

“You can’t speak Creole in here. English only”: Experiences of Stigma and Acts of Resistance among Adults of Haitian Descent in The Bahamas

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Abstract

This article builds upon William J. Fielding, Virginia Ballance, Carol Scriven, Thaddeus McDonald, and Pandora Johnson’s (2008) argument that there is a strong and pervasive stigma of being Haitian in The Bahamas. In this article, I build upon and support their research by using examples from 28 semi-structured interviews with adults of Haitian descent in The Bahamas which reinforce their arguments concerning stigma. In particular, I explore examples of stigma in the public hospital, speaking Haitian Creole, fear of being stopped by immigration officers, and surnames. This article will conclude by discussing the ways people of Haitian descent display acts of resistance in the face of such stigma. This is important because it demonstrates the way people of Haitian descent persevere in the face of adversity and the incessant stigma of being Haitian in The Bahamas.

Introduction

In early September 2019, Hurricane Dorian struck The Bahamas destroying businesses, homes, displacing thousands, and killing roughly seventy people. In a *South Florida Sun Sentinel* news article, “Stigma of being Haitian in the Bahamas reignites after Hurricane Dorian,” Tonya Alanez (2019) discusses tension between Bahamians and Haitians in the wake of the national crisis. Haitians, an already extremely vulnerable population in The Bahamas, arguably became even more vulnerable in the aftermath of the storm. However, the use of the word “reignites” in the title, may be somewhat misleading as the stigma of being Haitian is pervasive and incessant in the lived experiences of people of Haitian descent in The Bahamas.

In this article, I build upon William J. Fielding, Virginia Ballance, Carol Scriven, Thaddeus McDonald, and Pandora Johnson’s

(2008) argument that Haitians are a highly stigmatized group, that there is a strong and pervasive stigma of being Haitian in The Bahamas. In their work, Fielding et al. (2008), use secondary literature, media reports, and data from the *Report of the 2000 Census of Population and Housing* (Bahamas Department of Statistics, 2002) to situate their argument on the stigma of being Haitian in The Bahamas. In this article, I build upon and support their research by using examples from twenty-eight semi-structured interviews with adults of Haitian descent in The Bahamas which reinforce their arguments concerning stigma. In particular, I explore examples of stigma in the public hospital, speaking Haitian Creole, fear of being stopped by immigration officers, and surnames. This article will conclude by discussing the ways people of Haitian descent display acts of resistance in the face of such stigma. This is important because it

demonstrates the way people of Haitian descent persevere in the face of adversity and the incessant stigma of being Haitian in The Bahamas.

Research Context

In spring 2015, I conducted 28 semi-structured, open-ended interviews with English-speaking women (15) and men (13) of Haitian descent born and/or raised in The Bahamas. Participants were currently living in Nassau, aged 18 years to 43 years of age. Sixteen of the participants were in their 20s, six were in their late teens, and five were in their 30s. Pseudonyms are used to protect the confidentiality of the participants. This research revolved around two main research questions: What does it mean to be a person of Haitian descent born and/or raised in The Bahamas? How do persons of Haitian descent define themselves and construct their identities in The Bahamas? Out of the 28 participants, 20 expressed experiencing stigma in public spaces in Nassau. Although the remaining eight did not speak specifically about stigma, it does not necessarily mean they never experienced or witnessed stigma surrounding Haitianess in The Bahamas.

This article uses Fielding et al.'s (2008) conceptualization of the stigma of being Haitian in The Bahamas as a framework for discussing stigma among Haitians in The Bahamas. In their research, the authors argue that Haitians are a highly stigmatized group in The Bahamas and identify the ways Haitians suffer from stigma in the country. Using Ervin Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma as well as Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan's (2001) four characteristics of stigma, Fielding et al. (2008) developed a framework for understanding the way Haitians experience stigma in The Bahamas. Goffman (1963) defines stigma as the devaluing of one's social identity. In particular, Fielding et al. (2008) use the definition and four attributes of stigma developed by Link and Phelan (2001) as a

lens to conceptualize the stigma of being Haitian in the Bahamas. In their work, Link and Phelan respond to critiques of gaps in the definition and operation of stigma. Approaching stigma from a sociological perspective, they define stigma as being composed of the following: labelling (people separate and label human differences. These differences are not innate or static and are socially imposed); stereotyping (labelled individuals are associated with negative stereotypes and/or undesirable characteristics meaning stigma involves a label and an associated stereotype); separation (labelled individuals are placed into categories which separate "us" from "them"); and status loss and discrimination (labelled individuals experience inequality due to status loss and discrimination). Discrimination, a category often not included in stigma but critical to how it operates, includes individual and structural discrimination. Importantly, Link and Phelan argue that in order for stigma to occur, these categories must simultaneously happen with power. Stigma cannot operate without access to social, economic, and political power.

The categories listed above, labelling, stereotyping, separation, and status loss and discrimination are used by Fielding et al. (2008) to conceptualize the stigma of being Haitian in The Bahamas. The following three sections of this paper will look at the experiences of stigma mentioned by participants specifically discriminatory and prejudicial treatment at public hospitals, negative reactions from Bahamians due to speaking Haitian Creole in public spaces, being stopped by immigration officers as well as the way surnames function as a means to discriminate and stigmatize individuals. It is important to note that the experiences discussed below may simultaneously fall into one or more categories as they co-occur and often mutually reinforce one another. Finally, Fielding et al.'s research on stigma primarily

applies to Haitian nationals whereas this research is based on the experiences of adults of Haitian descent born and raised in The Bahamas, some of whom have Bahamian citizenship. This distinction means that the stigma of being Haitian encompasses the entire community even when one has Bahamian citizenship.

Use in Public Hospitals

Haitian nationals represent the largest undocumented community in The Bahamas. Because of their economic status and relatively low level of education in Haiti, the Haitian community in The Bahamas often disproportionately live in poverty as they are primarily employed in low and semi-skilled agricultural or domestic occupations (The College of The Bahamas, 2005). High levels of poverty in the Haitian community means they are more likely to use government hospitals than private hospitals. Poverty in the Haitian community within The Bahamas operates as a form of stigma as the levels of poverty and underemployment and unemployment are labelled as distinct differences between Bahamians and Haitians (Fielding et al., 2008). In 1998, the Public Hospitals Authority was created to oversee the three government hospitals in The Bahamas: Princess Margaret Hospital, the Rand Memorial Hospital, and Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre which are located in Nassau, New Providence and Freeport, Grand Bahama. Although there are private hospitals, the majority of Bahamians receive care from public hospitals. Located in Nassau, Princess Margaret Hospital provides access to healthcare regardless of socioeconomic status (Public Hospitals Authority, 2020), and this is where my participants sought healthcare and witnessed or experienced stigma due to their surnames or speaking Haitian Creole.

Participants discussed discrimination and mistreatment by hospital staff once they

recognized an individual was of Haitian descent. Marjorie—a 21-year-old Bahamian-born individual who had recently received Bahamian citizenship—spoke about her experiences at the hospital and the discriminatory treatment she often received because of her last name. According to Marjorie, “When they would call your name, like, say for example the nurse would call your name to come in the doctor’s office, she would say it funny and then look; the way she looked would just give it away.” Participant Wilma—a 21-year-old Bahamian-born individual who was waiting for Bahamian citizenship—spoke about her sister’s experience at the hospital where the nurses helped two patients with their bags, but her sister had to carry her own bags. Wilma believed that her sister had to carry her own bags because of her last name which functions as a signifier of Haitian ethnicity. Wilma went on to explain that the experience was so hurtful that “every time she tell me that story, like tears just come to her eyes.” According to Fielding et al. (2008), “Surnames can be an indicator of ethnicity and used to label and discriminate” (p. 47). This is not uncommon as surnames are used as a way to discriminate in the labour market and other discriminatory practices based on surnames of a stigmatized group (Bertrand & Sendhil, 2004; Bushman & Bonacci, 2004; Rubenstein & Brenner, 2013). In The Bahamas, the discrimination and stigma can be so intense that some Haitians change their name just to avoid the hostility that may accompany disclosure of their ethnicity (Fielding et al., 2008). Although none of the interviewees disclosed that they had changed or lied about their names, they did express hesitancy in telling people their names because of the reaction they might have received from Bahamian nationals.

However, the stigma experienced by Haitians at the public hospital also connect to larger ideas that Haitians are taking over The

Bahamas and are a threat to the national and cultural sovereignty of The Bahamas. For example, Marjorie shared, “and then sometimes, sometimes they don’t just look at you. They look at you and they say negative things. They would say, ummm, ‘These Haitians filling up the hospitals,’ and all sorts of stuff or whatever.” As mentioned above, the high levels of poverty in the Haitian community in The Bahamas mean when they need to go to the hospital, they are more likely to seek services from government hospitals creating the perception that Haitians are taking over and using government facilities that should be reserved for Bahamian nationals. This means that Bahamians view the Haitian community as overpopulated as well as comprised of foreigners (whether born in The Bahamas or not) taking advantage of public resources designed for the privilege and use of Bahamian citizens exclusively (Fielding et al., 2008).

Language also functions as a form of stigma, and Haitian Creole represents a linguistic and cultural difference between Haitians and Bahamians (Fielding et al., 2008). Wilma recounted her sister’s experience in the waiting room at Princess Margaret Hospital as another woman of Haitian descent was going into labour. According to Wilma, the woman was speaking Haitian Creole during labour, and the nurses were overheard saying “Oh, she can’t even speak English.” Her sister sat in silence as she overheard this conversation, and, as mentioned above, later experienced differential treatment by the hospital staff presumably because of her last name. Speaking Haitian Creole means that Bahamians are easily able to label an individual as Haitian, a group associated with negative stereotypes and seen as different from, even less than Bahamians. Haitian Creole as a site of stigma will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Critical to this discussion on participant’s

experiences at Princess Margaret Hospital is discrimination. According to Link and Phelan (2001), “When people are labeled, set apart, and linked to undesirable characteristics, a rationale is constructed for devaluing, rejecting, and excluding them” (pp. 370-371). Discrimination operates in two forms: individual discrimination and structural discrimination. The authors note that definitions of stigma do not usually include discrimination but that it is central to how it functions as it can impact the life chances of stigmatized groups (Link & Phelan, 2001). Discriminatory treatment has been identified in this section as it relates to being Haitian. Additionally, Wilma’s sister having to carry her own bag and Bahamians openly speaking negatively about Haitians in the presence of Haitians is justified because Haitians are essentially dehumanized in Bahamian society.

Negative Reactions to Haitian Creole in Public

Verbal assaults by Bahamians in public spaces appeared most frequently in the interviews as a response to Haitians speaking Haitian Creole in public. Participants expressed that Bahamians would outright tell Haitians that they could not speak Haitian Creole even if they were not in conversation with them. For example, Wilma told a story she witnessed at the Department of Immigration where two women were speaking Haitian Creole to each other. According to Wilma, “The immigration officer came over and was like, ‘Oh you can’t speak in Creole here. English only.’” Another participant, Alex, stated that many Bahamians get angry when Haitians speak Creole. “They get mad,” he said, “and then they spin around and they be like, ‘Umm excuse me sir. Excuse me ma’am. It’s very rude that you’re speaking this language around me and I do not understand.’” Alex even stated that he has been told, “Why [are you] f’n speaking this language around

here?” According to Alex, these hostile reactions come from strangers as well as people he knows. Denise also stated when she speaks Haitian Creole in public, she often gets a negative reaction from Bahamians. According to Denise, they give “an ugly look. Or tell you to speak English if they don’t understand you.” And Pierre-Elie remembers a time when he was speaking to a woman at the bank when his phone rang. After answering in Haitian Creole, he described the woman’s reaction as “Whoa!” as she reacted in shock to him speaking Haitian Creole. Haitian Creole labels one as Haitian sometimes resulting in negative reactions from Bahamians which can cause some individuals to refrain from speaking Haitian Creole in public spaces.

As discussed above, Haitian Creole functions as a marker of stigma because it represents a linguistic and cultural difference between Haitians (who are viewed negatively as a group) and Bahamians (who speak Bahamian Creole English and/or English). To further elaborate, stigma can cause individuals to respond in different ways, and, as it relates to Haitian Creole, it could cause individuals to refrain from speaking Haitian Creole in public due to the hostility and discrimination that may accompany it. In 1980s Miami, where there was pervasive anti-Haitian sentiment similar to the contemporary period of The Bahamas, some Haitian students were physically assaulted or teased because they spoke Haitian Creole or spoke English with an accent which labelled them as different. In such a hostile atmosphere, there was little incentive for Haitian youth to reveal their ethnic heritage resulting in some deciding to mimic African American cultural identity and hide their Haitian identity. Although not representative of all Haitian youth, the act of hiding one’s Haitian identity was a form of social survival in a climate of anti-Haitian sentiment and discrimination (Stepick, 1998).

The fear of being stigmatized and discriminated against sometimes causes people to refrain from speaking Haitian Creole in public. Wilma, a 21-year-old Bahamian-born individual, recalled an experience at work where a co-worker asked her where the ladies’ restroom was located in Haitian Creole in front of a Bahamian immigration officer, who was also a fellow employee. Wilma—who worked at the airport—expressed, “I didn’t answer. I looked at her dead in her eye, and I didn’t say a word to her. So, she just walked off. I wanted her to think that I didn’t speak Creole. That was my reason for not answering her.” Wilma refused to speak Haitian Creole because of her fear of Bahamians’ perceptions and reactions, and in this case, the reaction of the Bahamian immigration officer who was standing nearby during the encounter. Although the immigration officer was a fellow employee, immigration officers often produce fear and anxiety for many in the Haitian community as they represent the power of the state to detain, arrest, and deport. Although born in The Bahamas, Wilma was not a citizen even though she had applied (and was still waiting) three years prior to the interview. Her fear of speaking Haitian Creole in front of the fellow employee—who happened to be an immigration officer—may indicate the insecurity of her status as it is not uncommon for those born in The Bahamas to be subject to arrests during immigration raids (Robles, 2015). Wilma’s fear was also rooted in her belief that things were increasingly becoming worse for people of Haitian descent in The Bahamas. Her refusal to speak Haitian Creole may be explained by the notion that speaking Creole would readily label her as Haitian, possibly resulting in prejudice or discrimination. Although Wilma asserted that she did not know how to deal with increasing difficulties for Haitian people, she was in fact dealing with it by not dealing with it. In this

particular example, refusing to speak Haitian Creole in public, although she was fluent, was not simply avoidance, but may also reveal Wilma's desire to protect her mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Wilma resides in a society that is hostile to Haitians, and so she is navigating these boundaries by making a personal and political decision to not speak Haitian Creole in public.

The reactions by Bahamians to Haitians speaking Creole are often articulated as forms of nationalism and cultural preservation. According to Michael Craton (1995), in *The Bahamas*, Haitians are perceived to be an "invasive alien, as imaginary raptor, and as necessary exploitee. Invading aliens are a threat to our integrity because they threaten the familiar with radical change: they are not what we are, and they are what we are not" (p. 284). Craton continues explaining British and French colonial history and influence, arguing that "all of these features either clash with Bahamians' idealized view of themselves, their history and culture, or uncomfortably remind them of aspects of themselves (particularly their African heritage) which they deny, diminish, disparage or reject" (p. 284). Haitians are perceived as a threat to the cultural and national sovereignty of The Bahamas, and this is clearly exhibited through the often-hostile reactions to Haitians speaking Haitian Creole. Language as stigma is not exclusive to The Bahamas. In the United States, Latinx people have been threatened with calling Immigration and Customs Enforcement, detained by border control, and kicked out of stores for speaking Spanish. These actions were not new as speaking Spanish has been dangerous historically resulting in some parents not teaching their children Spanish out of fear of stigma and attempts to assimilate (Arellano, 2018). Although often conceptualized as acts of cultural and national sovereignty, these discriminatory acts are xenophobic and

perpetuate stigma.

The hostility and fear of Haitians "taking over" The Bahamas is also reinforced in the media (The College of The Bahamas, 2005; Fielding et al., 2008). In a 2005 *Tribune* letter to the editor "Creole 'will be the dominant language within ten years,'" the author discusses the continued undocumented immigration of Haitian nationals into the country and how, "with an estimated 300 Haitians per week trying to enter the country, total submersion of Bahamian culture is not far off" ("Creole", 2005, p. 9). The author continued, "within a decade, the Bahamas could be overrun, with people of Haitian origin installed at every level of business and government," likening the undocumented immigration of Haitian nationals into The Bahamas to the Latinx population of Southern Florida and the prevalence of Spanish over English. However, the Haitian population in The Bahamas is relatively small; in 2000 Haitians only represented 7.1 percent of the population and by 2010 only 11.5 percent of the population (McCartney, 2013). Needless to say, 10 years later, The Bahamas had not been overrun by Haitians, but there continues to be a stigma against Haitians in the country.

Fear of Immigration Officers

Finally, participants experienced stigma due to perceptions of presumed illegality. This manifested in a variety of ways in the interviews, but for the purposes of this paper participants spoke about their experiences with Bahamian immigration and police officers. Fielding et al.'s (2008) conceptualization of stigma concerning one's legal status concerns Haitian nationals, but the stigma of being undocumented also impacts people of Haitian descent born and raised in The Bahamas. In The Bahamas, there has been a pervasive perception that all Haitians are undocumented regardless of their status including those who were born in

the country (Sears, 1994; The College of the Bahamas, 2005; Fielding, 2008). Five interviewees, interestingly all men, discussed being stopped by immigration officers or police officers because of the assumption that they were Haitian. Again, being Haitian is associated with being undocumented which results in discriminatory treatment with agents of the state.

Importantly, these encounters with immigration demonstrate the way stigma is dependent upon social, economic, and political power. For example, Antoine shared an experience on the jitney where he was asked for proof of his identity. Despite being born in The Bahamas, Antoine gave a fake name out of fear of being identified as Haitian due to his surname. Antoine revealed:

And there's a point in time when they actually stopped me on the bus. And they asked for I.D., and I gave them a false name. Because I have a funny last name, and I know if I say it they would carry me.... They start asking everybody's name and everybody's I.D. They stopped me. I said I don't have an I.D. on me. So, they said get off the bus. Me and two other folks. So, they was like, "Uh, what's your name?" And I was like, I held it. I started to stutter. I just gave them a false name. I said, "Antoine Johnson." They say, "Do you have an I.D.?" I was like, "No, I don't have an I.D." They went to check my name in the system. And come to find out it was a good thing that the name I gave them was a clean name. So, I was good. I was straight. And they just let me left.

As agents of the state, immigration officers wield significant power and perpetuate stigma. Although born in The Bahamas, Antoine feared being deported to Haiti, a country he had never been to and knew little about. Antoine's "funny last name" would reveal that he was Haitian, but not necessarily

undocumented. Yet, this is the stigma associated with people of Haitian descent, that they are "illegal." By Antoine noting he had a funny last name he understood that it was not a traditional Bahamian last name (i.e. Anglophone) and that the immigration officer would assume he was not Bahamian and possibly undocumented. During immigration raids, it is not uncommon for Bahamian citizens with French-derived surnames to be arrested due to assumed ideas of being undocumented and the inability to immediately provide documentation of their status (Robles, 2015). More so, by saying he had a funny last name suggests that Antoine had internalized anti-Haitian sentiment in The Bahamas. Antoine revealed that he believed his bus was stopped because it goes through Carmichael, an area where many Haitians reside. Although everyone on the bus was asked for identification, it is important to understand that Antoine believed this bus was targeted by immigration officers because it was assumed a lot of Haitians may be riding the bus on their way to work.

Eric also discussed the issue of one's last name, assumed illegality, and discrimination by immigration officers. According to Eric, he had been approached by immigration officers in the following very blunt and hostile encounter, "What's your last name?" You say, "Pierre." They don't care to check if you have proper documents or not. "On the bus. Let's go." In this recollection, it was evident the way one's surname functioned as an indicator for not only ethnicity but one's nationality which then led Bahamian immigration officers to detain (and sometimes arrest) Haitians for presumed illegality. Due to these precarious and frightening encounters, Eric stated, "you live in fear, you live in fear of being persecuted because of your last name." This fear meant that Eric and others, often walked around with their Bahamian passport or another form

of identification so that they would not be taken to Carmichael Road Detention Centre.

Eric and Antoine's statements demonstrate the anxiety and fear many Haitians feel just by walking down the street. Moreover, anxiety and fear are heightened during periods of immigration raids or when seeing immigration officers walk down the street. The stress of poverty, marginalization, and discrimination may exacerbate hypertension, a prevalent condition in some transitional migrant populations, including the resident Haitian community in The Bahamas (Mazzeo, 2013). Although no studies have been conducted to examine hypertension among second-generation Haitians in The Bahamas, the interviews indicate they experience stress related to their stigmatized ethnicity and anti-Haitian sentiment in The Bahamas and suggests an area for future research as a public health concern.

The stress of living in The Bahamas because of being Haitian especially in periods of heightened discourse and policies on immigration was a theme in the interviews as the research had occurred a few months after immigration policy changes. On November 1, 2014, the new immigration policy required everyone to own a passport based on their nationality which was seen by many to target second-generation Haitians (Robles, 2015). According to the Nationality Act of 1973, children born to non-Bahamian nationals in The Bahamas were not citizens but could apply for citizenship upon their 18th birthday (Marshall, 1979). Second-generation Haitians are severely impacted by these policies as Haitians are the largest immigrant population in The Bahamas (The College of The Bahamas, 2005; Mazzeo, 2013). In the wake of this new legislation and subsequent raids, Nadia spoke about the fear of being "caught" by immigration despite being born and raised in The Bahamas. Nadia expressed being frightened because she was not carrying any documents to verify her status.

Nadia stated that on her way to work, her friend asked, "Do you have your documents on you?" And I was like "Why would I carry my documents on me?" She continued saying, "Everywhere I looked over my shoulder, like, I really don't want to go to the Detention Centre where someone has to come and bring my documents." Nadia's claims were not unfounded. During this period, second-generation Haitians were arrested and detained at immigration centres, some for weeks, even when they could show they had applied for citizenship (Robles, 2015).

Jean also discussed experiences with immigration and living in fear. According to Jean, his friends had been picked up by immigration for "just being of Haitian descent. Because you don't have no documents, or you can't show that you're a citizen of The Bahamas basically. Or residency here." Jean also revealed that he grew up living in fear stating, "It's always in the back of your mind. Sometimes you see Immigration; they wear green. Every time you see green, you feel like they're going to get me or whatever, you know." Jean's experiences demonstrate trauma. The processes of migration often lead to trauma among children and adults (Perreira & Ornelas, 2013) but it is equally important to consider the ways being a member of a stigmatized immigrant group can experience trauma or other mental health concerns. These stories communicate how those born and raised in The Bahamas, those who have and lack citizenship, live in a climate of fear. This climate of fear can begin as early as childhood (one participant spoke about Immigration raiding his home as a child and three participants spent a portion of their childhood or lives in Haiti because their mothers were deported) and can continue into adulthood.

Acts of Resistance and Resiliency

It is important to acknowledge that although

the Haitian community faces discrimination, overt hostility, xenophobia, and stigma, there is a great amount of courage and agency displayed by people of Haitian descent born and/or raised in the Bahamas. Link and Phelan (2001) argue that it is critical not to perceive stigmatized groups or individuals as passive or helpless victims. Certain behaviours exhibited by Haitians exemplify their tenacity in a society that is particularly hostile to their presence. These behaviours are seemingly connected to their identity or association with Haiti and/or being Haitian. Allan Wade (1997) defines resistance as:

any mental or behavioral act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions that make such acts possible, may be understood as a form of resistance. (p. 25)

Experiences of stigma can result in some being embarrassed about being Haitian and hiding their ethnicity when possible (Stepick, 1998). For participants, this was especially true during childhood but as respondents grew older, most seemed to embrace their Haitian heritage and expressed pride in who they were, who their parents were, and where their parents came from.

Ten respondents indicated they were “proud” to be and/or “love” being Haitian. This was not a standard question asked during the interviews, but rather sentiments expressed in their responses. At least 13 respondents demonstrated in their answers that they value being Haitian through their discussion of food, music, or being bilingual. Many participants experienced stigma in primary and secondary school, but instead of letting it negatively impact them, they used it as motivation to excel. This reality is not atypical from general immigrant experiences

as they understand they are foreigners in the host society and understand that education plays a key role in upward mobility and inclusion (Ogbu, 1991). Although born in The Bahamas, children of Haitian descent are treated as the “other” and some said this ostracism motivated them to excel educationally and professionally. In response to being teased at school, Tiffany declared, “It impacted me in a positive way! Why? Even though I did not understand back then how it would impact today, I believe they were my audience to push harder and strive for excellence.” Marjorie, who also experienced teasing in primary and secondary school and often fought to defend herself, stated, “I love being Haitian. And even going through that process and growing up and experiencing different things...It really made me value myself more. I’m proud of being Haitian.”

At least five respondents mentioned they celebrate Haitian Flag Day which is celebrated May 18th in Haiti and the Haitian diaspora. More respondents may participate in Haitian Flag Day festivities; however, this was not something they were asked directly, but rather, something several of them raised on their own. Celebrating Flag Day is an important indicator of resistance because it is a public display of a being Haitian and Haitian pride in The Bahamas. Although a Bahamian citizen, Alex stated he celebrates Haitian Flag Day, but rarely celebrates Bahamian Independence. The celebration of Haitian Flag Day is important, not only because it is an act of pride, but also because this display of pride lets others know that one is Haitian. Alex continued, “people see me and be like ‘Oh wow, I didn’t know you were Haitian.’ And I say, ‘Yes I am.’ Because I dress up red, blue, and white – Haitian colours.”

In a 2004 newspaper article, “Excited Crowd Enjoys Flag Day Frolics,” Clement Johnson (2004) discussed Haitian Flag Day

celebrations by the Haitian community, particularly people of Haitian descent born and raised in The Bahamas. At the celebration, there was Haitian music such as Zouk and Kompa, Haitian food for sale such as legumes, plantains, and Akusan as well as cultural dances that reenact important events of the Haitian Revolution. Johnson (2004) also noted that people were wearing Haitian colours (red and blue) as well as shirts with the description “100% Haitian and Proud, Bahamian-Haitian and proud of it” . In the article, a member of the Victory Chapel Church of the Nazarene (a Haitian church in Nassau), was quoted saying:

This generation of Bahamian/Haitians are proud of their heritage; they are no longer staying in the closet. They want to be recognized for who they are. We are not here to drain The Bahamas; we are here to make a contribution.

Johnson’s description is identical to participant’s responses. When asked why he attended Haitian Flag Day, Antoine simply stated, “because that’s the other half of me.” Participants were proud of their Haitian heritage, and Haitian Flag Day was one of the ways they expressed this pride.

As discussed above, Haitian Creole functions as an element of stigma in The Bahamas. Because of this, it can be argued that speaking Haitian Creole in public spaces is an act of resistance. Nine respondents stated they openly speak Haitian Creole in public. In response to what makes her proud to be Haitian, Yvonne explained how people of Haitian descent, in the face of stigma, were “not afraid to speak Creole when they are in a crowd of Bahamians.” Pierre-Elie described speaking Haitian Creole in public as “bold.” When asked if he felt comfortable speaking Haitian Creole in public, Pierre-Elie responded, “I speak Creole in public everywhere I go. If someone comes to me and they speaking in Creole, I respond in Creole.

Basically, I think it’s a very beautiful language.” Denise had a similar reaction, relating that she spoke Haitian Creole in public “all the time” even though she usually received negative reactions from Bahamians. Denise not only openly spoke and embraced Haitian Creole, but also stated that she was comfortable telling people she was Haitian and that people can “take it or leave it.” And Alex shared that he spoke Haitian Creole in public all the time. When I asked why, Alex responded, “Because it’s the language I love. And I grew up with it. So, I have no need to feel ashamed of it. I’m not ashamed; I’m not ashamed of my language.” Celebrating Haitian Flag Day, speaking Haitian Creole in public, and just being proud to be Haitian functions as an act of resistance among people of Haitian descent in The Bahamas and conveys the various ways second-generation Haitians challenge stigma in The Bahamas.

Conclusion

According to Dawn Marshall (1979) , “since May 1957, the Bahamas Government has been trying to solve what has become known as ‘The Haitian Problem’: the problem of the continuing, and apparently increasing, illegal entry of Haitians into the Bahamas” (p. xiii). This “problem” has extended into the post-Independence era resulting in stigma not only toward Haitian nationals, but also the children of Haitian descent born and raised in The Bahamas. The fact that Haitian immigration has been and continues to be referred to as a “problem” acknowledges the xenophobia and stigma toward Haitians. As noted by Alfred Sears (1994) when discussing “the Haitian Question,” little distinction is made between the different categories of Haitians residing in The Bahamas. Sears’ (1994) analysis is important especially as it relates to second-generation Haitians because it affirms that this population is also viewed as a problem.

Fielding et al.'s (2008) research heavily focuses on Haitian nationals. However, and as demonstrated in this paper, second-generation Haitians also experience the stigma of being Haitian. Although they were born in The Bahamas, their Haitian heritage labels them as different from Bahamians and stigma ensues. They experience stigma at the hospital, speaking Haitian Creole, their last name, and during immigration raids and encounters. Although these are the only factors discussed in this paper, the interviews demonstrate stigma in school, style of dress and physical appearance, and other structural issues such as employment and access to citizenship. Importantly, stigma continues to function even when one has acquired Bahamian citizenship.

Additional research on the experiences of second-generation Haitians would be effective to better understand this community and the challenges they face and should include children and adults as well as the intersectionality of gender, class, and sexuality. Although not explored in this

paper, the stigma of being Haitian is experienced as early as childhood, particularly during school from Bahamian school children, teachers, and administrators and continues into adulthood even after one has acquired citizenship. Stigma after citizenship, suggests second-class citizenship for Haitian-Bahamians indicating stigma and hierarchies in belonging. It is also worthwhile to explore the impact of immigration legislation instituted on November 1, 2014 on citizenship, belonging, and stigma among second-generation Haitians. Lastly, one of the major limitations of this research is the small sample size. It is also limited to Nassau and does not include Freeport, Grand Bahama and Abaco where there is also a concentration of Haitians. Increasing the sample size and extending the location in future studies about second-generation Haitians, in general, would provide a more holistic understanding of how they experience and navigate stigma, Bahamian society and the meaning of being Haitian in The Bahamas.

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