Introduction

Strangers in a Strange Land

THE LETTER

On October 1, 2002, Mayor Laurier Raymond released an open letter to African immigrants settling in Lewiston, Maine. In his letter, Raymond maintained that Somali newcomers were overwhelming the city. Endeavoring to protect the economic resources, physical space, and emotional health of Lewiston from what he understood to be the pressure of immigrant settlement, the mayor asked that local Somalis discourage further resettlement in the town. The letter read:

> For some number of months, I have observed the continued movement of a substantial number of Somalis into the downtown area of our community. I have applauded the efforts of our city staff in making available the existing services and the local citizenry for accepting and dealing with the influx.
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> I assumed that it would become obvious to the new arrivals the effect the large numbers of new residents has had upon the existing staff and city finances and that this would bring about a voluntary reduction of the number of new arrivals – it being evident that the burden has been, for the most part, cheerfully accepted, and every effort has been made to accommodate it.
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> Our Department of Human Services has recently reported that the number of Somali families arriving into the city during the month of September is below the approximate monthly average that we have seen over the last year or so. It may be premature to assume that this may serve as a signal for future relocation activity, but the decline is welcome relief given increasing demands on city and school services.
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> I feel that recent relocation activity over the summer has necessitated that I communicate directly with the Somali elders and leaders regarding our newest residents. If recent declining arrival numbers are the result of your outreach efforts to discourage relocation into the city, I applaud those efforts. If they

are the product of other unrelated random events, I would ask that the Somali leadership make every effort to communicate my concerns on city and school service impacts with other friends and extended family who are considering a move to this community.

To date, we have found the funds to accommodate the situation. A continued increased demand will tax the city's finances.

This large number of new arrivals cannot continue without negative results for all. The Somali community must exercise some discipline and reduce the stress on our limited finances and our generosity.

I am well aware of the legal right of a U.S. resident to move anywhere he/she pleases, but it is time for the Somali community to exercise this discipline in view of the effort that has been made on its behalf.

We will continue to accommodate the present residents as best as we can, but we need self-discipline and cooperation from everyone.

Only with your help will we be successful in the future – please pass the word: We have been overwhelmed and have responded valiantly. Now we need breathing room. Our city is maxed-out financially, physically and emotionally.

I look forward to your cooperation.

Laurier T. Raymond Jr. Mayor, City of Lewiston (Raymond 2002)

The mayor's missive, the first shot in what became a war of words, pit two communities against one another. Raymond characterized Lewiston as a "generous" and "accepting" "community" facing a growing "community" of undisciplined Somali immigrants making undue demands on the city's meager economic resources. Dominant voices in the media maelstrom that followed challenged Raymond's fiscal claims. Local liberals condemned the mayor as racist and mounted public demonstrations in defense of Lewiston's diversity. Meanwhile, individuals and groups calling for racial purity and an end to immigration seized upon the letter and its author as their cause célèbre. Raymond and many city residents appeared taken aback by the magnitude of the response to the letter. The mayor claimed he was misinterpreted and, after a few failed attempts to explain the reasoning behind the letter, withdrew from the media entirely. Somali residents of Lewiston released a letter of reply in which they dismissed Raymond's charges, criticized him for scapegoating them for the city's financial difficulty, and laid out the benefits of immigrant settlement in Lewiston.

Three months later the uproar caused by the letter culminated in a day of competing demonstrations. A homegrown diversity organization, the Many and One Coalition, staged a pro-diversity rally while a national white supremacist organization, the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC), held a recruitment meeting on the other side of town. Legions of journalists and hundreds of protestors stood outside the site

of the World Church of the Creator meeting, which was attended by approximately forty individuals. The Many and One event exceeded its 2,000-person seating capacity. An additional 2,000 supporters stood outside in the cold cheering and chanting. Charged with maintaining order and protecting public safety, Lewiston's Chief of Police William Welch created a security plan that called for the largest mobilization of law enforcement in Maine history. Welch's preparation was thorough. There was no violence and only one arrest – that of an anti-racist protestor outside of the World Church of the Creator meeting.

Following the rallies, everyday community building, service provision, and immigrant settlement efforts replaced polarizing rhetoric and demonstrations. As reminders of the social costs associated with bigotry and the mismanagement of diversity, the letter and the tumult that followed continued to loom large in public consciousness. The emerging rhythm of life in post-letter Lewiston included some novel elements. Diversity training programs, community needs assessments and discussions, Somali ethnic festivals, and multicultural celebrations marked the community calendar. Immigrant resettlement services and English language programs joined Lewiston's roster of municipal and social service programs. Sporadic expressions of hostility and bigotry intermittently shattered the calm and mobilized in diversity's defense a newly minted and competent cadre of local activists, law enforcement, and political figures. Old-timers and newcomers continued to negotiate the boundaries of the Lewiston and Somali "communities." In the wake of Mayor Raymond's letter and in the face of continued immigrant settlement, the city and its residents acquired, through a combination of predilection, consent, and coercion, the practices and perspective associated with upstanding residents of a locality characterized by diversity and inclusivity.

The Usual Plot

When Mayor Raymond wrote his letter I was in the early years of graduate school. I happened upon coverage of the letter in my hometown newspaper, Maine's *Portland Press Herald*, which I was reading online from my apartment in Madison, Wisconsin. My initial reaction to the letter was one of contempt and anger. I found the letter offensive, immediately assumed that it reflected the racism of the author, and felt keenly that it also reinforced the view that my home state of Maine, the whitest state in the United States and a place considered by many to be a rural backwater, was populated by bigots. I later learned through conversations with city

officials and administrators that Mayor Raymond received a flood of scathing emails, telephone calls, and letters from people who shared my perspective. The major news outlets reporting on events in the city also suggested that something was amiss in Lewiston.

Raymond publicly denied the charge of racism and asserted that his letter was a reasonable and unremarkable response to Somali settlement and the municipality's difficult fiscal situation. He insisted that he did not intend to discriminate, incite debate, or encourage hostility toward the Somalis. I also spoke with many longtime acquaintances of Mayor Raymond who maintained that, while the letter was a mistake, its writer was a good person who made a bad decision. Raymond believed that he was merely acting upon his motivation to explain that Somali settlement had an impact on the city and to communicate necessary information to the Somalis so they could change their behavior. The mayor asserted that he was not an agile public speaker and, thus, often relied on letters to convey information. He considered the case of Somali settlement no different from prior and successful efforts at communicating with city residents through the publication of open letters. Raymond was not alone in this assessment or in his astonishment that the letter became the subject of world news and the springboard for the mobilization of white supremacists and anti-racist activists. In a departure from the mayor's understanding of the letter as benign, some city residents welcomed its publication as long-overdue resistance to Somali settlement and the problematic "politically correct" and misguided "multiculturalist" ideas altering the racial and cultural fabric of the community. Other residents of the city claimed that while the letter proved a troublesome method of intervention, some response to the economic and social crises resulting from Somali settlement was necessary.

As an outside observer who perceived with immediacy and certainty that Lewiston's troubles were the result of racism, the lack of consensus among Lewiston's residents on the meaning of Somali settlement and the merit of Raymond's letter gave me pause. My disquiet only increased as I watched events in Lewiston unfold after the publication of the letter. Despite the unique characteristics of the community, the plot, timing, and cast of characters in the events that followed resembled precisely what one might observe in any social drama involving cultural outsiders and bigoted community members – desegregation squabbles in the South (e.g., Warren 1957), Chicago neighborhoods fighting public housing projects (e.g., Hirsch 1998), community mobilization in the face of a Ku Klux Klan march (e.g., Hall 1993), or tensions around Latino immigrant

settlement on Long Island, New York (e.g., Sandoval, Tambini, Camino Bluff Productions, New Video Group, and Docurama (Firm) 2004). City officials, schools, public servants, social service providers, and hospitals with negligible experience in and few policies concerning racial and ethnic minorities and immigration threw their efforts into learning about "best practices" for managing diversity and meeting federal requirements for equal opportunity and accessibility. Liberal white activists, whose limited mobilization experience centered on gay rights, poverty, and religion, organized against racism. Lewiston lacked historical racial diversity but was traditionally a center of population for Maine's long-standing cultural and linguistic underclass, Catholic French Canadians who only a generation earlier were subject to significant pressure to assimilate, were now witnessing a very different kind of orientation to minority language and culture. Somalis eschewed racial classification as African American and, instead, asserted their rights and belonging as immigrants and Somali Muslims bringing diversity to the community.

While my initial interpretation of Lewiston's troubles focused on Mayor Raymond's racism and its impact on Somali reception and the public perception of all Mainers, I learned through observation of the city that there is a story beyond individual bigotry worth telling. In Lewiston, Somali incorporation relied on cultural practices and perspectives that became decoupled from individual actors and took center stage in the negotiation of meaning and membership, identity groups, and self-identities.[1] The analytical approach mobilized in the following pages precludes an emphasis on both individual and institutional racism while acknowledging their role in perpetuating discrimination and inequality. Instead, this book delineates the mechanisms producing Somali immigrant incorporation in a majority Franco-American town in the whitest state in the United States. As the ties between Lewiston's response to Somali settlement and national interventions and discourses demonstrate, the cultural processes I observed in Lewiston provide insight into ideas and approaches characterizing contemporary immigrant inclusion throughout the United States and in other settings oriented toward the positive valuation of cultural heterogeneity.

[1] Jepperson and Meyer maintain that causal accounts do not necessarily need to reason at the level of the individual actor. Instead, the selection of the level of analysis in which causal relationships are observed should be established in relationship to the empirical case (Jepperson, Ronald and John W. Meyer. 2011. "Multiple Levels of Analysis and the Limitations of Methodological Individualisms." *Sociological Theory* 29:54–73).

A CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY OF IMMIGRANT INCORPORATION

This ethnographic and cultural sociological account of immigrant incorporation focuses on the cultural pragmatics of immigrant incorporation – the contextualized meanings and practices characteristic of the fragile inclusion of Somalis in Lewiston. I use the term "cultural pragmatics" to indicate the on-the-ground cultural or symbolic system that shapes immigrant incorporation. Inherent in the term is a shift away from the emphasis on the characteristics and motivations of individuals and groups of actors, and a break with the assumption that meaning as coded in language may be divorced from the context of its employment.[2] I demonstrate the material impact of cultural processes and consider the tight interrelationship between discursive meanings and social action in Lewiston.[3] The cultural pragmatics of Somali incorporation consisted of the establishment of symbolic boundaries[4] that were inclusive of immigrant newcomers; the dissemination of an epistemological orientation consisting of foundational meanings, assumptions, and a related praxis; and a system of disciplinary procedures for managing the challenges mounted by alternative perspectives and practices.

This cultural-structural system enabled and shaped the inclusion of Somali immigrant newcomers, provided the narrative framework for the moral constitution of community, and set the performative parameters for the expression of individual and subgroup identities worthy of community membership. The structures of meaning considered here operated independently of individuals while playing a crucial role in immigrant incorporation. City residents engaged these foundational meanings as they sought to identify the values that they believed defined their community. The broader establishment of an inclusive definition of the city and

[2] Thus, in the sense employed here, cultural pragmatics is distinct from Alexander's consideration of the cultural performances (Alexander, Jeffrey C., Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast. 2006. *Social performance: Symbolic action, cultural pragmatics, and ritual*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).

[3] Smith and Riley (Smith, Philip and Alexander Riley. 2009. *Cultural theory: An introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell) note that cultural theories are characterized by a focus on revealing the components of culture, demonstrating the influence of culture on social life, and accounting for the relationship between culture and action.

[4] I focus in this text on the construction and productive potential of symbolic boundaries that underlie epistemological divisions and categorizations. Social boundaries, the ontological categories visible and implicated in the divisions between groups' practices, positions, and treatment, have no necessary relationship to symbolic boundaries, and are of secondary concern here (Lamont, Michèle and Virág Molnár. 2002. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28:167–195).

its membership was fundamental to Somali immigrant incorporation. The inclusive community was constructed through narratives that centered on the value of diversity and pro-diversity individuals. These core values were associated with particular behaviors, a praxis taken as evidence of a moral uprightness. Widely shared and endorsed understandings that good people welcomed diversity were reified as particular positions, perspectives, and manners of speech. Genuine endorsement notwithstanding, individuals and groups constructed their belonging through the performance of their own inclusivity. Lewiston residents attempted to stake their claim to social membership by demonstrating consistency between those values and their individual characters. City residents struggled to make sense of their community and its moral foundations, producing ongoing heterogeneity and resistance to the meanings and methods of social life. The terms of social inclusion in Lewiston experienced ongoing challenge in the face of the assertion of additional perspectives, complicating facts, and alternative interpretations. Disciplinary procedures of silencing, excluding, and reimagining dissent assisted in the establishment and maintenance of Somali incorporation.

Theory and Method

The following contextual and cultural account of Somali immigrant inclusion in Lewiston demonstrates that incorporation is a process occurring through collective negotiation of the symbolic boundaries of the community and corresponding categorization of those who are included and excluded as members. These negotiations include immigrant newcomers, longtime residents, community leaders, and advocates and experts working across settings and, thus, oriented to macrocultural parameters and national (or regional) social institutions. As I show in the following pages, all of these actors participate in the creation, application, and challenge of symbolic boundaries. Their actions establish the significance of those boundaries for policy and program development, material management of communities, and the orientations people take to one another and their own personal development.

Given the role of group boundaries in the process of immigrant incorporation,[5] I avoid imposing outside categories on my ethnographic data

[5] Attention to boundaries is nothing new in the literature on immigrant inclusion and racial and ethnic relations (cf. Alba, Richard D. and Victor Nee. 2003. *Remaking the American mainstream: Assimilation and contemporary immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Lamont, Michèle and Virág Molnar. 2002. "The Study of Boundaries in

and dispense with classifying and analyzing my observations in Lewiston in terms of the unity of individual actors or "types" of people (e.g., men and women, racists, Somalis, liberals).[6] In fact, I seek to demonstrate that these very categories are not natural but are instead produced to great effect through selective vision and the negotiation of meaning. I offer only limited attention to individual qualities and biography. To a great extent detaching words from their speakers, I make no attempt to uncover the intentions and motivations of the people I encountered. Alternatively, I emphasize the shared community and cultural context of social inclusion. I listen for evidence of how words and actions take on meanings, how meanings engender categorizations, and how those categorizations have consequences for Somali immigrant incorporation in Lewiston, Maine.

The study of Somali immigrant incorporation in the context of Lewiston, Maine, the United States, in the early years of the twenty-first century uncovered an ongoing cultural process, and variations on this process may be observed in different settings and for different groups of immigrants (Voyer 2013). In the city of Lewiston, Somali and non-Somali residents I observed, encountered, and interviewed; the events I attended; incidents I witnessed; and the accounts I collected provided empirical insight into the cultural pragmatics of immigrant incorporation. As I accumulated ethnographic observations of life in Lewiston, I continued refining the open question that initially guided my research: "What happens when Somali, Muslim, immigrants settle in substantial numbers in a small, Franco-American city in the whitest State in the United States?" I conducted formal interviews and focus groups only as an entrée into enduring contacts and a supplement to my observations as a participant observer and ethnographer in the community.

the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28:167–195; Wimmer, Andreas. 2013. *Ethnic boundary making: Institutions, power, networks*. New York: Oxford University Press.). In this book I consider the process of category construction and application in the context of one city, but I also show the relationship between local categories and more broadly shared meanings and systems of relationships. This approach yields insight into the broader process of incorporation instead of merely highlighting isolated factors that might explain why different individuals, groups, or contexts yield particular trajectories of assimilation.

[6] In other words, I have abandoned what Abbott refers to as "the 'variables' paradigm" in favor of developing an account of a process as it unfolded in context (Abbott, Andrew. 1997. "Of Time and Space: The Contemporary Relevance of the Chicago School." *Social Forces* 75:1149–1182). Variations on this process may be observed in different settings and for different groups of immigrants (Voyer, Andrea. 2013. "Notes on a Cultural Sociology of Immigrant Incorporation." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 1:26–41).

Interested in developing insights from empirically rich observation of a given case, never did I attempt to construct a "representative sample" of interview subjects or locations.[7] A researcher motivated to achieve representativeness in the study of immigrant incorporation and multiculturalism would have committed a catastrophic error by ever setting foot in a city as outlying and full of outliers as Lewiston. My project is the study of a unique subject. I selected the case for its specificity and only learned through its examination how closely that specificity was related to more general social processes. While I make no claims to the representativeness of data in the statistical sense, I do maintain that my assessment of the process of immigrant incorporation in Lewiston offers unique and valuable insight into the similar processes unfolding in new destination cities and towns throughout the United States.

Listening for the meanings circulating in Lewiston required me to utilize mixed methods of social research. I gathered data primarily through participant observation and ethnography. Given its strength as a tool for detailed observation of cultural interpretations, routine behaviors and the underlying forces that motivate them, and the interaction between the local and larger systems of meaning and practice, ethnography is a research method well suited to the consideration of the cultural pragmatics of Somali immigrant incorporation in Lewiston (Fetterman 1998; Katz 2001, 2002; Marcus 1998). As an ethnographer in the city I uncovered the routines and rhythms particular to that place. I was able to observe the relationships between community life and extralocal practices and perspectives. Furthermore, ethnographic research provided the opportunity to take a long view on the research process and draw information from a variety of sources. Over a period of more than five years I observed Lewiston, supplementing data collected during visits to the field with other observational data garnered through interviews and newspapers as well as information gleaned through continued contact with folks in the fieldsite.

I began ethnographic fieldwork in Lewiston in July 2003. During the 2003–2004 academic year, I immersed myself in the community. I engaged Lewiston and its residents though everyday activities: purchasing groceries, clothes, and other supplies at local stores; getting my hair cut at the salon; going to the movies; and taking my laundry to the

[7] I concur with Small regarding the futility of forcing ethnographic work to adopt quantitative notions of validity, sampling, and representativeness (Small, Mario Luis. 2009. "'How Many Cases Do I Need?' On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research." *Ethnography* 10:5–38).

Laundromat instead of doing it at home. I attended the city's biweekly city council meetings, school sporting events, a host of diversity training sessions, professional hockey games, high school musicals, protests and demonstrations, meetings of community organizations, and any and every ethnic and cultural event I could jam into my calendar. In addition to the informal discussions that I had with locals in these venues, I carried out interviews and focus groups with local residents, both Somali and non-Somali. I also conducted semistructured interviews with public officials, service providers, and other public figures – journalists, academics, individuals considered Somali spokespeople, community organizers, and other people active in local civic life and thus considered community leaders. For the purposes of analysis, I privilege naturally occurring talk over my interview data. I returned to the site for follow-up data collection several times between 2003 and 2005, including two three-week visits to the community in February and May 2005. During my research I took detailed field notes and recorded most interviews.

Throughout my time in the field, I honed my focus upon the meaning of community emerging in the town, and the successes and challenges of Somali incorporation. I noted the manner in which city residents referenced or did not reference ideas about population diversity. As my research progressed, I grew increasingly aware of the influence of diversity professionals coming from outside Lewiston. A core group of community members served as local "watchdogs" identifying and challenging bigotry and discrimination in the city. Somali organizations and individuals did significant "pro-diversity" outreach by offering cultural festivals and sitting on advisory boards and panels. However, outside diversity professionals representing several different federal agencies, and national and international organizations provided crucial administrative and didactic expertise. Traveling from locales such as Portland, Maine; Boston; Seattle; Los Angeles; and Toronto, Canada, diversity consultants advised the city on its hiring practices, service plans, school organization, accessibility policies, and community-building efforts. Diversity trainers offered frequent seminars geared toward increasing participants' multicultural skill sets. The trainings variously targeted city personnel, social service providers, and laypeople.

Increasingly interested in the relationship between Lewiston's local characteristics and more generic and mainstream ideas about race, culture, and immigration, I followed diversity professionals out of Lewiston and into diversity train-the-trainer programs. Using Duneier's (2001) extended place method and "empirically following the thread of cultural