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# Searching for a Place to Belong in a Time of Othering

Hyacinth Udah

School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University, Logan 4131, Australia; h.udah@griffith.edu.au

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**Abstract:** Australia is a land of opportunity, where hard work can bring a better life. Most immigrants come to Australia to establish a new life and fulfil hopes and dreams for better life opportunities. Like many immigrants to Australia, I came to establish a new better life for myself and for family. In this paper, I share my challenges of being different, and of being black and the experiences of black Africans in Australia. The paper invites more conversations on finding ways forward to change the system that favours some and disadvantages others. It indicates the need to humanise the Other and make Australia a more inclusive and liveable multicultural environment.

**Keywords:** Othering; belonging; inclusion; white privilege; immigrants; tall poppy syndrome; Australia

## 1. Introduction

Australia is a land of opportunity, where hard work, supposedly in the long run, can bring a better life (Markus 2016a). It is also one of the most diverse, multiethnic, multiracial and multicultural Western nations with people of different backgrounds. The Indigenous people—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—are the first settlers of Australia. They have lived for over 65,000 years in Australia (Clarkson et al. 2017). Since the British arrived in 1788, the Australian population has increased tremendously. While the 1966 Census counted 11.6 million people, there were over 23 million people in Australia during the 2016 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS 2017), and there is likely to be over 25 million people by the end of the 2021 Census. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of people born overseas increased by almost one million. As indicated by the 2016 national census, nearly half (49%) of Australia's population are born overseas. Today, Australians are from nearly 200 countries, speak more than 300 languages, practice over 100 religions and represent more than 300 ethnic ancestries (ABS 2017).

Most immigrants who come to Australia want to establish a new life, thrive and fulfil their hopes and dreams for better life opportunities. Like many other immigrants to Australia, I came to establish a new better life for myself and for family. From the day I landed in Australia, I made every effort to acculturate and become an Australian citizen. To become an Australian the legal way, I spent thousands of dollars and countless hours reading Australian history because I wanted to adopt Australia as a home. Becoming Australian is among the precious prizes I have ever won. Since becoming Australian, I work hard, by choice, to put my knowledge and skills to best uses and prove that I am worthy of having the Australian passport, and of being identified, called or seen as an Australian.

It has been a journey—leaving Africa and living in Australia. I feel lucky to call Australia home. Australia, my adopted country, as written in the national anthem, *is girt by sea*. Its *land a-bounds in nature's gifts of beauty rich and rare*. As an Australian, I am always thrilled and happy when singing the national anthem because when you worked hard to get something, you value it, you treasure it! Like millions of other Australians, I do treasure Australia. However, I do recognise that immigrants in Australia (and other comparable countries) may find themselves in vulnerable situations as they make a new life in their new home because of “multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination,

inequality and structural and societal dynamics that lead to diminished and unequal levels of power and enjoyment of rights” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [OHCHR 2017](#), p. 6). On a structural level, the exclusionary nature of citizenship and the role of the state (polity) in constructing Otherness can cause increased vulnerability for many immigrants ([Aysa-Lastra and Cachón 2012](#); [Bustamante 2002](#)).

As immigrants, we constantly show resilience, agency, courage and creativity. On a regular basis, we make life-changing decisions ([OHCHR 2017](#); [Udah et al. 2019](#)). Our vulnerability begins when a country of our destination, exercising its sovereignty, establishes a definition of who is “one of us” and who is “the other”, who is “an insider” and who is “an outsider” and who is “a citizen” and who is “a foreigner” ([Aysa-Lastra and Cachón 2012](#); [Bustamante 2002](#); [Fraser 2009](#)). The social outcome of this distinction is the emergence of a discriminatory institutional framework that creates barriers and results in the creation of categorically unequal social subjects or citizens ([Aysa-Lastra and Cachón 2012](#)). Thus, as immigrants, especially as black immigrants, we are more vulnerable, though not inherently vulnerable, than native-born people because of the ways in which we have been constructed through the lens or norms of group labels—ethnicity, race, skin colour, religion, language and culture, including effective lack of resources, institutional barriers, class position and participation in our new countries ([Udah et al. 2019](#)).

Indeed, as a black immigrant to Australia, it takes courage to live day to day, and strive for a happy and healthy life knowing fully well you live in a system that oppresses and excludes you. Please, do not get me wrong. Even though my journey has not always been sweet, I must admit that I am blessed and lucky. Though I am a very resilient person, I am one of the exceptions, not the norm. Since moving to Australia, I have been given plentiful opportunities by so many wonderful Australians and colleagues who accepted me for who and what I am. From these Australians and colleagues, I have learned, first hand, the generosity of spirit, the unselfish disposition, the kindness of heart, and the overflowing friendliness that are required to make Australia a more inclusive place. Yet, not many of my white colleagues and friends can understand what it means to be black<sup>1</sup> and African in contemporary Australia. For black Africans, it is a unique experience. When you are part of a dominant group, you are not forced to spend time thinking about how you fit in and belong, and how you benefit from privilege or from a system rigged in your favour. I do, and many black Africans I know do too. As minorities, our visibility in terms of difference, here our blackness, from the dominant white Australian majority group remains an important defining characteristic. Our dark-skinned colour is a stigma that can make life harder for many of us.

In this paper, therefore, I explore the problem of Othering and how it feels to be the Other in Australia, where whiteness is still considered as the norm. Drawing on my own experiences as a black African living in Australia, I examine how Othering practices continue to oppress and marginalise Africans in Australia. Though a very diverse group, black Africans settling in Australia add an important chapter to the history of immigration in Australia. They have arrived in a number of different waves: the migrant group<sup>2</sup> and the refugee group<sup>3</sup>. While they belong to a plethora of nationalities, they are highly visible and recognisable by their skin colour, and/or by their accent, bodily and facial features, dress, and attire or by a combination of these visible traits. In this paper,

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<sup>1</sup> The word ‘black’ is used as a reference term for people of African descent, who are often racialised as black or black people ([Udah and Singh 2018](#)). In this paper, it is applied as reference to the skin colour of Africans in Australia, both male and female, who are dark-skinned and self-identified as black. Also, ‘blacks like me’ is used by the author as a term for shared identity and skin colour—having dark-coloured skin.

<sup>2</sup> There are two types of migrants: proactive and reactive migrants. According to [Richmond \(1993\)](#), proactive migrants are usually driven by economic and education factors or due to the promise of a better life, while reactive migrants are driven by war or persecution, violence, famine, political instability, conflict or natural disaster.

<sup>3</sup> To qualify as a refugee, one must have “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or to return there, for fear of persecution” (see United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [UNHCR 2011](#), Art. 1A (2)).

I address not only my personal experiences (what happened to me or what I have witnessed) but also vicarious experiences directed at others, through friends or family members, which may be seen or reported by another person, mediated experiences directed at black Africans through the mass media and cognitive experiences through my knowledge of the system (Essed 1991). I consider experience as a relevant source of information. Experiences are inseparable from the concept of memory because everything we experience is stored in memory and involves the retrieval of situationally relevant knowledge from memory (Essed 1991).

This paper allows me to tell my story, my personal experiences, and to tell the tale of my research. It is more a reflection, indicating my resilience, agency, strength and growth. It is an inward reflection about myself, better presented in this format than in a more traditional scholarship. By sharing my personal experiences of being different and the challenges of black Africans in Australia, this paper provides both scholarly and personal insights into race relations, racism, racialisation and white privilege. In writing this paper, I do not intend just to point fingers at anyone nor to accuse others of being racist. My intention is to help raise conversations around what is needed to move forward. It is to help raise discussion and critically reflect on where we are now and where we all want to be or go. The real thing I am trying to do in this paper is to say let us change the system that favours some and disadvantages others. Let us begin to change our mindset regarding the Other and challenge how we represent them. Let us see the humanity in all people and advance Australia far.

## 2. Otherness and Othering

Otherness reminds us of those who are different from us. It is not a status that people achieve, but a state of difference that is imposed (Udah 2018). Mainstream groups are not ‘Other’ by the very definition of the concept of Otherness nor defined by difference. In Australia, for example, existing meta-discourses of Otherness still give primacy to whiteness—an identity and invisible privilege—at the direct expense of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)<sup>4</sup> groups. In other words, Anglo-Celtic Australians are unmarked and considered as normative, while Indigenous Australians, African Australians, Muslim Australians, and Asian Australians are conventionally configured as outsiders and considered as ethnics (Udah 2018), an outcome of power relations. In the Australian context, CALD groups continue to be otherised and defined as ‘different’ to the normative Australian ‘Self’ (Udah and Singh 2018).

As an imposed state of difference, Otherness relies on binary, dualistic thinking, making divisions into two opposing categories such as ‘I’ and ‘You,’ ‘We’ and ‘Them,’ ‘Self’ and ‘Other.’ It is often based on difference in terms of race, skin colour, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, language, name, dress, and religion or other differential characteristics. As such, the notion of Otherness is important for understanding how societies categorise and form identities (Bauman 1991). It is a fundamental category of human thought. No group ever sets itself up as the one without immediately setting up the Other against itself (de Beauvoir 2011). Thus, inherent in Othering practices is dichotomy—there must be the Other for the Self to exist and vice versa, and by defining Self, one defines the Other (Canales 2000). Therefore, Othering process marks and names those perceived as different from self (Weis 1995). It is the “us” and “them” way of thinking in which “them” is often stereotyped (Udah and Singh 2019). It is usually hierarchical and based on a relationship of power, of inclusion and exclusion (Canales 2000<sup>5</sup>; Culea 2014).

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<sup>4</sup> CALD is commonly used to describe or label visible minority groups with a cultural trait different from the dominant Anglo-Celtic Australian culture (Hebbani and Colic-Peisker 2012). The CALD label reifies difference and normalises Whiteness by setting up the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Celtic Australian majority as the unremarkable default and positioning visible minority groups as different—the Other (Piller 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Othering processes can be divided into inclusionary or exclusionary Othering (Canales 2000). While exclusionary Othering utilises the power within relationships for domination and exclusion, inclusionary Othering utilises power within relationships for transformation and inclusion (Canales 2000).

Post-colonial, feminist and cultural studies suggest that Othering is an apparatus of power made real during discourses and regimes of meaning through which racialised subjects and bodies make sense of their lived conditions, act on them, and then, place limitations on themselves (de Beauvoir 2011; Foucault 1970; Said 2016; Spivak 1988; Yancy 2008). Rooted in Hegel's account of the "Master–Slave" relation, the notion of Othering has been used by post-colonial, feminist and cultural scholars to analyse the lived experiences and oppressions of colonised, enslaved, marginalised, misrepresented and exploited people marked as Other. For example, Said (2016) and Spivak (1988) have drawn on Foucault's theory of discourse to refer to the discursive regimes within Orientalism and the process of 'Othering' respectively. Working within post-colonial and postmodern theory, in her book *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak (1988) speaks about what she calls 'epistemic violence'—that is, the marginalisation of colonial subjects through discourses. Spivak defines Othering as a process through which Europeans/Westerners create differences between themselves as the norm and the others as inferior. Spivak believes that Othering denies subaltern voice and subjectivity. Spivak's subaltern is similar to Said (2016) idea of Otherness. In Orientalism, Said (2016) establishes the Europeans' sense of superiority and gaze upon the oriental subject. Said (2016) defines the essence of Orientalism as the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority. According to Said (2016), the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. By constructing the Orient as exotic, underdeveloped, uncivilised, backwards and barbaric, Western powers successfully Othered them and dealt with their Otherness. Just as the Orient's inadequacies were used as justification for colonisation (Said 2016), women have also been Othered by men who identify themselves as the Subject and see women as inferior and the inessential Other (de Beauvoir 2011).

Said's Orientalism and de Beauvoir's inessential Other strongly depend on Othering, which Brons (2015) calls crude (as opposed to sophisticated) Othering. Brons (2015) suggests a binary way of looking at Othering. He argues that Othering is either crude or sophisticated. While crude Othering is self–other distantiating—attributing undesirable characteristics of the Other, Sophisticated Othering involves or partially depends on self–other identification and misses the defining feature of Othering—attributing relative inferiority and/or radical alienness to the Other (Brons 2015). Crude Othering practices usually manifest in negative portrayal, derogatory slurs, verbal insults and racist discourses *about* the Other. It is borne out of the dominant group's fantasies about the radical difference of the Other. In many ways, Othering practices legitimise exclusion, marginalisation, subordination and exploitation (Johnson et al. 2004) and perpetuate new forms of racism and racial practices (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Yancy 2008).

Addressing ways in which racism functions subtly today, Yancy (2008) argues that the black body undergoes racist acts of confiscation in ways that are mundane and insidious through the phenomenon of the white gaze by whites who have assumed "the natural authority to seize black bodies both discursively and non-discursively" (p. 844). In other words, whites see the black body (or non-white body) through historically structured tacit forms of knowledge that regard it as an object of suspicion. Yancy (2008), for example, contends that whiteness is that according to which the black body is rendered—Other, marginal, ersatz, deviant, strange, dangerous, inferior, uncivilised, ugly, unruly, unlawful, criminal and hypersexual. This continues, according to Bonilla-Silva (2014), to maintain the racial structures that awarded systemic privileges to Europeans (whites) over non-Europeans (non-whites). Bonilla-Silva (2014) suggests that racism has a contemporary foundation and that racial practices operate today in a "now you see it, now you don't" fashion, while at the same time rearticulating some old racial practices (p. 3). In other words, new racism is characterised by subtle, sanitised, and seemingly non-racial/anti-racial practices that reproduce racial inequality.

Contemporary racial and Othering practices occur at the group and individual levels (Udah and Singh 2019). Though they tend to be subtler and less direct, hostile or blatant, they constitute a threat to the well-being and quality of life of those perceived as different, as the Other. Therefore, to understand the specific nature of contemporary racial and Othering practices, it is necessary to proceed from the level of individual attitudes to the larger economic, political and ideological

processes in everyday interactions in society (Bonilla-Silva 2014). When individuals or groups are racialised and Othered, they are labelled according to perceived differences often emanating from stereotypes—“the pictures in our head” when thinking about a social group (Lippmann 2018). These pictures are structured sets of unjustified beliefs about a group that contain the perceiver’s organised knowledge, beliefs, biases, assumptions, prejudices, fantasies, myths, distortions or overgeneralisations and expectancies about the group without ever meeting them (Locke and Johnston 2001). Thus, once a group is labelled as different based on stereotypical ‘mental’ representations, the group is stigmatised. And once stigmatised, full social acceptance becomes difficult (Canales 2000) because the group members become the Other and their difference is firmly and deeply fixed in a context of Otherness (Udah 2018). Indeed, Othering encompasses not only the many expressions of prejudice based on group identities but provides a clarifying frame that reveals a generalised set of common processes, structures and conditions that propagate and maintain group-based domination, exclusion, marginality and persistent inequality (Powell and Menendian 2016). The consequences of Othering can be very detrimental to blacks in Australia. Othering process can impact overall health, well-being and participation for racialised immigrant Others to Australia.

### 3. Racialised Immigrant Other to Australia

One of the reasons for immigrating to Australia is to further my education and develop skills required to compete in today’s world. When I arrived in Australia in 2010, I was particularly impressed with the multiracial, multicultural and multiethnic landscape of Australia, the quality of services provided by universities and government entities, and the low levels of racial violence. I still remember how the custom officer treated me politely on my arrival and said to me, ‘Welcome to Australia.’ However, with time, I became more aware of my difference and how it impacts on my life chances. The blatant and sometimes subtle forms of discrimination that I was experiencing contradicted the words of welcome. Gradually, I became interested in understanding the role of racialised identity constructions and the mediating effects of skin colour on racialised immigrants to Australia, which became one of the motivations for undertaking my doctoral studies.

As a black Nigerian immigrant negotiating identity and belonging in Australia, the motivations for the doctoral project come from my personal experiences and passion for social justice, and inclusion for individuals, families and communities. The project has an overarching theme in social justice and the need to improve conditions for marginalised and oppressed groups in society. It provides a better understanding of the experiences of and the problems-that-matter for some of Australia’s most recent immigrant communities. It examines the experiences of African migrants and refugees living in Queensland<sup>6</sup>, with an aim to develop a better understanding of their race, health, education and migration status and their everyday life. By addressing race relations as an important driver of disadvantage, the project extends upon existing understanding of black Africans in Australia and raises more questions for building a more integrated, just and socially inclusive Australia where all are given a fair go. The empirical investigation utilises both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection to allow a useful analysis of some of the complexities of the challenging topic. The theoretical approach synthesises concepts from critical perspectives from across the humanities, health and social sciences. The project sheds light on the circumstances of African immigrants in Australia, making a useful contribution to practice, public policy, social and community services and the growing body of work that seeks to better understand how to work with marginalised communities in Australia.

I began the project wanting to learn more about the black African experience in Australia as racialised black subjects. Though I have lived the very experiences I wanted to research, the motivation

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<sup>6</sup> Participants (N = 30), consisting of 10 females and 20 males who self-identified as black Africans, between the ages of 22 and 67 years, came from Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone in West Africa; Tanzania and Uganda in East Africa; Congo and Rwanda in Central Africa; Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan in Northeast Africa; and Botswana and Zimbabwe in Southern Africa.

to undertake the research project should not be seen as lacking objectivity. Rather, my doctoral project highlights my passion for social change, justice, equality, inclusion and human rights. Even when I was doing the research, some members of the African community, including some participants, were worried not just about the outcome of the research, but also about what will happen to me and other black Africans in Australia for doing the research. For example, a participant, Loretta, asked: *"Why did you choose this topic?"* This question was not because the topic appeared irrelevant to her, but she was a bit afraid that I might wake up the sleeping lion to my detriment and the detriment of other black Africans in Australia. While another participant, Aaron, told me that my project *"is very interesting,"* he cautioned me. He said, *"You do not have to take all I have said ... You have to be careful. You have to be eclectic. Ph.D. is not an end; Ph.D. is just a means."* Another participant, Ricky, advised me. In Ricky's own words, *"What I might advise you to do is to make the blame for them not to be as hard, to see the truth in a way that they may understand it. Even though the truth is quite hard and bitter at times, but it needs to be said. We are here now in Australia and some of us believed that this is our home."* If not for my passion and interest in social justice, social inclusion and and human rights, I would not have gone into nor continued nor completed my doctoral studies. Given the fears and concerns in the community about my health and well-being, and about how white Australians would react, including the admonitions that I received for even trying to investigate the lived experiences of racialised black Africans in Australia, I was really close to quitting my doctoral project.

Even when I did present the experiences of Africans, the challenges of being black African and visible in a society that takes a great pride in being multicultural, democratic, egalitarian and inclusive, but constantly objectifies and constantly marginalises the different Other, I was told that I should not forget how lucky 'Africans' are to be in Australia and how Australia has given, if not to most of us, a head start to grow. While some get defensive, as if I am accusing them of the things I report and write on, others accuse me of being too close to the issues, and therefore not in a position to write about these issues objectively. As a racialised immigrant other to Australia myself, I must confess that there were times when I had wanted to walk away from writing about these issues of Othering, racism and belonging. There were times when I have asked myself why I continue to research and write on these issues when the stories I hear, and see, are so painful, and it is so very painful, frustrating and depressing to listen to these stories repeatedly. And every time I retell these stories, I again relive the pain.

Why have I stayed? My perseverance is just one explanation of my passion for social justice and change. As an insider, I believe I was in a position to represent the worlds, and stories of black Africans in Australia. With my educational background, values and theoretical perspectives, I believe I was in a position to understand their experiences. For this, I stayed the distance to complete my research project. Yes, some people believe that racism is over and does not exist in Australia ([Augoustinos and Every 2010](#)). They argue that blacks should get over it and stop promoting racism where it does not exist, but my research and experiences suggest the contrary. I have researched to understand that racism is something inherent in the system ([Udah 2016](#)). I have also lived as black person in Australia long enough to know that it is not cool to be black when it should be ok to be any colour. It is true that we have made progress as Australians, but we have also retrogressed. Everything has changed but the system still favours some people. There is a need to continue to address racism and the impact of the historical legacy (of systemic racism) on the contemporary racialisation and Othering process in Australia and the world.

In places like Australia (and other white-dominated Western countries) where black Africans have settled, everything about us seems to be influenced by *how we are seen*. We are seen, classified, defined and otherised as blacks. As blacks, we do not have to dress, talk, and walk a certain way. Our skin and often our physical appearance identifies and singles us out. What is more, the labels applied to us continue to shape our identity and determine our positioning in society and the labour market ([Colic-Peisker 2009](#)). As blacks, we are labelled as the 'Other' and positioned as 'different' to the white Australian majority. We are racialised as lacking in something and not fitting ([Mapedzahama and](#)

Kwansah-Aidoo 2017). We are prevented from belonging through Othering and racism (Udah 2018; Udah and Singh 2019). Assumptions about us are often based on stereotypes and fantasies about black qua inferior (Yancy 2008). Though citizens, we are disenfranchised racially, and on socioeconomic level (Udah 2016). Our voices and perspectives are limited. Some still vilify and tell us to ‘go home’—to go back to where we came from. No matter how long we stay, we continue to be seen as foreigners, strangers and outsiders by those who see themselves as at home, and worry about the cultural and ethnic replacement brought on their country by the changing demographics caused by influx of racial and ethnic immigrant others like me. For many of us, our difference, our blackness continues to affect our life chances and opportunities. In short, it is simply hard for many blacks in Australia searching for a place to belong in a time of Othering.

#### 4. Consequences of Othering

Australia’s national identity has shifted from a racially based white, British Australia, to a diverse, multiethnic, and officially multicultural Australia since the 1970s (Moran 2011, p. 2156). For much of Australia’s history, immigrants were expected to abandon their culture, assimilate into the Australian culture, speak English and become Australians (Collins 1988; Jordens 1997; Lack and Templeton 1995). Support for a multicultural<sup>7</sup> Australia has become a strategy to: forge a new national identity, maintain ethnic identity, fight racism and smash long-standing ideologies of parochialism and racial prejudice, acknowledge, enhance and manage cultural and ethnic diversity, respond to the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, address the alienation experienced by ethnically diverse immigrants and their descendants and promote social inclusion, integration, cohesion and harmony between the various racial groupings in Australia (Kalantzis 1986; Kurti 2017; Moran 2011). As such, multiculturalism represented an ideal for Australia’s “nation-building project in the context of mass, multiethnic immigration, and as a way of rethinking Australian national identity” after the abolition of white Australia and rejection of assimilation policy (Moran 2011, p. 2154). In defining multiculturalism, Kymlicka (1995) notes that multiculturalism, as a public policy, provides answers to questions on how people of diverse cultures, languages, histories and religions may be included while living together within democratic states as citizens. Multicultural policies call for the maintenance of ethnic identities and for ways of incorporating all ethnic groups into society (Kymlicka 1995). However, despite radical changes in attitudes to immigration and various multicultural policy solutions put forward in Australia, we are yet to create a national space where all Australians treat each other as belonging with equality and dignity (Henry-Waring 2008; Udah 2018).

There is no denying the fact that the very first law passed in 1901 when Australia became a federation was the policy of securing a ‘white Australia’<sup>8</sup>. Under the ‘white Australia’ policy, whites were favoured. Only immigrants from Britain and Europe were accepted. With the policy, non-white immigrants (or coloured people) were effectively excluded and barred from entering or settling in Australia. The policy was discriminatory (Moran 2011; Udah and Singh 2018). Australia legally abandoned the policy in 1973 when the Whitlam government introduced a non-discriminatory immigration policy. The Racial Discrimination Act, passed in 1975, made unlawful any forms of

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<sup>7</sup> The term ‘multiculturalism’ was invented by Canada in 1971 in a quest to recognise minority cultures as the British and French—the two founding nations in Canada—left other groups feeling that they do not belong (Jupp 2002). When Canada abandoned its ‘White Canada’ policy, multiculturalism became a part of ‘new nationalism’ constructed to unite English Canadians and French Canadians and other new Canadians. Australia adopted multiculturalism in 1973. In Australia, multiculturalism is about the inclusion of all ethnic groups, supporting immigrants to maintain their cultural identities, which would be regarded as assets to Australia. Today, it has acquired considerable academic and political prominence over the past decades and has become like a slogan.

<sup>8</sup> The white Australia policy was designed to keep Australia ‘white.’ Its introduction drastically reduced non-white people (the Chinese, the Kanakas, the Afghans, and the Indians to mention but a few) in Australia. With the policy, non-whites were not allowed to become Australian citizens. The Indigenous Australians were only recognised and counted as Australian citizens after the 27 May 1967 federal referendum.

racially based immigration selection and introduced “new legal procedures and penalties designed to purge the evils of supposed racial prejudice and bigotry from Australian society” (Kurti 2017, p. 48).

Despite the significant policy changes, the cultural practice of Othering persists in Australia. The white Australia policy left a legacy of white privilege and structural racism seen in contemporary Australia. In so many ways, the modern multicultural Australian social landscape still reflects white Australia. While Australia is becoming increasingly diversified, partly because of a high rate of immigration, discrimination, resulting from Othering, still exists—and it exists in one form or another. It is alive and appears to be increasing. We are yet to eliminate all forms of discrimination. Some Australians, for example the dominant white Australian group, seem to be more entitled, favoured and privileged than ethnically diverse people, migrants and refugees in Australia. Disparity in outcomes—in the criminal justice, health, and policing systems, including social mobility—is a defining characteristic of institutional racism (and how whites have been systematically favoured) in Australia (Colic-Peisker 2009; Soutphommasane 2017; Uдах and Singh 2018). There is, for example, a dramatic underrepresentation of ethnically diverse people, particularly in senior leadership, within Australian organisations and institutions (Australian Human Rights Commission, AHRC 2018; Soutphommasane 2017)<sup>9</sup>. Despite the egalitarian promise in Australian democracy that all should be treated equally and should be free to rise according to their merit (Kurti 2017), Othering practices continue to create inequality by presenting bias and structural barriers associated with institutional racism. Despite our cultural diversity, Othering still makes it harder for ethnically diverse and racialised immigrant Others and their descendants to come through the ranks in Australia (Uдах and Singh 2019).

Thus, we have lived, as Australians, hundreds of years of the elevation of some people and the oppression of others, especially ethnically diverse people. Until the present, whites continue to be beneficiaries of white privilege—a flip side of oppression and discrimination—that has consequences for many black Africans and other people of colour in Australia. Despite our egalitarian rhetoric, whiteness makes social acceptance much easier for whites in Australia. More serious still, there seems to be a goal to maintain whiteness as the transcendental norm. Decades after the abolition of the ‘white Australia’ policy, whiteness is still valorised as the invisible norm from which others deviate and are judged, defined, scrutinised and controlled (Henry-Waring 2008; Moreton-Robinson 2004). For example, folk myths, untrue and biased, about the black Other are continually passed on to the generations and confidently peddled and refurbished as facts (Uдах 2018). The vitriolic attacks towards visible migrants and refugees by some politicians, groups and individuals in Australia are other examples of the legacy of ‘white Australia’ in modern Australia. Pauline Hanson, Fraser Anning and other politicians who criticise immigration and Islamic identity continue to perpetuate white Australia and racism to the extent that the narrative we hear most often is they are ‘radically’ different from us and they threaten our way of life. Such a narrative is at the root of Othering in Australia. It is hierarchical and feeds a climate of fear of the Other. This fear serves as a call to action to keep Australia white by demonising and dehumanising racialised immigrant Others to Australia.

Indeed, white Australia is yet to disappear (Uдах 2018). While the white Australia policy has ended, and the immigration of ethnically diverse people is allowed, the meta-discourses of Otherness in Australia continue to act as hegemonic carriers of power and ideology—within which, ideas about difference and diversity are created and refuse to be dismantled. These meta-discourses of Otherness shape attitudes, beliefs and actions as well as uphold the systems of privilege and/or disadvantage that have characterised the Australian society for a very long time (Henry-Waring 2008). In a serious way, despite the rhetoric of multiculturalism, whiteness still shapes the national imaginary of who does, and does not, belong in Australia (Uдах and Singh 2019). Whiteness still determines what is considered different without itself being defined by that system of difference (Yancy 2008, p. 846).

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<sup>9</sup> A total of 75.9 per cent have an Anglo-Celtic background, 19 per cent have a European cultural background, 4.7 per cent have a non-European background and 0.4 per cent have an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) background (AHRC 2018).



As a result, many, many black Africans I know including myself continue to be racialised in everyday interactions in Australia. We are not by default accepted in Australia (Udah 2018). For us to be accepted and included, we must network and get ourselves in a position where everyone vouches for us.

In the place we have called home (Australia), many of us struggle and still find it hard to feel belong (Udah and Singh 2019). They say home is where one feels safe and belongs (Hage 1997; Ignatieff 2001), but where is home when you do not feel you belong? To feel you belong in a community requires, as Yuval-Davis (2006) suggests, the combined effect of familiarity, identification, emotional attachment, recognition, security and a sense of membership. As black persons in Australia, our black bodies continue to be confiscated within social spaces of meaning construction, and of transversal interaction that are buttressed by a value-laden episteme (Yancy 2008) and negatively stereotyped. Imagine being negatively stereotyped every day, and wherever you go. In contemporary Australia, black Africans are still followed around by store security because they “might steal something” or shoplift (Argoon 2015). As black Africans in Australia, we are often singled out in ‘random’ security checks at airports. We are always demonised and portrayed negatively in the Australian media reports (Udah and Singh 2018). While many of us want to feel that we belong, it has not always been easy because we are otherised and perceived as different. We are impacted by prejudice, stereotype, discrimination, and suffer higher levels of unemployment (Udah et al. 2019). We face barriers in society, education and the labour market (Colic-Peisker 2009).

As racialised immigrant Others in Australia, racism surrounds us. Discrimination comes our way frequently—we are a visible minority who are different. Our names sound too ethnic. As blacks, we are identified, defined, characterised, racialised and constructed as a disruptive group (Windle 2008). The Australian media dehumanise us and grossly misrepresent us as problematic—we are seen as a token of danger, aggressive, troublesome, lazy, irresponsible, crime prone, and associated with violence (Udah 2018). In his essay, *The Fact of Blackness*, Frantz Fanon describes the ‘lived experience of a black person,’ which in part, illustrates the impact of stereotypic perceptions. According to Fanon (2003, p. 64), “The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case, everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the “idea” that others have of me but of my own appearance. I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling.” Such is the experience of many black Africans in Australia. As black people, we are cast into our blackness by racism, and become the categories, the insults and the stereotypes of the racist. Indeed, through the *knowing* that we are seen as negative and constructed using deficit discourse—that always problematises—comes the basis of the biopower that governs us (Foucault 1970) and affects our well-being (Austin 2004).

On a personal level, I have occasionally found myself in stalemate conditions given my black identity and the associated forms of discrimination since my arrival in Australia. Despite being a naturalised Australian, I was not only insulted and treated differently by a certain senior white Australian man, whom I would like to refer to as C, but I was also repeatedly bullied and told to go back to where I came from, violating my identity and human rights as both an Australian citizen and a human person. In retrospect, I think that racism, tall poppy syndrome (TPS)<sup>10</sup>, a desire to squash my self-determination as a person, and force subordination were underlying issues. With unbridled power, C, who occupies a very high position of authority, nearly destroyed my career. C’s plans were to crush my spirit, dreams and hopes. To feel empowered, C, with his influence and connections, took my livelihood, an experience that I am not comfortable talking about because I doubted whether

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<sup>10</sup> Tall poppy syndrome is a term commonly used in Australia. Rooted in colonial values of egalitarianism and the ‘fair go’ mentality, TPS is the expectation that poppies should grow together, and if one grows too tall, it has to be cut down to size (Billan 2019; Dore 2017). TPS can lead to isolation, withdrawal, mental breakdowns, fear, self-doubt, depression, weariness, insomnia, and anxiety, among other effects such as feeling deeply hurt and disillusioned by the leadership. Instead of cutting people down because of their success and achievements, we need to rethink and interrogate how we view success and achievements, both in ourselves and others. Rather than cut people down, we need to support each other and allow people to grow and be more ambitious to make contributions to our society and community.

anyone would care. Would anyone in a position to do something about this or even hear me, listen to me or believe me? C wanted me to suffer. While his uncharitable actions made me feel so excluded, and severely damaged my sense of belonging, I remained convinced that Australia is my home and that I do belong. Family, friends, and colleagues supported and kept me sane and sound. My doctoral supervisor lifted me up. She cared, listened and stood by me. She opened windows of opportunity to turn my life around—the opportunity to keep my dreams alive and follow my passion like everyone else. Make no mistake about it, there are many people like C in different positions of authority who continue to abuse their office and bully anyone who dares to criticise or challenge them into submissive silence. In the name of showing, and maintaining, power, they destroy the careers of people under their leadership.

In addition, in my doctoral research, I found that black Africans in Australia experience constant oppression and exploitation (Udah 2016). Often, they are denied opportunities to thrive. Sometimes, people are disrespectful in their tones to them. Sometimes, racially-charged inappropriate and dehumanising comments are made about their skills and capacities to work in the Australian educational or labour market contexts. Even with the policies of equal opportunity, a PhD is not enough to secure a full-time job for many of them (Udah 2016). Indeed, folks like me, black Africans with a PhD, are twice more likely to be unemployed than whites with a PhD (Udah and Singh 2018). That is the reality that some black Africans like me face in Australia. We are often discriminated against based on our visible difference (Udah and Singh 2019). Most often, we face multiple barriers and lack industrial connections and social networks needed for employment and full participation in society (Hebbani and Colic-Peisker 2012; Udah 2016). We experience noticeably poorer outcomes (Udah et al. 2019). In the metropolitan areas of Australia where we have settled, we are concentrated in the secondary labour markets with low pay such as cleaning, aged care, meat processing, taxi driving, and security (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2006). In short, black Africans in Australia constitute one of the most disadvantaged groups (Udah 2016). What is more, the moral panic created by the negative media portrayals and some politicians drives community angst and results in exclusion, including marginalisation and discrimination in society and the labour market (Colic-Peisker 2009; Markus 2016b; Windle 2008). Part of this has to do with the problem of Othering. It is the root of systemic racism that is built into the very foundations of Australia's society. To stay silent in the face of systemic racism is, for blacks like me, to continue to occupy our often marginal position in Australia, resulting from Othering practices.

## 5. Inclusion and Belongingness

Far from being dead, Othering processes still exist in Australia. Racial and ethnic-looking immigrants like me face huge barriers and challenges towards full socioeconomic participation and integration in Australia because of Othering (Colic-Peisker 2009; Hebbani and Colic-Peisker 2012). Negative Othering and portrayals of racial and ethnic-looking immigrants like black Africans continue to perpetuate racism and discrimination, affecting lives profoundly, including the ability to achieve life goals. Othering processes influence how people see and relate to many black Africans including myself.

As James Baldwin says, "To be a Negro . . . and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time." Not all our white friends can imagine the degree of anger in marginalised and excluded people who pay attention to the everyday Othering and racism in Australia. In many situations, our physical markers, such as skin colour and hair, including cultural heritages are used to distinguish us for exclusion, creating social injustice and inequality (Udah and Singh 2019). Given the marginalisation and problem-cantered constructions of blackness in Australia and other white-dominated Western countries (Fanon 2008; Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo 2017; Udah and Singh 2018; Yancy 2008), it is not uncommon for black Africans to have a righteous anger about racism. Being white is a lot easier than being black African or a person of colour in Australia. If you are not white, you may be missing out from getting that job, that grant and that opportunity (Moreton-Robinson 2004; Udah 2018). If you are not white, you may be seen as incompetent and lacking in something (Mapedzahama and

[Kwansah-Aidoo 2017](#)). Being white in Australia is clearly better because fair-skinned (white-skinned) people seem to have more chances than dark-skinned people ([Udah 2018](#)).

There is no doubt that there is a burden of being black for the “new” black African diaspora in Australia ([Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo 2017](#)), which is not different for African Americans in the USA whose ancestors were enslaved ([Austin 2004; Yancy 2008](#)). Through discursive practices, blacks are always stereotyped and constructed as a problematic difference in contrast to whites—an inferiority and the Other marked for exclusion. In the Australian context, black Africans are seen as dangerous, defined as troublesome, identified as the unfamiliar Other, and constructed as the unwelcome problematic black Other ([Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo 2017, Udah and Singh 2018](#)). This construction is burdensome for many black Africans in Australia. As blacks, we have no control over the negativity that is attached to our blackness and used for our oppression. Despite the rhetoric of equal opportunity, the lack of opportunity for and the experiences of marginalisation and exclusion by black Africans in Australia are important to finding ways forward to uplift our lot and make Australia a liveable multicultural environment.

We cannot continue to ignore systemic oppression and the social injustices that persist in society. As [Powell and Menendian \(2016\)](#) argue, the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of ‘Othering’ and the only viable solution is one involving inclusion and belongingness. Inclusion and belonging are the most frequent words used by activists, policy makers, educators and governments when considering the experiences of racial and ethnic immigrants. While the concept of inclusion is of paramount importance, it can place the onus on the dominant group as the ones to decide who to include or not. That is, those of us who are different from the dominant groups may be included based only on the mercy and tolerance of the dominant group and not on our identity as Australians and on our rights as humans. In other words, our belonging will depend upon the goodwill of the dominant white Australian majority. However, belonging means more than just being included, but feeling safe and at home ([Hage 1997; Ignatieff 2001](#)). While Othering practices marginalise and exclude people based on their distinctive skin colour or perceived differences, belonging confers membership, recognition and a sense of security in a community ([Powell and Menendian 2016](#)). As Powell explains, “Belonging means more than just being seen. Belonging entails having a meaningful voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of social and cultural structures. Belonging means having the right to contribute to, and make demands on, society and political institutions” (as cited in [Grant-Thomas 2016](#)). Thus, belonging is more than just feeling included or being tolerated. In true democracies, belonging means that everyone’s well-being is considered and that everyone can participate and prosper in their community.

Belongingness entails, therefore, an unwavering commitment not only to tolerate and respect difference, but also to ensure that everyone is provided with the necessary conditions to achieve or realise his or her full potentials within their community’s structures and institutions. The right to belong, here membership, is the most important gift we can give to each other, and it is prior to all other distributive decisions we make in society ([Powell and Menendian 2016](#)). Hence, together, let us change the society and advance to a community, where all people feel that they belong, and are welcome and at home. In doing this, we will be widening the circle of human concern. Widening the circle of human concern “involves “humanising the other,” where negative representations and stereotypes are challenged and rejected. It is a process by which the most marginalized outgroups are brought into the centre of our concern through higher order love—the Beloved Community that Dr. King envisioned” ([Powell and Menendian 2016](#), p. 32). The Beloved Community describes a society based on love, compassion, empathy, and spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood, where everyone is included. Fundamental to King’s Beloved Community is inclusiveness, both economic and social ([Ritterman 2017](#)). In the Australian context, it would be building a society based on justice, inclusion and equal opportunity, where all are embraced and can share in the wealth of the country without discrimination.

As race remains one of the key aspects of social relations, how can we pursue a more just and inclusive Australia where all belong? How can we realise Dr. King's dream? To realise King's vision in Australia, the structures that perpetuate racism must be removed. A prime way to begin is to change the narratives of fear, and to reimagine the 'we' in our community and society. We need to move away from the narrative about a smaller 'we' that is hierarchical and based in fear, division and exclusion to a narrative that reaffirms our bigger 'We', where we recognise our interconnectedness, embrace our common humanity and share with each other our hopes and dreams. By reimagining the smaller 'we' in our narratives, undoing our internalised biases, and transforming our narrow worldviews and conceptions of 'Self' and 'Other', we can create a bigger 'We' and build a more inclusive and just community and society, where we learn to care, love and help each other in our similarities and in our differences and where all belong and can claim membership. As Chamberlain (2015) would say "What started as fleeing persecution can end with the creation of multiple generations of families who participate in the society as good citizens and warm human beings." In creating the Beloved Community, therefore, we need to use more inclusive narratives that recognise and accommodate our differences rather than seek to erase them (Udah and Singh 2019). By strengthening belongingness and a bigger "We", the Other is no longer an object that seeks to be included, but who initiates the process of self-recognition, and demands a better future rooted in relationships of respect and reciprocity (Coulthard 2014). In other words, we need to deal successfully with the problem of Othering. Specifically, we need to remove any and all structures that promote or allow racism or any other forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice (Ritterman 2017).

## 6. Conclusions

Othering process still affects black Africans in Australia. While there is no easy way to confront it, we can reduce it by challenging our beliefs in racial hierarchy and difference. In our increasingly diverse society, it is essential to ensure that all people are given opportunity and helped to participate in society. Things can be completely different if we step outside of our old attitudes and practices, recognise the uniqueness of each person, avoid stereotyping and leave behind assumptions based on a person's race, ethnicity, language, or religion, and transform our conceptions of Self and Other. When we see each other as individuals, as part of us, we uphold all the things we have in common rather than what divides us. Though they are different, that is not everything about them. Though we are different, that is not everything about us too. Other than our skin colour and cultural differences, we all share a lot in common.

If we are going to share dreams, create the Beloved Community and become authors of that great future that we are building together, where we live for a more inclusive society and where all belong and are helped to fulfil their hopes, then we need to think carefully about how we relate with those otherised and perceived as different. We need to stand up to structural oppression and break down the barriers and challenges people including migrants and refugees face in society. We need to become more proactive in the fight for social and racial justice by reminding immigrants like me that we belong in the community and society. We need to change our mindset and challenge our fear of the Other that is often based on negative assumptions, myths, stereotypes and fantasies about their radical differences from us. Also, we need to believe in each person's equal capacity to contribute and give everyone opportunity to thrive and realise their full potential.

We cannot continue to ignore the problem of Othering. While many blacks like me have come to accept Australia as the place they want to call home, Othering and racism continue to create inequality. By not doing anything about the issues confronting black Africans in Australia, they may continue to experience exclusion in ways that further their disadvantage and inequality in society. As Australians, as a society and community, we need each other because we belong to each other. It is my hope that all show genuine interest in the progress of racial and ethnic others in Australia, whose identities are racialised and who are more likely to be discriminated, objectified, bullied, oppressed, marginalised

or excluded. It is my hope that all become engaged in the task of building an all-inclusive Australia where all can live in a spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.

As blacks settling in Australia, many of us want to take our chances and opportunities. Although skin colour may not matter to our friends born with the right (white) skin colour and belonging to the (white) dominant group in Australia, it matters to those of us who worry constantly about being unfairly treated. We may have the same experiences, and the same skillset, but our blackness, our difference often disqualifies us from getting certain opportunities. Our skin colour matters! It matters to those of us racially otherised, profiled and discriminated against. It matters also to those of us who deal with everyday Othering and the psychological pain of oppression arising from the social construction of our identities and differences. As one of the female participants in my study, Barbara, said, “*It is a real issue. It is an issue that some people want to deny, and some people are not open about it because of the fear of them being discriminated against based even on that.*” Othering not only oppresses us but also has real effects in the context of our daily lives.

Therefore, this paper is more than just my personal journey and experiences or the lived experiences of blacks in Australia. It is my expectation that this paper inspires both personal and institutional anti-racism education in society and the community by shedding light on the circumstances of black Africans in Australia. As many of our white friends may lack the depth of awareness of the benefits and protections they receive from simply being white, it is my hope that this paper not only inspires us to acknowledge everyday systemic racism, but also provides a setting for marginalised voices to be listened to and recognised. Indeed, it is my hope that governments and leaders show genuine interest in the progress of black Africans, whose identities are racialised and who are more likely to be discriminated, objectified, bullied, oppressed, marginalised and excluded. Therefore, I invite all to move beyond our present internalised prejudicial attitudes and biases, to recognise our shared similarities, and to consider our moral obligation to care for each other, while respecting our differences. I invite all to open conversation and dialogue against those constructions of identities and differences that exclude and marginalise people in terms of hierarchical otherness. Also, I invite all to reframe our relationship with the Other, work together, get along, see without prejudice, listen without bias, accept without preference, relate without fear, live without hate, believe in the richness that others bring to our community and respect all for who they are.

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