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## **“There is Really Discrimination Everywhere”: Experiences and Consequences of *Everyday Racism* Among the New Black African Diaspora in Australia**

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### **Abstract**

In this article, we use Philomena Essed’s (1988) concept of ‘*Everyday Racism*’ as a theoretical framework to introduce critical perspectives for understanding experiences of contemporary racism among the new African diaspora in Australia. The concept deals with the everyday manifestations and (re)production of systemic inequality based on race and/or assumptions around race, whether intended or unintended. Our findings expose the covert, subtle and contestable forms that racism takes in Australian society and the consequences it has for black Africans. By discussing participants’ views and opinions about working and living as skilled black African migrants in Australia, this article explores how racism continues to be perpetuated in Australia, where most citizens profess a commitment to the democratic principles of justice, equality, tolerance and ‘a fair go’. We conclude that, for our black African respondents who experience racism regularly in their daily lives, the consequences are real and painful, manifesting in recurring themes such as the burden of proof; the weight of history and historicity; the ‘constriction of experience’; and a superfluous self-surveillance and self-interrogation.

## Introduction

*...it is supposed to be a multicultural society, but I tell you I belong on the fringe. First many of the issues I make reference to here or allude to even after here ... some of these things cannot be classified as racism because racism can be defined only by the person who is experiencing it; it cannot be defined by the person doing it to you or the system which is doing it to you. But unfortunately, the system defines racism and unless you can provide evidence of all that is happening, you have no case. So, the system doesn't think there is racism. Some of my experience clearly is racism because we have gone past the period where you will be openly abused as a Black person or as an African. No, nobody does that any more. But there are much subtle, much more sinister ways of doing these things; there are much more devastating ways of doing these things. So, it doesn't have to be physical. Anyway, 400 years ago it was physical; 100 years ago, it was physical but there is just as much pain in the totality of your being as there was then. So, for me I have even ceased to try to label it racism or give it any name because that – Maybe these are my own ways of dealing with the pain.... I mean let me be frank with you that is not just a perception, it is well established. (Lasisi)*

We begin this article with this long quote from one of our research participants because it is poignant in the way it portrays the respondent's views about his position and positioning in Australia, while also capturing and encapsulating what this article is all about—"the experienced reality of lived racism" (Essed, 1991, p. vii) in Australia. The research project (explained in detail later) that forms the basis of this article concerned identity and belonging among skilled 'black' African<sup>1</sup> migrants in Australia. However, our data analysis revealed that, without any prompting, most

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<sup>1</sup> The target population for our research was people of African descent who migrated to Australia from Africa. We use 'African' here as an analytic category over other ethno-national markers on the premise that while Africa as a region has great diversity in the structure of its population, consisting of numerous people belonging to different ethnic, social and economic groups (see, for example, Ufomata, 2000), it is nevertheless a group with many commonalities of needs, interests and diasporic experiences: enough parallels to justify reference to it as a socio-analytic category.

participants talked at varying lengths about the prevalence of racism in their everyday lives—in the workplace and in society at large. Our analysis revealed that the central themes of identity and belonging did not feature as prominently as we had expected; rather, racism and racial issues took centre stage. So it is to racism or “racist practices” (Essed, 1991, p. viii) that we turn our attention in this article.

The expansion of Australia’s humanitarian policy, particularly since the 1990s, has meant that the past three decades have seen a steady stream of continental ‘black’ Africans entering Australia, resulting in a fairly significant emergent community of black African migrants. The inflow has naturally led to some attention being paid to this community, by way of research into the ‘African-Australian’ migration experience. This article follows in a similar vein, while focusing on the experiences and pervasiveness of racism in the everyday lives of this group, and how they deal with issues of ‘blackness’, ‘race’ and ‘otherness’ on a daily basis—what has been referred to as the “‘lived experience’ of being black” (see Deitch et al., 2003, p. 1301; also Essed, 1991, p. vii).

The value of this article lies in the fact that it is about the everyday lived experiences of racism by black Africans and the *consequences* of racism and racialisation for those living with such experiences. Such a focus ensures that this article addresses an important but often neglected and contentious topic—black African subjectivities and racial discrimination (see Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017). Generally, in Australia, discourses around the subject of racism fall into two broad categories: (a) those that very often seek to silence racism or diminish its occurrence in society (see, for example, Augoustinos & Every, 2007 & 2010; Babacan, 2008; and Dunn, Pelleri, & Maeder-Han, 2011) and (b) those that focus on the history of racism etched into Australia’s colonial past and white racist policies, such as the White Australia Policy (see for example, Jones, 2017 and Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, n.d), pointing to it as a precursor of ongoing racism in society. Such discourses claim the Australian space as White space and, therefore, see racism as inherent in the regular functioning of a system built on racism. Racism, in this case, is not an incongruity or something that is unusual; it is a normal part of how the system functions (see, for example, Hage, 1998; Stratton, 2006; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2014 & 2017). Of the two streams, the silencing discourses tend to dominate (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017), and so a major contribution of this article is to add to the literature and discussions of black African subjectivities and racial discrimination, and to serve as veritable resistance and opposition to the dominant silencing discourses.

As stated earlier, in this article we use Essed's concept of *Everyday Racism* as a conceptual lens to deconstruct the everyday lived realities of our interviewees. *Everyday Racism* is an appealing concept for comprehending and appreciating the experiences of black, skilled migrants for multiple reasons. The first is because individuals make sense of their lives and lived experiences through what happens to them on a daily basis—their everyday lived reality. As Douglas (1974) pointed out, “we must begin all sociological understanding of human existence with an understanding of everyday life” (p. x). Second, in a country like Australia, where “most citizens express commitment to the democratic principles of justice, equality, tolerance and fairness” (Beagan, 2003, p. 853), the concept will help reveal some of the covert ways in which racial inequalities are experienced, sustained and perpetuated at the micro level of society and within workplaces (Beagan, 2003). Third, it allows us to centre the respondents’ “subjective realm; the meanings they attribute to events, their perceptions of racism and their subsequent feelings and emotions” (Herbert et al., 2008, p. 104). The *Everyday Racism* framework enables an exploration of the experiences of black migrants in an environment where the discussion of racism is often silenced.

In centring and exploring the experiences of those whose daily realities involve racist encounters, *Everyday Racism* departs from earlier theorisations of racism, which have tended to focus on perpetrators as the lens through which to understand racism. Fourth, applying the notion of *Everyday Racism* to our data allows us to interrogate the participants’ narratives and get to the concealed and symbolic instances of contemporary racism (see also Lee, 2000, p. 356). In so doing, it not only uncovers the “hidden dimensions of racism” (Leah, 1995, p. 100) but also provides a sociological tool for comprehending the manner in which subtle racisms are exhibited in the Australian context.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows. The next section discusses the issue of ‘Blacks and Blackness’, pointing out the complexities in usage and understandings of the terms within the Australian context. Then we provide more detail about the study, including research methods and data analysis procedures. Following that, we discuss the conceptual framework of *Everyday Racism*, using quotes from the data to illustrate key concepts at significant points in the discussion. The penultimate section looks at the data in more detail, discussing the consequences of everyday racism. The last section concludes this article, noting that black African migrants regularly contend with varied forms of subtle racism. It is our hope that this article helps to expose some of the complexities and negotiations of being that black

African migrants are confronted with in their daily living, and the ways in which seemingly innocuous acts of everyday racism work to cumulatively “uphold social relations of power and privilege, marginality and oppression” (Beagan, 2003, p. 853).

### **Of blackness and the new African diaspora in Australia**

In asserting that we are writing about the experiences of everyday racism among black Africans in Australia, we are conscious of the challenges and criticisms that such a venture may attract. To begin with, Australia has a long (and troubled) history with racialised black bodies. Indigenous Australians are sometimes classified as black and so are the people of the Torres Strait Islands (see, for example, Foley, 1999 & 2001). Ample documentation exists that illustrates some historical convergence in the “experience of blackness as a constituted identity between indigenous people of Australia and other black subjects” (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017, p. 3). Furthermore, beyond the interconnected histories of indigenous Australians and other black subjects, there are also intricacies in the conceptions of black bodies in the Australian environment, which contains an indigenous population often described as ‘Black’, and other black people, including African blacks.

Being aware of the different articulations of blackness in Australia, and the associated consequences for racial and racialised experiences, we do not seek in this article to make generalisations about the racial experiences of all blacks in the Australian context. Rather, we focus on deconstructing how everyday racism is experienced among *black Africans*. While Indigenous Australians and black African migrants to Australia could share similar racialised realities, we also contend that there are significant experiential and historical differences between them that warrant a specific focus on black Africans. The continental black African is both culturally and physically distinct from the aforementioned groups. Additionally, the ‘migrant’ status of the ‘new’ black (African) body creates other complexities in relation to belonging, which further complicate their experiences. This means that, in some imperceptible ways, how they experience blackness, race and racialisation would differ from Indigenous Australians (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017). Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2008) allude to such when they suggest that, as ‘new’ bodies in Australia, the black African body is subjected to heightened hostilities and the suspicion directed at ‘newcomers’.

We note at this point that the black African diaspora is itself not a homogeneous grouping of people; many do not necessarily share common

characteristics and/or histories, apart from black phenotypic features and a (presumed) remote ancestry. Even though some scholars have made a case for classifying all ‘blacks’ outside Africa as diasporic Africans, on the basis that, at some point, they can trace their ancestry to Africa, we still acknowledge the heterogeneity of the category ‘black’ and of ‘black’ experiences. We agree with Alabi (2005), that “black people can on the first level relate to one another in terms of their experiences in racialized societies” and that they share a common understanding of “how Black people fare in the world relative to other groups” (p. 17). We further acknowledge that these shared common experiences and understandings allow black people to collectively query their marginalisation (Alabi, 2005).

One can therefore argue that the term ‘black’ cannot appropriately describe a grouping of people (even those with dark phenotypic features who have connections with Africa), because black people are not all the same and they experience their blackness in different ways. In other words, there are multiple ‘blacknesses’ and a variety of black experiences and black subjectivities. Consequently, just as we have done elsewhere, we use the expression ‘black’—and the concomitant term ‘blackness’—in this article in explicit allusion to that “collective group of people with the same phenotypic cues (including, most significantly, dark skin colour), who, though of diverse socio-cultural and political backgrounds, come originally from continental Africa, and have migrated to Australia over the past five decades or so; as well as their descendants” (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017, p. 3). For simplicity, we use the term ‘black’ in this article as a metonymic stand-in for the ‘new’ *black African diaspora* in Australia.

## The Study

The specific aim of the study was to investigate and understand the experiences of skilled ‘black’ African migrants in Australia. The focus was on first-generation black continental Africans who have immigrated to Australia since the abolition of the White Australia Policy in the early 1970s (see, for example, Jones, 2017 and Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, n.d), and have “traceable genealogical links to the continent” (Tetty & Pupilampu, 2006, p. 13) and how they experience life as individuals and professionals within their communities and workplaces.

It is also worth mentioning here that our interest in the ‘new’ African diaspora in Australia has a personal genesis: as African migrants we are part of this group ourselves. Our choice of research and our analytic concerns, therefore, do not arise out of naïve curiosity. We acknowledge that, though

rooted in a sociological rationale, our choice of research topic and research methodology is not in itself neutral. Rather, it is rooted in our own experiences as black bodies in the predominantly white Australian space. It is situated in our hybrid identity; our social location as black continental African researchers reading, researching and writing in the West. We bear both similarities to and differences from the participants in our research. We have personal relationships to the experiences of blackness and racism our participants talk about, and, as such, we declare our “autobiographical investment” (Young, 2010, p. 1) and use our own experiences as black African migrant bodies as part of the tool kit and skillset we use to make sense of and interpret the data. Furthermore, like Yancy (2008), we “write out of a personal existential context” which is “a profound source of knowledge connected to [our] raced [bodies]”, and we “theorize from a place of lived embodied experience, a site of exposure” (p. 65). Thus, we claim ourselves as situated rather than detached researchers but argue that our situatedness is not a liability; rather it allows us to bring a certain depth of understanding to the analysis and interpretation process (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2014) that ultimately refines and elucidates (Denzin, 1994) the narratives of our participants.

Interviews were conducted with a total of 24 skilled African migrants in Sydney, Adelaide and Canberra from November to December 2009, and then from October to December 2011. Participants were recruited via both official and personal networks, as well as through the use of a snowballing strategy where earlier participants were encouraged to inform other potential participants about the study and to pass on the investigators’ contact details. Participants were from wide-ranging cultural backgrounds, with many holding higher degree qualifications, including PhDs. Respondents’ professional backgrounds included academia, medicine, nursing, statistics, engineering, finance, accounting, and information and communication technologies (ICT). The participants came from varied backgrounds, including from countries such as Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria.

The age of participants ranged from 34 to 55 years and participants were predominantly male, with only three female interviewees. This gender distribution was not deliberate; rather it was a consequence of the recruitment strategy. Also, being qualitative, the study did not attempt to seek a gender representative sample. Nevertheless, age and gender distribution did not seem to have any impact on the data collection process or the data itself.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> *A Note on Methodology*: The average length of interviews was approximately one hour, with the longest lasting two hours and the shortest lasting 38 minutes. All interviews were

reason is that, as we have argued elsewhere (see Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2014), as skilled black African migrants ourselves, we were considered ‘insiders’ and therefore participants were very comfortable talking to us. All participants were assigned pseudonyms as part of the data de-identification process.

### **Everyday racism and/in the data**

In this section we discuss the concept of *Everyday Racism* and intersperse our discussions with quotes from our data to illustrate the key points raised by respondents<sup>3</sup> about their experiences of racism. The quotes also serve to justify our choice of *Everyday Racism* as our conceptual framework. Throughout this article, we discuss the participants’ perceptions of racism as non-blatant, “ambiguous and nebulous” acts of racism (Sue, et al., 2007, p. 272) which, though experienced violently “and persistently [by our respondents], are often difficult to pinpoint” (Essed, 2002, p. 204).

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digitally recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Given that the core of our study was to understand the personal experiences of continental Africans in Australia, our study was grounded in (qualitative) narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry, according to Mitchell and Egudo (2003), is informed by postmodern debates that knowledge is value-laden, and reality is based on multiple perspectives with truth grounded in everyday life involving social interactions among individuals. We therefore followed the processes of narrative inquiry and thematic analysis, engaging in “an exhaustive examination” (Manning, 1982, p. 280) of data, as suggested by proponents of analytic induction, while at the same time “staying close to the data” (Jankowski & Wester, 1993, p. 67) in accordance with aspects of narrative inquiry. Our thematic analysis process involved several key steps. Stage one involved the process of data reduction; in which key themes were identified and patterns in the data collected (identifying recurring themes and ideas from the transcribed interviews). From these we created detailed thematic notes that provided a second layer of analysis. The next stage involved allocating specific codes (single word labels) to all items on the list. These codes/labels were further sorted and grouped under “broader, higher order categories or ‘main themes’” (Ritchie, Spencer, & O’Connor, 2003, p. 221). The final stage of ‘data interpretation’ involved selecting core themes that we felt were key to the research and systematically relating them to other themes to create a “‘big picture’ story outline” (O’Dwyer, 2004, p. 394).

<sup>3</sup> Patton (1990) suggests that “sufficient description and direct quotations should be included to allow the reader to enter into the situation and thoughts of the people represented in the report” (p. 400). In accordance with that position we have provided sample quotes, which, although lengthy, are both indicative and illustrative of the core elements of everyday racism that we discuss here, as well as the experiences of our participants.

The focal point of Essed's theorising is upon everyday manifestations of racism and racial prejudice. Simply put, *Everyday Racism* is the familiar, often small, but nevertheless significant way in which non-white people encounter racism in the 'normal' ordering of day-to-day interactions with dominant white groups (Henry, 2004). Whereas racism in its extreme, overt form is easily recognised, everyday racism is overlooked, undermined, easily dismissed and, more importantly, invisible "to the perpetrator and, oftentimes the recipient" (Sue, 2005, as cited in Sue et al., 2007, p. 275).

According to Essed (1991, as cited by Beagan, 2003), *Everyday Racism* is about the "inequitable practices that infiltrate everyday life and become part of what is seen as 'normal' by the dominant group, even in the context of formal commitment to equality" (p. 853). The concept has two constituent parts: one part says that it is about racism and the other part says that it is about the everyday. It is about the everyday because these encounters with prejudice "are not rare instances but are familiar and recurrent patterns of being devalued in varied ways and across different contexts" (Deitch et al., 2003, p. 1301). Thus, it is about the everyday manifestations and (re)production of systemic inequality based on race and/or assumptions around race, whether intended or unintended, as illustrated in the quote below:

*Sometimes, as well, I think you come across situations where you know you are much better technically than other people but yet you see them progressing much faster than you ever hoped to. And you try to find a reason for that and there is no other reason except that probably because you are not Australian or because you are not White. Some positions basically are preserved maybe for people of certain races and not for other people and probably if you are a bit of a different race, if they present you as a front to the company ... I have been in situations where I do all the work and we get all the fantastic results and then it comes to the point where we have to present this to the public and then I'm pushed to the back row that nobody will even know that I contributed to that work. And it is presented as if those achievements were gained by probably my white [boss] with no mention or any reference to me at all. (Kosoko)*

As the quote above shows, everyday racism is systemic, it is "embodied in the way we 'normally' conduct ourselves and our business in the everyday life," just like other forms of discrimination, such as sexism (Ng, 1992, as

cited in Leah, 1995, p. 11). In the quote above, Kosoko talks about colleagues he is technically superior to but who progress faster, showing how black professionals are underestimated and undervalued. This is similar to experiences in the United States, which Feagin and Sikes (1994), citing their interviewees, describe as blacks in companies having jobs while their white counterparts had careers. Indeed, this theme of white colleagues progressing faster than blacks was a recurring one in the data, with some respondents even citing instances where they had to teach people who were promoted over them how to do their jobs. Walagas, who worked in the Australian Public Service, put it thus: "It's like a pyramid; the higher you go, the whiter it becomes". Such practices, while subtle and ambiguous, "can produce a racist effect while denying racism was the cause" (Herbert et al., 2008, p. 105). Consequently, *Everyday Racism* insists that non-whites' lived experiences of racial prejudice and racism are theoretically relevant. The notion of 'experience' is at the core of Essed's (1991) conceptualisation of *Everyday Racism*; specifically, the 'experience' of those who encounter racism (p. 3). As Henry and Tator (2005) point out, "racist beliefs and practices, although widespread and persistent, are frequently invisible to anyone but those who suffer from them," (p. 1) and these groups have "sophisticated knowledge about the reproduction of racism" (Hill Collins, 1992, p. 790).

*Everyday Racism* need not be ill-intentioned all the time. Indeed, in some cases the perpetrators believe they are doing good, or at least seem unaware of the implications of their actions or inactions and the source of the thinking that leads to their decision and subsequent action/inaction. The following quote is illustrative:

*We've had situations where people try to offer you help even though you really don't need their help. **They try ... not because they're so generous but because they feel you're one of those who have just come in to struggle and therefore you need help from them. We get situations where neighbours will say: "Oh, we're throwing away these things, would you like to have them?"** But these are things that we don't need. You know, if we want them we can buy. ... I mean those things get me angry but now over the years, I have learnt to live with these kinds of negative comments. (Aloma, emphasis added)*

In this case, everyday racism is insidiously embedded in ostensible goodness (Yancy, 2008). It is worth noting that, historically, whiteness has

defined itself via the social role of a “white saviour” (Hughey, 2014, p. 264). Consequently, it is not surprising that the respondent’s white neighbours regard themselves as socially superior to their lowly black neighbours, who deserve to be saved and uplifted from their poor socio-economic circumstances by being given second-hand items. While one can argue that racism expressed with ill-intention and that expressed without ill-intention<sup>4</sup> are different, the fact remains that both expressions rely on the same structures of racist thoughts and feelings (Eliasoph, 1992). In addition, they all seem to elicit the same kind of response: as the respondent noted, with ‘anger’. As Essed (1988) rightly points out, “racist discrimination should not be defined in terms of the underlying motivations, but as actions with negative implications and/or consequences for Blacks both as a group and individually” (p. 6). Our interview notes for that day show that the participant was visibly distressed as he spoke about this situation of racism embedded in supposed goodness. As a high-income earner, he found it disconcerting to be viewed in that light. This situation fits well with what Young (1990) described as:

[T]he vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic behavior and market mechanisms – in short, the normal processes of everyday life (p. 41).

In discussing everyday racism in Australia, Stratton (2006) calls Australia a “racialised culture” and argues that there are “attitudes and understandings” that are so embedded in the everyday life of the culture that most (white) Australians, “don’t even recognise themselves as making decisions based in a racialised history” (p. 662).

Another feature of everyday racism is its covertness: subtle discriminatory behaviour “such as avoidance of Blacks, closed and unfriendly verbal or non-verbal communication, or failure to give assistance”

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<sup>4</sup> This type of racism (which constitutes everyday racism) has been referred to by others as ‘benevolent racism’, i.e., acts intended and constructed as ‘beneficial’ (and outside the realm of ‘racism’) to the racialised group but that do in fact further cement stereotypes, further discriminate and oppress the racialised group (or are at least experienced by the group as such). See, for example, Esposito, Luigi, & Romano (2014); Ramasubriamianiam & Oliver (2007).

(Deitch et al., 2003, p. 1301), behaviours that other writers have termed acts of “micro aggression” by Whites against Blacks (Pettigrew & Martin, 1987; Deitch et al., 2003; Carbado, 2007). In the excerpt below, the respondent experiences the marginalising and excluding behaviour of the perpetrators as hurtful, and the symbolism of the refusal to acknowledge her competence and experience is not lost on her:

*I have had incidents whereby I would be standing in delivery suites at the Nurses' Desk where the girls are working and somebody will walk in. They will just walk in and just ignore me. I will be standing there and I will be the person to talk to them. They would ignore me and look around and pace up and down and come back and forth. And then if somebody comes they will ask the person – a White person maybe, I want this and they will go “Oh, Antonia [pseudonym of female nurse] is there; I think she is the person in charge. You could ask her.” ... At times, I get a bit angry inside because I think those people are undermining my experience and expertise which can be a bit frustrating. (Sampana)*

Tuen van Dijk (2000) alludes to the discursive, subtle and symbolic nature of the ‘new racism’, which is expressed, enacted and confirmed by text and talk in everyday conversations and actions which “appear far removed from the open violence and forceful segregation of the old racism” (p. 34). Yet, as he rightly points out, these acts may be just as effective in marginalising and excluding minorities and may be even more hurtful because of the way in which they are normalised and seen as natural by those who engage in them. The quote by Sampana is poignant in its depiction of van Dijk’s point. Needless to say, such occurrences are not one-offs for either this nurse respondent or other respondents (including medical doctors), who all reported similar situations. This illustrates the idea that *Everyday Racism*, as indicated earlier, is not only about the everyday; it is also about the fact that it occurs regularly and is cumulative. Each incident is not seen in isolation but rather as part of a series of incidents that happen over time and work together to affect victims’ selves and self-negotiation in varying ways. Thus, *Everyday Racism* is not a singular act but a multidimensional experience (McNeilly et al., 1996) and, as Essed (2002) notes, “one event triggers memories of other similar incidents, of the beliefs surrounding the event, of behavioral coping and cognitive responses” (p. 207). Each instance of everyday racism is made sense of mainly in relation to the whole complex of

relations and practices that happen within the wider framework of being and living (Essed, 2002). Again, the quote below is illustrative.

*I find out there is no point for me to go to the staffroom to sit down and eat because just the way you are sitting in the staffroom, somebody walks out. Nobody wants to talk to you.... People say all kinds of things in the name of networking and people actually exclude you. I mean let me be frank with you, that is not just a perception, it is well established.... So as hard as you may try to be part of the network, you are simply excluded. You are given a cold shoulder in different and very nice subtle ways. So, at a point you will say: "what is the point trying to network?" **Because I found out really nobody genuinely wants to know the truth about who you are. Nobody genuinely wants to know because knowing about who you are, commands a proper response. So therefore, it is better [for them] to remain in their own understanding of who you are and where you need to be, than to know what the truth is. ... And of course, when you want to be included and you are not included the only non-violent thing to do is to keep living in your own world. That is the only non-violent thing to do because otherwise you will violate the laws and then that precisely justifies what they have done to you.** (Lasisi, emphasis added)*

The quote above is revealing in the way in which the respondent makes sense of the actions of others. As insiders who share the same standpoint as our participants, we have had comparable experiences in varied ways which have ensured that, over time, we have come to acquire similar beliefs surrounding such events and understand the behavioural coping mechanism of self-segregation (Tatum, 2003) and the cognitive responses (Essed, 2002) that go with such incidents. We can therefore identify with both the point Essed makes and the narratives of our respondents. Also, Lasisi makes an important point about white colleagues not wanting to know the truth. This is what Mills (2007) describes as willful ignorance of racism or racist behaviour.

Everyday racism also has the capacity to put victims in situations where they are unable to recognise themselves (Yancy, 2008). Victims can become strangers to themselves when they are represented in ways that contradict their self-perceptions, making them unable to reconcile their knowledge of themselves with the way they are re-presented to themselves by perpetrators. In encounters where acts of racial 'micro-aggression' are visited upon

victims, they are usually seen and treated in ways that baffle them and they struggle to recognise themselves in/after the encounter. The quote below from Dontier highlights this point:

*I was told how lucky I was to be the only person to be interviewed for that position...I went to the interview and the head of the panel for the whole time that he was interviewing me, he wouldn't look at me. ...He wouldn't look at my face. Anyway, I could tell from the body language that he wasn't interested in me, or perhaps he was disappointed. He probably didn't know I was black because he looked at my CV and said "Oh, you did your first degree at Cape Coast University, is that in South Africa? I said, "no no no, that's not in South Africa, that's in Ghana". So, he probably was expecting me to be a South African White or something like that. And so, when he saw that I was black he was completely disinterested. So, I had that interview and left with not much hope. So, it didn't surprise me when I got my interview report and he said, I could not speak English. And I thought that it was a bit of an insult because he was fully aware that we Ghanaians have grown up with English. (Dontier)*

Dontier comes from an English-speaking background where all his education was in English, and he has also completed both a Masters and a PhD in Australia. His perception of himself was that of a fluent English-speaking professional, and yet the only 'justification' for not giving him the job was that 'he could not speak English'. Thus, he could not recognise himself as the one being re-presented in the interview report. Yancy (2008) narrates a different but somewhat similar encounter (in terms of outcome/consequences) with his teacher, who, in the name of counselling, told him to be realistic and seek to become a carpenter or bricklayer instead of the pilot he was striving to become. As Yancy (2008) so eloquently put it:

He returned me to myself as something I did not recognise... The teacher did not simply return me to myself as a carpenter or a bricklayer when all along I had this image of myself as a pilot. Rather, he returned me to myself as a *fixed entity*; a 'niggerised' Black body whose epidermal logic had already foreclosed the possibility of anything other than what befitted its lowly station (pp. 67-68).

In the case of Dontier, he was equally returned to himself (through the interview report) as an unrecognisable body, portrayed in ways that rendered him a stranger to himself. He was returned as a distorted, inferior and ludicrous body, configured through agential White-man psychology (Braithwaite, 1992), supporting Yancy's assertion that "the 'Black body's' 'racial' experience is fundamentally linked to the oppressive modalities of the raced white body" (2008, p. 65).

Another staging-point for everyday racism that can be gleaned from Dontier's quote is the politics of English and how it is used as an excuse to discriminate. Research shows that 'whiteness' discriminates against blacks and other non-native speakers who speak English with an 'undesirable' accent, or blacks who speak a variation of English that does not reinforce whiteness. Nguyen (1994) for example has noted that:

At times, employers have used claims of 'unintelligible English' to deny jobs to accented, but otherwise qualified, applicants. However, these claims may be mere pretense to discrimination based on national origin (p. 117).

Indeed, research shows many immigrants in English-speaking countries encounter a "barrier of accent discrimination – a closed economic door based on national origin discrimination" (Nguyen, 1994, pp. 118-119) because they do not "speak the part" (Jackson, 2011, p. 1). Furthermore, they are considered to not speak the part because they are indexed against "'whiteness' as an unmarked normative order" (Hill, 1998, p. 680). Dontier's quote provides clear insight into this practice of hiding behind accent or language to practice racial discrimination.

In fact, in the United States, where Civil Rights laws prohibit discrimination against people on the basis of race or national origin, the legal system recognises that employers may use the excuse of 'Unintelligible English' to engage in discriminatory acts. Consequently, the Act of 1964 specifically cautions against such actions, stating that:

Accent and national origin are obviously inextricably intertwined in many cases. It would therefore be an easy refuge in this context for an employer unlawfully discriminating against someone based on national origin to state falsely that it was not the person's national origin that caused the employment or promotion problem, but the candidate's inability to measure up to the

communications skills demanded by the job. We encourage a very searching look by the district courts at such a claim. (cited in Nguyen, 1994, p. 120)

In Australia, Manns (2015, n. p.) has noted that “accent remains fair game when it comes to racism and classism” while also rightly observing that “speakers of any number of non-standard or broad accents might have the potential to be marginalized”. Viewed within such a framework, it is justifiable to put the actions of the chair of Dontier’s interview panel and the contents of the ensuing report down to racial discrimination, and thus everyday racism.

### **Consequences of everyday racism**

The data analysis conducted for this research revealed several themes which we have grouped together and denoted as the consequences of racism for our participants. These themes are: the burden of proof; the weight of history and historicity; the ‘constriction of experience’; and a superfluous self-examination. We discuss these themes in detail below.

#### ***The burden of proof***

Our data revealed that many of our respondents live with a double-sided burden: on one hand the realisation that, irrespective of their qualifications, they are deemed incompetent, and on the other hand having to constantly work extremely hard to prove themselves competent. A number of respondents spoke about having to prove their worth and abilities on a daily basis. In their workplaces, such burdens of proof constituted their subjective everyday lived experiences; condemned as guilty by an ideological frame of reference that reduced them ontologically to the level of incompetents. For many, the consequence of being declared ‘guilty until proven innocent’, is that they believe they have to continually work harder than anyone else to defy what Yancy (2008) describes as the “fixed fantasies and distorted images” (p. xxii) projected on them through the white gaze. The quote below from Kente is illustrative:

*You always have to prove to them that you are not what they think you are and you are probably better than them. So, you go out of your way to work harder than others. ...And you know I work late hours, sometimes weekends. ...Probably if I was back in Ghana,*

*it will be more relaxing. I wouldn't be thinking that I have to prove to anyone that I'm good. In this case you go over and beyond what you are capable of doing to produce...As long as I live in this country I'll have to live with it forever because you always have to prove yourself. That perception will always be there. (Kente)*

The excerpt above shows that Kente believes he needs to work 'extra hard' (as another participant, Breda, put it) to have his competence recognised. This is not an isolated assertion, in fact it was repeated by 21 out of 24 participants and therefore cannot simply be overlooked. As noted earlier, contemporary racist practices are frequently only visible to those who suffer them and who have sophisticated knowledge about how they are reproduced (Henry & Tator 2005; Hill Collins, 1992). Indeed, as has been pointed out elsewhere, understandings and responses to racial occurrences are contextual and the culmination of a multiplicity of life experiences for those on the receiving end (Derald et al., 2007; Babacan, 2013). As Babacan (2013) rightly points out:

For minorities, a particular incident may not be the first time that similar situations had occurred. What may appear as a random event to a member of the dominant culture is a familiar and repeated experience for the person from minority culture. People from dominant cultures, while making appraisals about whether a situation or event was racist do not share these multiple experiences, and they evaluate either the incident or their own behaviours in the moment through a singular event (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Thus, they fail to see a pattern of bias and can easily deny any form of racism or discrimination (Sue, 2005, pp. 24-25).

In the quote below, Marijata recounts similar experiences, albeit in a different employment context, but expresses concerns that are analogous to those conveyed by Kente:

*I feel like you have to, coming from African aspect in spite of the fact that someone like me I actually got my PhD in Australia, I feel that sort of muted like 'this guy has got to prove himself a little bit more.' If you understand what I am trying to say, which I find quite fascinating because even when people that are*

*professionally below your level have been asked to come and ask you for help, they are reluctant. They will go around; they'll go around until they find out that 'OK there is nowhere else to go' then they come.... I will give you an example, even from my own perspective, the level at which I am now I feel I should be higher but it's hard to, like I said, it's almost like you have to prove yourself beyond what people of the same level have to do; I think you understand. So, there is some discrimination there. (Marijata)*

From the evidence provided by these respondents it is clear that black Africans in Australia are privy to experiences that influence how they think through race and racism and that they articulate their experiences using certain structured modes of thought. They consider their experiences not as separate incidents, but as a process that demands their constant vigilance, shaping their personal, professional, and psychological lives, and provoking profoundly damaging cumulative effects (Feagin & Sikes, 1994).

### ***The weight of history and the burden of historicity***

The data also reveals that respondents felt they were constantly being judged on the basis of events that happened in the past—historical occurrences that were either correctly or incorrectly recorded and/or presented in the West (Fanon, 1952/2008):

*I think there is a bit of a problem with people accepting, you know, black people to manage white staff. And I say this because... You're going to find that; many blacks do not supervise staff. Many Blacks in the Australian Public Service do not have staff that answer to them. They work by themselves and answer directly to their bosses. They do not have staff that they manage... And I think the issue is: people can't conceptualise it; they can't handle that concept of a black person managing, you know, white people. The history of the white man and the black man has been that the black man always has to be the underdog. And his master had to be, you know, white. I think there's still a lot of that in the system. (Dontier)*

In essence, respondents believe they are “forced into a normative space, a historically structured and structuring space through which they are seen

and judged guilty a priori” (Yancy, 2008, p. 2). According to the respondents, the practice of racial discrimination makes them, and by extension all other black African migrants in Australia, responsible for things that they have no control over—their (black) bodies, their race and their ancestors (Fanon, 1952/2008). As Fanon (1952/2008) put it, they are made to contend with things in their past and the inauthentic ways in which they have been presented—“ethnic characteristics... tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships” (pp. 84-85). The following quote from Kantanka elucidates this point:

*In the industries, it is really different; the discrimination and racism are not subtle. For example, they employed me as a project manager, a national project manager... Most of the managers in the industry are people who go through the ranks so it makes it very difficult. They are semi-literates academically. They are not exposed though they know their job.... well they consider terrible to them for a foreigner to come in to give them orders. So, they find that difficult to swallow for a Black person ... Few people have told me that already, face-to-face, in my face: “You Black man; you can’t just come in here and tell us what we know. As much as you were sent here by the bureaucrats in Melbourne, we are not going to give you that cooperation you want”. .... Well they are not comfortable working for me as a Black person. One put it to me that, where I belong is in the factory. (Kantanka)*

As the quotes from Dontier and Kantanka show, perceiving black Africans in such inauthentic and stereotypical ways has real consequences for them in their work places and, in some cases, reduces their chances of progress and/or receiving cooperation from colleagues. Such perceptions, and the actions or inactions they engender, indeed have negative consequences for their job-related and general wellbeing (Deitch et al., 2003). Indeed, research has revealed that there is a strong link between experiencing racism on a day-to-day basis and psychological distress, and that it can have chronic adverse effects on mental and physical health (see, for example, Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008; American Psychiatric Association, 2017).

### *Constriction of experience*

According to Fanon (1952/2008), for “as long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion... to experience his being through others” (p. 82). However, black African migrants in Australia are not among their own, and so racism forces them to experience their being not only through others, but also in a very restrictive way. The following quote demonstrates the idea being expressed:

*You just see the undertones and all that... there are times that you go to let's say a restaurant for example, and the moment you get in everyone turns around and starts looking at you. It is as if they are saying: 'we didn't expect you to come here'. ... They wouldn't say it for sure but you still feel there is something that is not right. Because an Australian couple will come in and nobody will look at them the same way but you get that kind of look that it is as if they are surprised to see you there. **And I think sometimes it makes you wonder... It keeps on reminding you that probably you are still not the same as anybody else which is a bit unfortunate.** Because you think people will accept you for who you are and all that and give you the due respect that they will give to anyone. (Kosoko, emphasis added)*

As the quote indicates, Kosoko experiences a level of uncertainty and unease at times as a result of these racial acts of ‘micro-aggression’ visited upon he and his partner’s bodies; in this instance, white peoples’ reactions when they see them (as a couple) in a restaurant. Fanon (1952/2008) aptly captures the feelings expressed by this respondent when he points out that:

In the white world, the man of color [sic] encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty (p. 83).

The black body in these contexts is constantly subjected to scrutiny by the ‘white gaze’ (Yancy, 2008), and that creates a certain self-awareness and colour-consciousness, as the following quote from Aloma demonstrates:

*...we were together in Ghana... [there] we see one or two, three White people. That doesn't influence anything. I mean we're all Africans, this is our home; there is nothing like maybe somebody short-changing you or anything. I don't even think of colour. I don't see colour when I'm Ghana. No, not at all! But, here, I see it every day. (Aloma)*

Aloma reveals that colour is not an issue or concern when he is in his native homeland, yet in the Australian environment he thinks of colour all the time. That statement reflects how he (and several other respondents who expressed similar sentiments) construct themselves as black Africans within the Australian context, and how colour becomes important in one context but not the other. It also shows how colour influences their thinking and being within the Australian context. The excerpts from Aloma and Kosoko point to how racism is embedded within the “embodied habitual engagement” of black Africans with their social world (Yancy, 2008, p. 230), and how it works to impact their everyday routine dealings, rendering them race/colour-conscious (Carbardo, 2007).

### ***Superfluous self-examination***

Yancy (2008) argues that one of the consequences of racism is the creation of a “doubleness within the Black psyche, leading to a destructive process of superfluous self-surveillance and self-interrogation” (p. 68), a situation which some of our respondents alluded to.

*Most of the challenges are actually self-imposed. They're self-imposed in the sense that you think at the back of your mind you will be discriminated against and you go according to the perception that you have. **So, you feel, I'm a professional here. I need to get my work done. I need to get promoted. I need to hold this position but then I also, that is what I feel, I also ask myself even if I'm given this position, would the people allow me to perform in this position?** (Sumanguru, emphasis added)*

*Oh, as a migrant some of the limitations are you always need to prove yourself. Why do I say prove yourself? To start with the colour is something ... I am not racist. I don't believe in race, but it is still there we can't run away from it. The race is still there. You enter a room with about ten people whose colour is different*

*and once that sort of ... How do I call it? You are not frightened but that difference is always there. So it can play on you somehow. You ask yourself “Will I be accepted and how will people judge me?” But I try as much as possible not to allow it to rule me too much, but it is there. We accept the fact that it is still there. (Walagas, emphasis added)*

It is worth pointing out that, despite what Sumanguru says in the first quote above, these restrictions are actually not entirely self-imposed. There is a whole history of black people’s experiences in the West that confirms the participant’s suspicion he will be discriminated against. Indeed, quotes from Dontier and Katanka in the previous section of this article actually reveal that (at least some) whites in Australia are ‘not entirely happy’ to see a black person in authority. The quote below from Aloma buttresses this point:

*I know from my UK experience that a White man will never think of a Black man as a smart person so even though sometimes I do things with people here they say, “oh, this is really well done; this is a bright idea,” I just thought maybe this is just lip service; maybe at the back of their mind they are just thinking of something different. ...So, I always have that at the back of my mind when I’m dealing with these people and that is pressure in its self, you know, to an African. (Aloma, emphasis added)*

The feeling expressed by Aloma in the excerpt has its basis in the fact that, historically, whiteness regards blackness as primitive, backwards and incompetent and the black body’s ‘racial’ experience has always been linked to the repressive tendencies of the raced white body (Yancy, 2008). Thus, a compliment from whites can come across as condescending, patronising or as a straightforward back-handed compliment, such as the often heard: ‘your English is good for a black person’. In essence then, as reflected in the voices of the respondents, the black body/mind becomes a battleground where a war of self-examination and questioning of one’s abilities and being is constantly waged, because, as Yancy (2008) points out, the larger anti-black racist society whispers mixed messages in the ears of black people who then “struggle to think of themselves as a possibility” (p. 68). Wetherell and Potter capture the situation most poetically when they note: “conflict may rage in the hearts and minds of ordinary women and men, but, in this case, it does not originate there” (1988, cited in Eliasoph, 1999, p. 485).

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings presented in this article highlight what can be unearthed by adopting a standpoint that treats racism as subtle, and discrimination as both ambiguous and pervasive (Deitch et al., 2003). As our data has shown, for our respondents discrimination is manifested, especially at work, in the form of subtle acts of mistreatment that they unduly experience and which have negative consequences for their job-related and non-job-related wellbeing (Deitch et al., 2003). Their lived experiential reality, for the most part, is marked by racial prejudice, racial discrimination and ‘otherness’. Our analysis has shown the subtle and yet incessant ways in which racism is both embedded and reproduced in Australian society, through discrimination and the seemingly innocuous and benevolent ways and actions of everyday life enacted in the lives of the black African ‘other’. In the words of Katanka: “there is really discrimination everywhere... it [is] in the private sector and public sector and the academic community”. Our data shows that our respondents believe that racism is pervasive in Australia and proof for them is obtainable by looking into their everyday lives.

Also, our data supports Deitch et al.’s (2003) assertion that “[n]ot only may everyday racism be more prevalent than discrimination that can be characterized as blatant and major, but its consequences for victimized individuals may be equally, if not more, profound” (p. 1315). As the excerpts have shown, respondents recounted the consequences of everyday racism as real and intense, manifesting in several ways, including: having to deal with the burden of proof; contending with the weight of history (including inauthentic representations of Africans); constraints on the ways in which they experience their being; and a superfluous self-examination which needlessly creates self-doubt. Our respondents, through the data, have shown that acts of “micro-inequities” (van Dijk, 2000, p. 34) occur frequently in their lives and are very much part of their everyday lived experiences. Moreover, these reported ‘micro-inequities’ keep recurring because Australian society and its institutions are deeply marked with ‘whiteness’ (Fordham 1988; Gould 1999) and borne out of a system built on and steeped in racism (Stratton, 2006) in which most White Australians continue to be oblivious to the racial implications of their everyday decisions, conversations and activities. This upholds the view of Derald et al. (2007) that “[t]he power of racial microaggressions lies in their invisibility to the perpetrator” (p. 275). It is reasonable to conclude that the interview excerpts reproduced in this article, which highlight everyday occurrences of these ‘micro-inequities’, represent more than just the beliefs of black Africans. They also reveal to

some extent the private beliefs and structural inequality in the Australian system—expressed in ways that affect black Africans’ lives on a daily basis—while also highlighting “the situations that create the subtle, nebulous atmosphere that Philomena Essed (1991) calls ‘everyday racism’” (Eliasoph 1990, p. 480).

In conclusion, we have shown in this article that, for black Africans in Australia, racism/racial discrimination is very much a part of their daily lived experience and it adversely affects their lives in ways that only they can comprehend from their uniquely Black African standpoint. By adopting *Everyday Racism* as its conceptual framework, and centring the voices of black Africans/our respondents, this article has given them an exegetical role, rendering their experiences meaningful (Yancy, 2008, p. 66) and in the process revealed the prevalence of discrimination and racism in their lives. As reflected in the title of this article—there is discrimination everywhere. It has also revealed the impact racism has on their sense of being. Through the notion of *Everyday Racism*, this article has thrown light on the micro-level processes through which inequities of power based on racialised differences are experienced and perpetuated (Beagan, 2003) in Australian society. This necessitates acknowledging that, although public commentary describes many Australians as professing a commitment to the democratic principles of justice, equality, tolerance and a fair go, the lived experiential reality of black Africans is that racism continues to exert a pervasive influence on interpersonal and institutional practices, processes and interactions, socioeconomic opportunities, workplace relations and relationships, and more.

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