The Role of Podcasts and their Influence in Shaping African Diaspora Relationships in the United States

by

Robert Otieno Apiyo

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Dissertation Committee:

Leslie Steeves, Chair

Christopher Chavez, Core Member

Dayna Chatman, Core Member

Alan G. Stavitsky, Core Member

Aaron Gullickson, Institutional Representative

University of Oregon

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Robert Otieno Apiyo

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication and Media Studies

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Title: The Role of Podcasts and their Influence in Shaping African Diaspora Relationships in the United States.

This dissertation examines the role and influence of podcasts in shaping intragroup relationships among African diasporan groups present in the U.S. Based on a qualitative case study analysis of three podcasts -- *The Stoop, Caribbean Life in America* and *Work Bae* (including the use of in-depth interviews, document and podcast analysis) -- this research argues that African diaspora podcasters employ various strategies aimed at, among other things, strengthening Afro diasporic consciousness while also challenging mainstream media's exclusionary practices. These strategies include adopting a mesh of legacy radio broadcast practices, African diaspora communicative practices, weaponizing their own intersecting diasporic identities, and tapping into their diverse histories and lived experiences to offer open, honest, and intimate conversations.

These creatives, who are on a mission to entertain, inform, educate, and "democratize journalism," not only target the African diaspora, but at times also attract listeners from other demographics, including populations considered marginalized in the U.S. Topics featured on their platforms broadly range from building social cohesion, countering stereotypes and misconceptions, creating connections, diversifying narratives, promoting social justice, and voicing their own lived experiences.

This dissertation's findings support those of prior scholars, including Jenkins & Myers (2022), who argue that podcasts serve as an extension of the Black digital public sphere, a role

that historically has been played by barbershops (Harris-Lacewall, 2010), the Black press (Berardi & Segady, 1990), the streets, educational institutions, and church (Black public sphere collective, 1995), as well as other expressive cultures including music, dance, and poetry. Each of the podcasts featured in the study is hosted by an African American, African immigrant or an Afro Caribbean based in the U.S., a tactic employed to ensure ethnic diversity and representation during this research exploration. However, as Alpers (2001) notes, individuals seeking to write about the African diaspora are likely to get entangled in the exercise of defining the term. I do struggle with the interchangeable use of the words "African diaspora" and "Black diaspora," throughout this dissertation. This may be due to the crucial roles that racism, geography, Blackness, the legacies of enslavement and colonialism played during the horrific period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that has led some individuals to describe those from the "African diaspora as the "Black diaspora" (Palmer, 1998). Findings based on analyzed podcasts confirm these assertions, with both terms applied in multiple contexts.

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In the onward march of life, through the tempest and the sunshine, through the battle and the strife, God helped me cross the rolling tide. While my faith at best is weak, he often whispered words of comfort throughout the entire journey. Thank you!!!

This is a project written from the depths of my heart to yours. It is a dedication to you who, on a daily basis, continue to fight your own battle to be free from the past, to live in the present, and create a meaningful future for your own self. Aluta Continua!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I stretch my hands to Africa to restore my dignity
As I learn my history, I see how much they did steal from me
But I shall not harbor hate and myself I shall elevate
Just like Marcus Garvey state and proved the Black man is truly great
We shall free our bodies, we shall free our minds
Our religion and Black complexion will once more become divine….
(*Who I Am* lyrics, by Lord Laro)

Information and communication technologies offer diasporic groups opportunities to reconnect with those in their original homelands and construct or reinforce their own collective identities (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010). In the U.S., they have also enabled these groups to communicate and participate in cultural and political activities within and across nation-state borders (Keles, 2016). Specifically, the African diaspora has not only used the platforms to maintain connections to family and friends, communities, groups and institutions, but has also used them to help sustain African values (Bernal, 2020).

The same media is also responsible for sustaining struggles for identity through the promotion of Black inferiority and misrepresentation of the group's culture (West,1999). They have also promoted conflicts, exposed stereotypes, and divided opinions among diaspora groups (Byrd, 2015). Specifically, in the U.S., the media has faced criticism of exploiting ethnic tensions among Black ethnicities by fixating on conflict storylines aimed at fueling Black/Immigrant tensions (Jenkins, 2007). These stories have mostly been fed by conservative anti-immigrant groups and, as a result, have shifted African American public opinion in the

direction of more negative attitudes and beliefs about immigration and immigrants (Jenkins, 2007).

Digital platforms, specifically Twitter (now known as X), provides a platform for the anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiments of controversial groups such as American Descendants of Slavery (#ADOS), whose supporters verbally attacked Black immigrants to the extent of even calling them "rats" (Drayton, 2019).

One of the tweets posted by the group's co-founder Yvette Carnell, on June 27, 2021, highlighted the historical tensions and called for a new ethnic identification category between African Americans and Africans:

> You can have the term AFRICAN American. Most Native Black Americans don't identify w/ a land mass w/ 54 countries. We want 2 differentiate American descendants of slavery from Black immigrants. We need a term SPECIFICALLY 4us that captures our culture/contribution/oppression.

Carnell's Facebook post dated December 28, 2017 also sheds light on the fierce competition for resources pitting African Americans and Black Immigrants in the United States:

> ……. Shouldn't Black immigrants, many of whom come from an elite group in their home countries, be made to mark "other" on job and university admissions applications, as opposed to African American? Isn't that designation solely for descendants of American slaves? …If we fight for rights and Black immigrants come over to enjoy the spoils, isn't that stealing? Or at the very least, isn't that competition? How is there any solidarity in that? Isn't this a failure of not understanding that what binds us as a group is lineage, not skin color? We have no automatic kinship or alliance with every brown or black group on the planet…

In the wake of the 2020 U.S. general elections, Kamala Harris' selection as Vice Presidential running mate by the then-Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden elicited both jubilant and hateful reactions. A majority of attacks came from Republicans and were unsurprisingly led by the former U.S. President Donald Trump who unleashed his characteristic

rhetorical playbook. He espoused superlatives nationwide describing Harris as "horrible," "nasty," "phony" and "belonging to the radical left." Carnell and her followers also took to Twitter, with a series of attacks through #ADOS directed at the left-leaning media. Carnell insisted the liberal media wanted a "inspirational feel-good story" based upon Kamala Harris' "fake" identity. The tweets also attacked Harris, who is of Indian-Jamaican descent, and South East Asian descent, as not being "Black enough." Essentially, the consensus was Harris wasn't qualified to represent the interests of the Black identifying individuals. Previously, Carnell's attacks were directed at former U.S. President Barack Obama due to his immigrant identity. Carnell claimed that Obama's Kenyan and a Scotch-Irish American contributed to his legacy of neglecting Black Americans needs. She insisted that his identity disconnect created a failure to address the economic inequality, systemic racism, police brutality and injustices Black Americans experience.

While the aforementioned instances highlight the polarization potential of information and communication technologies, they unequivocally reinforce the potential of the same platforms to offer an alternative, independent form of media able to shape debates, participation and interaction, specifically among the Black diaspora. This is evident by their ability to play a vital role in shaping public opinion within and outside the group by being at the forefront of championing various political and social causes. Twitter, for instance, has provided a platform for grassroot movements such as #BlackTwitter, which is mostly utilized by Blacks to draw attention to issues affecting Black communities (Reid, 2018) through sharing tweets and retweets, stories, memes, and videos. #BlackTwitter also highlighted atrocities committed by White police and fostered national discourses (Graham & Smith, 2016), as well as offered an entertainment, support, or refuge space (McDonald, 2014). The online platforms' discussion

conventions favor Black participation, which often includes network participation through retweets or comments, relevant hashtags, and a viral reach of trending topics (Brock, 2012).

Just like Twitter, podcasts can also be an effective tool in fostering discourses because its listeners tend to be highly engaged, and may choose to establish parasocial relationships with their hosts (Nadora, 2019). Its low-cost ability to reach audiences may also enable creators to meet the needs of their listeners. Moreover, podcasts are also quite easy to start, don't require a license beforehand, do not require gate-keeping bureaucracies, and can be produced in improvised studios (Berry, 2016). Such attributes have previously offered researchers the chance to critically examine issues affecting the podcasting industry, including systemic inequities, accessibility, lack of technical know-how, independent podcaster's experiences, monetization, and cultural and linguistic barriers. Some of these elements will be discussed further in the subsequent sections.

However, the same research interests haven't been reciprocated when it comes to evaluating the works and performances of podcasts and their potential as a connecting and solidarity building new media tool capable of shaping relationships among the diverse African diasporic ethnicities present in the U.S. With research indicating that the group's diverse cultures are more likely to be covered negatively by the U.S. news media compared to other groups (Pew Research Center, 2023), Raney (2019) notes that podcasts may be an alternative platform to provide this underrepresented populace a voice and opportunities to create connections and freely express themselves. All one needs to do is gain access to a recording device and the internet (Cal Newport, 2014).

I focused on the African diaspora because available literature indicates that while the group may share a common heritage (Jackson & Cothran, 2003), underlying tensions among

them persist. They display ignorance about each other (NewsOne Staff, 2018), the historically perceived role that Africans played in "selling" their counterparts into slavery (Brueggemann, 2020), and outside forces (Whites) who have deliberately spawned various myths and stereotypes that degrade Black people, strategically keeping them separated for easier domination (Darboe, 2006). The recent pronouncements by former President Donald Trump that immigrants are "poisoning the blood of our country…and they are coming in from Africa, from Asia, and all over the world" only serve to widen the divide and mistrust between African Americans and their immigrant counterparts, while providing a justification for anti-immigrant groups such as Yvette Carnell's #ADOS and its followers to continue spewing hate and division via social media platforms. Moreover, Trump, a second-generation German-Scots immigrant who married an immigrant from Slovenia, has repeatedly described Mexican immigrants as "rapists" and "killers" while allegedly referring to those from Haiti and Africa as "coming from shithole countries."

Seizing on this fertile ground for exploration, I argue that African diaspora podcasters employ various strategies aimed at, among other things, strengthening Afro diasporic consciousness while also challenging mainstream media's exclusionary practices. These strategies include adopting a mesh of legacy radio broadcast practices, African diaspora communicative practices, weaponizing their own intersecting diasporic identities, and tapping onto their diverse histories and lived experiences to offer honest and intimate conversations aimed at also promoting civic engagement and entertainment. In the process, they also confront dangerous anti-immigrant rhetoric promoted by politicians, anti-immigrant movements, and the mainstream media's misrepresentations and exclusionary practices.

To seek support for or against these arguments, I examined three podcasts produced by diverse members from the African diaspora based in the U.S.: *The Stoop, Caribbean Life in America* and *Work Ba*e. These podcasts serve as an extension of the Black digital counter public sphere and complement the role that has continuously been played, according to scholars, by the streets, the Black press, barbershops, Black churches, the World Wide Web and other forms of expression, including Rap music.

In a racialized country such as the U.S., most available literature and research have understandably focused on exploring the lived experiences of the African diaspora through a racial lens. Other research has focused on exploring the tensions among these groups while falling short of providing recommendations on how to bridge the gaps.

Equally so, Pan-Africanist scholarship seems to have long been forgotten, especially in the field of communication and media studies, where scholars have prominently -- and rightfully so -- focused on the areas of Black feminist scholarship, racial representations, epistemic injustices, and Black digital communities. In all fairness, according to an opinion article on Al Jazeera titled "Pan Africanism is the panacea to the West's systemic racism," the practice has largely been in the doldrums since the 1950s, with the occasional resurgence such as during the demonstrations against the brutal killing of African American George Floyd (Mhaka, 2022). Even then, Mhaka (2022) notes that the global solidarity failed to lead to a formation of a permanent support framework that would promote constructive relationships among groups of the African diaspora, such as resulted from the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, his wife Coretta Scott King, and Malcolm X.

I, therefore, seized on this opportunity to reawaken this very important subject by specifically examining the role new media technologies play in promoting constructive

relationships while also celebrating the African diasporan ethnic diversity and creativity, as showcased in the works and practices of the podcasters under study. I further provided contextualization their past histories and describe their ethnic identity influences.

To achieve this, I apply various approaches, including drawing on concepts such as subaltern counter public sphere, diaspora, cultural identity and the concept of boundaries to interrogate the discourses featured on the respective podcasts and their hosts' lived experiences. I also made use of literature on new media, migration, race, and ethnic studies to help provide broader context to the subject under study.

The concept of the subaltern counter public sphere, as proposed by Nancy Fraser, provides tools to help examine what makes podcasts effective in offering discourse on subjects touching on communities, which are often ignored by mainstream media. Topics such as conversational discourses and communicative strategies (language use, conversational styles, and approaches) are also examined. The concept further helped examine the types of spaces or networks podcasters use to communicate to their own audiences, especially in an environment where the institutional, political, economic, and socio-cultural powers have historically hindered the groups' participation in the mainstream public sphere. Since a multiplicity of publics brings its own challenges (Fraser, 1992), I applied the concept to examine how some of the challenges faced by these podcasters shape how discourses happen within the space.

I also consider Stuart Hall's cultural identity and diaspora concept, which suggests culture consistently undergoes transformation, by examining the influence of power relationships on the identities of African diaspora podcasters based in the U.S., their origins, lived experiences, present situations and future transformations. I determined this via in-depth interviews and analyzing the topics and themes featured in the podcasts to uncover the identity

similarities and differences of each individual podcaster through historical, geographical and cultural lenses.

The study draws upon the concept of boundaries, borrowed from the field of sociology, to assess ethnic group formations (us vs. them constructions) as explored by podcasters from the African diaspora. Specifically, I explore the porousness of African-diasporan ethnic group boundaries, motivations behind some of their conflicts and how to foster relationships among them as revealed through podcasts and in-depth interviews with the podcasters. This is analyzed through historical, cultural, geographical, and socio-political contextualization of the topics covered by the podcasts under study.

African Americans, Afro Caribbeans and African Immigrants

With studies indicating that the concept of the African diaspora remains contested, I adopted Butler's (2001) broadened definition, which defines the African diaspora as African immigrants from the continent, the Afro-Atlantic group, and the Afro-Asian group. In this study, African Americans are mostly defined as the descendants of captive Africans brought via the trans-Atlantic slave trade into the U.S., while Afro Caribbean immigrants are mostly the descendants of captive Africans brought via the trans-Atlantic slave trade into various parts of the Caribbean, including Jamaica, Haiti, Guyana, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic. They also include those whose voluntary migration to the U.S. can be traced to the first half of the 20th century when workers and laborers from the British West Indies program were brought to work in the U.S. agricultural sector (Zong & Batalova, 2019).

Immigrants from the African continent are mostly among the beneficiaries of policy changes brought forth by the U.S. Civil Rights movement, including the 1965 Immigration Act

(Warren & Twine, 1997). These groups also meet Butler's (2001) assertion of the characteristics that an African diaspora group must have: they must be dispersed to two or more regions, must exist over two or more generations, maintain some sort of relationship with their original homelands, as well as harbor a collective common identity. I also classify African Americans, the Afro Caribbean, and African immigrants as those who are part and parcel of the broader African diaspora, based on Safran's (1991) constituent elements detailing factors that lead to the creation of a diasporic consciousness. These include memory and vision of their homeland, marginalization in their host nations, desire to return, and commitment to the restoration of their homeland (Safran, 1991). These aspects will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

While I focused on the role played by podcasters in influencing intragroup relationships, specifically among African Americans, African immigrants, and the Afro Caribbean, I was also cognizant of the fact that these groups may share a history of collective struggle. This includes "brutal enslavement, institutional terrorism, and cultural degradation" (West, 1990, p.102), as well as a wide array of differences in their cultural and socio-political identities. The crucial roles that racism, geography, Blackness, and the legacies of enslavement and colonialism during the horrific era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade offers an understanding as to why some individuals may choose to refer to the "African diaspora as the "Black diaspora" (Palmer, 1998; Segal, 1996). These contrasts were all considered at the discussions and analysis stage.

This study does not include the work of African-diaspora podcasters living outside the U.S., such as the Afro-Asians, Afro Europeans, Afro-Cubans, Afro Latinos, and other African immigrants who've settled in other parts of the world. However, when necessary, the works of those in the African diaspora geographically scattered around the world was used for comparative purposes since some of their lived experiences and content covered in their podcasts

offer points of contrast to those of their counterparts living in the U.S. The results of the study were drawn from case studies of podcasts covering the themes under study. Interviews, document and podcast analysis were also used to collect relevant data related to podcasters' ethnic backgrounds, gender, generational status, nationality, age, class, and educational attainment.

Topic Selection

There are several factors that influenced my selection of this research topic. First, I chose the research topic sometime during my first year as a Ph.D. student after conversing with my committee chair, Professor Leslie Steeves, regarding the complexities that U.S. institutions face when departments meant to cater to both African and African American students are grouped together. We extended the conversation to the possibilities of exploring how topics examining intragroup relationships were being discussed in the media, among scholars and the court of digital public opinion. The topic perfectly aligned with my own personal research interest on questions around the areas of new media and identity, diaspora, migration, journalism, and global studies. I embraced this as an opportunity to help promote discourse on how new media, specifically podcasts, could be used as an effective tool for African-diaspora solidarity and community engagement, an understudied topic within the field of communication.

My resolve regarding the feasibility of this topic was further strengthened by the availability of literature detailing social, economic, political and ethnic relationships among diverse groups within the African diaspora. Further, new media literature provided support to explore podcasting as an alternative platform for marginalized groups, specifically the African diaspora, to break down gatekeeping barriers while fostering the participation and sharing of

lived experiences. Moreover, the level of access that I have, albeit limited, among African diaspora podcasters based in the U.S. also played a role in the topic selection.

At a personal level, I've always had a passion for reviewing literature capturing the life and times of Pan-Africanist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Haile Selassie, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois and Julius Nyerere, some of whom spearheaded the struggle for independence in various African countries and championed Pan-Africanist causes in their quest to unite the African continent and its diaspora. Phrases such as "united we stand, divided we fall" and the Jamaican national motto, "Out of Many, One People," which specifically highlights the coming together of several cultures, religions and races to form the Caribbean nation's society, continue to influence my resolve to promote better relationships across the African diaspora and beyond. This represents a challenging but rather noble cause to achieve, which has also been promoted by other creatives, including poets, storytellers, and musicians in genres such as Reggae, Dancehall, Calypso, Hip Hop, Afro beats, most of which have featured lived experiences and called for better interactions across the African diaspora.

Why is this Study Important?

I view this study as my own contribution towards advancing knowledge while also promoting the continuation of dialogue among diverse African diasporic ethnic groups, who continue to undergo some form of subjugation, slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Just like the earlier wishes and promises of Pan African scholars, it is my belief that peaceful coexistence is of beneficial interest to the African diasporan people scattered around the world, with the increasing popularity of digital platforms, such as podcasts, affording opportunities to fulfil such visions.

The study also addressed a neglected subject area, while laying groundwork for future research exploring the influences of new media in shaping cross ethnic relations, specifically among diaspora groups. While Anderson (2006) notes that newspapers laid the basis for an imagined nation because readers could share collective experiences irrespective of geographical distance and social order, I view my work on this dissertation as an opportunity to raise knowledge and awareness on the role podcasters play to minimize or accentuate the individual or collective differences among African diaspora groups, especially within the U.S. state borders.

Moreover, with scholars exploring the role that the African diaspora has played in the transformation of the modern world and Western cultures through their history of colonialism, imperialism, and racism (Patterson & Kelley, 2000), others, including Everett (2002) have noted that scholars have often overlooked historical and contemporary Black people's desire for modern technology, early adoption, and mastery. I, therefore, answer the call to showcase the adaptivity and mastery of technology by producers of content from the African diaspora and some of the factors that determine how their decision to create discourse and promote public participation are made. Such contributions are noted based on an ethnic lens as opposed to a racial lens which is notoriously synonymous with previously existing studies.

Similarly, the study provides knowledge that can be used by future scholars, policymakers and non-governmental organizations seeking to apply digital techniques in fostering relationships within diverse groups. By doing so, this dissertation extends the current literature by advancing knowledge on the unique contribution of podcasters towards promoting Pan-Africanist discourse among African diasporan audiences.

To realize these objectives, current literature was reviewed, with the study guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the podcasters understand their own diasporic identities?

RQ2: How do podcasters imagine the African diaspora as a potential audience?

RQ3: a. What programming decisions are made to appeal to this audience?

b) What kinds of civic discourses are evident in how programming is constructed for these audiences?

RQ4: What pressures shape how civic discourses are promoted on these podcasts?

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter I introduces the topic by featuring the social and political importance of digital media in the lives of the people of the African diaspora based in the U.S. It highlights the negative effects of both mainstream and new media in creating divisions and the crisis of identities among these groups while also exploring the history and usage of African diaspora media and other alternative media as tools for countering hegemonic narratives by giving communities a voice to share their experiences. It also positions podcasting as an extension of this history as it makes its place within production of Black media artifacts. It further highlights some of the goals of the phenomenon under study, its implications and expected contributions. Finally, it summarizes the chapters to follow.

Chapter II explores the context of the study, including the concept of the African diaspora. The chapter provides the historical background, the socio-politico-economic climate and the cultural, and contemporary relationships amongst Africans, African Americans and the Afro Caribbean people living in the United States. In addition, it provides the contextualization

of issues explored in the dissertation, including debates on immigration and slavery. Lastly, the reviews the opportunities created by podcasts to the African diaspora in the United States.

Chapter III considers the theoretical perspectives that provide the lens for examining the role and influence of podcasts in shaping intragroup relationships among African diaspora populations in the U.S. The analyzed theoretical perspectives and concepts that guide this dissertation include (i) cultural identity and diaspora, (ii) counterpublics sphere, (iii) concept of boundaries, and (iv) race and diaspora studies. This chapter also provides a review of advanced and related studies exploring the topic under research. It presents the research gaps that the study seeks to address, while establishing a rationale for this dissertation. The chapter also includes a portion of the proposed research questions.

Chapter IV focuses on the research methods, explanations and justification for the chosen sampling, data collection techniques, handling, and analysis, in order to address the research questions.

Chapter V explores the role and influence of *The Stoop* podcast in shaping relationships among African diaspora groups, specifically African Americans, African immigrants, and the Afro Caribbean. It unpacks the conversational discourse and programming decisions made, targeted audiences, and the kinds of external and internal pressures its hosts face. It also provides additional details on some of the motivations and lived experiences of the podcasters. The connections of the findings with the theory and literature are also discussed.

Chapter VI presents a case study of how the *Work Bae* podcast acts to influence relationships among the African diaspora while unpacking the conversational discourses, programming decisions, targeted audiences and pressures faced by its host. It also provides

details on their motivations and lived experience. The connections of the findings with the theory and literature are also discussed.

Chapter VII presents a case study of how the *Caribbean Life in America* podcast influences relationships among the same group while also uncovering some of the discourses held on the platforms, the decisions which guide its programming, lived experiences and targeted audiences. The connections of the findings with the project's guiding theory and literature are also discussed.

Finally, Chapter VIII, the Conclusions chapter, highlights the major findings of the three case studies, summarizes their connections to the theory and literature, and presents the implications and recommendations for the study.

Next, I present the context of the study, followed by the conceptual framework, related studies, methods, findings and discussion relevant to each podcast, and the conclusions of my dissertation.

CHAPTER II

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This chapter presents the historical background, social, economic, cultural, and political relations of the African diaspora, with a focus on African immigrants, African Americans, and Afro Caribbeans. It explores aspects such as historic backgrounds, racial and ethnic distinctions, and debates on identity, immigration, and slavery. The chapter will also provide some demographic information as well as capture podcasting history and trends.

While the legacy media has previously been accused of fueling Black vs Immigrant ethnic tensions (Jenkins, 2007), these conflicts have for the most part played out on social media. For instance, #HarrietDeservesBetter started trending on Twitter as soon as it was announced that British-Nigerian actress Cynthia Erivo would play as the lead for a Harriet Tubman biopic (Russ, 2018). Some African Americans threatened to boycott the film until the producers hired a Black American actress to play the part (Russ, 2018). Critics argued that "since Tubman was born into slavery in America and served as an abolitionist who fought to free those who suffered that very American specific plight, it was culturally insensitive to cast the British-Nigerian actress instead of an American descendant" (Telusma, 2019). However, it should also be noted that Erivos's past tweets mocking African American accents, history and culture also incited further criticisms against her (Telusma, 2019).

Boycotts predicated on the need for an African American actor to play a historically African American character, however, fall apart when considering the numerous examples of African American actors playing historically African roles. These include actors Morgan Freeman, Terrence Howard, Dennis Haysbert and Danny Glover (all played the late apartheid icon Nelson Mandela in different Hollywood produced movies); Forest Whitaker played the late

Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in the highly acclaimed 2006 film *The Last King of Scotland,* and Don Cheadle starred in the 2004 drama film *Hotel Rwanda,* which explored the real life heroic efforts of a hotel manager, Paul Rusesabagina, to house thousands of fleeing refugees during the genocide that took place in the country in the 1990's and pitted the majority Hutu tribe against the minority Tutsi. Multiple Oscar Award Winning African American actor Denzel Washington also played the late South African anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko in the 1987 epic drama film *Cry Freedom*.

Historically, debates pitting African Americans against immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa were also witnessed in the early 20th Century Black newspapers, which presented divergent views by Black thinkers, including African American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois and Afro-Jamaican-born immigrant Marcus Garvey, who mainly differed on issues relating to the future of Black people in the U.S. (Contreras, 2020). However, African Americans have generally been welcoming to African immigrants because they tend to be cautious of endorsing policies that would negatively impact other immigrants, especially those from marginalized groups (Smith, 2017).

In contrast, African countries, including Ghana, Ethiopia and Liberia have historically welcomed African Americans and Afro Caribbean persons. There are several historical examples of African society inviting them to resettle, reconnect with their past, and invest in Africa motherland. Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah constantly championed the Pan-Africanist cause. During his official inauguration on March 6, 1957, at the Old Polo grounds in Accra, the Lincoln University alumnus invited a large contingent of West Indian, African, and African American dignitaries to the event as a gesture of solidarity for not only their support of the West African nation's independence, but also for their leadership and inspiration of freedom

movements throughout Africa and the Americas (Gaines, 2006). To Nkrumah, Ghana's triumph against its British colonialists was to be shared among Africans and peoples of African descent, thus evoking a sense of solidarity and diasporic consciousness (Gaines, 2006). Former Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie also donated around 200 hectares of Shashamane land in 1948 to encourage Black people from the West to move back and settle in his country (Summers, 2014).

A host of African American celebrities have also been granted citizenship in several African countries, including African American rapper Ludacris and his fellow actor Samuel L Jackson, who were both granted Gabonese citizenship, while comedian Tiffany Haddish secured Eritrean citizenship. Ghana also promoted celebrations such as the 2019 "Year of Return" for African descendants around the world to mark 400 years since the first Africans were enslaved (Shenoy & Kove-Seyram, 2019). The huge tourism push saw the country receive visitors such as British actor of Sierra Leonean descent Idris Elba, British model of Jamaican descent Naomi Campbell, former quarterback and American civil rights activist Colin Kaepernick, and U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi with 12 members of the Congressional Black Caucus (Shenoy & Kove-Seyram, 2019).

The adoption of various cultural elements within the African diaspora group has also been documented, an aspect which signifies the nature and level of interdependence among them. Music genres in the U.S., including hip hop, rap, jazz, and blues, were greatly influenced by African music elements. Jazz, for instance, borrows heavily from African rhythms, while hip-hop and urban music were heavily influenced by Caribbean music culture through Jamaican Immigrant DJ Kool Herc (Rasool, 2018). Indeed, some of the most celebrated hip-hop acts are of Caribbean descent, including Notorious B.I.G, Busta Rhymes, Heavy D, Pete Rock and Shaggy. There has been a steady increase in music collaborations between African Americans and

African musicians. These include Rick Ross and P Square (Nigeria), teaming up on the song *Beautiful Onyinye,* and Beyonce's collaboration with various African artistes, including Burna Boy, Wizkid, Shatta Wale and Oumou Sangare in her 2019 album, *The Lion King: The Gift.* Caribbean Music, including reggae, ragga and dancehall and the Rastafari culture popularized by Bob Marley's lifestyle and music, has also left a huge mark on both African Americans and Africans. Reggae protest songs have also played a part in inspiring resistance movements, as well as the life of the first Black U.S. president, Barack Obama, who once visited the Bob Marley Museum during his state visit to Jamaica.

These examples highlight the forming of stronger diasporic bonds, especially in the U.S. among African Americans of slave descent, African immigrants, and Afro Caribbeans, many of whom have migrated to pursue their 'American dream,' consequently increasing diversity and ethnic composition among the African diasporan populace in the U.S. African Americans still out number Black immigrants living in the U.S. According to a Pew Research Study conducted in 2016, there were approximately 4.2 million Black Immigrants living in the country, an equivalent of around 10% of the total Black population living in the U.S. (Anderson & Lopez, 2018).

According to 2019 Pew Research Center studies, the top birthplaces for Black immigrants present in the U.S. include Jamaica 760,000, Haiti 700,000, Nigeria 390,000, Ethiopia 260,000, Dominican Republic 210,000, Ghana 190,000, Trinidad & Tobago 170,000, Kenya 130,000, Guyana 120,000 and Somalia 110,000 (Tamir, 2022). The study also found that more than half (58%) of Black U.S. immigrants arrived in the U.S. after the year 2000 (Tamir & Anderson, 2022).

These immigrants arrive to a much more welcoming environment compared to the one that greeted the arrival of African American ancestors, who came involuntarily during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. During this period, which occurred between the 16th and the 19th centuries, an increase in the global slave trade was recorded, with between 10 million and 12 million enslaved Africans shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas (Lewis, 2020). African Americans are the descendants of those whose ties to places and communities on the continent were severed by force and subsequently lost due to their long history of enslavement (Bernal, 2020). Their ancestors were kidnapped from Africa, trafficked, sold as slaves, and subjugated (Cohen, 2008).

Realities of some of the experiences encountered by these slaves are perhaps best captured by the text apologies introduced in the Alabama legislature by members of the State senate, led by Hank Sanders (The Associated Press, 2007). The apologies read in part,

> "…Africans were captured and sold at auction as chattel, like inanimate property or animals.... their fundamental values shattered, they were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and subjected to the dignity of being stripped of their names and heritage, their women and girls raped, families disassembled as husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, and fathers and sons sold into slavery apart from one another" (Rawls, 2007).

The perceived role that Africans also played in 'selling' their counterparts into slavery during the trans-Atlantic slave trade to this day remains a controversial topic and continues to influence relationships within the group. Some Africans are reluctant to accept such responsibility, arguing that they should not be judged for the alleged crimes committed by their ancestors. However, Brueggemann (2020) dismisses the notion that "Blacks sold Blacks into

slavery," calling it a sexy and smug proclamation often used by people who wish to silence discussions of slavery and soothe White fragility. Brueggemann also adds that while on the surface it is easy to repeat the phrase, it seeks to derail any White responsibility for slavery, while putting Black people in the driver's seat of causing their own suffering (Brueggemann, 2020).

However, very similarly to African Americans, the circumstances that led to the dispersal of some African and Afro Caribbean immigrants from their homelands have also been caused by violent forces, especially for refugees from African countries that have undergone war and civil strife, including Haiti, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, and Eritrea. According to the United States Census Bureau (2016), most Ethiopians (refugees and other migrants) in the U.S. are settled in Washington DC, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, and California (America Counts Staff, 2017). According to the 2015 UN estimates, there are around 150,000 Somali refugees in the U.S., most of whom have settled in areas such as Minnesota (Almond, 2017).

Most recently arrived African immigrants are among the direct beneficiaries of policy changes brought forth by the U.S. Civil Rights movement, including the 1965 Immigration Act, which effectively ensured that immigration was no longer a preserve of only European immigrants (Warren & Twine, 1997). As for the Afro Caribbean immigrants, who hail from the English-speaking islands of the West Indies (Waters, 1999), and refer to themselves as West Indians since it reflects their region's shared cultural and political history (Waters, 1999), their voluntary migration into the U.S. can be traced back to the first half of the 20th Century when workers and laborers from the British West Indies program were brought to work in the agricultural sector (Zong & Batalova, 2019). These migrants also played a key role in the Harlem

Renaissance with some of their lived experiences in the United States helping invigorate nationalist consciousness and political resistance in their Caribbean homeland (Foote, 2013).

While the scale of Caribbean migration to Europe changed after the second world war, when workers from the region were brought in to work in European metropolises including London, areas that were still suffering from labor shortage (Foote, 2013), the Caribbean migration into the U.S. was accelerated during the 1960s when political turmoil hit countries such as Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic (Zong &Batalova, 2019). The need for U.S. based companies to hire a large number of skilled professional workers, mostly from English-speaking Caribbean nations, including Jamaica, during the period also boosted their migration into the U.S. (Zong & Batalova, 2019).

Since the 1980s, the Caribbean immigrant population has increased significantly, with 2017 statistics indicating that there were approximately 4.4 million Caribbean immigrants (Zong & Batalova, 2019). Studies also indicate that 80% of legal Afro Caribbean immigrants enter the U.S. through family reunification visas while Africans enter in a multitude of ways, including refugee and asylum seekers fleeing violence across the continent (Gleditsch et al., 2002). Some also arrive in the country via the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program and student visas. Some of the difficult situations Caribbean migrants face in the diaspora include working in tough jobs with low pay, labor exploitation, loss of status, finding affordable housing, adjusting to the cold climate, homesickness and culture shock, and racism and discrimination (Foote, 2013).
In the U.S., West Indians (who also are Afro Caribbean), Africans, and African Americans, are mostly settled in large, racially diverse metropolitan areas (Batson, Qien & Lichter, 2006). According to the 2019 Pew Research Center studies, the largest Black immigrant populations lived in metro areas including New York, Miami, Washington D.C., Atlanta, Boston, Houston,

and Dallas (Tamir, 2022). Other studies have also revealed that African immigrants often live near, but not in the same neighborhoods as Afro Caribbean and African Americans, though there are some notable exceptions (Ludwiq, 2014). Such assertions are also confirmed by Smith & Edmonston (1997), who observed patterns of residential segregation among African Americans and other Black immigrants. Further details and statistics leading up to the economic, political and social conditions of the diverse African diaspora groups are discussed in Chapter III.

The Identity Debate

Here, I explore a series of the Black identity debates that have since evolved and broadened in the U.S. Racism ensures that today's African immigrants automatically become part of the Black racial identity as soon as they arrive in the U.S., since they are primarily identified by the color of their skin (Asante, 2012). Clark's (2009) study also confirms these assertions by noting that in America, where ethnicity is conceived as Black and White, African immigrants have to contend with internally and externally imposed identities that often leave them either embracing multiple identities or distancing themselves from an African American identity and all of the baggage that comes with it.

According to University of Minnesota Professor of African American and African Studies, Keith Mayes, "Black" was a term pushed by young activists in the 1960s as a way of rejecting the term "Negro" to refer to the descendants of slaves and to leave the Jim Crow era behind (Chavez, 2020). The term "African American" was later adopted in the 1980s as a more historically focused term compared with the generic "Black," before "people of color," originally meant to be a synonym of Black, was expanded to include Asians, Native Americans, Latinos, and other non-White groups (Chavez, 2020).

When asked about what it meant for “Blacks” in the United States to be referred to as “African Americans" during a televised panel debate hosted in 1989 that also featured Leon Winters, J. Bruce Llewellyn, and Ramon Edelin, the late prominent political organizer in the civil rights movement, Kwame Turé (originally Stokely Carmichael), chose to refer to “African Americans" as “Africans" saying:

> Human progress does not stand still, it moves. We came here (to the U.S.) as Africans. The first organization we had fighting for us was known as the Free African Society. The very first independent organization we had in this country was the church. It was known as the African Methodist Episcopalian Church. So, from Africans, our oppressor has changed us to colored, to Negro, to this to that, we understand it’s a step… Our land is Africa. America is not our land…We are Africans and that’s where we are going (AfroMarxist, 2019).

However, Ture’s views are polar opposite those of others, including the legendary American movie actor Morgan Freeman, who in a recent interview with the *Sunday Times*, rejected the whole idea of using the ‘African’ label:

> “African American is an insult. I don’t subscribe to that title. Black people have had different titles all the way back to the N-word and I do not know how these things get such a grip, but everyone uses ‘African-American’. What does it really mean? ……And you say Africa as if it’s a country when it’s a continent, like Europe…People used to talk trash about Irish Americans, or Italian Americans but not Euro Americans” (Griffin, 2023).

Freeman’s sentiments also echo those of Boxing legend Floyd Mayweather who has also distanced himself from the term African American, choosing to instead identify himself as “an American who was born in American soil.”

The emerging debates surrounding the appropriate terminologies helps explain the role racial and ethnic politics have played in defining groups and individuals, specifically those who trace their roots back to slavery in the U.S. Most importantly, they also broaden debates related to the concepts of race and ethnicity. As Agyemang, Bhopal & Bruijnzeels (2005) note, the

practice of self-definition of ethnicity has gained tremendous support. However, the scholars also argue that the use of broad terms such as "Black," "African," or "Black African" in scientific writings that tend to neglect the existence of diversity within populations of African descent may also be considered inaccurate and offensive (Agyemang, Bhopal & Bruijnzeels, 2005).

In Chapter I, I discuss instances where intragroup conflicts among African Americans, African immigrants and their counterparts from the Caribbean have played out publicly, and the steps that were taken by groups or individual actors to shape and influence their relationships and peaceful coexistence via various state or non-state sponsored strategies, traditional media, and digital platforms. So far in this chapter, I have provided information on the backgrounds, racial and ethnic debates among the African diaspora, as well as debates on identity, immigration, and slavery. Next, I will explore attempts by the mainstream media to bridge such gaps, the creative potential of new media technologies, specifically podcasts, in shaping these relationships, as well as review factors, which may limit the ability of these technologies to achieve their desired goals.

Media's Role in Bridging Gaps

Numerous attempts have been made by traditional forms of media to bridge the divide among African diaspora groups. For instance, films such as the 2015 produced *BlacknBlack* movie showcase the importance of considering the "complex histories of African and American relationships that span several centuries and continents, coloring the interactions and mutual perceptions within the communities of African Heritage" (Rodima-Taylor & Zokou, 2018). The shaky relationships among members of the African diaspora and those in the African continent have also been featured in the highly acclaimed 2012 produced *Black Panther* movie. The controversial film highlights themes such as "Pan-Africanism vs. nationalism, being African vs.

being an 'outsider,' multiple identities of 'Africanness,' African sovereignty, self-determination and colonization, and the role and appearances of Black women" (Neguse, 2018). The 2001 drama *Little Senegal*, directed by Algerian filmmaker Rachid Bouchareb also offers dialogue on "tracing African American roots back to West Africa while exploring the culture clash and apparent animosities between African Americans and Africans" (Shadow & Act, 2017).

Black women's monthly lifestyle magazine *Essence* previously hosted discussions with guests from a wide range of cultural and professional backgrounds immediately after the widespread uproar over 18-year-old Ghanaian American Kwasi Enin's acceptance to all Ivy League schools in the U.S. (Byrd, 2015). American daily *USA Today* had run an article portraying Enin as "not a typical African-American kid" in reference to Enin being an African "whose work ethic and interest in education was stronger than that of a Black American kid, hence, his attractiveness to the nation's top schools" (Byrd, 2015). The debate that ensued on social media highlighted the stereotypes and divisive opinions among various Black groups in the United States (Byrd, 2015).

Opportunities in Podcasting

Podcasting is the blending of the words iPod and broadcasting (Chandler & Munday, 2016). The term was first coined by British technologist and broadcaster Ben Hammersley in his article written for the Guardian in 2004, where he described a new technological advancement in amateur radio (Wolf, 2013). The Leicester born technologist currently based in New York reiterated that podcasts liberated producers from programming regulations, offered a platform to exercise creativity, and gave listeners freedom from space and time (Hammersley, 2004). Harris & Park (2008) describe podcasts as downloadable audio content for playback later, with users

having access to podcast episodes by subscribing to the feeds (Potter, 2006) and listening to available audio files whenever or wherever they are (Mcclung & Johnson, 2010). The medium offers an alternative model of broadcasting (Freire et al., 2018), which largely relies on the internet for distribution (Huntsberger & Stavitsky, 2006: Chawla, 2018).

Since its origins in the early 2000s, podcasting has gained prominence significantly over the years, and has also expanded audio listenership while diversifying culture and listenership (Biewen, 2017). The increase of podcast listenership from a niche to popular market can be traced to *Serial*, an investigative murder series that premiered in 2014 (Bottomley, 2015). Podcast listenership among Blacks in the U.S. can be traced back to the 2013 launch of *The Read'*s podcast that covers Hip Hop and Pop Culture and is presented by two African American comedians Kid fury and Chrissle West (Anderson, 2019). Black podcasters were therefore way ahead of the game by the time the popular *Serial* debuted in 2014 (Florini (2019), with *The Read's* popularity "instrumental in expanding Black podcasts from six programs in 2010 to hundreds by 2015" (Fox, Dowling & Miller, 2020 p. 299).

According to Statista's website, an estimated 78% of Americans were aware of podcasting, with 62 % having previously listened to the medium (Gotting, 2021). The study also revealed that 39 % of people in the U.S. found podcasts to listen to through "recommendations from family, friends, and work colleagues, searching the internet (27%), recommendations or advertisements via social media (25%), recommendations via their usual podcast app (24%), recommendations or advertisements on other podcasts (21%), promotions for podcasts via radio or TV (17%), and recommendations in newspapers/magazines (12%)" (Gotting, 2021).

While Apple has been the biggest hosting platform for podcasts over the years, it is projected that Spotify will surpass the California based company in 2022 by reaching 33.1

million U.S. podcast listeners compared to 28.5 million for Apple podcasts, that is according to eMarketer's latest predictions (Perez, 2021). Spotify's rise to fame is connected to its provision as a one-stop shop for everything related to digital audio and the company's quest to empower podcast developers and advertisers via its "proprietary hosting, creation, and monetization tools," according to eMarketer forecasting analyst Peter Vahle (Insider Intelligence Editors, 2021). Other most commonly used apps for listening to podcasts, specifically in the U.S., include Pandora, Audible and Tunein (Statista, 2022). Whites still dominate podcast audiences in the U.S. (67%), followed by Hispanics (16%), Blacks (11%), Asian Americans (3%) and other ethnicities 4% (Statista, 2021). Studies conducted by *Jacobs Media* also revealed that there was a higher number of males (31%) compared to females (28%) who consumed podcasts in the U.S. and Canada on a weekly basis (Gotting, 2021).

Podcast listeners typically come from all domains (Verna, 2008), with a listener base that tends to have a higher household income and education level (Mitchell, 2015). Generally, some of the motivations for listening to podcasts include information access, education, entertainment, voyeurism, fashion satisfaction, and convenience (Chung & Kim, 2015). The most popular genres in the U.S., according to a survey conducted by the *Morning Consult* and the *Hollywood Reporter*, consisting of comedy, news, true crime, sport, health/fitness, religion, politics, self-help/productivity, investigative journalism, finances, scripted comedy, game show, pop culture and scripted drama (Gotting, 2021). African Americans, on the other hand, produce podcasts covering content such as entertainment, politics, and consumerism from the standpoint of Black identity (Fox, Dowling & Millers, 2020).

Some of the most popular podcasts include "*The Joe Rogan Experience, Crime Junkie, The Daily, This American Life, My Favorite Murder, Stuff You Should Know* and *the Ben*

Shapiro Show" (Edison Podcast Metrics, 2022). Podcasting has also forced legacy news organizations to adopt the technology and increase listenership involvement (Menduni, 2007), with businesses also utilizing it for presentation purposes (McClung & Johnson, 2010).

Even though podcasters face advertising challenges and stiff competition from other online video platforms, including Twitch, Tik Tok and YouTube, there still exists greater possibilities for such platforms to allow marginalized users to circulate their own content while bypassing traditional media outlets (Florini, 2019). Podcasts, therefore, has the potential to afford space for traditionally marginalized groups, including those of the African diaspora, to counternarratives, share their lived experiences, to spread Pan-Africanist ideals, to discourage ethnic stigmatization, and boost connections, while also pushing for social and political change.

Summary

This section provided some historical, political, socio-cultural, and economic background that together shapes the identities and lived experiences of African Americans, Afro Caribbeans, and African immigrants based in the U.S. The chapter considers a range of debates generated among various scholars and members of the community regarding the description of people of African descent, specifically African Americans. Finally, it provided insights on the origins of podcasts, the nature of its use and some of the challenges bedeviling the platform. Next, I present the theoretical frameworks, key concepts, models, and related literature that ground this study.

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the various conceptual frameworks that guide this dissertation. They include, counterpublics sphere, cultural identity and diaspora, and the concept of boundary formations. Literature on migration, and ethnic studies are also featured. Research questions were developed following a review of both theory and related studies, with a summary of the rationale for my questions also featured.

Counterpublics Sphere

Warner (2005) refers to publics as a "queer creature" that is infinite, unobservable, and unavoidable. There also are different kinds of publics, with some more public than others, thus making generalization difficult (Warner, 2005). While its meaning depends on history, culture and appropriation, the definition of publics remains mostly Western centric (Warner, 2005). German social and political thinker Jürgen Habermas is credited with the conceptualization of the term "public sphere" in his 1962 publication the "Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere," which analyzes the historical origins of the bourgeois controlled public sphere and the increasing structural changes influencing the sphere (Kellner, 2000). Habermas studied with other renowned scholars, Horkheimer and Adorno, in Frankfurt, Germany in the 1950s and later examined the emergence of a new public sphere and how it promoted political debates during the Enlightenment period, including the American and French revolutions (Kellner, 2000).

According to Habermas, the public sphere is an arena that exists at the core of a democratic society where conversations and debates are held, even though the space isn't devoid of private interests, capitalism, and cultural industries (Kellner, 2000). Other scholars also view

the "public sphere" as a set of physical or mediated spaces where people can meet, exchange information, debate opinions, and front their political interests and social needs with other members (Squires, 2002).

Public sphere involves the open discussion of issues to advance interests and the public good (Kellner, 2000). According to Habermas (1989), freedom of speech and participation forms a core part of democracy. He reckons that individuals and groups can influence public opinion and shape political discourse, while also catering for their other needs and interests. Rutherford (2000) supports Habermas' by adding that the success of the public sphere is dependent on the rule of law, access, equal participation, the degree of autonomy, and the rejection of hierarchy. Otherwise, the public sphere is also prone to manipulation and control, especially from private interests, including corporations and governments (Habermas, 1989).

Just as there are ambiguities and contradictions in the word 'public' based on its constant transformations (Warner, 2005), Squires (2002) contends that the language captured in Habermas' theory is ambiguous, with many scholars viewing it as encompassing multiple publics based on different characteristics and identities. Fraser (1992) notes that Habermas' articulation of a single public sphere does not fully capture the patterns of public activities in democratic societies that have had a history of inequality among groups. While many scholars agree with Habermas on the importance of promoting citizen debate to enhance a strong democratic system, many have leveled criticisms against the Habermasian sphere itself (Dahlberg, 2005).

Susen (2011) notes that while the Habermasian approach provides useful insights as far as the structural transformation of the public sphere is concerned, especially in the early modern period, it fails to offer an adequate theoretical framework for examining the structural

transformation of public spheres in post-modern times. Susen further criticizes the Habermasian public sphere by asserting that it is exclusively focused on the bourgeois public life, holds a one-sided notion that only the bourgeois public sphere is rational and critical, maintains theoretical gender blindness, and applies a universal and dichotomous conceptualization between the private and public (Susen, 2011).

American philosopher and critical theorist Nancy Fraser argue that Habermas' articulation of a single public sphere does not fully capture the patterns of public activities in democratic societies that have had a history of inequality among groups (Fraser, 1992). Furthermore, Fraser contends that conversations in the public sphere are also shaped by members' cultural or status backgrounds (Squires, 2002). Factors such as ownership and operations, systemic inequality, marginalization, and participatory disparities make up some of the issues associated with the public sphere that benefit dominant groups at the expense of disadvantaged groups (Fraser, 1992).

The term counterpublics is therefore used to describe a subculture that promotes opinion and exchanges that remain distinct from the mainstream or authority (Warner, 2005). According to Fraser (1992), counterpublics sphere parallels discursive arenas where subordinated groups can create discourse, formulate oppositional interpretations, and cater for their own needs and interests. A multiplicity of publics in Frasers' opinion is far much better than a single public (such as that of the public sphere) in terms of promoting participatory parity, especially those formed under conditions of insubordination and dominance (Fraser, 1992).

Fraser argues that there exist two models of public sphere:

(i) the dominant public sphere- a domain of White-, middle- and upper-class males and

(ii) subaltern counterpublics sphere for historically marginalized groups such as women, African Americans, religious minorities, immigrant groups, which have all been systematically excluded from the dominant public sphere (Squires, 2002).

The Black Public Sphere

Marginalized groups such as African Americans have not only lacked a voice but have been on the receiving end of systematic exclusionary tactics from traditional forms of engagement, including law and social practice (Hill, 1997). The rejection of Blackness and Black culture through the proliferation of racist imagery and stereotypes in the mainstream media (Coleman, 1998) and the aggressive discourse of Whiteness have facilitated Black people's representation as expressions of social menace and male irresponsibility (Gray, 1995). Therefore, according to African American scholar Houston A. Baker Jr., nothing might seem less realistic or believable to African Americans than the notion of establishing their own Black public sphere (Everett, 2002).

Consequently, such negative representations and exclusionary practices by the dominant cultures have forced Black people to seek other discursive arenas to communicate and interact with each other freely. They converge together to worship, address communal issues, weave each other's hair, and exchange news, while using humor, music, and style to interact with each other (Harris-Lacewell, 2004). Such spaces, including barbershops and beauty salons, offer a platform to communicate ideologies and strategies and develop understandings of their collective interests (Harris-Lacewell, 2004).

The roots of such expressive cultures and practices can be traced back to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, where in the darkened abyss and below the decks of their European masters' slave ships, kidnapped slaves forged a virtual community of intercultural kinship structures, choosing to

express them through dance, language, song, talking drums, and other musical elements (Everett, 2002). The formation of such communicative strategies served to help captives to overcome their dislocation, alienation, and eventual commodification (Everett, 2002).

American political scientist Michael Dawson also traces the roots of the Black public sphere back to the antebellum America and the early 70's (Dawson, 1995). He defines the Black public sphere as a set of organizations, practices, and communication networks that promote debates on causes of and solutions to the current political and economic repression facing the majority of the Black community, as well as create alternative sites to gather (Dawson, 1995). For instance, the early Black press served to establish an African American identity through countering stereotypes perpetuated by the White owned press (Berardi & Segady, 1990). The role played by the Black press was central to the groups' history and culture, similarly to the Black churches, political and service organizations, cultural institutions, and schools and universities (Rhodes, 2016).

Magazines such as *Essence* focus on celebrating and empowering, while simultaneously receiving criticism for commodifying and selling Black images to multinational corporations for exploitation purposes (Gumbs, 2012). Other magazines, like *Black World/Negro Digest* and *Jet*, founded and owned by African American publisher John H. Johnson, also featured news articles highlighting the experiences of African diasporan people, while also aiming to connect their experiences with those in the African continent.

Instances of Black people establishing and participating in their own communicative platforms also thrived in areas like Chicago. For example, WVON-AM radio, a Chicago based Black-owned talk-radio station, created a platform for listeners to engage alternative conversational and physical public spheres. These spaces, allowed the audience to circulate

information and provide opportunities for community interaction and political involvement (Squires, 2000).

Other alternative strategies to counter hegemonic discourse among the African diaspora have also been applied in Art and music. For instance, the Hip Hop movement, which can be traced to the 1970s and was featured in places such as basements, street corners, public parks, demonstrated that a place for Hip Hop's socially conscious discourse existed (Watkins, 2006). Rap music has also been referred to as the "theater of the powerless" and a hidden transcript that uses cloaked speech and disguised cultural codes to comment on and challenge aspects of power inequalities, telling alternative stories, destabilizing hegemonic discourse, legitimating counter hegemonic interpretations, acting as an educative tool and drawing portraits of contact with dominant groups (Rose, 1994).

However, while the public sphere has long been heralded as a key part of promoting a well-functioning democratic system, it has also undergone many substantial transformations, including coming online (Holm, 2019). For the African diaspora, the year 1995 marked a watershed period in the history of internet transformation when *Yahoo* search engines initiated a separate category for Afrocentric content on the World Wide Web, providing an opportunity for them to forge a digital Black public sphere (Everett, 2002).

According to Kimberly Bryant, founder of Black Girls Code non-profit organization, which provides education to African American girls on the use of technology, Black America's digital footprint has witnessed an exponential growth, especially as result of smartphone technology and increased access to new media for content exchange (Booker, 2019).

The idea of a digital Black public sphere makes perfect sense for a community such as the African diaspora since digital media is often praised as potential space for resistance,

counter- discourse production, and the dissemination of alternative information (Florini, 2019). However, the digital media landscape has been impacted by neoliberal discourse, with its development and growth possibilities hampered by individualistic values and articulations of color-blind doctrines (Brock, 2020), doctrines that may be held responsible for erasing the groups' experiences (Florini, 2019).

Furthermore, the technological tools' focus on individuals have cultivated a change in focus from communities to loose networks of individuals, which Rainie & Wellman (2012) refers to as "networked individualism." This means that an African diaspora user might choose to pursue online practices that serve their own individualized interests while establishing networks that may not necessarily reflect the collective interests of the African diaspora. Andre Brock also notes that "Black Information technology use highlights Black technical and cultural capital while disrupting the White, male middle class norms of Western techno culture. Black digital practice challenges these norms through displacement, performativity, pathos, and the explicit use of Black cultural common practices." (Brock, 2020 p.17).

According to Fraser, the subaltern counterpublics may also have a dual character in stratified societies, including serving as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment, and as training grounds for activities directed towards the populace (Fraser, 1992). The *Black Twitter* hashtag, for instance, possesses characteristics of a counter public (Graham & Smith, 2016), since it is built on commentary about matters affecting the community (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2012), and is more likely to steer communicative efforts (Castells, 2012).

Factors that have always affected the public sphere, including ownership and operations, systemic inequality, marginalization, and participatory disparities that benefit the dominant groups at the expense of the disadvantaged groups (Fraser, 1992), have also slowly and steadily become

associated with the counterpublics sphere. For instance, while new media tools continue to prompt optimistic predictions about a level playing field and therefore increases in diversity, innovation, and opportunities for inclusion (Dicken-Garcia, 1996; Marvin, 1988), the same technologies also can be used as tools of oppression and discrimination and often privilege the dominant White group at the expense of people of color (Noble, 2018). Moreover, even though studies conducted in the U.S. suggest that podcasting "appears to be more diverse than the nation," as evidenced by the ways in which listenership cuts across different races, age groups and ethnicities (Inside Radio, 2021), the innovation remains a mostly White male dominated platform.

While hate groups in the U.S. have used digital platforms to attack immigrants, seeking to position them as threats to personal, economic, cultural, and national security (Costello, Restifo & Hawdon, 2021), Fraser (1992) contends that hate groups still help expand discursive space, nonetheless. However, Fraser (1992) also concedes that platforms are not necessarily virtuous in promoting democratic or egalitarian ideals, and fail to consider on a way to end marginalization.

Squires (2000) argues that while most theorists agree that there exist multiple, subaltern counterpublics spheres that coexist, discussions revolving around them have dwelt on group identity markers to differentiate between them and have therefore failed to offer alternative means for understanding differences among them. Based on exploring the history of the African American public sphere, Squires calls for the reconceptualization of counterpublics by noting that certain conditions may force marginalized groups to form what she refers to as "enclaves," "satellites" and "counterpublics" (Squires, 2002).

Conditions leading to such formations may include historical, socioeconomic, and political factors, with marginalized groups motivated to create such separations to keep their cultural identities intact (Squires, 2002). Members of enclaved publics are mostly hidden to protect

themselves, especially under repressive conditions (Squires, 2002). Counterpublics mostly engage with the public as a way to influence change (Squires, 2002). These engagements may lead to community actions, including protests and boycotts (Steele, 2018). Depending on circumstances, satellites may decide to engage with the general public while also remaining totally independent from it (Squires, 2002).

Fraser's' (1992) subaltern counterpublics sphere idea, which recognizes the struggles and contributions of marginalized groups outside the mainstream public sphere spaces that are mostly dominated by White upper-class males, provide fodder for examining the circulation of counter discourses among the marginalized African diasporan podcasters, their chosen mode of interaction (enclaves, counterpublics or satellites), and their work using podcasts as an alternative tool to promote or impede African diasporic consciousness. Moreover, with the coming of the digital age, the idea of examining civic discourses and participation among a historically marginalized such as the African diaspora group must be treated as an object of research interest because it offers clues on their understudied efforts to democratize the public space.

The Concept of Diaspora

Diaspora has been studied across various fields, including history, sociology, Black studies, religion, anthropology, music, dance, cinema among others (Brubaker, 2005). The ongoing global transformations, debates on the reconstruction of race and ethnic boundaries have also increased attention to the concept of diaspora (Anthias, 1998). Available studies suggest that the definition of the word "diaspora" itself remains contested. According to Patterson & Kelley (2000), the word diaspora originates from a Greek word referring to the scattering of people from their original homeland and was first used to describe the dispersion of Jews throughout the

Western hemisphere (Patterson & Kelley, 2000). Sheffer (1998) however noted that it was inaccurate to only associate diaspora with the Jewish people since there were many others who existed before, including Phoenicians, Nabatheans and Assyrians. The notion that diaspora is a vast territorial boundary whose people have settled in various parts of the world has also been challenged by scholars such as Werbner, who contends that members of a diaspora have shifting diaspora formations and multiple boundaries and should not be treated the same as a group (Werbner, 2015).

Bruneau (1995) identifies three major types of diasporas, which include the entrepreneurial diasporas i.e., the Chinese, the religious diaspora i.e., Greeks or Jews, and the politic diasporas who include Palestinians and Tibetans. Cohen (1997) further identifies labor diasporas, i.e., Indians, the trade diasporas, i.e., Chinese and Lebanese, the imperial diasporas, i.e., the British, and the cultural diasporas that include the Caribbean people. The cultural diasporas stem from the fact that most actors in these groups tend to be active in the public sphere and may include intellectuals, leaders, and writers (Anteby-Yemini & Berthomiere, 2005).

Safran (1991) broadened the definition of diaspora by noting that it could apply to numerous populations, including Africans. The phrase, African diaspora, was first used in 1965 by George Shepperson and Joseph E. Harris based on similarities between the scattering of Africans to various parts of the world as a result of slave trade and that of the Jewish diaspora (Ranger, 1968). To Shepperson, the migration of African slaves to Europe long before the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the enslavement of Africans by Muslim powers, European enslavement of Africans, and the dispersal of Africans within Africa both as a result of slave trade and

imperialism played a significant role towards the conceptualization of African diaspora (Alpers, 2001).

Scholars such as Harris (1993) have also broadened Shepherson's definition to assume a more continuous, dynamic, and complex characteristic stretching across aspects such as time, geographical location, gender, and class. According to Harris, the African diaspora comprises those dispersed voluntarily and involuntarily throughout history; groups may form a distinct cultural identity in their host nations based on their origin and social condition; and groups have a desire to return to their African homeland either psychologically or physically (Harris, 1993).

Just like Jews or Armenians, Africans have been victims of imperialism, forcibly dispersed from their homelands, subjected to persecution in their hosting nation, and to a greater degree still hold myths of the return to the original homeland, sometimes translated into solidarity with those in the African continent (Safran, 1991). Safran's views are in tandem with Clifford's (1994) assertions that African diaspora groups envision the African continent as their future home, consider themselves subjugated in their host nations, and lean towards forming a single culture even though they lack an official language and sovereign territories.

Safran further details the factors leading to the formation of a diasporan consciousness which include:

(i) The dispersal from these groups or their ancestors from their original homeland to two or more regions, often by violent forces or threat of violence;

(ii) The making of a collective memory, vision or myth of that homeland;

(iii) The alienation/marginalization in their new location;

(iv) A commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the original homeland;

(v) and the desire for return (when conditions are appropriate) and a continuing relationship (either personally or vicariously) and identity with the homeland that shapes the consciousness and solidarity of the group (Safran, 1991 p. 83- 84)

Butler (2001) also notes that a diaspora group must have the following characteristics:

(i) Scattered in two or more destinations;

(ii) maintain some kind of relationship with their original homelands whether or not it continues to exist after the scattering;

(iii) exist over two or more generations; and have a

(iv) collective common identity within the dispersed group.

African diaspora groups are considered marginalized in the United States. They generally face challenges such as police brutality, inequalities in health care and educational opportunities, and high incarceration rates. Being marginalized also plays a part in the creation of diasporic consciousness and solidarity among the African diasporan populace present in the U.S. African Americans, African and Afro Caribbean immigrants often come together to participate in protests against racism and police brutality, as witnessed during the recent killing of George Floyd, an African American, by a White police officer, Derek Chauvin, as an example. Just like African Americans, Immigrants of both African and Afro Caribbean descent have also lost their

lives to police force violence. They include: Burkinabé Ousmane Zongo, who was shot and killed by an NYPD officer in 2003; second generation Haitian American immigrant Patrick Dorismond, shot and killed in 2000; Jamaican-American teen Ramarley Graham who died in 2012 in the Bronx; and Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo, who was killed with 41 bullets at the hands of four plainclothes police officers, claiming that he met the description of a rape suspect and seemed to have a weapon on him (Ibrahim, 2020). Ethiopian immigrant, Mulugeta Seraw, was also clobbered to death in 1988 by three White supremacists in a hate crime related incident that occurred in Portland, Oregon. Nigerian American Oluwatoyin Salau was also murdered under suspicious circumstances with the Tallahassee Police Department, leading the chairman of the Nigerians Diaspora Commission to demand a full investigation into her death from the U.S. It should be noted, however, that some of the challenges faced by diaspora groups in the U.S. may also vary depending on the wealth and status of an individual, nationality, religion, citizenship status and level of education.

African music elements and rhythms have influenced Caribbean music genres such as *reggae*, which have also been used by Afro diaspora artists as a tool to promote African diasporan consciousness while shaping the collective memory, vision, or myth of their African homeland. For instance, the song, *identity*, quoted below, was written, and performed by the late Jamaican Reggae icon Peter Tosh. The Afro Caribbean artist often paid homage to his African roots in his lyrics, as evidenced in the track released in 1977.

"So, don't care where you come from
As long as you're a black man, you're an African
No mind your nationality
You have got the identity of an African

Cause if you come from Trinidad, You're an African) ...

And if you come from Cuba, you're an African…

And if you come from Brooklyn, You're an African...

And if you come from Canada, You're an African…

And if you come from Switzerland, You're an African

And if you come from Germany, You're an African

And if you come from Russia, You're an African

And if you come from Taiwan, You're an African

.... So, don't care where you come from

As long as you're a black man, you're an African

No mind your complexion,

There is no rejection, you're an African

Cause if your complexion high, high, high

If your complexion low, low

And if your complexion in between, you're an African"

(*Identity,* by peter Tosh)

The lyrics not only encourage Africans in the diaspora to identify or find ways to establish connections to their African homeland, but also highlight the reluctance of some Black people around the world to identify themselves as Africans, either because of the color of their skin, their nationality, and other historical factors. This reluctance has not only been expressed through music but also expressed through the views of some podcasters, who continue to play a vital role in shaping public opinion, within and outside the group.

There are several instances showing diasporan groups, including some African Americans' efforts to shape their collective memory as far as their African homeland is concerned. For instance, the Netflix docuseries *High on the Hog* traces the historical origins of African American foods, spices, and food culture back to Africa, with the host and producer Stephen Satterfield also exploring African Americans' food influences on the wider American food culture. Films such as *Coming 2 America* and *Black Panther,* which have been criticized for stereotyping Africa and African Americans, also touch on myths and visions about their African homeland.

The high number of African Americans, the Afro Caribbean who attended the "Year of Return, Ghana 2019" celebrations, and the numerous recorded visits by members of the African diaspora to various historical sites, including the Cape Coast and Elmina slave castles, signal a desire for return and a relationship between both worlds. Moreover, African Americans' continuous investment in businesses, agriculture, and cultural and political participation in various places around Africa, also provides evidence of a commitment to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland. Advocating for Pan-Africanist causes, while calling for an end to colonialism, neocolonialism, apartheid, and western imperialism in the African continent signal African Americans, and the Afro Caribbeans' efforts to cultivate a continuous relationship with their African homeland. Moreover, a number of African Americans and Afro Caribbeans have settled and invested in African countries such as Ghana and Ethiopia. They include renowned African American Scholar W.E.B Du Bois who moved to Ghana in the early 1960s, died and is buried in the capital Accra. The family of the legendary Jamaican reggae musician Bob Marley also owns a house in the Aburi mountains, Ghana, while Trinidadian born civil rights leader Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael) fled to Guinea with his then wife, the

late South African songstress Miriam Makeba, where he served in various portfolios in the country's leadership and later died and was buried in the capital Conakry.

Studies have also challenged the traditional cultural connections to a 'homeland' or focus on a 'return,' especially in the case of dispersed Africans and those from the Caribbean whose desire may not necessarily be to have roots in a specific place or a desire to return, but reestablishing a culture in various locations (Clifford, 1994). For instance, while the American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) movement may consider their perceived members subjugated in the U.S., they still envision their host country as their future home and lean towards establishing their own nativist culture separate from that which may include recently arrived immigrants or American-born descendants whose families have settled in the country for generations. ADOS' advocacy which is only aimed towards catering for the needs and interests of those who only trace their roots to slavery not only raises doubts on the concept of African diaspora but highlights how individual or group identities may influence the definition of the concept.

Political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson also explores the quest for diaspora groups to unite and form a 'nation,' albeit imagined. He describes it as a sense of communion among people who often do not know each other or haven't met but, despite their differences, imagine belonging to the same collectivity based on a common history, traits, attitudes, and beliefs (Anderson, 2006). They can include co-nationals, co-ethnics, co-religionists and to some extent classes, social movements, and generations. It can be argued that transnational African diasporic practices such as advocating and lobbying for Pan Africanism, the incorporation of African music styles by African Americans in music genres such as jazz, country, rock and hip hop, music collaborations among African American artists, African and Afro Caribbean artists, donation programs, and practices of producing art and films that provoke a desire by members of

the African diaspora to return to the African homeland are also geared towards the promotion of an imagined 'nation,' bonded together by a set of common history and beliefs.

Benedict Anderson also explores the concept of long-distance nationalism, which refers to a set of identity claims and practices that connect people living in different geographical locations to a territory that they view as their homeland (Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 2001). Long distance nationalists therefore consist of people who share the common belief with nationalists that a nation consists of people with a common identity, territory, and history (Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 2001). However, the main difference between them is that long-distance nationalism is a product of transnationalism and binds together those who have immigrated, their descendants, and those still present in their original homeland into one single transborder citizenry (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 2001). Long-distance nationalists may include emigrant groups such as exiles who engage in practices such as voting, lobbying, donations, art creation, killing, demonstration or dying (Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 2001).

While Anderson explores the formation of diasporic communities as a transnational phenomenon, my study seeks to dissect the imagined formations and relationships, specifically among the African diaspora, within a particular nation state, the U.S. However, I also recognize the fact that while I do not necessarily focus on African diasporic formations from a global or transnational standpoints, the practices of those studied in this research and the repercussions of their work go beyond their state borders courtesy of their content, targeted audiences, and the nature and spread of digital technologies. A future study to ascertain the role and influence of podcasts in shaping relationships among African diasporan groups may be undertaken by scrutinizing the work of podcasters or audiences beyond the U.S. through the application of both transnationalism or globalization concepts. My study may not be able to achieve these due to

time constraints and the cost involved in carrying out such an undertaking. However, such a study would be worth considering in the future.

Scholars have also distinguished between diaspora and emigration, with Butler (2001) noting that while diaspora involves the movement of a group from a single homeland to various locations, emigration involves the seasonal relocation to a single destination usually because of various factors including intolerable economic conditions. Other studies, however, indicate that emigrants can also be categorized as diasporas, even if they have been assimilated, like in the case of the Italian diaspora (Brubaker, 2005). Brubaker's conceptualization therefore means that no matter how much groups that trace their roots back to the African homeland (African immigrants, the Afro Caribbean, and African Americans) assimilate into American culture, they still earn the right to be classified as members of the African diaspora.

Clark's (2008) study on immigration reveals an interesting trend. The increase in African immigrants coming into the United States since the 1980s has led to these immigrants being referred to as "the new African diaspora," "the new African Americans," "the other African Americans," "first generation African Americans of African descent," "foreign born African Americans," or "African Americans of recent African descent" (Clark, 2008). While Clark's description, "the new African diaspora" provide evidence to confirm Brubaker's propositions that African immigrants might as well constitute the African diaspora, a scrutiny of these descriptive terms clearly recognizes that there exist certain similarities as well as differentials with regard to the conceptualization of recently arrived African immigrants and African Americans. Such contrasts will further be explored through adopting Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity and diaspora.

Cultural Identity and Diaspora

The concept of cultural identity and diaspora provides a framework that helps evaluate some of the transformations of diasporic identities as evidenced through the lifestyles and reviewed themes of podcasts that reinforce notions of a shared culture, and differences in each respective host's cultural identities. Hall (1991) work also highlights how various forms of visual representation produced by the Afro Caribbean individuals settled in the West are inspired by their own history and cultural practices. He also notes that practices of representation expose the position from which an individual speaks or writes, a position he refers to as *enunciation* (Hall, 1991).

He theorizes that though we may express ourselves based on our own experiences, the speaker and the subject who is spoken of never share similar experiences or come from the same place (Hall, 1991). Hall also views identity as a process/production within these representations, adding that we all express ourselves from a particular place, time, history, and a culture that influence us to speak from a *positioned* context (Hall, 1991). Notions, which provide the necessary tools for analyzing how the past and present lived experiences of African diasporan podcasters shape their content, identities and practices.

Identity is also described as an indication of conflict and hence is often invoked in arguments that are more political than philosophical (Gilroy, 1996). Such overlapping settings place the stability and coherence of the self in jeopardy, explaining why identity has become a popular, valuable, and useful concept (Gilroy, 1996). According to Hall (1991), there are at least two different ways of thinking about identity: The first reinforces the notion of a group of people with a shared culture, a shared history and ancestry, while the second recognizes such shared similarities but that there are also critical points of deep and significant differences.

The first definition recognizes that Africans in the diaspora share a history of collective struggle, which according to West (1999), includes brutal enslavement, institutional terrorism, and cultural degradation. Such conceptions of cultural identity shaped post-colonial struggles and influenced the works of photographer Armet Francis, renowned poets including Aimee Ceasire and Leopold Senghor, as well as bolstering Pan African unity quests (Hall, 1991).

The second definition recognizes the differences in the diverse socio-political identities and their continuous transformations. It emphasizes the similarities and the differences amongst an imagined cultural group and may be useful in understanding the trauma of colonialism because it emphasizes the historical and social contingency of identity (Hussey, 2014). The similarities and differences of the group's cultural identity makeup also offer a chance to understand what Black people really are or what they have become after history's intervention (Hall, 1991).

Stuart Hall's conceptualization of cultural identity as that which constantly undergoes transformations will provide the framework of analyzing the topics and themes covered in the podcasts, as well as helping provide the appropriate contextualization of each podcaster's contrasting identities and transformations as shaped by their own histories and lived experiences.

Concept of Boundary Making

The concept of boundaries has previously been used to explore social and collective identity and racial and ethnic group positioning (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). This study, therefore, borrows the concept from the field of sociology and applies it to the field of communication to help explore the documented porousness that exist among African diasporan ethnic group boundaries. These provide crucial clues and contextualization with regard to African diasporic

relationships, as well as assessing the implications of digital technologies, specifically podcasts, on the same group. These will be done by examining topics covered on the podcasts that reveal the creative's individual or collective ethnic group identities.

Studies on ethnicity, race and nations were initially fragmented into separate fields with much of the research focused or produced in the U.S. (Brubaker, 2009). While there has been a growing body of literature with changes in disciplinary boundaries, not much has changed in the case of paradigmatic compartmentalization (Brubaker, 2009). Changes witnessed in the current field of study have several characteristics, including comparative, global transformations, interdisciplinary and multiparadigmatic (Brubaker, 2009). Despite the broad recognition of the constructivist school of thought, there are substantialist and 'groupist' assumptions, which continue to inform studies on ethnicity, race, and nation (Brubaker, 2009).

Barth's constructivist approach, which explores how the boundaries between two ethnic groups are maintained, even though they may have cultures that are alike, is a total departure from the Herderian school of thought, which mostly views and defines ethnic identity as that acquired through birth (Wimmer, 2008). Barth also conceptualizes ethnicity as a product of continuous social processes rather than culturally given, "made and remade rather than taken for granted, chosen depending on circumstances rather than ascribed through birth" (Wimmer, 2008 p. 971). He rejects a view of ethnicity that stresses on a shared culture, in favor of a more relational approach emphasizing that feelings of communality should be understood in opposition to the perceived identity of other racial and ethnic groups (Barth, 1969).

Brubaker's constructivist approach also challenges the notion of 'groupism,' viewing it as a perspective rather than a thing (Svet, 2008). For instance, while ethnicity has often been conceived of as a collective identity, some scholars (Barth: 1969; Lamont, 2000; Alba, 2005;

Loveman, 1997) define it in subjective terms based on the foundations set forth by German sociologist, historian, jurist and political economist Max Weber. Weber notes that it is a subjectively experienced feeling of belonging that is based on the belief in a shared culture and common ancestry (Wimmer, 2008). Weber also calls for the abandonment of the entire conception of ethnic groups, owing to its complexities and vagueness (Svet, 2008).

Wimmer adds that other scholars identify the term as a result of struggle, either political or symbolic, over some of the classifications or categorical divisions present in society (Bourdieu, 1991; Brubaker, 2004; Wimmer, 1994). In Brubaker's view, race and ethnicity should not be represented as a group but as a political, social, and psychological process involving institutions/individuals that thrive from ethnicity (Brubaker, 2004). Such an approach is also referred to as "instrumentalism," which posits that individuals choose between various identities based on self-interest (Wimmer, 2008).

Modernists also link the prominence of ethnicity to the rise of the modern state, while perennialists maintain that ethnicity represents some of the most stable principles of social organizations when it comes to human history (Wimmer, 2008). Barth's (1969) work on ethnic groups and boundaries is influential because it challenges the traditional approaches to ethnicity while calling for perspective shifts towards the dynamics surrounding ethnic boundaries. Ethnic boundaries could not be observed by examining cultural traits, but emerge through categorical distinctions, interactions, prescriptions, and proscriptions, which influence social relationships based on who can interact with whom (Brubaker, 2009).

Scholars have also focused on group-making projects, studies related to classification, categorization, symbolic struggles, and assimilation (Brubaker, 2009). The same debates pitting the Herderian school of thought and groupism against constructivist approaches also surround

studies of group making projects, including the concept of boundaries. The concept has been used to explore social and collective identity, class, gender, racial and ethnic group positioning, professions, communities, and institutions (Lamont & Molnar, 2002).

A boundary typically displays a categorical social classification, collective representation and a socio behavioral dimension based on networks of relationships and individual acts, either through connection or distancing (Wimmer, 2008). Boundary making is sometimes referred to as group formation, a term first coined by Wimmer (2009). There are two types of boundaries: symbolic and social boundaries (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). "Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (Lamont & Molnar, 2002 p. 2). Symbolic boundaries are also synonymous with the practice of separating people into groups, thus creating feelings of commonality and group membership (Epstein, 1992). It is at this level that people acquire status and control of resources (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Both social and symbolic boundaries are closely connected. However, social boundaries are institutionalized, while symbolic boundaries involve classification struggles where the majority attempt to maintain privileges that come with their status (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003). The way symbolic boundaries are also policed or made porous basically reveals the strategic interests of majority groups (Bail, 2008).

Social boundaries only take effect when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon to the point where they show identifiable patterns of social interaction including social exclusion or racial and class segregation (Massey & Denton, 1993). Therefore, "Social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities' ' (Lamont & Molnar, 2002 p. 2).

Strategies that may be applied by an individual or collective actor to pursue ethnic boundary formations include institutional frameworks, the hierarchical positions of power, and structures of political alliances that determine who exactly is included in the actor's own category (Wimmer, 2008). Political alliances are also more likely to be formed between co-ethnics than between individuals depending on how salient the boundary is. However, the process of identification among individuals may also shift depending on the circumstance (Wimmer, 2008).

Zolberg & Woon (1999) identify three strategies that define the types of boundary making as a possible result of in-group and out-group negotiations: moving from one side to the other without altering the boundary (boundary crossing); decreasing the meaning of the primordial categories of differentiation (boundary blurring); and the incorporation of outgroup members into the in-group (boundary shifting). Wimmer (2008) observes that changes in some groups and boundaries are gradual processes and may occur in the course of many generations or a lifespan. Wimmer also adds that actors can take advantage of various strategies of ethnic boundary making, including boundary expansion, boundary contraction, boundary inversion, repositioning, and blurring, depending on their social contexts (Wimmer, 2008).

Boundary expansion involves the creation of a larger ethnic group from other smaller groups with the purpose of consolidating power or centralizing the system (Wimmer, 2008). Boundary contraction involves the promotion of narrower boundaries than those already existing in the social landscape (Wimmer, 2008). Bourdeau (1984) notes that certain elements in the dominant groups exercise "symbolic violence" by imposing a specific meaning as legitimate to mark cultural distance and proximity, thus monopolizing privileges to exclude and recruit new occupants to high status positions. "Boundary blurring aims to overcome ethnicity as a principle

of categorization and social organization altogether" (Wimmer, 2008, p. 189). Boundary blurring can occur if the mainstream culture and identity are relatively porous and allow for the incorporation of cultural elements from immigrant groups (Alba, 2015). Boundary repositioning occurs at an individual or collective level. It describes the actions of an actor seeking to change their own position within an existing hierarchical boundary system either through acquiring a status or religious change (Wimmer, 2008). Normative inversion mainly targets the hierarchical ordering of ethnic groups (Wimmer, 2008). The stigmatized often do not passively accept their inferior position in society but choose to transform negative meanings associated with their collective identity by developing certain strategies meant to challenge stereotypes directed towards their groups while negotiating the boundaries (Celik, 2018).

Related Studies

Since this research is interdisciplinary in nature, I review the interrelated studies as guided by the aforementioned theories. Around the global African mediascape, diaspora-based podcasters have been some of the earliest adopters of the technology (Royston, 2021). In the U.S., studies note that Black digital users have laid their claim to digital techno culture through creating Black spaces and performing Blackness in a mostly White dominated space (Brock, 2020). Such trends have therefore prompted scholars to explore the use of alternative spaces to create discourse while also countering narratives among groups of African descent. Several scholars (Fox, Dowling & Millers, 2020; Florini, 2017; Laughlin, 2021), have mostly explored such research through a racial lens.

Studies on the power and ability of podcasts to form enclaved social spaces have mostly focused on audience-based research. For instance, Susen (2015) found that the practice of Black listeners of podcasts who tune in to Black content using their headphones in majority White spaces

constituted an enclave habitus. Laughlin's (2021) study also found that Black Christian podcasters created both an enclave space, where Black listeners cocooned themselves in Black cultural idioms, and a counterpublics space that also targeted the general Christian public.

Research touching on the types of marginal publics have also been explored outside of podcasting. Steele's (2018) study applied critical techno cultural discourses to examine how bloggers and their communities make use of satellite and enclave spaces to explore Black representation, Black feminism, and class consciousness. The study, also explored through mostly racial lens, also found that Black bloggers may intentionally keep their conversations hidden from the dominant group or sometimes opt to engage with the masses (Steele, 2018).

Studies tracing the increase in popularity of podcasts focusing on the meaning of Blackness and hosted by African Americans also reveal that African American produced podcasts cover content such as entertainment, politics, and consumerism from the standpoint of Black identity (Fox, Dowling & Millers, 2020). Florini's (2017) study also found that Black podcasting helped provide insights and spark conversations and debates within the community. Studies exploring the practices of US based diasporan podcasters producing content for English speaking Africans in the US found that they featured neocolonialism, music, African cultural traditional values, love, relationships and gender related topics (Apiyo & Stavitsky, 2019). Other studies have further explored the use of Black podcasts as a discursive online tool for social justice, especially among African American women (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2009). Markmann's (2011) study studied the motivations of independent podcasters and identified financial, personal, interpersonal, media technology, content, and process as the six major categories of motivations for podcasting.

Studies exploring the nature, conversational styles and approaches applied by podcasters focusing on the meaning of Blackness while targeting African Americans have also found that

their programming featured aspects such as intimacy and authenticity, and outspoken views on issues challenging the problems that characterize their lived experiences, especially racism (Fox, Dowling & Miller, 2020). Royston's (2021) study also examined the content, structure, and themes of podcasts produced by podcasters in Africa and its diaspora and noted that the oral cultures they practiced while using the platform as a storytelling media served as an extension to the oral African traditions. Traditions, which often includes a range of diverse communicative aspects such as music (Nketia, 1963), use of cultural proverbs (Furniss & Gunner, 2008) and storytelling (Scheub, 2004). Historically, during the dreadful period of slavery, the enslaved still engaged in solidarity and cohesion building via activities such as games, festivals, ritual dances, and drumming during their free time (Foote, 2013). Family and religion, including African traditions and later Christianity were also crucial for their existence and survival (Foote, 2013).

Other studies (outside of podcasting) have examined the communicative strategies applied by Black content creators to communicate with their audiences. Gates' (2015) examined images on television shows such as *Love and Hip-Hop, Basketball Wives* and *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* to help illuminate the intersectional marginalization of Black women. He found that Black content creators activated the use of negative images associated with Blackness as a way of expressing or containing negation or denial to disrupt hegemonic norms associated with race, class, gender, and sexuality. Others have focused on communicative strategies used by Black women in grassroot organizing and found that these women employed basic tactics such as mimeographing and xeroxing to further their community's agenda, while also adapting to the changing demands of community empowerment in the digital age (Everett, 2002). Everett's study is important because it helps provide clues on the forms of orature (old or new media) applied by African diaspora podcasters to communicate with their audiences, while Gates' study also provides

groundwork for analyzing some of the communicative strategies and techniques applied to connect to their audiences.

Studies exploring the influence of external forces on discourses within the counterpublics sphere also reveal that podcasting has been used to shape discourse and to counter narratives that have been weaponized in order to lessen the severity of African American experiences. Narratives, which may be influenced by neoliberalist and color-blind doctrines. Just like in the environment which public service media operate in, podcasts also exist in a competitive and neo liberalized space that "prices above all the attention given by individualized listeners to specific creators willing to put some version of their intimate selves on display" (Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019 p.268). With podcasting shares many of the formal ideals of the public sphere presented by Jurgen Habermas (Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019), some scholars have questioned the platform's ability to expand the public sphere. Even though it offers a cheaper mode of discourse, unique opportunities to present diverse viewpoints and intimacy, and an avenue to mitigate physical discrimination, podcasting remains unpublic, with few creators having the chance to create a massive impact (Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019). Furthermore, not everyone has access or the technological knowhow to produce an episode (Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019).

Studies have also explored some of the racial inequalities when it comes to ownership and the use of podcasts while offering insights into how minority groups navigate some of these facets. Vrikki & Malik's (2019) study exploring the role podcasts play as an alternative platform in articulating the day-to-day lived experiences of Black and Asian podcasters in the UK, authors found that even though podcasting was still a space dominated by Whiteness, the platform still offered these groups a safe venue to express their identities in their preferred manner, build trust,

and challenge broader patterns of racism while also creating a framework for political activity. Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo (2019) also note that while podcast hosts use their own lived experiences to connect with their listeners, their mainstream successes are limited since White podcasters still dominated the platforms, with the already established mainstream designs and normative sound nearly indistinguishable from Whiteness

The aforementioned studies lay the groundwork to examine the online and offline spaces utilized by African diaspora podcasters to shape relationships among the African diaspora, and their contribution to the diasporan digital cultures. These efforts align with the podcasters goal to connect with their audiences in an environment currently dominated by Whiteness, that has systematically excluded them from participating in the mainstream public sphere.

Sociological research studies have also examined the relationships among African diasporan groups. Some have focused on the level of closeness and relationships among African Americans, African immigrants, and the Afro Caribbeans, while revealing that both African Americans and their Afro Caribbean counterparts are similar in their levels of closeness to other groups such as Whites and Asian Americans, while African Americans tend to relate more with their African as compared to their Afro Caribbean counterparts (Thornton, Taylor & Chatters, 2012). Research also reveals that Afro Caribbean Americans express a closer kinship than African Americans towards Black people from the Caribbean and Africa (Thornton, Taylor & Chatters, 2012).

Intermarriage relationships within the group have also been explored. Intermarriage indicates a final stage in the assimilation of racial and ethnic groups, thus representing deep erosion of social boundaries (Lieberson & Waters, 1988). Existing studies reveal that social, cultural, and economic barriers pose a challenge to intermarriage relationships among African

diaspora groups (Batson, Qian & Lichter, 2006). Immigrants are more likely to marry immigrants of the same national origin, while West Indians, a group that also include Afro Caribbeans, believe that intermarriages with other Black populations leads to a "downward mobility" (Batson, Qian & Lichter, 2006).

Although classical assimilation theory predicts that immigrants may lag in marital assimilation compared with their native-born American counterparts, research shows that the reverse is also true (Batson, Qien & Lichter, 2006). Recently arrived immigrants, including African and Afro Caribbean Immigrants, are in fact more likely than African Americans to marry Whites (Batson, Qien & Lichter, 2006). The history of discrimination, lower socioeconomic status and cultural patterns may also hinder the formation of such unions (Batson, Qien & Lichter, 2006).

Available literature also reveals aspects of boundary expansion, which occurs through the creation of larger ethnic groups out of other smaller groups with the purpose of consolidating power or centralizing the system (Wimmer, 2008). Voting patterns have signaled the possibility of coalition building among Black diaspora groups as evidenced during the 2012 re-election of Barack Obama, the son of a Kenyan migrant and first African American president (Waters, Kasinitz & Asad). A victory characterized by the building of political coalitions between native Blacks, immigrants, and their children (Waters, Kasinitz & Asad, 2014). The expansion of boundaries in this case attests to the fact that where the interests of immigrants and African Americans are aligned, the expansion of boundaries is activated. Obama was the torchbearer of the Democratic Party, a party that tends to be largely pro-immigration and emphasizes aspects of social equality and equal opportunity policies, which most African Americans may find 'friendlier' to align with. However, such boundary expansions can also be fragile, especially

when it comes to local political machinations. According to Jones-Correa (2011), U.S. born Black vs immigrant tensions are renewed when it comes to local politics, especially when native-born Blacks feel they are being deprived of/excluded from gaining resources at the expense of the 'newcomers' (Waters, Kasinitz & Asad, 2014)

Available studies also highlight some of the symbolic boundaries existing among African immigrants, African Americans, and Whites. Brubaker (1992) notes that citizenship is a key fundamental aspect in the boundaries separating native ethnic majorities and immigrants. Among the African diaspora, African Americans enjoy citizenship privileges thanks to the 14th amendment that was ratified in July 1868, in effect closing doors on plans that were aimed at making the U.S. a White person's country (Jones, 2018). Initially, citizenship privileges were enjoyed fully by Whites, who had even demanded that African Americans be resettled elsewhere, just like the Indian removal during the 1830s, or be forcefully removed or re-enslaved if they refused to relocate (Jones, 2008). This is a clear example of how legislation can influence boundary formations. Olson (2004), however, contends that democracy and racial oppression are often intertwined, based on the subordination of minority groups by the tyranny of the White majority. In his view, citizenship is still a racialized political privilege that tends to favor immigrants from White nations while disenfranchising people of color and calls for the abolition of the system that he says makes racial oppression possible, *Herrenvolk* democracy (Olson, 2004).

Studies have examined "layering" of ethnic identities and their effect on the expansion and contraction of ethnic boundaries, acknowledging that identities based on national-origin boundaries can shift upward to be based on a pan-national boundary (Okamoto, 2003). These patterns manifest among Caribbean and other African immigrants, especially West Indian

immigrants who sometimes identify as Black, owing to their color and a shared ancestry with their native-born U.S. counterparts, while the same group sometimes resists this racial categorization by emphasizing ethnic identities that are culturally distinct from American Blacks (Okamoto, 2003). Studies also show that immigrants from Sub Saharan Africa have easily identified themselves as Africans and have sought to debunk negative stereotypes about the continent and its people; however, when it came to developing racial consciousness, which is more visible than their 'Africanness,' some of them reject their Blackness (Asante, 2012).

Available studies also support such assertions by revealing that, just like their Caribbean counterparts, many African immigrants have distanced themselves from African American culture (Guenther et al., 2011). These immigrants often try to "distance" themselves from their native-born counterparts, since they view this as a bid to climb America's social ladder (Drayton, 2020). Others are also led to identify with the White population in the defense of their privileged market position or status (Shanahan & Olzak, 1999).

Evidence also reveals that first-generation West Indian immigrants are often worried about the downward mobility for their children, and therefore steer them towards embracing a pan-national ethnic identity as opposed to the Black American racial identity, since they find the immigrant identity to be more highly valued (Waters, 1999; Vickerman, 2007). Porters & MacLeod's (1996) study found that upwardly mobile second-generation middle-class youth identified more with a regional/national identity, while the poor and downwardly mobile group were more likely to adopt the Black American identity.

Competition theory predicts that when two different ethnic or racial groups compete for resources, collective action will occur because both groups are attempting to maintain or improve their standing in the social hierarchy (Banton, 1983). Inequalities in resources and income may

also play a role in the tensions among African diasporan groups. This explains why ADOS' supporters blame African immigrants, the Afro Caribbean, and other immigrant groups for taking away their deserved opportunities. Statistics based on wealth and economic gaps between African immigrants and African Americans show that the former have considerably higher levels of education and higher earnings than African Americans (Darboe, 2006; Anderson & Connor, 2015). The 2015 Pew Research report also found that U.S. born Blacks were less likely to have a bachelor's degree compared to Black immigrants -- 19% versus 26%, and foreign-born Black people earned a $10,000 higher median income than their U.S.-born counterparts-- at $33,500 (Lynn, 2020). Many Caribbean immigrants arrive in the country with substantial social capital giving them advantages over African Americans in terms of material resources (Greer, 2013).

Dominant groups (Whites) also play a huge role in influencing relationships among Black Immigrants and African Americans to cater for their own needs (Darboe, 2006; Waters, 1999). Black immigrants, especially those from the Caribbean, are sometimes referred to as a "model minority" and receive favorable treatment compared to African Americans (Greer, 2013). They are accorded preferential treatment by White employers who presume that they are more superior and compliant employees, possess a better work ethic and have a greater aptitude for learning compared to U.S. born Blacks (Thornton et al, 2013). Greer (2013) confirms these claims by affirming that foreign born Blacks are usually perceived by Whites and even African Americans as different, harder working and more productive citizens compared to their African American counterparts. Studies also found that West Indians, who consist of Afro Caribbeans, idolized their own cultures by emphasizing aspects such as hard work, saving, investment, and education, as compared to that of the Southern African Americans (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963). To counter racial stigmatization of the Black groups, Lamont, and Fleming (2005) observe that the African

American elite cope with racism by highlighting variables such as education, intelligence, and competence.

Available literature has also documented the activities of in-groups aiming to maintain feelings of superiority over those they consider out-groups. Tweets and protest activities by extremist Black groups in America such as American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) are all indicators of ADOS trying to enforce group distinctions and self-identification. For instance, they continue to advocate for reparations solely for African Americans who trace their lineage to slavery in the U.S. Such a decision would exclude civil rights icons such as Marcus Garvey (Jamaican descent), Malcolm X (Grenadian descent) and Stokely Carmichael popularly known as Kwame Ture (Trinidadian descent) from receiving payments, were they still alive and the payments made. The group also champions a new racial designation distinct from that of Black Immigrants while calling for a revision of affirmative action programs, which they claim have largely benefitted Black immigrants while disenfranchising African Americans (Stockman, 2019).

ADOS's co-founder Anthonio Moore has challenged the support accorded to Black immigrants at the expense of African Americans on some of his *Tonetalks* program sessions saying,

> "What's happening now is you can come here from West Africa, and you can access Jackie Robinson scholarships and Thurgood Marshall programs because you're Black. But I cannot go to Nigeria and access anything." (Russ, 2019).

The group's continued push against immigrants has however been met by backlash from several quarters, including political activists and African American rappers, like Talib Kweli, who has accused ADOS of fueling xenophobia (Drayton, 2019). ADOS also confirms Bourdeau's (1984) assertions that certain elements in the dominant groups exercise "symbolic violence" by

imposing a specific meaning as legitimate to mark cultural distance and proximity, thus monopolizing privileges to exclude and recruit new occupants to high status positions.

Other studies have also examined immigrant generational differences while noting that there exists a social distinction between immigrant and second generations, on the one hand, and natives, on the other (Alba, 2006). Adult second generation immigrant children, socialized in the receiving society, have the potential to challenge or cross boundaries that are taken for granted in the case of their immigrant parents (Alba, 2006). Second-generation members of an immigrant minority can achieve sameness of life with those in the ethnic majority or face exclusion from the societal mainstream (Alba, 2006) through processes such as assimilation (Hirschman, 1983) or participation (Wilson and Portes, 1980). Second generation Black immigrants may also find it difficult separating themselves culturally from African Americans, since they have a common early childhood experience (Waters, 1999), yet also face the pressure from their first-generation parents to maintain their African identities, even though they grow up with dual identities, since they are also raised by Music Television (MTV), Black Entertainment Television (BET), and the Black American aesthetic (Clark, 2009).

While the concept of boundaries has been influential in exploring research agendas in fields such as anthropology, political science, history, sociology, and social psychology (Lamont & Molnar, 2002), there exist limited studies exploring its use in the field of communication.

Research Questions

Based on the reviewed aspects, this study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How do the podcasters understand their own diasporic identities?

With studies pointing to the diverse social identities and cultural makeups of African diaspora groups, I seek to provide clues revealing how the various diasporic identities, including ethnic, religious, generational and national identities of each host influence their decision-making and production processes as revealed through their covered topics and themes. With scholars, such as Stuart Hall noting that identity undergoes constant transformations, I also seek to assess how each podcaster's past histories shapes their present-day lifestyles and artistic creativities. This study also analyzes the differences and transformations in the podcasters' social-political identities while bearing in mind the fact that while they may share a history of collective struggle, which according to West (1990 p. 134) includes "cultural degradation, brutal enslavement, and institutional terrorism," there also exists differences in their socio-political identities and their continuous transformations.

RQ2: How do podcasters imagine the African diaspora as a potential audience?

Here, I seek to reveal the kinds of audiences targeted by each of the reviewed podcasts. Since studies also indicate variations among scholars regarding the conceptualization of the term 'African diaspora,' I seek to uncover each hosts thoughts on the term and whether the same influences their own imaginations with regards to their target audiences. Providing such clues will be helpful towards understanding aspects such as the podcasters' planning, their audience engagement, marketing plan and their overall production and technical strategies.

I also scrutinize how aspects such as background, race, ethnicity, historical, cultural, religious and podcasters' other lived experiences, as well as demographics (age, class and education) influence the host's imagination of their own audiences. Anderson's (1991) notion that diaspora communities seek to 'unite' and form an imagined community also provides a basis of evaluating whether African diaspora podcasters imagine their audiences from within a specific

geographical location, or from a transnational or global lens, especially in an increasingly digital world.

RQ3: a. What programming decisions are made to appeal to this audience?

Black digital users in the U.S. have laid their claim to digital techno culture by creating Black spaces and performing Blackness in a mostly White dominated space (Brock, 2020). With various groups among the African diaspora having been the subjects of historical marginalization and systematic exclusion from engagement in the public sphere, scholars have noted that these groups established informal networks to form enclaved social spaces (Florini, 2015), and in some cases both satellite and enclave spaces (Steele 2018). Guided by studies examining the practice of podcasting as an alternative tool of engagement, especially in an environment that has hindered the participation and excluded the African diaspora from the mainstream public sphere, I explore the kind of online network spaces and patterns of communication the podcasters in my sample apply in their quest to shape relationships among the African diaspora. I also investigate the type of programming decisions they choose to engage their audiences, processes applied in determining their topics in these spaces, as well as the kinds of civic discourses featured. These investigations are significant because it helps uncover the podcaster's contribution to the Black diasporan digital cultures. With studies mostly exploring Black digital practices through the racial lens (Vrikki & Malik, 2019; Florini, 2015; Steele, 2018), I choose to focus on exploring the same practices mostly through an ethnic lens. Of course, I also must consider factors such as the podcasters' diverse cultural backgrounds, social lived experiences, nationalities, generational status, gender, and class considerations.

Other programming decisions explored include their communicative strategies (use of language, conversational style, format, and vocal tonality) to engage their chosen publics. I also examine questions related to the tactics employed by the hosts of these podcasts in relation to previous studies documenting tactics such as intimacy, authenticity and outspoken views as those applied by podcasters to serve their audiences (Fox, Dowling & Miller, 2020). Others have also found that oral cultures, which include aspects such as music, proverbs, and storytelling, applied by African and African diaspora podcasters in their shows served as an extension to the oral African traditions (Royston, 2021). Nketia (1963) also notes that Africa's oral literature often include a range of diverse communicative traditions including music, use of cultural proverbs (Furniss & Gunner, 2008) and storytelling (Scheub, 2004).

Studies outside of the podcasting realm have also documented the activation of negative images associated with Blackness, specifically on television shows (Gates, 2015), as well as the deploying of vernacular variations and free flowing, informal conversational styles associated with Black audiences (Florini, 2019). Black women's grassroot organizations for community empowerment have also been found to employ traditional tactics while also adapting to the changing demands of community empowerment in the digital age (Everett, 2002).

b) What kinds of civic discourses are evident in how programming is constructed for these audiences?

Available studies tracing the increase in popularity of podcasts focusing on the meaning of Blackness and hosted by African Americans reveal that African American produced podcasts cover content such as entertainment, politics, and consumerism from the standpoint of Black identity (Fox, Dowling & Millers, 2020). Others examining the practices of US based diasporan

podcasters producing content for English speaking Africans featured gender related topics, neocolonialism, music, African cultural traditions and values and love and relationships (Apiyo & Stavitsky, 2019). Florini's (2015) study examining some of the informal networks Black podcasters utilized found that they used Black American communicative practices, including Black vernacular, free flowing conversational and other radio-style approaches to help spark debates and represent the interests of their community. Other studies have further explored the use of Black podcasts as a discursive online tool for social justice, especially among African American women (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2009). Markmann's (2011) study examined the motivations of independent podcasters and identified financial, personal, interpersonal, media technology, content, and process as the six major categories of motivations for podcasting. There exists limited research, especially in the field of communication, exploring some of the conversations tackled by podcasters with regards to African intragroup relationships. This study seeks to bridge this gap by revealing some of these discourses as revealed through the lens of the sampled podcasters and as also guided by relevant theory and literature.

RQ4: What pressures shape how civic discourses are promoted on these podcasts?

While technology is often conceptualized as neutral and objective, the algorithms of digital search engines such as Google have also been proven to have bias against underrepresented or oppressed groups, including people of color and women (Noble,2018). The same criticisms of inequalities have also rocked the podcasting industry, leading to some scholars questioning the platform's ability to truly expand the public sphere. Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo (2019) note that podcasting shares many of the formal ideals of the public sphere as presented by Jurgen Habermas, even though it also offers a cheaper mode of discourse and a

unique opportunity to present diverse viewpoints. The authors further note very few creators have the chance to make a massive impact, with the already established mainstream designs and normative sound nearly indistinguishable from Whiteness (Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019).

The technology also operates in a competitive neo liberalized space, just like in the public service media, with issues such as access (Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019) and inequities in the use of the technology well documented (Vrikki & Malik, 2019). Reviewed studies also reveal how dominant groups, including Whites, influence relationships among African diaspora groups. For instance, Greer's (2013) study argues that foreign born Blacks are usually perceived by Whites as different, harder working and more productive citizens compared to their African American counterparts. Drayton (2020) also notes that some Black immigrants often try to 'distance' themselves from their native-born counterparts, since they view this as a bid to climb America's social ladder. Stories mostly fed by conservative anti-immigrant groups have also shifted African American public opinion in the direction of more negative attitudes and beliefs about immigration and immigrants (Jenkins, 2007). These studies will, therefore, help analyze how factors such as the commercialization of podcasts, digital inequalities and Whiteness politics may affect the works of sampled podcasters in their quest to counter narratives and shape relationships among their group.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODS

This section provides explanations and justification on data collection, handling and analysis in order to address the research questions presented above. I applied an interpretivist paradigm, which is generally associated with qualitative research. An interpretivist framework recognizes the role of social actors interacting dynamically in their environments in ways that constantly shape meanings (Babbie, 2010). The paradigm afforded me the opportunity to provide an in depth understanding on the backgrounds, interaction, practices and experiences of African diaspora podcasters, all of whom operate in an online and offline environment where institutional status quo still is still dominated by the mainstream White culture.

Qualitative research helps to illuminate how culture mediates human actions while helping situate data in a much wider social and cultural context (McCraken, 1988). With related studies having mostly explored the use of new media among diaspora communities through focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews (Vrikki & Malik, 2019), and ethnographic data (Florini, 2019), I adopted the use of interviews, document and podcast analysis to help investigate how *The Stoop*, *Caribbean Life in America,* and *Work Bae* podcasts shape intragroup relationships among African diaspora groups in the U.S.

My research is also subjective since I immersed myself in it as an African immigrant. This immersion also requires me to avoid mischaracterization when focusing my research on African diasporan groups, constituents which, according to Florini (2019), have been the objects of subjugation with their cultures misrepresented by the dominant White groups. I also apply my own knowledge and expertise as a podcast producer, as guided by Guba & Lincoln (1981), who note that in qualitative research the researchers serve as a data collection instrument, mostly due

to the depth of the research itself (McCraken, 1988), such that they are at liberty to make use of their own imagination, experience, and intellect (Miles, 1979).

The three case studies were selected due to their online presence on various podcast distribution platforms, including but not limited to "Spotify," and "iTunes." According to Crowe et al. (2011), a case study is useful since it provides an in-depth and multifaceted understanding of an issue, phenomenon of interest or event in its real-life context. Because this study was crafted to provide an in-depth understanding on the works and practices of podcasters shaping intragroup relationships in the U.S. context, a case study was therefore appropriate. As Yin (2009) notes, case studies accommodate the inclusion of various data collection techniques while producing rich and compelling sociological insights.

However, careful consideration must be taken in a case study selection process to help avoid time wasting (Yin, 2009). Consequently, purposive, snowball and maximum variation sampling techniques were applied in the selection of *The Stoop, Caribbean Life in America* and *Work Bae* podcasts respectively. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990). The sampling technique was critical in helping provide an in-depth understanding of the research questions while also testing the concepts guiding this study. In the case of *The Stoop* podcast, a Google search of the words "Best African diasporan podcasts" was conducted. The Google search provided a list of more than 36 podcasts. After hours of skimming through while listening to the themes and topics of each of the podcasts, and as guided by literature, I selected *The Stoop* because it offered a one stop shop for a variety of topics, including rich discussions highlighting both the positive and negative intragroup relationships among the

African diaspora, Afro diasporic experiences while also tackling themes featuring the creation of a diasporan consciousness construction of an African diasporic identity.

Moreover, it also had among the highest reviews and best feedback on its iTunes platform, a critical component in terms of participation. Both *Caribbean Life in America* and *Work bae* podcast participants were included through snowball sampling. The sampling strategy is based on referrals by those who share or are aware of others who have the same attributes as those being investigated (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). After my initial efforts to contact my preferred potential participants had failed, I used my access and connection to some African diaspora podcasters, and was able to accrue several suggestions, which were all thoroughly scrutinized to ensure relevance in the present study. *Caribbean Life in America* and *Work Bae* podcasts were deemed more suitable since they each had covered at least one episode offering direct conversations on intragroup relationships among the African diaspora. Such references helped speed up the selection process.

Since I also wanted to have a wide array of attributes among each podcast. I, therefore, applied maximum variation sampling strategy, advised by Lindlof & Taylor (2002) to maximize variation to the phenomenon being investigated. Since I figured out that featuring podcasts from a wide array of nationalities, ethnicities, age and gender would offer diverse opinions on the subject under study, I decided to feature at least one podcast that would relay the experiences of an African American (direct descendant of slavery in the U.S.), an Afro Caribbean immigrant (who traces his origins to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and has had prior lived experiences in one of the Caribbean countries), and an African immigrant (who traces their origins back to the continent of Africa and has also spent quite some time in Africa). Based on this, *The Stoop* podcast (hosted by African American and an African immigrant), *Caribbean Life in America*

(hosted by an Afro Caribbean) and *Work Bae* podcast (hosted by both a first generation and a 1.5 generation African immigrants) were all selected because they represented the diasporic and demographic richness I was seeking. The podcasters are also scattered in various geographical locations in the U.S. *Work Bae* hosts are based in New York, *The Stoop* (San Francisco) and *Caribbean Life in America* (Atlanta). This research also included three women and two men.

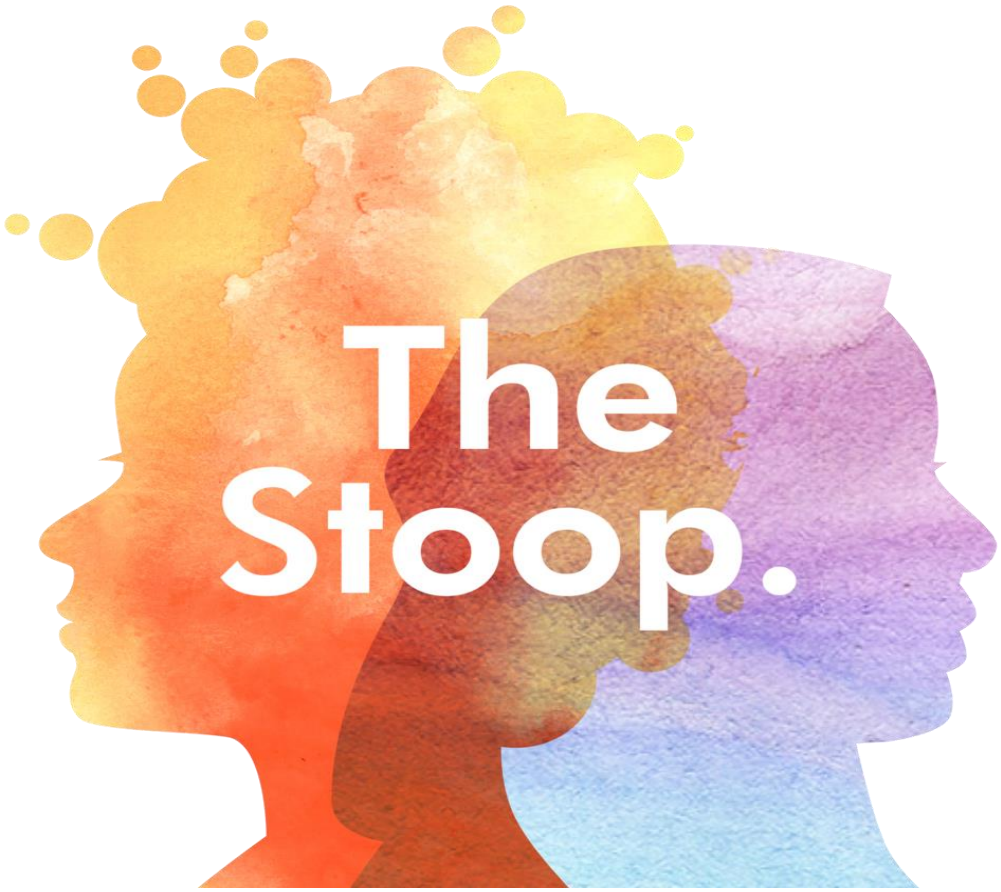
The Stoop

The Stoop podcast had more visibility and online coverage as compared to *Work Bae* and *Caribbean Life in America* podcasts. This helps explain why I featured more information on *The Stoop* as compared with the other case studies. *The Stoop* podcast, available on platforms such as Apple and Spotify, is hosted by two radio journalists, Hana Baba and Leila Day. This fun and informative podcast covers identity related topics from across the Black diaspora, including Black joy, tensions among Africans and African Americans, colorism, and racism. Hana presents the award-winning daily newsmagazine show *Crosscurrents* on KALW Public Radio, an NPR affiliate station based in San Francisco. She reports on immigrant related topics, race, health, education, culture, identity, arts, religion among others. The *TED* speaker's works have appeared in various highly acclaimed media institutions, including *PRI, BBC, NPR* and *OZY*.

Over the course of her career that spurns more than a decade at KALW, she has interviewed various newsmakers, artists, authors and influential personalities such as former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, Democratic politician and former Georgian gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, British American actor, director and producer David Oyelowo, Emmy award winning actress Uzo Aduba and American actor, director and TV host Levar Burton. According to her website hanababa.org, the voice and narration coach has won several awards in the course of her career, including those awarded by the National Association of Black Journalists, the San

Francisco Press Club and the Society of Professional Journalists Northern California. She has also been named as the “Bay are Cultural Icon by the California Legislature.

Figure 1: The Stoop Podcast logo. Source: www.thestoop.org



She has also served as an instructor educator of radio and podcasting classes at various San Francisco Bay area colleges and universities, including UC Berkeley, Cal State, University of San Francisco and Mills State. Her co-creator Leila Day is currently a senior producer at Pineapple Street Media, and formerly served as a healthcare and criminal justice reporter, and editor at KALW in San Francisco. The award-winning producers’ work has appeared on NPR and Al-Jazeera and has also taught audio storytelling inside California’s oldest correctional institution, San Quentin State Prison. She has also been a guest speaker at Stanford, Harvard and

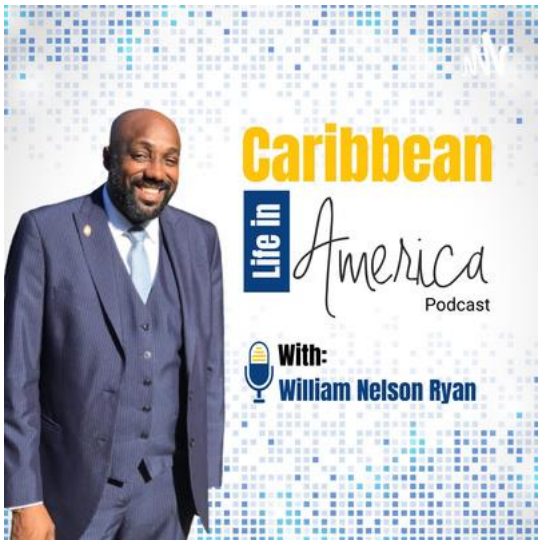
various audio festivals, including Third Coast Audio Festival. She recently won the 2023 Gracie Award for the best podcast producer.

Caribbean Life in America

This podcast, hosted by Montserrat born American, William Nelson Ryan, aims to highlight the experiences and contributions of Caribbean Americans living in the U.S. It covers a wide range of topics, which include lifestyle, music, social happenings, mental health, culture and money. Since the year 2012, Ryan has been running a YouTube channel, *the Love Factual*, which according to its description examines relationship and dating conversations aimed at "challenging the norms of modern-day romance and explore the timeless wisdom of traditional, biblical values." The channel so far has 1,675 subscribers with 467 videos also available on the platform. It has also accumulated 206, 835 views. He also established WCS Gospel Radio, wcsgospelradio.com, in 2017 to cater for the needs of the Caribbean Christian community in Georgia, USA while popularizing Caribbean gospel music, including Soca, Reggae, Calypso and Dancehall. His Sunday afternoon Caribbean music gospel show, according to the station's website, often airs at 4:30pm until 7pm.

The Hampton, Georgia based online station features music from the likes of George Nooks (Jamaica), Joseph Niles (Barbados) and Samuel Medas (Guyana). The podcast is available in platforms such as Apple podcasts, Podchaser, YouTube and Spotify.

Figure 2: Caribbean Life in America Podcast logo. Source: Apple Podcasts

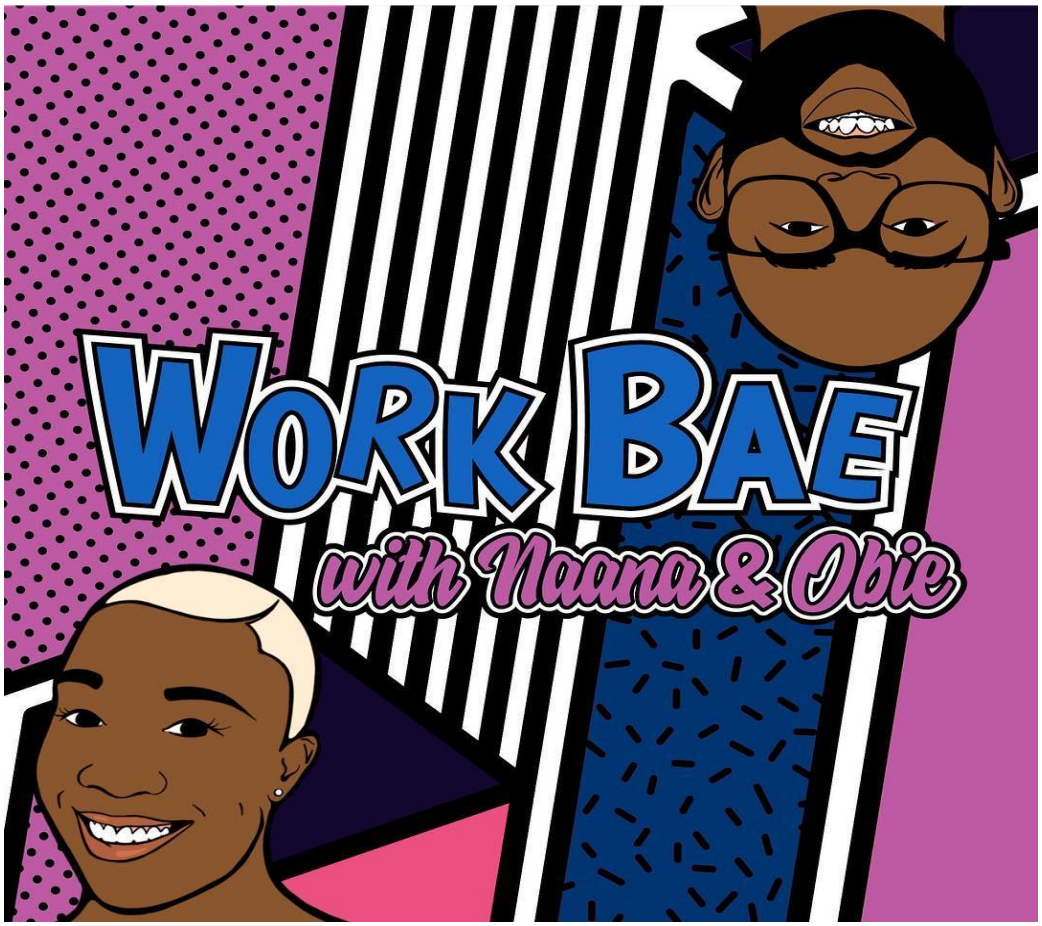


Work Bae

This podcast is hosted by Ghanaian-American, Naana, and Kenyan American Obed Obwoge. Both hosts are based in New York and were former co-workers who describe the platform as one that enables them to "drop their guards, crack jokes, chop it up and may even shed a thug tear or two." They describe their podcast as one that tackles everything from pop culture, dating, politics, mental health to challenging their own lifestyles. Some of their podcast episodes have also tackled the differences among African Americans and African immigrants, while others have also discussed African heritage.

The podcast is available in platforms such as Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, Soundcloud, iHeart Radio and RSS. They have recorded 53 episodes so far and promote their work on their Work Bae with Naana and Obie Twitter and Instagram pages. More details on each of these podcasts will be covered in the findings section.

Figure 3: Work Bae Podcast logo. Source: Apple Podcasts



Data Collection

Following IRB approval, I contacted the hosts/producers of the three podcasts via email, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook stating a clear explanation of the research intentions and purposes. A sample of the letter is available in Appendix B. I made sure that all participants granted permission before I proceeded to record any Zoom interviews with the producers and hosts of each podcast. The interviews' purpose, per Lindlof & Taylor (2010), was to gather information, verify, validate, or comment, inquire, understand conceptualizations, understand social actors' experiences and perspectives, elicit language forms used by social actors and achieve efficiency in data collection. In this specific case, the interviews helped provide insights

on how the lived experiences, gender, generational status, ethnicity and nationalities influenced the works and practices of these podcasters. The long interview was adopted to gather information because, according to McCkraken (1988), it is one of the most powerful and widely used qualitative methods, with the ability to transport us into the mental world of the interviewee and present an idea of the logic by which they view the world (McCkraken, 1988). It also offers an opportunity to take us into the daily experiences of an individual (McCkraken, 1988), while offering the African diasporan podcasters a voice to share their own experiences.

The interviews, which ranged between one to two hours, were entirely collected using the English language, even though some interviewees would occasionally throw in a word or two from their own native languages to help reiterate a point they wanted to pass across. The meanings of the words were accurately translated with the help of the podcasters. While no research assistants were utilized in this study, a loosely-structured interview guide (Appendix A) was also utilized to ensure the discussions covered all aspects of the research goals. The interviews took place in the period between February and May of 2023.

While interviews are central to our own understanding of societal life (Silverman, 1997), I conducted them while factoring in what Borer & Fontana (2012) describes as the interviewing postmodern sensibilities. Here, the interviewer and respondent cultivate a transformative collaborative relationship helpful towards promoting representation, fairness and constructing narratives (Borer & Fontana, 2012). I also spent countless hours listening to each of the three podcasts, a scrutiny that helped corroborate the answers provided during the interviews. *The Stoop's* analysis took more hours to analyze since hosts were more consistent on discussing the subject matter and also had the longest run hosting shows on the platform. Consequently, I analyzed around 40 episodes of the podcast as opposed to 10 *Caribbean Life in America*

episodes and five from the *Work Bae Podcast.* Moreover, a scrutiny of social media posts, websites, and online news articles also helped offer insight on some of the programming decisions made by the podcasts to appeal to their audiences.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis refers to the process of "labeling and breaking down raw data and reconstituting them into patterns, themes, concepts and propositions" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002 p. 210). Interviews recorded on *Zoom* as they transpired, were later transcribed verbatim using *Temi* transcription software. Since the transcriptions weren't 100% accurate, I manually went through the transcripts to ensure the accurate capture of information. The decision to manually code the data was arrived at since the volume of data wasn't substantial. Moreover, LeCompte & Schensul (1999) note that it isn't worth the time and effort spent using a computer to code less than 100 pages of text data. The interviews were thematically analyzed and also influenced by data aligning with literature, and the emerging data.

Thematic analysis is defined as the process of identifying and analyzing common themes, topics and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following the analysis process laid down by Braun & Clarke (2006), I familiarized myself with the transcribed data before proceeding to collate data in readiness for analysis. I engaged in this well aware of my own positionality as an African immigrant, an aspect that was critical in ensuring I exercised reflectivity when constructing narratives. I re-examined all data multiple times and thoroughly scrutinized them based on broader patterns before identifying, naming and contextualizing each theme.

I then proceeded to determine the findings and interpretations for a wider audience, which includes the African diaspora, digital media scholars, podcasters, peace building organizations among others.

Researchers' Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher identifies as a Kenyan immigrant and a member of the African diaspora living in the U.S. I view Black as a collective term based on racial representation, but nevertheless forms a part of a collective identity that distinguishes some members of the African diaspora from other groups, and in some ways unites them based on their racial experiences. The positionality of being an African immigrant and a Black diasporan, mostly worked for me in various ways, including participants freely sharing their perspectives with me. There were very few instances when the subjects under study chose to avoid answering certain questions, especially the ones that required opening up about their own negative interactions with other members of the African diaspora. These might have been due to the sensitive nature of the subject or their own allegiances to their listeners, who may also hold different perspectives on the subject.

I am also a former international broadcaster and podcaster who continues to produce content for educational purposes targeted towards members of the African diaspora and beyond. As a podcast insider, my ability to understand certain aspects related to production and listenership was an added advantage while conducting the research as compared to an outsider who may not be very familiar with some of the podcasting industrial process.

CHAPTER V

THE STOOP

This chapter explores the role and influence of *The Stoop* podcast in shaping relationships among African diaspora groups, specifically African Americans, African immigrants, and the Afro Caribbean. In addition, it unpacks the conversational discourse and programming decisions made, targeted audiences, and the kinds of external and internal pressures its hosts face. It also provides additional details on some of the motivations and lived experiences of the podcasters. In light of this, this chapter addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the podcasters understand their own diasporic identities?

RQ2: How do podcasters imagine the African diaspora as a potential audience?

RQ3: a) What programming decisions are made to appeal to this audience?

b) What kinds of civic discourses are evident in how programming is constructed for these audiences?

RQ4: What pressures shape how civic discourses are promoted on these podcasts?

This study will address these questions by drawing on themes emerging from analyzing *The Stoop*'s online episodes, interviews with its two hosts, and available documents such as news releases, and the podcasts' websites. First, I will briefly provide details on the podcast's origins and the motivations behind its establishment as expressed by hosts during the interviews.

Origins and Motivations

The Stoop wields a great deal of influence by offering broadminded conversations on issues affecting the Black diaspora. In many ways, the working relationships displayed by its award-winning co-hosts, Leila Day, an African American, and Hana Baba, a Sudanese American, provide a fine blueprint for examining the dynamics at play when engaging in inter-

ethnic discourse, specifically between African Americans and African immigrants based in the U.S. Influenced by their own broadcast backgrounds, both hosts first developed the idea of having a podcast during one of their many conversations at KALW public radio, an NPR affiliated educational FM station based in San Francisco, California, where they both worked as radio presenters.

According to the hosts, they settled on the name because it came from the word "Stoopy," which describes something that is controversial and would therefore get people fired up when talking about their conversations. They felt that podcasting also came "natural" to them based on the vast audio production experience they had previously garnered in the broadcasting industry. While explaining that audio offers them the most "intimate" form of media capabilities able to transform the experiences of their target audiences, Hana stated the following:

> There is something personal about audio. When you're listening to it in your headphones, you feel that the host is talking to you. There are no visuals to distract you. You don't have to use your eyes to read. You can close your eyes and do what you want and be immersed in this world. That's what I love about podcasting.

As can be deciphered from the above quote, the allure of audio's intimate connection and its multitasking-friendly capabilities remain unrivaled, at least according to *The Stoop*'s hosts, who have been lucky enough to benefit from the support and generosity of their station manager, who they report allowed them access to the recording studio and equipment at any time. Over the years, the station has provided a platform to help the hosts broadcast their content to an even wider audience. In today's world where 'everybody' either has a podcast or is thinking of starting one, receiving such support from a popular radio station not only highlights the convergence of radio and podcasts but also helps elevate *The Stoop's* reach and presence above that of other independent podcasters who can only dream of having access to such opportunities. On the flip side, podcasting has opened up space and opportunity for so many voices while

creating a plethora of opinions and perspectives, a situation quite different from the yesteryears, which according to *The Stoop* hosts, "gate kept journalism for quite a long time." According to Hana, such gatekeeping ensures only the chosen few are worthy of participating in or meet the necessary qualifications and standards of practices, including objectivity, truthfulness, fairness, and accuracy. While in today's world, alternative digital media such as blogs, *YouTube*, or *Substack* offer plenty of opportunities to express oneself, Hana had the following to share about podcasting's continuity trait, an aspect that makes it tick:

> There's something special about podcasting. It's a series. Makes you look forward to what's coming up, right? And you look forward to it each time, rather than an article that you just read.

It can be argued that videos, like podcasts, hold the same series circuit powers. However, *The Stoop* hosts believe podcasting grips the audience's attention longer while creating "a sense of belonging and familiarity" with its presenters. Hosts also claim their audiences "trust and care about them and their voices, easily relate with their content, and always look forward to hearing their next episodes." According to Leila, this is evidenced by the numerous emails and messages they receive from their vast array of fans:

> Most of the people that write us are Black people who have felt like the episodes touched them in some way. And then, you know, we get like some of them, let's just say, like, a White parent raising a Black child saying this really gave me some insight into the culture.

Receiving such positive feedback offers a much-needed boost to their production progress as they are hell-bent on "quenching the thirst" and meeting the needs of their listeners.

Shades of Identity on The Stoop Podcast

Results highlight that the hosts' respective national identities have a significant influence on their podcasting works and practices. Hana's Sudanese identity, for instance, is quite evident in the shared content, her bilingual skills, and lived experiences. She shares a typical immigrant American story, but with a slight twist. Her parents came to the U.S. from Sudan in the 1970s, when she was a baby. Her father came to pursue his master's degree. Hana then spent the next eleven years of her life in the U.S. before her family made the decision to move back to Sudan. During my interview with Hana, she opened up about the reasons her parents decided to move back to Sudan in 1986, a time when the Eastern African nation was just starting to recover after years of political turmoil:

> There were no big African or Muslim communities. I think they were lonely and also thinking about where home was and where they were going to raise their children, who will they be and what will they be. And so, they made the very difficult but brave decision to move back right after a major revolution had happened in Sudan. It wasn't an easy decision to make, and it wasn't an easy life there either. But the years that we lived there definitely were formative and crucial to who I am today.

In Sudan, Hana's parents made an intentional decision to rent a house close to her grandmother's house. The house was nicknamed 'Central Station' because "everybody had to swing by at some point during the day, before and after school."

> I would come back every time after school and always find the pots of food cooking. I would spend time with my family and that's how I learned the language and culture. And I think that was the intention. To create this experience of two places that equally are a part of you.

To further reiterate her acquisition of Sudanese cultural traditions and values, Hana also notes that the numerous times she spent with her family at her grandmother's house gave rise to her hobby of storytelling, which later turned into a fully-fledged career.

> Like many African and other communities worldwide, my grandmother's house was a house of storytelling, and my mother and her siblings inherited many oral folktales and fairy tales from their grandmother. And every Friday is the weekly holiday there. It's the weekend. And we would go from the morning and spend the whole day there. And in the evening when the sun goes down, tea would be served and cookies, biscuits and we would all sit to tell the story of the week. That also was a profound experience for me, and I think that is why no wonder I grew up to be somebody who told stories on the radio.

Oral folklores are in fact covered in one of the podcast episodes titled *Once Upon a Problem*. In the episode, Hana is encouraged by her aunt to continue the Sudanese oral tradition set forth by generations of storytellers in her family. Her aunt says:

> "These are your stories. The stories of your family and your great grandmother that you've inherited. You tell them!"

This quote highlights the responsibility bestowed upon the next generation to not only preserve knowledge and history, but also to pass the torch through oral storytelling. Hana's generation, compared to that of her older uncles and aunties, are much luckier because podcasting, being a new phenomenon, not only offers the opportunity to continue her family's legacy of storytelling to subsequent generations, including her college-going second-generation daughters who mostly identify as Americans rather than Sudanese, but also reach out to the African diaspora and beyond.

While in Sudan, Hana was educated in the British Educational School system before studying law at the University of Khartoum. She says she was "bitten by the media bug" in her last year in law school and worked as a journalist in Khartoum at a time when the government, led by the then President Omar El Bashir exercised tight control over the freedom of the press.

> There was no way to be a journalist without belonging to the government. Every night there was a soldier who came and made sure we didn't say anything that was against the government or whatever. Whatever it was, it was still a news experience. And I just went from there.

She later came back to the U.S. and became an active member of the Sudanese community, teaching weekend classes at the Sudanese Diaspora school around the DC area. "I later worked for like this Muslim broadcasting group and that's how kind of I got my chops in the American media," said Hana. Studying broadcast journalism for a year and listening to NPR on a daily basis further accentuated her interests in working for the public radio system in the U.S., a position she has served for the last two decades.

In the U.S., Hana previously lived in the Washington DC area, where she says she was able to connect with the huge number of the African immigrant populations present in the area. Here, she shares some of the trends and patterns she noticed based on her experiences and interactions with fellow African immigrants:

> I think East African communities tend to gravitate towards each other. And I think that's only because we have a lot of history in common. For example, we're very close as Sudanese people with the Ethiopian and Eritrean communities because generations of them came through Sudan after their wars and lived in Sudan as refugees and a lot of them stayed and a lot of them moved on to the U.S. And so, every time I would meet somebody from Eritrea or Ethiopia, and they find out I'm from Sudan, there's an immediate connection. Same with Somalia and same with if we if we go down, you

> know, Kenya, Tanzania, like that. I also got to know West Africans who were also prominent in the D.C. area, including Nigerian Americans and Ghanaian Americans.

Such proximities to not only the Sudanese American community, but also other African immigrants has seen her feature her own family members, Sudanese Americans, and other groups in the podcast. She argues that is her direct responsibility to diversify the narrative while providing authentic representations of her own African immigrant community:

> So, like many people who are children of African immigrants, I didn't see myself in any media growing up in this country. We just were not reflected in any way.

As a one and a half generation Sudanese American, she says she's "old enough to remember her experiences and get attached to Sudan, while at same time still remains very much connected to the U.S, a country she's lived in for most of her life. Identity is quite multifaceted and to a large extent depends on the varying degrees to which one feels about something, either because of their connection to their location, family or culture. However, this debate doesn't stop there for Hana. She says she primarily identifies as a Sudanese American even though a national identity remains quite a complicated issue that she struggles with quite a lot:

> I have this story about when I hear the national anthem of Sudan my tears come and when I hear the national anthem of the U.S., my tears come. So, you know, I think what my parents did was they wanted me to be just like, not neither, but both. And so, after many years of thinking about it, I think where I am right now is I am Sudanese American. America has played a huge part in who I am. Sudan has played a huge part in what I am, plus genetically who I am and the culture and the heritage as well.

She, however, acknowledges that her national identity switches just like "code switching among African-Americans," a practice that involves the mixing of different languages when

engaging in a conversation. Hana identifies as Sudanese American while in an African setting and identifies as Sudanese in a setting where she assumes "everyone knows what Sudan is." When she feels there's a need for her to start explaining what Sudan is, or in situations where she finds herself a minority, like in "conferences where it's like a lot of White people and very few Black people" she chooses to simply identify as Black. According to Hana, it all depends on the role she has to play, and power dynamics involved:

> If it's more useful to the group and it is important as a group to identify with each other then I am Black, especially in this country. I am African, but also Black. But there are instances, few instances where I've seen that I would have to kind of not change what I say about myself, but identify myself in a way that makes sense from where I am.

While such switches happen seamlessly, she also notes that she strongly considers identifying herself as American African:

> I heard once of the term American African and I liked it a lot because African Americans are, you know, Black Americans in this country who are the descendants of people who were enslaved by the United States. That's a very clear definition for me. But American Africans are, I think, to me, are the children of immigrants and maybe the immigrant themselves and then the children of immigrants and the like, the generations of immigrants to this country verses African Americans whose ancestors were stolen and brought to this country.

Hana is also a Muslim whose religious identity influences are evident in some topics covered in the podcast. These topics include those tackling anti-Blackness in Muslim America, intragroup discrimination and racist beauty standards ascribed to Black Muslim women (BMW), sexuality among BMWs, negative media representations, celebrating Muslim heritage and colorism issues faced by Black diaspora women in the Arab world. When covering these topics, guests often represent a diverse range of Muslim persons who share their lived experiences or initiatives they are engaged in to improve the situation. Cover illustration depicting the Muslim

culture have also been used to market some of their podcast episodes, as revealed in their website, with Arabian music also featured. As Hana asserts, *The Stoop* accords her the opportunity to portray both her Sudanese and Islamic cultures in positive light, a situation rarely witnessed in the mainstream media. In her opinion, her audience also appreciates learning more about the rarely covered culture:

> We get so many emails and messages of appreciation, especially from young Muslim women and men saying they relate to the topics. When people also heard an episode, I featured my mom who was saying words like *As-Salaam Alaikum*, it was something we took simple. But we didn't think it was a big deal for our listeners. I got so many emails from that episode just saying they appreciated hearing that word on the podcast. So, it's it goes from like very simple to very serious. And, you know, being Muslim is part of my identity and its part of the identity of so many people in this country.

The difference in the lived experiences between Hana and her Cohost, Leila Day, couldn't be more different yet alike at the same time. Leila was born in Las Vegas, pursued a Bachelor of Science degree in anthropology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and then studied documentary production at Salt Institute for Documentary studies in 2011. Leila, the youngest of two stepbrothers and a sister, spoke of her childhood experiences growing up in the Las Vegas desert:

> When you think of Las Vegas, you think of the big city and the lights and all that. I didn't grow up near anything like that. I grew up in a place where it was kind of away from the city. There weren't a lot of houses around us, but I was around a lot of cows and horses. Since I grew up in the desert, I used to go on a lot of long desert walks, and sometimes there'd be like, tortoises, desert tortoises that I'd find, and we'd also have, like, these motor dirt bikes which I would ride in the desert. So, I spent a lot of time walking and thinking as a kid. I rarely had friends and did a lot of stuff alone because we were so far away. But I do have good memories. Vegas was hot so we used to try to fry eggs on the sidewalk because they'd say, you could put an egg on the sidewalk, and it would fry. Yeah, I had a great childhood.

Leila's dad, a military veteran, was also an internal migrant who originally hailed from South Carolina and owned a "pretty successful" construction company. Her mother is a Delawarean and worked as a schoolteacher. While both of her parents grew up in very Black neighborhoods, Leila describes her dad as more of a "Black vanguard" who believed you could do anything if you put your mind to it. In his world, everyone was successful based on their merit. Success, therefore, had nothing to do with their race. Her mom, however, held the contrary opinion, and believed racism and discrimination played a huge part in the experiences of minority groups in the U.S. She says her mom's perspectives were shaped by her attendance of historically Black schools such Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee. Her engagement in various forms of activism, including freedom bus rides and sit-in protests throughout the South significantly shaped Leila's view of the world as it exists today. Just like Hana, Leila's parents played a role in her understanding of some African cultural traditions, especially through art and dance performances:

> I was exposed to a lot of different cultural things when I was young. I did a lot of dancing and I was in a dance group that focused on more like Black Afro dance and diaspora dance. My mom was an artist and had an art gallery. She had a strong love for African art. So, we had this huge African art collection that I grew up around and that was that was quite nice. The collection included artifacts from various parts of Africa. They included masks, games, instruments, and beautiful handmade like leather, stools, and wood carvings that were spread all throughout the house. And so, there was a lot of conversations around art.

Her mom's artistic influence rubbed off on her, and consequently, she views *The Stoop*'s production as an artistic creation, while also crediting her funny and amusing qualities in the podcast episodes to her dad:

> I love a good story, but I'm always thinking like, how can we make this story be felt and not just heard. And so, I think that has something to do with having a mom who's an artist and having a dad who's really funny. I like the humor in there.

Although at a personal level she doesn't consider herself African American, a close scrutiny of the podcasts indicates that her views often align with the presupposed perspectives of contemporary African American persons. While her DNA tests reveal that she's a mix of Nigerian, British and Irish, she identifies as Black because of what she terms her close connection to the Black culture she grew up around. Some of her family strongly identify as Black while others around her, especially the ones with mixed heritage, have creatively found ways to identify themselves. These include her Blasian (Black and Asian) and Blaxican (Black and Mexican) friends, and her Blackistani (Black and Pakistani) stepbrother. She was also exposed to Black African culture by attending a South African and Afro Haitian dance performance. Moreover, when she was young, she learned quite a lot about African dishes when her family hosted another Ethiopian family who had migrated to the U.S.

Leila says she grew up at a time when most of her peers identified either as Afro-American or African American. She did, also classify herself as an African American for quite a while before it all changed when she took a visit to Kenya, an experience she says significantly changed how she views herself today:

> I remember we went to another college to meet other college students. And there was a guy who had asked what I was. And I said, I'm African American. And he was laughing. He was like, There's nothing African about you. And it kind of hit me like, there wasn't anything African about me. I was just there for the first time. I was just trying to understand it like I didn't have that much of a connection to the culture or the language. Aside from the stories that I grew up reading and the art that I was around, you know, I have a very unique experience as a Black woman. And I started wondering if putting African in front of American was a way to be something other than Black and to be a

> little bit more like exotic in a way. And so, I just started thinking like, I just want to identify as Black.

While she wrestled with the ethnic identity question during her visit to Kenya, she did, however, enjoy the culture, music and interacting with Kenyans. In South Africa, a country with a long-recorded history of segregation, she noticed the same racial experience she's accustomed to in her home country, the U.S. Next, I will address the second research question, which examine how *The Stoop* hosts imagine the African diaspora as a potential audience.

Imagining The Stoop's Audience

The Stoop boasts of primarily targeting the wider Black diaspora, specifically those aged between 18-55 years. Also, both hosts' age falls within these demographics, which they argue reflects themselves, thus placing them in a better position to understand their Black diasporan audience needs. Here, the Black diaspora is applied as an umbrella term, encompassing the racial experiences of African-descended groups living outside of the African continent. This includes but is not limited to African Americans, the Afro Caribbeans, and African immigrants living in the U.S. The hosts appeal to these groups by tapping onto their racialized, cultural, religious, and lived experiences in their respective host nations. According to Leila, relatability plays a significant role in helping their conversations easily connect with their listeners:

> We write this for Black people. We're not going to be explaining a bunch of stuff. We're not going to explain what a *hijab* is. If we say, for example, someone is from the Yoruba tribe, we're not going to explain where the Yoruba tribe is from or whatever. You can figure it out. So, we deliberately made this for Black people.

From the above quote, hosts use Yoruba, a tribal language spoken mainly in Nigeria, Togo, and Benin, as a euphemism to describe their primary target audience as those with some connection

or familiarity with African traditional culture. It is important to note that in many of their podcast conversations, *The Stoop's* hosts sometimes use the words Black diaspora or African diaspora interchangeably to refer to individuals/communities of African descent present throughout the U.S. and other parts of the world as a result of historic, economic, political and other reasons.

The hosts' conceptualization of the term African diaspora further elucidated mixed reactions, perhaps highlighting the complexities surrounding its definition. Leila, for instance, fully agrees with the contemporary and broader definition of African diaspora as those of African descent who are spread throughout the world. Hana, on the other hand, does not necessarily disagree with her cohost's view, but also believes that the term has since evolved and should be redefined to reference the more recently migrated diaspora, a group that includes mostly immigrants and refugees who've been making their way to the U.S. since the 1960's, rather than describing a diaspora that "goes back hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years." She explains:

> …And I understand the idea of African Americans saying they are a diaspora. Right here in San Francisco, we have a museum called the Museum of the African Diaspora. And they mean all descendants of Africa. So, we got to respect that. People have their own definitions. But personally, when I say African diaspora, I mean something different.

While their content may target the Black diaspora, the hosts shared that some of those doing the actual listening fall outside these target demographics. According to Hana, White women formed part of a "surprisingly very active" audience:

> We get so many e-mails from White women. And it's funny because the first line usually of those emails is...Hi *Stoop* ladies. I know this podcast isn't for me (or some variation of that), but I'm loving your podcast and I know you're not talking to me, but I love listening. I love being a fly on the wall and hearing. I love learning and understanding.

In Hana's opinion, White women may be listening because they are trying to understand more about issues faced by Black people and the kind of struggles, they have to deal with in this era of the *Black Lives Matter* movement. Some of the issues faced by some White women, including sexism and gender equality struggles, may also contribute to them being much more sympathetic to the causes of the Black freedom struggle. Historically, the civil rights movement and feminist movements in the U.S. have been tied together in some ways, even though there have also been tensions between them. If such is the case, it implies that *The Stoop* offers a one stop shop for individuals from the outside groups to familiarize themselves about the cultural, political, social, and religious dynamics within the community. While White women audiences continue to grow, Hana notes that "as a matter of principle," they would never entertain tweaking their content, toning down on their accents, or using a language that fits the needs of those they consider 'fly in the wall' listeners:

> We're not going to water down anything. We're not going to over explain anything. You are going to hear accents on our podcast. We interview our moms; we interview our cousins. My auntie is on there with her accent. We have Arabic actually said, we have Swahili actually in there. So, the answer is absolutely not. They know it's not for them and they're being guests and listening. And that does not affect what we do in any way.

White women, therefore, constitute their secondary audiences, a group that hosts say further consists of other immigrant communities such as Latinos and Asian-Americans. These groups comprise people who may also be able to learn and relate whenever they tune in to listen. Anybody else who might be listening is considered as their general audience.

Their podcast listenership also extends beyond geographical boundaries. As it turns out, the hosts did not anticipate that they would be able to register international listenership.

However, as time went on it became clear to them that they couldn't feature diaspora experiences without discussing them from a historical lens. Therefore, they quickly seized on the opportunity to grow their vision from an only Black American audience experience to that of a more global Black diasporan experience. This was done by featuring plenty of international stories, an endeavor that seems to have since paid off. While most of their listeners are still based in the U.S., they boast of having audiences tune in from other parts of the world, including Hana's native country Sudan, in addition to South Africa, and Kenya. They claim that other listeners come from areas with a higher African diaspora settlement, including the UK, Canada, Australia, Arabian Gulf, and Dubai.

While acknowledging the symbolic importance of Africa to what they are trying to accomplish by connecting the experiences of African diasporan groups around the world, hosts have since laid out a growth plan and hope to make inroads aimed at boosting their listenership in the continent. They continue to build connections and are open to welcoming collaborations with various stakeholders on a continent where numerous studies have shown that radio remains king. As Leila remarks, their expansion very much remains in the cards:

> I think when we first initially started this thing, we were like, we want these stories to be heard in Africa. That was our end goal. We've been on a couple of radio stations, but we really wanted the stories to be heard because we really wanted to actually get more stories from Africa and get more stories from Africans and within the diaspora Africans like in Europe and stuff like that. So, I think like that was our goal for it to be more global. And I think that's still our end goal, to build like a more global audience.

Being the most dominant source of information in Africa and some parts of the developing world, radio plays a key role in encouraging communication and participation among

local communities. Hana knows this all too well because her childhood exposure to radio news and entertainment while living in Sudan had a profound influence on her storytelling career:

> A lot of people didn't have televisions. There was no internet, of course. So, radio was where we got our information, our entertainment. It was how you knew what time it was. I lived in a Muslim country, the Muslim call to prayer is everywhere, but it's also on the radio. And so, we listened to the radio all day.

Next, I address the third research question, which explores some of the programming decisions made by both hosts to appeal to their target audiences.

***The Stoop*'s programming decisions**

Timing is everything, especially when it comes to covering topics aimed at connecting the experiences of the Black diaspora and those of other Blacks living globally. *The Stoop's* hosts take advantage of current news events touching on the African diaspora to appeal to their audience. For instance, when sporadic peaceful protests and riots began shortly after the killing of George Floyd, an African American man, by a White police officer, Derek Chauvin, who compressed the 46-year old's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds, *The Stoop*, took advantage of the trending situation and covered the topic in their 41st episode titled *Connecting Black.* The episode explores the varied responses to the Black Lives Matter's protests, specifically in the African continent. One such response that highlights indifference by some Africans to the protests, was that of Nigerian journalist Patrick Egwu who says:

> Why have they (African Americans) been quiet and silent whenever there's a killing of a fellow Black man in Africa… Why haven't they been protesting whenever there is police brutality in Johannesburg or Lagos, Dakar, Kampala and Accra. They all keep quiet. I feel that whatever support we give to George Floyd; we should equally extend the same support and voice to police brutality happening all over Africa.

Egwu's feelings also represent some of the sentiments captured on other digital networked environment platforms, such as blogs and *Twitter*, which also influence the kind of topics hosts feature on the podcast. Consider *The Stoop's* premiere and award-winning episode, *Nice tribal wear. Now take it off,* which examines whether African Americans can also appropriate African culture. The hosts mention in the episode that the topic was sparked off by a blog post titled *Black America please stop appropriating African clothing and tribal marks,* written by British-Nigerian writer Zipporah Gene. Gene's carefully worded article targets Black diasporan communities, including those on *Black Twitter,* whom she accuses of creating an uproar when White people appropriate Black culture, while on the other hand failing to realize that they are also guilty of engaging in the same violations "under the guise of tribal fashion and connecting to the motherland. Her article reads:

> You take a cultural dress, mark or trait, with all its religious and historical connotations, dilute it, and bring it out for occasions when you want to look trendy… Ask yourself how is that any better…I admit this is petty but it's something that should be addressed. Sure, we may not wear *Ichafus* (Igbo Nigerian headscarf) on a day-to-day basis anymore, but that doesn't mean their significance to us is lessened. These things are reserved for funerals, births, weddings…significant rites of passage-vital points in our lives that we share with our community and people…

The 20-minute episode, which also features sound rich interviews of people sharing their thoughts around the topic, pits both hosts on opposing sides, perhaps, another strategy to try and cover the issue objectively by representing the views of both sides of the divide. The opposing perspectives make the episode much more appealing to listen to. Most importantly, each of their views are unsurprisingly aligned with that of their presupposed own ethnic cultural identities. For instance, Leila, who's an African American, expresses her absolute agreement with those voicing opposition to the appropriation claims by saying:

> How is it not mine if it's part of my heritage? I mean some of us don't know where in the continent of Africa we are from so we feel we can connect to any part of it.

Hana, as a Sudanese American, on the other hand supports the contrary argument that people should be aware of the meanings behind the garments and should acknowledge the African tribes they originated from. This episode also represents the very many other episodes in the podcast where the hosts' respective viewpoints, either consciously or unconsciously, align with the views of those they may share with a close sense of history, cultural heritage and traditions. However, while their differing positionalities on various subjects resonates with a lot of their listeners, they also mentioned that some, mostly self-identified pan-Africanists, view their diverse views on such hot button topics as an attempt to sow the seeds of division among Black people in the diaspora. Nonetheless, while they do acknowledge that they may have disagreements during debates, they still regard each other with so much respect and high esteem. They credit this attitude and affection towards each other as that cultivated from their long-term friendship. They also acknowledge that hosting the podcast has made them "better friends" and given them an opportunity to understand each other more. This is evident in their great chemistry on the podcast.

Linguistic pluralism also shapes how *The Stoop* serves its audiences. Hana's multilingual skills coupled with the inclusion of guests from diverse backgrounds ensures that the audiences are exposed to diverse languages, including English, Swahili, and Arabic to name but a few. Hosts also consider the inclusion of people with various accents on the podcast as a "beautiful thing." Hana acknowledges that though some of their listeners may not understand some words, context will still help them know what the words represents:

> You know, I've interviewed my mama with her accent. My husband has an accent. He's from Sudan. And so, I think people should get used to hearing accents and if you don't get some things, maybe that's okay.

The hosts' strict maintenance of ethical standards and practices in their podcast comes as a result of their rich backgrounds and training in public radio. According to Hana, the essence of maintaining authenticity of sources, more than anything else, is a standard she considers sacred:

> If you listen to an NPR broadcast or a BBC broadcast, even when they interview people around the world, you hear the real voice underneath for a couple of seconds just to get the authenticity of that person. And then you hear the reporter come in on top and translate while the other person's voice is still there… I find that respectful of the source and also very enriching for the listener to hear an accent, a language from somewhere else. So, we're very intentional about keeping that in The Stoop.

Take for instance their episode *Pretty for a Dark-Skinned Girl*, which tackles the conversations about colorism, an issue that has generated plenty of debate both in the African diaspora and the African continent. The episode features conversations and interactions between Hana and her Sudanese cousin who opens up in Arabic about the creams she uses to bleach her skin. Hana in return does all the translations from Arabic to English in a well-produced manner. In her opinion, these translations not only ensure accurate capture of information, but also helps the message reach the audience in a language they are more familiar with.

Their podcast also combines a variety of storytelling formats, including conversational discussions and interviews, narrative non-fiction produced in documentary-like fashion, and repurposed content. These podcast presentation formats have also been influenced by the extensive knowledge the hosts have acquired while working as public radio journalists. They also claim their presentation styles have been heavily influenced by some of the programs on

public broadcasters such as NPR and BBC, stations that make use of narrations, voice overs, sound design and multiple interviews.

In the podcasts, programming decisions are not only a two-person affair, but sometimes also include a sound designer who creates, and controls sounds and effects, as well as composing music to capture the mood and create emotions. The co-hosts describe their production as an "artistic creation" just like "film," with sound design and music forming a big part of its production to help "move the story along." Vox Pop -street interviews, which capture people's opinions about a subject, are also widely used to provide a snapshot of opinions of people on certain specific topics. Whenever there's a context they need to highlight, the producers sometimes use a newsreel clip from a long time ago to further illustrate the point they are trying to communicate. This practice helps capture the attention of the audience and also helps break the monotony of some of their conversations. According to Hana, these practices also help distinguish their podcast from many others that "only feature people talking the whole time."

There's also a strong emphasis placed on a high level of research, which reflects the hosts' extensive educational and journalistic qualifications. Moreover, they do feature a diverse pool of guests from various African diaspora groups who are knowledgeable about the issues they tackle. According to Leila, the prior research and guests selected are purposefully and intentionally meant to inform and educate:

> We want people to walk away saying I learned something. But not necessarily like I have the answer because that's one thing we don't want to do as is. And it's not a solutions podcast.

As Leila notes, *The Stoop*'s focus is on exploration rather than solutions. A situation they say often lacks in the mainstream media' narratives, which continue to perpetuate negative portrayals of Black people in the U.S. Moreover, the mainstream media mostly treats Black as a monolithic group, notwithstanding the fact that there exist differences in their ethnicities, ancestral nationalities, political ideology, class, education, and varied geographical concentrations. *The Stoop*'s scope of topics for the most part works to distinguish each individual/group featured in their episodes on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, and culture. With the mainstream media's inward-looking coverage model, which largely ignores positive news in the diaspora, *The Stoop* steps in to bridge such gaps, a situation that makes it a preferred choice for its audiences. Next, I will explore the next related research question that explores the type of discourses featured in the podcast.

Civic Discourses Featured

From my qualitative analysis, which identified and analyzed common themes, patterns and topics as featured in the podcast, civic discourses evident in the podcast include promoting social cohesion; raising awareness; diversifying narratives; social justice; and creating connections.

(a) Social Cohesion

The Stoop hosts engage in robust conversations when covering topics related to promoting connections and interethnic solidarity between African Americans and the African immigrants. Consider *The Stoop'*s thought-provoking episode "You called me African what?" which explores perspectives on how African Americans view Africans immigrants and some of the stereotypes they both perpetuate against each other. According to the hosts, Africans are mostly depicted by their African American counterparts as "jungle living," "poor" and

"backwards." They also associate Africans with "famine," "genocide," and "war," and perceptions that "all Africans speak the same language," "come from the same country," "have funny accents," and "speak with a clicking sound" were common. To further illustrate their point, hosts also feature a popular American children's handclapping song, which they argue has always been weaponized to portray African immigrants in a negative light. The song goes:

> Mailman mailman do your duty. Here comes a lady with an African booty. She can do the pom pom. She can do the splits. But most of all she can kiss kiss kiss with her red-hot lips….

According to the hosts, the usage of the slang and derogatory term *African booty scratcher* traces its roots to a time when there was an increase in African immigration to the U.S. in the 70s and the refugee act in 1980, which expanded the Black community landscape in the country. The entertainment landscape was also witnessing a massive shift at the time with the introduction of cable TV, which often featured 'Let's save Africa' advertisements and charity songs such as "We are the world" by Lionel Richie to raise money for famine victims in the continent. Both instances, they argue, somehow fueled misunderstandings between Africans and African Americans, and have since been worsened by the retaliation by some African immigrants who cultivate the perception that they are more hardworking, cultured or educated than their African American counterparts. Hanna confesses that such perceptions are prevalent among the Sudanese American community:

> I know Sudanese women here tell their sons, don't befriend African Americans. Right. Stay away from the Blacks. I hear that all the time. On the other hand, we also hear the perspective of you Africans are coming with your degrees and think you're better than us and think you're smarter than us.

According to hosts, who cover such hot topics with poise and eloquence, the blame cannot be squarely placed on the individuals perpetuating such divisions because their minds have primarily been shaped by the mainstream American media's interpretation of both the African and the African American experiences. Hana supports her argument by noting that most movies she watched while still living in Africa often portrayed African Americans negatively:

> It is the rapper with his pants sugging. It is the gangster terrorizing the neighborhood...These are some of the things I remember seeing and I think the only good things about African Americans relate to music and sports.

In the episode, hosts also discuss the use of slurs by both groups to degrade each other. Slurs are often meant to ridicule or humiliate a certain group of people by targeting certain features associated with them (Croom, 2011). Speaking from her own lived experiences, Hana opens up about how she was surprised when it was the "Black girls and not the White girls" who ridiculed her in school by calling her using derogatory names such as *African booty scratcher* and the lifelong impact it left on her, including a desire to use her podcast to educate those she considers ignorant about the African history and experiences.

(b) **Raising Awareness**

The Stoop hosts create discourse aimed at understanding specific nuances on issues. They raise awareness, inform, and educate their listeners on topics exploring COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among the Black diaspora, Black comedy, Black Tax, Black cultural expressions, the diasporan dilemma (the feeling like one belongs to two worlds), colorism, what it means to be in a White environment with a Black body, and the reasons why Black people are afraid to engage in swimming activities. They also help raise awareness by highlighting topics covering Black

men's struggle with infertility and the importance of taking care of one's own mental health. In fact, in *The Stoop on the Couch* episode, hosts describe their own experiences of having some rough mental patches when covering inter-ethnic conflict related topics among the group. In the episode, recorded during a therapy session, hosts, who decided to take care of their "mental and emotional well-being" by visiting a therapist, open up about how traumatized they were when producing some of the episodes and the opposition they also faced from the so-called pan-Africanists who claimed that their content was doing more harm than good to the community.

(c) Diversifying Narratives

According to Hana, the lack of diversity and representation in the American media newsrooms have accelerated the perpetuation of existing stereotypical narratives, thus leading to what she describes as wanton negative media representations of people in the African continent. Hana further notes:

> And this question is a larger question about the narrative about Africa and the narrative about the countries that we come from. Because the people in this country are fed what they are fed from the media. And so, another thing that I consciously do is try to help people understand the others, and the other things that happen, which is silly to say. Right? Of course, everybody has good and bad and highs and lows. But I felt a responsibility, honestly, as an African in this space. There are not many of us Africans in journalism in this country, not many of us in media and in mainstream media. So, I felt a responsibility to diversify the narrative. So, I bring Sudanese and African culture a lot because I'm the host.

Such representations have awoken Hana's resolve to correct such misrepresentations by mostly focusing on sociocultural stories instead of political ones. These stories, mostly sourced from Sudanese culture, and which according to her, some people might consider as fluff based on their simplicity, include making a *falafel* or highlighting the Sudanese tradition of burning

sandalwood incense. The diversifying of narratives, according to Hana, is a strategy for ensuring that her own immigrant community, especially diaspora children, teenagers, and young adults "feel like they are seen."

(d) Creating Connections

The hosts also engage in creating intercultural connections by tackling topics and conversations featuring Black history in the U.S., embracing Black beauty and reclaiming Black power and identity. They hope to also educate other Black immigrants on the sacrifices made by their African American counterparts. This aspect may lead to creating understanding and forging a solid relationship between these groups. As an African immigrant herself, Hana views African Americans as her "brothers and sisters," and equally believes that recognizing commonalities while also celebrating differences have contributed to strengthening her connections, relationships, and interactions with the community:

> I think there definitely needs to be more understanding between the two groups. And we have so much more in common than we think we do. Africans need to understand African American history when they come to this country and understand that their struggle in this country is what allowed us to come. I know my father would not have been able to step foot in this country if it wasn't for the Black struggle in this country. So, we as Africans have to have an appreciation of that when we come to this country and an understanding of Black history too.

On the other hand, Leila believes that creating connections through engaging in honest conversations makes both groups question how they have been conditioned to treat each other while also helping them reframe their perceptions in a way that it's not too divisive. In her opinion, doing so while maintaining an open-mindedness to learn from each other is a vital component towards achieving solidarity:

> I won't like me and Hana to be like all knowing hosts. That we sit there and we're like, Well, let us tell you how this should be. No, I love the moments where Hana will say something, and she'll say it wrong. Like something very Black and she'll say it wrong. and I'd be like, that's not how you say that. And you know, or I'll say something about like Africa and I know it's wrong, but I'll just say it to get the reaction from her. I'll be like, oh yeah, Kenya, that's in near the southern part of Africa. And she'll be like. No … To me it's just fun… because I think that's what's I think that's what's missing. It's like knowing we can be very different, and we can still make light of it and still, like love each other and still move on.

(e) Social Justice

The Stoop's effort to unpack some of the injustices faced by the African diaspora is evidenced by the podcast's focus on topics featuring the social, cultural, political, and economic upheavals faced by the group. One of their most powerful and popular episodes, *The Birth of Solomon,* explores the rate at which Black women die during childbirth. It features a riveting story of Leila's own sister's personal medical experience in the hands of U.S. healthcare workers. The discussion provides rich knowledge on the injustices and disparities faced by minority women seeking medical services. For instance, it emerges from the episode that "Black women are three or four times more likely to die than White women of pregnancy-related causes in the entire country." According to Leila, the story was produced at a time when there wasn't enough media attention highlighting the issue. She had also previously unsuccessfully tried to pitch the same idea to a radio editor. Still, she says it got turned down even when statistics indicated that it was a crisis situation. As Leila notes, she never despaired:

> And I just sat on that story for a while because my sister lost a baby, and I was in the hospital with her when it was really traumatic. And all the things that she was going through were really in line with what these studies were saying about how Black women are treated in hospitals, how their pain is ignored, and how many of them die. And so, it was really life and death situation.

The personal yet widely resonant story could only be made possible because the platform afforded her an alternative to tell such a story, which had initially failed to be considered for coverage by an editor in one of the mainstream media stations. As Leila admits, the gamble also paid off due to the timing of the story, and they were agenda setters on the issue:

> It was massive in the news, not because of my story, but the timing of it all. Everyone started focusing on the issue. And I think for me the story particularly stood out because it was personal.

The Stoop, in this case, did not only offer the two hosts a platform to feature such a thought-provoking topic but also provided a double-edged sword aimed at bringing together members of the Black diaspora through shared pain, and further awakening several calls to action from their audiences on the plight facing minority women.

Pressures

From my qualitative analysis, which draws on the analysis of themes emerging from interviews held with *The Stoop* hosts, the pressures facing their quest to push for civic discourse consisted of aspects such as finding consistency, listener pressure; monetization; lack of civility; and accusations of sounding too White. Internal pressures consisted of a lack of consistency, and heavy production workloads.

Consistency, Monetization and Feedback

Hosts claim they engage in their work "as a part time gig," with the amount of work required in production being quite enormous, hence the reason why their episodes weren't

produced weekly. According to Leila, while the podcast involves a lot of hard work, it's definitely worth engaging in it still:

> And, you know, it sounds like we're just sitting there chatting and conversing, but every episode is really highly produced. Its fact checked. It's a lot of reporting. It's a lot of like structure. It's editing. It's a lot, you know. It's not just us sitting down talking.

Listener pressure is also evident in the sense that while many of their listeners appreciate their podcast conversations, some urge them to chat even more. This request doesn't bode well with the hosts' strategy that sometimes involves using their own backgrounds to create non-fiction narrative stories. Since there are plenty of podcasts out there using the talking style, Hana and Leila are hoping more podcasters will see the value in experimenting with other forms of storytelling even though they acknowledge it "takes an arm and a leg" to produce them.

Hosts also acknowledge that monetization has consistently hampered their efforts to grow in the podcasting space. Hana notes that they have dealt with this aspect by keeping their day jobs for their own sustainability:

> We didn't belong to a network for a long time. We were independent and we relied on grants so we would apply to this grant and that grant. And depending on how much money we get, you know, sometimes maybe we don't hire an editor for this episode or an engineer for that episode or, you know, we just make it work, but we don't get really paid from the podcast. In that way, it's a labor of love for a lot of people.

However, Hana also adds that passion rather than monetary gains, drive their utilization of podcasts to reach out to their target audiences:

> In that way, it's a labor of love for a lot of people. I think that's why I always say, keep your job. For it to fund your life unless you get some big, lucrative company wanting you on for a lot of money. It's not going to be a livable income even if you make money off your podcast.

They note that their financial burdens have since reduced after joining networks such as *Radio Topia,* a network that, according to its website, was created in 2014, and provides a community while empowering independent podcast creators with the "support to deliver well crafted, innovative audio, and the freedom to thrive on their own terms." The network is also supported by sponsors, grants, and contributions from its listeners.

Hosts also acknowledge that covering some of the sensitive topics require them to develop "thick" skin. They have previously experienced what they refer to as a **"**lack of civility" from individuals describing themselves as Pan-Africanists. After publishing the episode, "you called me African. What?" which explores conflicts among African diaspora groups, hosts say these individuals sent them a harsh letter, signed by several organizations, expressing concern that the podcast was going against Pan-Africanist ideals and creating divisions among Black people in the U.S. Hana also adds that they were called names, with their only crime being sharing their own "personal experiences:"

> "It was a group of Pan-Africanists and we get it, right? Like we understand we are touching a nerve, but it's a nerve that's being touched every day, all the time in our lives. And what's the point if we don't talk about it, how will we come to understanding and resolution?"

These groups/individuals, steeped and rooted in Pan-Africanist philosophy, advocate for oneness and are quick to dismiss anything they deem harmful to the Black common cause. It also turns out that it isn't just the Pan-Africanists who are a threat to *The Stoop's* growth, but they have also had challenges selling their podcast ideas to "executives" who, according to Leila, don't support Black podcasts in the way they support the "others:"

> So, I've developed a very strong response. I don't cower from hard conversations or from hard questions to people who I know have biases when it comes to what type of podcast

> they want to promote. So, I'm very much more skilled and just being strong about, like, my mission and what we're doing.

Asked if she considers herself a Pan-Africanist, especially after such an ordeal, Hana noted that she still agrees with the philosophies of pan Africanism no matter what:

> Yes, I believe we are all tied. We're all bound together by this unique heritage. I also acknowledge our diversity and that Blackness is not a monolith. And that makes us stronger. It doesn't weaken us when there are many different kinds of people with different backgrounds of different religions. To me, it makes us stronger, not weaker. We do not have to all be the same with the same mindset. So, it's almost like you are denying what is true. So, the ideal of Pan-Africanism is wonderful for me. And as a theory, I believe it. But I also think if you don't acknowledge the diversity within this group, then it's a denial of truth.

Even though they have an infectious on-air chemistry, the hosts have also been accused of "sounding too White." As it appears, it is claim they aren't taking while lying down:

> Even when Black people say it to each other, like, Oh, you sound White, you sound so educated. And it's just like, what does that mean? Because it's assuming there's just one way to talk and it's the right way.

Irrespective of such "negative feedback," they still vow to continue sharing stories because they believe so many people connect to their personal experiences, including those, according to Hana, who are from the African diaspora and have been quite appreciative of their work:

> I remember one woman said I was crying because you are exactly talking about me. And nobody has talked about my experiences before because people shy away from it. And that's what we wanted to do on *The Stoop*. You know, talk about the difficult things, have people say how they feel. But really, and at the end of that episode, our conclusion was we just need more understanding of each other.

Discussion

I applied the use of in-depth interviews, document and podcast analysis to explore the role played by *The Stoop* podcast in shaping intragroup relationships among the African

diaspora. This chapter focused on podcasters' imagination of their potential audience, their respective identities, and how it shapes how they serve their audiences, the programming decisions they made, the types of discourse within the podcast, and how external pressures shape how civic discourses are promoted on the podcast.

Hosts' multiple identities, their lived experience, and target audiences strongly influenced the type of civic discourse featured on *The Stoop* podcast. Content featured on the platform include promoting social cohesion, raising awareness, diversifying narratives, championing for social justice, and creating connections. It is also clear that a vast audio production experience, passion for podcasting, the platform's nature of intimacy, reachability, online presence, continuity trait, lack of gatekeeping, and easier equipment availability all played a role in motivating the two podcasters to start their own podcasts.

Factors including geographic, demographic, language diversity, and psychographic tendencies all played a role in their selection of target audiences. Both hosts' experiences working as journalists in public radio significantly impacted their programming decisions, as evidenced by their maintenance of journalistic ethical standards and practices, mixing a variety of storytelling formats, and including a high level of research. Other strategies include borrowing topics from other digital platforms, using diverse strategies to connect with their audiences, and focusing on explorations, rather than solutions.

Pressures faced by the hosts also included a lack of consistency, and heavy production workloads, pressure from listeners, monetization struggles, accusations of causing incivility, and sounding "too White." Next, I will interpret the meanings of these results while drawing connections between them, the theories applied and the existing literature.

These findings are consistent with Hall's (1991) perspective that identity is a process that undergoes constant transformation thus transcending space and time. The shifts in the hosts' national and ethnic identity shifts, depending on their surroundings or experiences not only provides evidence of these assertions, but is also significantly reflected in the hosts' positionalities during debates and in the socio-cultural content produced on the podcast. For instance, Hana noted that she cries when she hears Sudan (her birth country) and U.S. (the country she's lived in for the most part of her life) national anthems because both nations have played a huge part in how she identifies. Sudan has played a huge part both genetically and culturally, while her children were also born in the U.S. As she acknowledged her national identity switches just like "code switching among African-Americans." This is further evidenced when she sometimes identifies herself as a Sudanese American while in an African setting, Sudanese in a setting where she assumes "everyone knows what Sudan is," and as Black in places where there are lots of White people and very few Black people. As time goes by, Leila who used to identify as African American, has since embraced her Black racial identity vis a vis her own ethnicity, since it dawned on her during her visit to Kenya that she really didn't have much of a connection to the African culture or the language. The conjoining of ethnic, national, and gender identities in the podcast also leads to similar conclusions as those featured in Hall's' own writings, which reflects his own journey as an immigrant from Jamaica at the age of 19 to his lived experiences as an adult in Britain.

According to Hall (1991), there are at least two different ways of thinking about identity: The first reinforces the notion of a group of people with a shared culture, a shared history and ancestry, while the second recognizes such shared similarities but that there are also critical points of deep and significant differences. A scrutiny of the topics and themes featured on the

podcast found that while some of them reinforced the notions of a shared culture, a shared history and ancestry, i.e., featuring historical and solidarity building topics, others focused on highlighting the critical points of deep and significant differences I.e., cultural tensions, differences in the African diasporan groups' social political identities, and the perpetuation of stereotypical notions against each other.

These issues support findings and extend existing literature in the following ways: Besides highlighting how podcasters from the African diaspora use the platform to reinforce the notion of a shared cultural identity, common ancestry, as well as the critical points of deep and significant differences, it also supports the argument that culture is not static but undergoes constant transformations. Furthermore, it casts a new light on Hall's cultural identity and diaspora by offering tactics that can be utilized by digital content creators to help bridge the deep and significant differences among the African diaspora.

It also emerged that the underlying reason as to why the reviewed hosts featured topics such as social cohesion, creating connections, diversifying narratives, and championing for social justice, was based on their ultimate goal of "democratizing journalism." While media institutions play a vital watchdog role in the maintenance of political and public arena democracy (Aldridge, 2007), the podcasters noted that the legacy media gatekeepers hampered efforts to allow minority groups to share their own experiences while also viewing the profession as elitist, where only the chosen few were worthy of participating in or meeting the necessary qualifications and set forth standards of practices. To better represent the needs of minority groups, *The Stoop*, therefore, opened up the space, giving them ultimate freedom to share their worldviews and stimulate debates, results that tie well with Florini's (2017) study, which found that Black podcasting helped provide insights and spark conversations and debates within the community.

It can be argued that podcasts provide a much-needed balance, since the media has often faced criticism of exploiting ethnic tensions among Black ethnicities by fixating on conflict storylines aimed at fueling Black-Immigrant tensions (Jenkins, 2007). These negative representations have led to some African immigrants rejecting their Blackness (Asante, 2012), while some, including Caribbean immigrants, distancing themselves from African American culture (Guenther et al., 2011).

According to Gray (1995), the aggressive discourse of Whiteness has facilitated the representation of Black people as expressions of social menace and male irresponsibility. Moreover, the mainstream media, including Hollywood, is still explicitly and deliberately dogged by racial inequality and hierarchy, which traces its connections to the Jim Crow systems, and its cinema industries also centered around economic and cultural exploitation (Erigha, 2019). This is further evidenced by the production of films that continue to perpetuate stereotypical themes and characterizations of Black people as either violent or notorious criminals, or a divided group, aspects that Chatman (2017), notes have resulted to Black Americans opting for counterpublic platforms such as *Twitter*, which afford them a chance to wrestle with interpretation of tests, while collectively seeking to define and police the boundaries of what is acceptable to watch. However, there seems to be a resurgence of Black producers, including Tyler perry, who are establishing their own parallel production companies capable of giving industries such as Hollywood a run for their money in their attempt to control their own image while redefining their own narratives in their quest to also fight racist ideologies.

This resurgence is also evident on *The Stoop* podcast, which acts as a parallel discursive arena where historically marginalized groups who have all been systematically excluded from the dominant public sphere are able to express themselves and challenge oppressive narratives

(Squires, 2002). These groups also include women, Muslims, and other immigrant groups. However, the study also found that *The Stoop's* listeners go beyond their own targeted audiences as evidenced by the numerous feedbacks received from mostly White women. They therefore harness such immense power at their disposal to ensure listeners from all walks of life are consistently kept informed, entertained, educated and engaged, another encouraging aspect when it comes to assessing the role of podcast in promoting participation parity and democratization of the media. The democratization is further highlighted by their attempt to promote participation parity on their podcast as evidenced by the feedback they receive from diverse groups through emails, and their numerous online ratings and reviews. It can also be argued that their constant inclusion of diverse audiences from the African diaspora, either as guests or via vox pops outlines their intentions to reduce participatory disparities, which is often a common fixture when it comes to the Habermasian bourgeoisie public sphere.

By applying storytelling strategies such as using African languages, music, humor, and other African artistic styles to interact with their audiences, the study agrees with the findings of scholars who have noted that podcasts serve as an extension of the Black digital public sphere (Jenkins & Myers, 2022). Here, I also argue that *The Stoop* serves as an extension to the oral African storytelling traditions, which often encompasses a range of diverse communicative traditions including music (Nketia, 1963), use of cultural proverbs (Furniss & Gunner, 2008) and storytelling (Scheub, 2004). These findings are also consistent with some of the strategies applied by kidnapped slaves, who according to Everett (2002), forged a virtual community of intercultural kinship structures by choosing to express them through dance, language, song, talking drums, and other musical elements. The presence of such practices on platforms such as *The Stoop*, which operates in today's digital world, presents opportunities of exploring the histories of preservation

and maintenance of African traditional storytelling strategies and cultural expressions from the trans-Atlantic slave trade period to today's increasingly connected digital world. Moreover, it also helps distinguish the artistic productions of those of African descent with producers from other races, ethnicities and cultures.

Just like the public sphere has faced challenges, including ownership and operations, systemic inequality, marginalization, and participatory disparities that benefit the dominant groups at the expense of the disadvantaged groups (Fraser, 1992), the digital media landscape has also been impacted by neoliberal discourse, with its development and growth possibilities hampered by individualistic values and articulations of color-blind doctrines (Brock, 2020). New media tools continue to prompt optimistic predictions about a level playing field and therefore increases in diversity, innovation, and opportunities for inclusion (Dicken-Garcia, 1996; Marvin, 1988), the same technologies also often privilege the dominant White group at the expense of people of color (Noble, 2018). Even though evidence suggest that Black technical digital practices and cultural capital promotes the disruption of the already set forth Western digital norms, and mostly associated with the White, male middle class (Brock, 2020), *The Stoop* still operates in a podcasting space largely dominated by Whiteness (Vrikki & Malik, 2019).

This is evident based on the monetization struggles and financial burdens hosts have to endure in such a competitive environment. Leila also alluded to this dominance when she noted that they found it a challenge "selling their podcast ideas to executives who don't really support Black podcasts in the way they support the others." While such setbacks expose the fallacy that podcast is a utopian space, it strengthens Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo's (2019) argument that podcasting still shares many of the formal ideals of the public sphere as presented by Jurgen Habermas. As the hosts noted, engaging in podcasting is "a labor of love for a lot of people,"

further advising those thinking of starting their own to keep their jobs unless they get a "big, lucrative contract from a company." *The Stoop* hosts have nonetheless proven to be guided by principles as shown in their refusal to entertain any tweaks on their content, toning down on their accents, or using a language that fits the needs of those they consider 'fly in the wall' or White listeners. Such loyalty to their primary target audiences show that hosts remain authentic to themselves, a trait that is so rare to find in the legacy media, which at times thrives on 'tweaking things' every now and again, to increase their ratings or revenue at the expense of authentic content.

The attacks against *The Stoop* hosts by some of their listeners also highlights Fraser's (1992) point that some counterpublics may not necessarily be virtuous in so far as promoting democratic, egalitarian, or ending marginalization is concerned, even though it still helps expand discursive space. Hate groups in the U.S. have used online platforms to attack immigrants while also seeking to position them as threats to personal, economic, cultural, and even national security (Costello, Restifo & Hawdon, 2021).

Attacks against *The Stoop* hosts are also based on the accusations from some of their listeners that they "sound too White," which translates to they sound too formal or well educated. Such listeners who engage in linguistic profiling assume that Black people can only talk in a certain way, and therefore expect to hear the presenters either engage in African American Vernacular English, communicate with an African accent or engage in style switching or code switching. In a world where language is used as a measure of one's social standing, Millroy & Millroy (2012) alludes to the fact that the standard English language is often drawn from the spoken language commonly associated with the upper-middle class. One is often assumed to be credible and even intelligent if they express themselves in standard English. The same trend has

also been studied by media scholars who have noted that the nature of public radio ensures editorial decisions are relegated to suit the needs of the English monolingual listener, the results that have contributed to the promotion of linguistic homogeneity while also ensuring that the most appropriate on-air speaking style is mostly based on the Standard American English (Chavez, 2021).

While during the interview the hosts noted that theirs was an authentic speaking style, it is important to also note that each of them received formal education in majority White and some of the most revered educational institutions in the U.S. Also, both have served as journalists in an NPR affiliated KALW radio station in San Francisco for decades. NPR broadcast standards have raised political and moral arguments in regard to linguistic diversity with its presenters of color having to suppress their own voices for them to be accommodated and maintained on the station (Chavez, 2021). Moreover, on air voices cultivated by the NPR platform situate Whiteness at its core with hosts speaking in ways that do not come natural to them (Chavez, 2021). While it could be that hosts have adopted some of the NPR standard linguistic practices, these critiques offer them important lessons to evaluate their performance while ensuring they strive to accommodate the needs of their listeners. This case also presents unique considerations while offering plenty of opportunities to explore language attitudes towards podcasters of the African diaspora.

This study argues that *The Stoop* exists as a counterpublic space that seeks to promote social cohesion, challenge narratives, create connections, raise awareness and champion for social justice causes. According to Squires (2002), counterpublics mostly engage with the public as a way to influence change. Just like the *Black Twitter* hashtag, which possesses characteristics of a counterpublic (Graham & Smith, 2016), built on commentary about matters affecting the

community (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2012), and is more likely to steer communicative efforts (Castells, 2012), *The Stoop*'s efforts to engage their publics, including supporting initiatives such as the Black Lives Matter protests, immediately after the killing of George Floyd, highlights its mission to engage the public in bringing broader societal change. Moreover, the feedback they received from people of all walks of life, including White women and other immigrants offer further evidence that the platform engages as a counter public.

This dissertation also argues that *The Stoop* sometimes oscillates between counter public and a satellite public. Satellite is where under certain conditions host can decide to engage with the general public while also remaining totally independent from it (Squires, 2002). This is evidenced by the application of linguistic pluralism on the podcast, including the limited use of Swahili, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Arabic. However, whenever non-English words were used for "authenticity purposes," as the hosts claimed, they still translated them back to English for their audiences to understand or get the contexts of what was being said. Therefore, contrary to the findings of Laughlin's (2021) study, which noted that Black Christian podcasters created both an enclaved space, where Black listeners cocooned themselves in Black cultural idioms, and a counterpublics space that also targeted the general Christian public, there were no evidence suggesting that *The Stoop* hosts participate in the space as enclaves, even though the hosts find themselves in conditions that Squires (2002) describes as historical, socioeconomic, and political and may force minority groups to participate in the space as enclaves.

While language acts as a point of separation, distinguishing those who understood AAVE, Arabic and Swahili from the rest of the publics, the act of going ahead to provide translation

effectively diminished the podcast's existence as an enclave public. Moreover, since hosts have also been accused of "sounding too White" in the podcast, which can also be loosely translated as not applying enough of the African diasporan cultural idioms as their audiences would want them to do. In Florini's (2019) study, Black podcasters engaged in a range of communicative practices which created networked enclaves through communicative practices which camouflaged them from White surveillance. A similar conclusion was also reached by Steele (2018) whose study, which examine how bloggers and their communities make use of satellite and enclave spaces to explore Black representation, Black feminism, and class consciousness, found that Black bloggers may intentionally keep their conversations hidden from the dominant group or sometimes opt to engage with the masses (Steele, 2018). Outside of podcasting, Rap Music has also been referred to as the "theater of the powerless" and a hidden transcript that uses cloaked speech and disguised cultural codes to comment on and challenge aspects of power inequalities, telling alternative stories, destabilizing hegemonic discourse, legitimating counter hegemonic interpretations, acting as an educative tool and drawing portraits of contact with dominant groups (Rose, 1994).

According to Steele (2018), satellites separate themselves from the wider public in a bid to maintain their group identity, while Squires (2002) also argues that they may choose to enter into conversations with the wider public sphere based on a convergence of interests. Steele further notes that satellite affords Black people an opportunity to promote the assimilation of African Americans into the mainstream, while also reaffirming the rights of those from the African diaspora to engage in the art that they can connect to. *The Stoop* meets the stipulated conditions through engaging with the wider public when engaging on conversations aimed at celebrating Black culture and championing for social justice causes, while at the same time

engaging in topics addressing the interests of their primary audiences, including promoting solidarity and improvement of relationships among the group.

The hosts' perspectives on who constitutes the African diaspora generally supported the contemporary definitions set forth by scholars, including George Shepperson, who describe it as those of African descent who are spread throughout the world. According to Shepperson, they include groups who migrated to Europe as African slaves long before the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Africans enslaved by Muslim powers, Africans enslaved by European powers, and Africans dispersed within Africa because of slave trade and imperialism (Alpers, 2001). One of the hosts' opinions noting that the definition of the word had since evolved and should be redefined to mostly describe the more recently migrated diaspora groups, also supported Harris' (1993) findings, which broadened Shepperson's definition to assume a more continuous, dynamic, and complex characteristic stretching across aspects such as time, and geographical location (Harris, 1993). Such a perspective also supports Werbner's (2015) argument that members of a diaspora have shifting diaspora formations and multiple boundaries and should not be treated the same as a group (Werbner, 2015). With the struggle to settle on a concrete definition being by scholars such as Alpers (2001), who warns that when seeking to write about the African diaspora, one is likely to get entangled in the exercise of defining the term (Alpers, 2001), our findings demonstrate that the African diaspora can be applied in multiple contexts, depending on one's needs. For instance, in the podcast, hosts sometimes used the words Black diaspora and African diaspora interchangeably during their conversations.

Topics covered on the podcast were also explored through the lens of the constituent elements laid down by Safran (1991), which provide details on the factors that lead to the creation of a diasporan consciousness. These include: the dispersal from these groups or their

ancestors from their original homeland to two or more regions, often by violent forces or threat of violence; the making of a collective memory, vision or myth of that homeland; the alienation/marginalization in their new location; a commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the original homeland; and the desire for return (when conditions are appropriate) and a continuing relationship (either personally or vicariously) and identity with the homeland that shapes the consciousness and solidarity of the group (Safran, 1991 p. 83- 84).

There existed strong evidence that *The Stoop* plays a significant role towards the creation and maintenance of an African diasporan consciousness through its coverage of topics such as: slavery to address the dispersal of African Americans from the African continent; racism, police brutality, inequalities in health care, and high incarceration rates to address the marginalization of the African diaspora in their host nation; the featuring of African sound elements, movies such as *Coming to America*, oral storytelling traditions, and sounds that embody Blackness to shape the collective memory, vision, or myth of their African homeland; calling to an end of conflicts in the African countries, including Hana's home country, Sudan, as a commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the original homeland; the desire to spread their wings in the African continent as a desire to return, and Black tax, Black sound, Black solidarity and nodding as a form of salute as a continuing identity with the homeland that shapes the consciousness and solidarity of the group.

The shifts in *The Stoop* hosts' ethnic identities depend on circumstances i.e., Hana acknowledging that her identity switches just like "code switching" because she identifies as Sudanese American while in an African setting, as Sudanese in a setting where she assumes "everyone knows what Sudan is," and as Black when she finds herself a minority in a majority White setting, affirms Wimmer's (2008) idea that individuals choose between various identities

based on self-interest. These analyses also support Barth's constructivist approach to defining identity, while rejecting the Herderian school of thought, which according to Wimmer (2008), mostly views ethnic identity as that which is acquired by birth. Barth conceptualizes ethnicity as a product of continuous social processes where categories are still maintained despite an individual moving across boundaries or adopting a new identity (Barth, 1969).

The Stoop hosts' distinct ethnic experiences challenge the notion of ethnic 'groupism.' Their diverse experiences are in tandem with scholars (Barth: 1969; Lamont, 2000; Alba, 2005; Loveman, 1997), who reject collective notions of ethnicity. The findings are also consistent with Weber's assertions that ethnicity is a subjectively experienced feeling of belonging based on the belief in a shared culture and common ancestry (Wimmer, 2008).

The existence of symbolic boundaries, which according to Lamont & Molnar (2002), consist of conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize people, in order to create feelings of commonality and group membership (Epstein, 1992), influenced *The Stoop* hosts' imagination of their audiences. Hosts categorize their primary target audiences not only based on racial classifications, but also feelings of commonalities and relatable experiences. The Stoop's aim of building solidarity among the larger African diaspora group by featuring topics from a diverse range of African ethnic groups based in the U.S. also served as a useful tool for the expansion of boundaries.

Social boundaries, which according to Massey & Denton, (1993) occurs when symbolic boundaries are agreed upon to the point where they show identifiable patterns of social interaction, while manifesting themselves through aspects such as unequal access or unequal distribution of resources/opportunities (Lamont & Molnar, 2002), was also evident in the coverage of their topics which highly discussed how aspects such as access to health care,

educational opportunities, class, and unequal application of the law contributed to the relationships among the African diaspora.

Topics featured on *The Stoop*, especially those exploring aspects such as perceptions, stereotypes, interactions, and social relationships present evidence of the existence of ethnic boundary formations among African diasporan groups. For instance, bright boundaries, which Alba (2006) defines as distinctions in which individuals are aware of the side of the boundary they belong to, was evident in the ways in which some African parents warned their children not to befriend and even stay away from African Americans. Such behavior gives credence to Guenther et al.'s (2011) argument that African immigrants distanced themselves from African American culture. At times, according to Asante (2012), they also embraced their 'Africanness' as opposed to their Blackness when it came to developing racial consciousness. However, it is important to note that, this should not be generalized, because other immigrants, Hana being a case example, proudly embraces both their Blackness and African identities, aspects which heavily influence her mission to forge unity among these groups through the use of podcasts.

Moreover, Hana has also been the victim of the existence of in-group activities perpetuated by some African Americans and aimed at maintaining feelings of superiority over those they consider out-groups, including African immigrants. While sharing her own lived experiences, she recalled how it was the Black girls in school who referred to her as *African booty scratcher*, a derogatory word used to describe African immigrants. She also shared how Africans, on the other hand, adopted the word *akata* to refer to African Americans. These results support Imoagene's (2015) assertions that both groups weaponize the use of slurs to denigrate each other. Imoagene notes that while second generation Nigerians/Africans have themselves been targets of the *African boot scratcher* slur, they returned the favor by weaponizing the slur

akata to refer to African Americans, a practice which was also applied as a socialization message in their own communities. *African booty scratcher* is commonly used to refer to Africans as the lesser type of Blacks, while the term *Akata* has its roots in the Yoruba language, meaning a wild cat (Imoagene, 2015). Africans use the term to depict African Americans as wild, aggressive and uncultured (Kperogi, 2013).

Intergenerational differences, between Hana's second-generation American children, whom she notes have had the privilege of growing up in a more diverse society and are more of global citizens, compared to hers and her own immigrant parents' experience confirms the findings of previously done studies which suggest that there exists a social distinction between immigrant and second generations (Alba, 2006). Their socialization in the U.S. society has however denied them a chance to grasp Sudanese languages while also experiencing Sudanese culture in its entirety.

With the concept of boundaries having been influential in exploring research agendas in fields such as anthropology, political science, history, sociology, and social psychology (Lamont & Molnar, 2002), these findings matter because there exists limited knowledge highlighting the application of the concept into the field of communication.

Summary

This chapter began by identifying *The Stoop* origins and the motivations behind the podcast's start. This was followed by unpacking the conversational discourse and programming decisions to guide the podcast, uncovering how the creators imagined their targeted audiences and the kinds of external and internal pressures the hosts face. Findings were made based on the research questions guiding the study and also analyzed based on existing literature and concepts,

including the concept of cultural identity and diaspora, concept of boundary making, and the counterpublics sphere.

CHAPTER VI

CARIBBEAN LIFE IN AMERICA

This chapter presents a case study of how the *Caribbean Life in America* podcast influences relationships among African Americans, African immigrants, and Afro Caribbeans. In addition, it unpacks the discourses, programming decisions, targeted audiences, and pressures faced by its host, while also providing details on their motivations and lived experiences. This chapter will address the following research questions, as in Chapter V:

RQ1: How do the podcasters understand their own diasporic identities?

RQ2: How do podcasters imagine the African diaspora as a potential audience?

RQ3: a) What programming decisions are made to appeal to this audience?

b) What kinds of civic discourses are evident in how programming is constructed for these audiences?

RQ4: What pressures shape how civic discourses are promoted on these podcasts?

This study will answer these questions by drawing on themes emerging from listening to and analyzing the *Caribbean Life in America'*s online episodes, interviews held with its host, Ryan, and document analysis. First, I will briefly provide details of the podcast's origins, and motivations.

Origins and Motivations

Caribbean life in America offers its host William Nelson Ryan a voice to shine a spotlight on the contributions of influential Afro Caribbean people who have helped shape U.S.

history. He says he recorded the podcast after noticing that there weren't lots of podcasts or shows in the U.S. featuring the relationships and contributions of individuals who trace their roots in the Caribbean, a star-studded list that includes: U.S. civil rights icons Malcolm X from Grenada and Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure) from Trinidad; actress Cicely Tyson from Nevis; boxing legend Mike Tyson from Jamaica; singer, model and actress Grace Johns from Jamaica; Rap legend Busta Rhymes from Jamaica; Basketball legend Karim Abdul-Jabbar from Trinidad and Tobago; Boxing great Floyd Mayweather Junior from Jamaica; former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell from Jamaica; American cleric Louis Farrakhan from St Kitts and Jamaica; actor and novelist Billy Dee Williams from Montserrat; American broadcaster Lester Holt from Jamaica and British singer Maizie Williams, whose of Montserrat descent. Ryan further notes:

> "The reason of this list is to show that migrants from the Caribbean have been coming here for a long time and have had a profound effect on the United States of American and its development. Now this list was narrowed down to the most famous and noticeable names because of time…The question I ask is whether African Americans realize the heritage of this people. And do the acknowledge the heritage and contribution of Afro centric people in this country? …I believe there should be a day of celebrations for these contributions.

In Ryan's' opinion, the success of the aforementioned individuals is mostly "based on the spirit, will and determination by the Afro Caribbean to accomplish goals to the highest of their ability." This, he adds, is the reason why Afro Caribbean immigrant children also grow up to be notable and well regarded. Another reason he says explains prosperity within the group includes the arrival of Afro Caribbean immigrants into the U.S. with a "level of freedom which Afro-Americans are actually looking for." This is in reference to having not experienced racism previously.

Ryan also says his mentorship work and wide range of knowledge, including gospel, prompted his followers to encourage him to start a podcast. He was convinced podcasting would be an ideal platform for "truth-telling" while helping him reach an even wider audience. He also adds that podcasting presented a perfect channel to help him fulfil what he considers a call to spread love and togetherness among the African diaspora:

> Unity is power and If I can bring us together as one, it'll be a very powerful thing, you know? So, I'm just trying to get people to get back to their understanding of their history.

The "newness" of podcasts, its online presence, easier usability, quick accessibility, current trends, and availability of recording equipment also contributed to Ryan's decision to take a stab at producing podcasts. According to Ryan, podcasts have made the world "a lot smaller" and continue to open doors of opportunities for him, including collaboration.

Shades of Identity

Ryan's ethnic and national identities heavily influence his podcasting content and practices. He describes his ethnicity as an "African-Irish mix," having been born in the British overseas territory and English-speaking Caribbean Island of Montserrat. His grandfather hailed from Ireland and married a Black African woman on the island who he also says had an Irish last name, Riley. Available literature reveals that Montserrat was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493 and was later colonized by settlers from Ireland in 1632 (Paxton, 1983). According to Ryan, Ireland has had a considerable influence on the island's sociocultural landscape:

> And so, you'll find that Montserrat is the only place on earth right now where St Patrick's Day is a national holiday. And some of us do wear kilts. The dress that looks like a skirt. But we only do it ceremonially.

Although he migrated to the U.S. in 1987 after being invited by his aunt, he strongly identifies as an Afro-Caribbean. This factor significantly contributes to his Afrocentric perspectives in the podcast:

> When I look at our history, most of the people that came down to Montserrat came out of West Africa. They came out of places like Ghana and other countries. And so, I feel like, you know, Africa is a mother country…... And as far as I'm concerned, you're a Black man. You're an African…. wherever you may be. Your history started in Africa. You got your roots. And once your roots are in Africa, no matter where you are, you're part of the African diaspora."

His Afro-Caribbean identity also influences his podcast conversations, as revealed by some of his featured topics, i.e., those assessing the successes of renowned U.S. figures with Caribbean roots. In another episode, he shares his own lived experiences growing up in Montserrat while also providing historical context about the island, including the infamous volcano eruption tragedy, which befell the island in 1995, destroying cities while causing population displacement in its now buried capital, Plymouth. Other topics that reflect his identity include the culture shock he experienced the first time he arrived in the U.S. and some of the misconceptions, cultural misrepresentations, and mispronunciations of names from the Caribbean. His Afro-Caribbean identity also manifests in his selection of Reggae as a theme song in one of his episodes.

Ryan's racial identity drives his motivation to correct the implicit stereotyping bias directed toward members of the Black diaspora. According to him, when some people see a Black person, all they see is a "downturn, problems and racial strife," a situation he attributes to

"people failing to educate themselves about the African diaspora," he says he self-identifies as a proud Black African diasporan:

> I always tell people, you know what, I'm Afro-Caribbean. I'm from Montserrat. I was born in the Islands. It doesn't really matter. You know what I'm saying? I just feel like we need to understand who we are. That's the bottom line. People are trying to run away from the reality of what's happening in the world. But yes, your skin tone always follows and so you can't really get away from it, no matter what you call yourself. We might sound different, but our color tells us where we come from, you see? So that's how I identify…

Consequently, he describes his own relationships with other individuals from the African diaspora as "rosy" while noting that his friends in the U.S. cut across various Afro-diasporic cultures, including Nigeria, Jamaica, Antigua, and African Americans. Activities that bring these groups together with one common purpose, including church services, Black History Month, and other cultural celebrations, often strengthen his resolve to seek to promote togetherness and solidarity.

During the interview, Ryan noted that first-generation immigrants work exceptionally harder compared to the subsequent generations who "take for granted the privileged opportunities they've got, live a comfortable life but lack discipline." Views that were clearly influenced by his own upbringing:

> As a first generation, we have a foundation where you know yourself. You grew up and you weren't wearing shoes. You had to go fetch water, go take care of the sheep and a goat. They don't know nothing about that. It influenced me differently because at least I've got that knowledge and I could say, hey, let me show you something. Let me tell you about something that you don't. You know nothing about. Because again, they think that the milk comes out of a bottle. Well, they don't know that it came from a cow

While he prides his podcasting work on bringing together African diasporan groups, some of the episodes reveals that his own male gender identity contributes to driving the gender wedge through his portrayals of African diasporan women as those who have lost their authentic selves. During the interview, Ryan doubled down on his attack on African diasporan women:

> I believe our women have lost their Africanness. The thing that that we came out of Africa with even as slaves. We didn't lose everything during slavery. But now this generation has lost more of it or most of it. And the women are not being wives. They're not meant to be wives anymore. You see what I'm saying?"

Imagining the Caribbean Life in America's Audience

While the *Caribbean Life in America* host notes that the podcast targets "anyone who will listen," a strategy meant to attract more listenership by featuring conversations cutting across diverse groups, an analysis of episodes show that his topics are primarily targeted towards niche audiences including Afro Caribbeans and African Americans. He features topics such as the contributions of the Afro-Caribbean people, primarily due to his Caribbean roots. Still, he also targets African Americans because he says they have failed to realize that they aren't the only ones who've played a part in the Black emancipation movements. Ryan further notes:

> Every time when we celebrate Black History Month, you'll hear them only talk about the people on this side of the world. The likes of Martin Luther King, Sojourner Truth and so on. But I always say, yeah, there were people from the Caribbean like Marcus Garvey who made major strides and lent a hand in the movement of freedom. And they need to talk about them too. They are part of the story.

Age-wise, Ryan says the *Caribbean Life in America* podcast content is mainly tailored towards 35-year-olds and above, a demographic he says constitutes most of its real listeners. He also concedes that those from the younger generation may not necessarily connect with his content:

> You know, the younger ones are looking for something totally different. And so, if I could get them to listen and maybe wake some of them up about the stuff that's going on, we would be able to change the narrative.

However, Ryan says he is banking on his mostly middle-aged listeners to help share his "gospel" with the younger generation. Scrutiny of his podcast, however, reveals some attributes which may turn off some of his listeners, especially women. Topics highlighting the battle of the sexes among the African diaspora feature misogynistic language, and this is evident in episodes such as "Strong Black Independent Woman," "The Female-dominated Relationship/the Masculine Energy Female," "Who Suffers Most After Divorce" and "Black Men are Looking for Filipina Wives*."* Rarely does his podcast cover topics attacking men using strong language.

Programming Decisions

While Ryan says he treats his podcast as a platform that provides people with an open dialogue space, analysis of podcast episodes reveals no use of Vox pops, interviews, or two-way exchanges. The only participatory feature involves soliciting donations from his listeners and requesting feedback by leaving comments or emailing him.

On the podcast, Ryan uses impassioned monologues delivered without interruptions, a style perhaps influenced by his passion for Christian gospel and having previously done biblical studies. At times, exhorting is often used when urging listeners to embrace ethical behavior. His deep Christian spiritual beliefs are rubber-stamped all over his content which help him support his arguments, encourage and inspire his listeners while also sounding authoritative. During my interview with him he also mentioned that he still harbors a dream to further his biblical knowledge by joining a seminary.

His shows also sound well-produced, and contain multiple elements. Episodes often kick off with a short and punchy female voice-over promo or music, followed by presenter links. Sign-offs are also done with faded music in the background. The music instrumentals are chosen across various genres, including Caribbean Reggae beats. The music is meant to capture the audience's attention and "lighten up the mood" of his listeners. Most episodes are 10-25 minutes, depending on the day's conversation, and have no commercial breaks or promos. While English is the most used language, Ryan says he sometimes uses coded language by saying things in a "Caribbean way" to connect with most Islanders listening to his podcast, specifically those "from Montserrat and Jamaica," whose slang he says share lexical similarities with his own.

Intimacy is also key to Ryan's' engagement with his listeners. In the episode "Looking at prostate cancer (My diagnosis*),"* Ryan shares his diagnosis to raise awareness about the "devastating disease." In the moving and well-researched episode, he starts by providing statistics on how the disease affects African diasporan men before breaking the news of his diagnosis to his listeners:

> Today I would like to talk to you about something that is not fun for most men over the age of 50 and even those approaching the age of 50. And that is the prostate. Research shows that men of the African diaspora and even those in the African continent have a higher rate of prostate cancer than any other demographic in the world, and this is serious. Now, it is said that one in seven African American men will develop prostate cancer in their lifetime. And so overall African American men are 1.8 more likely to be diagnosed with prostate cancer and 2.2 times more likely to die from it than White men. So, we've got to take this thing more seriously …Now this was not a topic that I had given more serious thought to… Not until recently when I myself was diagnosed with the early stages of prostate cancer… So, the question becomes after this then what next?"

He shares the kind of treatment he's taking, and its side effects and promises to keep his listeners informed on his progress. He also encourages African diasporan men to get rid of some

of the cultural barriers that prevent them from going ahead and doing early testing for prostate cancer. Sharing his own experience highlights a strategy of connecting with his listeners, primarily through his own painful experience, while also helping others open up about their experiences. Sharing such a personal issue shows that he genuinely cares about his listeners' health and wellbeing and speaks to the intimate bond of trust between him and his listeners.

Apart from putting on a counselor's hat and providing a list of pancreatic cancer dos and don'ts, he also asks some of his listeners diagnosed with the disease to share their experiences and the medication they chose. This highlights an attempt to establish a mutually benefit relationship with his listeners, with the high level of research featured in the episode and presented to the audience highlighting an attempt to build credibility and authenticity on the podcast.

As far as creativity goes, there is also an element of conformity, as evidenced by his decision to abide by some of the conventions set forth by the various podcast distribution platforms, including "framing certain things in a certain way" when discussing adult content. This he believes, hampers his creativity. He says that he has to stay within the guidelines because his podcast is not R-rated.

There's also plenty of subjective coverage, especially when it comes gender related topics. As the solo host (he's never yet featured any guests), most of his androcentric viewpoints often go unchallenged. This quote taken from one of his episodes provides a glimpse of his strong use of language against women when discussing the high rates of divorce in the U.S.:

> It is said that 80% of divorce in the U.S. are done by women. I believe this is the case partly because of that mindset. The mindset of the strong Black independent and now I'm

> gonna add… miserable woman who wants to control everything. And when she doesn't have control then guess what, she's gonna file a divorce because she can't control a man. I know this mindset exists in the Afro Caribbean community and also exists in the Afro American community. So, guess what? It seems to be an Afro centric mindset. It is difficult enough for relationships to succeed naturally… And if not remedied soon Black men are gonna look elsewhere for love and companionship. Our women will continue to achieve academically while having no one to share it with and for the Black man, the grass will continue to look greener on the other side even if it's over the septic tank."

Civic Discourse

From my qualitative analysis, which identified and analyzed common themes, patterns and topics as featured in the podcast, civic discourses evident in the podcast include spotlighting contributions, countering stereotypes and misconceptions, promoting empowerment, community cohesion, and comparative assessments.

(a) Countering Stereotypes and Misconceptions

Through podcasting, Ryan counters the negative stereotypical portrayals of the African diaspora, specifically those from the Caribbean Islands. In the episode "the misconceptions about the Caribbean Island," Ryan highlights some of the misconceptions around the islands as propagated by some Americans, including names, culture, music, the languages spoken and the location of the islands. In the episode Ryan also confronts the perceived lifestyles of Caribbean Island dwellers:

> Another misconception is that the island people sit around, drink coconut water all day and climb trees. Most of them also believe that the island people live in grass huts and don't drive cars and things like that. …Some believe that the islands are so poor that everyone is looking to pick your pocket when you go there or rob you… It is also believed that Reggae is the only form of music in the islands. But we have way more music in the islands than many people realize. The Caribbean music comprises of Reggae, Calypso, Soca, Dancehall, Zouk, Mento, Ragga, Reggaeton, Roots Reggae and more…Last but not least, English is not the main language of all the islands…Now some people speak Creole, Spanish, French, Dutch, Taki Taki, and Papiamento…

Ryan places the blame squarely on geographical and historical miseducation. For instance, he says it bothers him that quite a number of African diaspora populations still remain uninformed about the history of the slave trade and he has had to correct some African Americans about certain misconceptions associated with slavery in the West:

> A lot of them African Americans thought that slaves were only taken to the Caribbean and America. But it wasn't... It was 35 countries, including some in in Latin America. So when they started learning that these they were shocked. They said, well, I see people over there with my color. But why? How are they Black? And I tell them, yeah, they are. They might speak Portuguese or Spanish. But nonetheless, their ancestors were taken there. And that opens up their eyes and they are like, Wow. I never knew that. So, we find out a lot of people still don't know the truth about the history of the African slave trade.

Ryan further places the blame on the mainstream media and the U.S. education system that he accuses of failing to cover the real history of the African diaspora. He argues the media are guilty of "promoting misunderstanding and miseducation" about Africans and the African diaspora, consequently increasing tensions among these groups. He, therefore, views himself as some kind of a "history guardian," a role bequeathed to him by his own daughter:

> My daughter said 'Dad, the things that you have taught me, I didn't learn in school. So, when you know the history or even some of it, you got to share it because it's important, because you are enlightening other people so they will know.'

(b) Promoting Empowerment

Ryan also covers topics promoting empowerment among the African diaspora. For instance, in the episode *should you invest in cryptocurrency*, Ryan encourages the community on the benefits of having multiple streams of incomes and investments. He further encourages audiences to consider investing in real estate as a ticket to becoming financially independent.

According to Ryan, lack of investment knowledge is the motivation behind his issuance of such financial advice:

> I talk about investing and saving because I believe is something that Afro-Caribbean people and even African Americans have not really been taught yet. But I think that's what economically leaves us where we are, because we're not recognizing that there are ways to pull ourselves up. We are still depending on a 9 to 5 job yet there are other things that we can do. God has given all of us gifts. A lot of people are afraid to use it.

(c) Comparative Assessments

Ryan shares his own American lived experiences by comparing them to his earlier lifestyle while still living in Montserrat. In the episode, *my views as an Afro Caribbean person,* he reveals some of the culture shocks he has had to endure ever since arriving in the U.S.:

> **...**In New York City, people are out to mug you. You got to be careful and kind of watch yourself. Coming from a place with very low crime to a place where crime is shocking to your system…it was kind of a challenge adopting to that.

He describes his native country Montserrat as a "quiet, laidback and chill paradise," a place that offered him an opportunity to look at the world in a different light. Although he still appreciates the economic opportunities the U.S. has to offer, he notes that his native country's crime rate is less than 1%, with murders and crime so rare. He says nothing pisses him off in the U.S. like Black-on-Black crime, which is quite rampant in his current city of Atlanta:

> I keep on wondering why there is so much violence over here, so many murders and stuff. People need to wake up and realize that we are all one, especially when I see us as Black people fighting against each other, I don't like that. Yeah, actually, we're one people and it's about time that we recognize that we're one people… This is like a jungle. You get out in the jungle and you start thinking about where you came from. So maybe I'm able to impart something to the people in the jungle, maybe I could wake them up a little bit and let them understand that there's a better way to do things. You don't always have to be fighting and fussing. We are going to disagree. We're not going to agree on everything. But there's a way to do it and respect each other. And I said, if I could get that

> across and let people let them understand, especially the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, if they could understand that we were only dropped off as the boat went by, it dropped them off. We are connected.

His comparative assessments also touch on the quality of education and what he describes as "honest assessment" between Afro Caribbean immigrants and African Americans:

> You know we (Afro Caribbean) come with a mindset to work hard. We come with a mindset to achieve. To accomplish something. Because again opportunities that were not afforded to us. And so, when we come, we try to take advantage of those and try to make a better life for ourselves. And not to say that African Americans don't work but we have some that totally rely on the system. I guess because they grew up in this country, they take it for granted while people coming from the outside, they take advantage of some of the situations …

He, however, acknowledged that his insights are also shaped by a different kind of freedom in Montserrat, where he only had to deal with classism as opposed to the extreme racial issues in the U.S.

(d) Community Cohesion

Ryan argues that his experiences have inspired him to use his podcast as an avenue for African diasporan groups to learn more about their commonalities rather than focusing on divisions. According to him, language is also partly to blame for the emergence of divisions among the group:

> The problem is that we don't understand each other. And while we may look the same, we don't sound the same many times when we speak. And you judge a person by the way they sound. But no, you shouldn't do that, because we're all from different places. And when we come together, we can make real good music.

However, while Ryan leads efforts to promote community cohesion, he's also guilty of perpetuating the same divisions he's fighting against in his podcast. His misogynistic comments

and biased statements towards women are featured in episodes such as "the risk of marriage outweighs the benefits," which explores the reasons why men might be shying away from marriage. He accuses modern women of going against what he describes as the "traditional roles of a wife" even though "the same women are actually the sole benefactors of marriage." Ryan says:

> "Women bring absolutely nothing to the table, except her body, beauty and in some cases academic degrees… They also marry for money and are delusional. A lot of time women come into the man's life to use him, abuse him and throw him in a bath of water"

He also shares his belief that modern women are bred to compete with their male counterparts resulting into a power struggle kind of relationship:

> "They want to be on the same level with the man. Not giving him respect, not letting him be the head of the home. not letting him be the man that he's supposed to be. But challenging him and trying to wear the pants like he does and trying to do what he does. You see what I'm saying?"

Divisiveness is also evident in some of his negative portrayal of African Americans. For instance, he notes that Afro Caribbean immigrants strive to own a home as soon as they come into the U.S. as opposed to "a lot of African Americans who live in projects or prefer to rent houses and do not view owning a home as a high priority." He further argues that Afro Caribbean men are much more independent based on their upbringing and take advantage of opportunities in the U.S. by doing more than three jobs at a time to fulfil their dreams:

> So, I believe that a lot of people came from the islands and really gained a lot because they put themselves out to achieve. The crux of the whole thing is that you come out of the island to be able to achieve more than what you would have been able to achieve at home…...It is not an easy thing and that's why Caribbean people, especially the men, I believe, go through such difficult times in America and some of them end up with mental issues in a sometimes-hostile environment where you have to fight aspects such as racism, individualism, the rough winters, and loneliness…

Podcasting Challenges

From my qualitative analysis which draws on conversations emerging from interviews held with *Caribbean Life in America* hosts, the pressures facing Ryan's' quest to push for civic discourse consist of listener backlash, monetization, inconsistency struggles, and gaining more followers.

(a) Listener Backlash

Ryan's work has not been well received in some quarters. He discloses that he has faced a backlash over some of his political views, which sometimes involves criticizing the Democrats' hold on the Black vote in the U.S.:

> Politics is a serious thing because if I should look at it for what it is and what I've seen happen in this country, I would tell you straight up and as far as I am concerned, that the Democratic Party has taken advantage of Black people in this country. And I say that all the time because they promise a lot but deliver very little. So, I look at that stuff and know that that is a sore point with a lot of us because a lot of African Americans, and African Caribbean people are Democrats. And so, they don't want me to say certain things, but it's a fact. You can look at it, look at it for what it is. Don't look at it because you're affiliated with it. Look at it from a point of truth. And you see where I'm coming from. I look at both sides. I look at the Republican Party, look at the Democratic Party …So, I try to bring a balance.

He also noted that his views on women have also been received with mixed reactions:

> I like to talk about the relationship and mainly the women, because I feel like their attitudes needs to be adjusted because they have been misled. And so, when I talk about that, some people get a bit irate and they say, well, I don't agree with you. But the fact of the matter is what I try to do is get the statistics and the facts as well here. So, I say, you might disagree with me, but I want you to go ahead and check this out. But there's always that backlash of a set of people, you know, may not agreeing, which is fine. I know that everybody is not going to agree. So. yeah, but I do think about it, you know. But I go ahead anyway, because I need to put it up.

(b) Monetization, Inconsistencies and Followers

Monetization remains a significant challenge to his practice. While he initially started the podcast as a hobby, he says it has ended up opening opportunities that he would like to cash in on. He also struggles with consistencies in producing the podcast, with things being made much more complex by the fact that he has a full-time job as a receiver of merchandise in one of the leading U.S. companies. Moreover, he also runs his *YouTube* channel and Internet radio station concurrently. However, he hopes to build momentum by maintaining consistency and attracting more and more listeners:

> I keep putting it together and I keep doing it with the enthusiasm that I do it with and pray that one day, one episode alone might just go viral. Maybe, maybe I know it. When I look at, you know, there's so many people listening to that one episode because it has touched something somewhere and people are like, Yeah, we can identify with this one. So yeah, I'm going to just keep doing it and the sky's the limit.

While he views audience engagement as being key to a successful podcast, an aspect he considers a "working progress" when it comes to his own, he still yearns to create more collaboration between him and his listeners. So far, he says a couple of people have contacted him to feature him in some of their projects, an aspect he attributes to the presence of the medium on some of the top distribution platforms, including Apple and Spotify podcasts.

Discussion

This case study employed in-depth interviews, document and podcast analysis to explore the role played by *the Caribbean Life in America* podcast in shaping African diaspora relationships in the U.S. The four research questions focused on podcasters' imagination of their

potential audience; podcasters' identities and how its shapes how they serve their audiences; programming decisions made and types of discourse; and finally, how external pressures shape how civic discourses are promoted.

The major categories of discourses covered in the podcast include spotlighting contributions; countering stereotypes and misconceptions; promoting empowerment; community cohesion; and comparative assessments. I also found aspects that motivated Ryan to start the *Caribbean Life in America* podcast include a desire to engage primarily African diaspora audiences; a desire to share knowledge and insightful opinion; peer pressure; and ideal platform for "truth-telling." Other motivational aspects include the "newness" of podcasts; easier usability; equipment availability; podcast accessibility; and collaborative opportunities presented by the artform. Factors including age and ethnic demographic all played a role in the host's imagination of his audiences

Imagined audiences, a conceptualization of perceptions of audiences as put forth by Benedict Anderson's notion of *imagined communities*, are manmade artificial attempts by media creators to make macro level sense to their work (Nelson, 2021). Findings suggesting that Ryan's mental construction of his audience often fluctuated depending on the topic coverage are in tandem with Litt & Hargittai's (2016) study which examined how social network users describe their imagined audiences and revealed that they often envisioned a broad abstract imagined audience, while at times focusing on a more targeted audience. Targeting "anyone who will listen," as Ryan noted during the interview reveals that sometimes he does not think about targeting anyone in particular. Moreover, he also mentioned that he covers topics such as marriage and relationships which cut across boundaries to help him increase his podcast

listenership. On the other hand, some of his podcast topics are primarily targeted towards niche audiences among the African diaspora based on gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, and religion.

While Ryan traces his roots back to Africa, identifies ethnically as an Afro Caribbean, while sharing a mixed racial identities courtesy of his shared Black and Irish lineage, his interlocking diasporic identities, including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, nationality and generational status in America, has a significant influence on the topics covered on his shows. This is also consistent with Hall's' (1991) argument that individuals from the African diaspora express themselves from a *positioned* context. I will use his perception on African diasporan women as an example. He says:

> I believe our women have lost their Africanness. The thing that that we came out of Africa with even as slaves. We didn't lose everything during slavery. But now this generation has lost more of it or most of it. And the women are not being wives. They're not meant to be wives anymore. You see what I'm saying?"

From the example, it is evident that his identity has been shaped overtime by factors such as slavery, historical African origins, childhood experiences living in Montserrat, his male identity, and his own lived experiences and interactions as an Afro Caribbean living in the U.S. Changes which also insinuate that identities aren't fixed, but undergoes constant transformation transcending space and time (Hall,1991).

In line with Hall's (1991) idea that there are at least two different ways of thinking about identity: the first reinforces the notion of a group of people with a shared culture, a shared history and ancestry, while the second recognizes critical points of deep and significant differences, Ryan alluded to some of the commonalities which shape his lived experiences and consequently, his work:

> "When I look at our history, most of the people that came down to Montserrat came out of West Africa. They came out of places like Ghana and other countries. And so, I feel

> like, you know, Africa is a mother country….. And as far as I'm concerned, you're a Black man. You're an African…. wherever you may be. Your history started in Africa. You got your roots. And once your roots are in Africa, no matter where you are, you're part of the African diaspora."

Caribbean Life in America podcast conversations highlighting Hall's (1996) essentialist notions of understanding similarities in the cultural identity makeups of the African diaspora groups featured topics promoting education, empowerment and solidarity building practices among the African diaspora, while those highlighting the critical points of deep and significant differences featured his comparative assessments of African American vis a vis the Caribbean experiences, the common misconceptions about his Afro Caribbean heritage and his efforts to educate African Americans on the contributions of Afro Caribbean persons in the U.S., whom he says "have failed to realize that they aren't the only ones who've played a part in the Black emancipation movements."

Hosts such as Ryan continue to contribute to expanding the public sphere by utilizing the digital space to hold conversations on issues affecting the African diaspora and for the community's common good. Digital media, according to Bruns (2008), has rejuvenated the public sphere and promoted democracy, As Squires (2002) notes, the subaltern counterpublics sphere offer spaces for historically marginalized groups to create parallel discursive arenas, create discourse, formulate oppositional interpretations, and cater to their own needs and interests. Topics featured on the *Caribbean Life in America* suggest that the podcast embraces Squires' notions while extending the same legacy previously set forth by the historical Black press in helping create discourse on issues affecting the community. According to its host, the platform is conducive for "truth telling," an aspect which helps reiterate the powers of freedom and independence which comes with expressing oneself on the platform. Moreover, its online

presence, easier usability, quick accessibility, and its trendy aspect help facilitate his mission towards highlighting diasporan contributions, countering stereotypes and misconceptions, promoting empowerment and contributing to the building of solidarity among African diasporan groups.

Fraser (1992) notes that a multiplicity of publics is better than a single public in terms of promoting participatory parity, especially those formed under conditions of insubordination and dominance. While in one-way, *Caribbean Life in America* podcast helps reduce participatory disparities by promoting socially conscious discourse and messages of collective interests to the African diaspora, it seems to also lack participatory culture and representation on the *Caribbean Life in America* podcast as compared to *The Stoop*. Such is evidenced by Ryan's one-man show on the podcast with neither guest nor listener contributions from the audience being featured, an aspect which paves the way for his unchallenged views on issues or effort to include both sides of the argument. The result of which point towards a lack of diversity of thought or public engagement in the podcast. This goes against the Habermasian notion as explored by Squires (2002) as a space where people can exchange information and debate opinions with other members (Squires, 2002).

Moreover, his subjective coverage, especially when it comes to gender related topics where he has taken an androcentric point of view against African diasporan women evokes thoughts of what Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins describes as controlling images. Collins (2002) challenges the tropes and stereotypes Black women continue to endure, including being pictured as the 'Jezebel,' 'the mammy' and the 'welfare mother.' Collins describes the Jezebel trope as a woman that is considered "hypersexual," the mammy as "the defeminized and all cruelly domineering Black women" and the welfare mother as "exploitive elements" (Collins,

2002, p. 132). Ryan's assertion that African diasporan women are not "being wives" or "are not meant to be wives" anymore highlights the mammy characterization of women as obedient and submissive. Same to his opinion that "the women need to adjust their attitudes and have been misled." The Jezebel trope also manifests itself when assessing some of his views, especially those suggesting that "women bring absolutely nothing to the table, except her body, beauty and in some cases academic degrees…They also marry for money and are delusional." The welfare mother characterizations are also highlighted in his opinion that "a lot of times women come into the man's life to use him, abuse him and throw him in a bath of water." His sentiments that women also "want to be on the same level with the man and do not give him respect by not letting him be the head of the home the way that he's supposed to be" also attests to the hegemonic masculinity and the subordination of women among African diasporan groups.

While *Caribbean Life in America* podcast exist as a counter public, as evidenced by its engagement with specifically African diaspora groups, and using the host's description, "anyone else who would want to listen," evidence based on interviewing the host supports Squires' (2002) argument that hosts can decide to engage with the general public while also remaining totally independent from it, in what she describes as satellite public. This is evidenced by the host's usage of American English language while at times applying the use of coded language to express things in what he refers to as the "Caribbean way" when specifically addressing his Caribbean Island listeners, mostly from Montserrat and Jamaica since there exists a certain level of lexical slang similarities. Moreover, he also notes that some of his conversations tackling topics such as marriage and relationships, and mostly targeting general audiences have to be "addressed in a certain way" in reference to the podcast not being classified as R rated yet it features adult only content.

In both cases, language becomes a powerful weapon in ensuring their own freedoms while operating in a historical, socioeconomic and political environment, which according to Squires (2002) forces marginalized groups to either form an enclave, counterpublics or satellites as a way to create separations. This result also ties well with Laughlin's (2021) study which found that Black Christian podcasters created both an enclaved space where Black listeners cocooned themselves in Black cultural idioms. Steele (2018) reached a similar conclusion in a study of how bloggers and their communities use satellite and enclave spaces to explore Black representation, Black feminism, and class consciousness. Steele found that Black bloggers may intentionally keep their conversations hidden from the dominant group or sometimes opt to engage with the masses. However, it must be pointed out that there was no evidence to suggest that *Caribbean Life in America* exists as an enclave space or that its hosts applied the use of language to create separation as an enclaved space. While Squires (2002) describes enclaves as conversations mostly hidden by hosts to protect themselves under repressive conditions, evidence suggest *Caribbean Life in America* host continues to express his views without fears of repression, even after previously facing backlash based on his political and androcentric views.

The *Caribbean Life in America* podcast operates in what Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo (2019) refer to as a competitive and neoliberalized space which has relegated some creators to put some version of their intimate selves on display as a way of satisfying the attention of individual listeners. In this regard, it hasn't been easy for Ryan to fulfill the intimate needs of each individual listener as evidenced by the backlashes the podcast has faced based on some of his views on issues such as relationships. Moreover, the podcast still faces operational challenges, for example, a lack of consistency and the inability of Ryan to capitalize on financial gains, partly due to the high bar placed on attracting revenue in such a neoliberalized space.

Podcasting remains a space dominated by Whiteness (Vrikki & Malik, 2019), with the path to mainstream success for podcasts such as *Caribbean life in America* remaining quite limited based on what Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo (2019) refer to as already established mainstream designs and normative sound nearly indistinguishable from Whiteness. Such lines of arguments drive this dissertation to question the platform's ability to expand the public sphere since, according to Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo (2019), only a few creators have the chance to create a massive impact. Moreover, not every member of the African diaspora community has access or the technological knowhow of accessing podcast content.

Results were also scrutinized through examining how ingroup and outgroup relationships among the African diaspora influence the podcasters' lived experiences, and consequently their podcasting practices. Both symbolic and social boundaries were present. Symbolic boundaries, which according to Lamont & Molnar (2002), describes the categorization of people into different memberships or groups, manifested themselves through the host's coverage of racial, religious, cultural and ethnic topics. Symbolic boundaries are also synonymous with the practice of separating people into groups, thus creating feelings of commonality and group membership (Epstein, 1992). It is at this level that people acquire status and control of resources (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). To be precise, some of the themes reiterated on the importance of solidifying Black Pan-African boundaries, preservation of Christian morality and beliefs, reinforced ethnic boundary markers, including an us (Afro Caribbean) vs them (African Americans) mentality, male vs female gender expectations, and African vs Western traditions. The targeted audience, which include Afro Caribbean, and other African diasporan groups are also influenced based feelings of commonalities and relatable experiences. *The Stoop*'s aim of building solidarity among the larger African diaspora group by featuring topics from a diverse range of African

ethnic groups based in the U.S. also served as a useful tool for the expansion of boundaries. Social boundaries, which according to Lamont & Molnar (2002), manifested themselves through unequal access or unequal distribution of resources/opportunities were highlighted going by the host's subjective coverage of aspects such as access to housing, education, and healthcare opportunities.

Changes in the in-group and out-group memberships as a result of the shifting or modification of boundaries were also recorded, if lived experiences and the hosts' coverage is anything to go by. Examples of ethnogenesis and nation-building, as described by Wimmer (2008), and featured in the episodes include the attempt by the host to promote notions of a shared common ancestry and cultural traditions. Calls for racial, and political solidarity, and events such as Black History Month and church services aimed at bringing African diasporan groups together with one common purpose offered evidence of attempts to expand boundaries.

Ryan also suggests that Afro Caribbean immigrants' success and achievements in the U.S. is based on their upbringing, hard work, tenacity and taking advantage of opportunities. In his critique, which he described as an "honest assessment," when offering comparisons about Afro Caribbean immigrants and African Americans, Ryan says:

> You know we (Afro Caribbean) come with a mindset to work hard. We come with a mindset to achieve. To accomplish something. Because again opportunities that were not afforded to us. And so, when we come, we try to take advantage of those and try to make a better life for ourselves. And not to say that African Americans don't work but we have some that totally rely on the system. I guess because they grew up in this country, they take it for granted while people coming from the outside, they take advantage of some of the situations …

The genesis of Ryan' attitude towards African Americans is based on the misconceptions about people originating from the Caribbean islands. In his podcast, he describes them as being

thought of as "just sitting around, drinking coconut water all day, climbing trees, living in grass huts, and being so poor that everyone is looking to pick pocket or rob tourists who go there, having the ability." Therefore, as soon as they arrive in the U.S., they work hard to improve their conditions, present a great image of their countries of origin, while also proving their detractors wrong in the process. This achieved success, therefore, forms the basis of Ryan's claims that their counterparts born in the U.S. do not take advantage of the opportunities they have at their disposal. It is the hierarchical ordering aspect between African Americans and the Afro Caribbean, that Wimmer (2008) describes as normative inversion. Assertions supported by Celik (2018), who notes that the stigmatized often do not passively accept their inferior position in society but choose to transform negative meanings associated with their collective identity by developing certain strategies meant to challenge stereotypes directed towards their groups while negotiating the boundaries.

Previous studies have also shown that the Afro Caribbean are considered "model minority" (Greer, 2013), and often idolize their own cultures by emphasizing aspects such as hard work, saving, investment, and education (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963). According to Thornton et al, (2013), the Afro Caribbean are accorded preferential treatment by White employers who presume that they are more superior and compliant employees, possess a better work ethic and have a greater aptitude for learning compared to African Americans. The success of the Afro Caribbean is also evident in Ryan's episode featuring the contributions of the Afro Caribbean in the U.S. and formed a basis of his critique of some African Americans.

Ryan's thoughts on first-generation immigrants working exceptionally hard as compared to the subsequent generations, whom he claims take for granted the privileged opportunities

available to them while also lacking discipline, suggest that there exists an intergenerational divide among the African diaspora. Ryan notes:

> As a first generation, we have a foundation where you know yourself. You grew up and you weren't wearing shoes. You had to go fetch water, go take care of the sheep and a goat. They (the second generation) don't know nothing about that. It influenced me differently because at least I've got that knowledge and I could say, hey, let me show you something. Let me tell you about something that you don't. You know nothing about. Because again, they think that the milk comes out of a bottle. Well, they don't know that it came from a cow.

In the above quote, Ryan describes the attitudes and behavior of the second generation while also showcasing his strict authoritarian and controlling parental styles as influenced by traditional values and practices acquired during his upbringing in Montserrat. These findings therefore are also in line with Alba's (2006) findings which noted that there exists a social distinction between immigrant and second generations. A similar pattern of results was also noted by Clack's (2009) study which found that second generation children face pressure from their first-generation parents to maintain their African identities, even though they grow up with dual identities (Clark, 2009).

Summary

This chapter began by identifying *the Caribbean Life in America* podcast origins, and the reasons behind its start. This was followed by unpacking the conversational discourse and programming decisions made to guide the podcast, uncovering how the creators imagined their targeted audiences and the kinds of external and internal pressures faced by its hosts. Findings were made based on the research questions guiding the study and also analyzed based on existing literature and concepts, including the concept of cultural identity and diaspora, concept of boundary making, and the counterpublics sphere.

CHAPTER VII

WORK BAE PODCAST

This chapter presents a case study of how the *Work Bae* podcast acts to influence relationships among African Americans, African immigrants, and the Afro Caribbean. In addition, it unpacks the conversational discourses, programming decisions, targeted audiences and pressures faced by its host, while also providing details on their motivations and lived experience. In light of this, this chapter will address the same research questions as in the two previous case studies:

RQ1: How do the podcasters understand their own diasporic identities?

RQ2: How do podcasters imagine the African diaspora as a potential audience?

RQ3: a) What programming decisions are made to appeal to this audience?

b) What kinds of civic discourses are evident in how programming is constructed for these audiences?

RQ4: What pressures shape how civic discourses are promoted on these podcasts?

This study will address these questions by drawing on themes emerging from listening to and analyzing *Work bae*'s online episodes, interviews held with its hosts, Naana and Obie, and document analysis. First, I will briefly provide details of the podcast's origins and motivations.

Origins and Motivations

Naana and Obie's friendship dates to the year 2018 when, they met while working at a non-profit organization. Obie admits that their undeniable chemistry during their first interaction was quite unique and special:

> Often it all started with a book that that I shared with her. We kind of had our own personal one-on-one book club. And as time went on and as we got to know one another better, we realized that we had a lot to say and a lot to share and a lot of I think my favorite part, a lot to learn from one another.

They'd often meet whenever they had a break and talk for hours. In most cases, their conversations would involve an exchange of ideas on things that impact Black 30-something millennials. Although several other factors contributed to the hosts' considerations to host a podcast, peer pressure ultimately led them to eventually establish one. As Naana admits, it all boils down to New Year's Eve of 2019:

> I was hanging out with some of my friends and one of them was saying like, Oh, you should get into *YouTube.* And I was like, I don't want to be a *YouTube* star. I'm not really trying to be on camera like that. And they're like, Oh, well, would you consider podcasting? As an avid podcast listener. I had always joked around with folks about having a podcast. I definitely didn't want to do it by myself. And funny enough, Obie, I think he texted me, wishing me a Happy New Year and had suggested that we start a podcast. And I was like, that's so crazy that you said that because I was just having this conversation with friends of mine about this.

They also cite the podcast as a passion project. While the platform provides Naana with an opportunity to express her creative self and worldly views, Obie, whose day job is in the sales industry, notes that his real passion has always been in artistic creation:

> My primary kind of outlet has been photography for the past couple of years, but also the podcast. I write a little bit as well. So just anything that allows me to express myself and allows me to connect with other people through that expression, I really hold, I hold dear to my heart.

Obie also mentions that their coming together felt like "divine timing." Even though they lacked the necessary audio and podcasting experience, they felt comfortable experimenting with the medium together. Moreover, they also note that the level of trust and comfort that they share whenever they have conversations deemed as difficult, specifically gender related issues, also played a huge part in their decision to host the show together.

Online accessibility further influenced their decision to choose podcasts as a platform to share their experiences. Having access to a recording studio for their episodes makes it much easier as opposed to other media such as television, which they say require plenty of capital and planning to "create ideas and bring them to fruition." Podcasting, according to Naana, was the cheaper option:

> We birthed this vision, and we were able to bring it to fruition with very little money, very little. It was very attainable and very accessible. And I think that's great to have that outlet for you to express yourself and to share whatever it is that you have with the world.

"The magic of podcasting" in its ability to establish a level of trust and intimacy between its hosts and listeners is a factor that also appealed to both hosts. Such an aspect, they argue, is "kind of difficult to duplicate or replicate in the other forms of media." As for Naana, there's a feeling of responsibility to represent the often-marginalized views of Black women, whom she says have always returned the favor by appreciating, and connecting with her feelings and sentiments:

> I think when I hop on the mic, I know that I am representing Black women. Not all of them… I also understand the responsibility in that. And so, I think when I am on the mic or when we are hosting our podcast together, it's an opportunity to show a different perspective of what Blackness looks like. And one that is very clearly specific to us. …And so, I think as a way of bringing the community together would-be offering perspectives of what a Black woman can sound like, what she can look like, what her thoughts are. It's an opportunity to dismantle different ideas of what Blackness is or what women of the diaspora are."

Identity and the *Work Bae* Podcast

Identity shifts are evident in lived experiences of the hosts and conversations also held on the podcast. During the interview, Naana noted that while she simply likes to identify herself as a

Black woman, there are times when she identifies as Ghanaian, especially when she introduces herself to someone and the individual asks where her last surname is from. To further understand her identity shifts, it is essential to have a clue of her own historical background. She was born in Bronx, New York, raised in Yonkers, a place she says she was surrounded mainly by Ghanaian culture, and currently, she's back to the Bronx area. Growing up, she says the only opportunities she got to interact with other cultures from outside of her own presented themselves when she mingled with other students in school.

She, therefore, feels like she's trapped in a dual lifestyle, American on one side and Ghanaian on the other. Though she shares both identities, she says she doesn't like to identify herself as a Ghanaian American because she's lived in the U.S. for most of her life and only visited the West African nation a couple of times. In her argument, having to present herself as a Ghanaian American "rather than something that she truly is" is something that she finds so hard to manage:

> It's like there is nothing that I can do to take away from the Americanness of my life. Like I'm very much a New Yorker more than American. But like, I am definitely like someone who is from New York.

While she grew up in the nineties, a period she says identifying as an African American seemed to have been the norm, the idea of being referred to as such doesn't appeal to her either. In her opinion, such a categorization blanketly assumes that Africa is a monolith. Moreover, identifying with her racial label, she feels helps unite Blacks throughout the diaspora:

> I hate that sh**. I really don't like that. That's because while some of our cultures within the continent may meld into each other, they're very different. And that should be identified. And so, I don't typically call myself an African American for that main reason. I know I'm a Black person. I'm a Black woman for sure. And my family is from Ghana. And so that's how I identify.

On the other hand, Obie prefers to identify as an African "who happens to have kind of landed in the U.S. and is living an American experience." He says this helps him acknowledge and maintain a connection with his own African roots. He was born in Kendu Bay, Kenya, and grew up in low-income neighborhoods in Jersey City, New Jersey, which he says were predominantly surrounded by Blacks. He describes his migration story as the kind that "keeps Trump up at night":

> I came to the U.S. probably a year and some change. I don't even think I was two years when I emigrated here with my mother. My family's story is your typical kind of chain immigration story. My dad came here for his studies at NJCU, a university in New Jersey, which is where I grew up. So, he came here first, and then I was followed by my mother and myself. And then my brother and sister came in 1993. So, they were the last two to make their way to the U.S.

He also did both his undergrad and master's degrees in aviation at Florida Tech University, an experience he describes as one that brought him close to Afro-Caribbean groups who he says make up a large chunk of his friends. He also opposes the idea of categorizing himself as a Kenyan American even though he says he would never push back if someone were to refer to him that way.

Both hosts also share that they experience identity shifts depending on the circumstances they find themselves in. For instance, Naana notes that there are times when her nationality takes centerstage as opposed to her Blackness. This often occurs in instances when she finds herself in majority Black spaces. Spaces where one can delineate between the kind of Blackness one is and where they are from. In such situations, she says she chooses to identify as Ghanaian:

> I wouldn't offer that information up unless I'm in spaces where I know that other people who look like me may misconstrue me for somebody. Like another nationality. And I want it to be very clear that I'm from Ghana. I have people who confused me all the time. For a Nigerian.

Obie says he doesn't identify differently from space to space. The reverse happens in his case, with other people insisting he identifies in a certain way. He says his cousins or random people in his native Kenya try to put him in a "certain box" by trying to define his identity for him:

> A lot of times that happens, in like in a joking way, they take issue with me identifying as Kenyan and they're like, "Oh, no, you're American." And I'm like, No, I'm Kenyan. I was born here. I might not have grown up here, but this is absolutely a part of my identity. I speak my mother tongue.

Naana considers herself a first-generation Ghanaian. Her father migrated from Ghana to the U.S. to pursue higher education and was later joined by her mom. As for Obie, he considers himself a 1.5- generation, a situation which influences his perspectives on the podcast because he feels he is "impacted in a very direct way that wouldn't exist for someone who's of the subsequent generations and may have kind of lost the values and cultural connection of where they're from."

Both hosts also acknowledge that there are certain privileges that they have been afforded as millennials, whose conversations mainly revolve around their own day to day interactions and experiences. In Obie's opinion, having grown up in the U.S. and with access to things that their parents, grandparents or even the rest of the people who grew up in Africa weren't afforded plays a role in the ways they approach the kind of conversations they have. For instance, Obie claims conversations around issues such as mental health are topics that were not really happening in earnest when their parents were their age.

> When I think about my parents, by the time my dad was 30, he had three kids and was married, and was an immigrant in a new country and trying to figure it all out. So, there's definitely a certain level of privilege that I believe, you know, Nana and I definitely have

> been afforded by our experience growing up here in the United States…. I don't think that's something for sure that Nana and I take lightly.

Work Bae's Imagined Audiences

With both hosts based in New York, they confess to having a location bias when it comes to the kinds of topics they choose to cover. However, they are also quick to note that even though they live in New York, they do not solely target or reach any one geographical area. Their podcast metrics reveal that they reach audiences in more than 30 countries, including the U.S., Canada, and South Africa. The hosts also added that their episodes sometimes receive "hundreds or thousands of listens," a fact that still surprises them since they never foresaw such a fast growth rate. Obie remarks on their surprise resonance with their audience:

> I don't think either of us necessarily had the intention of like creating something that was going to blow up or have a big reach. You know, I think at the end of the day, we would have been doing it if we had ten listeners, if that was just our friends and family or if it was a lot of people.

While they target the Black diaspora, they also try to reach wider audiences beyond this group. According to Obie, they sometimes feature topics that they deem as appealing to a general audience:

> You know, you can be White, and you take some resonance when we're having a conversation about mental health or having a conversation about marriage or having a conversation about finances. These are universal things that impact all of us. So, in its own way, we're kind of bridging gaps in the diaspora, just in general, because, yeah, the topics, the things that we discuss are things that deeply affect all of us."

The hosts specifically target their fellow Black diaspora 30-something millennials who they claim make up the 'bread and butter" of their podcast. They also note that those who send them messages or leave feedback comments tend to fall within this same age range. However, they also claim that a few Generation Z's and Generation X's still tune in to listen to their content.

Naana and Obie also acknowledge that their upbringing in the U.S. enables them to connect and form deep meaningful relationships with their African diaspora audiences, though they also do acknowledge that the definition of the term comes with its own set of complexities. While the African diaspora, according to Naana, is made up of those whose origins start from the African continent, she also notes:

> I think once you start getting further and further down the line and people start mixing and mingling, it gets a little hairy. But that's how I've always kind of understood the term to mean. I think it's very clear looking at me that I'm a member of the diaspora.

Obi also recognizes the changes in the definition of the African diaspora throughout time and history. He states:

> I think I'm happy that I've made that shift because I think as I've come to learn more about Pan-Africanism, like learning about some of the stuff Marcus Garvey was talking about, it's just I feel like it's more instructive and productive to our causes that we all face throughout the world to think of ourselves as a unit, to think of ourselves as one people who, you know, just overlooked as a result of slavery, result of immigration, you know, voluntary immigration and have kind of spread all over the world. But ultimately, we are all a part of that diaspora.

Programming Decisions

The topics of the podcast episodes are, at times, driven by conversations happening on other social media platforms such as Twitter. As an avid Twitterati, Obie pays close attention to,

among others, African diaspora conversations, a situation that helped inspire their *Africa Unite* episode, which mostly addresses conflicts between Africans and African Americans. Secondly, hosts also relate the issues covered to their own lived experiences. Naana notes that this sometimes happens when they cover topics such as those exploring love and relationships:

> So, like, if I'm having issues with a boy or I don't understand why I'm still single, we may talk about what's dating looking like for the both of us.

The uniqueness of their episodes is also reflected in the naming of their episode titles, which are mostly borrowed from famous song titles. These songs, sampled based on the theme of conversation, include "Runaway Love" (Ludacris ft Mary J Blige), "It's Man's Man's world" (James Brown), "This is America" (Childish Gambino), "in Defense of My Own Happiness" (Joy oladokun), "Africa Unite" (Bob Marley), and many others mostly featuring musician from the Black diaspora. There's an element of timeliness and proximity based on their topic coverage. Hot in the mainstream news stories sometimes make their way as topics of conversations in their episodes, which often take 25 minutes to three hours. Topics featured include the tragic and untimely death of NBA legend Kobe Bryant, American rapper Meg Thee Stallion's court proceedings against fellow U.S. rapper Tory Lanez, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris' identity as a Black African American being called into question, controversy surrounding American singer-songwriter Beyonce's album *Black is King*, among others. Next, we explore the kind of civic discourses evident in how programming is constructed for these audiences.

A scrutiny of their online published episodes on iTunes also reveals the presence of a "cheat sheet," a short summary of content featured on the respective episodes to help listeners easily identify key discussion points. While hosts have featured other podcasters as guests on

some of their episodes, they also appear on other podcasts as a strategy to help market and promote their own work.

Civic Discourse

From my qualitative analysis which identified and analyzed common themes, patterns and topics as featured in the podcast, civic discourses evident in the podcast include addressing strained relations; community empowerment, raising awareness on aspects such as body positivity and the importance of voting; millennial conversations; social justice, Black unity; Black joy; and Black performativity.

Addressing Strained Relations

Work Bae podcast's nineteenth episode titled *Africa Unite*, the strained inter-ethnic relationships among the African diaspora. Themes featured include social distancing within the groups, the debate over slavery reparations, census race/ethnic classification, colorism, and the othering of fellow African diasporan members. According to Obie, the experience of having "one foot on each continent" and having a deep awareness that their own identity is made up of both African and African American components not only informs their own perspectives but also affords them the ability to explore topics related to conflicts within the African diaspora with a "certain level of nuance." Taking an objective standpoint when discussing the fierce diasporan wars often pits Africans and African Americans on Twitter and other digital spaces. Obie fully acknowledges that his open mindedness plays a key role in helping cultivate his own relationships with African Americans, unlike some African immigrants whom he says lack an understanding of the Black experience in the U.S.:

> I really think a lot of Africans lack the context of the Black experience. Because they weren't here for it, they don't understand the literal blood, sweat and tears that these people have put to be even in position where they are now. Unfortunately, a lot of times our African brothers and sisters look down on Black Americans and I think it's as a result of not having a full appreciation or understanding of what their experience has been. ……And I feel there is a certain privilege that comes with being particularly a Black immigrant because White folks tend to look at them as a step above Black Americans. …And what we do is we buy into that because it separates us from the other and helps us enjoy that higher standing … So, I think it's us buying into the whole notion of Whiteness.

However, both hosts also concede that it took them quite a while to achieve such level headedness. During the interviews, Naana revealed that growing up in the U.S. wasn't rosy after all. She was often forced to shy away from identifying as a Ghanaian in school to avoid the stereotypical labels that came with the association of being a West African in the U.S. She reveals:

> I didn't want anybody to know that I was Ghanaian, since it wasn't cool to be the girl that ate *jollof* every night. Like that wasn't something that I was offering to folks, you know what I'm saying? And so, I don't think that I stayed away from it, but it just wasn't like nobody was asking me that when I was younger. I think once I got into high school and I was participating in like Black awareness clubs and others like the Latino girls had their Hispanic Heritage Club, that's when I was like, Oh, I really want to own my Blackness…

Constantly being referred to as an "African Booty scratcher" also forced her to "fall into the background and just be a Black girl." Performing Blackness as opposed to her own ethnic culture turned out to be the only strategy, she was left with to deal with to avoid what she describes as "the onset of being bullied or being picked on." Obie also recalls how in elementary and middle school; African Americans always made it a point to kind of "other him" by referring to him with the kind of pejoratives that came along with being African. Time, according to him, has been the ultimate healer:

> So, I remember that kind of being a very confusing thing as a child. You know, you don't know what race is in second grade. These are things that you learn later on. But I will say, as time has moved on and as I've gotten older and definitely to where I am now, it has been great to see the way that the conversation has evolved in a way that's more kind of inclusive and in a way that also reflects the fact that, you know, especially if you're in the diaspora, you know, we're all Black. You just had a different stop on a boat. And for those of us who you know, where that isn't a part of our history, still being able to have some sense of pride or ownership about the fact that, you know, we do know we do have that awareness of where our roots are, but also holding space for the people who might not have that same level of clarity about it.

He opens up about how being referred to as *African booty scratcher* made him have a couple of "therapy sessions." Such bullying experiences, he says, created a lot of inner tension within him. He has kind of made peace with a lot of these experiences he had to face in the hands of his African American colleagues:

> I've definitely evolved in my stance on that because there is a level of grace that I've been able to afford people. And just knowing that ultimately the kind of infighting and the kind of back and forth that happens is really of service to like, you know, White supremacy and service to some of these other kinds of institutions that are that have been created to kind of keep us separate and to keep us, you know, against one another.

Naana, on the other hand, expresses her surprise noting that after all that she went through, associations with the African cultures are now being embraced as cool and trendy in the U.S.

> It's interesting that everyone now likes *Afrobeats* and wants to wear waist beads and braid their hair a certain way and wear printed clothing. Things that I would never, ever fu***** wear to school everybody wants to wear now, you know what I'm saying? And so, it's kind of a weird mindf*** sometimes to kind of see how popular it is.

While she feels a certain sense of ownership, based on her own connections with the African culture, she also feels it's a good thing to have more people embrace her African culture. She remarks:

> They want the *jollof* recipe. And I'm just I I'd never eat another bowl of *jollof*. I'll be fine. Even friends of mine sometimes are like, Oh, can you get me this? I'm like, why do you want to wear them all of a sudden? Like, where did that come from? You know what I'm saying? And, and having to kind of reconcile the ownership that I felt around some of my cultural practices and now not I don't want to call them interlopers, but like now all these new people want to participate. And you are like where did this come from? I don't want it to be a trend for just for the sake of it because this is my culture, you know what I'm saying? I want you to understand why we wear what we wear and why these colors matter and all that kind of stuff. And like, it's very important to me. And like, what these prints, the story that it's telling. And it's nice that you think that it's beautiful and it's pretty, but like, it's more than that. And so, having the respect and regard for those kinds of things, I don't even think that I ever thought about like that.

Obie is also a firm believer that African Americans can appropriate African culture, further noting that there are different ways one can go when paying homage to what ultimately, even for them, is a part of their culture:

> You know, I think they still do have some sense of ownership to that. And I, I would never want to put myself in a position where I would be kind of trying to gatekeep it. You know, trying to keep people away from being able to get connected to their roots. But I still think there's something to be said about doing that in a way, that is respectful or doing that in a way that is, you know, paying some level of deference to these cultures, especially if it's something that's outside of yourself that you're not very familiar with. But yeah, those tensions exist.

He's also noticed changes in the conversations involving the African diaspora. An evolution, he argues, has been brought forth by a certain collective awareness with those throughout the African diaspora:

> And it' s kind of like for what are we serving or what are we getting by trying to create these kinds of stark divisions and, and, you know, kind of insulting one another? It's kind of pointless.

Other topics also featured on the podcast include; body positivity through featuring the experiences of Black and Brown plus-sized models; male socio-sexual hierarchy; importance of voting; the American Dream; capitalism; sleep deprivation in Black communities; racial experiences; prejudice against Black women which have roots in racism (misogynoir); cancel culture; independent women; tokenization; surviving in White places as a Black person; sexuality; Black unity; self-care; Black travel movement; the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the Black community, and Black performativity.

Next, we investigate some of the pressures which may shape how civic discourses are promoted on these podcasts.

Pressures

From my qualitative analysis which draws on the analysis of themes emerging from interviews held with *Work Bae* hosts, the pressures facing their quest to push for civic discourse include lack of consistency; marketing and distribution, monetization, embracing openness and consensus building.

Lack of consistency is a leading concern when it comes to the production of the podcast. The situation is exacerbated with both hosts having full time jobs which limits the available time they have to record. A scrutiny of their online episodes reveals struggles with inconsistencies. For instance, they only managed to produce six episodes the whole of the year 2021, two in 2022 and by the time I was doing the interviews, they hadn't recorded any in 2023. The "much-needed

reset breaks" are often taken because sometimes they "need to honor the space that they are in." However, they also concede that the numerous messages they receive from their listeners inquiring about their resumption makes them have so much "guilt." Here's one such message from a concerned listener who left a comment on their iTunes page as soon as they resumed podcasting after a long hiatus back in 2021, saying:

> Thank you! Thank you for coming back. I've missed y'all. Now let's discuss this break and how even though I don't wanna tell y'all what to do, let's not break this long next time. You help so much when I have super anxious days, no pressure but some pressure.

During the interview, Obie, noted that such messages often leave them with a bittersweet feeling, with the breaks detrimental to their overall podcast success.:

> It's like such a beautiful thing that people actually want to hear our voice. But I feel horrible every week that goes by that we haven't recorded it. I think it really bothers the both of us.

The podcast has also impacted their marketing and distribution efforts, with Naana noting that to achieve success in podcasting requires tremendous support:

> I like making sure that more people are aware of who we are. Like, a lot of that stuff is really on our own backs. We don't have any support in that regard, and so it would be nice if we were on a network or what have you, and someone could help us kind of take a lot of that work off of our hands to really amplify the art that we're creating. So those are the things where I feel like if we had a little bit more support, we don't know where this could have gone. But yeah, since it's a team of two and our hands are in so many other pots it just becomes really difficult.

As Obie notes, monetization has also been a key challenge since they've had to self-finance, a situation that has kind of taken a toll on them to a point of almost giving up:

> I would love for us to get to the point where at the very least the podcast was paying for itself. Even that would be a win in my book. But, you know, I think even just in my own relationship with myself as a creator or as an artist, over time, I've kind of let go of. I used to have this icky feeling about the idea of like making money off of the things that I do as an artist or as a creator and that's gone now. I'm here for the checks and the dollar signs, you know, especially if it's with sponsors or with companies, organizations, so on and so forth that align with nana and i's values and kind of what we stand on. So, we haven't monetized just yet. But that is a that is a part of our picture of how we'd like to move forward. So, for now, we've been completely self-financed.

Embracing openness has also made them vulnerable in a way they say they couldn't have anticipated. First, some conversations have aroused their own existing emotional trauma. Others, according to Obie, have impacted on his own personal dating life negatively. He has had an incident where his views have been used against him by partners to a point that he doesn't let the new people he's dating that he's a podcaster until they actually get to know him in real life.

Arriving at a consensus has also been a challenge for the both of them. For instance, Obi has been trying to "gently nudge" Naana to consider doing a You Tube podcast in vain. He says he does this because some of their friends have had really successful video podcasts after making the shift recently. He still hopes they will start something together soon.

Discussion

As in the previous case studies, I analyzed podcasts, used in-depth interviews and document analysis to explore the role played by the *Work Bae* podcast in shaping African diasporic relations. The four research questions also focused on podcasters' imagination of their potential audience; podcasters' identities and how its shapes how they serve their audiences; programming decisions made and types of discourse; and how external pressures shape how civic discourses are promoted.

The study found that the major categories of motivation for *Work Bae* podcast include; listening habits; technology interests; a desire to artistically express oneself; desire to share their millennial, as well as, Black lived experiences; a responsibility to represent a minority underserved community, including women; peer pressure; chemistry; passion for podcasting; online accessibility; studio access; cheaper costs; and the ability of podcasts to establish a level of trust and intimacy with listeners.

Programming decisions also consisted of featuring content from other social media platforms; naming of episode based on song titles; timeliness; proximity; listening other people's podcast to gather thoughts and ideas; bringing private conversations onto the mic; using a "cheat sheet," to help listeners easily identify key discussion points; and featuring on other people's podcasts as guests to help market and promote their own work. Civic discourses featured on the podcast included addressing strained relations; community empowerment; raising awareness; Millennial conversations; social justice; Black unity; Black joy; and Black performativity. Lack of consistency was a leading concern, with other challenges including a lack of consistency; support; monetization, vulnerability, and consensus building.

While the digital space remains mostly a White dominated space (Brock, 2020), *Work Bae* hosts continue to lay their claim by applying the use of the podcast as a counterpublics space to host robust conversations, which highlight their own lived experiences, struggles, inter-ethnic discourses, relationships and expressions of joy within the community. Specifically, when it comes to civic engagement on topics tackling inter-ethnic conflicts, the platform offers them a chance to offer their perspectives on topics such as social distancing, reparations, census ethnic classification, colorism, and the 'othering,' an aspect which not only reiterates the digital

platform's potential power to promote cohesion, but also provide them with the freedom to challenge oppressive narratives facing their own communities.

By seeking to disrupt narratives, mostly perpetuated by the right-wing media, which studies indicate have exploited tensions within the community by fixating on conflict storylines aimed at fueling Black-Immigrant tensions (Jenkins, 2007), these finding help add on the existing usage of podcasts as a weapon for minority, to counter dominant narrative discourses. These results are also in tandem with previous diaspora studies which found that the platform has given a voice to Vietnamese American diaspora communities to discuss their own lived experiences while challenging and interrupting singular narratives perpetuated by the media about the Vietnam war and its aftermath (Tran, 2019).

Work Bae is also strategically designed to be a potent discourse production force through its adoption of various programming decisions, top among them being the adoption and subsequent discussion of topics from other digital platforms such as *Black Twitter*, an element which, according to Florini (2019), epitomizes how Black Americans make use of multiple digital networks to share their experiences, communicate, build solidarity, mobilize political activism and challenge legacy media narratives. However, to reiterate Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo's (2019) argument that podcasts have a paradoxical relationship with the traditional public sphere since it adopts certain ideals set forth by Jurgen Habermas, *Work Bae* podcast topics not only adopt topics from the mainstream news sources, but sometimes applies aspects such as timeliness, proximity, conflict, human interest and prominence, which are news value elements associated with the traditional mainstream media. Podcasting also remains very much unpublic and suited for a much more personalized experience (Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019). Therefore, with listeners having the power to choose whatever they want to listen to, *Work Bae* hosts have creatively devised

strategies to connect with their listeners, aspects which include energetic delivery, humor, intimacy, naming of episodes based on songs done by Black celebrities, and featuring guest and fellow podcasters, all from the African diaspora. The use of humor and music also serves as an extension of the oral storytelling African traditions, which previous literature notes often applied a diverse range of communicative traditions, including use of music (Nketia, 1963), cultural proverbs (Furniss & Gunner, 2008) and storytelling (Scheub, 2004).

The strategy of using their own personalized experiences to connect with their audiences speaks to the intimate nature of podcasting, a departure from Habermas' public sphere, which according to Fraser (1992), fears intimacy, the result of which help perpetuate hegemonic notions and taboos. However, this study also demonstrates that while embracing openness is a positive strategy to connect hosts and their listeners, it also does have negative repercussions, as evidenced by hosts acknowledging that some of the conversations aroused their own existing emotional trauma, while also impacting negatively on their personal dating lives.

Unfortunately, *Work Bae* podcast has failed to capitalize in an environment described by Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo (2019), as neoliberalized and hyper-competitive, as evidenced by the hosts' self-confessed monetization struggles. Their decision to self-finance also takes a toll on their morale which subsequently affects their consistency, dealing a blow to their interest of covering issues affecting their audiences. These struggles partly prove Nakamura & Chow-White, 2012) assertion that just because the digital sphere adopts neoliberal principles, which consequently offer disenfranchised communities a platform to freely express themselves, does not necessarily mean that they become enfranchised thus earning equal representations. As Brock (2020) contends, the digital space remains mostly a White dominated space (Brock, 2020), especially White-upper class

males (Fraser, 1992). This is evidenced by the list of the ten top richest podcasters of 2023, which mostly consists of White males, including Joe Rogan, Dave Ramsey, Dax Shepard, Tim Dillon, Pat Flynn, Andrew Schulz, and Patrick Hinds (Singh, 2023).

While Habermas' notion of the public sphere prioritizes men as the only authorities capable of shaping discourse, feminist scholars Fraser's counterpublics sphere offers a critique to such formulations by noting that such a masculine and single sphere is exclusionary at best (Harris-Lacewall, 2010). Habermas' articulation of the public sphere fails to account for other parallel discursive arenas, including the *Work Bae* podcast, where Naana and her brigade engage in, through what Harris-Lacewall (2010) describes as energies of the streets, church, schools and church, to challenge exclusionary practices. In the same token, Naana's sense of responsibility to represent the views of the often-marginalized Black women whom she says have returned back the favor by appreciating and connecting with her feelings and sentiments offers evidence to the representative and diverse discursive cultures among the African diaspora groups. These findings are also in tandem with Cole & Guy -Sheftall (2009) studies, which found that Black podcasts offered African American women an opportunity to use podcasts as a discursive online space to promote social justice.

With this study revealing that *Work Bae* offers a safe avenue for its hosts to express their identities in their most preferred manner, the study also found that identity shifts, depending on circumstances, had an influence in their perspectives on the podcast. Both hosts noted that their dual identities courtesy of having "a foot on each continent" offered them a chance to examine topics touching on the relationships among the African diaspora with a certain level of nuance. The host's' cultural identity shifts, mostly brought forth as a result of time and surroundings,

confirm Hall's (1991) assertion that identity is a constantly changing process, with their own *positioned* contexts (Hall, 1991) influencing their coverage of topics.

Even though the hosts acknowledged that they did not have great experiences growing up in the U.S., courtesy of being referred to by some African Americans as *African booty scratcher,* the hosts exercised levelheadedness when hosting episodes such as *Africa Unite*, which highlights relationships between African Americans and African immigrants. The episodes feature themes tackling the notions of a shared culture, a history and ancestry, with others focusing on the causes of the deep and significant differences which exists among the group. Hosts also offer advice and educate their listeners on the importance of understanding the impacts of slavery on the part of African Americans and racism on the part of African immigrants as a way to bridge the divides. These findings reinforce Hall's (1996) notions of cultural identity and diaspora, which helps understand the existing cultural similarities and differences among African diaspora.

The acknowledgment by hosts that there are certain privileges that their immigrant generation enjoys vis a vis that of their parents also confirm Alba's (2006) argument that there exists a social distinction between immigrant and second generations (Alba, 2006). This is evidenced by the hosts' coverage of topics such as mental health, which they say their parents never had when they were their age. While Alba's (2006) study notes that adult second generation immigrant children are the who have the potential to challenge or cross such boundaries which are taken for granted in the case of their immigrant parents, this study also demonstrates that first generation immigrants and 1.5-generation immigrants have the potential to challenge such social distinctions. Both hosts have partly assimilated into the American culture as revealed in their conversations, acquired accents and interviews. However, their Pan-

African identities sometimes took centerstage depending on whatever circumstance they find themselves in.

Studies also reveal that second-generation Black immigrants may also find it difficult separating themselves culturally from African Americans, since they have a common early childhood experience (Waters, 1999), yet also face the pressure from their first-generation parents to maintain their African identities, even though they grow up with dual identities. The same is also true of *Work Bae* hosts, who confessed that they not only felt trapped in their dual identities, but their racialized experiences influenced the formation of their podcast, their targeted audiences and topics. Some of these topics include the Black body, sleep deprivation in Black communities, prejudice against Black women, surviving in White places as a Black person, Black unity, Black travel movement, and how the pandemic has affected the Black community. With both hosts, embracing their racial identities, these findings differ with Asante (2012)'s study which noted that immigrants from Sub Saharan Africa only embraced their 'Africanness,' while rejecting their Blackness when it came to developing racial consciousness.

A review of their themes, topics, guest and music selection reveal that they supported solidarity building practices among the African diaspora, a bit of a departure from (Guenther et al. (2011) studies which showed that just like their Caribbean counterparts, Black immigrants often try to "distance" themselves from their native-born counterparts. However, Guenther et al. (2011) study's still relevant, going by the hosts acknowledgement that they have noticed that some of their immigrant counterparts distanced themselves from African Americans, in what Drayton (2020) notes in order to climb America's social ladder (Drayton, 2020).

While findings also revealed that aspects such as inequality, stereotypes and competition played a dominant role in the divisions among the African diaspora, they did also confirm

Darboe's (2006) assertion that Whites also played a role in influencing relationships among Black Immigrants and African Americans for their own benefit. According to both hosts, respectability politics, mostly adopted by their immigrant parents, often pile pressure on immigrant children to succeed in education, in the hope that they achieve social mobility. With such pressure comes what Greer (2013) describes as foreign-born Blacks being perceived by Whites as different, harder working and more productive citizens compared to their African American counterparts.

The practice of informing, educating, connecting and promoting solidarity building practices through the *Work Bae* podcast, can also be interpreted as a willingness to expand boundaries, since they target Black listeners beyond just the U.S. Moreover, it can also be said that their coverage of topics such as those addressing mental health reiterate their desire to use podcasts to extend these boundaries beyond just their own race. Some of their topics which touch on aspects such as interracial dating also highlights an element of boundary blurring.

Evidence also points towards the podcasters experiencing while also participating in in-group activities aimed to maintain feelings of superiority over those, they consider out-groups. This is evidenced by Naana constantly being referred to as an "African Booty scratcher" which forced her "to fall into the background" while adapting strategies such as Black performativity to survive. However, Obi who was also referred to by the same pejoratives to a point of having a couple of "therapy sessions at some point," is still believes that African Americans can misappropriate African culture, sentiments shared by Naana why "all over sudden African culture is now cool and trendy." These aspects also highlight an attempt to maintain boundaries on the part of the podcasters since they feel a sense of ownership towards their own African culture cultures.

Summary

As in the previous chapters, this chapter began by identifying origins of *Work Bae* podcast, motivations behind its start, the conversational discourse and programming decisions made to guide the podcast. It also uncovered how the creators imagined their targeted audiences. Details on the kinds of pressures faced by its hosts were also revealed, courtesy of findings based on the research questions guiding the study. These were further analyzed using existing literature and concepts, including the concept of cultural identity and diaspora, concept of boundary making, and the counterpublics sphere.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

This dissertation employed the use of interviews, document analysis, and podcast analysis to investigate the role and influence of three podcasts-*The Stoop, Caribbean Life in America,* and *Work Bae*- in shaping relationships among African diaspora groups (specifically African Americans, African immigrants, and Afro Caribbeans) present in the U.S. Available sociological research acknowledges that while there are instances of collaboration among the groups and within the larger group, there is also mistrust. Relationships are often influenced by economic disparities, historical feuds, stereotypical media coverage, cultural differences, and external forces such as Whites, and right-wing media.

Tapping onto the emergent practice of podcasting and its use as an alternative platform for open, intimate, and uncensored conversations, I drew on various frameworks and concepts: the subaltern counterpublics sphere, the concept of diaspora, cultural identity theory, and the concept of boundaries. I also made use of new media literature, and scholarship on migration, race, and ethnic studies to interrogate the use of the platform by African diaspora creatives to help forge ties, while also celebrating their work in elevating African diasporic digital and participatory cultures. In-depth interviews, document analysis and podcast analysis were all used to collect data, which were thematically analyzed.

The research questions explored: (a) the podcast hosts' understanding of their own diasporic identities and how they shaped the ways they served their audiences; (b) how each of the podcasts imagined the African diaspora as a potential audience; (c) the programming decisions made to appeal to audiences; (d) the kinds of civic discourses tackled; (e) and pressures that shaped how civic discourses were promoted on the podcasts.

Summary of Findings

How each of the reviewed podcasts imagined the African diaspora as a potential audience varied. First, the hosts' conceptualization of the term African diaspora influenced the type of audiences they chose to target. While there were varied perceptions as to what constitutes the African diaspora, the hosts of the podcasts generally adopted a collectivist approach when identifying their primary target market. For instance, since *The Stoop* hosts agreed with the contemporary and broader definition of African diaspora as "those of African descent who are spread throughout the world," they primarily targeted the group as a collective whole. The same is epitomized by the *Work Bae* and *Caribbean Life in America* podcast hosts, whose efforts to share their Afrocentric views with their listeners were largely guided by their view of the African diaspora as those whose roots and history started in Africa (the mother country), no matter where they now reside.

Relatability was also employed as an engagement strategy to not only reflect the podcast hosts' audiences' identities, offer personalized experiences, and also help them distinguish between their primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences. *The Stoop* host, Leila, best captures the role relatability plays in helping to easily connect with listeners when she notes:

> We write this for Black people. We're not going to be explaining a bunch of stuff. We're not going to explain what a *hijab* is. If we say, for example, someone is from the Yoruba tribe, we're not going to explain where the Yoruba tribe is from or whatever. You can figure it out. So, we deliberately made this for Black people.

While each of the hosts taps into their own lived experiences, in addition to their racial, ethnic, national, and cultural identities, to help connect to their fellow African diaspora audiences, it's also clear that in an ever-changing digital landscape, their reach goes far and

beyond their main targeted audiences. Here, we see White women tuning in as "fly on the wall" listeners in the case of *The Stoop*, evidence of the hosts' willingness to target "anyone else who cared to listen." The *Caribbean Life in America* and *Work Bae* hosts at times featured topics they deemed as appealing to a general audience, including mental health, marriage conversations, finances, and "other universal things that impact everyone, including Whites." Targeting general audiences also reflects that these podcasters are not only interested in shaping ethnic relationships among their own communities, but also providing useful knowledge that's necessary to create an understanding to bridge the broader racial divide in the U.S.

Linguistic pluralism also plays a part in how the reviewed podcasts imagine their own audiences. Some of the hosts' multilingual skills, coupled with their featuring guests from diverse backgrounds, constitute a testament to their efforts towards embracing a culture of inclusivity while also celebrating differences. Moreover, the languages featured help podcasters connect with their main audiences, while also giving authenticity to their work. The diverse languages that have been featured on *The Stoop* podcast include English, Swahili, and Arabic, while English, Swahili, and Twi words are heard on *Work Bae*, with *Caribbean Life in America* featuring English and Caribbean accents. Other factors that influence the podcasters' imagination of their targeted audiences include psychographic, geographic, demographic, and behavioral aspects.

Hosts' Identities

Interviews corroborated that the hosts' national, ethnic, cultural, and in some cases religious, political, gender, and generational identities, shape the ways in which they serve their audiences. However, these identities vary depending on their own thoughts about what identity

really means, the topics chosen, existing relationships and interactions, history, experiences, and their roles on the shows. For instance, and especially in the case of *The Stoop* podcast, while the ethnic views of Hana (Sudanese-American) and Leila (African American) are mostly aligned with the views of groups with whom they share an immediate sense of cultural heritage and traditions, both mostly take a common stand when it comes to discussions touching on their own racial interests, particularly topics touching on racial oppression, unity, and Black power. History, politics, culture, lived experiences, marginalization, racism, colonialism and neocolonialism, impact the perspectives of each host.

The Programming Decisions

Programming decisions made by *The Stoop* hosts to appeal to their audiences are based on factors such as timing, convergence culture, linguistic pluralism, ethical broadcasting standards and practices (accuracy, authenticity), storytelling formats, presentation styles, formal education, childhood upbringing, artistic influences, connections, broadcast exposure, travel experiences, and investment in research.

The converged digital environment also influenced programming on the *Work Bae* podcasts, with the inclusion of other podcasters as guests, and elements such as timelines and proximity also playing a vital role. However, the stylistic aspect of naming many episodes by famous songs of African diasporan musicians is unique to the *Work Bae* podcast.

The adoption of a preacher-like presentation style, audience interaction, use of Caribbean music instrumentals, show starters, coded language, and soliciting feedback and donations were common to the *Caribbean Life in America* podcast. Feelings of intimacy and emotional connection, a great responsibility to share spiritual, historic, and societal "truths" with listeners, subjective coverage, and conformity with the industry standards are also aspects that influenced

the *Caribbean Life in America* podcast's programming decisions. Interviews also revealed that aspects such as chemistry, attitudes, affection, empathy, and respect shared among the hosts are also important, especially in addressing hot button-topics, specifically those involving controversial aspects of the relationships among the African diaspora.

Civic Discourses and Pressures

Civic discourses that cut across the various podcasts include promoting connections and interethnic solidarity, countering stereotypes and misconceptions, diversifying narratives, community empowerment, raising awareness, social justice, and Black unity. With regard to external pressures, listener backlash was an issue for *The Stoop* and *Work Bae* podcasts. *The Stoop* was accused of sounding "too White" while monetization, inconsistent production values, heavy production workloads, and audience engagement were experienced by each of the three podcasts examined.

General Assessment

Overall, these explorations of the role and influence of the three podcasts uncovered a realm of meanings while contributing to the scholarship of digital media, identity, and diaspora.

By merging Western podcasting best practices and African diaspora communicative practices, which are subjectively delivered to their majority diaspora targeted audiences, these creatives based in the U.S. utilized the platform to offer open, honest, intimate, and engaging conversations aimed at, among other goals, helping to forge common ties, enhance a communal participatory storytelling experience, and raise Afro diasporic consciousness. The findings confirm those of prior scholars, including Jenkins & Myers (2022), who note that podcasts offer

a space for Black podcasters to build community, foster democratic discourses while countering hegemonic narratives. As Jenkins & Myers (2022) suggest, the podcasts also serve as an extension of the Black digital public sphere, a role that historically has been played by barbershops (Harris-Lacewall, 2010), the Black press (Berardi & Segady, 1990), the streets, educational institutions, and church (Black public sphere collective, 1995), as well as other expressive cultures including music, dance, and poetry.

Their practices can be compared to those of the *griots*, who, according to Schultz (1997), played essential roles in West African traditional societies, including the preservation of societal cultural memories, and providing counseling, social mediation, and the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. The 'digital *griots*' examined, therefore, extend the same storytelling cultural traditions of these ancient African storytellers while taking advantage of the convergent and networked digital storytelling environment to widen their scope of coverage and influence via the sets of memorable, interactive, entertaining, and persuasive oratory skills similar to those of their storytelling predecessors. Even though their work often goes unnoticed, especially in comparison with their Black Lives Matter movement counterparts, or divisive right-wing element groups on X, such as #ADOS, their continued efforts in shaping narratives and promoting participatory cultures among the diverse ethnic African diaspora groups and beyond highlight the significance of oral traditions in providing Blacks from all corners of the earth with a sense of connection and identity over time and space (Daniels, 2022). As Daniel's (2020) also notes, you don't necessarily have to be born or traveled to Africa to harbor an African experience.

While these African diaspora podcasters also engage in strategic weaponization of their own identities to shape relationships, differing perspectives were also recorded. Podcasts such as Caribbean Life in America are received with rather mixed feelings due to its hosts' controversial views on gender roles, as well as Black Americans' support of leftist political ideologies. This, combined with the stark contrasts witnessed in the diverse languages and accents utilized when hosts communicate with their audiences, not only critiques the myth of homogenous Black thought, but also highlight what Hall (1991) refers to as the differences in the African diaspora groups' cultural identities that transcend time and space. The divergence of views in these podcasts also highlight the various schools of thought, especially those historically represented by the likes of native-born Black-Americans W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, and their Black immigrant counterpart, Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey. These early Black intellectuals both offered contrasting visions of the future of the African diaspora. Garvey and DuBois both criticized Booker T. Washington's 'accommodationist' philosophy, which sought to encourage Blacks to accept playing second fiddle to Whites (Taylor, 2019), while also calling for Black people's financial independence (Bates, 2015). Marcus Garvey promoted his Pan-Africanist Garveyism philosophy by encouraging self-rule for Black people around the globe while promoting the return of members of the African diaspora to Africa (Taylor, 2019). Du Bois viewed Garveyism as encouraging segregation, in effect encouraging the African diaspora to collaborate with liberal Whites through the NAACP (Taylor, 2019). Other differences in opinions have also been witnessed between African American actors Tyler Perry and Spike Lee, who have both had a go at each other when it comes to portrayals of Black art, with their fellow African American authors James Baldwin and Richard Wright also differing over the characterizations of the Black community (Bates, 2015). Each of the podcasts reviewed at least

covered a mix of the aforementioned school of thought, with coverage at times focusing on topics such as Pan Africanism, Black economic empowerment, establishing coalitions, and the overall Black representation in the eyes of the wider public.

The characteristics and personalities of the reviewed podcasters indicate that both their personal and collective group identities are influenced by political, social, cultural, historical, and economic factors in their surroundings, a notion that agrees with Barth's constructive approach, which views ethnicity as a product of continuous social processes largely depending on one's circumstances. While the hosts' distinct ethnic identity experiences may challenge the notion of ethnic 'groupism,' evidence also suggests the podcasters' convergent thinking on topics touching on bridging ethnic gaps among the African diaspora, racial oppression, and Black pain, which partly differs from the ideas of Max Weber and other scholars (Barth: 1969; Lamont, 2000; Alba, 2005) who reject a groupist approach when conceptualizing the idea of ethnicity, choosing instead to define it in subjective terms. Moreover, the podcasters' goal of creating feelings of commonality and group membership among the larger African diaspora through their coverage of diverse topics targeted towards the group also reinforces groupist notions.

Each hosts' categorization of their primary target audiences was mostly based on feelings of commonalities and relatable racial experiences, thus signifying the existence of symbolic boundaries, which Lamont & Molnar (2002) describe as conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize people - in order to create feelings of commonality and group membership (Epstein, 1992). Their coverage of topics such as economic competition, inequality, and class conflicts highlight the existence of social boundaries within and beyond the African diaspora group formations. Each of the podcasts also presented topics that highlighted the existence of in-

group activities leading to the maintenance of bright boundaries. Such was also instrumental in the founding of some of the podcasts which were aimed at encouraging the African diaspora to proudly embrace both their own Blackness and African identities.

With the concept of boundaries having been influential in exploring research agendas in fields such as anthropology, political science, history, sociology, and social psychology (Lamont & Molnar, 2002), these findings matter because there exists limited knowledge highlighting the application of the concept in the field of communication. Specifically, with strategies that may be applied by an individual or collective actor to pursue ethnic boundary formations often perceived in terms of institutional frameworks, the hierarchical positions of power, and structures of political alliances (Wimmer, 2008), this research contributes to the field by exploring the application of digital communication tools as a strategy of strengthening both in-group and out-group interactions.

I also build on the work of Fraser (1992) who examines the counterpublics sphere as a parallel discursive arena where subordinated groups can create discourse, formulate oppositional interpretations, and promote participatory parity. Since African diaspora groups have to battle presumptions and negative stereotypes about each other that are often shaped by the skewed mainstream American media's portrayals and interpretations of their cultures, the podcasters interviewed revealed the usefulness of the platform to help share their own personal viewpoints and authentic selves, as well as educate those who they deem ignorant about their African diaspora histories through a digital sphere often noted for divisiveness. However, while *The Stoop* and *Work Bae* podcasts have incorporated more diverse voices into their respective platforms, *Caribbean Life in America,* on the other hand, struggles with promoting participatory culture and diversity. Although its host encourages listeners to provide feedback on the show, the

solo host's political and gender viewpoints often go unchallenged due to a lack of diverse representation. The inability to foster civic engagement adds credence to criticism leveled by scholars who have raised legitimate concerns about whether podcasts have become the new public sphere.

Nonetheless, imagining their audiences in multiple ways, either through psychographic, demographic, or behavioral lenses, highlights the podcasters' openness to reaching multiple audiences. This showcases their willingness to increase and improve various forms of representation. Moreover, since "journalism remains characterized by imbalances of power in the profit-driven or government-controlled industries that have left women journalists marginalized and denied upward mobility" (Steeves & Awino, 2015, p. 84), the women podcasters reviewed noted they shoulder a heavy responsibility to represent the often-marginalized views of African diaspora women. These practices help them "democratize" the media as they challenge exclusionary and marginalizing practices.

The podcasters' sustained efforts to deliver accurate information to their listeners are a significant departure from studies that tend to paint digital platforms with the same brush, as spaces that only serve to promote misinformation and disinformation. This is evident in the podcasters' practice of ensuring quality standards and the preservation of broadcast formats and practices, reminiscent of those practiced in the traditional Habermasian sphere, an aspect that may elicit debate on the historical ties, present intersections, and future evolutions of both radio and podcasting. The podcasters' attempts to at least maintain journalistic and broadcast standards dismiss notions raised by critics, including the famous and controversial radio DJ, American broadcaster, and media personality Howard Stern, who has openly expressed disdain for podcasts, while further belittling the practice. The host said:

> Nowadays, because there are podcasts, and everybody is podcasting and, on the radio, everybody thinks they know how to do radio. They know how to do talk. But you've never gone on a radio station and had to get ratings. It's nonsense what you're doing, sitting in your house with your podcast, no one is listening to it. No one gives a f***. …I tried to listen to some of them …. And it's a lot of people talking to other people who aren't really that interesting. They're bores. They're f******* bores. But no one tells them that they're bores.

I argue that the nature and freedom of podcasting revitalize and transform the radio industry. For instance, the combining of various elements, including Western and African communicative practices, and the listenership and influence that the podcasts reviewed here command, counter Stern's pedestrian view that podcasting is a "non-starter" and "not to be taken seriously." Though I agree to an extent that ratings do matter, I disagree that the art of podcasting and its influence should only be assessed in terms of profit and notoriety. Moreover, not every podcaster engages in the practice on a full-time basis or has an interest in targeting mass audiences. The platform empowers podcasters, including those reviewed in this dissertation, to target niche audiences, while enjoying the freedom of gatekeeping their own content. Stern argues that only "serious" and "seasoned" radio broadcasters should have a platform to spread their influence. In the digital age, however, podcasting has opened up plenty of money-making opportunities, with revenue in the radio broadcasting industry declining.

The experiences of hosts being negatively targeted by individuals who describe themselves as "Pan-Africanists," including Hana and Leila, raise concerns about the safety of podcasters, both online and offline. As the hosts put it, "our only crime was sharing our own personal experiences." Such experiences underscore Palfrey & Gasser's (2008) position that digital users face both real space and cyber-space risks, which include psychological harm from cyberbullying and cyberstalking, as well as physical harm. While no physical harm has been reported by the hosts interviewed in this study, the psychological trauma they have experienced

has taken a toll, with some seeking therapy for their own well-being. These experiences also reiterate some of the consequences associated with the podcasters' preference for oscillating between counter publics and satellite public spheres as opposed to utilizing a more guarded enclave network.

Despite numerous challenges, it is my belief that the diverse identities of Black podcasters remain important in transforming relationships among African diasporan groups. Moreover, their harnessing of digital skills, irrespective of the challenges they face, will continue to play a pivotal role in achieving participatory parity in the digital sphere. As Billgren (2021) notes, podcasting's uniqueness lies with the spoken word, which has helped humans express themselves since the invention of language. Ryan, host of the *Caribbean Life in America* podcast, best captures this optimistic belief in the future of the podcasting industry:

> Everything is going digital. We had the CD, the Walkman, and headphones. So, everything is digital now. And I believe the digital format will be with us for a very long time and will continue to grow. I firmly believe that because now you can send audio files across the world. And I believe that if I keep doing what I'm doing. Like I said, the sky's the limit. I don't know exactly where I'm going to end up, but I'm willing to take this journey and see how it plays out.

American Africans

This dissertation introduces the term "American Africans" into African diaspora literature. The term emerged during an interview, in which Hana, a Sudanese immigrant, used it to distinguish herself from African Americans. While it remains uncommon among scholars, I propose that American Africans should be considered when referring to the descendants of African immigrants who have acquired U.S. citizenship either by birth or through naturalization. Of course, I am fully aware that this won't be the first attempt to try and distinguish African immigrants from their African American counterparts. Based on existing literature, Clark (2008)

noted that the increase in African immigrants coming into the U.S. since the 1980s led to these immigrants being referred to as "the new African diaspora," "the new African Americans," "the other African Americans," "first generation African Americans of African descent," "foreign born African Americans," or "African Americans of recent African descent." However, in the emerging debate as to who should be described as African American, a term originally used to identify Americans who trace their roots to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the most popular label of Black Americans' collective self-identification (Kennedy, 2004), there has been a recent shift such that some in the group find the use of the word quite problematic. This includes Hana's co-host, Leila, who prefers to identify simply as Black, with a capital "B."

Recommendations to Podcasters

Since the podcasters interviewed reported the challenge of building an audience and landing sponsorship deals, I recommend that they take advantage of numerous strategies, including opportunities for mentorship and collaboration with other content creators. While some of them have been able to do so within the U.S. and state borders, I suggest that internationalizing their content by collaborating with other diaspora creators around the world would significantly help expand their important work, influence, and legacies. Adopting such strategies would also help them effectively counter fictionalized mainstream Hollywood movies such as *Black Panther,* which was celebrated by critics but also criticized for perpetuating problematic notions about Africa and African Americans.

Moreover, with data showing that the African continent has the youngest population in the entire world, as well as dramatic increases in internet access and connectivity, there are opportunities for podcasters to venture into such a viable technological market that has seen

global streaming giants such as Spotify distribute funds as a way of supporting African acts. Also, amid global media layoffs, funding models are bound to change. Podcasting's business model will likely come to resemble the public radio model of fundraising through foundations, grants, and individual listeners. Hence, podcasters will need to develop their own networks and tap into newer markets to be able to charm investors. These collaborations will not only expand the podcasters' reach into new digital media markets but will also serve the function of breaking cultural and geographical barriers that exist among African diaspora groups scattered around the world.

I also propose that creators explore a wide range of interactive techniques. They should seize on the current popularity and growth of social video tools such as Snapchat, Instagram, Tik-Tok and YouTube to spread their Afrocentric gospel while marketing themselves. I further suggest that they listen to plenty of other podcasts to gather thoughts and ideas on how to improve on their own, including diversifying their pool of guests in order to offer more nuanced perspectives while cultivating participatory cultures.

Recommendations to Future Scholars

This dissertation lays the groundwork for scrutinizing topics such as the podcasting manosphere. *Caribbean Life in America,* for instance, features plenty of stereotypical tropes towards African diasporan women. This would be an entry point towards examining the spread of such alpha male podcasts through a feminist lens. Scholars from other diaspora groups can also draw on this study to scrutinize the use of other digital tools to promote cohesive relationships within their own ethnic groups.

While my research focused on podcasters based in the U.S., I also recommend that future studies consider scrutinizing the relationships of African diaspora groups beyond the U.S., through the application of transnationalism, contra flow or globalization concepts. Internationally, podcasting has, among others, focused on the utilization of podcasts, hip-hop, and American radio among Afro-Germans who view the tools as offering communal spaces to help them connect their stories to the wider African diaspora and understand their own cultural identities due to a lack of Black representation in Germany (Daniels, 2022). Others have also explored its use as an anti-racist tool among Asian and Black podcasters based in the United Kingdom (Vrikki & Malik, 2019).

It is also worth noting that there are groups that the study did not include, especially Afro-Latinos, even though they are scattered all over Central and South America, and many migrate to the US. This group, according to the 2020 Pew Research studies, "made up about 2% of the U.S. adult population and 12% of the adult Latino population, with about 800,000 adults not identifying as Hispanic." Since the *Caribbean Life in America* host is from Montserrat, a country with a majority population of African descent, the podcast did not feature much of the experiences faced by the Afro-Latinos, who mostly come from countries such as Cuba and the Dominican Republic, even though some of their cultural values overlap with those of Afro Caribbeans.

Moreover, with findings also revealing that some podcasters resorted to seeking alternative funding methods, including joining networks such as *Radio Topia,* this would be a springboard to deeply scrutinize the political-economic relationships faced by African diaspora creatives in the podcasting industry. These include but are not limited to aspects such as monetization, labor relations, and advertising. In an era where some argue that free speech is

threatened by the widespread 'cancel culture' phenomenon, the idea of examining how self-censorship impacts these podcasters' work, as well as the use of artificial intelligence in policing digital content would be a worthy and timely venture.

Limitations of the Study

I experienced certain limitations in the course of conducting this research. From the available literature on the African diaspora to the interviews and podcast analysis that I conducted, it was clear just how much the ideas of race and ethnicity are intertwined in a racialized country such as the U.S. Therefore, I consistently grappled with interchangeable uses of the terms "African diaspora" and "Black diaspora" throughout the study.

In addition, I wasn't successful in reaching Camille Cockrell, the host of another crucial podcast, #ADOS Talks, who left no trace of her contact details online. In the podcast, she shares her feelings and experiences as a descendant of slavery and how she fits into American culture. She has featured talks addressing her "complicated thoughts on the Black Lives Matter Movement," her opposition to African actor "Cynthia Erivo playing ADOS's American icons," and antagonistic views on Pan-Africanist topics. The research would have benefited from her diverse viewpoints, as well as from other podcasters with views that are diverse from those studied in this dissertation.

While this dissertation employed the use of interviews, document analysis, and podcast analysis, it is my belief that a future ethnographic study would provide richer data, especially as pertains to understanding each of the podcasters' interactions and construction of their work in their natural setting, while also assessing firsthand how the broader environment affects their

work. Moreover, audience-based research assessing the impact of each podcast would have helped contribute to a larger discussion on the topic.

At a societal level, there is still a huge digital divide and access gap. Therefore, depending solely and entirely on digital platforms to help accelerate Pan-Africanist ideals among the wider African diaspora wouldn't be a prudent decision. However, it's a tremendous start towards helping foster dialogue, especially among younger African diaspora audiences who are digitally adept.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A- INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PODCAST HOSTS

I really appreciate your decision to participate in my research. My name is Robert Apiyo. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Oregon. In this interview, I seek your views on the role podcasts play and its influence in shaping intragroup relationships among African diaspora groups based in the United States. Specifically, I would like you to share with me details about your background and upbringing, identity, podcasting practices, and your targeted audiences. If you agree to participate in this study, you agree to be interviewed about general perspectives about podcasting, conversational discourses, communicative strategies employed and the overall impact of podcasting. Please be assured that your responses will only be used for academic purposes. Your responses will be handled confidentially.

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself. I would like to know your name, background, age, nationality, ethnicity, location, profession/training, education level, gender, occupation, and what your work involves.
2. In your opinion how would you describe the term African diaspora? Follow up: Do you identify as a member of the African diaspora? Why?
3. How would you describe your relationship/interaction with individuals/groups from the African diaspora based in the United States?
4. Are there instances where you've noticed divisions/corporation among these groups? What instances?
5. What does podcasting mean to you? Follow up: Why do you prefer to use the platform to vis a vis other media platform?

6. How would you describe your target audience? Follow up: Which criteria did you use to select your target audience? How do you reach them?
7. Do you encourage audience participation? Follow up: What strategies do you use to engage your audiences?
8. To what extent are you involved in shaping relationships among the African diaspora through your podcasts? Follow up: What topics/themes do you explore to this effect?
9. Are there instances where you've targeted other groups (those who are not of the African diaspora) with your message? What instances? Why?
10. How do you think your own ethnicity/nationality/generation status influences the topics/themes covered in your episodes?
11. What are some of the challenges you face when producing content targeting the African diaspora?
12. In what ways have economic/political factors affected the topics covered in your episode? Follow up: In what ways have those aspects affected your distribution choices? And delivery of messages to your target audience?
13. What kind of impact would you say your podcast has made to the African diaspora community? Follow up: How do you measure that?
14. What do you suggest digital content creators should do towards the betterment of relationships among the African diaspora groups living in the U.S.?
15. Is there anything you would like to add that is related to the topic?

Thank you for sharing your time and insight with me.

APPENDIX B- COVER LETTER FOR THE PARTICIPANT IN THE RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Title of Research: "The Role of Podcasts and its Influence in Shaping African Diaspora Relationships in the United States"

Principal Investigator: Robert Apiyo
Doctoral Student,
School of Journalism and Communication
University of Oregon
313 Allen Hall
1275 University of Oregon,
Eugene, Oregon 97403, USA
Email: rapiyo@uoregon.edu

I hereby request your participation in research titled: "The Role of Podcasts and its Influence in Shaping African Diaspora Relationships in the United States." The principal investigator (the person in charge of this study) will describe the study and its objectives to you. He will also receive and answer any questions you may have about the study and what will be required of you, should you decide to participate in the study.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the kind of networks, civic discourses and programming decisions utilized by podcasters seeking to influence relationships among the African diaspora living in the United States. This study will also examine the podcasters' contribution to the African diaspora digital cultures, while highlighting some of the challenges faced.

You are eligible to participate because your work revolves around using podcasts as a platform to create and promote discourse, specifically among the African diaspora in the U.S. If you agree to participate in this study, you agree to be interviewed about your own background,

lived experiences, and how political and economic factors may influence your programming decisions and how you imagine your audiences. We believe your expertise and insights will be relevant to the issues of concern in the study.

There are no major direct benefits for participants, but the findings from this study could highlight your own contributions in shaping African diasporic relationships, while also providing knowledge that may serve as a catalyst for change in the relationships, interactions and solidarity building approaches among African diaspora groups. This knowledge can also be applied by various podcasters, scholars, policy makers, and NGOs interested in peace building initiatives. Your decision to participate or not participate in this research is voluntary. Should you decide to participate, the procedure involves remote interviews, including Zoom, with the researcher at a time that will be convenient for you. Your responses will be confidential, and I won't use your name in any publications or forum, unless you consent to have your identity disclosed

The information you will provide will be securely stored without your name or any identifying information associated. The information will be used for academic purposes only. You retain the right to withdraw from the interview at any time before or during the interview. For more information about the study, kindly contact the researcher at any time rapiyo@uoregon.edu.

Thank you
Yours sincerely,

Robert Apiyo
(Principal Investigator)

I agree to participate to this study (Please tick one of the following to reflect your decision):
Yes [ ] No [ ]

APPENDIX C- INFORMED CONSENT

Consent for Research Participation

Title: "The Role of Podcasts and its Influence in Shaping African Diaspora Relationships in the United States."

Sponsor:

Researcher(s): Robert Apiyo, University of Oregon

Researcher Contact Info: rapiyo@uoregon.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information about this research for you to consider when making a decision whether or not to participate. Carefully consider this information and the more detailed information provided below the box. Please ask questions about any of the information you do not understand before you decide whether to participate.

Key Information for You to Consider

- **Voluntary Consent**. You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
- **Purpose**. The purpose of this research is to investigate the kind of networks, civic discourses and programming decisions utilized by podcasters seeking to influence relationships among the African diaspora living in the United States. This study will also examine the podcasters' contribution to the African diaspora digital cultures, while highlighting some of the challenges faced.
- **Duration.** It is expected that your participation will last between 40 minutes and one hour.
- **Procedures and Activities.** You will be asked to share your experiences, observation, and opinion about your own creative podcast productions and how they play a role in influencing relationships among the various African diasporic groups in the United States. You will also be required to share some information about your own background, lived experiences and how they might shape your content, target audience and guest selection. Questions will also tackle aspects related to how the existing political and economic structures shape the discourse promoted in your own podcasts. This will take the form of a friendly interview which will be audio recorded. The data you provide will be securely stored without any information associating you with the data which also be protected with a password.

- **Risks.** Some of the foreseeable risks or discomforts of your participation include asking you to talk about your own background, lived experiences and content. Such a conversation may make you recall unpleasant experiences. Another source of discomfort may be in asking you to speak about how the political and economic status quo affect your work which you may not want to talk about because it might impact on your listenership. The researcher is aware of this and encourages you to draw his attention to any source of discomfort that may arise from the interview, so that the particular question can be skipped, or the entire interview can be discontinued.

- **Benefits**. There are no major direct benefits for participants, but the findings from this study could highlight your own contributions in shaping African diasporic relationships, while also providing knowledge that may serve as a catalyst for change in the relationships, interactions and solidarity building approaches among African diaspora groups. This knowledge can be applied by various podcasters, scholars, policy makers, and NGOs interested in peace building initiatives.

- **Alternatives.** "Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate." You could opt out even after agreeing to participate.

Who is conducting this research?

The researcher, Robert Apiyo from the University of Oregon, is asking for your consent to this research.

How long will I be in this research?

It is expected that your participation in the interview will last between 40 minutes to one hour maximum.

What happens if I agree to participate in this research?

If you agree to be in this research, your participation will take the form of participating in an interview with the researcher. This interview will last between 40 minutes to one hour. During this interview, you will be asked to share your experiences, observation, and opinion about your own creative podcast productions and how they play a role in influencing relationships among the various African diasporic groups in the United States. You will also be required to share some information about your own background, lived experiences and how those might influence your content, target audience and guest selection. Questions will also tackle aspects related to how the existing political and economic structures shape the discourse promoted in your own podcasts. This will take the form of a friendly interview which will be audio recorded. The data you provide will be securely stored without any information associating you with the data which also be protected with a password. We will tell you about any new information that may affect your willingness to continue participation in this research.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

Information collected for this research will be analyzed for publication in an academic research journal. It may also he shared at academic conferences and other fora. However, your name will not in the publication or mentioned at any forum unless you give us your express permission to have your name published.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?

We will take measures to protect your privacy including not using your name, address, or any information that may identify you as a participant in this research. To this end, the principal investigator will securely keep all interview recordings, interview transcripts, and coding key. The codes will be saved as PDF files with passwords. The Microsoft word version will be securely deleted form the investigator's computer. This is meant to protect the privacy of the information collected. All the data will be destroyed soon after the analysis is complete.

The audio recordings of the interviews will be stored without identifying information on a digital recorder and deleted once they are transcribed. Identifying information will not be used on the transcripts. Rather, each participant will be assigned a pseudonym which will be used to store the files. If we take your contact information for potential follow-up interviews purposes, the information will be stored without your identity and the contact will be deleted as soon as the follow-up interview is done.

We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information including your name, designation, or your address. The information provided will be stored on a pass-worded personal computer that will secure your anonymity. Despite these precautions to protect the confidentiality of your information, we can never fully guarantee confidentiality of all study information.

Individuals and organization that conduct or monitor this research may be permitted access to and inspect the research records. This may include access to your private information, what you said during the interview and how it has been analyzed in the research. These individuals and organizations include: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of University of Oregon that reviewed and approved this research or government regulatory agencies.

What are the risks if I participate in this research?

The risks or discomforts of participating in this research include being required to talk for a relatively long time – about 40 minutes to one hour. Others may include asking you to talk about your own background, lived experiences and the content you produce. Such a conversation may make you recall unpleasant experiences. Another source of discomfort may be in asking you to speak about how the political and economic status quo affect your work which you may not want to talk about because it might impact on your listenership. The researcher is aware of this and encourages you to draw his attention to any source of discomfort that may arise from the interview, so that the particular question can be skipped, or the entire interview can be discontinued.

Whereas we will apply all measures (including not associating your name with the data, storing data in passworded PDF files on personal computer with password) to protect your privacy and confidentiality, members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research, and government regulatory agencies may have the power to access the data.

The researcher is aware of your potential discomfort and encourages you to draw his attention to any source of discomfort that may arise from the interview, so that the particular question can be skipped or the entire interview can be discontinued.

What are the benefits of participating in this research?

You may or may not benefit from participating in this research. However, the findings from this study could highlight your own contributions in shaping African diasporic relationships, while also providing knowledge, which may serve as a catalyst for change in the relationships, interactions and solidarity building approaches among African diaspora groups. This knowledge can also be applied by various scholars, policy makers, and NGOs interested in peace building initiatives through the use of new media.

What are my responsibilities if I choose to participate in this research?

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible for deciding if you'd like me to use your name in any publications or reports resulting from the research or if you prefer to remain confidential. If you also realize that you have provided information might affect your work negatively, you can prompt the interviewer to cut that portion from the recording.

What other choices do I have besides participation in this research?

It is wholly your choice to participate or not to participate in this research. If you decide you no longer want to do this, we can stop the interview process at any time before or during the during.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?

Taking part in this research study is your decision. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you can stop at any time. You have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from continued

participation at any point in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Oregon.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to participate in this research.

Will I be paid for participating in this research?

You will not be paid for taking part in this research, as it is purely for academic purposes.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research related injury, contact the research team

at:

Robert Apiyo

rapiyo@uoregon.edu

An Institutional Review Board ("IRB") is overseeing this research. An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies to ensure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. UO Research Compliance Services is the office that supports the IRB. If you have questions about your rights or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Research Compliance Services

5237 University of Oregon

Eugene, OR 97403-5237

(541) 346-2510

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information in this form. I have asked any questions necessary to make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout my participation.

I understand that by providing a verbal consent, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form. I understand that if my ability to consent or assent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to re-consent prior to my continued participation in this study.

Do you consent to participate in this study? (Yes/No)

_____

Do I have your permission to use your name in my research publications or do you prefer for your name to remain confidential?

_____

APPENDIX D-ACRONYMS

AAVE: African American Vernacular English

ADOS: American Descendants of Slavery

BBC: British Broadcasting Cooperation

BET: Black Entertainment Television

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease

DC: District of Columbia

DNA: Deoxyribonucleic acid

MTV: Music Television

NPR: National Public Radio

Ph.D.: Doctor of Philosophy

R: Restricted

UC: University of California

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

U.S.: United States

W.E.B.-William Edward Burghardt