

CHILDREN OF THE LAND OR THE LANDED?
IDENTITY AND SECOND GENERATION AFRICAN-CANADIAN YOUNG ADULTS

by

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ABSTRACT

This Major Research Paper explores the phenomenon of second generation African-Canadians young adults and their identity formation process. Through semi-guided interviews, 8 participants, 5 males and 3 females ages 18-30 of this demographic shared their experiences of identity formation in Toronto. The findings indicated that the participants have formed hybrid identities as a result of growing up between two cultures; they lived transnational lives which endowed them with the ability to have the best of both worlds; they have inter-generational conflicts with their parents, and their personal experiences have shaped their personal sense of identity. The literature in this study gives the reader an overview of the African Diaspora, the socio-economic challenges faced by African immigrants, the new acculturation process and the experiences of the second generation African-Canadians.

Key Words: Identity, Hybridity, Transnationalism, Discrimination, Inter-generational tension, Second generation African-Canadian.

To my mother, Odile Cyuma:

Your love, faith and courage inspire me to be a better woman

&

In loving memory of my father, Hesron Ribakare:

You lived fully, never holding anything back- we'll carry on your legacy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Literature review	3
Background of the African Diaspora	10
Theoretical Framework	17
Methodology	23
Findings and themes	27
Conclusion	43
Appendix A	45
Appendix B	47
References	48

“Never forget what you are, for surely the world will not. Make it your strength. Then it can never be your weakness. Armor yourself in it, and it will never be used to hurt you”. The words of American novelist George R.R. Martin (1996) are simple, yet powerful. They speak to the core of a silent pursuit - a quest to define one’s personal identity. Still one cannot help but wonder: is identity a conscious journey for all? Is it context-specific? Is it a product of how others define us, or a constant negotiation of how we view ourselves in spite of external judgement? Perhaps it is a combination of both.

In the documentary *Culture Clash: Children of Immigrant Parents* (Gilot, 2014), the narrator describes second generation children of immigrants as a bridge that is between two roads which move at different speeds. In other words, they are mediators between the pace of their parent’s lives on one side and that of a mainstream Western culture on the other- serving as a connecting point between two worlds that might never meet. Throughout their whole lives, the second generation observe and absorb different elements of their environment; trying to define what they see, how they feel, and understand their unique experiences in the context they live in. They are trying to make sense of what it means to be a second generation African-Canadian, to be a Black male or female, to be a young adult. They are seeking a voice of their own in the midst of the traffic- their own identity.

Identity is what makes us who we are. “There is a very deep ontological longing in people to feel complete, which manifests itself in a desire to belong to something that is greater than oneself and to participate actively in the life of this supra-individual entity” (Létourneau, 2001, p.5). The topics explored throughout this research include the complexities of identity formation in racialized second generation young adults in general, but specifically those of sub-Saharan African descent living in Toronto. Although this paper will be referring to Africans as a

singular unit, it is important to note that Africans are most certainly not a homogeneous group. They are diverse in many ways such as socio-cultural practices, language and country of origin (Baffoe, 2009). The findings are based on existing research as well as primary research conducted through interviews. The research explores the concepts of hybridity, transnationalism, inter-generational conflict, socio-economic challenges of integration, and a personal and collective sense of identity and belonging amidst the second generation. The central theoretical perspectives which guided this study are double consciousness (Du Bois 1996); the notion of the third space as defined by Bhabha (1994); and the segmented assimilation model by Portes and Zhou (1993). As a result of being influenced by two cultures, second generation African-Canadians are on a constant quest to find an equilibrium between the two.

Based on standard Statistics Canada (2001) generational definitions, first generation is anyone not born in Canada, second generation is anyone born in Canada with at least one parent not born in Canada, third-plus generation is anyone with both parents born in Canada. Since the immigration policy reforms of the 1960's (which eliminated origins-based selection criteria), the restructuring of the Multiculturalism Policy in 1971, followed by the Multiculturalism Act in 1988, an increasing number of immigrants of non-European origins have settled in Canada, transforming the nation into a state of multiculturalism (Reitz & Sommerville, 2004; Jantzen, 2008). On that note, second generation racialized Canadians are going through an identity crisis alongside their nation: the children of immigrants are growing in number. In 2001, those born in Canada represented 30 % of the country's "visible minority" population of 4 million (Statistics Canada, 2003). Similar statistics have indicated that those of the African population are relatively young compared to the overall Canadian population: 17% are ages 15 to 24 versus 13% of the overall population and 34% are between the ages of 25 to 44, compared with 31% of those in the

overall population (Statistics Canada, 2001). Given the increasing number of racialized young adults growing up in Canada, it is certainly in our nation's best interest to get to know them. The following literature review highlights certain works that have provided a backbone to this new and growing area of research.

Literature Review

Portes and Rumbaut (2005) conducted three waves of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study [CILS], which was a decade-long study that followed a large sample of second generation youths from early adolescence to early adulthood in the United States. It was observed that although the first-generation was not fully committed to long-term settlement, meaning *in* society, but not yet *of* it, the second generation by contrast was here to stay (Portes & Rumbaut, 2005). In addition, the researchers found transnational ties among children of immigrants to be weak and reflecting an overwhelming commitment and orientation among respondents towards their 'Americanized' lives; but, as with other dimensions of adaptation (i.e., educational attainment, incarceration and early childbearing) significant differences were found by nationality and social class. It is important to distinguish that the American culture is characterized as a melting pot where all immigrants are expected to assimilate or 'Americanize' whereas Canada is defined as a mosaic representing ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. That being said, the experiences of second generation racialized Canadians may be more intricate in nature. Regardless, this group shares race as a common denominator which makes them stand out against the backdrop of a White Canada- and for most, this is the only home they have ever known.

For many African immigrants relocated in Canada, there is an ‘emotional reconstruction’ of ‘home’ as they begin to regard their adopted country as their permanent home. This deconstruction and reconstruction involves very complex processes of emotional, cultural, economic, and social adjustment. A home is a place a person can feel safe and comfortable, a place of refuge but also a place where regular everyday activities are performed and identities are formed (Baffoe, 2009). The African parents of the second generation are overwhelmed by the tasks of integration such as establishing themselves economically, obtaining a job with a decent salary, acquiring a nice home and so on. Some arrive into the country with high levels of education and even higher expectations, and when life does not materialize into what they envisioned before coming to Canada, they may experience frustrations like many previous immigrants before them who found themselves relegated to relatively low-wage, less qualified jobs. Such problems create financial constraints and feelings of humiliation and anger- not to mention the lack of time and energy to provide a nurturing home environment to guide their children and supervise their activities (Mondain & Lardoux, 2012). Not being up-to-date on what is happening in the lives of their children creates an even bigger gap between them. Tettey and Pupilampu (2005) posit that many Africans living in Canada, irrespective of how long ago they immigrated, maintain a stronger connection to their cultural heritage than to mainstream Canadian culture. This can be a source of dissatisfaction for their second generation children who fear being ostracized as a result of their pronounced differences. In most cases, the second generation have not yet defined what it means to be of African origin in a dominant White culture. At the same time, they are noticing that they can never really blend in.

African immigrants’ desire to maintain their cultural heritage does not mean that they are closed to the idea of adopting cultural norms from their host country. The merging of these two

worlds for their second generation children is responsible for the creation of hybrid identities, which incorporate several aspects of various cultures (Arthur, 2010). Certainly, this transition is not an easy one for the immigrant parents who have left everything behind to start all over again in their new home, in a new country. Yet for the second generation, the concept of home is a more difficult one to define for they feel as though they belong neither here nor there (i.e., their parents' land). Taylor (2007) points out that "what you identify as your home, and your identity, is a figment of your imagination. Bits and pieces of your parents' and family's history have influenced you, but it is not *your* history" (p.130). Taylor recounts how despite being born on Canadian soil, engaging in a typical Canadian lifestyle, he is constantly asked "but where are you *really* from?" Being Black, he continues, has always been a distinguishing marker to remind him that he will never be fully Canadian. Yet ironically, anywhere he is outside of Canada there is an even more pronounced distinction reminding him that he is, in fact, Canadian. Though he embraces his roots, his home is where he has spent his life, where he has formed friendships and bonds, and where he has defined himself as an adult. The concept of identity then becomes fluid, never really belonging to a fixed location or specific culture. The identity holder is in constant pursuit of some sort of middle ground where they can feel at ease and proudly stand for all aspects of who they are.

At the same time, not all racialized immigrants report feeling a strong sense of belonging to the nation. Chariandy (2007) observed that among White immigrants, 47.9% felt a sense of belonging to Canada and of their second generation children 57.3% expressed the same feelings. Amongst visible minority immigrants, 60.7% expressed a sense of belonging to Canada while their second generation agreed only by 44.1%. Perhaps most strikingly were the responses of those self-identifying as Black: 65.3% of recent Black immigrants expressed a sense of

belonging while the second generation agreed only by 37.0%. Clearly, Canadian-born children of visible-minority immigrants are progressively identifying less with being Canadian. Why is that? Could it be this decline is due to a backlash of some sorts; are children of previous generations of visible-minorities realizing that they are not faring better than their parents? Has society made them feel like ‘outsiders’ in their country of birth? Is the backlash a collective sense of rejection from a mainstream culture in which they do not see themselves represented? Perhaps it is. Or perhaps it is an exaggerated response hinting at something much deeper; a desire to be accepted as both African and Canadian, as in the case of the participants of this study, without having to choose one or the other.

Ali (2008) claims that second generation youth who grow up in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods believe in the myth of Canadian multiculturalism; a depiction which does not extend past their ethnic enclaves. That is to say these young people are due for a rude awakening once they face the reality that this ‘multiculturalism’ is only symbolic; it does not guarantee equality. Ali believes that the transition of these youth from *outsider* to *insider* status in Canada is reliant on decision-makers to “reduce the differences in power and privilege between White and racialized second generation Canadians” (p.104). As a whole, second generation racialized youth need further research attention given that they are in a particular sociocultural limbo, where on the one hand they are raised with their parent’s cultural norms, while at the same time negotiating their way through the Western culture they were born into. To narrow the focus: sub-Saharan African communities in particular are still poorly known in Canada. The few studies that exist exploring this demographic show that they are among the most discriminated groups in terms of employment, housing, schooling, and health (Mondain & Lardoux, 2012). The aforementioned institutions are fundamental to their socialization process and their ability to

carve out a place in society, and if they are linked to negative experiences, the children of immigrants inevitably inherit a mindset of mistrust towards such institutions. In turn, their identity will, in part, be a reflection of how they think they are regarded in society.

Race and Identity

According to Reitz and Sommerville (2004), the second generation experiences have been studied as indicators of the long-term potential for racial minority integration into Canadian society related to education, labour market, government policies, and globalization. The authors believe that the experiences of the children of racial minority immigrants might be a truer reflection of longer-term problems in the integration of racial minorities in general. As true a prediction as this may be, it makes no reference to any significant undertakings put in place to facilitate the integration of this group in their current society.

Hasford (2010) explored the relations between race, gender, and power in Canadian community settings. He examines the experiences of young Black Canadians within the workplace. His purpose in doing so was driven by an interest to answer three main questions: (a) How does oppression influence the psychological empowerment of Black youth and young adults in the workplace?; (b) How do workplace characteristics promote Black youths' and young adults' psychological empowerment?; and (c) How does gender influence Black youths' and young adults' experiences of oppression and empowerment in the workplace? Hasford noted that the narratives of workplace empowerment showed that empowering workplace settings include four key characteristics i.e., relationships, roles, opportunity, and incentives. These then promote six empowered outcomes i.e., independence, confidence, eye opening, appreciation, a desire to give back, and the ability to talk to others. His findings repeatedly stress how significant

the empowerment of racialized minority groups is in the workplace. Meanwhile, Black youth are becoming increasingly aware of the discriminations they face in the labour market on the basis of their race and this can certainly have a detrimental effect to their identity formation, rendering feelings of rejection and inferiority. For example, Brooks (2008) states:

Second generation racialized Canadians are keenly aware of the changing nature and forms of racism in Canada, and this knowledge has been gained through stories told by their parents about their experiences of immigration. Although there is a general consensus among the group that racial discrimination is prevalent in today's society, many believe that they face less racism than their parents. Discussions of the forms of racism reveal sensitivity to a shift from overt acts of discrimination to increasingly subtler forms (pg.76).

This subtler form of discrimination is much harder to identify because it is not explicit in nature. Henry and Tator (2005) make an argument that this form of discrimination is institutionalized through the notion of “democratic racism”; which is a particular form of the new racism or “common sense” racism. “Democratic racism permeates through families, communities, schools, universities as well as the media that communicates ideas and images. Thus people learn racist discourse at the very same sites where every other form of learning and socialization is provided” (Henry & Tator, 2005, p. 23). The authors notice that in its application, democratic racism is an ideology in which two conflicting sets of values coexist: commitments to democratic principles such as justice, fairness and equity operate alongside negative feelings about minority groups and discrimination against them. As a result, there is a lack of support for policies and practices that might address and alter the barriers faced by these minority groups. As a sub-group of the Black community, second generation African-Canadians are not exempt from discrimination and its many forms, serving as constant reminders of their perpetual difference in contrast to ‘real’ White Canadians. Previous studies have indicated that the persistence of

disadvantages in certain second generation groups serves as an indicator to existing barriers; for instance young adults who are Black or Latino do less well than many other groups and are less likely to be employed in high skill occupations (Boyd, 2008). At its simplest form, the continuous manifestation of systematic disadvantages from one generation to the next can be explained as one of two things: either these societal barriers are present or they are not. The fact that certain groups within the racialized second generation have acquired higher education and possess proficient language skills, yet are still struggling in the same socio-economic cycle as their immigrant parents suggests the presence of such societal barriers.

When the racialized second generation defines themselves as something other than Canadian (though they were born here), it is only a reaction to the “perpetual exclusionary forces that Canadian society places on those who simply don’t look like they belong” (Taylor, 2007, p.129). Drawing from his personal experiences, Taylor writes “regardless of my status as a second generation Canadian, regardless of the fact that my parents were born elsewhere, and regardless of my hyphenated existence, I am Canadian. We are all immigrants to this country. Some of us have just been here longer” (Taylor, 2007, p. 131). Taylor is unapologetic about all the facets of his identity; he may have a hyphenated existence but it should not take anything away from his being a Canadian- he belongs here, period. Rummens (2001) believes that what makes individuals who they are is not only their personal traits and characteristics but their membership, being a part of something. In fact, one can only recognize how pronounced their identity is outside of their ‘membership’; this contrasting point can either serve to assert one’s differences by rejecting anything which does not resemble *me* (physical traits, personal norms and values) or it can serve as an opportunity to incorporate *new* principles by belonging to an additional community. David Snow (2001) makes a distinction between three types of identity:

personal identities; which are self-designated; social identities, which are attributed by others; and collective identities, which are described as having a shared sense of ‘one-ness’. How one sees oneself is a combination of the aforesaid identities within the confines of their social context. As such, the experiences of second generation African-Koreans for example will differ greatly from those of second generation African-Norwegians. Race or even ethnicity may serve as the unifying characteristic between the two; however their perception of self, within their respective social contexts will have a tremendous bearing on their overall identity formation process. A given individual can have a variety of identities which can intersect, overlap, conflict and collide (Peressini 1993; Rummens 2001; Létourneau 2001; Tastsoglou 2001; Snow 2011).

Background on the African Diaspora

The Africa diaspora is as eclectic as its people. Since the early 2000s and the rise of globalization, migration patterns have taken on new waves, new meanings, and new challenges. In the contemporary sense, the term diaspora encapsulates a group of people with a shared geographical origin and transmigration pattern whether forced or voluntary (Tettey and Puplampu, 2005). African immigrants represent many diverse cultural characteristics and reasons for migration. Also worth noting is that not all Africans are Black and not all Black people consider themselves African (Baffoe, 2009; Tettey and Puplampu, 2005). For the purpose of this study, the focus will centre on Black Continental Africans.

Leaving Africa

It is estimated that ten million Africans were brought to the Americas during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and that only 5-6 percent of those ten million arrived in the United States.

Presently, scholars claim that more Africans have arrived in the U.S. in the past twenty years than throughout the entire period of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (Clark, 2009, p.257). Nevertheless, the Black population in the U.S is presented as a homogenous group. As a result, most Africans just adopt an identity of a 'Blackness' that has already been socially constructed, further suppressing their sense of cultural diversity.

At the turn of the 21st century, Continental Africans have been increasingly active in the process of transmigration as a response to the changing nature of the economic condition of their governments. In some countries, the instability translates into civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and political persecution. Conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, Congo and Liberia for example, have contributed to a large number of immigrants and refugees resettling in Canada, France, Germany and Nordic countries (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005; Okepewho & Nzegwu, 2009). "The numerous local and regional wars that have devastated many African communities and killed off husbands, fathers, and sons have turned high numbers of women and children into refugees and migrants. For these women, emigration is a matter not of choice but of necessity" (Okepewho & Nzegwu, 2009, p.304). Indeed, most leave their countries because of economic hardships and political instability, seeking a more promising life elsewhere. However, there are also those who depart leaving behind an elevated social status in hopes of finding new opportunities in the Global North; cultural globalization has opened the doors for Africans to pursue professional prospects outside the Continent (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005).

It was not until the late 1960s that Black immigrants began to come to Canada in significant numbers from other countries. This is because prior to 1967 the Canadian immigration policy had biases against non-Whites, making it difficult for those groups to gain entry into the country. Over time, an increasing number of Continental Africans migrated to

Canada, mainly to the large metropolitans cities. Notably, the different experiences within the various African communities in the diaspora themselves are countless and need to be recognized. In Matsuoka's (2001), *Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of Identity and Community in an African Diaspora*, he demonstrates how most behavioural patterns of the migrants, from their choice of marriage partners to educational problems to job structure, are all related to the strong ties and memories made in the country of origin. It is often said that immigrants are uprooted from their land, yet Matsuoka makes the argument that a part of their roots always stays in their country of origin, and African immigrants make tireless efforts to integrate into the Canadian society despite the fact that they may never fully feel whole in their host country. In other words, these immigrants exist as partial beings. In spite of this, the beauty of diasporas is that they are productive spaces for generating and transforming culture and identity.

Transnationalism

Dr. John A. Arthur (2010), in his book of *African Diaspora Identities*, posits that Africans are redefining what it means to be Black in a race-, ethnic-, and color-conscious North American society, because the African immigrants do manifest identities that are cosmopolitan, transnational, and global. Indeed, the formation of various ethnic African communities such as churches, ethnic enterprises, and restaurants is emerging in major cities across the major metropolitan cities in North America. The establishment of such social spaces is what keeps the African immigrant communities vibrant and engaged. These are spaces where they socialize, exchange ideas and experiences, grow and learn from each other in their new host countries. Transnationalism has made it easy for Africans in the diaspora to maintain strong bonds with their countries of origin. The strongest factor for the retention of ties to their home country cited by most members of this group is the fact that close and extended family members still reside in

their countries of origin. They feel a strong sense of responsibility towards them, evidenced in some by frequent remittances send back home. Certainly, for many African migrants this is the essential part in what creates a feeling of a divided identity that is neither fully in their new country and neither fully in the old one.

One of the participants in a study conducted by Baffoe (2009) expressed the following: “Home was always an anchor in my memory, but things were not the same after the death of my mother. The anchor was broken and I no longer had the strong urge or attraction to go back” (p. 165). After the death of her mother in her homeland, this woman felt as though there was nothing there for her to go back to. Initially, a number of Africans see immigration as a short-term plan; leaving with the idea that they will one day come back home under better circumstances. Baffoe refers to a period he terms the *new acculturation process*, whereby the immigrants realize that their initial expectations of acquiring high capital and returning to their countries of origin with a better standard of living than the one they initially had, has not materialized. This process typically takes place after about five years. This is also around the time when some begin to have ideas of investing in Canada, for example, by owning a house, and coping with the emotional struggle that comes with the mental deconstruction of their original home in their country of origin. Baffoe also observed that the children of the first generation immigrants did not seem to have the same sense of attachment to the homeland as their parents did. However, this may be subject to change as they go through stages of discovering and re-defining their personal identity. The experiences of the children of African immigrants will be much different than that of their parents as they navigate through the many social nuances of race, institutional patterns and social relations in North America.

Socio-economic challenges

For some Africans, coming to Canada meant a downward social and economic mobility in their status after migrating. Konadu, Takyi and Arthur (2006) state that “Canada’s accreditation system is discriminatory towards African immigrants who arrive with professional skills; this is an experience that kept some Africans out of the labour force” (p.86). As expressed in the exasperated words of a highly qualified veterinarian from Kenya:

I had to sell my very successful veterinary business in Kenya and my wife also gave up her successful nursing business for us to move to Canada. Despite the high promises and assurances given to us by the Canadian High Commission in Nairobi, we were frustrated and very disappointed when we came to Canada. Nobody will hire me as a vet officer or my wife as a nurse. Our Kenyan qualifications were not recognized and they kept telling us that we had no Canadian experience. I worked for nearly four years in a factory and nearly went into depression. We could not go back to Kenya because we had nothing to go back to (Baffoe, 2009, p.168).

This veterinarian must have been convinced he was making the right decision as he and his wife left everything behind in hopes of advancing their respective professions in Canada. It did not take long for them to realize that their prospects do not match the reality they encountered.

Much of the public discourse on the Foreign Credentials Recognition (FCR) issue is that while the current government recognized this problem and pledged to address it, there is still a shortage of doctors and other professionals, meanwhile there is a vast number of trained immigrant doctors from the Global South who have been forced by their lack of credentials recognition to take up taxi driving or janitorial jobs in their adopted country (Okafor, 2009). In fact, those of African descent are generally more likely to be unemployed than those in the overall workforce. Surprisingly, even those who enrolled in Canadian universities with the hope of finding jobs that would help them gain Canadian experience have reported not being much better off than when they started. Initially, it was believed that their difficult integration in the labour market is attributed to lower proficiency English skills and lower levels of education. Although this may be true for a number of newly arriving refugees and some immigrants, it

certainly is not the case for those who come to Canada with the intention to enter into the skilled labour force, many of whom already have years of experience and speak English or French. Instead, African immigrants with accents are seen as “markers of individual incompetence regardless of the individual’s actual accomplishment” (Creese, 2011, p.50). This type of exclusion is baseless and without substance as those with other accents considered of ‘higher class’ (Australian, British, French, German) seem to fare quite well in the labour market. Are some accents then more acceptable than others? The outcomes proves that the answer is ‘yes’. As a result of chronic unemployment or deskilling, an analysis indicated that the family poverty rate among Africans stood at 34%, more than double that of the family poverty rate among other Toronto residents (Konadu, et al. 2006). Skilled African immigrants come to Canada with many years of experiences, as in the case of the veterinarian from Kenya, when denied the opportunity to practice their profession they have no choice but to take up low-skilled jobs to provide for their families. The constant pressure of making ends meet coupled with systemic roadblocks to upward mobility is debilitating.

Another common setback faced by first generation Africans is housing. A number of immigrants and their families have reported episodes of discrimination when searching for accommodation. Property owners seem to have all kinds of reasons to deny them apartments, such as the “intolerance of spicy or malodorous food” (Konadu, et al., 2006, p.87). For those who do manage to secure an apartment in a building, accounts of racist treatment, for example, graffiti in common areas such as the lobby and elevators, or reported acts of violence are not uncommon. In light of such treatment, one can see why some immigrants are not only forced to live in ethnic enclaves, but might even feel safer in such a common environment. Racism can result in social exclusion and housing segregation of immigrant groups in low-income

neighbourhoods (Teixeira, 2008). For these and other reasons, some African immigrants and their families resort to living in segregated ghettos where they form a certain sense of community with other minorities - but they are not sheltered from multiple social issues assurgent from low-income neighbourhoods.

There is also evidence that structural factors, particularly inadequate information and publicity about available opportunities for jobs and settlement services have played a role in the weak social and economic integration of these immigrants (Konadu, et al., 2006). Since certain African communities rely heavily on the knowledge of members of their ethnic group, they can miss out on certain resources available to them. All these circumstances contribute to the way in which a number of African immigrants spend many years trying to break out of a low standard of living without making any significant progress towards the life they had envisioned living before arriving to Canada.

African immigrants come to Canada with a body of lived experiences from back home and new experiences arising out of life in the North American society. Luckily, Canada's multicultural fabric allows them to express their uniqueness and maintain their cultural heritage.

Clark (2009), points out that the children of these African immigrants are being raised with MTV/BET and a socially constructed image of what it means to be Black, or an African American. One of the biggest fears for African parents is that their children will become Americanized or worst "African Americanized". In other words, they fear that rather than keeping their cultural differences, their children will adopt a Black identity dictated by the American culture.

Second generation African-Canadians are growing up in an amalgamation of cultures and they have to filter through it all to make sense of their own experiences. Conceivably, this is

what puts them in such a unique position. Through their parents' culture, their acquired identities are given meanings and boundaries are defied and defined. Indeed, their parents' migration process alone is identity-defining (Arthur, 2010).

The first generation has come to Canada with their culture, something they hold dear, and regardless of societal pressures to conform, this culture is what endows them with the ability to navigate two worlds and make the best of their experiences no matter how challenging. They are able to rise again after so many disappointments and obstacles because their lives have meaning. They persevere in defining their new found identity in their new country, and their children, in turn, carry out the process.

Theoretical framework

The central theories that guide this study focus on processes of identity formation. In particular, I will be referring to Du Bois (1996) and his theory of double consciousness; the notion of the third space as defined by Bhabha (1994); and the segmented assimilation model by Portes and Zhou (1993). These theories reflect key themes arising from this study. The second generation experience is not a generalizable concept amongst various racialized groups. However, there are certainly a few common points which are well articulated by these authors and their works. This section will seek to apply their findings to the experiences of African Canadian young adults in order to better define their identity formation process.

Double Consciousness

Double consciousness is a concept that Du Bois first explored in 1903 in his publication *The Souls of Black Folk*. Although his work was solely focused on the experiences of African-Americans at the time, it still rings true to the experiences of Africans living in the Western world today. On the one hand, African-Americans were denigrated and oppressed in a nation that the world saw as a proponent of principals of human dignity and equality. The internalization of negative sentiments, such as rejection from the outside world, shaped the experiences of African-Americans and, in turn, their self-image. Du Bois describes the reality of having multiple identities; recognizing that individuals experience a kind of ‘two-ness’, with two identities trying to exist within one person.

The logic of identity is extremely important to our own self-conceptions. It contains the notion of the true self, some real self inside there, hiding inside the husks of all the false selves that we present to the rest of the world. It is a kind of guarantee of authenticity. Not until we get really inside and hear what the true self has to say do we know what we are really saying (Back & Solomon, 2000, p.145).

In his work, Du Bois describes how every African- American has had two life-altering experiences: the moment he/she realized he/she was Black, and the moment he/she realized that was a problem. Blacks do not only view themselves from their own perceptual point of view, but they also view themselves as they might be perceived by the outside (i.e., White) gaze. For instance, in the case of younger generations of African-Canadians who are still trying to make sense of where they fit into the North American Black culture, their self-image can be shaped by Black stereotypes perpetuated by White mainstream culture. This can lead to phases of self-doubt or performing an identity which is not authentic because they are funnelled into a narrow and constructed image of what it means to be Black in North America.

Du Bois illustrates the dilemma of double consciousness with the story of a Black artisan who is conflicted between producing goods that reflect his unique perspective and life

experience, and goods that are marketable and acceptable to a broader population. This dilemma is transferable to second generation African-Canadians who desire to maintain their African heritage while at the same time having to live, work and socialize in a mainstream Canadian culture.

The Third Space

Bhabha's third space model (1994) refers to a space that is the product of the negotiations, interface, and exchange across cultural boundaries. In this third space, there is room for conflicting ideas where both cultures often collide.

The experiences of second generation African-Canadian young adults tell stories of cross-cultural negotiations, of combined worldviews...of hybridity. Scott and Marshall (2009) view hybridity as a process of continual cultural transformation which "undermine existing forms of cultural authority and representation" (p.328). This notion is debatable: how can individuals who possess a hybrid identity 'undermine' the same cultures that make up their hybridity? Rather they embrace aspects of two (or more) cultures and create a mixture which makes up their hybrid identities. Certainly, various encounters and circumstances shape one's understanding of personal identity. Hybridity permits one to be free of the obligations to adhere to a single worldview. Some second generation African-Canadians borrow aspects from their parents' culture, some try to assimilate entirely to the mainstream dominant culture; others merge the two cultures together to create an essence of their own.

Theorist Homi Bhabha claims there is a space in between the designations of identity and that "this interstitial passage between fixed identification opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Easthope, 1998,

p.145). Since the concept of hybridity itself is elastic, it is difficult to assume that persons in between cultures have no preference, no “assumed or imposed hierarchy”. Human beings are complex but rarely objective; therefore hybridity should not have to be a fixed concept, but one that is as flexible as the individuals who embody it. Nevertheless, the in-between space of two cultures makes for a unique experience - a transnational life even. Bhabha describes the articulation of cultural differences within these two spaces as creating “displacements of the present” (Ladha, 2005, p.39). As a result, these displacements lead to the formation of a hybrid space, a third space in-between the two (or more) cultures (Ladha, 2005). In the case of the young adults in this study, it took the form of intergenerational tensions, triggering culture clashes in which individuals often feel between two conflicting spaces: their parent’s cultural expectations and that of the mainstream culture. Hybridity allows the second generation to embrace both cultures, in varying degrees, without feeling as though they have to compromise themselves in the process.

Segmented-assimilation

Finally, the segmented assimilation model (Portes & Zhou, 1993) shows that assimilation for immigrants’ descendants does not necessarily follow a straight line, but rather one that can be uneven and even digressive at times. The authors highlight that structural barriers, such as poor urban schools and limited access in the labour market, are obstacles that disadvantage immigrant groups and subsequently, their children. In his article titled “Second Generation Decline”, Herbert Gans “speculates that the children of new immigrants could face socioeconomic decline relative to their parents’ position because the children of immigrants might refuse to accept the low-level, low-pay jobs at which their parents work” (Gans, 1992;

Waters, 1994, p.800). Gans points out that the children of immigrants, especially dark-skinned ones, might not obtain jobs in the mainstream economy.

The alternative of working perpetual minimum wage jobs to keep afloat is either too frustrating to bear or not even available as an option for some. This type of repeated pattern creates feelings of exclusion and gradual marginalization from the mainstream, leading many young men in particular to join racial groups where others share similar experiences. Although the author's article focuses on Black and Hispanics in the United States, common themes have surfaced amongst second generation Africans elsewhere, and Canada is no exception.

At the onset, children of immigrants manifest traits of ambition and perseverance, refusing to be categorized as immigrants who do not have anything to contribute to society- they feel just as entitled to their rights as any other Canadian should. In some cases, there is an undeniable disconnect between the hopes and aspirations the parents had for their children and the reality that awaits them. The first generation immigrants with a higher social status tend to believe that, while racism exists, "it can be overcome or circumvented through hard work, perseverance and the right values and attitudes. The second generation experiences racism and discrimination constantly and develops perceptions of the overwhelming influence of race on their lives and life chances that differs from their parent's views" (Waters, 1994, p.813). This can be grounds for a multitude of disagreements.

According to Portes & Zhou (1993), there are three features that hinder immigrants from having a fluid societal integration; the first is color, the second is location, and the third is the absence of mobility ladders. The authors' opinion is that "immigrants may form the backbone of what remains of labour-intensive manufacturing in the cities as well as in their growing personal services sector, but these are niches that seldom offer channels for upward mobility" (Portes &

Zhou, 1993, p.83). One of the frustrations of some second generation persons is seeing their parents endure the labour-intensive manufacturing life in hopes that their children, born in the land of toils, will one day climb up the social ladder. Year after year, obstacles serve as reminders of their color, location and stagnant position in the same economic cycle they have been trying to break away from. First and second generation African-Canadians may have differing worldviews, lifestyles and aspirations, yet somehow the experiences of the former have subsequently affected the reactions of the latter.

Double consciousness, the third space and segmented assimilation are complex phenomena; they are not fixed concepts since they are subject to change as this generation enters varying stages of their identity development. They are not hierarchical but rather inclusive because these young adults are exposed to many cultures which challenge their worldview, especially in Toronto. They are not predefined but personal to each one because experiences are unique. Second generation African-Canadians are navigating through the many phases of their mixed identity without having much to rely on as they go along; in many cases they are the pioneers of their classification. They are bold and ambitious, but also aware of the systemic barriers on their path to success, the constructed stereotypes associated with their self-image, and their own constantly changing self-perception in relation to their personal and collective identity. Their parents' culture, originating from the land of their progenitors, merges with their own culture, springing from a land of which they were born (which at times can feel foreign to them) giving them a unique perspective and helping them redefine who they are in the process.

Methodology

Research strategy

I have always been interested in the many facets of identities: how they are formed, how environment plays a role in defining them (personal experiences vary depending on race, gender, class and location), why public opinion influences self-image, how pivotal moments transform perception etc...identities are fascinating. The concept of immigration itself is full of stories about the shaping and redefining of personal identity: refugees leaving their homeland for fear of being persecuted, economic immigrants emigrating with hopes of a better future in a new land, families re-united after spending years and miles apart. All have had to adapt to different conditions, contrasting lifestyles and a new sense of self because they will never be the same again. For immigrants, the aftermath of migration has its episodes of sobering realities and challenges but also of happiness and optimism, especially for the sake of their children, born in the land of opportunity.

For the purpose of this paper, I have decided to focus on a particular demographic: second generation African-Canadian young adults. This study focuses on understanding their identity formation processes, exploring intergenerational differences and a changing sense of self as it relates to their environment and their experiences. Through a series of questions (See Appendix: A), I query which culture was the most dominant one in the household growing up? What is a common point of disagreement with their parents? Has their sense of identity evolved over the years? What defining moments have shaped their identity? This research takes a qualitative approach, because “qualitative research deals best with questions involving conditions, norms, and values” (Archer & Berdahl, 2011, p. 126). The specific strategy I found most fitting is transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental means “in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p.34). Creswell (2007), describes

phenomenology is a research strategy which seeks to identify the ‘essence’ of human experience about a phenomenon described by participants (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994), states that phenomenology seeks “meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts judgements, and understandings” (p.58). The researcher should therefore be concerned with accurately understanding and describing the phenomena from the perspective of the participants.

Epoche

Moustakas (1994), talks about the concept of *epoche* (or bracketing) in which the researcher must take a fresh perspective and not allow their own experiences to influence the phenomenon being examined (although Moustakas himself admits that this state is rarely ever perfectly achieved since no research can be entirely objective). Therefore my role as a researcher is to state my position and briefly describe my own experience with the phenomenon. My family immigrated to Canada when I was six years old. I spent most my life in Ottawa, Ontario where I attended school, formed life-long relationships and felt a strong sense of belonging to a community; I was exposed to different cultures and I had friends from all walks of life, this meant twice the joy but also twice the sorrow. I lost friends to street violence, I witnessed unjustified police brutality which left me feeling powerless and I experienced racism that knocked the wind right out of me. The world was a cruel place sometimes and I was not always prepared to fight back. My generation was looking for meaning, I was looking for meaning. I did not find it in the classroom, I did not find it in books, I found it in bits and pieces of my shattered experiences; like pieces of a broken mirror, one day it will all come together and reflect my meaning, my identity. In time I realized I was not alone in my quest, my interest in understanding identities was intensified when I started facilitating spoken-word poetry

workshops for the youth; I realized that poetry served as an outlet for them to express facets of their identity they would otherwise never expose; they used words to cut deeper than their inner pains, they used words to strike back at their abusers, they used words to release their anger and express the banalities of life. In our sharing spaces, they were not afraid to be vulnerable and bold, defiant and meek, zealous and deep. Often, we silence our voices for fear of what others may think. But our own experiences, good or bad; whether they have strengthened or wounded us, speak louder than anyone else's judgment ever could. As a researcher for this study on second generation African-Canadian young adults, I had to set aside my own personal experiences to be able to listen and reflect on the participants' experiences without first processing it through my own biased habits of thinking- because truth be told, I see the world through the lens of a young, free spirited, African-Canadian, Black woman.

Data collection procedures

This research is comprised of 8 participants (5 males and 3 females) who are second generation African-Canadians living in Toronto between the ages of 18-30. To gain access and rapport, flyers describing the study were posted in public locations and on social media websites to recruit participants. I also made small in- person announcements in local gatherings to initiate contact with potential participants. Those who were interested in taking part in the study signed a consent form prior to the interview which lasted about one hour on average. I met with participants on a one-on-one basis, except for one interview which was done over the phone. Participants were audio recorded in order to retain an accurate recollection of their interview. The data was password protected and encrypted; only my supervisor and I had access to this information. Participants were asked to choose pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Data analysis procedures

Once all the interviews were completed, I started transcribing my audio recordings. I then followed up with a process called *horizontalization* whereby I highlighted significant statements, sentences and quoted provided by the participants who experienced the phenomenon in order to develop *clusters of meaning* which can be organized into themes (Moustakas, 1994). These themes were then used to write a description of what the participants have experienced which is called a *textual description* followed by a *structural description* of the context or setting which influenced how they experienced the phenomenon. At last, I presented the *essence* of the phenomenon which focuses on their common experiences.

Limitations

The limitations to this study solely focus on the experiences of 8 second generation African Canadian young adults living in Toronto. The reason the study is narrowed to a specific group and locale is to allow a clearer and more in-depth analysis of this particular issue as experienced by the group of respondents chosen to fit the study. This study does not seek to understand the overall psychological practice of race and identity for this particular demographic; rather it seeks to present the participants' own interpretation of their identity formation processes. Although their experiences are not generalizable due to the small sample size, they are used as micro depictions of this phenomenon.

Significance of the study

It is of utmost importance to shed light on issues which have a social bearing on the lives of Black youth. I am conscious of the fact that they are not fairly portrayed in the media, their

social issues are seldom raised on political platforms and their presence is reduced to statistics. Although the scope of this study does not extend to the many dimensions and identities in the Black community, it targets one specific group hoping that they will realize that their voices are heard, their issues matter and they are not just a number. The topic of race is still the elephant in the room and the sooner we acknowledge it and build healthy and truthful discussions around it, the faster we can let our guards down, treat each other with integrity and work towards meaningful implementations in public policy.

Findings and Themes

Hybrid Identities

Participants were asked to describe what their experience was like growing up and which culture was the dominant one in the household; African (specific to their parents' country of origin) or Canadian? Certain participants recalled elements of both cultures existing in symbiosis; they described a kind of hybrid identity as a result of the mixture. However, for some, the feeling of being 'in-between' two contrasting cultures created a sense of confusion, not because of the stark differences which separated them but because they could not find their place in either.

Grew up kind of a hybrid with some North American views but with also a lot of Ghanaian parents' teachings, so they used what they learned from their experiences to teach us but then try to throw some Canadian things in...sometimes I feel like a displaced Ghanaian, so I'm just being a Ghanaian in a Canadian way. So, I would say there was a pretty good balance...like I remember we did skating (Vergil).

It's about equal, I mean we have both cultures, we do things that are Canadian; we watch the Olympics together, at time we even go skiing together...and then of course at home, my mother cooks traditional dishes, at times we'll eat pizza, hamburgers, you know

switch it up. She'll speak to us in Somali and then we'll respond to her in English and vice versa, it's used interchangeably, it's mixed, it's a fusion (Obinga).

But I was really in between two worlds even as a child because my life outside of my house was very White, very French... So I didn't know where I belonged, it was really confusing for me as a child up until I was about 6 or 7 years old, it was really hard to be Black and to be Congolese in the middle of an all-White world so I didn't like it(Irene).

Vergil recognizes that there is something unique about being a 'Ghanaian in a Canadian way', this gave him the ability to be a 'hybrid' and voluntarily include aspects of both cultures in his everyday life as a means of creating a balance between his environment and his cultural background. Obinga sees the interface between his Somali heritage and his Canadian one as being flexible and resembling a 'fusion'.

Irene on the other hand, remembers how difficult it was growing up not knowing where she belonged, even at a young age she experienced uneasiness; she felt she stood out in the middle of the 'all-White world' which surrounded her. Assuming a hybrid identity can be a pleasant experience when embraced consciously and willingly but those raised in a bi-cultural setting are not exempt from feelings of isolation and rejection as a result of not fully recognizing their permanent place within either one of both cultures.

Cultural Markers

Every culture has its trademark; something it is remembered for, something which stands out- a cultural marker. Participants were asked which specific markers they identify with in their parents' culture as well as the Canadian culture. The responses varied from traditional African dances and core values of hospitality to keeping up with the Maple Leafs hockey game and the ending a sentence with 'eh'.

African

I would say the music and the dancing; especially when people do an African dance, I just remember being at my house and seeing uncles or seeing like older cousins doing the dances or going to weddings and seeing dances (Vergil).

You know it's weird, I feel like for those of us who are [second generation]...we are extra African and I think it's from a bit of an identity crisis; trying to sort of reclaim something that we feel is lost within us. For example, in Canada, we're reminded all the time that we're not from here. As a Black man, you go into a shop and the clerk is watching you or you get stopped on the streets by police or people ask you where you're from- basic questions like that, I mean, really create an atmosphere of not belonging- and so, if we're not from here, where are we from? We're from Africa- and so we have this sort of like 'extra African vibe' (Phineas).

It's just that spirit of family; like Ghanaians are very loving, caring people, you know what I'm saying, that's something I really identify with (Togbe).

I think it's my facial features because a lot of people are like 'you look Kenyan, you look Kenyan' and it's like, I am Kenyan! (Jessica).

It was such a Congolese household, the food that my mum would cook...just the way we were educated was very African like at a young age, all the responsibilities that we had in the house and I was looking at my White French friends and they didn't have all of that... I felt like an adult really early but maybe it made me who I am today (Irene).

I identify really strongly with our culture of hospitality, politeness [respect] for authority...those are core values and I realize that I identify strongly with- which can't mesh in well with the corporate sector at all, it's actually a bit of a barrier; you'll get walked all over if you're constantly polite... modesty and humility are also core values in the Eritrean culture and there's a lack of assertiveness also not conducive in legal work; it weakens your brand (in terms of reputation) (Susu).

Phineas makes a profound observation by saying that those born here of African parents try to reclaim something they feel is lost within them. As a Black male, he cannot help but notice the gaze of suspicion and curiosity as though serving to remind him he's not from here- but if he does not belong to the land of his birth, then where? As a means of asserting his presence, he stresses his African cultural attributes by putting them to the forefront of his identity as though to

say: 'this is who I am, take it or leave it'. On the other hand, Susu finds herself torn between two conflicting ideals; the way she was raised in a hospitable and polite household versus working in a cut-throat business world where she feels as though she has to suppress essential aspects of her upbringing in order to survive in a corporate setting.

Some African cultural markers enrich the second generations' lives with depth and beauty yet others are not congruent with a Western lifestyle; creating episodes of tension for these young adults who are well aware that both cultures can seldom coexist in the same environment outside of their household.

Canadian

It's more Toronto than Canada; I feel like there's a difference because Toronto is different than Canada: the rest of Canada is not as multicultural. Toronto is everybody from everywhere is here... I've been around other cultures, I'm more understanding. (Vergil).

I think Canadian culture has also given me an appreciation for people of different ethnicities, different religions, being able to just vibe with everybody...I think Canada has been a really great steward in teaching me to be accepting of everyone- not just tolerable, but accepting (Phineas).

By virtue of the fact, we're more Canadian than we are African because we were born here and this is where our primary socialization took place (Togbe).

I love that in Toronto I can eat Ethiopian, I can eat Indian, I can eat Somalian, I can eat la poutine very Quebecois, yes I like that... I think it also helped me with my Canadian identity that I could speak French (Irene).

I'll probably say just keeping up with my Maple Leafs' games, even when I'm back there you know, watching hockey while most Africans have no interest. I used to be on the internet late watching games, I think that's so Canadian of me... and taking part in the democracies that we have here in Canada (Obinga).

The Canadian accent: the 'eh' like 'hey, do you know where the bus stop is eh?' and a lot of friendliness, people always realize that you're overly friendly when you're from Canada (Mack).

We live in an individualistic kind of capitalist society and now entering the working world, it's different values in terms of investing time strategically and getting returns on what I invest my time and energy into...and the idea of a 'Canadian dream' and going after what it is you want; having strong work ethics (Susu).

As has been noted, several participants made it a point to distinguish between Toronto and the rest of Canada, because they felt as though the rest of Canada does not necessarily mirror the dense multiculturalism experienced in Toronto. Responses however exhibit an overall sense of pride for being a part of an ethnically diverse setting. Obinga specifically mentions that part of what makes him feel Canadian is "taking part in the democracies" he has here. Popular Canadian hallmarks such as keeping up with hockey games, finishing a sentence with 'eh' and friendly manners were also mentioned as key characteristics that make the second generation stand out when they are outside of Canada.

As young adults, they now grapple with Western cultural values of individualism, though raised with a collectivist mindset. A culture of strategic time management, though time is flexible in their parents' country of origin. A competitive culture where you need to prove yourself, though they were always told to go by the book and avoid being domineering. Togbe maintains that this second generation is more Canadian than they are African because Canada is where their "primary socialization took place". Both African and Canadian cultural markers are important elements in creating a broader sense of membership, but neither suffices in constructing a solid personal identity.

Transnational Lives

The second generation grew up hearing their parents talk about their ancestral land, they take part in activities which reflect their cultural heritage and some have even spent time in their

parents' country of origin, while others have not. Participants in this study have all had experiences which transcend national boundaries; they have been exposed to different lifestyles and social milieus which redefine how they view themselves and others around them. The following are their responses to whether or not they have ever visited their parents' country of origin.

Yeah, I've been once for two months; best experience of my life... I learned where I came from, who I descended from...It's cool to know that I have a personal history that I can trace back and I can follow and I can learn and understand (Vergil).

Yeah for sure, visited many times, when I was a kid and then when I was around 10 we moved there to take care of my grandmother, she was sick. So we lived there, I went a boarding school there and essentially did 3 years of school in Ghana... the biggest sort of culture shock for me was school; we had to wear uniforms, and in terms of discipline, the teachers were allowed to discipline you with a cane so being the Canadian sometimes I got less of it, often times I got more (Phineas).

I was born in Calgary to Ghanaian parents; my dad was there for his PhD and then when he graduated, we actually moved to Ghana...came back here when I was like 17 and I've been going back and forth ever since but I live in Toronto (Togbe).

Yes, it's a huge culture shock. I just went [to Kenya] last summer and I hadn't been there for like 6 years before that. It makes me grateful for thing I have here because things there are a lot [more] difficult; when I go visit my grandparents, my mom's family, they live in the countryside so they don't have a real bathroom, you have to use the bathroom in a hut and they don't have electricity so they use the moon and candles at night (Jessica).

My parents are both from the Congo; they emigrated from the Congo to France. I have never been to the Congo and that's heartbreaking. My parents were both thinking 'yeah, we're going to make some money in France and study and then we'll go back' but the situation just got worse and worse in the Congo in the meantime...I guess even they became kind of foreigners in their own country because Congo changed so much (Irene).

I was born in London Ontario. My parents came from Somalia, they were economic immigrants ...I have never been, but I've spent time in Nairobi, Kenya for a couple of years, I've spent time in Geneva, in Switzerland, I've spent time in Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, I've spent time in Abu Dhabi, in the UAE because of my father's work (Obinga).

As a result of growing up in a Western society, some participants experienced culture shock upon arrival to their parents' country of origin; the romanticized idea of the motherland came face to face with the concrete reality of what life is really like back home. After spending time in the countryside with her grandparents, Jessica's experience gave her an appreciation for things she has taken for granted throughout her life.

While Irene and Obinga have never visited their parents' country of origin due to ongoing civil war, they have been exposed to other nationalities which have inevitably shaped and challenged their worldview. A transnational life does not only cross over boundaries created by nation-states, it is an expression of a heterogeneous global identity connecting norms, values and ideologies without attaching them to a specific geographical location.

Inter-generational Tensions

African parents are not always on the same wavelength as their children; exerting their traditional customary practices in a North American setting is often the trigger point for tension. Certainly they were raised in different times, under a different social context. They may not always relate to their children but they want the best for them- yet sometimes, their good intentions are lost in translation. To gain further insight into inter-generational dynamics, participants were asked if there was a topic they often did not agree on with their parents.

...my dad was a gifted soccer player but he never saw that as a way of making money or raising a family in his time because that's not what he was told. That's not the mold that you go by- you have to go to school, go to University and do this, do this. So when I was younger I talked to my dad about doing professional sports and he would never push or he would say that's not worth...they lack open mindedness because everything is so closed off (Vergil).

When I was younger, things such as what you're taking for lunch; so they would give us like Ghanaian food to take for lunch and it smells different, and there's big slabs of like goat right and the rest of the kids had peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, fruit roll-ups you know all these things (Phineas).

I wanted to be an artist...my dad was like 'no, you've got to do Economics, I want you to go to London School of Economics, then you'll come back and you'll work in the government.' So I actually had to go to university and study Political Science for my dad because I always knew I wanted to get into Art; I knew I wanted to be a film maker but I couldn't right off the bat I had to please my parents for my undergrad...I graduated from university then I got an opportunity to go to Vancouver Film School and do what I wanted to do (Togbe).

One I can really remember is my brother getting his ears pierced. My dad said 'this is not in our culture, take it out!' He's like 'dad, we're not in Kenya, everybody has an ear piercing, and it's not that serious' (Jessica).

Both of my parents are really into our family lineage and our family history and the culture...I hated when I was child because every weekend my mom and dad would make us sit and we had to learn all the names, the parents, the grandparents, the great-great parents, who did what and who came when and all of that...a lot of our history came from oral tradition so my parents had us know and repeat the family stories. So even though I've never been there, I know so many things from there (Irene).

I'll say the values that were instilled by my parents from early on, I wasn't the most perfect kid growing up, but they worked with me, they always kept me within arms' reach. I always had great respect for my parents and once you have that, you really feel like you ought to do the right thing (Obinga).

My parents were for sure stricter on grades and behaviour. I always had to be top of the line student, even though I wasn't- I got my share of beatings (laughs). Behaviour wise; I couldn't act like my friends; I couldn't talk in a slang, go to parties, dress like how they dressed... but I didn't understand it at first growing up. I always had to have a strong mind state and know exactly what I was doing, where I was going- just be in check, you know (Mack).

The concept of having a diary is completely foreign, the idea of having a diary that you can't access and privacy- that wasn't really understood; my parents didn't see a problem with reading your diary (Susu).

Immigrant parents put an added emphasis on the education of their children because they know how much more difficult it is for visible minorities to climb the social ladder of upward mobility. A number of the participants' parents refused to entertain notions of a creative career path in either in sports or fine arts, because they did not see it as a worthwhile or realistic pursuit. Other areas of contention centered on behavioral norms they wanted their children to uphold for fear that they will adopt a lax conduct and misrepresent their cultural heritage, as expressed by Jessica and Mack.

Even at an early stage in their lives, several participants recall subtle choices their parents made which clashed with their surroundings. As a child, Irene had a hard time understanding why she had to memorize her family lineage, Phineas did not like the fact that his lunch was different compared to other kids and Susu was bothered by the fact that her parents did not respect her privacy. African parents of the second generation also have their own struggles; in addition to navigating through the challenging process of integration in their receiving country, they are learning, experimenting and adjusting parenting styles to raise their children- born in different times, in a different land.

Personal Experiences

Identity is refined through personal experiences. Positive reinforcement and validation build confidence whereas criticism and any form of abuse rob an individual of their worth. To avoid being singled out, individuals often hide behind many facades permitting them to blend into the crowd. A person's race and ethnicity however cannot be disguised; it is at the forefront of their identity. As a result of this, self-perception is paramount to character development. Participants were asked if they have ever experienced discrimination. The following are their responses.

You don't get segregated against because you're second generation African in Canada, you get segregated against 'cause you're Black. The skin color does well more than any of those other things can ever do...as soon as you learn your history, all those things that people would tease you about, like your name and not understand, you're ok with it because you like it- and if you like you, then who cares what people have to say? (Vergil).

It's just the love of Hip Hop, sometimes I say Hip Hop is my religion; if I ever get a Wikipedia page, Hip Hop would be listed as my religion because when I was in Ghana, that was the only thing that connected me back to North America... coming back again [to Canada], I was identified as African, in Ghana I was identified as American, but then I rode with it. Like when I was in film school I was 'the African dude'; I had dreadlocks, with my beads and I can play the djembe- at film school I would go for drum circle- I would be the 'it guy for the djembe', the 'token Black guy' (laughs). I got to a point where I stopped fighting it and just started to embrace it. Then I recently went back to Ghana and it was a totally different experience, I embraced my Canadian side and I didn't feel so alienated anymore. I think it's when you embrace what you are that you stop feeling alienated, just accept who you are (Togbe).

Oh yeah, especially in high school, people just stereotyped me as 'the Black girl: loud and obnoxious' but then when you get to know me, I'm actually not like that, I'm really quiet (Jessica).

It was really hard, it was horrible. My parents have memories of me coming back from school and saying "I don't want to be Black- I want to be French and White and I wanted to have blue eyes and long blond hair". I didn't like that I was the only Black girl at school...I got bullied a lot, especially in kindergarten...I was always playing by myself because the other children didn't want to play with me because I was Black so they would call me the n-word every day, they would spit on me, they would beat me, they would do everything they could because I was like the 'scapegoat' (Irene).

But me myself, I have never felt so discriminated that I would hide my own background. I'd rather stand out of the crowd than be the same. I was always proud to be different; more looks, more questions, more everything. For example, there was one time in high school I showed up to school in a dashiki- which is a type of African clothing that men wear- and it just caught everybody's eye and they were just so intrigued by the fashion; it's different than your American Eagle or your Aeropostale with Levi's jeans and Vans (Mack).

I grew up in the west end of the city in the Keele and Eglinton Area which is what they call now 'a priority neighbourhood', which is another way of saying a high risk neighbourhood or a stigmatized neighbourhood...so we grew up there in what I would say a working class background, my parents had very limited skills, English was a second

language, all of the barriers you could think of in terms of racism, low-income and a lot social problems in the area [we lived in]... I actually taught my mom how to read and write English when I was young; helping her with her homework and usually it's the other way around, right? So that was just part of my experience (Susu).

The diverse lived experiences of the second generation portray a depth of meanings saturated in racial stereotypes, prejudices, bullying- but also character, confidence and courage. Togbe mentions how he was perceived as 'the African dude' while attending Vancouver Film School and accentuated the clichés by playing the part and because he ultimately embraced both his African and Canadian identities, these experiences did not affect him in a negative way. Jessica recalls how fellow high school students would automatically presume she is 'loud and obnoxious' because she is a Black girl, while in actuality, she has a quiet personality. Irene defines her childhood experiences as horrible: being the only Black girl at her kindergarten- she got severely bullied by the other children to the point of disliking the way she looked and wishing she were White. Scarring experiences can cause long-term damages to one's self-image if left unresolved.

Vergil is conscious of the role race plays in being segregated, but after feeling empowered by the knowledge of his ancestral history; he is no longer bothered by what naysayers have to say. Mack exudes self-assurance as he purposefully sets himself apart from his setting by showcasing elements of his African heritage; being different is something he takes pride in as he believes it gives him a certain advantage. Susu comes from a working class background, growing up, she witnessed her parents go through many challenges accentuated by their limited skills. Her experiences include an exceptional case of role reversal whereby she taught her mother to read and write. Incidents of discrimination can be demeaning and humiliating, but finding the strength within one's spirit to carry on with dignity and self-love is a restorative process.

Defining Moments

There are moments in life that change us; they shift our perspective, ignite a spark within us and never leave us the same again. Throughout a person's life, these defining stages are few and far between. Participants were asked how their identity has evolved over the years and what has most influenced them. Three responses are presented to illustrate the intensity of such moments in their respective lives.

Then I took an African history course and I just started falling in love with the history 'cause I just wanted to know more. Because I feel like, the Western point of view is so (pause) here's what happens: winners write the history. So that's why certain history is written by Romans, certain history is written by the English, they're going to make themselves look great because they get to write the book- fair enough that's the way the world works- but when you actually can read the history that isn't biased and you read the actual interpretation, why isn't that history the one celebrated?... Wouldn't it mean more to Black people in general to know: you've descended from Kings? You guys had universities; people used to come and travel to Timbuktu to study and they make it sound like you're just illiterate people walking through the jungle... making Black people feel like we were nothing and right now we're trying to catch up. No. We were something; there were Black Romans, there were Black knights, there were Black cowboys- none of these things are said! We're not coming from the ground; Black history didn't start 200 years ago (Vergil).

As a child I just wanted to be White; I felt like it would be the key for me to be nice and accepted...as a teenager, I started questioning the media and the thing that got me changed was reading *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison; before that, all my universe was White, I didn't even know about African literature because for me it was Descartes, Baudelaire, Rimbaud... so when I borrowed that book, it totally changed my life. First off, because she was a Black woman writer and I was like "Wow! Wow, this woman is amazing!" and the level of writing...I fell in love with that book: it's about this little girl who's Black and she doesn't want to be Black, she wants to have blue eyes, she's bullied by everybody because she's dark skin and people are like 'you're ugly and you're nothing' and she's sexually abused...so I could totally relate. After that I realized I can put Black characters in whatever I was writing... (Irene).

Going to Law school and seeing a whole different world changed my perspective. I later joined a very large Law firm downtown and it must be almost 90% White and then I got an award from the firm and in their bio, they characterized me 'refugee turned lawyer' kind of thing. That was when I really realized I have a blue-collar background and not everybody does- that's when it hit home (Susu).

Taking an African history course was a highlight for Vergil. Discovering the obliterated history of Blacks spanning over thousands of years was thrilling, thought provoking and enlightening- making him even more resentful of the distorted mainstream portrayal of Blacks. After reading *The Bluest Eye*, Irene felt that someone finally understood her. The main character in the story mirrored her life and she was moved- this gave her the inspiration she needed to assert her own voice. In law school, Susu was exposed to a different worldview. As she started her career as a lawyer, she became cognizant of the outside gaze of her predominantly White workplace setting. She then came face to face with the stark realization that not everyone had the same upbringing as she did. Defining moments in each of these three stories served as a centrepiece in grounding the participants' identity.

One Word to Define Myself

Words have power to cripple or restore, weaken or strengthen, infuse venom or passion into one's spirit. The word a person uses to define themselves speaks volumes on their perception of self and others. As a final question, participants were asked to choose one word which defines them and explain why they chose it.

If I had to choose one word to define myself, it'd be 'hungry'. I'm hungry to make an imprint on the world. I'm hungry to make a change and I just hope to take what I was given and make it better (Vergil).

I think 'human', I mean I'm really interested in the human condition, it's something that I think about a lot, probably too much for my own good, but it definitely is something that I enjoy focusing on (Phineas).

'Water'; water 'cause water takes the shape of any vessel that it's put in. Water can erode everyone's higher wall but it's [also] soft...you know about water, I don't have to explain (laughs). I call myself water because in Ghana I'm not accepted, here I'm not accepted but I have to be water and just be able to fit in everywhere (Togbe).

I would say I'm 'open-minded' because I'm open to people's opinions, even if I don't like them, I would hear you out and then I'll just say what I feel. I'm open to people's cultures; I don't like to discriminate... I have friends from almost every race (Jessica).

I would say: 'artist' because at the end of the day that's what I am and that's something that I've fought for so many years... My parents wanted me to be a lawyer or a doctor; in the Congo being an artist is frowned upon, especially for a woman...in Toronto everybody is an artist (laughs) (Irene).

'Learning'... it's not enough to say: "I've learnt everything that I need to know" ...learning can also be disappointing because once you learn about something you had no [previous] knowledge of, it disappoints because it's not always good news (Obinga).

One word to describe myself would be 'searching' because I am still searching for everything I will receive...I'm still searching for the things that I deserve, that I want, that I need, that I will get. I'm still searching for my cultural heritage (Mack).

I can't think of one word, but I would say: 'a go-getter'. If there's something I want, I have to have it; whatever it be, find a way, figure it out and just make it happen (Susu).

The participants' choices of words reveal an overall sense of drive, compassion, adaptability, creativity and a desire to explore. These attributes are reoccurring throughout their interviews; they paint a micro collective image that speaks to the complex and intriguing phenomenon of second generation African Canadians.

Message to Youth

At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they had any final thoughts they wanted to leave behind for fellow second generation African Canadians going through a tumultuous identity formation process. Here are some highlights from their responses.

Sometimes the biggest roadblock for us is ourselves (Vergil).

Understand that there's a war going on; a war for ideas, a war for morale, a war between good and evil. It was a few hundred years ago that we were considered 'not human'. It was just a little while ago that we weren't able to drink from the same fountains as White people... there is injustice towards Africans all over all the time but there's also a love

and a beauty and a joy that is found from the Continent and people in the diaspora...there is something so beautifully genuine in the spirit of being African that I think all human beings need to return to. I mean we're all African at the end of the day, just different shades of it and generations' traveled- but the war is fought with love, the war is fought with peace, the war is fought with understanding and knowledge.... we can move in-between cultures, we can speak a hip-hop dialect but also broken English from back home, we can eat the fruit roll-up and the fufu and soup...we live in this dichotomised world and we are the first people from our families to have the opportunity to dance between cultures and to really get the best of both cultures and I think true peace in the world comes from people like that who are able to see both sides of the coin and be able to dance along the borders that were made- not by us (Phineas).

Embrace yourself, stop trying to look for yourself outside yourself...culture is your operating system, you choose your operating system (Togbe).

I would just say there's going to be times when you just really don't know who you are or there are times when you just don't want to identify with your African culture...when you get a personal experience of the place you're from, you're going to realize that your culture is pretty cool (Jessica).

It's more important what you think about yourself because someone else is always going to project their own insecurities on you (Irene).

Stay in touch with your roots, your parents' roots, you can appreciate both the Canadian culture and your ties to Africa- do not let that go, do not let go of your African languages and be proud of your heritage, be proud of being African, being Black (Obinga).

I would tell them, don't ever be afraid of your culture or your background. Don't ever be ashamed because it's a privilege to be the best of both worlds. You should always search into both histories because for sure in classrooms in high school they teach you about Canadian history but they will never teach you about African history- that is up to you to find. So I would strongly recommend also for searching: spiritual searching, intellectual searching, at the end of the day- searching (Mack).

I would say: own your identity, own what you have and just be proud of your individual story because no one else has it; no one else will have that blueprint, only you (Susu).

Essence

“We all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience” (Hall, 1996, p.447). Second generation African Canadians have forged hybrid

identities as a result of living in-between two worlds. They embody both African and Canadian cultural markers though there is often a clash when both meet. Their transnational lives have endowed them with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with a variety of different cultures and adopt practices which transcend geographical boundaries. Growing up in a Western culture to African parents often means they will not always agree on certain topics, resulting in episodes of inter-generational conflict. Personal experiences have shaped how they view themselves; some have been troubling and detrimental to their self-esteem, others were uplifting and served to solidify their character. Defining moments impacted them for the better and instilled a renewed certitude within them. At last, their choice of self-defining words radiates with boldness and inner strength.

The way one sees things, the places where one has lived and the experiences one has undergone tell stories of one's identity. The life experiences of these African Canadian young adults are saturated with meaning. Their stories began long before they were born- when their parents left their ancestral land; wanting a better life for their children, a brighter future. For them, this is the only place that has ever felt anything close to home. They did not always have the easiest life growing up, at times they felt like strangers both inside and outside their households'- they may have been ridiculed, taunted and sidelined but they endured, hoping to one day express the beauty others failed to see. The common bond that holds them together in this study is their ambitious pursuits, their candid personalities, their acquired resilience and of course their love for both Africa and Canada.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the topic of identity and its many facets in the lives of second generation African-Canadian young adults. The findings reinforce the information in the literature by demonstrating the dynamics of race and identity; the participants' personal experiences influenced how they perceived themselves and interacted with others. Contrary to studies described in the literature however, this study shows that the second generation does in fact have an interest in their African heritage; this is evident by their knowledge and practice of traditional cultural norms or visits to their parents' county of origin. Participants also identified with their Canadian culture although they were not oblivious to the many forms of discrimination used to make them feel like outsiders at times.

Certain participants of this second generation study exhibit signs of Du Bois' double consciousness; in their ancestral land they are regarded as Westerners, in Canada they are regarded as Africans. They embrace these two separate, conflicting identities as being who they are. Bhabha's notion of the third space is depicted in the participants' creation of a hybrid identity which helps them to articulate influences of both cultures. The concept of "displacement of the present" (Ladha, 2005, p.39) points to differences within two spaces; manifested in inter-generational tensions between this group and their first generation parents. The second generation's inability to fully integrate in various aspects of Canadian society such as the workforce supports Portes and Zhou's segmented assimilation model. They became increasingly aware of the role race played in demarcating their perpetual difference in society.

Looking forward, further research can expand on several areas of this topic which were not covered in this paper such as: does social class influence personal identity? What roles do

social circles play in the formation of identity? Does the media's construction of 'Blackness' influence the second-generations' self-perception? Has the second generation shown signs of upward social mobility in late adulthood? What are some differences/similarities between second-generation Africans in North America and those in Europe? In terms of policy implementation, future research can include a public opinion survey on issues which are not adequately addressed in regards to this demographic (ie., their integration in schools, the labour market, their political engagement etc.). This research used a small sample size to explore multiple themes, in the future; it would be interesting to use a bigger sample size which covers a wider range of the African Continent and see if there are any variations in the outcome.

This study has made a modest contribution to a new and growing area of research by focusing specifically on identity formation from the perspective of second generation African-Canadian young adults. The findings have answered a number of preliminary questions raised in this research; the quest to define their identity is not always a conscious decision, sometimes their two worlds collide unexpectedly, other times, they were fully aware of their choice to incorporate aspects of both cultures. Although their experiences vary depending on the context, their acquired values have no distinctive boundaries- they live transnational lives. Throughout the years, their sense of identity has evolved; defined less by how others view them, but rather how they view themselves. They have found a voice of their own in the midst of the traffic; their identity is not their *weakness*, it is their *strength*. Yes, they are proud to be the children of the landed; born of the land.

Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire & Interview Questions

Children of the land or the landed?

Identity & second generation African-Canadians young adults

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Pseudonym _____
2. Age _____
3. Gender M F
4. Born in Canada Yes No
5. Current city of residence _____
6. Where did your parent (s) immigrate from?
Parent 1 _____ Parent 2 _____

Interview Questions on Identity

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your background?
2. Have you ever visited your parent(s) country of origin? If yes, what was the experience like? If no, do you plan to go/have interest in visiting, etc.
3. What do you most identify with in your parents' culture (if anything)?
4. Is there a topic you often don't agree on with your parents?
5. In what ways do you most identify with the Canadian culture?
6. As a second generation African-Canadian, which culture would you say was the dominant one in your household growing up? (Canadian or *country specific or other).
How has it impacted your identity?

7. What have been your experiences in the workplace? At your school?
8. Have you ever experienced discrimination? If yes, explain how.
9. Has your sense of identity evolved over the years? If yes, what has most influenced you?
If no, why not?
10. In you could choose one word to define yourself, what would it be and why?

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer



Ryerson University- Master's degree in: Immigration and Settlement Studies

Participants needed for a Research Project

Are you a second generation African-Canadian? Which culture do you most identity with? What does identity mean to you?

Purpose of Study: Understanding how second generation African-Canadians deal with personal identity in Toronto.

Your participation will involve an interview of about 1 hour in length.

Criteria: between 18-30 years old, male or female, must be born in Canada and have at least 1 parent born in Africa.

For more information, please contact Sandra at:

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