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Young African diaspora: Global African narratives, media consumption and identity formation

ABSTRACT

This study focused on identity formation and media consumption among first-generation young Africans in the diaspora. It investigated what it means to be African and the impact of multiple identities and forms of belonging within diasporic communities. Emphasis was on how they experience the diaspora as liminal spaces and subsequently negotiate relationships with other Africans in indeterminate diasporic spaces to construct, redefine, negotiate and even contest identities. Using snowballing and purposive sampling, the study analysed first-hand accounts and interviews informed by personal histories and lived experiences of (1) what they know about Africa; (2) their sense of belonging to Africa; (3) how Africa is represented in the media and (4) their views/attitudes on markers of African identity. Findings indicate that young Africans in the diaspora have a

KEYWORDS

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strong sense of belonging to Africa and are actively engaged with different forms of African media such as music and films.

INTRODUCTION

The African diaspora, that is persons of African descent living outside of the African continent, emerged mainly from historic movements, including slavery and colonialism. There, however, have been numerous dispersals associated with African peoples over time that can be traced as far back as prehistoric times (Zeleza 2005). In fact, Palmer (2000) argues that the history of the African diaspora is as old as the history of humankind. Zeleza (2005) categorizes African diasporas in terms of their places of dispersal including (1) intra-African such as West African diasporas in North Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands of Madagascar and Mauritius, (2) the Indian Ocean diaspora which comprised both forced and free migrants and flowed over centuries to Asia such as India and Sri Lanka, (3) Mediterranean diaspora such as the Negroid peoples in ancient Rome or the millions of Africans who were taken to Mediterranean lands of Islam and (4) the Atlantic diaspora comprising forced dispersals of Africans as slaves to the Americas, and more recently the post-slavery free labour and trade migration waves across the Atlantic.

Using the term 'African diaspora' to broadly define all those who descended from the historic migrations of peoples from Africa since the fifteenth century, the study investigated what it means to be African and the impact of multiple identities and forms of belonging within diasporic communities. African peoples have been in constant motion for over 100,000 years, travelling and transforming the globe and being transformed in many ways (Palmer 2000). This constant motion is reinforced by Zeleza (2005: 41) who describes the diaspora as naming, remembering, living and feeling of a group identity that is moulded out of experiences, positionings, struggles and imaginings of the past and the present, and times the unpredictable future, which are shared across the boundaries of time and space. Renowned scholar Joseph Harris asserted that the African diaspora is characterized by voluntary and involuntary dispersal of Africans globally, emergence of a cultural identity based on commonalities in experiences and the psychological and physical return to Africa by those dispersed (Harris 1993).

The African Union (2020) defines the African diaspora as 'people of native African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union'. This means the continental body is welcoming of African migrants, including the young African diaspora living in the global north, so that they can fully 'participate' in the building of the AU. Young African diaspora are arguably an important and yet understudied group within the global communities of people descended from Africa. According to the United Nations (2022), 70 per cent of those in sub-Saharan Africa are under the age of 30 and this presents an urgent developmental challenge. African youths, both in Africa and the diaspora, possess tremendous potential to reshape the developmental trajectory of Africa by introducing a multitude of new opportunities for progress and growth. By leveraging their talents and engaging in initiatives that drive positive change, young Africans have the capacity to unlock new possibilities and propel entrepreneurship and innovations in Africa. Yet not enough research exists that examines the perspectives

of African youths, especially those in the diaspora. Some questions that arise then include, firstly, who are the African youths in the diaspora and what do we know about their attitudes to Africanity, and secondly, from their multiple locations, including in Europe or North America, how do the young African diaspora regard the question of being African?

The advent of modern technological infrastructure has significantly amplified transnationalism and facilitated increased global information flows, playing a crucial role in fostering connections between individuals living both within and outside of Africa. By bridging geographical distances, these technologies have allowed for enhanced communication and engagement, enabling those in the African diaspora to maintain stronger ties with their home countries and communities. Nevertheless, a significant challenge persists regarding the bias in global information flows and its impact on narratives about Africa and identity formation among diasporic communities.

The unequal representation and distorted portrayals of Africa within mainstream media and information sources can shape perceptions and hinder a more accurate understanding of African identity. Addressing this bias and promoting a more balanced and nuanced portrayal of Africa is crucial for fostering a positive and empowering sense of identity among diasporic communities.

There have been renewed calls to explore and analyse stories about Africa in the diaspora and how diasporic communities negotiate and construct their African identities within the broader context of biculturalism (Anderson 2015; Kebede 2019; Sall 2019). This study will focus on identity formation and construction among first-generation young African diasporas (18–28) in the United States, the United Kingdom and France. The goal of the project was to investigate first-hand the study of global narratives about Africa and self-definition and identity formation among young African diasporas as they negotiate being African within biculturalism in the global north. The project uniquely sought to explore, analyse and determine the extent of the influence of global media and non-media narratives about Africa among young African diasporas in the United States, the United Kingdom and France at a time when digital technologies have allowed them to access other alternatives as well as to forge a new identity for themselves and the continent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of storytelling and narrative-making exerts a significant influence on how individuals construct their social realities, ultimately shaping their self-definition and identity formation. Identity formation occurs as young people forge and construct self-identities from associated groups such as family, ethnicity, race, education, membership to organizations/associations and media consumption habits. A diasporic identity implies a form of group consciousness constituted historically through expressive culture, politics, thought and tradition, in which experiential and representational resources are mobilized from the imaginaries of both the old and the new worlds (Zeleza 2005: 41). Narratives about Africa on diasporic dinner tables, social media, songs, film, TV shows, charity messaging and global news media such as CNN, BBC and TV5Monde impact how young diasporas perceive, navigate and constantly negotiate their identities. Zeleza refers to diaspora as 'a process, a condition, a space and a discourse' (2005: 41) and further notes that it is a continuous process of making, unmaking and remaking the places

where it is moulded and imagined, and the contentious ways in which it is studied and discussed.

Most work on diaspora communities focuses on migrants' links and connectivity to their homeland, although there has been a shift in recent studies. Tsagarousianou (2007), for example, emphasizes how the separation from the homeland often leads to an intense search for and a negotiation of identity among diaspora communities, and this is supported by Zeleza (2005) who notes that the diaspora is simultaneously a state of being and a process of becoming, kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings. From the above two descriptions of the diaspora, it is evident that the diaspora is a liminal and indeterminate space that is lived in, negotiated, contested and constantly evolving as it draws both from the richness of the depth of Africa through inter-generational oral stories, experiences and lived way of life, and the existing canvases of racialized global north metropoles. It therefore entails a culture and a consciousness, sometimes diffuse, and sometimes concentrated, that is often characterized by a diaspora regime marginalization, and an invocation of a rhetoric of self-affirmation and belonging (Zeleza 2005: 41).

The questions of what Africa is and who are Africans are critical to analyses of African diasporas (Zeleza 2005). Kibona (2008) notes that issues of identity among African diasporic communities include self-identification as well as identities imposed on African immigrants. The point is that migrants can also be impacted by their new environment, retaining a longing for the homeland but also get a sense of 'home' from their host-country. As Weedon argues, 'diaspora communities often display multiple and hybrid identities that draw both on relatively fixed ideas and new hybrid identities and cultural forms that emerge from engagement with the culture and society in which the original migrants settled' (2004: 104–05). They are complex communities created out of real and imagined genealogies and geographies of displacement and belonging, and are fashioned in the fluid contexts of social experience, struggle, transnational circuits of exchange of diasporic resources and discourses of power by intellectuals and political elites (Zeleza 2005: 41–42).

While there are emerging studies of African diasporas and global media, many are still limited to what happens in online communities. Crucially, 'an exclusive focus on media representations has denied agency to how those represented in mainstream media interpret, accept or challenge representations of themselves' (Mano and Willems 2008: 102). Also, apart from 'the role of the internet in linking up members of diasporic communities, the internet should more importantly also be considered as a space in which different diasporic identities are articulated, imagined and contested' (2008: 102; Kibona 2008).

It is important to note how African diasporas have to some extent 'acquired grounds and new spaces in which to talk about how they wish to be represented' (Mano and Willems 2008: 121). It is in this context that this research followed Castells (2010: 6-10) in observing 'plurality of identities' in the co-construction of identity fostered by social and cultural building blocks that can result in what Castells describes as: (1) Legitimizing Identity, which puts a distinct label and structure; (2) Resistance Identity, a collective attempt to resist oppression which results into building of communities; and (3) Project Identity, wherein new identities are built to create a new position or label in society.

METHODOLOGY

This study provides unprecedented insights into young African diaspora in the United States, the United Kingdom and France. The selection of these countries for the study was purposeful as they not only have large populations of African diaspora but are also top destinations for many young African diaspora. This study therefore focused on how they foster a sense of identity and belonging in these countries. Our research design was informed by the question posed by Zeleza (2005: 42) on how best to study African diasporas to capture their complex histories, connections and disconnections, and compare their experiences. Zeleza goes on to draw the answer from Hine's (2001) argument that calls for three features, namely, a transatlantic framework, interdisciplinary methodology and a comparative approach. This study therefore incorporated the three features to study global African narratives, media consumption and identity formation in the African diaspora. The methodology drew from a transatlantic framework in defining the diaspora, adopted interdisciplinary approaches and carried out a comparative analysis of young African diaspora in the United Kingdom, France and the United States. This section also covers the main research questions that guided the study and details the sampling procedures used and data collection methods.

Key questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How do first-generation diasporas perceive and construct what it means to be African?

RQ2. How are the narratives about Africa framed in global news and emerging digital entertainment platforms in the United States, the United Kingdom and France?

RQ3. To what extent have African diasporic youths defined and sustained a viable sense of African identity?

RQ4. How does the African diasporic youth negotiate both the tensions and convergences between their mediated experiences of Africa (via media) and their lived experiences of being African in American and European metropoles?

Sampling procedures

The project was a multi-country study of young people in the diaspora, from the following three countries: the United States, the United Kingdom and France. These locations were selected from countries in the global north as they continue to be top international migration destinations for migrant families and cosmopolitan young Africans. For purposes of this study, young people were conceptualized as those aged between 18 and 28 years, an age where they have experiences that allow them to look back and reflect on their current existence. Data generation involved sampling a diverse range of male, female, non-binary youths including those in education, work or unemployed college students aged between 18 and 28 years in the United States, the United Kingdom and France. We are also keen on those who migrated at the age of 5 and above as they are likely to have memory, affinity for African music, food, dress as well as the ability to speak African languages. The

sampling procedures used were snowballing through international students' associations, Black Student Associations and festivals and fairs.

The multi-country research project used multi-stage purposive sampling techniques due to the nature of the large geographic regions under study. The initial sample was 100 from each country (totalling 300), but through careful vetting, the size was reduced to 30 participants for the United States and twenty each for the United Kingdom and France, totalling 70 participants between the age of 18 and 28 years. The participants were mainly recruited via networks with the majority connected from cultural and educational links. Most of the participants (80 per cent) had some level of university education. We also had a few participants who had no form of college education or were recent high school graduates. However, most of the participants had a college degree or were in college during the time of the interview.

Data generation and analysis tools

The data generation tools included snowballing, and case study interviews complemented by archival data and content illustration of analysis of news coverage and social media mining of online conversations, stories and mentions about Africa in interpersonal, organizational and global diasporic platforms. The interview transcripts of research participants were analysed using thematic content analysis (TCA). From the findings and discussions, key findings were summarized and concluding remarks generated.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section covers main research questions that guided the study, details the sampling procedures used and data collection methods. Drawing from Hine's (2001) suggestions that diaspora studies need to incorporate a comparative approach, the findings below will be presented in three sections categorized by country, and thereafter draw comparative discussions reflecting both the similarities and differences from the three countries and finally give a summary of the key findings from the three countries. The discussion on young African diaspora will start off with the United Kingdom, followed by the United States and finally from France.

Section 1: African diaspora in the United Kingdom

The data generated looked at young African diaspora who came to the United Kingdom under the age of 5, as well as young Africans born to Black African parents. Being a young Black African diaspora invoked different senses of belonging among the respondents in the UK study. The assumptions about race and history are increasingly challenged by new research findings that show earlier than anticipated beginnings of African presence in the United Kingdom. The extent to which this impacts on the young African diaspora in Britain is unclear. When asked what being African means to them, the respondents all had varied responses with the majority mentioning that it was down to their African roots, skin colour, the language, family and friends' ties in the UK community, food, culture and at times belonging to a city such as London.

The above definition was echoed by others. For example, for UK Participant 1, belonging to Africa was about language. 'The language I speak, Shona, also helps in integrating with African culture and in providing me with a sense of

belonging in Africa. If I wasn't really able to speak the language, I wouldn't feel like I belong there' (UK Participant 1).

Being African was also defined in terms of being mastering African culture and

> being able to speak your mother tongue (language) freely and everywhere you go, I can speak at the shops, on the bus, I can speak it anywhere basically, not feel like I'm being shunned for speaking my own language. The food [and family] is also important […] [and having a] lot of your immediate family. It's now all through their phone, and calls and messages. So just having that sense of belonging […] where it all began (roots).
>
> (UK Participant 12)

Mobility was an important factor for young African diaspora in the United Kingdom eager to anchor their identity and reimagination of Africanity. Many of the respondents expressed a strong desire to travel back to Africa for the purpose of activating and nourishing their African identity by connecting with the authentic African lived experience. The few who travelled to Africa did so several times, especially as part of family vacations. It was both therapeutic and a source of pride to connect with their 'roots', especially in African countries of origin. Travelling back was an important opportunity to 'witness', 'just to see everything' and see Africa 'first-hand'. UK Participant 16 also described the travels as important life-changing experiences. UK Participant 20 saw this in terms as building one's knowledge of the continent as well as a strong sense of identity or belonging to Africa. There were huge benefits from visiting countries of origin:

> The first time I went to Ghana, I felt at peace. Like, it's very, I think, not because Ghana is a peaceful country, but it's the fact that you're surrounded by people exactly like you. People that do understand you, you're not, you don't feel like a stranger. So that's why I would like to travel back to Ghana, because I feel accepted. […] So it's mostly because of a sense of peace and a sense of freedom.
>
> (UK Participant 8)

As can be seen above, travel to Africa was an important affirmation of one's Africanness, mainly through family reunions, fun and overall experience of interacting with others. The UK participants travel to re-establish connection with 'cultural things' they missed. They found great excitement from rebonding with Africa (UK Participant 5).

However, the respondents' strong self-concept and identity has developed in an environment where identity is constantly checked. Consider how in December 2022, at the time of writing of this article, there were reports of a public row after a member of the British royal family had repeatedly asked a Black leader of a charity organization to disclose where they were 'really from'. The BBC (2022) describes the question as toxic and as one that makes one feel excluded because of their skin colour. The repeated questioning amounts to non-physical violence that undermines diversity and inclusivity policies. In relation to their self-perception and identity, the participants in this sample provided diverse descriptions of themselves as Africans. Their responses, for the most part, unequivocally affirmed their sense of identity. They were 'African British' or 'British Africans' showing a tension between there and here.

The participants faced everyday racial discrimination and marginalization. The treatment of Africans was dependent on the length of time they had been in the United Kingdom. The young African diasporas were concerned about the frequency of stereotypes in the mainstream media and the slanted coverage of Africa in global news. Most of the participants highlighted that the mainstream UK news channels such as BBC, ITV and Sky News routinely misrepresented Africa. The findings, however, showed that media misrepresentation of Africa was countered by other evidence, particularly evidence from personal visits to Africa, in this case the young British Africans using the evidence of celebrities moving to Africa as a safe destination. Outside the negative coverage and its impact on Africa, there was an understanding that Africans are becoming visible and acknowledged, especially in the cultural spaces. The situation was thought to have improved with more global recognition of African films, music and artists such as Burna Boy and Ama Piano. In the past few years, the global music area was seen to have benefitted from Afro beats, allowing the young British Africans to talk about a process of 'reclaiming' some form of 'respect'. The successes of the African artists gave them the feeling that 'we're winning', as evidenced by international awards for our music.

Section 2: African diaspora in the United States

An analysis of findings about African identity, concept of belonging and what being African means to them revealed recurring themes of family, community, and culture as significant aspects. These themes underscored the importance of familial ties, communal connections, and cultural heritage in shaping individuals' understanding of what it means to be African in the diaspora. In interviews with first-generation young African diaspora, it became evident that their perception of being African was rooted in a deep sense of pride and resilience. To them, being African meant that they come from greatness despite the negative portrayal of Africa and Africans by the global news media, television shows and Hollywood films. They embraced their African identity as a source of strength, countering any misconceptions or stereotypes that exist in the diaspora.

There was a sense of pride among them regarding their African identity, and they clearly indicated a recognition that Africa is much more than what is seen in global media coverage. There was a common running narrative among them about Africa being the home of early civilizations, and how there was a need to retell the history of Africa and restore the truth about Africa and early civilizations. Most of them mentioned with pride the pyramids of Egypt and the Nubian Kingdom, and how the early civilizations evident in Africa today are proof of entrepreneurship and technological innovations among African societies. When asked what belonging to Africa meant to them and their family, the findings showed that participants indicated that their parents had a stronger sense of belonging to Africa than them; however, they indicated that as they grew older, they also started identifying more with being African and having a sense of belonging to Africa.

For the participants, a profound sense of belonging to Africa provided them and their families with a strong and meaningful identity. It allowed them to connect with their origins and deepened their understanding of their heritage and cultural roots. Embracing their African identity fostered a sense of pride and enriched their personal narratives, creating a powerful link to their ancestral history. They further indicated that African belonging represented resilience, creativity and inspiration. This was illustrated by participants talking

about their knowledge of slavery and colonialism and how Africa is still rising despite the historical atrocities. Participants also indicated that they have a sense of belonging to Africa but there are times when they have felt like they do not belong in Africa based on their American accents, particularly when they are talking to African relatives or visiting Africa. The sense of identity was stronger among those who stayed in touch and regularly communicated with family members still living in Africa, followed African friends on social media or those who had travelled back to Africa.

> My parents were born in Nigeria and lived most of their lives there. All their family members are still in Nigeria and even though my parents have not been back to Nigeria, we still have a sense of belonging to Nigeria through video calls with family members they are very close to and we attend an online church in Nigeria.
>
> (USA Participant 10)

Mobility also emerged as a significant intersectional aspect intertwining with African identity in the diaspora. For instance, from the analysis of conversations with participants who had travelled to Africa several times, the common thread was that while there is recognition of the global north spaces that they live at the moment, travelling to Africa had played a key role in them being able to redefine and reconstruct an African identity. There was a relationship between those who have been to Africa before since they migrated as small children and an immediate plan to travel back. Those who had travelled to Africa recently had a stronger sense of identity and an immediate recognition of global media coverage of Africa. The participants expressed a strong inclination to travel to Africa, primarily driven by their experiences of marginalization as minorities while growing up in the United States. They noted that when they visit Africa, they no longer feel like a minority and experience a greater sense of tranquility and belonging. For some male participants, they indicated that when they are visiting Africa, they do not have to worry about the likelihood of every police stop being their last one, nor do they have to walk around fearful of gun violence, a major problem facing communities of colour in the United States.

The findings regarding media consumption indicate that participants in the study engage with both American and African media. While they consume a wide range of news media from social media to podcasts to traditional news media such as CNN, Aljazeera and BBC, they were aware that news coverage of Africa was biased based on the contradictions they saw in global media coverage versus the stories they heard from family members and social media profiles of friends and relatives in Africa. There was a strong sense of frustration about how Africa is portrayed in the global media among the participants. Their African identity and the continual search for belonging influenced their choice of media consumption and how they engaged with different forms of creative media (e.g. books, films, images, music, live performance and social media). There was a deliberate attempt to seek out and read books by authors of colour such as Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi, Aminatta Forna, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Maaza Mengiste, Nadine Gordimer and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In terms of consuming films and TV shows, they deliberately looked out for shows with a cast that was more representative, and particularly preferred shows with a diverse representation such as the HBO series *Insecure, Harlem* on Amazon Prime, Hulu's *Reasonable, The Black Hamptons* on BET+ and HBO's *Rap Shit*.

From the analysis of participants' conversations, it was also evident that the racial reckoning in America and the immigration conversations in recent years have led them to drift more towards identifying with their African heritage. For many young people in America, the highly publicized protests that followed the murder of Trayvon Martin were profoundly awakening an ignited consciousness and a deeper understanding of their Black identities in the United States of America. The subsequent Black Lives Matter movement helped shape the identity of young people of colour in America and many of them began redefining their identity based on their African heritage and roots. They asserted that the experiences of living in oppressive and marginalizing spaces in the global north have othered them, leaving them constantly negotiating their identity in liminal and indeterminate spaces.

Section 3: African diaspora in France

One of the key issues that emerged from the interviews pertained to the respondents' relationship with Africa on the one hand and the host country on the other hand. This relationship came across as profoundly ambiguous. Although all the respondents identified themselves as Africans, their relationship to the African continent itself was not clearly delineated or articulated. Nearly three quarters of the participants had never been to the continent itself – having been born in France – nor spoke an African language. Participants also identified as French because they were born there, and spoke the language and lived the culture of the country of their birth. However, they also felt they did not fully belong to the 'host' country either. This was in large measure, because of the ways in which both their lived and mediated experiences reminded them that they were not fully entitled to full citizenship on account of their race or colour. Asked whether she considered herself African, a respondent (19), born in France to Burkinabe parents, said:

> Not at all (I don't consider myself African), but I also don't fully feel like I belong to France. I don't really have a sense of belonging to one specific territory actually.
>
> (French Participant 4)

Related to the issue of their African identity, the respondents were invited to reflect on their relationship with their 'host' or 'adopted' country, France. As in the case of identity, this aspect came across as a zone of ambiguity. One thing was clear though: all of the respondents pointed to unanimous experiences of subliminal racism and exoticization. These ranged from comments on their skin colour, hair style and accent. Sometimes what passed for 'compliments' was problematic, as in the constant refrain 'Why do you speak French so well?' experienced by Paris-based African youth interviewed.

> I feel like often we are treated as intruders, immigrants who have come and shouldn't really stay. Often it also seems like we are treated as inferior. When I went to Guadeloupe for High School, people from there asked me why I spoke French so well when I wasn't even a real French person because I'm from Senegal. Sometimes it was even the teachers who asked me those kinds of questions.
>
> (French Participant 7)

The experiences of exoticization, within a predominantly White country, were also a routine aspect of life for young African diaspora. Said one respondent:

> As a black woman I have received a lot of strange little comments. It's as if we're extra-terrestrials almost, like aliens or something. They act like black women are something out of this world. For example, the questions asking about whether our hair is real or not. Those are questions that other people rarely receive, you wouldn't ask a white woman with long hair that. It's like we're aliens that they're trying to figure out. Like we don't exist in reality.
>
> (French Participant 8)

Although the experience of alienation especially in public spaces was shared by all the respondents, it appears those who were born in Africa and moved to France bore the most brunt. A young male respondent, born in the DRC and moved to France at 5, noted:

> I prefer to make a distinction between Africans born here in France and Africans born in Africa. The treatment is bad in both cases but it's even worse for immigrants because of stereotypes and cliches. As if people have images of Africans as being beasts and somehow stupid. The moment you tell people you are African it's like they immediately think you're incapable and you're immediately underestimated. If you do something intelligent, you get told that you're intelligent for an African.
>
> (French Participant 9)

Most of the respondents demonstrated awareness of the global media coverage of Africa, and the predominantly negative stereotypes that characterized such coverage. They pointed out stories depicting misery, famine, poverty and war. However, what was interesting to note is that the respondents also deliberately followed social media handles of prominent Africans (artists, business people, sportspeople) or read works by African authors, in order to glean 'on the ground' and alternative news about the continent.

One respondent of Mauritian origin (22) said:

> I mostly go out of my way to consume African stuff, like reading African authors or listening to African music, which I guess even non Africans do. But I also try not to disconnect myself from other things, I like K pop and Western stuff. But for the most part, being close to African things isn't hard for me because I like it, so I actively seek it out.
>
> (French Participant 12)

Sporting activities and events often present opportunities for fair to positive coverage of Africa. However, as the respondent, born in France to Senegalese parents, noted, this coverage is ephemeral and self-serving:

> I'm aware of the very negative news stereotypes around topics like immigration, poverty and disease. However, what I have also found interesting is that sport, especially soccer, gets some positive news. If the French team wins, it's celebrated in the media. But if it loses, sometimes it gets blamed on players of African origin playing in the French team.
>
> (French Participant 18)

Another respondent also spoke to his experience of the dehumanization of not just Africa but also Black people by the mainstream media, thus:

> I was talking to a friend recently who had posted something on Instagram about the film Madagascar and the fact that there were only animals and no real human beings in African countries […]. In the media we are represented catastrophically as a whole. But this is a little bit the case for all black populations everywhere. […] Media representation makes it hard to be proud to be African, if I'm to be honest.
>
> (French Participant 15)

What was interesting to note regarding media representation was the extent to which the respondents deliberately avoided predictable negative mainstream media narratives about the continent and actively sought alternative sources of information about the continent from social media platforms and media posts from positive sources such as African celebrities and influencers. This reflects the agency of African diaspora youth in their media engagement. While this does not take away the influence of negative media stereotypes of Africa on African diaspora youth, it demonstrates that such influence is not complete and uncontested.

The majority of the respondents were generally open about these spheres of socialization, i.e., dating or marrying outside of their race, placing more emphasis on shared values rather than specifics origins and race and culture. One respondent said: '[y]es, I would marry a non-African. It's not the origin that counts, in my opinion. It's the person that counts' (Respondent #9). Another respondent added that although she was open to a relationship with a non-African, 'the person has to understand and respect that there is a difference, otherwise I have to explain constantly and I don't want to explain my struggles or have them dismissed' (Respondent #8). The same principle of openness to socialization also applied to considering friendships. All the respondents noted that they had mostly African friends, either born in France or Africa, but were also open to friendships with non-Africans.

Finally, one issue that came out prominently in all interviews was the subject of travelling to Africa, reflecting a yearning by the diaspora youth for a tour of the African continent to better understand its ways and cultures and customs and lifestyles. Although the youth self-identified as African, they also acknowledged that they did not know the continent enough. All of the youth born in France said they would like to travel to Africa at some point in their lives, while those born in Africa said they wanted to travel to specific countries on the continent. Travelling to Africa was presented by the respondents as a kind of ontological duty one had to perform in their lifetime as an assertion of one's identity.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In summary, there was a strong sentiment to an African identity which was defined through claims supported by belonging to Africa through family, history and knowledge of Africa. The findings revealed that young Africans in the diaspora have a strong sense of belonging to Africa and positively consider themselves as Africans.

Their knowledge of Africa was strong, particularly limited and localized based on their country of origin. It was gleaned from wide ranging influences such as parents, relatives living in Africa and the diaspora, books and social media. There was an evident thirst for knowledge about Africa and an awareness that what is portrayed in the media about Africa is not always true.

The family was seen as pivotal to self-definition and linkage to African roots. The participants clearly drew inspiration from parents, siblings and family members in the diaspora. Respondents whose parents shared information about Africa, taught them about their African roots and learned to speak an African language were more likely to identify as African.

The existence of community networks was also significant in creating a sense of belonging among them and fostering an affinity with other Africans. The affinity was evident among those who attended diasporic events such as Kenya Night, Yoruba Cultural night or Liberia's Journey Home. While they mostly identify as American, participation in diasporic events helped them retain a sense of affinity to Africa.

For some, African churches in the diaspora were spaces where their parents took them, and while most of them said they were non-religious, they acknowledged that the African church in the diaspora, particularly the American diaspora is a space where they had met friends of African heritage. The African church fulfilled a vital role of fostering a sense of community among the diaspora. This was also evident among individuals who did not identify as religious but indicated that many of the connections their families had forged revolved around congregating in churches for various occasions and events such as fundraisers for families in need or for memorial and funeral services.

Their experiences of listening to African music, hearing/speaking African languages, and eating African food in their homes influenced how they identify as African. They expressed pride in outstanding global achievers in the entertainment industry, including notable figures such as Burna Boy, Tames, WizKid, Lupita Nyong'o and Trevor Noah. These individuals served as notable sources of inspiration and admiration due to their remarkable accomplishments on a global scale.

Regarding global media coverage, they hear both positive and negative stories about Africa, with the predominantly negative stories about Africa being poverty and violence, while the positive ones being innovations, entrepreneurship and the beauty of Africa. They are also acutely aware that Africa is viewed negatively in the diaspora and misrepresented through the commodified and stereotyped images in global media.

There is a continuous formation and negotiation of African identity among the young African diaspora which was sustained by the markers of identity. The markers they ranked high as being key to their African identity were African language, knowledge and history of Africa, and African names. Speaking an African language was a strong marker of identity even for those who did not speak an African language as they showed an interest in wanting to learn an African language.

The treatment of Africans in the diaspora is not good. Africans in the diaspora are marginalized and do not have equal access to government services and resources as compared to other races. The treatment of Africans and African Americans, Black British, Black people from the Caribbean or Afro Latinos is the same in terms of discrimination because of skin colour.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, it can be concluded that young African migrants experience the diaspora as liminal spaces, demonstrated through constant negotiation of their identities, and especially triggered by racism and other-ing in the diasporic environments. They adopt a vigilant and survivalist approach, whereby their outlook and strategy prioritize the preservation of their well-being and as part of this strategy, they predominantly cultivate family ties, friendships, and dating relationships with other young individuals within the African diaspora. This intentional choice serves as a survival strategy to navigate the challenges they face in diasporic spaces. The sense of belonging to Africa is seen as a source of pride, to be nourished, preserved, and developed through visits and historical reimagination. The aspect of belonging is mitigated by those who had travelled to Africa and the amount of times/frequency of their travel to Africa. Travel to Africa plays a key role in identity formation due to development of a more nuanced awareness of their African identity and knowledge about Africa.

Social media is the latest frontier in the fight for challenging the stereotype image about Africans and redefining identities. Social media affords a powerful platform for challenging and dismantling prevailing stereotypes, as well as reshaping narratives surrounding the African experience. It also offers an opportunity for Africans in the diaspora to amplify diverse voices, share authentic stories, and promote a more accurate and nuanced understanding of Africa and its people. While participants described social media as a perpetuator of stereotypes and negativity (for example, TikTok as a space was riddled with jokes where African accents were made fun of); on the other hand, they acknowledged that social media was also a platform for showcasing the continent's richness, diversity, and accomplishments. While traditional global media coverage has historically exhibited biases towards Africans, the advent of social media is offering spaces for diasporic communities to contest those hegemonic biased stories, challenge the stereotype image and reconstruct their own identities while negotiating the liminal and indeterminate spaces in the diaspora.

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