Cultural Diversity Interview Assignment

Student’s Name

Course Code and Number

Institutional Affiliation

Date of Submission

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**Introduction**

Primarily, the purpose of this interview process is to learn more about other people’s experiences and cultures as part of the fulfillment of my Cultural Diversity Course. Parallel to this, I was privileged to interview Jane Doe, who is an Eritrean and of Tigrinya ethnicity, aged 36 years and currently living in California. Since I’m a white American, Jane’s description was suitable for achieving my overall goal, which is to learn new things and expose myself to new information that I previously, did not have experience with. Additionally, this interview took place at Jane's residential house and it started from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. From this interview section, I was able to extensively discover new information and experience about the Eritrean people from their ethnic background, history of coming to the U.S.A. to salient characteristics, and strengths. With that said, the following paragraphs will explain and expound in detail about this ethnic group.

**Section 1: On the Person Being Interviewed**

**Description of Ethnic Background**

The Eritrean people came from Eritrea country, which is currently located in Eastern Africa in the Horn of Africa. Eritrea is under President Isaias Afewerki, who has been a dictator for many years (Spickard, 2005). Due to the “Scramble for Africa,” Eritrea has become a home to people of diverse living partners. Basically, it’s a multi-ethnic country with a population of around 6 and half million. There are nine officially recognized cultural/ethnic groups in the country, which include Nara, Kunama, Hedareb, Bilen, Afar, Tigrinya, Tigre, Saho, and Rashaida. Generally, there are two major religions in Eritrea, Islam, and Christianity, in which, 63% are Christians and 36% Islam, and <1% other religions. Eritreans are typically pastoralist and nomadic people. Handshaking is a normal form of greetings and tourists are expected to dress modestly. Also, the Eritrean people believe in taking coffee as a symbol of hospitality. Additionally, homosexual behaviors are illegal in Eritrea (Woldemikael, 2005).

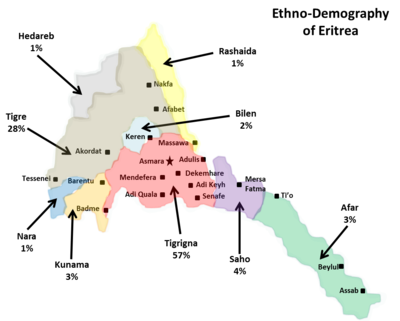


Figure 1: The Nine Ethno-Demography of Eritrea

**History of Coming to the U.S.A.**

The Eritrean immigration to America did not take place until the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1960s, since the inception of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war, many immigrants from Eritrea left for the U.S. The famine and drought drained the resources of a country already devastated by war, which was the primary reason for many Eritreans to leave the country (Connell, 2018). Therefore, many Eritreans came to the United States as immigrants/refugees seeking asylum against the Eritrean's authoritarian government that indefinitely detains and forcibly disappears its citizens, and tortures them. In recent years, approximately half a million Eritreans have fled the country, with many of them escaping the country’s military service indefinitely. Eritrea is notoriously known for torturing, tight immigration restrictions, mass enslavement, and violation of humanitarian laws and policies (McSpadden & Moussa, 1993). In this case, many Eritreans are forced to leave the country for fear of been tortured or killed seeking protection in the United States. The independence war, from the early 1960s to the 1990s, caused massive population displacement. Additionally, in the 1980s, the ongoing poverty and violence also created over 1 million refugees and resulted in a continuous flow of emigrants in America. It is estimated that there are nearly 1 million Eritreans in the diaspora.

**Reception of the Members of the Ethnicity by Other Americans**

Since the coming of Eritreans to America, their immigration process was not welcomed well by other Americans. With the current U.S. immigration policy instituted by the Trump Administration, the opportunities of the newcomers were affected. Former President Donald Trump expanded the U.S. travel ban and restrictions that left many Eritreans between a hard place and a rock. This controversial ban against Eritrea was established due to several reasons, namely the widespread visa overstays by Eritrean nationals, the lack of cooperation from the Eritrean government with America in its efforts to remove Eritrean nationals living in America without proper documentation, and their inability to comply with America information-sharing criteria on matters of national safety and security. This US immigration policy condemned thousands of innocent Eritreans to a life of pain, uncertainty, and oppression. Also, the Eritrean government does not issue passports to its citizens thus there is zero chance for them to score a non-immigrant visa and enter America. Furthermore, with the current notion that identifies Eritrea as a country that tortures and kills its citizens, the Eritreans have experienced a great measure of resentment and discrimination from other Americans.

**Salient Aspects or Characteristics of the People’s Ethnic Background**

Generally, the Eritrean culture is hugely shaped by its location on the Red Sea, as well as its historical links with neighboring countries like Sudan, Somalia, Italy, Ethiopia, etc. Local music, as well as customs, is influenced by Eritrea's ethnic background. The Eritrean cuisine is typically a fusion of traditional Somalian, Ethiopian, and Eritrean cooking. Basically, the key food in Eritrean cuisine is tsebhi (stew) served with sorghum and hilbet or wheat and injera. Also, they are known to be friendly and helpful people. Eritreans prefer that their children marry other Eritreans due to that they feel they will better understand each other's culture. Therefore, inter-cultural dating is discouraged among Eritreans. Birth control in Eritrea is commonly practiced. Further, it is also known for its popular music genre known as guaila. The Eritrean culture’s most intriguing aspect is the traditional coffee ceremony, usually used during festivals and tourist visitations. The Eritrean patriarchal culture is highly influenced by customary principles, where women are still inferior to men.

**Strengths**

Basically, a country is built on and secured by values. The strength of Eritreans is based on their family values. Values are often at the core of every family in Eritrea, where they are expected to nurture, acquire and transmit social values by educating their children about the love for justice and truth, respect to humanity and laws, love for their country, etc. Families often inculcate values that assist kids to become good citizens. Other strengths include their ability to establish strong cohesive families that are disciplined, industrious, and independent, who help to build the nation through unity and equality. In this case, the strength of the country solely depends on the strengths of the established Eritrean family system. Also, the behavior of homosexuality is highly illegal in Eritrea.

**Section 2: Questions for the Interviewer (you the student)**

**Q#1: Feelings/Emotions**

Putting myself in the situation of interviewing the person for this assignment, I can say I had mixed reactions of feelings/emotions. I am basically sympathetic and sad for the interviewed person in relation to the negative experiences she has gone through in America as a refugee/immigrant from Eritrean. Although she was not born in America, she is a legally-based Eritrean American in California. However, the mistreatment and discrimination she has undergone in the past years made me feel remorseful and companionate about helping her to overcome these challenges while living in America. As of the rest of the Eritreans, Jane also came to America seeking asylum and protection from her country. From this interview, I was able to have a clear picture of what the Eritreans are going through from both the U.S.A. and Eritrea, which made me sad, feeling sorry, surprised, remorseful, and sympathetic.

**Q#2: Group Membership/Race/Other Factors**

As a white American who has lived with people from different ethnic backgrounds, I can basically relate to their experiences while living in the U.S. I was able to interpret the experience from my level of experience with this ethnicity at a personal level. Typically, I was able to feel what the interviewee was experiencing in America as a refugee. Also, my race stereotypically influenced the ways I interpreted the experience. Although it seemed realistic and remorseful to hear their experiences, at some point I felt they are a bit exaggerated and often do not actually experience such extreme tortures and oppression as they normally claim. My race enabled me to see beyond the normal white supremacy perspective while dealing with Jane on this perspective of immigration to America. My group membership critically influenced my interpretation by providing me with the other side of life and the way of appreciating other people’s cultures.

**Q#3: Common Themes about Race/Ethnicity**

During the course of my completing the assignment, there were several common themes about race that appeared. These include racism, oppression, privilege, social injustice, etc. Since white supremacy is deeply entrenched in the American culture, other ethnicities such as Eritrean often face a high level of oppression and social injustice. Marginalized groups usually face a different experience of oppression, but their oppression is always geared towards the same goal. The theme of oppression is often interpreted as an issue that faces several people when they lack protection from human rights agencies. Also, social injustice is established in America as the level of racial discrimination continues to increase. People lack essential social amenities and the right to basic needs due to their ethnic background.

**Q#4: Aspects of White Privilege**

During the interview, I happened to have experienced or observed some aspects of white privilege such as racism/prejudice/discrimination, which is reflected in the story told by the person been interviewed. I wanted to take control of the situation and bring into light the aspects that they are still slaves in America and they should not complain. The person at some point viewed me as a racist that is not in favor of the Eritreans in staying in America and that I truly support the established travel ban or restrictions by the Trump Administration. In my own opinion, these occurred in those situations simply because I happen not to get along with Eritrean people and feel that they are just killers and are out there to dominate our country. I also believe that they are the reason for the continuous immigrant wars going on in the U.S. and their departure from America will bring peace in the U.S.A.

**Q#5: What I learned about Race/Myself**

As a result of doing this paper, I was able to learn a few things about race and myself. First and foremost, I learned the basic details about Eritrean background and history of coming to America. From this paper, I was able to gain insight and knowledge about the shared values of Eritrean people, when and why they came to the U.S., their strengths, and salient characteristics that contribute to the way they think and being. Also, I learned that ethnicity should not be one's reason for seeing the worst in others. Based on myself, I learned that I still show and express certain aspects of white privilege, i.e., benefiting at the expense of other ethnic groups. Also, I learned that it is important to listen and learn from other people's ethnic experiences. From this interview section, I was able to extensively discover new information and experience about the Eritrean people from their ethnic background, history of coming to the U.S.A. to salient characteristics, and strengths. I was able to learn that Eritrean continues to suffer and their case remains under looked at and underestimated by both countries.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, from the above paper, it is evident that people from other ethnic groups have experienced quite a negative life while in America. From this interview with Jane, I realized that much is needed to be done to help secure the lives of the Eritreans as they emigrate from their country to America. Also, Eritreans are people that are known to be friendly and hospitable. Additionally, they remain to be unique people. Furthermore, this interview has turned out to be a very insightful section where I learned a lot about other people’s cultures and ethnic experiences that were unknown to me. Eritrea is one of the countries in the horn of Africa that have managed to enter in America both legally and illegally to seek asylum.

**References**

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