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# The More She Longs for Home, the Farther Away it Appears: A Paradox of Nostalgia in a Fulani Immigrant Girl's Life

## **Abstract**

Nostalgia, which is derived from the Greek words *nos* (returning home) and *algia* (pain), refers to longing for the loss of the familiar (Kaplan, 1987). The loss of our connection to the familiar is a painful experience as such loss is connected to a fundamental loss, the loss of ourselves. By losing a connection to familiar people, objects, and places that continue to remain the same from the past to the future, we also lose the continuity within ourselves. And this discontinuity of our past, present, and future selves creates anxiety within us (Milligan, 2003). The painful experience that accompanies the loss of the familiar and the severe longing for the lost was originally viewed as a type of depression, which required psychiatric treatment. However, increasing mobility and changes in modern society have made nostalgia a more typical experience for many. Nostalgia is a relevant experience particularly for immigrants who live away from their homeland.

## **Keywords**

nostalgia, mobility, Fulani immigrant woman

## **Disciplines**

Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education | Curriculum and Social Inquiry | Education | Educational Psychology

# The More She Longs for Home, the Farther Away it Appears

## A Paradox of Nostalgia in a Fulani Immigrant Girl's Life

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**N**OSTALGIA, which is derived from the Greek words *nos* (returning home) and *algia* (pain), refers to longing for the loss of the familiar (Kaplan, 1987). The loss of our connection to the familiar is a painful experience as such loss is connected to a fundamental loss, the loss of ourselves. By losing a connection to familiar people, objects, and places that continue to remain the same from the past to the future, we also lose the continuity within ourselves. And this discontinuity of our past, present, and future selves creates anxiety within us (Milligan, 2003). The painful experience that accompanies the loss of the familiar and the severe longing for the lost was originally viewed as a type of depression, which required psychiatric treatment. However, increasing mobility and changes in modern society have made nostalgia a more typical experience for many. Nostalgia is a relevant experience particularly for immigrants who live away from their homeland.

Past studies of immigrants' assimilation indicate that nostalgia is more than a painful and romantic sentiment surrounding their lost home. Immigrants have used nostalgia as a coping strategy for losses; for instance, immigrant community members collectively recreate past spaces based on their official collective memories of homeland. Immigrants celebrate holidays, conduct religious rituals, speak in their native language, and maintain traditional marriage practices brought from their homeland. They also collectively invest in sustaining that space for the future. This type of nostalgia is called restorative nostalgia (Boym, 2001). Apart from this collective type of nostalgia, immigrants also embrace their personal memories of homeland and project those memories to the future. For example, a song from a radio could trigger memories of good old days and bring one back to the past familiar space. This music could also lead one to imagine oneself being in that past space sometime in the future. This nostalgia is called reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001). The way in which immigrants enact nostalgia indicates that nostalgia is more about the present and future rather than the past (Pettersson, Olsson, & Popkewitz, 2007). Nostalgia is a creative process of change that involves a complex interaction between the past (memories), present (reconstruction of the past based on the memories), and future (projection of

the memories toward a time that is to come).

While nostalgia is an essential experience for immigrants, past studies on immigration have not used nostalgia as a conceptual tool to understand immigrants' experiences in a host country. Studies also have not taken into consideration that American culture is a form of restorative nostalgia. Just as immigrant communities restore their past based on their memories of homeland, American society has its own collective memories and attempts to restore a previous version of America based on the official collective memories of the nation. When new immigrants enter the American society, they are expected to internalize those official collective memories of America under the name of acculturation. Thus, in understanding new immigrants' experiences in a host country, we need to take into consideration three types of nostalgia: American restorative nostalgia, immigrants' ethnic communities' restorative nostalgia, and their reflective nostalgia.

This article will explore a young Fulani immigrant woman's experience of these three types of nostalgia in New York City. Specifically, the article will explore (a) how memories in each nostalgia manifested in her present life, (b) how she negotiated the gaps among the different types of nostalgia, and (c) how those negotiations shaped her future aspirations. The article will contribute to the field by providing an alternative way of understanding immigrants' adaptation in the U.S. In particular, it will provide a new picture of assimilation that is more dynamic and complex than the conventional theories of assimilation, which conceptualize assimilation as a linear staged process of change from the past to the future (Gordon, 1964) or as the process of maintaining one's culture of origin while acculturating to the host society (Alba & Nee, 2005; Gibson, 1998).

In the following section, drawing on past theoretical studies on nostalgia, I will explain the nature of restorative nostalgia (i.e., American restorative nostalgia and ethnic communities' restorative nostalgia) and reflective nostalgia by contrasting them against each other. In the explanation, I will focus on the nature of the memories and how those memories are used in recreating the past space in the present as well as in developing particular future aspirations. After explaining these two nostalgias, I will share the case of one first-generation Fulani immigrant girl's nostalgia. My aim in this section is to demonstrate a complicated and dynamic nature of nostalgias by providing examples; in other words, by drawing on interview data about an Fulani immigrant girl's memories of homeland, future aspirations, and participation in restorative nostalgia in her community and school in New York City. I will explore how three nostalgias—Fulani community's restorative nostalgia, her reflective nostalgia, and American restorative nostalgia—manifested in her life and shaped her future aspirations. Finally, I will articulate the consequences of negotiating the three different types of nostalgias and provide alternative ways to use nostalgia to cope with the loss.

### **Restorative Nostalgia**

Restorative nostalgia (Boym, 2001) is a common strategy the displaced use to cope with the loss of the familiar. Normally, restorative nostalgia begins with the construction of official memories of homeland— creation of a narrative and rituals which include symbols that emphasize the national and/or ethnic group's pure origin and its people's superiority over others (Anderson, 1983; Domosh & Seeager, 2001; Hall, 1992). The repetitive presentations of the stories and engagement in activities, such as sporting events and festivals, that involve the

national and ethnic symbols (e.g., national anthems and flags) in their lives provide group members with a sense of unity and belonging (Barker, 2003; Hall 1992). As individuals participate in the practice of restorative nostalgia, they come to share one unified collective memory of homeland and develop one solid common national or ethnic identity. In the following section, I am going to briefly delineate two types of restorative nostalgia (i.e., immigrant community's restorative nostalgia and American nostalgia) that are relevant to the lives of immigrants in the U.S.

### ***Immigrant Community's Restorative Nostalgia***

Past studies of immigrants show that they reconstruct their homeland by engaging in a set of rituals and practices brought from their homeland, such as celebrating holidays, speaking in the native language, and maintaining traditional family style (Duktova-Cope, 2003). In fact, what we normally call "ethnic cultures" are manifestations of their restorative nostalgia. In many reconstruction activities immigrants engage in, women play a significant role. Reflecting patriarchal heterosexual power within restorative nostalgia, women are expected to be the gatekeepers of the culture (Maira, 2002; McDowell, 1999; Sharp, 1996). Consequently, women are often placed in the domestic space, which is associated with "pure ethnic space" (Maira, 2002), and expected to engage in domestic work, such as taking care of their siblings, cooking, and cleaning (Gibson, 1988; Kasirye, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Young women, especially, receive special attention from the members of the community to remain "ethnic": Community members often voluntarily censor girls' lives in attempts to eliminate outside factors that could Americanize the girls. For example, community members monitor girls' attire, relationships with their peers, and daily schedules (Dwyer, 1998; Espirits 2001; Kasirye, 2008). The maintenance of traditional female gender roles and social relationships within the home and ethnic community contributes to the re-creation of immigrants' homeland in a new country. This gendered nature of restorative nostalgia, which is sustained by the domination of patriarchal power, suggests an exclusion of women's memories of homeland. It further raises questions of whether a set of practices that reiterates those patriarchic memories of homeland can provide women in immigrant communities with a sense of belonging.

### ***American Restorative Nostalgia***

The risk of losing the familiar is not just relevant to today's immigrants. Because of rapid changes in ideology, economy, technology, and demography, citizens who do not leave their homelands are susceptible to the loss of the familiar. Under this circumstance, adaptation of restorative nostalgia as a coping strategy for the loss has become prevalent among non-immigrant populations. Restorative nostalgia often takes place at the national level. Nations attempt to restore their national identity and vitality by involving citizens in the project of restorative nostalgia especially at the time of crisis (Maira, 2002). This is currently happening in the U.S. through the dissemination of collective official memories of America and the exclusion of other memories. Public schools are the crucial sites where the official memories are imbued into the minds of future citizens. The influence of restorative nostalgia in education is demonstrated, for example, by the banning of ethnic studies in Arizona state (Lewin, 2010) and the enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 that promotes an English-only policy in education (Spring, 2009). Another example of American restorative nostalgia, which reflects the patriarchal nature of official memory is neoconservative groups' promotion of Abstinence Only Until Marriage (AOUM) education, which attempts to restore traditional

Christian family and sexuality values—such as reproduction within only heterosexual monogamous marriage—that they argue to be “the core of American society” (Boryczka, 2009; Duggan, 2003).

As immigrants enter the U.S., they are expected to internalize the memories of the American nation gradually in order to gain full membership in society. The fact that new immigrants are expected to adapt to American restorative nostalgia while participating in their community’s nostalgia, each of which is rooted in its own separate set of memories, complicates the understanding of immigrants’ assimilation and the process of their formation of future aspirations. In addition, the awareness of this fact leads us to question how immigrants negotiate the tensions between contradictory memories embedded in their community’s and American restorative nostalgia.

### **Reflective Nostalgia and Immigrant Lives**

Apart from the ethnic community’s collective memories of homeland and American collective memories of the nation, immigrants individually have their own personal memories of homeland. This nostalgia based on the personal memories of homeland is called reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001). Although past studies of immigrant assimilation have not focused on this type of nostalgia, reflective nostalgia in the lives of immigrants has long been a prevalent theme in art and literature (Boym, 2001). The artistic and literary works of nostalgia show that memories of home inherent in reflective nostalgia are personal and romantic, often highlighting moments that contain close personal connection with their friends and families (Boym, 2001). As the nature of memories in reflective nostalgia is personal, the same piece of music that is played in a common social space could trigger multiple romantic narratives from individuals who come from different homelands. And these multiple stories open up possibilities of creating new relationships between self and other based on those memories (Boym, 2001). This possibility is something nonexistent in restorative nostalgia, which homogenizes individuals’ memories and places individuals in a fixed patriarchal relationship within a nation or an ethnic group (Boym, 2001).

While being romantic, reflective nostalgia also has a realistic aspect: Individuals can insert a critical analysis in remembering and imagining home. With reflective nostalgia, individuals engage in acts that are seemingly contradictory with each other; they critically examine their past while they continue to romanticize it (Boym, 2001). This tension of romanticization and critical examination of one’s cherished past allows individuals to construct a new vision of homeland. In their vision, their homeland is not the exact replications of their memories. Rather, the memories are modified through the critical examination of the memories. The modified memories of homeland, then, are projected to the future, and that imagined homeland becomes a place they want to “return” to in the future.

Reflective nostalgia problematizes the simplistic view of nostalgia. First, attentiveness to the distinctions between memories that are embedded in three types of nostalgia (i.e., American restorative nostalgia, ethnic communities’ nostalgia, and reflective nostalgia) addresses the importance of looking at how individuals negotiate the gaps among these three types of nostalgia and how such negotiations influence immigrants’ future visions of home. In addition, the nature of critical examination of memories in reflective nostalgia indicates the limitations of viewing immigrants’ future aspirations as a simple projection of their past memories of homeland to the



future. It further suggests the needs for us to pay attention to how immigrants' critical examination of their memories of homeland shapes their future aspirations.

### **Nostalgia of a Fulani Immigrant Girl**

Responding to the need for studies of nostalgia and immigrants' future aspirations based on the acknowledgement of multiple and dynamic natures of nostalgia, I explored how different types of nostalgia manifest in a Fulani immigrant girl's life and how they shape her future aspirations. In this article, I will answer the following questions: (a) How do collective memories of homeland in the restorative nostalgia of the Fulani community and American society, and her personal memories of home in reflective nostalgia manifest in her current life?; and (b) How does her negotiation of three types of nostalgia as well as her critical examinations of the memories in each nostalgia shape her future aspirations? In exploring these questions, I focused on the experience of a first-generation immigrant girl. First-generation immigrant girls are celebrated for having higher academic achievement and aspirations than boys while maintaining their ethnicity, native language, and traditional social relationships within their ethnic community (Lopez, 2003; Qin, 2003; Stritikus & Nyugen, 2007; Zhou & Bankson, 2001). The maintenance of ethnic identity and native language indicate that first-generation immigrant girls are actively enacting in their community's nostalgia and maintaining their connection to their homeland. Their high level of adjustment to the new society—demonstrated by, for example, their mastery of the English language and conformity to the American “essential” cultural norms—also shows that they are participating in restorative nostalgia of America. Thus, studying this specific population provides insights into their experience of different types of nostalgia.

#### ***International School and Shy'm***

This article was written based on the data in a larger study on first-generation immigrant girls' future aspirations. The data were collected between 2005 and 2008 in an international high school located in a working-class community in New York City, which served the needs of late-entry English-language learning students (Anormaliza & Foy, 2003). The student body was approximately 300, which was comprised of two major ethnic groups, West Africans and Latinos. Although students were placed into culturally and linguistically heterogeneous classes, friendship circles within the school were ethnically based. Among the participants of my study, Shy'm was an exception in the sense that she chose to form friendships with a Jamaican and a Tibetan student (two other participants in the study). At the beginning of the study, I spent some time chatting with the girls after school and during lunch to establish a rapport. Throughout the study, I conducted 12 individual and 15 focus-group interviews. In four of the interviews, I conducted photo elicitation interviews, using photos that participants took to express the theme “this is me and my life in the future.”

In the interviews, all three participants shared unique personal stories related to nostalgia and future aspirations. However, in this article, I am going to focus on Shy'm's narrative. This is because Shy'm's story most succinctly represents the characteristics of both restorative and reflective nostalgia. At the time of the interview, Shy'm, a Fulani girl from Guinea in West Africa, was 15 years old. Similar to her self-chosen pseudonym, Shy'm was a *shy* Fulani Muslim girl. She came to the U.S. in 2002 with her family to escape from the political turmoil in Guinea. Although she did not socialize with her Fulani peers at school, she missed her homeland greatly

and was hoping to go back to her country after she becomes a doctor sometime in the future. In order to achieve her dream, Shy'm studied rigorously everyday, which made her become one of the most successful students in her school. She maintained a high grade point average and passed four subjects in the Regents exams by the end of 11th grade.

### ***Recreating Fulani Home: Shy'm's Experience of Community's Restorative Nostalgia***

It is common for immigrant community members to engage collectively in restorative nostalgia in a host country: The community members recreate their homeland by replicating social relationships, using the native language, and practicing customs brought from their homeland. Homes, which in restorative nostalgia are often viewed as the spiritual place where "pure" cultures are maintained and "true" selves are nurtured (Maira, 2002; McDowell, 1999), are important space for immigrants. Reflecting this patriarchal view of home, community members invest in maintaining everyday activities and interactions within homes similar to those in their homeland.

In order to recreate the home in the host country, the maintenance of the family structure becomes a central concern for the community. Shy'm experienced this phenomenon in her community, where the marriages of young women were arranged by male members of the family (Kasirye, 2008). Shy'm's parents constantly put pressure on her to marry soon. Shy'm expressed her concerns:

Shy'm: My parents want [me to get married to] someone from Guinea. In Guinea, most people are already married, and you become a second wife or a third wife. I don't like that. They marry young, too. Once you are, like, 20 you cannot stay in your parents' house. You are too old to stay there. If I were in Guinea right now, my parents would want me to get married now.... (Interview, June 16, 2007)

The community's tradition of polygamous arranged marriage did not appeal to Shy'm. The notion of home that was embedded in her community's restorative nostalgia and the role women had to play to reconstruct such a home was patriarchal. The home in the patriarchal memories of homeland in the community's restorative nostalgia was not the home Shy'm longed for. Her desire to escape from the patriarchal system and her parents' persistent pressure for her to follow the tradition as a "Fulani woman" caused constant conflict between Shy'm and her parents at home. Amid the struggle, Shy'm strongly held on to her personal memories of homeland and developed a fantasy of returning to her homeland and leading an ideal lifestyle, which was different from the traditional lifestyle expected of Fulani women.

### **Shy'm's Reflective Nostalgia**

#### ***Romanticization of Personal Memories of Home***

Unlike restorative nostalgia, which consists of collective practices of community members in the re-creation of homelands based on the official collective memories of homeland, in reflective nostalgia one simply dwells on the cultural spaces where one had a close personal connection with others and imagines oneself being there in the present and in the future (Boym, 2001). The following quote shows that Shy'm's nostalgia was reflective rather than restorative:



I want to go back to Guinea. I love there; I just love there, and I want to be there. I don't know. It is just that I don't really like to stay here because, like, you don't see other people. Everybody puts locks, and they don't come out; [there is] just nobody to play with. It was way different in Guinea. All the doors were open, and everyone was outside. My mom would go to my aunt's or stepmom's house. You could go walk in and out different places there.... I used to go to my friend's house after school. Sometimes she had dishes to clean. I helped her so that we could go outside. When we finish, all of our friends came. We danced and we did [dance] contests. We divided into two groups and we danced. (Interview, November 4, 2007)

Unlike patriarchal memories in restorative nostalgia, Shy'm's memory of home was centered on personal experiences, happy moments she had with her friends in her village in Guinea. Her memory of life in the village was also glorified. She even described the domestic work (e.g., washing dishes with her friend) as a beloved moment. In addition, her statement about her mother and her "stepmom" visiting each other indicates there was even an acceptance of polygamous marriage in her nostalgic memory. The connection with friends and family members that she had in her homeland was especially romanticized as she contrasted it with her current life situation, which was characterized by isolation and conflict with her family members. The juxtaposition of her problematic present and her glorified past, which is a common characteristic of nostalgia, further increased her longing for the lost past (Kaplan, 1987).

Imagining herself being in the past, where she had a close connection with her friends, reestablished a sense of stability. The emotionally safe space that Shy'm created in her present life, where she imaginatively reexperienced the close connection with her friends and family, provided her a continuum of past, present, and future. This conceptual space (romanticized memories of home projected to the future), especially amid the constant conflict with her parents about marriage, became the only space where she belonged. Shy'm spent many hours in her bedroom, where she had arranged her furniture in the same way it was in her bedroom in Guinea, pondering her homeland and the cherished memories of home.

### ***Critical Examination of Home in her Memory and her Future Home***

While Shy'm dwelled in the romanticized memory of home, she also critically examined these memories. This critical examination reflects another characteristic of reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001). Even though Shy'm possessed romanticized memories of home, she was also aware that the reality of life in Guinea was different from the one in her memory. Thus, Shy'm examined her own romanticized memory of her homeland and modified her future vision instead of simply projecting the glorified memories of homeland on to the future. This adjustment based on the critical examination is present in her conscious choice of living in a city even though she missed her village and her friends there.

Shy'm expressed her awareness that she would not be able to escape from the traditions in the village, especially from the village's disapproval of those who do not follow the norm of the community.

I want to live in a big house, but if you live in a big house, [the villagers] say bad things about you. People in village, they may do something bad to you. They can take money or power away from you. They can make you sick, too. Maybe I will live in the city where everything is, like, really beautiful and people barely know who you are. (Interview,

November 4, 2007)

Her statement about the villagers' power to harm the people who are materially well-off affirms Shy'm's awareness that the materially fulfilled lifestyle she wanted was incompatible with the villagers' expectations. Shy'm examined and accepted this gap between her former community members' life and the ideal life she wanted to have. Then, she concluded that people in her village—the very people she missed and wanted to be reconnected to—would not welcome her if she were to return there as a professional woman and have a luxurious life style. Having negotiated the desire to return to her village and live outside the patriarchal family system in the Fulani culture, Shy'm concluded that living in a city in Guinea instead of her village was the best way. It shows that her future vision of home was a reflection of reflective nostalgia. It was not a simple projection of her memory of home to the future as it is in the restorative nostalgia; her dream was modified based on the critical examination of her memory.

***Becoming Independent: A Method for Change***

Although Shy'm's dream of returning to Africa was guided by her cherished personal memories of homeland, Shy'm was also aware that achieving academic and occupational success in the U.S., which required acculturation to American society, was the necessary step to achieve this goal. Her determination to attain academic and occupational success in the U.S. stemmed from her belief that such success was the precondition for financial independence, which she needed in order to lead the life she dreamed of in Guinea. This awareness was in fact formed by her reflective nostalgia, critical examination of the community's restorative nostalgia: Shy'm became conscious of the patriarchal family system, particularly women's financial dependence on male members of the family, which this system enforces as the source of their oppression. She said:

My mom, she wants to leave [the marriage], but the thing is that she can't leave because her dad is sick, and her dad can't do nothing right now. So, if she goes back there, she has nobody to support her. And she doesn't work or have her own house. But sometimes when my dad is sick, she really worries, and she says she cares about him. The rest of the time, she cannot do nothing because she got the same problem. We are all stuck in one place. (Interview, June 16, 2007)

Shy'm articulated her mother's financial dependence on her husband and father. She realized the major problem of the Fulani marriage system lies in the economic structure of marriage, which makes women financially dependent on male members of the family. Based on the critique, Shy'm came to believe that financial independence was crucial for developing equitable gender relationships within a home. Shy'm's determination to attain financial independence is also evidenced in her statement about a career and building her own home. She stated, "I think it is important to have a career.... I want my own money. If he [my future husband] wants, he can leave. I will have my own house" (Interview, December 7, 2007). This statement also shows her understanding that marriage is a choice in one's life, not an obligation for women. While fighting against her parents' pressure to conform to the traditional marriage practice and witnessing her mother's endurance in her marriage, Shy'm proceeded on the path to financial independence so that she could one day have her ideal family in her homeland. This action is a manifestation of

Shy'm's reflective nostalgia —her negotiation of restorative nostalgia and longing for home based on her romanticized memories of homeland.

What is peculiar about the way Shy'm enacted her reflective nostalgia is that she didn't try to restore the close relationships she longed for in the present life. For example, she didn't try to change the relationships with her parents or friends. Shy'm instead saw the present moment as the time of investment for her future. Thus, her reflective nostalgia also gained the quality of future-orientedness. The following statement shows her careful planning of her life in order to achieve her dream:

I want to graduate from high school and college, and then I want to go back to Africa and be a doctor. That is what I want to be, and I don't want to get married until I become a doctor ... I don't want to stay here [the U.S.] forever, and I need some job that I can do when I go back. I could be a doctor there. I have an uncle. He went to France and studied and everything. He made his own hospital, and he is successful. In African countries, people are sick, but they don't even have medicine. They have lots of people who are sick. (Interview, November 6, 2007)

Seeking a profession that promises her financial independence was crucial in her future aspiration. Shy'm chose an occupation, a medical doctor, based on the observation that this profession could promise self-sustainability. Her quote also shows that this occupational choice reflects an element of reflective nostalgia, her desire to be reconnected to people in Guinea in a humanistic way by responding to their needs. In achieving this career goal mixed with her romantic sentiment for her homeland, Shy'm planned her life linearly, emphasizing the attainment of her education and career goals while postponing marriage and reproduction. This method of success, in fact, resonates with current American society's expectations for female citizens, where the state is withdrawing itself from the provision of social services and requiring all citizens, including women, to be self-sustainable and productive (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2008; Harris, 2004; Harvey, 2005; McRobbie, 2007). Thus, the method Shy'm chose to achieve this goal shows her adaptation to the current political and economic system in the U.S. In the adaptation process, her desire to return to her homeland in the future became translated into rigorous investment in education, which she considered a ticket to the achievement for her dream.

### ***Participation in American Restorative Nostalgia: Pressure to Master American English***

In her plan of returning to her homeland, Shy'm placed mastery of English as the prerequisite for the attainment of all other goals that are lineally aligned: educational success, occupational success, financial independence, and having an ideal relationship with her future husband in her homeland. Shy'm expressed her strong commitment in the mastery of the English language:

Shy'm: English is important, like, they only speak English in this country. They don't speak your language. First of all, the tests, SAT and Regents, all those things are in English. So, if you don't learn English, you cannot pass those. This is a country of English.

Author: Did you speak English when you first came?

Shy'm: Not so much. When I first came to this country, I was in sixth grade, and I only knew a few words [in English]. My friend used to teach me new words at school during

lunchtime. Then, I started to understand words. I told my friends [from Guinea] not to speak in Fulani. I told them, “I came here to learn English not Fulani. I already know Fulani.” (Interview, December 7, 2007)

As Shy’m acknowledges, the mastery of English determines the academic success of immigrant students in the American education system today (Ruiz-De-Valasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2000; Suárez-Orozco, 2008). The dependence of one’s English language fluency on one’s academics intensified as the U.S. education system began implementing the English-only policy after the implementation of NCLB in 2001 (Spring, 2009). Shy’m was experiencing the effects of the policy in the form of pressure to develop native fluency in English. Shy’m’s statement, “If you don’t learn English, you cannot pass those [tests]” succinctly captures the reality of the educational opportunities for English Language Learning (ELL) students in American schools. Despite the fact that it normally takes five to seven years to develop academic fluency in English (Cummins, 1984), ELL students must take the statewide-standardized tests in English.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Shy’m had to accelerate her English language acquisition process through strong commitment and hard work in order to pass the test. For Shy’m, mastering English was a method of attaining her dream: to become a financially independent doctor and lead an ideal lifestyle in her homeland. In other words, her persistence in speaking only in English in her current life was an enactment of her reflective nostalgia. Ironically, Shy’m was not aware that the English-only policy in education was a manifestation of American nostalgia. Just as immigrant community members strive to sustain the language brought from their homeland to rearticulate their ethnic pride and restore unity among its members, the U.S., which is currently facing drastic demographic changes due to massive immigration (Suárez-Orozco, 2005), is attempting to restore the “good old America,” by intensifying the use of American English, which symbolizes the “essence” of American society.<sup>2</sup> Shy’m’s action of speaking only in English in the U.S. was guided by two types of nostalgia (her reflective nostalgia and American restorative nostalgia) grounded in two separate memories of home, which were supposedly mutually exclusive of each other. However, Shy’m didn’t experience any internal contradictions. In fact, these two potentially incompatible nostalgias worked complementarily: One nostalgia (American nostalgia) served as a way to achieve the goals that were formed from her reflective nostalgia.

### *Paradox*

While Shy’m didn’t acknowledge the contradictions that underlay her simultaneous use of reflective nostalgia and American nostalgia, her Fulani peers recognized the contradictions. This gap placed Shy’m in a paradoxical situation: She rigorously invested herself in learning English to return to her homeland, where she had close connections with others. As a result, she became distant from her Fulani peers in her current life. Shy’m’s isolation started as her friends began to criticize Shy’m for speaking only in English.

Shy’m: I always speak in English.

Author: What if they (your Fulani-speaking friends) speak to you in Fulani?

Shy’m: I speak in English. And they always say, “Who are you trying to be?” Just because I am speaking in English, they say, “If you want to talk to us, speak in Fulani. If you want to speak English, then speak to English people.” I say, I speak whatever I want to. I always speak English. They say that I am trying to be an American. I am, like “OK.” (Interview, December 7, 2007).

Maintenance of one's native language is one of the important practices of restorative nostalgia.

Shy'm's quote above shows that the basic cause for the conflict between Shy'm and her friends was the difference in the type of nostalgia each chose as a strategy for survival in America. Shy'm chose to participate in the American restorative nostalgia as a method of returning to her homeland in the future. On the other hand, Shy'm's friends chose restorative nostalgia of the Fulani community and stayed within the ethnic origin-based community. By repetitively using the communication tools that reiterated the group's origin, they strengthened the unity and confirmed each other's loyalty to the group (Ueda, 1999). The clique provided them a sense of belonging to the Fulani girls at the international school, where multiple ethnic groups cohabited with tension. The linguistic boundaries that overlay the ethnic boundaries among students were constantly reinforced through inclusion and exclusion. Shy'm's friends considered Shy'm, who persistently spoke in English, an outsider who did not share their collective memory, and they excluded Shy'm from their circle. Although the fact that Shy'm spoke in English was driven by her nostalgia—longing for her homeland—her friends could not detect that from her action.

Shy'm's choice to speak only in English placed her into a state of isolation, a state which was opposite of what she longed for in her reflective nostalgia. It was ironic that Shy'm fell into this paradox driven by her desire to return to her homeland. What motivated Shy'm to participate in American restorative nostalgia was her cherished personal memories of homeland and her desire to return there and be in a close relationship with others just as she was in the past. Shy'm's strong determination to achieve her dream placed her in a paradox. The more she longed for her homeland, the more compelled she felt to master English. However, the more she spoke in English, the more she became isolated from her Fulani friends.

### **Emerging from the Paradox: Possibilities of Reflective Nostalgia**

This article, which explores Shy'm's experience of nostalgia, shows that Shy'm was exposed to three different kinds of nostalgia: Fulani community's restorative nostalgia, American restorative nostalgia, and her own reflective nostalgia. Shy'm didn't agree with the patriarchal practices in the Fulani community's restorative nostalgia, and the collective memories of homeland didn't resonate with her personal memories of homeland. On the other hand, Shy'm didn't find any incompatibility between her reflective nostalgia and American nostalgia. She actively practiced American nostalgia by speaking only in English because she believed that the mastery of the English language was the first step toward achieving her dream of returning to her homeland. However, American nostalgia created conflict between Shy'm and her Fulani friends, who operated in Fulani restorative nostalgia. The intersection of the three types of nostalgia (i.e., American restorative nostalgia, Fulani restorative nostalgia, and Shy'm's reflective nostalgia) that Shy'm experienced shows that together they worked to place Shy'm in a state of isolation and conflict with her family and friends; none of these nostalgias provided Shy'm with a space of belonging. In fact, the more she longed for her homeland and to be in a close relationship with others, the more isolated she became from them.

There were three major causes for this paradox. The first cause was her uncritical support of American restorative nostalgia: Shy'm was not aware that she was participating in American restorative nostalgia in her pursuit of achieving her dream. The second cause was the individualized nature of her reflective nostalgia: Shy'm kept her personal memories of



hometown, critical examinations of those memories, and future aspirations all within herself and didn't share them with her friends and family. Her friends were never aware of Shy'm's longing for hometown and her desire to return there. This further contributed to her friends' perception of Shy'm as simply trying to be "American" by speaking only in English. The final cause of the paradox was future-orientedness of her reflective nostalgia. Shy'm didn't try to re-create ideal relationships she had with others in her hometown in her current life. Instead, Shy'm believed the ideal life was something to be obtained only in the future, after the achievement of academic and occupational success. Therefore, in her present life, she focused merely on investing in her education in order to prepare herself for that future.

Although Shy'm fell into a paradox, the article indicates that reflective nostalgia still offers a great value for immigrants; nostalgia can still function as a coping strategy for individuals to deal with their losses. The way Shy'm enacted reflective nostalgia was individualistic and future-oriented. If reflective nostalgia was enacted collectively in the present moment, it could provide a space for belonging without leading individuals to fall into a paradox. In other words, instead of pondering the memories and future ideal vision of community individually, we could (1) construct new collective memories that include multiple memories of home from individuals of diverse backgrounds<sup>3</sup>; (2) develop a common ideal vision of future society based on the critical examination of both individual and collective memories of hometown in restorative and reflective nostalgia in the present; and (3) begin constructing the ideal society through the transformation of existing practices of restorative nostalgia in ethnic communities and larger American society in the present.

The doubleness of reflective nostalgia (Miller, 2010)—the evocation of multiple romanticized stories of the past and the critical examinations of those stories—could lead us to create a new type of community, a community in which members are not tied to the fixed social relationships that are rooted in the nationalistic/ethnocentric and patriarchal collective memories as it is in restorative nostalgia. American schools have the potential to become the major sites where this new reflective nostalgia is enacted. Public schools in the U.S. have become ethnically diverse spaces (Suárez -Orozco, 2005) where individuals who hold various collective and personal memories of hometowns come together. This social environment could provide educators opportunities to create dialogic spaces where students can share their personal and collective memories of hometown and critically examine them.

Teachers should especially invest in creating spaces where individuals can engage in the critical reflection of the memories inherent not only in their own communities but also in other communities where they may not have official membership. Students will greatly benefit from the dialogues if educators place the focus on exploring common social issues that cut across various communities' practices of restorative nostalgia. In particular, highlighting manifestations of the ethnocentric and the patriarchal nature of memories of hometown in various ethnic communities and in the American society is important. For example, polygamous arranged marriage, which was a major concern for Shy'm, can be brought into the public dialogic space as an issue of sexuality rights, which are rights for everyone regardless of one's ethnic background.

The need for educators to take responsibility for creating such spaces for dialogue is urgent today. The current economic and political instability in the U.S. has created a great anxiety and antagonism, particularly against immigrants (Darder, 2007) who do not share the official American memories. When ethnic tension arises, both immigrants and non-immigrants are tempted to draw back to our old pattern of "longing" for fixed collective memories of "origin" to gain a sense of stability. Thus, restorative nostalgia that is exclusive in nature has expanded



within the nation in the form of nationalism and ethnocentrism. However, we, especially educators, who work with diverse populations, must resist the temptation to depend on restorative nostalgia. We should instead believe in the possibilities of new reflective nostalgia, which is collective and focused on the present. We need to open ourselves to diverse memories of home and engage in collective critical examinations of those memories and the construction of future visions of homes. This should lead us not only toward the future but also to fresh memories, new homes to long for, and above all, a new sense of belonging.

### Notes

1. Although some test accommodations such as time extension and the use of translated versions of the tests are available (e.g., Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian and Spanish) (Menken, 2005), Shy'm had to take the test in English as there was no translation of the test in her language, Fulani.
2. As it is explained in the section of restorative nostalgia, these official memories are crafted with the influence of the state power (Hall, 1992). Thus, in this official memory, the fact that multiple languages have always been spoken throughout the history of the U.S. is excluded.
3. These memories would be different from nationalistic/ethnocentric and patriarchal memories in restorative nostalgia, which are exclusive.

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