

ARTICLES

From Diaspora to Multiculture: in Search of a Youthful Pan-African Identity

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Abstract

This paper draws on the early stages of my doctorate research into the formation of identity among a small group of young adult African Australians between the ages of 18 and 25 living in Canberra. These participants come from a cross section of the community, encompassing different genders, ethnicities, class, cultures and migratory patterns (diplomatic, humanitarian entrant, etc). I am exploring how these participants in my study perceive themselves and one another and whether they act together as a cohesive group across the 'boundaries' created by class, gender and ethnicity amongst other attributes. In describing the complexities evident in black African Australian youths' processes of identification and belonging, compounded by the lingering legacies of British colonialism and the White Australia Policy, I look initially to studies of African diaspora. Here I hope to find interpretive devices or ways of understanding the African diaspora in Australia vis-à-vis pan-African discourse. This includes adopting a number of theoretical positions primarily taken from the work of Paul Gilroy to expound my own narratives and that of my participants. I also make a number of observations concerning the arrival of Africans in Australia with the First Fleet up to the current migration of humanitarian entrants to Australia. Here I further explore the dynamic that exists between Africans in Australia shaped by changing patterns of migration, settlement, and ethnicity. In all I aim to make more visible the African presence in Australia through the cultural studies field.

Introduction

The "black Atlantic" is a conceptual name adopted by Paul Gilroy to signify a transcultural, international formation that has long been recognised as foundational to the development of contemporary black culture in Europe.¹ This "black Atlantic" formation or diasporic movement between Africa, North America and Europe has, to some extent, monopolised the global literature on both diasporic and Pan-African movements. Yet there is another space in which I would like to make the discourses surrounding these movements more visible through the ethnographic and cultural studies arenas. Australia shares the same contested space as Europe, in which nationalism, articulated together with racism, and citizenship, compete with the liminal space now afforded

¹ Gilroy (1993:4).

multicultural policy and discourse.² In contrast to this much-criticised social policy³ however is an unruly urban multiculturalism that attempts to create a more modest national identity that overcomes barriers of ‘race’ or xenophobia.⁴ It is within this multiculturalism that I am exploring the building of identity among black African youth from fragmented or disparate sources. I question whether this identity, often framed by pan-African or diasporic discourses, belongs more readily to this urban multiculturalism. I further question, when reflecting on black African Australian culture, how new arrivals of African refugee youth vis-à-vis second or third generations African Australians complicate the emerging black African Australian identity. Do these earlier generations see themselves as more authentic African Australians thus creating an ‘us’ as insider, ‘them’ as outsider tension with newly arriving youth?

The Black Atlantic

To explore these questions, and to better understand the process of identity formation in young African Australians in Canberra I initially look to the work of Paul Gilroy. In his canonical work the *Black Atlantic* Gilroy addresses Britain’s black settler communities as communities that have forged a compound culture from disparate sources. Such sources include elements of political sensibility and cultural expression that have been transmitted from America over a long period of time and have been re-accentuated in Britain in a newer black vernacular culture.⁵ Gilroy suggests that black Britons in creating their own hybridised distinctiveness drew extensively from the black African American arts movement in film, visual arts, and theatre as well as music. These influences helped create in Britain a new topography of loyalty and identity, an identity that left behind the structures and presuppositions of the nation state.⁶

I borrow this notion of “compound culture” to help me enunciate my own understanding of black African youth in Canberra and their struggle to create their own identity and culture amongst the competing influences of Pan-Africanism, diaspora, and national identity. In doing so I consider, as does Gilroy, the possibility of an outernational re-conceptualisation of self and community. I hope that this re-conceptualisation will allow me to examine the problems of nationality, identity, and historical memory relative to the struggle for autonomy and citizenship.⁷

² Gilroy (2003:31).

³ See Ang (2001); Hage (1998).

⁴ Gilroy (2005:96).

⁵ Gilroy (1993: 15).

⁶ Gilroy (1993: 16).

⁷ Gilroy (1993:16).

I am not suggesting that the history or movements of Africans to and from Australia is anywhere near as complex as that of Gilroy's "black Atlantic". Ien Ang however,⁸ when reflecting on tension between Asia and the West in identity formation among Chinese or Asian Australians, argues that anyone who wants to be taken seriously in the ongoing conversation on the politics of 'race' today will have to take account of Gilroy's path-breaking work⁹ among others.¹⁰ Ang stresses that in an age of globalisation and diaspora such work constitutes a prerequisite reference point, not just a neutral template, for engagements with 'race' in other geo-cultural and political-historical contexts such as Australia.¹¹ This slowly building black African culture in Australia for example faces a similar tension to that which Ang addresses in identity formation among Chinese Australians; in creating a black vernacular African Australians must strive to be both African and Australian. Possibly adding to this tension in Australia's geo-cultural context are ongoing changes to Australia's offshore humanitarian program that offers protection to refugees and asylum seekers under the broader immigration policy. This program since the mid 1990s, until as recently as 2005, has increased the intake of refugees primarily from the countries of Sudan, Sierra Leone and Somalia.¹²

To put this discussion into perspective I will firstly return briefly to an era or generation that I suggest is not yet recognised by the few contemporary scholars of African Australians today: my own generation born in the early to mid 1970s. In doing so I hope to demonstrate the mechanics of "compound culture" more clearly as they play out in my own construction or understanding of self. Following this I will return to the black / black tension amongst African youth I have mentioned above.

Early African Arrivals

Official historic records record the arrival of black Africans in Australia with the First Fleet in 1788. These "black founders", who numbered no more than a dozen, made a significant contribution to the founding of the early colonial settlement of Australia whilst coexisting with the larger Anglo-population of convicts, soldiers and administrators.¹³ Some of their legacies can still be found in more contemporary and progressive historical accounts of the early colony, such as the story of John Caesar (alias Black Caesar) Australia's first bushranger.¹⁴ Records also indicate arrivals throughout the nineteenth century of black African seamen who would take advantage of the trade routes

⁸ Ang (2001).

⁹ Gilroy (1987; 1993; 2000).

¹⁰ Kobena Mercer (1994); Henry Louis Gates (1986).

¹¹ Ang (2001: 170).

¹² DIMIA (2005).

¹³ Pybus (2006).

¹⁴ Pybus (2006); see also Udo-Ekpo (1999:1).

travelled between England and America. Such seamen would at times disembark on the east coast of Australia, disappearing into the various communities then forming in the colony only to surface in memory over a century later in various genealogical records.¹⁵ In the latter half of the 19th century the white population began to fear a loss of autonomy to the non-white population and instigated policies of exclusionism against the coloured population. This exclusionism reached a climax in 1901 with an Act of Parliament. The 1901 Immigration Act otherwise known as the White Australia Policy excluded non-whites from the colony and refused citizenship to those that remained; Aboriginal, Chinese and presumably Africans.¹⁶ Pybus suggests that during this period of exclusionism much of the African lineage disappeared into mixed marriages or integrated into indigenous communities. Her discussion of the outing of some Aboriginal Australians as part of this early African lineage late last century is indicative of this.¹⁷

A Diaspora Emerges

My own history of being an African in Australia began with my father's arrival in the 1960s, some two centuries after the first Africans arrived on the First Fleet. His arrival in Canberra marked the second leg of his journey since departing the former British colony of Rhodesia. He had completed his honours degree in New Zealand under a Commonwealth Scholarship and thereafter secured a position in the doctorate program at the Australian National University even though at the time restrictive immigration policies were still a deterrent for potential migrants to Australia. In the UK however the reception of blacks from the former colonies in the Caribbean and the African continent had been underway since the end of World War II. This immigration was the source of much disquiet in England as the colonised began staking a claim to citizenship in the land of the coloniser.¹⁸ Australia paradoxically was itself a former colony yet for the better part of the century prior to the late 1960s was considered an untouchable white enclave in the South Pacific. Unlike in the former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean or India, this was initiated, through Australia being declared "*Terra Nullius*" or a 'land without owners' by the British Administration prior to colonisation in 1788.¹⁹ This white population subsequently went about disenfranchising and dispossessing the indigenous population.²⁰ The White Australia Policy further determined which ethnicity was welcome, personifying a particular form of nationalism through legislation.

¹⁵Pybus (2001).

¹⁶Curthoys (2003).

¹⁷ Pybus (2001: 22).

¹⁸ Gilroy (2005).

¹⁹ See Jayasuriya (2001).

²⁰ See Reynolds (1989).

The 1960s and '70s ushered in a new era in Australia's history, one to which my father was privy. Following a referendum in 1967 the Indigenous population was recognised in the Constitution to be considered as part of the Australian population and having the right to vote. In the early 1970s under the Whitlam government a 'non-white' migrant intake was to begin in earnest and Australia bore witness to, what I consider to be a polarising moment in Australia's history, the implementation of multiculturalism. This policy was to be the state-imposed solution for the inclusion of the various ethnicities finding their way to Australia,²¹ a means by which they would be recognised as contributing to the well-being and development of the nation.

Such attempts at inclusivity however were not persuasive enough for many Africans who formed part of this early community in the 1960s and 1970s to remain. My father, for example, although the first *black* nuclear physics doctorate in Australia only remained in the country the length of time it took to complete his degree. His need to return to Africa to further the process of decolonisation coupled with the feeling of isolation or estrangement from an African community, was stronger than the opportunity a new Australia offered. With my father's departure and that of other Africans to 'their own countries' in the early 1970s there remained a new generation of black settlers, their children. This was the sparse African community of my childhood, a small number of bi-cultural, formerly known as 'half-caste', children dotted along the east coast of Australia. Social policy of the time determined these children as part of the multicultural order, and yet mainstream Australia was still influenced by the legacies of racial hierarchy and hegemonic White Australia discourse. As Reynolds suggests,²² miscegenation remained a culturally significant fear in postcolonial Australia throughout much of the twentieth century. Only in 2008 has the federal government made a formal apology to Indigenous people for its policies that specifically targeted the removal of 'half caste' children, now known as the stolen generation, from their communities. And difficulties continue for many Indigenous people in determining the legitimacy of their Aboriginality.²³

Born and Bred

Being 'born and bred' in Canberra I was well steeped in the cultural significance of what Michael Pusey describes as 'White Fella Dreaming'. This was a signifier of a particular set of understandings about Australia and its culture, a projection of an idealised and perhaps unrealisable dream of egalitarianism and nation building that leads 'us' to our own understanding of

²¹ Ang (2001:95).

²² Reynolds (2005).

²³ Reynolds (2005:11).

who 'we' are.²⁴ Yet I as a young citizen of this country struggled with the absence of any local signifiers for my black identity.

In the 1970s the images of African Americans that filtered through from popular culture were the earliest expressions of blackness my brothers, sister and I were exposed to. Sitcoms such as *Different Strokes*, *Love Thy Neighbour* or *The Cosby Show* appeared through the television screen in early American attempts to create black representation in the media. Other images of more easily assimilated African Americans as comedians, athletes or entertainers were also common. These representations differed sharply from the cultural and political images of Africa offered by my mother's close circle of friends - teachers, diplomats and political activists both black and white. For them Africa was an association, an experience of which we were a part.

Neither the black representation in the American media nor the socio-political astuteness of my mother's friends matched my own everyday Australian cultural experience of Canberra in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In this period I often battled with being typically characterised as a 'nigger', the essential 'exotic other'²⁵ or the 'native come good'; an ongoing dilemma with African Australian youth today. These differing influences I contended with as a child, and although conflicting, they began to raise my awareness of a black consciousness at a time when black Australia, African, Aboriginal or otherwise, was barely perceptible to me.

This developing black consciousness was fundamentally changed when I first travelled to post independence Zimbabwe and Southern Africa at 11 years of age. The year was 1983. Stepping off the plane in Harare I was immediately encompassed in blackness. I quickly became entangled in another home, one in which I found myself part of an extended family, a cultural ethnicity and a new belonging on the other side of the Indian Ocean. Here also were my first experiences of the African state embodied in the common sights of Harare's militarised street corners and President Mugabe's armoured motorcade. My family and the nation state of Zimbabwe soon became integral to my understanding of self. I also began to question how the segregation and racial divisions I experienced travelling with a white mother in Apartheid South Africa came as no surprise for a child who had grown up in what was considered a multicultural or pluralist Australia.

Throughout my adolescence I remained in Australia yet travelled often to Zimbabwe. I soon began to wrestle with an identity far less reliant on the popular Americanisation of the black diaspora. This was not a blackness that

²⁴ see Pusey (2007).

²⁵ Said (1978).

arose through the complexities of the “black Atlantic”. This was a direct relationship with my forebears, one that I carried with me, crisscrossing the Indian Ocean: a temporal moment spanning several years in which I became accustomed to my transnational movement between Zimbabwe and Australia and any black - white dichotomy this may have created. In my late adolescence however, I travelled extensively in Europe, an Australian flag emblazoned on my backpack. Due to the disjunction between my appearance and allegiance to nation symbolised in the flag I was often asked, “where do you come from?” I developed a routine response that still lingers today when asked the same question, that “I was born in Australia but my father is Zimbabwean”. During this time in Europe I was exposed to English black culture and I began to develop a sense of black solidarity, a solidarity that grew out of the black vernacular culture Gilroy speaks of, embodied in the sights and sounds of Black Britain.²⁶ Upon returning to Australia I began to rely less on the notion of the nation or the narratives of white Australia although these nonetheless retained a strong influence on my sense of self.

In my twenties I re-discovered Rastafarian teachings, which I had first experienced as a young child in the 1970s through reggae songs of slavery, emancipation, equality and a call to repatriate. Rastafarianism for a politically minded black youth in the West like me in the 1990s provided a means to understand legacies of colonialism and a means with which to fight back against the oppressions of ‘race’. Retaining links to Africa, ‘our father’s land,’ was a clear message central to this struggle. Such incantations and utterances have now come to signify a deeper spiritual awareness for me.

At the same time I had become increasingly frustrated with multiculturalism as no more than political rhetoric. Of late I have found solace in the thinking of critics such as Ghassan Hage who described this policy as “white multiculturalism”, that is a top-down social policy that creates social capital for Australia’s white cosmopolitan elite.²⁷ This began to rekindle the unsettling feelings multiculturalism invoked in me as a youth, feelings that were related to the under-representation of Africans in Australian cultural and public life. Even today, as Gilroy points out, we certainly see more black people in the dreamscape of advertising, on television, and on the sports field, though we do not see such representations in Parliament, the police service, or the judge’s bench.²⁸ This is as true in Australia where blacks now feature in a host of advertising and television programmes ranging from Australian Idol to All Saints, as it is in the United Kingdom. A recent address by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, highlighting the benefit of

²⁶ Gilroy (1993).

²⁷ Hage (1998: 118).

²⁸ Gilroy (2005: 124).

humanitarian intake to Australian society is evidence of this. Senator Evans struggled to specifically name any of the African doctors, nurses and academics that have contributed to Australian society, but was however able to humour the audience based on his own observations that Sudanese refugees should be readily accepted in Australia due to their growing representation in the national football team.²⁹

The final disparate source that I would like to briefly allude to in my interpretation of an antipodean form of Gilroy's compound culture is indigenous Australia. Ien Ang argues that the category 'black' in Australia refers to Aboriginal people who have little in common with the African diaspora.³⁰ Yet as a young man I often sought solace in black Aboriginal narratives and images. In the company of Aboriginal people in Alice Springs I, like them, have come under police surveillance as a non-white. This was a complex and perplexing moment that still haunts me today, possibly due to a desire to understand the dynamic between the differing layers of black Australia, a dynamic that includes black settler citizen and indigenous black, both of whom must wrestle with the resultant racism the signifier black can create. This is a conflicted, powerful and difficult space for postcolonial culture to make sense of. It questions what 'black' means in Australia, not only for African or Aboriginal, but for a range of indigenes including Melanesians and Torres Strait or Pacific Islanders and a variety of settlers.

Another Generation

From these brief vignettes I wanted to convey the disparate sources from which as a child and youth I began to piece together a fluid notion of what it means to be black in Australia. In my study, along with these autobiographical instances, I am collecting the biographical narratives of African Australian youth living in Canberra today. I have begun to explore the ways in which they appropriate cultural notions or similar language from different sources in forming a black vernacular or "compound culture". I am also interested in whether or not, within this vernacular, they include or value seeing themselves as Australian.

In my study, I have observed that black American popular culture in particular hip-hop has had a dominant influence in shaping identity. An established local creative arts organization, *Kulture Break*, founded by some of Canberra's African Australian youth, is indicative of this. In the words of its founders, the name *Kulture Break* 'embraces the meaning of breaking new territory, overcoming negative cultural behaviours, stereotypes and combining *our*

²⁹ Evans (2008).

³⁰ Ang (2001: 170).

community culture with dance'.³¹ Kulture Break's 'community culture and dance' relies extensively on the appropriation of American hip-hop and popular culture to create an identity that goes beyond the negative stereotype associated with difference in Australia. The founder, Francis Owusu, created this vision in overcoming the difficulties he experienced as a young black child growing up in Canberra, where colour and negative stereotypes for blackness were commonplace amongst youth in the absence of any real understanding of difference. I myself regularly faced taunts or racial stereotype and yet at times however was able to embrace these, such as the image associated with Break Dancing, as a means to positively differentiate oneself.

I am observing too that in seeking their identity my participants are also relying on iconic figures, much as I did. Figures such as Malcolm X, Bob Marley, Martin Luther King and, possibly in the future, Barack Obama, are a means by which to articulate their struggle to forge black identity. My participants' media spaces such as *MySpace* or *Facebook* also show evidence of this. In addition, some of the participants rely on local political affiliations and cultural expression based in the community to shape their identity. Some of these allegiances stem from their parents narratives and experiences. For instance Pentecostalism, although at times at odds with the youth culture due to strict moral thinking, also plays an important role in shaping a pan-African identity. This growing religion fosters a sense of pan African belonging for many African youth in Canberra, as it is a faith that crosses a number of African cultural and ethnic boundaries. For African youth in Canberra, Pentecostalism also provides a focus for identity with a multitude of non-African cultures and ethnicities via a shared sense of religious morality. The affiliations that arise through the church and religious community from the shared belief in Jesus and Christianity often determine loyalties prior to consideration of class or colour. Although one of my participants, a young Nigerian woman Talia,³² intends to and is confident she will marry an African, for example, marrying a Christian is unquestionable.

Unlike my generation, African youth in Canberra today are closer to being able to identify themselves as a community, through the collective strength of their cultural expression and political affiliations. This is the result of a growing African population that I suggest intends to politicise itself as part of Australia's multicultural environment. In my study however I am finding multiculturalism is confused, rather than conflated, with notions of nationalism. To be African and Australian still dominates dialogue amongst

³¹ Kulture Break (2008), my emphasis.

³² The names of participants used in this paper are pseudonyms and not the participants real names.

my participants, with identity cemented in pan-African, diasporic or nationalistic discourses but rarely integrating each with the other into a true multiculturalism. One such example is Amena who struggles to articulate her identity:

I consider myself Australian until someone reminds me that I'm African... I forget I'm black. I just keep forgetting that I'm Ghanaian whereas the other young girls at church, it's like, yes - they know they are Ghanaian before they are Australian regardless of the fact that they are Australian citizens whereas with me I just see myself as Australian and I forget that I'm actually Ghanaian.

Perpetual Outsiders

My participants' identity issues have become more complex with the influx of sub-Saharan refugees who have recently arrived through the Humanitarian program. My preliminary observations indicate that the most recent arrival of Humanitarian entrants might now be disrupting my participants' slowly building African identity in Australia.

As my participants are drawn from the growing African middle class in Canberra they have until now quite successfully strived for their own quasi-assimilationist identity. Even though they may have been forced into a position of ambivalence, feeling themselves as being not quite the same as white Australians, though not quite other as foreigners,³³ my participants have been negotiating the passages of what was once a 'white' nation tactfully. The middle class participants in my study could well be described as Udo-Ekpo's more 'tenacious Africans' who have refused to accede to a position of second-class citizen. Because of their families' professional backgrounds and their class status, they also struggle to identify themselves with refugees.³⁴

It is difficult to say, at present, whether this disassociation is a result of recent representation in Australian media of 'new arrivals' as impoverished and sparsely educated or other common representations of Sudanese youth as troublemakers or delinquents. The latter form of demonisation was previously restricted to 'other' ethnic or migrant groups such as the Vietnamese or Lebanese. The political lobbying of certain conservative, anti-immigration Australians who previously targeted Asians or Muslims have now found a new target for their particular forms of xenophobia or intolerance. Outspoken conservatives have through public statements in the media brandished non-white ethnic youth, in this instance African youth, as delinquents, forming gangs and as participants in crime. Dick, for example, cites Andrew Frazer as

³³ Bhabha (1994) cited in Ang (2001: 146).

³⁴ Udo-Ekpo (1999: xiv).

saying “the expanding black population is a sure-fire recipe for increases in crime, violence and a wide range of other social problems”³⁵ Equally as concerning are similar statements from the outgoing Minister for Immigration Kevin Andrews, statements endorsed by Pauline Hanson the former federal Member for Parliament well known for attacking both indigenous Australians and Asian migrants as posing a threat to the national identity.³⁶ According to Pearlman Andrews has stated that African refugees – particularly Sudanese – fail to integrate into the Australian community and alleged that they are instigators of race-based gangs and fights at nightclubs.³⁷ I suggest that the repercussions of this unsettling moment in the history of African migration to Australia have disrupted the somewhat harmonious and rather uneventful black African settlement. Africans were now to ‘run the gauntlet’³⁸ or undertake a rite of passage into white hegemonic relations. That is to say, they are to be stigmatized, as with other ethnic groups entering Australia on mass, as misfits or criminals and subjected to calls for assimilation or expulsion.

This push, particularly throughout the ‘Howard era’ to validate a hegemonic white national identity troubles my participants. Through their anxious awareness of Australia’s political landscape they are possibly for the first time considering themselves, as I have, subjects of exclusionary Australian identity politics. It is too early to say what will be the repercussions of this sudden apprehension of vulnerability. This group of youth however now fear being seen as perpetual outsiders or falling prey to these racist discourses that have become prevalent in recent years. Gilroy’s explanation of a similar situation in the British context helps to elucidate the situation my participants feel themselves to be in:

That group gets trapped in the vulnerable role of perpetual outsider, but their local sense of entitlement leaves them reluctant to make common cause against racism and xenophobia with more recently arrived refugees and asylum seekers. To do so would accede to the secondariness and marginality with which racism associates them.³⁹

One of my participants migrated to Australia from Ghana when she was 18 months old and has lived here since. At times she has argued that we should not be letting refugees or asylum seekers into Australia: “we should decide who comes into this country and when”. And more recently when faced with the growing tensions surrounding African migration as mentioned above:

³⁵ Dick (2005).

³⁶ See Ang (2001; 2003).

³⁷ Pearlman (2007).

³⁸ Canberra Times (2006).

³⁹ Gilroy (2005: 123).

I have been here my whole life...and what makes me so mad is that they come from war torn countries to seek refuge in Australia and they give Africans a bad name as now people don't look at you and think that she's Ghanaian – all they think is she's 'African'! It's not fair, why should I have to suffer because of them? I have so much against the Sudanese or Sierra Leoneans because it hasn't just affected them it has affected all Africans living in Australia.

Another participant Keren, who is a locally born bi-cultural Eritrean Australian, described a “huge tension” between the newly-arrived African youth and the more localised African youth, alluding to the Sudanese in particular as instigators of ‘trouble’ or even violence in a number of contexts, including social gatherings or school settings. The use of “fresh” (off the boat), a term once reserved for all new migrants arriving by ship as a means to identify those on the outside, is also commonplace among black African youth.

This is not to say that internal tension does not exist among the non-humanitarian or refugee African Australian youth, rarely does it rest however on notions of insider / outsider. This other form of antipathy that I am alluding to affirms itself more clearly in ethnic or political rivalry, such as that often found between Eritrean and Ethiopian youth or within the internal political tension of the Eritrean community, rather than notions of belonging. Although there is no space here to discuss this, both of these examples demonstrate the difficulty in creating within Australia's multiculturalism a new community that remains plagued by the ongoing political situation in the countries of origin.

The ‘elementary’ logic that prevails in the discourses of distancing and ‘othering’ of refugees is that those who have suffered due to marginalisation will subsequently replicate this process of marginalisation with ‘others’ or ‘outsiders’ through the politics of inclusion and exclusion.⁴⁰ The outcome of this solidarity by these earlier generations is to accept their fate as marginalised members of the ‘host community’ and then to seek salvation, as I have noted above, at the cost of ‘trying to embrace and inflate the ebbing privileges of whiteness’.⁴¹ In contrast, my own reaction to the growing humanitarian entrant population more resembles that of Gramsci's ‘organic intellectual’,⁴² working, albeit with limited success, pro-actively through academic, community and education institutions balancing the social, political and theoretical to create inroads for refugee youth. Upon subtle reflection, however, I still see myself primarily positioned amongst a white middle class in Canberra while so doing.

⁴⁰ Gilroy (2005: 101); see also Hage (2006) in Beilharz & Hogan (2006).

⁴¹ Gilroy (2005: 101).

⁴² Morley & Chen (1996:20).

Conclusion

To conclude, I re-emphasise that creating a black vernacular culture is a painstaking, slow and complex process that relies on the appropriation of disparate, and often competing sources. These appropriations also demonstrate the fluidity and complexity with which identity processes occur, positioned, as they are, not only in a pan-African or diasporic context but also while individuals and groups are simultaneously meeting the demands of performing subject positions which are both interpolated by the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity. If historical thinking and racial legacies are to affect the way in which we see ourselves as black, we need to think carefully about the cohesiveness of the African Australian community in Australia and our desires for future generations. As the African population increases, and as the variety of papers and themes in this publication demonstrates, we may be closer to reaching a critical mass that will allow us to perform as a self determined community that avoids conflict based on, or inhibited by, notions of 'race' or national identity. One possible way through the difficult and complex relations is to affirm the diaspora to be a part of Australia's history rather than of its contemporary geography.⁴³ The notion of migrant, refugee or settler citizen is, and will continue to remain, part of Australia's cultural heritage. The counting of generations of familial citizenship to determine belonging will also linger, whilst clinging to ownership of authenticity as an Australian persists. Yet we should continue to be able to work towards a multiculturalism that draws its strength from such difference.

⁴³ Gilroy (2005:149)

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