

THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN CANADA: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY & BELONGING

Edited by Wisdom J. Tetley & Korbla P. Pupilampu

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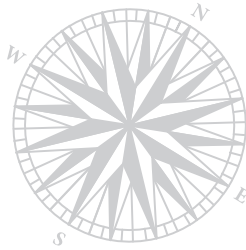
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SECTION I



Theorizing & Historicizing the 'African-Canadian' Experience



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CONTINENTAL AFRICANS IN CANADA: Exploring a Neglected Dimension of the *African-Canadian* Experience

Wisdom J. Tettey & Korbla P. Puplampu

INTRODUCTION

OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, the world has witnessed an unparalleled intensification of, and expansion in, transnational migration. It has been estimated that by the mid-1990s, more than 100 million people had taken up residence in countries different from those in which they had been born (*The Economist* 1997, 81; Wiener 1996, 128). As we enter the twenty-first century, indications are clear that the trend will continue. Figures for Canada point to the fact that, by the close of the last century, the country was recording about 200,000 immigrants annually, the highest since the early 1900s (Ley 1999).

As the processes of globalization simultaneously constrain and open up opportunities for Africans, they have responded in ways that have turned them into active participants in this phenomenon of transmigration. Economic mismanagement by governments, the structural location of the continent in the global capitalist system, and neo-liberal policy prescriptions from international financial

institutions continue to peripheralize its economies to an extent that creates extensive economic hardships for a significant number of people (see Smith 2003; Amin 2002; Cheru 2002). In some countries, this situation is fused with political turmoil resulting from civil wars, political instability, ethnic conflict, and political persecution. This panoply of factors has compelled many Africans to seek better economic opportunities and/or political sanctuary abroad.

Other dimensions of globalization have enhanced their ability to realize these objectives. These include the constriction of time and space and the resulting interconnectedness made possible by innovations in air travel and in communication technologies, such as the Internet. Cultural globalization also means that it is possible for Africans to pursue professional and educational opportunities outside their countries of origin because of the increasing affinities across systems. The imperatives foisted by the push factors and the opportunities promised by the pull factors are responsible for the increasing numbers of African immigrants in the industrialized world, including Canada. Consequently, the demographics of the African diaspora in Canada reflect the varying motivations behind emigration from the continent.

The concept of *diaspora* has multiple meanings; thus its application to the African population in Canada requires further explication. In one sense, it refers to a description of movement and location in the context of globalization. It also denotes a social condition and the processes that characterize it (see Anthias 2001). In the past, the concept has been applied to a group of people who were forcibly and/or violently compelled to leave their original domiciles and settle elsewhere. The classic example of this pattern of movement is captured by the case of the Jewish people. In the contemporary meaning, the term encapsulates a group of people who have a common geographical origin, have trans-located through migratory patterns occasioned either by the forces of globalization and/or domestic stress, and share identifiable markers (e.g., ethnicity), a collective consciousness, and common experiences in their new locales. In this volume, we use the concept in its second meaning; that is,

a people with a common origin who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside the borders of the ethnic or religious homeland – whether that homeland is real or symbolic, independent or under foreign control. Diaspora members identify themselves, or are identified by others – inside and outside their homeland – as part of the homeland national community, and as such are often called upon to participate, or are entangled, in homeland-related affairs. (Shain and Barth 2003, 452)

In view of this definition, the question arises as to who qualifies to be designated as part of the African diaspora in Canada. Tettey (2001) addresses the conceptual difficulties and political contestations surrounding the applicability of the term to various groups and individuals who have some connection

to Africa, whether imagined or manifested in concrete and verifiable linkages. There is, however, a paucity of literature addressing the complexities implied by these contestations. Indeed, not all Africans are Black, nor do all Black people consider themselves Africans (Tettey 2001). As Mensah (2002, 60–61) correctly argues, “while most of the immigrants from Western African countries ... are likely to be Blacks, the same cannot be inferred about immigrants from Northern, Southern, and Eastern African countries. North Africans ... usually consider themselves, and are best described as, Arabs. Also, immigrants from South Africa are just as likely to be White, Indian, or Coloured as they are to be Black. The situation among Eastern Africans is equally complicated by the large number of Europeans, Arabs, and Asians, particularly East Indians, in that part of Africa.” The conceptual ambiguity that results from these contestations of African identity therefore needs to be clarified for analytical and policy purposes, in order to adequately understand the specific circumstances of the continental African-Canadian population and to appropriately respond to it as a community. The next section will attempt to unravel the distinctions among the Black and African populations in Canada. The analysis will demonstrate the complexities that we are referring to here and make the case for why it is useful to engage in more nuanced analyses across the spectrum represented by those designations.

One consequence of the inflexibility of differentiation, because of the over-emphasis on race, for example, is the scant attention paid to continental Africans as an autonomous focus of academic inquiry. Unlike Asian or Caribbean immigrants in Canada about whom there is quite an appreciable amount of literature, continental Africans have generally not been the specific focus of many research endeavours. It is worth noting that this intellectual marginalization has occurred in the United States, as well. In her analysis of the literature on Black Africans in the United States, Halter (1998), for example, notes the inflexibility of census data collection patterns in differentiating among the contemporary Black American population. She contends that research on the country’s Black population tends to privilege the “Americanness of the research cohort,” or it overly focuses on the in-migration patterns of people from English- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries. Consequently, as D’Alisera (2003, 190) observes in her critique of Matsuoka and Sorenson’s *Ghosts and Shadows*,

the complex juxtapositions that inform everyday lives in the diaspora are left unexplored, providing little insight into how these [African populations] organize meaning and action in displacement, or how complex juxtapositions of cultural forms that are shaped by the autonomous and comprehensive interplay between here and there, and everywhere play themselves out in the daily lives of the authors’ informants. *Ghosts and Shadows* leaves us haunted by the past, but still wondering about the present.

The purpose of this book is to take up the challenge posed by these gaps in the literature, and to interrogate the specificities of the experiences of continental Africans in Canada. We hope, with this effort, to add to the sparse literature on this group (see, e.g., Mensah 2002; Leblanc 2002; Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001; Wong 2000; Konadu-Agyemang 1999; Rousseau et al. 1998; Manuh 1998). Furthermore, we hope to advance the process of engaging with this community as a worthwhile focus of intellectual discourse, quite independent of the homogenizing tendencies exemplified by writings about the Black community. It is important to point out that we recognize the affinities among members of the Black community, and indeed, among immigrant groups, as shown by the comparative analyses provided in the chapters. The undertaking that is represented by the volume is thus not an exercise in particularism or relativism, but a legitimate endeavour to highlight the specificities of the target communities, while providing critical insights into the dialectical conjunctures that allow us to understand the nuances and subtleties that differentiate immigrant groups across a variety of identity markers. These chapters also make significant contributions to the broader theoretical and conceptual literature through the critiques and novel perspectives that are brought to bear on the study of diasporas in the context of globalization and intensified transnationalism.

DEFINING *AFRICAN-CANADIAN*: INTERROGATING THE CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES OF IDENTITY

The term *African-Canadian* is often used in everyday parlance and in the academic literature as an uncontested signifier of identity capturing all peoples of African origin in Canada. A critical effort to unpack the term, however, reveals that it is a very complex and contested concept that defies the presumed consensus of meaning implied in its usage, as well as the homogeneity of shared origin that members of the group have. Tettey (2001, 165) contends that “the lack of concurrence about interpretations of who is covered by the term results from the fact that *Africanness* as an identity is defined by several criteria that are not necessarily congruent.” In order to interrogate the basis for the competing, sometimes conflicting, claims to *Africanness*, we adopt Tettey’s (2001) framework that isolates four approaches for understanding the rationales on which avowed and ascribed notions of incorporation or exclusion are founded. These are (1) The Immigration Authorities Approach; (2) The Black equals African/African equals Black Approach; (3) The Self-Exclusion Approach; and (4) The Authentic African Approach.

The first approach derives from the nomenclature used by Canadian state institutions, such as Citizenship and Immigration Canada. It is based on formal citizenship that designates anyone who arrives in Canada with a passport issued by an African country as an African. It is also informed by a geographical construct, whereby immigrants who claim origins in an African country,

such as refugees and others without official documentation, are classified as African. The classification of African-Canadians on the basis of formal citizenship and geography has, however, been criticized by those who argue that it is exclusionary. The critics contend that Africanness is an innate characteristic that should not be denied because one does not fit into a territorial conception of origin, whether geographical or political. Among those who support an expanded notion of Africanness, and hence African-Canadian, are groups and individuals who avow their identity as African because of their belief in some spiritual or ancestral link to the continent, even though that connection cannot be definitively demonstrated. Descendants of African slaves in Canada who have lived in Canada for generations (since the seventeenth century) claim a legitimate right to be called African-Canadian for this reason; so do Caribbean and South American Blacks who have immigrated to Canada since the mid-twentieth century.

The need to broaden the definition of African-Canadian serves as the foundation for the second approach; Black equals African/African equals Black. This approach racializes African identity and is atavistic in terms of its assumptions about African identity. The logic in this argument is that all Black people originate from Africa and hence can claim African identity because of their genealogical origin in the continent, even if the basis for their assertion is remote or imagined. For proponents of this approach,

[B]lack people in the diaspora should be recognized as Africans. In fact, some of them go as far as to argue that they are more qualified to be called African-Canadians than non-[B]lacks who may be recent immigrants from Africa but whose ancestral roots do not go as deep as those of Blacks in the [d]iaspora. This view ... comes from a belief in, and expression of a [B]lack consciousness and an identification with Africa. These internalized linkages to the continent define their African-Canadian heritage. (Tettey 2001 165–66)

In response to this view, others have argued that, notwithstanding the historical and cultural linkages between diaspora Blacks with no immediate genealogical ties with the continent and the continental African born, it is important to acknowledge the differences that set them apart. Critiquing the notion of pan-African identity from which the Black equals African/African equals Black approach derives its inspiration, Adeleke (1998) contends that continental Africans and their non-African-born cousins in the diaspora occupy different realities in terms of their collective daily circumstances, struggles, and aspirations. Referring specifically to the relationship between African-Americans and their continental African counterparts, he opines that “[r]egardless of the degree of African cultural retentions, regardless of how far Black Americans went in changing their names and wearing African clothes,

they remain, in large part, products of the American historical experience, an experience that has left its mark indelibly on Black American culture and identity” (Adeleke 1998, 187). Jones (1995) pursues a similar critique when he observes that descendants of North American, Black slaves cannot clearly identify their ethnic roots in Africa, nor can they express themselves in the cultural forms, such as language, of their African-born counterparts. Consequently, the arguments goes, their only basis for claiming an African identity is constrained to “a nebulous construct – Africa as a geographical entity, a racial origin, and a cultural imagination” (Tettey 2001, 166).

It is further argued that the different life experiences of the two groups inform their perspectives on a variety of issues in ways that sometimes conflict. Adeleke (1998) alludes to the animosity that simmers between African-Americans and recent African immigrants, as the former resent the latter for being undeserving beneficiaries of the fruits of civil rights and other socio-economic struggles, while being reluctant and/or less passionate about the causes that African-Americans consider important. In the view of these African-Americans, the lukewarm attitude of the continental African stems partly from the fact that they were not direct victims of the circumstances that underlie the kinds of passionate advocacy manifested by the former.

Another explanation that exacerbates the tension between the two groups is the reality that continental Africans in North America are generally better educated, hence more employable, than their native-born counterparts (see Djamba 1999). Competition for access to the resources of the labour market produces another wedge in the relationship between the two groups. Analysts have highlighted other distinctions between African and North American Blacks which erode the ethos of the pan-Africanist and cultural nationalist perspectives touted by the Afrocentric paradigm (see Asante 1990). Kanneh (1998, viii), for example, suggests that “modern African-American pan-Africanisms *appropriate* ideas of *Africa* for American agendas,” but they tend not to engage with the African reality, and their primary loyalty is not to the continent. Beyond the debate about a shared pan-Africanism, Tettey (2001, 167) points out that

the problem with the ‘[B]lack equals African/African equals [B]lack’ conception is that it is an exclusionary construct. It does not take cognizance of those who may not be [B]lack but whose traceable historical, culture, and cultural origins may be in Africa. Examples of these groups are East Indians and Whites from Eastern and Southern Africa who have known no other place of origin but Africa. Whilst these groups may not have originated in Africa as a racial or ethnic community, they may have no traceable origin to any other place but the continent. This may be where they call home and where they trace their roots. Out of the about 247,240 people who identified themselves as Africans in the 1996 Canadian census, about 30 percent were

Blacks, 27 percent Whites, 20 percent South Asian, and the remaining 23 percent was composed of other races ... The '[B]lack equals African/African equals [B]lack approach, therefore, effectively dismisses the African origins of [70] percent of African immigrants in Canada.

The third approach to African-Canadian identity is the self-exclusion perspective, which has two strands. The first comes from non-Blacks whose contemporary geographical origins are in Africa, while the second pertains to the children of first generation, continental African immigrants. Those incorporated into the first strand tend to contest their designation as Africans because, for them, African connotes Black. It is worth noting that even though the genotype, the invisible genetic make-up of human types, is the same across all groups, there is a tendency to emphasize the phenotype, the outwardly visible expression of the genes that varies across human types. This socially constructed emphasis on the latter is deeply ingrained because of the convenience it provides for creating hierarchies among humans, with attendant power imbalances. The contestation of the Black designation, then, stems from the socially constructed, negative connotations associated with the word. Things considered evil, for example, are associated with *Black*, while *White* denotes grace (see Mensah 2002, 20). These individuals, therefore, consider the arbitrary *colour* designations a more important marker of identity than geography, even though the fact is that colour designations and skin pigmentation do not match. Consequently, the Africans in this group assert their racial identity as the primary signifier of who they are, rather than their geographical, or even cultural, origins, because their skin pigmentation can be socially constructed as White, and that would secure certain mainstream privileges. Brodtkin (2000) brilliantly captures the process in *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*, and that process is quite different from the one Frantz Fanon (1968) addresses in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the hierarchical formulation of identity, the individuals who invoke a racial category present a subtle distinction between being African and being from Africa.

The second dimension of the self-exclusion approach reveals the dialectical tensions between ascribed and avowed identities as far as children of African immigrants are concerned. Even though these children have verifiable genealogical ties to the continent through their parents, they do not see themselves, at least not wholly, as part of the socio-cultural milieu with which their progenitors identify. As far as they are concerned, they are *Canadian* and not African, since their values and worldviews are shaped by the *here and now*, rather than the environment from which their parents came. "Consequently, the definition of these individuals as African, based solely on the origins of their forebears or on the colour of their skin, may appear inaccurate to them" (Tettey 2001, 168). The following narrative (in the Irish context) captures the frustration of these children:

I was born and raised here. I am Irish. I don't know any other country. But now, everyone thinks I should know something about Nigeria. People want to know where I come from. Even African people expect me to be like them. They are surprised when they find out I'm Irish. But I don't identify with them. I've gone other places. But I always come back here. This is home. (White 2002, 257)

The fourth perspective from which to look at African-Canadian identity is the Authentic African approach. It provides an insightful basis for understanding assertions of, or challenges to, avowed Africanness within the demographic cohort that the immigration authorities designate as African. The contestations emanate from varying conceptions of authentic Africanness. While some have suggested that there is no homogeneous African worldview (see Hountondji 2002; Appiah 1992), there is the belief among a significant number of ordinary Africans, as well as some analysts, that there are, indeed, certain basic values that cut across all African societies. These values, they contend, constitute a common ethos that underlies African personality. Jahn (1961), for example, asserts that there is a spiritual and philosophical *common denominator* of Africanness which encapsulates the Bantu worldview shared by all sub-Saharan Africans. Abraham (1962, 42) corroborates this viewpoint when he argues that “there is a type of African culture ... this type finds expression in the art, the ethics and morality, the literary and the religious traditions, and also the social traditions of the people.” Based on these perspectives about an intrinsic thread that all Africans share, anyone who does not manifest the tenets of that worldview is dismissed as not embodying the true essence of an African, and hence is not an authentic African. Consequently, those who subordinate the supposedly fundamental values of Africanness to mainstream Canadian values that do not dovetail with the former are, for example, considered to have adulterated their African identity. This calls into question their claim to a legitimate designation as African. What such ascription shows is that “there is a continuum of Africanness in which the most authentic form is manifested in a static preservation of cultural values and norms. Static preservation and adherence to the cultural values and social norms that characterize African societies is, therefore, a key manifestation of what it means to be a true African” (Tettey 2001, 168).

The Authentic African approach is the basis for the misgivings that some continental African immigrants have about the claim to Africanness by children born to African parents in Canada or those who, although born in Africa, have spent their formative years in Canada and have had their socio-cultural worldview informed by mainstream, Canadian values. The misgivings are premised on the belief that language and culture are both the central signifiers of identity and the “collective memory bank of a people's experience in history” (wa Thiongo 1987, 15). Therefore, from the perspective of advocates

of the Authentic African approach, “those born in the diaspora [who] cannot speak [any] indigenous African languages, lack a deep understanding of the African experience, or do not express the ritual forms of the continent ... are more Canadian than African, and so [they] cannot legitimately claim an African identity” (Tettey 2001, 169). Adeleke (1998) also conceptualizes the logic in terms of the notion of the *sovereign power* of African culture, a power whose authority elicits obligatory responses from all Africans and adherence to which is a *sine qua non* for qualification as an African. He uses the example of filial responsibility to illustrate his argument. In the view of Adeleke and those who advocate the Authentic African perspective, Africans, irrespective of their age, are expected to defer to the authority of, and be reverent towards, their parents. Therefore, children who imbibe a different set of norms in mainstream Canadian society that encourages them to challenge the authority of their parents are perceived to be operating with a value system antithetical to the sovereign power described above. The foregoing discussion about the Authentic African perspective “highlights not only the importance of self-categorization, but also the reality that our self-categorization might not coincide with how others categorize us” (Kelly 1998, 9).

Advocates of the Authentic African approach have been criticized for basing their definition of African identity on conformity to an unchanging, singular worldview, adherence to a uniform set of values, and attitudes that are concordant with a predetermined standard. Such a supposition, or proposition, suggests that one can only belong to the African community in Canada if one identifies with particular backgrounds, historical experiences, and worldviews. It fails to recognize the significant diversity that characterizes Africans, a diversity based on race, region, religion, ethnicity, gender, and so on. Even in Africa, one would be hard pressed to find the concordant constructions that the proponents of this approach offer as the sole determinants of Africanness. As several chapters in this volume reveal, this is a flawed way of defining continental Africans in Canada, because it loses sight of the dialectics of identity construction that result in multiple identities, all of which can be legitimately claimed, as well as the contestations that emerge within what is definitely not a homogeneous community (See especially Kumsa, and Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer in this volume). It is important “when we talk about African-Canadians, to recognize these sub-identities and their impact on the definition of how people conceptualize themselves as Africans, the collaborations and contestations between various groups, and their relationship to the meta-identity of *African*” (Tettey 2001, 169).

In the preceding discussion, we highlighted the complexities ingrained in the term *African-Canadian*. The analysis emphasizes the need to understand “African diasporic and Black identities as historically textured and politically determined constructs, constructs which rely on particular understandings of time, memory, and race” (Kanneh 1998, 48). In the midst of this contested

terrain, this book focuses on first generation, Black, continental Africans who have immigrated in the last forty years and who have traceable genealogical links to the continent. It is significant to note that they are the only group whose claim to an African-Canadian identity raises minimal, if any, objections. Furthermore, in view of the relational character of identity and the fact that it is not only avowed but ascribed, the analyses in this volume will show that these individuals and their children are likely to be characterized on the basis of race as Black African immigrants by the larger society, even if they choose to self-exclude. In the rest of the book, therefore, African-Canadian will be operationalized to mean continental, Black African immigrants and their children who have not explicitly and comprehensively chosen to self-exclude from that hyphenated identity. This definition is a departure from the omnibus categorization used by some academics and by various Canadian government agencies (including Statistics Canada), that tend to lump all Blacks together as though they were an undifferentiated mass. Admittedly, some of the analyses in the ensuing chapters of this volume are based on statistics derived from such a categorization. This use of the statistics should not, however, be construed as an endorsement of their validity as accurate measures of the situation of all Blacks, but rather, as the employment of the best proxy measures available. What our definition seeks to do is to initiate a rethinking, not only of the qualitative measures of African-Canadianness that take into account its nuances and heterogeneity, but also to engender a fundamental change in the current assumptions behind, and approaches to, quantitative data collection methods.

The rationale behind highlighting the experiences of the first generation of African immigrants within Canadian society is to address the empirical, conceptual, and methodological gaps in the literature. This study, as was pointed out above, seeks to highlight the peculiar, transnational characteristics of that group that may not be shared by other Blacks or non-Black Africans. The book also explores their children's circumstances as they try to negotiate a sense of self vis-à-vis their parents and the larger Canadian society. This latter focus is worth examining because it is germane to understanding the daily lives of the parents. The lifestyles, struggles, and aspirations of the children constitute an intrinsic part of the parents' reality.

This volume is long overdue because "as African immigrants become a visible part of the Canadian landscape, it is important that the rest of society understands their history in this country, the social constructions that have shaped that history, and the specific features that characterize the African-Canadian community" (Tettey 2001, 178). It is only through such an exercise that we can begin making viable efforts towards genuinely recognizing this group of immigrants as Canadians, not only in a legal sense, but also as a group worthy of scholarly investigation. Furthermore, an understanding of African-Canadians and an appreciation of their reality would help generate a feeling of belonging in Canada as they negotiate their multiple locations, and

give them a conducive atmosphere within which to develop their abilities and hence enhance their contributions to the larger society. To provide a basis for this process of understanding, reflection, and belonging, this book addresses a number of issues that are categorized thematically into four sections.

SECTION ONE: THEORIZING AND HISTORICIZING THE AFRICAN-CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

This section synthesizes the fundamental theoretical tools for understanding, analyzing, and designing policies that recognize the multiple locations of Africans in Canada and provide appropriate responses to their integration into Canadian society. The authors link these theoretical insights to a wealth of empirical material that reveals how antecedent constructions of Blacks and Africa have shaped the dominant society's ideas about Africans and their place in Canada. The interrogation of the historical connections between Africans and Canada and the circumstances under which people of African descent and African-born immigrants became a legally accepted and recognized community within Canada provide an important context for examining the issues addressed in the other sections of the book. It is, for example, useful to explore how the dialectical tensions between ascribed and avowed constructions of identity and the valorizations that undergird those constructions shape the positionalities of African-Canadians in Canadian society and their relationships to other groups. The political dimensions of these tensions and the attendant power dynamics that flow from them are critical determinants of who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell 1958). The benefits and/or deprivations of distributional politics go a long way towards determining access to political resources and hence, power. They also determine how the nationality and citizenship of specific groups are defined in relation to the state, what cultural symbols, values, and practices are accorded pride of place, and who is included in, or excluded from, the socio-economic sphere.

In chapter two, Pupilampu and Tettey examine the theoretical and political basis of identity. Identity is a contested concept, especially when it comes to accessing political, economic, and social resources, and it has implications for representation and integration. The concept of ethnicity can offer insights into the dynamics of identity. Drawing on Weber's conceptualization of ethnicity, Pupilampu and Tettey examine the implications of identity for African-Canadians vis-à-vis government policies on immigration and multiculturalism. Their analysis shows a disjuncture between the rhetoric of government policies and the reality within which African-Canadians function. They argue that there is a disconnection between formal/legal notions of citizenship and the everyday constructions of the concept among mainstream Canadians and institutions. The discrepancy leads to a questioning of the authenticity of African-Canadians' claim to citizenship and stymies their full

participation in their new locales. According to Puplampu and Tettey, these queries and the difficulties they generate for African-Canadians are, for example, manifested in the devaluation of knowledge and skills from Africa, as well as in the subordination of merit to the reality of political and social networking in employment situations. They also argue that policies designed to celebrate cultural differences have had unintended consequences, such as perpetuating the status of African-Canadians as *outsiders*, and hence *eternal immigrants*, despite the fact that some African-Canadians have acquired legal citizenship.

In chapter three, Abdi reflects on the historical and contemporary relationships that have structured the position of Blacks, including African-Canadians, vis-à-vis mainstream society. He argues that Blacks are currently positioned at a level within the social structure that peripheralizes them and constrains their capacity for structural transformation. He arrives at this conclusion by tracing the historical background to the contemporary circumstances of Blacks in Canada, including the political and social processes that defined their place and the resistances that they engendered. This analysis helps us to understand antecedents of interaction within which the *third wave* of Black immigration since the 1960s, including continental Black African immigration, was inserted and how they inform the contemporary location of Africans in Canada. He concludes that, although “legal racism or socially sanctioned, forced exclusion” has been neutralized, African-Canadians continue to face systemic and institutional discrimination that is subtle in form, but nonetheless constraining in effect.

SECTION TWO: LOCATION, THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION, AND THE CANADIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Location is a critical determinant of the perspective from which individuals and groups see themselves and others, and how they are seen in return. It also informs the value and power that they wield, or that is accorded to them, in the context of their relationships with others in the polity. Codjoe, in chapter four, addresses the politics of knowledge construction and validation in an empirical study of African students’ experiences in Edmonton, Alberta. Findings from his sample population of pre-tertiary education students indicate that there has been “little effort to systematically interrogate issues and questions about the nature of knowledge, positionality, and knowledge construction.” He argues that curricula in the school system reproduce structures of domination, and both marginalize and denigrate Africa, its people, its knowledge systems, and the contributions of African-Canadians. The consequence of these hegemonic curricula alienates African-Canadian students who cannot see themselves, their communities, or their histories reflected in what is supposedly a pan-Canadian body of knowledge. The chapter contends that the absence of African knowledge in the school system is a deliberate

case of institutional racism. In view of the relationship between knowledge and power, Codjoe argues that knowledge has historically been constructed by the powerful to perpetuate their control over the subaltern and to prevent the emergence of ideas in the public sphere that challenge their power base. Another debilitating impact of the skewed curricula and the invisibilization of Africans is the stultification of social capital formation among the youth. This then erodes the incentive for learning and achievement engendered by seeing oneself in the curricula, as well as the social mobilization that involvement in the educational system fosters among peers and other role models within one's immediate community.

In chapter five, Dei relates some of Codjoe's arguments to an analysis of knowledge construction and validation and to authoritative voice in the Canadian academy. He employs an anti-racist theoretical framework and personal narrative to interrogate how race, class, and gender are implicated in our ways of knowing and of knowledge itself (see James 1994; Williams 1991). He shares the view that "we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience" (Hall 1996, 447). Consequently, the knowledges that are upheld and propagated reflect specific experiences that cannot be generalized to all members of society. Unfortunately, however, knowledges that emanate from the specific experiences of the dominant *White* society are held up as indisputable facts, valid for all. Alternative ways of knowing and the experiences that shape them are denigrated, and their legitimacy as authoritative perspectives is questioned. The chapter thus advances the concept of *minoritization* and how it has been used to deny access to power and to structurally constrain the exercise of agency by minority faculty. To address these barriers, Dei advocates what he calls *structural hegemonic rupturing*. This involves resistance to the dominant power structures and forms of knowledge through concerted processes that challenge dominant discourses, advance alternative knowledges, and appropriate an authoritative voice for hitherto marginalized members of the academy.

SECTION THREE: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND CONTESTS OF THE AFRICAN-CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

There is significant literature reinforcing the argument that ethnic minorities suffer workplace discrimination in Canada. Discrimination in this setting takes a variety of forms, including less pay than racially-dominant counterparts for commensurate work with comparable qualifications, as well as more constrained access to upward mobility (see Stodolska 1998, 545; Croucher 1997, 328; Torczyner 1997; Henry and Tator 1995, 92-96). Bloom et al. (1995), while suggesting that discrimination may not fully explain the declining absorption of recent immigrants into the Canadian labour market, acknowledge that it could provide at least part of the reason. What is striking about the situation of

recent independent-class immigrants is the fact that a significant number tend to be highly qualified because of the value placed on education in the point system under which potential independent immigrants are assessed (Hou and Balakrishnan 1996). Tettey (2001, 175) suggests that

For a lot of these highly qualified individuals, however, the prospects of securing jobs commensurate with their qualifications remain very bleak. There is widespread perception among African-Canadians that their continent of origin and the racist stereotypes that it engenders in Canada constrains their employment opportunities. It is true that graduates from outside Canada are generally not accorded the same recognition as their Canadian-educated counterparts. But it must be pointed out that African certificates tend to be on the bottom rungs of the accreditation hierarchy.

As a result of these attitudes, African immigrants, like most minority immigrants, suffer significant earnings penalties (see Pendakur and Pendakur 1998, 531; Stelcner and Kyriazis 1995).

In chapter six, Laryea and Hayfron seek to ascertain the validity of the assertions made by the above-mentioned studies regarding the presence of a *vertical mosaic* in Canada (Porter 1965), with particular reference to the African community. They employ an econometric analysis to measure labour market performance by African-Canadians, comparing their earning differentials, career opportunities, and job satisfaction with their Canadian-born counterparts. The findings corroborate earlier work about workplace discrimination against African immigrants, as they reveal significant earnings gaps between the two groups. Laryea and Hayfron note that this earning differential exists, even though the available data show that African-born immigrants tend to have a higher level of education than their Canadian-born counterparts. Another significant finding from the study is that African-Canadians, despite their levels of education, are less likely to be employed in a highly skilled occupation, implying an underutilization of their skills. This conclusion is theoretically relevant because it calls into question the explanatory power of human capital theory. The authors argue that the theory only partially explains the employment circumstances of African-Canadians. They contend that, whilst the evidence confirms the theory's prescription that higher education is positively correlated with higher earnings, it also provides insights that reveal the limitations of the theory, that is, its inability to explain the earning differentials between Africans and native-born Canadians with comparable levels of education.

Yesufu continues the labour market theme in chapter seven, where she documents the daily struggle of African-Canadian women in Edmonton, a struggle complicated by structural inequalities, such as inadequate access to information, lack of social support services, and non-recognition of previous work experiences from Africa. She suggests that, in addition to facing labour

market discrimination because their qualifications were earned in Africa, the women's race also seems to affect their ability to secure jobs commensurate with their qualifications. The argument is based on the fact that, even in situations where the women have pursued further training in Canada and received accreditation from recognized institutions, their chances in the labour market have not necessarily been enhanced. Most of them are therefore compelled to accept low-paying menial and/or part-time jobs. This situation puts severe pressure on these women, some of whom serve as sole breadwinners for their families. This is certainly the case where they have student husbands who are not allowed to work more than twelve hours a week on campus and are restricted from seeking employment outside their academic institutions. The limited earning capabilities of the husbands, coupled with the pressure of their academic work, leads to dependence on the women to sustain the family. With such an obligation, the women, even those with tertiary educational qualifications, are compelled to put their career aspirations on hold and take any available job in order to take care of their families.

SECTION FOUR: PLACE, *IN-BETWEEN* SPACES, AND THE NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITIES

In response to the literature on immigration espousing a zero-sum model of acculturation among trans-migrants (see Faist 2000), other authors have argued that the time-space compression that has accompanied globalization and the embodied nature of cultural practices tend to generate hybrid cultures and identities among immigrant communities. Tettey (2004, 137), for example, observes that "geographical mobility does not translate into an inevitable replacement of home cultures by host cultures ... [Transnationalism] has made it even easier for diaspora communities to maintain attachments to, and retain, their cultures and communities of origin." Faist (2000), for his part, critiques both the canonical assimilation and cultural pluralist views of cultural adjustment among immigrants, arguing that they both fail to take cognizance of processes of diffusion and syncretism that characterize contemporary migration. These include mixed languages, hybrid practices, and hyphenated, collective identities.

As a corollary to this line of argument, Lyons (2004) notes that we are seeing a world where political, social, and economic actions are not confined to the specific territories of the sovereign state in which immigrants reside, but are straddling borders as transnationals engage with their home countries in those spheres. Shami (1998, 617) sums up the reality of the contemporary world when he points out that "[d]iasporas are an increasingly important phenomenon in the *era of globalization*. Transitional networks structure and restructure economic linkages, familial bonds, cultural identities, and political mobilization." The spatio-psychological fluidity that accompanies these interactions suggests

that, far from being dissociated from their places of origin, diaspora communities need to be seen as constantly evolving communities that are products of “a sociopolitical process involving negotiation of *who we are* and what it means to be *who we are* during particular performative moments,” not only in the context of their host societies, but in relation to their societies of origin, as well (Tettey 2004, 137). The authors in this section provide critical analyses of the complexities of attachment, social networks, identity, and the attendant contestations that define the lives of African-Canadians as they navigate the spatio-psychological fluidity of their deterritorialized environments.

In chapter eight, Tettey and Pupilampu use *translocational positionality* as a framework for examining the connections between African-Canadians and their societies of origin. They argue that African-Canadians maintain significant linkages with home countries that cover a wide gamut of interactions, including cultural transfers, transnationalization of civil society, and the re-enactment of traditional differences in the diaspora setting. These linkages are manifested in the replication of traditions, attitudes, and rites that confirm the diaspora’s avowed identity with their home communities, even as they adapt to the locales in which they are domiciled. The authors also explore the moral economy and the reciprocal obligations that come with it as a basis for the mobilization of social capital in the diaspora for developmental purposes at home. They contend, however, that despite the affinities that characterize the home-diaspora linkage, there are also areas of tension between the two milieux. These derive from the differences between the essentialized ideal of home that people in the diaspora imagine and the realities brought on by the socio-economic changes of globalization. The irony of this situation is that the more the home communities look like the world in which diasporan Africans live, the more they seem to clash in terms of expectations and perceptions of each other. Tettey and Pupilampu also interrogate the discursive political spaces that African-Canadians occupy. These take the form of internal conflicts within the diaspora itself, which are largely importations of political differences from their home countries. Further evidence of the deterritorialization of domestic politics is seen in advocacy work by diaspora civil society groups against individuals and host and home governments, as well as multinational corporations whose activities are perceived to be inimical to the interests of particular groups in the home countries.

Kumsa, in chapter nine, provides a context for understanding how the interplay of local and global forces creates nation-states through processes of exclusion and inclusion, a process that then results in the production of refugees. Situating this analysis vis-à-vis the Ethiopian state, she argues that Western powers helped disenfranchise Oromos while simultaneously offering them *safe passage* into exile. She then shifts the focus to an interrogation of the lives of exiled Oromo youth in Toronto, concluding that the binary perspectives put forward by both constructionist and nativist/essentialist notions of identity

fail to capture the “creative possibilities of the in-between spaces of marginality in which refugee lives are embodied and embedded” (Kumsa in this volume). She contends that Oromo youth are located in the interstices of three spheres of belonging – Canadian, Black, and Oromo – characterized by different forms of mutual tension and resulting in conflicts of identity for these youth. Their *Canadianness* is constantly questioned by those who think that their origin in another place, a place constantly denigrated by media images of poverty and war, makes their Canadian citizenship inauthentic. They share an affinity with other Black youth because of their common experience of racism vis-à-vis other groups in Canada and the racialization of identity that homogenizes all Black people. At the same time, however, they also have to contend with criticism from their Black peers who consider them not to be *Black enough*. The dialectical tensions surrounding identity for these youth are further complicated by the fragmented spaces within the diasporic Oromo community. This is manifested in Internet chat rooms, where fractures in Oromo identity are revealed through clashes in perspectives on a variety of issues based on differences in religion, region of origin in Oromia, and current location in the diaspora.

Drawing on rich narrative data from interviews and focus group discussions with the youth, Kumsa advances an alternative framework for analyzing the situation of exile communities – what she calls *dispersal affinity*. That framework allows us to capture how continuities and discontinuities of Oromia nationality and slavery affect the sense of belonging among the youth, as well as the impact of the simultaneous processes of global homogenization and local fragmentation on identity. Finally, it provides an appreciation of the dialectical processes of negotiation between the self and the community that create possibilities for multiple assertions of identity – at once conflictual and concordant with the group.

In chapter ten, Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer address the intergenerational experiences of African-Canadian youth, specifically young women. The authors situate their work in critical feminist scholarship and find considerable tension and conflict in the relationship between African parents and their children, whether born elsewhere or in Canada. In either case, the authors show that the young women take their parents as a frame of reference to shape their behaviour, values, expectations, and aspirations. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in expectations between parents and the children. These differences stem mainly from the different contexts in which the two generations were socialized and developed.

The authors analyze the multiple ways in which young, African-Canadian women negotiate their identity and sense of belonging. They not only retain some of their parents’ expectations, they also contest some of the values their parents hold, and in the process, create their own sense of self – a self that challenges the dichotomization of *African* and *Canadian* identities, à la the Authentic African approach referred to earlier, and imbibes a perspective that

involves a synthesis of those worlds. In the final analysis, “they must fluidly meander through the *homeland* identity they occupy with their parents, the multicultural identity still under construction, and the racist (and sometimes ignorant) perceptions of Euro-Canadian society they must continually reject” (Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer in this volume).

Overall, this collection makes an important contribution to an understanding of continental Black Africans and their children in Canada. It goes beyond the implicit homogenization of Canadians of African descent and shows how the unique characteristics and circumstances of continental Black Africans inform their place – not only in their new locales, but also in relation to their places of origin – as they negotiate their existence within both worlds. The specific negotiations, contestations, and collaborations that define these communities provide unique insights that are not only empirically illuminating, but theoretically engaging, as well. The chapters advance imaginative theoretical perspectives for understanding diasporas and immigrant communities in addition to offering useful conceptual frameworks for analyzing important issues in our increasingly globalized, yet asymmetrical, world; issues such as hybridity, transnationalism, identity, and belonging. The volume’s value for guiding public policy is also immense. The chapters not only provide a critical examination of the Canadian state’s role in determining the conditions of entry and the subsequent experiences of continental Black Africans and other immigrant groups; they offer ideas on how to make that role enabling, rather than constraining, for these groups. The analyses suggest that, while the state’s power may be eroding with globalization, it nonetheless still has the capacity and the responsibility to provide an equitable, inclusive, and truly democratic polity in which citizenship is not just an abstract construct, but has positive meaning for all members of this diverse society (see Castells 1997, 243).

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