Australasian Review of African Studies, 2018, 39(2), 19-47
http://afsaap.org.au/ARAS/2018-volume-39/
https://doi.org/10.22160/22035184/ARAS-2018-39-2/19-47

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLES

'*It still matters*': The role of skin colour in the everyday life and realities of black African migrants and refugees in Australia

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Abstract

This article looks at the everyday life and realities of some of Australia's most recent immigrant communities, by shedding light on the experiences of black Africans in Queensland. Particularly, this article examines the experiences of black African migrants and refugees living in South East Queensland, to better understand how race, skin colour and immigration status interact to shape their everyday lives and social location in Australia. Data were collected from 30 participants using qualitative research methods. The theoretical approach employed synthesises concepts from identity, blackness, race and racism, whiteness and critical race theory. The subjective experiences of the participants interviewed indicate that skin colour still matters in determining life chances for black Africans in Australia. While the empirical focus is specific to Australia, this article contributes to the research literature in valuable ways, both from a theoretical perspective and in terms of a comparative contextualisation of racism.

Introduction

Queensland, the third most populous state in Australia, is home to many migrants and refugees. In more recent years, Queensland has accepted many black African migrants and refugees. Many of these Africans have come to build new lives, change their families' circumstances and give new hope to their dreams (Jakubowicz, 2010; Udah, 2018). These African settler arrivals, though a very diverse group, add an important chapter to the history of immigration in Australia broadly and Queensland specifically. This article

looks at the everyday life and realities of black Africans living in South East Queensland (SEQ). In this article, we use the term 'black' specifically to refer to people of African heritage who are socially constructed or racialised as black in Australia. Though of diverse historical, sociocultural and political backgrounds, they share a similar phenotypical appearance— notably their dark skin—and have connections with continental Africa (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017). Thus, this article reflects not only an attempt to understand and interrogate their subjective experiences, but also a commitment to bringing about social change. This article focuses on the challenging issue of racism and skin colour (blackness) as an important, if not the most central, factor for consideration in assessing their settlement experiences, as measured by the level of satisfaction and comfort black Africans feel living in Queensland.[1] This is because racial discrimination can make it more difficult for immigrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to be accepted in Australia (Markus, 2016; Ndhlovu, 2013; Udah, 2018). For black Africans in SEQ, their visible difference—based on physical appearance, skin colour and cultural attributes—can complicate their social acceptance (Ndhlovu, 2013). Thus, critical to understanding the black African experience in SEQ is an elicitation of ways in which their visibility (in terms of difference from the dominant white Australians) interacts with other societal factors to marginalise, exclude and disadvantage them. Before proceeding, we provide a brief historical context of African presence in, and immigration to, Australia.

African presence in, and immigration to, Australia

While the African presence in the early days of the making of modern Australia seems to be largely ignored by mainstream historians, Pybus (2006) and Stratton (2006) have argued that Australia has a 'black' African history which dates to the late 18th century. Pybus (2006) indicated that the First Fleet that landed in Botany Bay on 26 January 1788 carried eleven convicts of black African descent who were all sentenced in England for crimes that would, today, be considered petty misdemeanours. As Pybus explained, between 1788 and the middle of the 19th century, almost every convict ship carried people of African descent to New South Wales and Van Diemen's

[1] The Australian Government considers successful immigrant settlement as integral to the achievement of a society which values Australian citizenship and social cohesion. While government agencies define successful settlement outcomes in terms of systemic outcomes (social participation, economic wellbeing, level of independence, and personal wellbeing), most migrants and refugees define settlement in terms of life outcomes such as personal happiness and community connectedness (Australian Survey Research, 2011).

Land (present-day Tasmania). For example, the legendary bushranger 'black Caesar'—as he was referred to by his contemporaries in the new colony—arrived on the First Fleet. He was a runaway African slave known for his leadership and survival skills. He was called black Caesar because he was a black man and had only one name: Caesar, a slave name (Pybus, 2006). Black Africans also participated in the Eureka rebellion of 1854 in Ballarat, Victoria—an uprising against British colonial exploitation and the oppression of the goldfield's poor workers, known as 'diggers' (Udo-Ekpo, 1999). However, it could be that the construction of Australia's convict history as 'white' has led to an almost complete erasure of these black African convicts in Australian history books, stories, film and television. This erasure may not be due to the small number of black African convicts on the First Fleet, but rather due to Australia's explicit aim to create a white utopia (Stratton, 2006; Novak, 2015). In an important sense, when Australia became a federation (nation) it wanted to be 'White Australia', as evidenced by the promulgation of the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 (the White Australia policy). As Stratton (2006) explained:

> The Immigration Restriction Act, passed immediately after Australian federation in 1901, attempted precisely this, that is, to create a clear boundary round Australia— a utopian channel, we could say — across which non-white people could not travel to reside permanently in the confined space of the new Australian state. (p. 672)

The Immigration Restriction Act 1901 (in force until 1973) was an explicitly racist and discriminatory policy designed to keep Australia 'white', 'British', and 'homogenous' (Castles, Vasta, & Ozkul, 2014). It effectively restricted people of colour from living in and immigrating to Australia. Its legacy has (and continues to have) significant implications, not only for the reluctance to meaningfully acknowledge the black presence in Australia's early settlement, but also for the reception of visibly and culturally different immigrants to modern Australia. One of the factors underpinning the Immigration Restriction Act 1901/White Australia policy was fear that culturally different groups would pollute the society and never assimilate into an Australian way of life, defined as Anglo-Celtic, Christian and white (Jakubowicz, 1985). It privileged whiteness, favoured white immigration to Australia, pushed Indigenous Australians[2] to the edge of economic, cultural, political and social extinction (Warry, 2007) and barred non-white people

[2] Indigenous Australians were only recognised and counted as Australian citizens after the federal referendum of 27 May 1967.

from residing permanently in Australia (though some non-whites did manage to gain entry to Australia on a short-term basis and under strictly defined conditions).

After World War II, during the height of European immigration[3] to Queensland, black African immigration to Australia was restricted by the 1901 act. Only white South Africans and Egyptians of Greek, Italian and/or Maltese origin came from the African continent to Australia (Jupp, 2002; Hugo, 2009). From the mid-1960s/early 1970s, under the Special Commonwealth African Assistance Plan, Australia accepted some African students (Udo-Ekpo, 1999). The introduction of a non-discriminatory immigration policy by the Whitlam government, saw the final eradication of the White Australia policy in 1973 and paved the way for increased migration by black Africans. Black African migration to Australia reached a peak between 1996 and 2005 with the entrance of African refugees and displaced persons from the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia), Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda accepted by Australia on humanitarian grounds (Markus, 2016). The Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 gave Australia positive media exposure in Africa. It showcased Australia as a "peaceful", "safe", and "well-governed" country with a "good" economy (Louw, Rivenburgh, Loo, & Mersham, 2001, p. 125) and exerted a considerable pull effect on black Africans immigrating to Australia. Since then, there has been a significant and steady increase in arrivals of black Africans to Queensland. To illustrate, while the 1986 census noted 3,522 Africans living in Queensland, this number had risen to 16,902 by the 1996 census. Between 1996 and 2016, the number of sub-Saharan Africans (white South Africans and Zimbabweans included) increased to 67,274[4,] while the number of North Africans increased to 7,117[5]

[3] In the post-1945 period, to fill immigration targets driven by the pragmatic 'populate or perish' slogan, the Australian government took in an almost equal number of refugees and displaced persons from Eastern and Southern Europe. These immigrants were considered non-white and non-British. As the first non-British immigrant group to arrive in Australia in large numbers, they were subjected to racism and suffered economic deprivation (Collins, 2003).

[4] The problem with these statistics however is that white Africans, especially white South Africans and Zimbabweans, are included in this number. In the 2016 census, there were over 23,436 white South Africans and 5,295 white Zimbabweans in Queensland (ABS, 2017).

[5] The ABS includes Sudan and South Sudan within North Africa. Consistent with the 2006 and 2011 censuses, the Sudanese account for over half (3,795) of all North Africans. The 2016 census records 2,370 people born in Sudan and 1,426 born in South Sudan living in Queensland.

(Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017). Although still a small minority group, they account for an increasing proportion of Queensland's total population. Though many of these African migrants and refugees play a role as Australian citizens and productive members of society (Jakubowicz, 2010), they also continue to experience discrimination and racism in everyday life.[6] In what follows, we discuss the theoretical and conceptual framework that we drew on to think about and write up the data collected for the study.

Conceptual framework: Identity, race and racialisation

Identity is an important and sensitive issue for many immigrants' sense of citizenship and belonging. Tabar, Noble and Poynting (2010, cited in Collins, Reid, Fabiansson, & Healey, 2011) have argued that identities are not simply symbolic entities through which we represent ourselves and others. For them, identity embodies practices of identification and adaptation and deploys particular kinds of resources (as shaped by an individual's classed, gendered and racialised histories) through which individuals situate and position themselves in diverse social domains.

For this article, it is useful to examine identity construction, especially in both its avowed and ascribed dimensions. While avowed identity is subjectively enacted by people's sense and knowledge of their membership in the social group in which they feel comfortable, affiliated and at ease, ascribed identity is assigned by others who seek to label individuals as members of a given group based on their imagined or presumed phenotypic appearance, physical characteristics, cultural traits (e.g., skin colour,

[6] Some elected Australian politicians have continued to problematise and blame black Africans, particularly African youth, for street crimes in Queensland (Duncan, 2017) and Victoria (Hunter & Preiss, 2018). Speaking on the issue, the Home Affairs Minister, Peter Dutton, told Sydney radio 2GB that "people are scared to go out to restaurants at night time because they are followed home by these groups and are worried about home invasions and cars being stolen…We just need to call it for what it is. Of course, it is African gang violence… We need to weed out the people, who have done the wrong thing, deport them where we can, but where they are Australian citizens; we need to deal with them according to the law" (Hunter & Preiss, 2018). While there are no statistics to support Dutton's claims, the then-Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull also weighed in on so-called African gang violence. Not only are politicians using racial categories to depict black Africans as violent, disruptive members of the community, the media and police also often refer to race when reporting crimes. Referring to race not only perpetuates negative stereotypes of black Africans, but also alienates and targets black African communities in Australia. In this way, focusing on race can serve as a platform for reproducing and enhancing both every day and systemic racism (Essed, 1991; Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2015).

language, name, dress, religion) or other stereotypical associations (Collier, 1997; Antony, 2016). Both identities are, of course, important for understanding intercultural communication, which takes place when individuals influenced by different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in everyday interactions (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Since social interactions are *ipso facto* relations of power, identity construction becomes a matter of social context and must be situated historically (Castells, 1997).

Our understanding of the concept of identity comes from the work of Anthony Appiah, who has spoken of identity in terms of identification—a process through which individuals shape their lives by reference to the labels used to identify them in public discourse—and individuality—pursued through the exercise of one's autonomy (Appiah, 2005). Appiah (2005) suggested that "[d]eveloping the capacity for autonomy is necessary for human well-being" (p. 6) because it means, among other things, choosing for oneself instead of merely being shaped by the constraints of political or social mores. What is important about Appiah's thinking here is not simply his conceptualisation of identity in terms of individuality and identification, but also that his argument helps to untangle the notion of identity as it pertains to race, gender, class and immigrant status. While Appiah stressed the importance of racial and other ascriptions for identity formation, he avoided any form of determinism (Kerner, 2007). Appiah (2005) argued that freedom matters because without it people cannot develop the individuality that is an essential element of human good.

Appiah also distinguished between two dimensions of identity: personal and collective. Whereas personal identities are often formed by defining oneself in relation to other persons, collective identities reflect how individuals and groups internalise established social categories, such as cultural, ethnic, gender and class identities (Appiah, 2005; Alabay & Çalikoğlu, 2013). For Appiah (2005), the collective dimensions of someone's identity refer to the social categories they identify with and are identified with by others, for example: men, women; straights, gays; Catholics, Protestants; but also blacks, whites, teachers, citizens, migrants, refugees. These social categories or kinds of person are brought into being by the creation of labels that are often organised around a set of stereotypes (which may be true or false). According to Appiah (2005), collective identities have scripts that operate to mould someone's identification. Hence, he suggested that people cannot make their lives as individuals beyond identity, but always as gendered and racialised subjects with a particular colour, sexuality and nationality. The labels created by the collective dimensions of individuals' identities play a role in shaping the way individuals make decisions about

how to conduct a life. Thus, through identification, Africans racialised as black in white Australia are more likely to shape their lives in accordance with their thoughts as to whether something is an appropriate aim or way of acting for black Africans and those living black.

Appiah's conceptualisation of identity is relevant to understanding the identity ascribed by skin colour. As Dei (1999, cited in Gismondi, 1999) explained, there is a permanence to the identity of skin colour because, throughout history, skin colour has been a permanent and conspicuous marker of distinction, used for establishing difference and assigning racial belonging. The identity of skin colour, blackness to be precise, is real for those racialised as black in white-dominated spaces. People still use the marker of skin colour to identify, define, construct and distinguish individuals for the purposes of discrimination, marginalisation, exclusion, disempowerment and disadvantage (Fanon, 2008; Yancy, 2008; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017). To understand the identity of skin colour and the signification of blackness in white contexts in relation to the lived experience of black Africans in Australia, it is necessary to conceptualise racial identity and racialised identity.

By racial identity, we refer to the notion of being black or white or Asian or Aboriginal. According to Dei (1999, cited in Gismondi, 1999), this is different from a black racialised identity, which is the political act of becoming black. A person's racial identity is often signified through their skin colour, which becomes a counterfactually specifiable information-bearing trait that can be used for inclusion or exclusion (Taylor, 2007). As Taylor (2007) indicated, classical racialism led people to believe that nature had sorted individuals into distinct and hierarchically ranked types, each with its own complement of physical, moral and mental traits. In this account, racism is defined as the belief that justifies the superiority of one race over another. From this belief stem theories of white supremacy, which underpin white domination and privilege (Mills, 2007), as codified in the legal, political, economic, and cultural systems through which whites control power and material resources, on the basis of conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement (Gillborn, 2005; Sullivan, 2006). In the field of critical whiteness studies, whiteness is a category of power and privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This privilege—white privilege—operates as an unseen, invisible, unmarked and even seemingly non-existent habit (Sullivan, 2006). For many critical race theorists, whiteness is a racialised identity and the absent centre against which others (non-whites) are perceived as inferior, marginal, undesirable, ersatz, uncivilised, ugly, deviant or points of deviation (Frankenberg, 1993; Ahmed, 2007; Yancy,

2008). Ahmed (2007) defined whiteness as an ongoing and unfinished history that orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they "take up" space and what they "can do" (p. 149).

As an effect of racialisation, whiteness is real, material and lived. By racialisation, we mean the set of historical practices, cultural norms and institutional arrangements that reflect and help to create and maintain race-based outcomes in society (Powell, 2012). According to Sithole (2016), blackness is created by whiteness because of what Fanoncalls the "constant comparison of what is at the centre of whiteness, as that which is supposed to live, and blackness, being dispensable to life" (p. 36). Blackness, as used here, is not merely about skin colour; it has become a social construct that is persistently distorted and conceived of in opposition to whiteness. As Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo (2017) have argued, blackness is "not only that which defines whiteness but is also inferiorised by it" (p. 1). According to Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo (2017), the black body in white spaces (such as Australia) is and always has been "constructed as a problematic difference to whiteness: an inferiority and an 'other'" (p. 1). From the perspective of whiteness, blacks are—contrary to the existentialist credo—an essence ('blackness') which precedes their existence (Yancy, 2008). Whites see the black body through the medium of historically structured forms of knowledge that regard it as inferior, evil or an object of suspicion to be avoided or disciplined (Yancy, 2008; Sithole, 2016). As Fanon (2008) observed, "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (pp. 82-83).

In this article, therefore, blackness as it pertains to black African migrants and refugees in Australia is "not limited to blackness as only a visible marker or blackness in relation to ancestry but also blackness as a socio-political relationship and political ontology" (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017, p. 2). In the white world, whiteness is superior and blackness inferior. Blackness is seen and constructed not only as the ontological other, but also as the very basis of lack and deficit, thus imposing a burden that those with black skin cannot escape (Fanon, 2008; Yancy, 2008; Sithole, 2016; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) can help to make sense of the complexity, interplay and intersections between race and skin colour (blackness) in the everyday realities and experiences of black subjects in Australia, where race and racialised preferences are core organising mechanisms within the socio-political and cultural structure (Stratton, 2006). CRT begins with these basic tenets: that racism is ordinary, natural, everyday and pervasive; that race is socially constructed; and that racism advances white privilege and advantage.

For CRT scholars, issues of race and racism in society must be challenged and minority people's voices must be recognised and valued (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Following CRT scholars, we recognise race and skin colour as central to black people's lives and, likewise, place the relationship between race, racism, skin colour and whiteness at the centre of our analysis. In the remainder of this article, we draw on ideas from these theories to explore and analyse the role skin colour (blackness) plays in the everyday life and realities of black Africans in SEQ.

Methodology

This study was conducted in SEQ[7], a region of Queensland where both skilled and unskilled job prospects are very high. The primary purpose of the study was to obtain a better understanding of the lived experiences of African immigrants in Queensland, Australia. Although the broad scope of the study was African immigrants, the main research focus was black African migrants and refugees in SEQ. First, black Africans were chosen because, while black Africans' experiences with racism in Australia are not new, they nevertheless remain neglected and under-reported in the literature (see Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017). Second, black African migrants and refugees were included to stratify the research population in ways that engage with the complexities of the African experience. While the inclusion of white (South) Africans in the sample could have created context for a comparative consideration of the similarities and differences in experiences, black Africans stand in stark contrast to white Africans, who have not only a different phenotype and genealogical roots but have also been traditionally welcomed into Australia.

Participants

The study's participants consisted of ten females and twenty males between the ages of 22 and 67. The remarkable feature of this group was the diversity of culture, religion, values, language, heritage and national background they represented.[8.] Seventeen of these participants came as

[7] There are various definitions used for SEQ, some including Toowoomba and some not. The Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (2013) includes parts of Toowoomba regional council in its definition of SEQ. However, the ABS (2012) does not include Toowoomba regional council. This study includes Toowoomba in the definition of SEQ.

[8] Participants came from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Liberia in West Africa; Uganda and Tanzania in East Africa; Rwanda and the DRC in Central Africa; Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan and South Sudan in Northeast Africa; and Zimbabwe and Botswana in

refugees through Australia's humanitarian program. Thirteen came as temporary migrants (six as students and seven as skilled migrants). Participants were selected because of their level of education and English proficiency, as well as their substantial knowledge of the topic. Most participants interviewed—both migrants and refugees—held a tertiary qualification. In addition, only participants who had lived in SEQ for three years or more were selected. All these criteria were considered important because it was plausible for new arrivals to feel that they were perceived and treated differently because they had lived in Australia for a shorter time, had poor language skills, and/or fewer years of education and skills to participate in the workforce, and educational and social activities. A majority of participants had acquired Australian citizenship and shared some similarities, notably their black skin colour. While most participants considered themselves black in terms of racial identity (the notion of being black), they were also engaged in the political act of becoming black (racialised identity) as a way to deal with the racism and other forms of marginalisation and exclusion they faced in Australia on the basis of their identity, skin colour, blackness or Africanness (Dei, 1999, cited in Gismondi,,, 1999).

Data collection and analysis

In-depth interviews were conducted over a four-month period, from April to July 2014. Interviews were face-to-face, semi-structured and carried out in the English language. Interviews were conducted by the first author—a black African immigrant to Australia who shares some important visible characteristics with the participants. Interviews lasted for not more than one hour, during which interviewees were encouraged to respond in detail to interview questions and provide specific examples from their own experiences. Interview questions centred around the theme of what has been described as "a set of characteristics" or "traits" that make black Africans distinct in the Australian social context (Colic-Peisker, 2009, p. 176). In other words, interview questions explored the role of a particular form of visibility—racialised black skin colour—on black Africans' lived experience, including their personal and socioeconomic well-being and sense of belonging. Participants were asked to talk about their own sense of identity and how they defined their personal and socioeconomic well-being in white majority Australia.

Most interviews took place in participants' homes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. A thematic approach was adopted to

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Southern Africa. The processes of immigration and settlement have created a transnational African identity among them (Udo-Ekpo, 1999).

analyse and interpret the textual interview data. The transcribed interview data were coded using NVivo 11 which helped to identify and produce a concise matrix of key emerging themes. During the coding, we returned often to the research questions and searched for keywords, buzzwords and metaphors to support our analysis and interpretation. Data memos were particularly helpful in the coding process to help note emerging ideas about codes and record thoughts during the coding process. Codes with similar ideas, meanings or purposes were merged to reflect emerging issues or themes. One of these themes involved the mediating effects of racialised skin and constructions of black identity on participants' everyday lives. Many participants said that their life chances were affected by their skin colour. For these participants, the racialised attributes attached to black skin and identity constituted considerable barriers and limitations. For this article, some case examples discussed within interviews are used to establish and make sense of the research findings.

Findings—participants' experiences

Skin colour has historically enabled the categorisation of Africans. Even in the early stages of contact between Europeans and Africans, skin colour shaped ideas of Africans as inferior—a discursive construction that still casts a shadow over black people (Fanon, 2008; Olusoga, 2015; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017). Many participants indicated that they experienced life at the boundaries of whiteness (see Sullivan, 2006; Ahmed, 2007) and suggested that negative constructions of black Africans in Australia have continued to impact and limit their advancement in different ways. For several participants, skin colour still mattered in their everyday lives. Participants suggested that skin colour was real and constituted a significant factor determining their identification, racialisation and life chances, that is, the opportunities for social advancement to which individuals and social groups have differential access (Sriprakash & Proctor, 2013). Some participants felt they had fewer opportunities and were treated differently on the grounds of skin colour. These participants defined their experiences through discourses of skin colour and used that to talk about and recount their 'disappointments', 'struggles', 'lack of participation', and 'isolation'.

Take Daniel's (pseudonyms have been used to protect interviewees' identities) story, for example. Daniel, from Zimbabwe, immigrated to Australia in 2008 as a skilled migrant. He believed that his skin colour was important in understanding and talking about his experience. He suggested that the stigmatisation of black Africans is still a big issue today, despite efforts made by successive Australian governments (with the introduction of

the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act) to recognise diversity and prohibit discrimination based on race or skin colour. When discussing the relevance of black skin, Daniel talked about the racist experiences of Aboriginal people in Australia. He stated, “when you look at the Aboriginal people and how they are treated and reported, you find that it [skin colour] still matters”. For Daniel, Indigenous Australians are still treated as inferior.

At the time of the interview, Daniel was feeling disappointed after being denied a senior position in his workplace. He believed the position was denied to him, not because of a lack of experience and skill, but because of his black identity and existing racialised discourses around blackness which positioned him as less competent. Daniel stressed that skin colour still matters in determining life chances for black Africans because some people in the workplace and in hiring positions hold a very low opinion of black African people and discursively position them as inferior, lazy, incompetent, and lacking in discipline and a strong work ethic. These discourses, although constantly challenged and contested, have a long history, and are still invoked by politicians to scape-goat or place blame on particular groups of people, as documented in the introductory section of this article.

In these discourses, blacks are not associated with goodness. Rather, blacks are constructed as a labouring class and represented as inferior, backwards, barbaric and deviant (see Ahmed, 2007; Yancy, 2008; Miller, 2015; Olusoga, 2015; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017). These discourses, which associate blackness with inferiority and equate whiteness with superiority, constitute a real problem and can play a crucial role in the oppression, marginalisation and exclusion of black Africans in contemporary Australia. This is because, as Dianna, one of the young female participants in this study, commented, “people still base their judgement on skin colour”. For this reason, Dianna suggested that negative stereotypes of blacks restrict many opportunities for black African people in Australia. Describing his experience of not being white, another participant, Damian, stated: “it takes a while to get into the system. You are not by default accepted. For you to be accepted, you have to prove it … It is discouraging when you get knocked back over and over again”.

In the Australian context, existing research has found that black Africans are constructed in opposition to whiteness and portrayed as unwanted migrants (Udo-Ekpo, 1999), a problem group (Windle, 2008), a non-desired other (Ndhlovu, 2013), and trauma infested (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017). For Windle (2008) and Ndhlovu (2013), the racialisation of black Africans within Australia’s media discourses is implicitly connected to the activation of race as an explanatory category, the negative stereotypical

discourses about Africa, and the history of racism in Australia. Thus, being black continues to have a deleterious impact on many black Africans living in Australia and other countries that privilege whiteness and construct blackness in contradiction to whiteness (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Fanon, 2008; Yancy, 2008; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017).

The effect of privileging whiteness, and constructing blackness negatively, is the institutionalisation of a normalised way of being. This can make black Africans feel bitter, despairing, uncomfortable, unaccepted, different and not belonging when they take up spaces orientated around whiteness (Ahmed, 2007). For many participants, skin colour (blackness) seemed to be the most salient characteristic around which stereotypes about them coalesced (Jablonski, 2012). For example, Loretta, a former school teacher from Nigeria, believed that racialised black skin colour "does affect what one gets in Australia". Loretta and her family immigrated to Australia in 2000, shortly after the Sydney Olympics, as skilled migrants. Since arriving in Australia, Loretta and her husband have told their children they must always work hard if they wish to succeed in the white world, because of their skin colour. In her own words: "We have always told our children that you need to work hard because with your colour, you stand out more … There are people that still have that notion that blacks are inferior".

There is a suggestion in Loretta's extract that racialised discourses about black skin colour can influence directly, not just indirectly, how black Africans define themselves through the discursive labels applied to blacks. As Appiah (2005) pointed out, "[o]nce labels are applied to people, ideas about people who fit the label come to have social and psychological effects … [i]n particular, these ideas shape the ways people conceive of themselves" (p. 66). Since black Africans often internalise messages about their alleged incompetence, insignificance and inferiority (Sullivan, 2006), it is unsurprising that Loretta suggested that racialised black skin and identity could be sources of disadvantage and discrimination for her, her children and her community. For this reason, she stressed the importance of working hard to her children so that they might negotiate/navigate the problem of institutionalised and everyday racism which discursively categorises and constructs people with 'black skin' as negative and inferior. Loretta's concerns resonate with Appiah's (2005) contention that people never make their lives as individuals beyond identities, but always as gendered and racialised subjects.

Given their racialised blackness, it is more likely that, as black Africans in Australia pursue their dreams and seek upward mobility, many will find that they must always negotiate the complex terrain of race and racialised

black skin and identity as well as confront prejudice, stereotype and discrimination (Udah, 2018). For example, some participants believed that their life chances were slowed down by being black. These participants suggested that they had been denied opportunities for advancement and singled out for discrimination and differential treatment because of their blackness. For one participant, Kevin, to be black in Australia meant to work twice as hard and to struggle to survive. According to Kevin:

> It means to me that you have to work twice as hard. There is this saying that a black man will run for what a white man will walk to. For me as an African to realise my dream here, I believe I should work twice as hard.

When asked to explain what he meant, Kevin stated:

> What they think of us is completely what we are not. You know when you have people think of you as inferior; people think of you as incapable before you even speak, that is a challenge in itself. You have to try and prove otherwise. I think a black man in this country means struggle, continue to struggle.

There is no denying that one's sense of identity, both internalised and externally imposed, is and continues to be strongly mediated by racial, gendered and socio-economic discursive constructions (Canales, 2000). Kevin, a young male participant, was a university student at the time of the interview. He was born in South Sudan and came to Australia in 2005 as a refugee. Kevin believed that blacks in Australia are seen as inferior. This belief was shaped by what he had seen and heard about blacks, including the way others communicated to him as a black person. Kevin's belief corroborates Appiah's (2005) argument that collective identities have scripts that operate to mould someone's identification. Like most participants in this study, Kevin had shaped his identity with reference to the labels used in public discourse to identify his kind of person (Appiah, 2005). Kevin believed that some people in the workplaces and education institutions have low perceptions of black Africans in terms of their capacity to act, and this perception can pose a real problem. As Dunn, Forrest, Pe-Pau, Hynes, and Maeder-Han (2009) pointed out, an environment in which certain groups are denigrated repeatedly through racist talk and other racist incivilities "can fundamentally undermine the sense of citizenship and belonging" (p. 3) of those disparaged groups. This can be seen in the following account of William.

William, one of the older participants in this study, had lived in Australia for more than 38 years. He came to Australia in the mid-1970s to study and chose to stay on permanently in Australia following graduation. It was when he started looking for jobs that he realised that his skin colour could be a barrier to accessing the labour market. He recalled being offered two jobs on paper, and how everything changed when the employers met with him. He thought he had the jobs before the meeting the employers but was denied the jobs after the interviews. As William expressed:

> That's when I realised that sometimes no matter what you know the skin colour does affect how people judge you. I was offered at least two jobs on paper before they saw me and when I went for interview it changes. Right, well, you don't blame people sometimes, you have to survive …. That's happened, possibly because of my colour. Maybe they don't understand and never gave me the opportunity.

William felt his skin colour had dissuaded employers from hiring him. Though the only evidence we have of this incident is his account, other researchers have found that immigrants' racial and cultural identities can influence their opportunities in the labour market (Nguyen, 1993; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018). At times, employers act in discriminatory ways—by hiding behind accent or language (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018) or by having a preconceived idea of the kind of person they are looking for based on national or cultural proximity (Heikkilä, 2005)—to deny jobs to accented (but otherwise qualified) blacks or other non-native immigrant applicants (Nguyen, 1993). Indeed, the incident affected William's perception of Australia, including his sense of citizenship and belonging. Despite his length of stay in Australia, William suggested that there are still some racism issues, particularly, in Australian workplaces. According to William: "even doing business now, you still see some elements of racism. This is home! That's the problem we are having in our second home. So we have to confront it".

William also indicated that being black discouraged him from applying for senior positions. He had a feeling of negation of his worth and believed that if he applied as a black man he would not be given a chance. He felt objectified and constructed as inferior in Australia. This feeling resonates with Fanon's (2003) description of his experience of being black:

> The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case, everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance. I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under White eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those with faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a genius. Why, it's a Negro! (p. 64)

In the above quote, Fanon suggests he was objectified and cast into his blackness by the white gaze, which made him become the categories, the insults and the stereotypes of the racists. Fanon's experience is indicative of the observed 'burden of blackness' or what it is 'to be' or 'live' black in a predominantly white context or racist society in which blackness is inferiorised and constructed in opposition to whiteness (Sithole, 2016; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017).

Born in 1925 to a middle-class family in Martinique, Fanon's childhood was comfortable and relatively unremarkable. Being aware of the horrible narrative myths used to depict black bodies, Fanon (1967, cited in Yancy, 2008) noted that the Negro is "the incarnation of evil" (p. 858), a phobogenic object of suspicion, a stimulus to anxiety, and that which is to be avoided. The racism in Martinique reminded Fanon of his blackness (Sithole, 2016) and permanently marked his identity and consciousness (Zeilig, 2012). For Sithole (2016), to be reminded of one's blackness is "the very fact of reminding blackness of its place in the anti-black world" and that place means being expelled, dehumanised, marginalised, excluded and oppressed (p. 29). Several participants suggested that their experiences of racism cast them, like Fanon, into their blackness, with huge impacts on their consciousness. Fanon (1986, cited in Ahmed, 2007) argued that, for a black man, consciousness of the body is a "third person consciousness" (p. 161) and the feeling is one of negation. To feel negated, according to Ahmed (2007), is "to feel pressure upon your bodily surface … as a restriction in what it can do" (p. 161). Thus, if to be human is to be white in Australia, then to be not-white, to be black, as Ahmed (2007) explained, is "to inhabit the negative: it is to be 'not'. The pressure of this 'not' is another way of describing the social and existential realities of racism" (p. 161).

Given the de facto but persistent normalisation of whiteness in Australia, one participant, Harry from South Sudan, believed that black skin played a significant role in determining the socioeconomic mobility of black Africans in Australia. Before coming to Australia in 2005 as a refugee, Harry taught as a primary school teacher. At the time of the interview, he was contemplating enrolling for his doctoral studies. Harry argued that black Africans in Australia have minimal chances of socioeconomic success because of racism and the way in which people of African descent are constructed. For Harry, black Africans in SEQ are seen as lower-class and positioned as inferior:

> They can see a black person as low class, a person that does not own anything in this country, a parasite. That is how they will look at me. How I will look at them is that they have been here for a long time. They are part of the majority group.

Harry also stated that there are still many "Pauline Hansons around" who perpetuate white supremacy in Australia. Recall that in her maiden speech in Federal Parliament Hanson (1996) said, "[o]f course, I will be called racist, but if I can invite whom I want into my home then I should have a right to have a say on who comes into my country". Despite this statement, Hanson has continued to describe herself as not racist but rather a proud Australian concerned with the cultural changes in Australia brought by immigration. Despite Hanson's claims that she is non-racist, or even anti-racist, her ongoing calls for a Muslim immigration ban and other similar speeches against immigrants of colour continue to give people like Harry the impression that she is a racist and that people like her are still around. Drawing upon CRT ideas and tenets, it can be argued that just because Hanson and people like her say they are not racist, does not mean that they are not. Many racist people deny being racist. Being racist is not something anybody proudly identifies with or owns up to today, because of the legislation in place against racism. While it is not appropriate to be racist, it is important to recognise that race and racialised preferences are still central to people's lives and still shape or structure social relations and the experience of black Africans in Australia.

Harry also stated that his children were bullied and/or experienced racism at school. As Harry commented:

> Our kids are being picked on every time at schools. Kids are kids. If a kid is different, he or she is being teased out by the

> other students. The day she is teased at school, she will come back home crying to get comfort from the parents. It is worst with the kids because they don't know the rules. If kids are picked on, the parents feel it.

Harry uses the phrase 'picked on' more than once when talking about his children's experience of difference at school. While the phrase has many possible associations, it sounded like Harry felt his children were bullied, singled out and treated differently because of their skin colour difference (blackness). To account for this we can think of Harry's children's experience, as Ahmed (2012) would suggest, as the experience of not being white, of being made into a stranger—the one who is recognised as out of place, the one who does not belong in a place he or she now calls home. For, being black skinned and different, it is more likely that the sense of belonging of many black Africans in Australia will be undermined, not only in schools, but also in workplaces, sports and even churches or religious institutions that normalise whiteness and assume certain bodies to be the norm (Ahmed, 2012).

An overwhelming majority of participants (28 out of 30) indicated that negative constructions of black Africans and the association of their skin colour with character stood out as a handicap. While several participants talked about their positive experiences of coming to Australia, many of them felt psychologically weakened by the persistent negative stereotypical portrayals of black Africans. In some cases, black Africans are simply subsumed into the 'refugee' category, because people assume that as black Africans they must be refugees lacking in education, skills, and English language proficiency. As one participant, Thomas, commented:

> They are still putting people in boxes. Like if you are black, without knowing you, they just categorise you: You're definitely a refugee, you've been living in a refugee camp, you didn't have any schooling and you ran out of the village. That's the whole story. They never allow the people to tell their own stories.

While black African refugees fleeing violence or persecution are prominent images of black Africans in Queensland, many black Africans in SEQ do not meet the definition of refugee[9] and have never lived in a refugee

[9] To qualify as a refugee, according to the 1951 United Nations' Refugee Convention, a person must have: A well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the

camp. Most black African migrants are skilled and educated and have come to search for a better life and economic opportunities (Udah, 2018). However, in its representations of black Africans in Australia, the media often offers stereotypical imaginings which can have material effects on how black Africans are understood, positioned and accepted (Ndhlovu, 2013). As Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama (2015) and Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo (2017) have shown, Australian media discourses construct black Africans in deficit terms, associating them with inferiority and pathologising and problematising them as lacking in something, as morally suspect and crime-prone or easily falling foul of the law. According to Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo (2017), such associations and problematisations are not only damaging to black Africans but also manifest as a 'burden' for black Africans in Australia, which the authors describe as:

> A fully embodied and affective experience which is represented by negative experiential and intersubjective processes, and which is negotiated by drawing on a variety of symbolic, material, and discursive resources to live a life that challenges the definitional markers of negativity enshrined in and attached to the word black. The symbolic burden arises out of the abstract pain and difficulty of dealing with the unseen messages and connotations attached to the colour of their skin. (p. 5)

This burden of blackness is "ever present" and "cannot be jettisoned" because the very colour of their skin (blackness) follows them everywhere and causes them to be stereotyped and treated in negative and discomforting ways (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017, p. 5). Some of these stereotypes caused some participants to become dejected, such that they did not want to participate in activities, leave their houses or go anywhere. Bruno, for one, felt disappointed with life in Australia because of these stereotypes. He suggested that he (and other Africans) may not have a future in Australia. As Bruno lamented: "for us, our future is over. Our time is over. I feel like we will be disappointed until we die. Hopefully, our children will be satisfied with the Australian society and way of life".

The overwhelming sense that emerges from Bruno's lamentation is that some black Africans in SEQ are likely to feel that they do not belong in Australia and have no hope or prospect of achieving their dreams or ambitions (Udo-Ekpo, 1999). It also illustrates the significance of racialised

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country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or to return there, for fear of persecution (Article 1A[2]).

blackness and the severity of the black African experience. From Bruno's and other participants' comments, it can be inferred that being at the wrong end of a stereotype-driven judgement affects the lives of black Africans in Australia. It can also be inferred that black skin colour has great significance in determining the social mobility of black Africans. As Madison (2012) argued:

> For many marginalised identities and people of colour, they are known in a particular world through caricature and stereotypes. A major problem is that the stereotypical projection of one's identity by otherworldly constructions of who one is diminishes the complexity and humanity of one's individuality, as well as one's ethnicity or affiliated group (p. 119).

Recall that, in 2007, the Howard government's Minister of Immigration and Citizenship, Kevin Andrews, problematised people of black African descent, especially the Sudanese, as having more problems and challenges settling and adjusting into the Australian way of life, as well as lower levels of education and English proficiency than necessary for settlement. Though Andrews' statements may be considered mere political rhetoric and a crude electioneering ploy, his comments nevertheless reflect a perception/image held by some groups within Australian society about black African people. Such comments by high profile people tend not only to feed existing racial stereotypes and negative ideas about black Africans in Australia, but also to help sustain racism and racist practices. Such comments have the potential to not only diminish the complexity and humanity of black Africans' individuality and ethnicity, but also to marginalise them from engaging in productive ways in work, education and social/leisure activities.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we have reported on the experiences of first-generation black African migrants and refugees in Queensland, Australia. The accounts presented were chosen because they provide important insights into the everyday lives and realities of black African migrants and refugees living in SEQ. While empirically focused on Australia, this article contributes to the literature in ways that are valuable from both a theoretical perspective and in terms of the comparative contextualisation of racism. More importantly, the perceptions of participants reported here have the significance of illuminating the perceived role and effect of skin colour (blackness) on marginalisation, exclusion and disadvantage.

Significantly, this article sheds light on the lived experience of black Africans in Queensland, while also contributing to debate and analyses on living black in Australia. Consistent with existing Australian research on being or living black (for example, Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2008; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2013, 2017), the subjective experiences of the participants interviewed indicate that skin colour still matters in determining life chances for black Africans in Australia. As suggested by participants, black Africans are more likely to be affected by racism on grounds of skin colour (blackness). As a new and emerging community in Australia, they were not only seen as lacking in something, but also constructed negatively as the 'other'—in opposition to whiteness. As Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo (2017) would argue, this construction constitutes a burden and struggle for black Africans in Australia, which arises out of their experiences of racism and other forms of marginalisation, in conjunction with their deep awareness that they are negatively constructed and positioned as inferior within white-dominated Australia.

Furthermore, the participants' accounts highlight the impact of black skin on black subjects (Yancy, 2008). As a lived reality, the participants' skin colour (blackness) played a role in defining them as inferior, less intelligent and lower-class in Australia and negatively impacted their life chances and opportunities. More than that, their skin colour, which serves as a signifier of negative values, can function as a stipulatory axiom: "[b]lackness is evil, not to be trusted, and guilty as such" (Yancy, 2008, p. 845). This stipulatory axiom, as Yancy (2008) explained, "[f]orms part of a white racist distal narrative that congeals narrative coherence and intelligibility" (p. 845), providing a framework according to which the black body or skin is rendered meaningful. Thus, this article, besides addressing the role of skin colour in the everyday worlds and lived realities of black African migrants and refugees in Australia, also contributes to the discussion of how race and racialised assumptions operate at the level of the embodied through the construction of the black subject qua inferior (Fanon, 2008; Yancy, 2008; Sithole, 2016; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017).

In addition, this article demonstrates the need to rethink whiteness (the white self) vis-à-vis blackness (the black body) and theorise ways Australians might come to terms with the everyday racism that permeates the dominant institutional order and social relations of everyday life in Australia (Stratton, 2006). Essed (1991) argued that "racism is more than structure and ideology … [a]s a process, it is routinely created and reinforced through everyday practices of racism" (p. 2). For Essed (1991), everyday racism connects the structural forces of racism with routine situations in everyday life, links the

ideological dimensions of racism with daily attitudes, and interprets the reproduction of racism in terms of the experience of it in everyday life. On the basis of this explanation, the participants' experiences call for increased engagement in more positive interactions that can challenge the attitudes, taken-for-granted assumptions and understandings of blackness so embedded in Australian institutions and everyday practices (Stratton, 2006), and to claim blackness as a positive racial category or identity marker (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017) such that the black subject can move from the existential condition of dehumanisation to what Fanon calls new humanism (Sithole, 2016).

Clearly, experiences with racism are painful, burdensome, damaging and detrimental (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017). Racism has much potential to impact negatively on black Africans, impeding their economic and social progress, and affecting their behaviour, perceptions and philosophy of life (Feagin & Sikes, 1994). Racism, resulting from unexamined common stereotypes about black Africans, can constitute a significant barrier leading to economic discrimination, marginalisation and decreased opportunity, which, in turn, place them, their families, their children and communities at greater risk of social exclusion. Although this may be hard to establish, it is also clear that prejudices triggered by racialised black skin colour can translate into racism expressed through discrimination in social, political, legal and employment settings (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Hebbani & Colic-Peisker, 2012). For example, Hebbani and Colic-Peisker (2012) found that initial uncertainty and bias towards black Africans in job interview settings is triggered by skin colour, even before a foreign accent or culturally alien non-verbal clues are displayed. Despite the complexity involved here, if this were to happen repeatedly to black Africans in job interviews, it could be considered an example of prejudice and resulting discrimination in employment. In fact, racism and discrimination, including encounters with negative stereotypes, can have the additional effect of perpetuating black African disadvantage in the context of both Australian society and the labour market (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007).

While there is an increasing diversity in Australia, the question of who is Australian is still defined on grounds of skin colour (whiteness)—Australian white—which marginalises and excludes coloured people or immigrants from backgrounds other than European (white, Anglo-Celtic) (Stratton, 2006; Bastian, 2012). As Bastian (2012) observed, implicit within many Australians' thinking is the association between Australian and white. This association is not only a belief explicitly held by some people, it has also been endorsed historically through policies and institutionalised practices.

The White Australia policy—not fully jettisoned until 1973—made it very clear who "fitted in" to Australia and what kind of Australian was desirable (Bastian, 2012, p. 58). More than that, the image of the true Australian, enshrined in Australia's media discourses is most often that of a white-skinned, Anglo-Celtic person (Stratton, 2006). One way to begin challenging this association of Australian identity with whiteness is to understand how whiteness is normalised in everyday life and the discursive practices in Australia, and how people or immigrants of colour are being made into strangers and recognised as not belonging to Australia. As a nation built on immigration, there is a need to define Australian identity in ways that are not divisive, and which recognise the diversity in modern Australia. The definition needs to be more open, flexible, and inclusive but also deeply meaningful (Bastian, 2012).

The diversity in contemporary Australia, if managed well, could be one of the country's most significant assets. For example, Italian, Greek and Chinese immigrants—once racialised and discriminated against—are now well-integrated socially and making significant contributions to Australian society. While this has been the pattern for many subsequent migrant arrivals, there is a real danger that Africans' skin colour (blackness) will impact their ultimate integration in Australia. Irrespective of their legal and citizenship status, their racialised blackness follows them wherever they go. As dark-skinned people, they are marked and assigned a racial identity as 'blacks'. Being categorised and racialised as black, primarily on grounds of skin colour, means being positioned and labelled as different to the white Australian majority. As Canales (2000) argues, individuals labelled as different to society's prevailing norms are stigmatised as pathological, and perceived as a threat to the existing social or as behaving in ways that contradict society's mores. This stigmatisation then feeds into dominant group members' understandings of black identity. Thus, it is more likely that the communication of stereotypical representations of black Africans (still happening today) as inferior, lower-class, backwards, less intelligent, incompetent or 'the problematic other' will materially constrain their access to opportunities and their full acceptance for social advancement in Australia.

To the extent that being white provides advantage in Australia, recognising blackness as a source of disadvantage for black Africans, who are visibly and culturally different from the Australian white norm, can help develop policies and/or programs to support their inclusion in Australian society. Given the general significance of issues around cultural difference, identity, belonging, diversity and migration, our participants' experiences and perceptions are relevant to the project of building a more inclusive and

cohesive Australia. As Australia develops as a multicultural nation, there is a need to challenge and denounce negative narratives, assumptions and stereotypes of black Africans, as it is through these negative stereotypes, assumptions and narratives that black Africans are constructed, produced and constrained as racialised subjects. As racialised subjects, black Africans are more likely to be marginalised, disengaged, and denied full social acceptance and participation in the imagined multicultural Australia. In an effort to build a more inclusive Australia where all people belong and thrive, it is important to negotiate shared meanings, promote positive stories and portrayals of black Africans, and focus on how black Africans (and other coloured immigrants) in Australia can be made to feel they belong and are valued in Australia's multi-ethnic society. When read in this context, Martin Luther King's dream that his children be judged not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character can be seen as a call to give everyone a 'fair go' in Australia.

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