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Identity construction amongst individuals with binational heritage in Africa

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on interviews with Africans of binational parental heritage to expand the literature on identity formation in two ways. First, it takes on the factors that shape primary identity formation more fully by extending it beyond the current focus on state constrictures on primary identity formation. We argue in this paper that in addition to state constricture, closeness of family ties is yet another factor that shapes the primary identity of individuals with binationality. Individuals claim the identity of that parent whose extended family members have a cordial relationship with them as evident in communication patterns, visits, presence at rites of passage, and the extent to which extended family members embrace them as one of their own. Second, we interrogate the literature on hybridity beyond its focus on types to highlight the instrumental and intrinsic purposes to which hybridity can be put. We show how individuals with a primary identity would choose a secondary identity for instrumental reasons such as the education or work opportunities it provides. The intrinsic value of secondary identity is the entertainment options and sense of self it provides. This piece, focusing on both the factors that shape primary identity as well as when/for what purpose such individuals choose a secondary identity, highlights the agency of such individuals.

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Primary identity; secondary identity; binationality; agency; Africa; parental heritage

Introduction

This paper adds to the growing body of work on mixed racial and ethnic classifications by focusing on children born to parents of similar race but different national identity on the African continent. Although 65% of sub-Saharan African migration happens on the continent (Shimeles, 2010, p. 8), we do not know nearly enough about the lives of children born as a result of this intermingling with regard to identity formation. The studies that do exist speak to the identity of children from the perspective of the parents (Bakewell & Binaisa, 2016; Whitehouse, 2012). Thus, the voices of the children themselves are missing from these narratives. In this article, we centre the children born out of these relationships. We ask how children born of at least one African-born parent and raised on the continent come to identify with either of those heritages and the purposes to which they put their secondary identity. We focus on race as a marker of identity

because although there are other salient markers of identity such as religion (Kurien, 2014; Peek, 2005; Souza, 2016), the existing literature on blacks in the West point to race and not religion as the essential marker of identity.

As Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer (2005) speaking of the Canadian experience and Adjepong (2018) speaking of the American experience have pointed out, blackness is an identity marker that Africans acquire in the West. It is meaningless, for the most part on the continent. In such a space then, where ethnic, religious, political, and national identity are more salient markers of difference, we interrogate how children of binational identity come to take on a primary national identity of their own and the circumstances under which they would claim their secondary identity. In focusing on both primary and secondary identity formation, we seek to offer a more nuanced accounting of identity formation on the African continent. In so doing, inspired by Fanon (1952), we seek to advance new conceptual perspectives on identity formation processes in a non-Western context.

Conceptualising mixed identity

There is a scholarly recognition that identities are not static and can thus change at various points in an individual's life (Adams & Vijver, 2017; Marti, 2008; Parades, 2007; Reddy, 2019; Vignoles, 2017). According to Foner et al. (2018, p. 3), there is a current concession that 'identity is not an objectively determined category but instead a construction, reflecting and substantiating a particular set of assumptions about the world or a particular position for viewing the social structure in which one exists'. The implication of this concession is that the subjectivity that characterises identity might lead to changes in identity, as subjective underpinnings for people's current identity can change across time and space. Personal identity instead of being seen as a one-time construction is recognised as 'a process of formation that begins in childhood and spans a lifetime' (Wiese et al., 2018, p. 47). Wiese et al. (2018) also captured an interesting idea that identity fluidity does not only occur when there is a complete transmogrification of every single constitutive element that makes an individual unique, but can also exist even if some aspects of an individual changes whilst other aspects of the same individual remains fairly stable or even unchanging.

Second-generation immigrants have various ethnic/national identity options which usually include: identifying with the host society's national/ethnic identity, identifying with their immigrant parent's or parents' national/ethnic identity, or a combination of the diverse national/ethnic identities to form a hybrid identity (Behtoui, 2019; Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2018). The notion of identity options is captured by Johnson (2019, pp. 6–7) as he argues that 'the fluidity of individual self-identification is constrained by phenotype and as a result, everyone cannot claim equal access to identity fluidity'. Johnson's (2019) argument captures an important element of the identity fluidity discourse, and that is the role of inhibitions in understanding identity fluidity. Inhibitions, whether socially or biologically imposed, are conditions, which when absent, allow for identity fluidity to freely occur; individuals in such a context can have unlimited identity categories to utilise in their configuration of a personal identity. Thus, in any discussion of identity fluidity, both the factors that enable it and the factors that inhibit it are essential in understanding why individuals would change their identities in certain contexts or time periods, but would not change their identities in other contexts or time periods.

According to Telles and Paschel (2014), Latin American scholars have identified about four types of fluidity: temporal fluidity, contextual fluidity, referential fluidity, and categorical fluidity. Telles and Paschel (2014) describe temporal fluidity as a type of (racial) identity fluidity engendered by changes in time. Thus, as time changes or as individuals grow older, they may reconstruct their sense of self by elevating or diminishing the status of a particular collective identity (nationality or ethnicity) in their lives (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2018; Telles & Paschel, 2014). Contextual fluidity refers to the phenomenon where individuals change their identities owing to changes in context or their interactional space (Davenport, 2020; Foner et al., 2018; Marti, 2008; Parades, 2007; Telles & Paschel, 2014). On contextual fluidity, Davenport (2020, p. 225) for instance notes that ‘identity can be relational to those surrounding the respondent; and that for instance, the presence of family members at home may magnify the effect of parents’ opinions on the racial identities adolescents choose to express in that context’. Malcolm and Mendoza (2014, pp. 4–5) capture the idea of context-engendered identity fluidity as they advance that ‘individuals also have multiple and competing identities that may exist simultaneously and may emerge depending on the situations one encounters’. Referential fluidity and categorical fluidity all stem from ambiguity: referential fluidity entails ambiguity in an individual’s features such that they can be classified into different collective identities by different individuals and categorical ambiguity entails ambiguity regarding the boundaries of collective identities themselves (Telles & Paschel, 2014).

Although these types of identity fluidity were presented by Telles and Paschel (2014) as forms of racial identity fluidity, it is applicable in understanding other forms of identity fluidity such as ethnic and national identity fluidity, as they all involve navigations of one’s membership in collective social identities (race, ethnicity, nationality, among others). These types of identity fluidity described by Telles and Paschel (2014), however, are best understood as enablers of identity, instead of as inherent modifiers of identity. For instance, the mere passage of time does not inherently engender identity fluidity, else every individual with several identity options would report different identities at various times. Similarly, contextual changes do not inherently engender identity fluidity, else individuals would change their identities across situations.

In addition to enablers of identity, there are also inhibitory forces that constrain the ability of individuals to take on an identity of their choice. A key inhibitory force is state categorisation policies and the extent to which states recognise the multiplicity of identities. This fundamentally affects the extent to which individuals can maintain fluid identities (Foner et al., 2018; Reddy, 2019; Saperstein & Penner, 2012). States in different parts of the world constrain individuals with multiple identities in different ways. In Malaysia and Singapore, Reddy (2019) notes how citizens get their racial categories at birth and ‘government officials ensure that individuals adhere to the categories that they have been assigned’ (Reddy, 2019, p. 331). The state’s determination of one’s racial category is based on the patrilineage of the individual with multiple identity. Such an individual is stuck with the father’s identity. Similarly in the USA, the state’s determination of the racial category of an individual with multiple identity including black identity is based on the one-drop rule, the social categorisation of individuals with any degree of black racial identity as black. This rule, codified into state law during the Jim Crow era, persists to this day although some individuals choose other ways of categorising themselves (Khanna, 2010; Roth, 2005). In Canada as well, Creese (2019) points out

that race is a significant marker of belongingness; white bodies belong to the Canadian state but non-white bodies do not. In such a space, children of African immigrants born and raised in Canada find that the society is not entirely accepting of them as bona fide Canadians. They are constantly being queried as to their origins because of their phenotypical marker of difference. On the African continent, very little is known about binational identity. Much of what exists focuses on either state or parental classifications and much less on the agency of individuals in terms of their self-classifications. Thus, Therrien (2016) who writes about Morocco points out that as in the Malaysian and Singaporean case, the state shuts down possibilities for multiple identity; once born to one parent who is Moroccan, an individual is automatically Moroccan and Muslim or as Gilliéron (2020) puts it, there is no political recognition of mixedness. In spite of these state categorisations, Reddy (2019) does find that some individuals with mixed identity refuse to be constrained by these categorisations; they might choose to claim the identity of their mother or a hybrid identity such as Chindian for those born to a Chinese and Indian parent. Roth (2005) also points out that multiracial children in the USA are no longer constrained by the one-drop rule and choose multiple permutations for themselves as they find befitting. Similarly, Whitehouse (2012) as well as Bakewell and Binaisa (2016) discuss how parents would like their children to self-identify, mostly in the same manner as the parents. In this paper, we are less concerned about state or parental definitions of identity and more concerned about self-identification. In focusing on self-identification, we move away from the literature on hybridity and fluidity and focus instead on the factors that shape the determination of mixed children's primary identity. We recognise as Rocha and Aspinall (2020, p. 536) point out that there is a 'lack of data and research on the classification of mixedness' in Africa and much of that which does exist focuses on the mixed-race population on the continent (Boswell, 2020; Chacha et al., 2020; Ellison & de Wet, 2020; Milner-Thornton, 2020; Nims, 2020). However, mixedness beyond race on the continent cannot be denied given that race is not the most salient marker of identity on the continent. It is thus imperative that we begin to theorise, conceptualise, and discuss mixedness on the continent more fully and we hope that this paper serves to generate further interest in the topic on the continent. The paper proceeds as follows. We begin with an account of the research methods that generated the data which serve as the basis for this paper. This is followed by an account of the factors that shape primary identity and a third section that focuses on the purposes for which individuals would seek a secondary identity. In the conclusion, we summarise what these findings add to the literature on identity formation.

Research methods

To understand the subjective identity formation processes of individuals with binational identity in Africa, we used a person-centered ethnographic approach. This approach refers to ways of describing and analysing human behaviour and their subjective experience (Hollan, 2001; LeVine, 1982; Levy & Hollan, 1998). 'A primary focus of person-centered ethnographies is on the individual and on how the individual's psychology and subjective experience both shapes, and is shaped by, social and cultural processes' (Hollan, 2001, p. 48). Person-centered ethnography enabled us to explore two sets of factors (the structural and individual) which influence primary identity formation. In

investigating the structural factors, we paid close attention to the socio-economic and socio-political factors that shaped the context within which these binational individuals lived. Individual factors affecting identity formation that we explored in this study included family ties and serves as the focus of this paper.

The key tool we used for assessing the subjective experience of our research participants was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate because we wanted to understand the formation of identity from the subjective perspective of these binational individuals on the continent. As scholars such as Merton and Kendall, Morse and Field (1995) as well as Richards and Morse (2012) (cited in McIntosh & Morse, 2015) note, the relatively detailed interview guide or schedule of semi-structured interviews may be used when there is sufficient objective knowledge about an experience or phenomenon, but the subjective knowledge is lacking. Our aim was to shed light on identity formation in the African context, a topic which is severely underrepresented in the literature. The descriptive semi-structured interviews (McIntosh & Morse, 2015) we used were very helpful in this regard. In addition, in as much as we wanted research participants to interact with us freely, we also wanted to guide the conversation, so they did not veer off topic. Semi-structured interviews gave us the perfect opportunity to do this.

Data for this research were collected from April 2020 to December 2020. We initially crafted this as a one-country study to be conducted in Ghana focusing on individuals of binational identity who lived in Accra. However, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic thwarted this plan. For weeks, we contemplated how to proceed. There was a ban on movement and public gathering in Accra and these we know are very fundamental to conducting traditional face to face interviews which we had planned. This led to the postponement of data collection. We then decided to use virtual interviews and since this method of data collection was relatively new to us, we were apprehensive about how it will turn out. Interviews were conducted via zoom and soon enough we realised that it presented an opportunity for us to interact with binational individuals living in other parts of the continent and beyond because the geographical barrier to data collection had been removed. We ended up conducting interviews with research participants in Ghana, Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and the USA. Although the majority of our participants had a Ghanaian parent, the sample was varied in that some of the other parents came from Francophone countries such as Burkina Faso, Togo, and Benin. In addition, we had a few individuals who had no Ghanaian parent, so for example, we had an individual with Gambian and Liberian parentage as well as one with Ugandan and Liberian parentage and another with Zimbabwean and South African heritage. There were no significant differences between the non-Ghanaian sample or the part Francophone sample. Our sample was definitely middle class and therefore these findings are limited to binational identity among middle class Africans. A key criterion for participation in the study was that research participants had to have lived in the African country of one of their parents' birth during their formative years. We conducted 54 interviews altogether but for this paper, we draw on the identity formation experiences of 32 research participants which speak to the theme of this paper.

The interviews were conducted in adherence to the ethical principles underpinning social science research. Approval for this research project was provided by the Ethics Committee for Humanities at the University of Ghana (ECH 129/19-20). Interviews were conducted and recorded with written and oral permission respectively from research

participants. They were then transcribed with the help of a research assistant. We employed thematic network analysis (TNA) (Attride-Stirling, 2001) to analyse the data. 'Thematic analyses seek to unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels, and thematic networks aim to facilitate the structuring and depiction of these themes' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). We developed basic, organising, and global themes. These were fed with quotes from research participants. They were then fleshed out to form the core of our analysis. For example, some of our basic themes included self-description, beliefs, and identity objects and all these fall under one of our organising themes which is subjective description of self (we defined subjective description as ways in which research participants describe themselves). All these fed into our understanding of our global theme of identity formation. This is depicted in [Figure 1](#).

We do the same for other basic themes such as positive experiences, negative experiences, and voting, for organising themes such as identity opportunities, identity liabilities, political engagement, etc. To ensure that the principle of confidentiality and anonymity are followed and to protect the identity of our research participants, we have removed all personal data and used pseudonyms.

Family ties and primary identity formation

One's primary identity is shaped primarily by the closeness of family ties during one's formative years as well as location in which one spends formative years, the latter being a distant second. Closeness of family ties is evident in a number of ways; communication, visits, and presence at rites of passage. A key one is constant communication. Given the current plethora of social media forms, this is made most manifest in the creation of family WhatsApp groups. Many of our participants were members of family WhatsApp groups. This would at minimum comprise one with members of their nuclear family as well as one with members of the extended family on either the maternal or paternal side. Visits were a second manner in which closeness of family ties was made manifest. Visits were two way, comprising either extended family showing up in the country of destination on a fairly regular basis or the children with the migrant parent visiting the migrant parent's country of origin. Occasionally, children would visit an aunt or uncle (a relative of the migrant parent) in a third country, usually a Western country. A third manifestation of

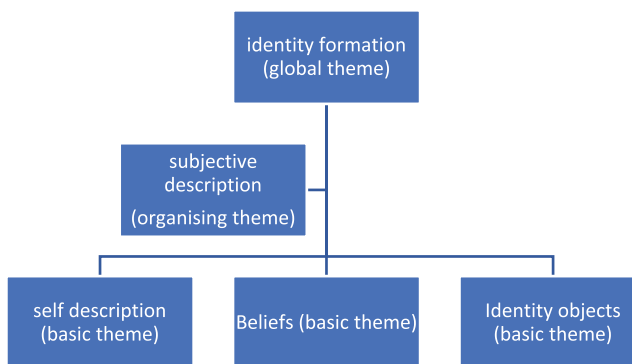


Figure 1. TNA. Source: Authors' construct.

the closeness of family ties is presence at rites of passage. Esi who is of Liberian and Ghanaian heritage (and thinks of herself as Liberian) describes the various members of her Liberian mother's extended family who were present at her graduation in the United Kingdom with fondness that was visible both in her voice and in her eyes as she spoke, 'and then my masters, it was two of my aunts: my mum's cousins ... one was in France and the other was in the States. They came for my graduation'.

Closeness of family ties is a function of both the relationship one has with the family and the extent to which that family accepts the individual as sharing a similar identity with them. The role of strong family ties in one's formative years in shaping primary identity is most evident in the case of three sisters born to a Motswana mother and a Ghanaian father. Maru, the eldest was born when her parents were settling into adult life. Maru was raised by her maternal grandmother while her parents completed school/found sustainable forms of employment in the city. Seliwe and Esinam were born almost a decade later at the point when their parents were settled comfortably into life in the city. The two younger sisters were therefore raised by their parents in the city. Maru describes herself as Ghanaian Motswana and admits to a very weak link with Ghana which only manifested itself in the choice of names for her children. Her younger sisters describe themselves differently. Seliwe who is epidermally visible as Ghanaian¹ describes herself as Motswana Ghanaian and spent a good amount of time during our interview talking about her paternal uncle who lived in Ho (a town in the Volta Region of Ghana from where her father hails) and the jollof rice at Papaye, a fast-food restaurant in Accra. At the time of the interview, Seliwe was actively looking for jobs in Ghana so she could relocate from Botswana where she had lived all her life.

The second factor that shapes closeness of family ties is the extent to which children are accepted by the extended family members on either the paternal or maternal side. Individuals stick with the side of the family that accepts them and their primary identity is therefore linked to that family. There are degrees of familial alienation ranging from pure visceral hostility to mild acceptance. The families with the strongest forms of hostility were perhaps unsurprisingly the families which were part Nigerian, part Ghanaian (Darkwah, 2019). The rivalry between these two countries is age-old and the children of these mixed nationality marriages suffer the consequences often from the side of the Ghanaians. These children generally took offense at the Ghanaian side's rejection of them and claimed their Nigerian side boldly and proudly. Thus, Adebisi declares unashamedly, 'I'm proudly Yoruba ... I identify more with the Yoruba side of my family'. She goes on to say:

We were taught intricately about the Yoruba culture, so in actual fact and in total honesty, I am more comfortable dressed in Nigerian clothes than your typical kaba and slit et cetera. I would rather wear buba and iro than to wear kaba and slit.²

Meghan who is in her 40s and married to a Nigerian says to us in the first ten minutes of our interview:

I'm Ghanaian by birth, my mom is Nigerian. My Dad passed when I was 4 and my Mom had a difficult widowhood rite so being Nigerian, she relocated us to Nigeria and so we grew up and went to school in Nigeria. I came back to Ghana when I was 19 and I've lived here since. I find that I relate more to my Nigerian side than the Ghanaian side even though I've lived longer in Ghana I would say that Nigeria was more accommodating and more willing to accept my

siblings and I from when we were kids People basically wanted us to come from wherever they came from and that is something that I've never really found in Ghana when I came back here. It was more like constantly having to explain myself here ... I belong to more WhatsApp groups where most members are from Nigeria and my social media following is more Nigerian.

The manner in which Meghan's Nigerian family embraced her is not unknown in Ghana. Ghanaian families can treat children of other ethnicities in a similar manner. Yaa, born to a Ghanaian father and Jamaican mother explained how her paternal aunt confirmed her Ghanaianess, by declaring 'since your mother is not Ghanaian, you are Akyem [a Ghanaian sub-ethnic group]'. Clearly then, Ghanaians can be welcoming. They choose whom to welcome wholeheartedly into their families and based on the interviews we did, Nigerian family members were not as easily welcomed as other family members. Ghanaian antagonism towards Nigerians runs deep (Darkwah, 2019) and our study shows that even blood ties do not necessarily dissipate this antagonism.

Two of our participants who did not have Nigerian ancestry were also not necessarily embraced fully by their Ghanaian side of the family. What they experienced can best be described as mild acceptance. Afiya who is part Ugandan and part Ghanaian and thinks of herself as Ugandan and not Ghanaian describes her experiences with the Ghanaian side of her family as follows:

I was very privileged to live with my paternal grandmother when I came back to Ghana and so the last year of her life, I was with her and erm that too was another cultural shift. If I'm honest, I felt more foreign, much more in Ghana than in Uganda They all speak English but the main language spoken in the family reunions and everything is Ga so they bond in Ga, share Ga songs and jokes and all that and so I often remain an observer. Even though I'll get invited to the functions, the partaking and being actively involved is not as strong.

As can be seen above, Afiya's lack of linguistic competence made it difficult to fully embrace her Ghanaianess. The majority of the sample were monolingual (English speakers) and the few who spoke an African language only spoke one of them but did not use it as a marker of identity. An interesting case is that of Seliwe who was growing up in Botswana and spoke Setswana like her mother. Although she did not speak Ewe, the language of her Ghanaian father, she insisted nonetheless that the Tswana community members with whom she lived pronounced her Ewe name correctly.

Rationale for secondary identity

Primary identities are foundational and serve as the core part of these individuals' identity. They choose which of their parent's national identity will be their primary identity based principally on the nature of family ties they experience. Being of binational identity, however, these individuals are also fully cognisant of their secondary identity. They draw upon this identity either explicitly for instrumental purposes or implicitly for its intrinsic value. Approximately half of the sample draws on their secondary identity for instrumental reasons. When a secondary identity is drawn upon for instrumental purposes, it usually serves as a means to an economic end, primarily access to tertiary education or employment. The participants with part Ghanaian, part Nigerian heritage whose primary identity was Nigerian were the ones most likely to draw upon their Ghanaian identity for educational purposes, specifically for access to tertiary education in Ghana.

The persistent strikes in universities in Nigeria that made tertiary education take much longer than it needed to be as well as the pervasiveness of occultism on university campuses in Nigeria made the individuals who could opt out of that environment do so. Meghan explains as follows:

Yeah. Ah huh cultism. They found a few here, mostly stemming from the Nigerian erm student body. So they were ... it was really really bad, it was very scary, and I started thinking about like 'Okay alternatively, what will be the option to come to ... where where will I go to school?' Now as at that time, my older sister, we don't share a father, she was already in Ghana, at Legon [the University of Ghana]. So, I had come to visit her, she was at erh she was doing law then. And the campus was just so surreal you know, and I think I just made up my mind then that I wanted to stay in Ghana and I told my mum and she was like 'okay, if that's what you want to do'. So that was it basically. So, I came back, and then I told my sister who was living with her dad and stepmom. So, we just ... I just stayed and it was, I mean it was okay. I didn't feel like I fit in there anyway, but I mean my sister and I have always been really close so it wasn't ... I wasn't looking for a replacement for my parents so ... so that was basically why I came back.

Amy also took advantage of her Ghanaian citizenship status to attend university in Ghana. In her words:

I spent most of my ... in fact all of my childhood in Nigeria, and then I usually came to Ghana like just for holidays to see my grandma, my cousins, and everybody. But then I decided that I wanted to school in Ghana, I wanted to do my university in Ghana. So, I came to Ghana after my WASSCE³ in 2010, and I applied to the University of Ghana and I got in to study erm Earth Science. So I graduated from the University of Ghana ... I had to write my WASSCE again and that was why I delayed in getting admission into my dream school. It wasn't easy though. And then again you know this nationality thing came up. It was so difficult because I had to convince them that I was Ghanaian, my mum is Ghanaian, I was born here, they should admit me as Ghanaian, it was a whole ... it was a whole bunch of ... it was a very, very long thing. It was a very long story. I, I resumed late because of the back and forth to be admitted as a Ghanaian. Yeah.

Citizenship was a complicated issue for individuals with binational identity. Formal definitions of citizenship did not always match the informal definitions of citizenship, as in how individuals with binational identity perceived their citizenship or interestingly, how officialdom perceived their citizenship. Formally, citizenship is conferred on individuals by birth, by ancestry, or by naturalisation. However, per the accounts of our research participants, in day-to-day interactions, accents serve as a marker of citizenship as well. So, our participants who had accents because of where they grew up often found that their citizenship was questioned. Such was the experience of Amy who had to produce her grandmother at the admissions office of the University of Ghana to confirm her citizenship because in spite of her birth certificate that showed clearly that she was born in Ghana to a Ghanaian mother, her thick Nigerian accent disqualified her in the eyes of the university officials. Amy persevered though because she was keen to draw on her Ghanaian heritage for the educational opportunity it provided her. Similarly, Zainab, also part Ghanaian, part Nigerian and Esi, part Ghanaian, part Liberian drew on scholarship opportunities available to Ghanaians for their education. Zainab received a scholarship from a Ghanaian not-for-profit self-help group in Ibadan, Nigeria to attend University there. Similarly, Esi got a national scholarship from the Ministry of Energy to pursue a master's degree in the United Kingdom.

Work was a second major reason for which individuals whose primary identity was not Ghanaian would draw on their Ghanaian-ness. Zainab, who had drawn on her Ghanaian-ness to receive a scholarship for tertiary education in Nigeria had drawn on her Ghanaian citizenship status yet again to find employment in Ghana. Both her citizenship status and her Ghanaian connections were very instrumental in her securing the employment. Adebisi who describes herself as Nigerian had a father who was a prominent Ghanaian, one she described as an Anglophile. A product of British education, he was a top civil servant in Ghana of the 1960s and owned one of the large properties in the Airport Residential Area. Adebisi who is a real estate developer was able to turn this property into high end real estate which serves as her major income source now.

Seliwe who is part Ghanaian, part Tswana thinks of herself as Ghanaian. In seeking for a job, she described how her paternal uncle located in Ghana was deeply involved in her job search, looking for opportunities for her in Ghana. However, she was fully cognisant of the fact that as a Tswana citizen, she could look for jobs in Botswana and so she was actively looking there as well. Tia is part Zimbabwean, part South African. Her primary identity is South African and she currently lives in Johannesburg where she has better job opportunities. She was, however, very mindful of how her Zimbabwean citizenship could come in handy when it came time for an international job such as at the United Nations. She explains:

Well, for one, if I ever wanted to be placed like in the UN erm there are certain countries that they have less I guess employees, so they want those countries that erm they they ... what I know my mum ... cos my mum actually works in the UN, they are more fav ... they favour countries that I guess are less represented, so that's one of the reasons especially for my Zim passport.

To draw on secondary identity for instrumental purposes, one's only requirement was a passport. Linguistic competence did not arise. This was perhaps one other reason for which linguistic fluency in African languages was not an important marker of identity for these individuals. While roughly half of the sample draw on their secondary identity for instrumental purposes, the other half draw on it for its intrinsic value. When these individuals draw on their secondary identity for intrinsic value, it is usually for entertainment purposes, i.e. food, clothing, music, and so on but also for a sense of self. Esme is part Ghanaian, part Ethiopian but identifies as Ghanaian. She does draw on her Ethiopian identity for its intrinsic value. She says:

we do have Ethiopian food every now and then which we know how to cook ... In terms of music I know of maybe one or two Ethiopian artists, but you know we just happen to have I think it was a cassette back then but you know it was played once in a while not like okay ... not even by us, it was just played in the house and so we happened to hear it.

Kekeli describes his connection to Sierra Leone in terms of the food. In his words, 'my family and then food, they are very strong ties. And then from that I do keep my Sierra Leonean heritage at the back of my mind'. Puli is part Zambian, part Ghanaian and identifies as Zambian. She does turn Ghanaian when it comes to mealtimes though. When asked about a typical meal she makes now that she is an adult living all by herself, she immediately reverts to thinking of her Ghanaian side. She describes a dish that her Ghanaian Dad would make when she was growing up, one that she had watched him make several times and declares that a typical dish she made now as an adult was 'her Dad's

rice'. Similarly, Yaa who is part Jamaican, part Ghanaian, thinks of herself as Ghanaian but cooks both Ghanaian and Jamaican meals at home. In the case of Maru, who carries a name reflective of her Kalanga (Botswana) heritage which is her primary identity, she affirms her secondary identity in the names of her children. She says, 'with my children even the names that I've given them, I've made sure that okay fine one has a Kalanga ... they each have a Kalanga [name] and they also have Ewe names or Ghanaian names'.

One can also draw on one's secondary identity to affirm one's sense of self. Amaka for example is Nigerian Ghanaian, her primary identity being Ghanaian. Unlike her siblings who live abroad and have abandoned their Nigerian names because it presents problems, she lives in Ghana and holds onto her name. Each time she introduces herself, writes or signs her name, she affirms the Nigerian side of her. As she puts it:

All my siblings use their Christian [English] names. They have dropped the Nigerian name. And I think not to look as if they are preferential, they do not use the Ghanaian name either but I think those are just personal choices on their part. They are not too enthusiastic about identifying with Nigeria ... I think a lot of the experiences growing up, I don't think were the most pleasant but I think it is what makes me me and to cut it off would be to sort of deny my identity. My siblings don't think it makes any sense. They think it is just a way to get discriminated against if you will but I think for me, it's my heritage and it's my father's background so I'd like to keep it. I like to identify with it. I know it comes with some hardship but I think it is surmountable.

Individuals with binational identity find that they have what we call transient fluidity, the ability to vacillate between their primary and secondary identity quite frequently sometimes on a daily basis. Esi in describing this to and froing that goes on with such individuals says the best object that describes such individuals are a spatula. They keep flipping back and forth all the time. However, while these individuals might be quite comfortable claiming both sides of their identity, others might not think of them as authentic enough. Sadia who is part Gambian, part Liberian says her Gambian husband often reminds her that she is not truly Gambian. When she asks him to explain what that means exactly though he cannot seem to put a finger on it. She like Esi feels that she is like water and flows from one identity to the other quite easily even if others do not think so. While Esi and Sadia did not seem frustrated or annoyed by the fact that they had to endure questions about their authenticity, Puli had clearly thought about this long enough and had come to her own resolution. Asked to describe an object that best described her, she provided a picture and replied:

The photo attached (See [Figure 2](#)) is a picture of a necklace from my family. It's of an elephant (Tembo in Swahili). To me it represents a strong animal that doesn't need to make noise to know its place. This concept became important to me after I spent time in Swaziland. The Queen mother or Ndlovukazi in Siswati is the mother of the King of Swaziland. She has almost as much power as the King and rules the land quietly. If I'm not mistaken, her picture hangs higher than the King's in government offices.

Interestingly, this questioning of identity is not unique to individuals of binational identity on the continent. Ghanaian American millennials also experience this questioning of their identity. Like Puli, they push back on a questioning of their authenticity. One of them says 'Whether or not I'm Ghanaian has nothing to do with the person who's talking to me, so it's part of who I am. Take it or leave it' (Marie, 2019, p. 134). Another says 'I am what I am' (Marie, 2019, p. 156). This idea of not having to defend the authenticity of their identity



Figure 2. Puli's necklace.

resonates with the Akan proverb 'Ahwene pa nkasa' translated figuratively as 'empty barrels make the most noise'.

Conclusion

We argue that rather than race which colours the identity formation of children of African immigrants in the West, it is nationality that defines the identity of the majority of children of binational identity on the African continent. Nationality and being able to claim citizenship have both instrumental and intrinsic value for these individuals. Claiming a particular national identity involves a process of inclusion and exclusion at any time. The dialectics of inclusion and exclusion means that these individuals are intentional about which national identity will serve as their primary identity and which would be their secondary identity. Primary identity was defined largely by family ties. The closer the family tie, the more likely an individual was to choose the nationality of these family members as their primary identity. Once primary identity was firmly established, these individuals then drew on their secondary identity for either instrumental or intrinsic purposes. At the structural level, there was an assessment of the potential resources that claims to a particular national identity presented be it work or educational opportunities and these individuals drew on these secondary identities to enhance their life choices. At the individual level, these individuals drew on their secondary identity for entertainment purposes as well as for a sense of self.

Identity is also constantly being negotiated in different spaces. Being that identity is a fluid process with ever-changing borders, it constitutes a very significant part of the lives of individuals with binational identity because they are constantly aware of it. Identity as this study suggests is incessantly being shaped by both the individual and their society. To avoid being pigeon-holed into a specific identity because of physical attributes or accent, these citizens take steps such as allowing relatives to vouch for them to recategorise and claim their identity as specified by law. They also push back against those who choose informally to pigeon-hole them into specific national identities. By analysing the experiences of Africans with binational identity, we have demonstrated that identity is informed and shaped by broader societal culture but is also heavily shaped by the individuals.

In describing the choices that individuals with binational identity on the African continent make, we seek to extend the literature on identity formation in two ways. First by extending the focus on the circumstances under which an individual changes their identity to include an understanding of the factors that shape an individual's primary identity. We argue that the fluid identity literature by extension recognises the idea of a primary identity. The factors that shape primary identity in the circumstances where one has options have, however, been poorly theorised. In this paper, we expand our understandings of identity formation among individuals with binational identity by focusing on the ways in which family ties shape the formation of primary identity. Second, we extend the literature on fluid identity by moving beyond typologies to discuss the purposes to which individuals put their secondary identity and in so doing highlight the instrumental and intrinsic values to which secondary identity can be put.

Notes

1. She speaks about both her body type and her West African hair texture, especially the latter.
2. Buba and iro refer to a basic blouse and long skirt worn by the Yoruba while kaba and slit refers to a similar blouse and long skirt made out of African print and worn by Ghanaian women.
3. West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination, the qualifying examination for all secondary school students in West Africa.

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