

2010

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Recommended Citation

Fournillier, J.B. & Lewis, T. (2010). Finding voice: Two Afro Caribbean immigrant members of the academy writing 'home'. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 32(2), 147-162. DOI: 10.1080/0158037X.2010.488356

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January 2010

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Finding voice: Two Afro Caribbean immigrant members of the academy writing “home”

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(Received ; final version received)

Two Afro Caribbean immigrants share our individual experiences of navigating the United States (US) academy, and the strengths we derived in the process. Through ongoing dialogue, reflections, in-depth conversations, and writing as a form of inquiry (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005) we explore the questions: How do we make meaning of our experiences as members of the academe? What accounts for our ability to perform, develop, and grow as scholars in a community that we made a home a way from home? We combine analyses of our experiences with reflections on the writings of local¹ and international scholars . Our reflections on the situated and peculiar nature of our dispositions as persons of African descent from the Caribbean are not meant to set us apart or create distance from scholars who identify as members of the Black Diaspora. Instead we hope that all persons who can vicariously enter into the experiences¹ might gain strength from our willingness to break the silences that often immobilize us.

Keywords: Afro Caribbean, US academy, Black Diaspora, immigrant, finding voice

¹ local refers to scholars who chose to work and write out of the Caribbean

The end is the beginning

It is the voice that I hear
the gentle voice I hear
that calls me home?.....

Upon the hill
the rising sun,
they sang and I couldn't help but add my own tone deaf
notes to the song I still love so, sang in a way I still love so,
It is the voice that calls me home
Erna Brodber(1994)

After years of dialogue, telling of flat-footed truths, and recounting tales of our experiences, our shared recognition of the power of “home” sparked the idea for this article. It is not coincidental that the epigraph we choose to frame this article comes from a Caribbean writer whose conceptions of home, space, and place resonate with us. Donnell (2005, 483) states that Brodber’s work (1980, 1998,1999) “affirm that the connection to place is not only about being able to locate oneself in relation to geography but also in relation to history”. Home is a metaphysical, historical, and a geographical space within which we feel most comfortable to explore and make meanings of the social and political interactions in the academy. In addition. we choose to use writing as a form of inquiry to explore our journeys into becoming members of the academy in the US . Richardson and St. Pierre (2005, 967) who claim that, “writing is thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery” greatly influenced us. Finally, a review of the literature and the writings of scholars like (Brodber, 1991, 1994, 1999, 20004; Garvey, 1937, 1983; Gates, 2002; Hodge, 1981; C. L. R. James, 1963, 1980a, 1980b, 1980c; Rodney, 1970, 1972; Lorde, 1984; and Wynter, 2004) provided us with various kinds of knowing about self and served as antidotes. These writers encourage us to dispel tendencies that might serve to re-colonize our existence as members of the academy who identify as Afro Caribbean. Lorde (1984, 44) reminds us that, “It is not

difference which immobilizes us, but silence, And there are so many silences to be broken”. Our narratives draw strength from our attempt to break some of these silences but they do not lessen the tensions that we experienced as Afro Caribbean immigrant members of the US academy.

In this article we explore the questions: How do we make meaning of our experiences as members of the academy? What accounts for our ability to perform, develop, and grow as scholars in a community that we made a home a way from home? And more importantly in a Trinidadian dialect we ask, “*You know who is me*”? This is a rhetorical question that people on the islands resort to when they perceive some slight—some hint that they are being discounted. And when it is posed the stance is usually one of resistance and of standing ground. In posing it here we are awakening a kind of consciousness of what it means to be Afro Caribbean and a scholar in the context of the US academy.

We do our conscious and unconscious analysis through identifying the patterns of experiences we discover in ourselves and in the writings of other Caribbean scholars. However this consciousness is not some kind of Zeitgeist. Instead, C L R James’ (1980c, 10-11) voice rings out loudly from beyond:

Consciousness is to know the concrete, but to know it dialectically" for "the content [of the concrete] moves, changes, develops and creates new categories of thought and gives them direction.... Philosophic cognition means not philosophy about it, but a correct cognition, a correct grasp of it, the concrete, in its movement.

As we tell our individual stories we begin to understand: (1) how we use social, cultural and academic tools, (2) what we know, and (3) how we employ these various ways of knowing as we navigate the process and hopefully make clearings for our brothers and sisters. Our way of viewing the world is therefore contextualist. Our experiences are seen as situated. And, our logic is apodictic because we are making meaning of the patterns as they emerge.

Remember when...

In this article, from our perch not on plantations like our ancestors, but in the academe, we argue that the ancestral tendency to think aloud through narrative is a living inheritance. Gates writes in the introduction to his *Classic Slave Narratives* that many ex-slaves felt compelled to tell their tales, and that “there is an inextricable link in the Afro-American tradition between literacy and freedom” (2002, 1). As descendants of slaves who found themselves captive on Caribbean islands in the service of king sugar, we agree with Gates that the narrative possesses cathartic power. We discovered through our conversations that as children growing up in the Caribbean (Trinidad and Tobago) we learned our early lessons from: our parents and grown-ups who passed on their wisdom in stories and sayings; our teachers who were our sages; our calypso singers and writers who were ahead of their time. On reflection, we realize that what seemed to be a social interaction provided us with the kind of freedom and catharsis that Henry Louis Gates (2002) points to in his introduction.

A basic underpinning premise of our narrative therefore is that overwhelmingly, the solutions to some of the difficulties that we face lie more in agency than in lament. Donnell (2004, 495) points to Brodber’s writings as ones that “allow us to see history as a form of agency and they also bestow agency and identity on those subjects for whom global mobility is not an option”. Some might view us as “privileged” in the sense that global mobility was an option. But, it does not prevent us from feeling the need to write and theorize a space in which we can begin to come to understand ourselves alongside and through other scholars.

There is little need to recount here the many ways in which the university environments can be a challenge for scholars of African heritage (Allen, Epps,

Guillory et al, 2000; Anderson Jr., Frierson, and Lewis, 1979; Frierson, 1990; Scott, 1981). We agree with Hill (2003) that for the Black scholar, looking inward is a surer way to find needed space than looking outward. But unlike Hill, our interest here is not in a discourse on obstacles to existence in the US academe. Indeed there is some merit in the sentiments of Thomas and Hollenshead (2001) that the life of a Black professor could descend to an existence at the margins; however our stance is that marginalization requires the concurrence of its victim. We therefore argue that its surest antidote is to reframe the problem of existence in the academy from one of overcoming marginality to one of “finding voice”.

As Afro Caribbean scholars who self identify as Black we believe that we need to focus more on what the academy offers, than what it does not offer. It offers us is the opportunity to think and to speak. We are contending that the quality of that speech should be a Black professor’s overwhelming existential focus on the campus. Finally, this quest for voice clarity can be enhanced when it is impelled by an ongoing search for *authenticity*.

Authenticity

Since our foundational claim here is that authenticity is paramount in the quest for voice clarity, we are impelled to explain just what it constitutes. And here fittingly we draw on the wisdom of C.L.R. James (1980c), towering Caribbean icon, who counsels that to live an authentic existence one should strive for Heidegger’s *dasein*, for “being there”. In *Being and Time* Heidegger (1962) contends that authenticity comes from being able to recognize one’s uniqueness—being able to find separate space for oneself. Failure to differentiate oneself means living an inauthentic existence. As Afro Caribbean professors working in the United States, we are insider/outsidere, and the quest for *dasein* is acknowledgement of this. This is not our

ground, and to pretend otherwise is to be inauthentic. We have to find our own platform from which to do our work. C.L. R. James (1980c, 160) in his interpretation of Heidegger says “You have to find out truth by being there, by living an authentic existence in this inauthentic world”. What we find through *dasein* is psychic footing—in the form of self-knowledge. This search for self-knowledge, the well spring of most of our scholarly activities, brought with it some tensions that are not unique to us as Afro-Caribbean scholars, but which we recognize as important to our understanding of the process of navigating the system.

One of the main challenges we faced in confronting the issue of self-knowledge is the notion of minority-ness. In the Caribbean we are not minorities and do not possess that dispassion of acceptance of being the *other*. In the United States, we are so perceived. But a mere airplane ride cannot alter one’s very being. This is the tension of which we speak here. We accept that on the American continent we are in the minority, if what is thereby implied is a census purpose. But beyond this concession to counting necessities, we hold the majority dispositions we brought. We argue in this article that to accept minority-ness, and all that goes with it in the American context, is to be inauthentic. This notion of authenticity is in no way unproblematic and so we find ourselves having to critically reflect on what it means for us as Afro Caribbean scholars.

Rinder and Campbell (1952, 274) contended that “cultural relativity” must be an ingredient in any formulation of authenticity, and that “Each situation must be considered anew in determining which are the authentic patterns of *identification* (italics added) and which are deviations there from”. They caution against the notion of an authentic self, since indeed we have as many selves as life-roles in which we engage. Still they contend that “Our authenticity consists in developing and

integrating within ourselves both a self and a self-consciousness for those identifications and roles which our unique life histories have provided us” (274). They continue, “Inauthenticity consists in our denying and being unable to integrate some facet of our life career with the rest” (274). Indeed, authenticity for us as Black professors in universities in the US means retaining our Afro Caribbean identities and at the same time integrating our research and scholarship so that it has an impact internationally and locally. George Herbert Mead (1934) frames this struggle of which we speak here, this tension between minority/majority identity, as that between the “I” and the “me”. The “I” is our self-declaration of who we are, namely majority people. The “me” would be a default minority status automatically imposed by American culture purely on the basis of race, and with which comes a set of behavioural and other expectations (see George Herbert Mead, 1934). Asserting this critical “I”, we believe, is the key to finding voice. Garrison (1998, 125) resorts to Mead in his essay on self-creation. He contends that the self-conscious “I” emerges from conversation with the me—self-creation coming about as a result of critical reflection. How then is this “*ting*” (the Trinidadian dialect for thing) we are doing to be categorized? Is this our attempt at self-creation via a process that we prefer to call “finding voice”? Is it a quest for self-understanding, and for saying who we are, rather than being told?

Caribbean icons as beacons

The case we seek to make here—that looking back to Caribbean roots has a centring and empowering influence, can be better made by briefly calling notice to the work of selected iconic figures. These men and women have made their marks on the region’s social and political history. In the process they have helped to construct its intellectual heritage and provided identity markers. We are particularly interested in the way in which Caribbean heritage comes to them at precisely the time when they

are about creating their finest work. Indeed we argue that their Caribbean-ness influences the questions they pose.

William's (1944) signal work *Capitalism and Slavery* was also his doctoral thesis, completed at Oxford. He argued that slavery was abolished not because of the advocacy of abolitionists, but because it had run its course as the mainspring of British capitalism. Williams conceived and argued this audacious and anti-colonial thesis in a sanctuary of British tradition. His writing demonstrated the British-flavored curricula in primary and secondary schools in his native Trinidad, and then at university in England. However, it did not completely obliterate his Afro-West Indianness. He remained fiercely West Indian and used his doctoral narrative to communicate the critical consciousness of the slave descendent and to speak the truth to colonial power, lest they write history in their favor.

Like Williams, Walter Rodney, from Guyana, completed his doctorate in Britain, studying at London University. His thesis too made an emphatic anti-colonialist statement, by re-reading slave history in his *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800*. In this work Rodney (1970) took lines that were contrary to that of western historians. He offered new insight into the debilitating and distorting effects of the slave trade in the Gold Coast. Rodney (1972) later restated this in his most acclaimed work "*How Europe Under-developed Africa*" in which he contended that a dialectic existed between the rise of Europe and the decline of Africa. Rodney's work and teachings provided a critical dimension of Afro-consciousness rising in the Caribbean region during the 1970s.

Derek Walcott 1992 Nobel Laureate of St. Lucia draws on the West Indian islands as the scene of his re-enactment of Homeric tradition. He too struggled with

the issue of authenticity, language, and identity. Walcott (1962) in one of his early poems *A Far Cry from Africa* reveals the tensions and his struggle with identity:

I who am poisoned with the blood of both
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed the drunken office of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?

His Nobel Laureate Lecture “*The Antilles: Fragment of an epic*” Walcott (1992) again draws on his experience of a of *Ramleela* to explore issues related to the othering of performances with which one might be unfamiliar. He admits, “I was seeing the *Ramleela* at Felicity as theatre when it was faith”..Walcott compares the purist interpretation of this performance to a grammarian interpretation of dialect. Indeed He supports our view that a dialect “ is a branch of its original language, an abridgement of it, but not a distortion or even a reduction” (In). In this lecture as in his many plays and poems there is evidence of Walcott’s Caribbeanness coming to him (See.).

Walcott joined the company of Arthur Lewis of St. Lucia who was the first Black man to receive a Nobel Prize (1979) for anything other than peace. He made his contribution to economics by setting forth a theory of under-development and economic growth. Lewis () sought to provide an appropriate framework for the study of economic development “driven by a combination of curiosity and practical need” (). The *point* named after Lewis recently got wide acclaim for the role it played in the economic development of China. In this work Lewis combined an analysis of the historical experience of developed countries with the central ideas of the classical economists to produce a broad picture of the development process. In his story a “capitalist” sector develops by taking labour from a non-capitalist backward “subsistence” sector. At an early stage of development, there would be “unlimited”

supplies of labour from the subsistence economy which means that the capitalist sector can expand without the need to raise wages.[

C. L. R. James had a strong influence on key African figures domiciled in London in the 1930s at the nascent stage of the African independence movement. He, like Rodney (1970, 1972) and Williams (1944), was repulsed by the slave heritage and sought to reveal untold histories illustrative of the perpetual quest of our ancestors for freedom. James (1963) in *Black Jacobins* drew attention to slave uprisings, notably that which led to the independence of Haiti. In his essay “*The making of the Caribbean People*” C.L.R. James (1980b) addresses the question of Caribbean-ness directly. What is it that motivates the people of the region, in particular, those of African heritage? He contends, and in our view quite compellingly, that it is rejection of the inferiority assumptions that attended West Indian slavery. He writes that coming out of the Middle Passage the newly arrived West Indian slave could discern that his lot was a concomitant of his race. Thus:

A white man was not a slave. The West Indian slave was not accustomed to that kind of slavery in Africa: and therefore in the history of the West Indies there is one dominant fact and that is the desire, sometimes expressed, sometimes unexpressed, but always there, the desire for liberty; the ridding oneself of the particular burden which is the special inheritance of the black skin. (James, 1980, 177)

We find this characterization of the West Indian to be accurate, validated by history, and by our lived experiences as Afro Caribbean members of the US academy. In the academy where we have minority designation, the desire of which James speaks is on vigil because this could lead easily to self-fulfilling prophecy. These circumstances could lead easily to alienation, self-doubt, and to self-fulfilling prophesy, if there is the absence of a countervailing inner force.

Marcus Garvey (of Jamaica) and Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure) (of Trinidad) were separated by decades. However, in their writings and on the streets, they both railed against the second-classness that was the condition of Blacks in the

United States., They became significant movement leaders by calling for empowerment. Garvey called for the repatriation of Afro-Americans to Africa, and indeed took concrete steps that led to the formation of Liberia. Toure coined the term "black power" and was a leader of student sit-ins in the 1960s.

(Insert pieces from the women like Claudia Jones (Trinidad) Sylvia Wynter (Jamaica) Erna Brodber (JA) Merle Hodge (Trinidad) Edwin Danticat (Haiti) Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua) Louise Bennet (JA)

What we find to be remarkable about the work of the persons/authors we have highlighted here is that they all employ heritage as springboards. There is the urge to tell the history of slavery, the basis of Caribbean society, from the point of view of its subjects. In their narratives, of anti-colonialism, black-power, and political independence, they manage to establish markers of self-hood from which it becomes impossible to walk away. The theme we discern in the work of these icons is a rejection of minority-ness—an unwillingness to see themselves as others would have them be seen. Indeed what we see across their work is the establishing of their own existential terms. In the cases of Williams () and Rodney (1970, 1072), there was a revising history away from colonial accounts. They called for the rejection of negative

Black stereotypes and their replacement with notions of empowerment, beauty, and assertiveness. This reflection on the motives of Caribbean icons is not meant to suggest that we are deterministically impelled as people from the region by ancestral suggestion. Indeed, our scholarly interests include the Caribbean to be sure, but extend vastly beyond it. Our point goes deeper. Beacons of Caribbean identity exist and their presence is important in our negotiation of space in the American university. It is the correlation between voice and gaze seen in the works of these exemplars that we find compelling. We see this as validating and inspiring, and full of suggestion as

to what, for the Afro Caribbean scholar functioning in North America, it means to be authentic.

You know who is me?

How did we consciously and unconsciously turn our gaze to the islands for the knowledge and strength to accept the differences that served to de-fine and empower us as we developed into scholars with whom we could live? The second author by virtue of near two decades at his university had many stories from which we could draw insight. And in retrospective accounts of departmental tensions and their resolution we kept going back ‘home’ for the local existential remedy. “*You know who is me?*” And in one case, again retrospective, the disposition was, “*I not from, you know, Mississippi, I from Marabella (South Trinidad)*”. The clarifying of place of origin as South Trinidad, rather than the American South, constituted an immunization strategy, employed as counter against the attitudes of his colleagues and their misunderstanding of the strength of his conviction and his unwillingness to be relegated to the margins.

The first author found that in the throes of the dissertation she drew on a robber speech (a think-aloud folk vehicle) that extolled the virtues of home land and her struggles with Euro American theoretical and methodological frameworks, It was at the point the second author reminded her, “*You not from Athens, Georgia, you from Mautica*” (North east Trinidad). This reminder of place—of where I was from—had the effect of pushing me to accept differences and the strengths that I brought with me to the US academy. It is this acceptance of our roots, and our differences, that define and empower us. However we insist that these differences are in no way intended to divide and conquer and so we invite ALL our sisters and brothers to journey with us.

Afro Caribbean Scholar speaks....

The more I² re-read and analyzed my written doctoral assignments, course work projects that grounded my preparation for a dissertation, the more I recognized that still small voice (s) that continuously beckoned me home. Thus although my actions might have been shaped by the cultural, social, and historical setting within which I was now located and was studying, they continued to be informed and influenced by the contexts that I inhabited for half a century. My interests therefore were and are always in methodological, pedagogical, and theoretical issues that pushed me to return “home” to what I knew and did not know. I combined it with the new knowledge that provoked me to critically challenge, re-think, re-construct, and de-construct the old.

As early as my first semester, I felt compelled to explore the experiences of my fellow women doctoral students from the Caribbean and the meanings they were making of their “stewardship”. This project provided me with rich data and allowed me to be a member of a community of scholars who shared similar tastes in food and brought back memories of what life was like in the Caribbean. This I realized was a much needed therapy that kept me from the doctor’s office and medication. There was strength in friendship and we were not afraid to hug and support openly. We could sit and chat for hours and we did not have to call up and ask if we could come over.

A White American professor encouraged me to use “any form with which you are comfortable” to re-present the data I collected as course work and as dissertation material. I returned to my experience as a teacher of English Literature and my reading of work by Caribbean authors (like Derek Walcott, Merle Hodge , Erna

² Although we share similarities in terms of the argument we make our stories are individual and unique . The first person I allows the first and second author to personalize their tales in the next few paragraphs of the narrative.

Brodber, Jamaica Kincaid,). My memories of Trinidad and Tobago's *best village* plays penned by playwrights (and fellow Mauticans) Efebo Wilkinson and Felix Edinboro) could not leave me. I remembered how we were able like Walcott to take European forms and make them our own. I was convinced that this was "the way to go". I added my days of participation in cultural arts festivals as a student teacher at Mautica³ and performing and singing on stages throughout the Caribbean islands. An act in three parts with the story teller, taking the role of Anancy (mythical spider) and spinning her web on stage seemed the most appropriate. "Crick, Crack, Anancy break he back for a two cent pommerac," I screeched on the page as the curtains opened and closed on the narratives. I was writing through the pain of transition and finding my voice in the US academy. My professor's words at the end of the graded assignment assured me that I was on a track that could take me somewhere. I soon discovered that there were women from the African continent, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean (s) who Alfred and Swaminathan (2004) described as "cultural bricoleurs". These women were drawing from "their diverse experiences different skills to develop a resilience for survival" (p. 268). Indeed, these actions and attitudes some scholars were theorizing made the difference. Ogbu (1992,1998) and Waters (1999) claimed that our voluntary immigrant status made Caribbean peoples different and accounted for our academic success. I was discovering that it was much more complex and complicated.

As we pointed out at the start of the article there was the issue of not embodying the notion of minority-ness. In addition to the majority and class status, The confidence that came from the accomplishments that accompanied my luggage were boosted by my embodiment of a majority and middle class status. These

³ Trinidad and Tobago's major in-service teacher training institution

characteristics allowed me to be very aware and conscious of the political, cultural, and social milieu into which I was being inducted. I might have felt some degree of fear initially but I refused to be intimidated or to compromise the standards of excellence I held. I was bold enough to apply for and obtain scholarships and internships that allowed me to create networks of support and mentorship. Some scholars (e.g. Pierre, 2004) viewed this notion of difference as a ploy to divide and conquer. Although there is some merit in her argument I was slowly realizing that I could draw strength from looking to “home” and the knowledge, attitudes, Caribbean humor, and values that I could not easily deny and which made me different, provided me with strength in my many moments of weakness. And, as standpoint theorists like (Washington & Harris, 2001) advise, “When spaces of difference are explored deeply and reflexively, then any one space may not seem so different from another.” (p. 82).

A central premise of what we want to say here is that Caribbean identity is critical in our arriving at centeredness. It allows us to proceed with our work in spite of the “noises in the attic” of the academy (Kilgour et al, 2000). The less centered one is, the more prone one becomes to distraction. The opportunity cost of pursuing distractions could easily be the great joy of being an academic and pursuing one’s scholarly interests.

Afro Caribbean Scholar speaks

What I have tried to do as a member of the North American academy for the past 19 years is to pursue my scholarly interests relentlessly, resolving always never to let the many noises that are concomitants of my existence therein drown out my great love for thinking, researching, and writing. I have been guided by the view that even for minority members, there is a kind of demonstrated competence from which the academy can not easily walk away. I will sketch in outline my scholarly interests,

and ways in which I have gone about their pursuit. My general area is practical knowledge, and its manifestation in curricula both at school and work. The related fields are technology education, vocational education and human resource development. In the United States these fields reflect technical culture and are responsive to employer needs. By nature the scholarship produced by adherents does not usually reflect a critical dimension, even though there is much opportunity for such. For example, technology education in the schools has been offered in a gendered way, and might be a reason why young women shy away from technical careers. Vocational educational education has historically been the basis of curriculum differentiation and discrimination in American schools, on race and class bases (Kliebard, 2004; Oakes, 1992, 2005). In general, the experience in the research university is that practical knowledge areas in education are of marginal academic status. A Platonist impulse in favor of abstraction is one reason. But, another is that the practical subject areas of which I speak tend to conduct their practice in isolation, with their own special organizations and scholarly journals. I have tried to carve out a space within this area of practice, in a way that does not tie me to the prevailing ethic of these fields in the American academy. I do so in several ways, including (a) framing questions about practical knowledge and in a way that is of interest beyond narrow practitioner fields, (b) by advocating and proposing liberal conceptions of these subjects (c) by connecting my work with international discourses, (d) by asking questions pertaining to race and class, and (e) by including focus on developing countries. The concerns I have with respect to use of the vocational curriculum in school for differentiation purposes are in keeping with democratic and social concerns raised by John Dewey (1916), to be seen in his *Democracy and Education*.

My background includes several years as a practitioner in the Caribbean, in the fields that I have set forth as areas of scholarship. I have therefore been able to draw on such experience in my scholarship and teaching. In a way then Dasein manifests itself in my approach by providing a solid context of practical experience on which to ground my thoughts as I write and teach. I have to this point written very sparingly about Caribbean problems. Instead I have dealt more generally with problems of introducing these subject areas in the curriculum of developing countries.

I have over two decades at the same institution derived great satisfaction, and arguably a reasonable degree of success, in pursuit of the agenda I have briefly sketched here. This by itself is unremarkable. The real story in this is that I have been able to keep my gaze affixed upon my scholarly interests amid the swirling currents. Upon reflection on the journey to this point, I can identify any number of distractions that, had I not been immunized culturally could potentially have been disorienting. Ogbu (1992) attributes this to my voluntary-minority status. The Afro-Caribbean professor at a major research university encounters the same peculiar existential challenges as fellow Black professors, primarily that of low expectations and concomitant self-fulfilling prophesy. My approach to this ethos of low expectations has been to ignore it. But self-fulfilling prophesy is insidious by nature. Because Black accomplishment is not expected, universities do not have schema to accommodate and celebrate it when it occurs. This is an indictment of the academe, on the count that it appears from my observations to be more accommodative of, and more prepared for, Black failure than Black success. But my disposition here has been to be aware of this, and to celebrate myself whenever I scale a hurdle that I know to be an acknowledged marker of competence at the research university. In my view, minority professors would have more satisfying existences in the academe if they

learn to recognize and strive to attain the markers of excellence set by the cultures in which they practice, and how to celebrate themselves. But to say this is to indict the academy. One should not have to resort to culture to find immunity in spaces that ostensibly subscribe above all to the ideal of rationality.

The call to ‘home’ continues

We seem to have been taking some responsibility for freeing our minds. Garvey’s (1939) pronouncement that the late Robert Marley in his Redemption Song, (1980) popularized years later came back to haunt us. Garvey reminded us that we had “to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery because whilst others might free the body, none but ourselves can free the mind. Mind is our only ruler sovereign”(Hill & Garvey, 1983, p. 791). This pronouncement still seems relevant to us as Afro Caribbean scholars in the 21st century. This article, brings to the fore the kinds of existential dilemmas that confront us as Afro Caribbean scholars. They demonstrate our search for a kind of freedom that seems to materialize when we listen to the voices that call us “home” (Brodber, 1991). This might account for our tendency to code switch () and to move along the continuum between Trinidadian vernacular or Creole and Trinidadian Standard English. It is use of the Trinidadian dialect that allowed us to express deep feelings and to engage in and relate to each other with a touch of humor that could only come from our use of the dialect/ that we intersperse in the article. We could not help but agree with Toni Morrison that there are some things we could not say “without recourse to my language” (Thomas LeClair, 1981, 27). Brooks (1985) discovered in her research that dialect is something people throughout history hold on to “because they regarded it as a badge of their identity and because they felt that only through it could they express their inner beings” (p. 2).

How/when/why do new historical perspectives and the past residues of dominant forces influence the path of learners and educators between resistance and conformity? And, we hasten to add, socio-cultural-political to historical perspectives. Our dialectical exploration have brought us closer to appreciating that learning changes our ability to participate in the world. Our Afro Caribbean-ness will always be with us. But by transforming our relations with the world and with others, our identities as social beings are affected. We recognize that it is not our naivety but our conscious awareness of the social, cultural, historical, and intellectual frames contribute to the ways in which we co-construct our notions of authenticity/in-authenticity. If we do not have that awareness, indeed we believe it will be forced on us. In our effort to desist from creating more nihilism and self-hate (hooks, 2003; West, 1993) we do not present ourselves as victims. It therefore seems most appropriate to conclude with the words of Freire (1997) who advises,

It is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite. On this level, the struggle for hope means denunciation, in no uncertain terms, of all abuses, schemes, and omissions. As we denounce them, we awaken in others and ourselves the need, and also the taste for hope. (106)

It is against this backdrop that we continue to explore hybrid ways of ethical existence and struggles to navigate our journeys within the academy.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank the reviewers whose suggestions helped us to make this article what it finally became.

1. ¹ Visweswaran claims, “the category “experiences” can be utilized not to pin down the truth of the individual subject, but as a means of reading ideological contradictions” (1994, p.50).

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