

BOUND BY BLACKNESS: AFRICAN MIGRATION, BLACK IDENTITY, AND  
LINKED FATE IN POST-CIVIL RIGHTS AMERICA

by

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores the identity formation of Ethiopian and Nigerian immigrants, their second generation children, and native born African Americans who reside in the Seattle metropolitan area. Using boundary formation theory, I argue that African immigrants and their second generation children are developing a shared sense of Black identity and racial solidarity (linked fate) with native born African Americans. This shared Black identity is illustrated through both Africans and African Americans' recognition of one another as racial group members, the constraints on their Black identities, and their navigation of similar institutional and political contexts. I argue that this is highly suggestive of an expansion of the Black racial boundary, and the reconstitution of Black identity in the post-Civil Rights Era.

Despite some boundary contraction within the Black racial category by some 1<sup>st</sup> generation Africans, the African 1.5 and second generation are engaging in boundary crossing particularly with African Americans through their bicultural identities. This process appears to be leading to the blurring of boundaries between the children of African immigrants and native born African Americans, especially through the 1.5 and second generations involvement and integration into African American social and professional

organizations. Evidence presented in this dissertation suggests that there is a weakening of ethnic identity among the African 1.5 and second generation. This weakening of ethnic identity among the children of Ethiopians and Nigerians suggest subsequent generations of Africans born here in the United States will eventually be absorbed into an undifferentiated African American/Black category.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Currently, the United States Census Bureau estimates that roughly fourteen percent (14%) of the US population is foreign-born (Greico, et. al 2012). According to projections by the Pew Research Center, this number is projected to increase to eighteen percent (18%) by 2065 (Lopez, et. al 2015). This dissertation is concerned with the migration of the Black population of this current immigration stream, particularly the rising African immigrant population. As a consequence of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, Black immigrants today account for nearly 9% of the nation's Black population, having tripled their share of this population since 1980 (Anderson 2015). This drastic rise in foreign-born Blacks has changed the cultural and ethnic demographic makeup of Black residents in many urban cities such as New York, Miami, Houston, and Washington DC. African immigrants alone account for 4% of all migration to the United States. The African population, however, is much more geographically dispersed than other Black immigrant populations, who tend to be concentrated in the Northeast and South Florida (Anderson 2015).

Because African immigrants, and Black immigrants more generally, enter a racially stratified US society that places them in the Black category (Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997), and they come to the United States with a very strong sense of ethnicity (Kasinitz 1992; Vickerman 1999), they make for an interesting case to investigate the potential changes to racial and ethnic boundaries in the post-Civil Rights era generally, and changes to and within racial and ethnic boundaries among Blacks and Black identity in this contemporary moment. To capture these potential changes, I look at

the identify formation of African immigrants through a lens of the historical phenomenon of racial solidarity, or linked fate, that has been an enduring characteristic of native born African Americans. Thus, the guiding question in this dissertation ask *do African immigrants and their second-generation children share a sense of linked fate with native born African Americans?* Historically, in the United States, we have seen a consolidated Black identity built through slavery and Jim Crow, and the institutionalization of the principle of hypodescent (Davis 1991). These political and institutional mechanisms served to draw the boundary around blackness in the United States. With the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, which diversified and intensified immigration from the African continent, the Caribbean, and Latin America, Black immigration to the United States has become increasingly important to study and understand its effect on Black identity in the United States in this post-Civil Rights Era. Moreover, it's also important to assess how Black immigrants understand their relationship with native born African Americans as a way to understand the changing racial and ethnic boundaries in this era of immigration to the United States.

### **Black Identity and Linked Fate**

In his seminal book, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics*, Michael Dawson (1994) argues that African Americans have developed a strong attachment to their racial identity due to shared historical experiences of racial oppression. Because race determines the life chances of African Americans, they develop a group consciousness that articulates individual African American lives as tied to the lives of the Black racial group as a whole. Dawson (1994) terms this sentiment linked fate. Linked fate mobilized politically results in blackness becoming both a racial and

political identity that unifies African American communities in the face of racial oppression. In what he calls the black utility heuristic, Dawson (1994) suggests it is rational for African Americans to develop a group consciousness. As long as race remains the dominant factor in determining their life chances, African Americans will continue to feel that their individual lives are linked to the fate of the larger racial group.

Many scholars have argued that an intersectional approach to African American communities is necessary in understanding the complexities of Black life and identity (Crenshaw 1991; Hill-Collins 2000; Simien 2005; Wilson 1978). Class has particularly been of interest to sociologists. Wilson (1978) specifically addresses deepening class divisions and changes in the Black class structure following the Civil Rights Movement. As the American mainstream opened up opportunities for some African Americans to become upwardly mobile and move out of impoverished inner-cities, this led to what Wilson (1978) calls a polarization of the African American community. With increased opportunities for a segment of the African American populace, we would expect to see a diminished sense of racial linked fate among African Americans. Dawson (1994), however, finds that despite class divisions, along with gender, and ideological differences, a strong attachment to a Black racial identity and linked fate remained among the African American population illustrated through Black unity in politics. African American social institutions such as community organizations, fraternities and sororities, and the preeminent Black social institution, Black churches, reinforce racial linked fate. These institutions help to reinforce not only Black racial identity, but they also inform African Americans about laws and policies, reinforcing a group based political ideology. African Americans then become politically mobilized around this shared racial identity

(Dawson 1994). As the Black population becomes increasingly diverse through immigration, the central question of interest in this dissertation is whether or not the notion of linked fate applies to African immigrants and their children.

### **Ethnic and Racial Identity of Foreign-born Blacks**

Throughout the past two decades, there has been a great deal of inquiry by scholars investigating the identity development of foreign-born Blacks. The identity formation of foreign-born Blacks is almost entirely characterized by a narrative of Black immigrants distancing themselves from blackness, and African Americans by highlighting their ethnic and cultural differences. This strain of scholarship argues that foreign born Blacks seek to reposition (Greer 2013; Wimmer 2008a, 2008b) themselves within the racial hierarchy by distancing themselves from a Black identity, which is equated with an African American identity. This literature highlights four reasons why foreign-born Blacks distance themselves from African Americans. First, some Black immigrants may view themselves as sojourners in the United States (Arthur 2000; Charles 2003; Rogers 2006; Zephir 2006). For many first-generation Black immigrants, holding onto their ethnic and national identities is a way to maintain their foreign status because they do not see themselves as permanent settlers in the United States. They have what Rogers (2006) calls, an “exit option,” the option to return to their home countries (Blyden 2012; Charles 2003; Zephir 2006). This longing to return to their home countries, along with a strong attachment to their ethnic and national identities become a way for them to affirm a sense of pride in who they are and where they come from, and to resist American racism (Blyden 2012; Rogers 2006; Zephir 2006).

A second reason hinges on the way in which Black immigrants perceive treatment from Whites. Many scholars have documented how Whites, especially White employers, tend to be more comfortable with Black immigrants than with African Americans. Whites tend to view Black immigrants as having a better work ethic than African Americans, and because they do not originate in the United States, and thus aren't "tainted" with the same historical relationship with Whites as African Americans, Black immigrants are said to not remind White Americans of their oppressive history (Greer 2013; Rogers 2006; Waters 1999). Black immigrants hold on to their ethnic and cultural identities as a way to gain favor from Whites, especially Whites in positions of power.

Previous research has also found that foreign-born Blacks believe that identifying with African Americans also restricts their identities. In societies such as Haiti and Jamaica, identity formation is attached to a strong sense of nationhood, reducing the salience of ethnic and racial identity issues (Arthur 2000; Charles 2003; Vickerman 1999; Zephir 2006). Race in these societies is much more fluid and the boundaries of racial identity more permeable. Unlike the United States, where racial classification systems subsume other identities, Caribbean societies have a long history of individuals defining themselves in terms of multiple ancestries (Vickerman 1999). In contrast, the United States has historically had a racial classification system more rigid, especially in regards to blackness. The principle of hypodescent, commonly known as the one drop rule, socially and legally classifies a person with any known African ancestry as Black, despite other known ancestries (Davis 1991; Gullickson and Morning 2010). Caribbean societies never developed racial classification systems as rigid as the ones here in the United States and thus Caribbeans of African descent have historically enjoyed more freedom to self-

identity. Racial identity in the Caribbean involves a number of variables, which include ethnicity, social class, and culture (Charles 200; Vickerman 199; Zephir 2006). When emigrating to the United States, foreign-born Blacks resist having their once fluid and permeable identities subsumed to “just Black” (Vickerman 1999). Because African Americans are at the bottom of the racial hierarchy in the United States (Bashi-Treitler 2013; Halter and Johnson 2014), foreign-born Blacks perceive that identifying with African Americans might hinder their identity choices (Charles 2003; Vickerman 1999; Zephir 2006).

The most widely cited reason for Black immigrants distancing themselves from blackness is their desire to distance themselves from the stereotypes associated with African Americans. Previous research has established that foreign-born Blacks tend to hold negative views of African Americans, perceiving them as violent, uneducated, lacking family values, welfare-dependent, and unambitious (Blyden 2012; Brown 2011; Habecker 201; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1999). Because physical differences between foreign-born Blacks and African Americans aren’t readily apparent, in order to disassociate themselves with these stereotypes, foreign-born Blacks will highlight their ethnic and cultural differences with African Americans as to not be associated with these characteristics, and according to some scholars, increase their chances of becoming upwardly mobile (Habecker 2012; Kasinitz 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1999).

While thoroughly explaining reasons for ethnic distancing from African Americans among Black immigrants, this literature does not consider that the identity formation of the first generation might be more nuanced, nor does it consider that first generation Black immigrants might also be invested in racial solidarity with African

Americans. Few scholars, with the exception of (Vickerman 1999) and (Zephir 2006), have considered the possibility that first generation Black immigrants might express a shared sense of identity, and linked fate with native born African Americans. Moreover, studies of identity formation among foreign-born Black immigrants is heavily based on Afro-Caribbean and Haitian immigrant populations. We have less knowledge about how the more recent African immigrant population in the United States understand their ethnic and racial identities, and their relationship to native born African Americans. Arthur (2000) notes that ethnicity is more salient for African immigrants, but they are also sensitive to their racial identities, although not in the same way as African Americans. While African Americans view their race through the lens of enslavement and access to opportunities, African immigrants view their racial identities through the lens of international migration where the United States is viewed as a place where the educational, cultural, economic, and political opportunities are vast (Arthur 2000; Humphries 2009). These differences in identity formation and understanding of the potency of racism in the United States, could potentially lead African Americans and Africans in two different directions, resulting in a fragmented sense of Black identity and weakening the strong sense of linked fate that has characterized the Black population in the United States historically. On the other hand, because immigrants enter an already racialized society (Bashi and McDaniel 1997), African immigrants could equally develop a shared sense of identity with native born African Americans that could result in a reconstitution of Black identity and racial solidarity.

## **Ethnic and Racial Identity of the Second Generation**

Scholars studying immigration and Black immigrants have also been invested in thinking about the identities of the children of Black immigrants. For the second generation, identity has been linked with their mobility in US society, specifically through the theory of segmented assimilation. Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993) argue that second-generation immigrants of color, generally, and the children of Black immigrants, more specifically, are likely to acculturate to American society in segmented ways. Recognizing that immigrants of color post-1965 will acculturate differently than European ethnics, segmented assimilation explains three acculturation paths for the children of Black immigrants: straight-lined assimilation, cultural pluralism, and downward mobility. Straight-lined assimilation, akin to the path taken by European ethnics, views second generation Black immigrants becoming fully American by shedding their parent's ethnic and national identities and integrating themselves into the white American middle class. The second path to acculturation has the children of Black immigrants maintaining the economic and social networks of their parents as a way of becoming upwardly mobile. These children are said to also maintain their parent's ethnic and cultural identities, distancing themselves from African Americans and a Black identity (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997). Finally, Portes and Zhou (1993) argue that some children of Black immigrants will experience downward mobility. For these children, they will become part of an enduring American "underclass" where limited economic mobility results in an "oppositional" culture to the mainstream, crime, high out-of-wedlock births, and other "dysfunctional" behaviors that are perceived to be abnormal (Wilson 1978). According to segmented assimilation, the children of Black

immigrants who experience this path to acculturation “choose” to embrace a racial identity, rather than their parent’s ethnic identities (Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1999; Zhou 1997).

Similar to the theory of segmented assimilation, Mary Waters’ work with second-generation West Indians in New York City posits a version of segmented assimilation that links identity to class, and gender. Waters (1994, 1999) suggests three main identity types among West Indian youth: the immigrant identified, ethnic identified, and the American identified. The immigrant identified, the more recent arrivals, she argues, stress their ethnic and national identities, similar to their first generation parents (Waters 1994, 1999). West Indian youth who were middle-class and upwardly mobile tended to maintain their parent’s ethnic and cultural identities, and used hyphenated identities, such as Jamaican-American. These youths also tended to distance themselves from African Americans, similar to how first-generation Black immigrants would. Waters (1994, 1999) argues these West-Indian youths are more likely to be female. Lastly, the American identified West Indians were low-income and had limited economic opportunities. They tended to stress their [Black] American identity as opposed to their parent’s ethnic and cultural identities. According to Waters (1994, 1999), these second generation youth were more likely to be male and embraced African American culture, adopting a culture of “opposition” to whiteness, similar to what Portes and Zhou (1993) and Zhou (1997) argue is happening among second generation Haitians in Miami.

By associating identity with mobility, segmented assimilation and Water’s (1994, 1999) theory of Black immigrant incorporation characterize racial and ethnic identities as competing forces that are not able to exist simultaneously among the second generation.

Ultimately, theories of Black immigrant incorporation posit that the second generation find themselves conflicted between remaining entrenched in their ethnic enclaves and maintaining their ethnic and cultural identities, or embracing a racial [Black] identity, and forgoing “their parents’ dreams of making it in America on the basis of ethnic solidarity and preservation of traditional values” (Portes and Zhou 1993:81). Moreover, implicit in this literature is that a Black identity is equated with an African American identity. Furthermore, a Black, or African American identity, is posited by this literature as also being equated with having adversarial stances towards education and cultural values that lie outside the American mainstream (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997; Waters 1994, 1999)

Like theories of acculturation for first generation Black immigrants that understands racial and ethnic identities as competing, the literature on the second generation, through its emphasis on socio-economic mobility, does the same. These theories consider ethnic distancing from native born African Americans, as a way to facilitate upward mobility, while embracing a Black identity is linked to downward mobility. This literature does not consider the possibility that Black immigrants across generations can hold both racial and ethnic identities simultaneously. Moreover, this literature also limits the scope of racial solidarity, or linked fate, with African Americans, to those in the second generation, who are downwardly mobile, reiterating a Black identity as associated with a downward incorporation trajectory, and as being synonymous with an African American identity. Furthermore, these theories neglect the possibility that native born African Americans can be upwardly mobile.

More contemporary scholarship has found contrary evidence to many of the assumptions embedded in the Black immigrant acculturation literature. Vickerman (1999) and Zephir (2006) both note that first generation West Indians and Haitians, respectively, understand themselves as Black and ethnic. Butterfield's (2004a) work with second generation West Indians in New York City, and Clerge's (2014) work with middle class first and second generation Haitians both find that these groups negotiate both their racial identities as Blacks, and their ethnic identities in certain social contexts. For both these upwardly mobile groups, their ethnic and racial identities are not in conflict with one another. Both groups view themselves as Black, but not African American, illustrating their understanding of a Black identity and an African American identity to be different.

Like the first generation literature, most work focused on the incorporation of the children of Black immigrants focuses on West Indian and Haitian populations. A small, but rich literature focused on the African population in the United States is emerging. Some researchers have found evidence consistent with segmented assimilation. Chacko (2005) and Habecker (2011) both find that second generation Ethiopians in the Washington DC metro area highlight their ethnic and cultural identities as a way of distancing themselves from African Americans. Chacko (2005) also notes, however, that 1.5 and second generation Ethiopians become more aware of their blackness as they interact more and more with African Americans, especially through the African influence in African American music. Habecker (2011) argues that Ethiopians take on the ethno-racial identity of "Habesha," a term that denotes Ethiopians and Eritreans' Semitic

(Hebrew or Arabic) roots, as a way of distancing themselves from African Americans, and blackness in general.

Emerging scholarship on second generation African immigrant identity has also found evidence challenging conventional notions that second generation African immigrants must choose between their race and ethnicity and that Black is equated with an African American identity. Balogun (2011) finds that middle class, second generation Nigerian immigrants embrace a Black racial identity that is neither oppositional, nor associated with downward mobility, as the second generation acculturation literature assumes. Working with upwardly mobile second generation Nigerians in the San Francisco Bay area, Balogun (2011) argues that the children of Nigerian immigrants negotiate between their racial identity of Black, their Nigerian ethnic identities, as well as their American national identities, depending upon the context. These findings demonstrate how the multiple identities held by the African second generation are not in conflict with one another, but instead the second generation highlights one identity over the other depending upon the situation. Additionally, Balogun (2011) shows how second generation Nigerians do not understand a Black identity as equated with an African American identity, nor do they associate it with downward mobility. Balogun (2011), Butterfield (2004a), Clerge (2014), all find that middle class, second generation Black immigrants embrace a Black racial identity and their ethnic identities. Furthermore, the works of these scholars suggests there is potential for the development of a shared sense of linked fate with African Americans, through their participants embracing of a Black identity.

## **Ethnic and Racial Boundary Formation Approach**

Consistent with this more contemporary scholarship on Black identity formation, this dissertation finds that the Ethiopian and Nigerian immigrants and their children in my study, also embrace both their racial and ethnic identities, negotiating between the two depending upon the context. My participants identify as Black, but not African American, illustrating how they understand a Black identity as something different than an African American identity. Moreover, their Black identities are not associated with downward mobility. I also find a shared sense of linked fate with African Americans among my African participants. This shared sense of linked fate was present *across generations*, not just among those in the second generation. Ultimately, the findings of this study are consistent with the works of more contemporary scholarship on Black immigration acculturation and identity formation that suggest Black immigrant identity and their understanding of their relationship with native born African Americans, is more nuanced than previous literatures have been able to capture. This dissertation, however, goes a step further and seeks to understand what Black immigrant identity formation and this shared sense of linked fate means for our understanding of Black identity and racial solidarity in the midst of growing ethnic diversity among Blacks in the post-Civil Rights era.

I approach this through the lens of boundary formation theory. Scholars of boundary formation theory are invested in understanding how boundaries are created, maintained, negotiated, and shift over time and space (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Loveman 1999; Wimmer 2008a). I draw mainly from sociologist Andreas Wimmer's ambitious theory of ethnic boundary making to demonstrate not only the non-competing

nature of Black immigrant identity, but I argue they understand their identities as non-competing because they understand them as “nested segments of differentiation” (Wimmer 2008a:976). This is to say, my African participants see no conflict in identifying as both Black, and Ethiopian or Nigerian, because they understand their identities as multi-layered. As chapter two demonstrates, my African participants identify their racial identities as Black, and understand their Ethiopian or Nigerian ethnic identities as a lower level identity, nested within their larger Black identity. Some of my Nigerian participants, specifically, move to an even lower level of their identity and discuss their Igbo identity that is nested within a larger Nigerian identity. Ultimately, these participants identify Black, Nigerian, and Igbo as their set of hierarchically nested identities.

Although scholars of identity formation have shown the multi-layered identification and situational process of identity (Kaufert 1977; Nagel 1994; Padilla 1985), as Wimmer (2008a) notes, there are institutional and political constraints on the identities of individuals. This theory recognizes that historical political alliances and institutional arrangements provide incentives for people to engage in boundary making strategies, and these characteristics and institutional practices influence the development and maintenance of certain boundaries within a society. When looking at the United States and racial boundaries, the majority members of a society, Whites, have an incentive to discriminate and erect boundaries between themselves and others given their inclusion as part of the “national family” (Wimmer 2008a:991) by being given access to resources during the nation-building process. This in turn, gave rise to the significance of what Lamont and Molinar (2002) refer to as a social boundary—objectified forms of

social difference that result in unequal access to resources—between those classified as White and those classified as non-White.

These institutional and political constraints dictate which boundaries become politically salient (Wimmer 2008a). The salience of these boundaries are predicated on the “degree of consensus” (Wimmer 2008a:1004) by social actors. A high degree of consensus around boundaries lead to a more closed, and durable (Lamont and Molnar 2002) social boundary, whereas a less agreed upon boundary produces a more fluid, and permeable boundary. African immigrants enter a society where racial boundaries, particularly the Black racial boundary, and Black identity, has a high degree of consensus within American society (Davis 1991). As this dissertation demonstrates through their shared Black identity and linked fate with native born African Americans, my participants understand the institutional and political constraints on their identities. This is particularly evident in chapter two when my participants discuss navigating similar institutional structures as African Americans. Ultimately, my African participants do not believe that non-Blacks recognize the ethnic distinctions among Black people. Therefore, the institutional and political structure of the United States results in the homogenization of Blacks resulting in African immigrants and their children experiencing similar forms of racism and discrimination. This in turn creates a shared sense of linked fate with native born African Americans.

Within these constraints, however, actors and groups engage in a plethora of strategies to deal with the structural constraints on their identities (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Lamont and Fleming 2005; Wimmer 2008a). Actors choose the strategy and identity, within their nested set, that provides them with the ability to further their

economic, political, and symbolic interests (Lamont and Fleming 2005; Wimmer 2008a). Synthesizing the boundary-making strategies in the literature, Wimmer (2008a, 2008b) outlines five strategies that individuals and groups engage to further their interests: boundary expansion, boundary contraction, transvaluation (or inversion), boundary crossing, and boundary blurring. Each are discussed below.

Boundary expansion and contraction happens when individuals or groups engage in strategies that either reduces the number of categories and expands an existing boundary, or adds new categories “and thus contracts previous boundaries” (Wimmer 2008a, 2008b:1031). We see boundary expansion and contraction in chapters two and three as illustrated through my African participants understanding themselves as members of the Black racial category—a strategy of expansion through adding categories, while simultaneously in chapter three, engaging in contraction through their understanding of themselves as ethnically and culturally different than African Americans. A third strategy actors may pursue is transvaluation, or inversion, where individuals or groups try to reverse their stigmatization and think of themselves as morally and politically equal to, or superior to the dominant group (Wimmer 2008a, 2008b). Lamont, et.al (2002) find this strategy among North African immigrants in France who distance themselves and their Islamic moral values from the Western values of the French, “explicitly affirming the moral superiority of their own traditions and values” (p. 400-401).

Another strategy individuals or groups may engage in is to try and reposition themselves within the ethnic and racial hierarchy through either boundary crossing (Alba and Nee 2003; Wimmer 2008a, 2008b) or blurring boundaries. When individuals or

groups engage in boundary crossing, they “melt” into mainstream institutional structures and organizations, fully becoming a part of the dominant group (Alba and Nee 2003), “escaping the minority stigma” (Wimmer 2008b). Boundary blurring occurs when ethnicity/race reduces in importance “as a principle of categorization and social organization” (Wimmer 2008b:1041) and “there is great cultural continuity” (Alba 2005) between the once marginalized group and the dominant group. The blurring of boundaries can lead individuals and groups to express “civilizational commonalities” among “the human family” (Wimmer 2008a:989). Lamont, et.al (2002) refers to this as “particular universalism” (390) where the marginalized attempt to blur the boundary between themselves and their oppressor by adopting a narrative and belief that all human beings are inherently equal. Some of my African and African American participants teeter on the verge of boundary crossing, between Blacks and Whites, but ultimately feel the potency of the institutional and political constraints on their Black identities. Within the Black racial boundary, however, I found considerable boundary crossing and boundary blurring among the African 1.5 and second generation with African Americans. As chapter three demonstrates, the African 1.5 and second generation, engage in both boundary blurring and boundary crossing through their bicultural identities. This is particularly demonstrated through their rather fluid movement in and out of African American cultural, professional, and social organizations such as the Black Student Union (BSU) and Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs).

Approaching African migration from a boundary making approach gives us the theoretical tools to understand African’s identity formation and their relationship with native born African Americans in a more nuanced way, not captured by the Black

immigrant acculturation literature. This approach also gives us a framework for thinking about the consequences of African migration, particularly, the changes it might bring *to*, and *within* the Black racial boundary. It provides a framework to think about whether African migration, and Black immigration to the United States more generally, is resulting in a more fragmented sense of Black identity, or whether this migration will result in the same processes we have seen historically with blackness in the United States, one where different Black ethnic groups are absorbed into an undifferentiated Black category.

### **Research Methodology**

This study relies on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with thirty-eight African immigrants from Ethiopia and Nigeria, as well as seventeen native born African Americans, residing in the Seattle metropolitan area. As a city, Seattle may seem like an unassuming place with regards to the migration of foreign-born Blacks. The foreign-born population of Seattle, however, is 17.4% and the city is one of the top fifteen metropolitan areas with the largest African-born populations in the United States (Greico et al., 2012). The sub-Saharan African born population in the Seattle metro area makes up 6.7% of the total foreign-born population. This is higher than the national percentage, where African migrants are 4% of all immigrants (Anderson 2015). Nationally, foreign-born Blacks make up 9% of the total Black population, but make up 15.1% of the Black population in the Seattle metro area (Anderson 2015). In other words, despite the relatively small population of Blacks in the Seattle metro area, Seattle will be at the forefront of many of the ethnic identity shifts within the Black population.

My sample consists of first, 1.5 and second generation Ethiopians and Nigerians. Most of my participants are single, and within the age range 18-70. Twenty-four participants are women, fifteen are men. All participants have a college degree and/or graduate and professional degree, or are currently enrolled in university, making this an educated sample of African immigrants and their US-born children. This sample consists of thirteen first generation immigrants and twenty-six children of immigrants. In addition, all participants were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. For comparison purposes, I chose the largest East African community in the Seattle metro area and the largest West African community in the area. This research strategy yielded Ethiopians and Nigerians, respectively, and is consistent with national numbers where Ethiopians and Nigerians are the largest continental African migrant populations in the United States (Anderson 2015).

The African Americans in my sample are mostly single, with an age range from 21-44. I interviewed almost equal numbers of African American women and men (8 women, 9 men). Like my African participants, my African American participants are also educated, as they range from those with some college experience to those with post-graduate or professional degrees. As with my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants, my African American participants were also given pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

I gained access to the African immigrant and African American populations in three ways: personal contacts, community organizations, and colleges and universities in the Seattle metro area. After initial interviews, additional participants were captured through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a method by which following an initial interview with a participant, I ask the participant for additional people who might

be interested in speaking with me about their experiences (Singleton and Straits 2005). This technique is useful in gathering respondents who are members of the same racial and/or ethnic group. This strategy was especially useful in the case of Nigerians, whose population in the Seattle metro area is more dispersed than Ethiopians.

Interviews were conducted between August 2014 and January 2016. This time period was in the middle of a rather difficult and exhausting period, where the United States was fresh off the non-guilty verdict of George Zimmerman for the 2012 killing of 17-year old Trayvon Martin, following the killing of Eric Garner by New York City police in July 2014. I began my interviews shortly after 18-year old Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri was shot and killed in the back by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson. In the years following, many more unarmed African Americans would be killed at the hands of police departments across the United States. As these were unfortunate and unforeseen incidents, conducting my interviews during this time did allow me to test the notion of linked fate with African Americans among my African participants in the Seattle metro area.

Interviews lasted forty-five minutes to three hours, with the average interview lasting one and a half hours. Forty-two interviews were conducted in person usually at local coffee shops or community organizations. Eleven interviews were conducted by phone, and two via Skype. The Ethiopian Community of Seattle and AfricaTown, proved quite accommodating of me with regards to providing participants for my study and lending the space needed to conduct interviews. Interview questions focused on racial and ethnic identity, intra-racial group dynamics, and current events affecting Black communities. The questions were open-ended, allowing space for interview participants

to adequately discuss the topics at hand. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of analysis because they allowed me the opportunity to delve into the experiences of my participants around a number of topics, that quantitative analysis cannot capture. All interview audio was transcribed by the researcher. Data were analyzed using open and focused coding (Charmaz 2014) by hand, and with the qualitative analysis software, Atlas.ti.

### **Overview of Chapters**

This introductory chapter explains the theoretical frameworks that undergird this dissertation. Chapter two, examines the racial identities of African immigrants, across generations, and addresses my central research question of whether African immigrants share a sense of linked fate with African Americans. The chapter begins by illustrating how my African participants engage in strategies of boundary expansion through their understanding of themselves as racially Black. Their membership in this category was defined by the institutional and political constraints of US society that classifies anyone with African ancestry as Black (Davis 1991). Additional structural constraints on their identities and also reasons they develop a shared sense of Black identity and linked fate with native born African Americans, are the homogenizing effect of the US racial order, and their everyday experience of racism and discrimination. These experiences, along with their understanding of themselves as ancestrally and historically connected to African Americans, leads to a development of shared linked fate. This shared sense of linked fate is present across generations for my participants, contradicting the findings of the Black immigrant literature that suggests linked fate with African Americans is found only among those in the second generation who are downwardly mobile. Furthermore, a

Black identity is not equated with an African American identity, nor is it associated with downward mobility for my participants, contrary to the Black immigrant literature.

Overall, chapter two illustrates the institutional and political structures that constrain the identity “choices” of my African participants.

Chapter three focuses on how African immigrants and their children understand their ethnic and cultural identities, giving us insights into the boundary work happening *within* the Black racial category. Drawing heavily from the multilevel process of identity (Kaufert 1997; Nagel 1994; Padilla 1985; Wimmer 2008a), this chapter demonstrates how identities are nested within one another through my participants understanding their Ethiopian and Nigerian ethnic identities as nested within their larger Black racial identity. This signals boundary contraction as demonstrated in their understanding of their Ethiopian and Nigerian identities as distinct from the identity of native born African Americans. This distinction however, is not characterized by distancing, but more so a recognition of the different ethnic and cultural identities that comprise the Black racial category. This point is illustrated by the significant number of my African participants (33%), who understand the term African American in multiple ways. This signals a high degree of fluidity around the African American boundary. Thus, within the boundary of blackness, there is a lack of consensus around what an African American identity means. Thus, African migration appears to be shifting the meaning of the once stable African American boundary.

Furthermore, while boundary contraction in terms of ethnic identity is evident among my first generation participants in contrast to native born African Americans, the 1.5 and second generation participants are engaged in strategies of boundary crossing and

boundary blurring, as illustrated through their everyday bicultural ethnicities. The blurring of boundaries with African Americans was demonstrated through their involvement in student union groups involving African Americans, such as BSU. Boundary crossing became evident in their membership in African American professional and social organizations.

In Chapter four, I continue drawing from the identity literature, and Wimmer's (2008a) notion of identities as "nested segments of differentiation" (976), as well as contemporary Black immigrant scholarship illustrating the fluidity of racial and ethnic identity (Balogun 2011; Butterfield 2004a; Clerge 2014). I extend this identity formation literature with a discussion of another layer of my African immigrant participants identities—their ideas about their Americanness. Most of my participants expressed how each layer of their identity were equally important to them, with some expressing how one of these identities became more salient in certain social contexts, than the others. This finding is consistent with more contemporary scholarship on the fluidity of identity in certain social contexts, and is contrary to the Black immigrant literature that characterizes Black immigrant identities in a competing, either/or, framework. Additionally, some participants expressed their racial identity as their most important identity, and tended to understand themselves and their relationship to African Americans through a Pan-African lens. These participants did not discount their ethnic identities, but felt more of an attachment to their Black identities as compared to their ethnic identities. On the contrary, a few other participants expressed deeper attachments to their ethnic identities. These participants acknowledged their racial identities, but had a deeper

affinity for their ethnic identities. Finally, chapter four explores how my African participants understand themselves as Americans, and their American identity.

Chapter five takes a different turn than previous chapters and focuses on how African migration is impacting the identity formation and understandings of Black identity for native born African Americans. I find that my African American participants understand themselves, as well as Africans, to be members of the Black racial category. This finding illustrates how my African American participants are engaged in boundary expansion. Moreover, the consensus by both Africans and African Americans on who belongs in the Black category suggests a level of agreement that signals the possible expansion of the Black racial boundary in the future. Furthermore, a significant number of my African American participants understood their Black identity strictly through an African American lens, which differed from the more global idea of Black identity expressed by my African participants. The different understandings of Black identity, however, did not fracture the shared sense of Black identity among my participants, as I find that my African American participants shared a sense of linked fate with African immigrants and their children. This shared sense of linked fate operates through their shared Black identity. This finding also highlights how people have different understandings of categories and their own personal membership within these categories. Overall, chapter five re-articulates, through the experiences of native born African Americans, the institutional and political constraints on Black identity in the United States. This chapter also provides evidence for a high degree of consensus on the expansion of the Black racial boundary through my African American participant's inclusion of Africans in the Black category.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, I discuss the major findings of my dissertation and the implications that the results have for thinking about African migration, Black immigration more broadly, Black identity, and linked fate, in the post-Civil Rights era.

## CHAPTER II

### BOUND BY BLACKNESS: AFRICANS, BLACK IDENTITY, AND LINKED FATE

This chapter examines the racial identities of my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants. Through an analysis of their understandings of race, the Black racial category, and Black identity, I provide evidence contrary to the existing literature on Black immigrant incorporation in three main ways. The Black immigrant acculturation literature argues that Black immigrants and their children “choose” not to identify as Black because they link a Black identity to downward mobility in US society (Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1999; Zephir 1996). Moreover, this literature suggests that Black immigrants also understand Black to be equated with a native born African American identity. Furthermore, this literature limits racial solidarity, or linked fate, with African Americans to the children of Black immigrants who are downwardly mobile (Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1999). My findings in this chapter, however, narrate a different story. I begin this chapter with data showing that my participants identify themselves racially as Black, across generations, and both groups. I illustrate, through demographic data, that a Black identity does not necessarily facilitate a downwardly mobile socioeconomic trajectory in US society. Next, I highlight how my participants understand Black to be a racial category, and not one that is equated with a native born African American identity. Moreover, this also demonstrates how my participants understand their Ethiopian and Nigerian identities, as well as the category African American to be ethnic identities nested within the larger Black racial category.

I follow with a detailed discussion of the meanings my participants give to their Black identities. They understand Black as an identity that connects them ancestrally,

and historically to African Americans. This shared Black identity leads my participants to develop a shared sense of linked fate with African Americans and others in the African diaspora who reside here in the United States. Linked fate is expressed, across generations, and groups, and is anchored on the homogenizing effect of the racialized social system (Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Kibona-Clark 2008; Watts-Smith 2014) and their everyday experiences of racism discrimination. Taken together, this chapter, and the mechanisms identified by my participants, demonstrates the institutional and political constraints (Wimmer 2008a, 2008b) on the identity formation of Africans residing in the United States, and Black identity, more generally.

### **Africans, Black Identity, Social Mobility**

Table 1 reflects the racial identities as reported by my respondents on their demographic questionnaire. All participants identified their race as Black, or some variation of Black such as African. Also reflected in table 1 are their educational and occupational backgrounds. As one can see, the majority of my participants are upwardly mobile. While education and occupation does not always cleanly translate into class status, combined they do provide some level of upward mobility in US society. As table 1 illustrates, all of my participants either have a college and/or graduate and professional degree, some college experience, or were entering college at the time of our interview, making this sample of African immigrants and their US born children a fairly educated group who consistently, across both groups, and generations, identify racially as Black. Moreover, the occupational positions of my participants provide evidence for their upward mobility. Their occupations range from students, program directors for nonprofit organizations, to academics, and software engineers. As evident by the data presented

Table 1: Demographic Profile of African Participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Racial Identity</b>	<b>Ethnic Identity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Generation</b>
Ayana	Black	Ethiopian	24	Female	Single	Bachelor's	Program Director for Non-profit	1.5
Bershadu		Ethiopian	25	Female	Single	Bachelor's		1.5
Desta	Black	Black, Ethiopian	31	Male	Single, Co-habiting	Master's	Community Organizer	1st
Hanna	Black	Ethiopian	27	Female	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student; Fiscal Specialist	1.5
Berhanu	Black	Ethiopian	27	Male	Single	Master's	Graduate Student	1.5
Yohanna	Black	Ethiopian	28	Female	Single	Some College	Supervisor at Starbucks	1.5
Negus	Black	Ethiopian, African American	23	Male	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student	1.5
Gete	Black	Ethiopian American	28	Female	Single	Master's	School Administrator	2nd
Telossa	Black	Oromo	24	Male	Single	Bachelor's	Unemployed	1.5
Tesfaye	Black	Ethiopian	55	Male	Married; Separated	Pharmacy	Pharmacist	1st
Alem	Black	Ethiopian	34	Male	Married	Master's	Operation Coordinator, Public Outreach and Engagement Liason	1st
Mehret	Black	Ethiopian	18	Female	Single	Entering College	Undergraduate Student	1.5
Meron	Black	Ethiopian	60	Female	Married	Master's	Educator	1st
Makda	Black	Ethiopian	21	Female	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student	2nd
Saba	Black	Ethiopian	21	Female	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student	1.5
Tena	African	Amharic, Oromo	46	Female	Married	Some College	Self-employed	1st

Kabede	Black	Ethiopian	43	Male	Divorced	Bachelor's	Insurance Agent	1st
Aster	Black	Ethiopian	20	Female	Single	Some College	Nanny and Sales Associate	2nd
Martha	Black	Ethiopian	22	Female	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student	1.5
Edward	Black	Ethiopian	70	Male	Married, Separated	Some College	Unemployed	1st
Elshaday	Black	Ethiopian	67	Female	Married	Master's	Retired	1st
Selassie	Black	Ethiopian	33	Male	Single	Bachelor's	Clinical Research Manager	2nd
Genevieve	Black	Nigerian	N/A	Female	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student	1.5
Chinwe	Black	Nigerian	28	Female	Single	Master's	Business Operations	1.5
Ikechuwku	Black	Igbo, Nigerian	35	Male	Married, Separated	Bachelor's	Software Engineer	1st
Nkeoma	Black	Igbo, Nigerian	N/A	Female	Single	Master's	N/A	1st
Sijuade	Black	Nigerian	47	Male	Married	PhD	Academic	1st
Ngozi	Black	Nigerian	22	Female	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student	2nd
Chidera	Black	Nigerian	26	Female	Single, Co-habiting	Master's	Graduate Student	2nd
Ndidi	Black	Nigerian	24	Female	Single	Bachelor's	Reservations Agent	2nd
Royowa	Black	Nigerian	31	Female	Single	Master's	Engineer	2nd
Zauna	Black	Nigerian	21	Female	Single	Some College	Unemployed	2nd
Dayo	Black	African American, Nigerian	30	Male	Single	Master's	Buyer for Amazon	2nd
Chimezie	Black	Nigerian	23	Male	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student	2nd
Oba	Black	Nigerian	N/A	Male	Single	Some College	Nurse	1st
Adeola	Black	Nigerian	25	Female	Single	Pharmacy	Pharmacist	2nd
Aniyan	Black	Nigerian	30	Female	Single	Master's	Nanny, Instructional Staff	2nd
Toben	Black	Nigerian	18	Male	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student	1st

Adaora	Black	Nigerian	21	Female	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student	2nd
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here, and contrary to theories of Black immigrant acculturation, embracing a Black racial identity, is not necessarily linked to a downward socioeconomic trajectory (Balogun 2011.)

**Nested Black Identities: Black as a Racial Category**

One of the big assumptions underlying the Black immigrant incorporation literature is that foreign-born Black immigrants and upwardly mobile second generations highlight their ethnic identities as a strategy to distance themselves from blackness because they associate a Black identity with native born African Americans (Habecker 2011; Imoagene 2012; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Waters 1994, 1999; Zhou 1997). Contrary to this literature, I find that 92%, or thirty-six (36) of my thirty-nine (39) African participants understand the term ‘Black’ as a “big race” (Gullickson 2016)—a large scale pan-ethnic category that is inclusive of the various ethnicities and cultures of people of African descent in the United States. They understand their Ethiopian or Nigerian identities, as well as the category African American, as nested within this larger Black racial category. Adaora, a second generation Nigerian studying biochemistry, succinctly sums up how my participants understand the term Black. I asked her if she views the term ‘Black’ and ‘African American’ as the same thing, she replies:

Oh no, I see those as two different things. I think Black is the umbrella term that encompasses Africans, African Americans, Caribbeans, Afro-Latino. I think African American is a more specific ethnic identity. Black is a racial identity. ~  
 Adoara, 2nd generation, Nigerian

Adoara explains that Black is a “big race” (Gullickson 2016), that “encompasses” all people of African descent in the United States, whether they are African, African American, Caribbean, or Afro-Latino. She clearly explains that she understands ‘African American’ to be “a more specific ethnic identity.” Thus, my participants’ understanding of Ethiopian, African American, and Nigerian as nested identities within the larger racial category of Black. Tolessa also views the term Black in the same way. As an Oromo—the indigenous majority ethnic group in Ethiopia—he established clear, distinct boundaries between himself and Ethiopians and Eritreans in our interview. Telling me he doesn’t consider himself an Ethiopian, I asked him if he considers himself Black, he replied:

Black could be African, African American, all types....You could be from Cuba, you’re Black. That’s how I look at Black. What type of Black, then that’s when the ethnicity comes in. African, African American, Cuban, Nigerian, you could be from France, if you’re Black, you’re Black. ~ Tolessa, 1.5 generation, Oromo

Again, Tolessa reiterates Adoara’s, and my other participants’ thoughts and reflections by saying “Black could be African, African American.....Cuban, Nigerian....all types.” Here Tolessa expresses again how Black is not synonymous with ‘African American’, but is a racial category that is comprised of various ethnic groups who are of African descent. My participants’ view of Black as an umbrella term that includes various ethnic groups and not just African Americans is consistent with more contemporary scholarship on the broadening of Black identity in the United States (Arthur 2000; Awokoya 2012; Balogun 2011; Butterfield 2004a, 2004b; Clerge 2014; Imoagene 2012; Watts-Smith 2014).

## **Multiple Meanings of the Black Category**

### *Black as an Ethno-Racial Category*

While the majority of my participants identified Black as a racial category, there were some who understood this term in multiple ways. Eighteen percent (18%), or 7 participants understood the term Black as one that refers to a specific ethnic group—those who are the descendants of Africans enslaved here in the United States. Interestingly, all of these participants also identified their race as Black. This signals that for some of my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants, ‘Black’ is both a racial category and a specific ethnic group. Chinwe, who immigrated here to the United States at the age of 11, illustrates this phenomenon. Asking her to expand on her interactions and experiences with African Americans from different class backgrounds, she says,

I think that in college I was a youth leader in my church in our community. It was a poor community and it was a lot of Black folks and I learned how to relate to them and I learned how to fellowship with them. I knew what my place was and what my place wasn’t and how to speak their language. I had to learn all of these things and now I will say if you put me with a bunch of Black folks, I would be comfortable, but that’s after years of learning how to be comfortable. Initially, no. ~ Chinwe, 1.5 generation, Nigerian

Through reflections of her time as a youth leader in her church, she interacted with many Black folks and eventually learned “how to relate to them....and...how to fellowship with them”. She says that she eventually learned to “how to speak their language” and now if she is amidst “a bunch of Black folks” she would be comfortable communicating and interacting with them. Chinwe clearly illustrates how she sees herself as different from the “Black folks” she went to church with in college. She erects a boundary between her and them, even though over the years she became comfortable with Black people

[African Americans]. As we continued our conversation, I asked Chinwe how she identifies racially and she replied,

“So, my racial identity is a Black woman, ethnic identity I would say Nigerian American.” ~ Chinwe, 1.5 generation, Nigerian

Thus, Chinwe clearly distinguishes herself as a Nigerian from the African Americans she went to church with, calling them “Black folks”, but simultaneously, identifies herself racially as a “Black woman”, illustrating how she views Black as a specific ethnic group, but also her race. Chidera’s understandings of the term Black is similar to Chinwe’s.

She illustrates this when she says,

I am a person of both these worlds and Nigerian is my ethnicity, and Black American is my race because that is how I am being perceived. But for me, I am equally both so that’s why I identify as Nigerian American.....I consider myself an African American as a Census term, it’s how we categorize people. And then Black American is one particular group that is part of African American. ~ Chidera, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Here we read how Chidera understands her race to be Black or Black American and her ethnicity to be Nigerian. She continues on, saying that she also considers herself to be an African American, in terms of how the Census classifies her. For Chidera, Black American is an ethnic identity that is nested within a larger pan-ethnic African American category. Seemingly, contradictory, both Chidera and Chinwe illustrate how some of my participants understand Black to be both their racial identity, as well as the specific group who traces their lineage back to the southern region of the United States. Moreover, Chidera also expresses another phenomenon with the terms Black and African American. In her quote above, she not only identifies Black or Black American as a racial category and a specific ethnic group, but she simultaneously identifies the term African American

as a pan-ethnic category when she says, “Black American is one particular group that is part of African American.”

*Black/African American as a Pan-Ethnic Category*

Like Chidera, fourteen of the thirty-nine Africans in my study (or 36%) understood ‘Black’ and ‘African American’ to be synonymous, but not in the same way as the Black immigrant literature has suggested. While theories of Black immigrant incorporation equate a Black identity with an African American identity, these participants viewed ‘Black’ and ‘African American’ as a consolidated ethno-racial category that includes all people of African descent in the United States. Participants spoke of how this ethno-racial category is constructed in a way where Black is the racial category, then African American is a pan-ethnic category that is nested within this larger Black category. Furthermore, one would then specify the “type” of African American they are. Negus, is a perfect illustration of how these participants understand the term African American. In our conversation, he told me that he identifies as Black, and as an African American male. Asking for clarification on how he understands these terms, he says,

I associate Black with African American and then I associated African American with Ethiopian American. If Black is right here [drawing a picture for me], I would have two things on the tree diagram, one of them would be African American and then Ethiopian American. ~ Negus, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

In this passage Negus, like thirteen other participants, understands Black as a “big race” (Gullickson 2016) and African American as a pan-ethnic category nested within the larger Black racial category. Ethiopian American is then the specific “type” of African American he is, which is nested within the larger pan-ethnic African American category.

Thus, for these participants, Black and African American mean the same thing, but instead of equating Black with a native born African American identity, they demonstrate a connection to native born African Americans through their identity with Black and African American. To illustrate their distinct ethnic identity, they then specify their specific African origins.

In summary, ninety-two percent (92%) of the Ethiopian and Nigerian participants in my sample understand Black as a racial category, of which they include themselves in. The terms Black and African American, however, held multiple and alternative meanings for some of my participants. Some who identified Black as a racial category, also expressed how Black could also refer to the specific ethnic group whose lineage extends back to the US South and is associated with the Civil Rights Movement (Greer 2013; Kibona-Clark 2008). Furthermore, a surprising 36% of my sample expressed how they understand Black as a racial category with the pan-ethnic term, African American, nested within it. Nested within the African American category then, are specific “types” of African Americans. These specific types could be Ethiopian, Nigerian, or native born African Americans. My data suggests that participants who understand African American as a pan-ethnic identity, would label native born African Americans as simply African Americans, or Black Americans, because they are unable to trace their lineage back to specific nation-states on the African continent. It is unclear whether my participants would place other ethnic groups of African origin, such as Jamaicans, in this same African American category, or whether they would be distinct from the African American category. My findings highlight the complexity of identity among some African immigrants and their children. This also highlights how African immigrant racial

and ethnic identity formation differs from West Indians and Haitians. Scholars (Butterfield 2004a; Charles 2003; Clerge 2014; Imoagene 2012) have shown that West Indians and Haitians clearly denote, or understand, ‘Black’ as a racial category, and ‘African American’ as a specific ethnic group. My data, however, shows this is not necessarily the case for African immigrants and their children, especially around the term African American.

While it may seem trivial, the multiple and alternative ways that my participants understand these terms should not be glanced over, especially on the dawn of the newly proposed 2020 Census categories that would disaggregate the Black racial category into various ethnic groups. Interestingly, the newly proposed 2020 Census categories continues with ‘Black/African American’ as an ethno-racial category, but then also includes ‘African American’, ‘Ethiopian’, ‘Nigerian’, ‘Ghanaian’, ‘Jamaican’, and ‘Haitian’, as separate ethnic groups under this ethno-racial category (Cohn 2016). With the multiple and alternative ways that some of my participants understand these terms, specifically the term African American, the categorical breakdown proposed for the 2020 Census categories under the Black/African American ethno-racial category might be setting up a situation whereby some Africans are double counted. For example, for participants like Negus who understands himself as both African American and Ethiopian, he might select both ‘African American’ and ‘Ethiopian’ on the 2020 Census.

### **Theorizing Black Identity Among African Immigrants**

How Black immigrants understand their Black racial identity has not been adequately explored in the Black immigrant literature. The assumption embedded in theories of Black immigrant incorporation is that blackness is something Black

immigrants and the upwardly mobile second generation perceive to be a stigma that they should distance themselves from. In this section, I explore the multiple meanings Ethiopians and Nigerians give to their Black racial identity. Overall, my participants expressed a Black identity as one that connects them to other people of African descent in the United States. My participants discuss their membership in the Black racial category in two major ways: ancestral connections and shared historical struggles.

### *Ancestral Connections*

The Ethiopians and Nigerians I interviewed saw themselves as part of a larger African diasporic community in the United States—a pan-ethnic community that includes them and other people of African descent. My participants understand their membership in this Black racial category as one that connects all Black people in the United States through direct or indirect ancestral ties to the African continent. Blackness for my participants is equated with being of African descent. Much of this content emerged when I asked my participants what it means to be Black. Desta, a first generation Ethiopian, succinctly expressed the thoughts of my participants when he said:

...the original Africans, the sub-Saharan Africans...under the belt of the equator are Black. If you are from the continent of Africa, it doesn't matter if you came here 500 years ago, it doesn't matter if you came last week, it doesn't matter if you are in Jamaica or Trinidad, somehow your sisters from Africa, so it goes beyond color, it goes beyond the complexion of your color, it's about your roots, it's about where you are from. It's about where your ancestors are from. That's the term Black, a person of African descent. ~ Desta, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Here Desta equates Blackness with being indigenous to the African continent. He includes those whose ancestors were taken from the continent of Africa through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and dispersed throughout the Western world. He says that Black “goes beyond color, it's about your roots.” Blackness for my participants indeed

does go beyond color, it's an identity that not only connects them to others in the Black racial category in the United States, but it's an identity that connects the global African diaspora to each other, and back to the African continent (Kelley 1999, 2000).

Dayo expresses these same sentiments when he says,

Being Black at the very root of it is be African, but I want to make sure I'm not confusing the two. I say that in the sense of what it means to be Black, there are some common core things that radiate throughout the entire African diaspora if you will....at the core of every Black person, whether they grew up on the continent of Africa, in America, or in the Caribbean, or even in Brazil, family is very central, family and community is very central to who we are as a people. ~ Dayo, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, African American/Nigerian

Dayo speaks of how to be Black at its very foundation is to be African. Like Desta, Dayo views blackness as being indigenous to sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, he emphasizes how Blacks, whether on the African continent, or in the diaspora, share some cultural affinities, especially through the family and their sense of community. As Kibona-Clark (2008) explains, the communalism of African American communities, as well as pressures from the community, may very well be a residual from African societies. In many African societies, especially West Africa—the region that most African Americans are likely to trace their heritage to—one is expected to sacrifice for the good of the community and follow the norms and values set by the community. Read in this context, my participant Dayo—who has an African American mother and a Nigerian father, and identifies with both cultures—is explaining how the centrality of family and community is a cultural norm and value originating in ancestral West African societies that are still prevalent in African diasporic communities today, regardless of ethnicity. Centering family and community, according to Dayo, is a practice that connects not only the global

African diaspora to one another, but also to their ancestral origins on the African continent.

Fundamentally, the Ethiopians and Nigerians in my study view a Black identity and Black people as those who have ancestral connections to the indigenous populations of the sub-Saharan region on the African continent. These ties include those who descend from older involuntary migration streams of Africans through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and the more recent voluntary migrations of Africans entering the United States and other countries across the globe.

### *Connected Historical Struggles*

For my participants, Black is a term equated with being of African descent. While my participants recognize the ethnic differences among Black people, as illustrated by the way they understand the terms ‘Black’ and ‘African American’, they also discuss how shared ancestries connect them to African Americans and other people of African descent across the world. This ancestral connection is accompanied by the similar historical conditions shared by African/Black people. They express how their shared histories of “forced labor, racial oppression, colonial conditions, and capitalist exploitation were global processes that incorporated Black people through empire building” (Kelley 2000:42) regardless of the nation-state they reside in. My participants believed these struggles should be read in congruence with one another. Take for instance, Sijuade, an academic who was born and raised in Nigeria, and immigrated to the United States on a Fulbright Scholarship to study African American history. While explaining to me the academic politics involved in separating African and African American communities, he says,

...African Studies programs across the country separated the contribution of African Americans to the study of Africa...But I'm happy to say because of the latter day migration of Africans to the United States and to some extent the Caribbean, the agenda have sort of returned to the source in which the diaspora is becoming increasingly a major component of African American Studies, of African Studies...I like to take some responsibility for that based on my specialization, my interests, my awareness of this issue over the last two decades. We have been able to keep everybody together under one umbrella. ~ Sijuade, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Nigerian

Here we see that through his work as an academic, Sijuade believes the study of the African continent and African American Studies should be studied as congruent disciplines. This is illustrated by his desire to keep “everybody together under one umbrella” in his capacity as a professor. Sijuade directly links the recent migration of continental Africans to the shifts in African American and African Studies regarding the African diaspora. That is to say, Sijuade views recent African migration to be responsible for expanding the concept of the African diaspora in African American Studies programs. Similarly, he believes that African Studies is also now invested in serious inquiry of African descended peoples outside of the African continent—specifically the contributions of African Americans to the study of the continent, as a result of Africans leaving and settling in the United States. These shifts not only highlight the congruent histories of those in the African diaspora and those on the African continent, but it also connects those in the diaspora to one another, and back to the African continent. This notion of shared historical struggles was prevalent among my participants. Hanna, who was born in Sudan to Ethiopian parents and works as a fiscal specialist at a hospital in Seattle, expresses similar sentiments as Sijuade when asked what a Black identity means to her. She replies,

It means....understanding the struggle that is currently going on and the struggle that has gone on previously, whether it be in Africa with European colonization or whether it be in America through slavery. ~ Hanna, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Hanna clearly expresses how she sees the history of continental Africans and the history of African Americans as connected when she says to be Black is to understand both these struggles. She implies that European colonialism of the African continent and the enslavement of Africans in the United States are historical events that resulted in the subjugation of both continental Africans and African Americans, and should be read as congruent histories that dominated and exploited people of African descent in similar ways, despite happening on different continents (Kelley 1999, 2000). Hanna expresses how a Black identity to her is one that connects her history as an Ethiopian to the histories of all Black people—regardless of ethnicity.

Like Sijuade and Hanna, Martha artfully articulates the argument at hand when I asked her what a Black identity means to her:

I never really thought about what it means in that sense. But I've always associated it with the recognition of colonialism and the vigilance and the resistance that colonized people face with their cultures, resources being exterminated, resilience in the face of structural inequalities, surviving in a world not meant for you. But it is also a term of solidarity with people who I don't necessarily have shared experiences or shared historical memory. I don't know what it is like to have family members who were descendants of slaves or who worked on sharecropping fields, but I identify with the struggle of equality and abolition of white supremacy. ~ Martha, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Martha clearly articulates that not only does a Black identity mean one has origins on the African continent, but she says that a Black identity is also an identity that places one in solidarity with “people who you don't necessarily have shared experiences or shared historical memory”, but one that allows her to identify with others of African descent

through “the struggle of equality and abolition of white supremacy.” For Martha, a Black identity is one associated with resilience and survival in a global racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva 1997) that subjugates all people of African descent—regardless of ethnicity. Like all my participants, she acknowledges distinct Ethiopian and African American histories, but also explains how these histories, through the struggle against global white supremacy, are connected. Succinctly expressed by Meron, a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Ethiopian and educator, who has been in the United States over 20 years, she says,

I am from Africa and any Black person is indigenous to Africa. The African American came here before me and they were classified as Black and I am part of that group, so I am Black. I couldn't be anything else. The space you occupy is in that realm so the Black history, the Black success, whatever is happening is yours. Whatever ethnic group it is, our destiny is the same, so you have to be part of the movement, the struggle, and everything to create the world we want for us, for all of us. ~ Meron, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

As Meron and so many of my other participants expressed, Black identity is equated with being of African descent. Meron also illustrates an additional phenomenon, the homogenization of blackness, which I will detail further in the following sections. She says, if one is of African descent in the United States, no matter your ethnicity, you, and by extension your history, becomes a part of the history of the construction of Blackness in the US. That Blackness, historically has been defined as African American (Kibona-Clark 2008), but because of the homogenizing effect of the racialized social system (Bashi & McDaniel 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Kibona-Clark 2008; Watts-Smith 2014), Ethiopian and Nigerian histories become subsumed into a larger Black history and thus the “Black history, Black success, whatever is happening...” also becomes a part of their histories. Essentially, my participants develop two histories that are read in congruence with one another—their distinct ethnic histories as Ethiopians and Nigerians—and the

broader Black history here in the United States. Black history here in the United States is the history and experience of African Americans. Once immigrating to the United States, my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants become a part of this history and experience. The absorption of Ethiopians and Nigerians histories into a broader African American history illustrates what sociologist Andreas Wimmer (2008a, 2008b) calls boundary expansion. As continental African populations immigrate to the United States, their distinct ethnic and national histories, and identities, become consolidated into a larger Black history and identity, expanding the definition of what it means to be Black in the United States.

In the next section, I detail how this shared Black racial identity leads them to develop a shared sense of linked fate with African Americans, and other people of African descent in the United States. Of particular importance to this development of linked fate are their perceptions that what happens to African Americans, specifically in the form of State violence, affects them also. Additionally, participants also point to how blackness in the United States is homogenized, and how their everyday lived experiences of racism and discrimination leads them to develop a shared sense of linked fate with African Americans and other people of African descent in the United States.

### **“It Could be Me”: African Immigrant Generational Linked Fate with African Americans**

In his seminal book, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics*, Michael Dawson (1994) argues that African Americans have developed a strong attachment to their racial identity due to shared historical experiences of racial oppression in the United States. Because race determines the life chances of African Americans, they

develop a group consciousness that articulates individual African American lives as tied to the lives of the Black racial group as a whole. Despite class, gender, and ideological differences, Dawson (1994) finds that a strong attachment to a Black racial identity and linked fate remains among the African American population. As the central focus of my research, I asked my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants questions about linked fate and whether they perceive their lives to be tied to the lives of African Americans. Ninety-two percent (or 36 of 39 participants), felt that what happens to African Americans has an effect on them and their lives. My participants defined linked fate with African Americans through centering their shared Black identity, and experiences of racism and discrimination (Johnson 2016; Nunnally 2010; Watts-Smith 2014). They talked especially about the highly publicized State violence against Blacks in the United States. Participants commonly expressed being intimately connected to what happens to African Americans. They often said “it could be me” or “it could be my children” to express their fear of State violence against Blacks. When asked about his reflections on events in Ferguson, Missouri and the Black Lives Matter efforts more broadly, Desta, a city employee and business owner who immigrated from Ethiopia in 2007, explains:

My feeling is none. You know why? This has been going on for the last 100+ years.....It stresses me out. Mike Brown can be my son tomorrow. Trayvon Martin can be my son. My son is American, he won't have a strong accent like I do, he was born and raised here in America and he'll be, just a Black kid. There is no reason why my son won't be a Trayvon Martin walking in the neighborhood. I don't know what I would do if that happened to my son, let me just put it that way.~ Desta, 1<sup>st</sup> generation Ethiopian

The long history of the systemic killing of Black males, children or otherwise, by the State is evident here for Desta as he reflects on the 2012 murder of seventeen-year old Trayvon Martin and the 2014 murder of eighteen-year old Michael Brown in Ferguson,

Missouri by Ferguson police officer, Darren Wilson. He feels that what happened to Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin, both African American kids, could easily happen to his son, who was a *newborn* at the time of our interview. The murders of Martin and Brown had Desta thinking about how his newborn son's life is already intimately connected to the lives of other Black children who have been victims of State violence.

Similarly, Tena, who emigrated from Ethiopia over twenty-five years ago expresses how she fears for herself and her family because of state violence. She tells me:

They just took a lady for changing a lane without a signal and she ended up dead under their watch, I mean, that could have been me, could have been you [referring to me], no telling. That's how I see this society, can I make it back to my house, without being arrested, without being harassed. You have to walk on the thin rope every day. I fear for my children, I fear for my husband, and definitely I fear for myself because discrimination is obvious, it's everywhere. That's how I feel about America ~Tena, 1<sup>st</sup> generation Ethiopian

Here, Tena, referring to the death of Sandra Bland, a Texas woman, who was found dead in a Texas jail cell after being stopped by police for an improper lane change, expresses linked fate with Bland by saying, "it could have been me, it could have been you". Tena does not use her "Ethiopianness" as a way to distance herself from Sandra Bland or other African Americans, but instead she feels her life as a Black woman in the United States is linked to both Bland and other Black women, through a shared Black identity that results in shared experiences of discrimination. Tena not only fears for herself, but she is also fearful for the safety of her children and her husband by noting that "you have to walk on a thin rope everyday....because discrimination is obvious."

Chidera, a second generation Nigerian, who is currently a graduate student, also reveals how she was affected by the killing of Sandra Bland:

...the last 3 weeks with Sandra Bland and all the other females, not to say that I didn't feel some type of way with the men that had been attacked because we know that that has always been the case, but Sandra Bland, that could very well have been me~Chidera, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Both Tena and Chidera express how their lives as a first generation immigrant, and a child of immigrants, respectively, are intimately tied to the life of Sandra Bland, an African American woman, by stating that Sandra Bland could have been them. This language illustrates that both these African women, from different generations, feel that what happens to African Americans, especially in the context of State sanctioned violence, has an effect on their lives. Meron, an educator, who immigrated in 1978, sums up what my participants felt:

...everything that happens to the African American community, happens in our communities too. So whether we like it or not, that's the fact ~ Meron, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

As Desta, Tena, Chidera, and Meron show, my participants, across both groups and generations, understand their lives tied to the lives and experiences of African Americans who have been victims of State sanctioned violence. All these participants illustrate that despite their ethnicity as Ethiopian or Nigerian, they are not exempt from State violence targeting African Americans (Benson 2006; Foner 2016; Johnson 2016; Rogers 2006; Vickerman 2016).

#### *Linked Fate Across the Diaspora*

For the African immigrants and their children in my study, linked fate was not only present with African Americans, but with all Black people here in the United States. As expressed by my participants in an earlier part of this chapter, they understand themselves as members of an international Black community (Kelley 1999) linked

together through shared ancestry and historical conditions, as well as shared contemporary experiences of racism and discrimination. Aniyah articulates the overall perception of my participants when she states:

But then for me in regards to being Black it also connects me to a larger community of people who go through similar experiences and just recognizing that the US has such a strong history of oppression, violence against Blacks, and recognizing that in some ways those experiences impact who I am, and will impact anyone who is considered Black ~ Aniyah, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

For my participants, linked fate with other Black people, not just African Americans, is based on their shared experiences of discrimination here in the United States. The “strong history of oppression and violence against Blacks” as Aniyah articulates, is what connects her as a child of Nigerian immigrants, to other Black people in the United States. Systemic anti-Black racism in the United States leads to feelings of linked fate because my respondents feel that all Black people, regardless of ethnicity, are impacted by the history of oppression against Blacks in the United States. Desta and Negus, respectively, make this connection explicitly clear when they state:

You show me that person is Black, I worry less about if he’s Jamaican or if he’s from Trinidad or if he’s Guinean...whether we like it or not, we all are in the same field now. Maybe we came here on different boats, now we’re in the same field and experiences we facing in the streets of Seattle and all over America for that matter is the same.

~ Desta, 1st generation, Ethiopian

Negus expresses a similar sentiment,

I’m a big picture kind of person. Big picture, when a white person walks by this room, what are they going to see? Two Black folks and my thing is I don’t care what your background is, I know we are still in the same struggle at the end of the day. So I see you as my sister [referring to me] and it’s the love that my parents showed me to have for another Ethiopian, another Eritrean, and people in the community, I’ve expanded it for myself to be for anyone else who is Black ~ Negus, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

For the Ethiopians and Nigerians in my study, linked fate with African Americans, and other Blacks, revolves around their shared ancestry and histories, as well as contemporary experiences of racism and discrimination. My participants believe that what happens to not just African Americans, but all people of African descent, has an impact on their lives, because they too, are Black in the United States. This is illustrated when the Africans in my study discuss how the violent killings of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland and countless other Blacks killed by the State, could have been them, or their children. Despite embodying different histories and cultural traditions, racial violence faced by African Americans is also felt by my participants who do not share the same ethnic or cultural backgrounds (Johnson 2016; Watts-Smith 2014). This finding points back to how my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants understand their Black identity. Black identity is viewed as a global identity that links people of African descent together through shared ancestry and historical conditions, as well as shared contemporary experiences of racism and discrimination in the United States.

In the next section, I detail the two underlying mechanisms that result in my participants developing linked fate with other people of African descent in the United States—1) the homogenization of blackness and 2) everyday lived experiences of racism and discrimination.

### **“Black Bodies is Black Bodies”: The Homogenization of Blackness**

As table 1 illustrates, all my participants identify racially as Black and ethnically as Ethiopian or Nigerian. Although my participants distinguished themselves ethnically from African Americans, their perception is that the racial classification system in the United States homogenizes Blacks into one group based on race, rendering their ethnic

identities of Ethiopian and Nigerian as invisible (Bashi-Treitler 2013). My participants' perceptions are not unfounded, as scholars across the social sciences (Bashi & McDaniel 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Kibona-Clark 2008; Watts-Smith 2014) have written about the structural constraints on racial/ethnic identity that homogenizes people into "big races" (Gullickson 2016). My conversation with Tolessa exemplifies this. When asked if he thought African immigrants and their children face racism and discrimination in the same ways as African Americans he replied,

I've seen a White person call an African and African American a nigger. Because when it comes down to it, it's about the race. Every Black person is the same, they'll look at Africans or African Americans in the same way ~ Tolessa, 1.5 generation, Oromo

Bershadu and Sijuade express similar sentiments. When asking Bershadu how she identifies racially and ethnically, she states:

I identify as Black Ethiopian. I identify as Black every day, all day, because when people see me, whether or not I tell them I am Ethiopian, whether I tell them I am Nigerian, or whether I tell them I am from the Caribbean, I'm a Black person to them and they are going to treat me like a Black person...I don't think they decipher ~ Bershadu, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Sijuade, uses his son, who is bi-racial Black/White, as an example of the homogenization of blackness when he says:

All these little White ladies think my son is cute now, but he will one day grow to be a Black man and we will see if he is still cute to them ~ Sijuade, 1st generation, Nigerian

Both Bershadu and Sijuade illustrate how my participants believe that Whites do not distinguish between different Black ethnic groups. For Bershadu, she says that she doesn't think people "decipher" between Ethiopians, Nigerians, or someone from the

Caribbean. She also says that whether she tells people or not that she is Ethiopian, she feels that she gets treated like a Black person. Thus, in Bershadu's experiences, she is treated "like a Black person" with no attention paid to her identity as an Ethiopian. She is just "simply" Black. We can see the same process at work with Sijuade as he discusses how "little White ladies" will grow to view his son as "simply" a Black man.

Interestingly, during our interview, and specifically in this quote, Sijuade never mentions that his son is bi-racial, nor a second generation Nigerian. His failure to mention either of these identities illustrates how my participants perceive that others do not recognize the ethnic and cultural distinctions among Blacks in the United States. Sijuade's failure to mention both his son's Nigerian background and his bi-raciality throughout our interview, exposes how blackness gets homogenized in terms of ethnicity, but it also illustrates how a first generation Black immigrant has embedded himself and his son within the historical framework of the African American experience by imposing the principle of hypo-descent on his son's identity. Neither his son's ethnicity, nor bi-raciality matters, the only thing that matters is that his son will one day be "simply" a Black man (Bashi-Treitler 2013; Kibona-Clark 2008; Watts-Smith 2014).

The homogenization of blackness, particularly in their interactions with Whites was quite present. Take for instance, Alem, a first generation Ethiopian who immigrated to the United States as a political refugee three years ago. When asking about his experiences with African Americans at a company he used to work for he said whenever something bad happened, the White managers would always implicate "us Black guys". The White manager, according to Alem, did not distinguish between him, an Ethiopian, and the African American men with whom he worked. They were all referred to as

“those Black guys” according to Alem. Other interactions with Whites centered on those in positions of authority and particularly those part of the State. My participants perceive that law enforcement, specifically, does not make a distinction between them and African Americans. Speaking to Dayo, who has an African American mother and a Nigerian father, about whether he has experienced tension between the groups, he says,

I’ve experienced a lot more solidarity than I have tensions. Here’s how you know there is solidarity. You know there is solidarity when a police officer unjustifiably murders a Black man in the streets...You interact with a Black person, whether they be an African American, Ethiopian, or Nigerian, they are upset about it...African people are just as hurt and invested as you are [as an African American]. Because why? At the beginning and the end of the day, that person is Black before they open their mouth, a lot of times they don’t get a chance to open their mouth. They know that could just as easily be a Nigerian child or an African American child, or an Ethiopian child. ~Dayo, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian and African American

Chidera expresses the same sentiment when reflecting on an incident she and her brothers had with the police. She recalls,

my brothers and I were in the car and I forgot to turn my lights on and it was night. And to see the interaction with the police officers with my brothers, who were just sitting in the car and him cussing at them and the way in which the police officers talking to them versus talking to me, the person who was actually the one who messed up. I guess in that moment, my Black identity is being highlighted, it doesn’t matter he sees my ID and my name is long, and has a lot of vowels in it, he’s just seeing us as Black people. ~ Chidera, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Nigerian

The racial classification system that results in a homogenized form of blackness leads my participants to develop racial solidarity with African Americans and other people of African descent here in the United States. As my participants’ experiences illustrate, to Whites, they are not Ethiopian or Nigerian, they are “just Black” (Butterfield 2004a). To

be Black in the United States, means one size fits all, despite the different histories, ethnicities, languages, and customs among people of African descent residing in the US.

### **Experiences of Racism Among African Immigrants and the Second Generation**

The second underlying mechanism that results in my participants developing linked fate with other people of African descent in the United States centers on their everyday experiences of racism and discrimination. Few studies to date have systemically documented African immigrants' experiences of racism here in the United States. With the exception of the recent works of Showers (2015) and Johnson (2016), African immigrants' every day lived experiences of racism have remained understudied in the social sciences. I uncover that the Ethiopian and Nigerian participants in my study, experience similar forms of racism experienced by African Americans in the classroom, with the police, and at their places of employment. These experiences lead them to develop linked fate with their African American, and other Black counterparts residing here in the United States. Experiences of racism for my participants and their children range from everyday racial micro-aggressions to being racially profiled by law enforcement. Participants also discussed how when others were clued in to their ethnic differences with African Americans, they faced other forms of discrimination centered around their language and accent, religion, and cultural stereotypes about the continent of Africa.

#### *African Immigrants and Racism in the Classroom*

Experiences of racism in the classroom were much more common among the children of African immigrants in my study than the first generation, who tended to be older and were already in the workforce. Experiences in the classroom centered around

others linking their blackness to their abilities. Negus, for example, tells me about an incident he encountered in the classroom with a professor:

...I'll be in an engineering class or a prerequisite, even better, and the teacher is talking up front, and I am the only Black kid in the class. I'm sitting towards the front, my sweats relaxed and chilling, professor is like, 'for anyone who doesn't know, this is Math 225: Calculus Level 2' and just looking dead at me. I know exactly what you are trying to say and I understand it's because I'm Black. ~ Negus, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

In this experience, Negus experienced what scholars have referred to as racial micro-aggressions (McCabe 2009). Racial micro-aggressions, defined by McCabe (2009) as brief, subtle, and covert, verbal and non-verbal acts and insults, experienced by subordinated groups frequently, oftentimes link the ability of minority students, such as Negus' experience with his professor in the situation above. The professor assumed, because Negus is Black, that he was in the wrong course. The assumption made by the professor through "looking dead at" Negus is that Black people, specifically Black men, are not interested in and/or do not have the ability to do level two Calculus. This assumption however, was indeed wrong, as Negus was an engineering major, and this particular class was a requirement for his degree.

Genevieve told me about a similar experience to Negus when she tells me about being Black and having to navigate her way through programs where there are very few other Blacks. She recalls:

I guess even with school, people always assume that you don't have the ability to do, especially in the pre-med classes, because probably, I'm the only Black person, once in a while, there will be like maybe one or two, but on average, I'm like the only Black person in my pre-med classes or in my lab. And people just assume that you're probably gonna be needing extra help to get through something. I'm like no, naw, naw, I got this, okay. And yea, just little micro-aggressions. ~ Genevieve, 1.5 generation, Nigerian

Similar to Negus, Genevieve, has experienced racial micro-aggressions from others in her pre-med classes, assuming—through verbal clues—that she does not have the ability to do the work and that she will need extra help. The racial micro-aggressions that Negus and Genevieve experience in the classroom are grounded in the pervasive stereotype of Blacks not being as intellectually inclined as White and Asian students, especially in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. With Negus and Genevieve’s experiences, the racial micro-aggressions they faced are based on this perceived lack of ability to do intellectual work, especially intellectual work in math and “hard” sciences. Interestingly, their ethnic backgrounds are not important in the classroom setting, because they are perceived to be Black first and foremost and thus, “out of place.” These experiences by my participants are contrary to the pervasive narrative that characterizes Black immigrants and children of Black immigrants as “model minorities” (Rogers 2006; Sowell 1979; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1999). This stereotype hides experiences of racism in the form of racial micro-aggressions that my participants experience in the classroom. These experiences also highlight how stereotypes associated with African Americans are imposed on African immigrants and their children (Kibona-Clark 2008; Pierre 2004).

Royowa, speaks of a similar experience where her intelligence and ability were linked to her blackness by a White classmate, who she referred to as a “jock”. She recalls this experience,

I did really well in terms of college, I applied to the top UCs and Stanford, and got into all of them....But I remember in high school, this one jock, this White guy, who didn’t do his homework, didn’t do his work, but thought he could just get into school by acing the standardized test and playing football. He was sorely

disappointed and started interrogating me about what my GPA was, what my test scores were, all this bs. And I am kind of like in hindsight, if I was a White girl, he wouldn't have done that. I think he was trying to get into the 'oh you got in because of this' but when I told him that my unweighted GPA was higher than his weighted GPA, that shut his ass up. ~ Royowa, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Royowa explains how her mediocre white, male, classmate believed that he could and should be admitted to the top University of California system schools by doing well on standardized exams and having played football. The act of asking Royowa about her GPA and test scores signals a form of verbal racial micro-aggression because he assumed that Royowa couldn't possibly be admitted to top tier universities by intellect and ability alone because she is Black. Additionally, these actions are also non-verbal because the white male student is implying that Royowa must have been admitted as an "affirmative action" case (McCabe 2009). Royowa challenges his assumptions of her and Black people by telling him that her "unweighted GPA was higher than his weighted GPA".

Returning to Negus' experiences, when asking him if a Black identity is important to his self-image, he replies:

..it dominates my self-image. I know when I walk into my engineering classes...with my sweats, it will not present a good impression ever because it will only hurt my case of how others will form their opinion of me. But then on the first midterm, when I kill it and I'm like hey! An A! and I'm laughing with my friend [who is Black] because we actually studied together. Other people are hearing us and like, what? You scored what? I'm like yea. The next time we have class and are told to get in groups, White people are like, hey can I be in your group. I'm like, eh, no new friends. ~ Negus, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Here again we read how Negus describes how because he is Black, male, and enjoys wearing sweatpants, others perceptions of him rests on the stereotypes associated with young Black urban males—stereotypes that characterize him as unintelligent, lazy, and not engaged in his courses. The expectation, like Royowa experienced, is that someone

like him is not supposed to do well on their midterm exams, or be admitted to top tier universities because they are Black. Similar to Royowa, Negus resists the assumptions made by his White classmates about blackness by excluding them from his next study group.

Furthermore, the 1.5 and second generation also expressed how, similar to some African Americans, they felt that they were made to feel as if they represented the entire Black race (Feagin and Sikes 1995). Further into my conversation with Royowa, she highlights this when I asked her if her Black identity is important to her self-image. She replies,

Yes it's important to me, and it has these limits, but I don't focus on those. You automatically know what it's like to be judged essentially because we are always being judged and it's a huge burden. I remember when I was in grad school, one of my best friends, she was in medical school and we were commiserating over not doing well on exams. And she was like when I don't do well, it's like why did they let her in here. And I was like, 'yea it sucks, it's not just you not doing well, it's you letting your race down.~ Royowa, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

In this passage, Royowa illustrates, through a conversation with her best friend, the pressure she feels to not just achieve, but to constantly be perfect because if she doesn't do well on an exam, it's not just a reflection of herself, but a reflection of Blacks as a whole.

For my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants, particularly those in the 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation who were attending college, or had attended college, their experiences with racial micro-aggressions (McCabe 2009), and pressures to be representatives of the entire Black race (Awokoya 2012), are consistent with the experiences of many African Americans and other racial minorities in the United States, especially African Americans in the middle class (Feagin and Sikes 1995).

## *African Immigrants and Law Enforcement*

The overwhelming majority (77%) of my participants told me that their interactions with police had been fine. While they hadn't had negative experiences with the police, there was an overall lack of trust of law enforcement among these participants due to police brutality against Blacks in the United States. Only four of my participants expressed outright trust in law enforcement. Approximately 13% of participants who had negative personal experiences with police, cited how they believed the police held racial bias against them because they are Black.

Alem, a first generation Ethiopian immigrant, who came to the United States as a political refugee and asked not to be voice recorded due to his status as a political refugee, told me about an experience with the police that opened his eyes to how people of color are treated in the United States. According to Alem, he was driving, and a man he describes as White, hit his car on the front passenger side, then attempted to speed off. Alem said he didn't know what to do in this situation, so he followed the guy. Finally catching up with him, he called the police. Once the police officer arrived, Alem said he was told to sit in his car. The officer went over to the other driver. According to Alem, he was sitting in his car thinking the officer was going to come and ask him what happened. Instead the police officer ticketed him. The officer cited him for "improper lane change" he said. Continuing on, Alem said he tried to talk to the officer, but there was a language barrier, and the officer was not willing to listen to him. According to Alem, the other driver drove off laughing. As he reflected upon this incident he began tearing up saying he was very upset, and began to cry after being cited. He said this

incident with the police made him realize that people of color are not treated fairly and judged solely on color in this country.

Tolessa, through an experience at an intramural basketball game in college, described how he feels that police wrongfully target Blacks because of their racial biases:

I really don't like involving myself with the police because they take the authority, they abuse their power basically....at school, I was in a fight and two police officers came to the place. They had no idea what was going on. Our team was all Black, and the other team was mostly white and the police officers come in and came to our side, handcuffed some of us asking questions. They didn't know the whole story, they just came to our side. ~ Tolessa, 1.5 generation, Oromo

Similar to Alem's experience, the police officers called to Tolessa's intramural basketball game, assumed the all Black basketball team were the perpetrators in the fight, without asking them their side of the story. From Alem and Tolessa's view, the officers illustrated and engaged in racial bias and discrimination by assuming that the Black people involved in each case, were the guilty parties, giving Whites in the situation, the benefit of the doubt. Alem and Tolessa's perspective is not unfounded as the United States has a history of constructing blackness, and specifically Black men as perpetrators of crimes. Despite having roots in other countries, the participants who had negative personal interactions with law enforcement, experienced similar forms of racial bias and discrimination by police, as African Americans. Being the victim of everyday shared experiences of racism and discrimination causes my participants to feel their lives are tied to the lives of individual African Americans, and the Black race as a whole. Despite not sharing the same history, culture, or traditions as African Americans, both Ethiopians and Nigerians, across generations, in my study, believe law enforcement treats them as if they are African American (Foner 2016; Johnson 2016; Pierre 2004). Interactions with law

enforcement, whether through direct contact or through the collective racial trauma enacted by the State on African Americans like Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Sandra Bland, State violence and racial discrimination is central to why and how African immigrants and their children develop linked fate with African Americans and other Blacks in the United States.

### *African Immigrants and Racism at Work*

My participants also talked about the racism and discrimination they faced at their places of employment. Participants who spoke about racism at their place of employment were more likely to be 1<sup>st</sup> generation. Their experiences in their work context centered around how their Blackness elicited a lack of trust in their abilities and legitimacy from colleagues and clients.

Oba, spoke with me about the discrimination he faces at work saying:

Being a nurse, going into a patient's room, automatically they think you are the aide until you tell them you are actually the nurse taking care of them. And then some of them kind of reject you, they will ask for a whole different person to take care of them. So at work it's a little challenging sometimes. I don't get that a lot, but sometimes, especially when you dealing with a white patient ~ Oba, 1<sup>st</sup> generation Nigerian

Oba explains how White patients will sometimes assume he is not qualified to be their nurse, assuming that he is the nurse's aide because he is Black. Although male, Oba's experience is consistent with the experiences of African immigrant women nurses working in the healthcare industry here in the United States. Patients will oftentimes question the legitimacy of African immigrant women nurses, assuming they are nurses' aides (Showers 2015). Like Oba, Meron, a business owner, is assumed to be "the help,"

not the person in a position of authority. When I asked her had she ever faced racism and discrimination, she replied:

All the time. When is it that you don't face that? In my own work place. I own the school, but as people walk in they think I am the janitor. They want to see the director. I say, yea I am [the director]. People would apply for a job and they come for the interview then are looking for the owner, the person they can talk to. They say, 'I'm here for an interview, who do I talk to. ~ Meron, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Both Oba and Meron describe instances where largely White Americans assume that neither of them are the person of authority precisely because they are Black. For Oba, White patients assume he is the nurse's aide and not the nurse in charge of their care. For Meron, who is the owner of an educational business in a mostly White area of Seattle, is assumed to be "the help" instead of the director of the school. In both these examples, the actions of the White clients present a lack of trust in Oba's and Meron's abilities, and the legitimacy of them being in positions of authority. Tesfaye, a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Ethiopian unveils these same actions by Whites in his work as a pharmacist. He says,

...I identify as Black and I know racism exists, overt and covert racism, and I have lived with it especially in the work context. Sometimes people might find that when you have an accent, they might have a difficult time accepting your professional advice. They might think that, especially in this field, sometimes I see some people's hesitation to accept my counseling in the pharmacy field, they think that oh this guy has an accent, what does he know? ~ Tesfaye, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Tesfaye connects his experience of clients questioning his knowledge of pharmaceutical drugs and his ability to counsel clients about these drugs, to his blackness. The act of questioning Tesfaye's professional knowledge is grounded in his client's' assumptions that he is not qualified to be a pharmacist. The experiences of Tesfaye, Meron, and Oba harkens back to the experiences of the 1.5 and second generation in the classroom, where

their intellectual and leadership abilities are linked to their race as Blacks. Across these contexts, blackness becomes almost synonymous with inferior intellectual and leadership ability, as compared to Whites. Thus, the participants in my study who are intellectually driven in the classroom, and assume positions of authority in their workplace, face racism from Whites who question their intellectual and leadership abilities. In his quote above, Tesfaye also links the racism he faces in his workplace to his accent. Some of my participants identified accent, religion, and misconceptions about the African continent as additional forms of discrimination faced by Africans, but not their African American counterparts. These added layers of discrimination are discussed in the following section.

*Added Layers of Discrimination: Accent, Religion, and Cultural Representations*

Deeper into my conversation with Tesfaye, I asked him if he thinks Africans face the same type of racism and discrimination as African Americans. He replied,

...it might be double. Whenever a people are racist, for them it's just one brush, everybody is Black. And then for us, a second detrimental, I always discuss this with my son, we have also an accent. It all shows us because we couldn't express ourselves, we couldn't display our emotions, we couldn't say what's inside, we are struggling, it's a kind of language. I don't know how the African American will see it, but the African immigrants have that double, double problem to climb. The racism from the folks that see Black folks as haven't achieved, or who doesn't belong here, and also that language barrier ~ Tesfaye, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Here Tesfaye explains that African immigrants face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans through their shared Black identity in the United States, but he also expresses how African immigrants have a “second detrimental” or layer of discrimination, that African Americans do not have to deal with—the language and accent barrier. Alem spoke of this as well. When asking him if he thought White Americans treated African immigrants better than African Americans, he said no, but that

he thought African Americans may have a slight advantage because they speak English better than some Africans. He also said he thinks African Americans, because they know the culture, and are Americans, can better defend themselves because they know the language. Like Tesfaye, Alem perceives that White Americans generally don't treat African Americans and African immigrants any differently, but that when ethnic differences become apparent—through speech patterns for example—Whites discriminate against African immigrants because of their accent when speaking English. This finding is consistent with the works of Butterfield (2004b) and Showers (2015), who find that second generation West Indians and first generation African immigrant nurses, respectively, perceived their accents to be a source of discrimination.

A few of my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants also believed that religion was also a source of discrimination faced by Africans and not African Americans. Because the African immigrant population is so varied in terms of religion, some of my participants suggested that being a part of a visible religion other than Christianity, had the potential to add to the discrimination that Africans face. For example, Chidera, who is Christian, explains how she thinks accent and religion play a role in the way Africans are treated. She says,

I think there are variations depending upon how evident one is from their home country. So like here in Seattle, if one is wearing a hijab, their blackness is not thought of, it's their religion. I think if one has an identifier or if one has an accent then I think that's something that can sometimes overlay people. ~  
Chidera, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Bershadu expresses similar sentiment when discussing the 1999 murder of Amadou Diallo at the hands of New York City police officers and the differences in how she

perceives the treatment of African American boys and African immigrant boys. She states,

“I feel like there’s elements to foreign and domestic, treating us like foreign criminals. I’ve never seen an immigrant African dying at the hands of an officer, there probably are. Immigrant African boys are always causing trouble and they are stupid and they don’t know what they are doing with their lives, but they never get killed. These African American boys all across the nation are getting killed and they aren’t armed, they aren’t doing anything. Why are they being killed so easily, but we get arrested a million times. I think there is a different way of treating Africans and African Americans in this unjust justice system. He [referring to Amadou Diallo] was Muslim, and that maybe has to do with religion too, but that also plays a role in crimes too. ~Bershada, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

While Chidera believes that a Muslim who is Black in Seattle solely experiences Islamophobia, Bershada takes a more nuanced approach perceiving that Diallo’s Islamic faith and his blackness played a role in his killing at the hands of New York City police officers. Ajrouch and Kusow’s (2007) work with Somali immigrants in North America reveals Bershada’s intersectional approach to discrimination. Ajrouch and Kusow (2007) find that despite Somali immigrants thinking of themselves as Muslims first and foremost, they are also “othered” by their blackness as well. Thus, not only is their Islamic faith a source of discrimination in the Canadian context, but their blackness also “otherizes” them. Interestingly, Bershada’s response also illustrates how law enforcement might potentially treat immigrant Blacks differently than African Americans when she describes how African immigrant boys almost “never get killed” by police officers, but African American boys do. While there have been high profile cases involving African immigrant deaths at the hands of police (Johnson 2016), Bershada’s reflections signal the possibility of differential treatment of Blacks based on national origin.

Finally, a few participants talked about how African immigrants faced discrimination based on the misrepresentation of the African continent as a *country*, ravaged with diseased, and poverty ridden people who were in need of saving. On the opposite end of the same racist spectrum, Africans are viewed as the “exception”, or are “exotic” in juxtaposition to African Americans. Aniyana and Elsabet give insight into these narratives when I ask them if they think African immigrants and their children get treated differently than African Americans and whether they think Africans face racism and discrimination in the same ways as African Americans.

Some same, some different. Because of the general racism within the US and different in regards to accents and stereotypes people have about Africa, for instance, that Africa is a country, not a continent. So I think there are some things that are similar and some things that are worse. I do find that in some situations people like to make Africans the exception, talk like ‘oh you are not Black, you are African’, kind of like pitting them against [one another], whether it be the exception or an exoticizing of them, which are both different versions of the same thing ~ Aniyana, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

In response to the same questions, Elsabet replies,

“yes, that [white Americans treating African immigrants different] became evident to me from the moment I got to this country because I was too naïve to understand all the nuances being used to insult me even as they were complimenting me, that was very strange. So like the term ‘exotic’ was frequently used to describe me, ‘you’re not like them’ was one....from the physical description to the way my behavior or the way I carried myself was described and used to separate me from African Americans and it was very confusing, very very confusing. So you look at yourself in the mirror and clearly you are Black, and somebody tells you you’re not Black.” ~ Elsabet, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Elsabet continues,

...generally, white people, whether in the US or abroad, the more they think you need their help, the kinder they are to you. So when they approach us when we are here in this country, they have this perception of what Africa is and why we are here, like we are starving, uneducated, we are savages that need saving, our

religions are superstition...we have never lived in proper homes. It's like there is work to be done here. We can civilize you or teach you how to worship, or who to worship, and how to behave. There is still a chance for us to shape you in the way that we like Black people to be as opposed to those African Americans who won't listen. So yea.~ Elsabet, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Both Aniyan and Elsabet tell me about experiences where they have dealt with the misrepresentation of the African continent and how they have experienced racial micro-aggressions in the forms of being told they are “exotic” or “exceptions” (McCabe 2009). Aniyan says that Africans are treated the same as African Americans through the “general racism within the United States,” but that Africans also suffer from the mischaracterization of the African continent as “a country, not a continent”. Similarly, Elsabet articulates this same sentiment when she says that Whites have the perception that Africans are “starving, uneducated” and have “never lived in proper homes.” She goes on to articulate a much deeper connection between this misrepresentation of the African continent and her experience being the “exception” or “exotic”. She links White Americans’ perception of Africans to their attempt to “civilize”, or make Africans into their image of the way they “like Black people.” This image is juxtaposed to African Americans who are characterized in the White mind as not being grateful. This paternalistic attitude towards Africans feeds into Aniyan and Elsabet’s experiences of being “exoticized” or “exceptions” by White Americans. Aniyan speaks of being made an “exception” by being told that she is not Black, but African. She viewed this as her Africanness and blackness being pitted against one another. Elsabet relays a similar message when she describes how White Americans would tell her she was “exotic” and being told “you’re not like them.” This confused Elsabet who said Whites told her she wasn’t Black, but she would look in the mirror and see that she was “clearly” Black. For

both Aniyan and Elsabet, White Americans made them exotic and exceptions, or “good Blacks” juxtaposing them to African Americans, who Whites considered “bad Blacks” (Rogers 2006).

Aniyan and Elsabet were both uncomfortable with these experiences, for good reason. In her article, “Black Immigrants in the United States and the ‘Cultural Narratives’ of Ethnicity, Jemima Pierre (2004) documents how the social sciences, sociology in particular, has developed theoretical frameworks whereby Black immigrant cultural distinctiveness and success, frames African Americans as culturally deficient. Pierre (2004) argues that the discipline of sociology is not only ignorant to global Black culture and histories, but through this cultural superior narrative of Black/African immigrant success, it neglects how the West also racializes Africans as culturally deficient through its pathological representation of the African continent. In other words, Pierre (2004) argues that the emphasis on Black/African immigrant cultural differences with African Americans ignores the similarities across the African diaspora (Kelley 1999)—especially in terms of shared histories of struggle against global anti-Black oppression—but it also neglects how Africans and the continent of Africa are characterized as, in the words of Aniyan and Elsabet as “a *country*” filled with “starving, uneducated” “savages that need saving...” Pierre’s (2004) argument that the West views Africans and African Americans, and Blacks more generally, in the same ways, is consistent with what my participants in this study expressed also. Furthermore, the reluctance and uncomfortable feelings experienced by Aniyan and Elsabet to the “compliments” of them being exotic or exceptions, in contrast to African Americans, is

rooted in this larger global framework that views all Blacks, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, as culturally inferior.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that my upwardly mobile Ethiopian and Nigerian participants, across generations, and groups, identify their racial identity as Black, signaling that embracing a Black identity does not necessarily lead to downward mobility as the Black immigrant literature suggests. Moreover, while this scholarship tends to characterize immigrant identity in an either/or framework, I show how my participants understand themselves as Blacks, but not African American. Ninety-two percent (92%) of my participants view Black as a racial category comprised of various ethnic groups. Their Ethiopian and Nigerian identities were identified as specific ethnic groups nested within the larger Black racial category. African American was also identified as a specific ethnic group by most. Thus, my participants do not equate a Black identity with an African American identity. While the overwhelming majority in my sample identified Black as a racial category, there were some who understood the category in multiple and alternative ways. Some participants understood Black to be both a racial category, as well as the specific ethnic group who trace their heritage back to the US South. Others understood Black and African American to be synonymous, but not in the same way as the Black immigrant literature has suggested. Instead of Black being equated with an African American identity, these participants understood Black/African American to be a pan-ethnic category where one specifies the “type” of African American one is. This finding illustrates the complexity of identity for my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants. This data also signals that the identity formation processes of African immigrants and

their second generation children is perhaps different from the processes that West Indian and Haitian immigrants undergo. As Butterfield (2004a) and Clerge (2014) illustrate, West Indians and Haitians understand the term African American to be one that is associated strictly with those whose heritage extends back to the southern United States. The evidence presented in this chapter tells a far more complex story of the term African American for African immigrants and their children.

For the Ethiopians and Nigerians in my study, a Black identity is one that connects them to others in the United States through shared ancestry, and histories of struggles against global Black/African subjugation. This ancestral connection links their histories as Ethiopians and Nigerians, to the histories of African Americans and others in the African diaspora and contribute to a shared sense of linked fate in the US context. Of particular importance to the development of linked fate with others in the diaspora is their perception that what happens to African Americans has an effect on their lives. Recent killings of unarmed Black men, women, and children by police, drove this narrative, as they reflected on how Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, and a host of others, could have been them or their children. Related, my participants also discuss how the homogenizing nature of the US racialized social system (Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Kibona-Clark 2008; Watts-Smith 2014) and their everyday experiences of racism and discrimination (Nunally 2010; Watts-Smith 2014) also lead them to develop a shared sense of linked fate with other people of African descent in the United States. Participants discussed how their ethnic identities as Ethiopians and Nigerians did not seem to matter very much in their day to day interactions with others. It was “simply” their blackness that others saw. The respondents in my study talked at

length about the discrimination they faced in the classroom, at their place of employment, and when dealing with law enforcement. While my participants believed that they faced the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans by simply being Black in the United States, some also talked about their accents, religion, and the gross mischaracterizations of the African continent as additional layers of discrimination they face. Despite the different ways in which Africans experience discrimination as compared to their African American counterparts, ninety-two percent (92%) believe that what happens to African Americans, has an effect on their lives.

In addition to providing a more nuanced understanding of the Black racial category, Black identities generally, and African immigrant identities specifically, this chapter has also identified the institutional and political constraints to African immigrant identity in the US context. Through their understanding of themselves as members of the Black racial category, and attaching ancestral and historical connection to African Americans and their Black identities, they are actively engaging in boundary expansion (Wimmer 2008a, 2008b), specifically the expansion of the Black racial boundary. Moreover, my participants identify the homogenizing effects of the US racial social system and their navigation of similar institutional contexts as African Americans to be the underlying mechanisms that lead them to develop a shared sense of linked fate with native born African Americans. These mechanisms are part of the institutional and political structures—along with the one drop rule (Davis 1991)—that places constraints on the identity formation of African immigrants and their children. African immigrants and their children enter into a society where there is a high degree of consensus on who belongs to the Black racial category. The high degree of consensus results is a far less

fluid, or permeable Black racial boundary. Thus, because they believe that Whites do not recognize the ethnic differences among Blacks, and because they are navigating similar institutional contexts as African Americans, my African participants understand that whether or not they highlight their ethnic and cultural identities with African Americans, at the end of the day, their identities are constrained by these larger institutional and political forces that render them “just Black” (Butterfield 2004b).

## CHAPTER III

### ETHNIC DISTINCTIONS AND EVERYDAY ETHNICITY: ETHNIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

In the previous chapter, I identified and illustrated the institutional and political constraints on African immigrant identity. Within these constraints, however, individuals and groups oftentimes engage in various strategies of ethnic boundary-making (Wimmer 2008a, Wimmer 2008b) to erect symbolic boundaries—distinctions made by individuals or groups that separate people into different groups and create feeling so similarity and group membership (Lamont and Molnar 2002). This chapter details the strategies African immigrants and their children engage in through their ethnic identification, to create symbolic boundaries between themselves and African Americans. I begin this chapter with a discussion of how my African participants identify ethnically, illustrating how they actively engage in boundary contraction—drawing narrow boundaries around their ethnic identities (Wimmer 2008a, 2008b) and African Americans. I demonstrate boundary contraction through my participant’s understandings of themselves, and African Americans as distinct ethnic groups nested within the larger Black racial category. While my African participants were engaged in boundary contraction, this was not accompanied by ethnic distancing.

Next, I discuss the meanings they attach to these ethnic identities, and how the understanding of ethnicity among the 1.5 and second generation is far more complex than for the first generation. I illustrate this complexity through the 1.5 and second generation’s flexible understanding of the African American boundary. The flexibility of the African American boundary was particularly evident in the final section of this

chapter that discusses boundary-making strategies among the 1.5 and second generation. Unlike the first generation, all of my 1.5 and second generation African participants had bicultural identities—identities that combined elements from both their Ethiopian or Nigerian cultures, and African American culture (Phinney and Devich-Navarro 1997; Vasquez 2014) The 1.5 and second generation actively engaged in the blending of cultural traits from both backgrounds, giving them the ability to cross boundaries between their ethnic communities and African American communities. This flexible ethnicity (Vasquez 2010) is illustrated through my participant’s integration with African Americans particularly through student union groups and African American social and professional organizations. These findings suggest the boundaries between the children of African immigrants and African Americans is becoming increasingly blurred (Alba 2005; Alba and Nee 2003; Wimmer 2008a, 2008b).

### **Ethnic Identification**

As Table 1 illustrates, eighty-two percent (82%), or 32 out of 39 of my participants identify ethnically as Ethiopian or Nigerian. The other eighteen percent (18%) in my sample identified as Igbo or Oromo, which are “lower levels of differentiation” (Wimmer 2008b:1036) nested within their Ethiopian or Nigerian identities. These participants illustrated the essence of the multi-level character of identity (Wimmer 2008a) as they understand and view their racial identity as Black and nested within that Black category is their Ethiopian or Nigerian identities; within those Ethiopian and Nigerian identities are additional layers, such as Oromo or Igbo. These participants also demonstrate a strategy of boundary contraction as they emphasize these lower levels of differentiation. Moreover, for the African immigrants and their second

generation children who claim an African American ethnic identity, they understand this to be an identity that allows them to “embrace their African culture” and “also celebrate their experiences in America and how their new country has helped shape who they are” (Kibona-Clark 2008:172). These few participants embraced both the African and American parts of their identities. Not surprisingly, these respondents were all children of immigrants. As I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter, a surprising number of my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants have multiple understandings of the term African American, and these multiple understandings illustrate not only the lack of consensus of who is African American, but it also illustrates the flexibility of the African American ethnic boundary.

#### *African American, Ethiopian, and Nigerian as Ethnic Group*

The Black immigrant literature argues that a Black racial identity is equated with an African American identity (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997). More contemporary scholarship, however, has shown that Black immigrants understand themselves as Black, but not African American (Balogun 2011; Butterfield 2004a; Clerge 2014; Imoagene 2012). As illustrated in chapter two, their findings indicate that Black immigrants understand African Americans to be a separate ethnic group under the Black racial category. Consistent with the works of these scholars, I find that 56% of my participants understand African American to refer to a specific ethnic group that is nested within the larger Black racial category. Their ethnic identities as Ethiopians and Nigerians are also specific ethnic groups that fall under the larger Black racial category. This finding, along with other scholar’s work, signals that Black migration is shifting the American ethno-racial landscape through Black immigrants and their children’s understanding of

themselves as Black, but not African American. Tesfaye, a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Ethiopian, makes this clear when he tells me,

Well, I knew for sure I couldn't identify as African American, the experience is totally different. I have a couple of friends and we talked about their experience from slavery,.... but I don't have that experience....so there is no, there is no African Americanness. But I identify as Black. I am Black, I identify as Black although I am Ethiopian.~ Tesfaye, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Here, Tesfaye expresses how African Americans have a different historical experience than he does as an Ethiopian—one that he cannot identify with even though both African Americans and Ethiopians are Black. Tesfaye establishes a shared Black identity with African Americans, but he also illustrates the distinct ethnic histories of African Americans and Ethiopians through his articulation that his ancestors did not experience chattel slavery. As Tesfaye eludes to in a conversation with his African American friends, the African American ethnic narrative has been anchored by slavery, Jim Crow, and State sanctioned racial violence (Johnson 2016), an experience that Tesfaye, as an Ethiopian, does not have. Similarly, Alem, also a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Ethiopian, who if you recall from chapter two, did not want to be voice recorded, tells me that he views the 'Black community' as one that is inclusive of all people of African descent. He says that he believes that people of African descent are "all the same people", but expresses later on in our conversation, that African Americans and Africans have "different styles, cultures, and ways of thinking". He says that "language and culture" are the only things that divide Blacks. Alem, like Tesfaye, sees himself as part of a larger 'Black community' in the United States, but he also delineates the ethnic differences between African Americans and Ethiopians.

Ngozi, a second generation Nigerian illustrates the argument at hand when she tells me about her experiences with African Americans. She says,

Oh I identify with them a lot. It's like even though I am Nigerian American or African, their struggles, I feel their struggle. I don't feel myself as any different and I have a lot of African American friends. When we talk about the struggle, we are all in it. Yes, my background might be different.....but it doesn't make my struggle any less. ~ Ngozi, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Again, we see Ngozi speak of a connection with African Americans through their shared Black identity and the struggles of being Black in the United States, while simultaneously distinguishing between her background as a “Nigerian American or African” and that of her African American friends. As illustrated in chapter two and reiterated here, the Ethiopians and Nigerians in my study, understand themselves as part of a larger Black racial category. Their Ethiopian and Nigerian ethnic identities are nested within this larger Black category. Thus, my participants do not equate blackness with African Americaness, nor do they distance themselves from blackness, as theories of Black immigrant incorporation suggests.

### **Ethnicity as Familial and Cultural Legacy**

The ethnic identities of Black immigrants have tended to be linked to socioeconomic mobility in the existing Black immigrant literature (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997; Waters 1994, 1999), but the meanings they attach to their ethnic identities has been understudied. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) note that ethnic identity gives individuals the answer to the question, ‘where do I come from?’ (161). The responses to these questions are oftentimes expressed through language of kinship, a sense of nation and family, or a sense of common origin or ancestry.

In her article on second generation West Indian identity, Butterfield (2004a) finds that her participants understand their ethnic identity as West Indians to encompass specific cultural, historical, and migratory patterns that differ from those of African Americans. Other scholars have found African immigrants attached similar meanings to their ethnic backgrounds (Balogun 2011; Chacko 2005). Building on this scholarship, I explore the meanings Ethiopians and Nigerians in my sample give to their ethnic identities. Consistent with previous scholarship, I find that my participants understand their ethnicity in two main ways: as familial and cultural legacies, and as origins and roots on the African continent. Meron, a first generation Ethiopian who has been in Seattle for over 20 years, explains how she understands both African Americans and Ethiopians to be nested identities within the Black racial category and how there are different meanings attached to both. She responds:

When you say African American, you have that special food, that special language, communication, thinking, smells, all those things. Like when I say Ethiopian, but we are all Black.~ Meron, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Here Meron expresses how to be Ethiopian is to have “that special food, that special language, communication, thinking” and “smells” and how those characteristics are different from African Americans. Meron makes it clear that both African Americans and Ethiopians are Black, but certain types of characteristics— communication styles and language, for example— are associated with each group’s specific familial and cultural lineages. Hanna expresses the same sentiment when I asked her what it means to be Ethiopian. She replied:

I think being Ethiopian means holding on to a legacy, holding on to what my family has endured, whether that be fighting in the [Ethiopian] civil war or the oppression that the [Ethiopian] government put on them when growing up. The culture that they hold, the things that they do that I see myself doing. Whether that be the coffee ceremonies or wearing certain clothing, doing my hair a certain way, putting on henna, having that part to hold on to, being a part of that is beautiful. Being Ethiopian is having a strong grip of who my family is. ~ Hanna, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

For Hanna, connections to her familial and cultural lineage is expressed by being deeply rooted and knowledgeable of her family's legacy of struggle against the Ethiopian government, coffee ceremonies, and other cultural traditions. These things are at the center of an Ethiopian identity for her. Like most of my participants, Hanna expresses how being Ethiopian or Nigerian connects them to a specific set of traditions, practices, and histories. Genevieve shared similar reflections. Born in Nigeria and immigrating to the United States with her parents at the age of 14, she explains the essence of the argument at hand when I asked her what does it mean to be Nigerian/Igbo. She replies,

It means I have a set of traditions and a set of activities that were passed on to me that I'm familiar with...I'm coming from a line, a lineage of people that practice or have similar beliefs. I come from a similar heritage of people that practice or speak a similar kind of language and practice a similar kind of culture, eat similar kinds of food. It just means I share a history with a group of people that come from that region, Igbo place. Igbo land. ~ Genevieve, 1.5 generation, Nigerian

My participants make distinctions between their traditions, histories, foods, and languages, and those of African Americans, illustrating their understanding of the ethnic and cultural differences between themselves, African Americans, and others in the African diaspora. My participants have strong attachments to their ethnic identities which connects them to specific ancestral lineages and cultural practices. Ethnicity as familial and cultural legacies among my participants is consistent with the works of other

scholars who have explored the meaning of ethnic identity among Black immigrants and their children (Balogun 2011; Butterfield 2004a; Zephir 1996).

Martha, who is Oromo, but identifies her ethnic identity as Habesha, explains how her attachment to this ethnic identity gives her access to specific Habesha spaces,

it gives me access to spaces that a Black identity doesn't necessarily give me, like access to graduation parties, roots, the music, food, weddings, parties, access to cultural stuff. But it also affords me access to going back to somewhere in East Africa, and not be out to place, being able to stay engaged in a conversation about East African politics....It affords me privileges, but they only have meaning in Ethiopian cultural spaces or Afro-Caribbean spaces where everyone has that type of diaspora identity—recent memory of home, and home being not just the US, but somewhere else. ~ Martha, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

For Martha, her ethnic identity as Habesha—a unifying term used by some of my Ethiopian participants to denote the cultural connections between Ethiopians and Eritreans—gives her the knowledge and ability to access certain cultural spaces that her Black identity does not. These spaces are specific to the Habesha identity and culture, or other African diasporic identity spaces, where she says those who have identities linked to places outside the United States, come together around their “recent memory of home”. This home that Martha speaks of is the specific place of origin, that roots their families and ethnic groups on the African continent.

### **Ethnicity as Origins and Roots**

Participants tended to talk about their ethnic identities and this sense of home through their emphasis on home being a place that provides them with a sense of foundation and historical knowledge. The home spoken of by my participants roots them, or connects them and their families to a specific places of origin on the African continent. Take Desta for instance, when I asked him how he identifies ethnically, he replies:

I'm Black. Give me a job application, I'll just put Black. I'm not putting Ethiopian, Ethiopia is my place of origin, it's a location, I was born there. I will tell you I am from Africa, if you ask me from where in Africa, I will say Ethiopia  
~ Desta, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Desta states that his most important identity is Black, and that his Ethiopian ethnic identity clues people into his “place of origin” on the African continent. Like the overwhelming majority of my participants, Desta not only has a strong attachment to his Black racial identity, but he also illustrates how my participants understand their ethnic identities to be ones that root them to specific African geographical spaces. Negus, expresses a similar sentiment. When asking him how he identifies racially, he paints a picture for me:

I associate Black with African American and then I associate African American with Ethiopian American. If Black is right here [drawing me a picture on a sheet of paper where Black/African American is the umbrella term], I would have two things on the tree diagram, one of them would be African American and the other would be Ethiopian American.

Negus is one of the thirteen participants who understand the terms ‘Black’ and ‘African American’ as an ethno-racial category where one would then specify what “type” of African American they are. In the case of Negus, he is an African American who is specifically Ethiopian. As I probed deeper into how he thinks about these terms, I asked him if he considers those who are the descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States, to be African Americans also. He replies:

Yep, in the same way I would see myself as African American. And if someone really tries to ask me where I am from, or really what I am. Ethiopian American. I'm still an American, and I'm from Ethiopia. ~ Negus, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Although Negus views the terms ‘Black’ and ‘African American’ as a consolidated ethno-racial category, he still links his Ethiopian ethnic identity to a specific place on the African continent—an ancestral legacy he recognizes that African Americans do not have. He illustrates this when he says that he views himself as African American just like those who are the descendants of Africans enslaved in the United States, but if someone asks him where he from or what he “really” is, he says he would reply, “Ethiopian American.” Here Negus acknowledges not only that Ethiopia is his specific African American identity, but it is also his place of origin. Additionally, we also see how Negus understands himself to be an African American in the same way as native born African Americans, but unlike native born African Americans, he has the knowledge of knowing exactly what “type” of African American he is.

Other participants illustrated ethnicity as origin by talking about, and juxtaposing their identities to African Americans’ identities as well. Speaking with Ngozi, who was born here in the US to Nigerian parents, about how she identifies, she replies:

Oh I say Nigerian American. After I went to Ghana, I was like yea, I’m going to call myself Nigerian American. I used to call myself African American, but now more and more I am saying Nigerian American.

Probing deeper, I asked her why she made the switch and she says,

African Americans are folks who are obviously born here, they don’t have an historical lineage or background, they don’t know where they are from, so they get categorized as African American because they are African and they are American. I know where I am from....if one can say African American, they are from Africa, well more specifically I’m from Nigeria, so I think it would be fit to say Nigerian American.~ Ngozi, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

In this passage we read how Ngozi also understands herself as an African American, and specifically a Nigerian. Her ethnic identity shifted due to her trip to Ghana, which made her re-evaluate her identity in relation to native born African Americans. As Ngozi explains, she used to define, and call herself an African American because she identified with the ‘African’ and ‘American’ parts of the term. Since going to Ghana with African Americans, who cannot trace their heritage back to specific countries on the African continent, Ngozi’s ethnic identity has now shifted to a Nigerian American identity because as she says, she knows her specific cultural origins.

Negus and Ngozi both illustrates the argument at hand—my participants’ ethnic identities constitute an attachment to specific places of origin on the African continent. Moreover, these participants challenge prevailing notions that Black immigrants and the upwardly mobile second generation, use their ethnic identities to distance themselves from African Americans. As Negus and Ngozi both illustrate, they do not distance themselves from African Americans, but rather include themselves in the African American category, along with native born African Americans. The only difference between the ‘African Americanness’ of some of the Ethiopians and Nigerians in my study, and native born African Americans, is that the Ethiopians and Nigerians are able to link their African Americanness to specific geographical origins on the African continent, while native born African Americans are “generic” African Americans.

### **Multiple Understandings of the term African American**

As I illustrated above with Negus and Ngozi, as well as in chapter two, not all of my participants understood the term African American to mean those who have multigenerational roots that lead back to the American South. Thirteen, or 33%, of my

participants view 'Black' and 'African American' as an ethno-racial category that includes all people of African descent in the United States. For these participants, they understood Black/African American as an umbrella, or generic, ethno-racial category describing all Blacks in the United States. One would then specify what "type" of African American they are. Chisom, a second generation Nigerian, gives insight into how these participants understand the term when I asked her if the terms Black and African American mean the same thing to her. She replies,

Black and African American mean the same thing when you are talking about someone, but the politically correct term used is African American, instead of Black. To say Black, it sounds more derogatory, even though it's really not.~  
Chisom, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Continuing, I ask her does she identify as African American, or if she has ever identified as African American and she replies:

yes, just because it's easier to just check a box than to explain my ethnic culture, yea. Technically, I am African American, specifically Nigerian American.~  
Chisom, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Here we see Chisom discuss that Black and African American mean the same thing and that, although she doesn't agree that Black is a derogatory term, she says that most people use African American as the politically correct term when referring to Blacks in the United States. She then goes on to say that she is an "African American, specifically Nigerian American." Chidera understands African American in a similar way. As a second generation Nigerian who grew up in the San Jose, California area and is now attending graduate school in Seattle, she explains that African American is an umbrella term that includes all people of African descent who reside in the United States. She states,

African American means all-encompassing of everyone who is Black in America. So those who have multi-generational roots in the United States due to slavery, those who are of Caribbean descent, those of African descent. So I consider myself as African American as a Census term, it's how we categorize people. And then Black American is one particular group that is part of African American, so Black American is multi-generational roots. ~ Chidera, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Here Chidera explains how she understands Black/African American to be an umbrella, or “all-encompassing” term that includes all people of African descent in the United States. Her identity as a Nigerian American is the specific type of African American, while, Black American is the specific ethnic group under the African American category who has multigenerational roots in the US South. Finally, I had three participants who understood the term African American to be one that referred specifically to recent African immigrants who had settled in the United States. Zauna gives insight into how these three participants think about the term African American. A second generation Nigerian, she replies the following, when I asked her if the terms Black and African American mean the same thing to her:

I think of myself when I think of an African American, I'm an African American... I'm full Nigerian, but I grew up in the United States of America, so I think that is the actual definition of African American that has a whole different history behind it, [rather]than with the whole slave trade and the generations growing up here who don't really know the culture of their ancestors. There are other traditions based on that too, from the South and everything, but they don't know the African side at all. ~ Zauna, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

As Zauna articulates, as a child of Nigerian immigrants, she considers herself and others like her, to be African Americans. For her, the term African American is reserved for those who reside in the United States and can trace their ancestry to specific places on the African continent. Thus, as a child of Nigerian immigrants, she is an American of African descent who is able to trace her ancestry directly to Nigeria, therefore, she is an

African American. According to Kibona-Clark (2008), African immigrants, especially those who have become American citizens, and their second generation children, feel they have every right to call themselves African Americans. Probing deeper, I asked Zauna what label she uses to refer to those whose are the descendants of Africans enslaved here in the United States. She referred to them as the “Black American community,” or Blacks. As I noted in chapter two, participants like Zauna, not only identify their race as Black, but they also understand Black to be a specific ethnic group as well.

While most of my participants understood the term ‘African American’ to be the specific ethnic group with multigenerational roots that lead back to the Southern region of the United States (56%), others contested the term viewing it as an umbrella, or all-encompassing term, that includes all people of African descent. Thus, African migration is causing the term ‘African American’ to be contested in this Post-Civil Rights era. The multiple ways of understanding who is African American by my African participants signals there is a lack of consensus, or agreement, around the African American boundary, making this boundary politically salient in this contemporary period. This means, that the lack of consensus around the category of African American is creating a boundary that is perhaps flexible and permeable. The shifting and contesting of the African American boundary can be illustrated in the debate over whether foreign-born and second generation Black immigrants should have access to affirmative action programs.

As part of the 1965 Civil Rights Acts, affirmative action programs were instituted within various sectors of American public institutions. Colleges and universities were no

different, originally institutionalizing affirmative action policies as a way to recruit native born African Americans into the top colleges and universities. These policies were originally viewed as restitution for past generations of exclusion. In 2003 Harvard law professor, Lani Guinier, recognized that a disproportionate number of Black students at Harvard had immigrant backgrounds. This led her to question the goals of affirmative action programs, and specifically whether Black immigrants and their children should benefit from these programs. A few years later, in a study comparing Black immigrants and native born African American attendance at selective colleges and universities in the United States, Massey, et.al (2007) confirmed Guinier's observations at Harvard, and found that Black immigrants were overrepresented at the nation's top private and selective colleges and universities. My participants' multiple understandings of the term African American goes to the heart of this debate on affirmative action as it appears admissions officers at colleges and universities throughout the United States illustrate a flexible and lack of consensus on who is African American. Thus, through Black migration to the United States, the African American boundary has become increasingly contested and convoluted, resulting in an unstable and politically salient boundary. This debate can be even further complicated through the identity formation of the 1.5 and second generation. As I detail below, the identity formation, and specifically the "everyday" ethnicities of the 1.5 and second generation in my study, highlights the bicultural identities of my participants and their engagement of strategies of boundary blurring and crossing.

### **"Everyday Ethnicity" Among 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Ethiopians and Nigerians**

While most of my participants discussed their ethnic backgrounds as connecting them to familial and ancestral legacies that originate, or root, them to specific countries on the African continent, many in the 1.5 and second generation also expressed their ethnic identities to be far more complex than did the first generation. In addition to viewing their Ethiopian or Nigerian ethnic identities as identities that root their familial and ancestral legacies to specific places, they also discussed a form of ethnicity that they embody on an “everyday” basis. These ethnic identities are grounded in their experiences growing up in the United States and particularly their interactions with African Americans.

### *Bicultural Identities and Selective Blending*

Previous scholarship focused on the identity formation of the children of immigrants have found that the identity development of the 1.5 and second generation tends to be much more complex than that of their first generation parents (Butterfield 2004a, 2004b; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Waters 1999; Vickerman 2006; Zephir 2006) as they are “situated within two cultural worlds and must define themselves in relation to multiple reference groups.” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001:150). This was no exception in my study, as the children of African immigrants exhibited a much more complex understanding of their identity than the first generation. The overarching strategy of ethnic identity development among my participants was bicultural identification. Bicultural identification, as defined by Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) is when ethnic minorities are “exposed to two cultures, their ethnic culture and the culture of the larger society” (3). In their study of African American and Mexican American adolescents in a Southern California high school, Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997)

find a significant number of adolescents who equally identify as ethnic and American, and developed an identity that combined elements from both their distinct ethnic culture as well as the broader American culture. Similarly, Vasquez (2014) identifies a form of biculturalism among some of the Latino/White intermarried couples in her study where couples actively engaged in blending “cultural traits from their and their partner’s ethnic backgrounds” (396).

The overarching strategy of ethnic identity formation among the children of African immigrants in my study was blended, or selective biculturalism. My participants actively selected cultural elements from both their Ethiopian or Nigerian cultures, and African American culture. Taken together, my participants embodied an “everyday” ethnic identity that was neither Ethiopian or Nigerian, nor African American, but both. Tolessa gives us insight to the identity formation of the 1.5 and second generation when describing his ethnic identity. He replies:

It’s a mixture of African, African American, American culture. I grew up in America, but at the same time, my parents taught me a lot about my culture [Oromo culture] and I’ve seen and learned a lot for myself through American culture. I’m all the cultures, it’s just hard to be one. So I consider myself unique. I’m mixed in between, where some of the stuff my parents taught me to do, I don’t commit fully to it. I pick up some parts of it that goes with my life and at the same time, I just pick parts of American culture, I don’t pick the whole culture. ~ Tolessa, 1.5 generation, Oromo

Here Tolessa clearly expresses the identities of my bicultural participants when he says his ethnicity is “a mixture of African, African American culture.” He goes on to say that he picks some parts of his parent’s culture and some parts of American culture—specifically African American culture—to create his “unique” identity. Negus also

considers himself as a blend of both his Ethiopian and American cultures. I asked Negus if he considers himself an American and he replies,

I don't think I have a choice. Personally, I think it's bullshit, sorry for my French, when people who are African have lived here for 20 years and will say I'm not an American, I'm African. I get it, that is great, but you've adapted to life in this society. To an extent you can still hold on to your African heritage, your African rituals, your culture, and say mix it together because what you really are is a blend. You're not a pure African, once you've been in a society for so long, it corrupts you. Corrupts is a harsh word, it changes your mindset, it changes how you think....social norms really do impact one's identity. ~ Negus, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

In this passage, Negus explains how he doesn't "have a choice" in whether or not he is an American because having grown up in the United States his "mindset" has changed and he has adapted to the "social norms" of American society. Through adapting to US social norms in the form of identity, Negus believes that one can only partially hold on to their "African rituals" or their African culture in US society because they have to "adapt to life in this society". For Negus, incorporation into the United States is not a "choice," and through incorporation, a person can no longer be "fully" African, but at the very least, one's identity is a "blend" or mix of both their African and American influences. Thus for him, his identity is a mix, of both Ethiopian and American culture. Tolessa and Negus' identity formation process is one where they have adopted certain cultural elements from both Ethiopian and American cultural contexts to create a bicultural identity for themselves. This bicultural identity is neither Ethiopian, nor American, but both. Aniyana expresses the essence of the argument when she expresses how she is somewhere in between being Nigerian and American. She stated,

I feel like I am somewhere in the middle of being Nigerian and American...among family here I am definitely Nigerian, but I am also American. But if I'm visiting with my family in Nigeria, I am definitely American. So for

me, I know that I am somewhere in the middle. I'm not quite Nigerian—I don't speak Yoruba, which is the language that my parents speak, and when I try, I have a really horrible American accent, but in regards to cultural values and foods and other things that make me, me, I am Nigerian. I grew up here, this is the place that's home and I would be a fish out of water if I moved to Nigeria. With that said, I just find myself somewhere in the middle.~ Aniyani, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Aniyani clearly articulates the feelings of these participants when she says she is “somewhere in the middle of being Nigerian and American.” She equates being “fully” Nigerian with speaking a native Nigerian language, and maintaining the cultural values and foods of Nigeria. For her, not speaking her parent's native Yoruba language makes her “less” Nigerian than someone who speaks the language, but her strong Nigerian cultural values and food ways make her not “fully” American. Therefore, Aniyani sees her identity as one that occupies a space in-between Nigerian and American culture. Aster expresses a similar sentiment. Born and raised in Tacoma, Washington, Aster's mom immigrated to the United States in 1992, with her dad following four years later. Growing up in the United States Aster tells me that she feels partly American, but she cannot say she is “strictly” Ethiopian because of the many American practices that she enjoys.

#### *Flexible Ethnicity and Boundary Crossing*

The bicultural, or selective blended identities of the children of African immigrants in my study gives them the ability to engage in boundary crossing. As Wimmer (2008a) and other scholars (Alba and Nee 2003) have noted, boundary crossing is when individuals are able to “shift sides” (Wimmer 2008a:1039) and integrate themselves into the institutional structures and organizations of the dominant group. They become fully integrated and their ethnicity becomes symbolic (Alba and Nee 2003). Boundary crossing among my 1.5 and second generation participants was illustrated

through their membership and integration in both Ethiopian or Nigerian oriented spaces, as well as in African American cultural spaces. Furthermore, I conceptualize boundary crossing among my participants as flexible ethnicity. In her work with third generation Mexican Americans, Vasquez (2010) argues that some of her participants possessed the ability, or cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986), that allowed those who are part “European-descent or have lighter skin and hair colors,” to traverse “multiple racial terrains with dexterity” (63). Drawing from Vasquez’s (2010) conception of flexible ethnicity, I propose that the 1.5 and second generation children of Ethiopian and Nigerian immigrants in my sample exhibit a type of flexible ethnicity through their selectively blended identities that results in them being able to cross ethnic boundaries and “become African American,” rendering their Ethiopian and Nigerian ethnic identities as symbolic in certain contexts. This process was demonstrated mainly through my participant’s membership in student union groups on college campuses, and African American professional and social institutions. Each of these are discussed in the following section.

### *Student Unions*

For my participants who are bi-cultural, African Student Unions and Black Student Unions on their college campuses was the most frequent avenue through which they illustrated their bi-culturalism. Ngozi gives us a look into this process when I asked her if she was a member of the African Student Association and the Black Student Union on her campus,

I was president of ASA last year...Funny thing that you should mention it, so the president of BSU, she’s Ethiopian. She was born and raised in Ethiopia, but then she came here for high school or something like that. I was born here in America and I’m president of the ASA. She was born in Africa, she is president of BSU. ~ Ngozi, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Continuing on, I asked her if she was also a member of the BSU, she replies,

oh yes, I was part of BSU. We support each other. Both organizations are well needed but serve different purposes. BSU is more political movements, trying to get reforming, action, activism, all that good stuff. African Student Association is more of the teaching African culture and just making sure that we basically educate people about African culture...we have one Black student, she's African American, she ran for a position on ASA and now she is on the ASA board...it doesn't really matter, you don't have to be just African. ~ Ngozi, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

In these passage we read how Ngozi is a member of both the African Student Association and the Black Student Union. She understands these student organizations to have different purposes, but together, they meet her needs as a second generation Nigerian student. Ngozi illustrates her own flexible ethnicity (Vasquez 2010), as well as that of other members in these organizations, through her description of being American born, and president of the ASA and her friend being African born, and president of BSU. Ngozi is able to move in and out of both the BSU and ASA without conflict. Additionally, she doesn't see a conflict with being American born and serving as the president of the African Student Association. Ultimately, she possesses the 'cultural toolkits' (Swidler 1986) and skill sets to comfortably navigate and integrate herself into both the ASA and the BSU.

Chidera, also a second generation Nigerian expresses similar experiences, when I asked her questions about whether African Americans and Nigerians ever integrate. She says,

We have Black [African American] families that participate in Nigerian stuff back in California. We went to Black [African American] events, like I was part of the BSU as an undergrad. People that were part of our BSU also went to African Association meetings, went to our cultural events and things of that sort. There

was a lot of intermixing that I wonder if especially as you get to higher education there's less. So talking to my cousin who goes to Columbia, for her there's even this mixture there too...I wonder if it's because there is so little of us as we get further along in education. ~ Chidera, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Like Ngozi, Chidera expresses her flexible ethnicity through her membership in both the African Association and the BSU as an undergraduate. Chidera goes on to explain how there is “a lot of intermixing” among African Americans and Nigerians in institutions of higher education, a fact she attributes to the decreasing numbers of Black students, the higher one goes within academia. Chidera's inquiry is not unfounded, as scholars such as Balogun (2011), Butterfield (2004b), and Clerge (2014) have all found that a Black identity and racial solidarity with African Americans, become more salient among Black immigrants and their children in predominately white settings.

The fact that both Ngozi and Chidera can comfortably go from an African Association meeting where their Nigerian ethnic backgrounds are highlighted, to a Black Student Union meeting where their most salient identity becomes Black, illustrates not only how identity shifts depending upon the context (Balogun 2011; Clerge 2014; Vasquez 2010; Wimmer 2008a), but I argue that it also highlights how their ethnic identity shifts. Despite Black Student Unions being places for all people of African descent, historically, these spaces have been centered around the experiences of native born African Americans. Therefore, Black Student Unions are African American cultural spaces. When the children of immigrants, like Ngozi and Chidera attend BSU meetings, not only does their Black identity become more salient, but they essentially “become African Americans” in this context. This is not to say that they are no longer Ethiopian or Nigerian, but rather, their ethnicity becomes symbolic in a context where their Black

identity is most salient. This process also illustrates how my participants engage in boundary crossing as they integrate themselves into the institutional structures of BSU—an African American cultural space.

### *African American Professional and Social Organizations*

A second way my participants demonstrated their flexible ethnicity was through their involvement in African American professional and social organizations. Similar to Clerge's (2014) work with 1<sup>st</sup> and second generation Haitians, these organizations served as avenues into middle class African American society, while also helping to establish a sense of Black pride for some of my participants. As a member of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), an organization invested in developing Black and other minority students interested in engineering disciplines (NSBE 2017), Negus tells me that his parents were initially uncomfortable with him identifying as African American, and being a member of the NSBE. He recalls,

..when I told my parents I'm going on a trip with the National Society of Black Engineers. My dad was like, you are doing what? What do you mean? I was like, dad, it's safe. You have to warm them up to whole new concepts in changing their minds in how they perceive others. But then last year, a friend of mine and I hosted the legacy soiree entitled 'Black Excellence' and its filled with educated people who have done things in the community, things of that nature. So when they [his parents] are there, they are like wow! They felt proud of their race because by this point and time, from when I was about 12 until I was about 22, they too started identifying as African Americans. Whereas, before I was 12, before I would form my own opinions and stick to it, they were like no we are brown, not Black. So all throughout the transition and...where I am now, they are perfectly fine with it, especially because I am getting a good education. I'm staying on the successful path they want me to be on. I could call myself white, they wouldn't really care. ~ Negus

Negus demonstrates his flexible ethnicity through his membership and involvement in NSBE, as well as other programs on his campus focused on Black achievement. His

involvement in these organizational and leadership capacities affords him access into middle class African American cultural spaces. Negus does not feel a conflict in these spaces, but instead, moves in and out of these spaces fluidly. His membership in these spaces demonstrates how he is able to move fluidly within and between NSBE, while maintaining his Ethiopian ethnic identity. He “becomes an African American” in the context of NSBE—crossing the boundary between his Ethiopian ethnic identity and African American ethnic identity. As he “becomes an African American,” in NSBE, his Ethiopian ethnic identity becomes symbolic.

Negus’ membership in NSBE and other programs has also been an integral part of his identity development. Negus clues us into his identity formation when he talks about how, following his parent’s examples, he initially thought of himself as brown and not Black. As he grew older and went off to college, his interaction with African Americans through NSBE and other programs helped to develop his sense of pride in being Black. This process has resulted in Negus identifying himself as an African American. If you recall from earlier in this chapter, Negus is one of a significant number of my participants who view the terms Black and African American as an ethno-racial category inclusive of all people of African descent. His specific African American lineage is Ethiopian. Furthermore, Negus’ involvement in African American professional and cultural spaces, also affected the identity of his parents, who he characterized as initially being fearful of his membership in NSBE because of the negative perceptions they had of African Americans. He says that they too, now, identify as African Americans because he introduced them to a more balanced representation of native born African Americans.

Other participants illustrated their flexible ethnicity through their membership in Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs). Housed under the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), BGLOs are “international (but predominately USA-based) social-service collegiate and alumni organizations dedicated to the development of positive black diasporic identities, community uplift through economic and religious education, brother/ sisterhood, and social justice” (Hughey 2010:37). These organizations have historically been critical to the advancement of African Americans both civically and academically, and outside of the Black church, and organizations such as the NAACP, they were the largest influence on the Civil Rights Movement (Hughey 2010).

Berhanu, the child of Ethiopian immigrants, and member of BGLO Phi Beta Sigma [referred to as Sigma henceforth], talks to me about his Black identity and how Sigma gave him a platform to engage with Blacks from across the African diaspora. He says,

I’ve never had an experience where I was made to feel like I’m not Black, or that I am not part of the organization. And I think that because of the history of these organizations coming from the elite, college educated, and those who have a history of knowledge of pan Africanism, interactions across various Black populations, and the ways in which our organizations were impacted by that...I had been dating a Zeta. A bunch of Ethiopian and Eritrean girls are a part of Zeta Phi Beta, so from the jump, as far as where we are in these organizations particularly with Zeta Phi Beta and Phi Beta Sigma, but even in Delta Sigma Theta, there were a bunch of West African girls that were members. So these organizations felt like they were a place for us too, in fact one of the places where we came together and identified together. Part of that was me wanting to be part of that and identifying myself as a member of not just these organizations, but that broader struggle to find identity with one another and to mobilize together for the service of our communities. ~ Berhanu, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Here Berhanu illustrates his flexible ethnicity through his integration with African Americans through his membership in the historically Black fraternity, Phi Beta Sigma.

He expresses how he joined Sigma because of its history of Pan-Africanism and because it's a space where both African Americans and others in the African diaspora "came together and identified together". Sigma gave him the opportunity to identify himself with the "broader struggle" of Blacks globally and to serve Black communities—regardless of ethnicity. Saba, is also a member of a historically BGLO—Delta Sigma Theta—and a member of the ASA and BSU on her campus. When I asked her what her experiences with African Americans have been like she replies,

It's been good. I always get, well I'm in a Black sorority so a lot of my friends are African American, so it's always like super loving. It's always been good, really warm, accepting. I feel like that's why I identify with it so much because I can't say that for my own culture sometimes not being as accepting. I mean my culture is very accepting, but I've noticed that a lot of the older generations of Ethiopians definitely do talk a lot about the younger ones and there is just a lot of judgment, but I haven't really experienced that with African Americans.~ Saba

Similar to Berhanu, Saba expresses her flexible ethnicity through her membership in Delta Sigma Theta and both the African Student Association and Black Student Union. She also notes how African Americans in Delta have been accepting and "really warm". While many BGLOs have reached out to members of the African diaspora through the establishment of chapters outside the United States, Hughey (2010) reminds us that BGLOs are still very much centered around the native born African American experience, and are thus, African American cultural spaces. Berhanu and Saba's comfort in these organizations signal their flexible ethnicity through their abilities to integrate themselves among middle class African American society and culture. This also demonstrates how both Berhanu and Saba "become African American" through their integration with African Americans in BGLOs—crossing the boundary between their Ethiopian communities and African American communities.

Negus, Berhanu, and Saba's experiences in African American professional and social organizations is consistent with contemporary scholarship on 1.5 and second generation Black immigrants. The works of Balogun (2011) and Clerge (2014) address specifically how the boundaries between upwardly mobile 1.5 and second generation Black immigrants and African Americans are more 'blurred' (Alba and Nee 1997), than segmented assimilation theory has suggested. Balogun (2011) and Clerge (2014) both find that among second generation Nigerians and 1<sup>st</sup> and second generation Haitians, respectively, integrating themselves with African Americans through African American cultural spaces is not uncommon, especially in predominately white contexts where ethnic differences oftentimes become mute. Participants like Berhanu and Saba, demonstrate their flexible ethnicity through their membership and integration into African American fraternities and sororities. Like the Black immigrants in Balogun (2011) and Clerge (2014) studies, my Nigerian and Ethiopian participants understood themselves as ethnically different than African Americans, but they did not use their ethnic identities to distance themselves from African Americans, instead my participants illustrated how they are bi-cultural, and able to integrate themselves among African Americans who are upwardly mobile—crossing ethnic boundaries.

The selective blended biculturalism and flexible ethnicity of my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants also provides evidence for the minority culture of mobility thesis. One of the glaring failings of the Black immigrant assimilation literature is its mischaracterization of African Americans. Despite decades of literature detailing class distinctions among African Americans (Wilson 1978, 1987), the Black immigrant literature characterizes African Americans within a 'culture of poverty' framework, with

seemingly no chance for upward mobility (Pierre 2004). The stereotypes associated with poor and working class African Americans in the United States come to represent the essence of the entire African American population, neglecting the significant advances African Americans have made since the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s—advancements that have given rise to the African American middle class. For middle class African Americans despite oftentimes challenging these stereotypes, the “controlling image” (Hill-Collins 1991) of African Americans remains attached to the African American poor, urban underclass.

Recognizing this gap and mischaracterization of African Americans, Neckerman, Carter, and Lee (1999) develop the theory of minority culture of mobility that acknowledges the unique position of racial minorities who are middle class. Neckerman, et.al (1999) describe the minority culture of mobility as one that develops from middle class racial minorities undergoing a racialization of their identity and facing discrimination and isolation in majority white contexts, but also dealing with intra-racial class formation as well. For upwardly mobile Black immigrants and their children, they will “borrow” the symbols, experiences, and traditions of middle class African Americans who are used to “straddling two worlds” (Neckerman, et. al:954-957). For my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants, the “borrowed” symbols, experiences, and traditions from middle class African Americans comes in the form of membership in African American professional and social organizations.

## **Conclusion**

Individuals engage in various strategies of ethnic boundary making within the institutional and political constraints on their identity, in order to build familiarity and

group membership (Wimmer 2008a, Wimmer 2008b). In this chapter, I have provided insight into some of the boundary work happening *within* the Black racial category, as a consequence of African migration. I have shown that my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants understand themselves as ethnically and culturally different than their African American counterparts. Over 80% identified their ethnic background as Ethiopian or Nigerian, or some lower level of their nested identities, such as Amharic or Igbo. I find that my participants understand their ethnic and cultural identities in two main ways. First, they understand their Ethiopian and Nigerian ethnic identities to be ones that link them to a specific familial and cultural legacy. This legacy includes a set of specific traditions, practices, foods, and histories that are distinct from those of African Americans. These findings are consistent with the works of other scholars who have explored the meaning of ethnicity among Black immigrants and their children (Balogun 2011; Butterfield 2004a; Zephir 1996). Their ethnic identities also provide my participants with a sense of home. This home roots their familial and cultural legacies to specific geographical spaces on the African continent. They recognize their ability to root themselves on the African continent is something that African Americans and others in the African diaspora do not have the luxury of doing.

Contrary to the Black immigrant literature that uses Black and African American identity as synonyms, my participants express a different understanding of these terms. The majority of the Ethiopians and Nigerians in my study, understand the terms African American to be one that identifies the specific ethnic group whose ancestors were imported and enslaved here in the United States. My participants identify this group as those who can only trace their familial and cultural heritage back to the southern region

of the United States. I also find that the terms Black, and especially African American are being renegotiated through African migration to the US. This process becomes evident through the 33% of my participants who understand Black and African American to mean the same thing. Their understanding, however, differs significantly from how the Black immigrant literature suggests. For these participants, Black and African American is an ethno-racial category that includes all people of African descent, where one would then specify the “kind” of African American one is. Finally, I had a few participants who articulated that the term African American is a term that is designated for those who are recent immigrants from the African continent, or the children of these immigrants who are born and raised here in the United States.

African migration to the United States appears to be shifting and contesting the boundaries of an African American identity. The lack of consensus around who is African American as illustrated by my participants, results in a flexible and seemingly permeable African American boundary. In no other place is this clearly illustrated than in debates over Black immigrants benefiting from affirmative action policies. Furthermore, data on the ethnic identity formation process presented in this chapter also illustrates the permeability of the African American boundary, particularly through my participant’s bicultural ethnic identities that can be characterized as a blending of both Ethiopian or Nigerian, and African American cultural elements. Their blended identities give the 1.5 and second generation the ability to cross boundaries through their flexible ethnicity. This flexible ethnicity is illustrated through their membership in both African and African American student union groups and African American social and professional organizations. Their ability to integrate themselves among African Americans

demonstrates how the boundaries between the African 1.5 and second generation appear to become increasingly blurred. The blurring of the boundaries between the children of African immigrants and their African American counterparts provides evidence for the weakening of ethnic identity among Africans in subsequent generations. Because the 1.5 and second generation in my study embody blended bicultural identities and are able to integrate themselves with African Americans, it is quite possible that subsequent generations of Africans (3<sup>rd</sup> generation) will not engage in strategies of ethnic boundary-making, but will consider themselves fully African American.

In the next chapter, I turn my focus to how African immigrants and their children negotiate between their racial and ethnic identities providing evidence for how my participants understand their identities to be multi-layered, or nested, and thus not in competition with one another, as previous literature has suggested. I also explore an additional layer of my African participant's identities—their American identity—an avenue that has been understudied in the immigration and Black immigrant literatures.

## CHAPTER IV

### NEGOTIATIONS: THE RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND AMERICAN IDENTITIES OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

In this chapter, I turn my focus to a more detailed account of the multi-layered process of identity (Kaufert 1977; Padilla 1985) among my African participants through an analysis of how they negotiate between their racial, ethnic, and American identities. Through their understanding of their identities as “nested segments of differentiation” (Wimmer 2008a:976), this chapter also provides evidence contrary to the Black immigrant acculturation literature that characterizes Black immigrant racial and ethnic identities in a competing framework. That is to say, existing literature suggests Black immigrants must choose between their racial and ethnic identities. The findings of this chapter are consistent with more contemporary scholarship that finds that Black immigrants actually embrace both their racial and ethnic identities, and negotiate between the two depending upon the context (Balogun 2011; Butterfield 2004a; Clerge 2014; Kaufert 1977; Padilla 1985). Some participants however, did feel more attached to one layer of their identity than others--this was especially clear when my participants discussed the American layer of their identity. The degree of attachment to one segment of their identity over another is influenced by various factors including institutional and political constraints, and also their challenge to these constraints.

#### **Negotiating Racial and Ethnic Identities**

For the African immigrants and their children in my study, negotiating between their racial and ethnic identities was not problematic because as I have shown in previous chapters, my participants understand a Black racial identity to be an umbrella term that

connects them and their distinct histories and struggles with other people in the African diaspora. Ethnicity on the other hand is more specific as it connects their familial and cultural legacies to specific nation-states on the African continent. Thus, my participants did not perceive a conflict between their ethnic and racial identities, because their identities as Ethiopians and Nigerians, and as Blacks, are what Wimmer (2008a) calls, “various levels of differentiation” (977). Their Ethiopian or Nigerian identities are nested within their more broadly defined racial identity as Blacks. Furthermore, both of these identities are salient to the identity formation of my participants. They do not choose one or the other as the Black immigrant incorporation literature suggests, but they identify both as being important to them. Adeola, a pharmacist whose parents are from Nigeria, expresses this when she tells me:

They are both equally important. Nigerians aren't White, they aren't Asian, they are Black [laughing]. I don't know how to separate the two. Yea I'm Black, to be more specific, I'm Nigerian. Someone might be from Jamaica, from Ghana, or wherever. We are all Black, we are just from different cultures. They are the same.~ Adeola, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Adeola makes it clear that she values being both Nigerian and Black and doesn't know how to separate them, saying “they are the same.” Thus, Adeola understands her Nigerian ethnicity to be a layer of her Black identity that gives specifics about who she is. She says that she cannot separate the two because both are important for understanding who she is. This narrative was consistent throughout my interviews with both Ethiopians and Nigerians. Ayana, who was born in Ethiopia and immigrated to the United States with her parents when she was 7, expressed similar sentiments as Adeola. She states,

When the police shoot Black people, they aren't going to identify you as African, they aren't going to identify you as Ethiopian. We're all Black to them. Amadou Diallo, the one that was shot in New York, he was Guinean, they don't care.

These things, our Ethiopianess, our Blackness, our Africanness is so much tied to us being here that we have to be involved, we have to, we don't have a choice....we don't separate our Blackness from Ethiopianness or our Africanness  
~ Ayana, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Like Adeola, Ayana clearly understands her identities as African, Black, and Ethiopian to be nested, or layered, and thus equally important to her. In this passage, Ayana is explaining how she does not separate her Black, Ethiopian, or African identities from one another because they are all “so much tied” to her identity formation here in the United States. Ayana also reiterates the homogenizing effect of the American racial structure as the reason she does not separate her identities when she says, “When the police shoot Black people, they aren't going to identify you as African, they aren't going to identify you as Ethiopian. We're all Black to them.” As I found in chapter two, the homogenizing effect of the racial structure in the US is one of the central reasons that African immigrants and their children develop a shared sense of linked fate with African Americans and other people of African descent. Adeola and Ayana's reflections on how they give equal importance to their racial and ethnic identities was a consistent narrative in my interviews, and are consistent with previous research that has shown identity to be a multi-level process (Kaufert 1977; Padilla 1985; Wimmer 2008a). The equal importance that my participants give to their racial and ethnic identities is also consistent with the findings of contemporary scholarship on Black immigrant identity formation (Balogun 2011; Butterfield 2004a, 2004b; Clerge 2014; Pierre 2004) that argues that Black immigrant's racial and ethnic identities are both important to the construction of their identities.

## **Black and Ethnic: Fluidity and Contextual Identity**

Understanding their racial and ethnic identities as “nested segments of differentiation,” (Wimmer 2008a, p. 976) however, does not mean that one identity wasn’t highlighted over the other in certain social contexts. Similar to Butterfield’s (2004a, 2004b) work with second generation West Indians, and Balogun (2011) and Awokoya’s (2012) work with children of Nigerian immigrants, my participants discussed how their ethnic and racial identities varied in importance depending upon the situation they found themselves in. Interestingly, most of my participants who explicitly discussed the fluidity of their identities were second generation Nigerians. Ngozi, who was born in the United States to Nigerian parents and identifies as Nigerian-American, says that neither her ethnic nor racial identities are more important than the other but that her Black identity is more salient when she interacts with others Black people. She states,

I don’t think either one is more important than the other. When the time comes to like get together in Black Lives Matter, that is referring to all of us, whether you are African American or Nigerian, Kenyan, whatever, we’re all Black. ~ Ngozi, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Using the example of #BlackLivesMatter, Ngozi illustrates how her Black racial identity becomes more salient in some situations than in others. In this passage, she explains how her Black identity is highlighted more than her Nigerian American identity in spaces where issues pertaining to race are the most important. She sees herself as well as other people of African descent—regardless of ethnicity—as being included in the #BlackLivesMatter efforts. Ngozi illustrates this through her insisting that the #BlackLivesMatter efforts is “referring to all of us”. As you may recall, Ngozi is one of the many 1.5 and second generation who are members of both the African Student

Association and the Black Student Union on her campus. She told me that the ASA and BSU “served different purposes,”

oh yes, I was part of BSU. We support each other. Both organizations are well needed but serve different purposes. BSU is more political movements, trying to get reforming, action, activism, all that good stuff. African Student Association is more of the teaching African culture and just making sure that we basically educate people about African culture. ~ Ngozi, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

For Ngozi, her Black identity is highlighted, or becomes most salient, when she is in a context where matters affecting the African/Black diaspora in general are centered. Her Nigerian identity becomes highlighted in the African Student Association where matters of culture and heritage are central. This highlights the fluidity of identity among some of my participants. Similarly, Chimeze, also a second generation Nigerian, describes how his identity is fluid depending upon who he is with. Growing up with Nigerian parents who he says would, “cook everything from stuff that was native Nigerian food to stuff like burgers and fries,” Chimeze, is bi-cultural and moves in and out of both African American and Nigerian spaces. Asking him if he ever identifies as Black and how that might impact his life, he said,

yes, I do sometimes. I mean cause all my friends are Black [African American], so I guess that will come into play. I think it impacts a lot in terms of like the stuff I like culturally. It’s part of the music I listen to, the food I eat, the stuff I watch on TV. ~ Chimeze, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Following up, I also asked Chimeze if he ever identifies as Nigerian and he replies,

“If I am around Nigerian people and they say something I will be like oh yea, I know what you mean...I know a lot of Nigerian parents equate the most extreme stuff. They be like ‘if you don’t go to school, you want to work at McDonald’s the rest of your life?’. It’s that extreme, it’s no in between. And maybe somebody

else that wasn't [Nigerian] wouldn't understand what that meant. ~ Chimeze, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Here Chimeze illustrates how when he is with his African American friends his Black identity “comes into play”. Through his peer group, which are almost all African Americans he tells me, a Black racial identity becomes more salient, oftentimes because it influences the things he likes culturally—music, TV shows, and foods. Simultaneously, he discusses how he identifies as Nigerian around other Nigerians through his example of what he perceives to be Nigerian parents being overbearing when it comes to life choices. Furthermore, Chimeze also exhibits a bicultural identity, giving him the ability to move rather fluidly between two distinct cultural groups in his everyday life (Phinney and Devich-Navarro 1997). As a second generation Nigerian, he is integrated with African Americans through his peer groups, but he is also able to comfortably integrate with other Nigerians, specifically in the context of cultural parental norms. He integrates both his African American culture—music, food, television interests, basketball—with his Nigerian cultural background through cultural and parental expectations and norms.

Chidera artfully illustrates the argument at hand. She states,

It's context dependent and who I am with. When I'm with my cousins, being Nigerian is most important, when I am with my family, being Nigerian is most important. When I'm in school, it's both depending upon the setting. When doing my work, because the conversation has been so focused on the disenfranchisement of Blacks, then it's important to highlight that Nigerians are also being missed in this conversation. When I'm with my Black [African American] friends, being Black, but also being Nigerian is important. They will call me out. I don't know idioms, American idioms, because as a child of immigrants, our idioms are psalms [laughing]. It's very context dependent on who I am with and where I am at. There are times that I have to highlight one identity over the other. ~ Chidera, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Chidera gives explicit examples of the fluidity of her identity through her description of how she highlights either her racial or ethnic identity depending upon the situation. In the context of her family, she states that her ethnic identity as Nigerian becomes most salient, but when she is among her African American friends, her Black identity is most salient, but her “Nigerianness” is also sometimes highlighted through her lack of understanding of African American cultural lingo.

As Ngozi, Chimeze, and Chidera all illustrate, one layer of their identity becomes more salient in certain situation (Butterfield 2004a; Clerge 2014; Kaufert 1977; Padilla 1985). In spaces where race is the common factor (ie. interactions with African Americans), their Black identity was most salient. In other contexts, like the African Student Association and their family life, their ethnic identities as Nigerians was highlighted more. These examples illustrate the fluidity of identity and is consistent with contemporary scholarship on Black immigrant identity formation (Balogun 2011; Butterfield 2004; Clerge 2014) and identity construction in general (Wimmer 2008a). These findings challenge the competing identities framework found in theories of Black immigrant incorporation.

#### *Salience of Racial Identity*

While the overwhelming majority of my participants had strong attachments to both their racial and ethnic identities, some of my participants identified more with their racial identity. Take Mehret for instance. While she describes her Ethiopian ethnic identity as one that symbolizes pride and strength for her, she tells me that the instincts of

a racist person is not to find out exactly where one is from, but they only see you as Black.

I always use the phrase to a racist person, someone who is overtly racist, their first instinct isn't to find out exactly where you are from, they just don't like you just because you are Black. I think if you are denying blackness, you are denying apart of yourself. I don't see how someone could be African not also identify as being Black. Because you are Black first to them and then you are African later.  
~ Mehret, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

For Mehret, she perceives her racial identity of Black to be the most important identity in the US context. While she told me that her ethnicity is important to her and she associates it with pride and strength, she feels that in the United States, her ethnicity does not matter all that much to racist because “you are Black first to them and then you are African later.” What Mehret expresses is consistent with evidence from chapter two that shows how my participants perceive that in the American context, blackness is homogenized (Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Kibona-Clark 2008; Watts-Smith 2014). Despite her feelings of attachment to her ethnicity, Mehret says that others (Whites and non-blacks) in the United States tend to see her as Black, without attention to her Ethiopian ethnic background. Similarly, when asking Alem, an Ethiopian who emigrated to the United States as a political refugee, how he generally identified, he replied, “I’m an Ethiopian.” As our conversation continued he revealed to me that his main identity here in the United States is Black. His Black identity becomes more salient here in the United States he says because Whites don't see him as any different than his African American counterparts. He said some might, but most don't distinguish.

Hanna, who was born in Sudan to Ethiopian parents, articulates the essence of the argument. She states,

oooooh, they are both equally important. Again, the first thing I ever knew is that I was Ethiopian. Obviously to be Ethiopian to me and being black were the same. I didn't know that being Ethiopian and being Black were two separate things. It's very important. I grew up in this household everything was Ethiopian, the language, the family get together, everything cultural that was brought from Ethiopia here happened in America still even if they aren't in Ethiopia, I felt it every day. Being black is very important...when it all falls down, you are Black first because to me being Black means you have African descent and it's the shade of your skin, you have pigmentation, you have melanin...I am Black. You can't look at me and say oh she's Ethiopian, but you can look at me and say she's Black. That's what I mean when I say there is no categorization. Not meaning that there aren't Black people from other places, meaning to the outside world looking in, you are Black and we live in a society that don't give a shit [about our ethnicities]. ~ Hanna, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

As Hanna so eloquently expressed, she doesn't view being Ethiopian and being Black as separate things, they are different segments of her identity (Kaufert 1977; Padilla 1985; Wimmer 2008a), and while her Ethiopian ethnic identity—the language, food, and culture—is very important to her, so is her Black identity. For Hanna, her Black identity announces her African heritage, and to the outside world, that is all that matters. She expresses how the outside world doesn't “give a shit” about the diversity among Black people, and categorizes all Black people as being the same. Thus, despite the importance of her Ethiopian ethnic identity to her personally, she perceives that the outside world does not care, it is only her racial identity of Black that is salient in most cases.

These participants illustrate the homogenization effects of racism in the United States (Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Kibona-Clark 2008; Watts-Smith 2014), through the importance that they attach to their racial identities, while simultaneously valuing their ethnic identities. These expressions illustrate how my

participants engage in boundary expansion (Wimmer 2008a, 2008b) through identifying themselves as Black and perceive racial boundaries to be the most salient boundaries in the United States (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Omi and Winant 1993), through their insistence that “when it all falls down, you are Black first.” Interestingly, participants who spoke explicitly about this attachment to a Black racial identity were more likely to be foreign-born Ethiopians (1<sup>st</sup> and 1.5 generations). This may seem counterintuitive, but when looking at the history of Pan-African thought in Ethiopia, along with how Ethiopians pride themselves on being the only African nation to never be colonized by a European imperial power, it becomes clear why Ethiopians who immigrate to White imperialist nations such as the United States, would recognize the power of race. Interestingly, twelve (12) of my thirty-nine (39) participants, approximately 31%, expressed their identity and relationship with African Americans through a lens of Pan-Africanism.

### *Pan-Africanism*

Pan-Africanism as a broad intellectual tradition has its origins in the West among those of African descent. This political ideology is rooted in “the collective experiences of African descendants in the New World”, but expanded as an ideology that links the histories of slavery in the West with the histories of colonialism on the African continent and the Americas. The ultimate goal of Pan-Africanism is to build transnational solidarity among people of African descent globally (Kelley 2000), and thus can be conceptualized as a response to the institutional and political constraints on Black identity. Pan Africanism, I theorize, is a form of boundary expansion with its emphasis on building solidarity among people of African descent globally. This perspective, by its very nature, seeks to add new categories of people of African descent to the Black

boundary, globally. With a long history of Pan-African thought in the African diaspora, as well as on the African continent by activist, academics, and everyday people (Getachun 2007; Kelley 1999; Von Eschen 1997), it is not surprising that twelve (12), or approximately 31% of my participants, understood their identities and relationship to others of African descent through a lens of Pan-Africanism.

Sitting at her kitchen table in the Holly Park Apartments, enjoying the beef tips and injera she warmed for me, Bershadu, who was born in Sudan to an Ethiopian mother and Eritrean father, expresses a Pan-African perspective when she tells me that she identifies as Black “every day, all day.” She continues:

I think being Black, we are the first people of the entire civilization...I like to read books about how the world was Black, it was a powerful beautiful place. We are the discoverers of a lot of things and we brought a lot of knowledge to the world, and I think there's a beautiful history, Black history, I think the amazing things we have done, the amazing things people before us have done, I love being able to claim that. I'm a part of that. Maybe I wasn't there doing it but I belong to a lineage or I belong to the group of people who have taken the world so far..... And I think some people have differentiated Black from African and I'm like wait a minute. Just because somebody knows their country, their nationality in Africa, doesn't make them Black? And if somebody doesn't know where they are from in Africa, that means they aren't African? I don't get it. Black, African American, African, to me it's synonymous, those are the exact same thing, it's just about in what context you are using them.. ~ Bershadu, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

In this passage, Bershadu illustrates a Pan-African perspective with other Blacks around the world through her expressing how she doesn't understand why some people differentiate between Black and African. To her, African Americans and others whose ancestors were transported from the African continent and enslaved in the West, are “just as African” as someone like her, who has direct ancestral ties to a specific nation state on the African continent. She questions why some people believe that those who can trace their ancestry aren't considered Black and those who cannot trace their ancestry back are

considered Black. This distinction she says doesn't make sense to her because "Black, African American, African, to me it's synonymous, those are the exact same thing, it's just about in what context you are using them." Bershadu clearly illustrates not only how my participant's identities are "nested segments of differentiation" (Wimmer 2008a), but she clearly expresses how she understands her identity as an Ethiopian, and her relationship to African Americans and others in the African diaspora, as one that links all these groups together through shared African ancestry, and histories (Kelley 1999, 2000).

Similarly, Meron also understood her identity and relationship with others in the African diaspora from a Pan-African perspective. A first generation Ethiopian who believes that Blacks will only be liberated through building strong economic communities, Meron tells me about her Pan-African identity development and how this identity was constructed over her lifespan through her interactions and experiences in Ethiopia, as well as with others in the African diaspora. Asking specifically if she thought about this idea of race while in Ethiopia, she says,

you don't think about it because you are the dominant. My situation is a little different. My father was a little bit informed and he was college educated. We had lots of books about South Africa, Namibia, and all those places. So at a young age I used to read those things and I used to really get frustrated about it and wonder how that could happen. And I remember when I was 10, I read about Patrice Lumumba and his wife Elizabeth and how their life was hard and that got me into really understanding those things before I even left my country. And then when the Italians invaded Ethiopia and they wanted to colonize Ethiopia, for many people, they are very shallow about it, for me, it had depth. Then when I was a young adult, I went to England to study while I was living there. I met a lot of people from the Caribbean, I was a part of that group. So I learned about Marcus Garvey, I really adore that guy and his life, and I had lots of [Afro-Caribbean] friends, I was just consumed by that. Afterward, I went home and got married, and it didn't work out so I came here. After I came here, I always had African American sisters and actually, a group of us raised our children together, so my girls have African American brothers and sisters. ~ Meron, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Meron first became aware of the notion of race through reading about the colonial conquest of the African continent as a little girl in Ethiopia. This notion of race became even more real during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War, when Italian dictator Benito Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935, as revenge for Ethiopia having defeated Italy in the Battle of Adwa in 1896 (Kelley 1999). Thus, while growing up in Ethiopia, Meron gained an understanding of Western imperialism through reading about the invasion of Ethiopia during her childhood. Her understanding of white supremacy and her identity as part of a larger African diaspora was further solidified during her time in England among her Afro-Caribbean friends where she learned about business icon and economic revolutionary, Marcus Mosiah Garvey. The Jamaican born Garvey, was a central figure of Black resistance across the African diaspora in the West, as well as those on the African continent (Blyden 2012). Garvey's insistence on Black economic independence is present in the life of Meron today, as she expressed to me that she supports the #BlackLivesMatter movement, but "we" [Blacks] need to "change our brand," by becoming economically independent. Not surprisingly, Meron is the owner of an educational institution in the Seattle metro area. Furthermore, understanding herself as intimately connected to a larger Black or African diaspora, after moving to the United States, Meron reared her children among African Americans, referring to the African American mothers as her "sisters." Meron's interactions and experiences with others of the African diaspora, across her lifespan, resulted in her developing an understanding of blackness as a Pan-African, and transnational identity that links her history as an

Ethiopian with the histories of Jamaicans, African Americans, and others in the African diaspora.

Like contemporary scholarship on the Black immigrant experience, the majority of my participants give equal importance to their racial and ethnic identities (Balogun 2011; Butterfield 2004; Clerge 2014). There were, however, some of my participants who root their identities in the racialized social structure (Bonilla-Silva 1997) and consider racial boundaries to be most salient in their lived experiences (see Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Winant/Wimmer 2015 ERS debate). Some of my participants even expressed their identity and relationship to African Americans through a Pan-African lens, a form of boundary expansion that adds additional categories of people to the Black boundary from across the globe. To be clear, participants who expressed the salience of their Black racial identity, and those who understood their Black identity and relationship with African Americans through a Pan-African lens, did not disregard their ethnic identities as non-important, but based on their experiences, they perceived their Black racial identity, and thus racial boundaries, to be the more salient identity in the US context and globally. On the contrary, a few of my participants pointed to their ethnic identity as their most salient identity.

#### *Salience of Ethnic Identity*

Seven participants in my study, or approximately 18%, expressed no attachment to their Black racial identity. While they all identified as Black, as a way of recognizing their place in the racial hierarchy of the United States, their ethnic and cultural identities were the most important to them, illustrating the contraction of boundaries through their

recognition, but also rejection of the notion of race. Genevieve, succinctly expresses the sentiments of these seven respondents when she says,

my ethnicity is more important to me than my race because race is just physical attributes. Even within my community, within my ethnic group [Igbo], there are people with different shades of color.....one of my cousins, she is very light, if you saw her from the back and she had a wig on, you'd think she's a white lady. But she is still from my ethnic group. So the idea of race, I just think is superficial, a negative instrument used to oppress and classify people. So for me, race is not as important as my ethnicity. Ethnicity is something that provides value and foundation for me, not race. Race is an excuse people use to oppress me, but my ethnicity is something that provides a foundation and values for me to navigate through the world. ~ Genevieve, 1.5 generation, Nigerian

While acknowledging a Black racial identity within a racialized society, for these seven participants, race was not an important identity to them. Their sense of attachment was to their ethnic and cultural identities. They viewed race as “superficial” and a mode of oppression, while their ethnicity provided them “values and foundations” to operate in the world. Ikechuwku gave a similar response as Genevieve when I asked him how he identifies racially. He replies,

I more strongly identify culturally than I do racially, but I will accept Black. For some to say they are Black it is a strong identifier of who they are, for me it's the equivalent to saying I'm human. It's not a useful thing. I'm Igbo, not even Nigerian, I'm Igbo. If you want to get a sense of who I am then you have to understand what it means to be Igbo. ~ Ikechuwku, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Nigerian

Like Genevieve, and the others who expressed their ethnic identity as most salient, Ikechuwku identifies as Black, but is more strongly attached to his cultural identity. He characterizes a Black identity as something that simply identifies his skin color, but other than that, “it's not a useful thing” he tells me. Furthermore, he makes it clear that his ethnic and cultural identity is Igbo, “not even Nigerian,” and to understand who he is, one

must understand “what it means to be Igbo.” Ikechuwkwu clearly expresses his strong sense of attachment is to his Igbo ethnic identity.

Like those who recognized the homogenizing effect of the US racial structure, prioritizing their racial identity, while simultaneously holding strong ethnic identities, these seven participants did not distance themselves from a Black identity in US society. They recognized their placement in the US racial hierarchy by identifying as Black, but they were not attached to their Black identity. Participants in this category tended to be 1<sup>st</sup> generation and Nigerian. This is a distinct ethnic pattern from those who prioritized their racial identity and expressed Pan-African solidarity with others in the African diaspora. While the participants who prioritized their racial identities and/or understood their identities through a Pan-African lens, were more likely to be foreign-born Ethiopians, those who prioritized their ethnic and cultural identities, were more likely to be Nigerian. As a result of the ‘uniting’ of over 200 ethnic groups to create the nation of Nigeria, Nigeria is the most ethnically diverse country on the African continent (Adebanwi and Obadare 2010). Many Nigerians grow up in ethnically distinct geographic regions among others in their respective ethnic group, which could result very strong attachments to one’s ethnicity despite living in a racialized context such as the United States.

Above I have focused on how my participants negotiate the racial and ethnic segments of their identities. In the following section, I explore an additional, but understudied, layer of my participant’s identities—their American identity. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of my participants identified themselves as American citizens. I focus on how they understand their American identity and citizenship in relation to their

racial and ethnic identities. Additionally, I explore the meanings my participants attach to their American identities.

### **African Immigrants and American Identity**

Previous studies with Black immigrants and their children has not adequately explored how those who are American citizens think about their American identity or the meaning they attach to an American identity. In the only study, to my knowledge, to ask questions of American identity, Butterfield (2004a) finds that second generation West Indians did not consider themselves to be American because they were children of immigrants, and Black. Additionally, they didn't consider themselves American until after visiting their parent's home country. Contrary to Butterfield's (2004a) work, I find that most of my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants do consider themselves Americans. Thirty of the thirty-nine Africans in my sample (77%) were American citizens. Most of my participants connected being American to citizenship—either through being born in the United States, or having been naturalized. Interestingly, 63% (19 participants) of those who are American citizens told me that their American identities were as equally important to them as their racial and ethnic identities because it is a part of who they are, and informs their worldview. Negus illustrates how most of these participants thought about their American identities when he tells me that he doesn't have a choice in whether he is American or not. He states,

I'm a proud Ethiopian, but I'm also an African American. I don't think I have a choice....once you've been in a society for so long, it corrupts you. Corrupts is a harsh work, it changes your mindset, it changes how you think....social norms really do impact one's identity. ~ Negus, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Like most of the American citizens in my sample, Negus, who immigrated here to the US with his parents at an early age, expresses how he doesn't have a choice in whether or not he is an American because as he's grown up in the United States, and has adapted to the social and cultural norms of American society. Thus, his identity as an American is a part of who he is. Dayo expresses a similar sentiment to me when I asked him if he considers himself an American. He succinctly replies,

Yea. Got a passport and everything. ~ Dayo, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, African American/Nigerian

Following up, I asked him which of his identities is more important to him or if they are all equally important. Laughing he says,

It's like saying what's more important to you, your arm or your leg [laughing], you need them both. They are both who you are, they both inform certain experiences in your life. They both inform how you perceive the world and how you react to certain things, like they are all a part. So it would be ridiculous to deny one for the sake of the other. I think those combinations of identities just informs how you look at things. It informs your experience if you will. ~ Dayo, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, African American/Nigerian

The son of a Nigerian father and an African American mother, Dayo views his racial identity as Black, his African American and Nigerian ethnic identities, as well as his American identity to all be of equal importance to him because in his view, they all "inform how you perceive the world and how you react to certain things." Dayo's sentiment illustrates Wimmer's (2008a) notion of nested identities through his acknowledgment that his Black, African American, Nigerian, and American identities, are all of equal importance to him and inform his life. He thinks it's "ridiculous to deny one for the sake of the other." Echoing Negus' sentiments, Dayo understands all his identities to be equally important to who he is, and points to US social and cultural norms

as informing his experiences and his identity formation. Finally, to illustrate the centrality of the social and cultural context on identity formation, Adaora explains that her Black and Nigerian identities are central to her identity formation, but so is her American identity because it has helped to shape her views and culture. As the child of Nigerian immigrants born here in the United States, she says,

I guess I would say that my Black and African [Nigerian] ethnicity would be more important, but at the same time, I feel like my views and culture has been shaped by being in America, being an American. ~ Adaora, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

### *African and American*

If you recall, Negus from above identifies strongly as Ethiopian and American. The sentiment of being both Ethiopian or Nigerian, *as well as* American, was unexpectedly quite prominent among my 1<sup>st</sup> and 1.5 generation African immigrants. Previous research has shown that the ethnic identities of foreign-born Black immigrants are likely to remain quite strong despite being in the United States (Kasinitz 1992; Waters 1994,1999; Kusow 2006), and the foreign-born Africans in my study were no different, but I also found that they identified themselves as Americans too. The exchanges below with participants Meron and Elsabet confirms previous researcher's findings, but I expand on this research by illustrating how many of my 1<sup>st</sup> generation participants also have strong attachments to their American identities as well. Meron and Elsabet illustrates this strong attachment through their reflections on becoming naturalized US citizens.

Me: Do you consider yourself to be an American?

Meron: I am an American now because I am naturalized. I'm still Ethiopian, but I have all the rights and privileges of an American.

Me: Black, Ethiopian, and American—are one of these identities more important to you, or are they equally important to you?

Meron: They are equally important. I am Ethiopian and all the things I have, the talents and privileges are all mine. And I am an American and I am here, and I want to be participating in the process of making America the home for us and I have the privileges and the responsibilities to and for that reason. I want to contribute in both and when I contribute in both, then it would be a real development of growth for me as well as for the community. Yes, equally important because I don't live a split life. I want my life to be in harmony, if it's split there would be, one has to take advantage over the other, it couldn't because it has to move forward.

Equally, my exchange with Elsabet echoes Meron's sentiment.

Me: Do you consider yourself to be an American?

Elsabet: yes, but I also consider myself an Ethiopian and sometimes that's not easy to hold those two identities at the same time. When I go back to Ethiopia, I'd like to think of myself as an Ethiopian but there are so many American values that I have absorbed over the years, but really I am not the Ethiopian I used to be when I left home. And I'm not entirely an American because of my accent, my mannerisms, there are many things that make me different than someone that was born and raised in the US....When I go [to Ethiopia], there is some sadness..because of the history that has taken place and I wasn't there to be a part of that. When I meet with family and friends, there is that gulf that separates us. So I don't have that shared experience with them. Yea there is some sadness because I have lost that, but at the same time I feel that I have become, I don't want to say a better person, but a more complex person, having lived in this country because along with the not so many positive experiences, there have been many positive experiences that have enriched me I believe, so it is a mixed bag.

Both of these women see themselves as Ethiopians, and Americans. Meron expresses her attachment to both Ethiopia and the United States in her desire to “contribute in both”.

She values both her Ethiopian and American identities equally and expresses how both are equally important to her because she does not “live a split life”, but desires to live her life in “harmony”. Meron reiterates the equal importance of both her Ethiopian and American identities when she says “if it's split...one has to take advantage over the other, it couldn't because it has to move forward.” Meron's strong sense of her Ethiopianness

and Americanness harkens back to how my African immigrant participants understand their identities multi-layered, and thus not in conflict with one another. Thus, Meron sees no conflict in being Black, Ethiopian, and American because for her, all of these identities are a part of what makes her identity, and life, harmonious.

Elsabet, though it initially appears that she is torn between being Ethiopian and American, reconciles these identities by saying that she has become a “more complex person” who, like Meron, is a member of both Ethiopian and American societies. Elsabet expresses how she isn’t “entirely” American due to her accent and mannerisms, and she isn’t “entirely” Ethiopian anymore either because “there are so many American values” that she has “absorbed over the years” that makes her a different type of Ethiopian than she used to be. Elsabet, considering herself both American and Ethiopian, illustrates a bicultural identity (Phinney and Devich-Navarro 1997), and selective blending (Vasquez 2014), through having “absorbed” cultural elements from both American and Ethiopian societies. While it may appear as though she occupies a space in-between American and Ethiopian culture, she reconciles her feelings on being both American and Ethiopian as “a mixed bag”, symbolizing the presence of a bicultural identity (Phinney and Devich-Navarro 1997), and selective blending (Vasquez 2014) of her American and Ethiopian identities. Like Meron, her American and Ethiopian identities are layered, and thus not in conflict with one another. To be clear, Elsabet is sad that there is a “gulf” between her and family members who remain in Ethiopia, but she is also happy for the experiences she has had as an American. This finding extends the Black immigrant literature that has a tendency to highlight the attachment that foreign-born Blacks have to their ethnic identity (Kasinitz 1992; Kusow 2006; Waters 1999) by showing that for some African

immigrants, an American identity is just as salient as their ethnic identities, especially for those who have resided in the United States and taken up American citizenship (Kibona-Clark 2008).

*American Identity as Privileges, and Opportunities*

Other participants tied their American identities to certain privileges and opportunities available to them in US society that might not be accessible to them in their countries of origins or their parent's countries of origins. For example, Aster, who was born here in the United States to Ethiopian parents, tells me that she identifies as an Ethiopian American because she is rooted in both Ethiopian and American culture.

Asking her specifically if she considers herself an American, she says,

Yea. Apart of me does. I can't say that I am strictly Ethiopian because of many of the American practices that I enjoy, like going out until 2 am. If I was a typical Habesha girl, I'd be home tucking my sisters into bed and reading them a story. So I think my mom always says, I've been raised with the freedom that comes with being an American. The freedom that comes with being an American within the culture is so liberating to me. But there isn't that kind of freedom for any Ethiopian girl in the Ethiopian culture. That kind of freedom doesn't exist... That's what it is it's the fact that Ethiopians are sexist and here in America, women in this day and age, it's not like that. I can be a woman and do whatever I want, whereas in the Ethiopian culture, I can be a woman and do whatever the man says, and I don't appreciate that. When it comes to my personal freedom and my being able to do whatever I want whenever I want, because I'm a woman, that's part of American culture that I've adopted wholeheartedly.~ Aster

Here Aster clearly expresses how part of her identity as an Ethiopian American is constructed through the freedom that she perceives women to have in American society. She juxtaposes the freedom she feels as a woman in US society with her perceived lack of freedom for Ethiopian women through her insisting that “a typical Habesha girl” and women are to “do whatever the man says”. She also characterizes Ethiopians as “sexist” and says she doesn't appreciate that. For Aster, part of her identity as an Ethiopian

American rests squarely on the fact that she perceives American society to be far more open and tolerant of women being independent and self-sufficient, than Ethiopian society. Interestingly, I also interviewed Aster's mother, who echoed similar sentiment. Aster's mother, who was the first in their family to immigrate to the United States, told me that she insisted that her husband consider moving to Tacoma, rather than staying in Seattle because she felt constrained by the social norms that Ethiopians have towards women working outside the home. For Aster's mother, being in Tacoma felt liberating because there are fewer Ethiopians in Tacoma in relation to Seattle, where the existence of an Ethiopian ethnic enclave makes it much harder to distance oneself from the social and cultural expectations of the community. For Aster and her mom, staying out until 2 am and working outside the home, respectively, represents how the American context is shifting or redefining what it means to be an Ethiopian woman. Interestingly, Butterfield (2004) finds a similar phenomenon with second generation West Indian girls whose mothers teach them to be able to "take care of themselves without a man," (p. 305), challenging long standing patriarchal norms in West Indians households.

Adeola also connects her American identity to the privileges and opportunities that she has as a Nigerian American woman, juxtaposing it to her perception of the situation of girls and women in Nigeria. When asking her if she considers herself an American, she replies,

Yes, unfortunately, I do. How do I want to put this? I do because even though my household is very Nigerian, I can't even deny the fact that I am who I am and the opportunities I have is because of this country. If I were to say that oh I hate America, that would be me being ungrateful. Yea we have plenty of problems, but I think.....[hesitation]..... growing up here shaped who I am. Me definitely being a teenage and being able to speak my mind versus growing up somewhere else, I don't know if I would be this independent... And the fact that, even when it comes to gender, I know growing up in Nigeria, I would be a little more

conservative than I am now, because back home, I definitely realize how much how behind Nigeria is with female roles. Yes, we have female in offices, and yes we have females working in the workforce, but when I go to a village, gender roles are still very, very conservative. What a woman should do, how a woman should act, even now, when it comes to marriage, and burials, people still keep traditions... Because it is and I feel like back home with girls who get married super early and God forbid when the husband dies, they get stuck and are at the mercy of the husband's family. Crazy things like that, would it happen here? So, I find myself more of an American speaking to the woman side of me than my actual Nigerian side because I wouldn't be who I am right now if it wasn't for the American side. So yea I consider myself an American. I can't even deny that. ~ Adeola, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Although she was first hesitant to identify as American, Adeola says that she “can't deny the fact that I am who I am and the opportunities I have is because of this country.” She constructs her identity as an American through the opportunities the United States gives to her as a woman, compared to the opportunities that she perceives she would have in Nigeria. Adeola clearly expresses how she feels that she would be “a little more conservative” if she were in Nigeria, whereas being here in the United States she is able to be independent and self-sufficient. She illustrates the lack of independence of rural Nigerian women through her example of a Nigerian girl marrying early and having to depend on her husband and his family when the husband dies. For both Adeola, and Aster, their American identities are rooted, or tied to their perceptions of the opportunities and privileges to be self-sufficient as a woman in the United States.

### **Weak American Identity**

Eleven of the thirty American citizens in my sample (36%) expressed a tenuous sense of being American. Participants who fell into this category expressed a weak attachment to their identity as Americans for three main reasons: feelings of marginalization, conflicting morals and values, and strategic purposes.

### *Marginalized American Identity*

Five of the eleven participants who had a weak sense of attachment to their American identity identified feelings of marginalization, specifically through what they characterize as the attack on Black life in the United States. All specifically mentioned the killings of unarmed Black people (men, women, and children) as specific examples of attack on Black life. Saba, who immigrated here with her parents from London at the age of 2, considers herself an American because she “grew up here”, but says “it’s hard to say it sometimes.” She states,

yea, I grew up here. It’s hard to say it sometimes. But in some people’s eyes, I might not be considered American and plus with the constant attack on Black life, as of the past couple of years, it’s hard to be proud. I mean I’m definitely proud because I grew up here, but it’s hard to be proud lately. ~ Saba, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Saba expresses how she is proud to be American, but with the “constant attack on Black life” and others challenging her Americanness, “it’s hard to be proud lately.” State violence against Blacks in the United States has a long and troubled history. Saba’s statement about how she is not regarded as an American in “some people’s eyes” reverberates Glazer’s (1993) argument that assimilation is dead because, despite having longer ancestral connections to the United States than most Whites, Blacks were left out of the Americanization campaign in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Considered, to be outside the pail of humanity and citizenship, Blacks were never intended to be part of the American system, with the exception of being labor. Through her disappointment and disillusion with State violence against Black bodies, Saba illustrates her feelings of marginalization, and weakness to her American identity.

Similarly, Chidera, a second generation Nigerian considers herself an American “at times.” I followed up asking her “When are those times?” She replied,

I can say it’s been really hard to see myself as just an American especially with all the killings that have been going on. That at times when, when Obama was originally voted into office, okay that’s a good day to be an American because it shows that we can have diversity in our leadership to the world at large. When.....I’m like drawing a blank just because how difficult the last year and a half as been to be a Black person in America. I think the experiences of 1- education and social mobility, those things are, like our parents like to tell us, they tell us, it’s something they used to tell us it’s just like the immigrant story, but us getting older, yea we do have a lot more opportunities here than our parents ever would have had in the US or for myself as a female that I think Nigeria is just starting to get to, at times this this a good thing to be growing up in America. But over the last year and a half, it’s made it difficult to feel good about being an American. ~ Chidera, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Nigerian

Chidera expresses that she was proud to be an American when President Barack Obama was elected the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, but her sense of attachment to her American identity shifted in light of “all the killings that have been going on” and the difficulty she feels being “a Black person in America” “over the last year and a half.” She simultaneously expresses a sense of appreciation for the educational and social mobility opportunities she and her family has in the United States. She feels that she has “a lot more opportunities here” than her parents. Chidera’s experience of having more opportunities than her parents, is consistent with the experiences of the second generation generally, who previous research has shown to be upwardly mobile when compared to their parents (Alba, et.al 2011). Furthermore, Chidera reiterates what some of my other female respondents expressed about gender. She appreciates what she perceives to be the opportunity for independence and self-sufficiency in the United States for woman, as compared to Nigeria that she views as “...just starting to get to”. In other words, Chidera

appreciates the opportunities she has in the United States, opportunities that she thinks are just now being opened up for women in Nigeria.

When asking Mehret if she considers herself an American, her thoughts and reflections summarize the feelings of the five participants who expressed a marginalized American identity. Mehret replies,

Ahhh. Yes and No. I think that's the hardest part of identity for someone who is first generation [growing up in the United States]. While I want to claim being an American for some reasons, this country has also denied the existence and the validity of Black people, but also internationally the way they have been involved in things, makes me want to deny this country a lot. I believe that it is very, I don't know, it's a very difficult little spot, while I think this country is corrupt in a lot of ways when dealing with Black people, people of color, immigrants, any marginalized person. I guess I can't deny it because I am a naturalized citizen here. So, a lot of people use the argument that well, America has given you all of these opportunities, and of course I am grateful for them, so yes and no. ~ Mehret, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Like Saba and Chidera, Mehret links her weak sense of attachment to her American identity to the treatment of Black people in the United States. She says that while she wants to present a strong American identity, she is not able to because “this country has....denied the existence and the validity of Black people...” She says that because the United States is “corrupt in a lot of ways when dealing with Black people, people of color, immigrants, any marginalized person,” she does not consider herself an American. Simultaneously, she expresses that she cannot deny that she is an American because she is a citizen and she is grateful for the opportunities that the United States has afforded her. Moreover, Mehret mentions US involvement in the affairs of other countries across the globe, as a reason why she wants “to deny this country a lot.”

These participants who expressed a weak sense of attachment to their American identities because of feelings of marginalization, identify violence against Black bodies as an institutional and political constraint, not on just their identity, but on their very existence as human beings. Recognizing these constraints on their very lives causes them to express tenuous feelings towards their American identities. That is to say, while they understand themselves as Americans through citizenship and the opportunities they are afforded, they also feel outside the boundary of Americanness due to the threats on Black life. This illustrates how individual identity is multi-layered, but within their nested hierarchy of identity, individuals are more attached to some of their identities than others. The degree of attachment to certain identities, depends upon various institutional and political factors in the broader society.

### *Conflicting Morals and Values*

Two participants, Bershadu and Hanna, both naturalized American citizens who expressed how they are grateful for the opportunities that the United States has afforded them, were simultaneously critical of the United States' morals and values, which they say conflicts with their own. They, thus distanced themselves from an American identity, illustrating a strategy of boundary contraction. Bershadu illustrates this through telling me about a lecture she attended at Village of Hope, a community center in Seattle that does racial and social justice work in the greater Seattle metro area (<http://www.thevillageofhopeseattle.org/>). When I asked her if she considers herself an American, she states,

No. No. I'll say African American sometimes. I rarely use that. I have a huge negative connotation to being American. I'm very grateful to my parents for bringing us to America and I cannot lie that there is more opportunity here than there would be in Ethiopia. My parents sacrificed a lot to come here, so I can't

just throw that all away and say I hate them for bringing us here and I hate this country, but I see this country's principles and values as not aligning with mine. Because of that, I have no reason to associate with it when it comes that. My values and morals never have seemed to align with this. My parent's morals and values, this never seemed to align. For me, for people of color. I learned about this thing, when a psychologist came to the Village of Hope. This psychologist came and he talked about the difference between white people and people of color is that white people have connections to objects. Blacks, Asians, Latinos, all have the same, their connection is to community. ~ Bershadu, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

Through her perception that “white people have connections to objects” and Blacks, Asians, and Latinos have their connection to community, Bershadu illustrates and implies that to be American is to be White, individualistic, and materialistic. On the contrary, she associates the cultures of Blacks, Asians, and Latinos to be centered around communities, not material objects.

This communalism that Bershadu eludes to among Blacks specifically, is not unfounded. Scholars of African and African American societies point to communalism as being central to the experiences and affirmation of individuals in these societies (Arthur 2000; Kibona-Clark 2008). By doing this, Bershadu implies that non-whites in the United States are not American because she associates American identity with being White. Bershadu's sentiment echoes the findings of Butterfield (2004a) in her study with second generation West Indians who attributed an American identity with whiteness. Although an American citizen, Bershadu does not consider herself to be an American because she bases her conceptualization of Americanness on its cultural morals, values, and principles. Echoing similar sentiment is Hanna. Hanna was born in Sudan to Ethiopian parents and migrated to the United States with her parents at the age of 5. Like Bershadu, Hanna is an American citizen, and appreciates the opportunities she has here in the United States, but she does not consider herself an American because of what she

perceives to be the US' morals and values. She discusses these morals and values through the United States' portrayal of itself internationally. When asking her if she considers herself to be an American, she says,

This is such a tough question. It's sooooo hard because I live in America, I reap the benefits, I was fortunate enough to come here on a visa as refugees and life here is better than what it would be back in Africa, although it's a lot of hard work.....[hesitates] if I...I don't even know how to put this. With the values that America holds, I wouldn't consider myself American. As a humanitarian, I don't believe that America is aligned with what they say. I think that is my biggest thing. You are so quick to go jump in other countries business but what the fuck are you doing. You don't stand up for what is right, or for equal democracy. That's why I wouldn't consider myself an American. Although the Ethiopian government has had very brutal regimes before, they were very transparent about that [laughing]. To me it's about transparency. When you say all this but you don't do it, you're a liar. And I think that's where my issues lie with America, you say you are all this, but you are not, and that's why the values I believe in and seeing them not believe in them, makes me not want to be an American.~ Hanna, 1.5 generation, Ethiopian

As Hanna so eloquently expressed, she is grateful for the opportunities and benefits that come with being an American citizen, but she does not believe that the United States' values align with her own. She characterizes herself as a humanitarian, but doesn't believe that the United States is a humanitarian, despite portraying itself internationally as such, with its emphasis on standing "up for what is right, or for equal democracy". Interestingly, she appears to have more respect for the "transparency" of the "brutal regimes" of Ethiopia rather than the United States who she characterizes as being a "liar". Both Bershadu and Hanna, conceptualize an American identity as one associated with certain morals and values. Bershadu associates an American identity with being White, individualistic, and materialistic. For Hanna, an American identity is rooted in a lack of transparency, and humanitarian principles. Despite being appreciative of the opportunities presented to them in American society, their only identification and

attachment as American lies in their status as naturalized citizens (Arthur 2000). They both distance themselves from an American identity, engaging in boundary contraction, because they fundamentally perceive the US's morals and values to be in direct conflict with their own.

### *Birthright and Strategic Americanness*

Similar to Bershadu and Hanna, there were three participants who are American citizens, but expressed no attachment to this citizenship or identity. One participant was born here in the United States, but moved to Nigeria when he was 3, only to return to the United States for college. When I asked him if he considered himself to be an American, he succinctly replied,

By birth yea. But I'll tell you I'm African~ Oba, US born-1<sup>st</sup> generation, Nigerian Oba considers himself American by birth only. Other than that, he does not attach any significance to his American identity because as he says, he's an African because he was "raised in that culture..." Thus, despite his birthright as an American citizen, Oba's only identification with an American identity is through being born in the United States. He clearly and without pause says, "I'm an African." Oba's situation demonstrates that although identity formation is a multi-level process, individuals do not attach the same amount of salience to some layers, as others. As Wimmer (2008a) notes, this degree of salience of a boundary depends upon various factors. In Oba's case, despite being born in the United States, having lived the majority of his life in Nigeria affected his degree of attachment to the American layer of his identity.

The other two participants who expressed a weak sense of American identity became American citizens for strategic reasons. Arthur (2000) notes in his book, *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States*, that some African immigrant families understand American citizenship and carrying an American passport as “freedom to travel anywhere else in the world...” and one that “offers...protections” when traveling to the African continent (p. 178). Tesfaye, a first generation Ethiopian who settled in the United Kingdom before immigrating to the United States, expresses this sentiment when he tells me that he became an American citizen in order to gain the “respect” an American passport garners globally. In response to my asking him if he considers himself an American, he says,

Legally, yes [laughing]. I have signed the document and I have renounced unfortunately, any allegiance to any other power when I signed. But it is difficult to take out the Ethiopianess from me, that’s how you are. For the benefit for what America has to offer, the first step is to be a citizen. By being a citizen you have the privilege to bring your mom and dad. Also, very funny story, I was leading a mission trip to Africa and there were Americans, except me, so when we were going to some places, they give the priority to the Americans. I am the lead of the mission, but every African brother gave priority to the Americans, and I said listen, because I have an Ethiopian passport, you are giving a priority to an American and not me. That happened a number of times in the African context, and also when I was visiting Europe, they give me a hard time with my Ethiopian passport. So being an American, except in the Middle East, an American passport is more respected. So I said okay. There are a couple of reasons, for bringing my family from Europe and Africa, an American passport gets you more respect. So, for that reason, for freedom, it gets you more [laughing]. My worldview has changed, has become American, but the history, roots, culture, who I am is very much Ethiopian. ~ Tesfaye, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

Tesfaye says he is “very much Ethiopian” and that becoming an American citizen was a strategic move so that he could gain the privileges that an American passport affords him. He illustrates this through his story about traveling to the continents of Africa and Europe where he observed those who had an American passport being given special priorities.

After this experience, Tesfaye decided to become an American citizen in order to gain the “respect” that the American passport gets in many places across the globe. Tesfaye’s experience is not unfounded. In the 2016 Visa Restriction Index study done by residential and citizenship firm, Henley & Partners, the United States passport was the fourth most powerful passport in the world, allowing Americans to travel to 174 different countries without visas (Addady 2016). Moreover, Tesfaye also says that becoming an American citizen allowed him to bring his parents from Ethiopia. Despite admitting that his “worldview has changed, has become American,” he still considers himself to be “very much Ethiopian.” From Tesfaye’s response we can gather that even though he has engaged in selective blending (Vasquez 2014), his Ethiopian identity remains expected very strong as previous research has indicated (Kasinitz 1992; Kusow 2006; Waters 1994,1999). The American layer of his identity is only salient for him when he travels internationally, and is in the midst of non-Americans, other than that, Tesfaye has no real attachment to this layer of his identity.

Tena, who is also a first generation Ethiopian, echoes the same sentiment. Sitting at a table in Starbucks in Renton, Washington, during a very emotional moment in the interview for Tena, she explains to me why she refused to become an American citizen for nearly 15 years.

Okay, here is the deal. I’ve lived in America without taking citizenship when I could have done it in 4 or 5 years of having a green card. The reason being when I thought of taking an American citizenship I thought of struggling with it, it felt to me....now I want to adopt a new mother. I would take American citizenship and let Ethiopia go. And then I always wanted to keep my citizenship as an Ethiopia as an honor to my mother who died when I was only 5. If I give up, it felt like I was giving up on my own mother and I loved her so much..... ~ Tena, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

For Tena, she associates becoming American with adopting “a new mother”, and letting go of her Ethiopianness. She did not feel that she could be both an American and an Ethiopian. Given this, I followed up and asked Tena why she decided to become an American citizen if she didn’t want to give up her Ethiopian citizenship. She stated,

I didn’t take American citizenship for 15 years and then I worked in the immigration detention center. When I worked there I only had my green card, I didn’t take citizenship and then I saw people in the deportation process for things like not doing their taxes right, they didn’t pay child support, they did something like a domestic violence type or whatever. Going through the deportation process, and I never knew that you could get deported for all these reasons. So it hit me, I then said, I have two children. If I do anything wrong and they deport me, I ‘m going to have to leave without my children. I can’t let that happen. So, if I do anything wrong, I don’t plan to, but I want to do the time and get back to my family and not get deported and separated from my children for good. That scared me, gave me a wakeup call. And with that, I applied to become a citizen. I’ve been a citizen now for 10 years, but I always think of myself as an Ethiopian. I’m an American through my children because they were born and raised here, they are totally 100% American, but I am an Ethiopian. ~ Tena, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Ethiopian

As we read above, Tena’s decision to become an American citizen came after working in an immigration detention center. She describes the fear she felt of possibly being deported and separated from her children, if she ever found herself in trouble. She states that working in this immigration detention center gave her “a wakeup call.” Thus, for Tena, who describes herself as “an Ethiopian”, becoming a naturalized American citizen was strategic in order to provide her and her family with legal protection. Despite now having been a citizen for 10 years, Tena only recognizes her American identity through her children who she characterizes as “totally 100% American.” For her, she maintains “I am an Ethiopian.” Her insistence that she is an Ethiopian is clear illustration of Tena delineating her Ethiopian identity from an American identity. She clearly contracts the boundary around her Ethiopianness--distancing herself from an American identity. The

American layer of her identity rests on her ability to get due process if she were ever to get in any legal trouble, and becomes important to her only in this context.

### **Non-Americans**

The remaining six participants (15% of total participants) did not consider themselves American because they told me that they were not American citizens. Of those six, only two expressed interest in becoming American citizens, and were excited to go through the process. Yohanna, the child of Ethiopian immigrants, told me that she was not an American because she wasn't a citizen. She did not comment any further on the matter, and I did not ask her if she wanted to become an American citizen. Nkeoma, Ikechuwku, and Toben, all first generation Nigerians, lacked interest in gaining American citizenship. They cited their desire to return to Nigeria one day as the reason for their not wanting to take American citizens. As previous scholars (Arthur 2000; Vickerman 1999; Zephir 2006), have shown, many immigrants in the first generation have sojourner attitudes about their time in the United States. These three participants were no exception, as all expressed a desire to return to Nigeria. They perceived the United States as a place that provided them with the economic opportunities for a better life, but neither of them saw themselves remaining in the United States permanently. I should note, there were three additional participants who I do not know whether or not they considered themselves Americans or not. One interview was cut short on the first day, and we were never able to do a follow-up interview. Another interview took place over the phone and I was not able to understand the participant's response to the question on American identity. Finally, I failed to ask the third participant whether or not he considered himself an American.

## Conclusion

This chapter has provided evidence contrary to the Black immigrant acculturation literature that has tended to frame Black immigrant identity in an either/or framework. Understanding the racial and ethnic identities of Black immigrants as competing, I argue the contrary, and find that African immigrants and their children do not experience conflict between their racial and ethnic identities. Drawing from the scholarship that has shown identity is a multi-level process (Butterfield 2004a; Clerge 2014; Kaufert 1977; Padilla 1985; Wimmer 2008a), I illustrate how most of my participants give equal importance to their racial and ethnic identities. Moreover, they expressed how they could not separate or choose one over the other because both are important. As one participant said, “we don’t separate our Blackness from Ethiopianness, or our Africanness.” As previous scholarship has shown, the nested nature of their identities did not mean that one identity did not prove to be more salient in certain social situations (Balogun 2011; Clerge 2014; Kaufert 1977; Nagel 1994). Interestingly, participants who spoke explicitly of the fluidity of their identity were more likely to be 1.5 or second generation, and Nigerian. Participants illustrated the fluidity of their identities through their involvement in organizations, interactions with their peer groups, and school.

For some participants, their racial identity proved to be the most salient identity to them. Interestingly, these participants were more likely to be 1<sup>st</sup> generation and Ethiopian. These participants pointed to the homogenizing nature of the racial classification system here in the United States as the institutional and political constraints that results in them prioritizing, and feeling more attached to their racial identities. Furthermore, a significant number, 31%, of my participants conceptualized their racial

identity and their relationship to African Americans and others in the African diaspora through a lens of Pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanism, I theorize, is a form of boundary expansion, and is in response to the structural constraints on Black identity globally. These participants did not disassociate from their ethnic identities. Their ethnic identities were important to them, but they expressed how “no one gives a shit about” their ethnic identities in the American context. This signals that participants who highlighted their racial identity, and/or expressed Pan-African sentiment, attribute their identity formation to their belief that racial boundaries—and thus racial identity—are the most salient boundaries in the United States (Omin and Winant 1993; Winant 2015) and globally.

Illustrating a strategy of boundary contraction, as a challenge to the notion of race, were seven of my participants who expressed no real attachment to their Black racial identity, but felt more attached to their ethnic and cultural identities. These participants identified as Black as a way of acknowledging their place and relationship to African Americans in the US racial hierarchy, but their Ethiopian or Nigerian identities were most salient for them. As they saw it, their ethnic identities grounded them and provide “values and foundation” to their lives, something their higher level Black identity does not do. These participants were expectedly, of 1<sup>st</sup> and 1.5 generation status, and more likely to be Nigerian. These participants all identified racially as Black, but Black was not an identity they felt attached to, it was, as one participant said, “a descriptor” and a “class status.” I find a distinct ethnic pattern from Ethiopians, who tended to highlight their racial identity.

Finally, I explore an additional layer of the identities of African immigrants and their children—their American identities. Seventy-seven percent of (77%) of my participants were American citizens. I find that my participants overwhelmingly place their American identities as being of equal importance to their racial and ethnic identities. These participants expressed how being an American was simply part of their identity because it influenced how they thought about certain things, and how they navigate the world. American identity was expressed through my participant's association of American with certain privileges and opportunities, especially for women. Interestingly, 36% of my participant expressed a weak sense of American identity. These 11 participants identified three institutional and political constraints on their attachment to their American identities: feelings of marginalization, US values and principles, and geopolitical and legal politics.

The results in the chapter point to the need for future research on 1<sup>st</sup> generation Black immigrants and how they think about their racial identities in particular. The Black immigrant literature argues that foreign-born Blacks distance themselves from a racial identity, choosing to highlight their ethnic identities as a means of distancing oneself from African Americans. The evidence in this chapter, and my two previous chapters tell a different story. Moreover, research should expand on Pan-African thought and perspectives among 1<sup>st</sup> generation Black immigrants and the children of immigrants, which has a long tradition throughout the continent of Africa and its diaspora (Kelley 1999). Finally, future research should also explore American identity among Black immigrants, particularly the 1<sup>st</sup> generation. Much of the literature on foreign-born Blacks has tended to focus on their ethnic identity formation (Kasinitz 1992; Kusow 2006;

Rogers 2006; Waters 1999), with little mention of the possibility that they may also understand themselves as Americans, especially ones who are citizens. As this chapter illustrates, some 1<sup>st</sup> generation African immigrants not only see themselves as Ethiopian and Nigerian, but also as Americans. Furthermore, some may even identify as African Americans (Kibona-Clark 2008).

Up to this point, this study has focused on the identity formation of Ethiopian and Nigerian immigrants and their children who have settled here in the United States. In the following chapter, I turn my focus to how African migration is impacting African Americans—a question that has received less attention among sociologists in the areas of immigration and race. How do African Americans understand their relationship to African immigrants and their second generation children? African immigrants and their children are engaged in boundary expansion of the Black racial boundary, but are African Americans—the majority ethnic group in the Black racial category—accepting this expansion, or are they policing the boundaries of blackness? Furthermore, do African Americans share a sense of linked fate with African immigrants and their children? I explore these questions in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### AFRICAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES: AFRICAN MIGRATION, BLACK IDENTITY, AND RACIAL SOLIDARITY

In my previous three chapters, I have focused on the identity formation of first, 1.5, and second generation Ethiopians and Nigerians. In this chapter, I turn my focus to how the migration of Africans to the Seattle metro area is impacting native born African Americans. I focus specifically on how this migration is impacting African American's understanding of blackness and their own Black identity. I also pay close attention to whether my African American's understandings of their identities and relationships to Africans, leads them to develop a shared sense of linked fate with Africans. While I have shown in my previous chapters that my Ethiopian and Nigerian participants are engaging in boundary expansion (Wimmer 2008a; 2008b), as illustrated by identifying themselves as racially Black, and developing a shared sense of linked fate with African Americans, this chapter addresses whether my African American participants—the largest ethnic group within the Black racial category—are accepting this expansion of the Black racial category, or if they are policing the boundaries of blackness and Black identity.

#### **African Americans, Racial Identity, and the One-Drop Rule**

As Table 2 illustrates, seventy-six percent, or thirteen (13) of the seventeen (17) African American participants in my study identified their racial identity as Black, or Black/African American. The majority who identified their racial identity in this way, acknowledged that they have other ancestries, but consistent with previous scholarship, I find that these participants accept the principle of hypodescent. Commonly referred to as the one-drop rule, the principle of hypodescent socially and legally classifies a person

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Native Born African American Participants

Name	Racial Identity	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Educational Level	Occupation
Andre	Black	40	Male	Single	Bachelor's	Software Test Lead at Microsoft
Jerricka	Black	38	Female	Single	Juris Doctorate	Attorney and Non-profit consultant
Darius	Black	25	Male	Single	Bachelor's	Customer Service
Stephen	African	44	Male	Married	Some College	Uber and Share Ride Taxi Drivers
Krystal	Black	24	Female	Single	Master's	Graduate Student
Angela	African American	44	Female	Married	Bachelor's	Nurse, RN
Judy	Black	23	Female	Single	Bachelor's	Office Manager
Marcus	African	42	Male	Married	Bachelor's	Engineer
Bryson	African American	31	Male	Single	Bachelor's	Dean of Students, Education
Kara	Original	35	Female	Single	Some College	Self-employed
Josephine	American	N/A	Female	Single	Bachelor's	Engineer
Malik	African	43	Male	Single; Divorced	Bachelor's	Program Coordinator
Candice	African American	47	Female	Married	Some College	Community Organizer/ Advocate
Jerome	Black	23	Male	Single	Bachelor's	Intake and Referral Specialist, VIP Host and Entrepreneur
Dayo	Black	30	Male	Single	Master's	Buyer at Amazon Fashion
Amber	Black	21	Female	Single	Some College	Undergraduate Student
Brandon	Black	24	Male	Single	Master's	Police Officer

with any known African ancestry, no matter how small, as Black in the United States (Davis 1991). Jerricka is a perfect example this. When asking her to describe her racial identity, she replied,

I mean, I say I'm Afro-American, Black, Black American. I keep it simple. I know that in my racial makeup I have Caucasian, but I haven't been able to do any genealogical research to see what kind of Caucasian other than some family members on my mother's side found out that we are direct descendants of a man named John Hawkins. ~ Jerricka

Here, Jerricka expresses how she knows that she has Caucasian ancestry, but she keeps "it simple" and identifies her racial identity as "Afro-American, Black, Black American." Keeping it simple, illustrates her acceptance of the one-drop rule through ignoring the European ancestry in her family. Krystal gave a similar response when I asked her how she would describe her racial identity. She says,

oh gosh. I guess for me, I don't want to say a blur. I can go back and trace my Native American heritage. I have a grandfather who was 75% Cherokee Indian, so I know I have Cherokee ancestry and I guess racially I would identify myself as Black. That is the only thing I can trace back to is being part Cherokee, that's really all I have. ~ Krystal

Similar to Jerricka, Krystal expresses how she has Native American, specifically, Cherokee ancestry, but she identifies her race as Black. Like Jerricka, Krystal acknowledges that she has other ancestry in addition to African ancestry, but because of the high degree of consensus on this boundary, by both Blacks and non-Blacks (Davis 1991), the one-drop rule as endured, resulting in both women disregarding their additional ancestries, and identifying only as Black. Darrius sums up what most of my African American participants expressed,

...from what I know, it's just mainly Black. If I ask I know my grandmother said that her dad is Native American. I'm not sure which tribe or anything like that...and then on my father's side, she said that there is some Italian, I think and I believe that might be it. I do know my grandpa, who is from Louisiana, who still lives in Baton Rouge, he speaks French Creole. Other than that, I don't know much more than that per say because I asked around, but it just kind of stops at Louisiana." ~ Darrius

As our conversation continues, I ask him how he describes his racial identity and he replies,

I would just say Black or African American if somebody asked. I say that I am Black. ~ Darrius

Similar to Jerricka and Krystal, Darrius expresses how he knows that he has other racial ancestry in addition to his African/Black ancestry, but when asked how he identifies himself racially, he says, "I would just say Black or African American..." This illustrates how my participants actively engage in the one-drop rule by ignoring other ancestries and embracing "simply" a Black racial identity. This engagement with the one-drop rule is a two-way street, however. As Gullickson and Morning (2001) illustrate, those who have historically had African ancestry, have been socially and legally classified as Black in the United States. My participants' acknowledgement of their multi-racial histories also signals, as Harris and Sims (2002) points out, that the Census and other surveys capture "a multi-racial population, not *the* multi-racial population" (625) because my African American participants are just as "racially mixed" as any other group, but because of the one-drop rule, their multi-raciality has historically been ignored. This high degree of consensus around the Black boundary, as illustrated through the one-drop rule, results in my African American participants identifying themselves as Black, despite knowingly having other ancestries. The one-drop rule is an institutional and political constraint on

the identities of my African American participants, and Blacks more generally. While some scholars have shown the one-drop rule to be weakening in its effect on Black identity formation in the United States (Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2007), my findings support the work of other scholars who have shown that the one-drop rule remains central to Black identity formation in the United States (Gullickson and Morning 2001).

### *The African Race*

While most of my African American participants identified their racial identity as Black or African American, eighteen percent (or 3 participants), identified their race as African. All three of these participants let me know that they did not believe in the concept of race. Their African racial identity is one that connects their history to a specific geographical location, although none expressed that they knew from exactly where their ancestors originated on the African continent. Nevertheless, their racial identity as African served to root their ancestry and history to the African continent. Malik, the program coordinator for a youth service organization in the Greater Seattle area, makes this known when I asked him his thoughts on increased ethnic diversity among Blacks in the area. He replies,

It has brought a new level of pride into what it means to be of African descent. Black history month used to be all about the things with Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and everyone was so proud and pumped. I witnessed, as a kid, that was confusing to me because knowing that I have a culture that goes back multiple generations, it's almost as if everyone acts like Black culture began in 1965 so before that time, we didn't do anything before 1965? So this new wave of Africans and this new wave of storytelling, having griots in the community, and this new level of connectedness allows people to see that we're next to people who have been in a particular village for 200 years and we're all descendants of one of these countries, so you don't really have to know where you are from to know that you are at home with family. It gives you a new sense of identity and understanding. ~ Malik

Malik identifies his racial identity as an “African in America”. Here he clearly expresses how he understands the culture and history of native born African Americans here in the United States to be an extension of the culture and histories of Africans on the African continent. This is illustrated through his articulation of how the new wave of Africans to the Seattle area is producing a “new level of connectedness” that allows native born African Americans to see that they are the descendants of people whose histories extend back to a “particular village”. With this historical connection, and use of the term “family”, Malik invokes both a sense of historical and ancestral kinship with Africans. Kara does the same when explaining to me why she identifies her race as the “original woman”. She states,

Umm, I put original woman, you know why, cause I’m the original woman so I’m not messing with nothing else. Yes, I identify as being a Black sister, but everybody can be Black because we come from that seed, everybody comes from the same seed. I could say Ethiopian, because that's the genetic blood line of Black people, or all people. That's where the oldest living human being was found. I could say that. And then I could also say multi-racial because we've been mixed and mixed, and mixed, and mixed, so how could I go all this way and be a pure' black seed? I couldn't be a pure black seed because there are white people in my family and I'm pretty sure there are white people in your family. ~ Kara

From this we can see that Kara equates blackness and Black identity with being the “original” peoples of the Earth, and more specifically Ethiopians, who she classifies as “the genetic blood line of Black people, or all people because as she says, “that’s where the oldest living human being was found.” Thus, Kara connects her “original”/Black racial identity to the continent Africa, and specifically to the present day nation-state of Ethiopia. For Kara, to be an original, or have a Black racial identity, is to be racially African. Thus, similar to Malik, Kara links her racial identity back to the African continent through ancestry. Kara, also interestingly, says that she could also identify her

race as multiracial because she has been ‘mixed, and mixed, and mixed, and mixed’ and is no longer a “pure black seed.” So, while Kara identifies her racial identity as African, like many of my African American participants from the previous section, she also acknowledges that she has multiple racial ancestries. She illustrates this by saying that “there are white people in my family...” While acknowledging this, she, as my participants from above, reaffirm or re-consolidate the notion of the one-drop rule through their articulation of their racial identity as Black or African, despite being knowledgeable of other racial ancestries as well. Interestingly, Kara’s insistence that all human beings descend from one pure black seed in current-day Ethiopia, hints at a universalizing strategy (Lamont and Fleming 2005; Lamont, et. al 2002; Wimmer 2008a) through her articulation of all human beings being equal because they descendants of the same “seed”.

Malik and Kara’s understanding of themselves as “Africans in America,” is consistent with my African participants who understand their relationship to native born African Americans from a Pan-African perspective. If you recall from chapter three, 31% of the Africans in my sample understand their identities and relationship to native born African Americans and others of African descent through a lens of Pan-Africanism. These participants linked different Black groups together through their shared African ancestry and histories (Kelley 1999, 2000). Malik and Kara do the exact same thing through their understanding of their racial identities as African. Thus, while theories of Black immigrant incorporation have tended to highlight the ethnic and cultural distinctions among various Black ethnic groups, my data illustrates that a Pan-African perspective may also be a viable narrative in understanding how Black immigrants—

Africans specifically, and African Americans understand their relationship to one another.

### *American as a Race*

There was one lone African American participant who conceptualized her racial identity through the lens of nationalism. Josephine, an engineer at Boeing, expressed to me that she does not adhere to the concept of race, and tells me that her racial identity is simply “American.” Our exchange below illustrates her take on the concept and why she chooses to identify her race as “American”.

Me: You said you have a pretty diverse background. How would you describe your racial identity, or how do you identify racially?

J: I’m American.

Me: Why do you take American as your racial identity?

J: Because I think that’s the way we should all think of it. Probably just the way I have been treated, I guess. If I’ve been discriminated against because of my race, I haven’t openly been aware of it. I can probably say my brothers might have a different answer to that, but I haven’t. And people are aware of the fact that I am Black, if they can figure that out sometimes, some people can’t figure that out. I think of myself as American. If you had asked me that 20 years ago, I might have given you a different answer.

Me: What do you think it would have been 20 years ago?

J: Probably Black. It would have been more on that side. As I get older I realize it doesn’t matter...I think as I learn more about people and myself, I’m finding it doesn’t matter actually because the whole racial thing,.....it bugs me to no end, the division.

In this passage we see that Josephine claims a racial identity, but through her national identity as an American. Interestingly, she does acknowledge that she is Black and would have claimed this as a racial identity 20 years ago. Josephine explains the shift in her understanding and view on her Black identity through a lens of nationality, as her getting older and believing that race doesn’t matter. Similar to Kara above, Josephine

engages in universalizing strategies (Lamont and Fleming 2005; Lamont, et. al 2002; Wimmer 2008a) through her articulation that we are all Americans.

Overall, seventy-six percent (76%) of the African American participants in my sample, identified their racial identity as Black or Black/African American. This is consistent with how my African participants identified themselves racially as well. As you recall, 92% of the African participants identified their race as Black. Another 18% (3 participants) of my African American participants identified their race as African, in contrast to only one of my African participants. For these African American participants, their African American identity is grounded in their strong sense of identity with a shared ancestral and historical connection with Africans, as well as the African continent. For these participants, it didn't matter that they could not trace their familial and cultural legacy to a specific nation on the African continent, but what mattered was that they perceive their ancestors, and themselves, as an extension of Africans on the African continent. As one participant said, they are "Africans in America". Their perceived ancestral and historical connections to the African continent, are consistent with the ways in which my African participants understand their Black racial identities. Thus, despite not using the word Black to describe their racial identities, for these three African American participants who identify their race as African, they fundamentally understand Black to be equated with being of African descent, just as my African participants did. Finally, there was one participant who described her racial identity through the lens of nationalism, distancing herself from the notion of race, while simultaneously reifying the notion of race by identifying herself as Black.

Despite the labels used, what this section illustrates is that both Africans and African Americans in my sample, identify themselves as racially Black and connect their Black racial identity back to the African continent. In the next section, I turn to a discussion of how my African American participants understand the term Black, and the meanings they attach to their Black identity.

### **Theorizing Blackness Among Native Born African Americans**

The overwhelming majority of my African American participants understand Black as their racial identity, this section delves into how they understand the term Black. I find that most of my African American participants understand Black as a racial category that includes various ethnic groups. This finding is consistent with how my African participants understand the term Black. Some of my African American participants also understand Black to be equated with an African American identity, while simultaneously including Africans and other people of African descent as Black also. Similarly, one of my participants understands the term Black as an historical condition that should only be applied to those whose ancestors were part of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Others understand Black to be a category that represents the universally marginalized.

#### *Black as an Inclusive Racial Category*

Eighty-eight percent (88%), or 15 of my 17 respondents, identified Black as a racial category that is inclusive of all people of African descent here in the United States. This finding is consistent with how my African participants understand the Black category as well. Krystal, a graduate student, reiterates this point when she tells me that there is a difference between Black and African American. She says,

Black can be African American. I just think it encompasses everything. Like I said, African American, that doesn't include Haitian, that doesn't include Caribbeans, in my opinion....[Black] is more inclusive....Black covers everything.~ Krystal, graduate student

Here we read how Krystal understands Black to be a category that is “more inclusive” and “covers everything,” while African American doesn't include groups such as Haitians and Caribbeans. She articulates that Blacks can be African American, but doesn't view all Blacks as African American. Thus, for Krystal, she understands Black as an umbrella term that is comprised of various ethnic groups. Angela expresses similar sentiments when she tells me that Black is anyone who is a descendent of Africa. She succinctly says,

...Black is basically anybody with descendants from Africa, that's what I consider Black. And anybody who is a descendant or indigenous, not like a South African white woman. ~ Angela, Nurse

Angela, like Krystal, and the majority of my other participants, understands Black to be anyone who is a descendant of, or indigenous to the African continent. Thus, like Krystal, Angela understands Black to be a racial category that is comprised of various ethnic groups whose ancestors either descend from the African continent, or are indigenous to the African continent. Additionally, Angela's expression of blackness being indigenous to the African continent is consistent with how my African participants talked about their Black identity. If you recall in chapter two, the African participants in this study also linked blackness to sub-Saharan indigeneity.

As both Krystal and Angela express, they, along with the majority of my other African American participants include African immigrants and their children as members

of the Black racial category. They illustrate this through their understanding of Black to be a racial category comprised of “anybody who is a descendant or indigenous” to the African continent. This finding is consistent with the work of Watts-Smith (2014) who finds that Black immigrants are shifting the understanding of the term Black, from one that has historically been associated with race, to one that is now pan-ethnic in the contemporary moment. My findings are also consistent with the works of Balogun (2011), Butterfield (2004a, 2004b), and Clerge (2014) who find that second generation Nigerians, West Indians, and Haitians, respectfully, understand their ethnic identities to be nested within the larger Black racial category. Both my African and African American participants understand themselves as members of the Black racial category. This signals that there is a degree of consensus about who is Black in the post-Civil Rights era, providing evidence for the possible expansion of the Black boundary. Thus, both Africans and African Americans in my study are engaged in strategies of boundary expansion through their inclusion of one another as members of the Black racial category. A significant number of my participants, however, held multiple understandings of the term Black.

#### *Black as African American*

A significant number of my African American participants (53%) also understood and used the terms Black and African American interchangeably. Most of these participants also tended to identify their racial identity as Black/African American. These participants, like a significant number of my African participants, view Black and African American as a consolidated ethno-racial group. If you recall from chapter two, thirty-six percent (36%) of my African participants understood Black to be synonymous

with African American. For them, one would then specify what “type” of African American one is. This differs tremendously from the majority of my African American participants who understand the terms Black and African American to refer specifically to those who have multi-generational roots that extend back to the US South. In other words, these African American participants understand a Black identity to be one that is equated with an African American identity, as described in the Black immigrant literature (Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1999; Watts-Smith 2014; Zhou 1997). Jerricka, an attorney, illustrates the point at hand when she tells me that Black and African American mean the same thing to her. She states,

Being Black... Black American, African American, those terms are interchangeable for me. ~ Jerricka

Similarly, some participants within this group described the terms Black and African American as two sides of the same coin, where Black represented the political identity of native born African Americans, whereas African American was viewed as the more respectable, or politically correct way to refer to native born African Americans. Andre, a software test lead for Microsoft, is a perfect example of the participants who discuss the potency of each term. When asking him how he would describe his racial identity, he matter-of-factly stated,

“Black.” ~ Andre

As our conversation continued, I asked him if the terms Black and African American mean the same thing to him and he replied,

I think Black is the power side of it all. African American is the assimilated, make people comfortable side....There is nothing that is hyphenated about it. You can't hyphenate it, it just is, it's there and it's going to always be there. African American, there are several different ways people spell it—they

hyphenate, some people go Afro-American. There's all these watered down versions, you can't water down Black. I think that's just from my early militant side going to a predominately white school I think why I lean towards just describing myself as Black because, I am who I am. There is no watered down version of me, you can't water me out. If you push too hard, I will push back. ~ Andre

Here we can read how Andre understands Black and African American to mean the same thing, but have a different potency. He describes Black as the “power side”, and African American as the “assimilated, make people comfortable” term. Thus, for Andre’ and the majority of my other participants who understand Black as synonymous with an African American identity, the two words are simply opposite sides of the same coin, with one being more politically potent, and the other having less potency politically.

Judy, an office manager, expressed a similar sentiment as Andre when I asked her how she identifies racially. She says,

I'm Black. Honestly I really hate like when people, for some reason with people that are not Black when they say African American. I feel like they are trying to be too politically correct like, no I am Black, say Black. That's what I am. ~ Judy

Judy describes her racial identity as Black. In describing how some non-Black people will use the term African American instead of Black when referring to her racial identity, Judy illustrates how she not only equates Black with being African American, but she also illustrates how she perceives the term African American to be the “politically correct” version of Black. She bluntly says, don't call her African American, call her Black.

These findings are consistent with previous scholarship that has shown that African Americans tend to understand Black and African American to mean the same thing (Watts-Smith 2014). It is worth noting again, however, that although over half of

my African American participants understood their identity in ethno-racial terms through equating Black and with an African American identity, they simultaneously extend blackness, and a Black identity to African immigrants and their children as well. The extension of blackness to Africans illustrates strategies of boundary expansion among my African American participants.

*Black as an Historical Condition*

Similar to those participants who understood the terms Black and African American as synonymous, Marcus, an engineer, understood Black as a category based on “historical origin, historical circumstances.” Sitting at Africa Town, a community based organization founded for the social and economic advancement of people of African descent in the Central District of Seattle, Marcus, in the unrecorded portion of our interview, tells me that Africans are not Black and that Blacks are people in North America who were enslaved and evolved out of slavery into civilization. In our recorded follow up, interview a few days later, I asked him how he identifies racially. He states,

I don't believe there is a Black race because the term Black was envisioned and created by people here in America to reflect the identity of people whose forebears were enslaved here, and the term Black was a revolutionary term to combat Negro and nigger and other categories that were being thrust upon the people in America. Black is a cultural identity of a group of people that were brought to North America as slaves and whose descendants casted off the slave masters defining criteria of them, defining terminology for them. Then if we were to say there is an African race.... Race gets cloudy, to say yes I identify with the African race and the Black culture would be probably the best definition. ~  
Marcus

Thus, for Marcus, Black refers to the people who were enslaved in the western hemisphere, and who eventually “casted off the slave master's defining criteria of them” through adopting and embracing the term Black. Because African immigrants, nor their

children, are descendants of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Marcus, does not consider them to be Black. His understanding of Africans as outside the bounds of blackness illustrates a strategy of boundary contraction (Wimmer 2008a, 2008b), as Marcus clearly demarcates and polices the Black boundary, including the experience of only those who are the descendants of Africans enslaved in the West inside this boundary. I should note that Marcus appears to only include people of African descent in North America as Black, begging the question of whether he would extend blackness to people of African descent in South America in countries such as Brazil.

*Black as the Universally Marginalized*

Two of my African American participants expressed their understanding of the term Black as one that includes anyone, who is part of, or chooses to be part of the struggle of being Black. Stephen, a taxi driver, told me a person does not have to be of African descent in order to be considered Black. I asked him if he would mind expanding on this idea. He states,

Well, so if you go back to slavery, the one-drop rule. So just because somebody didn't look Black in appearance, maybe they had a 'Black' nose, but they got straight hair and light skin, if you know you came from somebody Black, you are Black. Black is not that you have to necessarily be from African descent or African American, you could be Samoan, Filipino...it could be for anybody. Black is kind of the negative term they give to anybody who doesn't fit [in as] part of the Eurocentric, European, Western Civilization, part of that structure. ~ Stephen

Stephen clearly articulates how anyone who does not fit into “the Eurocentric, European, Western civilization” can be considered Black. What Stephen is articulating is a strategy of boundary expansion of blackness as a category that is extended to marginalized people, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and so forth, across the globe. From

his perspective, the Black category can be even further expanded to include the universally marginalized, not just those of African descent. This perspective differed from the majority of both my African and African American participants, who as you may recall in chapter two and earlier in this chapter, respectively, understand Black as a category comprised of people of African descent, who are indigenous to the sub-Saharan region of the African continent, whether directly or indirectly.

The overwhelming majority of African Americans in my study understand Black to be a racial category that is inclusive of Africans, and other people of African descent here in the United States. This provides evidence for the possibility of an expansion of the Black racial category as we see a degree of consensus on who is Black through both these groups understanding one another as Black. Like my African participants in chapter two, some of my African American participants hold multiple understandings of the Black category. A significant number understand Black to also be interchangeable with the term African American. As I have shown, most of these participants, consistent with theories of Black immigrant incorporation, equate Black with an African American identity. Although some of my African participants understood Black and African American to be synonymous, they took it a step further and specified the “type” of African American a person is (ie. Ethiopian, Nigerian, etc). This is a fundamentally different understanding of the ethno-racial Black/African American category than my African American participants. For both these groups, Black is most oftentimes a racial category comprised of various ethnic groups, but it is also a term that can refer to the specific ethnic group that traces its heritage back to the US South.

One of my African American participants actively engaged in boundary contraction through his policing of the Black category. This participant understands only those who are the descendants of Africans transported to the West and enslaved, to be Black. Through his strict interpretation of blackness, he contracts the boundary of blackness, excluding Africans. Finally, two of my African American participants engaged in boundary expansion as they understand Black to be a category for all marginalized and oppressed people. Two of my participants relayed that one did not have to be of African descent in order to be Black; one could be Filipino, for example, and be a member of the Black category. Through their interpretation of blackness as a category that can be extended to the oppressed globally, they actively expand the Black boundary.

The latter two ways in which my African American participants understand the term Black signals that future research should delve further into how people of African descent understand the term Black and how that might affect their sense of identity and their relationship with others racialized as Blacks. Despite the multiple understandings of the term Black, my data clearly shows that the African American participants are receptive to Africans establishing themselves as members of the Black racial category. This strategy of expansion, however, does not mean that African Americans understand their blackness in the same ways as Africans. I discuss this in the following section.

### **African Americans and Black Identity**

If you recall from chapter two, my African participants point to their Black identity as an identity that connects them to others in the African diaspora here in the US through shared ancestry and historical struggles against global anti-Black/African oppression. In contrast, I find that a little over half of my African American participants

understand their Black identity as grounded in the African American experience. These participants point to the history of African Americans in the United States as the defining characteristic of their Black identity. Moreover, they also express a pride in this history and their identity as Blacks. In addition to those African American participants who understand a Black identity as grounded in the African American experience, 41% (or 7 participants) expressed their understanding of a Black identity and their relationship to Africans, through a Pan-African lens. Similar to my African participants in chapter four, these participants identified ancestral, cultural, and historical connections between Africans and African Americans.

*Black Identity: The African American Experience*

Fifty-three percent (or 9 out of 17 participants) of my African American participants thought about their Black identity as one that is grounded in the native born African American experience. My participants who identified their Black identity through this perspective talked about the history of struggles of African Americans in the United States, but they also talked about the pride they have in this history and struggle. Bryson, a dean of students at a non-profit educational organization, illustrates this when I asked him what it means to be Black/African American to him. He replied,

I think it's owning who you are, owning your history, and the path that has been laid for you. I feel like I'm standing on the shoulders of so many different people, so to me that means, being Black I have this job to do, making sure that what's been done doesn't die. The struggles that have happened doesn't die and that's for me, that's why I work as hard as I do. My [great-great] grandmother was in the field being whipped so that I can sit at the table with people. To me, being Black is really being aware and owning who you are....There's a richness in our culture and our history and really being aware of that. ~ Bryson

As Bryson so eloquently states, his Black identity is based on the history of native born African Americans in the United States, starting with chattel slavery. Bryson illustrates this history of chattel slavery through articulating how his great-great “grandmother was in the field being whipped.” In spite of this history, Bryson feels that it’s partly his job to make sure that the struggles of his great-great grandmother doesn’t go unnoticed or doesn’t die. He is proud of this history of struggle and resistance as illustrated through his perception that being Black means “owning your history” and continuing the struggle of the “richness” of the culture and history of African Americans. Krystal, a graduate student, reiterates this meaning of a Black identity when she tells me that to be Black is about the history of oppression here in the United States, but also the resistance to this oppression among African Americans. She reflects,

For me, to be Black, I look at what that means going back to our history, the history of slaves, being descendants of slaves who went through struggles and hardships and even the Civil Rights Movement, that’s what being Black means to me. I mean there are different shades of Black, you have dark skinned, fair skinned complexion, for me, being Black is Black history, that’s what ties me to being Black. The way I look, hair pattern, texture of hair, we have the situation where people are going natural. I am natural now. It’s been a journey. Being Black is a journey tracing back to slavery, coming to America, the struggle with being in America, the Harlem Renaissance, to the Civil Rights Movement, to Black Lives Matter. That’s what I take from being Black. ~ Krystal

Like Bryson, Krystal roots her Black identity in the history of native born African Americans in the United States. She refers to the “history of slaves, being descendants of slaves” and the hardships faced by African Americans in the United States as the struggles that root African American history. Additionally, Krystal also discusses the history of resiliency of African Americans through resistance when she talks about the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and the current day grassroots effort of

Black Lives Matter. Like Bryson, Krystal understands her Black identity as rooted in this history of oppression, but her Black identity is also rooted in the great sense of pride she has when thinking about the resistance movements that African Americans have engaged in to combat their oppression. Like Bryson, she sees herself as “standing on the shoulders” of those African Americans who came before her. Andre, a software test lead for Microsoft, sums up the perspective of my participants, accordingly. He states,

I think my Black identity comes from the struggles I have to deal with—being followed in stores, being harassed by the police, or instantly being questioned more than my white friend I’m with, by the police; walk into a store, can afford to buy anything in there, don’t get any help and then finally I figure out what I want and I go up and I’m like, ‘hey, can somebody help me.’ When they realize ‘oh you work for Microsoft,’ all of a sudden they want to show me something else. ‘Nah, I’m good.’ Even at work they have this thing called interpersonal awareness: how we talk to people, communicate with people and make them feel comfortable. It’s always amazing to me how I’m constantly described as intimidating, or people don’t feel comfortable with me or don’t like my responses, when they are being kind of nasty towards me. I feel like I am being very controlled because there are a number of things I could have said, or done. I always feel like I have to make myself small so other people feel comfortable. So to me that is blackness, that is my identity. ~ Andre

He continues,

But then there’s the positive side of it—creativity, we’ve created so much and you go back and look at the history there’s that proudness of ‘these are the type of people I came from,’ regardless of all the adversity we go through, we still can create something in the middle of chaos that is beautiful. I don’t think there is another race of people that can. Someone stomps down on you, got you chained, take your kids and do whatever they want to you, and you still can come up with Negro spirituals, things to uplift you, you continue to move; come up with dance and ways to express yourself, ways to communicate such that nobody knows what you’re actually communicating about. Or, you come up with different languages, even though it’s not an original African language or the general American language, it’s a language that’s unique to those people who have been oppressed. I don’t think you’ll ever stop blackness. There is no way to eradicate blackness, it is a truism. Those things make me very proud and that’s the other part I associate with Blackness. ~ Andre

Spoken so clearly, Andre sums up how these 53% of my African American participants understand their Black identity. In the first passage, he clearly articulates how his Black identity is firmly rooted in his everyday experience of racism as illustrated by him “being followed in stores, being harassed by the police”, or having to make himself “feel small so other people feel comfortable.” The other side of his Black identity, however is the pride he feels knowing that in all that African Americans have been through, they have remained resilient and creative. This resiliency and creativity is illustrated by Andre’s description of African Americans having gone through chattel slavery, and in the midst of this having created music, song, and dance as a way to express themselves and secretly communicate with one another. He ends by saying “I don’t think you’ll ever stop blackness. There is no way to eradicate blackness, it is a truism.” For Andre, and my other participants, who root their Black identity in African Americans’ history and resistance in the United States, they discuss their Black identity, not just as one that brings racism and discrimination, but one that also makes them proud to be the descendants of a people who were, and continue to be, resilient and resist their oppression.

*Black Identity: A Pan-African Perspective*

Not all of my African American participants however, understand their Black identity through just an African American experience. Seven, or 41% of my African American participants understand their Black identity through a Pan-African perspective, much like 31% of my African participants from previous chapters. As an intellectual tradition and political ideology practiced by activist, academics, and everyday people (Getachun 2007; Kelley 1999; Von Eschen 1997), Pan-Africanism got its start in the

Western world among people of African descent who were the descendants of Africans transported across the Atlantic Ocean and enslaved throughout the Americas. A Pan-African tradition links the histories of slavery in the West with the histories of colonialism on the African continent, thereby understanding both these phenomenon as congruent histories that result in the subjugation of both continental Africans and people of African descent in the Western diaspora (Kelley 1999, 2000). This Pan-African sentiment came through when I asked Stephen, a taxi driver, whether the terms Black and African American mean the same thing him. He replied,

definitely Black and African American, or Black and African, yea they go hand in hand, all three are the same to me. ~ Stephen

Earlier in our conversation I asked him how his pride in being Black was developed and he replied,

Knowledge of self. I consider myself a truth seeker, someone who seeks knowledge and tries to better their self-intelligence with information, [with] more information I sought out, the more it directed and guided me to this and I have a better understanding now of these things. I didn't know all of the things we had accomplished as a people before other people had done anything. And I think that's a big part why people don't, when you're young, you don't want to identify with being Black because you don't know, they just teach you about slavery. Nobody wants to be associated with a slave or somebody who was in servitude to another people, the things done to slaves, they don't want to identify with that because that's the only history they gave us. They don't teach us that we did other things, that we made contributions to the world more than all the other races put together. We founded the first civilizations, these types of things. So first, finding these things out made me take pride that I was a part of this race, this group, but then also, I have a group responsibility to carry that on and further that. ~ Stephen

In these passages, we read how Stephen understands his Black identity and his relationship to Africans from a Pan-African perspective. He illustrates this first, through his description and understanding of Black, African American, and African as going

“hand in hand” and meaning “the same” to him. This resembles how 31% of my African participants understand their Black identity as well, as they link their identity to African Americans through shared African ancestry and histories (Kelley 1999, 2000), as Stephen did. Thus, just as my African participants fundamentally link their Black identities to indigenous sub-Saharan Africans, Stephen links his identity and history as an African American, back to African histories through his reflection around the contributions that Africans have made to the world, specifically through them founding the world’s first civilization. Like my other African participants who understand their Black identity from a Pan-African perspective, Stephen understands his history as an African American, to be distinct, yet an extension of a larger African/Black history that is connected (Kelley 1999, 2000).

If you recall Dayo, who has an African American mother and a Nigerian father, also illustrates how these participants understand their Black identity and relationship to Africans. A graduate of Florida A&M University (FAMU), a historically Black college located in Tallahassee, Florida, Dayo told me that he has always been privy to the diversity of the Black community through not only his background, but also through his time at FAMU. Asking him how he understands the term Black, he tells me,

Being Black at the very root of it is to be African.....so when I hear Black, I think of somebody who is of the African diaspora. Could there be a better word to describe it, should there be a better... word to describe it, probably, but if we are talking Black the way it is generally understood, not only in this country, but in a lot of other countries, it means a person of the African diaspora. ~ Dayo

Here we read how Dayo, like Stephen, and my other participants who understand their Black identity and relationship with Africans through a Pan-African perspective, links his Black identity as an African American to others in the African diaspora, but also back to

the continent of Africa. He illustrates this when he says at the very root of being Black is to be African, and thus when he hears the word, Black, he associates it with “a person of the African diaspora.” Furthermore, through his experience growing up in both African American, as well as Nigerian spaces, and attending FAMU, Dayo says he sees many cultural similarities and connections between African diasporic and continental African culture—specifically African American and Nigerian culture. He gives me an example,

I think the biggest similarities that I’ve seen between African American and Nigerian culture is the way they view themselves and the way they view each other particularly within the family unit. Very often in the Black [African American] and the Nigerian community you will see somebody say ‘oh this is my uncle, or this is my auntie’, knowing good and well that’s not your biological auntie [laughing]. But it’s the way we think about our community....there’s that collective ownership of familiarity with each other. And I think what that speaks to more than anything is being invested in the success of the people in your community. It’s not just the thought, but the knowledge, that these people are going to be looking after me even though your parents might not be physically watching you, they always have eyes on you, kind of a thing. Even like an auntie saying ‘that’s my baby’. We understand that I’m not literally like your child, but we are related. It’s a sense of closeness. It’s interesting in the way that they say it, with both languages or both dialects, so even if they aren’t necessarily saying it in Yoruba, they can say it in English. The approach to it might be different, but it’s still the very same thing. ~ Dayo

Dayo, through his analysis of the family unit in both African American and Nigerian culture, expresses how both these cultures are similar. He uses the example of African Americans and Nigerians using the terms uncle or auntie to refer to people who are not biologically one’s uncle or aunt, to illustrate these cultural similarities. What Dayo is describing is the sense of “collective ownership” within many African American and African communities (Kibona-Clark 2008) where it’s not just his biological parents who are invested in him, but oftentimes others throughout the community who may have been “looking after” him when his parents weren’t. As Dayo expresses, this auntie may or

may not be biologically kin to him, but she feels just as invested in him as his parents do. This is the reason she will say “that’s my baby”. She feels just as responsible for Dayo, and has taken ownership over him, just as his parents would. For Dayo this is not uncommon among people throughout the African diaspora as he tells me earlier in our conversation that “...at the core of every Black person whether they grew up on the continent of Africa, in America, or in the Caribbean, or even in Brazil, family is very central, family and community is very central to who we are as a people. Wanting to pursue the common good for the entire community, not just yourself.” These cultural and ancestral links that Dayo perceives between him and others in the African diaspora, including Africans, is not unfounded, as Kibona-Clark (2008) has argued that pressure from within African American communities may be a remnant left over from West African cultural practices. Thus, for Dayo, not only does he understand his Black identity as linking him to others in the African diaspora, but he also sees cultural and ancestral connections between African diasporic and continental African communities.

Fifty-three percent (53%) of my African American participants understand their Black identity as grounded in the African American experience, centered on the history of chattel slavery and Jim Crow, along with African Americans’ resistance to these oppressive institutions. This differed from the African participants, who if you recall in chapter two and chapter four, understand Black identity as a global identity that connects them to others in the African diaspora, but also connects the diaspora back to sub-Saharan Africa through ancestry and historical struggles. Although the majority of my African American participants centered their Black identity around the history of African Americans in the United States, they also recognize Africans, and other people of African

descent as Black. This signals the possibility of the expansion of the Black racial category through African Americans--the largest ethnic group within the Black racial category--readily accepting Africans as Black racial group members, but it also illustrates the multiple understandings of the blackness held by my participants. Thus, while immigration is likely to expand racial boundaries (Alba and Nee 1997; Wimmer 2008a, 2008b)—specifically the Black racial boundary—it is simultaneously complicating our notion of what it means to be Black in the United States. Furthermore, I have shown my African American participants overwhelmingly understand Black as a racial category inclusive of various ethnicities, but understand their Black identity mainly through their African American experience illustrating how people of African descent in the United States understand the Black *category* and how they understand their own *personal identities within this category*. Instead of resting on the assumption that people understand and give the same meaning to racial categories, future research should examine how people understand not only the meanings attached to racial categories and terms, but also the meanings they give to their identities as members of these categories.

Another forty-one percent (41%) understand their Black identity through a Pan-African perspective centered on ancestral, cultural, and historical ties to Africans and the African continent. This is consistent with the way my African participants identified their relationship with African Americans also. This signals Black identity as a global identity that links various black ethnic groups to each other (Watts-Smith 2014), but also back to the African continent. These African American participants not only willingly renegotiate the Black racial boundary through expanding it to include Africans, but they also fundamentally see their blackness and the blackness of Africans as the same. This is

not to say that they don't acknowledge cultural and language differences, or that ethnic tensions don't exist, but they understand their Black identity to fundamentally be tied to the identities of Africans in the US, as well as on the continent. They identify ancestrally, culturally, and historically with other people of African descent in the diaspora, but also with continental Africans (Kelley 1999).

### **African American Perceptions of Discrimination Against Africans and Resources**

So far I have shown that the African Americans in my sample are willingly expanding the Black racial boundary to include Africans and their second generation children, although they have multiple understandings of what their blackness means in relation to how Africans understand blackness. In this section, I explore in more detail whether or not these multiple meanings of blackness—particularly those African Americans who understand their Black identity through the African American experience—serve to put distance between them and Africans, or whether these different meanings are minute. I approach this question mainly through asking my African American participants whether they think Africans face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans, and whether they think what happens to Africans has an effect on them. I find that my African American participants perceive Africans here in the United States to face the same types of racism and discrimination as them, through simply being Black in the United States. Additionally, some participants identified additional layers of discrimination for African immigrants and their children: language and accent, culture, and issues of immigration. Despite over half of my African American participants understanding their Black identity strictly through an African American experience, they simultaneously consider Africans to be Black, and perceive

that they experience the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans. Because of this, I find that my African American participants share a sense of linked fate with African immigrants, and their children.

#### *African American Perceptions of Racism and Discrimination against Africans*

Decades of research has shown that native born African Americans have a strong attachment to their racial identities due to shared historical and contemporary experiences of oppression that include chattel slavery, Jim Crow (Dawson 1994), and present day mass incarceration. This strong sense of identity results in a group consciousness that articulates individual African American lives as tied to the lives of the Black racial group as a whole (Dawson 1994). Part of this linked fate among African Americans develops through shared experiences of discrimination. I asked my African American participants whether they think Africans face the same types of racism and discrimination as they do. If African Americans think Africans face the same the same types of racism and discrimination as they do, they are more likely to extend a shared sense of linked fate to Africans. Below is a discussion of how African Americans perceive the discrimination of Africans.

Ninety-four percent (94%) of my African American participants expressed how they believe that African immigrants and their children face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans. Marcus, an engineer and Sunni Muslim, who personally doesn't perceive Africans to be Black because he understands Black people to be those whose ancestors experienced the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, did however, tell me that African communities in Seattle are now dealing with the same types of social conditions as African Americans have been dealing with for centuries. As we sat in the

old red and white building that is AfricaTown, Marcus tells me that a few days before our interview, he had attended the funeral of 20-year old Zakariya Ibrahim Issa, a young Somali man, who was shot and killed by an ex-friend. According to Marcus, the initial belief among the Somali community is that Zakariya was killed by an African American. Soon after Zakariya's funeral, police arrested another young Somali man on charges of first degree murder of Issa. Marcus tells me that many in the Somali community expressed a sense of disbelief that Zakariya was killed by another Somali. Through this story, Marcus expressed to me that African communities have always thought that African American communities were filled with gangs, drugs, and poverty, and this was due to their own ineptitude. He says now that African communities are dealing with these same issues, Africans are now realizing that it's not that African Americans have some internal ineptitude, but that it's the American context that creates these situations for people.

Thus, Marcus' experience with Africans, particularly through gang violence, illustrates how African communities in Seattle are now navigating similar institutional structures as African American communities. Marcus' perception that Africans face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans is consistent with previous studies that have shown that African men--specifically Ethiopian men--in the second generation are more disadvantaged than the first generation (Emeka 2016). This disadvantage has not been well explained, but some have attributed it to their phenotypical blackness, as well as their mode of entry into the United States as mainly refugees (Emeka 2016). Throughout my interviews, some of my African participants spoke about the high numbers of East African young boys and men incarcerated in

juvenile detention centers in Seattle. Although my dissertation does not delve into this, I theorize that their interactions and involvement with law enforcement and the legal system in the United States might also contribute to the poverty, and violence Marcus discusses above.

Andre also believes Africans face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans. When asking him this question directly, he says,

Yes...I have some friends that went to school in Virginia and some of their stories of dealing with the cops and white people and their perception of how things are done, are the same stories I have. ~ Andre

I asked him if he could give me any examples of things his West African friends have gone through. He continues,

Getting arrested by the cops. You're walking in a neighborhood hanging out with your white friends, you leave your white friends and are walking back through the same neighborhood you walked through before, and all of a sudden the cops pull up on you wanting to see your ID. They asked him "What are you doing over here?" He gives them his college ID so they will know he's in school and he was like, the cop didn't care, he wanted to act like he was doing something..... ~ Andre

Here we read how through interactions with police and Whites, as told to him by his African friends, Andre has developed a belief that Africans are the victims of the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans. According to Andre, his friends have been the victims of racial profiling from police as illustrated when he tells me about his African friend being interrogated by police while walking through a predominately white neighborhood. The experiences of Marcus and Andre both illustrate how these African American participants have come to perceive that Africans face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans. For Marcus, he came to

understand this through seeing African communities—specifically Somali communities—be subjected to the same social ills—poverty, residential segregation, drugs, gangs, etc.—as African Americans (Rogers 2006). Similarly, Andre develops the same perception through his African friends being racially profiled by police. This is consistent with the experiences of some of my African participants who described their experiences with law enforcement in chapter two. If you recall, some of my African participants felt that particularly law enforcement treated them as if they were African American. Additionally, similar to what I noted above, some of my African participants mentioned throughout their interviews issues between the African immigrant and refugee community, and the Seattle police department. The problem appears to be significant enough that it prompted a community wide town hall meeting during the summer of 2015, of which I attended.

Jerricka, an attorney tells me that she thinks Africans face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans, but that it differs by class. She states,

Yes, I think it's class level, it's like dealing with being the only Black person in the boardroom, corporate board room, you're going to get racial stereotypes and sometimes you overcompensate by being super studious... you know the Black tax. The Black tax impacts them [Africans] just as much as it impacts us. They see some of that in terms of business and science, more so than some of the underclass. ~ Jerricka

In this quote Jerricka expresses how she thinks that upwardly mobile Africans face the same type of racism and discrimination as upwardly mobile African Americans through being the “only Black person in the...corporate boardroom” where Africans will have to deal with racial stereotypes. The “Black tax,” as Jerricka describes it, involves Blacks trying to prove to their white colleagues that they are qualified to hold the position that

they have, and that they are not affirmative action hires. Jerricka perceives that high achieving Africans, like high achieving African Americans, face the “Black tax” where the legitimacy of their qualifications for the position they hold is questioned because they are Black. A variation of the Black tax was also expressed by my African participants in chapter two, specifically among those who were attending university. If you recall Negus, Genevieve, and Royowa all spoke about their intelligence and abilities being questioned in the classroom, because they are Black. Furthermore, Jerricka distinguishes between the types of racism upwardly mobile Blacks face as compared to other Blacks when she says that the “Black tax” is applicable for upwardly mobile, high achieving Blacks, but not necessarily for Blacks in the “underclass”, who presumably would face a different type of racism and discrimination.

*Other Forms of Discrimination: Language/Accent, Culture, and Deportation*

Other of my African American participants said Africans face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans, but they also faced additional types of discrimination. They identified language/accent, cultural differences, and the possibility of deportation as sources of added levels of discrimination against Africans. When I asked Malik, a program coordinator for a non-profit agency in the Seattle metro area, whether he thought African immigrants and their children face the same types of discrimination as African Americans, he replies,

...higher levels of discrimination, they are Black, just like we are visually, they live in the same communities as we do, so they are going to get that. Then there are loans that they get at a much higher rate than we do because they have a lack of understanding, and then they won't understand all the language and terminology that is being used around them because they are not native English speakers...~ Malik

Malik clearly articulates that Africans and their children face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans because in his words, “they are Black just like we are visually, they live in the same communities as we do” and thus, “they are going to get that”—the same treatment as African Americans. He continues and illustrates the added layer of discrimination that Africans face when he tells me that Africans—specifically the 1<sup>st</sup> generation—get higher interest rates on loans they may take out because they do not understand the “language and terminology” because “they are not native English speakers”. In this instance, Malik, who works mainly with East African populations, is referring to and basing his knowledge on the lack of native English speakers among Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Somalis in the Seattle metro area. Nigerians, who were British subjects during colonialism, tend to come to the United States with full knowledge of, and the ability to speak the English language.

Sitting at his kitchen table in a very affluent neighborhood in West Seattle, Brandon, who describes himself as having been lucky to grow up in a solidly middle class family, tells me that Africans face multiple forms of discrimination due to their accents, and the cultural bias that the West has towards the African continent. He states,

I think that Africans are unfortunate in that they get multiple layers. Having an accent is just not an advantage, no matter what. It’s not...even though I would look at my own name with some sense pride, on an application, it just screams that you don’t speak good English and it’s terrible because it’s not true, necessarily. But if you are a person that has 3 ‘O’s in your name, [that] speaks of foreigner, a person who doesn’t understand our way of life, all that stuff. I’d say that Africans have the disadvantage of being dark-skinned persons, which makes you non-white, and then on top of that you have the cultural bias associated with just not being a Westerner, and specifically not being an American. So you might even be the lowest of the low because you’re a person of color that is not from here. Not only do you look like dirt, but you don’t know our ways, that’s sort of the most negative way you can look at it...when you talk about discrimination, that’s kind of the way you have to describe it, the lowest of lows. So, I’d say yea,

it's very unfortunate. I'd say they face a higher degree of discrimination. ~  
Brandon

Brandon vividly explains why he thinks Africans face multiple forms of discrimination on top of being “dark-skinned” and thus “non-white” in the United States. He points to not only accent, but discusses how an African, despite having pride in their name, will be perceived as not having the ability to “speak good English” and thus will be discriminated against on this basis. He continues and articulates how Africans are also discriminated against due to them not being Westerners, and “specifically not being an American.” Thus, for Brandon, Africans not only face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans through being Black in the United States, but they face additional forms of racism and discrimination through their accents, names, and not being Western. To Brandon, this places Africans as the “lowest of lows” in terms of how discrimination impacts their lives.

Similarly, Bryson adds to the sources of discrimination that my African American participants perceive Africans to face. When I asked Bryson, a dean of students at a local middle school in Tacoma, whether he thought Africans faced the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans, he said,

Oh yea. To some degree, given the state of our nation, it may be even worse at times depending on what is going on. In our society we are so set on looking at the outward appearance. I told my nephew, he's lighter. I told him, 'I don't care if you are biracial' [Black dad, white mom], when the police see you, you are Black.' They don't go on the radio and say 'biracial male', no you are a Black male, you are Black. And I think that is the same thing when it comes to African immigrants and African Americans, it's you're Black. Certain ways we are viewed, I think when it comes to legal things, even when it comes to the court system, more goes into that...again, a friend of mine, she's a social worker, she was doing this work and she was telling me that when an African immigrant goes into the court for whatever reason, there is always somebody there from immigration. All these different parties that are involved when an African

immigrant is there. Whether it is custody, drugs, crime, whatever, at any given time it's 3-4 people besides the attorneys that are present. Racially, I think it's pretty equal footing when it comes to...discrimination. When you get into the legal system, I think it gets a little bit worse for African immigrants. There are so many factors that go into that. What happened? Do you have your green card? All these different pieces that make it a little bit more difficult to be, I guess to live, and to survive. Again, to the eye, you're Black, so if you get pulled over, you are Black. ~ Bryson

In this passage, we read how Bryson not only adheres to the one-drop rule through him telling his bi-racial nephew that “when the police see you, you are Black”, but this also illustrates how he understands Africans to be Black in a similar way. As he says, African immigrants [and their children] are Black, and thus subjected to the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans. However, as he continues, he points out through the interactions he has had with an African friend of his, that Africans have to worry about additional forms of discrimination, particularly around immigration issues. Bryson illustrates this through his recollection of conversations with his friend and how she has told him that when Africans come in contact with the legal system here in the United States, it's not just the person's attorney that is present at court proceedings, but there are also immigration officers present. He says, “racially,...it's pretty equal footing when it comes to...discrimination,” but for Africans, they have a more difficult time living and surviving because there is always a threat of possibly being detained and/or deported.

The findings in this section are consistent with the ways in which my African participants expressed how they felt as if they face the same types of racism and discrimination as African Americans. Both groups point to issues with law enforcement as well as Black racial stereotypes as shared institutional contexts that they both navigate

in similar ways. These shared experiences of racism and discrimination in these contexts, operate through their shared Black identity (Nunally 2010; Rogers 2006; Vickerman 1999). If you recall from chapter two, some of my African participants identified additional layers of their identities that were also sources of discrimination. They, like my African American participants above, pointed to language/accent, and the cultural misrepresentations of the African continent. One of my African American participants also identified possible issues with immigration, particularly detention and/or deportation for African participants, especially if they are, at any point, involved in the US legal system. While the majority of my African American participants said Africans faced the same types of racism and discrimination, there were a few participants who also discussed how they felt that Africans were given more access to better economic, housing, and public assistance resources than African Americans.

*Differential Treatment: Access to Resources*

There were five (5) of my African American participants who expressed to me that they perceived that the US in general, and Seattle specifically, treated immigrants, not just African immigrants, better than they treated African Americans. These participants believed that the city of Seattle gave the African immigrant community more access to economic, housing, and public assistance resources, as compared to African Americans. Take Stephen for example, when asking him if he thinks Africans are treated better in the United States than African Americans, he replies,

Africans? Yes. Absolutely. Well, economically. It's a lot easier for an African probably to get a loan than it is for an African American to walk in and get a loan for a house or a business. Lot easier for them to get public assistance or assistance from the government, organizations, or groups than it would be for an African American. So I definitely think there is a difference in that, especially in economics, or money wise. I don't know why that is, but I think Malcolm X once

mentioned that it's because they identify as African, they know who they are...for some reason they see them differently.” ~ Stephen

Angela, a nurse and devout Sunni Muslim, expresses a similar sentiment when I asked her the same question. She states,

I would say...they treat immigrants better than they treat African Americans and I don't know if they get that treatment because they fall into that category, or if it is because they like them. I don't know. I have heard African American people complain here in Seattle. One time I was at a rally about housing and an African American woman came up to me...so from my attire she assumed I was East African because I am Muslim and of course, there are hardly any African American Muslims. And so she made the comment that she had been in Seattle all of her life, for this long period of time, and now all these people had come here and got assistance with housing and starting businesses and doing this and doing that...she's been here her whole life with little assistance from Seattle. And she made it in kind of a snotty way to me. And I said, 'hmm, I know that's right.' And when she heard my voice, she said, 'where are you from'? I said, 'Kansas.' She said, 'oh I know that, but where did your mother and father come from'? I said, 'Alabama and Texas'. She said, 'oh so you're Black'? I said, 'yes, I'm Black'. She said, 'oh I didn't know, you got on that suit they wear'. ~ Angela

As we read, Angela gives a very vivid and detailed articulation of the argument at hand. Through her interaction with another African American woman at a rally for housing, Angela tells me that in the city of Seattle, there is a sense among African Americans that African immigrants are being given access to different types of assistance—housing and business resources—at the expense of African Americans. She talks about how the African American woman, who mistook her for a Somali, had been in Seattle her entire life, but had little assistance from the city of Seattle. Moreover, Angela agrees that the city of Seattle is providing immigrants, and African immigrants in particular, with more resources than they are African Americans as illustrated through her stating, “hmm, I know that's right” after the other African American woman states that she hasn't received assistance from the city of Seattle. Both Stephen and Angela, interestingly, do not know

why the United States is more open to African immigrants, or immigrants more generally, than to African Americans. Previous literature has speculated that white Americans tend to view immigrants as a mirror of themselves—people who work hard and don't complain, unlike African Americans, who remind the United States of its original sin, chattel slavery. Waters (1999) notes in her work with West Indians in New York City that she was more comfortable with West Indians than she was with African Americans.

Marcus, who happens to be Angela's husband, proposes another theory as to why the United States is more open to immigrants than it is to African Americans. Marcus tells me that he believes Mexican, Asian, and African immigrants are being allowed in the United States to exploit African Americans, but to also push them out of the few resources that they have. According to Marcus, 70% of all welfare recipients used to be White in Seattle and 15-20% were Black. This supposedly did not go with the vision that the city of Seattle wanted to create for itself, therefore, in order to create a more diversified view of welfare, Seattle began accepting immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Mexico. This according to Marcus, is also a way to push African Americans from welfare benefits. Today in Seattle, he says, if you go into the welfare offices you see mainly Asians and Somalis. He also said that much of the public housing—Rainier Vista, the New Hollies, Yesler Terrace, etc.—is filled with East Africans. It is Marcus' belief that the White man, who he characterizes as not an individual, but a system of white supremacy that controls the international economic structure of industrial processes, owes a debt to African Americans, but doesn't want to pay, so they allow

Africans and other immigrants to come to the United States and take advantage of resources set aside for African Americans, and to exploit them.

While the overwhelming majority of my African American participants expressed that African immigrants and their children experienced the same types of racism and discrimination as they did, and thus were not advantaged, a few of my African American participants perceived that African immigrants and their children receive advantages in economic, housing, and public assistance benefits. Interestingly, this did not seem to affect how these participants understood their relationship with African immigrants and their children within the context of blackness in the United States. Of the five participants who discussed Africans having access to more resources, none of them expressed that this excluded Africans from the Black racial boundary, nor did it appear to cause resentment among most of my African American participants. One lone African American participant, Marcus, did express resentment towards his perception that Africans were given access to resources at the expense of African Americans. For the majority of my African American participants, however, the blackness of my African participants seemed to outweigh the perceived benefits from the White power structure. As I will illustrate in the following section, the overwhelming majority of my African American participants expressed a shared sense of linked fate with African immigrants and their children.

### **African Americans and Linked Fate with Africans**

The differential treatment expressed by a few of my African American participants, along with the fifty-three percent (53%) who expressed the meaning of their Black identity to be grounded in their African American experience, did not impact my

participant's understandings of their relationship to African immigrants and their children. Eighty-eight percent (88%), or 15 out of the 17 African Americans in my study, expressed a shared sense of linked fate with African immigrants and their children. Linked fate, as you may recall from chapter two, is the historical phenomenon among native born African Americans that developed due to their shared historical experiences of racial oppression in the United States. According to Dawson (1994), African Americans develop a group consciousness that articulates individual African American lives as tied to the lives of the Black racial group as a whole. This shared sense of linked fate expressed by my African American participants, like the linked fate my African participants expressed with African Americans, is centered on both groups' shared Black identity. Andre, a software test lead with Microsoft, makes this clear when I asked him if what happens to Africans has an effect on what happens in his life. He states,

I think when they are here and it happens to them, I think it can easily be set as a precedent. I don't think America views them as Africans. I think America, the non-Black community, views them as Black....I've never seen anything that happens, or maybe I didn't notice that happened, specifically to Africans here in America, that wasn't happening to Blacks, to Black Americans, so. There's not a difference. ~ Andre

Andre clearly states that he can't think of anything that is happening to Africans here in the United States that is not happening to African Americans or any other person of African descent. He says "there's not a difference," implying that there is no situation that happens to specific Black groups, but what happens to African Americans, happens to other Black people in the United States. Thus, Andre, like the overwhelming majority of my other African American participants, understands his identity as an African American to be linked to the identities of Africans through their blackness. Judy

expresses a similar sentiment when I asked her if she thinks she would have been affected by the killing of Michael Brown in the same way if he was a young African boy. She said,

Yes. I would...to me if he was African, I don't care where he was from, if he was from California, if he was from Nigeria, yes that's just as important to me. That's a Black man. African man, Black man, I don't care, that's still important to me, I don't care, I'd still raise hell about the same thing. A difference isn't made to me there, cause I'm just like that's another man in our community, in our larger Black community so for me, that's crazy. I'm not going to be like, oh my gosh, is he from Africa. That's not me, that's not my people, ya'll go ahead and take care of that. No, we all gotta come together on those issues and be in solidarity about that kind of stuff. ~ Judy

Judy clearly explains that it doesn't matter if Michael Brown was from California, or from Nigeria, his killing would have still been important to her signaling that she understands her identity as an African American to be tied to the lives of African immigrants and their children. Judy also illustrates a shared linked fate with Africans and their children when she says that if Michael Brown had been African or the child of an African, he is still "another man in our community, in our larger Black community..." This sentiment of viewing Africans and their children as members of a larger Black community here in the United States, was prevalent among my African American participants with 16 out of my 17 African American participants placing Africans and their children as members of the Black community here in the United States. The shared sense of linked fate among Africans and African Americans in my study demonstrates how the boundaries of blackness in the United States are indeed expanding, as African Americans, the largest ethnic group within the Black racial category, understand and

accept Africans and their children as members of the Black community who are bound together with them.

In her study examining diasporic linked fate among African Americans, Nunnally (2010) finds that African Americans express a shared sense of linked fate with other African Americans, but this shared sense of linked fate with West Indians and Africans was more tenuous. My data shows that my African American participants do express a shared sense of linked fate with Africans. I, however, am not able to determine how solid or tenuous this sense of linked fate is.

Some of my African American participants also expressed a shared linked fate with Africans outside the borders of the United States. These participants tended to understand a Black identity in the same ways as most of my African participants—a global identity that connects all people of African descent through shared ancestry and historical conditions. Stephen, who is married to a Moroccan woman, makes this clear when he says,

What happens globally to Africans? Yes, so like I said, if you are Black, people see you as Black. Everybody wants to say it's not about race, but it's hard to not think that. We take in more information with our eyes than anything else, so when you see someone you automatically saying this person white, this person Asian, this person Black, and like I said we got it worse than anybody on the planet cause everybody kind of got it against us. Globally, locally, even other Blacks sometimes have it out for us. So, yea, I definitely think I am impacted or feel impacted by things that go on wherever Black peoples are, especially if it's negative. ~ Uber and Shareride taxi driver

Here we read how Stephen feels connected to the struggles and conditions of Black people “wherever” they are in the world, “especially if it’s negative”. He, like the other African Americans who expressed linked fate to Africans on a global scale, feels that what happens to Africans globally affects him because he understands himself and his

Black identity as tied to Africans “globally” and “locally”. He also expresses how all people of African descent are connected through this Black identity when he says “...we got it worse than anybody on the planet cause everybody kind of got it against us...even other Blacks sometimes have it out for us.” Other participants who understood their Black identity as one that connects them to Africans globally gave explicit examples of how the issues of Africans on the continent of Africa affects them here in the United States. Krystal gives us insight into how these few participants felt they were connected to some of the issues going on within various nations of the African continent. When I asked her if she feels that what happens to Africans affects her life, she replied,

I do. When you hear about the stuff that was happening in Africa...the stuff that is happening in Darfur and stuff like that, the girls that were missing in Africa [Nigeria], it does hit home because at the end of the day, I’m a Black girl. That possibly is my culture, that’s what I identify with. Other than the fact that they are African and I am unsure of what I am...racially we are the same. For me, I feel like, hearing about Darfur and the girls that were missing, that personally was like heart-wrenching, you don’t want anything to happen, those are my people. ...It’s just hard for me to say or describe, but for me it wasn’t a matter of that’s an African problem, cause even though...I have been identifying as African American, I guess I kind of struggle with the identifications because I feel like I keep going back and forth, but being Black has been more of a recent thing. Still even if I do use Black, there is part of me that is still deeply like I am African American. I’m just using Black because I am displaced from what I am. Hearing about that situation, I am still disheartened because I identify with those people. ~ Krystal

As Krystal articulates, she feels a sense of shared linked fate with Africans not just in the United States, but also on the African continent. Krystal illustrates this sense of shared linked fate with Africans on the continent through her expression of being “disheartened” by the rape of women and children in the Darfur region of Sudan during the War in Darfur, and the kidnapping of over 200 Nigerian schoolgirls from the town of Chibok in 2014. Krystal expresses how even though she associates her Black identity as one that

signals her “displacement” from a specific African ethnic identity, she still very much identifies with the term African American, a term she told me earlier in our interview she associates with African immigrants who are US citizens and their US born children. Despite Krystal’s feelings of being displaced, she still feels as though she is connected to Africans on the continent of Africa—especially women and children—because, as she states, “at the end of the day, I’m a Black girl. That possibly is my culture, that’s what I identify with.”

Stephen and Krystal’s feelings of connection with situations on the African continent are consistent with the work of Thornton, et. al (2016) who show that African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans feel a closeness to Africans on the African continent. Thornton, et. al (2016) identify the history of Pan-Africanism in both African American and Afro-Caribbean communities, especially the historical overlap of the Civil Rights Movement and the “emergence of independent African and Caribbean nations” (15) as reasons why African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans have a shared sense of closeness with continental Africans.

There were two of my African American participants who did not share a sense of linked fate with Africans. One participant, Brandon, expressed to me that he did not feel that what happens to Africans, or the majority of other African Americans, has an effect on him because he is privileged socioeconomically. Although his best friend is Eritrean, Brandon is biracial (African American dad and White American mother), and grew up in a home where his household income is over \$200,000. He grew up in an affluent white and Asian neighborhood in West Seattle, and attended a private Catholic high school. Brandon clearly placed his privilege on the table during our interview, explicitly saying

“I know I’m extremely privileged”. He told me that he votes Democrat out of empathy for those less privileged than himself. During his description of interactions with police and experiences he says that he doesn’t think he has ever been racially profiled. Thus, for Brandon, his biracial and class privilege makes it hard for him to identify with the experiences of many other African Americans, as well as Africans, despite shared Black identity.

Josephine also expressed a lack of linked fate with Africans. For Josephine, who has African American, German, and Native American ancestry, and is racially ambiguous, told me that she only interacts with Africans--specifically Nigerians--at her work at Boeing. She says that she does not feel that she has ever been discriminated against because she is Black or because she is a woman working in the male dominated field of engineering. Josephine lives in a mixed neighborhood in Renton and doesn’t feel a part of a Black community, although she does share a sense of linked fate with African Americans--specifically through police brutality against Blacks, which she described as “ridiculous” and makes her “cautious when she drives”.

I should note that both Brandon and Josephine are both very light skinned African Americans, neither grew up in neighborhoods with a substantial number of African Americans or Africans, and both are uncertain of the potency of racial discrimination in their everyday lives. These factors could be explanations as to why neither of them have a shared sense of linked fate with Africans, and for Brandon with other African Americans. Josephine expressed a shared sense of linked fate with African Americans.

## Conclusion

My African American participants overwhelmingly identify their racial identities as Black or Black/African American. Despite most of them acknowledging other ancestries such as Native American or European, they consistently identified their racial background as Black, or Black/African American. Their acceptance of the principle of hypodescent illustrates the high degree of consensus around the Black boundary by both Whites and Blacks. This also is consistent with the work of scholars who study mixed race populations and argue that the increasing notion of mixed race individuals should be placed in context and understood as “*a* multiracial population and not *the* multiracial population” (Harris and Sims 2002). As my African American participants illustrate, they are as racially mixed as any other group in the United States, but the racial classification system of the United States constrains their identities.

There were also African American participants in my study who identified their racial identity as ‘African’. Their African racial identities served to connect them to a specific land, that a Black identity cannot. Although none of these participants expressed knowledge of where they were specifically from on the African continent, they took pride in their African heritage and tended to express their identities and relationship with Africans across the diaspora through a Pan-African lens. This finding overlaps with the 31% of Africans in my study who also understand their identities and relationship with Africans Americans through their shared African ancestry and histories. Finally, there was one of my African American participants who conceptualized her racial identity through a lens of nationalism. Although she explicitly said she is Black, she identified her racial identity as American.

This chapter also illustrates how my African American participants understand the category Black. As I have shown, 88% of my African American participants, like my African participants in previous chapters, understand Black to be a racial category that is inclusive of all people of African descent. This finding is evidence for the possible expansion of racial categories (Wimmer 2008a, 2008b), and specifically the Black racial category in the United States as illustrated by both groups identifying each other as racial group members. There were others who had multiple understandings of the term Black. Some of my African American participants also understood Black to be a term that is interchangeable with the term African American. Like a significant number of my African participants, these African American participants understand Black/African American as an ethno-racial category, inclusive of all people of African descent in the United States. Their sense of this category, however, differs significantly from my African participants' conceptualization. For my African American participants, Black is equated with a native born African American identity—the quintessential African American (Greer 2013) whose roots extend back to the southern region of the United States. My African participants, however, understand Black as a category and African American to be a pan-ethnic category nested within the larger Black racial category, where one would then specify the “type” of African American one is (ie. Ethiopian, Nigerian, etc.). To my African participants, native born African Americans, who cannot trace their ancestry to specific African countries, would be “generic” African Americans.

Similar to those who equated Black to an African American identity, one participant reserved the category Black exclusively for those whose ancestors survived the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Thus, for this participants, Africans, nor their children,

are considered Black, illustrating a strategy of boundary contraction. Black as a category associated with the universally marginalized—anyone who is non-European and considered outside the structure of Western civilization—was also expressed by a few of my African American participants, illustrating a strategy of boundary expansion to include not just those of African descent, but all marginalized and oppressed people across the globe.

Despite these multiple understandings of Black, the overwhelming majority of my African American participants did consider Africans to be members of the Black racial category. My African American participants, however, did not necessarily understand their Black identity in the same ways as my African participants. A little over a half of my African American participants understand their Black racial identity as one that is fundamentally grounded in the African American experience. This is in contrast to how my African participants thought about their Black identities. The overwhelming majority of my African participants understand their Black identity to be one that connect them to others in the African diaspora through shared ancestry and historical struggles. There were some of my African American participants who understand their Black identity in the same ways as my African participants. These participants expressed their understanding of Black identity and their relationship to Africans through a Pan-African lens. Taken together, this chapter demonstrates that future research should unpack how people, native born and immigrant, understand racial categories and how they understand their personal identities and experiences as members of these racial categories.

Finally, this chapter demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of my African American participants believe that African immigrants and their children face the same

types of racism and discrimination as African Americans—and sometimes even worse discrimination due to their accent/language, cultural misrepresentations of the African continent, and issues of immigration for those who are not US citizens. A few of my African American participants did express to me that they felt as if African immigrants and their children were given more access to economic, housing, and public assistance resources, at the expense of African Americans. Most did not understand why the United States appeared more welcoming to immigrant in general, than to African Americans, but one of my African American participants theorized it is because the United States does not want to pay native born African Americans reparations and thus allow immigrants to gain economic, housing, and public assistance resources in order to push African Americans out. Despite some perceiving African immigrants and their children receiving these benefits at their expense, and their different understanding of their blackness, 88% of my African American participants expressed a shared sense of linked fate with African immigrants and their children. This shared sense of linked fate, like the linked fate my African participants expressed with African Americans, is centered on both groups' shared Black identity whether in the local or global context.

Overall, African Americans' understanding of Africans as members of the Black radical category points to how they are accepting the possible expansion of the Black racial boundary to include Africans and others people of African descent here in the United States. The multiple understandings of Black and meanings my African American participants attach to their Black identities, signals how there is a renegotiation of these terms going on among Black people. As the largest ethnic group within the Black racial category, my findings in this chapter articulate African Americans' accepting the

expansion of blackness, rather than policing its boundaries. The acceptance of this possible expansion is illustrated through their understanding of themselves as tied to African immigrants and their children, and through their shared sense of linked fate with Africans. This expansion is not new as historically we have seen the Black boundary expand to include biracial people (Davis 1991). Thus, African migration is not rearticulating the Black boundary, but rather it's possible that it is simply expanding the boundary through the addition of various ethnic groups. African Americans' perceptions are engaging in this expansion by accepting Africans as Black, which, in the United States, has always been excluded and marginalized, whether native or foreign.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

For any random White person, I'm a Black guy...but then we as Blacks within ourselves, we have our own divisions, oh he's Black but African, he's Black but Caribbean, he's Black but African American...so to outsiders, when I say outsiders, the Whites, look at us as all Black and then within Black we are divided. ~ Desta, 1st generation, Ethiopian

I'm a Black person in America. I don't have Nigeria written on my forehead and even if I did, what does that mean? It's not going to distinguish who I am because Black bodies is Black bodies. I'm just like any African American, I'm just another Black body walking... ~ Genevieve, 1.5 generation Nigerian

Black comes first, you're Black before anything. Walking down the street, you're going to see a Black man before I even open my mouth. Opening my mouth you might hear an American accent, you might hear an African accent, you might hear a Dominican accent. But walking down the street, driving, I'm going to be Black no matter what. ~ Dayo, 2nd generation, Nigerian and African American

The quotes above capture the essence of the argument presented in this dissertation—while there is unprecedented ethnic diversity among Blacks in the United States, to those outside the boundaries of blackness—particularly Whites—Black people remain an undifferentiated group. Black immigrants today account for nearly 9% of the nation's Black population, having tripled their share of this population since 1980 (Anderson 2015). This drastic rise in foreign-born Blacks has changed the cultural and ethnic demographics of Black residents in cities such as New York, Miami, Houston, and Washington D.C. The overwhelming majority of these immigrants are Afro-Caribbean populations, with recent growth being driven by continental African migration (Anderson 2015). This dissertation was concerned with the recent and growing African immigrant population. African migration has more than quadrupled in the last two decades and

unlike prior waves of African immigrants who would come to the United States to gain an American education and skills, then return to their respective nations, today African immigrants are settling and building families, and a life here in the United States (Takougang 2003). Unlike Afro-Caribbean and Haitian immigrants, both of whom are concentrated in the Northeast and South Florida, African immigrants tend to be much more spread out regionally (Anderson 2015), with significant communities in major metropolitan areas across the United States, as well as small towns in states such as Idaho and Maine (Takougang 2003).

As foreign-born Blacks, and specifically, African immigrants, immigrate and settle permanently into a racially stratified US society where they are racialized as Black (Bashi and McDaniel 1997), but also maintaining very strong ethnic identities, it becomes increasingly important to understand their identity formation. This dissertation sought to understand this through their relationship with the native born African population--the largest ethnic group within the Black racial category. Understanding the identity formation of African immigrants through their understanding of their relationship to African Americans can tell us a lot about the changes *to* and *within* the Black racial category as these immigrants and their children acculturate to US society. Furthermore, understanding this relationship helps us understand how racial and ethnic boundaries may be shifting in this era of immigration to the United States. I approached this through asking the specific question: *Do African immigrants and their children share a sense of linked fate, or racial solidarity, with the native born African American population?* To answer this question, this dissertation engaged thirty-nine (39) African immigrants and

their US born children, as well as seventeen (17) African Americans, all of whom reside in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan area.

In chapter one, I discussed the existing literature on the historical phenomenon of linked fate in African American communities that has resulted in native born Blacks developing strong attachments to their racial identities and a group consciousness that ties their individual lives to the lives of the Black racial group as a whole. Existing literature on foreign-born Blacks has tended to characterize this generation's understanding of its identity through an ethnic only lens, arguing that the ethnic identities of the first generation are very strong, and thus, they tend to distance themselves from a racial identity (Blyden 2012; Rogers 2006; Zephir 2006). This in turn, leads the literature to conclude that foreign-born Blacks do not share a common identity with African Americans, and therefore, do not share a sense of linked fate. The literature on the second generation has taken a more nuanced approach, but still tends to characterize Black immigrant identity through an ethnic lens only. This literature links the identity formation of the second generation to mobility, arguing that the children of Black immigrants who maintain their parent's ethnic identities and distance themselves from a racial identity, are more likely to be upwardly mobile. Embracing a racialized Black identity and expressing a shared sense of linked fate is reserved for those children of Black immigrants who are downwardly mobile according to this theory (Portes and Zhou 1997; Waters 1994, 1999; Zhou 1997). Thus, existing literature understands the identity formation of Black immigrants and their children in a competing framework, where they result to choosing either a racial or an ethnic identity. I employ the theory of boundary formation, of which I argue is a far better approach to understanding the identity

formation of Black immigrants and their children because not only does it understand identity formation as a multi-level process (Wimmer 2008a), rather than competing against one another, but it also gives us the theoretical framework to think about the constraints on African immigrant identity, as well as the strategies that individual Africans engage in within these constraints.

Chapter two details the constraints on African immigrant identity, and addresses the central research question of my dissertation. This chapter illustrates that my African participants, who are upwardly mobile identify racially as Black, and they understand Black to be a racial category that encompasses a vast array of ethnic identities that are nested within this category. Understanding themselves as members of this Black racial category illustrates how my African participants are engaging in the expansion of the Black racial boundary. Moreover, my participants tended to view their Black identity as a globalized identity that connected them to others in the African diaspora through ancestry and historical anti-African/Black global struggles. Their shared Black identity lead them to develop a shared sense of linked fate with African Americans, and other people of African descent here in the United States. This sense of linked fate rested on the homogenized effects of the racialized system (Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Watts-Smith 2014) and their everyday experiences of racism. Because others view them as African American, they are treated as African Americans. Thus, because the majority--Whites--view them to be African American and they experience the same types of racism and discrimination because of this, their identities are constrained, and they have no choice in whether or not they are Black or not.

In chapter three, I explored the various strategies of symbolic boundary making among my African participants, *within* the constraints on Black racial identity. I illustrate how my participants engage in boundary contraction, through their understanding of themselves and the meanings they attach to their ethnic identities, as ethnically distinct from African Americans. This contraction however, was not characterized by ethnic distancing among my African participants. I illustrate this particularly among the 1.5 and second generation who exhibited bicultural identities (Phinney and Devich-Navarro 1997) and engaged in selective blending (Vasquez 2014). My 1.5 and second generation participants' identities were a combination of both their Ethiopian or Nigerian cultures, as well as African American culture. This identity gave them the ability to cross boundaries and "become African American" in certain social contexts. This flexible ethnicity as demonstrated by my 1.5 and second generation suggests the boundaries between the children of African immigrants and African Americans are becoming increasingly blurred.

I turn my focus to a more detailed account of the multi-layered process of identity work among my African participants in chapter four, providing a more nuanced account of identity formation among Black immigrants and their children than the competing framework outlined by the Black immigrant acculturation literature. This chapter focused on how my participants negotiated between their racial, ethnic, and American identities. I find that my participants understand their identities as "nested segments of differentiation" (Wimmer 2008a, p. 976), and thus see each layer of their identity as being equally important. Most of my African participants embraced their racial, ethnic, and American identities, but one of these identities become more important in certain

social contexts than others. Moreover, some participants did feel more attached to one layer of their identity than others. I theorize the degree of attachment to one section of their identity over another, is dependent upon various institutional and political constraints.

Chapter five focuses on how the migration of Africans to the Seattle metro area is impacting African American identity formation. In this chapter, I look specifically at how my African American participants understand Black as a category, Black identity, and their relationship to Africans who have settled here in the United States. My African American participants overwhelmingly identified their racial identity as Black, despite acknowledging other ancestries. This illustrates their acceptance of the principle of hypodescent, which is an institutional and political constraint on the identity formation of African Americans, and Blacks more generally in the United States. This chapter demonstrates how my African American participants are also engaging in boundary expansion through their understanding of Black as an inclusive racial category that includes anyone who is of African descent. Thus, they include Ethiopians and Nigerians as members of the Black category, even though a significant number also understood Black to be synonymous with African American. In another show of boundary expansion, two of my African American participants extended the Black classification to the universally marginalized. One lone participant contracted the Black boundary by insisting that only those whose ancestors experienced the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade should be considered Black. My African American participants understood their Black identities through either strictly an African American experience or from a Pan-African perspective. Despite a majority understanding a Black identity through an African

American experience, and a few expressing Africans having more access to resources than African Americans, the overwhelming majority (88%) of my participants expressed a shared sense of linked fate with African immigrants and their children. This shared sense of linked fate rested on their shared sense of Black identity with Africans, and thus their belief that Africans in the United States faced the same types of racism and discrimination as they did.

### **Future Research**

In the course of writing my dissertation, it became apparent to me that there are far more questions about Black immigrant identity formation and acculturation to the United States that my dissertation nor existing literature has yet to answer. One such question lies in how my participants understand the categories Black and African American. I focus on the meanings my African participants attach to both these terms, something most existing literature does not do. The assumption embedded in this literature is that Black immigrants and their children associate Black with an African American identity (Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1994, 1999; Zhou 1997). Butterfield (2004a) and Clerge (2014) have begun doing this work, but future research should delve into the meanings different Black ethnic groups give to these terms. This would be particularly interesting scholarship among other African populations, such as South Africans.

Secondly, I find a Pan-African narrative among 31% of my African participants, and 41% of my African American participants. These African participants were more likely to be foreign-born Ethiopians, as compared to Nigerians in the study. Because the African continent did experience a history of colonialism by European countries in the

19th century, continental Africans have a long history of understanding their identities through a racial prism and has sought to build bridges between their experiences and the experiences of Africans throughout the diaspora, including African Americans. Future research should engage this perspective, particularly among foreign-born Black immigrants. Similarly, future research should also revisit the identity formation of the first generation. While existing literature focuses on the ethnic identity of the first generation, my data has shown that my first generation Ethiopian and Nigerian participants also have strong racial identities.

Finally, my dissertation focuses on the identity formation of African immigrants in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan area. While my dissertation is unique in its focus on metro areas outside traditional immigrant settlements, it also only highlights a particular social context. I find that my African participants shared a sense of linked fate with African Americans, however, future research should engage this question with Africans, and other Black immigrant groups, in other regions of the United States. Previous research has shown that the children of immigrants tend to highlight their Black identity in predominantly White social contexts, while highlighting their ethnic identities where the situation is the reverse (Balogun 2011; Butterfield 2004b; Clerge 2014). This begs the question whether we would find the same sense of linked fate among, and ethnic boundary work among African immigrants in other emerging gateway cities, such as Atlanta and Houston--cities with far more long standing native born African American communities than Seattle.

## **Implications of Current Study**

Through an investigation of the identity formation and understanding of their relationship to native born African Americans, this dissertation provided a more nuanced understanding of the intersections of race, ethnicity, migration, and identity. Through a theoretical framework focused on boundary formation we see how the institutional and political constraints—homogenization of Blackness and shared experiences of racism—results in African immigrants, across generations, and across both Ethiopians and Nigerians, developing a shared sense of linked fate with African Americans. Because Whites perceive all Blacks to be the same, all Blacks are treated similarly. This in effect prompts both my African and African American participants to engage in boundary expansion through their extension of blackness to one another.

There are however, renegotiations and symbolic boundary work going on within the Black boundary as a result of African migration. This could not be more evident than in the 1.5 and second generation who not only tend to have multiple understandings of the term African American, but who also have flexible ethnicity and are able to “become African American” in certain social contexts. This signals a weakening of ethnic identity among the 1.5 and second generation and the blurring of the symbolic boundary between the children of African immigrants and native born African Americans. This renegotiation and blurring of the African American boundary could prove quite important in the future of allocating resources such as affirmative action policies. Moreover, as we approach the 2020 Census, current proposed racial classifications could be setting up a situation where some African immigrants and their children are perhaps double counted as African Americans and Ethiopians or Nigerians. Thus, evidence presented in my

dissertation suggests that subsequent generations of Africans in the Seattle metro area, will quite possibly, eventually melt into the larger African American category. As my participants illustrate how they are perceived to be Black, and thus African American, I theorize this ethnic category within the larger society will continue to be equated with Black. African migration, then, results in a reconstitution of the Black category and a Black identity, as all those who have African ancestry are constrained by not just the one-drop rule, but by the homogenizing effects of the US racial classification system. What remains then is an increasingly ethnically diverse Black population whose roots reflect fewer quintessential African Americans (Greer 2003) and more African Americans whose roots extend to other parts of the African diaspora.

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