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Articles

Black bodies in/out of place? Afrocentric perspectives and/on racialised belonging in Australia

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Abstract

Global movements of people have produced socio-cultural environments of increasing racial diversity, in which issues of belonging abound. Yet, within research and discussion of how migrants construct a sense of belonging, the role that experiences of racism play in their constructions and feelings of belonging have not been centred or fully explored. Using *Everyday Racism* as a conceptual framework, we draw on data from our study on identity and belonging among skilled Black African migrants in Australia to explore Afrocentric perspectives on belonging, which centre experiences of racism. These Afrocentric perspectives expose the complexity and contested nature of belonging when constructed within narratives of subjective experiences of racism. We propose understanding this as a typology of belonging—*fractured belonging*—with four dimensions: contestation, negotiation, ambivalence and compromise (for spacio-temporal comfort). Ultimately, our article's main purpose is to argue for more nuanced understandings of this *fractured belonging* among Black African migrant in Australia, and its implications for their subjective realities.

Introduction

The global movement of people across national boundaries has not only created complex identities and mixing, it is also progressively giving rise to issues of who does and who does not belong in certain spaces. More and more, such debates are being framed around issues of boundaries and belonging; they are becoming about who can be counted as part of the community (Simonsen, 2017). Throughout history, many nations have struggled with the issue of belonging and Australia, our focus in this article,

is no exception. As O'Gorman (2014) rightly pointed out, Australia is "a nation with a long history of problematic conceptualisations of belonging [and where] belonging is still mobilised, often in violent acts of exclusion" (p. 284).

There is a significant body of work exploring migrant's experiences of mobility and constructions of belonging (see, for example, Marcu, 2014; Dvorakova, 2016; Roberts, 2013; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Gilmartin, 2008). This body of work has explored, for example: how the relationship between mobility and belonging, particularly through the concepts of transnationalism and translocalism and through scales of belonging ranging from citizenship to the home, can be theorised (Gilmartin, 2008); the links between human global mobility and a sense of home and belonging (Marcu, 2014); and, the meanings migrants attach to their mobility and settlement experiences (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). Notwithstanding the usefulness of these discussions, it is still not clear from the literature what 'shapes' belonging for migrant and racialised/othered groups. Zeleza (2009), for example, captured the complexity of belonging when he noted that:

> [Belonging] entails a culture and consciousness, sometimes diffuse and sometimes concentrated in a 'here' separate from a 'there', a 'here' that is often characterized by a regime of marginalization and a 'there' that is invoked as a rhetoric of self-affirmation, of belonging to 'here' differently. The emotional and experiential investment in 'here' and 'there' and the points in between, indeed in the very configurations and imaginings of 'here' and 'there' and their complex intersections, obviously changes in response to the shifting materialities, mentalities, and moralities of social existence. (p. 32)

A glaring omission in the body of work on belonging, therefore, is critical discussion that explicitly investigates the implications of racialised existence for shaping constructions, experiences and anxieties of belonging for racialised minorities in western, white-dominated contexts. This article aims to address this gap by presenting Afrocentric perspectives of belonging, that is, where African experiences and narratives are at the centre of 'knowing belonging' and 'talking about belonging'. At the core of our discussions in this article is the question: how do Black Africans[1] in Australia express their

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[1] 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

sense of belonging? Afrocentric conceptualisations of belonging are grounded in and intertwined with narratives (and experiences) of racism. Experiences of racism often result in loss of identification with place, and a sense of being a perpetual stranger who does not belong. For us, this re-affirms the contested and complex nature of belonging for Black African migrants in Australia which warrants more nuanced analyses and discussions. Black Africans in Australia are "non-white bodies who do not always conform to dominant social and cultural norms" (Lobo & Ghosh, 2013, p. 412). As a result, they often, unsurprisingly, find themselves "'outside belonging' … in everyday spaces" (Lobo & Ghosh, 2013, p. 411).

This article, therefore, re/presents novel ways of thinking about belonging as it pertains to Black racialised bodies in Australia. Specifically, this study centres racism and racialisation as fundamental to constructions and feelings of identity and belonging. In other words, we focus on belonging as an embodiment and a lived experience influenced by racism or "racist practices" (Essed, 1991, p. viii). Given that we write extensively about the extent to which respondents spoke of the pervasiveness of racism in their daily lives, we adopt Philomena Essed's concept of *Everyday Racism* (1988) as a conceptual framework (see also Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2014; Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018) to foreground our analysis of responses pointing to racism in our data.

Our analysis of the data leads us to discuss four dimensions of Afrocentric perspectives on belonging within this article, namely: contestation, negotiation, ambivalence and compromise (for spacio-temporal comfort). This discussion is organised as follows: first, we clarify how the term 'belonging' is used in this article, considering that there are multiple ways to conceptualise the term. We then provide details of the study, including research methods and data analysis procedures. Following that, we give a brief overview of Philomena Essed's concept of *Everyday Racism* as a conceptual framework for understanding the narratives of race that inform our participants' perceptions of belonging. The penultimate section on Afrocentric perspectives begins by presenting data on participants' narratives of their experiences with racism, to help establish our key proposition that when narratives of race and racism in people's accounts of belonging are acknowledged and centred in understanding belonging, a new typology of belonging emerges. Thereafter, the four dimensions of this new typology—

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.

characterised as fractured belonging—are presented. The final section concludes this article, and notes that the feeling of 'not belonging' fuels a fantasy of return to one's original homeland; a phenomenon that has been referred to elsewhere as "the nativist dream of return" (Chang, 1996, p. 55).

Clarifying Belonging

The plethora of research on belonging reveals multiple ways of conceptualising the term (see, for example, Lobo & Ghosh, 2013; Nolan, Farquharson, & Marjoribanks, 2018). While it is beyond the focus of this article to summarise this literature here, we nevertheless wish to clarify our use of the term. This is necessary because, as Simonsen (2017) rightly points out, while "the concept of belonging has grown in popularity in recent scholarship [it] is seldom explicitly defined in the studies where it is used" (p. 120).

In a basic sense, belonging is about being a member of or affiliated with a particular group. It is widely accepted, though, that belonging is more than just an affinity with a particular group, it is about "identifying with and feeling attachment to a social group" (Simonsen, 2017, p. 120) and about "formal and informal membership in society" (Lobo & Ghosh, 2013, p. 411). Inherent in a sense of belonging, therefore, is a strong sense of acceptance and being a valued member of that group. According to Nolan, Farquharson and Marjoribanks (2018), "'belonging' refers to a feeling, or a set of feelings, of being 'at home' … [s]uch feelings bring with them a sense of security and confidence in one's capacity to operate socially, as an accepted member of a given community" (p. 4). Nolan et al. (2018), citing Noble (2005), refer to this as "homely belonging" (p. 4).

More critical sociological definitions of the term, however, acknowledge that belonging connotes something fundamental about how groups are positioned within society, as well as how they are perceived and regarded. It reflects an objective position of power and resources, as well as the intersubjective nature of group-based identities (Powell & Menendian, 2016).

Our use of the term 'belonging' in this paper goes beyond the 'acknowledgement' discussed above to integrate its multi-faceted nature. Following Andreasson (2016), we conceive of belonging as including the following components: an emotional attachment (Yuval-Davis, 2006a); involving being at home (Hage, 1997) and being at ease (May, 2011); feeling safe and being recognised (Ignatieff, 1995); but, also, as being the goal of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 5). For us, conceptualising the term in this way allows for more nuanced analyses and discussions of the various

dimensions of belonging from the perspective of the Black African migrants interviewed for this study. Thus, in tandem with Lobo and Ghosh (2013), we conceive of belonging as a "political, contested and ethical concept that is still relevant today because it is central to the joy of life that we experience through co-presence and intercultural encounter in local places" (p. 411).

In clarifying our concept of belonging, it is also necessary to acknowledge the complexity of discussion about who 'belongs' in the Australian imaginary. We argue that, for example, denial of the existence of 'white privilege' feeds narrow constructions / interpretations of belonging in Australia where, as Hage (1998) argues, "white ethnic power relations remain omnipresent in a multicultural society and [are] reproduced by the very ideologies of cultural pluralism and tolerance that [are] supposed to transcend them" (p. 16).

The Study

The specific aim of this 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 immigrated to Australia after the abolition of the White Australia policy in the early 1970s (see, for example, Jones, 2017; Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, n.d) and have "traceable genealogical links to the continent" (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005, p. 13) and how they experience life as individuals and professionals within their communities and workplaces.

Following Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama (2018), it is worth pointing out 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 and differences to the participants in our research. We have personal relationships with 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 that helps us 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, while arguing that our situatedness is not a liability but rather 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 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 possessed 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 various countries, including 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. The gender distribution was not deliberate, but rather a consequence of our recruitment strategy. Further, 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 resultant data.[1]

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[1] *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 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, 1991, 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 reason, as Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo (2014) argue, is that as skilled Black African migrants ourselves we are 'insiders'; therefore, participants were very comfortable talking to us. Finally, all participants were assigned pseudonyms as part of the data de-identification process.

Everyday Racism as a conceptual framework

> Everyone talks about 'racism' but no one ever defines it.
> (Jackson, 1991, p. 1)

To make sense of the (previously unpublished) examples of racism or "racist practices" (Essed, 1991, p. viii) provided in this article—which also serve as a veritable launching pad for the delineation and discussion of the dimensions of belonging derived from our data—we adopt Philomena Essed's (1991) notion of *Everyday Racism* as our conceptual framework. According to Essed (1991), everyday racism involves discriminatory practices that have so permeated everyday life they have become almost invisible and are part of what is considered normal by the dominant group, even in contexts where there is a formal commitment to equality. At the core of Essed's theorising is everyday manifestations of racism and racial prejudice. In simple terms, then, as Henry (2004) explains, *Everyday Racism* is found in the familiar and often small but significant ways in which non-white people encounter racism in the 'normal' ordering of day-to-day interactions with dominant white groups. We find this concept more appropriate because our data analysis showed that participants perceived their experiences of racism as non-blatant, "ambiguous and nebulous" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 272) which, though experienced violently "and persistently [by them], are often difficult to pinpoint" (Essed, 2002, p. 204). Thus, while racism that manifests intemperately and blatantly is easy to identify and acknowledge, everyday racism is disregarded, challenged, easily rejected and, more importantly, undetectable to the person responsible for it and, oftentimes, the one at the receiving end (Sue et al., 2007).

Afrocentric perspectives on belonging in Australia

Given that the core of our argument is that the quotidian nature of racism in the lives of our respondents influences the way they conceive of and experience their sense of belonging in Australia, it is pertinent that we begin

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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).

this section on Afrocentric perspectives on belonging by providing examples from our data to buttress this position.

The data speaks: Manifestations of Everyday Racism
In line with the conceptual framework of *Everyday Racism*, we provide three examples of racism from the data[2] to establish the basis for our argument and support our contention that racism/racist experiences lie at the core of and affect the ways in which respondents conceptualise and experience belonging in Australia. As indicated earlier, all participants in the study spoke about regular incidents in their lives they perceived as racism.[3] Below are three excerpts which highlight the pervasiveness of racism for our respondents.

Example one
> I will give you a typical example. I take the bus to work every day in the city and most of the time most of the seats will be filled before anyone sits next to you. You will not believe it but it happens in Australia up till today. I don't know whether it is coincidence but it has happened so many times for me to conclude that probably it is not coincidence. Because the bus basically has two seats on each side so maybe you get in first and you sit at the farthest seat so there is one seat by you. But people keep coming in and coming and you see all the other seats being filled. And sometimes someone may be heading towards your direction but the moment they lift their eyes and they see you, you see a bit of hesitation and they move on to the next seat. (Kosoko)

In the above excerpt, it could be easy to dismiss Kosoko's claim of racism and put it down to something else, yet we can attest from our own personal experiences and those of a number of respondents who recounted similar incidents, that at the core of such experiences is racism; what Deitch et al. (2003) call subtle discriminatory behaviours such as "avoidance of Blacks"

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[2] We have published extensively elsewhere about everyday racism using data from the same study (see Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018). However, the examples/quotes provided here have not been published previously.
[3] After most of the interviews, participants spoke of how beneficial the interview had been for them in providing a space where they could comfortably talk about issues of race and racism. Some of them spoke of the interview as being 'cathartic'.

(p. 1301). This has also been shown to be true in many settings, including in the United States, for example, where in recounting similar experiences Carbardo (2007) noted that: "[t]he seat beside me on the bus was almost always racially available to another black person" (p. 2). Thus, respondents recounted their experiences of racism as occurring in the normal processes of their everyday lives (Young, 1990), as illustrated further in the second excerpt, below.

Example two

> I will give you an example. Someone walks into my consulting room and says… "I want a pap smear but I want an Australian [white] doctor to do it for me." Then I'll say, "OK, emm there is one next door so you can go and the one will do it for you". Then the one will say, "I didn't mean to sound rude but that's what I want." Then I say, "that's fine you can go and the one will do it for you," while I'm unhappy about that comment. As a person, I'm unhappy but my approach is not a confrontational approach, ok. And then the one goes and the one is told, "OK, I don't do pap smears. The doctor you saw will be the best person to do it for you." (Osono)

Osono's experience can be likened to 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 … the normal processes of everyday life" (p. 41). The patient who, through her words and deeds, indicates to Osono that she prefers a 'white' doctor to him, a 'black' doctor, is engaging in subtle discriminatory behaviour by avoiding Blacks (Deitch et al., 2003), just as in the bus experience narrated by Kosoko. These acts are similar to what other writers have called acts of 'microaggression' by whites against blacks (Pettigrew & Martin, 1987; Deitch et al., 2003; Carbado, 2007). Van Dijk (2000) notes that such acts "appear far removed from the open violence and forceful segregation of the old racism" (p. 34), yet, they 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. For Osono's patient, her act of requesting a 'white' doctor over a 'black' one is natural. To justify her position she notes: "I didn't mean to sound rude but that's what I want". The quote from Osono is an apt depiction of van Dijk's point: Osono experiences the woman's marginalising and excluding behaviour as hurtful and does not lose sight of the symbolism

embedded in her rejection of his competence and experience, and his being "judged guilty a priori" (Yancy, 2008, p. 2) and condemned by an ideological frame of reference that reduces him ontologically to the level of incompetence (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018). Ultimately, such hurtful acts of microaggression and discriminatory behaviour on the part of perpetrators engender, in those on the receiving end, feelings of injustice and unfair treatment and result in the sense that one is an 'outsider' who does not belong. This is illustrated in the third example, below.

Example three

> After all, the people who are managing in the departments are Australians. You get a bit of that – a sense that you are an outsider. You know what you think is due you, you don't really get that until you prove yourself. For example, publication is a thing now … and you are not going to get anything according to them unless you publish. But then somehow, I got two/three [white] colleagues who actually got what I was looking for without any publication. They were given time, three years to publish but you have to be in here and do exactly the same thing I do and do better. And to worsen it all these people don't have even PhDs which of course I do. … So, there is this … discrimination … it hurts, and like I said I can only call it racism. (Kantanka)

The excerpt above shows how everyday racism is systemic, "embodied in the way we 'normally' conduct ourselves and our business in the everyday life" (Ng, 1992, cited in Leah, 1995, p. 11), just like other forms of discrimination such as sexism. In the quote, Kantanka talks about 'white' colleagues, who are less qualified and have published less than him, being promoted over him despite not even meeting the promotion requirements/criteria. As Herbert et al. (2008) noted, the subtlety and ambiguity in such practices means that they "can produce a racist effect while denying racism was the cause" (p. 105). Indeed, the theme of white employees progressing faster than their black colleagues recurs in the data of this and other studies (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018). Kantanka's quote illustrates how inequality based on race and/or assumptions around race, whether intended or unintended, is manifested and (re)-produced in a systemic manner.

While Kantanka's experience could also be dismissed because of its non-blatant nature, the conceptual framework of everyday racism allows us to

centre his "subjective realm" (Herbert et al., 2008, p. 104), that is, the meanings he attributes to this event, his perceptions of racism and his subsequent feelings and emotions. In this way, we are able to get to the concealed and symbolic exhibitions of contemporary racism (Lee, 2000) as depicted here, and to uncover the "hidden dimensions of racism" (Leah, 1995, p. 100). It also allows us to show "the manner in which subtle racisms are exhibited in the Australian context" (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018, p. 84).

Having provided examples of and established the prevalence of everyday racism in the data, we can now discuss the dimensions of belonging gleaned therefrom. We argue that the perspectives/dimensions of belonging we found in the data are attributable to the fact that respondents' sense of belonging is conceived of and experienced through the lens of quotidian racism or "racist practices" (Essed, 1991, p. viii). Based on our data, our contention is that, when you centre narratives of race in people's accounts of belonging, a typology emerges which we have delineated as follows: belonging as contestation; belonging as negotiation; belonging as ambivalence; and belonging as compromise for spacio-temporal comfort. Each of these types will be addressed in turn in the following sections.

Dimension 1: Contestation

Experiences of racism hinder or compromise one's sense of belonging. This is because racism and racialising processes produce the 'other', who is on the receiving end of these behaviours. The notion of 'othering' "provides a clarifying frame that reveals a set of common processes and conditions that propagate group-based inequality and marginality" (Powell & Menendian, 2016, p. 17). For Black African migrants, the process of being othered is enduring and, when 'othered', belonging in that specific context is contested. This was evident in the way our participants spoke:

> It's something to do with the colour of our skin. Generally, people think that: 'well you are someone different, so you don't belong to us.' (Kosoko)

> I don't look like them, I don't speak like them. So where do I belong? I guess internally this is something that I'm trying to deal with. I need to go back to [name of African country of origin]. (Ojam)

Beyond making explicit the connection between racialised difference and feelings of (non)belonging, we would argue, following Garbutt (2011), that

the excerpts above highlight the contestation of what it means to be a 'local' in Australian space. Reflecting on territory and 'being a local', Garbutt (2011) writes:

> Local is a territory of the mind – my mind, here. Local is home
> territory that is distinguished from territory for travelling through.
> Of the mind but also a physical location with boundaries. It is real.
> *I never expect an endless play of difference here […] Being a local*
> *is a sort of transparent belonging in this place.* It is the resting
> point of the subject where the inner most reasonably fits the outer
> […] the local is a known place: being a local is being at home in
> this place here, the place where I'm a local. (p. 8, emphasis added)

The idea of being a local here is not simply being an inhabitant of a particular land but rather entails an uncontested "sense of the connection between place and identity as it is lived" (Garbutt, 2011, p. 7). We would argue, therefore, that experiences of racism and racialisation interfere with the processes of 'being local' and the resulting effect is a sense of non-belonging. As Aloma pointed out:

> It's covert [racial discrimination] but I still have at the back of my
> mind that I don't belong here. And that creates a lot of anxieties in
> me because all the time I feel like I should go back to my home
> where I think I can do a lot more or where I believe personally that
> I would be more relevant than here. (Aloma)

In his articulation of (non)belonging, Aloma raises another issue that is important for our discussion here, that of (racial) anxieties. We would argue that the heightened stress resulting from apprehensions about being the subject or target of racism culminates in racial tension which affects racialised groups' sense of belonging. For those who experience racism, racial anxiety is pervasive, albeit subtle, affecting both micro (interpersonal) and macro (with systems and institutions) interactions.

Furthermore, connected to the idea of 'being a local'—or, rather, not being one when one's belonging is contested—is the notion of being a 'perpetual stranger'. In their narratives of racism, participants spoke about specific and particular expressions of othering, and the feeling of being a perpetual stranger that arises out of their persistently being asked where they are from. We interpret this question as not only dislocating, but also as a contestation of 'local-ness' and a gate-keeping mechanism with profound effects for a sense of belonging. For this reason, we discuss this question in detail in this section.

Where are you from?

Several of our participants talked about the implications of being persistently and consistently asked the 'identity' question—'where are you from?'—for their sense of belonging in Australia.

> I've always been asked where are you from? Originally where are you from? And in my mind if I'm making this place home and I get asked this question I get confused. So that means maybe for me I think I belong here but for them I don't. So that is one thing, I don't think I'm really accepted here. (Missi)

> Most of the time the question they ask you is "where is home?" […] Or they ask you "where are you from?" "I live in Canberra." "No, I mean where are you from?" "Oh, OK you mean that one. OK, I'm from [Name of African country of origin]." […] When people approach you and ask you that sort of question you think "OK, well I definitely don't belong here. They don't think I belong here. So, I shouldn't fool myself that I belong here." (Bissi)

In terms of the exclusionary nature of the question 'where are you from?', the issue is that it is:

> …selectively asked only of certain groups of people, in particular, those who are non-white, racialised and constructed as the 'other'. In Australia, the public imaginary of who 'is' an Australian still centres white skin and marginalises our black skin in the imagined Australian nation (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2010, p. 6)

Moreover, the participants' statements exposed for us what Chang (1996, p.57) called "attributions of foreignness" which allow for "symbolic deportation". As Chang (1996) writes:

> [f]oreignness [is] inscribed on [their] bodies in such a way that… [they] carry a figurative border within [them]. This figurative border operates to confirm the belongingness of 'real' [Australians] and marks [what Hage (1998) calls visible ethnic minorities in Australia: 'those who are Third World-looking' visible others from poor third world countries] as unAustralian. (p. 57)

The incessant posing of this question means that Australian space comes to exist for Black African migrants as a paradox: a place where they

simultaneously belong and don't belong. The quote below from Asempa captures this.

> You still feel you're [name/adjective for people of African country of origin]. You still feel that. I think to some extent you talk about Australian identity it's a bit out there. I have an Australian passport, Australian citizenship but you still feel you're [name/adjective for people of African country of origin] in terms of your identity. What actually is ... a bit like you are [name/adjective for people of African country of origin] but just living your life somewhere else. (Asempa)

The constant reminders that they are 'from' somewhere else that is not 'here' affects racialised minorities in at least two ways. First, it makes it difficult for them to be able to consider 'here' as "home, in any comfortable, unproblematic sense" (Ang, 2001, p. 53) and, second, it causes inner dislocation. Fonseca (2010) captures this situation by noting that "to always be from somewhere else means to struggle with the intersections of 'inside' and 'outside' within us" (p. 101).

As has been done elsewhere, we argue that when a person is repeatedly asked 'where are you from?' the question is experienced as denaturalising their status as a co-inhabitant of this country (Ang, 1996; see also Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2010). For our participants, the question symbolically deports them back to the faraway places 'where they are from'. It creates the feeling that their presence here is always defined in terms of their difference, not their sameness. The very act of being asked this question immediately reinforces the barrier of difference between 'us' and 'them', forcing 'them' to inhabit an in-between space where they are neither 'authentic' Australians nor 'authentic' foreigners (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2010). They are not authentic Australians because their visible difference (attributable to their skin colour) impedes their inclusion in the imagined Australian nation. Yet they are not authentic foreigners because, apart from having Australian citizenship, some of them have been here too long to be bona fide foreigners. Thus, while this question may enable the questioner to 're/locate' the questioned to some distant geopolitical location, it also imaginatively dislocates them from 'here' and makes them strangers in a familiar land (Fonseca, 2010). In this sense, what the question does to those of whom it is asked is remove them from and deposit them outside the 'Australian group', causing them to look upon themselves through the eyes of the questioner. In other words, they become 'other' to themselves; what Yancy (2008) refers to as "corporeal malediction" (p. 85)

and Dubois (1903) calls *double-consciousness*. In describing the feelings associated with double-consciousness, Dubois (1903) notes:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness … two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 45, cited in Yancy, 2008, p. 83).

Essentially, when asked that question a person undergoes a distinctive phenomenological process that makes them appear different to themselves (Yancy, 2008).

Although sometimes stemming from genuine and innocent curiosity, the question 'where are you from?' reflects "larger political hallmarks of white racism: the audacity and power to relegate nonwhites to the margins, to segregate them, to instill in them the sense of existing outside the space of white normalcy and normativity" (Yancy, 2008, p. 84). Here, Hage's (1998) notion of the 'white nation fantasy' also offers a way of understanding the contested nature of belonging in the Australian space. According to McCormack (1999), the white nation fantasy involves an ideal of a White Australia inhabited by an ideal White self/subject who is an empowered governor of an empowering social space. We argue that it is the power of the 'White Australian' subject (whose centrality or self-perceived centrality is part of the white nation fantasy even if it is, as McCormack (1999, n.p.) argues, "artificial and imaginary" to govern social space that leads to contestations of the belongingness and unbelongingness of the migrant other.

Dimension 2: Negotiation

> [H]ome is both a material and a symbolic place of belonging that protects us from difference that is unsettling and confronting but also invites us to reach out to others. In a mobile world where we often inhabit multiple homes as a result of voluntary or forced, temporary or permanent migration, home is both 'here' and 'there'. (Lobo & Ghosh, 2013, p. 411)

Some participants' narratives also revealed a dimension of belonging that exists as a kind of negotiation between/of cultures, specifically, the culture into which they were born and the broader Australian culture, and perhaps an acknowledgement that they (still) identify with the culture into which they

were born. This does not mean abandoning or rejecting Australian culture, but rather negotiating so that both cultures can become a part of how they inhabit space in Australia.

> I'm an Australian citizen. But, culturally I'm a Ghanaian or African. It is like if you look at the Italians or the Greeks, they're Australians but if you delve into culture, they're Italians. *So, I'm an Aussie, Afro-Aussie. Let me put it that way.* Each migrant or each race has brought its own culture so I've brought mine too… It simply means my culture hasn't left me. (Marijata, emphasis added)

Interestingly, when belonging is a negotiation or negotiated, participants tend to claim both worlds—as in the case of Marijata when he claims himself as Afro-Aussie. He doesn't categorise himself in terms of his pre-migration, non-Australian identity, thereby implying an unproblematic sense of self, but rather claims a hyphenated identity and, in so doing, exposes the fact that he "carr[ies] two disparate cultural baggages" (Chen, 2003, p. 22; see also Anzaldua, 1987). The implications of claiming hyphenated identities for feelings of belonging are twofold: first, it makes visible the complexities of belonging and, second, it complicates unproblematised assumptions of the 'other', who belongs in a distance place. This is demonstrated in the following response from Otoyo.

> So, you tend to always refer to [name of African country of origin] as home. It's a something of home. The de facto home is actually here. Because for many of us, and many of us are coming to that realisation, many of us who are actually having children here, well this is the home of the children. And if you want a family that is together, then this is going to be home. Because for our kids, there is no other home. [Name of African country of origin]. is a tourist destination for them. They will go to [name of African country of origin], visit for a few weeks, at the most a month, and they're back here. (Otoyo)

Belonging-as-negotiation recognises the possibility for an individual to become attached to more than one group, ethnicity or place. Most participants acknowledged that they live between two cultures: their everyday reality straddles two worlds, that of the culture into which they were born and raised and the dominant 'Australian' culture in which they now live. So, they occupy, to use Gloria Anzaldua's (1987, p. 79) phrase, "the borderlands"; they are in-between places and cultures. They "juggle cultures [and have]

plural personalit[ies] [and] operate in pluralistic modes" (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 79).

Dimension 3: Ambivalence

Some of the participants' statements revealed not only negotiation but also ambivalence, expressed as uncertainty about where they belong. Thus, the Afrocentric conceptualisations of belonging emerging from our research also expose how the idea of belonging in Australia for Black African migrants entails a sense of ambivalence. Here we use the word ambivalence in its common-sense meaning of existing in a state of mixed feelings, contradiction or uncertainty about something, as highlighted in the excerpts below.

> The belongingness thing is a big issue. It seems like we don't actually belong anywhere. We're just torn between two places. It may be better for some than others. Some may be more accepting of the new home as where they're going to spend the rest of their lives. But I think others, perhaps like me, believe that, I owe something to the fatherland, I owe some contribution. (Sumanguru)

> Whether I see myself as a [name/adjective for people of African country of origin]]. I don't know. I am not an Australian either. So, I'm between and betwixt. I'm between two worlds. I don't really know where I belong. I find it hard to live in [name of African country of origin]. Like I'm not … when I go to [name of African country of origin] people … I've been to [name of African country of origin], I've been to the shops. They will sell me things three times the price because when I open my mouth I'm not one of them. So, the price is immediately raised three or four times. But when I come back here, I don't look like them, I don't speak like them. So where do I belong? I guess internally this is something that I'm trying to deal with. But I need to go back to [name of African country of origin] because I don't see myself living here. I don't see myself spending the rest of my life here. It's not possible. (Ojam)

> *I find myself in a kind of limbo. You neither belong here nor there.* You feel there are certain things you can never ever do in this country or you can't fit in in certain ways in this country and that's some of the things I talked about: social occasions where alcohol is the main thing, their footy and rugby. They are not just sports; these are actually part of the culture. They have become like cultural

things and I will never fit in when it comes to those things. At the same time, I mean my experience back home when I visited shows that I probably don't fit in there either because you've developed new perspectives on life. You've developed ways of seeing things that are quite different from the way [name/adjective for people of African country of origin] see things. (Asempa, emphasis added)

The excerpts above clearly show the sense of ambivalence respondents live with. All three respondents—Sumanguru, Ojam and Asempa—use strong expressions to portray the sense of incongruity they live with. To speak of being "torn between two places", "in a kind of limbo" or "between and betwixt" is to express the uncertainty and feeling of mutability that accompanies their thoughts on place and belonging. They are aware of not fitting well into either of the locations they have bonded with over the years. Their ambivalence points to "the ever-shifting nature of the relationship between mobility, identity and place" (Gilmartin, 2008, p. 1838). Such vacillations also raise the need for new articulations of the relationships people have with places, as influenced by mutable identities, connections and extended global networks. They also highlight an uneasy relationship between these multiple nodes of interaction, which calls for more sophisticated and less incongruous ways of defining belonging to capture these relationships. The excerpts discussed here reveal that the 'homeland' (Africa) exists only as an imaginary, and that there is an ambivalence about place that occurs for respondents in both Australia and the countries of their birth.

Dimension 4: Compromise (for spacio-temporal comfort)
An insightful finding from our research is that constructing a sense of belonging in Australia for Black African migrants also entails compromise in an effort to remain comfortable about being in Australia spacio-temporally, in the here and now. In other words, for participants to feel both physically and psychologically comfortable in the Australian space, they need to compromise by accepting to live with the harsh realities of racism in their lives. We use the word comfortable here deliberately, to denote ways of experiencing space that go beyond 'simply' identification with that space. We use the word in its psychological and cognitive sense, suggesting 'comfort' as describing or linked to a sense of feeling wellbeing in an inhabited space at a specific time, again whether this space is physical, psychological or emotional. The quote below from Bissi illustrates the point about having to accept the way things are in order to be 'here':

> … the way I deal with it [racism and exclusion], is, I'm here for a time and a purpose and I'll embrace what comes my way while I'm here. But I don't think I'll ever fully belong to the Australian culture or to the way of life … I don't think I'll be completely accepted by the Australians. I feel that you have to do all the giving, you have to do all the adjustments, you have to do all the assimilating, it's not reciprocated. And I feel like, if I continue giving and giving and giving, I would lose myself and that, that would not be true to myself. Yeah so, I'm at the point now where I'm like I can only give so much and I know you can only accept me so much. So, in a way it's like there's a bridge, kind of like wall that's being built around me, I'm building kind of like this protective wall. Yeah just because I feel I'm never going to be fully accepted. (Bissi)

This quote is very poignant in the sense that Bissi acknowledges her need to embrace whatever comes her way if she is to continue living in Australia, while also emphasising her belief that she will never fully belong. She provides reasons why she believes she will never fully belong, including the fact that she can only be "accepted so much". By saying she feels she is never "going to be fully accepted", Bissi acknowledges that she is compromising to be in the Australian space in the here and now. The same kind of sentiments are expressed by Kantanka (albeit differently) in the quote below.

> I don't know whether I mentioned before that, at a stage, I really wanted to leave this country. I wanted to get out so that I will go to Africa where I will be recognised and valued; you know given my due respect. Australians are doing what is best for them. That is what they believe is best for them … So, work-wise, as an adult making a living I don't think Australia is the best place compared to where I come from originally. But generally, it is OK looking at myself as a migrant. Somehow, I have accepted it so that I can continue living here. If I don't accept that, then I would probably die of frustration or something. So, it is not all a bed of roses; it is not the best. (Kantanka)

Our data showed that, while many respondents spoke of not feeling a sense of belonging in Australia because of the racism they encountered, they had also made compromises and adjustments to the way they thought and felt about belonging in order to feel both physically and psychologically comfortable in the Australian space. In both Bissi's and Kantanka's quotes there is a sense in which the participants acknowledge that compromise is

necessary for their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Bissi talks about not "losing" herself and being "true" to herself, while Kantanka says he has to "accept" so that he doesn't die of frustration. These sentiments also portray a certain pain, and we can attest to the palpable sense of pain in the voices of many respondents as they spoke about these issues. Aloma's quote, below, is especially expressive of such pain.

> … to be very honest I have considered this [going back] many many times especially when I feel so low that I feel [like going back] home. Even when nothing is really bothering me. My wife will be worried, "I mean what is wrong with you?" There is really nothing bothering me but everything is just psychological. *The pain of living here* because I just really feel I don't belong here but I belong somewhere else. *I felt I have finished paying my dues here* and it's time for me to go back, you know I have all those kinds of things. (Aloma, emphasis added)

We interpret Aloma's reference to the "pain of living" and his finishing "paying [his] dues here" as indications of the psychological discomfort he experiences living in Australia. While, as discussed, what we mean by comfort is something that is also complex, we still acknowledge our awareness of the fact that 'comfort' has a physical and psychological composition. So, when Aloma talks of 'paying dues', we would argue that this implies not only the common-sense understanding of paying dues as that of earning a given right or position through hard work or long-term experience, but also implies some suffering in the process and in the very act of compromising to achieve spacio-temporal comfort with being in Australia.

Concluding observations: "Not belonging" and the fantasy of return
In this article we have argued that to expose the power relations, contestations and complexities inherent in the notion of 'belonging' among Black Africans in Australia, we need to go beyond an understanding of belonging as subjective, personal and emotional adjustments that one has to make to live in a particular location and attachment to particular groups and constructs of 'home' as portrayed in the bulk of the literature on belonging. Such analyses must centre Black Africans' experiences of the persistent and consistent racism that lies at the core of their everyday reality, in order to uncover the more insightful perspectives we have referred to as Afrocentric perspectives. To achieve this end, we first showed, by interpreting our data through the conceptual lens of everyday racism (Essed, 1991), the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in the lives of our participants and how

it affected their sense of being. Following this, we discussed how centering participants' experiences of racism in the data gave rise to a four-point typology that exposes the complexity and contested nature of belonging. We have proposed that this should be understood as a typology of belonging— *fractured belonging*—with four dimensions: contestation, negotiation, ambivalence and compromise (for spacio-temporal comfort). These four dimensions, taken together, expose how experiences of racism construct feelings of 'otherness' which operate as an impediment to a sense of national belonging and result in fractured belonging—a sense of (non)belonging or splintered belonging—influenced by an intersection of factors among which are marginalisation (resulting from experiences of racism) and other prevailing circumstances. This is exemplified in Kente's quote, below.

> We romanticise about where we belong. To an extent, you may not. And whether it's psychological or not, I don't know. But a lot of times you may not, or I do not feel the same sense of belongingness, as I did once up on a time when I was in [name of African country of origin]. Even though I've been here for 20 plus years. I do not feel the same level of belongingness [...] you also find that when you go to [name of African country of origin], when you go to [name of African country of origin] you can see yourself as out of place. You know, where everything happening around you, is not what you expect. (Kente)

Fractured belonging is politicised belonging, fraught with a power play that positions the racialised 'other' as a perpetual stranger who does not belong. This power play restricts and destabilises Black African migrants' sense of belonging. In a world marked by the fluidity of borders and identities within a 'global community', Black African migrants in Australia still carry, as we have noted, a "figurative border with [them]… [which] operates to confirm the belonging-ness of 'real' [Australians] and marks [Black Africans as un-Australian]" (Chang, 1996, p. 57).

One consequence gleaned from our data is that this feeling of fractured belonging or non-belonging among our participants has resulted in a situation where many find themselves harbouring fantasies of return to the 'homeland' they left years ago, as illustrated in the quote below from Aloma:

> I really don't think I do really belong here. I think I belong to Africa. Yes, I think because that is where I think I will have my dignity as an individual. I will be able to rub shoulders with everyone else. And I will be able to become who I really want to become […] I don't think I will have big opportunities here. (Aloma)

Like Aloma, many of our respondents' fantasies of return are influenced by their feelings of dejectedness within Australia which prevent them from fully belonging. In their dejection, they believe that the only way out is for them to go back home, thus making their desire to move back home explicable in terms of "relative opportunity" (Gilmartin, 2008, p. 1838) or through what Dorigo and Tobler (1983) called the difference between dissatisfaction at the origin and expected satisfaction at the destination.

To answer the question 'can we go home again?' in relation to the new African diaspora in the USA, Okpewho (2009) discussed the difficulties involved and the price one had to pay for deciding to separate one's self from their home. Okpewho's (2009) observations were poignant and worth quoting at length because, in many ways, they capture the feelings of many of our respondents:

> Anyone who expects members of the new diaspora, naturalized or not, to feel an unqualified elation about expatriation is being rather uncharitable. There is some trauma involved in the separation that will take some time to heal. ... For a start, we are black people, and however qualified or competent we are in our fields of endeavour, some whites who judge everything in human relations by Manichean principles have not hesitated to put us in the same place they have reserved for African Americans throughout their history. It does not take long for us to be shocked by a rude curtailment of that old-assurance that we could get anywhere we had a mind to. Some of us may eventually attain our goals; the rest are broken in despair. Those who succeed are never entirely spared the feeling that they owe their success to someone else's token nod, not the strength of their own hard work. (p. 11)

Notwithstanding the desires and fantasies of returning to one's homeland discussed above, many of our respondents also found themselves on what Zeleza (2009) eloquently described as "a kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings, of networks, of affiliations" (p. 32). To be on such a voyage is, in and of itself, an embodiment of fractured belonging.

Paradoxically, in this world "where increasingly complex migration patterns and technology intersect, a sense of belonging is critical" (Gerrand, 2014, n.p.). Not having a sense of belonging, or having a sense of fractured belonging, has consequences; some of them deeply emotional. Not surprisingly for our participants, one major consequence is that it makes them

cling to the "nativist dream of return" (Chang, 1996, p. 55); a dream that is very real for many of them. This dream of return is not wholly of the nativist's making; it is in part fuelled by, as well as an outcome of, the power play that dislocates them through experiences of racism, through processes that racialise and other them, and through constant reminders that they are not from 'here', as embodied in identity questions such as 'where are you from?'. As Dunn, Forrest, Pe-Pau, Hynes, and Maeder-Han (2009) have rightly pointed out, an environment in which certain identified groups are denigrated repeatedly through racist talk and other racist incivilities "can fundamentally undermine the sense of citizenship and belonging" (p. 3) of the groups that are disparaged.

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