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Afropolitan Projects: Creating Community, Identity, and Belonging

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Afropolitan Projects: Creating Community, Identity, and Belonging

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin
May 2017

Dedication

To HOLAAfrica! for throwing me a lifeline when I most needed one;
and to the Ghanaian Community in Houston, without whom this project would not have been possible.

Afropolitan Projects: Creating Community, Identity, and Belonging

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

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Abstract: Despite a dramatic growth in the numbers of African immigrants to the United States, until recently, this population has been marginal in studies about voluntary migration and race. Likewise, in mainstream scholarship about black identities, Africa appears as a site of imagination and struggle whilst contemporary Africans are frozen in an unchanging, parochial age. My dissertation addresses the marginalization of Africa and Africans in both race and migration studies through an ethnographic case study of a community of Ghanaians in Houston, Texas. The research considers how questions of religion, race, class, and sexual politics shape the community's boundaries of belonging. I explore how answers to these questions inform members' relationship with Ghana, Africa, Houston, and the United States more generally. The ways in which the community addresses these issues are part of what I call its *Afropolitan projects*, which advance a modern non-victimized narrative about Ghana and Africa more generally, and sustain the community's identity as progressive, modern Ghanaians. By outlining the contours of one community's *Afropolitan projects*, my research offers an urgent contribution to understanding contemporary African and black identities. The dissertation argues that within the intentionally curated community of Ghanaians in Houston, members engage Christianity, sexual and racial politics, and class respectability to claim their place in the United States and to a culturally complex and cosmopolitan

Ghanaian/African identity. These practices of belonging are produced through community members’ experiences as Christians, postcolonial Africans, and American residents and citizens. My analysis reveals how this particular Afropolitan project complicates possibilities for the community to find solidarity with working class and queer black/African people and instead aligns itself with heterosexual respectability and middle-class progress. By examining this black/African community formation through a theoretical lens that complicates flattened conceptualizations of community, this project proposes new ways of building solidarities across difference within the black diaspora.

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Chapter One. Introduction

I became interested in studying an immigrant community in part because of my own history. In 2002, I left my parents and siblings in Accra, Ghana and moved to the United States. I left a life of relative privilege in the bustling capital city of Accra for a small racially segregated village in the middle of nowhere, Texas. In Ghana, I attended a middle-class, internationally diverse school. In Texas, I was labeled an African. My schoolmates called me un-American for criticizing the Bush administration's war on terror. I left for college on the East Coast where I met other Africans from privileged backgrounds. I became an African. My schoolmates were from all over Africa, including Nigeria, Lesotho, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe and had arrived at Princeton by diverse routes – from New Mexico, refugee camps, and elite East Asian, United States and African prep schools. Despite our diverse backgrounds, our funny names, accents, dark skin, and some intangible bond we shared coalesced into an African identity.

Being an African meant being black. The few South Africans we knew were white and did not participate in the African Students Union. Our efforts to articulate an identity as African were informed by our experience of blackness in the United States. Within this space of being African, we made jokes about Uncle Bob's refusal to die, vengefully challenged anyone who opted to remain ignorant about the continent's diversity in the age of Google, discussed the political and economic climate on the continent, including our desires and qualifications to "go back and fix things," and served one another jollof rice, ugali, pap, and spicy soups. Despite our many shared concerns, some of my university mates occasionally looked askance at me, calling my queer sexuality un-African and thereby writing me out of this collective identity. Increasingly, I spent less and less time with other Africans because I no longer felt like I belonged. But with the emergence of the Afropolitan, an identity used to mark cosmopolitan belonging and African roots, the meanings of being African seem to be changing.

I open this dissertation with the foregoing anecdote about my life in order to illustrate a number of points. First, this project is grounded in my personal experiences of becoming an African upon moving to the United States. Aspects of the experiences described above will be familiar to many black immigrants labeled African in the United States. These experiences, including assumptions of ignorance and primitive existence, are examples of sincere fictions (to borrow from Feagin (2013)) that Americans of diverse races tell themselves about Africa and its residents. Feagin (2013) explains sincere fictions as the romanticized stories about the United States' racist past that white Americans tell themselves. In these stories: (1) slavery was not all that bad because, for example, slaves were well-fed, and Jim Crow was for everyone's comfort; (2) racism is a thing of the past, and (3) white men are virtuous heroes.

I borrow Feagin's use of sincere fictions to refer to implicit assumptions of Africans as primitive, diseased, and backwards. These assumptions inform representations of Africa and Africans in the United States. For example, in the summer of 2014 Africa showed up prominently on U.S. news because of the Ebola epidemic. School age children and adults with African names and accents were told to "go home, Ebola" (Colletti 2014; Hagan 2014). Prior to Ebola, Africa appeared most significantly in U.S. news when questions were raised about Barack Obama's qualifications to run for the presidency as well as the authenticity of his black identity (Hughey 2012; Wingfield and Feagin 2012). Here, the concern was whether Obama's Kenyan heritage disqualified him from the presidency and whether that same heritage, along with the fact that he had a white mother, discounted his racial identity as black. A third way in which Africans have been showing up in the United States recently is as highly educated, upwardly mobile immigrants (Anderson 2015).

Moments such as the Ebola epidemic, questions about Obama's American and racial identity, and the upward mobility of African immigrants illustrate three key ways in which "Africans" appear in different U.S. contexts. First there is the idea that the continent is disease-ridden and Africans are always potentially infectious disease carriers. In 2013 when my partner and I went to Ghana, their father warned cheerily, "don't bring back any diseases!" reflexively feeling the need to affirm his beliefs about the diseased Dark Continent. More publically, a social media executive on a trip to South Africa tweeted, "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!" (see Pilkington 2013; Ronson 2015). Such "joking" remarks about an Africa imagined as inherently disease infected reproduce colonial tropes about the continent. Secondly, there's the contention that an African heritage means that a person cannot also be American. This idea is often explicitly articulated in right wing white supremacist spaces where even black Americans whose families have lived in the United States for generations are told to "go back to Africa" (see Love 2016; Reed 2017). Thirdly, Africans show up as model blacks, whose cultural identities, educational attainment, and economic upward mobility distinguish them from an imagined homogenous black American underclass (Arthur 2010; Konadu-Agyeman, Takyi, and Arthur 2006). These highly educated black Africans are seen to challenge dominant representations of blackness in the United States and as such are painted as less authentically "black" (Pierre 2004; Wright 2012, 2013).

EPISTEMOLOGY AND MOTIVATIONS

In large part, this dissertation is interested in two issues: the communal processes that produce an identity as African within a U.S. context, and how Africans challenge the negative images about themselves, affirm the positive ones, and produce new ways of being black (and) African in the United States. I examine these processes through an ethnographic study of a self-described Ghanaian community in Houston, Texas. As feminists have long asserted, and I believe this claim to be true, the personal is political. This project, grounded in feminist and queer of color epistemologies, is politically motivated to understand what an African identity in the United States entails. The epistemological orientation of this research means that an African identity cannot be attended to without an explicit examination of gender, sexuality, class, and race. I understand these categories of identity not as analytically separable but as an assemblage. Jasbir Puar (2007) defines an assemblage as "an affective conglomeration that recognizes other contingencies of belonging (melding, fusing, viscosity, bouncing) that might not easily fall into what is sometimes denoted as reactive community formations – identity politics – by control theorists" (p. 211). Thinking through gender, sexuality, race, and class as assemblages refuses to stabilize any of these categories as comprising a coherent identity. Instead, throughout this dissertation, I attend to the messiness and heterogeneity of what it means to be a raced, classed, gendered and sexual being.

Secondly, as a project grounded in a queer of color critique, this dissertation works towards an end to normativity (Ahmed 2006; Ferguson 2004). Sara Ahmed (2006) explains normativity as a politics of following straight lines. Straight lines constitute the path laid out by society, which orients us in/towards one direction or other. Although straight lines are carved out by society, following them is not expedient for everyone. Yet to deviate from these lines is to disrupt the social order and as such to appear out of place.

A queer of color critique deviates from the straight lines of disciplinary, epistemological, and social demands to instead create unofficial paths and affirm new ways of being in the world. Ahmed describes these unofficial paths simultaneously as lifelines (because they save lives) and desire lines, "where people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow" (2006, p. 20). Creating these new lines might produce a queer effect in a normative world, but this queerness saves lives.

Roderick Ferguson (2004) outlines a queer of color critique in his book *Aberrations in Black*. He contends that a queer of color critique takes culture, understood not only as beliefs and practices but also as negotiations with material and discursive ways of being, as a site for examining normative ideals about morality, capital, class, race, gender, and sexuality. Using Karl Marx as an example, Ferguson shows how property ownership came to be understood from an uncritical perspective of universalized heteropatriarchy (2004, p. 6). As Ferguson argues, "Marx imagined social relations and agency…through heteropatriarchy and racial difference simultaneously" (2006, p. 7). A queer of color critique questions the underlying assumptions of our everyday lives through disidentifications. Disidentification is a "survival strategy the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (Muñoz 1999, p. 4). Disidentifications include an ambivalent relationship to the academic canon, our normative theories, capitalism, marriage, and the like. In this ambivalent relationship, a critique of historical materialism, for example, "means determining the silences and ideologies…that equate representation with reality" (Ferguson 2004, p. 5). This epistemological orientation can make normativity an object of inquiry. To problematize the normative is already the task of the critical scholar. However, a queer of color critique engages this problematic by simultaneously examining racial formations without excluding an analysis of heteropatriarchy, “sexuality not severed from race and material relations,” and culture not external to colonialism, globalization and empire (Ferguson 2004, p. 29).

The political thrust that undergirds the epistemological orientation of this project is an investment in a “way of inhabiting the world by giving ‘support’ to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place” (Ahmed 2006, p. 179). This investment is what Ahmed calls a queer phenomenology. It is recognizing that the world is more involved in some bodies than others, and creates spaces to accommodate the experiences and ways of being of some people at the expense of others. Throughout these pages, I attempt to show how the cultural politics of black African immigrants are engaged in recreating the world to accommodate them. Sometimes this politics is assimilationist, what Ahmed (2006, p. 173) describes as “a politics of following the straight line even as a deviant body.” At other times, this politics involves drawing new lines and creating new ways of being in the world.

Finally, this dissertation is a postcolonial examination of black identities beyond the confines of the middle passage. In a context in which blackness has a dominant definition largely legible through descent from the transatlantic slave trade, how can we understand the global processes that produce black identities within and beyond this frame? This question gestures towards the fact that in the United States of America, Africans are, first of all, legible as black. In that regard, the dominant narratives of blackness that pervade the U.S. landscape circumscribe our identities and inform our relationship to blackness. Michelle Wright (2006) outlines many of these narratives about blackness in her essay “What is black identity?” Here she suggests that blackness is presented as a master discourse that shares “implied parameters on nation, gender, and sexuality [which] implicitly posit black identity as normative masculine, normative heterosexual, normative African American" (Wright 2006, p. 139; see also Clark and Thomas 2006).

In order to move beyond the confines of this definition of blackness, Wright (2004, 2006, 2015) argues that black identity is better understood as something that happens, rather than something that is. This understanding of blackness as an identity builds on the scholarship of cultural theorists and diaspora scholars (including Gordon 1999; Hall (1993), Hanchard (1999)) who theorize blackness as a processual identity occurring over space and time. This understanding of black identities is the political project of African Diaspora studies, which "was originally constructed in opposition to still vital racialist ideologies that depicted Blacks in essentialized terms" as biologically, culturally, and intellectually inferior to whites (Gordon 1999, p. 285). As well, Wright challenges conceptualizations of black identities that exclude Africa from its theorizing (most famously, Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*). Elsewhere, Wright (2013, p. 5) discusses an ambiguous relationship between African and "authentic blackness" suggesting that within black diaspora studies, dominant beliefs about Africa accords Africans with an essential blackness. Unlike the black diaspora, Africa need not produce any cultural contributions to prove its blackness. This perception of African blackness paradoxically sustains the idea that the cultural projects of black Africans are apart from other black cultures.

Despite how "Africa trumps all other cards of blackness," (Wright 2013, p. 9) in certain contexts, in others, that black Africans are black is a contested idea. Jemima Pierre's (2013) *Predicament of Blackness* offers an effective challenge to this point. Pierre outlines the ways in which Africans were racialized as black during and after formal European colonialism. Her ethnographic analysis of race in Ghana includes an examination of how colonial and postcolonial states and contemporary relationships with Britain and the United States simultaneously erases the racialization of colonization and sustains the myth of white supremacy. From this perspective, Pierre (2008, 2013) shows how processes of racialization are relevant in contemporary Africa, disrupting the exclusion of Africa and Africans from discussions of modernity and contemporary economic and cultural politics.

The following examination of black identities takes into account how African blackness is informed by European colonialism, capitalism, globalization and its attendant limitations on how people move around the world (Clarke and Thomas 2006; Hanchard 1999; Ifekwunigwe 2006). In the pages below, Africans are considered black, and I will enunciate the specifics of this blackness.

WHAT ARE AFROPOLITAN PROJECTS?

Between 2002 when I first arrived in the United States and about 2010, being "African" appeared to take on new meanings, at least in the U.S. American popular imagination. In 2006, the writer Taiye Selasi published an essay in the LIP magazine describing "the newest generation of African emigrants." Of these new Africans, she wrote:

> [They are] coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos… We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world.

This essay, titled "Bye-bye Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)" set the terms of the conversation around this new generation of African emigrants. Over the years, Selasi's description of Afropolitans as highly privileged transnationally mobile Africans has been taken up and contested in various circles.

In 1989, Canadian film critic Cameron Bailey described a black film festival in Boston featuring films of black Africans, Europeans, and North Americans as Afropolitan. Many of these films, Bailey (1989, p. 25) wrote, retold "features of colonialism," telling stories of race, class, sexuality, and black identities from the perspective of postcolonial subjects. Subsequent uses of Afropolitan (and they were rare), primarily described Johannesburg, South Africa, as an Afropolitan city, noting its cosmopolitan yet uniquely African diversity (Gevisser and Nutall 2004; p. 518; Mbembe 2007; Naidu 2003). Despite its early appearance Afropolitan did not take root in popular culture until about 2010. Around this time, the term began to appear more frequently in popular culture, and occasionally in academic literature.

In popular culture, Afropolitan has been attached to fashion, lifestyle magazines, music, and social groups. For example, in 2014, Blitz the Ambassador, a Ghanaian-born hip-hop artist living in Brooklyn, released an album titled *Afropolitan Dreams*, which chronicled his journeys as a Ghanaian immigrant to the United States and a black American. Similarly, an online shop selling African-derived clothing and accessories calls itself the Afropolitan shop. Meet-Up groups in urban centers around the United States and Europe for young Africans call themselves Afropolitan (such as Afropolitan HTX, Afropolitan NYC, Miami, Paris, Afropolitan Elite (in London)) and an online feminist blog by Nigerian-Finnish writer Minna Salami is titled *MsAfropolitan*. Increasingly, Afropolitans also live in the cosmopolitan cities of Accra, Lagos, Nairobi, Abidjan, and Dakar. In 2014, filmmaker Nicole Armatefio launched a YouTube series titled "An African City." The show featured the stories of comfortably middle-class, fabulous, heterosexually liberated women from several African countries, who had returned to Accra after growing up and receiving degrees from prestigious U.S. and U.K. universities. These popular cultural representations of the Afropolitan are indicative of the ways in which this identity is shaping some young Africans' sense of self in the world today.

In academic literature, the Afropolitan is treated as a cultural phenomenon that describes African identities in online spaces, literature, and commodity cultures. For example, in two recent books, *Negotiating Afropolitanism*, edited by Jennifer Wawrzinek and J.K.S. Makokha (2011) and *In Search of the Afropolitan* by Eva Rask Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek (2016), the authors explore this identity primarily through art, fiction, folktales, and music. The literary turn towards understanding the meanings of the Afropolitan has yielded important insights into how the identity is mobilized for different cultural productions. For example, Achille Mbembe (2007, p. 29) argues that the Afropolitan "is an aesthetic, and a particular poetic of the world. It is a way of being in the world, refusing on principle any form of victim identity." Similarly, Chielozona Eze (2016, p. 117) posits the Afropolitan as a "universal narrative," arguing that:

> To be Afropolitan means to admit the simple fact that one's culture or society is composed with strands from other societies and cultures. Afropolitans acknowledge that their society comprised (or should comprise) people from diverse ethnicities, and their cultures can no longer be understood in purist categories. They thus assemble a universal narrative with registers from these diverse backgrounds.

The Afropolitan, as it is theorized, is an inherently hybrid identity. It claims this hybridity with an ease and grace that seamlessly fuses together privileged meanings of being African with claims to belonging in a global world.

In claiming belonging to a global world, the Afropolitan affirms an identity as a rooted cosmopolitan (Appiah 1997, 2006; Selasi 2014). As Kwame Anthony Appiah (1997) explains, a rooted cosmopolitan…

> … can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is…attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, [while] taking

> pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different people (p. 618).

The spatial ties that the rooted cosmopolitan claims is articulated in the definition of Afropolitan as Africans of the world. Eze (2014, 2016) suggests that the new name for the African cosmopolitan gestures towards the continent's history in the world, while disrupting normative assumptions about what it means to be African. Building on Eze (2014) and Appiah (1997, 2006), Selasi (2014) makes the case in a TED Talk that rather than asking people where they are from, ask where they are local. She contends that this question challenges the ways in which countries come to stand in for particular experiences and ways of being in the world. Instead, she suggests that asking "where are you local?" allows for a response that recognizes the particular experiences of a person who, for example, grew up in Boston to Ghanaian parents raised in the England.

But how many people have those experiences so that "where are you local?" might produce such colorful responses? On the one hand, the Afropolitan says Africans have heterogeneous experiences. On the other hand, this heterogeneity is presented as a very privileged existence. The individuality of the rooted cosmopolitan in the guise of the Afropolitan is potentially limiting in who may claim such an identity (Dabiri 2016; Ede 2016). Although an Afropolitan identity can liberate a person from the constraints of nation and other circumscribed ways of belonging, its emphasis on hybridity can also reinforce oppressive modes of belonging (Adjepong 2017; Anthias 2001).

Academic depictions of Afropolitan, this new generation of African emigrants, have not as yet examined how people might articulate an identity as Afropolitan in their everyday lives. In a special issue in the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* titled "Afropolitanism: Reboot," the authors begin to attend to this omission by providing some insights into individual reactions to how the Afropolitan represents Africans. The authors in these special editions focus on how the middle-class positionality of the Afropolitan papers over important inequalities and marginalizes working class African immigrants without the cultural capital to attain Afropolitan status (Dabiri 2016; Ede 2016; Musila 2016). On the other hand, other authors celebrated the freeing potential embedded within Afropolitan identity, which they argued makes possible an important challenge to the dominance of western identities as the marker of modernity (Eze 2016; Pahl 2016). These debates are important in that they extend conversations about the Afropolitan beyond the realm of artistic production to examine how this identity informs and is informed by the people who engage it.

In a recent article, Christopher T. Fan (2017) suggests that part of the Afropolitan identity lies in its self-conception as model minority and flexible citizen (Ong 2006). Based on a reading of Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, Fan argues that an Afropolitan identity is interpolated through Asian American identity, "converging upon Orientalized subjectivities" whose futures depend on one another (Fan 2017, p. 76). Here, Fan points to how China's economic interventions into various African countries haunt Afropolitan representations, especially in narratives of return to the continent. Afropolitan literature as Fan calls it, imagines Africa as "the place where things have the potential to be reassembled, and where the future is more open to possibilities than in America where capitalism and racism circumscribe futurity" (2017, p. 82). In this imagined Afropolitan Africa, futurity is a heteronormative reproduction. Fan's intervention on the heteronormativity of Afropolitan literature is an important and missing aspect of the celebration of this identity and the possibilities it portends. I emphasize Fan's point about the Afropolitan imagination of a heteronormative Africa in my research (Adjepong 2017).

This dissertation provides an important missing piece to debates about contemporary Africans identities. By examining how discourses of the Afropolitan can help understand the lived experiences of a community of black Africans in the United States this study moves research about the Afropolitan beyond music, literature, performance, and visual arts, to critically examine the everyday lives of regular Africans. To focus on the daily lives of Africans is not to discount the importance of popular culture in shaping these lives. Instead, following Stuart Hall, I believe that

> Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged; it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured (1981:239).

Afropolitans engage in a struggle against homogenizing narratives about Africa and Africans. In popular culture, this struggle is evidenced through Afropolitan novels including Adichie's (2013) *Americanah*, Gyasi's (2016) *Homegoing*, Ndibe's (2014) *Foreign Gods, Inc*, and Selasi's (2013) *Ghana Must Go*; music such as Blitz the Ambassador's *Afropolitan Dreams*, M.anifest's *Nowhere cool*, and in arts and other festivals such as the Brussels Afropolitan Festival. These cultural productions challenge narratives about Africa as a wasteland and tell new stories of African exceptionalism, culture, and modernity.

Understanding popular culture as an arena of consent and resistance means also paying attention to how this struggle plays out and produces anxieties and pleasures in daily life. Other studies that have considered the aesthetic import of the Afropolitan render the "imagined lives" of contemporary Africans, (if I may borrow from Caribbean scholar and human rights lawyer, Tracy Robinson (2011)), only legible in one sphere. Our imagined lives are constituted by our emotional well-being and connectedness to each other, our sexuality, and our leisure. When Afropolitans are only legible as the product of artistry and beyond their quotidian experiences, stories about contemporary Africans might reproduce old ideas about us. Those Africans who cannot be Afropolitan are circumscribed by one-dimensional assumptions about Africans as disease-ridden and backwards, whereas Afropolitans, an imagined fabulous demographic to be aspired to, appear increasingly unreal as Africans.

As the first ethnographic examination of how a community engages with, challenges, and remakes the Afropolitan to adequately represent their sense of self, this dissertation brings the cultural stuff into conversation with the everyday to provide an empirically grounded analysis of this black identity, its possibilities, and limitations. I describe the processes through which this community engages with Afropolitan identity as *Afropolitan projects* (Adjepong 2017). Afropolitan projects are the diverse strategies and cultural endeavors through which communities of Africans living outside the continent articulate an identity that acknowledges the complexity of their histories and contemporary realities. In the United States, Afropolitan projects include a variety of cultural endeavors that articulate diverse racial, gender, sexual, and class politics. For one thing, Afropolitans are black Africans who seek ways to define their blackness beyond dominant U.S. definitions. These black identities are complicated by pedestrian claims that Africans are not black (Tsri 2016), black immigrants are not "really" black (see Pierre 2004 for more on this point), and the United States is postracial. The existence of these discourses in the popular sphere shapes the racial politics of Afropolitan projects. Similarly, the gender and sexual politics of Afropolitans intersect with dominant ideas about black and African sexualities. These ideas, whether they are repeated without question or challenged in online spaces such as the queer African blog HOLAAfrica!, shape and express the gender and sexual politics of contemporary Africans on a global stage. Finally the classed identity of the Afropolitan and the connections it makes possible or forecloses are part of how different groups articulate their identities and engage in Afropolitan projects.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

In the following chapter, I review the literature on black immigrants in the United States. This chapter defines the key terms that I use throughout this dissertation including community, hybridity, identity, and culture. Defining these terms helps to frame subsequent discussion of United States immigration through a lens attentive to race, gender, sexuality, and class. I spend considerable time focusing on how sociologists have come to understand black immigrants despite important challenges to the "ethnicity paradigms" that shape these debates (Pierre 2004). Additionally, the literature review makes room to understand that black immigrants are black beyond the limiting confines of "the middle passage epistemology," and engages with ethnicity as an articulation of the particularities of their black identities.

Chapter Three ("Research Methods") expands on why I chose to study Ghanaian immigrants to understand the cultural endeavors of African immigrants more generally. After explaining my chosen case I describe the context in which this study took place and my access to the community. In addition to providing details about the community, I present my research design and guiding questions. I follow this presentation with a discussion of how I conceptualize the ethnographic "field" and my orientation to and positionality within it. I conclude Chapter Three by exploring the ethical concerns I had with conducting this project.

Chapter Four, titled "Little Lagos, African Ethnicity and the Afropolitan Project" examines how an African ethnicity emerges in the context of U.S. immigration and urban life. Here, African ethnicity is posited as a new identity formation that responds to the

U.S. racial landscape by affirming ties to some place on the African continent and solidarity with others from the continent. Chapter Four shows how, at the same time that an African ethnicity affirms a collective African identity, it also provides a space for distinctions amongst Africans. In this way, I suggest that an African ethnicity engages in what Gayatri Spivak famously called strategic essentialism to critique the fixity of narratives about Africa and Africans. At the same time, the community employs narratives about Africa to create community and tell a different story about themselves. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the Afropolitan expands on the meanings of African beyond the boundaries of the continent and in conversation with a global world.

In Chapter Five, "'Postracial America' and Being/Becoming Black," I discuss how Africans "become black" in the United States. I argue that a dialogue between diverse experiences of blackness, U.S. American citizenship, African ethnicity, and Ghanaian national identity informs this process of becoming black. In order to develop this argument, I provide an overview of racialization processes and commonsense thinking about race in the United States and in Ghana. I then turn to an empirical discussion of how the community understands themselves as black but in a different way from American blacks. I make the case that by affirming their blackness as different, Ghanaians, and by extension other black immigrants are not *de facto* engaging in anti-black racism as some scholars have argued (Sterling 2015; Waters 2009). Instead, sometimes these claims must be understood as challenging a colonizing discourse that homogenizes black identities as only legible through U.S. historical and contemporary frames. The chapter concludes by examining how postracial logics and Afropolitan identity inform some of the ways in which Africans come to understand themselves as black.

Chapter Six, “The Christian America Afropolitan Project,” focuses on how the idea that the United States is a Christian country is employed in the Ghanaian community as a discourse of belonging. This chapter examines the meanings of Christianity amongst Ghanaians and puts those meanings into dialogue with “Christian America.” Christianity here is understood not simply as a religion but rather as a community identity that gestures towards modernity through the colonial project, capitalism and financial success, and Western education. I argue that by affirming a Christian identity, the Ghanaian community implicitly lays claim to an American identity, which also disavows Muslims. Although appearing in religious garb, claims to Christianity are far from evangelical, but rather are about cultural citizenship and political belonging.

In the concluding chapter, (Chapter Seven), I summarize the key contributions that this dissertation makes to knowledge about black identities and practices of belonging amongst contemporary African immigrants. The conclusion returns to the importance of addressing class, gender, and sexuality, when examining African immigrant cultural politics. Finally, I discuss some of the questions that this project was not able to answer and point towards avenues for future research. Despite its limitations, the arguments laid out in this dissertation provide a heuristic for understanding the cultural politics and practices of belonging amongst contemporary African immigrants in the United States.

Chapter Two. Literature Review

This literature review provides the reader with an overview of the key debates on immigration to the United States, including a discussion on who is imagined as an immigrant, and where, when, and how black immigrants enter into the conversation. I begin by providing an overview of the sociological literature on community as a site where cultures and identities are produced, learned, and contested in everyday life. Then, through a review of the sociological literature on racialization and immigrant ethnicities, I show how critical race and immigration scholars have attended to questions of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class to make sense of immigrant incorporation, cultural practices, and identity in the United States. I conclude by clarifying my key research questions.

COMMUNITY AS BELONGING

Community is the framework through which people come to understand where and how they belong in different contexts (Bauman 2001; Cohen 1985/2007; Collins 2010; Delanty 2003/2013; Jenkins 1996; Mulligan 2015). Sociologist Emile Durkheim 1933/1997) wrote about community as "common consciousness." Organic and mechanical solidarities, which he explained as linking individuals to society through their differences and similarities, were the basis of community identities. By contrast, Max Weber argued that status groups, defined as a "specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honor… shared by a plurality" are normally communities (1946/1958, p. 187). Unlike Durkheim, for Weber community was less about similarities in social roles and more about similarities in social esteem. For Georg Simmel (1971), community was understood as "an impulse to sociability" wherein participation in "economic associations or blood fraternities…[is] accompanied by a feeling for, by a satisfaction in, the very fact that one is associated with others and that the solitariness of the individual is resolved with togetherness" (p. 128). Despite the slight differences through which early scholars understood community, the important aspect of this term was in how it defined a sense of togetherness amongst people.

Community as a sociological concept is a contested term. On the one hand, as Bauman (2001; see also Farrar 2001) notes "community" brings to mind feelings of warmth and security, safety and belonging. On the other hand, because community has the tendency to aggregate difference, it papers over, and sometimes, even silences important distinctions amongst the people who claim to be part of any given community (Cohen 1985/2007; Collins 2010; Delanty 2013). A generally accepted definition for community is based on how people use the term – to express an idea about belonging and articulate how different groups understand themselves to be different from others (Cohen 1985/2007; Delanty 2013). This definition is productive for any study of community. But likewise, the contests embedded in community are important to keep in sight when examining any entity that purports to be a community.

Communities exist on multiple levels. Abstract imagined communities such as nations, race (e.g., black/Latino community), gender (sisterhood is global), and professional groups represent one level of community. These imagined communities do not involve direct face-to-face contact among members (Anderson 1983/2006). Instead, the communion that members of an imagined or symbolic community feel amongst themselves comes from their shared origin stories, claims to cultural similarity, and other markers of commonality (Anderson 1983/2006; Calhoun 1991). By contrast, local communities refer to "an entity…invested with all the sentiment attached to kinship, friendship, neighboring, rivalry, familiarity, jealousy, as they inform the social processes of everyday life" (Cohen 1985/2007, p. 13).

Local communities can be place-based although the place of community is only important insofar as that place is imbued with meaning. In an article on community as an ambivalent yet hopeful formation, Martin Mulligan (2015) suggests that thinking about communities as either projected (imagined) or grounded avoids the problematic of overemphasizing physical space as a basis for community. Mulligan writes, "The focus is on culture rather than geography even if cultural differentiation is influenced by geography" (2015, p. 344). As such, local communities may involve people living in close proximity to one another such as a few blocks in a neighborhood or they may extend across an entire city (Back 1996; Collins 2010; Delanty 2013). Regardless of the physical space it occupies, a community can be identified through the meanings attached to its boundaries of belonging, the ways it informs members' processes of everyday life, and its function in providing a medium for expressing members' individual identities (Cohen 1985/2007; Hunter 1975; Lamont and Molnár 2002).

Community boundaries determine who belongs and who does not. Sociologists distinguish between social and symbolic boundaries (DuBois 1903; Jenkins 1996; Lamont and Fournier 1992). Social boundaries are "objectified social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and non-material) and social opportunities" (Lamont and Molnár 2002, p. 168). For example, racialized residential segregation (see Iceland 2009; Massey and Denton 1993) and employment discrimination (see Pager 2003; Pager and Pedulla 2015; Pedulla 2016) illustrate how a white community in the United States creates social boundaries around race in order to exclude people of color from full participation in society. By contrast, symbolic boundaries demarcate what becomes known as culture. Symbolic boundaries articulate feelings of similarity and belonging amongst those people who see themselves as within those boundaries (Cohen 1985/2007; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Lamont, Pendergrass, and Pachucki 2015).

Culture as contested ideological terrain

Within sociology, culture has been defined in several ways. For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848), culture is a dominant ideology that reflects the interests of the ruling class. Antonio Gramsci (1971) and Stuart Hall (1996c) developed this understanding of culture as a reflection of bourgeois interests and social forces to examine how culture is a contested ideological terrain. Following Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) analysis in *Distinctions*, culture is also understood as a site for articulating class distinctions through access to cultural capital (see for example, DiMaggio 1982a, 1982b; Lamont 1992; Lareau 2003). For Bourdieu, "art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences" (1984, p. 7). For Lamont and Fournier (1992), culture is a site for cultivating differences by establishing symbolic and social boundaries. Others define culture as frames or lenses through which people understand their lived experiences and respond to daily life (Harding 2010; Small 2004), or as narratives, the stories that people tell themselves to explain their lives (for example Anderson 1999; Young 2004). Culture's role in legitimating social differences is evidence of how it is a contested ideological terrain. Ann Swidler's (1986) conception of culture as a "toolkit" which individuals and groups draw upon to make sense of their world is one way of understanding the strategies through which these differences are sustained and contested.

In an excellent overview of the various, sometimes conflicting, often overlapping sociological definitions of "culture," Michèle Lamont and Mario Small (2008) show how the different approaches to understanding culture each provide some insight into this amorphous, contested, heterogeneous site for meaning-making in people's lives. They outline these different approaches to understanding culture as an intervention into research on racial inequalities and poverty and argue that "culture in its many forms may interact with [social] structure" in myriad and unanticipated ways (Lamont and Small 2008, p. 90). By accepting an understanding of culture as variously defined and deployed, it is possible to see how culture (as narratives, lens, capital, toolkit) is a site for producing normative values of acceptable and deviant behavior, orientations to social inequalities (for example beliefs in "post-racial America" or who should have access to social welfare programs) and explanations for perceived differences and similarities. Furthermore, not losing site of culture as a contested ideological terrain brings into focus questions of power.

In this context, Michel Foucault's (1978) understanding of power is productive. "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (p. 93). In the domain of culture, culture itself is that "complex strategical situation." It is a site where differences are negotiated and consent is manufactured. As the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha (1994) explained, culture emerges as a negotiation of differences (see also Cohen 1993; Johnson 1986; McClintock 1995; Young 2005). For Bhabha (1994), "the *cultural*" is not "the source of conflict [as in, different cultures]," but rather "the effect of discriminatory practices – the production of cultural *differentiation* as signs of authority" (p. 114). Cultural differentiation is articulated through the value placed on different cultural products (i.e., tangible material objects such as a painting) and productions (performances like plays, or even a manner of walking).

By way of example of the above discussion, I turn to hip-hop music. Hip-hop serves as a familiar example of the various registers of culture. Hip-hop comprises a musical form, dance culture, art (e.g., graffiti), and fashion. As well, hip-hop tells stories that articulate and produce black identities, enact resistance against racism and economic inequalities, and provide political commentaries about social worlds (Hurt 2006; Matlon 2016; Forman and Neal 2004; Rabaka 2013; Rose 1994; Shipley 2012). As a black cultural form, hip-hop might represent, for dominant white communities, an extension of problematic ways of being black. For people who identify with hip-hop it reflects back their sense of self and affirms their identities. Importantly, although from the outside, hip-hop might appear to project a coherent identity for those within and outside the culture, a closer look reveals that this is not the case (Rose 2008). As such, it would be more accurate to refer to hip-hop cultures to reflect the competing narratives and boundaries that shape belonging within these communities.

The above definitions of culture as frames, narratives, repertoires and capital, gesture towards the idea that communities collectively create and sustain their cultures. Importantly, communities are produced through competing discourses that shape our daily interactions (Back 1996; Rudrappa 2004). A person understands herself to be part of a community as a result of shared symbols and similarities that encourage such a sense of belonging, while also making sense of those similarities for their specific case.

Culture and ethnicity

Sociologists describe ethnicity as a social boundary rooted in perceptions of cultural, historical, and ancestral difference (Brubaker 2004; Calhoun 1993; Weber 1922/1985; Wimmer 2013). For Weber (1922/1985), ethnicity is characterized by subjectively felt belonging to a group having a common ancestor. By contrast, Brubaker

(2004) understands ethnicity to be “embodied and expressed… in everyday encounters, practical categories, commonsense knowledge” and other banal ways (p. 2). This understanding of ethnicity moves away from claims to ancestral similarity to focus on relationships and processes that produce mutual feelings of belonging. In this regard, Brubaker’s conception of ethnicity moves away from groups as pre-existing bounded entities, to understand the processes that bring collectives together. Ethnicity can be symbolic (Gans 1979), taking on meaning occasionally, such as on Saint Patrick’s Day. For whites, it can also be an option, as Waters (1990) showed, voluntary chosen to assert some kind of romanticized past.

In immigration scholarship, people of color have ethnicity as some *thing* that helps them battle different forms of racial inequality and prevents them from ultimately becoming like every other American (see for example Arthur 2000, 2008; Kasinitz 1992; Rogers 2001, 2006; Waters 1994, 1999). Ethnicity in this context can be reactive (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, and Holdaway 2008; Portes and Rumbaut 2014; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 2008; Zhou 1997) when it reproduces negative stereotypes about a racial group. For example, Portes and Rumbaut (2014) write about “those youths for whom ethnicity would neither be a badge of pride nor a social convenience but a mark of permanent subordination” (p. 279). Here, immigrant ethnicity is posited as flavorful sign of diversity (“a badge of pride”) or as a proverbial “trump card” that can help an immigrant navigate society. However, if ethnicity offers neither of these benefits, especially for “the offspring of working-class immigrants for whom a negative mode of incorporation has prevented the development of strong and coethnic communities” (p. 280) they “assimilate downward” and their resulting ethnicity is “reactive.” Likewise, for Zhou (1997) reactive ethnicity refers to

> Symbols of ethnic pride and cultural identity that developed in reaction to social isolation and racial domination (e.g. the sparkling mounds of braided hair of young African-American women) [which are] signals that barred access to resources and employment in the larger society (p. 83).

Another way in which immigration researchers have written about immigrant ethnicity is as linear (Portes and Rumbaut 2014; Portes 1999) when it creates social capital through networks with other immigrants from the same group. For Portes (1999), linear ethnicity emerges when "governmental reception of immigrants of a particular nationality is not uniformly hostile and when the group is sufficiently small and dispersed not to raise major concerns among the host population" (p. 466). In this context, immigrants avoid others from their home countries as a way to distance themselves from any stereotypes attached with their country. Instead, they engage in transnational relationships in order that are "'linear' extensions of the immigrants' interests" (p. 466). These explanations of immigrant ethnicity in the context of social inequalities locate the ways in which immigrants' navigate this context as cultural failings.

The ways in which ethnicity is politicized in an immigration context for people of color in particular emphasizes cultural differences as explanatory factors in navigating social inequalities. (Below, I will discuss what Jemima Pierre (2004) refers to as cultural narratives of ethnicity with a specific focus on black immigrants.) Anthony Cohen's (1993) conceptualization of ethnicity as the politicization of culture is useful in this regard. Although Cohen is referring to ethnicity in the context of subjective identities rather than those imposed on a group of people by immigration scholars, his analysis offers a different way of understanding immigrant ethnicities from the immigrants' own perspectives. Cohen's (1985, 1993) broader argument is that culture is constituted by symbols that provide a means for expression and meaning-making, and is a political exercise. This means that culture, which is produced in communities and by groups of people, is the product of contests and consensus. For Cohen, ethnicity is a political claim that represents that consensus. This understanding of ethnicity is subjective and articulates an identity. Cohen's (1993) concept of ethnicity as the politicization of culture is more in line with Brubaker's (2004) ethnicity without groups in that it emphasizes the processes and negotiations through which this identity emerges.

Ethnicity is at once a politicization of culture, a site through which individuals and groups negotiate their identities, and also a highly racialized idea that marks some people as "Other" in reference to a dominant group. The various meanings of ethnicity are context specific and shaped by the power dynamics that different so-called ethnic groups and the majority enjoy. When I refer to ethnicity I recognize that it is racialized, especially for people of color in a United States context and also value the way in which the community understood the term. From their own perspective the language of ethnicity provided a way of articulating the particularities of their experiences in conversation with others who were similar to them. As such, ethnicity was a basis for claiming cultural identities without conceding the concept to a fraught racial landscape.

Culture and identity

Through culture, individuals and groups define aspects of their identities (Cohen 1993; Gilroy 1997; Hall 1995). The sociologist Richard Jenkins (1996) provides a historical review of identity, offering a definition that posits identity as "being or becoming…our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)" (p. 4-5). This definition of identity emphasizes its dialectic and social dimensions and emerges from symbolic interactionism perspective. Here, we understand that identities exist in context and are produced through different sets of relations. On this point, Simmel (1971) argues that “the narrower the circle to which we commit ourselves, the less freedom of individuality we possess…correspondingly, if the circle in which we are active and in which our interests hold sway enlarges, there is more room in it for the development of our individuality” (p. 257). Our cultural milieus help define our identities.

Identities emerge out of cultural production and are historically and materially grounded through different relations with social structures (Bhabha 1994; Gilroy 1997; Hall 1990, 1996b). Understanding identities as products of culture highlight the idea that a person’s (or cultural) identity does not represent a unitary self (Gilroy 1997; Hall 1996b). The processes and social conditions through which different identities emerge, whether racial, ethnic, class, Goth, or hipster, are not stable across time or space and also intersect with various other ways of being in the world (Anzaldúa 1987/2007; Bhattacharyya 1998; Hall 1995). Individuals internalize the meanings and values of their culture, which they produce, in order to orient themselves to their world. This internalization becomes part of a person’s identity, or as Stuart Hall (1995) describes it, “identity helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world,” thus bringing the subject in line with the structure (p. 598). Identity as a way of aligning with culture is not meant to indicate identity as essentialist and unchanging. Instead, referring back to an understanding of culture as meaning making, identity is one way in which such meanings are attained, a basis for social solidarity, and a way of negotiating being in a changing world (Gilroy 1997; Hall 1996b).

Community as an orientation device

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed (2006) describes orientation devices as ways of making the strange familiar through “a process of becoming intimate with where one is" (p. 11). Orientation devices are not apparent to those who are already oriented to their space. Instead, they appear as natural, while also creating a sense of familiarity and comfort. Communities are such orientation devices. They provide normative discourses of belonging by generating "'shared attributes,' which are then *retrospectively* taken up as evidence of community" (Ahmed 2006, p. 122, emphasis in original). Ahmed likens the family to community and reflects on how this orientation device reproduces itself through inheritance, generations, and access to different social resources. Being part of different communities orients us to particular ways of being in the world. This orientation to the world is produced through culture and passed on as an inheritance.

The orientation provided by our communities constitutes our culture. This orientation provides the toolkit we employ to explain, for example, our commitment to working seventy-hour weeks or taking summer vacations, lends us a frame for how we perceive our relationship with others, and offer a narrative for why and how to make certain choices in different circumstances.

Returning to community as providing a sense of familiarity, I want to place emphasis on the *family* in familiarity. Considering family as a formation in which we inherit things including our names, "values," tastes in food and music, learn how to relate to others, and trace origins in one form or another, I offer community as a similar site of inheritance. Within our communities, we "inherit" culture and produce them anew in our everyday interactions with others. Just as we might lose our familial inheritance, whether carelessly (by making a bad deal) or intentionally (by making a good deal), cultures can also be lost through different contests. In the loss of one culture, new cultures arise, shaped by the people who seek other ways of being in the world through alternate sets of repertoires, narratives, and frames.

Diaspora, difference, and hybridity

Implied in the above discussion of culture and identity is the notion of difference (Bhaba 1994; McClintock 1995; Young 1995/2005). As Bhabha argued, culture is articulated at the point where oppositional forces come together. Thinking specifically from a postcolonial context, Bhabha understands these differences to be racialized. Robert Young (1995/2005) picks up on Bhabha's point to argue further that the racialization of difference also produces an "ambivalent axis of desire and aversion" (p. 19). This desire/aversion axis is articulated through hybridity, which "makes difference into sameness and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different" (Young 1995/2005, p. 26).

Diaspora is an important site for examining and understanding cultural identities, difference, and hybridity. As Paul Gilroy (1997) argues, diaspora challenges identity as stable and, as such, allows for a rethinking of identity. Like "community," diaspora enjoys many different uses and definitions, which I will not recount here (see Clifford 1997; Cohen 2008; Dufoix 2008). In this context, diaspora refers to a social condition that shifts the boundaries of identity and ethnicity (as politicized culture) by transcending the nation and reshaping origin narratives (Anthias 1998; Edwards 2001; Wright 2004). Diaspora is already hybridized and syncretized and challenges the static nature of normative conceptions of identity. As such diaspora offers a way to think about identity as constituted through different means and forces, rather than as characterized by an essential core. As Brent Edwards (2001) reminds us, for African derived populations, diaspora helps to account for the differences amongst these groups, in ways that terms like pan-Africanism, for example, could not. But even more importantly, diaspora points to difference, "not only internally (the way the way transnational black groupings are fractured by nation, class, gender sexuality and language) but also externally" in relation to other types of diasporas (Edwards 2001, p. 64). Consequently, for Edwards (see also Hall 1990) diaspora demands an examination of culture across difference.

The differences that produce culture are not only racialized and classed, but also infused with desire (McClintock 1995; Young 1995/2005). The articulation of this desire can be found in the language of hybridity (Anthias 2001; Young 1995/2005). Hybridity, or the fusion (mixing) of cultures, signals an ability to live with and through difference (Appiah 2006; Eze 2016; Hall 1990). According to Hall, who explains diaspora through cultural identity, hybridity is an important aspect of diasporic identities, which "are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew" (1990, p. 235; see also Gilroy 1993, 1997). In this regard, diaspora and cultural identities are not static but rather, are processes of being and becoming, constructed through unifying narratives such as Alex Haley's *Roots* or Henry Louis Gates' PBS documentaries (Hall 1990; Hussey 2014).

Despite celebratory claims about hybridity (e.g., vis-à-vis the Afropolitan (Appiah 2006; Selasi 2005; Eze 2014), which show that culture is neither static nor essentialist, scholars have highlighted how beliefs about cultural fusion can reify ideological claims about culture and difference (Anthias 2001; Young 1995/2005). For example, Anthias (2001, p. 628) is clear that simply because hybridity fuses cultural forms does not mean that such cultures are "more desirable or progressive than others." Instead, despite the anti-essentialism of hybridity, discourses of power impose on the negotiations that produce this cultural form (Bhabha 1994; McClintock 1995).

Having laid out the theoretical debates around culture, identity, and community, I now turn to a discussion of immigration in the United States, with a particular focus on black immigrants. From the perspective of migrants, diaspora is simultaneously a condition characterized by displacement from territorial homelands and also a process of discontinuities and becoming. For black African migrants, the diasporic condition emphasizes a homeland that might emphasize some romanticized notions of the African continent while also focusing on the (often) unfortunate economic and structural issues that encouraged them to leave their national homelands. In this context, migrants' diaspora projects might include extra-national efforts with concrete ties to homeland, implicitly or explicitly driven by a desire for return. For example Haiti's 10th department is how the country engages politically, economically, and socially with its large migrant population. Similarly, in 2014, the government of Ghana established a "Diaspora Affairs Bureau" with the intent of providing resources and connectedness for "individuals and members of Ghanaian networks, associations and communities who have left Ghana but maintain links with the country" (Ghana Embassy, Washington D.C.). When migrants are reimagined as constituting different national diasporas, this relationship affirms territorial claims of diaspora (homeland connections). Nevertheless because diaspora conceptually refers to shifts in identity and exceeds national origins, when, for example Ghanaian migrants become part of a Ghanaian diaspora, the meanings of Ghanaian nationality in this context necessarily transform.

IMMIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES: WHEN BLACKS ENTER

Popular studies of migration to the United States often focus on men's experiences, implicitly identifying these as "the immigrant experience." Likewise, in the United States, immigrant is coded as someone from Spanish-speaking North and South America. Especially in Texas and California, Mexican is synonymous with immigrants. The research on Latinx[1] immigrants has provided important insights into how racial capitalism has shaped immigrant incorporation into the United States (Hagan, Rodríguez, and Castro 2011; Massey 2008; Rodríguez 2012), the gendered and sexual politics of immigrant journeys (Cantú 2009; Epstein and Carrillo 2014; Gonzalez-Lopez 2005; Hagan 1998), and the affective dimensions of immigrant life (Singer and Gilbertson 2003).

For example, in her interview study with Mexican immigrants living in California, Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez (2005, 2006) found that some of the ideas these migrants held about sexuality were re-shaped or affirmed through their migrant journeys. Gonzalez-Lopez consideration of regional patriarchies and virginity as *capital feminino* illustrate ways in which ideas about sexuality are used to signal cultural values and construct particular cultural identities before and after migration. In Texas, Jacqueline Hagan's (1998) ethnographic study of a Mayan immigrant community in Houston, Texas found that whereas men's ties expanded over time because of their employment outside of homes and thus their ability to form relationships with people outside of their immigrant community, women were constrained to their relationships with men and other women in their community. As a result, women had access only to the information that men shared with them. In studies of LGBT Latino migrants, Cantú (2009) and Epstein and Carrillo (2014) illustrate the ways in which queer sexuality is racialized as white in a U.S. context. These studies are important in highlighting the ways in which the United States emphasis on its progressive stance towards same-gender loving people manages to exclude different racialized and classed LGBTQ subjects. The scholarship on Latinx immigrants highlights how discourses around immigrant ethnicity and assimilation sustain whiteness as a primary marker of belonging within the U.S. nation and posit ethnicity as a way of challenging racial discrimination (Alba and Nee 2003; Cantú 2009; Gonzalez-Lopez 2005, 2006; Hagan 1998; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003).

In addition to the abundant research on immigration from Spanish-speaking North and South America, a productive number of texts addressing the presence of black immigrants in the United States also exist.[2] From its inception, sociological scholarship about black immigrants focused on the U.S. American experiences of people from the Caribbean (Bashi, 2007; Bryce-Laporte 1972; Kasinitz 1992; Reid 1939; Rogers 2001, 2006; Vickerman 1998; Waters 1994, 1999). Increasingly, scholars (e.g., Arthur 2000, 2008, 2009, Arthur, Takougang, and Owusu 2012; Greer 2013; Moore, 2013; Okpewho and Nzegwu, 2009; Shaw-Taylor and Tuch, 2007; Falola 2013, 2016; Halter and Johnson 2013) are including the experiences of U.S. Africans in their analyses and theorizing about black immigrants to the United States. Largely concerned with questions of identity and political participation, the authors of these texts have examined how (mostly male) black Caribbean and African immigrants who live in New York City come to see themselves as U.S. American. I will discuss these texts below, but first take a detour to discuss how immigrants are imagined in dominant U.S. discourse and its implications for black immigrants. Following this discussion, I turn to the research on black immigrant ethnicities, and then return to a critical review of the scholarship on black immigrants.

Imagining the immigrant

According to sociologist Paul Spickard (2007), an "Ellis Island" model has historically dominated who is imagined as an ideal immigrant to the United States. This ideal immigrant has been produced through different laws and policies that allow his entry into the United States. These laws include the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which as the name implied banned Chinese citizens from migrating to the United States, the Johnson-Reed Act (1924), which set quotas on immigrants based on the number of people from that county already in the United States, thereby privileging immigration from Western Europe, and the Expatriation Act (1907), which revoked the U.S. citizenship of women who married non-citizen men (Glenn, 2009; Ngai 2014). Over the years, U.S. immigration policies have evolved, bringing in unexpected people into the fold of what it means to be U.S. American. These policy changes, including the Immigration Act of 1952 and the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 and the Immigration Act of 1990 has dramatically reshaped the national landscape. With their preference systems, these acts opened up U.S. immigration to a slightly different class of idealized immigrants – educated skilled workers. In addition to privileging "family reunification" defined as heteronormative nuclear family, these acts also made it possible for skilled migrants from countries historically underrepresented in U.S. migration streams to make their way to this country.

The Hart-Cellar Act is widely regarded as the law that opened the way for the vast majority of black people to migrate to the United States (Omi and Winant 2015; Portes and Rumbaut 2014). Prior to 1965 however, there were black immigrants in the United States, largely from the Caribbean. In his ethnographic study of black immigrant identities, Philip Kasinitz (1992, p. 8) notes that in the 1920s, black Caribbean immigrants "made up almost as large a proportion of black population in New York" as they did at the time of the book's publication. Likewise, black Africans have also been historically present in the United States as voluntary immigrants, a prominent example being Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah who lived in the United States for ten years between 1935 and 1947 and attended the historically black Lincoln University in Pennsylvania (Sherwood 1996).

Despite a historical presence, black people remain marginal to the story of immigration in the United States. The DREAMers movement is a prominent and typical example of this marginality. The DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act is a proposed law that would qualify undocumented migrants who came to the United States before the age of sixteen for permanent residency. The face of the

DREAMer is often imagined as a non-black Latino. Latinos account for the vast majority of immigrants, documented and otherwise, including black Latinos who come to the United States from the Caribbean and Latin America. Over half a million black immigrants (approximately 16%) in the United States are undocumented (BAJI 2016; Passel and Cohn, 2016). These black immigrants are largely left out of discussions and decision-making about how to improve their lives in the United States.

In addition to popular renderings of immigrants in the United States as non-black Latinos, academic texts also reproduce this image. For example, Sharkey's (2013) important study about how black people disproportionately live in underserved neighborhoods found that these neighborhoods experience an economic revitalization once immigrants move in. Throughout Sharkey's book, immigrants and foreign-born Americans are largely presented as non-black Latinos, thereby offering little insight by way of where black immigrants fit into these analyses. Research about where black immigrants live has found that this population typically lives in ethnically diverse neighborhoods, close to other immigrants (Freeman, 2002; Vang 2012; Wright, Ellis, and Park 2005). Because of racial discrimination, black immigrants also live with other black immigrants, often from the same country or region as them and far from white Americans (Danso and Grant 2000; Iceland, 2009; Takougang and Tidjani 2009; see also Massey and Denton 1993).

Black immigrants and ethnicity

Above, citing Cohen (1993), I discussed ethnicity as the politicization of culture. However, I also noted how theories about ethnicity in immigration scholarship are primarily concerned with distinguishing American blacks from other people of color, immigrant and otherwise (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, and Holdaway 2008; Portes and

Rumbaut 2014; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 2008; Zhou 1997). Sociologist Vilna Bashi Treitler (2013) calls these efforts at distinction the ethnic project. The ethnic project is a collective effort undertaken by people in different U.S. racial communities to distance themselves from the bottom of the racial hierarchy, which is anchored by American blacks. Within a U.S. context, nobody is exempt from the ethnic project and all are implicated in sustaining whiteness as the top and blackness as the bottom of the racial order. Treitler's ethnic projects help to make sense of a dominant narrative in scholarship about black immigrants. Invariably, scholars who study these communities find that black immigrants emphasize their ethnicities, that is their cultural difference from American blacks, when articulating their identities as Americans (see for example, Kasinitz 1992; Rogers 2001, 2006; Vickerman 1998; Waters 1994, 1999).

For example, in *Caribbean New York,* Philip Kasinitz (1992, p. 13) interviews political activists, almost all men, to understand the public identity of English-speaking black Caribbean immigrants. For Kasinitz (1992), a critical reading of the Carnival celebration offers insights into how a West Indian ethnicity is formed through the interplay of group and individual processes that also seeks to make sense of the racial context of the United States. Kasinitz' reading of Carnival sees this performance as a site where what it means to be West Indian in New York City is contested by virtue of the different voices and interests that participate in the festival. Despite this contest, Carnival is also a site where the boundaries of this contest are demarcated and a shared cultural heritage is emphasized. Kasinitz (1992) finds that ethnicity is largely instrumental amongst black Caribbean immigrants in New York City, who "play the ethnic card" (p. 253) in attempts for political mobilization and as a way to distinguish themselves from U.S.-born blacks. Although noting how the men in his study articulate a shared cultural heritage amongst one another, Kasinitz also imagines that this shared heritage only distinguishes them from other blacks, and not also from whites, non-Caribbean peoples, and other U.S. Americans.

The suggestion that black immigrants "play the ethnic card" as a strategy for distinction from U.S. born blacks is repeated, although in toned down language in Mary Waters' (1999) *Black Identities*. Waters' comprehensive study included interviews with black Caribbean immigrants and their children, U.S. born blacks, and co-workers of different races, as well as participant observation in workplaces and schools in order to understand "the social process of identity construction among the immigrants and their children" (2009, p. 9). Waters' key argument is that although black immigrants come to the United States expecting racism, the extent to which it negatively impacts their lives can come as a shock to them. Consequently, especially for middle-class black immigrants, they emphasize their cultural identity, that is, their ethnicity, to position themselves as model blacks, while distancing themselves from the negative images and stereotypes attached to a black American underclass.

People from the Caribbean islands are not the only black immigrants' whose cultural and ethnic identities are identified as superior to U.S. American blacks'. Scholars of African immigrants to the United States have also made similar claims. A primary example is John Arthur's (2000) *Invisible Sojourners* (but see also Arthur 2008, 2009; Chacko 2003; Mensah and Williams, 2015). *Invisible Sojourners* (Arthur 2000) is foundational in offering a sociological examination of black African immigrants to the United States. Based on census and immigration data along with a survey of 650 black Africans living in four U.S. cities, Arthur provides a comprehensive overview of this historically understudied immigrant population. This overview includes: who African immigrants are – their country of origin, whether they are refugees or economic migrants, their age, gender, marital status, income and educational attainment; why Africans migrate to the United States – for economic opportunities, in pursuit of higher education, family reunification, and exile/asylum; the communities in which these immigrants participate in, their transnational ties, their cultural identities, and their sense of self as U.S. Americans.

Like Kasinitz (1992) and Waters (1999), Arthur (2000,) reiterates the idea that black immigrants (from the Caribbean and Africa) "came to the United States from countries where blacks are in the majority" and as such have little understanding of "the dynamics of discrimination against black Americans and people of color in general" (p. 73). Despite this minimal understanding of racism, Arthur (2000, p. 77) contends that after experiencing such discrimination, Africans find a need to "identify themselves as 'African blacks'" and distance themselves from U.S. American blacks. Reproducing the argument that black immigrants have cultural values that facilitate an upward educational and socioeconomic trajectory, Arthur acknowledges the negative consequences of racism. It is worth quoting at length his understanding of how culture can resist racism (Arthur 2000, p. 81):

> The patterns of socialization and cultural identification are different [for immigrant and native-born blacks]. Sometimes the cultural gap and differences in value orientation become sites of conflict and tension between the two groups. To the majority of African immigrants, the key to social mobility in the United States is education and human capital as broadly defined in terms of strong family relationships, foresight, frugality, pursuit of educational goals, and cultural value based on entrepreneurship. Racism and discrimination serve as structural constraints to full participation in society. And African immigrants and native-born blacks both experience its harmful consequences. But African immigrants and native-born blacks differ in terms of the relative value that they attach to race as affecting advancement in the United States.

Here Arthur delineates what he thinks makes African immigrants successful when compared to U.S. blacks – their cultural values and investment in education. Noting that African immigrants value education implies that U.S. blacks do not. Claiming foresight and frugality as African traits denies these same traits to U.S. blacks. And finally, simultaneously acknowledging structural racism while suggesting that the value attached to race is what circumscribes black upward mobility squarely blames black underclasses for their disadvantaged position.

The idea that African immigrants, unlike U.S. blacks, are uniquely invested in pursuing higher education is repeated in a number of academic and popular texts about this population including Arthur (2008, 2010), McAdoo, Younge, and Getahun (2007), Ette (2012), Gyasi (2016). What remains unsaid in these statements is the resources with which many Africans come to the United States, positioning them to take advantage of higher education made available to them. For example, Arthur (2008, p. 39) is clear about which Ghanaians, historically, have had the opportunity to migrate – "Tens of thousands of Ghanaians educated by the country's secondary and tertiary institutions of learning have no choice but to leave the county…Most of them have been recruited for more lucrative jobs in the United States and Great Britain" (p. 39). Although people without educational credentials and readily marketable skills in Western economies also migrate out of Ghana (and other African countries), these people were supported by the resources of well-established and economically secure community, facilitating their successful incorporation in their new contexts (see Bashi 2007). Over half (60%) of immigrants in Arthur's survey of Ghanaians were middle or upper middle class (p. 80). Without paying attention to how this supportive and economically privileged context facilitates the pursuit of expensive higher education, it is easy to repeat that African immigrants, unlike U.S. blacks, are inherently better at taking advantage of this country's resources.

From the above summaries of key texts about black immigrants, the ways in which black immigrants participate in the U.S. ethnic project are apparent. But additionally, as anthropologist Jemima Pierre (2004) argues, immigration scholars are also complicit in advancing “cultural narratives of ethnicity,” which articulate black immigrants’ cultural difference (from U.S. society) as inherently superior to black Americans. In her critical review of scholarship about black immigrant incorporation in the United States, Pierre shows how claims about immigrant cultures simultaneously sustain the myth of a multicultural progressive United States of America, and also reinforces existing racial hierarchies. She notes how “the focus on Black immigrant ethnicity is usually done – however inadvertently – within a ‘model minority’ paradigm that simplistically subsumes racio-political dynamics under a potentially benign language of ethnic identity” (Pierre 2004, p. 150; see also Wu 2013). This benign language of ethnic identity circumscribes black people, immigrant and native-born, outside of the U.S. mainstream, while also maintaining a myth of black American pathology.

Homing in on how scholars, news media, and lay publics alike posit ethnicity as instrumental for black immigrants, Pierre highlights how this so-called ethnic option reduces “ethnic identification to a solely subjective process, as if racialized Black immigrant ethnicity is so decoupled from race categorization and the U.S. racial hierarchy that it renders self-definition authoritative” (2004, p. 152). Understanding ethnicity as the politicization of culture (Cohen 1993) sheds additional insight into how cultural narratives of ethnicity arrange the U.S. racial landscape. Taking note of how black immigrants articulate their cultural identities means paying attention to how as individuals and communities, they align their subjective experiences with their place in the world (Pierre 2004; Hall 1995). As such: “The sense of agency brought to bear when Black immigrants interact with United States racial formation is more complicated than a foregrounding of ‘ethnic’ identity over a racial one” (Pierre 2004, p. 159). Importantly, these complicated responses are not merely about adjusting to the racial landscape in the United States, but also about how their cultures inform understanding of their present conditions. Throughout this dissertation, I will refer often to this dialogue between past and present processes for which racial meanings are attached to different ways of being in order to tease out the complexities that inform black immigrant identities in the United States.

Racialization and black immigrants

The racial identities with which black immigrants arrive to the United States are not the same as black Americans' racial identities. These identities differ not only because of class, gender, and geographic locations, but also because of the historical and social circumstances through which these black identities were formed (Gordon 2007; Wright 2004, 2015). Racialization is a useful concept for understanding the diverse processes that produce racial identities and racial meanings across different populations. Racialization generally refers to "processes by which racial meanings are attached to particular issues—often treated as social problems" (Murji and Solomos 2005, p. 3; Omi and Winant 2014; Saperstein, Penner, and Light 2013). For example, in the United States, welfare may be understood as a racialized issue in that the recipients of this form of government assistant ("welfare queens") are largely imagined to be undeserving black people taking advantage of a supposedly generous U.S. government (Alexander 2005; Collins 1990; Quadagno 1994).

Omi and Winant's (2014) racial formation theory captures important aspects of racialization for a United States context. Racial formation theory assumes that individuals and groups engage in a various racial projects through which they make sense of the world. A racial project is "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines" (Omi and Winant 2014, p.

125). Not all racial projects are racist. Some are concerned with undoing racist structures of domination (Omi and Winant 2014, p. 129). In Chapter Five, I provide a more extensive discussion of the debates about racial formation theory and racialization. For now, it is important to simply note that a crucial aspect of racial formation theory is that it views race and racial identities as politically contested and in dialogue with representational and structural elements of society (Winant 2000). The dialogue between processes of racialization and racial formations in the United States are critical for understanding how black immigrants "become black" in a U.S. context

Examining the different processes that have produced black identities, Michelle Wright (2004) makes the case for understanding the fluidity of black identities in the West through histories of immigration, colonialism, and enslavement. Arguing that these histories produce black identities as "complex negotiation between dominant and minority cultures that all peoples of African descent…must make in order to survive," Wright (2004, p. 26) calls attention to the multiplicity and internal incoherence of black identities. Despite the various ways in which black subjectivities exist, a dominant narrative about what it means to be black persists, what Wright (2013, 2015) calls "middle passage blackness." Middle passage blackness privileges the transatlantic slave trade and its historical arc as the most authentic process through which black identities emerge. However, if black identities are to be understood as coming into being through a range of historical processes, then blackness must be understood as spatially and temporally constructed through dialogues and interactions with various social conditions (Wright 2015, p. 14). Particular attention to this dialogue, which is both collective and individual, helps to make sense of black immigrants' identities in the United States.

A number of sociologists and political scientists studying black immigrant identities have inched towards a more intentional examination of how black immigrants' histories might inform their U.S. American identities without wholesale reproducing "cultural narratives of ethnicity." For example, in *Crosscurrents*, Milton Vickerman (1998, p. ix) prefaces his book with the following statement: "They [black Caribbean immigrants] tend to be profoundly uncomfortable dealing with race, because, despite a history of colonialism, their societies socialize them to ignore it." This preface should provide some insight into some of the processes that inform these black identities. Despite this start, which challenges claims that black majorities in Caribbean and African nations discounts racism, Vickerman still suggests that "powerful forces suppress the overt expression of racialism in those societies…[so that] being of African ancestry and emphasizing merit are not contradictory" (1998, p. 9; see also, for example Arthur 2000, p. 75, 2008 p. 67; Chacko 2003, p. 501). In a footnote, he explains that this racial pride is in contrast to black American oppositional identities (Vickerman 1998, p. 19, n40).

Here, although Vickerman initially seems to challenge the idea that Caribbean nations are not racialized, his subsequent analyses and conclusions discount racism and highlight cultural superiority. As a result, despite some apparent nuances about West Indian immigrants and race, Vickerman ultimately concludes that, although problematic and controversial, black immigrants' ethnic options and cultural distinctiveness make them a model minority (1998, p. 155 – 160). Vickerman's chapter on race in Jamaica (Chapter 1) had the potential to offer a more nuanced reading of how this context might have informed the black identities of the 106 men he interviewed. For example, Pierre's (2008) essay on skin lightening in Ghana is an excellent example of how racial commonsense, even when seemingly suppressed, continues to inform ideas about beauty, deservedness, and merit in postcolonial contexts. Instead, for Vickerman, ethnicity and culture discount this racial history and become the sole basis for identity. These blacks are not black.

In similar fashion, recent political science scholarship about black immigrants, although paying lip-service to the racialized contexts from which these immigrants come to the United States detangle race from ethnicity and as such black immigrants from U.S. American-born blacks. Of note, Reuel Rogers (2006) examination of the political behavior of black Caribbean immigrants reiterates how "the immigrants usually turn to their own distinctive ethnic identity to navigate racial barriers in the United States" (p. 174) and again how "the immigrants' home country ties furnish then with an exit option to which they can ultimately resort if racial barriers in the United States prove too daunting" (p. 245). Although noting that black Caribbean immigrants felt a racial bond with U.S. blacks, Rogers concludes that there are no political meanings of black identity for these immigrants (2006, p. 250).

By contrast, Christina Greer's (2013) study of black union participants in New York City teases out how a shared political and racial identity might emerge despite ethnic differences (cf., Alex-Assensoh 2009; Humphries 2013). By examining the political leanings of Africans, Caribbean and U.S. blacks, Greer simultaneously shows how black immigrants adopt an elevated minority position, which includes a so-called exit option (p. 91) while also politically aligning themselves with American blacks on issues that affect them as black people, such as affirmative action (p. 95). By examining different political issues and positions across three black immigrant groups, Greer's conclusions make room for an appreciation of the various diverging and converging political interests of these populations. However, Greer does not lend much weight to the particular histories that bring different black populations to the United States and how these histories might inform their political stances. Instead she privileges the middle passage, while inexplicably, writing Caribbean blacks outside of that narrative, and rendering African histories as inconsequential to it (see for example, p. 43 – 45). It is perhaps by locating black people in a shared historical narrative that Greer can find room for the possibility of coalition between these racialized populations.

The little we get of African histories from Greer include that Africans are more invested in the "American Dream" because "they do not have the same exit options as Afro-Caribbeans" (Greer 2013, p. 103). No further comment is made about this point and the reader is simply left to imagine what is going on in Africa that takes away the option for return from immigrants. That some black immigrants have an "exit option" from racialization in the United States is also a dominant theme throughout the texts under discussion (Moore 2013; Rogers 2006; Vickerman 1998; Waters 1994; 1999). The idea effectively disconnects different parts of the world, suggesting that racial domination is only relevant in the United States and postcolonial societies are outside of this sphere. However, taking seriously first, that colonialism reshaped the world, and second that globalization means ideas and practices travel the globe makes it impossible to accept that there is some place to escape racism, as claims about an exit option suggest.

The limitation of cultural narratives that render some black people as not black lies in the implicit expectation that black people are expected to fall in line. Specifically, the linear narrative of the middle passage epistemology, underline these cultural narratives, and the only possible conclusion for these stories is on U.S. shores. Wright (2015, p. 8) accurately explains this phenomenon when she writes:

> In short [African immigrants in the United States] have experienced differences that these linear progress narratives of Blackness strongly encourage them not to discuss, perhaps even to *see*, much less acknowledge. …perceived differences *will* be expressed, but because most dominant constructs of Blackness cannot understand differences within, difference is often expressed as a dichotomy between "Black" and "not Black."

The tensions that arise in competing narratives about black identities reappears in scholarly and lay texts about these populations. Above, I have focused on the broader narratives around black immigrants. I will now turn to the extant literature about African immigrants in the United States with particular attention paid to how the literature discusses the identities of this population.

AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Africans have been voluntarily migrating to the United States since the abolition of slavery in the United States (Jalloh and Falola 2008; Takougang 1995). However, they did not begin arriving in significant numbers until, first after World War II, and then after the official end of colonialism in several African nations (Falola and Afolabi 2007; Gordon 1998; Tagougang 1995, 2002). According to historian Joseph Takougang (2002), Africans began migrating to the United States in large numbers during the 1960s to learn the skills necessary to lead their respective countries. However, in the 1980s three main factors contributed to an increase in permanent African migration to the United States: economic and political failures of postcolonial African nations; the apparent relaxation of U.S. immigration policy, through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and the 1990 Diversity Visa Program, at the same time that European countries were experiencing an economic downturn; and the presence of African networks established in the 1960s when the first large numbers of Africans voluntarily moved to the United States (Takougang 2002). About twenty-five percent of all Africans in the United States entered through the Diversity Visa Program (Gambino, Trevelyan and Fitzwater 2014).

A recent report by the Migration Policy Institute indicated that this immigration trend continues. Although Africans only make up about 4% of total immigration to the United States, this demographic is also the fastest growing immigrant group in the country. Between 2000 and 2009, black African immigration increased by 92% (Capps, McCabe, & Fix 2012). About 1.6 million United States residents were born in an African country and the largest African-born populations are from Nigeria (14% of African-born population), Ethiopia (10%), Egypt (9%), and Ghana (8%) (Gambino, Trevelyan and Fitzwater 2014). Across the United States, two metropolitan areas have African-born populations larger than a hundred and fifty thousand, New York (212,000) and Washington, DC (161,000). Los-Angeles, Atlanta, and Minneapolis – St. Paul are each home to at least 60,000 African-born residents. These African populations are racially and economically diverse and arrive in the United States via diverse routes including as refugees, students, and workers. In this section, rather than review the demographic characteristics of African immigrants (for that see Arthur, 2000, 2009; Arthur, Takougang, and Owusu 2012; Logan, 2007), I focus on how the literature has represented African immigrants' cultural politics and sense of their place as Africans and U.S. Americans.[3] Specifically, I outline scholarly representations of African immigrant cultures, class, racial, and (often implicit) gender and sexual politics to illustrate how these factors shape the complex identities of U.S. Africans. When possible, and where relevant, I focus on how Ghanaian immigrants have been discussed.

The question of identity remains relevant for studies about U.S. Africans as scholars seek to make sense of the complex ways in which they balance becoming U.S. American while maintaining their particular continental and national identities. These questions have spurred the publication of a number of books describing the "new African diaspora" in North America in the last two decades (including but not limited to Creese 2011; Falola 2013; Frazier, Darden and Henry 2010; Konadu-Agyeman, Takyi, and Arthur 2006; Koser 2003; Okpewho and Nzegwu 2013; Tettey and Puplampu 2005). For example, Okpewho and Nzegwu's (2013) edited collected provides analytical examinations of contemporary Africans' journey across the Atlantic to the United States, including in-depth discussions of treacherous boat rides to Europe, back and forth journeys to sustain transnational ties, and efforts to navigate (or resist) race in the new context. The key conclusion from all these essays is that regardless of a dominant discourse about "returning home," Africans in North America are here to stay. Similarly, Arthur, Takougang and Owusu (2012) begin from the premise that Africans in the United States are part of a millennial global economy and are unlikely to return to their home countries. Their edited collection, *In search of promised lands*, examines how immigrants form communities through formal associations, relate to black non-immigrants, and sustain ties to their home countries through business, online communities, and frequent visits.

To different extents recent scholarship on African immigrants also examine questions on identity through a discussion of race, culture, and occasionally, gender and sexuality. For example, Elizabeth Chacko's (2003) study of U.S.-raised Ethiopian immigrants argued that these Americans formulate an identity that recalls their parents' Ethiopian roots, take pride in their cultural heritage and maintain ties to their ancestral homeland. Although these Ethiopian-Americans might lose knowledge of their parents' language, they remain proud to be Ethiopian and maintain a strong ethnic identity (see also Awokoya 2012; Clark 2008). In a slightly different context, Joseph Mensah and Christopher Williams (2015) argue that African youth in Canada navigate a tight space between an ethnic and hyphenated identity as a way to resist race-based discrimination. They note that the ways in which African immigrants self-identify serves as a reprieve from pressures to choose a national or ethno-racial identity (see also Ette 2012; Showers 2015). Others have also examined how African immigrants sustain transnational ties, (Olupona and Gemignani 2007; Owusu 2000; Yeboah 2008), their aspirations for attaining the "American Dream" (Greer 2013; Moore 2013), and changes in family dynamics and heterosexual gender relations that migration produces (Arthur 2009; Creese

2011 (specifically chapter 5); Donkor 2004; Manuh 2003; Nchinda 2014). These scholarly interventions provide insights into the negotiations that black Africans constantly engage in to produce their identities while also addressing how coalitions might emerge across different black constituencies.

Of particular interest for scholars seeking to stake a claim in blackness for African immigrants is the question of how this population negotiates their black identities across continental borders. Despite the impulse (as discussed above) to discount race in favor of culture and ethnicity for black immigrants, increasingly, scholarship is tending towards an acknowledgement that although their blackness might have a different shade from dominant constructions of U.S. blackness, black Africans are indeed black. These dominant constructions include blackness within the middle passage epistemology as well as blackness as it is represented within white supremacist imaginaries.

The representations of "blackness in the nonblack imagination" (Saucier 2015, p. 92) have constrained identity options and possibilities not only for U.S.-born blacks but also black immigrants. These constraints, while not always relevant for daily life, are remarkable in mainstream scholarly texts that seek to represent black life. A recent example of these representations of black life is Alice Goffman's (2014) much critiqued *New York Times* bestselling ethnography, *On the Run,* which risks reifying stereotypical and one-dimensional notions of black masculinity and the ghetto. A particularly striking example of this reification of violent black masculinities is in Goffman's methodological appendix in which she describes riding along on a stakeout with Mike, who is seeking a revenge kill for his friend's murder. Goffman's descriptions read like a scene from the American crime film, *New Jack City*:

> We started out around 3:00 a.m., with Mike in the passenger seat, his hand on his Glock as he directed me around the area. We peered into dark houses and looked

> at license plates and car models as Mike spoke on the phone with others who had information about [the suspected killer's] whereabouts (Goffman 2014, p. 262).

Such depictions of black life, without critical attention to the social processes, including mass incarceration, surveillance, and economic disparities that create ghettos affirm the link between blackness and inherent criminality (Sharpe 2014).

Black immigrants new to this context, but aware of the negative meanings associated with representation of U.S. "blackness in the nonblack imagination," have attempted to bargain with white supremacy in the hopes of receiving marginally better treatment. As such, earlier writing about black and African immigrants (including Arthur 2010; Vickerman 1998, and others discussed below) navigated a tight space between U.S. scholarly and lay constructions of blackness, and the particular identities with which they came to this country. These constructions make it so that black African identities in the United States are only legible through cultural narratives that discount the heterogeneity of blackness. Yet Wright's (2015, p. 8) generous assessment of recent scholarship about black identities from the perspective of African immigrants makes room to examine how these negotiations, along with others happening across the black diaspora, are seeking to expand limiting notions of blackness.

Race, identity, and black African immigrants

With regard to black African immigrants a number of books in the last decade have sought to make room for recognizing the racialized experiences of these immigrants. For example, Arthur's (2010) *African Diaspora Identities* and Halter and Johnson's (2014) *African & American: West Africans in Post-Civil Rights America*, both begin by affirming the cosmopolitan identities of African immigrants to the United States. These cosmopolitan Africans, Arthur (2010, p. ix) argues, have a unifying desire "to change how Africans…are viewed by the rest of the world and…use the experiences they garner abroad to empower Africans." The cosmopolitanism of African immigrants exceeds the limits of a racial identity. For example, in "Bye-Bye Babar" Selasi (2005) suggests that racial identity is a matter of politics noting, "not all of us [Afropolitans] claim to be black." As Kwame Anthony Appiah has argued in several places (1997, 2006), and recently in the BBC's Reith Lecture series, cosmopolitan identities usher in a postracial world. From this perspective, African immigrants refuse racial categorization in an extension of the idea that race has no meaning in Africa.

In *African Diaspora Identities,* Arthur (2010) is concerned with the cultural identities, economic aspirations, and transnational relationships that these immigrants engage. Nevertheless, he dedicates two chapters to considering the racialized experiences of black Africans in the United States. Interestingly, these experiences are only represented from women and girls' perspectives. In fact, in many of the books discussed above, gender is something that only women possess, with men's experiences representing an unqualified universal perspective. Take Vickerman's (1998) book in which he interviews 106 men, and although acknowledging that this perspective might be limited, there's no intentional exploration of how this representation of Afro-Carribean New Yorkers might be a uniquely heteromasculine perspective. Similarly, although Arthur (2000, 2008, 2010) and Yeboah (2008) are both careful to show how men and women's perceptions might differ, they each include a chapter on women's position without further exploration of how masculinity and heteropatriarchy shapes these positions. Likewise, when considering the racial identities of study subjects, these identities appear most salient in considering the children of African immigrants, the so-called second generation who were born and/or raised in the United States. These children of cosmopolitan Africans, Arthur (2010, p. 162) argues, "will also manifest a broad array of identities… that will link them to multiple social fields and spaces."

Although taking on a black identity, this blackness is negotiated. The girls “disavow the notion held by white Americans that blackness is a monolith” and instead articulate an identity that reflects their historical, cultural, and political experiences (Arthur 2010, p. 166; see also Halter and Johnson 2014, Chapter 5). Unlike their parents, second-generation African girls’ identities include blackness. However, the identities they form “will span not only their black African roots, but also their multiracial, class, and ethnic heritages. Their sense of being black spans the identities that can be formed in the multiple places that they now inhabit” (Arthur 2010, p. 198).

Just as second generation black girls negotiate new identities, “for black African immigrants, the articulation of racial identity is linked to the historical symbolisms often associated with being black” (Arthur 2010, p. 208, Halter and Johnson 2014). As such, Arthur (2010, p. 209) contends that these immigrants bring to black identities in the United States a cultural content that bolsters “shared cultural essences.” Here, although he initially challenged a hegemonic essentialist definition of blackness, Arthur relies on precisely this idea in order to make sense of black African women’s identities as black. But even in this context, the shared cultural essence is something that African women possess and can in turn pass on to U.S. American black women (Arthur 2010, p. 247). Here, African blackness reappears as essentialist.

In this conceptualization of black African identities is an obvious challenge to white Americans’ notion that blackness is a monolith. The statement that class, ethnicity, and geography inform U.S. born/raised African’s black identities is often made as if it is a reality unique to this black population (see also Clark, 2005; Halter and Johnson 2014; Mensah and Williams 2015). But black people the world over have black identities that intersect with a myriad of other structural positions. Scholars of intersectionality including Alexander (2005), Crenshaw (1993), Collins (1990, 2000), Combahee River

Collective (1982), Lorde (1984), Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981), and Mohanty (2005) have articulated this point in a variety of ways. These scholars remind us that race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, citizenship, and language collectively shape our lived experiences and our sense of belonging within different cultural formations. For example, writing of *mestiza* consciousness, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/2007) describes the intimate terrorism of finding oneself belonging and not belonging at home. *Mestiza* consciousness highlights how belonging and identity are negotiated through various borderlands. Anzaldúa described how as a woman (sometimes), a Mexican American, an American, a Chicana, and a lesbian, existing on the margins and within these constructs shaped her consciousness and experiences of the world. Black immigrants also exist at various intersections of being in the world. A refusal to recognize this point does not make it any less true. Yet the idea that black immigrants are uniquely black, sometimes gendered, and existing in diverse class relations, but rarely sexual beings, with diverse abilities and experiences persists.

The forgoing texts about the black identities of African immigrants emphasize essential blackness to make room for these immigrants to be black. But despite this shared blackness, which can simultaneously be diverse and fixed, black immigrants also seemingly have an option (that, as I deduce from these texts, American blacks do not have) to emphasize an ethnicity that refracts/complicates their essential blackness. Khalil Saucier's (2015) *Necessarily Black* demands a different understanding of black immigrants' so called ethnic options in the face of anti-black racism. In his ethnographic study of the experiences of second-generation Cape Verdean immigrants in Boston, Saucier (2015) maps out the different ways in which these youth articulate their black identities through lived experiences of anti-black racism. Saucier (2015, p. 7) is clear to tease out anti-blackness from white supremacy, defining anti-blackness as "a symbolic order that marks and values human lives in relation to nonblackness." This definition of anti-blackness makes room to understand unifying claims such as Arthur's "shared cultural essences" not as "essential monikers, but markers for the structural position of being black in an antiblack world" (Saucier 2015, p. 8). From this foundation, Saucier offers a critical intervention into how black Africans come into being as black through histories and presents of colonialism, economic and political disenfranchisement, and other acts of violence. Importantly, Saucier (2015, p. 39) is clear that when Cape Verdean youth "choose to identify with continental Africans…they do not deploy ethnicity to draw a distinction from blackness [but rather] as a political project. Therefore, they are not obfuscating the power relations embedded in processes of racialization." Instead, their identity as Africans is also a black racial identity that is enforced by their structural location in an anti-black world.

Jordanna Matlon (2016) extends our understanding of blackness as a structural position beyond the middle passage in her ethnographic study of working class men in the Ivorian city of Abidjan. Arguing that in a context where everyone is black, the structures of racial capital intersect with class to reify hegemonic tropes of black masculinity as "hyper-capitalist participation" including wearing brand name clothing and succeeding as a hip-hop artist. Assessments of blackness as structural locations make room for understanding the black identities of Africans not only on the continent but also as immigrants in the West. Such analyses, including Saucier's (2015) and Matlon's (2016), clear the theoretical ground to see and engage with the black identities of Africans, immigrants and those on the continent and are important to understanding the diversity of blackness (see also Clarke and Thomas 2006; Weheliye 2014; Wright 2015).

Considering gender, class, and sexuality among black/African immigrants

Recent scholarship (including Ifekwunigwe 2004, 2013; Matlon 2016; Pierre 2008, 2013) pivots from the United States to examine how blackness is lived elsewhere. This research considers how black identities are interconnected with processes of globalization, and provide a foundation for how scholars can understand the diverse processes that constitute blackness. In such scholarship, questions of class, gender, and sexuality are attended to in order to highlight the complexity of these black identities. For example, theorizing the intersections of black African women's sexuality, global capital, colonialism, and the reverberations of the transatlantic slave trade, Ifekwunigwe (2004) examines how the feminization of poverty produces black women migrants as sex workers. Within these frames of acceptable and possible work for African women migrants, tropes of the hypersexual black woman reappear (see also Agergaard and Bothelo 2016, p. 1).

Likewise, edited collections from Sylvia Tamale (2011) and Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas (2013) offer critical introductions to gender and sexuality from contemporary postcolonial African perspectives (see also Dankwa 2009; Nyeck and Epprecht 2013). However, the same cannot always be said about scholarship concerning black African immigrants to the United States. Yet, research about immigrant sexualities, gender, and class illustrate the complexity of immigrants' cultural identities and inform transnational ties. For example, Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez' (2005, 2006) has shown migration north of the US-Mexico border transforms the gender dynamics of sex and sexuality for Mexican men and women who, through their new networks and relationships, come to understand themselves differently as sexual beings. Such scholarship shows how economic demands, new racialized status, and citizenship concerns reconfigure gender and sexuality among immigrants (Eng, Halberstam and

Muñoz 2004; Epstein and Carrillo 2014; Lubheíd and Cantú 2005; Lubheíd 2008; Cantú 2009).

Attending to the sexual economy of migration when examining the experiences of African immigrants – beyond normative assessments of how the respectably heterosexual nuclear family "adjusts" to life in the United States – is important in fully understanding the structural location and cultural contexts that shape diverse black identities. If, as Roderick Ferguson (2000) has argued, the racial formation of American blacks aligned with sexual excess even in heterosexual couplings, rendering blackness outside of heteronormativity, how do black immigrants come into this racial positioning? How does this positioning of black American sexuality come into conversation with African sexualities, which are simultaneously marked as exclusively heterosexual, primitive, exotic, and excessive? In each empirical chapter, I attend to how class, gender, and sexuality inform the black identities of African immigrants in the United States. This intersectional analysis takes seriously the ways in which African immigrants' identities are negotiated through various structural positions, politics, and cultural contests.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have shown that communities are intentional formations through which different groups of people define themselves as similar to one another and unlike others. Communities can be understood as living organisms, which orient themselves towards and against other groups depending on context and the meanings attached to their boundaries of belonging. Individuals, who make up communities, reproduce the feelings of belonging attached to the community formation by participating in shared meaning making, emphasizing similarity with other community members, and affirming the community as sustaining a way of life. In their communities, people sustain existing cultures, produce new ones, and articulate identities to negotiate their social worlds. That communities reflect a primacy of belonging for individuals raises questions about what community means for diverse populations, particularly those who live at the intersections of different worlds.

Immigrant communities are valuable sites for examining these questions of culture, identity, and belonging. Such communities are intentionally formed, concerned with sustaining old cultures, producing new (hybrid) ones, and providing frames and narratives for making sense of the world. Immigration scholarship, policy research, and interventions focus on networks (see for example Avenarius 2012; Bankston 2014; Bashi 2007; Hagan 1998; Menjivar 2000) or assume a community that exists because people share a common language or migration experience (Takenaka and Osirim 2010; Takyi 2009; Zeleza 2009). However, as the literature on community explored above indicates, communities are intentional. An immigrant community is a site where boundaries of belonging are simultaneously articulated and bridged to create new connections. Within these communities, often institutionalized through immigrant associations, immigrants construct, negotiate, and perform their social identities.

Immigrant associations are voluntary mutual aid organizations in which immigrants come together to support one another in their new context. Research about these organizations show how they sustain transnational ties, reproduce and create cultures, and facilitate integration into immigrants' new contexts (Avenarius 2012; Owusu 2000; Rudrappa 2004; Schoeneberg 1985; Takougang and Tidjani 2009). The cultural productions of immigrant communities, which occur through association life, places of worship, and other recreational organizations, are illustrative of how cultures transform through different negotiations. These cultural productions articulate immigrants' ethnic and racial identities as well as their gender and sexual politics. As such, the communities in which immigrants locate themselves are foundational to understanding their identities as well as how they fit into the U.S. mainstream. However, as I have shown above, the narrative frames with which sociological scholarship understands black/African immigrant communities and identities overemphasize some aspects, specifically around culture and ethnicity, while discounting the ways in which race, class, and sexuality also inform these identities.

In this dissertation, I make the case for paying close attention to *how* immigrants create intentionally curated communities. Focusing on the cultural politics of a black African immigrant community provides insight into black identities in a global context by locating Africans as participants and producers of black cultures whose identities are shaped by racial, class, gender, and other structural formations. Specifically I ask the following questions: (1) What constitutes an immigrant community? (2) How does a black/African immigrant community understand and articulate its identity in a U.S. context? (3) What are the cultural politics of these communities and how do they articulate incoherent identities, produce new cultures and articulate new ways of being and belonging?

In the following chapter, I describe in detail the specific empirical case for undertaking this research about community and identity. More concretely, I outline the questions that guide this research and provide an in-depth discussion of both the methods that I used and the underlying methodology.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

[1] Latinx is the gender-inclusive alternative to Latino, Latina, and Latin@

[2] To focus on scholarship about black and non-black Latino immigrants is not to discount the important work done by scholars about other immigrants of color including Rudrappa's (2004) study of South Asian immigrants in the U.S. Midwest, Cho's (2008)

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book about Korean women who moved to the U.S. following the Korean War, and Selod's (2015) work on Muslim immigrants.

[3] In Chapter 3, I will provide demographic characteristics of the Ghanaian community that is the subject of this dissertation.

Chapter Three. Research Methods

I began this research with the intention of examining the processes of immigrant community formation from the perspective of the queer of color. Roderick Ferguson (2004) proposed a queer of color critique as an analytical stance that extends "women of color feminism by investigating how intersecting racial, gender, and sexual practices antagonize and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation-states and capital" (p. 4). The motivation for this dissertation is a desire to understand how Africans in the United States came together to as a community through assertions of what constituted "African-ness," especially in a moment in which this definition seemed to be changing. The Afropolitan was the harbinger of this changing definition of African and I wanted to know how communities were engaging with and complicating this new African identity. A queer of color critique provided me with the tools for assessing this change and understanding how contentions around gender, sexuality, race, nationality, and religion can be productive in expanding community identities and creating new kinds of relationships across difference.

This chapter begins by making a case for why I conducted this research with a Ghanaian community in Houston, Texas, provides an overview of how the community is organized, and discusses my methods, including research design and questions. My epistemological orientation, produced out of a queer of color critique, outlines a reflexive approach I call invading ethnography. Ethnographers study places, people, and organizations about which they may have intimate or no knowledge. Their research, which includes meticulous observations and analysis, reveals critical and rich qualitative insights into how people in organizations, communities, and social groups sustain these social units, contend with disparities, and engage with a broader social world. Invading ethnography is a reflexive practice that interrupts the ethnographic narrative in order to reflect on how a presumably non-normative (read: queer) ethnographer takes up space in the field. This reflexive approach was inspired by the feelings of disorientation that I experienced while conducting my research. I developed *invading ethnography* as a way to disrupt the racialized heteropatriachal lens of normative ethnography. I conclude by addressing ethical concerns that came from engaging these methods.

CASE SELECTION: WHY GHANAIANS IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

Black Africans are the fastest growing immigrant population in the United States (Capps, McCabe, & Fix 2012) and are shaping the social, economic, and political landscapes of the cities in which they live. I wanted to know how this population understands and performs their belonging in different social contexts, specifically as Americans, as Ghanaians, and as Africans. I began with an exploratory study of an association comprising Nigerian men of Yoruba descent in Austin, Texas.[1] This preliminary research helped me understand how immigrant associations serve as a way for people to preserve and/or reconstruct particular cultural practices, sustain relationships with their home countries, and form affective bonds amongst themselves.

The ties that immigrant associations facilitate include friendships that provide moral and sometimes economic support. For example, when I asked members of the Yoruba organization why they had formed such a group, a recurring response was about the importance of having a community of people who “understand you.” As one member explained,

> Back in Nigeria the support you have is primarily family, friends, members, and then when folks get out here [they barely know anyone]....And so they decided its good to have a forum where people come, get together and look out for each other… It’s good to get together and know where each other are and give each

> other support. And that's the primary reason why we started it…It's to talk about some of our culture, but most importantly it's a social club. The most important thing for us is being there for each other.

The quote above makes a comparison between Nigeria and Austin and suggests that the kinds of networks that the respondent had in Nigeria were so useful as to recreate them here as well. For this Yoruba Association member there is something about knowing other Yoruba people that helps the process of socializing and "being there for each other." By calling attention to the ability to talk about culture, he suggests a cultural particularity that facilitates the social club as well.

My initial research also suggested to me that the ways in which immigrants perceive their belonging to the United States as well as to their home country are refracted through racial and gendered logics. The Yoruba group I studied was an exclusively male group and some members suggested a difference between men and women that made it difficult to effectively organize in a group with women. As one member explained to me, "We could carry on and shout at each other as most men will do, but after that, hey, we're having a [good time]." By contrast, he argued, including women in the group's organizing might create more tensions than necessary. Although group members I spoke to did not discount the exclusive maleness of the organization, they also considered it a family organization. They explained that the association organizes a mother's day brunch for the women and also frequently has family events.

Despite what appeared to be a tension between how members described the group – as a family association, and how it operated – as a men's group, members were also attune to certain notions around what it means to be "an African man." For example, one member explained that when organizing events for members' children, the association tried to reach out to the children to identify what they will want as part of the event "because…it's typical of African men to decide for people, so we try not to do that." This comment calls attention to what both members identify as moments of generational and cultural tension around masculinity.

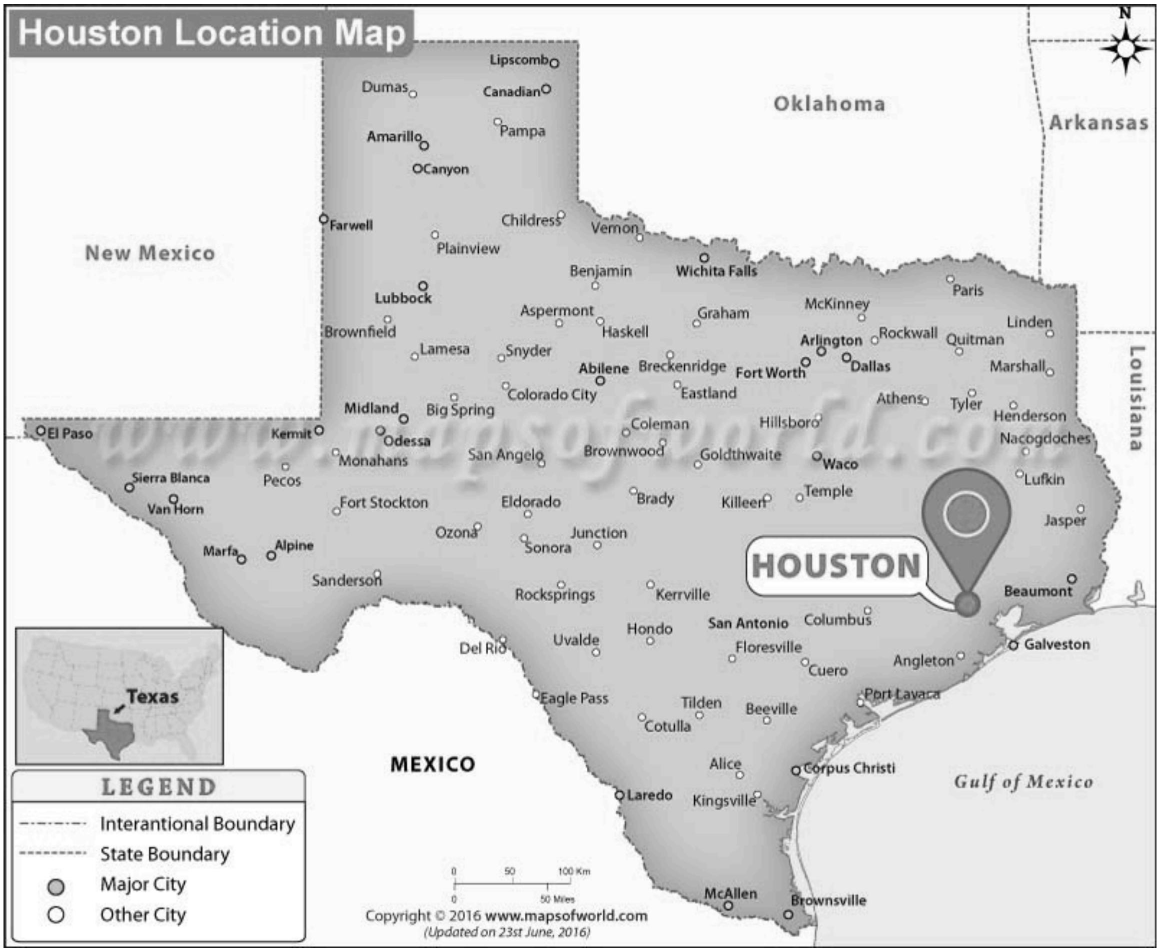
Although a fruitful exploration, my research with the Yoruba immigrant association had several shortcomings. In particular, my inability to understand Yoruba meant that I could not attend association meetings and understand conversations between members. Additionally, not being of Nigerian origin meant that I was not always able to ascertain country-specific references that I felt provided insight into why people did and said the things they said. Decades ago, anthropologist Maxwell Owusu (1978) discussed the importance of knowing a language in order to understand an "other" and make sense of their world view. Outlining the prevalence of simple factual errors found in ethnographies of Africa, Owusu argued that many of these mistakes are a result of language ignorance on the part of the ethnographer. A result of this ignorance is that the mistakes of the ethnographer, seen as an authority, may come to stand in for the native's reality (Owusu 1978, p. 320). But if ethnography is about observing and understanding the practices and worldview of a group of people, understanding their local idioms is an important entry-point into this project.

Although my lack of language knowledge was a limitation, there were also benefits to being an outsider in this research context. As a young non-Nigerian person attempting to study older Nigerian men, I found it easy to ask certain clarifying questions simply because I was not expected to know. By contrast, on more than one occasion in Ghanaian settings, when I asked clarifying questions, one or more people gathered would look at me in disbelief and express their surprise that I did not know what I claimed not to know. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) outline how the researcher's presentation of self shape field relations in different ways. They emphasize the importance of "maintaining a position as an acceptable marginal member" when conducting ethnography as an overt researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. 68). For me, this meant constantly negotiating and anticipating how perceptions of my gender, age, and national origin positioned me to pursue answers to certain questions.

Studying a Nigerian immigrant community to understand the cultural politics of black African immigrants in the United States included what I saw as some insurmountable limitations especially since I was not in the position to learn Yoruba. Consequently, I set about finding a community of Ghanaians for this project. The insights I gained from studying the Yoruba association guided my decision to select a community of Ghanaians for my dissertation research. As a Ghanaian who can speak Akan, the dominant language spoken in Ghana, and understand Ga, another popular Ghanaian language, I determined that my language skills and familiarity with the cultural codes and contexts would make a study of a Ghanaian community a more productive case for addressing my interests in understanding how Africans were shaping the cities in which they lived. My initial searches for Ghanaians in Austin were unsuccessful. If there was such a thing as a Ghanaian community in Austin, they did not have an online presence, and I did not have the contacts to find them. As I will show throughout this dissertation, being part of a community requires intentional participation and the simple fact that I am Ghanaian did not include me in any Ghanaian communities that might have existed in Austin.

According to the Migration Policy Institute report on Ghanaians in the United States, the largest numbers of Ghanaians live on the East Coast in New York, New Jersey, Virginia, and Maryland. Although most Ghanaians in the United States live in New York City, Worcester, MA has the highest concentration of Ghanaian immigrants at about 0.5 percent of the population. Texas barely registers as a destination for Ghanaians living in the United States. In Texas the largest Ghanaian population lives in the Dallas

Fort-worth (DFW) area. This population of about 3000 Ghanaians accounts for less than 0.1 percent of the entire DFW population (MPI, Ghanaian Diaspora 2015). In Houston, Nigerians make up about 0.4 percent of the total share of the population and the number of Ghanaians was not enough to warrant counting in the MPI report. However, I chose to conduct this research with Ghanaians in Houston rather than Dallas for a number of reasons including Houston's proximity to Austin. Having limited funds, frequent trips to Houston were more feasible. Additionally, Houston's Ghanaian community had a visible online presence that made the community easy to find. My Internet searches during the summer of 2014 revealed an active self-identified Ghanaian community in Houston. In addition to being a find of great serendipity – I now had a potential case study, Houston as a city proved to be an ideal site for learning about African identity, community, and culture in the United States.


Houston Location Map
N
Lipscomb
Dumas
Canadian
Oklahoma
Arkansas
Amarillo
Pampa
Canyon
Farwell
Childress
Vernon
New Mexico
Plainview
Wichita Falls
Benjamin
Paris
Lubbock
Aspermont
Graham
McKinney
Haskell
Linden
Brownfield
Arlington
Rockwall
Quitman
Lamesa
Snyder
Louisiana
Abilene
Breckenridge
Fort Worth
Dallas
Marshall
Colorado City
Eastland
Midland
Big Spring
Athens
Tyler
Henderson
El Paso
Kermit
Odessa
Coleman
Hillsboro
Nacogdoches
Monahans
San Angelo
Brownwood
Goldthwaite
Waco
Sierra Blanca
Pecos
Lufkin
Temple
Van Horn
Fort Stockton
Eldorado
Brady
Killeen
Jasper
Ozona
Junction
Marfa
Alpine
Sonora
HOUSTON
Sanderson
Beaumont
Rocksprings
Kerrville
San Antonio
Columbus
Hondo
Del Rio
Uvalde
Floresville
Galveston
Angleton
Cuero
Texas
Eagle Pass
Port Lavaca
Tilden
Beeville
Cotulla
MEXICO
Alice
Corpus Christi
Gulf of Mexico
LEGEND
Laredo
Kingsville
Interantional Boundary
State Boundary
Major City
Other City
0 50 100 Km
0 50 Miles
McAllen
Brownsville
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(Updated on 23st June, 2016)
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Figure 1. Map of Texas, showing Houston Retrieved from http://www.mapsofworld.com/location-maps/usa/where-is-houston.html

Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States. The city is located in southeast Texas close to the Gulf of Mexico and is home to over two million people. Houston's top industries include energy production, primarily oil and gas, biomedical research, and aerospace and aviation. It is also the most racially and ethnically diverse city in the country (Emerson et al, 2012). According to the 2010 census, Houston has nearly twice as many foreign-born residents as the entire state of Texas (30% vs. 16%). Additionally, Houston's African-born residents account for four percent of the total population, the same ratio as in the United States. Houston's demographics make the city an ideal site for understanding the processes that shape immigrant community identities, and how immigrants are taking part in the social, political, and economic projects of a diverse American city. Despite Houston's racial diversity, like most American cities, it is also highly segregated (Emerson et al, 2012). An observer would be inclined to think that Southwest Houston is home to large numbers of West Africans, Latinos, and South Asians, as evidenced by the presence of Indian markets, signs and billboards in Spanish, and churches with the names of Nigerian and Ghanaian pastors prominently advertised, lining the streets and highways.

Houston is also home to the second largest population of Nigerians living in the United States (MPI 2015). This population of Nigerians is forty percent of the city's total African population. Although studying Nigerians for this project would therefore have been an obvious choice, for reasons explained above, I selected a community of Ghanaians, who comprise a sizeable majority of the West African immigrant population living in Houston. Ethiopians are the second largest African immigrant population in Houston (MPI 2015). The dominance of Nigerians in Houston also provided an interesting context in which to conduct this study, lending additional insights into how groups articulate community identities and fashion themselves along with or in opposition to others.

THE GHANAIAN COMMUNITY

Houston is not a common destination for Ghanaian immigrants to the United States. Instead, as I noted above, the East Coast, specifically New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, have larger Ghanaian populations. When I spoke to people who had lived in Houston for over twenty years, the most common reason given for why they moved to the city was to pursue a post-baccalaureate degree at Texas A&M University. Following receipt of their degrees, they stayed and over time, formed a community with other Ghanaians from school and those who had sent for their relatives.

The Ghanaian community in Houston, Texas is a vibrant and active space comprising several voluntary associations, charitable groups, and churches. In the community, several Ghanaian ethnic groups have formed associations that have regular meetings and organize different events including summer picnics, traditional festivals, and holiday parties. These associations include Ga, Ewe, and Akan groups. Despite the ethnic distinctions that group members make, I also met a number of people who participated in several associations at the same time. In addition to these voluntary associations, the community also comprises several churches including Pentecostal, non-denominational charismatic, Roman Catholic, and Seventh Day Adventist churches, and charitable foundations that raise money for schools and villages in Ghana. The overwhelming majority of Ghanaians (over 70%) claim some kind of Christian faith. Muslims account for between sixteen and thirty percent of the population and all other religions make up between ten and fifteen percent of the total Ghanaian population (see Appendix B for a breakdown of religion and Christian affiliations). Between all of these formal organizations and informal groups of friends, there is always something to do in "the Ghanaian community" on any given weekend in Houston.

The immigrant community, including the ethnic associations, churches, and charity groups, comprises social networks that facilitate access to jobs, education, and information about how to normalize immigration status (Bashi 2007) as well as affective ties of belonging. In Houston, and in Ghanaian communities around the world, in addition to a Ghana Association, there are several ethnic associations directed towards different groups (see Attah-Poku 1996; Owusu 2000; Yeboah 2008, 2012).[2] Previous studies of immigrant or ethnic associations have assumed the internal coherence of these groups. For example, Owusu's (2000) study of Ghanaian immigrant associations on Canada suggested that ethnic associations served particular cultural needs of the different ethnic groups. Contrasting ethnic associations such as the Ashanti Multicultural Association with the Ghanaian Union in Toronto, Owusu (2000, p. 1166) infers that the national association is ineffective in addressing the "cultural needs of their members." These cultural needs include meeting the ethnic group's language, customs, and social norms. However, the national association helped to bridge "inter-ethnic" divides and provide a representative voice for all Ghanaians in Canada (Owusu 2000, p. 1171). Similarly, Attah-Poku (1996) found that having particular ethnic associations was important to Ghanaians in his study of New York associations. He noted that "many of the Brong and Ahafo citizens feel that because they belong to a different region back home, speak a slightly different dialect, and have different histories, they need not be automatically members of the Asanteman Association" (Attah-Poku 1996, p. 60). These distinctions resulted in the formation of the Brong Ahafo Association in New York. Studies of Ghanaian immigrant associations at the ethnic, township, and national level are productive for understanding the internal organization of immigrant communities and the public faces they require for making political demands of host countries. However, such studies also reify the boundaries of ethnic groups, giving a salience to these divisions that I did not observe.

In Houston, in addition to the Ghana Association, several ethnic groups also organized their own associations. Ewes could participate in a local chapter of CEANA, the Council of Ewe Associations in North America. Since Ewes are in Togo, Ghana, and Benin, CEANA chapters include people from these three countries. Likewise, the Ga-Dangme people had a group of their own, as did the Kwahu, the Akuapem, and the Ashanti. In addition to these "ethnic associations," there were also groups such as the

Metropolitan Connection of Ghanaian Houstonians (MCGH), comprising Ghanaians younger than 30 years old, who were born or raised in the United States, a professional women's club, an investment club, charity groups, churches and church groups, and soccer teams. All of these groups were explicitly Ghanaian, although most included an invitation to anyone "that aspires to the [group's] ideals." Importantly, each of these associations organized events, parties, and other activities to which they invited the larger community. One role of the Ghana Association was to ensure that events did not overlap. This way, people did not have to make a choice between attending the Ewe Association's Christmas bash instead of the Akuapem Association holiday dinner, for example. Likewise, the Ghana Association also had grand parties to mark significant events such as the New Year and United States and Ghana Independence Days.

ACCESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Gaining access to data can be a complicated affair involving multiple gatekeepers. As qualitative researchers explain, access to a site is not a straightforward, one-time incident and instead requires frequent negotiations with different gatekeepers (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). My entry into the community was facilitated by my participation in two associations. The first was the Okuapeman Association, an ethnic association comprising older Ghanaians who moved to the United States well after their teenage years. I learned about and was invited to join the Okuapem Association in July 2014. While conducting observations at a hair salon, a woman with bright red hair walked in carrying two plastic bags in which were Styrofoam containers of food. She interrupted our conversation about gendered inequality in education in Ghana by asking in Twi, are there any black Americans in here. Giggling, one of the stylists pointed at me and said, “that’s one right there.” This was meant to be a joke since I had been visiting this hair salon for nearly two weeks at that point and everyone present knew I was a Ghanaian conducting research. Furthermore, we had all been speaking in Twi when the red-haired woman came in. Yet the intentional refusal to acknowledge me as a Ghanaian despite *knowing* me as one might also be understood as a way of rhetorically identifying some perception of me as different in some way from the other Ghanaians in the hair salon.

Eventually, the woman introduced herself to me as Adjoa and as most Ghanaians do, asked me where I was from. I told her my family was from the Eastern region of Ghana and she suggested I was Akuapem. As this sounded familiar, I said yes. Hearing this, Adjoa gave me her telephone number and invited me to the Ghana Association end of summer picnic the next day. This picnic took place at George Bush Park, where I first met the Ghanaian community in Houston at a July 4th celebration. In subsequent chapters, I will discuss the significance of this park in the community. Adjoa explained that she would be cooking at the picnic and offered to introduce me to Veronica, the vice president of the Okuapeman Association. The next day was a Sunday (July 27th) and happened to be the July meeting for the Okuapeman Association. Since the group met monthly, I took the opportunity and attended this first meeting.

The salon where the Okuapeman Association meets was in Southwest Houston. The meeting took place in the reception area of the salon where plastic chairs were arranged along the edges of the wall. In the middle were the chairs and mirrors and in the back an area marked “employees only” and a restroom. Before the meeting officially began, the five women who had arrived early chatted amongst themselves, making jokes about sex, church attendance, and aging. One woman mentioned that when her husband is not around (he lived in Ghana half the year), she is finally able to catch up on sleep. In response to this comment another said, “That’s very private information. You shouldn’t be telling all of us this,” and the others laughed. This kind of exchange reflected the comfort and familiarity the women in the group had with one another.

Around 4:30PM as more members arrived, Veronica, the vice president opened the meeting by calling out in Twi, “*agoo*” and then asking the shop owner to pray. After the main business of the meeting had been attended to and during announcements, I introduced myself to the people in the room as a Ghanaian who was doing my PhD and wanted to learn more about the community. I started speaking in English and immediately wished I had not. The meeting had been conducted mostly in Twi and I felt that perhaps I should have worked harder to prove that I really belonged. But regardless of what I felt was a blunder on my part, the overwhelming response to me was one of welcome and excitement.

Following this initial introduction, I attended monthly meetings of the Okuapeman Association between July 2014 and October 2015 when I was able. Although meetings were regularly once a month, there were months when there was no meeting. For example, during festivals such as *Odwira* many members traveled out of state and the monthly meeting was canceled. As well, there were months when I was away and could not attend meetings. For example, in June 2015, I was out of the country and missed that month’s meeting. I also helped organize and attended different events that the group put on and became good friends with several of the women members in the group, some of whom adopted me as their child (*me ba*) or niece/nephew (*wɔfa ase*). These relationships also provided me with access to other associations that members were part of, including the Ghana Association, the Ga-Dangme Association, soccer clubs, and churches. Additionally, I served as a liaison between the Okuapeman Association and the

Metropolitan Connection of Ghanaian Houstonians (MCGH), the other association that I participated in for this research.

At the same picnic where Adjoa introduced me to Veronica and other members of the Okuapeman Association, I also met Serena, one of the founders of the MCGH. That day, Serena wore a brunette sewn-in weave wrapped in a colorful headscarf. In the Texas heat, she wore shorts and a t-shirt emblazoned with “Coca-Cola.” Her brown sunglasses matched the tint of her hair. Serena was with a group of other younger looking Ghanaians who were organizing games to entertain the children at the picnic, including face painting. Serena did not seem especially interested in a conversation with me and instead directed me to Facebook to learn more about MCGH. But not before she explained the group’s mission, which she said was to bridge a gap between “those born here (in the United States) and those born there (in Ghana).” I will discuss MCGH in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Taking Serena’s advice, I went to Facebook, where I learned that the next MCGH activity was on Saturday, August 2nd, 2014. Group members were volunteering at a church to provide underprivileged children with school supplies. This volunteer event allowed me to meet other members of MCGH and tell them about my project. However, I did not attend my first meeting until October 2014, at which I officially introduced myself to MCGH members present as a Ghanaian working on my PhD about Ghanaians in Houston. This introduction was met with some protests from some people in the room who I suspected did not like the idea of a stranger studying them. When I started seeking interviews and asking more questions, my suspicions were confirmed. A fair number of MCGH members, even when they agreed to be interviewed seemed reluctant to talk. However, I continued to attend events and help out with MCGH organizing whenever I could. Overtime, more members warmed up to me and I remain friends with a small number of members. Through my active participation in Okuapeman and MCGH, I became known as a member of the community and was subsequently invited to events where I could conduct observations and recruit people for interviews.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Once I had identified a viable case study to address my research interests, I developed a research design with a grounded theory approach in mind. Conducting research from this approach involves beginning with a general interest informed by disciplinary paradigms and theories (Charmaz 2014; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Grounded theorizing is the "discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser and Strauss 1967/2009, p. 2). This qualitative research practice involves close, iterative analysis of empirical data in order to produce new theoretical insights about social life (Charmaz 2014; Glaser and Strauss 1967/2009). As data collection proceeds, grounded theorists analyze their data frequently and pursue new questions that might arise from their analysis. In the case of ethnography, fieldnotes focus on process as well as descriptions of the setting and these notes guide subsequent observations and follow-up interviews. Constructing grounded theory also means coding data line-by-line to identify patterns and processes. The data analysis process is iterative and compares empirically supported sociological theories with observations from field notes and interview transcripts. A primary reason for employing this approach is that it provided a way for me to build new theories to help understand African identities, black immigrants in the United States, and politics of belonging.

The practice of constructing grounded theory is tedious and it is not always clear how this approach differs from conducting a good ethnographic study. For example, Atkinson and Hammersley (2007, p. 3) define data collection in ethnography as "relatively 'unstructured'" and "generated out of the process of data analysis" (see also Atkinson et al 2001). As I was primarily interested in understanding how Ghanaians were taking part in social life in their home city, and how they understood themselves as Americans, Africans, and Ghanaians, remaining open to my research setting allowed me to be flexible to new and unexpected situations. Although I began the ethnographic project aware that sociological concerns about immigrants include how well they assimilate or integrate into the United States, my goal was to allow the processes I observed and the conversations I had to guide my understanding of the research setting. As such my data collection process was relatively unstructured and analysis informed the subsequent questions I asked.

My ethnographic approach remained open to what constituted the field. Because I was studying a community that took up space across an entire city and often traveled, James Clifford's (1997) recommendations in "Traveling Cultures" were helpful to me. Clifford defines the field not simply as a bounded site *in* which the ethnographer records observations, but also as a set of discursive practices including languages, relationships, and movement across time and space. Understanding the "field" in these terms means paying attention to the multiple relationships that shape the identities and experiences within the community being studied. An ethnographer studying an immigrant association, for example, must also pay attention to how the immigrant association is located in a broader field of other associations, within a city, and perhaps in relation to a country or two. As such, I was mindful of different levels of relationships amongst the community in which I was conducting my research (Clifford 1997; Marcus 2012). These levels included the Ghanaian Association, smaller immigrant associations, relationships with Nigerians and other Africans, and also relationships with other communities both in Houston, across North America, and in Ghana. Since I was studying an unbounded community, paying attention to several layers of interactions was especially important. These relationships provided insight into the processes that sustained the community and the broader social forces that helped shape community and individual identities.

An ethnographic approach was also well suited to my research interests because I was interested in observing how people came together to produce feelings of belonging. I wanted to know what material objects, music, foods, and other practices created a sense of community for Ghanaians in Houston. I participated as a pseudo-member of MCGH and Okuapeman Association, attending meetings and helping organize events. By pseudo-member I mean that I did not pay dues for either of these groups. Because I could not afford the $300 dues for one club, I decided not to pay the dues for the other in order to, ostensibly, keep my commitments fairly even. I also attended social events over the course of eighteen months between June 2014 and December 2015, including weddings, funerals, birthday parties, picnics, a fashion photo-shoot, soccer matches, festival celebrations, church services, happy hours, and long lunches with individuals who identified themselves as members of the Ghanaian community.

After each event I attended, I recorded fieldnotes within 24-hours of leaving the event. Following Clifford Geertz (1973/2000), my fieldnotes comprised highly detailed and context specific accounts of my observations. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) argue, detailed fieldnotes are necessary not only to capture observed events but also, and perhaps more importantly, fieldnotes interpret and frame the processes that the researcher observes. Additionally, this “thick description” provides a space for the ethnographer to articulate their insights and reflect on the research process.

Employing "live methods"

In a special issue of the journal *The Sociological Review* (edited by Back and Puwar 2012), the authors make a case for cultivating a "live sociology" that intentionally engages with an increasingly technologically mediated world. Live methods are attentive to "the 'newly coordinated' nature of social reality" and incorporate the fleeting and ephemeral aspects of everyday life into qualitative methodologies (Back 2007, 2012, p. 29). In my research, I engaged live methods in multiple ways including an attentiveness to how the Ghanaian community in Houston lived their lives in technologically mediated ways. Our mediated world includes the use of social media technologies such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to stay connected with one another in far-flung places, meet strangers, and participate in social worlds beyond our immediate environs. For example, WhatsApp is a text-messaging platform that uses Internet data rather than telephone networks to connect users all around the world. A *New York Times* article about the platform, which Facebook bought in 2014 for $19 billion, described WhatsApp as a lingua franca amongst immigrants (Manjoo 2016). When studying a population of immigrants, a live sociology would be remiss to ignore how tools like WhatsApp or Facebook are part of the life experiences and self-fashioning of those who use these platforms.

As a way of gaining access to people outside of association meetings and social events, I employed different social media platforms. First, I created a Facebook account specifically for my research. In this account I identified myself as a researcher studying Ghanaians in Houston. As I met people in person, I requested that they add me as a friend on Facebook, and over the course of my research I gained over 100 Facebook friends. Facebook became a way for me to keep in touch with people in Houston when I could not be there in person. Through Facebook, I was able to take note of different kinds of commentary that people made about social and political events including thoughts on Black Lives Matter, the legalization of same-sex marriage, and news about the educational attainment of African immigrants. Additionally, I learned about social events and received invitations to them on Facebook. I also joined two WhatsApp chat groups. WhatsApp is a mobile messaging application that allows people to communicate with one another without using up their allotted text message quotas on their phone plans. With WhatsApp, I would often wake up to a message sharing 'an inspirational' religious quote each morning. But in addition to these viral messages, people would often have heated discussions about any given issue, from perceived lack of commitment to the group, to President Obama's visit to Africa to sharing jokes and videos that interested or offended different members. Through Facebook and WhatsApp, I was able to remain connected to different members of the community even when I was not physically present. These platforms helped me in recruiting interview respondents and provided me insights into different aspects of some community members' lives.

One benefit of contacting some respondents via Facebook was that I did not have to wait to happen to see them again somewhere in order to follow up. Additionally, my presence on Facebook meant that some people with whom I had never spoken invited me to events simply because the platform identified me as a Ghanaian with whom they had "friends" in common. I received invitations to weddings, birthdays, and barbecues from people I had not met. Using Facebook as an additional avenue for research provided insight into another way that the community produced feelings of belonging. My experience of the social media website suggested to me that some Ghanaians in Houston expanded their social circles by inviting other Ghanaians they had not met to private events they hosted. Another benefit of using Facebook was that I could chat with people over time, asking them questions about their lives in Houston and other topics that came up over the course of cyber-chatting. Engaging with people in the community not only in person but also through social media was my way of "taking advantage of the opportunities offered by digital culture," and thereby more wholly incorporating the different ways in which the community understood its identity and belonging (Back 2012, p. 34).

In-depth interviews

To date, there have been a number of studies that seek to understand the how Africans (especially West Africans) living in the United States understand their place in this country and the relationships they have with their home countries (see Arthur 2000, 2009; 2012; Arthur, Takougang, and Owusu 2012; Attah-Poku 2006; Chacko, 2003; Halter and Johnson, 2014, Okpewho and Nzegwu 2009; Yeboah 2008, 2012). For the most part, these studies have relied on interviews and personal narratives to shed light on questions of identity and belonging. Interviews are an important way of learning about people's personal motivations, how they articulate their identities, and their reflections about different events (Pugh 2013). As such, I also used interviews in this research.

The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews for this research was to learn the subjective experiences of Ghanaians in Houston. The important concern for my interviews was to reach a point at which I was not learning any new information from my respondents with regard to their understanding of their experiences. This would be the point of saturation (Small 2009). By my fifteenth interview, I could already anticipate participants' answers to my questions. However, to ensure that I was not missing any unexpected responses, I continued to interview people in order to exhaust all possibilities. Interviews capture respondents' sentiments about past and present circumstances in a specific time and place (Pugh 2013). The responses analyzed in this study are constrained by these realities. However, by examining these subjective experiences in conversation with theoretically informed ethnographic observations, my analysis captures an important articulation of contemporary black/African identities.

I interviewed a convenience sample of thirty-two people, two of whom were Ghanaians but did not consider themselves part of the Ghanaian community. The distinction between being part of the Ghanaian community or not was important because it highlighted how belonging was negotiated through different strategies and actions. In short, being part of a community includes intentional participation and recognition by other community members that you belong. The semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted between August and October 2015. Doing semi-structured interviews meant that although I had an interview guide I did not follow it strictly. Although generally, I asked everyone I interviewed the same questions, I also made room for respondents to share information that may not have been considered in the guide (Lofland et al, 2006). I constructed my interview guide based on my observations in the field. The guide addressed three general areas (see Appendix C for complete interview guide): first I asked respondents some biographical information, then we discussed their thoughts on politics, religion, and any associations they were part of. Finally I provided some vignettes about current events to hear their thoughts on those.

Of the interview respondents, sixteen were women and sixteen were men between the ages of twenty-three (youngest) and sixty-five (oldest respondents). The average age of all respondents was thirty-seven and on average they had lived in the United States for seventeen and a half years. Two respondents had lived in the United States for thirty-eight and forty years respectively, and three had lived in this country for five years or fewer. Four of my interview respondents were born in the United States and one in Western Europe. Ten others moved to the United States from Ghana between the ages of eight and eighteen. Twenty-two of my respondents had at least a bachelor's degree and worked in white-collar jobs primarily as engineers, in the healthcare field as doctors and nurses, and as scientific researchers and professors. Amongst those without a four-year degree (10 respondents), five of them were completing requirements for their bachelors and the rest, all of them older than thirty, had completed some kind of postsecondary training. These respondents worked in healthcare fields as pharmacy technicians and certified nurses assistants as well as in manufacturing. Appendix A contains additional demographic information about interview respondents.

The differences in educational attainment of my respondents helped create status groups that demarcated boundaries within the immigrant community. Amongst African immigrants in the United States, Nigerians are the largest population. Nigerians have also attained higher levels of education and earn more income than most U.S. Americans. By comparison, Ghanaians are a much smaller proportion of African immigrants in the United States. In fact, the United States is only the second most common destination for Ghanaian immigrants. Nigeria is the first.[3] In terms of income, employment and educational attainment, Ghanaians in the United States are worse off than most Americans. As far as educational attainment, Ghanaians are about as well educated as other Americans, if not slightly less so. Despite the relatively high educational status of Ghanaians living in the United States, only about 15 percent of Ghanaians obtained education at or above secondary school (GLSS-6, 2014). Table 1 provides a comparative summary between Ghanaians and Nigerians in the United States compared to the total U.S. population. This demographic information is important because it provides a context for understanding how Ghanaians might see themselves in comparison to Nigerians in the United States. Throughout this dissertation, I will show the ways in which educational disparities weighed on community identity formations and created symbolic boundaries amongst members. These boundaries also heightened comparisons to Nigerians, who are the most highly educated immigrant group in the United States. The educational and financial status of individuals, especially younger people in the community was a source of tension for many people with whom I spoke.

Table 1: Characteristics of Ghanaian, Nigerian, and U.S. Populations in the United States.*

	Ghanaians in the United States	**Total U.S. Population**	**Nigerians in the United States**
Household Income			
Median	$44,000	$50,000	$52,000
…With high incomes ($90,000+)	18%	25%	25%
…With very high incomes ($140,000+)	5%	10%	10%
Employment			
… In labor force	76%	64%	73%
… Employed	91%	91%	88%
… In professional occupation	22%	31%	46%
Educational Attainment			
… High school or some college	62%	57%	31%
… Bachelor's degree	18%	20%	37%
… Advanced degree	12%	11%	29%

*The data from this table come from the MPI Diaspora Profiles (2015) for Ghana and Nigeria

Hoping to gain better responses to my interview questions, I waited until I had been a part of the community for fourteen months before I requested my first interviews. To recruit interview respondents, I either sent Facebook messages to my contacts on Facebook or asked people whenever I saw them in person. In total, I contacted or followed up with thirty-eight people on Facebook and conducted interviews with about twenty of these contacts. Only three people I asked for an in-depth interview via Facebook refused – one refused directly, saying he was not interested and the other two offered noncommittal answers. Eventually, the one who said no, an MCGH member, came back to me requesting an interview. This request may have been a result of conversations he had with friends reassuring him that the interviews were nothing to worry about. Unfortunately we were unable to schedule one. Scheduling conflicts kept me from interviewing the others.

Agreeing to an in-depth interview with a person you barely know is not a trivial issue and I am surprised so few people declined. At the start of each interview, I asked respondents why they agreed to speak with me. Overwhelmingly the response included a commentary on the value of education and their desire to help me with my school project. I cannot claim to know why those who refused to an interview said no. However, Abigail, an interview respondent who was reticent in her responses provides some insight. I met Abigail at a coffee shop while conducting an interview with Mary. She wore a black trousers and a black long sleeved shirt and was eating a pastry as she worked on her large Dell computer. She was surrounded by textbooks and was staring intently at her laptop screen. During our interview, I learned that Abigail moved to Houston from Dallas because she was seeking “a change in scene” and “different vibe” from what she knew growing up. Additionally, she felt that the job market was better in Houston. Despite her move to Houston in 2012, she said she still considered herself a “Dallasite.” Abigail was born in Ghana but moved to Texas as an infant with her parents, who attended school in north Texas. She also had a young daughter who she “chose to give her a regular English name.”

Abigail was working on her laptop as I waited for Mary, a nurse in her mid-twenties who had lived in Houston since she was six years old. When Mary sat down, Abigail commented on her wax print purse. They recognized each other and chatted for a while prior to the interview. Afterwards, I explained my project to Abigail and asked if she would be interested in an interview. She told me that she was not really part of the

Ghanaian community and I noted that her perspective would be valuable to me as a Ghanaian in Houston who was not in the community. She agreed and we exchanged numbers. At the beginning of our interview, as with all my other conversations, I asked Abigail again why she agreed to speak with me. Recalling our earlier conversation she said:

> Yes, because I honestly, I was like, let me just tell her, I really don't, I don't get out [much in the community] and then you said you need some that aren't really [part of the community] then you can make some comparison. I said, "Okay fine, I can do it."

Abigail's stated reasons for participating were neither about helping with my project nor about any real interest in knowing more about the Ghanaian community. Maybe she agreed to participate because, having overheard Mary's interview, she felt that the conversation would not be invasive. When I asked direct questions about her age, her education, her relationship history including her daughter's father, she evaded answering these questions directly. This evasion suggested that she deemed those questions too private for a recorded interview with a stranger she had just met two days earlier at a coffee shop. Abigail's reticence during our interview helps to explain why some other people might have refused directly, especially those people I met on the Internet. I was a stranger wanting to ask them questions about themselves and they were under no obligation to say yes.

I conducted all of my recorded in-depth interviews in person either in women's homes (N=3), twice at social gatherings, in respondents' private offices (N=3), twice at churches, once at a bar, in coffee shops (N=13), and out at lunch (N = 5) or dinner (N = 3). Once respondents agreed to an interview, I asked them to suggest a place where we could meet to talk. Unless I could not make it in time for an interview, I did not negotiate with respondents when they suggested a location. On occasion, and typically with male respondents, they asked me to suggest a place and I worked with them to pick a coffee shop near their homes or workplaces. In this way, I attempted to give respondents control over the place where our conversations took occurred (Herzog 2005). At coffee shops, we typically sat outside regardless of the Texas heat and Houston humidity, and respondents appeared comfortable discussing issues about their experiences in the community. However, mentions of racism frequently came through whispers and a quick glance to see if anyone was listening in. Such whispering was also apparent at restaurants and other public locations, although not in respondents' homes, churches (which were majority Ghanaian or African) or parties where the majority of people were Ghanaian.

In a recent study of how an ethnic and religious minority in Egypt (Coptic Christians) dealt with fears of discrimination and indirect violence, Hyun Jeong Ha (2017) argues that the negatives emotions amongst the minority group reveal their concerns in ways that their words might discount. Ha (2017, p. 146) notes that "Coptic Christians' subdued and self-effacing behaviours in public spaces provide us with insights when considering the effect of unjust, discriminatory legal restrictions and violence on everyday emotions." By paying close attention to how a minority group behaves in public, Ha's research provides important insights into why almost all of my respondents whispered their criticisms of white racism, the U.S. president, and public policies they opposed. By contrast, they did not whisper their perceptions or even mentions of other people of color suggesting that they did not experience the same kinds of oppressive negative emotions about these populations.

With the permission of my respondents, I audio recorded all interviews and transcribed them for analysis. I used the recording device in order to keep my faculties focused on the respondent and therefore allow myself to pay attention to physical movements that people may have used for emphasis or to express dis/comfort. But additionally, the recorder helped me to listen attentively without worrying about taking notes and missing out on anything that respondents said. Les Back (2010) makes the argument that despite its many contributions to qualitative methods, the tape recorder can also be interpreted as a surveillance device that socially shapes what our respondents speak into it. For almost all of my respondents, the presence of the tape recorder appeared to have the effect of producing more cautious responses, at least at the beginning. Eventually, someone might self-consciously remember and ask, "are you still recording?" or "take this off the record." Such comments indicated a power dynamic of which I was not always conscious.

Use of the recorder as a mechanism for capturing our conversations also meant that I felt largely innocent and ignorant of what it meant for people who had agreed to be interviewed to have those interviews captured in this particular way. It was not so much that respondents were uncomfortable with the tape recorder. Instead, its presence produced a different kind of conversation, one that appeared official and watchful, and therefore made respondents self-aware. In turn, I too became self-aware. I checked myself to make sure not to look at the device in the middle of the conversation to see if it was still recording and I reassured those who asked that nobody else would listen to the tapes, affirming that I was only recording so I could give them my complete attention. Once the tape recorder was off, respondents appeared to visibly relax and breathe a sigh of relief. Sometimes they would congratulate me on a job well-done or remark that it was not so bad after all! Contrary to their initial suspicions, a research interview really was just a conversation. Following Luker (2008), I recorded impressions and preliminary analyses after each interview. These notes helped to refine my interview guide and extend my theoretical frame.

Data analysis

Data analysis occurred in several phases. After completing the first six months of observations, I systematically analyzed my fieldnotes to identify dominant themes and patterns in my observations. This preliminary analysis involved reading over all my notes as a way to refine my research questions. The following questions emerged from my preliminary analysis of my case study:

1. In what ways does a population of West African immigrants from the same country constitute a community?
2. In what ways do Ghanaians living in the Houston, a diverse American city, understand themselves as African and/or American?
3. What are the political, social, and cultural projects that Ghanaian immigrants engage in?

The above research questions guided my subsequent observations and in turn shaped my interview guide.

For analysis, I entered all my fieldnotes and interview transcripts into the software *Atlas.ti*, where I coded and analyzed my data. The qualitative analysis software made it possible to have an available repository for line-by-line codes as well as subsequent thematic codes. Additionally, using *Atlas.ti* meant that different iterations of analysis could be performed on the same document without getting overwhelmed by initial codes. With my interviews, I began with line-by-line coding to identify patterns and processes that my respondents spoke about. Once I detected dominant themes in the transcripts, I conducted focused coding guided by my theoretical interests (Esterberg, 2002). As I coded, I also wrote memos to help make sense of the patterns I identify and to connect them to larger theoretical issues. After coding all my interviews, I returned to my fieldnotes to make connections between what my respondents said and what I observed.

This process allowed me to develop a nuanced understanding of how individuals related to the community and understood themselves as belonging in different contexts.

INVADING ETHNOGRAPHY

Over lunch with Irene, a researcher and member of the Okuapem and Ga-Dangme groups, she asked me: “Have you ever noticed how all studies done in Ghana about Ghanaians are done by white people?” Her query struck me. For a long time I had tried to shrug off my concerns about legitimacy as a combination of imposter syndrome and cynicism. However her question pushed me to think critically about what it means for someone like me, a queer black person, to conduct ethnographic research. How was I to make sense of the ways in which I was misrecognized (as a researcher, Ghanaian, a man or a woman) in the field? At church one Sunday, I was introduced to the whole congregation as “Brother Anima Adjepong.” On other occasions, someone exclaimed with disbelief, “Anima is a Ghanaian name!” as if also implicitly asking, did you know that? What were the possibilities and limitations for me taking up this particular location as an ethnographer?

An imagined tradition of white male ethnographers found me often misplaced and misrecognized in the field as a legitimate researcher. I say imagined because people of color, men and women, have been doing ethnography for as long as ethnography has been around, yet ethnographers are largely imagined as white men. To wit, in *The Urban Ethnography Reader* (Duneier, Kasinitz, and Murphy 2014) University of Chicago professor Robert Park is credited as the progenitor of urban ethnography. This re-telling of urban ethnography’s American origins remains despite knowledge of W.E.B. DuBois’ (1899) earlier ethnographic and sociological scholarship (see Morris, 2015). Women of color are also ethnographers. For example, Zora Neale Hurston was a trained anthropologist whose ethnographic research informed her fictional works. She published *Tell my Horse* (Hurston, 1938) an ethnographic account of voodoo in Haiti and Jamaica. More recently, scholars of color such as Kimberly Hoang and Christen Smith have produced compelling ethnographic accounts of economic ascendency in East Asia (Hoang 2015), and black people's contingent citizenship in Brazil (Smith 2016).

One result of the imagined tradition of the white male ethnographer is that methodological instructions often implicitly assume this person. These instructions evade an engagement with the ways in which embodiment shapes a person's relationship with the world. Because white men embody what sociologist Nirmal Puwar (2004) calls the somatic norm, bodies assumed to always belong in any given space, they do not typically have to be reflexive about how *their* bodies take up space. The unquestioned somatic norm disrupts the ethnographic practice of "bodies out of place" by upsetting the imagined order of things. The following brief methodological note reflects on how I managed or failed to take up space as an ethnographer over the eighteen months that I conducted this study.

The work of scholars such as Felly Simmonds (1997), Puwar (2004), and Ahmed (2006), has encouraged me to reflect on how I invade and interrupt the politically charged space of *the ethnographer*. Following Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez (2011), I offer *invading ethnography* as an epistemology of the wound, where my disorientation (the wound) becomes a site for the production of knowledge. These reflections are also made possible as a result of the marginal scholars whose work sustained me, but with whom I could not viably engage in this scholarly dissertation; the poets, musicians, and visual artists who inspired in me new ways of engaging the community and their world with an open heart and mind. For me, the wound freezes my tongue while my mind races but also opens me up to take in the world that my academic training could not provide because of who it imagines to do this kind of work. The subsequent reflections not only help me make sense of my experiences as an ethnographer, but my hope is that they also provide some sense of solidarity and offer guidance and consolation for others whose embodiment and experiences mark them as bodies out of place.

Simmonds (1997, p. 237) writes of the importance of “admitting the body and embodied social experiences into theory.” Simmonds argues that for the black woman doing sociology, this kind of reflexive work is especially important because it challenges the limits of normative theories, which have historically marginalized, if not excluded black people’s lived realities. Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (1986) explains in her foundational essay “Learning from the Outsider-Within,” that in order for black women to become sociologists, they must assimilate a white male standpoint that comes with a set of assumptions that devalue black women’s experiences. These scholars (and also: Ahmed 2006; Bhattacharyya 1998; Carby 1996; Ferguson 2004; Puwar 2004) highlight how people of color are rarely assumed to be producers of knowledge but rather are the subjects of inquiry and rendered voiceless in scholarly texts.

The insistence of admitting marginalized experiences into theorizing about society goes against the advice of scholars such as Wacquant and Bourdieu, for whom there is “no need to make resounding private revelations to explain [themselves] sociologically” (Wacquant 1992 p. 44; see also Desmond 2016). For these scholars, admitting the body might encourage “narcissism and solipsism” and ultimately take away from the “scientific practice” of qualitative research (Wacquant 1992, p. 46). However, advocates of a reflexivity that addresses the researchers’ embodied social experiences argue that not doing so obfuscates relations of power (Bhattacharyya 1998; Collins 1986). For them, a reflexive analysis is informed by the disciplinary theories that a normative reflexive sociology advocates; but additionally, it engages with “the social reality of [the researcher's] habitus," (Simmonds 1997, p. 226), that informs how they know what they know about the world. Marginalized by dominant scholarship, scholars of color must admit their bodies into their scholarship in order to redress dangerous and confining representations.

Marginality shapes how people reckon with the world. By paying attention to the social processes that produce different and unequal lived realities, a black queer's perspective on the social world offers important critiques of social inequality and the potential for finding viable ways to address them. However Sociology, like many other disciplines, operates under logics that challenge admitting marginality into the process of doing theory. Scholars have differently characterized these failings of the discipline as a "zero-point epistemology" (Mignolo 2011), "white logic, white methods" (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008), and "a white racial frame" (Feagin 2013). To different extents, these characterizations call attention to how "White logic assumes a historical posture that grants eternal objectivity to the views of elite whites and condemns the views of non-Whites to perpetual subjectivity" (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008, p. 17) and places western European thinkers as the center of knowledge and modernity (Bhambra 2007; Mignolo 2011). When people of color produce knowledge, whether about their communities or others, a question of bias or lack of objectivity arises. Rarely are similar questions asked of white scholars studying their own or other communities (Collins 1990; Hendrix 2002; May 2014).

As a queer black scholar, I inhabit several positions of marginality. By acknowledging this marginality, I do not mean to claim a position of moral superiority. Instead I want to highlight the set of social relations that shape my orientation to doing research and to the community that I studied. First, within sociology, I am an outsider-within, working with theories and methods that have historically excluded black/African people's experiences or represented them in problematic ways. Secondly, although I am a Ghanaian immigrant who shares an understanding of many of the cultural codes of the community I studied, as a genderqueer person I challenge the heterosexual respectability and gender normativity of the Ghanaian community in which I studied. Consequently, I was simultaneously rendered invisible and hyper-visible, sometimes met with distrust and disbelief when I called myself a researcher.

To reflect on the researcher's positionality in the field is already an important and necessary aspect of doing ethnographic research because it addresses the assumptions that the researcher might take with them into the field. A reflexive ethnography as such avoids producing a sociology that is fundamentally flawed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A queer of color ethnography is reflexive. But more importantly, a queer of color ethnography critically employs autoethnography as a way to expose the underlying logics of the methodology, which implicitly rely on embodying normative gender and sexuality. I will discuss the politics of autoethnography below.

Taking up space in the field

In her book *Queer Phenomenology,* Ahmed (2006) writes about how certain bodies extend into spaces that have already taken their shape. These bodies fit comfortably into spaces designed with them in mind and in turn, the spaces fit the shape of these bodies. In this way, certain spaces and bodies are reproduced as simply going together. Consequently, when the "wrong" kinds of bodies try to take up these spaces, these bodies produce a queer effect. Ahmed writes, "When bodies 'arrive' that don't extend the lines already extended by space, then those spaces might even appear 'slantwise' or oblique" (2006, p. 135). Not only do these bodies stand out as being out of place, the space these bodies (try to) occupy also become strange. This is the effect of space invaders. They are dissonant bodies that highlight the ways in which spaces are politicized (Puwar 2004). In making evident the often unspoken ways in which spaces are organized to be exclusive, space invaders can produce an ontological anxiety for the supposed rightful inhabitant of that space and for the space invader who is arrested by "the look."

An important aspect of taking up social space is the idea that one can feel at home or alienated in any given space. Yet just because some bodies are first confronted as space invaders, does not mean that they always remain marginal outsiders. Instead, some outsiders, as a result of their social trajectory, can find that they fit into historically exclusive spaces after all. For example, the first black president of the United States was also a Harvard Law School graduate, locating him in a long tradition of Harvard alumni taking up the U.S. presidency (Harvard Gazette, 2008). His history makes him "inclined to have a habitus that allows for a greater degree of ontological complicity than those who have not had the same social trajectory" (Puwar 2004, p. 127).

Ontological complicity is an important concept in making sense of how bodies take up space. Ontological complicity is about extending the lines of any given space by adapting oneself to the rules of that space. It involves sharing or investing in the projects of particular institutional spaces. Writing about how historically excluded people are included into institutions, Ahmed (2012, p. 158) highlights the importance of institutional passing. Institutional passing means being the right kind of minority, which includes assimilating the views of the dominant group and muting as much as possible, difference that might challenge the reproduction of that space. Considering how bodies take up space and resist ontological complicity offers a way to think about how the black queer does ethnographic research. As such, I examine how queer embodiment disturbs the field of research as well as the method of ethnography itself.

Disorientation in the field

At the beginning of my fieldwork, as people met me for the first or second or third time, they often assumed that I definitely was not a Ghanaian because "I did not look like a Ghanaian."[4] A year into my fieldwork, one member of MCGH was surprised to "suddenly" discover that I was from Ghana. At events that I attended I often felt myself at once hyper-visible and invisible. I was subjected to what Franz Fanon (1986) called the look, which fixed me as a body out of place, not belonging in the social space that I dared to enter. At the same time, I was rendered invisible, observing people talking around me but not talking to me. An invisible and inconvenient black mass that could not or would not be acknowledged until someone else, someone more respectable than me introduced me as their child, evoking a fictive kinship that allowed me to belong. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes is illustrative of some of the challenges I experienced in the field and how these experiences informed my analysis of the community's identity. The events described below occurred at the Ghana Association's celebration of Ghana's Independence Day in 2015.

> At these events there's usually a professional photographer who takes photos against a white tarmac with different companies advertised on it. The photographer was the same person from a previous event. When we came to take the picture Angela turned my back to her and wrapped her arms around me. Too closely. It felt like a prom-pose and I remember thinking, what is happening right now? Then the photographer suggested that we turn around and I wrap my hands around her. She grabbed my hands and had me hold her. I was very uncomfortable. Then we stood side-by-side again with my hand around her a bit closer than I would have liked. Later on when we went to collect the pictures I was so embarrassed by the "prom posed" pictures because we looked so ridiculous. While we were getting the pictures some woman asked Angela in Ga, assuming I wouldn't understand: "is this one of your daughter's friends?" Angela responded no, and the woman said, good. We don't like their kind here.

Angela was someone I met early on in my fieldwork. She was in her late forties, gregarious, and very outgoing. She preferred to speak in Twi, often making jokes.

Whenever she got serious, she chose to speak in English. That evening, Angela kept asking me if she looked alright. She wore a beautifully tailored wax print skirt and blouse, had her hair freshly plaited into cornrows and wore bright orange high-heeled shoes. In sharp contrast, I wore black trousers, a plaid red white and blue shirt, red Nike Jordans, and held my shoulder length dreadlocks back in a ponytail. I looked like an oversized prepubescent boy standing next to her in those "prom"-like pictures. I was conscious of the looks I got simply for being underdressed at this event. For the most part, people did not say out loud what their looks were supposed to convey. However, at this event, "the look" was articulated as a rejection of whatever my kind was – genderqueer, underdressed, probably not Ghanaian, wearing dreadlocks, all wrong. Moments such as the above highlight how my racialized genderqueer embodiment was at once legible and illegible in the field.

The fieldnote I shared above is illustrative of the disorienting effects that the queer body can have in certain spaces. When the words, "we don't want their kind here" are explicitly spoken, the façade of civility is lifted to make room to address the ways in which the body out of place might make spaces appear "oblique" or "slantwise." The effect is disorienting. Throughout my project, I experienced different degrees of such disorientation. For the first three months of undertaking this project my fieldnotes were concerned with the consequences of being "outed." I could not afford to have my project rendered impossible if the community decided that it could no longer absorb my "difference." I resorted to rhetorical equivocation in an attempt to remain open with the people who agreed to talk to me, while evading the disclosure of what Simmonds (1997) calls "certain private information." The following fieldnote describes an evening out with some women members of MCGH. The details are indicative of some of the strategies I employed to keep certain information private, and the feelings these strategies evoked.

> As we were wrapping up, Mary said she did not think it would be okay for us to part without me saying more about myself. She said since they had been sitting here telling me about their lives and what kinds of guys they wanted to be with she wants to know about my partner. "What is she?" I laughed but was completely flustered. Mary is the first person to have assumed my partner is a "she." I did not "correct" her as I have not corrected anyone. I answered that we are both graduate students, my partner in environmental engineering. I remember stumbling over this part. I had become unraveled. I did not expect to be legible in that way and I still cannot figure out if this was Mary's way of outing me or what she was doing? I asked Mary what she thought. The others who already knew that my partner is white asked about the wedding and I was relieved. I tried to buy time by answering questions about planning as I figured out what to do with Mary's question. She was persistent. Mary said she thought my partner might be white I laughed and shook my head as if to say possibly. Or Hispanic. I asked why it was so important that she know and the others agreed that she had asked at least three times. I said I was not avoiding the question I just thought it was funny that she kept asking. Then I said, "My partner is white." This is the moment I wanted – to be able to say 'my partner' without a pronoun. For those five minutes or so when we talked about this SHE I was scared. The repetition of the pronoun jarred me. I was finally getting people to talk to me and I did not want them to stop now. But as I left I felt a sense of relief. It had happened and it was fine. Everyone said they had fun and we should do this more frequently.

In the episode above, no one imagined that my partner was black or African. People assumed my partner is white. This assumption indicates a relationship between whiteness and non-normative gender/sexuality. In so doing, it excises queerness from the constitution of black, diasporic and African identities and locates it in the realm of the other. For my part, by attempting to evade the question of race and gender, I was in some ways complicit in recreating the imagined community as a black heterosexual space. And yet, I failed. I could not extend the lines of normativity.

So what's a black queer to do? Following the insights of queer of color critique, I propose a queer of color reflexive practice, which I call *invading ethnography*. This approach to doing ethnography is in response to the possibilities that arise from a failure to conduct normative ethnography. This failure often occurs as a result of being a space invader. As an ethnographic space invader, the queer of color is often not successful in extending the shape of racialized heteronormative spaces. Ontological complicity is not attainable. Rather, the queer of color interrupts the comfort of homogeneity that these spaces rely on to reproduce themselves. This interruption happens not only within the field of ethnographic research, but also within the methodological logics of ethnography itself. A queer of color ethnography interrupts and transforms the ethnographic project through an intentional use of autoethnography.

The politics of autoethnography: A combative native "I"

Discussing the politics of autoethnography, Muñoz (1999, p. 81) argues that autoethnography inserts "a subjective performative often combative 'native I'" into the ethnographic project, thereby disturbing the hierarchical relationship between the anthropologist and his subjects. In the fieldnotes I shared above, I also interrupt the ethnographic project by turning my analysis towards how I am located in the field. Consequently, I am able illustrate the ways in which my presence in the racialized heteronormative spaces of this Ghanaian community produced a queer effect. By employing this approach to the ethnographic project, an ethnographic space invader demands a reckoning with their subjugated knowledge at the same time that they decode dominant modes of knowing.

Boylorn (2014) and Boylorn and Orbe (2014) have discussed the usefulness of "critical autoethnography" as a way of examining one's belonging within a community. In particular, Boylorn (2014) argues that the ways in which autoethnography implicates a researcher as a cultural member makes possible a critical interrogation of "problematic cultural practices that [the researcher has] participated in" (p. 324). Queers of color have been doing this kind of work in different settings and with great success. For example, Kwame Otu's use of an "amphibious methodology" for his study of *sassoi*, effeminate men in Ghana, invokes his own experiences of queerness to guide his methodological frame. Otu's amphibious methodology addresses the complex relationship between individual and community identity by exploring the tensions and harmonies his queerness creates between him and his mother. Through the short film *Reluctantly Queer*, directed by Akosua Adoma Owusu (2016), Otu turns to autoethnography to place himself firmly within the experiential frame of the *sassoi*, thereby asking his interlocutor to engage differently with his ethnographic project. Similarly, Shantel Buggs (2016) invokes an autoethnographic lens to explore the ways in which familial and racial obligations compel mixed-race children to collude in sustaining white innocence and a fiction of postracial utopia. By turning her analytical lens towards her own experiences, Buggs (2016) disrupts a dominant postracial narrative assigned to the children of interracial couples to shed light on the ways in which racial obligation is used to silence criticism. *Invading ethnography's* autobiographical reflexivity extends the insights of scholars of color and critical autoethnographers who have shown how thinking from their marginal social locations radically alters hegemonic ways of knowing (Boylorn 2014; Boylorn and Orbe 2014; Collins 1990; Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011; Simmonds 1997).

The intentional use of autoethnography to interrupt the ethnographic project performs the disorienting dialogue between the ethnographer, the method, and the field of inquiry. By proposing a queer of color ethnographic approach characterized by autoethnographic interruption, I am illuminating how the black queer does ethnography. By invading ethnography and consciously admitting my body (out of place), I highlight the potential that a marginal orientation brings to the research.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

As with any study, this one has its methodological limitations. Unlike a "traditional" ethnography, in which the researcher ostensibly lives with the people under study for a year or more (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. 1), the research for this project involved frequent back and forth trips to Houston. These frequent trips meant that my observations were interrupted by my absence from the community. Although a limitation, these interruptions also provided me with new insights as I re-immersed myself into the community. I was able to learn anew how "old" friends were welcomed, new faces were reintegrated after an absence and the practices and performances that made it possible for one to claim belonging in the community.

Despite my best efforts, it would have been impossible to be fully immersed in the community's activities at all times. I was studying a community of busy professionals outside of an institutional context. Beyond their intentional activities as a community, people in the Ghanaian community worked and played as Houstonians, attending Texans football games, as travelers exploring different cities and towns in the United States and elsewhere, as students, and as volunteers in different charity organizations. I used interviews to learn more about their activities and experiences, which I could not observe. Of course, interviews only tell us what people choose to disclose and find important. This is an inherent limitation of the method. However, it is important to note that interviews are not meant to find some objective truth about respondents' world, but rather to understand how they make meaning of their experiences (Jerolmack and Kahn 2014; Pugh 2013). As often as possible, I followed up my observations by asking respondents to replay an incident in order to help me understand how they experienced it. Sometimes, people would provide a contradictory account of my fieldnotes where they appeared more inclusive than the general sentiment of the community, be it on matters of sexuality, religion, or class inclusion. I do not see these reports as lies but rather as important articulations of how people chose to present themselves to an outsider in the community (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). As such, such discrepancies are part of the negotiations that individuals make with the colonizing discourse of community.

ETHICS

This research received IRB approval from the University of Texas at Austin. Throughout the narrative below, I use pseudonyms for almost all organizations and people with whom I spoke. Because the city of Houston and its Ghanaian immigrant population are an integral aspect of this study, I name the city and the Ghana Association of Houston. Likewise, where relevant, I name specific ethnic associations. However, for all other associations, churches that I attended, and individuals I interviewed, I use pseudonyms. All my interview respondents provided informed consent for the study.

Aside from the institutional demands to address ethical concerns, I also approached this research mindful of my own social location as a queer immigrant turned social science researcher. From the start, I sought to undertake a feminist ethnography as a way to proactively address the intrusions of the research process. As Judith Stacey (1988) has argued, the reflexivity of feminist principles, coupled with its critique of power hierarchies can begin to resolve some of the messiness that ethnographic investigation produces. Throughout my research, I took on a mindful ethics approach towards my respondents as a way to minimize as best as possible, any harmful situations that came up as a result of my questions and intrusions into people's lives (Gonzalez-Lopez 2011).

The next chapter turns to my ethnographic observations to illustrate how Ghanaians in Houston understand their identity as Ghanaians in the midst of a large

Nigerian population. The chapter considers how despite historical contentions between Ghanaians and Nigerians, an overarching, albeit contested African ethnicity emerges in the immigrant context. Importantly, I show how this African ethnicity is complicated by questions of class, sexuality, and religion. I argue that these class tensions are articulated through the Afropolitan.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

[1] I am grateful to Toyin Falola for introducing me to the Yoruba Association and to several members of the group who took the time to entertain my questions and share with me their thoughts on community, friendship, and belonging in Austin.

[2] Attah-Poku's (1996) book provides an elaborate ethnographic illustration of the form and functions of immigrant associations.

[3] When Nigerians migrate, they are most likely to move to the United States, followed by the United Kingdom, and then Cameroon (MPI, Nigeria 2015)

[4] In response to that I borrow the words of one of my interview respondents to ask back, "am I supposed to look a certain type of way?"

Chapter Four. Little Lagos, African ethnicity and the Afropolitan

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Ghanaian rap duo FOKN Bois released their satirical single, "thank God we're not a Nigerians." The four-minute rap trafficked in stereotypes about the differences between Nigerians and Ghanaians including lines such as "you like school more than any African I've seen, simple thirteen and you still say tharteen", "can't you just say hi, what is kilon jele?" and "for example, shining five piece agbada, you can look nice in dolce and gabana." The artists simultaneously mocked and criticized a common perception of Nigerians as highly educated, bombastic, and loyal to their cultural roots. Although not explicitly stated in their lyrics, the song suggested that Ghanaians are diametrically different from Nigerians. One might conclude from these lyrics that Ghanaians do not like school, prefer to wear Dolce and Gabana to their traditional attire, and would greet one another with an English hi rather than with a Twi *maakye* or Ewe *efoa*. To conclude their song, the artists declare, "but at least you're better than Liberians, so thank God you're not a Liberians" including a third Anglophone West African country in the fun. The FOKN bois' rap capitalized on historical tensions between Ghanaians and Nigerians.

This chapter examines the unique relationship between Ghanaians and Nigerians as it plays out in the Ghanaian community in Houston to develop a theory of African as an ethnicity. As discussed in Chapter 2, ethnicity is characterized by a group's perception of their shared cultural and ancestral history. Ethnicity can also be understood as the politicization of culture in that ethnicity can articulate boundaries of belonging and identity (Cohen 1993). I begin by outlining a theoretical frame through which to understand black immigrant ethnicities through Stuart Hall's (1991, 1996b) conceptualization of "new ethnicities" and the strategies of boundary-making amongst groups. I then outline a brief cultural history of the relationship between Ghana and Nigeria, placing emphasis on how historical contentions have played out in popular culture such as hip-hop and Internet wars.

The empirical portion of this chapter is divided into two substantive areas. In the first section, I share ethnographic narratives to show how the community organizes itself in Little Lagos. Houston's large population of Nigerians has earned it the nickname Little Lagos, referring to the former Nigerian capital (see also Asante 2012). I suggest that living in "Little Lagos" may have exacerbated an already existing cultural tension for many Ghanaians, as evidenced by the regular comparisons that many people made to Nigerians. By exploring how Ghanaians distinguish themselves from Nigerians and from one another I show how despite these distinctions African identity serves as a unifying discourse. The next empirical section relies on interview data to show how Ghanaians in Houston are reshaping their African identity to become Afropolitan. This Afropolitan identity emphasizes Africa as a contemporary site of identification through references to some specific place on the continent, such as "a city (Ibadan) or an auntie's kitchen" (Selasi 2006). This specificity affirms their connections to the continent and encourages complex stories about what it means to be African, where being African means being from a society with diverse ethnicities and cultures (Appiah 1997; Eze 2016; Mbembe 2007). I conclude this chapter by revisiting how Afropolitan reorganizes African as a new ethnicity that politicizes African cultural identities.

RACE, ETHNICITY AND BLACK IMMIGRANT IDENTITIES

When it comes to studies of race and ethnicity, sociological scholarship often concerns itself with race *or* ethnicity, rarely considering how both of these constructs structure U.S. society (Pierre 2004; Treitler 2013; Valdez and Golash-Boza 2017). In a recent article examining the consequences of disentangling race from ethnicity in sociological scholarship, Zulema Valdez and Tanya Golash-Boza (2017) show how immigration scholars' concerns with assimilation overlook how racism relegates some immigrant groups to the margins of society. By not contending with how racism weighs on immigrant trajectories these immigration scholars rely on claims about culture to justify racial inequalities (see also Pierre 2004). Likewise, they argue, race scholars' focus on structural and systemic racism discounts "the agentic properties associated with racial or ethnic group membership…which may mobilize resources and support to facilitate the process of incorporation by minimizing or perhaps even overcoming the effects of racism" (Valdez and Golash-Boza 2017, p. 6). Valdez and Golash-Boza (2017) contend that when paradigms of racism and ethnicity are considered in tandem, the integration trajectories and cultural politics for black immigrants might be understood more fully. This chapter begins from the perspective that race and ethnicity matter in understanding the identities and cultural politics of black immigrants.

Ethnicities articulate symbolic boundaries that distinguish one group from another. Andreas Wimmer's (2013) theory of ethnic boundary-making provides an important way of understanding how new ethnicities emerge in an immigrant context. Here, new ethnicities gestures towards the fact that immigrants typically enter a new ethnic context when they move from one country to another. The United States ethnic context is one in which, as mentioned in Chapter Two, white people have ethnic options and people of color have ethnicity as a protective mechanism against racism. Wimmer's (2013) taxonomy of ethnic boundary-making begins with the assumption "that there is already some form of ethnic boundary that is relevant and to which actors relate" (p. 49). Consequently, for Wimmer, modes of boundary-making include, but are not limited to, expanding or contracting the meanings associated with these already existing ethnicities, creating new ethnicities by grouping "smaller minorities…into larger categories," or giving new meaning to an already existing ethnicity. Wimmer (2013) is clear that although modes and means of ethnic boundary making might overlap, one cannot be subsumed under any other. This means, for example, that ethnic boundaries may be formed either through expansion to allow for an ethnicity to include different others, or by creating a new ethnicity, which amalgamates smaller minorities into a single ethnic group, or by changing the meaning of an ethnicity, which already exists.

Despite Wimmer's important contributions to understanding ethnicities and the salience of boundaries, his analysis of race does not adequately address the co-construction of race and ethnicity. In part, this omission is because Wimmer does not see whiteness as an ethnic identity. Instead, he treats race as a "special case of ethnicity," (p. 8), thereby overlooking two important ways in which ethnicity, in a United States context, sustains the racial hierarchy (Treitler 2013). By subsuming race under ethnicity, the ways in which ethnicity can be racialized are discounted in favor of claims about presumed cultural differences (Pierre 2004; Taylor 2008).

The ways that immigrants articulate their collective identities in the United States initiates new processes of boundary-making. In the racial and ethnic context of the United States, black immigrants navigate a landscape in which race is a master category. As discussed in Chapter Two, the U.S. racial context in which black immigrants find themselves produces constrained opportunities for articulating their cultural identities. Instead, structural inequalities and colonizing discourses about what it means to be black means that when black immigrants assert their cultural differences, these differences are interpreted as distinguishing them only from U.S.-born blacks. This assertion of cultural difference is then further interpreted as explaining any success that these immigrant groups experience in an anti-black United States (Pierre 2004; Treitler 2013; Valdez and Golash-Boza 2017).

Anthony Cohen's (1993) definition of ethnicity as the politicization of culture is helpful in understanding how black immigrants assert their cultural differences from and similarities to U.S. society generally. Understanding these differences as directed exclusively at black Americans misses the ways in which immigrants negotiate the broader social structures of their new context. In this new context, black immigrants are either marginalized in representations of black cultural politics or used to sustain white supremacists conceptions about American blackness (Pierre 2004). Under these conditions, black immigrants, Africans in particular, have engaged a new cultural politics "designed to challenge, resist, and where possible, to transform the dominant regimes of representations" (Hall 1996b, p. 443).

Referring to a new cultural politics that served to challenge dominant representations of blackness in the United Kingdom within a singular, marginalized, stereotypical, and fetishistic framework, Stuart Hall (1991, 1996b) wrote about "new ethnicities." In this context, new ethnicities described cultural and political strategies that black British populations engaged in order to challenge hegemonic representations of blackness and articulate a nuanced, complicated, diverse, and anti-essentialist black cultural politics. Hall explains this new conception of ethnicity as "a new cultural politics which engages rather then suppresses *difference* and which depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities" (1996b, p. 447—448). This understanding of ethnicity recognizes particularity without constraining it. Instead new ethnicities, in Hall's sense of the term, are "predicated on difference and diversity" (1996b, p. 448). These differences mean attending to questions of race and ethnicity, sexuality, and gender, which are not assumed to stay the same over time and across different spaces.

Borrowing from Hall's (1996b) description of new ethnicities as a cultural politics that challenges hegemonic representations of black identities, I posit the Afropolitan as just such an ethnicity. As explained in Chapter One, Afropolitan articulates a particular African identity that challenges dominant representations of what it means to be from the continent. Eschewing the simplifying and often depressing narratives about Africans, Afropolitan offers a new frame for understanding contemporary cosmopolitan Africans as belonging in a global world. Although the Afropolitan provides a unifying narrative for the diversity of these contemporary African experiences, it does not eliminate contests of nationality. Instead, as Hall (1996b) argued about new ethnicities, this new cultural politics repositions the boundaries around which these contests occur and, more importantly, does not fix these boundaries for eternity. The next section examining Ghanaian-Nigerian relationships illuminates the contestation around these national identities.

FROM "GHANA MUST GO" TO #JOLLOFWARS: GHANA-NIGERIA RELATIONS

In the post-independence era, many Nigerians migrated to Ghana and were deported in 1969 by Ghana's president Kofi Busia (Aremu and Ajayi 2014; Osiki 2015). In 1983, Nigerian president Shehu Shagari in turn deported over one million Ghanaians (along with one million other Africans) who, according to his administration, were in the country without proper documentation (Brydon 1985; Rule 1985). This 1983 deportation became popularly known as "Ghana must go," referring to the silk bags that many Ghanaians packed their lives in to make the journey back to their home country. In popular culture, "Ghana must go" returns as a haunting of this traumatic history. Author Taiye Selasi (2013) titled her heartbreaking novel about the peregrinations of a Ghanaian-Nigerian family "Ghana must go" alerting the reader to the intimate, rewarding, and traumatic relationship that exists between the two nations. In his song "Coming to

America," M.anifests asks, "chale where my Ghana must go bag dey?" as he describes the economic reasons for his migration to the United States. These echoes of "Ghana must go" are a reminder of the traumatic aspects of Ghana-Nigerian relations.

Today, Nigeria is home to the largest number of Ghanaians living outside of Ghana (MPI Ghana 2014). Likewise at last count in 2010, Nigerians account for the vast majority of students and other immigrants living in Ghana (Anarfi, n.d). The similarities and tensions amongst Nigerians and Ghanaians reveal a sort of sibling rivalry between the two countries. This rivalry is informed by a shared colonial heritage from the British, somewhat diverging economic paths following the discovery of oil in the Nigerian delta in 1956, and political upheavals in both countries including coup d'états, the Biafra War at the end of the 1960s in Nigeria, and the 1983 famine in Ghana.

But aside from the shared economic and political concerns amongst Ghanaians there is also some fun to be had between the two countries. The FOKN Bois that opened this chapter is only one example of how Ghanaians view Nigerians and make joking comparisons between the two countries. In the summer of 2016, these playful comparisons drew public attention during the Jollof Wars. The Jollof Wars emerged out of #jollofgate, which occurred in 2014.[1] The hashtag described British chef Jamie Oliver's apparent bastardization of the celebrated West African rice dish (Torres, 2014). For many observers, jollofgate became another example of how westerners took something that belonged to Africans, ruined it and then presented it as "the African story." To quote one commentator on the matter, "our plates will not be colonized," a sentiment that was repeated across the twittersphere. But before #jollofgate was a popular cultural quarrel over jollof rice that left Nigerians and Ghanaians at loggerheads. This quarrel, simultaneously playful and yet very serious, offers critical insights into the relationship between Ghanaians and Nigerians, at least from a Ghanaian perspective.

In 2016 Ghanaian artist Sister Deborah turned up the heat by releasing a video single titled "Ghana Jollof." The sensual video set to a Ghanaian hip-life beat showed the artist either in a kitchen at a counter stocked with plum red tomatoes or standing against a large green white and green Nigerian flag. She sings, "Today call me chef" as she cooks a delicious pot of jollof rice ("finger licking licking with chicken chicken"). Out of the kitchen supposedly in Nigeria, three men wearing agbada and hats and waving little Nigerian flags sit at a green table in front of a larger Nigerian flag. They are waiting for their jollof, which we see being "prepared." The preparation involves opening a can of "African queen" mackerel and pouring it over what looks like raw rice in a Styrofoam container. The women who bring the "Nigerian jollof" are wearing large and colorful *geles*, and lace skirts and blouses. They also have beards. At first, the Nigerian men appear to enjoy the attention from the women, until a Ghanaian woman – we know she is Ghanaian because her plate of jollof also has a small Ghana flag planted on it – walks past. Her hair is dyed blond and she is wearing a wax print bikini top. As she passes, the men get excited and leave their women. Sister Deborah sings, "my jollof brings all the boys to the yard / Nigerian boys are always glad." Later she adds, "when your naija boys chase me don't blame *juju,*" referring to supernatural powers from indigenous religions. The video, uploaded to Sister Deborah's Youtube page is captioned, "Sister Deborah's contribution to the eternal Ghana-Nigeria #JollofWars."[2]

"Ghana Jollof" highlights important aspects of the relationship between Ghana and Nigeria that extend beyond a dish of rice, pepper, and tomatoes. The video reveals how concerns about gender, heterosexuality, culture, and finesse animate these tensions. Portraying Nigerian women as bearded men wearing *geles* and customary lace while also describing Nigerian jollof as "extremely white / Dencia white" suggests that Nigerians are simultaneously overly traditional, even backwards, and also self-hating black people.

Dencia is a Cameroonian artist who in 2014 launched a skin care product, Whitenicious, advertised as meant to remove dark spots. Whitencious came under fire for being a skin-lightening product that encouraged self-hatred amongst black women. By calling Nigerian jollof "Dencia white," as she raps about how her "jollof brings all the boys to the yard," Sister Deborah posits Ghanaian jollof/women as more natural than Nigerian jollof/women. Likewise, Ghanaian women in this video are portrayed as sexy, independent women. There are no Ghanaian men in the video. Rather, three Ghanaian women sit on a perfectly manicured green lawn eating the Ghana jollof that one of them has prepared. By contrast, the Nigerian women serve their men, wipe excess food off their mouths, give them shoulder massages as they eat, and are generally subservient.

In popular Ghanaian music such as "Thank God we're not a Nigerians" and "Ghana Jollof," on Twitter, and Youtube the serious and playful rivalry between Ghana and Nigeria is enacted in ways that reveal anxieties about cultural preservation and progress, gender, sexuality, and class. These tensions are also evident in everyday interactions amongst Ghanaians and Nigerians. My observations lend grounded insight into how amongst Ghanaians in Houston, comparisons to Nigerians served to augment the community's identity as progressive, high achieving, middle-class citizens. Additionally, these comparisons helped to articulate shifts in identity from, for example Akuapem to Ghanaian to African, that is, from ethnic to national to continental identities within an immigrant international context.

The next section of this chapter uses ethnographic narratives to introduce the Ghanaian community in Houston, how it is organized, and how the community constructs itself as not Nigerian, whilst living in "Little Lagos."

BEING GHANAIAN IN "LITTLE LAGOS"

Whether in one-on-one interactions or during social events people in the community often brought up Nigerians either admirably or derisively. One especially poignant moment in which these comparisons occurred was at my first introduction to the Metropolitan Connection of Ghanaian Houstonians (MCGH). The MCGH is a group of about thirty people under the age of thirty. The majority of the group's active participants, about twenty members, were born in Ghana. The group's founders, Owura, Daniel, and Serena, roughly mirrored the ratio of Ghana-born to U.S. -born MCGH members. Owura and Daniel were born in Ghana and Serena was born in Houston to Ghanaian parents. With the exception of three people that I knew of, most MCGH members had lived in the United States for at least ten years. The group's inaugural celebration took place about a year after Owura, Daniel, and Serena, diagnosed a divide between "those born there" and "those born here." Although most MCGH members were, in fact, born in Ghana, the group tended to use the language born "here" or "there" as a way to distinguish between themselves and more recently arrived Ghanaians. Finding a divide between recent arrivals from Ghana and themselves, the three friends decided to create an organization to correct this issue. In describing the group's genesis, Serena highlighted the importance of education to the group. Comparing Ghanaians to Nigerians, she explained, "When [Nigerians] come here, they all go to school. They treat college like it's high school – as a requirement. But Ghanaians aren't always like that." Part of founding MCGH was to encourage Ghanaians to also pursue higher education, so that like Nigerians, there could also be "doctors and lawyers amongst us."

The exchange took place at the annual Ghana Association end-of-summer picnic in 2014, at the beginning of my fieldwork. Serena's descriptions alerted me to the ways in which Nigerians would come up often throughout my research. Likewise, the way she talked about "those born here," "those born there," and the importance of education indicated a concern with the community's image and place within the broader African and Houston community. Below I outline how Ghanaians in Houston strategically align and differentiate themselves from Nigerians as part of an identity politics and ethnic boundary-making process. As Serena's descriptions of the MCGH's mission illustrates, these distinctions serve to articulate particular African identities, class aspirations and racial politics.

On several occasions during my fieldwork, someone would refer to Houston as "Little Lagos," explaining that Nigerians run "this town." When I asked people why they thought so many Nigerians lived in Houston, the response usually referred to the city's oil and gas industry. Houston has a major trade with Nigeria for oil. In 2015, Houston mayor Sylvester Turner reported that the annual trade between the city and Nigeria's oil industry reached fifteen billion dollars (Shosanya 2015), up from under 2.5 billion dollars in 2014 (Jankowski et al 2015). This trade relationship inspired United Airlines to fly daily direct flights from Houston to Lagos in 2011, making this route one of two U.S. airlines to fly direct flight from the United States to any African city.[3] However, in the early summer of 2016, citing weakness in the energy sector, United canceled these direct flights. Below, I share three distinct ethnographic narratives that lend insight into how the Ghanaian community in Houston defined themselves as Ghanaians, in a context where the vast majority of black Africans (40%) were Nigerians. These narratives reveal the different rhetorical strategies and performances that the Ghanaian community engages in order to either align themselves with or distinguish themselves from Nigerians when expedient.

Celebrating being Ghanaian in "Little Lagos"

With Houston being home to the largest number of Nigerians in the United States most Ghanaians I met had several stories about being mistaken for Nigerians. Given the countries' historical relationship, this mistaken identity was not well received by many in the community. One way in which to affirm the community's identity as Ghanaian was through the Ghana Association. At the 58th anniversary of Ghana's Independence from Britain, in March 2015 the Ghana Association hosted a party, as it usually does. That year, just as in 2014, the party occurred at the Arab American Cultural Center. In addition to celebrating Ghana's independence, the event that March was also meant to honor George Owusu, who is credited with having helped Kosmos Energy discover oil off the Western coast of Ghana. Owusu's participation in this discovery brought him great wealth and was a matter of pride for the community.

Inside, the event hall looked like a scene from a movie. Specifically it looked like the opening scene of Nigerian filmmaker Andrew Dosunmu's (2013) *Mother of George*. The chandeliers, hanging high above, illuminated the room and showed off the brightly colored, freshly tailored wax print and *kente* outfits that people wore. Those men who did not wear *kente* cloths thrown over their shoulders wore *kente* vests or ties, or tailored linen *agbadas* with elaborate embroidery on the chest, and colorful amber beads around their necks. The women also wore *kente* sewn into traditional "kaba and slit," skirts and blouses, with large, bright headscarves that reached out to the ceiling. Some of the women, whose headscarves were especially big and intricate, like starched cotton origami swans, had asked their Nigerian friends to pre-tie their *geles* for them. The warm glow of the chandeliers accentuated the flamboyant outfits and lent a celebratory air to the hall. A dance floor made of engineered wood divided the room into two sections. Flanking the dance floor on either side, the tables were covered with red, yellow or green table clothes, reminiscent of the Ghana flag. In front of the dance floor, an elevated stage held a set of peg drums, and two full-size flags, one Ghanaian, one U.S., on either side of the stage. Behind the flag, DJ Jojo had set up his equipment ready to provide a soundtrack for the evening.

As usual, the event opened with a Christian prayer, which a local pastor was invited to give. The pastor was asked to "pray and thank God for Ghana reaching 58 years of independence." Following the prayer, which was in English, the room was asked to remain standing for the national anthems, meant "to honor our country the United States and also Ghana." An instrumental recording of the U.S. anthem boomed from the loud speakers. Looking around the room, I saw people solemnly singing along, their hands on their hearts. Once the Star Spangled Banner was completed, another recording came on, the Ghana national anthem. Once again, people sang. Their voices seemed louder than before, although the words came out mumbled and I wondered if they had forgotten the lyrics. At another event hosted by a the Okuapeman Association (described in Chapter 6) with members attending from chapters in the U.S. and Canada, the party opened with the U.S., Canadian, and Ghanaian anthems pledging allegiance to all their countries. The singing of national anthems was one way in which the community projected a sense of belonging across different countries.

Following the anthems, the consul general, who runs the Ghanaian consulate in Houston, was invited to give a welcoming address. Jack Webb, a white man from Houston, took the stage. Webb was one of about five white people at this event of over a hundred black Africans. In his welcome address, Webb discussed how proud he was of Ghana and of the community in Houston, noting, "We don't have Ebola in Ghana." He added that in the last year (2014), his office processed 6000 visas for Ghanaians going to Ghana. He had never seen any country where the people enjoyed their homeland so much, he said. This comment elicited applause from the packed room. But around me, people talked over him, seemingly uninterested in what he had to say about “our country, Ghana.”

In a telephone conversation [March 14, 2017] with Diane Webb, Assistant to Jack Webb, the honorable consul, she explained that the 2014 visa numbers were actually substantially lower than in earlier years. In 2013 the Houston office had processed the most visas to date (she did not have specific numbers). However, as a result of the Ebola epidemic, fewer school groups and individuals applied for visas to Ghana. In subsequent years, 2015 and 2016 the number of visas issued was going back up compared to 2014. The Houston office does not track how many Ghanaians collect visas.

After Webb’s address, the main part of the evening began – celebrating George Owusu. In 2007, with the help of Owusu, a Ghanaian who lived in Houston, Kosmos Energy discovered oil off the West Coast of Ghana, in the Western Region.[4] This discovery was announced as a turning point for Ghanaians whose government, it was suggested, would manage their oil industry better than Nigeria’s had (Amanor 2010; Melik 2010). Reports highlighted how Ghana’s diversified economy meant that oil revenues only represented 6% of the country’s revenue. This number was compared favorably to Nigeria’s 92% revenue from oil, noting that the Nigerian economy was overly dependent on oil and could potentially take a downturn should oil prices plummet (Amanor 2010). Likewise others argued that the Ghanaian government was in a better position to manage the newly developed oil fields and protect them from militant insurgency. Ghana’s oil discovery was posited as a boon for the nation’s economic prospects.

However, nearly ten years after this discovery, the education, agricultural and health issues that Ghana’s oil revenue was meant to address remain matters of concern

(Borowski 2013; Hicks 2014). Rather than providing increased economic stability, Ghana's oil industry has raised the cost of living in the Western Region. In an article about how the oil discovery had affected the region, Guardian writer Celeste Hicks (2014) described how "Roads that connect the harbour to the city, and the city to the coast and beyond – all the way to the border of Ivory Coast – continue to creak under the burden of increased traffic and heavy goods vehicles." Likewise the cost of living has risen so high that a private room that used to cost between 10 and 20 cedis (between 2 and 5 USD; 2017 conversion rate) was at the time of the report renting out for 120 cedis (26 USD). Although the oil discovery did create jobs and employ locals, Tullow, the company Hicks profiled, employs only about 250 Ghanaians. For the rest of Takoradi's residents, including fishermen whose jobs have become more dangerous due to the presence of oil tankers on the seas, and others who want to rent out a home or a room, or just navigate the city, Ghana's oil has not delivered on the promises it made (Hicks 2014; Hilse 2014).

The recognition of Owusu's success began with a ten-minute long documentary, projected onto a white screen.[5] When the lights dimmed, the people at my table began to complain that they could not see their food. The first three minutes of the documentary focused on a white man talking about Ghana and oil discovery. A woman wondered out loud, "Is Mr. Owusu that white man?" The clip discussed the white man who runs Kosmos Energy, the company that spearheaded the oil discovery. Owusu's role in the endeavor seemed marginal – he appeared to have served as a middleman, connecting the actual power brokers. The documentary's depiction of his role did not convince me that he should be receiving an honor at the Independence Day party. But likewise, Owusu had been accused of bribing government officials in Ghana, fired from his position at Kosmos, and in his words, "thrown under the bus" (Osborne 2014). Despite his troubles, Owusu made millions from the deal and according to an interview with the *Dallas News*, does not spend much time in Ghana following the deal/ordeal (Osborne 2014). A point that the clip highlighted was how the discovery of oil would profit Ghana. Owusu's personal wealth was translated into his philanthropic endeavors and the audience was told how this wealth would help the nation. As the documentary went on, others began to complain about its length, wanting to get to the dancing part of the party – the reason many had gotten dressed and attended the event in the first place. With all the talking going on around me, it seemed that nobody cared about Mr. Owusu and his escapades.

At the end of the documentary, which seemed much longer than ten-minutes, the audience was asked to give Owusu a standing ovation as he came up to receive a plaque, a symbol of his honor and the good he had done for Ghana. As Owusu walked up to receive his award, the drummers played *adowa* to accompany him to the stage. Unlike many of the men at the party, Owusu wore a black suit, black tie, and black shoes. His watch was the only piece of jewelry I could see and it looked expensive in its simplicity. Next to him, his wife also dressed simply – in an understated kente *kaba* and *slit*, with very little make-up and barely any accessories or bling. In his short speech, Owusu thanked God by saying "God is miracles" and it was through those miracles that he has been so successful, despite a long drawn-out lawsuit and the naysayers. "Don't listen to the naysayers," he said. "Don't listen to the PhDs. They will always pull you down. Listen to God."

The Ghana Independence party was an opportunity for the community to come together as Ghanaian and American. In 2015, celebrating being Ghanaian included celebrating the discovery of oil in the country in 2007. The honor accorded to Owusu was also an honor that the community claimed as its own. As Owusu went to collect his award, someone in the audience reminded the room that "before he was George Owusu, we in Houston knew him as Nana Owusu." Owusu was a Ghanaian in Houston and his wealth and success reflected positively on Ghanaians in Houston. Community events such as these were meant to do exactly that – show how well Ghanaians in Houston were doing. These events were part of a community effort to project particular claims about Ghana and Ghanaians, in Houston, and in general. Likewise, such events affirmed the community's roots in Houston and in the United States by doing things such as singing the U.S. national anthem, celebrating U.S. Independence Day, and participating in international cultural festivals in the city.

Although the Independence Day party was an intentionally Ghanaian event, the brochure that Ghana Association made to raise money included advertisements from different Nigerian-owned businesses as well as individual families. The event brochure was just one way that Nigerians in Houston participated in and supported the Ghanaian community. This support was evident at other ethnic association events as well. The next ethnographic narrative reflects on how one ethnic association engaged with the Nigerian presence in the community.

"Our friends from the Nigerian Community"

In September of 2015, the Ga-Dangme Association was celebrating twenty years since its formation in Houston. This celebration also served as an opportunity to mark the Ga harvest festival, *Homowo*. The party was held at India House, a non-profit house for the "Indo-American community." The banquet hall in the back looked like a wedding reception – cream table clothes with purple borders, vases of fake flowers, and chargers for dinner plates. Some of the tables had handwritten signs informing guests of where to sit depending on which part of the Ga-Dangme regions they came from. Outside the banquet hall, professional caterers set up a buffet of jollof and fried rice, waakye, kenkey, meat stews, and salads. Homowo means hunger has ended and the master of ceremony encouraged people to eat. Describing the buffet to the guests, he explained in English, "Ga people like kenkey but since we are in America, there's also rice." The members of the Ga-Dangme Association in Houston were all dressed in clothes made from the same fabric. The material included a stamp of the association's logo. The men wore shirts and the women wore kaba and slits. Invited guests included Ga-Dangme Association members from Dallas, who also wore clothes made from the same material, although different from the Houston group's.

Like the Independence Day party, the Ga-Dangme program included advertising from Ghanaian- and Nigerian- owned businesses and families. The private family ads typically read as follows: "The Adeboye Family Congratulates Ghana on their 58th Independence" and included a photo of the family. At the Ga-Dagnme party, the master of ceremony acknowledged "friends from the Nigerian community," who he said always come to these events. "We don't do a good job of acknowledging them," he noted. Despite not always being acknowledged, Nigerians, along with other Africans, were often part of Ghanaian community events.

The program for the Ga-Dangme party included several short skits meant to amuse the guests. The first one opened with a robbery. A man in a gray tank top and jean shorts that went down to his knees grabbed the purse of an MCGH member. After the robbery, the rest of the skit was at a court. In the court, a police officer, a chubby woman in a hat and black dress, two lawyers, a judge and a bailiff joined the robber and his victim. One of the lawyers, a man, wore a large white clown wig, shorts, and a black coat. The other, a woman, wore too tight pants. Every time she spoke to the judge, she wiggled her behind and sang "eh judge-y." The judge was a man who wore a kaba, smoked a pipe, and carried a cane. The actors spoke in an amalgam of languages including Ga, English, Twi, and Nigerian pidgin, making silly jokes as they performed.

Looking around, it seemed the actors were having more fun than the audience they were meant to entertain. At the table where I sat, the women were not amused. One woman, arms crossed, wanted to know why the event was going on so long, why there was so much talking, and most importantly, why were they even speaking Nigerian pidgin. Nigerian and Ghanaian pidgins are mutually intelligible languages. Yet, to privilege the Nigerian version in a Ghanaian setting proved to be contentious, at least for one person. The use of Nigerian pidgin at this event further acknowledges the Nigerian presence in the Ghanaian community.

MCGH and the "fear of Nigerians"

The MCGH inauguration party was an example of another event at which Nigerians were acknowledged, although not with the gratitude that was expressed at the Ga-Dangme party. A little over a year after its formation, the group wanted to organize a party to officially introduce itself to the Ghanaian community. To do this, they hosted a formal inaugural ball at the beginning of January 2015. The event took place at a reception hall in Houston's Energy Corridor, a neighborhood west of downtown Houston, known for its many energy-sector companies. A number of people in the community worked in this part of Houston and its proximity to downtown seemed to make the area attractive to younger Ghanaians in the community. As with other Ghanaian community events, people were dressed to the nines in their elegant ball gowns, elaborate *kaba* and slits, *agbada* and western suits, and wax print and *kente* bowties. As usual, a professional photographer took photos of people in their fancy clothes against a tarpaulin backdrop of logos from different Ghanaian owned companies and associations in Houston. An important feature of event photos was the red carpet, which led up to the tarpaulin backdrop. Without fail, the photographer always brought lamps, light modifiers, and a giant flash to ensure that the pictures came out beautifully. They always did. Throughout the evening, as MCGH members, their parents, and others in the community arrived, they made sure to have their photo taken before entering the reception hall.

Inside the hall, round tables that seated about ten people each were draped with purple table clothes, which nicely matched the cream colored curtains. The twenty-two tables were neatly arranged through the room, leaving access to a bar and a buffet table where as usual, a yummy spread would be served. In the middle of the room, a dance floor was kept open for the party to come, as well as the cultural show. DJ Jojo who often played at such community events had set up his equipment on one corner of the elevated stage next to a projected image of the MCGH logo. The logo was the letters of the organization, written in red, yellow, and green from top to bottom, with a black star in the middle of the text – the Ghana flag. Tonight Jojo would play mostly new hip-life music from Ghana, accompanied by videos projected onto the white screen next to him. As the night went on, he played some other West African music including Angelique Kidjo and at the end of the night, announcing that he was "throwing back to Houston," played "the cupid shuffle" and some other U.S. trap music.[6]

The masters of ceremony (MCs) that evening were John and Darnell, two MCGH members. John introduced himself as an East Coast transplant to Houston, and marveled at the wonderful community he had come to find himself in. He repeated often that he never saw such community where he used to live and wondered if it was because "in Houston there is a fear of Nigerians." From the audience, a group of people at a table called out, "We're Nigerians!" Nigerians were not only in the audience. Dinner that evening included jollof rice and very spicy chicken kebabs. When I asked what the kebabs were, the response was suya, a popular Nigerian street food. In John's remarks throughout the evening, he often made reference to Nigerians, comparing them to Ghanaians in Houston one way or another. The program that evening included recognizing different MCGH members for their help in organizing the inaugural ball. As the members being appreciated went to the stage to collect their plaques, John would introduce them as "soon to be a doctor," or "an engineer," explaining to the room that MCGH members are not all "professionals but some of us are." As he continued his introductions, John repeated the description of MCGH that Serena had offered at our first meeting in July of 2014. He explained that MCGH wanted Ghanaians to be more like Nigerians by achieving higher education and having elite jobs. He described how Nigerians encourage their children to "go to school so that they will become doctors" and said that Ghanaians can also achieve that goal. John is a twenty-seven year old middle manager at a large engineering firm. His company had transferred him to Houston from the East Coast and he was completing a masters' degree. His educational and professional accolades, although not rare amongst MCGH members, was not the norm for most young Ghanaians in the community. For example, Darnell, the other MC for the evening was also in his late-twenties. However, he was still working towards a bachelor's degree and did not have a white-collar office job.

Within MCGH, educational disparities were often a source of tension, especially for those young Ghanaians who wanted to participate, but felt alienated by the kinds of comments John made about going to school and becoming doctors and engineers like the Nigerians. In an interview with Dmitri, he explained that these kinds of comparisons upset him. Speaking in a mixture of English and Twi because "sometimes *nu*, when you speak English it doesn't come" and he prefers to speak Twi "like 24/7," he explained,[7]

> When we come what, you think the work we do, we don't have bills? Most of the Nigerians they have money. Because for them when they come here, they have a lot of people here. So you know, they get help from every side they go. To push them to school, get money faster and everything. *Ghanafuo* [Ghanaians] we don't help one another. So it's difficult to finish school, get a job, you know? So yes,

> most of them [MCGH members] have money, many of them have bought homes and things, do I lie? Most of them have money so they can pay.

In his comments, Dmitri was calling attention to how income inequalities shaped people's access to education and to attaining the standards that MCGH wanted its members and other young Ghanaians to reach. At twenty-four, Dmitri had lived in Houston since he was sixteen years old. With his mother and younger sister, he joined his father, who had moved to Houston ahead of them. He described his life in the large Ashanti Region capital of Kumasi as "balling," explaining,

> When I was in Ghana, let me tell you something, my mother can come home and pour the money into a trunk and we'll be counting it. That's how much the spices, ginger and what not [that she sold] were bringing in.

However, when they moved to Houston, life got to be more difficult and his family would go weeks eating just rice because they could not afford any differently. Despite these difficult experiences, Dmitri won a scholarship to play soccer out of town ("Because I was African, so soccer," he reminisced). At first he decided against taking the scholarship "because I didn't want to go away from my parents. I'd just gotten here." So instead, he enrolled at Houston Community College (jokingly referred to by some as African Community College because so many Africans attended school there) for a semester and then eventually got another scholarship to play in a different state. But after a year away, he missed his mother and returned to Houston recalling, "My mother was alone here so I didn't want to leave her." After much back and forth, Dmitri completed an associate's degree at Houston Community College and was trying to enroll at University of Houston to get his credentials to work as a digital artist. He disclosed that he has had "so much disappointment" and he reached a point where he said,

> Fuck it. I'm done with school, you know, I'll just go and find a job, try to live my life. You know, it's been hard, it's been hard. People don't understand they see you and they say o you're a vagabond. You don't go to school. It's like a

> disgrace… The system does not make it easy for you to achieve the things that you want to achieve, unless you're very lucky.

Dmitri levied a critique of MCGH's insistence on completing a bachelor's degree and the comparisons the group often made to Nigerians. His analysis of the situation came from recognizing that the successful Nigerians who MCGH members wanted to be like had access to greater resources than he did. Likewise, the MCGH members who were doctors and engineers were in a privileged position. Rather than accept his lack of a bachelor's degree as a sign of his failures, he described the systemic issues that kept him from reaching this goal and concluded that "The bachelor is nothing compared to [experience], because it's a piece of paper. Your experience is what matters. Because when you go to work, nobody asks for that paper, right? You're working."

Despite his critiques of MCGH, Dmitri was clear that he was not going to quit the organization because he saw some good things in the group including the potential to find a girlfriend. He hoped that MCGH would facilitate informal dates with young Ghanaian women in Houston because as he explained it, "Me for one, apart from Ghanaian girls, the women I can marry are Nigerian. I will never marry a *broni* [a white woman]." In Chapters Six I discuss the community's racialized sexual politics.

Heterosexual politics of Ghanaian identities

Although several other MCGH members with whom I spoke did not consider the group a place to find a partner, the first event they organized following the inaugural ball was a panel discussion about marriage rituals. John had foreshadowed this event at the inaugural ball by telling the assembled guests that "we are ready to marry and we want to learn the traditions for doing something like that." Shortly after Valentine's Day, at a Nigerian owned nightclub in the Energy Corridor, several MCGH members gathered on a

Saturday in the early evening to learn about Ghanaian marriage rituals. About fifteen MCGH members were in attendance along with the three panelists, who were chosen in part because they had long marriages. At least twenty years, Darnell, the evening's host disclosed approvingly. The three panelists also represented four different Ghanaian ethnic groups – the woman discussed Ga and Krobo marriage rituals, and the two men discussed Ashanti and Ewe rituals. The only difference amongst the rituals the panelists' descriptions was that Ewe marriage ceremonies occurred at the man's family home, rather than the woman's. Besides this location shift, each person discussed the importance of sealing the traditional ceremony with a church wedding. The panelists reiterated the fact that marriage ceremonies were incomplete without the blessing of the church. The woman added that the bible warned people not to be "unequally yoked" and cautioned MCGH members to be sure to marry Christians. The Ashanti panelist, who was also a preacher, added that language is a God's natural gift and it was equally as important to marry a Christian, as it was to marry someone from "home."

After each panelist had shared their story – the same story three times, MCGH members could ask questions. Primarily, members were interested in how to broach the subject of a traditional ceremony with someone who was not Ghanaian. The men wondered how they could give their future fiancées surprise engagements as was expected in their American culture, while also ensuring that they went through the proper family channels. The women wanted to know how to convince their potentially non-Ghanaian boyfriends that the traditional rites were important. These questions were mostly circumvented. Although this event was meant to share distinctive cultural practices associated with courting and marriage, there was nothing particular about the rituals that each panelist explained. The lack of distinctive difference between Ghanaian ethnic groups was an important aspect of the community's identity because it allowed for a coherent Ghanaian national identity.

Despite the proliferation of different ethnic associations within the Houston Ghanaian communities, I found that the boundaries of these groups were a lot less salient than appeared at first sight. In the community in Houston, it was rare to meet people who only participated in one ethnic association. Rather, the decision to participate in an immigrant association was sometimes simply about choosing an ethnicity. At the Ga-Dangme *Homowo* celebration, five people I knew from the Okuapeman Association, including two officers, wore fabric to indicate their belonging to the Ga-Dangme Association. At least two of these women, close friends who called themselves sisters, disclosed belonging to all of the ethnic associations in Houston. One of them explained to me that she had fun, enjoyed the community and friendships in the different associations, and in any case, she added, "I speak all the languages." In an interview with an officer of a different association, in response to my question about why she decided to participate, she said simply, "Well it was a group of friends who were talking about it. I'm not from Kwahu, my husband is. But because we all socialize, [attend] the same church, the same social circles… I'm an Ashanti… even though it's a Kwahu group, it's really friends." For these women, and many others, participating in an ethnic association was not about strong ties to a particular ethnicity. Instead, it was about community and friendship.

The different associations were founded for reasons similar to what Owusu (2000) cites – because people wanted to distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups in one way or another. However, these distinctions were overwritten in everyday life. For example, the founder of the Akuapem group, lovingly celebrated as "Mother of the Association," explained to me that the idea to form this group came to her after participating in the Ashanti Association for years. Her husband was an Ashanti and since the early 1990s when she moved to Houston, they had always been involved in the group. After meeting and making friends with a few people from the Akuapem regions, she wondered, "why don't we also have something like the Ashanti group?" Once the idea was formed, she started recruiting other Akuapems she knew. As she explained, "we went to a couple of parties and we announced that the Akuapems in Houston are going to have a group here so whoever wants to come should come and join us. So I think March that year we had the first meeting at Sarah's place. That was back in 2000." In 2015, the organization had a party to celebrate joining the Okuapeman Association of USA and Canada (see Chapter 6).

Although holding an event about Ghanaian marriage rituals where MCGH members learned about the importance of marrying someone from Ghana, in July of 2015, the group organized a date auction. A date auction is an event where men and women are "auctioned" off to the highest bidder who wins a night out with their prize. At the MCGH date auction, the people who gave the highest bids would go on a group date with the auctioned MCGH members. This event was organized to raise money for floods that had devastated Accra in June 2015, killing about 150 people (Andoh 2015). At this event, nearly half of the guests making bids were Nigerians and the rest were either Ghanaian, from another African country, or U.S. American blacks. These young people were mostly professionals in white-collar jobs, making bids of up to $270 for women and $150 for men. The date auction reveals the ways in which MCGH could reach out to a community beyond its immediate Ghanaian community. Most of the invited guests worked in the same firms as MCGH members or were part of other social clubs such as the Young African Professionals Meet-up Group.

At the date auction, as with the marriage ritual event, there was overt assumption that everyone present was interested in a monogamous heterosexual union. One way in which this assumption was visible was in the fact that everyone who agreed to be auctioned off at this event was not currently in a relationship. This choice signaled a seriousness of the "date" aspect of the auction that did not cohere with the fundraising motivation. John was the MC for the auction. He described each person being auctioned by noting something about their religious beliefs, such as the fact that they "love God" or were "God-fearing," a trait that he said admired in a potential partner. Likewise, John was sure to let the guests know that "we are all straight here" and women could not bid on other women. They should save that for the men. For one woman, John called her "Ms. Independent, but tonight she's looking for a date." When John asked this woman to turn around, she said out loud "no. I feel like I'm being pimped." The way John talked about the men and women were laden with gendered expectations of what makes a woman wife-material and how men can be good romantic partners. For example, when Jordan went up, John read out loud what he had written about himself. Jordan said he liked long walks on the beach, to which making his usual commentary, John asked, "how is that not romantic?" He added "people said Ghanaians are not romantic" but Jordan was obviously an example that Ghanaians [who I guess are all men] were in fact, romantic. For women, John would tell us about how she was going to be a doctor so "your money will double if you marry her," or "she enjoys chick-flicks; maybe you can watch a movie every night." The way John said, "maybe you can watch a movie every night" sounded suggestive. I wondered if he was implicitly referencing "netflix & chill," a euphemism for hooking up under the premise of watching a movie or show on the streaming service, Netflix.

I sat at a table with Marlon and Shinka two teachers at a charter school. Marlon was a black American and Shinka was Nigerian-American. She was friends with one of the MCGH officers had had come with Marlon to support her friend. As we talked, I noticed looks passing between Marlon and Shinka when John made certain comments about women's bodies, the bible, and the "God-fearing" people up on the stage. In an attempt to determine what their looks meant, I noted that I thought the MC was sexist. This forthright comment was meant to evoke an unguarded response. If Shinka and Marlon's eyes met as a criticism of John's words, by positioning myself as in agreement with their critique, I hoped to learn more about what they thought. Marlon responded to my comment by explaining that he felt John's comments were more homophobic than they were sexist. As we talked, Shinka encouraged her friend to participate by bidding on someone. Although he said no, Shinka insisted. Shinka's insistence made me uncomfortable. It was obvious to me that Marlon was gay and I assumed that, as his friend, Shinka knew. It was also obvious to me, and everyone else present, that men could not bid on other men, nor women other women. John had made this point clear multiple times already. In order to clarify why Marlon refused to bid however, I suggested that Shinka was not being fair to her friend. I hinted that if he really wanted to win a date, it would be with a man not a woman and Marlon agreed. Once we had clarified this point, Marlon told us about how as a university undergraduate, he had attended more inclusive, what he called "mixed" date auctions where people could bid on whomever they wanted, gay or straight. Marlon's presence and exclusion from participation at the date auction served as a reminder of how explicit heteronormativity of MCGH spaces marginalized some people who might otherwise have been part of the community's outreach and organizing.

The date auction was not only alienating for queer people or people who wanted to challenge heterosexism, it was also alienating for some Ghanaians regardless of their sexual identities or political views. In my interview with Dmitri, I asked him about his thoughts on the auction. Dmitri had a lot to say about this event.

> They shouldn't have made it a date auction. It restricted a lot of Ghanaians coming… what we should have done was go to the churches, because the churches are the main pillar of the Ghanaian society here. So what we should have done was talk with the pastors and have them tell people about it. And then do a collection. When that's over, have a little get together where you pass bowls around and people will help out. You would have gotten more money.

For Dmitri, a date auction was exclusive and kept other Ghanaians in the community from participating in the event. Because the event had sexual undertones and included a cost to entry, many people in the community did not feel comfortable attending. The people being auctioned were their children, nieces, and nephews. The Ghanaian community comprised people who were either too old or too young to participate in a date auction with people between twenty-one and thirty years old. Although amongst MCGH members Dmitri's position on reaching out to the church was rare, he was probably right that a church-organized activity would have included more people. A date auction could not draw in the same crowd. Despite these limitations, MCGH raised $2000 for the flood victims. Two members took the money with them to Ghana on their summer trip there and presented the check to a radio station, which was leading relief efforts for flood victims.

The MCGH date auction and marriage discussion panel show how the Ghanaian community in Houston can be simultaneously expansive and insular. The date auction, which sought to help ameliorate the consequences of an environmental disaster in Ghana, included other Africans and black Americans, in a gesture of charity. By contrast the marriage panel was exclusive, focusing on something particular to Ghanaians – rituals from different Ghanaian ethnic groups. Although these rituals were not in the end all that different, they still helped MCGH articulate some sense of cultural difference, which augmented their connection to Ghana. What both these events had in common was a subtle (sometimes overt and aggressive) insistence on Ghanaians as monogamous heterosexual Christians. In Chapter 6, I will discuss further how Christianity and sexual politics inform the community's identity.

Above, I have shown how Ghanaians in Houston affirmed an identity as Ghanaian through comparisons to Nigerians and by creating different ethnic associations. Despite ethnic distinctions, these distinctions did not constitute salient boundaries. Rather, sexuality and class emerged as more salient boundaries of belonging. The same can be said about comparisons made to Nigerians. What was really important in making these distinctions was that this Ghanaian community was also part of an African community. I now turn to a discussion of being African as a different kind of ethnic identity, which is currently becoming Afropolitan.

BEING AFRICAN IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

In Chimamanda Adichie's (2006) novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, protagonist Odenigbo, reflecting on the Biafra War for Igbo independence from the Nigerian state, noted that before he was Nigerian, he was Igbo. This statement revealed the ways in which for many Africans, national affinities are constructed out of colonial imposition. The Berlin/Congo Conference, which partitioned the continent between various European powers, also created administrative borders that would eventually become independent countries (Förster, Mommeson, and Robinson 1988; Sesay 2010). The partitioning of Africa was insensitive to the already existing autonomous nations with their various indigenous forms of governance (Falola 2002). These nations included the Igbo in current Nigeria, the Ashanti in Ghana, and the Ewe in Benin, Togo, and Ghana. The arrival of the Europeans rendered these nations tribes, which were located outside of the political sphere. These tribes, without any recognized political power became colonies, and subsequently countries (see Pierre 2013, specifically Chapter 1).[8] These new countries became part of "Africa."

Interestingly enough, South Africa, also on the continent was somehow apart from “Africa.” Writing for the website “Africa is a country,” writer and activist Sisonke Msimang, examined how and why the borders of Africa did not extend to South Africa. She suggests that a colonial image of “Africa” as the heart of darkness informs this construction. Msimang (2014) argues that despite a proximity to and intimate knowledge about the independent nations of the African continent, in order for South Africa to define itself as a functional, orderly, and efficient nation, it “relies heavily on the construction of Africa as a place of dysfunction, chaos and violence.” This construction of Africa is a colonial relic that simultaneously posits South Africa as an African exception, while sustaining “Africa” and those deemed Africans as a homogenous monolith besieged by disease, warfare, and dysfunction.

I offer these thoughts on Africa and the construction of Africa in South Africa to remind the reader that it is not only in Europe, and the Western world, as Achebe (1977/2016) rightly noted, that Africa is set up as a foil. Growing up in Ghana watching news about the Rwandan and Somalian Wars and the famines in the countries on the Horn of Africa, I often thought to myself, “man, people are suffering in Africa.” The images on the television about “Africa” portrayed a foreign and awful place that said nothing about the life of relative comfort I lived in Accra. In those days, I was not an African. Years later, I went to university with a Rwandan who came from a very wealthy family. I wonder if he also felt this way about the “Africa” he saw on the news in his home country. Because Africa is a construction that informs the western world’s own identity, it is unnecessary, even damaging, to know any actual details about the continent, its diversity, and its people. Or as Achebe (1977, p. 332) put it, “Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray -- a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate.” The intimate ties between Africa and Europe highlight how these histories are not only connected, but also mutually constituted (see Bhambra 2007; Blaut 1993; Go 2013; Mignolo 2011).

On the one hand, to be African is to have an identity weighed down by racist colonial meanings about the continent. This weight renders Africans abject others in conversation with modernity. Africa's position in the global hierarchy constructs Africans as racialized people. This racialization is simultaneously black and African, although these identities are accentuated in different contexts. Godfried Asante (2012) has argued that African identity develops in the immigrant context as a part of an effort to debunk negative stereotypes about the continent. Asante's study comprised focus group discussions amongst undergraduate and graduate students who participated in African students' unions at a Midwestern U.S. university. These students were all immigrants from an African country. Although primarily concerned with how African immigrants develop a racial consciousness as black in the United States, Asante argued that in order to become black, they first had to become African.

Becoming African for these immigrants meant taking on an identity as "representatives of Africa." By positioning themselves as African representatives, the people Asante interviewed used their individual success as a way to challenge the negative stereotypes they confronted about the continent. Since Africa, in the Western imagination is an undifferentiated mass, immigrants were not always willing to deal with having to educate Americans about their specific countries. Instead, they assumed an ambassadorial position as "a strategy against the subordinate position they [found] themselves in…[and] accepted their Africanness in order to debunk any negative stereotypes about Africa" (Asante, 2012 p. 35). Taking on an African identity is not a "reactive ethnicity" because Portes and Rumbaut (2014) posit reactive ethnicities as a strategy for resisting racialization. However, African is already racialized and claiming that identity is not going to protect anyone from the negative narratives about the continent.

In addition to positioning themselves as representatives of Africa, Asante's focus group respondents also posited Africa as "home." In this context, home was a place free of the kinds racial prejudice and inequalities that they experienced in the United States. This rendering of Africa as home reimagines the continent against the narratives of dysfunction, chaos, and violence that have constructed it. By contrast, Africa as home assumes the continent as "a space which is pure, which is uncontaminated by movement, desire, or difference" (Ahmed 1999, p. 339). In theorizing the meanings of home and the formation of migrant communities, Ahmed argues that normative approaches to understanding home as a bounded static spaces make home impossible. Home is not and cannot be "a purified space of belonging" because home is constituted through difference and through "encounters between those who stay, those who arrive, and those who leave" (Ahmed 1999, p. 340). As such, Ahmed suggests a definition of home as a lived experience – a way of being in the world by contending with feelings of estrangement and finding commonality across differences. This definition of home is especially salient for understanding how African immigrants might imagine the continent. This African home is where strangers can come together to form a community "through the shared experience of not being fully at home" (Ahmed 1999, p. 345).

Similar to Asante (2012), I found that the Ghanaians in Houston, although actively involved in a Ghanaian community, also identified as Africans. The interviews discussed below will provide insight into how people in the community understood their African identity. For many, being African was simply a matter of fact; it is what they were. Those who were born in the United States as well as those who were born in Ghana shared this African identity. Considering the ways in which African acknowledges a racialized experience that is constructed historically, culturally, and politically, it can be understood as an ethnicity, just like Ashanti or Akuapem. Because ethnicity refers to how a shared history or imagined cultural heritage informs subjectivity, it is especially useful in understanding how immigrants from Africa develop an African identity. Hall's (1996b, p. 447) call not to allow ethnicity to be permanently colonized by discourses of racism is productive in theorizing African as an ethnic identity. African as an ethnicity contains multitudes because it cannot be reduced to a single nation, cultural practice, language, or history. Rather it is "predicated on difference and diversity," which acknowledges that although "we all speak from a particular experience, a particular culture" we cannot be contained by that position (Hall 1996b p. 448). In the conclusion, I will discuss how Afropolitan begins to reorganize African as an ethnicity by engaging in a cultural politics that challenges dominant representations of Africans. But to get to that point, we must have an understanding of how Ghanaians understand their African identity.

"African to my core": The African identities of U.S.-born Africans

Of my thirty-two interview respondents, four were born in Texas, and a fifth was born in Western Europe. All five of them strongly identified as African and Ghanaian. Below I discuss the African identities of these five respondents who were largely unequivocal about being African despite their birthplaces.

Take Stacy, a member of MCGH born in Houston to two Ghanaian parents. Stacy had lived in Houston her whole life leaving briefly to attend university in a nearby Texas town. She returned to pursue a postgraduate degree and be closer to her family. During our interview, Stacy told me that the last time she visited Ghana was fifteen years ago, when she was ten. However, when people ask her where she is from,

> Majority of the time I respond my parents are from Ghana because majority of the time, for some reason, a lot of people they don't believe that I'm Ghanaian or even for the most part they don't believe that I'm even African.

Stacy's response to the question identifies her parents as Ghanaian but she finds it difficult to convince people that she is also Ghanaian, much less African. She wondered whether her lack of a discernable accent, "skin tone or hair texture…or maybe like facial features" led people she met to find her claims to being African questionable. However, she added, "In the beginning I was like, I guess I don't [look Ghanaian] but as I'm growing up I'm like ok what am I supposed to look like?" Stacy strongly identified as a Ghanaian, explaining that she considered herself a Ghanaian because of her experiences growing up with two Ghanaian parents, the food she ate at home, her visit to Ghana and her interactions with other Ghanaians in Houston. Yet, she said, "I refer to myself as African American." For Stacy, being African American meant feeling connected to both Africa and America. Being African was because "my family is from Africa and the culture that they have, they brought it over here, like passed it on to me or let me learn from it." Likewise, being American was because she ate American food, listened to American music and "assimilated with the American lifestyle." Making the distinction more clear, she concluded, "I consider myself a Ghanaian who is African American but I consider my parents Ghanaians who are Africans." The succinct way in which Stacy identifies herself and her parents as African shows this ethnicity is constituted through layers of difference and similarity.

Like Stacy, Emefa considered herself "An African American. A true African American." Emefa was born in Austin, Texas to two Ghanaian parents. Emefa was very involved in the Ghanaian community in Houston, serving as a youth coordinator for one of the language groups, actively participating in the MCGH, and helping start a group specifically aimed at young professional women like herself. She described this women's group as “a group of us women just supporting each other – a small Ghanaian network.” In addition to her participation in the aforementioned organizations, Emefa wanted to “shift gears from my focus around the Ghanaian community and Ghanaian outreach to other avenues in Houston.” To do this, she was going to pledge a local chapter of a black sorority that did volunteer work in African American communities. In response to the question where are you from, Emefa explained that depending on who was asking, she usually responded, “I’m from Austin.” When asked to expand on why it depends, she added,

> I think that to ask where I’m from is another broad question. It stems from where did you grow up? Where is home, and also where are you from when it comes from the cultural side and the family side? Where are you from, meaning where is your origin? Where are your original roots? So if somebody that I know, like an aunt or a family member were to ask where are you from, of course I would say Ghana because that’s where my home is, that’s my origin. But if somebody were to ask me just an employer or something, I’m from Austin because that’s where I grew up, that’s where I was born.

Emefa’s thoughts on the question where are you from performs the kinds of maneuvers that Selasi (2005) describes in her essay “Bye-bye Babar.” These maneuvers are signs of the Afropolitan, with ties to the African continent and ties to elsewhere places. For Afropolitans, the question “where are you from” cannot elicit a single answer but instead traces the roots and routes that help articulate her sense of belonging (see also Selasi 2015). In Emefa’s case, home is in Austin and home is in her ties to Ghana. Home is rife with ambivalence about belonging and identity. It is a site where she can return and where she already is, calling attention to home is as much an experience as it is a place (Ahmed 1999). Emefa added that she went to Ghana “almost once a year” because her grandmother, who she lived with for about four years while growing up, lived there. Now that her grandmother had passed away, Emefa’s mother was moving to Ghana and as such would provide Emefa with a reason to keep going back.

Although specifying that she is from Ghana, Emefa understood African as "the U.S. standard definition" for black people. She explained that if an employer asked, she could not respond "Ghanaian American." There was no place on a form for that identity, but African American provided a language to claim her ties to Ghana. As with Stacy, Emefa also felt that her ties to Ghana were concretized when she "grew up living the Ghanaian culture of life." She cited eating Ghanaian foods, speaking Ewe, wearing Ghanaian clothes, and learning about Ghanaian culture as things that made it so that "there's just a lot of things about me that I self-identify as Ghanaian." Despite having been born in Texas and spent the majority of her twenty-five years (she lived for four years as a child in Ghana) in the United States, she strongly identified as a Ghanaian. She reiterated, "Everything about me I feel is Ghanaian."

Of note, although all five called themselves Ghanaian, they did not always use African as an identity. Stacy, Emefa, and Manny, who was born in Western Europe to two Ghanaian parents, called themselves African. For Manny, his answer to the question where are you from did not depend on anything. He simply said, Houston. He explained that his strong ties to Houston were a result of the friendships he developed in middle and high school. He described how when he first moved to the United States, he was bullied in middle school "because I am African and I was really black." However, he also made friends with some people who some might "call them thugs [but] they were cool with me." He explained that his new friends helped him really get in touch with Houston – "I feel like Houston's made me myself." What really sealed his love of the city was when, following Hurricane Katrina, several students from New Orleans were moved into his middle school in Southwest Houston. Describing "a full blown riot" between the New Orleans students and the students at his school, Manny told of how,

> Some guy from New Orleans came up to me and was like, “hey you, where you from?” [pretending to shout] and I was like “not New Orleans?” And I got jumped. And what happened was like a couple of guys, they were born and raised in Houston they didn’t want them messing with me, they were like, “man you just can’t jump this little dude. He’s from Houston too.” They were like, “he’s from Houston too,” so they had my back and they helped me out, basically saved me. So I was like ok, I’m not from Houston but still they say I’m from Houston, right? … And they ask me like, they don’t question it, like ok were you born here, no? But I’m from here. And people tell me also I’m still really deep in my African culture right? Everybody tells me, like men, you’re African.

Having experienced bullying from other students, the protection and acceptance that Manny’s new friends gave him allowed him to feel like he was from Houston. Importantly, nobody questioned Manny’s claims to Houston. Instead, they accepted him as African and from Houston. This acceptance was important in Manny’s love for Houston and his identity as “Houston raised, but I’m still African to my core.”

For the five U.S.- and Western Europe-born Ghanaians (the identity they all claimed), the way that they answered the question “where are you from?” often depended on the person asking. They would respond Dallas, Houston, Austin, or whatever town or city they were born in. As Jordan explained,

> It depends on who asks. If it’s a non-Ghanaian, I’ll say I’m from Dallas. If it’s a Ghanaian, I’ll say I’m Ghanaian from Dallas. Because Ghanaians don’t like to hear you say you’re not from Ghana, that you’re not Ghanaian before you say you’re an American. You get pushback from them each time you do that.

Jordan’s answer suggests that in some ways, the reason why he claimed Ghana was because of external pressures. Other Ghanaians wanted to make sure that they were not erased in the identities of their U.S. born kin. Jordan is a twenty-four year old technology worker who moved to Houston for university and never left. He often dressed conservatively in a button down shirt and trousers, his goatee neatly trimmed, hair cut low. Although he had never been to Ghana, he identified the church as facilitating his ties to the Ghanaian community and to Ghana. In his words,

> I've been in the church for 20 years so a lot of the cultural and the different experiences I've picked up through people, through family, communication with family that's in Ghana, and events that Ghanaians throw. So I'm involved in that sense, but I've never actually been to Ghana.

As with all the others, having Ghanaian-born parents, participating in a community that identified its practices as Ghanaian, eating foods called Ghanaian foods and speaking languages affiliated with Ghana helped affirm Jordan's ties to Ghana.

Unlike the others, Jordan did not describe himself as African, instead calling himself an American because "I was born here, I went to school here, [I like American] sports and entertainment." Despite calling himself an American without qualification, part of his American identity was experienced through what he described as "the struggles" of being African American. He understood these struggles as being "already at a disadvantage in the community, so finding ways to step above what you're being perceived as, and being even more so that you can continue to rise up in your community." Despite seeing African American disadvantage as one that he shared, he also distanced himself from this struggle, later on referring to "the struggles, which African Americans are facing in *their* community" (emphasis added). For Jordan this distancing was in part because he did not want to "become just a regular African American but…stay true to my roots," which included "cultural clothing [and] the level of respect which Ghanaians have for each other." Jordan was different from the other non-Ghanaian born Ghanaians in that he expressed to me some negative perceptions about American blacks as a homogenous monolith. Although acknowledging that "there are systematic things that have caused them to stay at the position which they have from generations," he also felt that as a group, American blacks "tend to show signs of laziness and then complain." In Chapter Six I will discuss in detail how Jordan's perspective is part of a postracial discourse that some Ghanaian men used to explain their individual success. For now, I want to suggest that Jordan's identity as Ghanaian and American were informed by a refusal to be associated with the negative perceptions he held about African Americans, as well as a very specific connection to a romanticized Ghana.

Finally, there was Yaa. At twenty-six years old, Yaa was born in Houston but attended junior secondary school (junior high) in Ghana. She explained that the move was precipitated by her father's retirement. Since she was the youngest amongst her siblings after her father retired, he, along with Yaa and her mother moved to Ghana, where she lived for four years between the ages of eleven and fifteen. She returned to high school in the United States and at the time of our interview, was completing a bachelor's degree with plans to be a nurse. Ultimately, she disclosed,

> I really want to move back to Ghana, so I want to do something where I can set up something back in Ghana. So for that I have to do, I have to go back and do nurse practitioner and with that I can open my own clinic.

Yaa's desire to move back to Ghana was in part informed by her annual visits back to see her father, her pride in her Ashanti cultural heritage, and the ease with which she felt she adjusted to life in Ghana every time she went back. For Yaa, when someone asks her where she comes from, the answer is unequivocally, "Ghanaian." In follow up to that answer, I asked Yaa what experiences made her feel Ghanaian and she responded,

> Because I mean, once they see my name, they're going to be like, "you're not from here, so where are you from?" So I just say Ghana, just to you know, cut it short. I mean then if they go into well you have an American accent, I'll say well, I was born here, raised here, so that's why.

When contrasted with Manny's firm, "I'm from Houston," Yaa's claim to being Ghanaian can be understood as partly an identity that is forced on her. Although her name marks her as not quite American her accent tells a different story. In order to avoid an inquisition into how someone with a "funny" name but no "funny" accent got to be in Houston, she provides the answer she thinks people want. (In Chapter 5, I discuss the tensions around accents and racial identities). Throughout our interview, Yaa referred to herself as African only twice. The first time she called herself African as a way to contrast between what she called an "American community." When asked to describe who or what she meant by the American community, she explained,

> Like the people I go to school with when I used to stay in [small north Texas town]. They're predominantly [lowers voice] white over there, so I feel like I'm too, I won't even say Ghanaian, I'm too African for that.

Subsequently, in discussing her reactions and thoughts to the Black Lives Matter movement (I discuss this further in Chapter 6), she referred to herself as African and then black, explaining that she had never experienced racism but felt that "there are some people out there that are racist." Yaa's use of African highlights the ways in which the identity is a racialized one. In fact, Yaa did not always make a distinction between her African identity and African Americans', noting that in addition to "skin color" she also "[felt] like their ancestors, they can trace their ancestors back to Africa and I'm from Africa, or Ghana." So whereas Stacy and Emefa claimed that they were "true African Americans," Yaa made no such distinction, simply contrasting African with white and as such positing it as a racialized identity.

To different degrees, as I have shown above, respondents born in the United States claimed an African identity. Their use of African called attention to their affective ties to the continent as well as how some of their cultural practices defined them as belonging to the continent. As scholars (Arhtur 2012; Manuh 2003; Takougang 2003) have shown, Africans who have attempted to return to their home countries after years living as immigrants in the West typically have a hard time adjusting and return to their new homes in the United States or elsewhere. Yet, claiming an African identity was a way for U.S. born Ghanaians to explain their familiarity with different languages, their craving for foods from across the Atlantic, and the ways in which they felt they were different from other Americans and similar to not only other Ghanaians, but also other people from Africa. African as an ethnicity decouples “ethnicity, as it functions in the dominant discourse, from its equivalence with nationalism” (Hall 1996b, p. 448). An African ethnicity rejects the negative conditions assigned to the continent, and instead seeks to create something new out of it. This something new is not tied to particular nations nor does it overcome the ways in which different African countries are different. Instead, it is an ethnicity that admits Africa as a site of diaspora experiences, constructed through hybridity and the mixing of already mixed cultures.

Being African from an Experiential Perspective

The use of African as an identity was not exclusive to people born in the United States. As Asante’s (2012) study showed, this identity is also prevalent amongst others from the continent in an immigrant context. My interviews revealed that as with Ghanaians born in the United States, for many Ghanaians born in Ghana, being African was experiential, a result of the kinds of foods they cooked, the languages they spoke, and things that they went through, which they identified, not as uniquely Ghanaian, but broadly African. This section discusses the ways in which respondents born in Ghana described their identities as Africans.

Lisa is a doctor in her mid-fifties who had lived in Houston for about twenty years. She was a member of the Okuapem Association and unlike several other members, did not participate in any other immigrant associations. When not in scrubs, Lisa was dressed meticulously whether in Western frilly blouses or wax print *kaba*. When describing her African identity she explained,

> I consider myself African because I think that I have experiences that, if you’re not from Africa, you possibly could not have gone through those experience. And I’m of that generation but I don’t think that my children, even Jane, who lived in Ghana for a long time, I don’t think she’ll consider herself African in that sense. But I consider myself African because I went though certain experiences that are just, you know, you just have to be African to, you know?

For Lisa, the experiences that made her African included growing up with a broad definition of family that included far-flung relatives, living in a compound house with her aunts, uncles, and cousins and attending three-day long funeral celebrations as things that made her African. Having done these things constituted part of Lisa's African identity. Importantly these experiences were not exclusive to growing up in Ghana. Other people from the continent could identify with these experiences and that is part of what made them African.

Although calling herself an African, Lisa's response to the question where are you from was as complicated as those Ghanaians who were born in the United States. Explaining that few people asked her where she was from because most people she met already knew she was Ghanaian, she added, "when I'm joking or they get on my last nerve, I say look, I'm as American as you are." She reflected that the question "where are you from?" came primarily from her patients who remarked on her "different accent." She concluded, "But you know, I frequently just tell them that I'm from Katy [a suburb of Houston] when they ask me because it's annoying, I'm annoyed." Like Yaa above, who was born in Houston and who would say she was from Ghana just to "cut it short," Lisa sometimes said she was from Katy to avoid being further annoyed by the question. These kinds of maneuvers and responses are Afropolitan. As an Afropolitan, she answers the question "where am I local" (Selasi 2015) highlighting the various places she calls home, rather than offering a seemingly reductive response by claiming to be from "Africa" or Ghana. By allowing people to simultaneously claim ties to Africa (generally and specifically) while not closing off the long-term connections they have to Houston, the various responses to the question where are you from affirm the hybridity of an African ethnicity.

Lisa considered her children Ghanaian because her and her husband were both from Ghana. But the way she understood her African identity, as constructed through particular experiences, was not, she explained, applicable to her daughters. Lisa was not unique in identifying herself as African but her children as Ghanaian. Several other parents, primarily mothers, described their children as Ghanaians who were also Americans. Take Rose, for example. I met Rose, a homecare practitioner who had lived in Houston for over thirty years at church one Sunday. Rose was a small woman, barely taller than five feet. That Sunday, she wore a flowery peach dress, open toe sandals and her hair was cut short. Although initially hesitant to speak with me because I was a stranger, she disclosed that she agreed after learning that I was from the University of Texas at Austin. Her daughter was a student there and she hoped a connection with me might help her daughter. For Rose, when people asked her where she was from, she responded, "Ghana, West Africa." She added that she did not feel American because,

> I still feel I was born in Ghana and I will one day go back home to Ghana. And I have put that in my kids and they know, even the two that were born here, they are born here but they don't feel like they are from here. Yes. That's a fact. Yeah, they speak a lot of Twi. I cook African, I talk to them in Twi at home, I mean, you know, the way we live, we live like we live in Ghana.

Rose's identity was primarily Ghanaian and she extended that identity to her children. For her, by raising her children in a Ghanaian household, teaching them to speak Twi, and doing things as if she lived in Ghana, she felt that her children, at the very least, identified as Ghanaian. Interestingly, although being mostly specific about Ghana in her descriptions of her identity, she described her cooking as African. Cooking African might include preparing jollof rice, fufu with soup, or any other foods shared across West Africa. Perhaps it was because these foods are shared across the region that Rose referred to them as African rather than specifically Ghanaian. Or perhaps it was because some of the ingredients were purchased at an "African store," which I will discuss further below.

Sometimes people noted that calling themselves African was in part because others would accept only African as a legitimate identity for them. For example, James was a thirty-three year old engineer who had lived in the Southwestern United States for fifteen years, and in Houston for five. James stood out at community events because of what he wore – often a newly tailored, brightly colored, wax print or batik outfit, the material for which matched his wife and young daughter's. Although many others were similarly dressed, James' outfits always had an extra layer that drew my attention. At the 2015 Ghana Independence Day celebration for example, he wore an *agbada* with a map of Africa elegantly embroidered on the front in the traditional *kente* colors of orange, green, blue, and black. James told me during our interview that he always responds to the question where are you from with Ghana. He added,

> I'm a U.S. citizen. Do I feel American? I think on paper, yes, it may say I'm American but then like to face facts, you know? I know the lady sitting there, even if I show her I'm an American citizen, in her mind, it's like no, you're from Africa. So like all these acceptance things, like I know, I will not fight for you to accept me as an American. If I say I'm an American, I'm an American.

The way James describes his African identity makes it sound as if it is one that is mainly imposed on him. However, the sartorial choices he makes at events suggest otherwise. In the interview excerpt above, it seems that it is not so much the African identity that James takes umbrage at, but rather that others will not allow him to simultaneously claim an American identity. When contrasted with Manny above, one can begin to see how others' acceptance is an important aspect of how people navigated their already hybrid identities (Ang 2003; Giddens 1991). Whereas Manny could identify as "Houston raised but still African to the core," James suggests that for him, to claim any U.S. American identity proves to be more difficult. In this regard, James, who was born in Ghana, is a bit like Emefa, who called African "the U.S. standard definition" for black people.

Besides Jordan who insisted on being called Ghanaian-American, the only resistance against being called African came from Patrick, a university professor who explained that he did not "like using the African word in the plural because sometimes it's misleading." Here he was repeating what many others had said about how they sometimes simply called themselves African because some Americans might ask if they meant Guyana, or simply stare agog, unsure what a Ghana was. In one instance while I was attending a wedding at a church, I struck up a conversation with a woman who was wearing wax print skirt and blouse. She was handing out programs to guests as they trickled in well past the 2pm start time that had been advertised. I noticed with some surprise that people I saw speaking Twi or Ga to one another spoke to her in English and so when she sat down next to me, I asked her about herself. She told me that she was from Liberia and curious, I asked where in Liberia? Perhaps it was because she did not hear my question or maybe it was because she anticipated my ignorance, but in response, she smirked at me and informed me that Liberia is in West Africa. I could understand how exchanges such as this one, along with a recognition that the question is meant to show how someone, because of their accent or style of dress, is out of place in the United States, might lead people to retire to simply saying, African to just "cut it short." However, Patrick wanted to educate people by letting them know that

> Africa is a big continent. We have over 50 countries and a lot of times when people see you and you say African, they think Africa is a country. I don't know if you have that experience. They think Africa is a country and so because of that I always try to specifically say I'm Ghanaian to make people understand that yes, Africa is big. We are essentially the same people with boundaries but we come from individual locations that have names… Yes I'm African but I'm a Ghanaian first before I'm African [chuckles]… Yes, I would like to consider myself Ghanaian but of course, we're all Africans, no matter what.

Although Patrick is insistent that he is Ghanaian first, he concludes by calling himself African no matter what. Patrick's refusal to immediately be called African is not a rejection of the identity or the continent. Instead, he takes on what Asante (2012) called an ambassadorial role. His connections to Africa include a desire to educate people about the continent's simultaneous diversity and unity. Patrick's remarks illustrate how for many, being Ghanaian described a specific instantiation of their African identity.

HOUSTON, AFRICAN ETHNICITY AND THE AFROPOLITAN

Above I have discussed how individuals in the Ghanaian community understood their identities as African. In addition to how individuals reflected on their African identities, the city of Houston was also a vital site for this sense of self. The following ethnographic vignette illustrates how the presence of other Africans in the city augmented people's African identities.

In Southwest Houston, where many West African immigrants live, in addition to mom-and-pop stores that sell imported goods from West Africa (goods that have sometimes been first imported from England to Ghana or Nigeria) there is also a large grocery store, "Southwest Farmer's Market." The grocery store's tagline, "We bring ordinary African food, movies and beauty products to Houston" comprehensively describes its offerings. In addition to Heinz baked beans, Guinness Stout, and dried fish, the market also sells Dax hair pomade, cocoa butter, DVDs of (mostly) Nollywood films, fresh meat from Halal butchers, and prepared foods including jollof rice, fried goat meat, and meat pies. I first visited Southwest Farmer's Market after trying to get lunch at the only Ghanaian restaurant in Houston, Afrikiko. The grocery store was less than a quarter mile from the restaurant in a shopping center that included a money transfer store, a pawnshop, halal butchers, an auto shop and a pharmacy.

Entering the store, one is overwhelmed by the smells of beauty products meeting dried and fresh meats, items usually sold in an open-air market. But even these smells take on an air of familiarity, the smell of an African grocery store. The products on the shelves evoke a feeling of familiarity. For those who grew up eating or feeding their children Cerelac, the nutritionally dense breast milk supplement, cans of the powder meal are readily available. For those who crave stock fish for their soups or stews, they can buy a packet of their choice, just as if they were at home in "Africa." For those who wanted cocoa butter just like the ones they used at home, Southwest Market provides these things. And if you desired a Nollywood film for your entertainment, you had plenty of choices in Southwest Market. During my visit to the store in July 2014, right at the entrance was a film-poster advertising a screening of *Half of a Yellow Sun,* Adichie's historical novel turned into film by Nigerian director and screenwriter Biyi Bandele (2013).

The cooks in the prepared foods section, like many of the customers, spoke in accented English that suggested they were Africans of diverse origin, or in Nigerian languages that I could recognize but not comprehend. Although Southwest Farmer's Market is Nigerian-owned and operated, it was an African grocery store and it provided a space for diverse Africans to find the comforts of home through their foods, self-care products, and entertainment. In spaces such as African grocery stores, strangers could develop community as African, through shared experiences of estrangement from home, and their need for that space. Such spaces facilitate an African ethnicity by creating a physical site in which people can commune with one another, even if only in transactional ways.

In addition to places such as Southwest Farmer's market, where Africans could come together to find some semblance of home, Houston's racial diversity also contributed to this feeling of familiarity. Recall also that Houston is home to the second largest population of Nigerians living in the United States. Nigerians are also the most prominent black African immigrant population in Houston. This reality means that in the racially segregated city, the presence of Nigerians is remarkable in certain parts of town. A keen observer would notice the concentration of African immigrants in certain areas of Southwest Houston. For example, the location of Southwest Farmer's Market off Bissonnet and Highway 59 is less than a twenty-minute drive away from the city's only Ghanaian restaurant, at least two additional Nigerian restaurants, "African" grocery stores, several Nigerian and Ghanaian churches, and George Bush Park, where I attended several events hosted by different groups in the Ghanaian community. Driving down any major road in Southwest Houston, whether on Westheimer, Bissonet, Gessner, or Fondren, it is impossible to miss the signs for African grocers (no country specified), churches with names of Nigerian pastors, and restaurants, interspersed with shop signs in Spanish, Indian grocers, and Pakistani tailors, along with signs advertising lawyers and accountants from these countries. In Chapter Six, I will discuss the importance of the city's diversity to many Ghanaians with whom I spoke. For now, it is necessary to highlight how the visible presence of Nigerians in Houston facilitated a relatively comfortable identity as African.

Map showing African presence in Houston, Texas

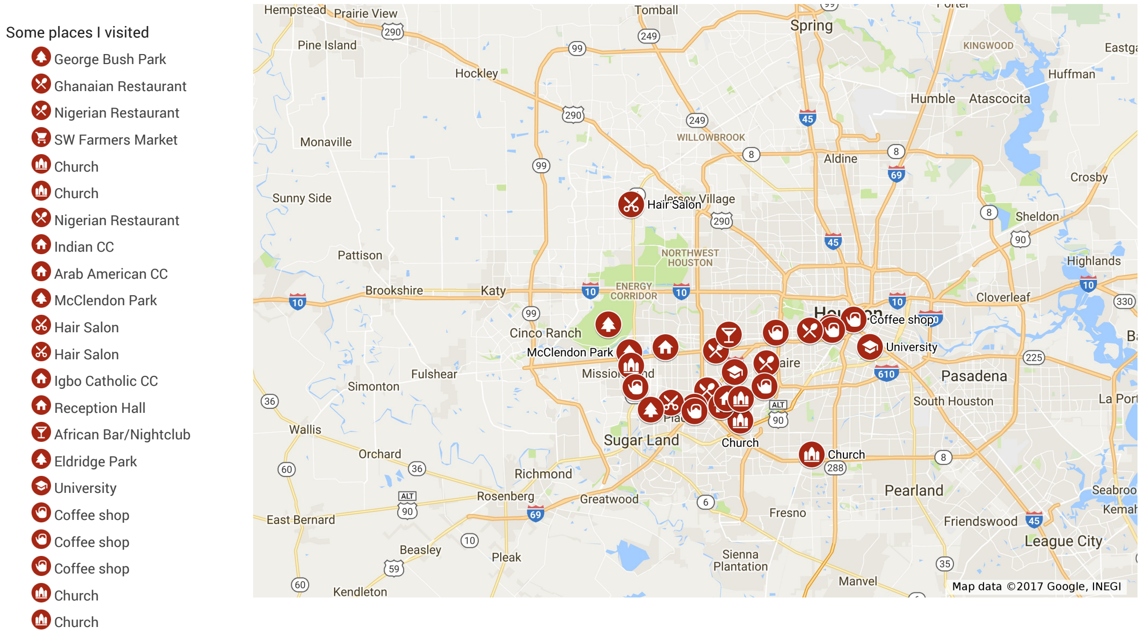
Some places I visited
George Bush Park
Ghanaian Restaurant
Nigerian Restaurant
SW Farmers Market
Church
Church
Nigerian Restaurant
Indian CC
Arab American CC
McClendon Park
Hair Salon
Hair Salon
Igbo Catholic CC
Reception Hall
African Bar/Nightclub
Eldridge Park
University
Coffee shop
Coffee shop
Coffee shop
Church
Church
Hair Salon
Coffee shop
University
McClendon Park
Church
Church
Spring
Katy
Sugar Land
Pasadena
Pearland
Map data ©2017 Google, INEGI

Figure 2. Map of Houston, showing selected African-owned and operated businesses.

The fact that twenty-three percent of Houston's population is black likely helped many people to feel at home in the city. Above, when Yaa explained that the predominantly white people in the small Texas town where she went to school made her feel too African for that space, she was gesturing towards how Houston's visible black population was comforting. Many others made similar arguments, sometimes specifying visible black populations, sometimes simply referring to the city's diversity. For example, there was Cindy. Cindy had lived in Houston for about eleven years, moving there from a small, predominantly white town on the East Coast, where she completed a year of high school as an exchange student. Having decided to stay, she moved to Houston because "a guy at church told me about Houston because he had been here." She explained that compared to the small, very cold east coast town which was "primarily Caucasian" and where she felt "almost like a specimen," she liked "that I can be African in Houston."

Cindy added, “What has made me stay in Houston has just been that I like that there’s a big African community so when I’m at work, I can be American, and when I go home, I can be Ghanaian.” Cindy slips between an African community and the option to “be Ghanaian” at home. This way of speaking illustrates they ways in which “African” is a description of an identity that for many supersedes Ghanaian, but does not erase it. References to an African community were abundant in my interviews. More than half of my respondents referred to this feature of the city, telling stories about other towns in which they lived, where like Cindy, they felt like “specimen.”

The African community that many referred to suggested a generalizable but contested African experience. For those Ghana-born Americans who called themselves Africans, this identity emerged as a result of how their African parents raised them. The experiences they acquired from their African parents sufficiently helped them feel at home in this identity. For Ghana-born Ghanaians who called themselves Africans and American, a few, including Lisa, tried to suggest that growing up on the continent made one more legitimately African. Several others, such as Rose, described their African identities and how they passed those identities on to their children. Being African was a fact of life that could also be passed on from parent to child, an inherited identity. Many discussed being African as an already accomplished fact. Despite this claim, being African is not an inherent trait. Rather, it is a set of negotiations that people employ to claim an identity that makes sense in context. All my respondents discussed experiences and activities that made them African. These experiences were primarily about the foods they ate, the languages they spoke, and the clothes they wore. The experiences and practices that produced an African identity could be pleasurable, but they were not always. James’ description of not being accepted as an American is a reminder that sometimes being African was the only tenable position for many people. Their funny names, accents, and styles of dress did not qualify them for an unequivocal American identity.

BECOMING AFROPOLITAN, COMPLICATING AFRICAN AS A BLACK ETHNICITY

Being African means feeling at home in Africa and in African contexts. Africa as home for black people the world over is a dominant idea in popular culture and in part fed respondents' professed desire to "return home." Saidiya Hartman's (2007) *Lose Your Mother* challenges this idea of an African home and questions the possibility of a homogenous black identity. Hartman writes about her experiences of estrangement in Ghana, where she hoped to find some sense of belonging. Instead, her journey highlighted feelings of absence and loss and raised questions about possibility of a uniform black identity. Consequently, *Lose Your Mother* raises the question of what it means to be African and African American. Hartman (2007, p. 231) writes, "…it mattered whether the 'we' was called *we who become together* or *African people* or *slaves*, because these identities were tethered to conflicting narratives of *our* past, and, as well, these names conjured different futures." Hartman's reflections are a reminder that being African occurs through many incoherent processes. This incoherence and infinity illustrate the potential and the possibility of theorizing African as an ethnicity.

The interviews and ethnographic vignettes in this chapter showed how, from the perspective of the Ghanaians in Houston, an African identity affirms connections to other black people from the continent. These connections make Houston home by remapping the city as an African city. Likewise, we begin to see how being African transitions into being Afropolitan. Being Afropolitan means admitting heterogeneity of experiences and perspectives as the norm. To say this is not to say that there are not totalizing claims about what it means to be African within this new identity. There are. Yet, becoming Afropolitan makes possible also being American, Ghanaian, Nigerian, Ibo, and

Akuapem. The Afropolitan as a new African ethnicity is not a colonizing identity, superseding all ethnic identities, nor is it devoid of racial meaning. Instead, it is expansive, inclusive, and heterogeneous.

Afropolitan as a new African ethnicity reorganizes African ethnicity by overlooking concerns about dominant negative stereotypes about the continent. This new African ethnicity emerges out of what Les Back (1996) calls "community discourses," which are ways in which diverse populations create belonging. These discourses help produce new ethnicities by merging cultures and breaking down boundaries. This politics of ethnicity includes a contestation with racism, although race is not always the most salient aspect of it. But importantly, the emergence of new ethnicities is constructed through difference and builds solidarities in ways that "make common struggle and resistance possible, but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities" (Hall 1996b, p. 445). It repositions African ethnicity in ways that demand an acknowledgement of the already hybrid content of this ethnicity, showing how different boundaries of belonging matter at different times, regardless of an overarching commitment to an African ethnicity.

An Afropolitan identity is not open for every African living outside the continent, nor does it exclude all Africans living in Africa. Instead, it is a middle-class, upwardly mobile, highly educated African identity that emphasizes hybridity and discounts less privileged aspects associated with being African. Dmitri's experiences, including his sense of being excluded from the MCGH because he does not have the same education or fabulous life are illustrative of how some people are written out of this new African identity. Likewise, television shows like "An African City," which follows the lives of a nationally diverse but otherwise homogenous group of highly educated, sexy, progressive

African women who have returned to Accra, Ghana show how Afropolitans take up space on the continent as well.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I showed how culture is politicized and enacted through Internet "wars," music, novels, and visual arts, as well as in community events that articulate Ghanaian-American and African identities. The ethnographic narratives above illustrated how processes of boundary-making simultaneously distinguished Ghanaians from Nigerians and also produced an African ethnicity that includes all black people from the continent. Ethnic boundaries are constructed and articulated through celebrations and cultural events through which Ghanaians in Houston recognize one another as familiar. Here the community as an orientation device (Ahmed 2006) reifies itself by reproducing its symbolic boundaries. But these events were not sterile and pure spaces in which the community could be Ghanaian. Instead, a Nigerian presence called attention to the ways in which the community navigated a national identity as Ghanaian-American (that is, *contra* Nigerian but not mutually exclusive with U.S. American). Likewise, this same Nigerian presence highlighted the similarities and solidarities the community has with a broader continental identity.

Aside from the racial implications of this African ethnicity, I emphasized the ways in which the community's cultural politics also imposed middle-class, heteronormative, and Christian constraints on what it means to belong in this context. A queer of color critique (Ferguson 2006) provided a framework through which to assess how normative claims about educational aspirations, cultural heritage, and Christianity sustained the community's discourses of belonging. Community as a discourse of belonging in these contexts produces symbolic boundaries that orient people towards one another as Ghanaians and also U.S. Americans (recall the national anthems) while also making room for an African identity that encapsulate this diversity. Finally, Chapter Four showed how African immigrants are engaging "a new cultural politics" that challenges hegemonic representations of blackness and Africanness. This has been an ongoing process but the class privilege of the Afropolitan brings this politics into the public arena.

The emergence of an Afropolitan identity that appears to admit heterogeneity of African perspectives is sustained through different cultural projects. In the introduction, I explained Afropolitan Projects as collective strategies through which Africans foster an identity that encompasses the heterogeneity of their experiences as black Africans with diverse and at times conflicting political interests. As I have shown above, African as an ethnicity entertains many simultaneous boundary-making processes. The African ethnicity I theorize challenges the existing meanings of African while at the same time maintaining the uniqueness of national identities and local ethnic identities. This "new" African ethnicity begins to do what the Afropolitan presents as an accomplished fact: an ethnicity that is rooted in a contemporary Africa and interconnected with Western education, upward mobility, disparate political views, black racial consciousness and postracial aspirations. In the next chapter, I explore the black identities of the Ghanaian community in Houston. I begin with a recap of the theoretical debates on blackness, racialization, and race in Africa in order to provide a context for making sense of how interview respondents come to see themselves as black or post-racial Africans, Ghanaians, and U.S. Americans. Then, turning to in-depth interviews I examine how individuals in the community understood their black identities.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

[1] Jollofgate plays on the popular use of the suffix "-gate" to describe any controversial political issue. This use of "-gate" refers back to the 1970s Watergate scandal in which Republican operatives broke into the Democratic National Convention. After Watergate, several other "-gates" have occurred, including "nipplegate," when Justin Timberlake tore Janet Jackson's shirt at the 2004 Super Bowl halftime show, "gamergate," which covered sexism and harassment in online gaming culture, and "jollofgate," which referred to Jamie Oliver's scandalous interpretation of jollof rice.

[2] In the Jollof Wars of Summer 2016 these tensions were brought to the U.S. American public's attention during the inaugural New York African Food Festival. The "Jollof-off" was a special competition meant to settle the matter once and for all between the West African countries that claimed jollof as their own. Online memes that derided Ghanaian and Nigerian jollof reminded people with allegiances to either country the importance of this competition. The New York City paper the Village Voice covered this festival and it was subsequently picked up by NPR (National Public Radio). Suddenly, a vigorous debate found primarily on "African Twitter" was being translated to a U.S. American public that may very well have imagined these discussions as simply "another African war."

[3] Delta Airlines provides the only other direct U.S. airline flights from a U.S. city to an African city, flying from Atlanta to Lagos and Johannesburg. South African Airlines and Ethiopian Airlines also fly directly to Accra and Addis Ababa respectively from Washington, DC.

[4] Ghana is divided into 10 administrative regions – Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Western, and Volta Regions.

[5] The clip was from a 2014 documentary produced and directed by Rachel Boynton titled "Big Men." This documentary follows Kosmos Energy employees as they conduct backroom deals with government officials to take control of the newly discovered oil fields in Ghana. The film explores how the quest for money is as much shaped by masculinity as it is by corporate greed.

[6] A southern rap style.

[7] *Brofu nu, ukaa, emba.*

[8] I can't help but think of Achebe's (1977) point about language. In a discussion of how school children who speak one language at home and a different one at school have difficulty, European tongues were rightfully seen as languages. However, when it turned to Africans and Indians, their tongues were rendered dialects, because of "an instinctive desire of the writer to downgrade the discussion to the level of Africa and India… Language is too grand for these chaps; let's give them dialects!" (Achebe 1975/2016, p. 25). In the European imagination, Africans have neither history, nor art, nor language. Likewise, Africans do not have nations outside of postcolonial formations.

Chapter Five. “Postracial America” and Being/Becoming Black

> It’s a double-edged sword being African and black American. How do I stand true to my race and myself but at the same time still associate [sic] in a society that looks at me as inferior?
>
> Abigail, mid-30s, Lived in the United States over 20 years

> They tend to be profoundly uncomfortable dealing with race, because despite a history of colonialism, their societies socialize them to ignore it.
>
> Vickerman, 1999, p. ix

INTRODUCTION

Throughout my time in Houston, the city’s diversity seemed to be a matter of great importance to people in the Ghanaian community. One of my first contacts with Ghanaians in Houston was at a picnic in the summer of 2014 (discussed in Chapter 6). The Assemblies of God Church organized this affair to celebrate U.S. Independence Day. When I showed up at George Bush Park in Southwest Houston, an outreach leader, a person who welcomes people into the church, greeted me. This gregarious man, Paul, wore a bright orange shirt and was enthusiastic in his welcome. Standing at about five feet ten inches tall, Paul was slim and looked like a retired amateur football (soccer) player who was developing a slight paunch. He kept his hair closely cut, his face clean-shaven, smiled often, and had many stories to tell – about the “very rich,” “pure white” people he knew, his longstanding admiration of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana’s first president), who according to Paul, married an Egyptian woman as a politics of Pan-Africanism, and his desire to work in oil and gas. The desire to work in the energy sector was what brought Paul to the United States after completing his bachelor’s degree at the University of Ghana. In later conversations, he explained that he moved to the United

States three years prior to our meeting in 2014. Before moving to Houston, Paul lived in a Southeastern state with his "rich, white parents" for under a year. He described the neighborhood he lived in as "full of rich white people, probably all republicans, so they didn't like black people." Feeling uncomfortable with his situation and wanting to be somewhere he could find employment in oil and gas, he moved to Houston after getting connected with the pastor of the Assemblies of God Church. He said the pastor helped him find a place to stay and provided him with a church community. Later on, he would explain to me that one of the reasons he liked Houston is because the city is "free to live in [because of] varieties of religions, varieties of races, varieties of food and everything." Paul's connection with the pastor is how he found himself the outreach leader at his church.

In welcoming me to the picnic, Paul explained that the church boasted a congregation including "people from all countries." Looking around, I heard people speaking primarily in Twi and Ga and wondered where the "people from all countries" were. I also wondered if, having read me as not a Ghanaian, the outreach leader might have oversold the diversity of his church as a way of making me feel welcomed. Over four hours at this picnic, I only met one person whose French West African accent gave her away as not Ghanaian. Despite the predominance of Ghanaians at the picnic and in most other social occasions I attended while conducting my fieldwork, a refrain I often heard from individuals was that they liked the diversity of Houston, referring to the city's many citizens of color, its world cultures, and its international perspectives. In this chapter, I argue that "liking diversity" is another way in which people in the Ghanaian community in Houston articulate how they are part of multiple collectives at the same time.

For many in the community, Houston's diversity meant that people could avail themselves of resources from other immigrant communities, learn from others' experiences, and fashion themselves as cosmopolitan and connected individuals. Diversity meant that people had meaningful relationships with others of different nationalities and races. Houston's multicultural multiracial context created the potential for different formations of racial identities and solidarities. Relying primarily on my in-depth interviews, this chapter considers how people in the Ghanaian community understand their racial identities to create connections with different collectives. In particular, I examine how individuals within the community craft an identity as black, African, American, or simply Ghanaian, paying attention to the nuances inhered within each of these nomenclatures.

I begin the following analysis by sketching two conceptual and at times geographically specific frameworks for understanding black identities. Outlining these paradigms provides a context for making sense of the different ways that Ghanaians in Houston articulate a racial consciousness. As such, I spend a significant amount of time clarifying terms and defining the context prior to presenting the chapter's empirical data. Next, turning to my interviews, I show how people in the community locate themselves within a U.S. racial hierarchy by simultaneously affirming a black identity, claiming ignorance about racism, highlighting narratives of difference, and making claims to postracial discourses. These at time conflicting discourses call attention to a heterogeneity of black identities that, paradoxically, affirms the blackness of those engaging this discourse. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how these conceptions of black identities rely on commonsense discourses of belonging, including narratives of progress and cultural difference, to demarcate boundaries while expanding out to other imagined communities. I argue that this strand of the community's

Afropolitan project is rooted in delineating an identity that is at once racialized and yet discounted as "not black" within normative ways of marking black identities. Claims to "liking diversity" augment this Afropolitan project by highlighting an individual's cosmopolitanism and connection to different collectives beyond an immediate national or racial community.

UNDERSTANDING BLACK IDENTITIES

In order to inform the subsequent discussion of my empirical observations, I outline two important frameworks for making sense of racial formations and black identities. I begin with a discussion of racialization as they have been examined in the United States from a primarily sociological perspective. An understanding of racial formations in the United States provides insights into an important aspect of the social context in which black immigrants form a racial identity in their new location. Next I review racialization processes within an African context, highlighting how colonialism informs particular racial identities and commonsense. Following Weheliye (2014, p. 3), I understand racialization to mean "a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and non-humans." This understanding of racialization extends Murji and Solomos' (2005) definition to include how processes of racialization consequently attach racial meanings not only to issues, but also people, who in turn become social problems when rendered not quite human.

Understanding how African identities, in particular Ghanaians, are racialized as black through a colonial history provides a framework through which to make sense of how people within the Ghanaian community understand their particular racial sense of self. This discussion leads to a consideration of the emergence of black diaspora identities, paying attention to how these identities develop outside of and in conversation with dominant U.S. black identities. By outlining how racial identities emerge differently in the United States and in Ghana, I call attention to how the racialized histories of the Ghanaians in Houston must be taken into account when trying to understand how they perceive their racial identities in the United States.

Race in a U.S. Context

The United States is a racial state that believes itself to be postracial (Bonilla-Silva 2013; Goldberg 2002, 2015; Hill Collins, 2005; Omi and Winant 2015). For Goldberg (2002), the modern state is a racial state. He argues, "the sociocultural embeddedness of race – its forms and contents, modes and effects of routinization and penetration into state formation and order – has been basic to fashioning the personality of the modern state" (Goldberg 2002, p. 246). As a racial state, the United States is founded on principles that determine some people as not belonging within the state. Those who do not belong are either excluded through segregation or forced to assimilate and become more like those who do belong. By excluding certain people as not belonging, a racial state also unequally distributes resources and creates institutions that disproportionately and negatively affect those who are not part of the imagined community of the state. Their welfare is not of consequence to the development and progress of those who do belong.

Beginning with an understanding of the modern state as a racial state helps to make sense of racial formations and racial projects in the United States.[1] Omi and Winant (2015, p. 109) define racial formations as "the sociohistorical processes by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed." In other words, racial formations create racial identities through broader interactions with social structures. In the United States, where race is a master category, the salience of racial identities can be felt in all aspects of life, including in how the state determines who counts and who does not. This categorization creates racial identities that emerge out of shared experiences of oppression, domination, and privilege (Omi and Winant 2015). Racialization can be understood as an extension of racial formation whereby people "become racialized" through interpellation as some race or another. Racialization is context-specific, which is to say that one is not racialized the same in India as she is in Indiana. Likewise, gender, class, and sexuality inform processes of racialization. Whereas Omi and Winant restrict their discussion of racial formations to the United States, they identify racial projects as potentially global. Racial projects are ways in which individuals, institutions, and groups affirm (or challenge) racial meanings (Omi and Winant 2015, p. 124 – 127).

"Postracial America" is an example of a racial project. In a postracial state, race, and by consequence racism, is discounted as having a meaningful and negative effect on people's life chances. Instead, colorblindness or race neutrality, which emphasizes enlightenment ideals about equal opportunity for everyone, is posited as the operating logic of society (Bonilla-Silva 2013; Goldberg 2015). Within this context, any commentary or critiques that suggest that racial inequalities persist must be silenced. Instead the presence of people of color in public life including the first black U.S. president or the first Latina on the Supreme Court of the United States become evidence of a country in which racial inequalities and systemic oppressions have receded into a past that is best forgotten.

A belief in a postracial America produces neoliberal subjects, who cast themselves outside of the reach of structural inequalities (Bracke, 2016; Hesse 2011; Goldberg 2002). Bracke (2016, p. 2) argues that the political economy of neoliberalism gives rise to a "context in which agency is particularly salient as a way of accounting for the world." This context of increasing privatization wherein "practices of racial privilege, racial discrimination, and racial profiling are reconfigured [as] outside the sanctions of the state" (Hesse 2011, p. 156) produces neoliberal subjects. Drawing on Judith Butler, Bracke (2016) highlights the ways in which this subject position is produced in response to discourses beyond an individual's control. The shifting economic relations of neoliberalism mean that the neoliberal subject must be resilient. Bracke (2016, p. 13) writes,

> Resilience becomes the very stuff of which agency is made off in neoliberal times: structural pressure, including oppression, is expected to be met with individual elasticity, rebounding, and adaptation.

By characterizing the neoliberal subject as resilient to structural inequalities and oppression outside the sanctions of the state, Bracke offers some insights into why people of color (her subject is the Spivakian subaltern) might choose to believe in "postracial America." Although believing in "postracial America" calcifies racial inequalities by turning a blind eye towards structural conditions that reproduce racism, it also provides a basis on which black people might resist these same conditions. Despite claims to a postracial United States in which institutional, economic, and political manifestations of racism exist only in the past tense, scholars have shown again and again that the United States remains a racial state operating a neoliberal color-blind racial project (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Goldberg 2002, 2015; Omi and Winant 2015).

Considering the ways in which racial formations and identities evolve in the United States helps to understand what Treitler (2013) has called "the ethnic project." In her book *The Ethnic Project*, Treitler (2013) shows how beliefs about ethnicity reinforce racism and racial logics. Beginning with a discussion of how theories of assimilation locate Anglo-Saxon whiteness at the top of the U.S. racial hierarchy, Treitler explores how different immigrant and racial groups participate in sustaining a racial order by buying into the logics of the racial state. Given how ethnic projects rely on U.S. racial logics, race as a master category, and the black/white binary (see Feagin 2013), I understand Treitler's ethnic projects to be U.S. specific instantiations of racial projects.

An example of how the ethnic project operates can be found in Waters' (1994) discussion of black Caribbean immigrants in New York. Waters shows how the children of immigrants emphasize being Jamaican or Haitian rather than American black as a strategy to overcome the negative perceptions that their white peers have of them. Waters discusses how the U.S.-born children of Caribbean immigrants made sartorial choices such as carrying a key-chain in the shape of a Guyanese map or learning accents from their parents in order to "accentuate their ethnic identity" (1994, p. 806). Waters concluded, "being an ethnic black in interactions with whites seems to be a shorthand way of conveying distance from the ghetto blacks" (1994, p. 816). This conclusion is illustrative of Treitler's (2013) analysis of how people of color, in particular black immigrants, make attempts to stake a position in a U.S. racial hierarchy that is not at the bottom. This jockeying for position, the ethnic project, is how all people in the United States form racial identities and participate in sustaining the logics of racism.

Social scientists have contributed to the U.S. racial project by misidentifying ethnic projects as legitimate cultural differences that distinguish immigrants of color from U.S. American people of color, in particular American blacks (see for example, Chacko 2003; Waters 1994, 2009). Through this logic, they sustain the racialization of American blacks as unassimilable into the racial state. However as Bashi (2007) has shown, the success of immigrants is attained through their close-knit networks, the social capital that allows them to migrate, and the resources they bring to this country. This (relative) success is often identified as proof that the United States is postracial. After all, this logic goes, if immigrants (especially immigrants of color) can achieve the "American Dream" of upward mobility and economic success, then institutional racism is not as potent as some might have you believe. For example, Alba and Nee explain that although resisting "a Panglossian optimism about [the decline of] American racism," they find arguments about how racism challenges assimilation for non-white immigrants unpersuasive. For them, Asians (who they imagine as a homogenous monolith) "show strong tendencies toward assimilations, including high rates of intermarriage with whites" (2003, p. 131).[2] By contrast, Portes and Rumbaut are less confident in the teleological promise of assimilation, but suggest that "ethnic resilience has been the rule among immigrants...and constitutes a central part of the process of political incorporation" (2014, p. 213). But for Portes and Rumbaut, ethnic resilience seems to have little to do with racism but rather highlight "the functional advantages of ethnicity, ranging from moral and material support…to political gains made through ethnic bloc voting" (2014, p. 74).

In Chapter Two I discussed "cultural narratives of ethnicity" (Pierre 2004) which are used to diminish the realities of racism and explain immigrant success. Cultural narratives of ethnicity follow logics of U.S. immigration that posit ethnicity as mere cultural difference that marked some people as Others who can ultimately assimilate into whiteness (Omi and Winant 2015; Steinberg 2007). Within a postracial framework, immigrant success points to the ways in which the neoliberal subject, through their individual hard work and without state welfare can overcome any situation to attain the so-called American Dream. The presence of networks and social resources that make immigrant success possible, along with the other forms of structural inequalities with which many immigrants contend in order to survive are discounted. Instead, immigrants' racial formation in the United States relies on an ethnic project that emphasizes postracial America even as it must contend with racism. These beliefs, held amongst some social scientists and in popular culture, constitute ethnic projects.

The ethnic project of black immigrants is invested in distinguishing itself from American blacks who, imagined as a homogenous monolith, make up the bottom of the U.S. racial hierarchy (Treitler 2013). Consequently, black immigrants employ ethnic or cultural differences (seen to be superior or better than American black culture) in response to their racialization in the United States. However, claims to cultural difference are not unique to black immigrants. Individual American blacks also distinguish themselves from those blacks that make up the bottom of the racial hierarchy by highlighting their educational status, economic wealth and general proximity to whiteness. For example, some artists including Pharell and Common have recently dubbed themselves "new blacks." On Oprah Winfrey's couch in 2014, Pharell declared, "The New Black doesn't blame other races for our issues. The New Black dreams and realizes that it's not a pigmentation; it's a mentality" (Parham 2014; Williams 2015). Claims to a new blackness are part of a black American ethnic project also invested in distancing from negative stereotypes about American blackness. But as Treitler (2013) argues ethnic projects among American blacks and black immigrants typically fails because there is no one lower on the racial ladder than black people.

Treitler's analysis of ethnic projects is a productive way of understanding how immigrants experience the U.S. racial landscape. Having come from somewhere else to meet a particular racial landscape, they must find a way to fit. From Treitler's perspective, the way immigrants become part of the United States is to participate in reproducing racial hierarchies that keep black people at the bottom of this hierarchy. Although in agreement with Treitler that the immigrants' racial landscape in the United States is shaped by a white/black hierarchy, I find that her analysis discounts the racial histories and identities that immigrants bring with them to this country. For black immigrants, what sociopolitical contexts inform their racial identities prior to arrival on

U.S shores? To ask this question does not discount that all immigrants and all Americans participate in U.S. racial projects. However, considering the racial identities of black immigrants outside of the United States lends new insights into how we understand the projects they undertake to formulate their racialized identities in this context. From this perspective, rather than imagining the ethnic projects of black immigrants, that is, how they respond to racialization in the United States, as exclusively a way of distancing themselves from a monolithic and negative perception of American blacks, we might begin to consider their articulation of a black identity as a challenge to monolithic perceptions of what it means to be black. Below, I turn to a discussion of racial formations in Africa with a focus on Ghana to set the groundwork for understanding what these black identities looked like prior to arriving in the United States and its peculiar racial hierarchies and frames.

Post/colonialism, race, and Africa

Despite a large body of literature on black diaspora, there remains a jarring absence of Africa and Africans within these discussions. Pierre poignantly asks the question, "where is 'Africa' in the African diaspora?" (2008, p. 24). This question highlights a lack of serious engagement with Africa as a contemporary space where "people of African descent" live. Pierre convincingly argues that this construction of Africa as atavistic advances ideas about the continent as outside of modernity and globalization. Of her research in Ghana, Pierre (2013, p. 203) writes,

> I have often been told by other academics, directly and implicitly, that my subject group was not necessarily the 'real' Africa…since my research focused not only on racialization, but also included data on educated and middle-class professionals.

This critique of *The Predicament of Blackness* (Pierre 2013) illustrates how, from certain perspectives, "the real Africa" is characterized by tribes and savannahs, the acacia tree, and the mostly covered face of a dark skinned woman.[3] This perception of Africa is not exclusive to Western scholars either. A chapter of John Arthur's (2009) *African Women Immigrants in the United States* is titled "Passage from the Savannah Grasslands of Africa to America", affirming the trope of Africa as a tribal jungle that can readily be dismissed in order to discuss more pressing issues of black diaspora. This uncritical way of studying Africa is "a move away from theorizing the continent as a living and modern space" and results in the marginalization of the experiences and contributions of a billion people (Pierre 2013, p. 213).

Elsewhere, Wright (2013) has called attention to the ways in which U.S. cultural hegemony dominates intellectual production in such a way as to exclude a diversity of black experiences that emerge outside of the transatlantic slave trade (see also Clarke and Thomas, 2006; Zeleza, 2005). In highlighting the absence of Africa and Africans in studies of black/African diaspora, these scholars raise important questions not only about how we understand black diaspora, but also about how race, in particular blackness, is conceptualized in an African context.

A normative approach to the question of race in Africa is, "we don't have race in Africa." This response can be found in the work of scholars such as Appiah (1992), whose theorizing on African philosophy, identity, modernity, and culture lament the ways in which a metaphysical solidarity (that is, race) is imposed on Africans as a result of European colonialism (see in particular Appiah (1992), Chapter 4). Arguing that "there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask race to do for us" Appiah teases out the ways in which colonized Africans (his father among them) returned home from receiving an European education with warm memories of Europe (1992, p. 87; also

Chapter 1).[4] For Appiah, experiences of racialization for Africans in Europe and their subsequent return to their home countries where "black people were in the majority…they had no reason to believe that they were inferior to whites" (1992, p. 25). In affirming the diversity of African perspectives and challenging a shared commonality vis-à-vis racialization, Appiah concludes that race is not a meaningful category of identity in Africa.[5]

Likewise, Zeleza (2005, p. 63) wants to move away from a "preoccupation…with Blackness" when examining Africa and African diaspora, in order to "free studies and discourses of African diasporas from their racialized trope," especially for those African scholars of European and Asian descent who have no concerns with blackness. Instead, Zeleza argues for a temporal distinction between an old black and a new African diaspora, thereby finding Africa in the African diaspora. This temporal distinction not only discounts the relevance of the Atlantic slave trade to black identities, but also rejects the label of black for contemporary Africans whether they live on the continent or elsewhere as immigrants and part of a diaspora (Zeleza 2005, 2010). On the one hand, Zeleza is right. Not all Africans are black – some are South Asian, some are white, some are Middle Eastern. However, in conceptualizing an African diaspora that he defines as "[implying] a form of group consciousness constituted historically through expressive culture, politics, thought, and tradition" but not race, Zeleza effectively repeats Appiah's (1992) claim that race is not a meaningful category of identity in Africa (2009, p. 33). Consequently, although for scholars like Zeleza there is an African diaspora, that diaspora is distinct from black diaspora, effacing the historical conditions that produced black diaspora in the first place.

Contrary to those scholars who argue that there is no race in Africa, I agree with scholars including Ifekwunigwe (2006), Pierre (2008, 2013), and Wright (2004, 2015) that Africa is a racialized space. In this racialized Africa, the realities of colonialism, transatlantic and trans-Indian slave trades shape a racial consciousness. Ifekwunigwe's theorizing about old and new African diasporas highlights the connections and fractures between post/colonial migrations, transatlantic slave trade and contemporary African subjectivities (2006, p. 223). By examining discourses surrounding the trafficking of sex workers between Nigeria and Italy, Ifekwunigwe draws a line of continuity between the middle passage and contemporary African migrations. However, her analysis does not paper over the critical breaks between these movements. For one thing, she notes how trafficked sex workers maintain ties with their families in Nigeria, sending home remittances when they can. Their experiences are a product of new, yet similar economic, political and social realities "which grew out of the earlier globalizing phases of transatlantic slavery and empire" (Ifekwunigwe 2006, p. 222). The connections that Ifekwunigwe highlight between the forced migration of transatlantic slavery and the migrations produced as a result of economic inequality, political instability, and stalled progress show one way in which old and new African diasporas emerge out of similar albeit differentiated conditions. Within this analytical framework the geopolitical processes that produce different realities of black subjectivities can be seen as simultaneously underlined by "sinews of inequality and subordination" (Ifekwunigwe 2006, p. 222).

Just as Ifekwunigwe (2006) draws similarities between old/new diasporas and historical/contemporary geopolitical realities, Pierre's (2013) examination of racial politics in Ghana helps to illuminate how colonialism shapes contemporary political, economic, and social realities in an African country. Pierre's argument begins from the premise that colonialism is a form of racial rule. This acknowledgment allows for an analysis of the ways in which contemporary realities emerge out of a racialized colonial history. Pierre's (2013) ethnography traces a history of Jim Crow style segregation in the Gold Coast, where European colonialists enforced residential, social, and economic segregation on local populations, created tiered political systems that destabilized indigenous forms of government while empowering colonial middle managers, and finally transitioning into a postcolonial state that juxtaposed racialized tradition, culture, and self-determination against neocolonial relationships identified as markers of modernity. A postcolonial analysis of Ghanaian identity shows the ways in which processes of racialization, including pan-Africanism, transnational blackness, and diaspora dialogues belie the claim that there is no race in Africa. Instead, Pierre's analysis reveals how colonialism, economic inequalities, and globalization all shape black African identities and forge connections between diaspora and African black people. These connections not only highlight how race is a meaningful category of identity in Africa, but also help locate Africa in black diaspora studies without discounting important distinctions in the lived realities of black people around the world.

An important intervention from Pierre (2008, 2013) on how Africa is racialized as black lies in her discussion of how these racialization processes are interlinked within the global context of white supremacy. In this regard, her assessment of the meanings of whiteness in a contemporary Ghana racialized as black is meaningful. Pierre carefully teases out the ways in which *obruni*, which means white person, can also be used to refer to a black person who, "even if jokingly, is to be associated with the [privileged] class and cultural standing of Whites (and Whiteness) in Ghana" (2013, p. 77). In extending her argument that postcolonial Africa be treated as "historically 'coeval' (Fabian 1983) with black communities in diaspora" (Pierre 2008, p. 11), she understands *obruni* in reference to a black person to be similar to *blanc* in the francophone Caribbean or "Oreo" in the United States (Pierre 2013). These terms are indicative of a racialized discourse in which whiteness is privileged and automatically assigned intelligence, power, and wealth.

Obruni, especially when used to refer to a Ghanaian, valorizes whiteness. The language of whiteness assigned to a Ghanaian racialized as black, reveals how access to colonial education and conversion to Christianity granted some Africans some of the social privileges of whiteness. In this context *obruni* for black Africans might be understood in Fanonian terms. On the one hand, the black *obruni* who takes the place of the colonizer (as a result of being educated and converted to his ways) is the Fanonian (1963/2004) bourgeoisie. For this black *obruni*, race is seemingly not a meaningful category of identity in Ghana because they experience many of the privileges of whiteness (see Appiah 1992). On the other hand, a black *obruni* might be like Fanon's Antillean negro, who "will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language" (1967, p. 18). In this instance, a black *obruni* simultaneously calls attention to the privileges of whiteness in a Ghanaian context and also the socialization of the colonial and postcolonial elite. Pierre (2008, 2013) provides a viable and critical intervention in understanding how Africans are racialized as black. As such Pierre draws important contemporary connections between black people around the world.

Michelle Wright (2005, 2006, 2015) pushes this analysis further by examining how gender, sexuality, and a deviation from the middle passage epistemology produce different narratives about blackness. Wright moves beyond a discussion of racialization with a focus on global white supremacy to consider black identities in their own right, thereby making room to consider black subjectivities beyond the dominant frameworks of western discourses.[6] When we understand blackness as something that happens, that is, as a way in which a subject *becomes* Other, the processes that produce this otherness *cum* blackness can be examined in a renewed light. For Wright (2004), an individual becomes black when they encounter one of the many discourses that produce blackness. These discourses are not the same, occurring differently in different time periods. For example, German philosophical portrayal of Africans as “Other-from-without” produces a different type of blackness when compared to U.S. conceptions of black people as “Other-from-within” (Wright, 2004). Likewise, the ways in which British colonialism produced blackness in the Gold Coast created a hierarchy in which some black people, through conversion to Christianity, colonial education, and general proximity to the colonists, could become *obruni* or white.

In a different context, Trinidadian scholar C.L.R James (1963), describing his experiences as a “native” socialized as British, called himself West Indian but British through and through. This articulation of James’ identity is a reminder that colonial experiences of becoming black are not the same as enslaved experiences of becoming black. Consequently, the types of discourses and counter-discourses that circulate around blackness will not be the same. However, despite temporal and geographic particularities, what Wright (2015) calls the “when” and “where” of blackness, a dominant heteropatriachal black Atlantic narrative frames what it means to be black. As Wright (2004, p. 229) notes, this frame produces blackness as homogenous and heteropatriarchal and also “returns us to the same unyielding and theoretically suspect discourses that first produced Black Others.”

To address the complex intersections and geopolitical processes that produce black identities as incoherent and multiple, Wright (2015) proposes a “physics of blackness.” A physics of blackness consider how dialogues, intersecting experiences, and individual negotiations with social structures produce different subjectivities that can all still fall under the umbrella of blackness. From this perspective, there is no authentic way to be black. Instead, the different ways in which people become black – whether because they come from a formerly colonized African country, because their African ancestors were trafficked in the transatlantic slave trade or their ancestors fought for European countries during the World Wars – are not forced to coalesce around a single narrative. Importantly for this understanding of black identities, is a recognition of the multiple intersections and collectives that make up blackness. The ways in which people with different histories, political and economic realities, and identities subjugated by heteropatriarchy come to understand themselves as black are no less authentic in a "physics of blackness" framework. Wright's (2015) focus on heterogeneity, while productive for circumventing claims of authenticity and base assertions of universality and similarity, tends to overburden the individual. Consequently, *Physics of Blackness* risks discounting the important ways in which larger structural processes shape this positionality.

Bringing together Wright (2004, 2015) and Pierre's (2013) theorizing about black identities and African racial consciousness provides fertile grounds for examining how Africans living in the United States might articulate a sense of themselves as black/African. I find a middle-ground between Wright (2004, 2015) and Pierre's (2013) positions by considering how group consciousness and processes of racialization from a Ghanaian and U.S. context inform the black identities of the Ghanaian community in Houston. The empirical analysis below examines the complications of defining a black African identity in a context that at times denounces processes of racialization whilst acknowledging colonial histories and experiences of anti-black racism. This murky context for African immigrants and their children has produced the black middle-class identity of the Afropolitan, an identity that emphasizes its African roots while claiming ties with multiple others. At the same time that in the United States these immigrants confront and employ cultural narratives of ethnicity and use networks and resources made possible by their social circles, Africans living in the United States also attempt to articulate the specificity of their black identities in conversation with dominant ways of understanding what it means to be black. To assess how people in the Ghanaian community in Houston navigate this identity conundrum, I consider different ways in which individuals in the community become black and how their blackness differ from and affirm other ways of being black. The ensuing analysis sheds light on the intricate connections between historical and contemporary contexts, individual experiences, and cultural realities in the formation of racial identities.

"BLACK LIKE US" WITH A DIFFERENT MINDSET

For many people in the Houston Ghanaian community, that they were black was not a point of contention. The fact of their blackness was, however, complicated by what they articulated as the different historical and contemporary contexts that defined their black identities. Likewise, many also saw themselves as black people living in a country with a fraught racial system that disproportionately and negatively affects people of color. For one thing, Ghanaians arrived in the United States to meet other black people with a longer experiential history of U.S. racial inequalities. Ghanaians living in the United States are not immune to anti-black racism. These realities produced a complicated racialized sense of self for many of the Ghanaians with whom I spoke.

As immigrants, many perceived themselves as being in the United States in pursuit of economic opportunity. Kobby, a slight man in his late-twenties, neatly dressed in light khakis, a checkered purple and white shirt explained his "immigrant mentality" as here in the United States "to take advantage of whatever opportunities that there is out here…every immigrant living in the United States has this sort of mindset." Kobby, who had moved to Houston from Accra a year prior to our interview in 2015, was currently working in a job in which he found himself “at the bottom.” After completing his bachelors’ degree at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, he worked “through the ranks [and] was already at the top level, part of management,” in his telecommunications job in Accra. However he believed that opportunities were more abundant in Houston and he felt that he could “transfer within the company into a different department. If not there’s a lot of money out there anyway so I will definitely be going out.”

To Kobby, as well as many others, they were in the United States in pursuit of the so-called American Dream and therefore shared a similar orientation to life in the United States as any other immigrant. This mindset, an unfettered pursuit of the “American Dream” of economic success and material comforts, complicated the ways in which some Ghanaians saw themselves as black. An immigrant mentality set them apart from U.S. American blacks who, as the thinking went, after generations of oppression, no longer saw the possibilities available to them as U.S. citizens (see also Greer 2013).

However, despite being here to take advantage of U.S. economic opportunities, everyone with whom I spoke in Houston also identified themselves as black – black immigrants. Consequently, many challenged uncomplicated distinctions between immigrants and other blacks. For example, some people rejected what they saw as black people dissociating themselves from one another by claiming a different mindset (as immigrants) or history (as enslaved). Take Mary, a nurse in her mid-twenties. Mary moved to Houston with her family when she was seven years old. Her parents were active in the community and owned what Mary described as a “family business” that provided a space in which many Ghanaians could socialize. When she arrived at the coffee shop where we conducted our interview, my eye was immediately drawn to her giant purse made from wax-print fabric. She explained that she had bought it from Ghana, where she had spent six weeks during the early summer. Mary often talked about her cultural pride, not only during the interview but also at other social events. She recalled being called an African booty-scratcher when she was in middle school and feeling ashamed. "But now it's like you can't tell me nothing, I'm proud. At work they call me Ms. Ghana, like you know [laughs]. I'm proud to be Ghanaian, African, whatever."

Her pride as a Ghanaian and an African did not discount Mary's connection to black American people. During our interview, she told me about a conversation she had with a man she assumed to be black American. This man asked if she was African and when she responded in the affirmative, said to her, "y'all don't like us." Mary countered the man's charge by calling attention to what she saw as black Americans being offended to be called "African American". She continued,

> The only difference between you and me is that my people never got on the boat. And the only difference between you being a black American or a Caribbean is where the boat went, ok? So there is no difference.

Mary acknowledged various slave routes as instigating the dispersal of black people from Africa to North America and the Caribbean. But she went on to discount the consequences of this dispersal by concluding that slavery explained many differences between black people and also constituted no difference at all.

In about one-third of my interviews (10 of 32), slavery came up as way to claim connection between American blacks and Africans. The aftermath of slavery were discounted to argue, as Mary did, that "there is no difference" or as others saw it, they are "black like us." The invocation of transatlantic slavery and the dismissal on its meanings for racial identities and contemporary experiences on the one hand affirms solidarity between black people. But on the other hand, this dismissal discounts the important differences in trajectories that produce different contemporary circumstances. Statements about transatlantic slavery affirm that, one way or another, all black people have ties to Africa. However, to discount the different trajectories that slavery produced is to buy into a middle passage epistemology that only has room for a linear and homogenous narrative of what it means to be black.

Despite Mary's claim that "there is no difference at all," several others reported that it was not always easy to overcome the distance of historical differences and their subsequent contemporary realities. Paul, the outreach leader from the beginning of this chapter, expressed sadness that, "they [American blacks] don't want to talk to us because sometimes they even look down on us from Africa." In his lament, Paul was calling attention to a popular negative perception of Africa as backwards, underdeveloped and unchanging (Piot, 2001; Zeleza 2005, 2009). Although finding that some American blacks hold negative views of Africa, he concluded, "all black people come from Africa whether Jamaicans or what, we're all from Africa for some reason." Similar to Mary who claimed that the only difference is where the boat went, for Paul, despite frictions and fractures, Africa ties all black people together. This view of Africa "as a site of origin and purity, uncontaminated by those histories of the modern that have lent black Atlantic cultures their distinctive character" (Piot 2001, p. 156) can also be found in academic literature. A primary example of this characterization is Paul Gilroy's (1993) *Black Atlantic*, which effectively sinks Africa into the ocean in order to trace routes and rhizomes between black people in North America, the Caribbean and Western Europe. Of note, in his concluding chapter, Gilroy offers a critique of tradition as anti-modern. Reserving the term tradition "for the nameless, the evasive, minimal qualities that make these diaspora conversations possible" he locates Africa as enclosed by tradition and merely facilitating Black Atlantic dialogues (Gilroy 1993, p. 199). Gilroy's *Black*

Atlantic cannot find Africans in the shared oppression and cultural productions of black diaspora. Instead he paints a portrait of Africa that shows an atavistic, imagined, and unchanging space (see also Hall, 1990).

Despite the ways in which Africa and by extension Africans have been written out of discourses of black diaspora, scholars including Piot (2001), Pierre (2008, 2013), and Wright (2013, 2015) have shown how transatlantic slavery and colonialism constitute diasporic cultural processes on the continent. These processes mean that Africans also see themselves as black people, albeit in differentiated ways. Amongst my interview respondents, two claims supported people's perceptions that as Ghanaians not only were they black, but other black people were like them.

Over one-third (11 of 32) of respondents repeated stereotypes about black people, regardless of origin, to show how alike they all were. Such stereotypes included claims about men's sexual prowess, violent behavior, facial features, and phenotype. It is important to note it was only men who spoke to me about black men's sexual prowess. These men made distinctions between Ghanaian women and African American women, claiming that African American women were more sexually available than Ghanaian women. These claims were sometimes a negative critique of what they regarded as Ghanaian women's excessive chastity, and at other times a condemnation of African American women's promiscuousness. These distinctions are critical to understand the sexual and gendered dimensions of the community's Afropolitan projects. For a number of people I spoke with, stereotypes about black people affirmed a connection between Africans, Caribbean, and American blacks. For example in a conversation with Evelyn, a university professor and Houston resident of 10 years, she recalled an incident in which some black women were kicked off a train because they were supposedly too loud (Rocha 2015).

> I think naturally black people are more aggressive. We're loud, you know? Recently some women were kicked out of a train. When we're having fun we're loud. I think it's just how God made us. Look at our churches…Look at African American churches and African churches. So similar. I went to Grenada, they're like us! The way they behave, talk, loud. They're just like us and I think that's something that we have in common.

Evelyn's experiences with loud black people in the United States, the Caribbean, and Ghana were enough to affirm that "they're like us." Similarly, others referenced Caribbean names and cuisines that could be traced back to West Africa to support their belief that despite geographical differences, blackness can be boiled down to a few essentialist stereotypes.

The use of certain stereotypes about black people to affirm that "they are like us" was not exclusive to neutral or only slightly negative perceptions of black people. At a hair salon in Southwest Houston where I conducted ethnographic observations, I was party to a conversation in which several participants expressed strong negative opinions about black Americans, Africans, and other people of color. The conversation was between the Ama, Ghanaian owner, Chibuzor, a Nigerian woman whose hair the owner was styling, Sheila, another Ghanaian stylist and myself. The other stylist was braiding a biracial child's hair and the child's white mother was waiting in the lounge area where I also sat. Ama and Chibuzor were speaking to each other in English, discussing the differences and similarities between the Nigerian city of Lagos and Ghana's capital Accra. The Nigerian woman explained that Lagos has really improved over the years, "you wouldn't even recognize it." She added that the state government had removed all the hawkers and *okada* (motorbike) drivers from the street so that Lagos Island is now a really posh part of town. She concluded that the people who had been removed could "go back to wherever they came from. They can't come to Lagos to make it dirty." The issue of dirt led her to ask, "Have you noticed that everywhere there is a large concentration of blacks or Mexicans there is also higher crime, more potholes in the road and the place is just generally dirty?" This question piqued Sheila's interest and she joined the conversation to agree that eighty percent of all blacks "are disrespectful, lazy, and dirty, giving the rest of the race a bad name." Surprised by the turn the conversation had taken, I asked the women if they really believed the things they were saying and what it said about them as black people. Chibuzor responded by explaining that indeed most black people ("allow me to generalize," she implored) fit the negative stereotypes described. But the women in the hair salon, she added, are more like white people, the majority of whom are hardworking and clean. The negative perceptions that these women ascribed to black people encompassed the incompetence of African heads of state and African businesspeople including the hawkers and *okada* drivers of Lagos. For these women at the hair salon, although they identifying themselves as black, they also disclosed anti-black sentiments that posited white people as superior to blacks.

Pierre (2013) suggests that the positive view that many Africans hold of white people is a product of the way in which colonialism valorized whiteness. Her theorizing about this racial politics helps to explain how the women in the hair salon found the majority of white people to be superior in many ways to the majority of black people. Pierre notes that in the Gold Coast, colonialists discounted the validity of indigenous cultures, customs, and traditions and rewarded those blacks who successfully mimicked European ways. Although Bhabha (1984) calls this kind of mimicry an "ironic compromise," the next chapter will show how the successful adoption of European religion and colonial education produced material benefits, thereby affirming British colonial ways of being as superior to indigenous practices. This historical reality implicitly equated all that is good with Europeans and all that is bad with Africans. Consequently, when the women in the hair salon claim that the majority of white people affirm positive stereotypes about whites and vice-versa, their proclamations are weighed down with a history of colonial racialization. And even within this context, they challenge the totality of equating negativity with Africans/black people and positivity with white people by suggesting that not all whites/blacks fit these stereotypes. In a U.S. context, Greer (2013) has called the ways in which black immigrants resist narratives of white supremacy as an elevated minority discourse. This discursive move allows some people of color to distinguish themselves from the negative perceptions associated with the group to which they belong. But in order to make this distinction, they must first accept the validity of the negative stereotypes attached to their race, thereby upholding these stereotypes.

An elevated minority discourse (Greer, 2013) or what Pierre (2008) has called "cultural narratives of ethnicity" helped some of the Ghanaians with whom I spoke to distinguish themselves from a monolithic and negative American black and African subjectivity. Aside from the immigrant narrative noted above, some also suggested that hard work and industriousness were particularly Ghanaian values and something that made them different from other black/African people. Jordan, the Dallas-born Ghanaian we met in Chapter 4 attributed his success to the fact that, in his words,

> I'm Ghanaian. My parents raised me [laughs] in a Ghanaian house so they taught us to work hard and when you work hard you achieve things that you um, that you should get. You get your merits, you get your honors, you get, you're treated well for the most part when you do what you need to do.

He contrasted these values with his belief that some black people "show signs of laziness and then complain" about not having opportunities. Jordan was born in Texas to Ghanaian parents and although he had never visited Ghana before, strongly identified as a Ghanaian. Jordan's Ghanaian identity, which he understands through the Ghanaian church, informed his sense of a specifically Ghanaian work ethic. In his view, although "there are systematic things that have caused them [American blacks] to stay at the position which they have from generations," it was also "kind of a mental thing." For this young man as well as many other Ghanaians including the women in the hair salon, their relative success ("you're treated well for the most part") was proof enough that despite systemic inequalities, black people like them could be successful.

At dinner with a group of Ghanaian women, they repeated the importance of education and industriousness to Ghanaians as compared to other West Africans. One woman recalled being previously engaged to a Liberian man who in her words, "was not going anywhere in life." Although he was working on a masters' degree, nobody in his family had attended college, and from her perspective, his family did not aspire to achieve this status. This woman reported that after consulting with her grandmother, they decided that she should end the relationship because unlike Ghanaians, "Liberians do not value education." The preceding exchange portrays different layers of how Ghanaians distinguish themselves from other black people, including even other West Africans. On the one hand, there is the mindset or "mental thing" that differentiated Ghanaians from American blacks. That mindset was at times identified as lingering effects of slavery and years of oppression in the United States, which as Ghanaians, they felt did not affect their American experience. But on the other hand, as discussed in Chapter 4, many also claimed particular Ghanaian values that either distinguished them from, or emphasized their similarity to, other Africans. Paying attention to these layers of distinctions and similarities reveals a complicated landscape in which Ghanaians understand themselves as Ghanaian, West African, African, Black, and also American.

"BLACK LIKE US" BECAUSE "ALL THEY SEE IS BLACK"

A second way in which Ghanaians understood themselves to be black in the United States was through their experiences of anti-black racism. The majority of my respondents, all but seven men explained that American racism, in the words of one woman, "is no respecter of persons." Three of these men were certain that racism was over, whereas four felt that it was "getting better" as one man concluded. In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss these men's positions in detail. However, the point that racism "is no respecter of persons" articulated for many Ghanaians how, despite their claims to difference, their blackness in America exposed them to racism. Their experiences of anti-black racism explain a second way in which many in the Ghanaian community felt that "they are like us." On the one hand, some people called attention to how their "funny names" and accents produced reactions ranging from conviviality to disparagement from people. For example, Abigail, describing her experiences in predominantly white churches remarked,

> If I go to a church that's predominantly white and I talk about my background, I can see that they are uptight…But once they hear I'm African, it's like oh! They treat me better…it's like why do I have to tell you I'm African before you start smiling?

Abigail articulates what many people I spoke to in Houston experienced and believed to be true – whatever animus white Americans fostered against blacks, as Africans they were at times exempt from it.[7]

For many, one way to evade the hostility that white Americans directed at black people was to confess to being African. The need for such a confession raised alarms about the nature of anti-blackness because, making reference to police killings of black people, Hassan noted,

> Even though we may have an accent, we have a lot we've acquired and we've achieved a lot. So if an officer can get that sense from you, he might accord you some regard. That's not even a true statement all the time. You may not have enough time to prove to an officer that you're an upstanding member of society. You might be dead by then.

Hassan moved to the East Coast with his parents and siblings when he was thirteen years old. He was in his late twenties when we met in 2014 and had lived in Houston for about four years. He was a short but muscular man, standing at about 5'6. A closely trimmed haircut and a bushy beard framed his dark eyes and dark face. Hassan did not talk much but whenever he did, he commanded the room with a measured and thoughtful voice. Hassan completed his bachelors' degree and worked as in engineer on the East Coast before transferring within the company to Houston. Every time I saw him, he drove a remarkable German car. In one informal conversation, Hassan described an experience that he said helped him understand why black people buy expensive things. White people treat you better, he said, if they think you have money. Despite Hassan's success he, like many others, felt consciously aware himself as a black African man.

Although being African was sometimes perceived as beneficial in the face of anti-black racism, many people I spoke to also unequivocally expressed their awareness that this difference was not a sufficient insurance policy against racism. Furthermore, as Hassan explained, an accent was not always a positive thing. By stating that *despite* his accent he has achieved a position as an "upstanding member of society," Hassan also begins to highlight how being African could compound an already marginal experience as a black person in the United States of America.

Throughout my interviews, accents came up frequently as a visible marker of my respondents' difference. In her research on African migrants in Vancouver, Canada, Gillian Creese (Creese 2010; Creese and Kambere 2003) has shown how relations of colonialism play out in responses to what she calls "African-English." For Creese (2010, p. 303), marking someone's accent is in itself a form of racialization. She argues:

> The "foreignness" of the African accent/body is a "foreignness" to the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) of Canadians produced through centuries of colonial practices that attempted to instill White/British/English-language dominance as central parts of nation building and identity.

Amongst my interview respondents, accents were similarly a site of struggle, which amplified their otherness and affirmed others' perception of their incompetence. In this vein, several interview respondents described their accents along with being African in negative terms. Rose, introduced in Chapter Four, explained how in her experience, "they wouldn't tell you but then you can feel it, you can know it, that your accent is [inaudible] people discriminate especially if you say you're from Africa." She described how when she first arrived in Houston from Accra, a professor in a pharmacy technician class pulled her aside to find out if she could handle the material. She remembers him saying to her, "do you think you can do this? Because uh, we have a lot of big words, you know, hard concepts." This woman recalled feeling "put down, right from there…because I thought well, if this is the person that is going to teach me, you know, from the start look at what [they are saying] so then I didn't feel like going and I quit." Others reported similar experiences in which they felt their accents or their parents' accents kept them from attaining full incorporation into U.S. society.

Kwaku, an information technology professional and East Coast transplant to Houston, commenting on how he's "never going to be seen as American," explained,

> It's just the way it is. I'm never going to lose this thick accent, right? It's always going to be there so there's going be something that I will never, nobody will say, [I'm an American]. I can't claim I'm from Philadelphia.

Despite having lived in the United States for over two decades and most of his adult life, Kwaku still experienced his accent as a marker of his marginality. (See Creese, 2010 for an extended discussion on accents; see also Ndibe, 2014). But additionally, he felt that his accent and the fact of his being African barred him from attaining certain business opportunities that he had pursued. Describing a business deal that he had sought with another friend he said,

> Before you get a bite of 1%, it's not that easy, you know? It's a mature market everywhere… Especially if you're a minority as well, it's difficult. When we would go out to the hospitals, try to talk to the case managers and whatnot, seeing two black guys, two young African guys, it's not, it's not easy. This guy was a Ghanaian guy, him and I would go to the hospitals, try to talk to the case managers, ok this is a new home healthcare, we're starting to build our clientele, and it's just like the trust is not there.

Like Rose who felt diminished by her pharmacy professor, Kwaku attributed the barriers to entry in one business arena as partly a result of the fact that he and his business partner were black and African. Their names and accents marked them as such. As Showers (2015) has shown in her study of African immigrant women's experiences in the healthcare field, to be black and African in a context in which both identities are marginalized can be alienating on many levels. Showers found that the negative perceptions of Africa as inferior and backwards informed the professional lives of the women in her study by compounding possibilities for career advancement and collegiality.

Accents, which augmented the otherness of being black and African, were one way in which many people I spoke with recognized how, although they shared some similar negative experiences with other black people they also had certain marks that distinguished them and their experiences as black Africans. Creese and Kambere's (2003) discussion of the accent as a kind of border is helpful in understanding the sense of marginality that people ascribed to their accents. Positing the accent as a border, Creese and Kambere (2003) highlight the material (employment discrimination, for example) and figurative (assumption of incompetence and unbelonging) consequences of an "African accent." The accent as a border renders some people as outside of the boundaries of belonging within the nation state. Creese and Karembe's (2003) discussion focuses on how "African accents" contribute to exclusion from a white British colonial heritage in ways that Australian and New Zealand accents, for example do not. Although African accents prefigure (black) African bodies, they can also constitute a border between American blacks and African immigrants. One woman describing these distinctions in a matter-of-fact way stated:

> However you look at it, yes, the race of being black would be a strike against me; and with the fact that I'm an African with another accent will be a strike against me. Is that supposed to make me unhappy? You work with stuff that you can change. Because there's a stereotype but the same way that stereotype can work against me, at certain points in my life, that stereotype works for me.

This straightforward factual approach to the impacts of racism (what this woman discounts as mere stereotypes) must be understood in the context where sometimes being African means being seen as ignorant about racism and therefore friendlier towards white people. I discuss this point in detail in the next section, but for now, I simply want to call attention to how some people within the community understood their blackness and Africanness as occasionally reinforcing their marginality and at other times diminishing their experiences of inequality.

An overwhelming experience of anti-black racism informed how almost all the people I spoke with understood their American experience. Even as many articulated the particular ways in which being African created different experiences of racism, others also assured me that, in Mary's words,

> If they choose to discriminate against me or choose to be racist, they're not going to be racist based on 'o she's an African black girl or she's an American black girl

> or she's a Jamaican black girl. They're going to discriminate because you're black.

Or to put it more succinctly as several others did, "all they see is black." This sentiment that all they see is black was matched by others' experiences that "people just don't like [blacks]". Describing the quotidian experiences of racism in her workplace, Lisa, the doctor introduced in Chapter Four noted with frustration that, "it's difficult."

> Maybe you haven't experienced it but in the workplace, in my residency, people just don't like, like I told my boss, I just said, people don't like a loud-mouthed black woman. And people don't like a soft-mouthed black woman. People just don't like, it's difficult. It's difficult. That's just the fact, you know?

These statements, that "all they see is black" and "people just don't like [black women]" acknowledges how for many of my respondents, despite some particularities in how they experienced racism, the fact of their blackness was the first frontier in this experience. When I asked who "they" was, the answer was typically, "The whites," as one woman explained it. She continued, "Just the fact that you're black is like you're nothing, you know." Likewise, Hassan described his experiences of racism by noting how as black people, "it seems like you always have to present all your credentials…because maybe you can buy respect." Or in the words of another, "Africans are considered black. There's no differentiation when you come to America. There's no respecter of persons." Regardless of how the Ghanaians with whom I spoke distinguished themselves from other blacks, they could not escape the black/white dichotomy that structured the U.S. racial state. Their experiences of anti-black racism put them firmly in the same proverbial boat as U.S. American black people.

An important point to note at this juncture is the gendered dimensions of people's experiences of racism. In fact, as noted earlier, the most explicit claims about a postracial America came from well-to-do men who typically remarked on Barack Obama's presidency as proof of this claim. But despite the reality of the first black president of the

United States, over three-quarters of my respondents (25 people), regardless of their professions or socioeconomic class, felt the sting of anti-black racism in their experiences as Americans. In this regard, they understood themselves to be black people.

But if the experience of anti-black racism was not enough to settle the question of whether the Africans were black or something else, the experience of marking a box on government forms confirmed it. Many commented on how having to mark themselves as "African American/Black" on forms also contributed to a perception of themselves as African American/Black. Despite concerns about anti-black racism, stereotypes that confirmed that American blacks "are just like us" and a belief that all black people came from Africa, there was a latent suggestion that Africans were ignorant about the intricacies of racism. Being foreigners on someone else's land (*obi man so*) many were also not always willing to speak out against racist injustice. The next section explores how this stance and a belief in a postracial America complicated the racial identities of many in the Ghanaian community in Houston.

***OBI MAN SO*: IGNORANCE/INNOCENCE ABOUT RACISM AND POSTRACIAL AMERICA**

Despite personal experiences of and concerns about anti-black racism, a latent sentiment amongst some in the community was the idea that, although they were Americans, they were also "foreigners" or visitors, living on someone else's land, *obi man so* in Twi. This sentiment simultaneously articulated a sense of marginality, a form of resistance against racism, and a way of expressing an affective distance from U.S. American inequalities. Above, I have noted how an immigrant narrative sustains economic attainment as an important value for Ghanaians living in the United States. Similarly, this construction of foreignness was used as a way of apologizing for and valorizing whiteness while claiming ignorance about anti-black racism. Yes, all interview respondents identified as black people. Despite claiming a black identity however, a small number (7) of respondents, all but one of whom were men with white-collar employment were explicit that Barack Obama's presidency, along with their individual success, was proof that the United States is postracial or at least close to it. To these men, racism was a thing of the past and had no bearing on contemporary struggles that people experienced. This sense of a postracial United States served to locate these well-to-do men, in the words of one professor I interviewed, as "part of the system" while also maintaining their ties to myths about an Africa devoid of racial inequality. In this way, they crafted a racialized identity that placed them in a U.S. American postracial mainstream, while navigating ways to distance and protect themselves from some of the assaults of U.S. anti-black racism.

Claiming ignorance about racism or that the United States is postracial were gendered articulations. In fact, whereas slightly less than a half of all the men interviewed (7 of 16) were either ambivalent or certain about a postracial United States, women were clear that this reality had not been attained. This gendered disparity meant that although women and men were equally likely to emphasize myths about a non-racial Africa, which sustained the idea that Africans are ignorant about racism, men were more likely to use their individual success as a way to discount negative consequences of racism and claim a postracial America.

One way in which interview respondents and many in the community claimed their innocence when it came to racism was to emphasize that they held no negative views about white people. As noted above, several people expressed critical views of white racism and as DJ Jojo put it during our interview, "I know white people are racist behind doors; they will cut a black person way before a white person, but there are some good ones in there too, you know?" Criticisms of whiteness were often couched in positive statements such as the one above. And if such criticisms were not accompanied by claims that white people have a "love for God and humanity" as one person suggested, then negative comments about white racism were whispered as if one feared being caught. The ways in which people hesitated to criticize white racism in public can be traced to the fact that many in the community saw themselves as visitors in the United States. But additionally, as Pierre (2013) has argued, Africa's colonial history means that white supremacy is part of the racial landscape of African countries.

Consequently, it should come as no surprise that a community comprising a diverse group of educated, upwardly mobile Ghanaians who have lived in the United States for many years and who have experiences of and concerns about anti-black racism would still be reticent in their criticisms of white racism. This reticence can be more fully understood when we consider the historical and contemporary relationships that Ghanaians have had with white people. For example, one respondent brought up how "in Ghana we benefitted from mission schools where whites make contributions from here," referring to charities that churches and other U.S. organizations have set up in Ghana. Likewise, Paul offered extensive descriptions about his "white parents" who he said donated supplies to his primary school and helped him with his university fees.

From the perspective of a developing country where the state is disempowered with regard to making a difference in people's lives, the perceived generosity of western states (who have contributed to the state's disempowerment) makes it difficult to criticize the other negative things that one may see white people do. (See the edited collection from Abbas and Niyiragira, (2009) for a discussion of aid, colonialism, and racism in Africa.) After all, who wants to seem ungrateful when white people present themselves as saviors and indeed can make a difference in individual lives? So although as noted above, many accepted that experiences of anti-black racism in this country were just “facts you can’t change,” or as another person put it, “that’s the country we’re living in,” as Ghanaians, their relationship to whiteness was complicated by the real material benefits they gained from white charities.

The acceptance of racism as a fact of American life was compounded by the way in which many Ghanaians saw white people – as missionaries who came to help. Many also regarded themselves as ignorant of U.S. racial history and therefore hoped to be exempt from its consequences. Four interview respondents implicitly suggested that unlike black Americans who harbored resentment towards white people, Ghanaians and other Africans were innocent of such antipathy. In fact, as the quote below shows, many suggested that they treated white people in such a way as to show that they held no negative views of them. John (the erstwhile MC in Chapter Four) was one of the men who felt that the United States was close to being postracial. He told me that he held white people in very high regard.

> So first thing I knew about racism was when I came here. I never knew, because I treated every Caucasian that came to Ghana like, you know, they were somebody that has wealth of knowledge and talent and capabilities to do a lot of stuff.

In many ways, John was like Hassan. He moved to the east coast when he was eleven years old, and at twenty-seven, found himself in middle management in a large electronics company. Like Hassan, he drove a nice car and always dressed sharply often in a button-down shirt with a wax-print hat, tie, or bow-tie. Unlike Hassan however, John felt that treating white people as if they were inherently knowledgeable and capable of doing all things was a sure sign that he did not have any racist views. On this point, Pierre’s (2013) discussion of the structural position if whiteness in postcolonial is Ghana is relevant. Arguing that through colonialism, whites came “to occupy a privileged position in the racial consciousness of local communities," Pierre (2013, p. 75) shows how the racialized consequences of colonialism have long lasting effects on Ghanaians' racial sense. This perception of whiteness must be understood from the context in which Ghanaians become black. Europeans arrived on the Gold Coast as colonizers who offered conformity to their way of life as a passport to material resources including colonial education and commerce. Assessing how Ghanaians become black helps to make sense of why so many of my respondents perceive whiteness in a primarily positive light. The Nigerian afrobeat artist Fela Kuti famously lyricized this perspective as "colo-mentality," referring to an internalization of European superiority. Fela sings,

He be say you be colonial man
You don be slave man before
Them don release you now
But you never release yourself
…
The thing wey black no good
Na foreign things them dey like
No be so?

Colonial mentality produces not only a distancing from indigenous ways, but also an admiration for the colonizer and their culture (see Utsey et al, 2014). John found white people to possesses "a wealth of knowledge and talent." He continued by noting that although some people hold prejudices, there is no racism per se. Furthermore, in his opinion, "everybody experiences racism. Even Caucasians experience racism." When asked to give an example of how white people experience racism, the response was that, "growing up in Ghana, we don't see color" but view all white people as talented.

Several people contrasted the claim that "in Ghana we don't see color" with experiences of white people receiving better service and business deals than Ghanaians at different establishments. For example, Kwaku, who earlier described the difficulty of getting a business deal in the United States conceded, "even sometimes when you go back home you deal with the same thing too." He continued,

> I mean when you go to Ghana and if I want a contract with the government and I show up with a white guy, there's a possibility that I will get that contract because they assume the white guy is involved so there's going to be more money.

As the quote above indicates, a belief in the inherent goodness, wealth, knowledge and superiority of whites to blacks negatively affected black people in Ghana as well as in the United States. Despite people's best efforts to deny that Ghana is colorblind, the special way in which many perceived white people belied this claim. The special way in which many viewed white people could be seen in the offhand comments made about how well white people organized events, the sincere belief that white people were charitable in a way that blacks and other Africans were not, and the way in which people apologized and made excuses for white racism. Such comments and reactions to white racism sustained claims by some that as Africans, they were innocent about racism and therefore should be exempt from U.S. anti-black racism. Following Wright's (2015) thinking about the different ways in which different people become black allows us to make sense of the claims that some Ghanaians in Houston made about being on *obi man so*, their apologies about white racism, and their belief in "postracial America."

Living on "obi man so" in the time of Black Lives Matter

During the time of my fieldwork, Sandra Bland, an alumna of Prairie View A&M University was involved in a traffic stop that resulted in her arrest and subsequent death. Bland video recorded and narrated her interaction with the police officer. The recording, which showed the officer using physical force and aggressive language became further evidence in a long list showing police aggression and violence towards black people. In about half my interviews, respondents brought up Sandra Bland's arrest and death as one example of anti-black racism in the United States. But likewise, this video interaction was used as a way of explaining how Africans and American blacks responded differently to oppression from white people. A few people mentioned Bland's responses to the police officer as proof that black Americans were holding on to a grudge and were equally responsible for deadly interactions with the police. Others saw Bland's "tone" as evidence of black American aggressiveness.

Irene, a resident of Houston for over forty years noted that African Americans were probably "very bitter, don't you think?" When asked to expand on this diagnosis, she explained, pausing frequently as she strung her thoughts together,

> Because they think, not that they think, they've been through a lot. They've had to fight for everything and [pause] maybe we come from a place where, I don't know, [long pause] I feel we can [pause] the African like me cannot, not not relate but we don't feel the same way they feel about it. I mean we empathize and we know that these things are there; racism is there, because we face it all the time, yes we do. But um, I guess they've been here in America longer and they've seen all the struggles that have gone on so, and besides I think sometimes we are, maybe afraid or not um, willing to voice exactly how we feel so it's um, we are very supportive of them, at least I am, I know I am and I try to put myself in the place of the black American, which now I am a black American [laughs].

Although having lived in the United States for nearly forty years, Irene articulates an understanding of U.S. racism as something that she experiences as partly from a distance. Although she acknowledges that as Africans, "we face [racism] all the time," she also suggests a hierarchy of racism in which American blacks can be bitter because they have been in the thick of it, fighting against anti-black racism right from the start. Finally, for Irene, there is also a hesitation on the part of Africans to speak out against racism. Many others repeated the idea that an African would try to avoid creating "problems" by speaking out in such a situation.

Comparing Africans to American blacks, Hassan noted,

> I think some officers also know or feel that Africans are more or can be timid and in our timidity we come off as respectful…But those of us, those that were born, bred here, tend to want to claim their rights so they are more mouthy, like you know, the officer asks you to show your ID and then asks the other person to show their ID. Now first of all, that's wrong but an African fresh off the boat will just, you know, *fa ma nu* [give it to them] but you know, an African American will say no.

Or as another explained, referring to the video of Sandra Bland,

> I'm not saying what the police did was [right], because you stop her just for traffic offense. Then she died but the thing is I know my black sisters. If you stop them or anything they will start giving you the 'what the fuck did you think?' and they won't take it, you know?

Likewise another noted,

> I know that sometimes in a way, I [laughs] when people say that blacks can be, sometimes we're aggressive in a way but um, and I think an African's perspective might be very different from an African American. They way African Americans see things because of what they've experienced is very different from us Africans. We're very passive, like if a cop stops me and even gets me pissed of, I will not retaliate or do anything. An African American, 'I know my rights,' like don't do this, you know. And some of them have, it's always like white's are racist, whites are racist, and I feel like sometimes that causes problems.

As the quotes above indicate, a number of people contrasted a timid African response to unfair treatment especially from authority such as the police with what they perceived to be "mouthy" black American response. Underlying this assessment of aggressive American blacks versus passive Africans is a pressing concern for the negative and potentially deadly consequences that emerge as the result of a police encounter, for example.

The way in which some explained the differences in response was by pointing to black Americans long history of oppression – "they've had to fight for everything." Conversely, as Africans, they found themselves visitors in the United States, living in someone else's land. Despite being subjected to many similar forms of oppression, for some, their status as visitors meant that to their minds, the same rights that American blacks appealed to in such interactions did not always pertain to them. Furthermore, the way in which Ghanaians have experienced whiteness produced a different response to these inequalities. Ghanaians' experiences of whiteness and the impulse to explain away white racism highlight the economic inequalities that colonialism and U.S. hegemony has created and how these inform racialized identities as well. The where and when of Ghanaian blackness produces a response to anti-black racism that when interpolated through a middle-passage epistemology locates them as in cahoots with white supremacy and against black Americans. However, from a perspective that takes into consideration the history and present of Ghanaians and other Africans, whether living on the continent or as immigrants in the West, the history of colonialism and the realities of underdevelopment help to make sense of these responses.

Finally, being visitors who claimed to be unfamiliar with a history of anti-black oppression allowed many people to distance themselves from the overwhelmingly negative emotions that racism produced. A minority of people, three men, argued that American blacks "are always dwelling on the slavery thing" as one man saw it. However, for the most part, many suggested that American blacks are justified in being bitter about this country's racist climate and history. For example, one woman discussing the emotional reactions to the police killing of Michael Brown in August 2014 noted, "when you look at the history of the black race in this country, they were not brought here to prosper." Instead she saw the current protests following Michael Brown's murder and subsequent Black Lives Matter demonstrations as part of a long trajectory of black oppression in the United States.

> When you are bitter you'll be angry. When you are angry you're capable of doing anything. Whatever happened when we lost Michael Brown, whatever happened after that was as a result of anger. And when you look at the history of the black race in this country, they were not brought here to prosper. After slavery they were supposed to continue to be in bondage. I listened to Louis Farrakhan, he mentioned something about being in slavery for 300 and something years, and then after slavery they were also, you were a free person but you're a free slave. Continue to serve for 150 years… So they are justified being angry. But the anger too doesn't solve any problems. It makes you bitter; it makes you active; it can destroy you; it can destroy others.

This woman empathized with the oppressive history of black people in America but also she simultaneously distinguished herself from and aligned herself with black suffering. For example, she identified Michael Brown's murder by saying "we lost Michael Brown" but distanced herself from the historical suffering of American blacks that, in her view, produces anger and bitterness by noting, "they are justified" in their anger. The position articulated above is illustrative of the stance that many in the community espoused, which is that although aligning themselves with many of the issues that black people in America faced, they also distinguished their affective response to these forms of oppression. A perceived difference in how black immigrants and American blacks reacted to racial inequality resulted in a "different mindset" because Ghanaians, as Kobby explained, have not "suffered any oppression."

An important way of understanding the different affective responses to anti-black racism in the United States by immigrant blacks is to consider that as immigrants, many of the Ghanaians in Houston came to the United States with an express intention to take advantage of the opportunities available here. Consequently, the ways in which they felt disparaged and diminished because they were black were overshadowed by their experience that, in the words of several interview respondents, "America has been good to us." Lisa, a medical doctor who had lived in Houston for over twenty years frankly explained her experiences as a U.S. American as follows:

> Well I think that, first of all, I'm always very grateful that I had this opportunity to come here and live here. That's one thing I won't diss because I think that it's opened up, it's been hard for me. There've been a lot of biases and all that but at the end of the day it's been very rewarding.

Similarly Nina, a biomedical researcher and East Coast transplant to Houston, contrasted living in the United States to Ghana by reflecting on her economic position and the opportunities she felt were available to her in this country. She explained,

> I feel like if I was living back in Ghana, I probably wouldn't get those types of opportunities, like go to school, further my education, even jobs. Because there are people who graduate from back home and can't find jobs, so definitely, I like that about America.

Likewise, Kwaku saw the United States as a place where hard work is reward and said he felt like here he had "options."

> I mean, I think it's the number one thing, really having options to be; I have friends that are way smarter than me in Ghana and everything, went to school, got all their degrees, and still not, you know, probably living at home in their parents house. So that option to move up wherever it is; say this is who I want to be. But in Ghana you can set a goal but if you don't have the help from other people it's always impossible to attain. Over here I can say this is where I want to get to and so long as I'm willing to put in the work, I can get it. So that part of it [inaudible] I'm proud that if you put in the work, you're going to be alright.

For many, including the speakers above, the opportunities that living in the United States presented for them and their families potentially discounted any other negative experiences. Likewise, when they looked to Ghana and compared their lives in the United States with what they imagined it could be like in Ghana, they unequivocally felt that life in the United States was much better. The opportunities available to many in the United States is in part because those opportunities are not available to people in Ghana.

However, this point is unimportant to the people whose material realities have been improved by their move to the United States.

The relative success of many in the community in Houston (Chapter 3) also meant that some men discounted claims that systemic inequalities held black people back. In James' words,

> If Barack Obama can be the president of America, that means black life matters. You know? Like I will not come from Africa with this thick accent, you know, even sometimes when I'm speaking they don't understand me. But yet they will make me the senior design engineer at [firm]. Like 99 or 95% of them are white people. Why would they hire somebody like me?

By pointing to his personal success and well-being, James attempted to diminish claims of systemic inequalities that affect black people. When he mentioned his "thick accent" he also implicitly challenged any Africans who might argue that their potential is limited because they have accents. For him, his acceptance into a majority white firm coupled with his upward mobility in that firm was enough to discount protests against anti-black racism.

Individual success and the community's middle-class aspirations sustained a belief in "postracial America." Even as many in the United States were proclaiming that "Black Lives Matter" to call attention to the ways in which black people disproportionately experienced incidents of police brutality and institutional discrimination, others could not help but point to the ways in which they felt exempt from these issues to denounce the validity of this particular anti-racist protest.

In some ways, although these men saw themselves as black (except one discussed below), their blackness was different from dominant ways of understanding black identities in the United States. Consequently, one way in which they could affirm their identities was to latch on to popular sentiments about "postracial America." Although many acknowledged how racism impacted their lives, they also knew that the concerns of an imagined monolithic black America were not by default their concerns. Instead, Ofori, a university professor explained his racial identity to me noting,

> Well, I don't want to say, in a way [I see myself] as an African living in America. But I don't want to put too much emphasis or too much weight on that. Mostly, I see myself as, you know, being part of the system…I've always dealt with white folks. And so it got to a point where I really didn't think much about being African or Ghanaian, I saw myself as being part of a system, part of the American system.

Ofori's perception of himself as part of an American system emphasizes an identity that bypasses but does not completely discount race. In a way, seeing himself as an African living in America, he can become part of the American system because of an African colonial history that included black people within the colonial system. Unlike American blackness, which was constituted as what Wright (2004) describes as outsider-within, African black identities emerged out of a colonial system that sought ways to incorporate some black people into the system. The discourse most readily available to make sense of the experiences of Africans who expect to be and eventually become incorporated into a U.S. American system is the discourse of postracial America. However, rethinking how African blackness happens offers a new way of understanding African immigrant racial politics in the United States. Their concerns about racism belie any claims that they think the United States is postracial. Likewise, these same concerns challenge their claims that they are ignorant about racism whether here or in Ghana. These discrepancies ask us to come up with a different way for understanding African immigrant racial identities in the United States.

CONCLUSION

This chapter began with an epigraph from a woman trying to articulate her identity as African and black American, as someone who lives in a society that sees her as inferior. The struggle to self-identify in a context where there is only one right way to identify is part of what characterizes the racial identities of many of the Ghanaians who shared their stories with me. In this conclusion, I offer an alternate approach to making sense of African immigrant racial identities in a U.S. context. First, as the Ghanaians in Houston made clear, they see themselves as black and have sympathy for and concerns about anti-black racism. Secondly, despite these concerns, many still consider their black identities to be different from U.S. black identities. Finally, many indicated their belief in a non-racialized Africa and postracial U.S. America. Here I want to consider how these seemingly disparate concerns reflect the when and how of the community's black identities, and also show the heterogeneity of blackness in ways that make room for diverse experiences. This discussion leads back to the concerns about diversity articulated by many in the community and that began this chapter.

On the one hand, scholars (Omi and Winant, 2015) have pointed to how racial formations shape racial identities in the United States. Their theorizing offer important ways of thinking about the particular U.S. context that produces black, white, Latinx, Asian-American, and other racialized identities. Understanding the United States as a racial state also helps to make sense of why U.S. black identities are clumped into a homogenous monolith. Papering over the particular identities and differences amongst black people simplifies the racial states' discriminatory mechanisms. The ways in which black people come to be black people in the United States is specific – to repeat an earlier respondent's words, "the black race in this country, they were not brought here to prosper." The historical context that produces U.S. black identities is not the same context that produces African black identities. However, upon arrival to the United States, black Africans must navigate this racial landscape. Yet, as I have argued, Africans do not appear in the United States without a history of their own. However, to read immigration texts about black immigrants (including Greer 2013; Vickerman, 1999; Waters 1994, 2009) is to read little of their racial histories – those same histories that inform their present identities and experiences of U.S. racialization.

Although Treitler (2013) offers a critical indictment of how U.S. Americans are all implicated in sustaining a racial hierarchy, there is little room in her theorizing to consider what shapes these black immigrants' racial identities beyond the U.S. context in which they find themselves. So what is the history that shapes black immigrants' racial identities? Pierre's (2008, 2013) theorizing on racial politics in colonial Gold Coast and postcolonial Ghana provides an answer to this question. From a postcolonial perspective, Pierre's theorizing reveals how racialization occurs in an African context. The racialized dynamics that emerge through colonialism, the ways in which whiteness is valorized in the colonial context, and the ways in which Africans come to know themselves as black all challenge any claims that "we don't have race in Africa."

Although Pierre's focus on racialization is productive in understanding the relational processes through which Africans are racialized as black, this focus offers little insight into African blackness. Examples of how colonial officers deputized some Ghanaians to sustain the power of the colony illustrate how these black people became white-adjacent, but say little of their black identities. As such, although Pierre's analysis notes how racialization processes in colonial and postcolonial Ghana positioned white people and whiteness as superior to the indigenous population, we only get a small glimmer into the racial identities of this population. Specifically, we learn that they value whiteness and navigate a complicated relationship with indigenous practices. Despite the presence of Jim Crow style segregation in colonial Ghana, the racial formation of privileged Africans occurred through their access to western education and religion. Becoming Anglicized, they had different kinds of relationships with white colonial officers. Pierre finds race in Africa and provides concrete insights into how Africans are racialized as black. In the pages below, I fill in the content of this blackness by discussing how Ghanaian blackness comes into conversation with U.S. blackness in order to provide a more complete understanding of black African immigrants' racial identities. Building from Pierre, I show how the fact that in Ghana some black people can become *obruni* is part of the racial history that they bring to the United States as immigrants (see Appiah (1992), Chapter 1). This privileged existence, acquired through proximity to whiteness also offers a different orientation to whiteness without discounting the racial inequalities of anti-black racism.

Understanding the historical racial formation of Ghanaians and how it differs from racial formations in the United States provides a more complete lens through which to consider what Treitler (2013) calls the failed ethnic projects of black Americans and black immigrants. Wright's (2015) physics of blackness offers a way to make sense of the diversity of black experiences and identities. This perspective eschews blackness as a monolithic collective identity to find those people whose narratives do not fit onto the linear timeline of the middle-passage epistemology. Within Wright's theorizing, we can begin to consider how the racialization that occurred in the colonized Gold Coast shaped the consciousness of contemporary Ghanaians. Likewise, we can see how geopolitical relations in which European and U.S. American economic forces impose structural adjustment programs while at the same time sending charity to Ghanaians might inform a particular black identity and relationship to whiteness. These realities are part of the history that Ghanaian immigrants bring to the United States and pass on to their children.

Importantly, these realities produce a collective sense of self as black vis-à-vis whiteness as savior/colonizer/harbinger of modernity. It is at this juncture that I diverge from Wright's (2015) assessment of when and how people become black. In Wright's (2015, p. 154) theorizing, finding black identities beyond a middle passage epistemology means starting with the individual. In this way, her assessment of how black identities emerge is limited to individual experiences and does not account for how social forces weigh in on these experiences. By contrast, I highlight how a Ghanaian black identity, for example, is produced as a result of post/colonial relationships with different communities. This collective black identity is forged in different fires from the black identities of U.S. and other diaspora blacks and consequently, experiences and responds differently to forces of white supremacy, racial and class inequality, heterosexism, and homophobia. Nonetheless, that Ghanaians and other Africans have a collective black identity cannot be dismissed.

Understanding that Ghanaians are black in ways that do not match up with U.S. racial identities and furthermore, recognizing how once they arrive in the United States, their black identities become compounded by U.S. racial hierarchies and relationships helps to make sense of the importance of diversity to people in this community. The individuals with whom I spoke liked diversity because it affirmed different aspects of their experiences. As immigrants, they felt connections with other immigrants who came to the United States in pursuit of economic comforts and opportunities. As black people, they understood and felt the sting of anti-black racism. They empathized with the trauma of police killings of black people and celebrated with black America when Barack Obama was elected. As Africans, they had particular experiences and concerns that they could share with other African immigrants in their new city. Importantly, all of these standpoints cut across gender, class, and (hetero)sexuality. Living in a city like Houston, where they could find other collectives who related to the different aspects of their identities contributed to how much people liked Houston. The city's diversity affirmed individual's and the community's sense belonging to multiple collectives in ways that did not discount any aspect of their identities.

In a context where so many different ways of belonging can be affirmed, logics of postracial America seem plausible. After all, if a Ghanaian-American living in Houston, Texas feels that she can advance in her career, have intimate and genuine relationships the different people around her, and also be accepted as a black person in the ways that are meaningful to her, then surely, the United States is postracial. This sense of belonging is one aspect of the community's Afropolitan projects. Individuals, and the community more generally, articulate a racial identity that simultaneously emphasizes blackness whilst affirming connections with other collectives. The nuances of this racialized identity reveals the ways in which Afropolitan projects emphasize ties with other others.

In the next chapter, I illustrate the Christian America Afropolitan Project, which examines how the Ghanaian community in Houston portrays a particular African identity that intersects with conceptions of the United States as a Christian nation founded on Judeo-Christian principles. The Christian America Afropolitan Project is not without contest, and can advance or challenge different political perspectives that people in the community espouse.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

[1] Goldberg argues that despite Omi and Winant's discussion of how the United States is centrally implicated in racial definition, they theorize the state as analytically distinct from race. My point of departure in this regard is to frame my argument around Goldberg's racial state, which posits the state as already racialized and race as part of state-making processes. My discussion of racial formation and racial projects therefore, proceeds from this understanding.

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[2] Ellen Wu's (2015) *The Color of Success* discusses how Asians in America (in particular Japanese and Chinese Americans) went from being a "yellow peril" to becoming a model-minority. Wu's analysis challenges the myth of uncontested Asian-American success and assimilation by showing the diversity within this population and the various economic, racial, and political struggles and successes they experience.

[3] Tom Devriendt (2011) and Elliot Ross (2014) at the online blog *Africa Is A Country* created a meme showing the alarming similarity amongst book covers from African authors. This meme emerged after someone tweeted a collage of book covers showing the acacia tree, the orange sunset, and the occasional gazelle or elephant. Such popular cultural critiques remind us that popular western imagination of Africa (these books are often published by western presses) remains deeply entrenched as tribal jungles.

[4] This claim that we are asking race to do too much is a strawman argument. It ignores the nuanced and precise ways in which racial theorists have thought about race.

[5] Several scholars repeat the claim that there is no race in Africa in various ways. For example, K. Wright (2016), in a discussion of how Stuart Hall's theorizing can facilitate a critical examination of African blackness (which he admits Hall himself only marginally addresses Africa), argues again and again that "the absence of a direct, dominant white gaze renders race as phenotype and racial politics largely inconsequential" or "…Africans, even those located in sub-Saharan, postcolonial 'Black Africa', are not particular black nor particularly African [until they leave the continent]" (p. 88) or elsewhere, "black Africans are not black at home" (p. 92). Although K. Wright's goal is to complicate continental blackness by showing the ways in which Africa is also a diasporic space informed by hybridity and a process of transcontinental and transoceanic dialogues, by insisting on the absence of racialization within the continent, his conclusions leave us with a black African identity that can only be made possible once an African leaves the continent. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, and drawing on Pierre (2013) and M. Wright (2015), these arguments include a refusal to engage critically with the ways in which colonialism and global white supremacy inform black/African identities. For a more extended critique of how race is imbued into the social fabric of African societies, see Pierre ((2008) and (2013, p. 206 – 209)).

[6] Although Tommie Shelby's (2005) *We Who Are Dark* makes important claims about black political solidarity which challenges an overly homogenous conception of blackness (vis-à-vis black nationalism), I find Wright (2004, 2015) and Weheliye (2014) discussions of blackness more productive given how they intentionally include an intersectional discussion of race, gender, class and sexuality, all of which challenge homogenizing discourses of solidarity, while making room for a revolutionary politics that moves beyond static notions of racial identities.

[7] On this point, Zeleza (2009, p. 44) writes, "It is not a secret that sometimes university committees prefer to hire African immigrants to fulfill affirmative action mandates and thus to save themselves from combative race relations with African Americans, among whom memories of racial terror and bigotry are deeply ingrained." While descriptively

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accurate, the flaw in Zeleza's analysis here lies in his inability to examine what it might mean for other black people to take on this position of the so-called "happy darky" even as they are exposed to anti-black sentiments.

Chapter Six. The Christian America Afropolitan Project

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, a Gallup poll found that 96% of Ghanaians report being religious. Christians make up 71% of this number. In the capital city of Accra, this Christianity is evident in barbershops sporting banners announcing “Holy Ghost Razors”, mini-buses emblazoned with signs of the cross and a bible verse. Despite Christianity’s hegemonic grip on Ghana’s national imagination, contemporary voices are emerging to challenge this dynamic. For example, Brooklyn-based artist Azizaa in collaboration with the self-proclaimed Afro-gypsy, Wanlov the Kubolor released a music video in 2015, titled “Black magic woman.” The video serves as an explication of a wariness and fear that many Ghanaian Christians hold towards traditional religions (Amanor 2004; Gifford 2004; Meyer 1999).

In the video’s opening scenes, two young men walk up to a woman in a patterned shirt. Her natural hair, which is dyed red, is pulled into a bun on top of her head. She is talking on the phone. The men, dressed in black trousers and white button-down shirts introduce themselves as Evangelist Sammy and Prophet Paul. They carry bibles in their hands. They tell this woman, who they call sister, that they have been sent from God to “deliver her from spirits.” One of the men grabs her shoulder. She removes his hand and tells him not to touch her. In the next forty-five seconds, the evangelist and prophet place their hands on her stomach, around her thigh, and on her lower back. Finally she runs away into a clearing in the jungle where the artist Azizaa sits on a wooden throne flanked by a dwarf adorned with white paint patterns on his face playing an *agbadza* drum.[1] Azizaa herself is dressed in all black, wearing black lipstick, a septum piercing in her nose and lower lip. Her black hair is threaded into horns high above her head. The evangelist and prophet, who chased after the woman into the jungle, cower when they see Azizaa.

Christianity came to Ghana in the 15th century when Roman Catholic missionaries accompanying Portuguese traders arrived in Elmina on the western shores of what is now Ghana (Amanor 2004). Religion scholars have argued that missionaries spread Christianity in the colonial Gold Coast and present day Ghana by attempting to transform the societies in which they proselytized, and encouraging individuals to denigrate their way of life in favor of a Western Christian identity (Amanor 2004; Meyer 1998, 1999, 2012). Azizaa's song and music video, which critiques Christianity's dominance in Ghana as well as its colonial overtones, reflects a small but emerging popular criticism of Christianity and the fears attached to traditional religions in Ghana (Durosomo 2015; Gomez 2015; Kabir 2015; Lebrave 2015). Additionally, the music video offers a feminist response to the abusive heteropatriachal practices that many Christian leaders visit upon their women congregants (Kabir 2015; Soothill, 2007). In an interview with the music magazine *The FADER*, Azizaa and Wanlov share their critiques of Christianity as a colonial imposition and a "very safe choice" for Ghanaians (Lebrave 2015). Through their music, which speaks not only to the local Ghanaian context but also across West Africa and the oceans, these artists along with a number of others including FOKN Bois and Blitz the Ambassador, are bringing to the fore a conversation that challenges an easy equation of being Christian and being Ghanaian, being Christian and being "educated."

This chapter explores the role that being a Christian plays in the Ghanaian community in Houston. In any given community of Ghanaians in the United States, one can expect to find at least one, if not several, Pentecostal churches serving the community (Baffoe 2013; Mensah, 2009; Olupona and Gemignani, 2007). Appendix B includes a list of churches in the Ghanaian community in Houston. And while churches play an important role in providing a space for worship, as in Ghana, Ghanaians in the United States do not confine their Christianity to the pews. Relying on my ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews, I argue that within the Ghanaian community in Houston, being a Christian is one node of a broader Afropolitan project that posits the community as modern global citizens who are both Ghanaian and American. The fact of being in the U.S. Bible Belt and more specifically in Houston, Texas, which is home to a sizeable number of evangelical churches, also means that the community's Pentecostalism finds a welcoming home in their city. Additionally, being a Christian is a way of belonging in the community, as opposed to being atheist or practicing some other religion. As such, being a Christian is one way in which the community symbolically constructs its boundaries at the same time that it expands towards an imagined community of other Christians, in particular, "Christian America" (Anderson 2006; Cohen 1985/2013; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Straughn and Feld 2010). "Christian America" refers to a belief that the United States is a Christian nation founded on Judeo-Christian principles (see Straughn and Feld 2010; Smith 2000). Christian America constructs an imagined community that sustains a particular political class in the United States by supporting public policy decisions based on so-called religious freedoms.

The following analysis begins with a brief overview of Christianity in Ghana, discussing both its historical and contemporary developments. The meanings of being a Christian in Ghana are not the same as in Houston. However, there are important connections that the community in Houston has to Ghana, even as there are key distinctions. I will outline these similarities and differences below and show why contextualizing Christianity in Ghana is important for understanding the role of being a Christian in the Ghanaian community in Houston. Next, through my ethnographic investigation, I illustrate how being a Christian matters in this Ghanaian community. The ethnographic narrative leads into a discussion of why being a Christian matters in this community by returning to the ties between Christianity, modernity, colonization, and the U.S. political landscape. The chapter concludes by explaining how being a Christian relates to the community's Afropolitan project of presenting a modern non-victimized African self in conversation with other modern selves.

COLONIALISM, MODERNITY, AND CHRISTIANITY IN GHANA

The three Cs of colonialism, Christianity, commerce, civilization helped sustain a contemporary normative assumption that to be a modern educated and potentially successful Ghanaian is to be Christian (Gifford, 2004; Meyer 2012; Nkomazana 1998). The equation of Christianity with national belonging is sustained by a conception of the nation as a family. McClintock (1997) has argued that the rhetoric of the nation as a family is undergirded by an idea of the nuclear and extended family as atavistic. Within this conceptual framework, the extended Ghanaian family in particular is a site where, if not careful, one can easily slide back into uncivilized spiritual practices. For example, when Christianity first arrived in the mid-to-late 1800s in my family's village in the Eastern Region of Ghana, those who converted began to live apart from the people who sustained their ancestral Gods.[2] Early in 2016, in one of our telephone conversations over WhatsApp my mother explained how our matrilineal ancestors were split into two camps as a result of the colonizing mission. She suggested that her grandmother's marriage to a Western educated Christian man is a cause of her descendants' access to book learning. On the other hand, my great-aunt's family stayed with the old Gods and only in recent times began converting to Christianity. As a result, this side of my family was also slow to achieve formal education. When I visited the village as a child, I learned to view the practice of ancestor worship as backwards and uneducated (see also Meyer, 1999; Thomas, 2015).

The divide that Christianity instigated between the Ghanaian extended family was not merely one of religious difference but also a binary distinction between success and failure, access to colonial education and ignorance. Christian missionaries' conquest amounted to an almost complete annihilation of the diverse ways of life, including ways of knowing and being in the world, of the colonized peoples. By seeking to control the people's spiritual life, colonizers ensured that the desires and spiritual needs, sacred memories, and connectedness were destroyed (Alexander 2005; Anzaldúa 1999 [1987]; Mignolo 2011; Smith 2005). The consequences of Christian missionaries in Ghana remain today. Research about religion in Ghana, in particular Pentecostalism reveals a disturbing tendency to equate Christianity with success, modernity, and national belonging (Gifford 1998; Meyer 1999). This relationship between Christianity, national belonging, and modernity also marks Muslims, who make up about 16 percent of the population and other religious practitioners as marginal. I will expand on this point below but first, I outline a framework for understanding the relationship between Christianity, European colonialism, and modernity with a focus on Ghana.

The relationship between European colonialism and modernity is an intimate one, with some scholars pointing to colonialism as "the darker side" of modernity (Bhambra 2007; Go 2009; Magubane 2004; Mignolo 2011). This characterization of colonialism calls attention to the idea that what is considered modern is impossible without colonialism. As Gurminder Bhambra (2007) argues in *Rethinking Modernity*, instead of considering Europe as spontaneously generating something called modernity, it is important to recognize the ways in which European colonial exploits produced modernity as a unique possession of the west (see also Blaut 1993). This normative understanding of modernity as uniquely western and progressive disconnects the colonial processes and historical narratives that produced it as such.

Just as modernity is undergirded by a European colonial history, it was advanced "under the banner of the Christian mission" (Mignolo 2011, p. 6). European colonial exploits were also Christian missions, funded by the Catholic Church and other protestant denominations. For example, in *Islamophobia and the politics of Empire*, Deepa Kumar (2012, Chapter 1) offers a history of how Catholic and Christian Empires expanded across Europe and the Middle East in the so-called Holy Wars. Bhambra (2007, specifically Chapter 4) also expands on the idea that Europe imagined itself as a culturally homogenous Christian space. Similarly, recalling that the Catholic Church through Queen Isabella I of Spain and King John II of Portugal helped to fund the imperialist journeys of, amongst others, Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama respectively helps to highlight the ties between Christianity and European colonialism.

The relationship between Christianity and colonialism/modernity also informs norms around race, class, and sexuality. With regard to racialization, for example, Pierre (2013) argues that so-called ethnic differences subsumed the racialized relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. This process produced some "natives" as more civilized than others, a perception that was justified through claims to cultural difference and superiority. For example in Ghana, the translation of the bible from English into the Akuapem (Twi) language facilitated the formation of a superior Akuapem identity where there may not have been one before (Dankwa, 2005; Hauser-Renner, 2009). This translation was part of the efforts of Basel (German) missions, which located their educational centers in the Akuapem Hills in the Eastern Region of Ghana and thus provided large numbers of Akuapem converts with colonial education (Middleton 1983).[3] This history of the Akuapem, including access to colonial education along with a written and printed language not only contributes to a sense of cultural superiority but also shows how European colonial Christian missions shape one aspect of racial and class-consciousness in Ghana. Likewise, Christian beliefs about sexuality were imposed on the local landscape in different ways. For example, the church legislated heterosexual marriages and nullified marriage between a Christian and non-convert and imagined indigenous sexualities as aberrant and excessive (see Alexander 2005, Chapter 5; Wright 2015, p. 130).

Above, I have provided a framework for understanding the intimate ties between colonialism/modernity and Christianity. I now turn to a discussion of how being Ghanaian is implicitly equated with being a Christian.

BEING CHRISTIAN, BEING GHANAIAN

Christianity in Ghana was spread through missionaries from Western Europe, including Portugal, Germany, and Britain, as part of a colonial project. Consequently, people who took up the faith (whether exclusively or in conjunction with their indigenous religions) also learned how to read and write English (Berman, 1974; Koonar 2014). But additionally, being a Christian meant being "a successful modern person" (Gifford 2004; Meyer 2012, p. 102). This construction of Christianity thus meant that the nation itself emerged through the struggle between Christianity (as modernity) and tradition. As scholars (Mamdani 1999; Pierre 2013) have argued, traditional or native practices have historically legitimized colonial rule by transferring power to indigenous institutions. For example, during national celebrations such as Ghana's Independence Day, a priest pours libation to acknowledge the country's history. Pierre (2013, p. 15) has suggested that on the one hand, such a performance establishes "the legitimacy of rule through" the incorporation of what the British colonial officers considered the organic institutions of the indigenous population. On the other hand, such performances were also "the first front in the fight against colonial rule" because it made local terms available to the colonized population to reject this same native/traditional imposition (Pierre 2013, p. 20). This tension helps to explain a contention that remains amongst Ghanaian Christians about what they see as backward, uncivilized, evil, yet powerful practices of traditional religions (Adamo, 2011; Gifford, 2004; Meyer 1999).

The colonial underpinnings of Christianity in Ghana produced a belief that to belong as a Ghanaian is to be Christian. This point is especially illustrated by the fact that for years following Ghana's independence, Muslims were engaged in a struggle for citizenship within the new nation (Kobo 2010). In fact, if Kobo's (2010) examination of citizenship in Ghana is taken to its logical conclusion, Muslims were never meant to be a part of the Ghanaian nation. Kobo (2010, p. 69) discusses threats by then presidential candidate Nana Akuffo-Addo to deport residents of *zongo* (ghettoized neighborhoods which house large numbers of Muslims considered to be immigrants to Ghana), if his party won the elections in 1996.[4] Kobo examines the ways in which the Ghanaian state passed laws that denied *zongo* residents the right to citizenship regardless of their length of stay in the country, only including these Muslims into politics when any given political party had something to gain. These political maneuverings simultaneously include and exclude Muslims in Ghana.

Muslims make up about 16% of Ghana's population (Pew Research Center 2009) and about 1% of the population of the United States according to a Pew Research Center report (Mohammed 2016). In Ghana, the Coalition of Muslim Organizations often contest reports of how many Muslims live in the country, claiming that these numbers are intentionally deflated and should be as high as 30% of the population (Mahdi 2013; Safo 2002). Despite the remarkable difference in numbers, in both countries, Muslims are relegated to the margins of society. In the United States for one, the backlash against President Barack Obama was not only racist in nature, but also Islamophobic (Browne and Carrington, 2012; Carrington, 2009; Giardina, 2010). For example, in July 2008, *The New Yorker Magazine* published a cover featuring an animated drawing of Barack Obama in long robes and a *kufi* (a prayer cap worn by Muslims) fist bumping Michelle Obama, dressed in military fatigues and sporting an afro, with an AK47 slung over her shoulder. In the right of the cartoon was a fireplace, in which the U.S. flag burned. Looking down on the scene was a portrait of Osama bin Laden (See Figure 3). This image illustrated the racist, Islamophobic discourses that surrounded the Obamas and the ways in which black and Muslim (and black Muslim) people can sometimes come to represent an assault on the U.S. nation (Kumar 2012; Mamdani 2004; Puar 2007).

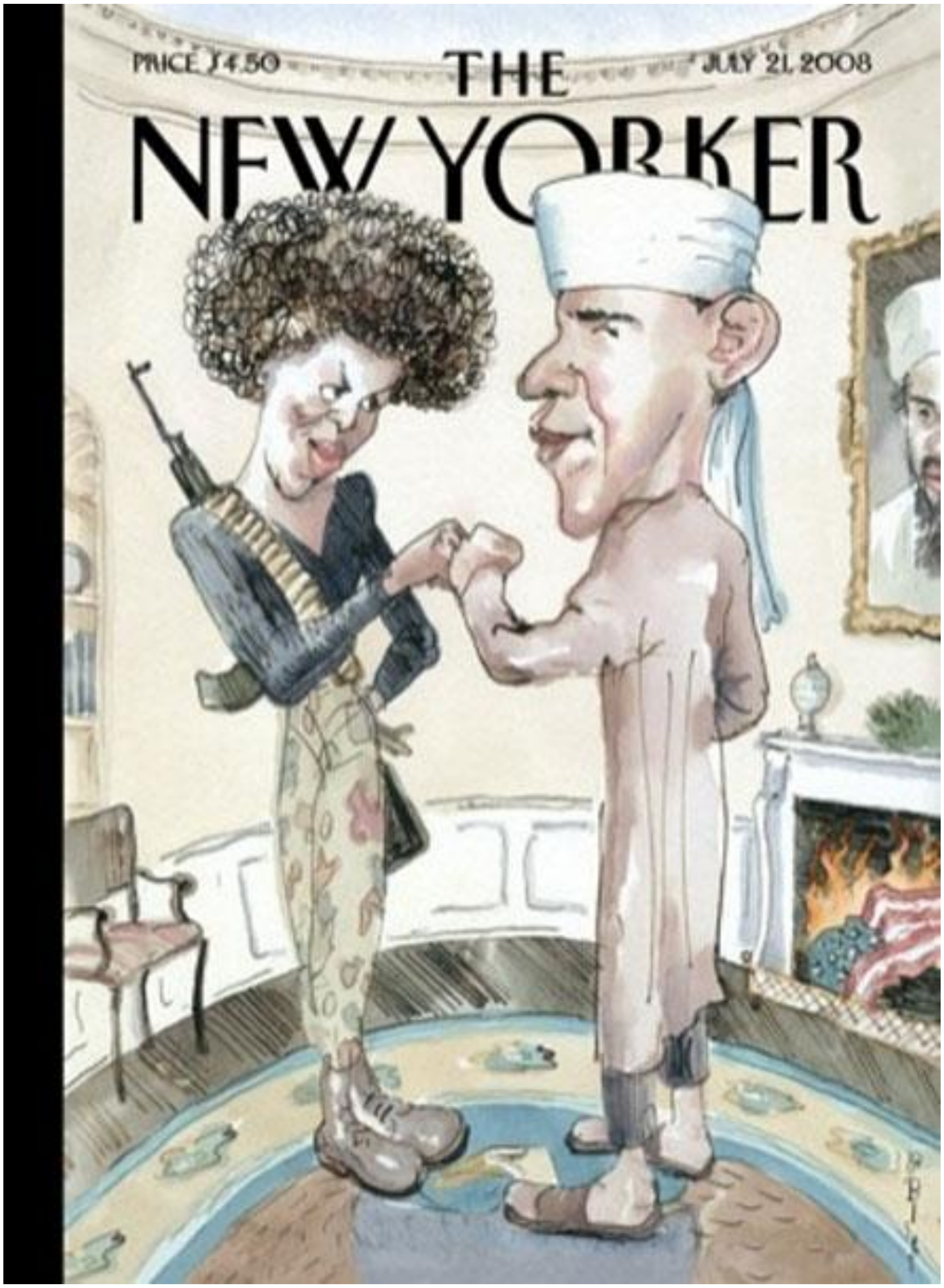
PRICE $4.50
THE
NEW YORKER
JULY 21, 2008

Figure 3. New Yorker Cover of Barrack and Michelle Obama, 2008

By contrast, in Ghana, although Muslims are marginal, Alhaji Aliu Mahama, a Muslim from Yendi in northern Ghana, served as the vice president of the country between 2001 and 2009. According to Ghanaian religious scholar Abdul-Hamid (2011, p. 29), the care taken to include a Muslim as a running mate on presidential tickets is indicative of the inclusiveness that Muslims experience in Ghana. However, even within this context, Abdul-Hamid quotes presidential candidate Nana Akuffo-Addo describing Muslims as potentially disruptive. He writes, "if there is to be a major eruption in the country, it will certainly come from the Muslim north where poverty is rife" (Abdul-Hamid 2011, p. 29).[5] Without unpacking this statement, Abdul-Hamid repeats normative Ghanaian assumptions that Muslims are violent people whose inclusion into the sociopolitical boundaries of the nation are merely a way to keep them from erupting into violence (see also Kobo 2010).

The relationship between being Christian and being Ghanaian is not limited to the geographic boundaries of the country. Instead, a proliferation of churches in communities that Ghanaians establish around the world is one indication of the importance of the Christian church for Ghanaians whether at home or abroad. In a foundational study of Ghanaian immigrants' religious life in Canada, Mensah (2007) provides substantive insights into the formations and social role of Ghanaian churches in Toronto. The study found that in addition to providing immigrants with a place of worship and religious community, churches also provided social functions including help with finding employment, housing, and legal assistance. Ghanaian churches in Toronto allow immigrant communities to sustain and reproduce their cultural identities through services in their local languages. Not unlike other immigrants, through participation in Ghanaian churches, immigrants gain access to social capital that facilitates their lives in their new cities (see also Badillo 2006; Cadge and Ecklund 2007; Hirschman 2004; Ley 2008; Warner and Wittner 1998).

The important role of immigrant churches has received some attention within immigration studies (Olupona and Gemignani, 2007; Mensah 2009). However, religion and religious affiliations exist beyond the church room. In order to understand the social function of Christianity outside of church, it is therefore important to examine the meanings of Christianity in everyday life. As scholars interested in the ties between Christian missions and colonialism have shown, as formerly colonized peoples have syncretized Western practices of Christianity to make it their own, the religion has also been used to distinguish between those who are enlightened or modern, and those who remain ignorant (Gifford, 1998; 2004; Meyer 1999). In Ghana, the ties between Christianity and modernity remain in place (see Gifford 2004; Soothill 2007). Recognizing the foundational social function of Christianity amongst Ghanaian people, whether in Ghana or elsewhere, it becomes important to also consider how quotidian practices of Christianity reproduce belonging within an imagined community of Ghanaians and augments claims to modernity. In an immigrant context, quotidian practices of and claims to Christianity also lends insight into how a Ghanaian community affirms its place as inhabitants of their new country.

GHANAIAN CHRISTIANS IN (WHITE) CHRISTIAN AMERICA

The subsequent narratives present ethnographic illustrations of how the members of the Ghanaian community in Houston engage with Christianity outside of the church. During my field research I attended Sunday services, weddings, and other social events hosted by different Ghanaian denominations including Church of Pentecost, Assemblies of God, and the Presbyterian Church. Although these church events are part of my general analysis of the community's organization, the case I make below is that for Ghanaians in Houston, Christianity is not exclusive to church pews. Instead, in its everyday instantiations, it is part of the community's Afropolitan project and its claims to belonging in "Christian America."

In his recent book *The End of White Christian America*, Robert P. Jones (2016) outlines the political import of Christianity on the U.S. landscape. Jones traces the origins of the explicit notion that the United States is a country for white Protestant and Evangelical Christians arguing that from George Washington's speech at the nation's first inauguration, through the Lincoln address after the civil war, George Bush's rhetoric around the war on terror, and critiques of Barack Obama's presidency, the United States has always been imagined as a white Christian nation. The scope of Christian America is not merely an articulation of symbolic boundaries. Instead, in everyday life, U.S. Americans exchange currency emblazoned with "In God We Trust," school children recite the pledge of allegiance, affirming that the United States is "one nation under God," and presidents since George Washington have sworn the oath of office on a Christian Bible, with the forty-fifth president, even swearing the oath on two bibles. White Christian America was initially populated by WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants), but increasingly is home to white evangelicals. According to a PRRI – American Values Atlas (2015), white Evangelicals account for the largest percentage of white Christians (17.3%). Of the other three main Christian traditions, white mainline Protestants account for 13.3% and white Catholics are 12.1%. As Jones (2016; also Sides 2016) argues Catholics "do not fit into the story of White Christian America," noting that in the 19th and 20th century, Catholics were considered neither white nor Christian. To date, John F. Kennedy has been the only Catholic U.S. president, all have been Christian and nearly half have been Episcopalian or Presbyterian (Masci 2017).

The presence of Christianity in the public sphere has transitioned from being primarily controlled by mainline protestant to now largely in the hands of white evangelicals. White Christian America (WCA) is characterized by racism, sexism, homophobia, free market capitalism, U.S. imperialism and anti-immigrant sentiment (Jones 2016; Kruse 2015).[6] Jones argument is that despite the historical stronghold that has been WCA, a demographic shift in the United States will alter the political landscape in ways that reconstitute the idea of the United States as a white Christian nation. Key to Jones' argument is that the exclusionary tactics of WCA has isolated them from Americans who are LGBT, non-white immigrants, people of color, atheists and non-Christians. Consequently, he suggests that unless WCA extends its symbolic boundaries to be more inclusive of other Americans, it would have no place in the nation's future.

Depictions of Christianity within the U.S. public sphere provide an important context for understanding the place of this religion in the United States. However, U.S. evangelical Christianity extends far beyond this country's borders. As I will show below, just as amongst Ghanaian Christians religion is not confined to Sunday church services and bible studies, in the United States Christianity permeates aspects of public life at home and abroad. Importantly, it serves as a boundary of belonging to the imagined community that is the U.S. nation and provides a discourse of belonging for non-white, immigrants Christians living in the United States (Straughn and Feld, 2010). However, I argue further that the boundaries of Christian America, in particular U.S. evangelical Christianity, have a tangible presence on the African continent. For example, reports about U.S. evangelical support of anti-LGBT legislation in East Africa are a reminder of the hold that WCA has on the continent (Cheney 2012; Oliver 2013). But the relationship between African and U.S. evangelical Christianity goes further back than these recent report – as far back as the 1960s, when U.S. American televangelist Billy Graham visited Kenya to preach (Gifford 1990; Nyabwari and Kagena 2014).

On a personal note, growing up in Ghana in the early 1990s, I remember watching frequent telecasts of Billy Graham's large crusades from Madison Square Garden. Recognizing that African Christianity is a remarkable presence in white Christian America shifts analyses about how Christian America comes to an end by calling attention to how U.S. evangelical Christianity has always included an expansive agenda that reaches beyond this country's borders. Additionally, the relationship between (white) Christian America and foreign Christians plays a vital role in how Ghanaians understand what it means to be a U.S. American.

The U.S. South is WCA's strongest hold (Emerson and Smith 2000; Jones 2016; Smith 2000). Houston, which is home to at least twelve mega-churches including Pastor Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church is perhaps exceptional as a site where Christian America flourishes.[7] Importantly, Houston's racial and ethnic diversity, in addition to its staunch Christianity make possible the claim that the United States is a Christian nation. This context matters for understanding why and how Ghanaians in Houston employ discourses of Christian America as part of their claim to belonging. Living in the U.S. Bible belt, their access to this language is facilitated in daily interactions not only with one another but also with the city at large.

"We're all Ghanaians, we're all Christians"

The Houston Okuapeman Association (HOA) is a one of the Twi language immigrant associations in Houston, Texas. This group comprised about thirty Ghanaians in the city who claimed to be from the same region of Ghana. Claimed to be, because upon questioning, several people revealed that they were affiliated with the HOA either through marriage, because they attended school in that area, or simply because their friends were part of the association. As discussed in Chapter Four, the salience of ethnic boundaries allowed for lose affiliations to particular ethnic groups and Ghanaians participated in the different organizations as they saw fit.

Houston Okuapeman Association members included men and women, typically over the age of forty. Many of them had lived in Houston for at least a decade although several had been in Houston for well over twenty-five years. Members included people with postsecondary degrees including medical doctorates, nursing certification, and PhDs as well as people who had not advanced past secondary school. As with the diversity in educational attainment, HOA members also represented disparate economic classes. Despite their apparent differences, group members articulated their cohesion through claims to being family (*ye yɛ enuanom*) who had, by uncontrollable circumstances, been separated (*ye mu atiti*). This logic affirmed that within any family, people will take different paths in life, but the ties that bind should supersede these differences. Furthermore, as one group leader, explained to some visitors during one of the association's monthly meetings, although the group distinguished itself as belonging to a particular Ghanaian ethnic group, what was really important was that "we are all Ghanaians and we are all Christians." In Chapter Four, I discussed the permeability of ethnic boundaries within the community and the above statement is an example of this point.

On the one hand, the above comment can be understood as a facile equation of being Ghanaian and being Christian. However, the statement is also insightful in that it helps to explain several practices I observed at different Ghanaian group events. Prayer was one such practice. At the start of every community-oriented event, someone prayed to begin. When convenient, a prayer also closed the event. Whether it was a picnic, an association meeting, or even a birthday party, no matter the location, a prayer set it off. On one occasion, to begin a meeting, an HOA executive member asked another member, Solomon, to pray. When Solomon declined, it was remarkable as several other members goaded him either by encouraging him not to be shy or shaming him for refusing. Beatrice, the "mother of the association," asked if anyone had ever seen Solomon pray, suggesting that perhaps Solomon was not a praying man, and therefore, potentially not Christian. Although no further comments were made about this member's unwillingness to pray, the mere fact that he was asked indicates an assumption that everyone present at these meetings and events shares a desire to pray. Prayers were thus a way of affirming the claim shared by many Ghanaians that to be Ghanaian is to be Christian (Kobo, 2010; Yirenkyi 2000).

In May 2015, the Houston Okuapeman Association celebrated their inauguration. This was a big event for the association. Not only would it officially make HOA a part of the North American Okuapeman Association, but it was also the local group's responsibility to host the national organization's mid-year meeting, which included Okuapeman Association members from around the United States and Canada. The main feature of the inauguration was a big party that the HOA hosted following the national organization's meeting, making the event a weekend-long affair. Preparations had been in place for at least a year and HOA members expressed excitement and anticipation about holding a superior event. At meetings members talked about how much they bragged (*dwa nanum*) about Houston when they traveled to other places. Since people would be coming from all over North America, HOA members wanted the annual meeting and inaugural party to be extra special. Members often repeated the importance of putting their "best foot forward" as they planned this meeting. They reassured one another that "we, the Akuapem" are a refined people who know how to put on a good party. There will be no cutting corners and no "tacky" organizing at this annual meeting *cum* inaugural party.

As Lisa explained to me, the Akuapem are a meticulous people. In her words, “out of Ghana, we’re the ones with couth.” Unlike many other HOA members that I knew, Lisa did not participate in other ethnic associations. She explained to me that she identified as “pure Akuapem” having lived in the Akuapem mountains until she left Ghana over thirty years ago. At meetings, she spoke in refined Akuapem Twi, a dialect of Akan. Lisa’s pride in her Akuapem heritage informed her exclusive affinity to the group. Although she supported other associations, including her husband’s, by attending their events and contributing to their fundraisers, she was one of a few people to limit her ethnic association membership. When Lisa described the Akuapem as sophisticated, she may have been channeling history and social narrative that located the Akuapem as learned, a result of their long colonial contact with missionary churches and schools (Berman 1974; Dankwa 2005). When the claim about the Akuapem being cultured and refined is understood in a context of contact with British colonizers and German missionaries, one begins to see how this language is racialized. Underlying concerns about being exemplary hosts and throwing a good party was a desire to show off the association as Afropolitan, that is being particularly African, in this instance Ghanaian, and worldly in their deployment of refinement and class.

For the inauguration, HOA members from all around the United States and Canada arrived in Houston on Friday evening. The local chapter had organized rides from the airport to the hotel to welcome delegates, the term used to describe executive officers of other Okuapeman Associations. Upon arrival at the hotel, HOA members would provide dinner and a brief welcome ceremony to help make their guests comfortable. Women in the local chapter had been asked to cook for that evening’s dinner whilst the men were expected to contribute cash to pay for the provisions the women needed to cook. This gendered division of labor was often the case for other immigrant association parties as well, with women assumed to be willing and able to cook and men expected to fund the effort. However, this gendered division of labor intersected with class to structure expectations with the community about who produces care work such as cooking (see also George 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2011; Parreñas 2000, 2008).

At one HOA meeting, Solomon suggested that women prepare food for the group's holiday party. Hearing this, Lisa and Irene responded saying that they did not have time to cook. Both women, one a medical doctor and the other a research scientist, refused to be burdened with the task of housework. Instead, like the men, they offered to contribute money to the effort. With this retort, they bought themselves out of the group's gendered expectations, relegating that work to the working class women in the group. The women charged with cooking for the annual meeting welcome dinner had confirmed their roles and were expected to bring the food around 5:30pm in order to set up the serving area and be ready when the delegates arrived. Since I was signing up delegates that evening, I also arrived early to help with arranging the room.

The meeting room was a large and empty hall in the east wing of the Holiday Inn Express. Inside, the tables had been arranged into rows reminiscent of a high school classroom. At the front of the room was a table with six seats facing where the audience would be sitting. That evening, the blinds were drawn and the fluorescent lights shone brightly in the room, giving the dark gray carpets an antiseptic tint. I sat in the back right corner of the room behind a long table. Since I was also meant to play music as delegates arrived, I hooked my computer up to the small speakers on the ground and tried to find appropriate Ghanaian music to entertain the excited room. Soon the horns and drums of the high-life music permeated the room and people spoke loudly over the sound. Around me, men hugged one another, expressing sincere joy at seeing their friends. As people entered the room, the smell of floral perfumes and musk came in with them. Around the room, the delegates, who were mostly men, sat with one another chatting boisterously or conspiratorially. The few women in the room sat quietly together with one or two men sitting amongst them, painting a stark contrast to the convivial groups of men.

Irene was meant to help me with registration but had not arrived on time. Consequently, I sat alone at the table feeling unsure about why I was asking strangers for their names, cell phone numbers and emergency contact information. It seemed to me that collecting these details were primarily about the performance of being organized and responsible. At the registration desk, someone asked why "we" were speaking in English instead of Twi and I realized that I did not know how to say "emergency contact" in Twi. The delegate's question highlighted how important it was for the people present to speak their own language. Ideally, the entire weekend-long affair would be conducted in Twi. Or at least that was what I thought until the next evening when the national chapter president addressed the room in English at the inauguration party. Perhaps the question was a way of wondering out loud if the person registering delegates (me), the person who did not speak Twi, belonged in that space.

Along with a desire to host a welcoming event, the HOA's inauguration also illustrated the marginality of Muslims within the Ghanaian community in Houston. Around 7pm, one delegate started to complain about being hungry. He said he was Muslim and needed to eat at a certain time. Some food had arrived about fifteen minutes prior but not enough to begin feeding the group. When others in the conference room heard this man's claim to be Muslim, a few men got visibly upset. One said in Twi, "we do not have a Muslim amongst us" and wondered how it was possible that this other man could be a Muslim. Very quickly, the tone of the conversation turned aggressive as men barked out loud their opinion that there were no Akuapem Muslims and this man must be lying. Some asked why this Muslim did not tell the group earlier that he needed to eat at a particular time. He could wait like everyone else to eat. I began to feel sorry for him, as it seemed as if the room was ganging up against him. I suggested that it could have been Ramadan (it was not) and he was fasting. I also noted that he could have told people and it was possible that the information was not relayed accordingly.

Lisa, apparently trying to ease the tension, asked the man where he was from. It turned out he was from the same town as she was, and she asked how come he was Muslim if he was from that town, and what kind of Muslim was he? He looked uncomfortable as he tried to answer her questions. I too felt uncomfortable, knowing that despite popular conceptions, there is a long history of Muslims throughout southern Ghana. For example, Dovlo and Asante (2003) offer an in-depth historical overview of Muslim migration throughout the former Gold Coast. They discuss Muslims' arrival in Ghana as early as the 14th century as merchants and clerics, long before Christian missions first made their impact. Later on Lisa told me that she saw him eating beef rebutting my suggestion that he may also have been concerned about eating *halal*.[8] I found myself angry that this man may have used Ghanaian Christians' general ignorance of Muslims to get his dinner early. This incident challenges Abdul-Hamid's (2011) claim that "a dialogue of life" occurs between Muslims and Christians in Ghana, facilitated by living in close proximity to one another and education about both religions in school curriculums. Instead, the belief that "we are all Ghanaians and we are all Christians" is enacted in every day life and in different social settings.

Muslims as "against the grain"

During the annual Ghana Independence Day football (soccer) match played at Eldridge Park in Southwest Houston, the marginality of Muslims in the Ghanaian imagination was once again made evident. The game was between members of the Metropolitan Connection of Ghanaian Houstonians (MCGH), introduced in Chapter

Four, and other Ghanaian men who played football regularly on Saturdays. The MCGH is a group of Ghanaians who were either born or raised in the United States (primarily Houston). I received an email announcing the match from the MCGH list-serve. The message was addressed to "gentlemen, our brothers who normally play soccer" but "ladies" were "also invited, of course," to "come cheer on the soccer players for victory". Responding to this message, I found myself sitting with three MCHG members, Leslie, Alex, and Maame on the periphery of a soccer field. These women, all in their mid-twenties had come to cheer their friends in the MCGH and been unwittingly recruited into babysitting one of the players' three children.

It was a crisp March morning, about 15ºC (60ºF) and the women were dressed accordingly. Leslie and Maame wore long running tights, tee shirts, sneakers, and North Face and Oakley fleeces. Their dress style projected a sporty middle-class fashion sense. Both women also had their hair wrapped, one in a Ghana flag bandanna and the other in a silky floral headscarf, which I assumed would reveal a hairstyle at the Independence Day party later that evening. Alexis wore brown boots that came up to her knees over black tights and a mid-thigh length flowery shirtdress. Her hair was blown out into a giant Afro, which she revealed to the other women had cost her $270. Although the women seemed to enjoy playing with the children, kicking a ball with them and asking them to show off their skills, Leslie still asked the children's father for $20 as payment for babysitting. The others repeated this request, refusing to have their labor be taken for granted.

As the football game went on and players trash-talked one another, someone said of the MCGH team in Twi, "you've brought these women here to watch you lose." MCGH had agreed to this match in part to recruit other young Ghanaians into their group but at this comment, Alexis, who understood Twi, revealed that the other men intimidated her. She understood their sport trash-talking to be mocking "those professional MCGH people" and was not sure that she wanted them in her group.[9] As we chatted, Alexis asked me if I was Ghanaian and whether or not I spoke Twi. Upon hearing this question, Leslie retorted that she did not speak Twi but was Ghanaian. She spoke Ewe and was annoyed by the assumption that to be Ghanaian means to speak Twi. Acknowledging her mistake, Alexis turned back to me and noted that she saw me as being "against the grain." Am I a Muslim, she wondered? These questions about my origin, language skills and religion were meant to make sense of a perception of me as different. By explaining that perceived difference as being Muslim, Alexis reproduced the idea that "we don't have a Muslims amongst us."

Despite the dominance of a construction of Muslims as outside of the community's boundaries, during interviews this point became more nuanced. Some interview respondents affirmed the equation of Christianity with being Ghanaian whilst others tried to be more inclusive. For example, one man who belonged to an Ewe (language) association explained to me that the reason why their meetings begin with a prayer is

> Because most of the people are Christians even though we don't go to the same churches, we're all Christians…we believe in one person, Jesus Christ. Period. And that's what brings us together, right?

Similar to Solomon, the HOA member who saw his group as "all Ghanaians and all Christians," this man understood his group to be symbolically bound by Christianity. From this perspective, beginning immigrant association meetings with a Christian prayer does not exclude anyone. Instead it merely augments the ties that bind the group together.

In one-on-one interviews with HOA members, they typically gave similar responses about Christianity bringing the group together. However, two members offered more nuanced and potentially inclusive explanations for the prayer. Both members were responding specifically to a question about the claim that "we are all Ghanaians, and we are all Christians." The first was Irene, who reminded me that it is "a big assumption about everybody being Christian… most Ghanaians believe that everybody is a Christian in Ghana, which is not true at all." She continued:

> We have Muslims, we have, you know? But I guess what they mean is we all believe in God, which is, most Ghanaians do but I'm sure there's a small percentage that are atheists or don't believe in anything…[but] I don't think people in a normal Ghanaian setting would let anybody know that they are atheists…just so they won't create any problems for themselves.

Likewise Lisa, recalling the incident with the supposed Muslim at the inauguration party asked if I remembered.

> It was true. He's a Muslim and he was doing the fast so he was hungry. So you can't assume that everyone is a Christian. And we do that as Ghanaians but you cannot assume that everyone is a Christian. I mean we don't go around asking, 'are you a Christian or not?' But we can't assume that everyone is a Christian. And that's not part of the requirement in being in the group. Even to be Okuapeman *[sic]* is not part of the requirement [to join the group].

The two responses above challenge the normative assumption that to be Ghanaian is to be Christian. Perhaps the specificity of the question in part explains the nuanced response. However, even an acknowledgment that there are in fact "Muslims amongst us" still locates Muslims on the margins. The "we" that has Muslims is implicitly a Christian "we." And in order to bring Muslims into the national fold, Irene turns the discussion to one about monotheism. Despite an acknowledgment that Christianity as a mode of belonging within a Ghanaian (national) community is problematic, the religion maintains a dominant place in the symbolic construction of this community.

“CHRISTIAN AMERICA” OR “THEY SAID HERE IS A CHRISTIAN NATION”

The equation between being Ghanaian and being Christian also translate into claims to belonging within the U.S. national framework. Consequently, several of my interview respondents discussed their belief that the United States is a Christian nation founded on Judeo-Christian (but not Muslim) principles. The conception of the nation as fundamentally Christian was exclusive to the United States. When interview respondents spoke about Ghanaians as Christians, this point was not made about the Ghanaian nation as a Christian nation. Instead, Christianity in Ghana was about a cultural (read: colonial) heritage. In this section, I discuss how respondents engaged with the idea that the United States is a foundationally Christian country. Although some interview respondents contested this idea, they often did so as a way to express their disapproval of laws such as the legalization of same-sex marriage and extension of abortion rights. From their perspective, a Christian nation would not make such public policy decisions.

A discussion of how the United States is framed as a Christian nation would be remiss without mentioning the Other against whom this perception of Christianity relies. Through the language of “radical Islamism,” Muslims hold an undesirable place as a fundamental outsider to the nation (Mamdani 2005; Puar 2007). Politicians and news journalists contribute to this rhetoric when they call anyone with an Arab name or affiliation a radical or a terrorist (Ewing 2008). The casual way in which the United States’ so-called war against terrorism is also a war against Islam and Muslims facilitates a construction of American Muslims as not belonging to the national community. As one respondent, explained to me,

> I think there is a fear of Muslims in this country. Even me, sometimes when I see people who are very covered I get a little bit intimidated because of the history of what we think they represent.

That history that Americans believe Muslims represent includes the unfounded idea that Islam is a regressive, anti-woman, oppressive religion with the sole purpose of dismantling western modernity (Abrahamian, 2003; Crimino, 2005; Ewing, 2008; Saeed 2007). Talking about "what *we* think *they* represent" aligns this respondent with a larger community of Americans who are imagined to be Christians. Through this framing, Muslims are not only imagined as marginal in the Ghanaian national community, but also in the U.S. national community. Likewise, claims of the United States as a Christian nation also served to make Muslims and Islam marginal to a U.S. American imagined community. Muslims therefore represent a symbolic other against whom people make claims to normativity and shared community. Likewise, as I have shown above, respondents brought up Muslims as a way of articulating some kind of difference ("being against the grain") vis-à-vis inclusivity and progress.

The claim that the United States is a country undergirded by Christian principles is not entirely bizarre. In fact, many people will recognize this claim as part of a conservative right-wing rhetoric that especially incites anti-Muslim violence (Crimino 2005; Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2004; Straughn and Feld, 2010). Consequently, to hear black Africans repeat this idea was, for me, often jarring and disorienting. Yet, understanding the importance of Christianity within the Ghanaian imagination can help make sense of how and why such a discourse might be attractive to many members in the Houston community. In particular, a belief in "Christian America" frames Ghanaian Christians as belonging in the United States. As Christians in "Christian America," even though they might be exposed to anti-black racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and derision about Africa, they can still imagine themselves part of the moral majority and as such in tune with the mainstream of their society. At the same time, recognizing how

Christianity is used to promote an insular, exclusive American identity raises concerns about how black immigrant Christians latch on to this discourse.

During my interviews, I asked respondents about a visit that President Barack Obama had made to Kenya in 2015. This visit had reverberated across news outlets and social media for many reasons. First of all, Obama's trip to Kenya would mark the first time a sitting U.S. president had visited the East African country. Like many African countries, Kenya is known for harsh anti-LGBT laws (Finerty, 2013). Likewise, many consider homosexuality to be "un-African" and an affront to a respectable consciousness (Msibi, 2011; Nyanzi, 2013; Nyeck and Epprecht, 2013). As Obama was visiting Kenya in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court legalization of same-sex marriage, many wondered if he would comment on these laws, and several hoped that he would remain silent (Coly 2015; Moodley, 2015; Smith, 2015). While in Kenya, at a press conference, President Obama noted that if somebody is a law-abiding citizen they should not be treated differently or abused because of who they love. The Kenyan president, Uhuru Kenyatta responded by saying that the issue of gay-rights is a "non-issue" and not something that Kenyan culture or society would accept (Moodley, 2015). I asked my interview respondents about their thoughts on this exchange.

In Ghana, same-sex sexuality is characterized by silence along with public claims that homosexuality is a western import (Dankwa 2009; O'Mara 2007). The country's legal code criminalizes "unnatural carnal acts," generally understood as same-sex sexuality. Although it is unclear if this this law has actually been used to prosecuted any people, from time to time news media report on individual groups attacking and assaulting suspected homosexuals in Southern Ghana (Nyavor and Appiah 2016). On occasion, a member of parliament or some other politician might bring up prosecuting "homosexualism" as part of their political agenda. Jyoti Puri's (2016) *Sexual States* offers some insights into why states might feel increasingly invested in legislating queer sexualities and genders. She argues that as the state shrinks in one area, through privatization and other neoliberal reforms, legislating genders and sexualities becomes a site through which the state can reconfigure power and reassert its authority. Attitudes towards same-sex sexuality in Ghana are shaped by several concerns including religion, political sovereignty, and respectability.

Christian and Muslim leaders in Ghana have historically come together to condemn queers, saying that they are the cause of the country's ills (News1Ghana 2013; Nyeck 2009, p. 71). Political leaders push back against foreign nations who threaten withdrawing aid if homosexuality is not legalized (GhanaVibe 2011; Kwarteng 2016), and a large majority of the population generally accepts that queer gender and sexuality are alien to Ghana and Africa as a whole. Despite this dominant perception, there are communities of gay, lesbian and transgender Ghanaians who organize amongst themselves (Dankwa 2009; O'Mara 2007) and one or two organizations directed at providing services for LGBT Ghanaians (Solace Brothers Foundation). The prevailing sentiment about same-sex sexuality amongst Ghanaians, provide a context for how many of my respondents discussed the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States and President Obama's comments in Kenya.

In response to the question about same-sex marriage, many respondents, almost all men, replied with the claim that the United States is a Christian country. Several expressed their disapproval of the U.S. president's comments by making claims to cultural relativity. For example, one man, anticipating my question interrupted me by exclaiming, "He [President Obama] should leave Kenyans alone!" This comment was meant to express that what happened in Kenya was none of the U.S. president's business. Another respondent, Hassan, said to me, "when I heard that, I just felt this sense of *di* *wufie asɛm*", meaning Obama should take care of the issues in his own home before concerning himself with other people's problems. Picking up on the president's comments about not criminalizing law-abiding citizens, Hassan went on to explain, "Don't go and tell somebody about how to treat law-abiding citizens when you haven't even addressed how you treat your own law-abiding 8%," a reference to the many news stories about the extra-judicial killings of black people in the United States (Yamahtta, 2016).

In addition to comments about cultural relativity, several other respondents supported their disapproving comments with the argument that the United States had strayed from its Judeo-Christian foundations. David, a thirty-seven year old civil engineer had received his first degree in Ghana and completed a masters in another U.S. southern state. He had lived in Houston for about eleven years and was raising children here. As with other interviewees, David anticipated my question by interrupting: "he [President Obama] made a stupid comment". When I asked him to elaborate, he continued,

> I think he shouldn't have brought it up. It's none of his business. He should do his deal in America if that's what he wants to do because he's in charge here. He's not in charge in Kenya. He shouldn't try to change their opinion… This country is founded on Judeo-Christian principles and that is against same-sex marriage, period. So the country has thrived and survived based on those principles so there's no reason to change the recipe for success. That's my opinion.

Although the decision to legalize same-sex marriage came from the Supreme Court, several interview respondents credited President Obama for it. For those who liked the president, they suggested that he was forced to accept same-sex marriage as part of a ploy to emasculate black men (see Johnson, 2001; Riggs, 1991 on this argument). Others also claimed that he passed the law to appease a formidable white gay contingency with a "gay agenda." People who opposed the legalization of same-sex marriage but accepted that Barack Obama was responsible for it often followed the logic of the above respondent. First they argued that President Obama's comments were out of line because what happened in Kenya was none of his business. They followed this reasoning with an argument about the Christian foundations of the United States, claiming that Christianity was the basis of this country's economic success. For these respondents, legalizing same-sex marriage went against the Christian foundations of the United States and would bring about the country's downfall.

Several other men repeated this claim that the United States is a Christian nation and expressed concern about how the legalization of same-sex marriage would affect the country's economic and global success. As one respondent explained,

> It will bring something bad on this country because they said, according to what people are saying, they say this country is Christian country so it is Christian country we have to follow the word of God and the word of God says homosexuality or something is evil.

As these interview respondents understood it, the importance of Christianity and Christian principles in governing the United States was directly related to its successes. The legalization of same-sex marriage, which for them went against the bible, signaled the arrival of the country's failure. The ties between same-sex marriage and the decline of a nation are supported several ways. First, people used the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which they interpreted to condemn same-sex sexual activity. Secondly, this belief was often supported by the idea that same-sex sexuality brought about the decline of the Roman Empire and will also end the U.S. empire (see for example Carson, 2012).

Our praying forefathers, Lincoln and Washington

The belief that the United States is a Christian nation not only supported disapproval of the legalization of same-sex marriage, but also explained what many people in the community saw as the country's success. This perception of Christian foundations and its equation with success was illustrated at a U.S. Independence Day picnic celebration I attended in 2014. A local Assemblies of God church, headed by a Ghanaian pastor, organized this picnic at the George Bush Park. This park is a public space that hosted several other picnics and parties during my time in the community. Located west of Houston's outer loop and south of Highway 10, George Bush Park is sandwiched between Katy, Texas and Southwest Houston, two neighborhoods in which a large number of West Africans live along with predominantly Latino and Asian Americans (Demographic Data, City of Houston 2017). The park covers 7800 acres of land and includes jogging and biking trails, picnic and barbecue areas as well as sport fields. At 1pm, the sun was high in the sky and the pavilion covering, where picnic attendants gathered, did not provide much respite from the heat. In one corner a group of four men operated a large grill, on which they barbecued ribs and chicken leg quarters. Across from them a DJ set up his equipment, which included a set of large loud speakers through which blared Ghanaian high-life, Nigerian and Ghanaian hip-life and the occasional French West African artist – music geared towards old and young picnic attendees. Beyond the pavilion and under a small tree, three women were setting up small gas stoves on which they would later fry yams, plantains, and buff-loaf, a sweet donut-like pastry.

Around 3:30pm the event officially started with a prayer from the church's pastor. The pastor stood near the loudspeakers and waited for the crowd to quiet down. At this point about fifty people were at the picnic including a group of six men and women who looked to be in their mid-twenties. They sat close to the DJ and tried to make conversation over the loud speakers. They spoke in Pidgin English, Twi, and English with American and Ghanaian inflections. Beyond the covered pavilion some children played on the swing sets while adults made conversation with one another and set up the buffet line. When the group had quieted down, the pastor began his prayer. He prayed in

English, asking that God bless the food and bless *our* country America. He expressed gratitude for *our* forefathers, including George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, who made America a great country. He also thanked God for making America a shining beacon to the rest of the world, a beacon that exports democracy to those nations that do not have it. After the prayer, people made their way to the buffet line to enjoy the feast that had been prepared.

The pastor's prayer begins to articulate the ways in which Christianity intersects with the United States' global position as a beacon of democracy. Although not explicitly mentioned in this prayer, in interviews, a number of respondents expressed their belief that Abraham Lincoln and George Washington were "praying people." In the words of one respondent,

> Those Abraham Lincoln and other people, you know? I've not read about them that much but I heard they were praying people, like they go on their knees, talk to God and stuff, you know? And they developed this country in a way that no one can in our days, you see? Because these people, they don't have the gospel in them, because the bible says Christ in you, the hope of glory. So if you don't have Christ in you where is the hope of glory?

Understanding that a reference to "our forefathers" including Lincoln and Washington is also a reference to Christianity helps to explain why many members of this community perceived the United States as a Christian nation. But likewise, as the quotes above suggests, it is this Christianity that helped build up the United States to its current global position. Straughn and Feld's (2010) study of how "Christian America" is deployed as a boundary-making strategy is useful in making sense of this immigrant community's affirmation that the United States is a Christian nation. Focused on white Christians, Straughn and Feld's (2010) argument suggests that the symbolic boundary of belonging inhered in claiming a Christian America affirms a national attachment. They speculated that "recent immigrants who are Christians may be disproportionately attracted by the idea that their faith makes them more 'truly' American" (Straughn and Feld, 2010, p. 302). Within the Ghanaian community in Houston, we can begin to see how a belief in the United States as a Christian nation helps to locate them as belonging within this national context. Furthermore, living in racially diverse Houston, where 73 per cent of the population is Christian (Lipka 2015) facilitates this attachment.

Despite a dominant shared perception of the United States as a Christian nation, a number of women also challenged this point. It is important to note that despite individual opposition to the idea of the United States as a Christian nation, the dominant community discourse was the opposite – that is, within the community at large, through their events and discussions, the United States was a Christian nation. However, some respondents found any characterization of the United States as a Christian nation to be blatantly false because of what they saw as obvious rejections of Christian principles. Esther, a twenty-three year old medical student who had lived in Houston since she was nine years old explained to me that despite being a Christian, the legalization of same-sex marriage "did not come [to me] as a surprise." According to her understanding, it was only constitutional that such a law would pass.

> You can't say that you can't let homosexuals marry because of your Christian beliefs…Ok America they say was founded on Christian foundations or something, but I mean, I don't believe that [laughs].

In response to my question, "who said that and why don't you believe it," Esther said "a lot of Republicans" and using air quotes, "our forefathers founded this country, one nation under God." Despite these claims, for Esther, "America is not a Christian country!" She concluded, "America is not the children of Israel [God's chosen people]…if you're even to compare America to a biblical city or country or nation, America would be Sodom and Gomorrah. Or Babylon, you know [laughs]." By referring with skepticism to Republicans' claims about America being a Christian country, this respondent levied a critique of one particular United States' origins narrative. Importantly, her critique of this narrative found that claims about the United States being a Christian nation are wrapped up in a belief that the country is divinely chosen. Esther's rejection of the Christian America discourse was also a rejection of the United States as a moral compass and world police. Although Christianity held significance for Esther, her opposition to much of U.S. foreign policy also shaped Esther's rejection of how Christianity shapes U.S. political life. However, in our interview, she also acknowledged that many Ghanaians perceive the United States as a Christian country and are genuinely surprised when they learn that things happen here that go against the bible. But as she saw it,

> Under the American government and laws, it's right for them to do that [legalize same-sex marriage], you know? I mean of course, under God's law [it's not], but America never claimed that it was under God's law [laughs].

Rejecting the narrative that America is a Christian nation made it possible for this respondent to accept the legalization of same-sex marriage as a natural part of living in a democratic society.

As another woman, Abena explained in response to President Obama's comments in Kenya, "I think you have a right to be angry if you voted him into a religious position." Abena is a thirty-five year old engineer who had lived in the Houston for about 8 years. She moved to the city to pursue a master's degree after having worked in Ghana for a few years. For Abena, the issue of same-sex marriage or LGBT rights could only really be contended within a religious context, and even then, since LGBT people were not living in people's homes, she explained, "I don't see why Christians are praying against it." By separating church and state, certain laws that some respondents may have found problematic within their religious sensibilities could be more readily accepted. Likewise by challenging the underlying meanings of the United States as a Christian and therefore divinely chosen nation, respondents such as the one quoted above could criticizes U.S. government policies through a language of Christianity.

One surprising aspect from my interviews was how differently men and women responded to the legalization of same-sex marriage and same-sex sexuality in general. Although the dominant community discourse was that the United States is a Christian nation, the people who expressed this point most explicitly were men. In particular, they used this language as a way to express their opposition to same-sex marriage while affirming their identity as Americans. This discursive strategy, rather than asserting some kind of traditional African rejection of same-sex sexuality, relied on claiming an investment in the United States as a Christian nation. Without claiming that there is a distinctive and gendered difference in the acceptance (perhaps more accurately tolerance) of non-normative sexuality, my interviews indicated that women appeared to be more tolerant of same-sex sexuality than men. To be clear, this was not always the case and on Facebook and in WhatsApp group messages, some women participated in the general anti-gay climate that the community at large perpetuated. Yet in one-on-one conversations, women's views on same-sex sexuality appeared tempered. At this juncture, I offer two tentative explanations for why this might be the case.

First building on the insights from Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez's (2005, p. 162) *Erotic Journeys,* I suggest that through their extensive networks with U.S. Americans and fellow immigrants, women's views on sexualities had been transformed in ways that may have "helped them to actively construct new prescriptions and standards for socially acceptable sexual beliefs and practices." Although focused on Mexican immigrant men and women, *Erotic Journeys* offers a critical perspective for understanding how immigration results in new networks that have the potential to expand beliefs and practices about gender and sexuality. Understanding that women's expanded social networks might provide an opportunity for “emancipatory networking,” (Gonzalez-Lopez 2005). On the other hand, scholars of masculinity in the United States have suggested that homophobia serves as means of bolstering men’s claims to normative (Kimmel 1994; Pascoe 2011). As such, men’s social networks might reproduce normative heterosexual masculinity, explaining why some Ghanaian women appeared more tolerant of same-sex sexuality than men did.

Another possible reason for which Ghanaian men appeared to be more critical of same-sex sexualities than women might have to do with masculinity and heterosexual patriarchy. My earlier reference to women’s emancipatory networks gestured towards this possible explanation. Scholars of men’s masculinities propose hegemonic masculinity as the theoretical apparatus used to explain patriarchy (Connell 1993, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).[10] Underlying hegemonic masculinity is an investment in heterosexual patriarchy. In her essay “Erotic Autonomy,” Jacqui Alexander (2005, Chapter 1) makes the argument that women’s sexual agency and erotic autonomy challenges “the ideology of an originary nuclear heterosexual family that perpetuates the fiction that the family is the cornerstone of society” (p. 22). Drawing a line from white imperial patriarchy to a neocolonial black heteropatriarchy, Alexander (2005, p. 62) suggests that the ways in which colonialism excluded black heterosexuality from the realm of normative sexuality (see also Ferguson, 2000) encourages a contemporary investment in “the bequeathal of white colonial masculinity,” that is, black heteropatriarchy. The foregoing are only two possible explanations for my observations that men and women had different approaches to their understanding and tolerance of same-sex sexuality. An intentional examination of men and women’s networks and views on sexuality would be needed to more affirmatively support these tentative explanations.

It is important to note that although many in the community agreed with the idea that the United States is a Christian nation, nobody claimed to be a Republican. While I was conducting this research, the long presidential primaries (from 2014 to 2016) were happening and like many other Americans, the community was stuck on the theatrics that was Donald Trump's candidacy. By the time the two main parties had selected their frontrunners, I was no longer in Houston but had the sense before I left that most of the community was hoping for a Hillary Clinton presidency. Several people explained that they liked the Democratic Party's social platform and did not like the Republicans because of how they had treated the U.S. first black president. One point of contention for some respondents was that they perceived the Republican Party to be a better financial choice for them, but its anti-immigrant stances left a sour taste in their mouths. The quote below from David captures this sentiment:

> David: It's going to be very difficult to vote for republicans.
>
> Anima: Why is that?
>
> David: Very difficult because of their attitude towards immigrants. But at the same time, I think economically, or from a business standpoint they may be the better party. That's why I have a hard time, you know, choosing one side. But at the same time I like the democrats for how welcoming they seem to be. But they may also be enabling minorities to stay as minorities so that they can get their votes, you know what I mean?

For people like David who earned a good income from his job as an engineer, as well as many others middle-income Ghanaians in this community, a tax code that allowed him to keep more of his money was appealing. For this reason, voting Republican was attractive to him. At the same time, as an immigrant he did not feel welcomed by the Republican Party's desire to build a wall and keep immigrants out. In Chapter Five I discussed how some Ghanaians bought into common U.S. sentiments that imagined people of color as overly reliant on the state. Above, David replays this argument when he suggests that Democrats enable minorities by providing them with basic social services.

Only rarely did people challenge Christianity as an inherently good religion, occasionally making a connection to colonialism and slavery. For example, Lisa told me that her faith had shaken, explaining further,

> Well you know, Anima when you hear all these things about you know, this person was shot, the police did this that and all that, you know, sometimes it's like I feel like, [lowers voice] white man brought Christianity to Africa and white man uses Christianity [unspoken] and you know the people that [unspoken], they are the ones sometimes [unspoken], you know, but I have faith.

Lisa's reference to Christianity's introduction to Africa is also a critique of what she sees as the oppressive uses of the religion. Her lowered voice mirrored the way several other respondents' criticized the United States or spoke about race, in particular whiteness. The lowered voice suggests at least two things. First, a lowered voice indicates that the respondent is sharing a secret she does not want overheard. Likewise, speaking in a whisper indicates a belief that by saying these words out loud, the respondent is breaking with convention – one should criticize neither white men nor Christianity (see also Ha 2017). Lisa's reference to police shootings in the context of a criticism of Christianity and white men also suggests an implicit critique of the idea that this country is a Christian country. It is reasonable to understand the subtexts and unspoken words in the quote excerpted above as referring to different forms of violence that this respondent associates with Christianity. Another respondent, Nina made the point more clearly when she said to me,

> Back in slavery they still did it to black people anyway, so I think that's why when a lot of these white people use "the bible this, God this" to justify a lot of stupid stuff they are against or claim it's not right it makes me, I don't know.

In making the connection explicit, Nina highlighted what she found to be a hypocritical use of Christianity and the bible to support whatever viewpoint white people wanted to support. The unmistakable relationship drawn between oppressive forms of whiteness (including colonialism, slavery, and police brutality) and Christianity suggest that at least for the two women quoted above, their experiences of Christianity were not without some ambiguity.

Paul, who was first introduced at the beginning of Chapter Five, offered a criticism of Christianity primarily directed towards the Roman Catholic Church. He explained that ever since he read about the Vatican's involvement in the slave trade, he feels "pity for every black person who is Catholic… they brought the bible to us just to calm our souls down so that we will not feel the pain of slavery, that's what I feel now." For Paul, he made peace with his Christianity by writing Catholics out of the religion. Despite having received his education in Roman Catholic schools, Paul felt that Catholics "should exempt themselves from Christians" because, in his opinion, they were opposed to Christ. Despite some respondents' criticisms of Christianity, their ways in which many people discussed the religion were undergirded by a discursive construction of belonging, whether in Ghana or in the United States. Likewise, claims to Christianity also facilitated an affiliation with the kinds of success and sense of modernity that is attached to being a Christian.

On the one hand, the explicit description of the United States as a Christian nation was complicated because some respondents also saw the United States as a white supremacist nation. In community settings and during interviews most respondents were hesitant to explicitly acknowledge racism, either leaving it unspoken or whispering their criticism. However, every single one of my interview respondents disclosed feeling some concern about experiencing forms of racism in their lives. Yet because "we are all

Christians," a sense of belonging within "Christian America" could be attained. This boundary-making discourse allowed many members of the community to affirm their belonging within the United States by promoting a sense of solidarity with a broader Christian national community (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Straughn and Feld 2010). The community's popular narrative, which affirmed the United States as a Christian nation facilitated this belonging because it spoke to diverse groups of Americans who could come together under the banner of Christianity. Regardless of whether people believed that the United States was a Christian nation, there seemed to be a general acceptance that the country strove to be such a nation and that acceptance was enough to encourage a sense of belonging within the national community.

On the other hand, despite the idea that all (or at least the majority of) Ghanaians are Christians, nobody made the point explicitly that Ghana is also a Christian nation. Perhaps this omission is in part due to the fact that Ghana is constitutionally a secular state. But then again, so is the United States. Unlike the United States however, the preamble to Ghana's constitution opens "In the name of the Almighty God," claiming the state's monotheistic leanings (Quashigah, n.d., p. 2). Despite the claim to the United States being a Christian nation, similar language cannot be found in its constitution. Of course, most people making these claims, whether about Ghana or the United States are not referring to either country's constitution, but instead to the popular discourses that characterize the national histories.

Ghana emerged as a postcolonial state riddled with missionary schools that were loosely converted into secular institutions post independence. Many of my respondents who attended senior secondary school (high school) in Ghana, for example, still refer to the missions that founded their schools. The country's history is in part a tangle between the church in the form of colonial missionaries and the colonial power of Great Britain

(Thomas 2015). At the same time that the missions squashed practices of indigenous religions, they supported the colonial state by training the colonized people to participate in the new economy that colonization imposed (Gifford, 2004; Meyer, 1998; Pierre 2013). The relationship between being a Christian and being educated and capable of attaining modern markers of success were consequently embedded in the consciousness of the new nation's citizens. Today, the relationship between being a Christian and being successful by modern standards remains an accepted cultural norm. Christianity as it is invoked within the community is, I argue, in part about belonging in both a United States and Ghanaian national context, about claiming success through modernity, and about claiming some aspects of a shared culture. In the conclusion of this chapter, I expand on this claim and show how being a Christian is part of the Houston Ghanaian community's Afropolitan project.

CHRISTIANITY AS AN AFROPOLITAN BOUNDARY-MAKING PROJECT

To argue that Christianity is invoked as a claim to belonging is neither to diminish nor dismiss the religious significance of Christianity to people in the Ghanaian community in Houston. Rather, by setting aside its religious content to consider the cultural meanings of Christianity, I have sought to unpack the popular associations that this community of Ghanaians has with the religion. In this section, I discuss how Christianity serves as a symbolic boundary of the Ghanaian community in Houston similar to the U.S. national community (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006; Straughn and Feld 2010). Particular attention is paid to the role of Christianity as a shared cultural orientation that underlies certain state policies and also reproduces neocolonial relationships. For example, scholars have shown how a perception of the Christian God as white sustained the racialized colonial project (Dyer 1997; Pierre 2013). This equation of God with whiteness produces a belief in the inherent goodness of white people and supports a desire to be part of their imagined community.

Locating Christianity as part of the symbolic construction of the Ghanaian community in Houston also begins to tease out the uses of Christianity as part of an Afropolitan project. When an Afropolitan identity is understood as constructing a symbolic community of modern, progressive, fabulous and worldly Africans, the ways in which Afropolitan projects generate feelings of similarity with other privileged groups can become clear. In the case of Christianity and the Ghanaian community in Houston, we can begin to see how being a Christian advances this community's Afropolitan project in at least two ways. First, Christianity's history in Ghana (and much of Africa) as a colonial route to modernity and success aligns Ghanaians with this narrative and therefore with a path to the economic success (commerce) and civility that Christianity supposedly brings. Secondly, in the United States, an insistence on what Straughn and Feld (2010) call "Christian America" helps to align this immigrant community with an imagined national community that supposedly shares their religious convictions. Christianity's hegemonic position in Ghana and its material implications sustain the symbolic construction of a Christian America and a Christian Ghanaian community in Houston. The Houston community's Afropolitan project, while grounded in the specificity of being Ghanaian also aligns itself with western modernity and the U.S. national community through claims to Christianity.

Christianity's history in Ghana included giving converts access to colonial education and therefore the capacity to participate in the new economy. Christianity therefore became a path to a different kind of success. The relationship between Christianity and success/modernity remains for many Ghanaians and acts as a critical marker of belonging. The same could be said for the United States, especially when a commonly repeated narrative constructs this country as a Christian one. The significance of Christianity in the United States is evident in the yearly "war against Christmas," discussions about prayer in schools, and the inclusion of "under God" in the U.S. pledge of allegiance during the 1950s (Kruse 2015). These gestures are not always about adherence to religious doctrines. Instead, they articulate a desire for a collective investment in the meanings of the symbols of Christianity.

As Cohen (1985/2013, p. 22) has argued, community articulates a sense of primacy and belonging in such a way as to "transforms the reality of difference into the appearance of similarity." The national community of Christians that Ghanaians in Houston refer to when they discuss the United States as a "Christian nation" provides a framework through which as Christians, they can belong in this country despite other ways in which they might be excluded. Through claims to an imagined religious community comprising American and Ghanaian nationals, the Ghanaian community in Houston symbolically locates itself as equally belonging in both countries. As such, the imagined community of Christians draws a symbolic boundary that includes Ghanaians as American and mitigates other social boundaries that the community might experience (Lamont and Molnár 2002).

An important material reality of the imagined community of Christians is the social boundary this construction creates around other religious groups (Anderson, 2006; Lamont and Molnár 2002). For example the reactions to Muslims described above show how this Ghanaian community's symbolic boundary of Christian belonging negatively affect Muslims who breach the community's space. Likewise, in the United States, Muslims face violence and hostility in public spaces. Whereas Ghana's colonial history is underscored by a coercive conversion to Christianity the United States was founded on a concern for religious freedoms (Ekeh 1975; Meyer 2004). Despite these differences, an important similarity between the two countries is a Christian tradition that increasingly, after 9/11 and in the age of ISIS and Boko Haram, marks Muslims as enemies of (western) modernity (Cimino 2005; Mamdani 2005).

CONCLUSION

Just as Islam is Christianity's Other, in Ghana, Christianity also served to send traditional religions into hiding. One result of this marginalization of traditional religions is that although increasingly accepted that many Ghanaians practice these religions in some capacity, they are still seen as backwards and ignorant (Meyer, 1999; Thomas, 2015). Despite this negative perception of traditional religions, increasingly popular artists are asking that we reconsider these religious practices. I began this chapter with a discussion of Azizaa's music video, which I argued challenges the heteropatriarchal practices of Christianity. In similar fashion, hiplife artist Blitz the Ambassador has produced a trilogy of music videos titled *Diasporadical* (2016), which shows traditional religions positively. This three-part album is set in Accra, Ghana, Bahia, Brazil and Brooklyn, USA. Blitz the Ambassador's "*Juju* Girl," "Shine," and "Running" tell stories of love and *juju*, ancestors spirits and worship, and afro-Brazilian spirituality. These videos bring to the fore the ways in which traditional religions still have resonance for some Ghanaians and speak in solidarity with diasporic black peoples. Blitz the Ambassador and Azizaa are amongst several Ghanaian artists who identify themselves in one way or another as Afropolitans. These artists, including FOKN Bois engage in an Afropolitan project that critiques colonialism and Christian dominance in Ghana. Their Afropolitan project invokes a different imagined community – a black diaspora that rejects the coercive conversion to Christianity. Although these artists are marginal to mainstream Ghanaian hiplife, their Afropolitan project offers an important challenge to the dominance of the imagined Christian community in the Ghana.

This chapter has explored how the Ghanaian community in Houston relied on an imagined community of Christians to locate themselves as belonging both in the United States and Ghana. The place of Christianity in the Houston Ghanaian community aligns in many ways with the place of Christianity not only in the United States but also in Ghana. Through opening prayers at community events, a common assumption that most (if not nearly all) Ghanaians are Christians, and by repeating a belief that the United States is a Christian nation, this community produces a Christianity that exists outside of the church pews and Sunday services. For this immigrant community, an imagined community of Christians not only cements their ties to Ghana, but also inserts them into one dominant frame of belonging in the United States as well. Likewise, I have shown how Christianity serves as a symbolic boundary that mitigates the social boundaries that the community experiences vis-à-vis their racialized immigrant status. Despite experiences of racial inequality, many in the community had faith that a shared Christianity made them part of the in-group.

On the one hand, when the Ghanaian community in Houston experiences marginalization as black immigrants, their inclusion within the symbolic boundary of a "Christian America" regardless of its problematic political stances might mitigate other forms of social inequalities (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Straughn and Feld 2010). On the other hand, as Gifford (1998, 2004), Meyer (2012, 1999, 1998) and Soothill (2007) have shown in their various studies about Christianity in Ghana, the material implications of following this religion are significant in a postcolonial nation where economic comforts are hard won. My examination of Christianity as a discourse of belonging within an immigrant community extends these findings in two ways. First, although Christianity mitigates some experiences of social inequality, especially by aligning black immigrants with a white Christian mainstream, the religion also serves as a basis for discriminating against other marginalized people. Specifically, I showed how at community events, Muslims were excluded through claims such as “we’re all Ghanaians, we’re all Christians.” These ways of excluding non-Christian (imagined almost exclusively as Muslim) others are not only informed by a U.S. religious and political landscape that marks Muslims as outsiders, but also by a post-colonial Ghanaian Christian context in which Islam and all other religions are rendered illegitimate. Similar to my claims in Chapter Five about how Ghanaian and U.S. American contexts shape immigrants’ racial identities, the above analysis shows how the political, economic, and religious landscape of these two countries inform the community’s relationship to Christianity.

The underlying rhetoric of Christianity within this community’s Afropolitan project raises challenging questions. If “we are all Ghanaian and we are all Christian” and this sense of self helps to posit the community as modern successful Ghanaians what becomes of Ghanaians who are not Christians? How do they fit into the imagined community of modern successful Ghanaians? Likewise, when Christianity is used to justify laws that penalize queer sexuality, disenfranchise women and visit violence against religious others, how does modernity, marked by multiculturalism and inclusivity become aligned with this religion? I suggest that the dominance of Christianity begins to explain why marginalized groups might align themselves with this religion. In an immigrant context, not only does being a Christian allow communities to be part of the U.S. nation, but it also aligns them with financial success in Ghana.

While Christianity within this Ghanaian community is part of an Afropolitan project, Christianity in Ghana is similar to Christianity in the United States. It is part of a symbolic construction of the community. Consequently, Christianity serves three main roles in the Houston community – belonging in the United States and Ghana, and projecting an image of modernity and success. The preceding chapters outlined various ways in which Ghanaians in Houston actively created a community, articulated their identities as U.S. American, African, Ghanaians, black, and Christians. In the next chapter, I bring together the diverse threads of this dissertation by first sharing an ethnographic vignette from a visit to Houston nearly a year after my fieldwork officially ended. This vignette offers a potent illustration of how Afropolitan projects are enacted beyond nationalist confines of "the Ghanaian community," while still maintaining the underlying discourses of Ghanaian, Christian, U.S. American, racialized middle-class, and heteronormative dimensions. I answers the questions raised in Chapter Two and, in light of my analysis, outline the limitations of this research and provide directions for future research.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER SIX

[1] Agbadza is a type of dance accompanied by a wooden drum called the agbadza drum

[2] My mother's stories do not include an exact date for conversation. As such, I approximate the date based on other academic scholarship about Christian missions in the Akuapem/Akropong region. Specifically, Serena Dankwa's (2005, p. 106) brief history of the Basel Missions in the area informs my estimate.

[3] In 2015, the Okuapenhene, the king of the Akuapem credited the Basel Mission and the Swiss government for their foundational role in the development of Ghana. He noted how the mission's provision of formal (western) education and its propagation of Christianity around the country was instrumental in the country's development (GNA 2015). Such continued gratitude towards former colonizers and missionaries are illustrative of the hold that colonial ideologies of European superiority hold in certain (many?) Ghanaian contexts.

[4] See Pellow (1991) on power struggle and spatial oppression in *zongo*

[5] It is beyond the scope of this project to discuss the geography of Ghana's Muslim North and supposedly Christian South. However, it is important to note that much of the works that I cite about Ghanaian beliefs are more accurately a reflection of the Ghanaian south. Generally, the country is imagined as a Christian South and a Muslim North, where the north begins at the southern border of the Northern Region. However, Muslims and Christians (along with other religious subjects) are present throughout the country.

[6] Jones (2016) differs from Kruse (2015) in that he centers whiteness as intricately connected to the role of Christianity in the U.S. political/public sphere. By contrast, Kruse on the other hand, is largely concerned with how Christianity took hold in the

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public sphere, arguing that although the founders wanted a separation of church and state, the presidency of Eisenhower disrupted that desire and produced “one nation under god.”

[7] A mega-church has a weekly attendance of more than 2000.

[8] It is possible that the beef was *halal*.

[9] Elsewhere (Adjepong 2017) I discuss the MCGH reputation as being exclusive of young Ghanaians in working class employment. Alexis’ comment reveals an awareness of this reputation and an in a way affirms it when she says she is unsure she wants these men in her group.

[10] I specify “masculinity among men” to acknowledge that masculinity is not an exclusive possession of cisgender men. As the work of scholars including Jack Halberstam (*Female Masculinity* – 1998), Bobby Noble (*Masculinity without men* – 2004), and CJ Pascoe (*Dude you’re a fag* (specifically Chapter Five) – 2011) show, masculinities, like femininities, must be understood as a set of practices and performances that have been done often enough to be identified as gendered in particular ways. But because gender is a performance (see Butler 1990) masculinity and femininity operate beyond bodies and normative binary gender.

Chapter Seven. Conclusion

In November 2016, Lisa sent me an invitation to attend a fundraising dinner organized by the Education Fund (EF). The Education Fund is a charity organization founded by Ghanaians living in the United States and located in three states and Ghana. The organization raises money to provide equipment such as computers, library books, and laboratory tools to Ghanaian high schools and gives out scholarships to students in the United States and Ghana. The November fundraiser marked the EF's eighth annual fundraising dinner in Houston and Lisa, who served on the EF board, was one of the co-hosts. Tickets to the charity dinner cost $60 a person or $500 for a ten-person table. Lisa and her husband had bought a table and invited me as one of their guests. In attendance were MCGH and various other ethnic association members, George Owusu, the oil millionaire introduced in Chapter Four, members from the newly founded Ghana-Houston Chamber of Commerce, and other Ghanaians I had seen at different community events including United States and Ghana Independence Day celebrations. There were also Ghanaians who I had either not seen or noticed during my earlier fieldwork, including Lisa's co-host, Jerry. Jerry explained to me that as a member of the country club, he contributed to EF's fundraising by donating the cost of the space for hosting the fundraiser. In addition to Ghanaians, guests at this fundraising dinner included black Americans, South Asians, and one or two white people.

The diversity present at this occasion, along with its mission to fundraise, produced a different kind of event from what I had typically seen at other Ghanaian community events. For example, the evening did not open with a prayer as was usual at other celebrations. When I asked Lisa why she thought this was the case, she said perhaps its because there were Muslims present. How she knew this is unclear. Instead of a

Christian prayer, a solo drummer opened the night, playing a remarkable five-minute long set. Aside from the absence of an opening prayer, this event was also conducted exclusively in English. Although I overheard guests speaking to one another in Ga, Ewe and Akan, the hosts, MC, and anyone else who got on the microphone only spoke in English. On the one hand, using English exclusively acknowledged the non-Ghanaians in the room by allowing them to fully participate in the event. On the other hand at events where Ghanaian languages were spoken, such as at Ghana's independence day, the language was typically an Akan language, ignoring the fact that not all Ghanaians speak this language.

After the drummer played, the master of ceremony, John took the stage. John, the MCGH member first introduced in Chapter Four as an MC at the group's inauguration, was visiting Houston briefly after having been transferred to Nigeria with his company. In our conversation, John told me about how much he enjoyed "moving back home to Africa," and how easy the transition to life in Lagos had been for him. He explained that having lived in Houston, he had an intimate understanding of life in a predominantly Nigerian city. He also said that the stories his Lagosian friends told following their back and forth journeys provided him with a good sense of what things would be like in his new home. Tonight, wearing a navy kurta and multicolored slippers, John's dress style reflected his travels. Since most other men wore western suits and ties and women wore western formal dresses with the occasional wax print pop of color, John stood out. In fact, Lisa had counseled me against wearing an *agbada* to tonight's event, instead encouraging me to wear a western suit and tie. Looking around and noting what everyone else wore, I was grateful for her advice. John's first words following the drummer's set were to note that it was important to insert some tradition into this event. The drum solo was such a tradition, employing a cultural performance to root this investment in western education and style.

The main portion of the evening included pitches from the co-hosts, Lisa and Jerry, encouraging the attending guests to reach deep into their pockets and make a charitable contribution. In conversation with the organizers, I learned about their frustrations that the cost per plate was too low at $60. In their efforts to be inclusive of most people in the community, the organizers felt that they had set costs so low that the dinner itself did not raise any money. Furthermore, they felt that despite their many pleas for donations along with the silent auction, the guests present did not come prepared to write checks, as was expected at a fundraiser. As one organizer explained to me, in the future, the cost for attendance should be much higher, thereby weeding out those who simply wanted to come for a good time.

EF organizers concerns about raising money for their charity reflected a class tension within the community. Whereas some, such as the fundraiser organizers, felt that the community was wealthy enough to make contributions to this education charity, it seemed from the actions of some guests that this assumption was not accurate. In requests for donations, Jerry reminded the room that their donations were tax-deductible and people could even make a commitment to have monthly contributions taken directly out of the paychecks. One South Asian man, identified as a lifetime sponsor of EF, spoke about his commitment to education and his decision to support EF. As the hosts and MC had done before him, he reiterated that the people gathered were lucky to live in the "greatest country in the world." Education, he said, is the easiest path out of poverty and the hosts, and other sponsors including George Owusu, implored the people present to pass on their blessings to the less fortunate in Ghana.

Attending the EF fundraising dinner was an opportunity to see several important aspect of what it means to be a Ghanaian in Houston. First, this fundraiser, much like the date auction MCGH organized (see Chapter Four), offered insight into the community's identity as a philanthropic group of people. The criticisms about charitable giving and low per plate costs point to a recognition that on some level, to be inclusive of most people in the Ghanaian community means to recognize the financial constraints that some Ghanaians face. At the same time, the criticisms against attendants' unpreparedness (read: unwillingness) are implicitly accusations of moral failure. Whereas Americans are posited as uniquely charitable, the seeming inability of many to support a charity through financial donations is posited as uncharitable behavior. Secondly, the frequent claims of how lucky the people gathered were to live in the "greatest country in the world," repeated by Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian immigrants alike, reflected the community's investment in the dominant narratives about the United States by its citizens. In order to direct aid towards underfunded schools in Ghana, the community discounts the structural inequalities that produced these schools and posits the students and their families as simply unfortunate. As Ghanaian-Americans, their American citizenship grants them the opportunity to save Ghana through private funding, new business ventures, and charity work.

In the preceding chapters I have examined the processes through which a Ghanaian community and the individuals that comprise this community articulate complex identities as Ghanaian, African, and U.S. American. I have shown how these identities are not devoid of classed, racialized, and gendered meanings. Examining the diversity of Ghanaian community events, including fundraisers, church services, festival celebrations, and religious and national holiday parties provides insight into the collective ways in which the community presents a coherent identity. Considering different practices that produce a collective identity showed how individuals and groups that stake a claim to the different aspects of belonging within the community contest this identity.

Chapter Four presented a case for understanding African as a black ethnicity that provided a space for Ghanaian immigrants to claim their histories and connections to other people from the continent. This ethnic identity presented an essentialist African identity that asserted supposed similarities amongst people from the continent as the defining feature of identity. The way people in the community understood themselves as Africans affirmed their black racial identities whilst also claiming belonging to a contemporary Africa. This articulation of a shared African identity can best be understood as an ethnic identity in the sense that it affirmed their connectedness to others from the continent and the similarities of their experiences in the United States. At the same time, through their comparisons to Nigerians and other Africans in Houston, the community showed me that an African ethnicity is internally contested based on national and indigenous ethnic (such as Ga and Ewe) distinctions. These contests painted some Africans as morally superior to others through their ties to western education, economic success, and gender and sexual respectability. As such, I argue that processes through which the community articulated an African ethnicity reflected the many incoherent processes that produce this identity. Importantly, I showed how understanding African as an ethnicity in the U.S. context makes possible belonging as black Americans and immigrants.

Scholars who study Central American migration to the United States have noted how the process of migration facilitates the emergence of regional identities where they did not exist before (Menjívar 2002; Rodríguez and Menjívar 2009). My findings suggest that an African ethnicity in this context might be akin to a "Central American" or Latino identity in how it provides a language through which immigrants from the same region might articulate their bonds of togetherness. From their experiences being hailed as Africans in the United States, some of the more salient differences that Nigerians, Ghanaians, Kenyans, or Zimbabweans claimed could be papered over in order to promote a sense of togetherness in the immigrant context. But on a micro-level, these differences still mattered as shown by the distinctions Ghanaians in Houston made between the "Muslim North" and "Christian South."

In Chapter Five I examined how black African immigrants navigate the racial landscape of the United States and affirm their black identities. This chapter highlighted how the community's racial histories, their position as immigrants and their class aspirations and gender and sexual politics informed how they engaged with and understood experiences of racial inequalities in the United States. Being a black African immigrant meant that pursuit of the "American Dream" of upward mobility was stalled by anti-black racism and beliefs about Africans as inept. However, Barack Obama's presidency and the visible economic success of some black African immigrants facilitated claims about "postracial America" even in the face of evidence and personal experiences of anti-black racism. I argue that the different histories, narratives, and experiences that African immigrants bring to the United States inform their black identities in ways that have historically been misidentified as anti-black. However, paying attention to the experiential and intersectional forces that inform these black identities provides a framework for understanding the diversity of blackness.

Finally, Chapter Six examined how the community understood their place in a United States imagined as a Christian country. I suggested that by beginning from the claim that the United States is a Christian country, many in the community were able to use their shared Christianity to critique laws, policies, and U.S. foreign interventions, while affirming their belonging to "Christian America." Using the example of the legalization of same-sex marriage, I showed how men and women differently articulated their commitment to Christian America. Even if some women disagreed that same-sex marriage should be legalized, they felt that the United States is a progressive country and laws should not impinge on others' freedoms. Despite these differences however, Christianity held a promise of economic success for the community. I argued that this promise refers back to a colonial heritage in which Christian missionaries provided colonized people the tools (civilization and commerce) to participate in the new economy that colonialism created. As such, Christian America provided a broad umbrella of belonging that also acknowledged the community's historical and contemporary relationship to Christianity.

BLACK AFRICAN IDENTITIES IN CONTEXT

At this point I want to briefly answer the questions set out at the beginning of this dissertation. I asked: (1) What constitutes an immigrant community? (2) How does a black/African immigrant community understand and articulate its identity in a U.S. context? (3) What are the cultural politics of these communities and how do they articulate incoherent identities, produce new cultures and articulate new ways of being and belonging? Below, I answer each of these questions in turn.

(1) What constitutes an immigrant community?

I found that the community is intentionally constructed. Not every Ghanaian living in Houston is part of the Ghanaian community. Instead, people opt in through a variety of avenues. By participating in organizations with a mission to promote a Ghanaian community, contributing to fundraisers designated as Ghanaian, and attending churches and after church events, individuals find themselves part of a Ghanaian community. In this regard, it is important to note that not every person in the Ghanaian community is a Ghanaian either. Instead, the community names itself as such while also making room for Nigerians, Ivorians, Liberians, other Africans and even Americans to participate in community activities. Being part of the community requires active participation. It is not enough to shop at African grocery stores or attend African churches. Other Ghanaians living in Houston participated in these activities without considering themselves part of the community. Likewise, people within the community criticized Ghanaians they knew, who they felt were not involved in creating and sustaining the community. This criticism highlights how being Ghanaian is not a sufficient condition for being part of the Ghanaian community. The need for active participation is indicative of the intentionality of community.

At the same time, references to a larger African community suggest that the demand for active participation is not required across different imagined communities. Although claiming belonging to an African community, I was aware of only two instances in which the Ghanaian community participated in this broader collective. Both of these instances were at the first and second Annual Festival of African Arts, Culture, and Entertainment. Claiming belonging to a broader local and transnational African community while also maintaining intimate boundaries around who belongs in the local Ghanaian community, illustrate how the meanings of community change depending on when and how it is invoked.

In everyday life, one might hear references to a black or LGBT or Muslim community. These references are indicative of how some people occupy a marginal status in society. (With the exception of committed/explicit white nationalists, it is rare to hear of a white community or a male community.) For example, the burning of a Texas mosque by anti-Muslim groups or the shooting of black Christians at a Southern AME church might be identified as harm towards the Muslim or black community (Finley and Fung 2015; Rathod 2016). For example, a *CNN* report on the shooting at the Emanuel

African Methodist Episcopal Church described the church as "the very heart of African American history" (Foreman 2015). In *The Atlantic*, the attack was described in the context of other attacks against black churches and further, as "an additional burden borne by blacks: the hate crimes and terrorist attacks that have targeted their places of worship for generations, each incident signaling virulent animus toward the entire black community" (Friedersdorf 2015). These reports highlight the unique suffering communities of color face in a white supremacist society. However, such reporting also constructs these communities as homogenous and their internal diversity and contests are suppressed to serve the needs of those who have rendered them a community.

By contrast, a bombing at the finish line of the Boston Marathon or the shooting at a school of predominantly white children (Sandy Hook) is named an American tragedy. For both of these events, books have already been written describing the "American tragedies" that occurred at Sandy Hook and in Boston – Masha Gessen's (2013) *The Brothers: The Road to an American Tragedy* and Matthew Lysiak's (2013) *Newtown: An American Tragedy*. Who is considered part of a (marginal) community and who is considered part of the U.S. nation highlight the importance of community for those written outside of broader frameworks of belonging.

(2) How does a black/African immigrant community understand and articulate its identity in a U.S. context?

For those invoked as a community, including Muslims, black, Africans and LGBT people, regardless of their active ties to one another, being marked by structural forces as a community produces affective bonds. Although some Ghanaians in Houston consider themselves part of an intentional Ghanaian community, the broader city and country might see them as Africans who are part of "an African community." As such, their identity as a community is in dialogue with various other identities imposed upon them.

These contesting discourses do not, however, discount the meanings of community for this population. Instead, when the Ghanaian community acknowledges that they are part of an African community regardless of how they personally identify, they acknowledge the ways in which the larger society imposes an identity on them. Insisting on their Ghanaianness does not discount the fact that they are considered African in America, nor does insisting on their Africanness water down the fact that they are identified as black in the United States. Instead, the meanings of and processes through which community makes sense amongst Ghanaians in Houston shows how this group of people simultaneously accepts the frames that hail them, while also staking a unique place within these frames. Efforts by the Ghanaian community to articulate unique positions constitute their collective identities as Ghanaian, African, and American. By holding events to celebrate different aspects of who they are, the community actively affirms their belonging to various collectives at once, without conceding these collectives to a homogenizing discourse.

With regard to understanding Africa and Africans as racialized people, my research lends nuance to claims that discount the black racial identities of African immigrants in the United States by overemphasizing cultural difference (Arthur 2008, 2009; Chacko 2003; Mensah and Williams 2015; Waters 1999; Waters, Kasinitz, and Asad 2014). Instead, I saw how Africans engage with the U.S. racial landscape in ways that challenge normative essentialist ideas about Africans and black people. As such, this research illustrates the intricacies of black immigrants' claims to cultural and historical complexity through participant observation and in-depth interviews that take seriously how these experiences inform their racial identities.

The sociological importance of this intervention lies in how it shifts thinking about black identities, race and ethnicity, and class. Scholars including Pierre (2008, 2013), Wright (2004, 2015), and Saucier (2015) have made the argument that dominant narratives about racialization and blackness have been told in such a way as to write out contemporary Africans from this framework. The consequences of this practice have been to render Africans as outside of globalization and modernity. To address this omission, Pierre (2013) reframes our understanding of Africa as a space shaped by racial rule in the form of colonialism and Saucier (2015) and Wright (2015) suggest that black identities emerge through diverse sociopolitical relations that mark some people as black. These insights challenge assertions that race has no meaning in Africa, Africans are not black, and black Africans choose or emphasize ethnicity to shield themselves from systemic anti-black racism.

Affirming the insights of scholars who provide a framework for understanding Africans as racialized people in a modern world, my research further shows that class, gender, and religion complicate black identities. With regard to their racialized identities, the Ghanaian community in Houston understands themselves as African *and* black, thereby disrupting "cultural narratives of ethnicity" that posit black immigrants as model blacks and position them against U.S. American blacks imagined as a homogeneous racial underclass (Pierre 2013; Treitler 2013). Ethnicity in this analysis is not merely (claims to) cultural difference that one can put on as a protective cloak against anti-black racism. Instead, ethnicity refers to a particular history (imagined and otherwise) through which black immigrants from the African continent can claim a shared history and identity. When my respondents described themselves as African American, they were describing their understanding of their U.S. American ethnicity, which they understood as "ethnically" African. This ethnicity affirms how black Africans are racialized not only in the United States but also globally. African ethnicity is important in how U.S. Africans understand their identities as Americans. This ethnic identity speaks to a particular historical articulation of what it means to be an African racialized as black. By considering how processes of racialization, along with their ethnic identities, shape immigrants' understanding of their racial experiences in the United States, my research complicates an overly simplistic notion that black immigrants' identities are not "really" black (Halter and Johnson 2014; Tsri 2016; Waters 1999) or have ethnic identities based on defensively othering themselves from U.S.-blacks (Alba and Nee 2003; Greer 2013; Portes and Rumbaut; Treitler 2013). As the members of the Ghanaian community made clear to me, their proximity to other black people was an important aspect of their sense of belonging as Americans. Black immigrants' experiences of racism counter the argument that their ethnicities protect them against such inequalities.

(3) What are the cultural politics of these communities?

Afropolitan projects provide a heuristic through which to understand the cultural politics of black/African communities. As each empirical chapter argued, Afropolitan projects are concerted efforts through which the community implicitly counters negative stories about Africa and Africans and offers new narratives in which Africans jockey for position in a global middle-class elite. By articulating their identities as a different shade of black, the Ghanaian community in Houston highlighted two key points about black identities and new ethnicities. First, black identities are diverse – if there is a "new" one, surely there are others, old and contemporary. Secondly, ethnicities are sites of contestation. The struggle over the Afropolitan, whether as an elitist identity (Santana 2016), a new colonizing narrative (Bwesigwe 2013; Dabiri 2016; Ede 2016), or a neology that articulates African modernities (Eze 2014, 2016; Mbembe 2007; Selasi 2005, 2015) are illustrative of the cultural politics that contemporary Africans of the world engage. Afropolitan projects are the cultural politics that this black ethnicity helps to articulate. Performances and practices of Christianity, U.S. and Ghanaian nationalism, and "ethnic cultures," reveal the community's orientation and cultural politics around race, sexuality, class.

Afropolitan projects, as such, alerts us to the importance of considering class, gender, and sexuality in efforts to understand black African identities (Dankwa 2009; Ifekwunigwe 2006; Matlon 2016). This dissertation offers a sustained examination of how the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality inform black African identities. The overarching discourse of contemporary black African migrant identities, presently framed through the Afropolitan, is aligned with a global middle-class politics. However the sexual politics of this black identity might include a variety of positions including conservative Christian ideologies that sustain heteronormative western ideals. Future research focusing on questions of gender and sexual politics amongst so-called Afropolitans and African immigrants are important to addressing unanswered questions about this black African sexual politics.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As with any sociological study, this one has its own set of limitations. Most important to point out is the fact that my analysis presents only a partial understanding of the complex lives of the members of the Ghanaian immigrant community. Over the course of eighteen months of research, I did not spend every waking minute with someone from the community. With the limited resources I had available to me, I was not able to live full-time in Houston during my ethnographic investigation. Instead I spent two to three weeks at a time in the city, attending events and trying to spend social time with informants when they would let me. Although in some ways a limitation, the frequent back and forth trips to Houston also allowed me time to analyze my fieldnotes before going back into the community. The process of returning allowed me to gain new insights and different perspectives on how the community fashioned itself.

One of the things I learned when I did stay in Houston for long periods was that the people who made themselves available to me were also very busy professionals. This meant that even when I was in Houston for twenty-one days with nothing to do but observe and participate in the lives of members of the Ghanaian community, people were often at work, taking classes, or simply not available to spend time with me. Consequently, the greater part of my observations occurred in social settings intentionally created to showcase the community and bring people together. Within these social settings, I was not always privy to "backstage" moments in which people were at ease and not concerned with showing their most respectable selves (Goffman, 1959/2002). From where I stood, mostly present for front stage renditions of what it meant to be part of a Ghanaian community, I am only able to report on a particular performance of community life. Despite this entry point into my study, interviews and small group social time with some community members helped lend me some insight into some of the nuanced ways in which community members related to the city and to a larger African community.

Interviews were one way in which I addressed some of the limitations presented by conducting participant observations. However, the individual approach that interviews take means that they only tell us about one person's meaning making and may obfuscate the relational aspects of how this meaning is attained (Jerolmack and Khan 2014). One way that I tried to address this discrepancy was to use interviews as a way to follow up on observed events as well as learn people's personal motivations for participating in community events. However, most of the Ghanaians who agreed to participate in formal interviews were overwhelming class privileged and highly educated. This skew towards middle-class and college educated Ghanaians limit the claims I can make about community but were augmented by the informal conversations I had at social events.

Combining interviews with ethnographic observations at social events and smaller social non-community oriented events provided a way to get a glimpse into different perspectives that were not necessarily centered during community events.

Finally, this study is not meant to be a representative or generalizable analysis of Ghanaian communities in the United States. As Mario Small (2009) articulates, judging ethnographic methods according to quantitative paradigms not only misses the point about what the work can achieve, but also forces ethnographers to model their craft in ways that weaken the research. The strength of my ethnographic approach is to lend insight into the processes that shape a community's sense of self and belonging. Additionally, this research offers some empirical basis for understanding the relationships between an immigrant community and the different countries and communities with which it aligns itself. However, this study does not purport to define all African, West African, or even Ghanaian immigrant communities living in the United States. Importantly, this study does not assume that all large populations of Ghanaians living in any city constitute a community.

An important follow up to the above discussion would be to examine the collective identities and practices of other groups in Houston in order to see the extent to which the conclusions about community might apply. For example, ethnographic observations amongst Nigerians in Houston would provide insights into how this population, which is much larger than the Ghanaian community, articulates a collective identity. What stories might the cultural projects of a Nigerian community tell about being Nigerian, African, black, and American and how might these stories augment what we know about community? Or, rather than another national immigrant group, what new knowledge might come of observing a religious institution such as a Latino church or a mosque in addition to an immigrant community? My research is limited in its ability to answer these questions. However, my observations of Nigerians within the Ghanaian community, along with preliminary research with a Nigerian association in Austin, Texas suggest that at least amongst immigrants, similar cultural projects articulate racialized identities as African and U.S. American.

CREATING COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, AND BELONGING

In the current political moment, following the election of a white nationalist to the presidency of the United States, it is especially important to examine the ways in which those marked out of national belonging nevertheless claim their U.S. Americanness. People with seemingly disparate political views levy similar discourses of patriotism and American exceptionalism to define what it means to be a U.S. American. For example, a striking image of a woman covered in an U.S. flag hijab (Figure 4) is used to show that being Muslim does not exclude one from being U.S. American. However inclusive and welcoming this image appears, it elides a long history of Islamophobia in the United States and simply asserts Muslim belonging. Likewise, it constraints a Muslim identity to an American national community in ways that raises troubling questions about United States' wars against Islam and in majority Muslim countries in the Middle East.

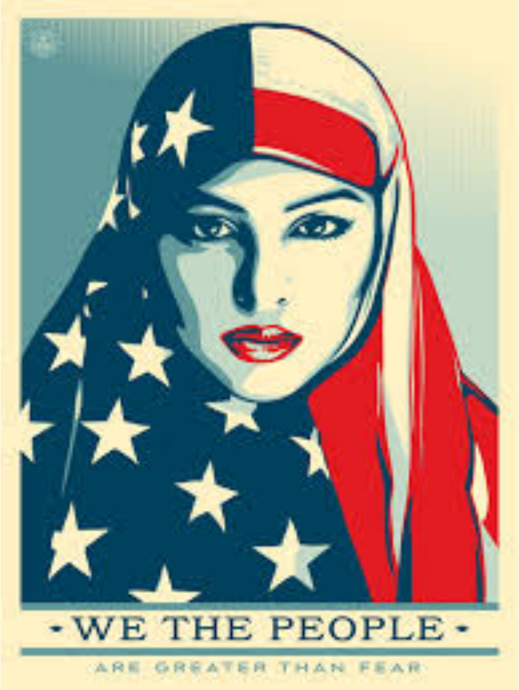

Figure 4: “We the people” series by Shepard Fairey

Despite the inclusive potential of an American flag draped hijabi, as I have shown, the notion of Christian America is a poignant one. One aspect of the larger national community is that the United States is a Christian nation founded on Judeo-Christian principles (that do not recognize Islam as an Abrahamic religion). I showed how among some black African immigrants, the idea of the United States as a Christian nation is advanced with only a slight nod to the white supremacist underpinnings of this Christian America. Beyond religion, I have shown how these same African immigrants, regardless of their place of birth, advance an essentialist narrative about Africa in order to assert an identity within a larger African community. The discourses of community that these Africans engage articulate their orientation to a world in which they align themselves with the power of the U.S. nation and its attendant privileges while suppressing the very real and concerns of those who cannot be part of this discourse.

As scholars (Cohen 1985; Jenkins 1996; Mulligan 2015) have shown, community can be a problematic discourse that papers over differences and silences dissent. But additionally, communities do not exist in isolation, nor are they mutually exclusive. Instead, the competing discourses and daily interactions that create communities can also challenge the narrow nationalism prescribed by the normative meanings of "American" or "African." These discourses expand the limits of the imagined national community to create "cosmopolitan nationalists" (Anderson 1985/2006; Nielsen 1999). In this instance, cosmopolitan nationalists are not citizens of the world as Martha Nussbaum (1996) suggests, but rather citizens of many nations. Such an identity maintains discourses associated with national belonging, including its inherent racial and gender inequalities, land claims, and capitalist tendencies that exploit labor. Yet, to be a citizen of many nations means to present yourself with a menu of options as to which of the nation's concerns you align yourself. In the case of U.S. American Afropolitans, they can simultaneously claim "a rich African culture" and belonging to the "greatest nation in the world." Here, the economic devastation experienced by many people living on the continent might be acknowledged in the context of how their belonging in the world's greatest nation may address those issues. Likewise, their belonging in the "greatest nation in the world" may circumscribe any criticism they have of the United States' less savory foreign interventions and problematic local policies.

On the one hand, Afropolitan appears to have radical potential as a politics of identity because it appears to encompass Africans outside the continent with widely disparate class, gender, and even racial experiences. As hybrids, Afropolitans call for new ways of belonging by expanding the meanings of certain all-encompassing categories of identity such as African and American. The hybridity of this new ethnicity neither calcifies nor discounts what it means to belong in disparate communities with diverse histories and viewpoints. Instead, Afropolitan insists on an inherent diversity of viewpoints. As such, this identity makes possible worlds in which individual experiences are not lost within collective identities. Instead, Afropolitan identity has the potential to create worlds in which many worlds exist by imagining and making possible new possibilities for being.

On the other hand, the Afropolitan is limited in how it can challenge what Adichie (2009) called a dangerous single story. As far as discourses of national belonging, the Afropolitan does not so much challenge these discourses as much as make it possible for some Africans to also belong to multiple nations at the same time. In this way, the Afropolitan challenges how Africans are restricted to an atavistic unchanging African continent with its multiple issues and limited possibilities. But as citizenship by investment programs indicate there is nothing particularly radical about being a dual national. For $275,000 a single applicant can become a dual citizen of St. Kitts and Nevis while maintaining citizenship to their country of birth. For $311,500 they can include their different gender spouse and two children under sixteen years old in this citizenship.[1] Afropolitans just claim this benefit at a lower financial cost. Likewise, critiques that Afropolitan impose a new single story about Africans (of the world) as economically secure, highly educated, and well-travelled raise questions about what, besides their ascription as black, makes this identity different from the identity of a person in the global middle class. Anthias' (2001) caution about the desirability of hybridity is relevant in this context. Just because hybrids merge cultures does not necessarily make them more progressive. Instead as anthropologist Haim Hazan (2015) has suggested, the celebration of the hybrid comes at the price of making non-hybrids invisible. Africans become legible and acceptable as global citizens only insofar as they are Afropolitans – Africans of the world. To be Africans of Ghana, Zimbabwe or Kenya is to be irrelevant to the global conversation.

CODA

The exercise of "reclaiming" ethnicity, for Africans in particular, is an uncomfortable one. Africa is an incredibly racialized space in which ethnicity has been used to write out the indigenous population from discussions of progress, modernity, and belonging to a global world order. In the context of U.S. migration, ethnicity for people of color is problematic in how it systematically excludes us from full belonging within the national frame. Nevertheless, having an ethnic identity has strong resonance for people. As such it is important to contend with the meanings that people assign to their ethnic identities and listen to how these meanings challenge white supremacist notions about people of color's claims to ethnic particularity. In the Ghanaian community in Houston, individuals claimed an ethnic identity as Akuapem or Ewe or Dangme and also identified boldly as Africans "no matter what," as Patrick put it. Yet from the perspective of this community, their identities as Africans, Ghanaian and Ewe, for example, did not exclude them from other ways of being and belonging in the world. That they used the language of ethnicity, despite its racist baggage and while challenging its restrictive meanings, reflects the cultural contest that continues to take place around the concept.

On this point, throughout this dissertation, I have also struggled to clarify my description of African as an ethnicity. On the one hand, this description came from what the Ghanaian community was telling me when they claimed an African community, called themselves African American and described African as "the U.S. standard definition" for black people and also African as the kind of food they cooked at home. On the other hand, I recognize the troubling alarms "ethnicity" raises for black immigrants, for whom this concept has been used to juxtapose them against U.S. blacks and also exclude them from belonging to the nation. A return to disidenfitications is important to help clarify this unsettled conceptual struggle. “Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning” in order to represent “a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (Muñoz 1999, p. 31). Throughout this research, I listened to Ghanaians affirm their identities as black, as African, as highly-educated middle-class Americans, as Christians, and as citizens of a modern world; I heard them share their desires to see Africa and Ghana recognized as part of the narrative of modernity, and saw them care for one another despite language, class, and citizenship differences. The complexity of these lives resisted neat categorization. Instead through their disidentifications – facilitated as they were by their class privilege and aligned with Pentecostalism and heteronormativity – with dominant meanings of U.S. American, African, ethnic, and black, the community encouraged new thinking about these concepts. Their cultural politics illustrate the messiness, the limits and possibilities of normative strivings for belonging.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER SEVEN

[1] Same-sex couples are not granted legal permission to marry in Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Appendices

APPENDIX A1. INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

	Age	Years in the United States	Relationship Status^{+}	Number of Children	Occupation	Education
RESPONDENTS WHO LEFT GHANA AFTER AGE SIXTEEN						
Women						
Abena	35	8	Married	3	Engineer	Master's Degree
Beatrice	63	25	Married	0	Nurses' Assistant	High School Diploma
Eunice	55	13	Married	4	Nurse	Master's Degree
Evelyn	35	10	Married	1	Professor	Master's Degree
Irene	65	38	Married	3	Biosciences Researcher	Master's Degree
Lisa	58	20	Married	2	Doctor	Doctoral Degree
Nancy	55	24	Married	1	Nurses' Assistant	High School Diploma

Rose	59	31	Married	5	Home health worker	High School Diploma
Men						
David	31	11	Married	3	Engineer	Master’s Degree
Emmanuel	32	5	Married	1	Homemaker	High School Diploma
James	33	16	Married	1	Engineer	Bachelor’s Degree
Joshua	35	6	Single*	0	Engineer	Bachelor’s Degree
Kobby	29	2	In a relationship	0	IT Technician	Bachelor’s Degree
Kwaku	35	18	Single*	1	IT Consultant	Master’s Degree
Ofori	60	40	Married	3	Professor	Doctoral Degree
Patrick	45	14	Married	1	Professor	Doctoral Degree
Paul	28	3	Single	0	Odd jobs/Applying to graduate school	Bachelor’s Degree

(continued)

	Age	Years in the United States	Relationship Status	Children	Occupation	Education
RESPONDENTS WHO LEFT GHANA BEFORE AGE SIXTEEN						
Women						
Abigail$^{\Omega}$	mid-30s	~ 30	Single[*]	1	Supply Chain Manager	Bachelor's Degree[‡]
Cindy	29	11	Married	1	Finance	Master's Degree
Emefa	26	26	Single	0	Healthcare Administrator	Master's Degree[‡]
Esther	23	14	Single	0	Medical Scribe	Bachelor's Degree
Mary	26	20	Single	0	Nurse	Bachelor's Degree
Nina	28	20	Single	0	Biosciences Researcher	Master's Degree
Stacy	25	25	Single	0	Medical Student	Doctoral Degree[‡]
Yaa	26	26	Single	0	Undergraduate Student	Bachelor's Degree[‡]

Men

Dmitri	24	11	Single	0	Postal Worker	Associate's Degree[‡]
Gyamfi	30	21	Married	0	Engineer	Bachelor's Degree
Hassan	29	18	In a relationship	0	Engineer	Bachelor's Degree
John	26	15	Single	0	Finance	Master's Degree
Jojo	25	14	Single	1	Student	Bachelor's Degree[‡]
Jordan	24	24	Single	0	IT Consultant	Bachelor's Degree
Manny	23	17	Single	0	Undergraduate Student	Bachelor's Degree[‡]

[+] Respondents either implied or were explicit that their current and former relationships were with people of a different gender than them. If respondents were married or currently in a relationship, they were partnered with a Ghanaian.

[*] Denotes previously married

[‡] Denotes degree in progress at time of interview

[Ω] Although agreeing to an interview, Abigail was reticent to share details such as her age, occupation, and length of stay in the United States. For example, rather than respond to the question how old are you, she said, how old do you think I am? Eventually she agreed that we "should just leave it at about 30."

APPENDIX A2. AVERAGES OF INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

	Age	Years in the United States	Relationship Status	Education [Î]	Occupation
ALL RESPONDENTS					
Women	40.2	21.3	Married: 9 of 16	17	All women had paid employment
Men	31.81	14.69	Married: 6 of 16	16.88	15 of 16 men had paid employment
RESPONDENTS WHO LEFT GHANA AFTER AGE SIXTEEN					
Women	53.13	21.125	Married: 8 of 8	16.375	All women had paid employment
Men	36.44	12.778	Married: 5 of 9	17.56	8 of 9 men had paid employment
RESPONDENTS WHO LEFT GHANA BEFORE AGE SIXTEEN					
Women	27.25	21.5	Married: 1 of 8	17.625	All women had paid employment
Men	25.86	17.14	Married: 1 of 7	16	All men had paid employment

[Î] Compared to other Ghanaians in the United States my interview respondents were much more highly educated. According to the MPI profile on U.S. Ghanaians (see Table 1 in Chapter 3) 62% have a high school diploma only (compared to 12.5 % here), 18% had a some college degree (compared to 43.75% among respondents) and 12% had an advanced degree that (compared to 43.75% among respondents).

APPENDIX B1. CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN THE HOUSTON GHANAIAN COMMUNITY[∞]

	Denomination
Christ Life Kingdom Ministries	Pentecostal Charismatic
Church of Pentecost[*]	Pentecostal
First Love Church	Pentecostal Charismatic
Gloryland Assemblies of God	Pentecostal Charismatic
Ghanaian Catholic Community[†]	Catholic
International Central Gospel Church	Pentecostal Charismatic
International Community Church	Pentecostal Charismatic
Light House Chapel North[*]	Pentecostal Charismatic
Praise Fellowship Chapel	Pentecostal Charismatic
Presbyterian Church of Ghana Houston	Presbyterian
Presbyterian Church of the Redeemer	Presbyterian
Redeemed Christian Church of God Throne Room[¥]	Pentecostal Charismatic
Wesley Methodist Church	Methodist
Victory In Christ Chapel International	Pentecostal Charismatic
Winners Chapel International[¥]	Pentecostal Charismatic

[∞] This list is likely only a partial list of churches that Ghanaians in Houston attend.

[*] These churches have two locations

[†] The Catholic community is not a church in the traditional sense. The group meets once a month to worship together. Catholics I spoke to in the community reported attending U.S. Catholic churches but appreciating the opportunity to worship with other Ghanaians.

[¥] These churches begun in Nigeria but have branches in Ghana and internationally.

APPENDIX B2. RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS IN GHANA

AFFILIATION	2000 CENSUS[*]	2010 CENSUS[°]
Christian	68.8%	71.2%
Pentecostal/Charismatic	24.1%	28.3%
Protestant	18.6%	18.4%
Catholic	15.1%	13.1%
Other Christian	11%	11.4%
Muslim[^]	15.9%	17.6%
Traditional	8.5%	5.2%
None	6.1%	5.2%
Other	0.7%	0.8%

[*] Data retrieved from Religion Facts (http://www.religionfacts.com/charts/adherents-by-country)
[°] Data retrieved from CIA World Factbook, Ghana (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gh.html)
[^] The percentage of Ghanaians who are Muslims is a contested figure, with Muslim leaders suggesting that the number is understated for political purposes and to create an image of a predominantly Christian Ghana.

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Establishing Rapport + General information

1. Why did you agree to participate in this study?
2. Can you tell me about what first brought you to Houston?
3. What are some of the things you like about living in Houston?
4. What are some of the things you don't like about living in Houston?
5. What are some neighborhoods or areas in Houston you especially like and why?
6. What are some neighborhoods are areas in Houston you don't like and why?
7. Tell me about your educational background. Where did you attend school? What made you choose that school? Do you plan to attend more schooling in the future?
8. What do you do for work? What made you go into this line of work? What are some things you like about your job? What are some things you don't like about your job?

National identity and religion

9. When someone asks you where you are from, what do you say?
10. Do you consider yourself an American? What about yourself and your experiences make you feel like an American?
11. Do you consider yourself a Ghanaian? What about yourself and your experiences make you feel like a Ghanaian?
12. Do you consider yourself an African? What about yourself and your experiences make you feel like an African?
13. What is your country of citizenship?
14. What are some things that make you proud to be a Ghanaian? An American? An African?
15. What are some things that make you ashamed to be a Ghanaian? An American? An African?
16. Do you consider yourself to be black? What about yourself and your experiences make you feel like a black person?

17. Do you consider yourself to be a religious or spiritual person? Tell me about your religion. Do you attend church? How did you find your church? What keeps you going back?
18. How important is it to you to enter into a long-term relationship with someone who practices the same religion as you? Why?
19. How important is it to you to enter into a long-term relationship with someone from the same country, continent as you? Why?

Politics

20. Do you consider yourself a politically motivated person? What does that mean to you? Have you ever voted in a national, state, or local election in any of the places you have lived? Can you tell me about why you have or have not?
21. Do you support any political party in the United States? If yes, which one(s) and why?
22. Do you support any political party in Ghana? If yes, which one(s) and why?
23. Can you tell me about how your politics relates to your community and the people you are friends with?

Associations

24. Are you a member of any Ghanaian associations such as the Ghana Association, the Asante Kroyo or the Ga-Dangme group?
25. What made you decide to become a member of those association(s)?
26. What do you think the purpose of your group is?
27. What are some things you think your association does really well?
28. What are some things you think your association could do better?
29. Why do you continue to attend meetings and events?

II. Thoughts on current events

I am going to ask you some questions about issues and incidents that have happened here in the United States, in Ghana, and in Africa more generally. I will describe the issue to you and ask you to share your thoughts and feelings about it. Don't worry if you are unfamiliar with the incidents, I will provide as much detail as possible and you can always ask me for clarification.

Chalk Incident

At a gathering of chiefs and other elders, the headmistress of a school in the Eastern Region of Ghana asked the second lady, Mrs. Matilda Amissah-Arthur if she could relay to the government that the school needed chalk, log books, and other basic supplies. The second responded by noting that the government has spoilt Ghanaians by providing them with basic needs because now parents won't even buy school uniforms for their children. Instead waiting for government to provide these supplies. She further suggested that the headmistress should gather the names of the school's alumni and have them provide the chalk and other basic needs.

1. What do you think of this response?
2. How would you respond to someone who says that Ghanaians are over-reliant on government?
3. What do you think the role of Ghana's government should be?
4. How do you think the government can fulfill this role?

Black Lives Matter

In the last year or so, the United States has seen a rising social movement using the language of "black lives matter." These movements have been in response to police killings of unarmed black people in cities including Arlington Texas, Ferguson Missouri and Queens, New York; the murder of trans women of color, and immigration policies that criminalize immigrants of color by holding them in what some have called inhumane conditions in detention centers. In response to black live matter, others say all lives matter, arguing that saying that black lives matter devalues non-black lives.

1. What do you think activists mean when they say, "black lives matter"? How would you respond to this claim?
2. What do you think "all lives matter" means? How would you respond to this claim?
3. How do you make sense of the current uprisings happening around the United States?

Homosexuality and marriage equality

Just this past July president Obama visited Kenya, the first time a sitting U.S. president has visited the country. His visit was met with much attention especially as some wondered if he would bring up the issue of homosexuality, a matter that some argue is un-African. At a press conference, President Obama noted that if somebody is a law-abiding citizen they should not be treated differently or abused because of who they love. The Kenyan president, Uhuru Kenyatta responded by saying that the issue of gay-rights is a non-issue and not something that Kenyan culture or society would accept. Obama's visit to Kenya came on the heels of the U.S. Supreme Court's legalization of same-sex marriage across the country. On the other hand, in Kenya as in many other African countries including Ghana, same-sex sexual activity, at least between men, is considered a criminal act.

1. When people say homosexuality is "un-African" what do you think that means?
2. What do you think of President Obama's argument that homosexuals should not be abused or treated differently?
3. What do you think of President Kenyatta's response?
4. What do you think of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to legalize same-sex marriage in the United States?

III. Respondent's reaction to Interview

1. Is there something we did not discuss about your identity, being a Ghanaian/American, or your religion that in your opinion would be important for you to share with me?

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Vita

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