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Book Reviews

'African-Australian' Identity in the Making: Analysing its Imagery and Explanatory Power in View of Young Africans in Australia[1]

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Abstract

This article explores the term 'African-Australian', commonly used to describe Australians of African descent as a single homogeneous group. Even though it has been used for a long time, there has been little research into whether this generic term can properly describe African migrants and/or what people of African descent say about it. This article explores young Africans' self-categorisation and self-identification in relation to the broader label 'African-Australian', against the backdrop of their ethnic or national backgrounds. A qualitative inquiry was adopted, focusing on personal accounts, narratives and the perceptions of participants. Findings suggest that while there is generalised use among participants of the label 'African-Australian', some participants reject it and prefer to self-identify using their respective ethno-national hyphenations, such as 'Ethiopian-Australian'. Nonetheless, the research shows that there is a new trend emerging towards embracing a globalised black African identity crafted out of essentialised attributions of 'Africanness' and/or 'blackness'.

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[1] This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the 38th Annual AFSAAP Conference and published in the proceedings (see Gebrekidan, 2016).

[2] The research underpinning this publication was undertaken while completing a PhD at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Victoria.

Introduction

This article explores the term 'African-Australian', widely used in public discourse to refer to African migrants and diaspora communities in Australia. The media, local community associations and academics alike use this expression to describe and refer to African-origin black people in Australia (Nsubuga-Kyobe & Dimock, 2002; Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2010). While Australian statistical recording and the identification of ethnic groups depends on characteristic information, such as the self-perceived ethnicity, birthplace, language, ancestry and religion of individuals (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2005), public and academic discourses tend to employ the generic term 'African-Australian'.

The term is exclusively applied to refer to people from sub-Saharan African as a whole (Nsubuga-Kyobe & Dimock, 2002) and does not include non-black immigrants originating from Northern Africa. Rather, Arabic-speaking North African migrants are technically incorporated into the Middle East (ABS, 2005), because North Africans tend to be viewed as 'not African' on the grounds of their race and culture, while those south of the Sahara are considered somehow 'more African' (Jakubowicz, 2010; Nsubuga-Kyobe & Dimock, 2002). In addition, the term excludes white migrants from African countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, who become 'colourless' or invisible upon migration to Australia (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2013, p. 62).

The hyphenated term 'African-Australian' discursively categorises all black people of African descent as a homogeneous group. However, African migrant and diaspora groups consist of individuals of a diverse mix of ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, religious and professional backgrounds. These migrants have also entered Australia under different visa categories and programs. While many Africans, particularly those from Southern African countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, have entered Australia as professionals and skilled migrants, significant numbers from the Horn of Africa region are humanitarian migrants (Jakubowicz, 2010; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2013). Recently, the number of Africans migrating to Australia has increased rapidly. According to the ABS, in the 2006 census the estimated number of African-born people living in Australia was 248,700, which accounted for 5.6 percent of the overseas-born population (4.4 million); this figure had increased to about 338,000 by the 2011 census (ABS, 2008 & 2012). African migrants and refugees in Australia comprised extremely diverse ethnic, national, linguistic or cultural groups. Any generalised label will not only be deceptive and distort representation but will

also have the reifying and homogenising effect of constructing black African identity as the 'other' (Matereke, 2009; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2013).

Some scholars have dismissed the term 'African-Australian' as an inadequate, misleading and simplistic label adopted for political, bureaucratic and technical convenience "without critical attention to its relevance and impact" on African migrants (Phillips, 2011, p. 57; Ndhlovu, 2014). This umbrella term has also been criticised for ignoring internal socio-political and cultural differences and lumping the diverse ethnicities, races, cultures, experiences and migration histories of Africans into a collection of stereotypes (Jakubowicz, 2010; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2013; Ndhlovu, 2014; Zwangobani, 2012). According to Jakubowicz (2010), in Australia the whole idea of 'African' is tarnished by a "map of stereotypes" (p. 4), such as disease, conflict, war, poverty and famine.

The existence of these negative stereotypes has been supported by empirical research. In a social representation study in a regional town of New South Wales, Hanson-Easey and Moloney (2009) examined and compared local peoples' attitudes and thoughts when presented with terms such as 'refugees', 'refugees from Africa' and 'refugees from Asia'. The study found that the term 'refugee' when conjoined with 'Africa' generated a higher score on negative stereotypes than when linked with another place of origin, such as Asia (Hanson-Easey & Moloney, 2009, p. 509). According to the study, in contrast to those from Asia, refugees from Africa were characteristically associated with negative images such as hunger, blackness, disease and sadness.

Further, mainstream media portrayals of youth offending and 'African youth gangs' are strongly condemned by multicultural groups and African migrant community agents for their biased, racist and sensationalist news reporting, and their simplistic generalisations based on single cases (Windle, 2008; Reiner, 2010). While Reiner (2010) warned that the term 'African' should be carefully examined, research by Windle (2008) indicated that media representations have gone to the extent of presenting the story of the entirety of African migrants as a story of one ethnic group, in which "Sudanese is often used to cover all 'black' refugees" (Windle, 2008, p. 554). European migrants such as the Irish, Italians, Greeks or Germans are rarely subjected to a continental designation such as 'European-Australian' (Phillips, 2011). Why, then, are Africans and African migrants defined and perceived in such a generalised way? Where do these generalisations originate?

One of the central problems with the generic view of Africans relates to the fundamental question of how and in what context one defines 'Africa' and by extension 'African identity'. As far as collectivist interpretations are concerned, any knowledge of and information about 'African' people and 'African identity' is questionable across practical, theoretical and analytical levels. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2006) offers a compelling analysis of the ontological and epistemological limitations and problematics of defining Africa, because:

> Africa is exceedingly difficult to define…the idea of "Africa" is a complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings, so that extrapolations of "African" culture, identity or nationality, in the singular or plural, any explorations of what makes "Africa" "African," are often quite slippery as these notions tend to swing unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency. (p. 14)

As stated by Zeleza, the problem of defining Africa is multifaceted and permeated with theoretical, historical, political and pragmatic considerations of what defines Africa and what makes Africans 'African'. In the view of the western world and western scholars, the idea of being 'African' is characteristically framed by essentialist discourses of 'Africa' as referring to either the sub-Saharan African region or the black Africans inhabiting this region. This offers a racialised view of Africa, or Africa-as-biology, confined to representing sub-Saharan Africans as the pristine locus of the real Africa (Zeleza, 2006). The conflation of a geographic region with black Africans encodes racial identities into geographical representations, from which 'African' is interpreted through direct reference to skin colour.

In the global diaspora, it has become the conventional practice that African migrants are homogeneously identified by names such as 'African-Americans', 'African-Canadians', or 'African-Australians' in their respective destination countries. The primary factor used to bind all Africans together is one of biological (racial) rather than cultural or social similarity (Zeleza, 2006; Tettey & Puplampu, 2005). In most cases, 'Africanness' is perceived in the essentialised context of 'Blackness'.

In the US, studies show that the term 'African-American' was introduced by social activist Jesse Jackson in the 1990s as an alternative to the previously used pejorative terms 'black', 'negro' and 'people of colour' (Martin, 1991; Smith, 1992; Neal, 2001). In the view of Martin (1991), Jackson's introduction of the hyphenated identity was intended to renew social

solidarity among black Americans while at the same time reconnecting them to their motherland, Africa. The campaign for the use of this term was meant to increase racial consciousness by redefining 'black' in terms of pan-African ethnicity. Changes and developments in the lexical preferences of black Americans reflect different sociocultural and symbolic significances for Africans in and outside of the US by building a sense of solidarity with each other and connection with their motherland, Africa.

Terms such as 'Black American' or 'African American' have a historical significance that dates back to the 17th-century transatlantic slave trade. The slave trade caused not only the forced migration of millions of Africans, but also constructed racialised 'Africa' and the subsequent formation of an African diaspora through which 'African' became racialised as a collective identity (Zeleza, 2006, Espiritu, 2011). Africans migrated to America not as 'black' or 'African' but as distinct members of various ethnic populations (Espiritu, 2011). In America, in addition to their ethnic or national identities, they are identified by the pan-ethnic label African-American. Espiritu (2011) defines pan-ethnic groups as politico-cultural collectivities made up of people of several tribal or national origins. It is a macroscopic concept that contains numerous ethnic and subethnic groups and nationalities, which are internally diverse, yet externally presumed to be homogenous. Pan-ethnic labels such as African-American, Asian-American, and Latino-American etc. are products of imposed categorisation that lump together diverse peoples into an enlarged "ethnic framework" (Espiritu, 2011, p. 6).

A similar trend has appeared in Australia wherein 'African-Australian' is applied to describe all black African migrants. However, compared to black Americans, African migrants in Australia have completely different histories and migratory journeys. Most have come as refugees and humanitarian entrants or skilled migrants over the past three decades. As a result, it may be less appropriate to adopt a similar designation such as 'African-Australian'. However, practical usage of the term seems to have a wide popularity in public discourse, political rhetoric, newspaper reporting and research. How do African migrants themselves react to this generic term? Is the hyphenated identity preferred by all black Africans in Australia? This article seeks to unpack the explanatory power of a pan-African ethnicity in view of Horn of Africa background youth in Australia.

Methodology

This article utilises data collected for my doctoral research, which explores sense of identity, belonging and social inclusion among Horn of

Africa background youth who were born or raised in Australia and live in Melbourne. Data for the study were collected through ethnographic observations and qualitative interviewing which focused on a range of thematic areas including knowledge of ethnic or national origins, self-identification, family connections and transnational ties. The term 'African-Australian' emerged as one identity category used by participants to describe themselves.

This article focuses on the interview data and investigates what the term 'African-Australian' means for these young people, and how they understand and react to the collective identity used to refer to all black African migrants in Australia. A total of 18 young people (male=12, female=6, aged 18 to 25)—13 from a Horn of Africa background (9 Ethiopians, 3 Eritreans, 1 Djiboutian) and five of South Sudanese origin—participated in one-on-one, in-depth interviews. Initially, potential participants were recruited through purposive sampling, with the help of key informants from the target migrant groups. Further participants were then recruited through the referral chain (snowball) method, based on the personal networks of interviewees (Bryman, 2012). In qualitative research, sampling revolves around the notion of purposive sampling, as the researcher selects participants in a strategic way so that samples are relevant to the research (Bryman, 2012). Characteristically, a majority of participants displayed a blend of ancestral cultural identities and Australian values and lifestyles.

Interviews were conducted in English in open and safe spaces arranged in agreement with participants. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, with each recording ranging from 60 to 90 minutes. Data collection took place between May and December 2015. Thematic analysis was employed, involving a thorough reading of transcripts and the systematic coding of key ideas into themes and subthemes (Bryman, 2012). Participants' knowledge, perceptions and acceptance or rejection of the term 'African-Australian' was thematically indexed into the broader African-Australian identity. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was coded as PT followed by a sequence number (for example, PT5 means participant 5). Ethics approval was obtained from the La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Analysis and Discussion

Analysis of the participants' stories and narratives uncovered complex feelings around the concept of being 'African' and identifying and being identified as 'African-Australian'. While participants defined and interpreted

the term in numerous ways, two competing arguments dominated the interpretations. On the one hand, participants' views suggested that pan-African ethnicity served as an organising tool by bringing together diverse ethno-cultural groups in pursuit of a common goal. The unifying power of being 'African' principally stems from the essentialised interpretation of continental Africa as one based on racial similarity, and the minority position African migrants occupy as a group. Other participants challenged the logical validity of the term, arguing that though there is a sense in which Africans are racially homogeneous, African migrants as a whole are also extremely heterogeneous and encompass diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and national backgrounds. In the view of these participants, using the generic name is meaningless because it does not express the diversity of Africans in Australia. Those who opposed the term preferred to self-identify or identified by others in terms of the narrower ethnic or national origin of their parents. These competing views are outlined in the following sections.

'African-Australian': Its Meaning and Explanatory Power

As stated earlier, African refugees and migrants in the global diaspora are often collectively identified by generic labels such as African-American, or African-Canadian, in their respective destinations (Smith, 1992; Tettey & Paplampu, 2005). 'African-Australian' has become an equivalent designation. These kinds of umbrella names derive either from above, through bureaucratic and political practices of classification undertaken by the state, or from below, in ordinary conversations, social interactions and informal ways of naming by the dominant society.

According to participants in this study, the all-encompassing, pan-ethnic designation 'African-Australian' is emerging as a common descriptor for all black Africans in Australia. 'African' is referentially defined as a core identity that embraces all black émigrés from Africa. In this sense, the hyphenated term refers to someone who has a darker complexion, presumed to have African descent, and lives in Australia. It shows a random association between 'black' and 'African', which can be real or imagined. According to participants, the 'African personality' and 'African identity' are things automatically ascribed to *all* black people of African origin by mainstream Australians. Some members of African migrant communities accept this automatically ascribed 'African-Australian' identity and subscribe to it by using that label in their immediate self-identification. The following comments illustrate this racially invoked interpretation of the term.

To me it will probably just means someone who is dark skin and that lives in Australia that is what it is. (PT17)

So, I say I am African-Australian but when I mean African, I am Australian, you got the sense? I like to say I am global citizen if there is such a thing but you know, at the moment in Australia, I say I am African-Australian. What does that mean? You know, just somebody who is African descent that is born in Australia or lived here long enough to become citizen of the nation. So but besides that in terms of culture, you know, I am African. So I have accepted that, you know, I don't think Australia has such a culture, like, nobody knows what Australian culture is. So we accept Australian values but it is important we keep our culture and those two together and form that African-Australian identity. (PT5)

I identify as an Oromo living in Australia even though technically my nationality is Australian. On top of that I would identify, in terms of my racialised identity as a black person living in Australia and a black person also living in the global context of diaspora but not really in my immediate identification do I use the word Australian or identify as Australian. (PT3)

The above reflections show that, as an identity category, 'African-Australian' is connotatively understood and interpreted as a racial category—an identity category that stems from one's ascribed membership to the black human race. As used in everyday discourse and interactions, its meaning hinges upon the archaic equation of 'Africanness' with 'blackness', from which racialised pan-African identity is constructed (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005). Expressions such as "I would identify, in terms of my racialised identity, as a black person living in Australia" (PT3), become common ground shared by all Africans as members of the black human race. It is a common identity, a point of connection for all black Africans across the world, regardless of location, nationality or ethnicity. This racialised identity is something that binds all black Africans together as a group, and in this regard, being 'African-Australian' serves as a link to broader global black African identity (this will be discussed further below). This is an extrapolated identity derived from a generalised view of continental Africa based on people's physical appearances. As Zeleza (2006) stated, equating Africa with the geographical region of sub-Saharan Africa discursively defines Africa as

biology, as the continent of black people. Racialised and essentialist understandings of 'African identity' give rise to the danger of encoding identity onto the biological trait of skin pigmentation, and often mistakenly conflate 'Africanness' and 'blackness'.

African Identity, Commonality and the Problem of Othering

Participants reported that the designation 'African-Australian' also fostered a spirit of commonality among African migrants in Australia, based on shared problems and experiences. It provides a sense of commonality, social harmony and solidarity that Africans share with each other simply because they are all from the same continent and have common problems and issues. Several participants believed that the expression 'African-Australian' describes the broader, macroscopic ideological constructs of pan-African ethnicity that glues together all black African migrants in Australia. For reasons of commonality, they affirmed their affiliation and allegiance to that broader naming. This idea of shared commonality is revealed in the following short discussion with female participant PT15:

> *Interviewer: African-background people are somehow identified as one group like 'African-Australians'. Are you aware of that term? Does it make sense for you?*

> *PT15: Yes, yes because the issues that Ethiopians face here are the issues that most Africans here face too. So in terms of community spirit and this kind of collective idea, yes I really like that term and probably I am very comfortable with that term because I think it encompasses a lot of the issues and a lot of the identity issues that come up with coming from migrant background. So yeah I am comfortable with that term.*

Participants also pointed out that having links to two cultural worldviews—'African' and 'Australian'—provided the advantage of intercultural mixing in their immediate social milieus. It implies hybrid identities in that the young people incorporate and assimilate identities based on their African heritages and Australian experiences and can mediate and negotiate between the two. This idea was echoed by PT11, who confidently claimed that the hyphenation can describe his identity as follows:

> *Yeah, definitely, it describes me 'African-Australian', you know, just having that, and I have the mixture, so definitely yeah. I have*

also friends that are Africans but most of their identity rule is ruled by Australian, about Australian culture, so I would identify them just as Australian, but for me I have the mixture of two, I can be African-Australian… that is how I see it, having a mixture of both cultures. So being able to connect with both at whatever time you need to. So if you go to an Australian event, you will be able to fit in easily, know how to speak the language, and just know how to do the activities, the same thing with the African cultures. (PT11)

The above account indicates the great flexibility and situational variability, in which young people can identify themselves as both 'African' and 'Australian'. Similarly to PT11, other participants also believed that being identified by the hyphenated term provided advantages when interacting in and navigating the different social and cultural worlds of 'African' and 'Australian'. In this regard, the hyphenated term 'African-Australian' has the advantage of forging social solidarity, a spirit of community and cultural unity among the black African population in Australia by fostering an 'African identity' embedded in a shared commonality as refugees, or migrants, and Africans.

Another significant point reported by participants relates to the hierarchical nature of identity. It shows the priority one gives to her 'African heritage' first, with 'Australian' as a secondary option. In the view of the participants, the prefix 'African' implies the notion of having an 'African identity' first and 'Australian identity' second. For this reason, the hyphenated phrase is preferred as an alternative identity category. A comment by one interviewee, PT10, points out this reality:

I like it, it is good, I like it because it is true we are Africans first, Australian second. Everybody should have something before Australia besides Aboriginals. The only people to be called 'Australians' are obviously Aboriginals because they are natives, you know. Like, yeah I like it, it is good name. I don't mind if they call me African first, that is what I am, and then Australian second, I am Australian too because I live here now…even if, like I don't know why they say that but it is true, I am African first, Australian second. But if they call me that, they have to call themselves something else like, England first, Australian second, England-Australian, you know what I am saying? Unless they are

> *Aboriginals that is the only way I can approve right now, to be honest. (PT 10)*

In part, justifications for ranking 'African identity' first and 'Australian' second relate to the contested argument around what constitutes 'true Australian' identity. It signals a competing mindset among young people, such as that articulated by PT10 when he stated, "if they call us 'African-Australian', then they have to call themselves like European-Australian". As indicated in the above comment by PT10 and those of other interviewees, Aborigines are the only people who can be seen as 'true Australians'. As far as these young people are concerned, all Australians except Aborigines are immigrants and thus should be identified by some form of hyphenated identity. However, participants' narratives always referentially indicated that 'Australianness' had a predominant core of 'whiteness', notably associated with Anglo-Saxons or Europeans. All other migrant groups are implicitly relegated to hyphenated ethnic categories. 'Who is Australian?' has been a highly problematic question, complicated by dominant perspectives of allegiance to British heritage and, for black African migrants, how Australianness has been redefined in confrontation with the 'African other' (Matereke, 2009). It is perhaps for this reason that none of the young people referred to or preferred 'Australian' as their first identity category—without any prefix—although they admittedly acknowledge their national identity as 'Australian'. The comments below by PT15 highlight the predominance of 'whiteness' as follows:

> *Interviewer: Why do you need to have an affiliation like 'African-Australian', why not just 'Australian'?*

> *PT15: Because this country makes you feel that if you are not white and blonde hair, blue eyed, you are not Australian. So papers mean nothing.*

Therefore, when it comes to subjective self-identification, 'Australian' identity seems to be confined to citizenship status. Without further division into smaller categories (national, ethnic or subethnic levels), 'African' always comes first in the identity hierarchy.

The data also indicate that one of the problems associated with the hyphenated identification is the issue of social recognition and acceptance of Africans as full Australians. Some participants commented that it made them

less than being 'fully Australian', an idea explicitly illustrated by one of the interviewees as follows:

> *I guess it can describe me but at the same time it won't make me 100 percent Australian, not 100 percent but it won't make me accepted or whatever as to what is happening, it won't make me fully like everybody else. So if they say 'you are African Australian', that is how I will be seen 'African Australian', not 'Australian', you know what I mean? So it can be good and it can be bad…for example, bad as in not seen as equal, you know what I mean? Like I am not equal as everybody else; and good as in, you know, I can still hold on my culture and my heritage. So I can have that will to say 'yes I am African', 'yes I am Australian' together (PT12)*

Indeed, one of the criticisms of hyphenated identities such as 'African-Australian', 'African-American', 'African-Canadian', etc. relates to the problem of divided loyalty suggested by such naming. In the US, hyphenated identities such as 'African-American' have traditionally been regarded as symbols of divided loyalty, in which groups are seen, at best, as less than 100 percent American and, at worst, as traitors to their adoptive homeland (Thernstrom, 1980, cited in Smith, 1992, p. 508). Smith (1992) also suggested that such hyphenations may encourage white racists to urge that blacks be 'sent back' to Africa. Likewise, research among African-Canadians in Canada indicates that one effect of hyphenated labels resides in perpetuating the perception of the "eternal immigrant", in which African migrants are not seen as 'real' Canadians by mainstream society but are rather viewed as temporary residents or "over-stayers" who ought to go back to where they came from (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005, p. 41). A similar idea is reflected in this study. Some participants highlighted that hyphenated labels are subtle and systematic reminders of one's position in the citizenship hierarchy. PT14 poignantly illustrated this purpose of hyphenations as follows:

> *African-Australian? It means a second migrant, basically a second citizen, you are not the first that is what it means to me. Yes, I am proud to be African, I am proud of my ethnic group, I am proud to be black, but I know this country is not meant, you know. I am just here to dwell basically, that is how I feel, it could be different for other people. Obviously, if you are black, you are*

always African-Australian. For example, we have African-Americans, they are not called Americans; they are called African-Americans why? Because they come from Africa, you know, that is how it is. (PT14)

In the long run, being defined, labelled and identified by hyphenated names such as 'African-Australian' contributes to systematic exclusion, marginalisation and othering. It prospectively perpetuates the problem of being seen as an "eternal immigrant" (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005, p. 41) or a second-class citizen and, thus, systematically excluded from full membership in mainstream society and discriminated against. Previous studies have shown that, in Australia, African-descent people are rarely considered to be full members of the Australian nation, by virtue of their sociocultural and racial backgrounds, and because their "blackness is associated with a refugee status and being an outsider" (Hatoss, 2012, p. 65; Ndhlovu, 2014).

"They Don't have to Say Black": Resistance to Racialised Labelling

Conventional representations of names and naming involve an act of political practice that holds significant power and imagery (Martin, 1991). As a racial representation, the term 'black' carries a controversial meaning that potentially implies positive as well as negative connotations. Not surprisingly, none of the respondents apparently viewed 'black' as an alternative preference, although many of them expressed pride in their skin colour. In other words, 'black' is generally considered by participants as an offensive, racist, obsolete and outmoded word as elaborated by PT10 below:

Interviewer: How about 'Black African' term, they call sometimes like 'Black African'?

PT10: They call us 'Black African'?

Interviewer: How about that kind of term? That term itself?

PT10: They don't have to say black. If they just say 'African-Australian' that is cool. If they say 'black African-Australian' then they are trying to be racist.

In a similar vein, PT13 reiterated her comments, emphasising the underlying stereotypic meanings of both 'black' and 'African-Australian' as being the same.

> They don't use 'black' now, it is considered racist; but they just say 'African'. I think it is a way of saying 'black', 'African' is a way of saying you are 'Black Australian'. I think that is what it means and sometimes I feel that is what they are saying but it is a lot nicer to say 'African' than saying 'Black Australian', a kind of an insult when someone says 'Black Australian'; they shouldn't identify them with the colour. (PT13)

A recent study in the US found that the term 'black' carried more negative stereotypes than the term 'African-American' (Hall, Phillips, & Townsend, 2015). Being identified as 'black' signalled a more negative stereotype, higher discrimination and lower socioeconomic status than 'African-American', which reflected a comparatively better social position, fewer stereotypes and positive emotional tones.

In another instance, participants pointed out the conceptual and logical limitations of 'African-Australian' as designating a collective identity. Some of the participants explicitly rejected this generic name because of its flawed epistemology. They pointed out that Africa is a continent, not a country by which someone can be identified. It is meaningless to identify someone as 'African-Australian' because it does not denote the person's ethnicity, race, culture, nor his or her national background and affiliations. For this reason, participants preferred more specific ethnic or nationality markers, such as 'Ethiopian-Australian', 'South Sudanese-Australian' etc., which convey their genuine social identity categories and ancestral origins. Using ethnicity-based hyphenations allows for the recognition of all the family histories, cultural norms, traditions, routine practices and systems of beliefs that define and embody their cultural identities and relationships. In the following transcripts, PT13 and PT16 plainly illustrate the meaninglessness of using the broader label 'African-Australian' as an identity marker.

> Interviewer: What do you feel about this term 'African-Australian', do you think it can describe you?
>
> PT13: It doesn't make sense to me but I don't know, for some reason I have learned to accept that, I don't know why because it should be like Africa is a big continent, so it is not a country

someone should have been classified as African. I would definitely love to be identified as 'Ethiopian-Australian' because that is my country.

PT16: No I am not African-Australian, I am Ethiopian-Australian like Africa, as I said before, it is not a country, like yeah I am black but my culture is not African because Africa has many cultures, even Ethiopia has many cultures. So like it can describe me but it can't really, really describe me because it is not me. I am not even like I am Australian citizen but yeah, I don't think it can describe me, you can use it but it doesn't describe Africans, African-Australian, it doesn't, I don't think.

From the above comments, we can observe that, as a collective name, 'African-Australian' by itself is an inadequate concept to bring together diverse ethnic groups based on some form of common identity or culture. As a universal racial identity attuned to all African migrants, 'blackness' has more unifying power than 'African-Australian'. Therefore, the idea of being 'African' or, more broadly, 'African-Australian' is something arbitrarily imposed by mainstream society. This externally imposed pan-African ethnic term straddles the boundary between acceptance and rejection among the African-descent youth interviewed for this study.

Towards Institutionalising 'Black African Culture' in Australia

Another issue that emerged from this study relates to the idea of building 'Black African culture' in Australia. This idea is part of the process of and a reflection of the need to strengthen intergroup relationships and interactions among the diverse ethnic groups in African migrant communities. Some participants gave an insight into the importance of establishing 'Black African culture' in Australia to represent the shared life situations and experiences of Africans. Regarding this enthusiasm for forming 'Black African culture', PT3 provided her thoughts as follows:

Black people in Australia, Black Africans specifically in Australian, it's gonna take a long, long time before we establish or we cultivate some kind of Black African culture that is ours, that is not something that is just middle ground between Australian and African ethnic identity but something that is substantial, like something not similar to but I guess the idea

comes from African-American, or Afro-European, or Afro-Peruvian or Afro-Latino these cultures that are actually developed over time. We haven't been here very long to do that. (PT3)

The comments by PT3 and others highlight that the type of 'Black African culture' they are seeking or hoping for others to form in Australia is influenced by African migrants in the US, Europe, Canada and elsewhere. An earlier study among African-background youth in Canberra observed a similar trend of establishing a pan-African youth culture (Zwangobani, 2008). Zwangobani found that pan-Africanism, diaspora and national identities play significant roles in framing and shaping 'African-Australian' youth subculture. According to Zwangobani (2008) these young people aspire to create a 'Black African subculture' that reflects their own identity and culture in the multicultural spaces of Australia.

The impact of black American youth subcultures on the everyday lifestyles of these young people can be witnessed in their strong preferences for and selective consumption of black American musical genres. Numerous participants reported black musical genres, such as hip-hop, R&B, reggae and soul, as their favourites because these musical genres contain powerful messages that bring together and unite all Africans. The following excerpts from PT4 and PT9 illustrate this idea:

> *I like the old school hip-hop because of the message it has, and I love also old school soul, and old boys about 60s through to the 80s. I just like the messages that they give and the way that music was sent around to different struggles, and the way that they expressed it differently, like soul is different to rap or hip-hop. They are all kind of trying to do something with it rather than mainstream music. I feel like music serves a high purpose in things like hip-hop, and soul. (PT4)*

> *My choice is hip-hop music, I am addicted to hip-hop music because I listen to hip-hop every day actually. Hip-hop is my everyday music. I think the reason why I am addicted to hip-hop music is that you know a lot of hip-hop music artists are black because if you are black, you follow your like background. So I think that is why I am addicted to hip-hop. (PT9)*

From this we can understand that participants' preferences for and subscription to Black American pop culture, particularly its music genres, serves as a way of appreciating, supporting and strengthening affiliations with the global 'black African youth culture'. Part of this process of producing 'African-Australian' pop culture has already shown significant progress due to the work of some self-initiating young African pioneers (Zwangobani, 2008; Hendrie, 2011). Journalist Doug Hendrie (2011) wrote that African-Australian rappers and artists have emerged and gained wider recognition and popularity by bringing an *African-approach* to Australian hip-hop culture. Zwangobani (2008) stated that black American hip-hop culture has had a particularly large influence in shaping emerging black African culture in Australia, mentioning the Canberra-based local community arts organisation known as *Kulture Break* as an example of the emerging trend of 'black African culture' in Australia.

Conclusion

This article has explored the emerging terminological label 'African-Australian', commonly used to refer to African-background black people in Australia. Conceptual and empirical research in this article shows that the continental designation is imaginatively constructed in a way that homogenises Africa and Africans based on a presumed racial, ethnic and cultural uniformity. The everyday usage of the term implies the idea of 'Africa as the land of black people'. Findings from this study indicate that 'African-Australian' has broader application, encompassing *all* black migrants and refugees originating from Africa. Although most of the participants interviewed for my doctoral research proudly self-identified as being black and Australian of African descent, neither the pan-African ethnic designation 'African-Australian' nor the more pronounced racial epithet 'black' is a favoured identity category for all. A majority of participants rejected the word 'black', stating that it entails a pejorative meaning, particularly when used by white people. There was a general use among participants of the alternative label 'African-Australian' in preference to 'black'. For the immediate purpose of self-identification and categorisation, participants chose to self-identify in terms of the more informative national, ethnic, or country origin of their parents, for example as 'Ethiopian-Australian', 'South Sudanese-Australian' and so on. Proclivities toward narrower hyphenations maintain ethno-cultural, linguistic and ancestral roots and identities by bridging and assimilating these with experiences in Australia.

It was also found that a common African identity and a sense of oneness and unity among Africans has been promoted and encouraged, the manifestation of which included institutionalising 'black African culture' that fits the contexts of Africans in Australia. As a tool for mediating cross-cultural and transnational realities and building social solidarity and unity among minority black African migrants and refugees in Australia, participants accepted the pan-ethnic subtype 'African-Australian'. In this context, the unifying power of being 'African' principally stems from essentialised understandings of continental Africa, and the disadvantaged social, cultural, economic, political positions that Africans occupy in wider Australian society. On the other hand, participants also pointed out the marginalising effects of being collectively identified as 'African-Australian'. They pointed out the problem of 'othering' and being always seen as immigrants, which downgrades their status to second-class citizens. In the view of participants, it is unlikely that an African-background person would be considered a genuine 'Australian', which affects both their sense of belonging and acceptance as full members of the Australian society. Therefore, generalised labels have not only homogenising effects—by reconstructing, recreating and sustaining uniformity and commonality—but also the negative outcomes of marginalisation and othering.

In conclusion, the term 'African-Australian' is certainly an identity in the making, generally applied to refer to Australian citizens of African descent; however, in the view of this study's participants, the explanatory power of the pan-African ethnic label straddles the boundary between acceptance and rejection. Further research is suggested, perhaps with a larger sample size and more participants from African migrant groups in order to determine the label's appropriateness and impacts on the people being labelled.

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