don't have the (meali meal) hupfu to make them the porridge that we used to make back home but peanut butter is a part of Zimbabwean food, uhm one of the main foods that we eat ... and they do have it almost on a daily basis. They have it on their bread. They have it on their rice. They have

it, in many different ways. And as they go to school, we teach them to respect people. Hard work, it's one other thing that we impress on them so much. It's good to work hard; you better your life by working hard. Being hardworking also includes doing chores in the household. We really encourage them, and we've put in place a mechanism where each child takes responsibility for specific chores.

Most of these are done in Shona, most of it. We would want to use Shona most of the time, but because we also use English, right now we are using English. So, sometimes it comes not because you have planned that you are going to speak English, but because it's something that you do every day. When I go to work, I cannot use my language. I come home; I may intentionally think that I am going to be speaking in Shona. However, when I get home, it (English) just comes, urikunzwa. But every time I think of it, we use our language. I also pray and sing in our language...

Every day is a battle
Battling my mind and my tongue
Reminding my mind to remember my tongue
Yet my tongue is freeing
ndiri muondo, kurwisana nepfungwa dzangu
I am at war, battling against my mind
Do you see my struggle when you see me?
Me raging against myself...
Calling my tongue! My tongue! Don't leave me
Trying, freeing the tongue only to be captured by the
mouth
Free my mind, free my tongue

Every now and then, we do listen to Shona songs on YouTube. Recently, we posted on Facebook, a picture of me putting on my black cloth. I was in mourning. We were mourning a famous musician who had passed. And so, my kids were asking, what is that thing for? Why are you dressed like that? So, we told

them about how we mourn the dead. That is how we pay our last respect to people when they die. However, this one, was uh... was a special case where everybody in the country had to put on black and to put on a black headgear in respect of him. People do it differently but this one was a very special case, where a prominent good man, musician passed. When this happens, every woman in the nation puts on black cloth and headgear for him.

Death. The battle ends.
rufu runogumisa hondo
Death ends the war
Her voice will continue to ring
Calling others not to give up
ita pfungwa dzakasununguka
sunungura rurimi
make the mind free
make the tongue free
ReMember

The realization: multi-beau-tongued

We have come to the realization of our uniqueness. Many times, when you meet locals, they really admire our ability not only to speak English but also having an alternative language. It reveals to us that our local language, our native, our heritage is important for us to treasure and for us also to perpetuate to generations. And not only that, but we also want the children to be able to communicate with the elders back home, who cannot communicate fluently in English. Living in ForthAlien and living in an international community, we really treasure just seeing our neighbors raise their kids in the context of their culture, and there are some good things that we could uhm also absorb from that. Therefore, we ask ourselves, what is it that they could also be learning from us? Then it became clear: the best avenue for them to learn from us is through our kids. We are also learning through their kids as they interact and as they converse with

our kids. For instance, uhm it was easy for our neighbor to, like correct their children in their own language, without everyone raising alarm like, what! what are they... urikunzwa. And you will see that every time they would say a word in their language, their kids will kind of calm down. Or there are certain words that they understand the pang of, the gravity of the word in your own native language than in another language. So uhm that, that really helped us to want so much to teach them our language.

Translation

Translation, it is never full

The strength is weakened

The pang is ... well...

Is there pang in translation?

Discipline is in my tongue

It guides my culture

It is who I am and become yet the same

That pang of your word, urikunzwa. We'll give an example of uhm a word like quiet. Right. They hear that word in school every day and sometimes it doesn't mean as much as it will be if we say nyarara, which is in our language to say keep quiet. They know that if we say it like this, she means it. Or, there are so many other examples like I'll spank you. Spanking to them does not really mean what it means like if I say it in my language kurova or even if I give them a complement like, you have done so well or excellent. If I say it in my language, waita, basa rakanaka there's uhm... I guess it's because that's what we grew up hearing and that is what we understood more. There's pang in them understanding it, hearing it from us that way. We praise them, we show appreciation, we verbalize our love to them in our language. We don't want them to know just the hard word from our language... laughter... They would not love it.

To push for retention and transmission denotes a realization of your worth or your value in a community. When you join a

certain community, it's you who really must find your footing in it. So many times, like for Africa, we are victims, or we came through colonization, and it shaped how we look at ourselves. So, from that upbringing, there's that intention that if I send my kids to a school that places emphasis on speaking English, I am doing my kid a favor. Consequently, when you come into an environment where, again, English is being uplifted, you are bound to look down on your language. However, when you come to that epiphanic revelation where your consciousness is awoken shiw! – No! actually my language is good, my culture, with its flaws, is good – you recognize the ground that you as an individual must cover. Then it becomes a question of how should I now transmit it? Unfortunately, or fortunately, the starting point is mainly using the language for correction because it creates a safe zone for you, so to speak. That's why many a time, it's more linked to the negatives. But it is actually the effort we put in that endeavor that really counts. Like when you look at the Chinese, literally, they can do everything, even from the very lessons that we are going through, they can do that in their language. But for my language, I cannot, urikunzwa. You talk of biology; the words are just too big. Because it's not something that we were taught to embrace, so my kid will discover that word and it will really wreck his or her mind. However, the same word in English, we are comfortable with it. Those are some of the things that bring a dilemma on us and hence, the negative notions linked to our languages and cultures.

The mindset problem: Baba and Amai in conversation

Colonialism-Neocolonialism-Imperialism-

Kudyidzana-Neoliberalism

Linguistic capital

Colonialism, Neocolonialism, *kudyidzana kwenyika*,

uye dambudziko repfungwa

Pfungwa muhusungwa

Dzorera pfungwa: SUNUNGURA pfungwa

Colonialism-Neocolonialism-Imperialism-
Globalization-Neoliberalism

Linguistic capital

Colonialism, Neocolonialism, globalization, and the
mindset problem

Minds in bondage

Decolonize the mind: F.R. E. E the mind

Baba: *The main challenge is the mindset problem that we are dealing with. Back home, you think and ask yourself, “why am I learning this language?” Maybe it’s just an addition to the number of subjects that I need to pass either the junior or senior high school. Thereafter, there’s nothing you can do with it. That is the mindset I grew up with. Our countries do not necessarily have structures in place that promote the language use beyond the subject levels. So, now when it comes to transmitting my native language, there are considerations to make, “I say fine. Right now, there is dynamism in our culture. There’s globalization, and languages are shifting. Does my kid really need to know all the dept of the native language or the global languages?” With that in mind, if I am given French and Shona, I will say I appreciate Shona but no, I choose French or English. You see, it’s really a mindset thing. However, when an initiative is put in place that says let’s make Swahili to be like the southern African language, I would go for it. Because this is something that you can say like, “ok! I see my kids going all the way to Uganda, communicating, and being relevant. But If I take Shona, maybe it’s uh... within a region of, radius of 300kilometers, then what? Even within that 300km, there are so many dialects. Therefore, a basic appreciation suffices for them. But of these seemingly established languages, they must have a need, a status.” A privilege that will encourage people to want it as much*

....it is really a mindset problem to me. Many times, it's really, what's the objective of learning? It may be an emotional objective. Just because others have. But what's in it, urikunzwa? If you look at the Chinese, the moment Chinese people come into the university system, they introduce their language and they are takers⁹. But if you come here and say we are introducing Shona, how many will come? They will rather come in context of African languages. Because we don't have something to really offer that distinct, urikunzwa, so they'd rather come up with a term that is acceptable. But if you are not discussing or advocating for common African languages but for individual languages, then you may realize that we are irrelevant. In such a situation, you get to realize that, it can be an emotional appeal, urikunzwa. But we don't, we, we need to establish ourselves first. Then, we market a product that is appealing. However, where are the opportunities for such an engagement. When it comes to the social aspect for instance, the kids have a schedule that we have to fit into. Unlike back home when I have maybe access to him or her the better part of the day, here it's actually the opposite. They come out at 4 p.m. having gone out at 8 a.m. They are so stressed, they have homework... when the sun motions for the moon to smile, the focus is helping them meet those obligations and these things are being effected in a different language. There's no way I can sit down and say, ok for this math let's do it in my native (language). Because there's a target. Come tomorrow, there's something new. In such a situation, we really need to be intentional in assessing the situation – if up to 7pm they are under this influence (English) and we can only impart them, maybe for 30 minutes, is it enough to really go all the way into retaining and transmitting

⁹The use of the term here is nuanced – read as either positive or negative. In this case, there is a sense of envy of the Chinese pride and ability to retain language and culture in a foreign land, while the African shy away. The opposite could also be true – that the Chinese are asserting themselves everywhere, even when they are not wanted.

our language? I like how the Chinese start with the baby even in kindergarten; they go to kindergarten, but the better part of the time, they are with their grandparents. These are the people who are really sowing the language, the heritage. If you are to ask the actual parents say from China, it can be a different situation.

Amai: *I think ... I personally think we can do it if we want. If we say the other countries are doing it, then it's all in our mind that we can't. Because they are going to the same schools, they are coming back with the same homework and yet, they are able to learn their language. Why can't we teach the homework in our own language? If they come home with 1+1, I will teach them in my language chimwe ne chimwe zvova zviriri. So, it's all in our minds. We, uh, I think as Africans, we've come to a point where we just look down upon ourselves and we think we cannot do it. I mean, as important as it is that we have different languages, it was done for a purpose, when God did it, right? And if we want to, we can do it. Just like in our country, we have uh Ndebele and Shona, we have two main languages, right? And, even if Ndebele person comes to the Shona's, they can still keep their language and maintain it. Because that's what they want. And it's the same thing even in our country where the Ndebele people are like, if you come to us, speak in our language but you still go there and use your language. We have Shona kids who are doing Ndebele but still speak their Shona. I personally think, it's a mindset, like you said. If we look down upon ourselves and think oh we as Africans cannot do it, then yeah, we are killing it here in this generation. And this generation under us, they won't get anything. So yeah! It's a mind game.*

The mind game: a game that started long ago. We didn't even know we were playing the game, or did we? It seems like we found out too late, what the game was all about. Are we so far gone that we can't look back? When we look back, what do we see? How far back can we go? Take your mind. Sit it on your lap. Look at it – really look at it – talk to it. Where are you from? Where do you want to go? Are your roots rooted or are you just waiting for the wind? It never stops blowing. Do you have to go with it?

The African immigrant and identity

As levels of migration continue to increase due to globalization, sociocultural issues concerning language, religion, culture and ethnicity have become a paramount area of research in a number of fields within the social sciences (He, 2010; Kenway & Fahey, 2014; Koc, M., 2006; Liu, 2017; Nieto & Bickmore, 2017; Oriyama, 2011; Paat & Pellebon, 2012). The high rate of immigration in many western countries has profound implications and influences on identity development (Schwartz et. al, 2018; Verkuyten et. al, 2019). Another aspect of the study of the relationship between majority and minority societies is the focus on language and cultural transmission or maintenance among the minority groups and how the dominant language and culture affect that phenomenon. Mchitarjan and Reizenzein (2015) explain that the desire to preserve cultural identity and to transmit heritage language to the next generation – *cultural transmission motive* – is innate to immigrants. However, this motive seems unattainable when issues of mobility and success in the new environment (i.e., apprehensions about physical transportation, where to live, *education for kids* and where to find a good job) are concerned (Baubock, 1998; Butler, 1999). This is true for many immigrants in the U.S. Over the past 25 years, there has been considerable research in the United States on the issue of Heritage Language and culture loss among immigrant children and families (Liang, 2018). Much of this research has focused on Hispanic and Asian immigrant families

and communities, which is not surprising, given demographic realities. However, looking at the growth rate of African immigrants in the U.S, it is equally important to look at their experiences.

When an individual migrates from one country to another, or from one continent to another, the individual encounters issues around identification, identity, and culture. This is particularly true for Africans who migrate to the United States. As Adichie (2014) rightly puts it, beyond your identity as African, you become Black – it is not a choice you make – it is made for you by the country, the systems and to some extent, the people. Looking at the current trends in globalization and immigration, where knowledge, identity and cultures seem polarized yet complex, the feasibility of conceptualizing cultural identification and identity formation from the binary perspective of center/periphery is no longer worthwhile. Neither can they be viewed from the geographical/border perspectives, especially because technology has made it possible to share and adopt cultures. There is, therefore, the need to find alternative ways of understanding globalization, immigration and identity formation issues. Using the AOTS Framework as methodological and analytical framework, draws on decolonialization that is ethically centered on resistance to the genocide of languages and cultures that are indigenous to African peoples. What the Farisais share travels through bilingualism, biculturalism, heritage language, the postcolonial (dealing with colonization and its continuous effects) and decolonial (new ways of understanding and conceptualizing identities), and in African philosophical perspectives and worldviews. The stories as told reflect how Africans retain, maintain and hold on to their indigenous languages and cultures. The push is for an African situated eye-view of what we term hybridity. Hybridity that is identifiably Ghanaian, Zimbabwean or Nigerian based on the specific ethnicities – culture specific rooted hybridity (Osei-Tutu, in print) which is analyzed and theorized through culturally

responsive storytelling. As Mazama (2001) puts it, “the Afrocentric idea rests on the assertion of the primacy of the experience of African people. In the process, it also means viewing the European voices as just one among the many and not necessarily the wisest one” (p. 388).

Conclusion

These experiences as shared by the Farisais are not the wisest ones, but necessarily, the culturally responsive ones. Therefore “Are we still Shona?” Yes. Hybridized. The Farisais’ answer is a nuanced ‘yes’. Nuanced as they expound on how their lived experiences inform and influence their decision-making as they navigate conversations around culture, language, and identity. Additionally, they share how their African and Shona cultural knowledge provides the foundation to grapple with the global, sociocultural and political rhetoric in the U.S. The underlying conversation on the need for Africans to decolonize their minds is culturally articulated in the mindset problem. Ultimately, it is their conviction to maintain, retain, and transmit, and their ability to build community that will determine cultural and linguistic continuation or discontinuation. Therefore, we need to change our perspectives. We must realize our own complicit actions that condone and uphold colonialist mentalities of ourselves and other African peoples. We cannot resist the imperialism and neocolonialism while our minds are enslaved. First, begin the process of freeing the mind. Seeing with new eyes. Going back, reviving our shared gems and then new paths and avenues may be clear. There must be a collective endeavor by Africans in the diaspora and those still on the continent to transmit cultural codes, build appreciation, and instill African pride in the next generation (Onuzulike, 2017).

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