

Diasporic Experiences of Everyday Multiculturalism:  
Navigating Race and Space Through African Women's  
Beauty Practices

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines how everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora mutually interact to shape racialization processes in multiple spaces, both public and private, through an exploration of African women's beauty practices. Five main social spaces relevant to African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism are analysed throughout the thesis including the self, the home, the church, social media, and the workplace. Blending analytic categories of everyday multiculturalism with the African diaspora while incorporating concepts from critical race theory, the public-private dichotomy, the women-as-nation premise, and feminist insights on agency, this thesis makes three central arguments based on the empirical findings. Firstly, I argue the dynamic interplay between everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora simultaneously reconstitutes social spaces by creating rich combinations of complex experiences that challenge and redefine the "public" and "private" in various spaces through new meanings of race, beauty, class, pan-African continentalism, long-distance nationalism, multiculturalism, sexuality, and gender. Secondly, I argue everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora simultaneously structure racialization processes so that African women's racialized identities are layered, formed, and informed by a new African diaspora community within Canada, local nationalist and postcolonial racial formations, Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, and globalized meanings of Blackness. Furthermore, racialization processes are constantly shifting across social spaces so that women creatively juggle different racialized identities by creating hybrid iterations, of being African and Black, that are heterogenous, complex, and multilayered. Lastly, I argue everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora interact in paradoxical fashion to produce a conception of agency reflective of simultaneous articulations including accommodation and resistance. The ways women use their beauty practices to navigate race and space thus reveal the context dependent manifestations of different expressions of agency in the public and private. This complex dynamic makes it difficult to neatly generalize African women as either completely agentive or completely oppressed in any given space.

***Keywords: African Diaspora, Agency, Beauty, Canadian Society, Everyday Multiculturalism, Racialization, Social Spaces***

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction & Literature Review

### *Research Context*

“You look different, Rumbi”. I could tell from the expression on his face, which held a mix of curiosity and confusion, that he was carefully choosing his words before continuing. My white male Canadian colleague had seen me the week before with my natural hair<sup>1</sup> meticulously accessorized by a brightly coloured headwrap. “Your hair grew really long and straight from when I last saw you”, he continued, as he approached me trying to figure out how this had happened. Before I could answer, another one of my Asian colleagues who could overhear our conversation jumped in to explain to him that it was in fact a weave<sup>2</sup>, merely stopping in her impromptu tutorial on the intricacies of black women’s hair to ask me whether the hair extensions were Brazilian, Indian, Malaysian, or Peruvian. Ten minutes later and looking more bewildered than when the conversation first begun, he simply smiled, nodded, and mumbled some politically correct compliment as he walked back to his desk. Although I have spent close to a decade in Canada pursuing my education, as a black African woman my hair texture and skin colour often announce me as a perpetual foreigner in many of my intercultural encounters even before I speak. Furthermore, whenever I change my hairstyle, wear an African-print outfit, headwrap, or “ethnic” beaded jewellery the comments and questions that come with these seemingly mundane choices have made it apparent that my beauty practices are not just a frivolous indulgence but an important accessory for navigating a multicultural society where

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<sup>1</sup> Natural hair: hair that has not been altered by chemical straighteners, including relaxers and texturizers.

<sup>2</sup> Weave: wefts/extensions made of human or synthetic hair are sewn into flat braided cornrows on the head.

identity, belonging, race, and nationalism don't just exist in a passport or flag but also in my makeup bag as well.

Intercultural encounters like these are not unique to me as an African woman living in Canada. In fact, while the myriad of these types of encounters varies, they all highlight the common feature of the day-to-day realities that racialized immigrants deal with while living in a multicultural society. Furthermore, cultural diversity is hailed as one of Canada's greatest strengths and a key trait of its national character<sup>3</sup>. Since 1971, multiculturalism policy in Canada has encouraged immigrants to retain their cultural heritage, values, and practices seeing them as complementary rather than antithetical to Canadian culture. Additionally, despite the current ongoing health, political, and economic crises globally, the Canadian government has set the highest targets in history to welcome even more immigrants over the next three years to support Canada's diverse society and its economic prosperity<sup>4</sup>. However, while political elites have taken pride in policies that promote Canadian immigration and diversity in a plethora of ways, what does the actual daily lived practice of cultural diversity from the perspective of immigrants and their communities look like? More specifically, Africa has been a growing source continent of immigrants to Canada,<sup>5</sup> yet the migratory and multicultural experiences of this diverse diaspora group, especially the women, are rarely discussed. Therefore, as the title

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<sup>3</sup> Statement made by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Canadian Multiculturalism Day, June 27, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> El-Assal, K (January 25, 2021). Canada's immigration minister provides COVID-19 update". *CIC News: The Voice of Canadian Immigration*.

<sup>5</sup> *Statistics Canada, 2019:8*

suggests, this thesis examines the diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism<sup>6</sup> through an exploration of African immigrant women's beauty practices in order to shed light on the ways in which these women<sup>7</sup> engage in the daily mundane practice of cultural diversity. By centering African immigrant women in Canada, this thesis aims to shift broader discussions on race and multiculturalism from politicized top-down policy approaches to a more gendered Afrocentric perspective of how cultural diversity is interpreted and experienced on the ground.

As African women migrate to Canada multiple internal and external shifts occur simultaneously at local, national, and global levels. Accordingly, these multilayered transitions intersect to create opportunities and challenges for new gendered diasporic identities in a multicultural context. Furthermore, racialization processes are a central feature of the migratory journey and immigrant life. While racial politics in the United States remain prominent and highly charged, Canada's national narrative of multiculturalism can stifle similar discussions on race as they are hidden beneath policies promoting diversity and the accompanying veneer of political correctness. However, these silences do not erase issues of race but merely obscure the realities

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<sup>6</sup> For the scope of this thesis, "everyday multiculturalism" is used as an analytical framework and refers to the grassroots practice of cultural diversity. This concept is employed to move beyond official state policy, the reality of demographics, and ideological approaches to highlight the practical and mundane ways that multiculturalism manifests in African women's day-to-day realities. In other words, this bottom-up lens productively spotlights some of the tensions and contradictions that exist between Canadian multiculturalism policy and African women's lived experiences in everyday intercultural encounters and moments of cultural exchange.

<sup>7</sup> African immigrant women, as opposed to other racialized immigrant women, are positioned uniquely within Canada because of their different national and colonial histories, their socio-cultural locations, their political relations with the nation, and their migration experiences. This includes women who have migrated from African countries but hold a range of citizenship status in Canada. Put simply, legacies of colonialism have racialized African women in a way that is different from other black immigrant women, and local patriarchies as well as nationalist projects have gendered them uniquely. Consequently, African women's experiences are integral to understanding the varied everyday dimensions of cultural diversity and intercultural encounters as they are lived.

of homegrown racism that continue to colour immigrants' daily lives in various forms. Coupled with racial politics, everyday multiculturalism for African immigrants in Canada is also punctuated by the presence of the African diaspora<sup>8</sup> along with its transnational intragroup politics of embodied nationalist identity and belonging within this community. Consequently, beauty becomes a multipurpose resource that African women use to make sense of and maneuver these cultural and racial changes. Furthermore, beauty captures the complex identity politics that intersect along the lines of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. Moreover, beauty is important to gendered nationalist projects and lived experiences of cultural diversity as women's bodies reflect the collective identity through nationalist constructions of femininity and dress. Therefore, rather than a mere skin-deep indulgence, African women's beauty practices provide profound insights into the practical and mundane ways, beyond official political rhetoric, that this group of racialized immigrant women in Canada "do multiculturalism" on a daily basis.

Furthermore, African women's cultural engagement and their intercultural encounters are negotiated in various social spaces such as the home, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and shopping malls. Accordingly, different spaces in Canadian society become a place of struggle and contestation as well as excitement and curiosity where different identities and communities

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<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, it is acknowledged that there are many African diasporas whereby notions of belonging and community are simultaneously tied to the continent, home country, and/or ethnic-tribal group. In many instances, these various communities and identities overlap and sometimes run counter to each other. Furthermore, not all Africans are racialized in the same way, for example citizens from North African countries and citizens of African nations that are of white, Arabic, or Asian descent. Moreover, this study is not focusing on women of African descent such as women who are black Canadian, black British, African-American, or Caribbean. As such, "the African diaspora" in this thesis is an analytic category and refers to the majority of immigrants from the continent who are racialized as Black and can therefore be regarded as 'belonging to Africa'.

are represented and compete for the continuous process of place-making through the appropriation of the public and private<sup>9</sup>. In other words, immigrants and their communities are often required to navigate established spatial norms of the dominant society by constructing new meanings of the public and private through various cultural practices that foster inclusivity and belonging amid intercultural encounters. Therefore, African women's lived practice of cultural diversity highlights the tensions that invariably arise when different communities coexist within various social spaces. Consequentially, at the heart of this juxtaposition, between the African diaspora and a culturally diverse society, are questions about identity, belonging, national community, and multiculturalism in practice. Thus, as women migrate and resettle into a new society marked by a diversity of cultures they must contend not only with the beautiful-ugly woman dichotomy, which itself is racialized and gendered, but also with mixed cultural messages and transnational diasporic narratives regarding beauty, race, and community that contrast each other. As such, what exactly constitutes doing multiculturalism, being Black, the public and the private, national community, and agency for an African immigrant woman living in Canada?

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<sup>9</sup> Although this thesis seeks to complicate and challenge the public-private dichotomy, simply defined, the private refers to what is individual, hidden, or withdrawn while the public refers to that which is collective, open, revealed, and accessible (Weintraub, 1997:5; Landes, 1998:1-2). Accordingly, the chapters in the thesis follow this structural layout of the social spaces that will be analysed starting with the private (the individual/self and the home) and then the public (the church, the workplace, and social media).

## Literature Review

In order to unpack and explore these ideas further, the rest of the chapter situates the thesis by reviewing six key themes in the relevant scholarly literature in the following order: mainstream feminist scholarship on beauty, racialized constructions of beauty, agency, the African diaspora, everyday multiculturalism, and lastly, the public-private dichotomy and social spaces. The literature review begins by highlighting the various ways that beauty is important to globalized nationalist projects and daily lived experiences of multiculturalism. In other words, beauty is one of the many transnational gendered racial projects part of wider global racialization processes. As a result, it remains a contested symbolic resource in which individuals and groups invest in and promote particular ways of seeing beauty that serve racialized purposes including nationalist, ethnic, generational, and religious goals. Furthermore, my analysis of the literature shows that understandings of beauty and race shift as they are reimagined through the migratory process. Consequently, the African diaspora signifies these transnational movements and the challenges of creating novel forms of community and identity in new locales. Moreover, these challenges are accentuated against the backdrop of Canadian discourses of multiculturalism and new everyday intercultural encounters with other ethnic groups and the dominant white Canadian culture. Specifically, these daily intercultural encounters are negotiated in various social spaces. As a result, the boundaries between what is public and private are increasingly contested and yet remain a crucial issue for immigrants and their communities. The literature review is followed by the study's research questions and concludes with an outline of the thesis.

## ***Mainstream Feminist Debates on Beauty***

Beauty is a historical, racialized, and gendered construct that has played and continues to play a role in shaping women's lives. Subsequently, it remains an ethnocentric notion resting in the eye of the cultural beholder, a raced site of othering that has aesthetic and political contestation between local and global norms, and an important site where processes of race, gender, nationalism, and identity formation manifest and are crystallized (Yanick & Feagin, 2015; Tate, 2009; Roseman, 2017). Consequently, the black female body is a site where the articulation of cultural values and the reproduction of norms regarding femininity that revere masculinity, whiteness, and slenderness occur (Thompson 2019; McCracken, 2009). Additionally, while the black female body is deployed as a vehicle for hegemonic cultural projects, it is just as much a site of resistance and the celebration of black femininity. Furthermore, beauty is important to nationalist projects and intrinsic to the daily mundane lived experiences of cultural diversity and racial difference (O'Connor, 2010; Saraswati, 2011; Roces, 2005). In short, beauty encapsulates the complex identity politics that intersect along the lines of race, gender, age, (dis)ability, religion, nationality, ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

As such, feminists have argued that beauty culture is not a frivolous topic merely about creating beauty and glamour. Rather, it is uniquely a social, political, and economic issue because it both produces and reproduces structures of inequality through race, gender, age, ethnicity, class, (dis)ability, and sexuality. Furthermore, beauty is political because notions of femininity and race intersect to create difference amongst women through the sociopolitical meanings attached to it. Therefore, beauty matters in a personal way as an inevitable and underlying socio-

political framework for how women operate in the world (Brand, 1999; Roseman, 2017). The terms “beauty” and “beauty culture” are used interchangeably in this thesis in order to capture large-scale processes and themes in the literature as well as specific everyday individual realities. Accordingly, “beauty culture” refers to the tools, methods, and business practices of altering and caring for women’s appearances<sup>10</sup>. It encompasses treatments for women’s hair, skin, and bodies along with training and employment for those who work as beauty culturists, beauticians, and cosmetologists. Additionally, it includes cosmetic and hair products as well as the advertising and marketing of these products (McCracken, 2014; Walker, 2007; Roseman, 2017; Peiss, 2011). This definition encapsulates the macro-level contexts and large scale sociocultural and political processes of beauty. On the micro level, beauty practices through “beautification” involves women’s use of beauty products, ideas, and practices designed to meet social aspirations and affective on the body. It includes dress and other types of adornment and bodily modification (accessories, cosmetics, perfumes, haircuts, weight loss, cosmetic surgery etc.). Beautification practices reveal that material and ideological fashion is shaped by the social context, they include bodily practices that are affective on the body and lived experience, they reflect social belonging and differentiation, they actively shape social and intimate practices and values, and they have a social and identity forming dimension (McCracken, 2014:14).

Thus, the politics of beauty encapsulates the power dynamics and injustices that help sustain inequalities and studying it provides insights into gendered and racialized privilege as well

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<sup>10</sup> The literature mainly makes reference to women; however, the contemporary beauty culture also includes men, transgender, and non-binary individuals.

as power. As such, the “question [of beauty] for feminist politics... is not so much moral-is beauty good or bad for women? - but pragmatic: how is beauty defined, deployed, defended, subordinated, marketed or manipulated and how do these tactics intersect with gender and value” (Colebrook, 2006: 132). In other words, constructions of beauty have less to do with *physical* characteristics of beauty and more to do with the cultural meanings attached to the physical appearances of the female body. Put differently, beauty is a complex three-dimensional debate that entails women’s *bodies*, women’s *feelings* about their bodies, and the *cultural meanings* that accompany beauty. Beauty thus remains an ideological battlefield where women grapple actively and knowledgably with opposing cultural constructions of femininity, beauty, and the female body (Davis 1991). Consequently, feminists are concerned with beauty because of its intimate connection with power for women and they have theorized the role of beauty in gender politics (Bordo 1993; Faludi 1991; Jeffreys 2005; Wolf 1991; Hakim 2011; Young 1980).

Specifically, this body of scholarship has proposed that beauty products, images, and ideals are powerful socializing agents for women and rather than illustrating women’s vanity and frivolity, are evidence of deep social inequalities in terms of gender, race, and class. The focus of this body of literature is on the institutionalization of beauty as an articulation of white patriarchal capitalism. Accordingly, the literature gives attention to the relationship between beauty, gender, and capitalism as exemplified in the notion of the beauty premium<sup>11</sup>.

Additionally, the feminist literature on beauty has moved from an oppression model to a

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<sup>11</sup> The economic ramifications of beauty whereby physical attractiveness can be enhanced by cosmetics and impacts women’s lifestyles from the ability to attract marriage partners to better career opportunities and higher earnings.

discourse model (Davis, 1991:26). The oppression model (Chapkis, 1986; Jeffreys, 2005) views beauty in terms of power as a matter of male domination and female subordination, while the discourse model (Bordo, 1993; Hakim, 2010) views beauty in terms of power that is not merely repression but also productive and constitutive. However, even these changes in feminist approaches to beauty still do not explain women's active and knowledgeable involvement in beauty practices that are also detrimental to them, such as skin bleaching for example. As a result, women are automatically relegated to the position of "cultural dopes" (Davis, 1991:29).

However, this "cultural dope"<sup>12</sup> approach in feminist literature on beauty obscures agency and as a result, analyses of women's active and lived relationships with their bodies disappear in such feminist accounts of beauty. Additionally, such "oppression model" approaches do not account for the possible ambivalences in women's decisions to engage in certain beauty practices thus making it difficult to develop a critical perspective on the oppressive nature of beauty practices without undermining the women engaged in them. Moreover, within this body of literature (Chapkis, 1986; Bordo 1993; Davis 1991; Jeffreys 2005; Wolf 1991; Hakim 2010), the idea that beauty is also racialized and rooted in whiteness is not problematized enough at best and taken for granted at worst. While beauty has indeed been institutionalized and serves as a political weapon against women's advancement (Wolf, 1991), the weakness of such feminist analyses on beauty remains in that they focus on beauty at the level of gender as a macro product of white male capitalist institutional power thus negating

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<sup>12</sup> A situation where women have so completely internalized the norms and values of society that their activities become limited to acting out a predetermined script.

issues like race, migration, nationalism, and cultural diversity that some women may encounter in their everyday lives.

Furthermore, the interconnectedness of sociocultural processes and women's everyday realities highlights how mainstream discussions of beauty relegated to the realm of either/or the public and private are simply incomplete. For example, feminists have examined the harmful effects of various beauty practices, such as skin bleaching and dieting, that women engage in within the private realm (Jeffreys, 2005; Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991). These analyses extensively explore the internal processes women go through as they participate in these practices thereby positioning beauty as a private matter in the domestic realm. On the other hand, feminists have also explored how the institutional and capitalist nature of beauty influences women through social interactions, advertising, marketing, and media thus placing it in the public (Hakim, 2010; Wolf, 1991). However, these insightful analyses do not quite make the necessary connections of how the public and private are mutually constitutive so that public discourses of beauty inform private experiences, and women's beauty practices in the private also shape ideas of beauty in the public. Still further, while the feminist literature on beauty focuses mostly on beauty in the private realm, with the occasional mentions of representation in the public, it does not account for the ways in which the public and private take on new meanings for African immigrant women so that beauty is no longer solely a cultural practice in the private realm.

As such, this study seeks to fill in this gap within the literature by showing that beauty is both a public and private experience that is imbued with racial, nationalist, and multicultural

elements, and not just universalized white hegemonic norms. Furthermore, this study seeks to show that African women are not merely victims being influenced by dominant white standards of beauty in the public, through mainstream media and capitalism for example, but their private beauty practices also shape the public sphere through their counter-narratives and acts of resistance to hegemonic beauty norms.

### ***Racialized Beauty***

Accordingly, the question of beauty for black women specifically is fraught with competing demands. Between a mainstream feminist critique of feminine beauty and a racial denial of non-white beauty, where does this leave black women? Race makes claims about the body, beauty, ugliness, and sexuality as white bodies have been endowed by globalized racist processes with inherent beauty and black bodies relegated to ugliness (Erasmus, 2000). In other words, racialized conceptions and constructions of beauty continue to be marked by colonialism's legacy of defining ugliness against Blackness. Consequently, beauty's adverse function in racial politics duplicates beauty's debilitating role in gender politics (Cheng 2000). That is, the myriad forms of beauty's potential harmful effects for some women living with the realities of race mirrors the way in which beauty is used as a political weapon to hinder women's advancement at a broader level. In other words, constructions of beauty can be viewed as a process of difference and identification that serves as a likely discursive alibi for race and gender ideologies.

Therefore, in response to the shortcomings in the aforementioned mainstream feminist scholarship that for the most part sidelines race, black feminists<sup>13</sup> have contributed to the politicization and discourse on race and beauty by highlighting the wider sociocultural milieu. These works highlight the ways in which black women's bodily choices and identities are imbricated in complex relations that intersect race, gender, and class lines that delineate the boundaries of what it means to be ugly and beautiful (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Banks, 2000; Collins, 1990; Prince, 2009; Peiss, 2011; Thompson, 2019; Walker, 2007; Roseman, 2017). Furthermore, feminists have theorised black beauty as diverse, multifaceted, and multilayered because it is imbued with dual and oftentimes conflicting meanings for black women. Additionally, it is performative as it is an ongoing negotiation of aesthetics, stylization, and politics produced through the mobility and mobilization of beauty knowledge and stylization technologies (Thompson, 2019; Patton, 2006; Tate, 2009). Thus, although most black feminist thought speaks from a particularistic perspective of the American context and gets universalized as 'the black women experience', neglecting other black feminists and experiences, much of the theorization and conceptualizations resonate with some of the experiences of women within other black communities globally as transnational structures of feeling link diverse black populations in a global network of black beauty ideology and practices (Tate, 2009:1). Furthermore, while black Canadian culture has its own unique histories, experiences, and relationship with the state, African-American histories, experiences, and cultural products have influenced and shaped black

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<sup>13</sup> Black feminists in this thesis refers to scholars who are racialized or self-identify as Black and/or whose scholarship is rooted in identity politics, critical race theory, and is committed to challenging interlocking structures of oppression through an intersectional framework that centers black women's experiences.

Canadian culture in terms of the beauty, fashion, media, advertising, consumerism, and modelling industries (Thompson, 2019:1-2).

In spite of the fact that there are distinct differences between black Canadian experiences and African-American ones regarding black women and beauty, there is a symbiotic socio-geographical relationship between the two communities as various black beauty experiences connect women of African descent in different ways. However, this study seeks to broaden the discussion on black women and beauty by not only incorporating African-American, black British, Caribbean, and black Canadian women's perspectives for example but also introducing a specific focus on African immigrant women in Canada. African women's experiences of beauty as black women in Canadian society are particularly unique because they are mediated by processes of migration, discourses of multiculturalism, a transnational African diaspora community, local nationalist gendered projects, and postcolonial racial formations.

Moreover, racial legacies of slavery and colonialism drag the coloniality of power, being, knowledge and affect into the present-day realities of many black women embedding black beauty with shame<sup>14</sup> because the beautiful blue-eyed, blonde, thin white woman could not be considered beautiful without the 'other' black woman with classical African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair (Collins, 1990; Tate, 2018). Consequentially, postcolonial

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<sup>14</sup> "Black beauty shame" (Tate, 2018:122) exists within racialized societies which situate white beauty as iconic, and as a result produce black 'ugliness' as a counterpoint. This shame is constructed through enslavement and colonialism, and it drags the coloniality of power, being, knowledge and affect into the present day by branding black women with dishonor, thereby producing a visceral reaction of abjection to self and other black women.

feminists have also used explanations of race-making more broadly to explain why contemporary ideas of beauty continue to center on ideas about whiteness (Mire 2001; Lugones 2010; Saraswati 2013; McClintock 1995; Stoler 1989). Race is salient for the performance of gender normativity through constructions of beauty and these feminists demonstrate the systemic racial discrimination inherent in dominant globalized white beauty standards. Furthermore, the racial rearticulation of beauty in most postcolonial contexts occurs within gender, class, and nationalist politics (Saraswati, 2013; Figueroa and Rivers-Moore, 2013; Craig, 2002). Therefore, looking at the pragmatics of beauty and its intersections with racial projects in Indonesia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, these works highlight the conflation and disassociation of whiteness with race and nation as well as the shifting meanings of whiteness as both skin colour and racial categorization which speaks to the need for us to expand our conceptions of race and beauty beyond Euro-American contexts.

### ***The Global Political Economy of Beauty***

Another subtheme of racialized constructions of beauty is the global political economy of beauty. As highlighted thus far, beauty operates within not just a gendered context but also a racialized one (Patton, 2006; Banks, 2000; Hall, 2013; Mire, 2001; Saraswati, 2011, 2013; McCracken, 2014). Therefore, it is important to place the black beauty culture in its cultural, economic, political, and historical context because it is a complex process shaped within black communities as much as it is formed in reaction to dominant white standards of beauty. Resultantly, the cultural practice of beauty involves a myriad of choices that black women are uniquely faced with when it comes to various aspects of the beauty culture including hair, skin

tone, cosmetics, body image, and fashion. Furthermore, these beauty practices are often part of larger processes including globalization and the commodification of beauty. Historically, globalization after 1945 represented a diffusion of Western, especially American, hygiene and beauty ideals. However, by the 1980s globalization had *not* resulted in a pervading Americanization of global beauty as some scholars argued (Jones, 2008; Lowe, 2013).

Consequently, the beauty industry's success has always relied on convincing consumers to purchase the beauty premium by taking beauty norms and marketing them to appear locally relevant. Subsequently, contemporary globalization is facilitating greater diversity in beauty ideals that is not necessarily driven by a normative white sense of beauty. As a result, the global beauty market is generating more transnational conversations between the Global North and South. In other words, those who were previously dominated by the Western beauty markets are now grabbing hold of other markets through the promotion of their own cultural beauty norms (Sippel, 2015). As a result, leading firms in the beauty industry have struggled with the challenge of how to respond to consumers who require increasingly nuanced mixtures of the global and the local in the fashion and beauty brands they buy (Jones, 2011; Berghoff & Kühne, 2013; McCracken, 2014).

Furthermore, feminist scholars, such as Peiss (2011) and Walker (2007) provide a historical examination of the ways in which systems of mass production, distribution, marketing, and advertising transformed beauty firms into global enterprises which have led to the creation of a mass consumer market for beauty culture globally. Moreover, feminists also highlight the “commercial and cultural trappings of femininity” (Walker, 2007:186) through the

commodification and systemization of beauty's invented necessities such as hair, makeup, and nails within the global political economy of beauty (Thompson, 2019; McCracken, 2014; Walker, 2007; Roseman, 2017). This scholarship argues that consumerism and advertising present the female body as malleable and always in need of improvement thus 'consuming beauty' becomes a social activity and the mechanism to express a particular version of femininity. Consequently, consumption is intimately tied to the creation and production of a sense of self for women. Therefore, the ongoing success of the global political economy of beauty rests on producing and reproducing ideals and practices of femininity that include ever increasing amounts of make-up, hair products, dieting, beauty services, and incessant youth pressure. Furthermore, these works show how the global political economy of beauty is intimately tied to the reproduction of social belonging and differentiation because it privileges some identities, ideologies, and institutions more than others and is characterized by classic inequalities of access through race, class, sexuality, nationality, and gender.

As such, feminists also examine the processes of racialization and sexualization in the global political economy of beauty showing how beauty is a useful analytical category to question the ways in which skin colour, hair texture, facial features, class privilege, and racialized or ethnic identities are connected to gender norms of beauty and femininity. While the "universality of beauty" (Jones, 2011:889) continues to hold some influence, the local conceptions of beauty are never entirely subsumed by the homogenized global (Jones 2011, 2008; Saraswati 2013, 2011; McCracken 2014). Thus, as discussed earlier, these works also highlight how the global political economy of beauty reproduces gendered power and difference

as well as racial divisions, thereby revealing that an analysis of race in globalized beautification processes and ideals further brings into doubt the idea of an omnipotent globalization that spreads Anglo-American beauty standards. Accordingly, the global political economy of beauty is considered a “set of parallel globalizations competing for recognition and authenticity in local contexts” (McCracken, 2014:144). In other words, globalization is a deeply historical and uneven process and to the extent that different societies appropriate materials of modernity differently, it is also paradoxically a localizing process (Appadurai 1996). Furthermore, it is a process driven by the tensions between homogenization and heterogenization. In short, this scholarship argues that American-Eurocentric ideals of beauty are being replaced by more multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial ones. Namely, they emphasize the mobility and heterogeneity of beauty by conceptualizing the globalization of beauty as centering around skin colour and postcolonial colourism through which the discipline and modification of women’s bodies is employed to ensure the embodiment of ideas on progress, development, and modernity that the world can relate to and that nations can measure themselves against (McCracken, 2014; Jha, 2016; Jafar & Casanova, 2013).

### ***Migration***

Moreover, when it comes to the inherently destabilizing process of migration, women’s bodies are pivotal to the establishment, maintenance, and negotiation of ethnocultural boundaries (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2016). However, there is no common standard immigrant experience as gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, language, and historical contexts of migration affect settlement (Agnew, 2003; Thobani, 2007). Furthermore, scholars have pointed

out that African immigrant women bear different cultural backgrounds and histories. Therefore, homogenizing them in or excluding them from migration studies subsumes their specific roles in their migratory paths as they navigate these gendered systems of power across the globe which are riddled with patriarchal constraints imposed on women but not evenly distributed (Mohanty 1991, 2003; Blanes, 2011). Additionally, the literature on beauty, migration, and the diaspora (Faria, 2010; Lowe, 2013; Hernlund & Shell-Duncan, 2007) highlights how women's ideas of beauty often shift in the migratory process. Looking specifically at women in Kenyan and Sudanese diasporas, Faria (2010) and Lowe (2013) examine the conflicting visions of womanhood and patriotism for women in the diaspora by unpacking the perseverance and power of the woman-as-nation discourse and the ways national identities promote particular faith, race, and class-based versions of femininity. Furthermore, they draw attention to the ways in which the transnational diaspora community influences practices and perceptions of beauty. Accordingly, this project seeks to contribute to this body of literature by elaborating how concepts of beauty, race, gender, nationalism, and multiculturalism are constantly being reassessed and reimagined through migration as the relocation of African immigrant women's bodies and racialized identities in Canada also carries with them ideas, images, and products of local nationalist projects and postcolonial racial formations.

Furthermore, women's bodies are the symbolic sites wherein debates about the trajectory of a nation take form shaped by various factors such as shifts in the global economy, migration, cultural globalization, and colonial trajectories (Dewey, 2008; Hoang, 2011). Consequently, women serve as cultural bearers of tradition through various tropes of

domesticity, motherhood, and modesty in gendered nationalist discourses. Additionally, they are also regarded as symbols of modernization through discourses of work, politics, and sexuality (Chatterjee, 1990; Gaitskeu & Unterhalter, 1989; McClintock, 1995; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003; Kandiyoti, 1996). This nationalist imaging of women is reproduced through the diaspora as women resist and/or express particular connections to their homelands and culture through “aesthetic nationalism<sup>15</sup>” (Edmonds, 2010:41). As such, women’s cultural constructions of the body and beauty are shaped by the role of local and global media consumption, the quest for modernity and upward mobility, as well as the tension between establishing ethnic or racialized identities and incorporating into mainstream societies (King-O’Riain, 2008; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003; Faria, 2010; Balogun, 2012).

Moreover, nationalist discourses connect the politics of the body and nation as feminist scholars have highlighted the powerful gendering of nationalism through the idealization of a nationalist body that works to promote rigid, totalizing, and essentializing constructions of femininity that serve nationalist projects (McClintock, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Enloe, 2000; Faria, 2010). As a result, diasporas also play an important role in reproducing gendered and nationalist constructions of femininity for immigrant women (King-O’Riain, 2008; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). In short, the women-as-nation literature highlights how women play a crucial role in the migratory process as they are entrusted with the biological, cultural, and political reproductions of the nation and other collectivities through national representations of femininity within the

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<sup>15</sup> The process of retaining a strong sense of collective cultural identity as projected through the body and beauty practices aimed at maintaining nationalist/ethnic femininity that is tied to preserving the nation as well as memories of the home country (Edmonds, 2010; Lowe, 2013; Balogun, 2012).

diasporas (Yuval-Davis, 1993; Chatterjee, 1990; Enloe 1990; Jayawardena, 1986; McIntock et al., 1997; Rajan, 1993; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989).

In essence, the literature shows that globalization and migration are neither analogous to the Westernization nor Americanization of beauty as such an understanding is ethnocentric and oversimplifies how people, products, and beliefs migrate and embed themselves in cultures, societies, and nations other than those they emerged from. Thus, a more suitable approach, as this study aims to develop, is to view beauty and globalization from the perspective of the intertwining of local and translocal processes, the impact of globalization on everyday worlds, and how gendered diasporic identities are transformed within the context of a globally embedded everyday life. Therefore, rather than the economic definition of globalization, a conceptualization of globalization as the growth and intensification of the rapid transnational spread of communication, goods, ideas, and people is useful for understanding how racialized beauty ideals circulate in the global political economy of beauty. Furthermore, deterritorialization, because of media and migration in a globalized world, has led to the emergence of translocalized cultural experiences, long-distance nationalism<sup>16</sup>, and the diasporic public sphere (Faria, 2010; Brah, 1996). This conceptualization of cultural globalization in the literature is one this study seeks to advance by highlighting the ways in which the link between mainstream media, social media, and migration also plays a role in creating opportunities and challenges in the making and unmaking of transnational gendered diasporic identities as well as

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<sup>16</sup> A set of practices that connects a territory, its dispersed population, and its political system by binding together those in the diaspora and at home into a single transborder citizenry (Faria, 2010: 224).

racialized constructions of beauty. In short, this study seeks to advance this literature by demonstrating how multiple ideals of beauty, based on nationalist and multicultural norms, coexist for African immigrant women in Canada, as they are immersed into the global political economy of beauty through migration and long-distance nationalism in a globalized context.

### ***Black Beauty Practices***

Another subtheme of racialized constructions of beauty is black women's beauty practices. More specifically, a prominent practice of beauty is black women's haircare. Hair is a contentious topic in black beauty culture and black feminists have documented the various ways black women's hair is racialized. Notably, this literature argues that the notion of an American-Eurocentric beauty standard defined by straight, long, and flowing hair has a sociocultural effect on black women's understanding and experience of beauty, mainly concerning their own hair which differs greatly from popular images (Thompson 2009; Majali et al., 2017; Robinson, 2011; Barnett, 2016; Tate, 2007). Additionally, worth noting is Prince's (2009) study, one of the very few works on Canadian beauty culture, looking at perceptions of black women's hair and how it is judged and graded in comparison to the dominant standard of beauty. Other works on black women's hair are diverse and focus on a variety of women's experiences including historical accounts of black hair and slavery thus highlighting how the meanings and cultural significance of black hair has changed over time shaping women's everyday hair care and ideas about their racialized identities as well as constructions of femininity (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Rooks, 1996; Banks, 2000; Jacobs-Huey, 2006).

In addition to hair, colourism often intersects with sexism to disempower black women thereby reproducing social inequalities and hierarchies through which they must navigate in various ways. Thus, colourism is a phenomenon of prejudice based on skin shade and manifests as either discrimination against women who have darker skin tones or preferential treatment of those who are racialized the same but have lighter skin tones. This discriminatory and preferential treatment occurs within both intragroup relations and intercultural/interracial encounters. Furthermore, there is no singular history of colourism because it has evolved in different ways through different geographic locations, however, histories of slavery and colonialism are necessarily implicated in skin-tone prejudices (Tate, 2015; Phoenix, 2014; Hunter, 2007; Monk, 2015; Robinson-Moore, 2008). Consequently, due to skin tone prejudices surrounding black women, cosmetics brands have often targeted black consumers in the form of skin bleaching products to lighten their skin tones (Davis 2013). Accordingly, there has been a valorization of whiteness with skin bleaching as a particular attempt to gain respectability and social mobility within the white supremacist capitalist social and political order (Pierre, 2008; Mire. 2001; Blay, 2011). As such, for most black women, the quest for white beauty is important and must be located in the specific context of the continuum of the Western practice of global racism and the economic practice of commodity racism where white/light skin is a form of “racial capital”<sup>17</sup> gaining its status from existing racial hierarchies and connected to larger systems of racism and colourism (Mire, 2005; Mire, 2019; Hunter, 2011).

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<sup>17</sup> Racial capital is a resource drawn from the body that can be related to skin tone, facial features, and body shape. It describes the role that white/Anglo bodies play in the status hierarchy through skin bleaching creams or cosmetic surgery. This is distinct from racial identity as it is more closely related to phenotype and how others perceive an individual rather than how an individual defines themselves (Hunter, 2011:145).

Additionally, when it comes to notions of beauty and black women's body image, thinness has been central to the female beauty ideal (Collins, 2004; Hooks, 1992). However, dating back to slavery and colonialism, the construction of the black female body has been the antithesis of this ideal through images of a body that is voluptuous, unwomanly, and primarily built for functionality and labor (Gentles-Peart, 2018). This enduring cultural image has created the ideology of the 'thick black woman' that constructs black women as naturally curvy and voluptuous. Accordingly, constructing and normalizing ideologies about black women's bodies as naturally voluptuous have upheld gendered racial inequalities (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Gentles-Peart 2016; Shaw, 2006; Appleford, 2016). Furthermore, fashion has been considered a powerful beauty practice and tool to discipline the body, as well as validate and exemplify the nation's identity (Barnes & Eicher, 1992). As such, in the era of globalization, power is represented, constituted, articulated, and contested through fashion in various ways and locales resulting in a synthesis of local traditional and contemporary modern styles (Allman, 2004; Eicher, 2008; McCracken, 2014; Paulicelli & Clark, 2008; Maynard, 2004; Gott & Loughran, 2010).

In sum, these feminist works on black beauty culture highlight how women grapple with their racialized identities through beauty. Furthermore, it is not just constructions of beauty as a whole but also different parts of black women's bodies that are entangled and splintered in racialization processes. Furthermore, they reveal how racialized and gendered representations of black women have played a fundamental role in delineating the boundaries of what it means to be both black and a woman as well as ugly and beautiful (Hooks, 1990; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; Bailey, 2010). Consequently, representations of black female bodies in

contemporary popular culture rarely subvert or critique images of black female beauty and/or sexuality that were part of the cultural apparatus of nineteenth century racism and which still shape perceptions of black women today. Furthermore, black women have been repeatedly denied from the purview of globalized mainstream beauty culture, even those black women who approximate Western standards of beauty, as race powerfully denies black women beauty and representation no matter how closely they conform to hegemonic standards (Roseman, 2017; Tate, 2018; Walker, 2007). Additionally, standards of beauty through these representations of the black female body, reproduce the workings of racism by weaving racist assumptions into the daily practices and inner lives of black women, most saliently by encouraging them to accept and act on the supposition of their own ugliness (Taylor, 1999; Hooks, 1990; Pyke, 2010). However, although black women increasingly face “misogynoir”<sup>18</sup>, the advent of social media has invited a process of redefining representation that has allowed black women to challenge the normative standards of beauty and bodily representation in popular culture.

While the feminist literature on race-making more broadly (Wing, 1997, 2000; Hua, 2003; Razack, et al., 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and black beauty more specifically seeks to understand how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies by examining the appearance of race and racism through dominant cultural modes of beauty in public, it does not show how multiple gendered racialization processes like postcolonial discourses and nationalist racial formations, as well as discourses of multiculturalism and constructions of Blackness

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<sup>18</sup> The specific combination of anti-Black racism and misogynistic representation in visual culture and digital spaces that shapes broader ideas about black women (Bailey, 2010).

interact to create complex racialized diasporic identities for African immigrant women. In other words, although the literature highlights how black women grapple with their racialized and nationalist identities through beauty, it does not account for how African immigrant women in Canada are specifically and uniquely affected by race-making given their different sociohistorical backgrounds, colonial legacies, and migratory experiences. Furthermore, while the literature highlights how different parts of black women's bodies are racialized, it does not explain how different parts of their bodies and beauty practices have varying, and sometimes conflicting, degrees of significance within multicultural communities and nationalist collectives. As such, this study seeks to fill in this gap by highlighting how racialization processes within the African diaspora in Canada and discourses of multiculturalism create different gendered racialized diasporic identities for African women, thereby placing importance on different parts of women's bodies and beauty practices depending on which social spaces they are navigating.

### ***Agency***

Moreover, debates on black women's bodily choices and practices are informed by different theoretical perspectives about agency. Agency, simply defined, is having the ability to act and to be recognized as an actor. Postcolonial and black feminists' scholarship emphasize contextualizing and differentiating agency with the end goal of uncovering the complex dynamics of oppression and subordination. Additionally, this body of work highlights the socio-historical, multifaceted, and often contradictory character of agency (Spivak, 1988; Mani, 1998; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1988; Mahmood, 2001; Narayan, 2002). In other words, agency is not just synonymous with resistance to relations of domination but refers to "a capacity for action that

historically specific relations of subordination enable and create” (Mahmood, 2001:203). Furthermore, this version of agency is based on the principle markers of voice, resistance, community and piety (Mahmood, 2005; hooks, 1990; Collins, 2000; Davidson, 2017). As such, these feminist scholars highlight the ways in which subjectivities and agency are anchored within a nexus of social relations and structures that intersect to reproduce power and privilege. In other words, this intersectional approach to agency links systemic and relational concerns with interlocking power structures, such as race, class, and gender by highlighting their enabling and disabling effects for black women. Consequently, these interlocking structures of domination determine the relative position of women at any one time creating specific and varied patterns of accommodation, resistance, inequality, and discrimination. From this perspective, there is no ontological priority of agency to context. Instead, it focuses on specific contexts and articulated social formations from which different forms of agency and subject positions arise (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000; Bilge, 2010).

In other words, this body of literature shows that agency is a concept that involves different capacities for action within structures of power and not always outside of them. These capacities may not necessarily include liberation from oppressive structures but there may be active compliance with such patriarchal structures that may be seen as “bargaining with patriarchy” (Narayan, 2002:421). In short, there is a duality that exists within agency for racialized women including constraints on women’s choices and choice within the constraints. Furthermore, these feminist works show that women may be agentive in ways that do not align with white feminist expectations which include choosing not to resist unequal social

arrangements and embracing the family, nation, and/or other social structures that mainstream feminists see as a location of oppression or even as contributing to the subjugation of others. Put simply, agency may include different capacities for action including those not aimed at liberation. As such, when it comes to women's compliances with cultural practices, like "regimes of beauty" (Narayan, 2002:421), it is important to maintain a dual awareness seeing both how the practice imposes constraints on choices and how choices are in fact being made within these constraints.

In sum, the literature argues that the idea that women's values, attitudes, and choices can be impoverished and distorted by patriarchy should not completely efface the value and significance of these choices from the point of view of the women who make them. However, the tension between structures and individual agency is troubling and complex, and it is this very tension that this project seeks to unpack further. Accordingly, this study seeks to contribute to this body of scholarship by demonstrating that African women wrestle with an often-contradictory juxtaposition of agency and structures of power which means they may employ various ways of negotiating these structures rather than completely boycotting and/or rejecting them. Furthermore, constructions of the self are central to feminist questions on agency for racialized women (Crenshaw, 1991; Lugones, 1992) and this thesis adds to these discussions by highlighting how African women's reconfigurations of their racialized identities post-migration impacts what agency means and how women exercise it. In other words, as women redefine their sense of self, notions of agency manifest differently as it is channeled by notions of the public and private, racialization processes, discourses of multiculturalism, the African diaspora in Canada, nationalist patriarchy, and new freedoms for beauty practices. This complex dynamic

makes it difficult to neatly define African women as either completely agentive or completely oppressed when it comes to analyzing the formation of women's racialized identities and their beauty practices as they navigate different social spaces.

### ***Racializing The African Diaspora***

In addition to beauty and agency, race and the African diaspora are also key features in African women's migratory experiences. More generally, scholars have argued that African immigrants experience dislocations and redefinitions of subjectivity as they enter Canada and into a history of racialized relations, representations, and assumptions through which their bodies are marked by colonial legacies (Ibrahim, 1999; Okeke-Ihejirika & Spritzer, 2005; Kelly, 1998; Creese, 2011). Consequently, the majority of African immigrants are racialized as Black in the North American context and must negotiate a new society marked by norms and power relations of whiteness. It is also worth noting that not all Africans are racialized as Black in the same way, for example immigrants from North Africa and citizens from African countries who are of Asian, Arabic, or white descent. Nevertheless, race trumps nationality in Canada and perceptions of self are altered in direct response to racialization processes whereby representations of Blackness are embedded in a specific Canadian history and refracted through the omnipresence of American race politics and popular culture (Creese, 2011; Ibrahim, 1999). In other words, African immigrants encounter new meanings of Blackness that are shaped by Canada's history of settler-colonialism as well as the state's relationship with Indigenous communities and racialized minority immigrant groups. Furthermore, notions of Blackness in Canada are intertwined with America's history of slavery and the contemporary racist images,

assumptions, and stereotypes drawn from African-American popular culture such as music, entertainment, and sports.

Additionally, scholars have noted that before leaving their home countries, immigrants often have little need to explore the larger African identity, as they have a sense of themselves through a pan-African identification, and rarely regard themselves as Black because national and ethnic identities take precedence before entering Canada where they are already constructed, imagined, and positioned through hegemonic discourses of Blackness that are steeped in colonial legacies and practices of white privilege (Ibrahim, 1999; Okeke-Ihejirika & Spritzer, 2005). In short, multicultural imaginings remain firmly racialized in Canada as skin colour is made synonymous with immigrant status (Bannerji, 2000; Mackey, 2002; Li, 2003). Moreover, the history of colonization in Canada has produced a white imagined community of the country that continues to underpin racialization processes today as race, culture, and civilization have been inextricably linked with nation building.

Therefore, scholars have argued that while Canada is portrayed as a state innocent of racism, through state policies of multiculturalism that represent Canada as a welcoming haven for immigrants and refugees, these policies in reality have often deepened structures of exclusion that keep new immigrants of colour in a marginal social, political, cultural and economic relationship to Canada (Dua et al., 2005; Razack et al., 2010). Accordingly, “becoming black” and “learning to be black” become central elements of their migration experience in a new context of white domination, multiculturalism, and a new diasporic identity (Kelly, 2004;

Kelly, 1998; Creese, 2011). However, although these studies show how discourses of multiculturalism and race affect African immigrants in Canada specifically, they do not give much attention to how this racialization process is also deeply gendered through beauty practices and tied to specific public and private articulations of various social spaces for African women.

More specifically, at a community level, the African diaspora in Canada is also racialized as Black. Studies on the African diaspora characterize it as a group of people who: have a common geographical origin; have trans-located through migratory patterns occasioned by globalization or local domestic issues; share identifiable markers such as ethnicity and nationality; and have collective consciousness and common experiences in their new locales (Tettey et al., 2005; Zeleza, 2009; Takougang & Owusu, 2012; Terborg-Penn, 2011; McGregor & Primorac, 2010). In short, the African diaspora is characterized by decolonisation, increased immigration, globalization, and other phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, habituating, and travelling within and across nations (Counted, 2019; Cohen, 1999).

Furthermore, scholars have broadly studied the African diaspora in two timeframes. Firstly, the African diaspora as historical patterns of dispersal of African peoples around the world, through the Atlantic slave trade, and the diasporic identities these populations developed in new locations. Secondly, the contemporary analysis of the linkages that African diasporas have maintained with the continent with the emphasis being on demographic, cultural, economic, political, ideological, and iconographic flows<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, despite cultural variations and

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<sup>19</sup> This thesis focuses on the contemporary timeframe so that the African diaspora refers to immigrants from African countries and not those of African descent whose ancestors were forced to leave the continent through the slave trade.

political divisions, the African diasporas are united by past and present, but not exclusively, experiences of racial oppression (Creese, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2015; Palmer, 2000; Zeleza, 2008). Therefore, as a theme of critical race studies, scholarship on the African diaspora focuses on how individuals and communities experience the diaspora as well as the social processes that sustain these communities. It is used as an analytical tool to examine how transnational communities form, operate, and interact within the global African experience (Butler, 2001; Okpewho, 1999; Harris, 1996; Palmer, 2000; Koser, 2003; Gomez, 2005).

Accordingly, these works characterize the African diaspora as fluid, performative, and relational rather than a fixed entity emanating from transnational movements across space. It is a way of being 'other' among the established and these African diasporic experiences produce distinct forms of community, identity, and modes of cultural production marked by hybridity through diasporic culture and long-distance nationalism (Adogame, 2008; Brah, 1996; Hall, 1990; Blanes, 2011; Manning, 2003; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2001). In short, the African diaspora entails shifting boundaries, discourses of culture, and other mechanisms of differentiation extending beyond a North American center to include an 'active' Africa. Furthermore, scholars on the African diaspora and diasporic identities highlight how they are formed in the context of relations with states (home and host) and other multiple positioned groups coexisting in the same spaces. As such, diasporic communities create new ways of belonging as they mix, redefine, and recreate cultures, identities, and new forms of hybridity in new locales (Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2001).

Furthermore, rarely are diasporas from other regions racialized Black in the same way as the African diaspora and these racialization processes, in contexts of Canadian migration and multiculturalism, inevitably construct and maintain diasporic difference (Zeleza, 2005; Creese, 2013). In other words, the African diaspora is significantly marked by the integument of race as racialization processes and marginalization are central to diasporic experiences (Schueller, 2003; Zeleza, 2005; Pinn, 2009; Creese, 2011; Ibrahim, 1999; Kelly, 2004). However, this literature does not show how the African diaspora is formed as much by external racialization processes as well as internal ones determined by different appropriations of public and private spaces. As such, this thesis will demonstrate that while the African diaspora is racialized as Black by public policies of multiculturalism and racist attitudes within Canadian society, members belonging to this group, namely African women, resist these external racialization processes by reshaping notions of community through a pan-African<sup>20</sup> identity rooted in continentalist and nationalist culture. This continental identity has individual and collective cultural expressions that are displayed in different ways for different reasons depending on how each social space is situated within the public and/or private as well as how women are positioned in relation to this.

Additionally, scholars have highlighted the ways in which the African diaspora is a signifier of transnationality and movement. Moreover, immigrants who identify themselves as part of the African diaspora tend to show a strong commitment to the political struggle to define

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<sup>20</sup> Pan-African is used as a descriptor to refer to the collective continental identity and cultural community that emerges through the African diaspora in Canada without homogenizing, reifying, or essentializing the diverse diasporas, experiences, and commonalities in racial/cultural struggles. In short, it refers to a continental identity and collective culture within the context of multiculturalism not to imply a homogenous community.

the local as a distinctive community in historical contexts of displacement. In other words, the African diaspora refers to the multiplicities of identity, transnationalism, and hybridity formed through migration. It is a “voyage of negotiation between multiple spatial and social identities” (Zeleza, 2005:41) as internal and external relations are mediated by gender, generation, class, politics, and religion. Additionally, it is the meeting place of the global and local in constructing new belongings and contexts of displacement thereby placing discourses of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension. Still further, it is a “category of practice” (Brubaker, 2005:12) that creates new ways of belonging as they mix, redefine, and recreate cultures, identities, and new forms of hybridity (Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2001; Brah, 1996; Hall, 1990; Clifford, 1994; Brubaker, 2005). In short, the African diaspora is a signifier of transnationality, community, and cultural practice.

While the literature reveals the different manifestations of African transnational movements and their settlement patterns into foreign communities, the notion of the African diaspora is full of contradictions, tensions, and controversies. Consequently, invoking diaspora as a unified or ontological group remains ever present and one can argue that it still needs to fully acknowledge the diverse, complex, and shifting nature of historical and contemporary migrations of Africans. Accordingly, this thesis acknowledges that there are many African diasporas whereby notions of belonging and community are simultaneously tied to the continent, home country, and/or ethnic-tribal group. In many instances, these various communities and identities overlap and sometimes run counter to each other. Furthermore, not all Africans are racialized in the same way, for example citizens from North African countries and

citizens of African nations that are of white, Arabic, or Asian descent. Therefore, “the African diaspora” in this thesis refers to the majority of immigrants from the continent who are racialized as Black and can therefore be regarded as ‘belonging to the African diaspora’. As such, this study seeks to add to this literature by demonstrating how the formation of the African diaspora in Canada is shaped not only through migration but also by multiple racialization processes that complicate and rework notions of community and women’s racialized identities so that they simultaneously hold elements of Africanness and Blackness. Furthermore, this study aims to highlight how this pan-African identity and new meanings of community, formed specifically in the context of multiculturalism, is deeply gendered and most prominently expressed in particular public spaces. In short, women’s ethnicities and nationalities are merged into a pan-African identity against the backdrop of multiculturalism. Accordingly, this continental identity is expressed through new forms of community and deployed for different reasons depending on the social space women are navigating.

### ***Multiculturalism***

As highlighted thus far, African diaspora communities are racialized and uniquely formed in the context of multiculturalism as cultural diversity introduces complex dynamics to diasporic and intercultural encounters. As such, Canadian discourses of multiculturalism evoke a complex history of legislation and social policy designed to manage the country’s ethnocultural diversity. Multiculturalism in Canada is the umbrella of policy and program initiatives introduced since 1971 designed to address the plurality of cultural expression found in Canadian society (Pillay, 2015:70, *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, 1988). Furthermore, multiculturalism policy, as

promoted by the federal government, was designed to break with previous colonial and racist politics vis-à-vis ethnic minorities as well as to subsume the specific issue of Québec's nationalism (Day, 2000). Accordingly, the state-initiated enterprise portrays Canada as a nation which respects diversity and embraces peoples of various ethnicities by encouraging immigrants to retain, maintain, and develop their cultural and religious practices and belief systems. As such, supporters of multiculturalism argue that it bolsters the integration of immigrants into Canadian society without demanding that they give up their cultural heritage (Banting et al., 2007; Bloemraad, 2006; Kymlicka, 1998). In short, the political lexicon of multiculturalism constitutes the formal management of diversity through federal, provincial, and municipal initiatives (Pillay, 2015; Hyman et al., 2011; Bannerji, 2000).

However, some scholarly concerns over the meaning, use, and failings of multiculturalism are that it is a “tool to maintain difference, distance, and dominance while maintaining its language of diversity and inclusion” (Chapra & Chatterjee, 2009:15). In other words, notions of cultural diversity in Canada still tend to equal a dominant white ethnicity that tolerates and even celebrates the co-presence of ethnic others who comply with its values and accepts its hegemony. Consequently, official discourses of multiculturalism position the state and whiteness as benevolent saviours, therein legitimising the settler-colonial state's determination of who should be ‘tolerated’ or ‘saved’ and on what terms (Bakali, 2015:417). Furthermore, multiculturalism and debates of immigrants' inclusion into the Canadian nation also highlight the grievous exclusion and insubordination of Indigenous peoples and communities (Chapra & Chatterjee, 2009; Abu-Laban & Nath, 2020; Das Gupta & Lacovetta, 2000). Consequently,

multiculturalism promotes ghettoization and balkanization by emphasizing differences between Indigenous and immigrant groups rather than their shared rights or identities as Canadian citizens (Fleras & Elliot, 2002).

Moreover, critics of multiculturalism argue that the rhetoric conceals racist, discriminatory, and exclusionary attitudes/prejudices as well as the real experiences of racialized minorities, thereby sidelining acts of racism and limiting opportunities for anti-racist action within the myth of a tolerant nation (Matthews, 2007; Thobani, 2007; Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Reitz & Bannerji, 2007; Ambwani & Dyke, 2007). Put simply, scholars have illuminated the various ways multiculturalism policy reproduces existing power relations that oppress and marginalize racialized minorities in Canada, especially women. Accordingly, women are either absent from discourses of multiculturalism or cast in conservative cultural roles relative to the maintenance of fossilized gendered cultural traditions and multicultural imaginings of race (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Akwani, 2002). Furthermore, even though it purports equality for all, multiculturalism policy is written within a liberal democratic framework that espouses a 'one size fits all' vision for racial, ethnic, and cultural harmony in Canada which perpetuates acts of violence upon women through exclusionary practices and hierarchies of power based on gender, race, class, culture, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality (Thobani, 2007; Pillay, 2015).

As a result, racialized women's cultural practices and identities are constantly examined, questioned, and contested to assess if they meet the guidelines for inclusion within Canadian society as developed by those in power. In other words, the "myth of multiculturalism" (Pillay,

2015:77) places racialized women on the margins of Canadian society as it has a limited understanding of the complexities of racialized, gendered, and heteronormative identities. Consequently, policy discussions on multiculturalism characterize the marginalization that racialized women experience as rooted in their ethnocultural community and position as victims without agency as opposed to within systemic structures of power like racism (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Pillay, 2015).

In sum, the literature on Canadian multiculturalism highlights that top-down policy approaches have little impact on the ways in which people negotiate racial difference and cultural diversity as part of their daily lives. Furthermore, it is disconnected and out of touch with everyday realities and actual inter/intra group relations. Additionally, state multiculturalism is not necessarily representative of the lifestyles and experiences of the people it claims to represent as it is often associated with elite ideals of cultural exchange and diversity that privilege Western white middle-class values. More specifically, the literature also shows the challenges of Canada's official multiculturalism policy for racialized women. Therefore, adding to this scholarship, this project seeks to contribute to insights on the varied experiences of racialized women with multiculturalism by taking a closer look at how multiculturalism policy and practices play out in everyday situations for African women specifically. In other words, the thesis will highlight some of the joys, tensions, and contradictions that exist between the official Canadian policy of multiculturalism and African women's lived experiences.

### ***Everyday Multiculturalism***

Accordingly, while official Canadian discourses of multiculturalism have a top-down policy approach, studies on *everyday multiculturalism* offer a more situated approach to understanding the everyday dimensions of multiculturalism as it is lived. The literature on this multiculturalism-from-below (Wise & Velayutham, 2009; Harris, 2009; Hardy, 2017; O'Connor, 2010) explores how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated on the ground in everyday situations like neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. It examines how social relations and social actors' identities are shaped and reshaped in the process suggesting a far more fluid experience of difference than those captured in calcified discourses of official multiculturalism that reduce social distinctions to hard bounded groupings of ethnic and racial categories. Furthermore, it includes wider social, cultural, and political processes, institutions, and structures revealing how they filter through to the realm of everyday practice, exchange and meaning making (Wise & Velayutham, 2009:3). As such, the scholarship on everyday multiculturalism moves beyond an ideological and policy-oriented conception of multiculturalism to the empirical recognition of diversity within contemporary societies as "actually existing multiculturalisms" (Uitermark et al., 2005:625). It represents a broader, if at times contradictory, range of ways to theorise engagement with cultural diversity and difference by highlighting the fluidity of distinctions and their persistence as social categories.

Moreover, everyday multiculturalism is a category of analysis and practices that shows the pragmatic aspects of how individuals navigate difference. This multicultural praxis is a more fluid and prosaic process rather than official multiculturalism policy's fixed notions of

homogenous communities bound together and defined by discrete identities, thereby revealing how the theoretical ideal of multicultural citizenship plays out in situated contexts. In short, scholarly work on everyday multiculturalism highlights the “lived practice of cultural diversity” (Wise & Velayutham, 2009:3) as it is experienced on the ground, how difference is constructed and contested within different contexts and through different activities, and how the everyday mundane is experienced and mediated by larger cultural, political, economic processes and social contexts (Wise & Velayutham, 2009; Wise, 2014; Harris, 2009; Colombo & Semi, 2007; O’Connor, 2010; Colombo, 2010; Uitermark et. al, 2005; Hardy, 2017). Furthermore, everyday racism<sup>21</sup>(Essed, 2002) is a subtheme of everyday multiculturalism that provides an understanding on the intersections between racialization discourses, processes, structures, and everyday practices. Everyday racism is not about extreme incidents, but the mundane practices embedded in routine and everyday intercultural encounters so that it is experienced as amorphous and difficult to explicitly identify but it is felt in the exoticization and “forever foreigner” comments that it comes with (Nakagawa & Arzubiaga, 2014:108; Essed, 2002; Nakagawa & Arzubiaga, 2014; Meszaros & Bazzaroni, 2014).

However, while the literature on everyday multiculturalism highlights the lived realities of cultural diversity through different cultural practices including food, religion, language, and

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<sup>21</sup> Everyday racism highlights how systemic racism is reproduced largely through routine and taken-for-granted practices, procedures, and intercultural encounters in everyday life. Furthermore, it encapsulates the way discrimination is perpetuated through society combining both individual action and institutional structures. Additionally, it is the recurrent, systematic, and familiar practices within society that disadvantage ethnic minorities. As such, it’s not about extreme incidents but mundane cumulative practices embedded in routine and everyday practice so that it’s covert and experienced as amorphous and difficult to explicitly identify.

fitness it lacks a more specific gendered analysis of the ways in which other practices are used by men and women to navigate racial difference and cultural diversity. As such, this study aims to fill in this gap by incorporating a gendered analysis of everyday multiculturalism, hitherto lacking, by focusing on African women's beauty practices. By prioritising beauty culture as a legitimate mode and space of intercultural encounter, how African women dress and the bodily ways they interact with culturally diverse constructions of beauty can be viewed as critical to the daily lived experience of diversity and the (re)formation of their racialized identities. Furthermore, given different local racial legacies and racialization processes in host countries, immigrants' experiences of everyday multiculturalism will vary significantly from one diaspora or ethnic/nationalist group to another, yet the literature (Wise & Velayutham, 2009; Harris, 2009; O'Connor, 2010) does not make this distinction clear.

Thus, this study aims to fill in this gap by specifically focusing on the African diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism in Canada. Additionally, most studies on everyday multiculturalism have been conducted in Europe, Asia, and Australia. However, this study seeks to contribute to this literature by placing it in the Canadian context in order to remedy some of the shortcomings within official Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, especially where racialized immigrant women are concerned. Finally, this literature focuses mainly on the *public* micro-geographies of intercultural encounters such as the workplace, neighborhoods, malls, and schools. However, this study goes further and also focuses on private spaces, such as the home and self, to highlight how this sphere also shapes and is shaped by public intercultural encounters, cultural exchanges, pan-African continentalism, long-distance nationalism as well as

new norms of race, gender, sexuality, and class. In other words, the private as well as the public are intrinsic to cultural diversity and intercultural encounters for African immigrant women.

### ***The Public-Private Dichotomy & Social Spaces***

As such, what the public-private distinction means in context diverges widely within and between disciplines. However, simply put, the private refers to what is individual, hidden, or withdrawn while the public refers to that which is collective, open, revealed, and accessible (Weintraub, 1997:5; Landes, 1998:1-2). Furthermore, the dichotomy has been central to feminist writing and political struggle (Pateman, 1989) thus feminists have challenged the divide in three main overlapping arguments. Firstly, conceptual orientations of the dichotomy ignore the domestic sphere or treat it as trivial. Secondly, the distinction is deeply gendered in almost uniformly invidious ways thereby perpetuating gender roles and relegating women to positions of inferiority. Finally, classifying institutions like the family as private enables the dichotomy to shield abuse and domination within these relations from political scrutiny and legal redress (Weintraub, 1997:28-29). In short, the dichotomy is seen as the source of women's oppression since the private is exempt from liberal principles and political accountability while activity in the private is not valued like that in civil society.

However, some feminists reject the liberal notion that the public should not impinge on the private arguing for the preservation of the divide as it may be meaningful to women in various ways (Higgins, 2000; Ackelsberg & Shanley, 1996; Prokhovnik, 1998). Furthermore, other feminists view the personal as political and therefore argue that there is no distinction since the

private is public (Mackinnon, 1989; Gavison, 1992). Still further, some feminists acknowledge that the private is a sphere of oppression for women and minorities, but the public is where they are included as citizens and so matters just as much for their visibility and participation in society (Synowich, 2000; Lister, 1997).

Moreover, the regulation of the private sphere becomes particularly important for immigrants and diaspora communities as this is where culture is predominantly practiced and reproduced. Consequently, culturally endorsed practices often remain hidden in the domestic realm because a great deal of culture-based gender construction and inequality occur informally in the private sphere (Okin, 1998; 1999). Therefore, the public-private dichotomy has significance in multicultural societies and diaspora communities. The historical dichotomy of space has defined the private as feminine and the public as political, economic, and therefore masculine so that different tasks and norms of behavior for men and women are associated with each space. Nevertheless, scholars argue that definitions and interpretations of the public and private are related to the context in which they are embedded (Weintraub, 1997; Benn & Gaus, 1983; Bargetz, 2008; Armstrong & Squires, 2002). This contextual definition of the public and private allow for social spaces to be viewed as social exchanges among strangers as well as a set of emotional and meaningful ties imbued in the context.

However, feminists (Hooks, 1990; Boyd, 1997; Crenshaw, 1989; Young, 1997; Collins, 2000) critique the dichotomy for its Eurocentric bias as a liberal white concept. In other words, the divide is viewed as exclusionary for the ways it oppresses and marginalizes those who are

different from white, male, middle-class, and heterosexual structures underpinning the divide. Additionally, due to racial oppression, black women rarely fit neatly into this model because it relies on the archetypal white middle-class nuclear family as the norm. Furthermore, the public-private distinction shapes and limits black women's roles in the home and public life as it is predicated on white women's experiences through exclusion in the public and glorified gender roles in the private sphere (Crenshaw, 1989). Therefore, gender as a cause of oppression in the public and private obscures the role of race, culture, class, nationality, sexuality, and disability in shaping the dichotomy. In other words, the public-private framework both fails to recognize the intersectional identities of black women and enhances the production of deviance by using it as a normative yardstick for explaining why they deviate from the alleged norm.

Yet even these feminist critiques fail to recognize the unique realities of African immigrant women as notions of the public and private are challenged in the migration process and the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism. In other words, the idea of separate distinct public and private spheres is an ideological distortion inconsistent with the realities of the African diaspora and a complex, highly differentiated multicultural society like Canada. As such, scholars specifically note how immigrant women face a double-burden of raced and gendered exclusion as they encounter discrimination in multiple ways in both the public and private spheres (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999; Abraham et al., 2010; Zavos, 2010). For example, discourses of nationalism, nations, and citizenship belong to the political public sphere, so women are excluded because of their designation as 'the reproducers of the nation' mainly in the private sphere of the home (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Yuval-Davis & Werbner,

1999:12; Lister, 1997). However, even though many immigrant women must also negotiate social spaces outside the home, through their work for example, their presence remains mostly invisible thereby resulting in their subjection to structural inequalities in the public as well. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to add to the scholarship on the public-private dichotomy by unpacking diasporic notions of the distinction to highlight the ways in which African immigrant women are repositioned across social spaces through new meanings of gender, race, class, pan-African continentalism, long-distance nationalism, and multiculturalism which emerge to challenge the public-private dichotomy of social spaces.

Additionally, African immigrant and diaspora experiences in Canada are framed simultaneously by processes of exclusion and practices of resistance through active negotiation of “diaspora spaces” (Brah, 1996:16) in the public and private where the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are contested. These are spaces of resistance through the expression of a particularly raced, faithed, classed, and nationalist identity and community as well as connection to the home country (Faria, 2010). Furthermore, belonging is negotiated in specific social spaces that are gendered, classed, racialized, and sexualized as African immigrants move through them while (re)defining their subjectivities. In short, constructions of difference are navigated within the social spaces of ordinary life such as neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools, and not simply in abstract multiculturalism policy (Colombo & Semi, 2007; Wise, 2014; Harris, 2009).

As such, the notion of space is an increasingly salient social question across contemporary multicultural societies. Scholars have argued that spaces are socially constructed so that no space is socially neutral, but it is shaped by social relations where groups appropriate it for collective purposes (Lefebvre, 1991; Low, 1996; Richardson, 1982; Spasford, 2000). In other words, space as a social construct means space is not a subjective or objective structure but rather a social experience. Furthermore, space as a social product and social construct are two different but closely interrelated and mutually complementary domains of analysis within the literature. On the one hand, space as a social product implies the operation of power relations and the historical emergence as well as political and economic formation of space (Low, 1996). On the other hand, space as a social construct denotes the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict, and control (Richardson, 1982). Specifically, the literature shows that space is constructed through meaning in social interaction. In other words, people construct and reconstruct spaces based on their own realities, meanings, and experiences. Thus, the spatial composition of social spaces and their cultural configurations mean that space is not only a physical location but also made of cultural and social practices that occur across and within it. Additionally, ethnicity and culture are influential for the perception and experience of social spaces (Hooghiemstra, 1997; Nayar & Hocking, 2013). In other words, social spaces have physical, social, and cultural components that immigrants must navigate. As such, social spaces accommodate host-immigrant social exchanges among diverse groups of people in multicultural societies so that cultural diversity and racial difference are represented in a variety of conflicting spatial practices where the dynamics of intercultural interactions are also revealed.

In sum, the literature argues that what are considered public and private social spaces is a process rather than a static structure of a categorical distinction or a natural way of viewing the social world. Consequently, scholars have argued that the public-private dichotomy is more of a “fractal distinction” (Gal, 2002:80). In other words, the public-private dichotomy is not categorical but shifting and negotiated. These spheres are nested and enmeshed, continually renegotiated, redefined, and always in relation to one another. They are not truly dichotomous even when women try to collapse them into a single dichotomy to simplify what is, in practice, complexly recursive. Put simply, the public and private, and the differences between them, are contextual, relational, and relative terms that shift according to individual perspectives.

Therefore, the literature (Gal, 2002; Ford, 2011; Nippert-Eng, 2010; Wolfe, 1997) shows that the public and private are situational “anchors on either end of a continuum with multiple and fluid interstitial categories being created and destroyed as needed” (Ford, 2011:563). Accordingly, this thesis adds to the literature by showing that the public and private bleed into each other and the line is constantly blurred. Specifically, as this thesis will demonstrate, official policies and programs of Canadian multiculturalism manage diversity in the public sphere at a federal institutional level while encouraging racialized minority individuals and groups to continue their cultural and/or religious practices in the private sphere without state interference (*Canada Multiculturalism Act*, 1988). However, the lived experiences of women in this study will reveal that the distinction is unclear regarding where the influence of public policy ends and private practices begin as African women’s diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism mesh the public and private into each other through intersecting individual, diasporic, institutional, and societal influences.

## ***Conclusion***

It is evident from the literature that notions of race, space, diasporic community, agency, and beauty are important to gendered nationalist projects and intrinsic to the daily mundane lived practice of cultural diversity for African immigrants. However, this body of literature treats these themes as mutually exclusive without giving into the possibility of what occurs when, rather than being siloed experiences, the African diaspora and everyday multiculturalism interact to shape African immigrant women's lived experiences as they navigate diversity and difference through beauty and the complex identity politics intersecting along the lines of gender, race, culture, nationalism, ethnicity, class, religion, and sexuality. Therefore, building on the feminist literature on race-making through beauty that addresses the questions of how race is shaped by global interlocking structures of domination and large-scale sociopolitical processes in the public, as well as how racialized and nationalist identities are defined through the continual interplay of individual beauty practices and collective identity, this thesis will explore how everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora interact to shape racialization processes in multiple spaces, both public and private, through an exploration of African women's beauty practices.

## ***Research Questions***

Accordingly, this thesis seeks to answer two key questions. Firstly, how do African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism in a globalized world shape social spaces and impact gendered racialization processes as evinced through beauty practices? Secondly, how do African diaspora women exercise agency as they navigate these spaces?

The thesis analyses five main spaces that emerged as significant in the everyday lives of African diaspora women within this study. While the thesis will challenge meanings of the public and private within different social spaces, the layout of the thesis chapters is structured based on how spaces are more generally categorized. As such, the public is defined by the collective, the community, common good, things open to sight, accessible and shared by all while the private is individual, closed, hidden, and exclusive (Landes, 1998; Weintraub, 1997). Accordingly, the thesis begins with the private (the individual and the home) and then moves into the public (the church, the workplace, and social media). Firstly, the thesis starts with an analysis of the self and African women's individual internal consciousness showing how this is where they process their thoughts and feelings regarding the numerous changes that occur as they migrate and enter a new multicultural society. Furthermore, it is also the space where racialization processes are internalized thereby reshaping women's racialized identities and definitions of beauty. Secondly, the thesis analyses the home as the next private space demonstrating that this is where women navigate their individuality, families, and heterosexual<sup>22</sup> relationships. Additionally, the notion of 'home' for African women in this study is characterized by duality as it has local and transnational influences given that many women's nuclear and extended families are still in their countries of origin.

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<sup>22</sup> Although the African diaspora includes members from the LGBTQ+ community and non-binary gendered individuals, this thesis focuses mainly on cisgender heterosexual women.

Thirdly, the thesis analyses the church<sup>23</sup> showing that this is where African women can find a strong sense of community in the context of multiculturalism as Africanized values and nationalist culture are rooted deeply in the social, rather than solely religious, practices of this public space. As such, new forms of community emerge as this space is mostly defined by a pan-African identity displayed through continental aesthetic nationalism. Fourth, the thesis analyses the workplace showing how this is the public space where intercultural encounters and discourses of multiculturalism are experienced most intensely as they occur daily and on a larger scale. Consequently, it is also the space where everyday racisms are most pronounced for African women as their racialized identities are a pervasive source of difference. Finally, the thesis analyses social media demonstrating that this is where women in this study are able to connect with the global black community<sup>24</sup> and participate in online long-distance nationalism<sup>25</sup> by engaging in transnational diasporic culture. Furthermore, they are able to utilise new technologies and knowledge to learn the beauty skills required, through online tutorials, to navigate Canadian society with its accompanying racialization processes.

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<sup>23</sup> While there are numerous churches and denominations, “the church” in this thesis refers to the Christian religious community and the physical space used for religious services. Accordingly, this thesis analyses mainstream established Christian churches and historical denominations rather than other religions or religious/spiritual services.

<sup>24</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the term is simply used as a descriptor to refer to individuals and diverse communities across the globe who self-identify or are racialized as Black.

<sup>25</sup> Borrowing from concepts of gender and Third World nationalisms by Chatterjee (1990), Yuval-Davis (1993), and Faria (2010) I use the term ‘long distance nationalism’ in this thesis to demonstrate how gender is incorporated into processes of nation-building through women’s bodies and beauty practices. Specifically, I use the term to demonstrate how ideas of nationalism are used as a way for African diaspora women in Canada to form new notions of community, retain their connection to and memories of home, and distinguish their nationalities from other African women in the diaspora. For example, a Nigerian woman will wear her Gele, a Beninese woman will wear her Boubou and a Ugandan woman will wear her Gomesi. In other words, women’s nationalism is expressed through dress which holds conceptions of national identity and belonging particularly in the context of Canadian discourses of multiculturalism that racialize African women as Black without adequate differentiations in ethnic and national identities. As such, I use this term to refer to the ways women are incorporated into and internalize the processes of gendered nation building projects at home and within the African diaspora in Canada through their bodies and beauty practices.

Accordingly, everyday intercultural and intragroup encounters happen in these social spaces that include and exclude, connect and marginalise. In other words, African women's intercultural encounters within these social spaces also serve as the means of social identification that define, establish, and sustain the boundaries between who is in and out, not only between them, other ethnic groups, and Canadians, but also within the African diaspora community. Thus, for African immigrant women in this study, the appropriation of certain social spaces is a means to position themselves within highly complex gender roles and racialized diasporic identity formations in the context of a multicultural society as each space improves or intensifies the disparities pronounced by cultural diversity and racial difference. Subsequently, their spatial articulation of the public and private is relevant to the discussion on diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism because there are cultural connotations to social spaces such that certain spaces are inscribed with a mix of familiarity, inclusiveness, and exclusion through gendered racialization processes, diasporic culture, and everyday multiculturalism.

Additionally, migration and the duality between host and home countries impacts perceptions, interpretations, and the use of social spaces because women also migrate with perspectives of place-making, habits, customs, and norms of use for each space. In other words, they maintain transnational ties resulting in different conceptions, interpretations, and spatial practices for each space. Furthermore, these social spaces for African immigrant women in this study become even more important for cultivating community and belonging as well as exercising agency while working out processes of cultural accommodation and/or resistance

where racialized diasporic identities are made and unmade in the context of cultural diversity.

Therefore, the thesis unfolds by elaborating how each of these five different spaces are simultaneously shaped by everyday multiculturalism and the African Diaspora as well as the ways in which women demonstrate agency as they navigate race and space through their beauty practices.

# Thesis Outline

## ***Chapter 2: Methodology & Theoretical Framework***

This chapter discusses the project's methodology which is guided by a feminist qualitative research framework. It details data collection and data analysis processes including my reflexivity process, sampling, in-depth interviews, the operationalization of beauty practices, participant observation in the study's key spaces, and content analysis of social media photos, videos, and black beauty blogs and websites. The chapter then highlights the theoretical framework and central arguments of the thesis. Blending analytic categories of everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora while incorporating concepts from critical race theory, the public-private dichotomy, the women-as-nation premise, and feminist insights on agency as a theoretical framework this thesis makes three key arguments:

Firstly, I argue the dynamic interplay between everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora simultaneously reconstitutes social spaces by creating rich combinations of complex experiences that challenge and redefine what the public and private mean in various spaces through new meanings of race, beauty, pan-African continentalism, long-distance nationalism, multiculturalism, and gender. Secondly, I argue everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora simultaneously structure racialization processes so that African women's racialized identities are layered, formed, and informed by a new African diaspora community within Canada, local nationalist and postcolonial racial formations, Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, and globalized meanings of Blackness. Furthermore, racialization processes are

constantly shifting across spaces so that women creatively juggle different racialized identities by creating hybrid iterations, of being African and Black, that are complex and multilayered. Lastly, I argue everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora interact in paradoxical fashion to produce a conception of agency reflective of simultaneous articulations including accommodation and resistance. In other words, the ways in which African diaspora women use their beauty practices to navigate race and space reveals the context dependent manifestations of different forms and expressions of agency in the public and private. This complex dynamic makes it difficult to neatly generalize the implications of regarding African women as either completely agentic and empowered or completely oppressed and victimized in any given space.

### ***Chapter 3: Shifting Identities***

#### ***Migrating & 'Becoming Black' in a Multicultural Society***

This chapter argues that migration reconceptualizes meanings of race for African women as their internal subjectivities are shifted from exclusively postcolonial to multiculturalism's constructions of Blackness while retaining residues of the former. Consequently, women begin to form hybrid racialized identities, of being Black and African, as they navigate new locales. Furthermore, this chapter points out how the African diaspora retains influence over this internal space through African patriarchal norms of gender as well as the ways in which multiculturalism policy and discourses of raced and classed beauty seep into this space through new intercultural encounters in the public that women internalize. Accordingly, women demonstrate their agency in various ways including utilizing new access to beauty products, tools, and technologies, as well as redefining beauty and recreating their racialized identities on their own terms, often incorporating nationalist and multicultural aspects.

#### **Chapter 4: The Home**

##### *African families and Heterosexual Relationships*

This chapter argues that the home is shaped by the African diaspora through African women's transnational families that often demand that they uphold nationalist constructions of femininity while simultaneously perpetuating postcolonial racial formations by encouraging an American-Eurocentric image that is considered appropriate for minimizing racism while navigating public spaces within Canadian society. Furthermore, the chapter demonstrates how the public is ever present in the home through "exoticizing racisms" (Meszaros & Bazzaroni, 2014:1258) displayed by diverse groups of men which seep into intimate heterosexual relationships, thereby racializing women through historical colonial fantasies of Blackness which results in them being fetishized and eroticized. Subsequently, women's agency is channeled by both African patriarchal norms of gender and diverse masculinities. However, women are also able to exercise agency through their beauty practices and identity reformation processes away from familial and cultural pressure.

#### **Chapter 5: The Church**

##### *The African Diaspora through Aesthetic Nationalism*

This chapter argues that the church is shaped by the African diaspora within Canada that reconstructs this public space into a semi-private communal place reminiscent of the home in its function of revalorizing nationalist practices, diasporic culture, unity building within the community, and resistance to racialist prejudices within Canadian society. Furthermore, women's Black identity from discourses of multiculturalism is reinscribed by a pan-African identity because the church space is experienced as a distinctly "African thing" that eclipses

individual national and ethnic identities, as well as global racial regimes. This racial shift is best demonstrated in what I refer to as the “African gospel of dress to impress” which is used to express new forms of community through collective culture and continental aesthetic nationalism. Additionally, this chapter highlights how women’s agency is channeled by African patriarchal norms of gender including piety, modesty, and respectability. However, everyday multiculturalism punctuates this space to offer women options of alternative Sunday aesthetics through intercultural encounters in other multiethnic and white Canadian congregations.

***Chapter 6: The Workplace***  
***Multiculturalism & Everyday Racisms***

This chapter argues that the workplace is a public space steeped in cultural diversity with women’s racialized identities as a pervasive source of difference. Subsequently, women’s pan-African identity is reinscribed by Blackness through discourses of multiculturalism. Consequently, women’s agency is channeled by the micro inequities of “everyday racism” (Essed, 2002) as their racial difference is magnified. Subsequently, women are compelled to contain their Blackness by dressing it up and by muting the racialized markers attached to hair and skin colour to make their racialized identities less visible. However, the African diaspora also briefly punctuates this space as women migrate with gendered nationalist constructs of formal professional femininity before intercultural encounters interrupt diasporic pressures and provide women with business casual office alternatives.

## **Chapter 7: Social Media**

### ***#BlackGirlMagic in Canada & Beyond***

This chapter argues that the public digital space of social media is shaped by the global black community as a semi-private “Virtual Homeplace” (Lee, 2015) and Virtual Beauty Parlour as it carves out diverse communities of belonging, through different social movements and practices, where women’s racialized identities are both publicly and privately challenged and resisted. Consequently, African women’s racialized identities shift from a local pan-African identity within Canada to a globalized Black identity through transnational structures that link diverse black populations in shared experiences of racial oppression as well as practices and ideologies of black beauty. Accordingly, women exercise their agency in various ways including creating communities of belonging, learning the appropriate beauty skills to navigate gendered racialization processes within Canadian society, and creating user generated images of their own visions of black beauty. However, women’s agency is also channeled by black nationalist discourses of ‘black authenticity’, gendered nationalist projects, and transnational diasporic culture online.

### **Conclusion**

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the study’s main contributions as well as recommendations for future research and policy work.

## **Chapter 2**

# **Methodology & Theoretical Framework**

This chapter proceeds with a discussion on the project's methodology, theoretical framework, and central arguments. Firstly, the chapter discusses the data collection process which included a pilot study to test the resonance of the broader research questions and relevance of interview topics among a small group of African women. Furthermore, this initial inquiry provided the opportunity to begin grappling with the messy and complex reflexivity process as both an African woman navigating racialization processes across different social spaces through my own beauty practices and as a privileged researcher conducting a doctoral project. Following this, the chapter outlines the sample for this project, African women based in Ottawa and Toronto, as well as the selection criteria that was used when recruiting women. Moreover, the chapter defines how "everyday beauty practices" was operationalized and applied throughout the research. As such, data collection included a mixed method approach of 30 formal one-on-one semi structured in-depth interviews, participant observation in the study's five key spaces and content analysis of social media photos, videos, and black beauty blogs and websites. Employing such a mixed methods approach enabled the project to capture the complexities of the lived practice of cultural diversity that occur at multiple local and global levels-- the individual, communal, and societal--within this study. Subsequently, the chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework which incorporates analytical elements from everyday multiculturalism, the African diaspora, the public and private dichotomy, the women-as-nation premise, and critical race theory. The chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of the thesis's three central arguments based on the key themes of space, race, and agency.

## Methodology

The sociocultural context of social spaces and diverse populations warrants textured examination to make sense of when, where, and how intercultural encounters in the context of multicultural practice occur productively, antagonistically, or somewhere in between. In other words, everyday multiculturalism is the diversity that exists in real lived environments and not simply in abstract multiculturalism policy. Accordingly, the methodology of this study reflects that as it analysed five main spaces that are significant in the everyday lives of African diaspora women in Canada including individual identity, the home, the church, social media, and the workplace. These spaces were selected for analysis because during fieldwork they emerged as the most important sites to better understand how some of the project's key themes such as gendered racialization processes, multiculturalism, the African diaspora, agency, and beauty play out in the daily lived experiences of African women in the study.

Broadly, this project employed a qualitative research framework (Brady & Collier, 2010; King et al., 1994; Lune & Berg, 2017; Leavy, 2014) which was best suited to this study because it is conversational in its approach to understanding the belief systems, perspectives, and social realities of African immigrant women that shape their diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism. More specifically, the methodology of this project was also guided by the political commitment of feminist qualitative research<sup>26</sup> to produce useful knowledge for the

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<sup>26</sup> This approach has several key features appropriate for this study including examining the gendered context of women's lives, exposing gender inequalities, empowering women, advocating for social change, and/or improving the status or material reality of women's lives. Additionally, it is committed to promoting women's freedom, examining, and exposing oppression based on gender and opposing institutions, practices and values that subordinate and denigrate women (Jayarante & Stewart, 2008; McHugh, 2014; Ackerely & True, 2008; Hurtado & Stewart, 2004; Harnois 2005).

transformation of women's lives through social and individual change. Such a qualitative feminist research approach was appropriate for this project in order to center African women's varied gendered diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism without essentialising and contributing to gender or racial inequalities.

Additionally, this study incorporated a grassroots approach to look at the everyday practices and lived experience of multiculturalism in various situations and spaces of encounter. This approach included "getting close" to women's day-to-day realities by exploring how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated on the ground, as well as how social relations and identities are shaped and re-shaped in this process (Wise & Velayutham, 2009). As such, this bottom-up methodology was suited for this project because it prioritizes direct observation, listening, and devoting attention to strategies of meaning making in the context of everyday multiculturalism and encounters of difference (Wise & Velayutham, 2009; Harris, 2009; Colombo & Semi, 2007). Furthermore, it focuses on concrete mundane everyday interactions where difference plays a key role in defining the situation, regulating intercultural relations, and defining social hierarchies with the awareness that difference is something unstable, in constant evolution, and always open to question. In short, this approach prioritises the analysis of actual social spaces outside of multiculturalism policy and encourages attention to the dynamics of intercultural relations, the construction of the 'other', and the lacking or distorted recognition of this. Accordingly, incorporating this approach enabled the project to pay close attention to African women's local and cultural contexts as they navigate gendered racialization processes and social spaces in Canadian society, thereby taking into account their excluded and

marginalized experiences. As such, this approach necessarily foregrounded African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism in their lived context and contributes to bringing marginalized subjectivities from the periphery. The following section discusses the study's processes of data collection and data analysis.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

### ***Pilot Study***

Data collection began with an informal pilot study of 10 African women to test initial research questions, collect different perspectives, and determine the selection criteria for African women to be included in the interviews as well as the best cities in Canada for the study. Given that this study was birthed as much out of intellectual curiosity as my own lived experience as an African immigrant woman in Canada, I incorporated my experiences over the years across various social spaces including graduate classrooms, office spaces, the church, heterosexual relationships, and social media to name a few. I used these experiences to inform my initial questionnaire and test some of my hypotheses and observations in a wider context. The pilot was based on a loosely defined purposive sample of women across various cities in Canada from different African countries between the ages of 25-35 who had been in Canada for at least one year. As such, the women in the pilot study were drawn from my personal, academic, and professional networks. Additionally, the pilot study was used as an opportunity to relationship build and identify possible participants for the formal interviews as well as gather further information about the relevant and resonating questions on the study's overarching themes around beauty, race, multiculturalism, migration, and the African diaspora in Canada. In

short, the pilot study was used to do an initial analysis of the appropriate interview questions and themes as well as begin networking to recruit women for the study.

Accordingly, conducting this initial pilot study enabled me to refine the project's research and interview questions, based on topics that came up that I had otherwise overlooked, as well as determine the appropriate selection criteria for the sample. In other words, this pilot study was important because during the period between my proposal defence and the start of fieldwork, I was still grappling with some of the research decisions regarding the sample. For example, I was weighing the strengths and limitations of selecting women from specific African countries as opposed to keeping the sample open to all countries on the continent. Additionally, I was debating on whether to include African women of all ages to capture generational nuances or to narrow down the age range to capture specific trends like women's experiences of globalization and new technologies during migration. As such, the pilot study enabled me to make these decisions based on the empirical evidence that I had collected. Furthermore, speaking to women who had completely different experiences than mine provided additional insights into what questions were to be added to the interview questionnaire so that it was more well-rounded in the themes it covered.

Moreover, this pilot exercise was also useful in helping to identify my own biases and begin the process of maintaining reflexivity by putting mechanisms of reflection firmly in place. This included a research journal, to make clear distinctions between my own experiences and the women who were participating in the study, as well as regular conversations with my thesis

supervisor and other colleagues to help keep me aware of when I was imposing my own personal assumptions, privilege, and experiences on the research process. This was not always a neat and tidy process of balancing my own experiences with the project. As such, the boundaries were often blurred but throughout this project I made diligent efforts to remain cognizant of the ways in which the research process was grounded in my own social realities and conditions, as well as informed by the situational dynamics with my participants.

This complexity of occupying multiple subjectivities resulted in a constant negotiation of the insider-outsider divide. As an African woman belonging to this group, I was positioned to provide insights, inner meanings, and subjective dimensions that would likely be overlooked by an outsider, even with the advantages of detached perceptions. Furthermore, for the women participating in this study, I was not merely representing their experiences but also mirroring the social and cultural contexts of the raced and gendered discourses that are inherent in the study's research questions. This insider status thus provided me with easy access to women in order to gain more intimate insights into their experiences and opinions, it gave me the ability to ask more meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues, as well as the ability to project a more holistic and culturally sensitive understanding of African communities and identities in the context of multiculturalism. However, as an outsider, through my privileged position as a doctoral researcher, these boundaries between the insider-outsider status were constantly blurred with ambiguity and complexity as my positionality constantly vacillated across circumstances due to various factors including class, ethnicity, and age. Furthermore, my status as a doctoral researcher placed me in the position where I had power and authority over the knowledge production, data collection, and presentation of this research which inevitability

meant my experiences were embedded with privilege. All the same, navigating this insider-outsider continuum and my multiple subjectivities gave me a critical view of the research process even if it added a complicated layer to the study. Consequently, my reflexivity process included holding space for multiple and oftentimes conflicting emotions, making room for contradictions, and striving for compatibility of ideas rather than consensus.

### ***Reflexivity Process***

There are several instances of this messy reflexivity process that come to mind but one particular example where this is best demonstrated was in my own initial view of agency. At the beginning of the project, I was very fixed on a specific narrative of agency based predominantly on my own beliefs and experiences. As a result, I found myself repeatedly applying this limited framework onto the preliminary questions and hypotheses. Additionally, I was interpreting other African women's agency through the lens of my own assumptions and experiences. These assumptions and biases were mainly rooted in my (over)emphasizing the role of individual choice while not adequately acknowledging the extent to which interlocking structures of power complicate notions of choice especially as African women are located differently in relation to these structures based on class, nationality, ethnicity, age, religion, sexuality and so forth. It took several conversations with my thesis supervisor calling me out on these proclivities and encouraging a more nuanced view of agency before I could finally see her valid point.

Part of the resistance with seeing my own prejudices was because viewing agency any other way would inevitably challenge my own long held beliefs and perspectives. Namely that I

was a “woke”<sup>27</sup> African woman making my own choices without external influences.

Consequently, I would have to confront the possibilities that I too have not been immune to the impacts of interlocking structures of power as evidenced by my own internalization of dominant white gender norms and racial stereotypes of black women which have impacted my raced, gendered, and classed understanding of agency. Moreover, it would mean admitting that even my version of ‘individual choice’ is affected by interlocking structures of power that influence my choices, even if only in subconscious and subtle ways. Therefore, in order to critically engage with the notion of agency throughout my research project would mean confronting the fact that my bodily choices, beauty practices, and racialized identity are shaped as much by personal values and preferences as well as the social contexts, diverse communities, and structural processes within which I live. Moving forward, I had to adapt a more open, nuanced, and complex understanding of agency even when it conflicted with and challenged my own pre-existing version.

This example best captures some of the core tensions that existed within my process of reflexivity throughout this project. While researching a topic that has close personal connections can make it easier to stay passionately committed during the lengthy rigorous PhD process, it can also be even more challenging. Particularly because when a topic is too close to home it can be counterintuitive to critically engage, not only because I am embedded in these very structures, but also because questioning these ideas is not just challenging theoretical

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<sup>27</sup> A term originating in the United States referring to awareness of sensitive social issues and injustices like racial prejudice and discrimination.

perspectives but my own personal beliefs and identity. As such, my research process required a delicate balancing act between simultaneous intellectual and personal transformation throughout the project. Consequently, during the data collection and data analysis phases, I had more frequent check-ins and discussions regarding my findings with my thesis supervisor to make sure that I was maintaining an objective approach both in my interviewing and interpretation of the data. I also ensured I utilized my research journal to write down detailed reflective notes and observations so I could continually identify any personal blind spots and biases. This journaling process was especially helpful after interviews or conversations with women during participant observation where they would say something that I either overly identified with or did not completely agree with. Subsequently, journaling about the interviews and my interactions with women helped to separate my own thoughts and experiences from the intellectual observations and analyses that I took away from the conversations. Furthermore, I also had conversations with colleagues and other black women that shed light on other points of view and helped me question my own perspectives so I was aware not to project these too much onto the study. As mentioned earlier, this was not always a neat and tidy process executed with perfection, but it did enable me to consistently remain cognizant of my own assumptions, privilege, and experiences.

### ***Operationalization of Beauty***

The operationalization of *everyday beauty practices*<sup>28</sup> for this project included five main characteristics: hair, skin-tone, body image, fashion, and cosmetics. These categories were selected based on their importance in broader conversations about black women and their bodies, in the academic literature and pop culture, as well as their relevance to African women who participated in the pilot study. These five characteristics are by no means an exhaustive list for what black women in general may regard as important beauty practices, but these categories are significant in providing an understanding of how African immigrant women's beauty practices in this study are shaped by discourses of multiculturalism, the African diaspora, and the complex intersecting identities of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, class, religion, and sexuality.

Firstly, the social significance of hair reflects gendered racism that has very particular and specific implications for African women (Patton 2006; Harvey 2005; Byrd & Tharps 2001; Caldwell 2000; Weitz 2001). Secondly, colourism is skin-tone discrimination against racialized women with darker skin tones and preferential treatment for those who racialized in the same way but have light skin tones. The racist legacy of colonialism has thus led to the internalization of white supremacist racial classification in which African women are implicated as evidenced by the skin-bleaching phenomenon (Patton 2006; Banks 2000; Hall 2013; Mire, 2001,2019).

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<sup>28</sup> Beauty practices are conceptualized within the "everyday" (Wise and Velayuthum, 2009; Heller, 1984; Essed, 2002) as "everyday beauty practices" because it includes both public and private issues and thus overcomes the public-private dichotomy. Furthermore, it makes it possible to include spaces, actions, and attitudes that are supposedly private and therefore excluded from mainstream concepts of the political without reproducing the public-private dichotomy by concentrating on either of the two spheres.

Thirdly, the aftermath of colonialism coupled with the current phase of globalization has led to a booming commodity culture in the beauty industry with cosmetics being a significant part of African women's beauty regimes (Jeffreys 2005; McCracken, 2014; Wolf 1991; Jones 2011; Walker, 2007). Fourth, body image for African women is caught within the conflict between the 'thin ideal' and voluptuous bodies that are supposedly more common for black women (Jeffreys, 2005; Wolf, 1991; Bordo, 1993; Toselli et al., 2016; Benkeser et al., 2012). Finally, during colonialism dress provided a powerful arena for colonial relations to be reenacted and challenged thus serving as a method of cultural resistance and expression. This has also led to the present acculturation, identity construction, and embodiment of modernity through Western dress in postcolonial eras. Consequently, fashion for African women is the locus for local-global debates, past-present dialogues, and self-other discourses (Barnes & Eicher, 1991; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992; Allman, 2004; Jennings, 2015; Gott & Loughran, 2010). Accordingly, the ways in which African women use any of the above to navigate gendered racialization processes across various spaces in Canadian society is therefore referred to as "everyday beauty practices".

### ***Sampling***

***African Diaspora Women:*** The sample for this project was African diaspora women. As highlighted in the previous chapter, "the African diaspora" in this thesis refers to the majority of immigrants from the continent who are racialized as Black and can therefore be regarded as 'belonging to the African diaspora'. Subsequently, "African diaspora women" in Canada refers to women in this sample who have migrated from the continent and are racialized as Black.

Furthermore, this includes women who have migrated from African countries but hold a range of citizenship status in Canada. While not every woman in the study identified as “diasporan”, conceptualizing the sample as such for this project enabled me to see how African women’s diasporic identities and new forms of the African diaspora community in Canadian society are made and unmade in specific contexts of cultural exchange and intercultural encounters within the public and private. Additionally, this conceptualization facilitated the ability to capture the experiences of women from various African countries while acknowledging intersectionality and heterogeneity within the group. Furthermore, conceptualizing the sample as “African diaspora” also helped to capture the deeply gendered cultural constructions of African community against the backdrop of multiculturalism as demonstrated through an emergent pan-African identity, that incorporates nationalities and ethnicities into a continental one, as well as collective practices such as aesthetic nationalism.

However, at the beginning of fieldwork, the heterogeneity within the group was not as apparent which resulted in some ambiguity. This was likely because women initially interviewed were from the same countries, as a result of referrals from other participants, so more commonalities came up quickly and strongly. Nevertheless, clarity began to emerge as fieldwork progressed and more women from different countries were added to the analysis which highlighted clear intra-African differences and high cross-sectional femininities that were more pronounced. Accordingly, this project views the African diaspora as a diverse community, not just a social and geographic totality nor a collection of regions and nationalities. In other words, the African diaspora community is articulated with and hybridized based on migration and the

tensions and joys of living in a multicultural society. Therefore, when referring to the “African diaspora” in this thesis, the emphasis is on the transnational connections through migration, shared ethnicity and nationality, collective culture, multiple perspectives of ‘community’ through a continental identity in the new locale, and common experiences in the context of multiculturalism. Importantly, the African diaspora is not a homogenous or monolithic group. While there are semblances and similarities, there are also vast differences that exist in the diverse migratory patterns, institutions, and identities that structure African women’s diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism in diverging and converging ways.

***African Countries:*** The decision was made not to select women from specific African countries in order to collect data on a wide range of African nationalities and experiences. This decision to keep the sample of African countries open was also appropriate in the context of everyday multiculturalism which is not necessarily experienced on the level of nationalities and ethnicities but race more generally. However, one of the challenges with keeping the sample pan-African<sup>29</sup>, rather than specifically national or regional, is that the study focuses more on broad cultural themes as opposed to an in-depth analysis of specific nationalist histories, practices, cultures, ethnic identities, and their experiences of multiculturalism in Canada. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, the sample yielded rich insights because African women as a group may produce certain commonalities of outlook but the diversity of class,

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<sup>29</sup> Pan-African is used as a descriptor to refer to the collective continental identity and cultural community that emerges through the African diaspora in Canada without homogenizing, reifying, or essentializing the diverse diasporas, experiences, and commonalities in racial/cultural struggles. In short, it refers to a continental identity and collective culture within the context of multiculturalism not to imply a homogenous community.

ethnicity, nationality, religion, age, and sexuality shapes individual lives and results in an assortment of experiences. In other words, these factors resulted in different expressions of common themes regarding African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism. In short, African women are not a monolithic or homogenous group and the findings of this study suggest their experiences manifest in ways that are similar, varied, dynamic, and often contradictory. Thus, African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism differed based on their country of origin and migration experience as well as how they individually adapt, innovate, and navigate across social spaces within Canadian society.

The women represented in this sample originally come from Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. These African countries emerged as a result of the women that offered to participate in the study. As I had decided to keep the sample open to capture a range of African nationalities, I focused less on managing the selection of specific countries and more on the selection criteria for individual women, which will be discussed below. Furthermore, the women from these countries were all racialized or self-identified as Black, and none were citizens of African countries who are of white, Asian, or Arabic descent. Additionally, none of the women are from any North African countries as citizens from these countries are racialized differently. Thus, the purpose of focusing solely on black African women was to capture the effects of gendered racialization processes, due to the hegemonic racialization of the continental identification as Black, on diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism.

While not everyone fits neatly into a prototypical model of Blackness, for this project, “Black” was defined as non-white, non-Asian, non-Arabic and used as a descriptor of African cultures, histories, ethnicities, and nationalities. Moreover, although there are other racialized immigrant minorities like Asians and Arabs migrating from Africa, this project focused specifically on black African immigrant women because they are positioned uniquely within Canada as a result of their different national and colonial histories, their socio-cultural locations, their political relations with both their home country and Canada, as well as their migratory experiences. In other words, women’s racialized African identity is coloured by local patriarchal norms of gender, nationalist culture, and postcolonial racial formations that they migrate with. As such, African women were chosen for this study, as opposed to women from other black populations in Canada (like African-Americans, black Canadians, black British, Latinas of Afro-descent, and Caribbean women), because black African women as a group remain underrepresented in the mainstream media, academic literature, pop culture, and other discussions on beauty, race, and multiculturalism.

***Sample Selection Criteria:*** African women in this study were drawn from a purposive and snowball sample. Three criteria requirements were used for this purposive sample. Firstly, women who are African nationals by birth and lived in an African country for a minimum of 18 years before migrating to Canada. Furthermore, this included African women who may hold a range of citizenship status in Canada so long as their country of national origin is an African country. I chose the age of arrival in Canada for after 18 as that is the age of majority in most countries. As such, women would have spent their formative years and grown up in African

cultures thereby having lived experience on the continent. Furthermore, as women would be legally considered 'adults' after 18, they would have some level of independence around their migratory decisions, bodily choices, and beauty practices. Additionally, while there are African women who migrate when they are younger, but their families still maintain strong ties to their nationalist cultures, there are distinct differences between growing up in the African diaspora within a predominantly white society and growing up on the continent with predominantly black populations. Moreover, the category of immigration was relevant from the perspective of making the sample inclusive for women with hyphenated identities such as a Canadian-Nigerian woman. Given that not all African countries permit dual citizenship, there are African women who may legally identify as Canadian citizens, but my primary focus was on the day-to-day cultural and racial realities of being an African woman in Canada.

Secondly, I selected women who had been living in either Toronto or Ottawa for a minimum of two years at the time of interview. The reason "a minimum of two years" was chosen was to ensure that women had a fair amount of time to be immersed in and familiar with either city so as to be able to have sufficient experiences with some of the social, structural, institutional, and systemic factors that shape African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism in local contexts. Specifically, the decision was made to conduct this study in Ontario, Canada's central province, and one of the most multicultural provinces, with the largest black population in Canada (*Ontario Demographic Quarterly*, 2017; Creese, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2019: 17). As such, fieldwork was conducted in Ottawa and Toronto because the social geography of migration makes these places of settlement within Canada important for shaping

African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism. Additionally, this study focused on African women's urban lifestyles because more than 90% of black immigrants move to large urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2019:14).

However, limiting the study to two cities in Ontario, mainly Toronto and Ottawa, did not necessarily capture the full range of everyday multiculturalism experiences in Canada. As a result, I made the effort during fieldwork to have informal conversations with women and observe African Beauty Influencers based across Canada to contextualize women's provincial experiences within the sample in the broader Canadian context. For example, during the pilot study I spoke with women who lived in other cities like Halifax, Calgary, and Montreal to get an idea of some of their experiences from a provincial lens where the demographic reality of multiculturalism or Quebec nationalism looks different than Ontario. Additionally, I also observed African Beauty Influencers in other Canadian provinces including British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, and the Atlantic provinces.

One of the key differences that stood out from these conversations and observations was the lack of availability of black beauty products and/or hairstylists for women in Halifax and Calgary as compared to Toronto where there is a larger black population so products and services for black women are more readily available. Furthermore, women in cities outside Ontario expressed that this difference made an impact on the way they felt appropriately equipped to navigate their racialized identities in different social spaces like the workplace. As such, while this project focused on Ontario, these informal conversations with other women in

different Canadian cities increased my awareness and informed my analyses so I could remain cognizant of the fact that African women in Canada have different experiences of beauty, race, the African diaspora, and everyday multiculturalism based on multiple intersecting factors including provincial and local city contexts.

Lastly, the study sample was made up of women who are between the ages of 20-45. This specific age range was chosen to capture women who migrated to Canada from the 1990s to present. As this project also sought to address how processes such as globalization and new technologies shape African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism across spaces, this age range was chosen to try and capture these variables. For example, women who would have migrated in the 1990s arrived in Canada before multiculturalism policy had really taken root within Canadian society. Furthermore, the 1990s was a period where social media, as it is today, was nascent and globalization was still evolving. As such, these women's migratory and diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism would look very different to women who migrated in the 2000s during an era of increased globalization, technology usage, and when official discourses of multiculturalism have deepened within Canadian society, at least more so than during the 1990s. Accordingly, the purpose of this age range was to capture some of the generational nuances and differences in experiences based on age as well as the effects of globalization and new technologies.

Furthermore, while not part of the sample selection criteria, interviews also included 'ice-breaker' questions at the beginning of each session about aspects of women's intersecting identities such as religion, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (class) in order to tease out and

capture the heterogeneity within the group. Moreover, women's intersecting identities shed light on some of the significant differences that exist among African diaspora women, thereby shaping their varied experiences navigating their racialized identities, through their everyday beauty practices, across social spaces. However, as women for this study were drawn from a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, they are mainly students or working/middle-class, Christian, and heterosexual. As such, the study's key findings are heteronormative, classed, and faithed making the small sample very specific thus limiting its generalizability. Nonetheless, the decision was made to continue with the sample as it is for two main reasons.

Firstly, Muslim women were excluded from the sample because scholarship on Muslim women in Canada abounds, including conversations around their bodies, dress, religion, and the practice of burqa or hijab (Abu-Lan & Nath, 2020; Bakht, 2007; Hamdani, 2005; Korteweg, 2008; Razack, 2007; Ghobadzadeh, 2010). However, there is scant scholarship on African Christian women's practices of dress in the church and how these shape their racialized, cultural, and religious identities as well as new notions of African community in the context of multiculturalism. Secondly, although the African diaspora includes members from the LGBTQ+ community and non-binary gendered individuals, this sample focused on heterosexual cisgender women because little research attention has been given to black African women and the ways in which their romantic and/or sexual relationships with men are a key site where African patriarchal norms of gender, nationalist culture, discourses of multiculturalism, and racial stereotypes of their sexuality intersect to shape their racialized identities and beauty practices. Thus, this sample remains valuable and provided important findings on African women's varied experiences and diverse identities within Canadian society.

## ***Recruitment Procedures***

Fieldwork occurred from January-October 2019 inclusively. As discussed earlier, the women were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Most of the recruitment for women in Toronto was done online and through participant referrals while the recruitment for women in Ottawa was done both in-person and online. Recruitment posters and flyers were distributed through various websites and social media platforms belonging to women from the pilot study as well as women from my various personal and professional networks. Hardcopies of recruitment flyers were also placed for distribution in a beauty salon for predominantly black women in Ottawa. Additionally, I distributed flyers randomly and spontaneously to African women identified in different places including Ottawa malls, drugstores, beauty supply stores, train stations, as well as social and professional networking events for black women. Identifying African women usually involved approaching black women in general and asking where they are from. If they were from an African country, they received an invitation flyer. From the total number of women interviewed in the sample, 17 of the 30 women came through referral from other participants in Ottawa and Toronto. Accordingly, snowball sampling was useful in getting women from as many different African countries as possible. However, as a result, the sample is formed around regional clusters of communities and a small selection of African countries as women referred each other within these groups. Consequently, as noted earlier, the sample is from a small group of African countries and includes specific intersectional identities (Christian, heterosexual, working/student) that are not necessarily representative of all African women's experiences from the continent but still reveal significant findings.

### ***Formal one-on-one Interviews***

Women who responded to the recruitment call with interest were sent a formal invitation letter with all the study details to verify their eligibility to participate. Arrangements were made for a one-on-one interview based on the women's availability. Interviews in Ottawa were scheduled on a rolling basis while interviews in Toronto were scheduled and coordinated during fixed dates for travel purposes. Interviews were semi structured, in-depth, and generally lasted between 60-90 minutes. Additionally, they were often scheduled in locations most convenient for the women which included coffee shops, university campus, their places of work, and their homes. At the beginning of each interview, women were given a consent form to read and sign to ensure the women understood the process that would be used to protect their right to confidentiality. Subsequently, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by myself after each interview and the data was saved on my password protected laptop. Furthermore, immediately after each interview, thorough observation notes were written down to capture specific details about that particular interaction and any other outstanding reflections about the woman interviewed including descriptions about her appearance.

Accordingly, the interviews, as part of a feminist qualitative research framework, facilitated access to the voices of women who are marginalized, including the subjugated knowledge of the diversity of their realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated (Jayarante & Stewart, 2008; McHugh, 2014; Ackerely & True, 2008; Hurtado & Stewart, 2004; Harnois 2005). As such, these formal one-on-one Interviews were useful for exploring the depths and nuances of African women's attitudes and diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism. A total of

30 one-on-one semi structured and in-depth interviews were conducted during fieldwork. This number of interviews was the point of data saturation and no further interviews were necessary as the purpose was to retain quality and depth, not breadth, in the data collected. Additionally, this number of interviews was sufficient as other methods were employed for data collection including participation observation across the study's key social spaces as well as content analysis of social media, beauty blogs and websites, which will be discussed below. Consequently, these interviews helped to learn the internal consciousness and thoughts of the women's lived experiences navigating gendered racialization processes across social spaces within Canadian society by asking questions that would lead to fluid discussions and a thick description of those experiences and their interpretations.

After the first 15 interviews the interview guide was reviewed and adjusted as I began the process of coding all the themes that were emerging. Furthermore, the tone of the interviews was more conversational than solely rigid Q&A sessions following an interview guide. Considering the nature of the subject, it was easier to cultivate a connection with women by approaching interview meetings as a "girls chat about all things beauty". Additionally, it was also necessary to use my own experiences as an African woman to make a connection as an 'insider' and build situational trust so that women felt comfortable to answer questions by candidly sharing their experiences in great depth and detail. This included sharing my own experiences with them earlier on at the start of the interviews in order to break the ice and get the conversation flowing. However, once women felt comfortable enough in the interview, I resumed my researcher role by refraining from sharing my own experiences during the formal

part of the interview so as to not influence women's answers. Consequently, my reflexivity process during the interviews was crucial because, although I followed the interview guide, women would often say things that resonated with my own personal experience or differed greatly, and it was easy to filter women's answers through my own experiential lens. As such, recording the interviews was helpful as it enabled me to attentively engage with women in-person while making room for my own experiences to silently move in and out of the interviews. After each interview, I would immediately make notes on key observations such as outfit details, body language, and unsaid but implied answers. Subsequently, I would then listen to the recorded interview twice, once just to listen for a general sense and then a second time to transcribe. This process enabled me to listen and engage more critically with each interview while keeping my own biases in check.

### ***Social Spaces & Participant Observation***

Five key spaces were identified for this study and chosen for analysis based on the significant role that they play in African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism within this sample. These spaces included individual identity, the home, the workplace, the church, and social media. Additionally, there were other "micro-publics"<sup>30</sup> such as beauty salons, beauty supply stores, drugstores, and African community events that were relevant spaces of observation. Accordingly, participant observation in these spaces helped me

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<sup>30</sup> Micro-publics exist in the liminal space between public and private as they can resemble either or neither. Furthermore, they are collective but not for the entire society as they are communities of interest and subcultures. Moreover, they are not as private as a nuclear family, yet they are far less public than the neighborhood (Amin, 2002:959).

“get close” to women’s everyday realities in order to capture the dynamics of participants’ intercultural interactions and lived experiences (Jorgensen, 2011; Schoene, 2011; Weeden, 2010; Bayard de Volo & Schatz, 2004; Schwartz-Shea & Majic, 2017; Gillespie & Michelson, 2011; Delamont, 2007). As such, this method allowed me to have informal conversations with other African women while also juxtaposing what interviewed women said in their interviews and how they actually negotiate their racialized identities and navigate these spaces.

As an African woman, I had access to many of these spaces and where I needed permission to observe, like in the beauty salon, I acquired the necessary permissions. Additionally, I was invited by women whom I had interviewed, and also women I had met through informal conversations, to different events such as church services, professional networking mixers, diaspora get-togethers, and social events for black women. Consequently, the process of participant observation was sometimes more participatory and other times it was more observational. For example, when I attended a church service that one interviewee had invited me to, I was a participant by also dressing up, engaging in the formal part of the service, and approaching women in the congregation after the service ended to strike up conversations about their beauty practices in the church. On the other hand, I was also an observer of the congregational demographics, social/racial dynamics, and the ways women were dressed as well as how they were interacting with others as they navigated this space. Conversely, the process of virtual participant observation on social media was mainly observational as I do not have any active personal social media accounts. As such, I did not participate by posting pictures or videos and ‘liking’ or commenting on posts in the ways other women in the sample were doing. All the

same, participant observation enabled me to witness African women as they actually navigate race, space, the African diaspora community, and cultural diversity in their daily lives. In short, participant observation was useful for capturing the everyday nuances and contradictions of social and political processes, as well as the ways African women engage with these through their behaviours and practices.

A specific observational protocol guideline (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010; Schoene, 2011; Kawulich, 2005) was developed and used to flag themes to pay attention to during observations. This guideline included the study's five operationalized characteristics of everyday beauty practices as well as relevant questions regarding each space adapted from the interview guide. The observational guideline was adjusted to fit each space accordingly so it could allow for the observation of specific themes, behaviours, and ideas related to that particular space. As such, going into these spaces and observing African women provided background information and additional context for data collected during interviews, as well as supplementary themes and questions from informal conversations for further interviews and analysis. The specific methodology for each space is detailed below.

### ***The Self/Individual Identity***

Considering the private internal space of subjectivities, the data on this space was collected primarily through the formal one-on-one interviews and participant observation in micro-publics such as beauty salons, beauty supply stores, and drugstores which play an important role in women's migration journeys and identity reformation processes. These

community spaces, specifically beauty salons, are places that serve as a “homeplace”<sup>31</sup> (Hooks, 1991) where African women in this sample go and partake in their beauty practices, momentarily escape racialization processes in Canadian society, and connect with other black women. With permission from the owner, I visited one beauty salon with a large predominantly African clientele in downtown Ottawa. There were usually five or six women, including three hairstylists, during each visit. I did three, 4 ½ hour visits at different stages of fieldwork. It was easy to start conversations while women, sometimes myself included, were having their hair done or waiting for their appointments. The conversations in the beauty salon were also particularly more intimate and personal because during each visit the space felt like “walking into an African living room”, as one woman put it, where women were sharing their issues and thoughts from where to find certain beauty products to how to handle immigration issues, workplace discrimination, or interracial dating. They would be sharing food (most times women brought food given that their braiding appointments would take at least 4-5 hours) and giving each other advice even though most of them were strangers. While this was a public building, the intimacy of the space created a sense of home and private community where women could “walk out of Ottawa and into Africa”.

The loose observational guideline for this space included themes, keywords, and phrases that emerged and repeatedly occurred in women’s interviews regarding their migration journeys

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<sup>31</sup> Hooks (1991) reconceptualizes ideas of “homeplace” as a site of subversion and resistance, and a political space for resistance and affirmation denied on the outside in the public world. This homeplace is a site of reclamation, solidarity, renewal, resistance, and safety. Furthermore, the homeplace provides agency in constructing the private and public as a site of resistance. As such, the subversive value of the homeplace creates a private space where racist aggression, racial domination and oppression are not directly encountered.

and identity shifts once they arrived in Canada. These included phrases such as “culture shock”, “Canadian weather”, “hair”, “lack of availability of hair and makeup products”, and “challenges/changes of beauty practices after migration.” I would casually throw out a random question from my interview guide and allow the conversation to develop while I was listening and chiming in occasionally. Although the salon manager was aware I was conducting research observations, I did not initially disclose this information to women until the end of the conversations because I did not want them to say the things that were, as one woman later described it, “suitable answers for a PhD project”. I wanted the conversations to flow organically with as little intervention or influence on my part. I also waited to take notes until after I had left the salon so I could attentively engage the women in these informal conversations. As soon as I left the building, I made point form notes of key observations and statements on my phone while standing outside and then once I returned home, I was able to write detailed notes in my research journal about the conversations.

One of the interesting observations I made during each of these visits was that when I led with questions regarding experiences of being a black woman in Canada, like workplace discrimination based on hairstyles, women would be hesitant to comment. However, when I led with a pop culture reference or trending news about black women and beauty, they were more willing to candidly share their thoughts. Thus, although women initially shied away from the questions with underlying tones of official racial politics, when they spoke about their beauty practices in social spaces, like the workplace and heterosexual relationships, they actually revealed their strong opinions on multiculturalism and instances of racial discrimination in

Canadian society. As such, I concluded that women may not always be able to articulate their experiences in the formal rhetoric of multiculturalism and racism, but beauty practices serve as a bridge between official policy and women's everyday lived experiences. Additionally, while women were often strangers to each other, the discussions were rich and lively as a sense of community through shared continental identity and experiences was palpable. When I would close out the conversations by letting women know that I was conducting a doctoral research project hence why I was asking questions, women's reactions included shock and excitement. On the one hand, some women were shocked because they weren't aware that one could "go to school just to study such things like African women and beauty." On the other hand, women were also very encouraging and expressed that it was the first time they had been asked about their experiences in that way and they were happy African women were finally getting some attention on these issues.

In addition to the beauty salon, I also frequented two drugstores, Shoppers Drug Mart and Rexall, in Ottawa. It was often easy to find a few women, mainly in the hair or makeup sections, who were picking up beauty products so I would casually strike up a conversation about what they were trying to find. Those conversations were very brief and usually revolved more around the affordability and availability of products they were looking for and/or why they needed it for their hair and/or skin care regimens. Women repeatedly mentioned that they are not able to easily find their beauty products once they migrate, especially in Ottawa, so they go online to order them from the United States, China, the United Kingdom, or their home countries. I wanted to get a better sense of their experiences, so I visited two beauty supply

stores in Ottawa that are specifically for black women. I was able to speak with two of the managers who were able to share their experiences and thoughts as black women in the beauty business in Ontario. The conversations were often short and in between customers. However, they accomplished their purpose of providing information for more context and background on the shortages around black women's beauty products within the Canadian beauty landscape. Accordingly, visiting the beauty sections in local drugstores and beauty supply stores where women said they shopped provided insights into large-scale processes, like the global political economy of beauty, that affect African women as they migrate and navigate new identities, racialization processes, and intercultural encounters across spaces in Canadian society.

### ***The Home***

Given the private nature of the home, both physical and decisional, most of the data on this space was also collected from the formal one-on-one interviews. However, five of the interviews were held in women's homes in Ottawa and Toronto. During these home-based interviews women were willing to take me to their bathrooms and/or beauty rooms and show me their pictures, products, and sometimes even take me through their beauty practices (like applying make-up or their hair regimen) as they answered my interview questions. Thus, the opportunity to witness their beauty practices firsthand provided experiential insights into this space as women were in their element. Additionally, I was able to make note of the environment, beauty routines, and unmentioned themes that would not have come up in the interview otherwise. Additionally, many of the YouTube videos I observed and analysed were filmed in women's homes so watching those videos provided a glimpse into this private space,

although the complexity of social media means that what is considered a private space is in fact curated for public consumption. In short, the data for the home came primarily from interviews and was complemented by a few in-person visits.

Additionally, during a fieldwork visit to Toronto I also attended a dinner party of ten people hosted in one of the women's homes that I was interviewing. There were seven women and three men from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Congo, Nigeria, and Kenya. They all knew I was in town doing interviews for my research, as I was scheduled to be interviewing some of the women that were in attendance, so naturally the topic came up. After I had finished sharing my research elevator pitch, one of the men exclaimed "why are you not interviewing us men for your research? We have thoughts to!" This was an unexpected but interesting question. I made the decision very early on in the project not to sample African men because nationalist culture is often established on African patriarchal norms (Balogun, 2012; Faria, 2010; Lowe, 2013). As such, I wanted to focus on themes regarding beauty, agency, women's bodies, and nationalist discourses of femininity from women's perspectives in order to center their gendered racialized experiences in wider discussions on multiculturalism and African diasporic culture. However, when I conducted the pilot study, women repeatedly spoke about how their relationships with diverse groups of men, African and non-African, shape their racialized identities and beauty practices. Consequently, although men are not formally part of this study, they are peripherally included from the perspective of women's heterosexual relationships. Accordingly, it was still helpful to have these informal conversations and hear African men's thoughts on women's beauty practices.

Thus, the question, “why are you not interviewing us men for your research?”, led to a spontaneous conversation, more a battle of the sexes beauty debate, that involved the men sharing their likes and dislikes about African women’s beauty practices, as well as the men’s preferences for what aesthetic they prefer on African women. The women inevitably pushed back with their own experiences and reasons for their beauty practices as black women navigating Canadian society. It was a lively conversation that touched on different themes in my interview guide, even though it was not a planned situation. In particular, the nuance the men’s voices brought into the conversation highlighted additional ideas on how African patriarchy and diasporic masculinities shape the home and the subsequent ways in which women navigate this space, their families, and their heterosexual relationships.

### ***The Church***

The church was another key space for African women in this sample. However, women referred to the cultural, rather than religious reasons, for the importance of the church space. As such, this study focused less on the religious role of the church for the African diaspora as articulated by other scholars (Adogame & Spickard, 2010; Akyeampong, 2000; Adogame, 2008) and conceptualized it as an important diaspora space that captures new formations of an African community in Canadian society. While there are numerous churches and denominations, “the church” in this thesis refers to the Christian religious community and the physical space used for religious services. Accordingly, this thesis analyses mainstream established Christian churches and historical denominations rather than other religions or religious/spiritual services. I visited a

total of five churches during fieldwork, one in Toronto and four in Ottawa. The churches chosen for observation and analysis were based on the churches the women interviewed attended and which I had been invited to by some of the participants. I attended each of the four Ottawa churches for Sunday services over three consecutive weeks at a time and one visit for the church in Toronto. In Ottawa, two of the four churches were mainstream established and historical denominations with predominantly Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic churches held in cathedrals and church buildings. Although I only attended Sunday services, I did note that there were no social community events for the African diaspora. Rather, community events were categorized by gender, age, or relationship status. For example, “women’s Bible study”, “men’s fellowship”, “youth night”, or “singles’ retreat”. As the chapter will show, this speaks to how racialization processes in the church function differently. The other two churches I visited were predominantly African/black non-denominational and Pentecostal churches located in school auditoriums and rented event spaces such as halls. While I was not able to do more church visits for observations in Toronto, I was able to browse the websites and social media pages, based on the churches women attend in Toronto, to try and find some context and clues of what the dress culture is through photo galleries.

For each church visit in Ottawa an observational guideline was created based on the themes that had emerged from the interview questions specifically related to the church. The themes included the study’s three operationalized characteristics of everyday beauty practices, namely cosmetics, fashion, and hair. The guide also included themes related to the congregation’s cultural and racial demographic. As women did not really mention religious

reasons for church being an important space in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism, I focused solely on the role of churches in facilitating the formation of a pan-African identity and new forms of diaspora community through collective culture, particularly continental aesthetic nationalism. Subsequently, I was mainly observing how women dress and asking women questions around their Sunday morning routines for church preparation. The first week visit was simply to observe African women and their physical appearance based on the operational themes, the congregation's demographics, the dress culture, and intercultural interactions. I made observation notes to capture the physical and social context of each location. As such, I took the time to obtain a complete overall impression of the environments and interactions. Immediately after leaving the service, I made notes on my phone, later transcribed them into my research journal, and then coded them based on the preliminary themes that arose during the interviews. What was interesting from the initial observations is that the type of space, whether church building or hall, influenced the church dress culture. In other words, congregations that met in a cathedral or church building wore more formal-casual attire while those that met in halls or auditoriums had a "come as you are" dress code. Accordingly, it was also interesting to observe the ways in which churches play a role in establishing 'unwritten norms' about appropriate dress and makeup on the broader African diaspora community, as the chapter will later reveal.

The second week visit was a continuation of my first week observations but after each service I would approach a few women, whether alone or in a small group, by leading with a compliment or comment on their physical appearance to segue into a conversation about their

beauty practices when getting ready for church that morning. The conversations revolved around Sunday morning beauty practices, the reasons for their regimes, and how much time they spend getting ready and selecting outfits. I was able to have conversations with 2-3 women on each visit. Conversations were brief, lasting 10-15 minutes, as women were leaving after the service. However, some of the women provided their phone numbers to follow up with questions at another time. For the follow up conversations, I had three short questions prepared but allowed the women to lead the conversation. I made notes of the conversation key points and observations about the women I had spoken with as soon as I left each service. The final Sunday visit was a continuation of observing intercultural and diasporic interactions while also identifying another handful of women and continuing to observe the women I had already spoken to in the previous week. Some of the conversations were held on site and some were continued during the week when women had more time to go into the details about their Sunday beauty routines. I added the observation notes to the interview transcripts so analysis could occur side by side.

### ***Social Media***

Additionally, social media<sup>32</sup> plays a significant role in African women's lives as they redefine their racialized identities in the context of multiculturalism. Thus, the data for this space

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<sup>32</sup> Social media in this thesis is defined as any web-based services that allow individuals, communities and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact and build a community by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible. In particular, it's a public sphere where the Black community is well equipped to achieve some degree of power over public discourse to voice their racialized experiences and perspectives (McCay-Peet & Quan-Hasse, 2017:23; Carney, 2016; Snelson, 2016).

was collected through “digital ethnography” (Hine, 2000) of mainly YouTube<sup>33</sup> and Instagram<sup>34</sup>. The decision to conduct observations on mainly YouTube and Instagram was based on the relevance they had to African women in the sample as these are the sites they use most frequently. As such, digital ethnography in this space involved participant observation of African women and African beauty influencer’s<sup>35</sup> video and photo postings as well as the accompanying comments. Weekly observations and data collection occurred over three months with posts and videos being collected and saved for analysis. Additionally, data was drawn from the formal interviews and informal conversations. Specifically, women were asked questions about how they use social media and what role it plays in their daily lives. The data was then coded and analyzed through thematic and qualitative content analysis.

Accordingly, the process of digital ethnography included observing women who were interviewed and had provided their personal YouTube channels and/or Instagram profile pages, as well as 10 African beauty influencers based in Canada that were identified through a google and Instagram keyword search. Additionally, I observed the beauty bloggers and beauty influencers followed by African women in the sample. These beauty influencers are based mainly in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Africa. Furthermore, while they offer video tutorials and beauty content, they are also beauty influencers making money through paid partnerships with beauty brands and/or receiving sponsorship and free products so that they are

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<sup>33</sup> An online video sharing platform.

<sup>34</sup> A photo and video sharing social networking service.

<sup>35</sup> Beauty Influencer: an individual who creates and posts videos online about cosmetics, fashion, hairstyling, nail art and other beauty-related topics.

in essence entrepreneurs. As such, their virtual platforms operate like a business by trying to get as many views as possible on their videos/posts and encouraging viewers to buy the products they are marketing. During observations, a social media observational guideline (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010; Schoene, 2011; Kawulich, 2005) was created based on the study's operationalized characteristics of everyday beauty practices as well as the themes, keywords, and phrases that emerged from the women's interviews regarding their social media usage. Specifically, for YouTube, this included focusing on hair and makeup video tutorials that women watch to learn new beauty skills and find products. While on Instagram, the observational guideline focused on women's overall appearance including hairstyles, skin-tones, makeup, and fashion practices. Additionally, the guide included popular hashtags, that serve as keywords to make it easy to identify similar posts, like "#NaturalHair", "#BlackIsBeautiful", "#BlackBeauty", and "#BlackGirlMagic."

For the women who shared their social media profiles, 18 out of the 30 women interviewed, I focused solely on images posted between 2018 and 2019 as most of the profiles had over 100 pictures. Given that the women had already been interviewed, I was looking for additional contextual information. I selected 10 photos for each woman and focused on the posts, captions, and comments specifically looking for similarities and/or differences based on their interview, as well as any new insights that had not come up in their interview based on the observational guideline. I took observation notes for each photo and added these to their interview file for analysis to occur side-by-side. For the African beauty influencers and bloggers identified through a keyword search, as well as mentioned in the women's interviews, I used the

observational guide to identify key themes. I selected five of the bloggers and influencers that had been mentioned by more than one woman in the study and observed their YouTube videos, Instagram profiles, and beauty blogs. YouTube videos ranged from 10-20 minutes, so I selected their top three most watched videos based on the number of views. I watched each initial selected video three times. The first viewing was to get a general idea of the video's content. The second viewing was to identify key themes, keywords, phrases, and topics that came up. The third viewing was to take detailed observation notes. Most of the videos were a combination of women sharing tutorials on how to achieve a particular hairstyle or makeup look and women sharing updates about their personal lives.

The videos would usually start with the woman introducing herself, welcoming her viewers, sharing what her channel is about, and what that specific video was going to focus on. Depending on the purpose of the video, the Influencer would start off with her freshly washed hair or face and then proceed to walk viewers through the steps and products to achieve a specific look. A "product review" was usually a short video mainly focused on sharing the pros and cons of a particular product, how to use it, and where to buy it. A "GRWM" (Get Ready With Me), however, was a lengthier video and would involve the Influencer sharing the steps and products she was using to achieve a particular look for an event she was attending. These GRWM videos would also involve women simultaneously doing their hair and/or makeup while sharing the intimate updates of their lives from dating experiences to marriage tips, workplace challenges as black women, life as an immigrant, or motivational pep talks. Sometimes they

would also tackle more serious issues du jour like racism in the beauty industry or the continuous cultural violence against African women.

In general, the tone of the videos was casual, informational, and entertaining. I too attempted to follow some of these tutorials but, as many of the other women shared in their interviews, my DIY attempts rarely resembled anything like the immaculate finished look in the video tutorial. Additionally, I went on the Influencers' Instagram pages to browse their profiles. Similar to the women interviewed, I focused solely on pictures posted between 2018 and 2019, and only used the photos to get a broader picture of their beauty practice specialty (hair, skin care, fashion, etc.). I also looked at their personal beauty blog websites as well as four other beauty websites that had been mentioned by women in the study and videos. However, the beauty blogs and websites were more for context as well as background information and were not analysed with the same depth as the videos and photos.

For the initial phase of content analysis, I reviewed the captions, comments, phrases, hashtags, and keywords to give context to each photo and video. Based on this contextual information, I then identified similarities, differences, and patterns in order to sort videos and posts into themes and categories accordingly. The coding frame (Snelson, 2016) for this space was both concept driven and data driven, with the codes dependent on a theorized connection between the images and broader cultural context. Additionally, I applied codes from the interviews to the content analysis which served to integrate the data gathered by different methods. Subsequently, I used both content and thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009; Bell, 2011)

which were helpful in refining ideas, identifying conceptual boundaries, and seeing the fit and relevance of categories within the broader cultural context. This thorough systematic review of social media and beauty website content provided additional data to help understand the sociocultural, political, and economic context of navigating gendered racialized identities online thereby situating the project in large scale processes such as technology and globalization.

### ***The Workplace***

Finally, the data for the workplace was collected through a combination of formal interviews and participant observation. While I interviewed some of the women at their offices, providing me with a sense of their workspace in terms of the building and the demographics of workers around the lobby areas, access was not possible to shadow them in their offices for more observation. Therefore, data collected for this space was primarily based on the formal interviews. The women interviewed work in Ottawa and Toronto with their positions ranging from entry-level to management within various industries including government, banking and finance, entertainment, beauty and fashion, entrepreneurship, academia, technology, health, law, and customer service. Additionally, I was able to draw on my own experiences and access, working in different Government of Canada departments, to conduct participant observation. Both offices I worked in during my fieldwork were located in downtown Ottawa. The offices were in larger buildings with an average of 500-2000 workers from other industries and businesses so there were opportunities for observation given the vast number and diversity of professionals. I highlight the fact that there were several businesses from different industries because this

meant there were various types of dress codes present, depending on where an individual worked, as well as professionals from different ethnicities.

Accordingly, I was able to identify other African women for observation mostly by bumping into them in the women's bathrooms, coffee spots, food courts, and cafeterias within the buildings. I would strike up conversations by leading with a comment/question on their work outfit and then ask what country they are from which would lead to a brief conversation. Some of the women I met this way were willing to give me more time after work hours to ask specific questions about their experiences navigating the workplace. Workplace observations were thus more sporadic and spontaneous, and I would make notes after each incident, conversation or observation that stood out. Furthermore, given that my own workplaces at the time were predominantly white, and I was the only black woman on each of the teams I was on, I used it as an opportunity to conduct mini social experiments and observe coworkers' reactions to me. This usually included choosing to purposefully wear my hair in its natural state or wearing African prints and headwraps on different occasions. Intentionally choosing to showcase a black/Afrocentric cultural aesthetic at certain times in the workplace was an interesting exercise that yielded memorable encounters full of curious questions, comments, and conversations with many of my white co-workers. Moreover, while many of my office attire choices were based on my own style preferences, I was aware that, just like the women I was interviewing and speaking to, I was also navigating racial difference in the workplace through my everyday beauty practices.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis consisted of transcribing all audio-recorded interviews by myself. Transcribed interviews were then summarized. Additionally, the data collected from my observations during fieldwork were also transcribed and summarized. Once transcription and summation were complete, women were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, data analysis was a combination of content and thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009; Bell, 2011). Content was analyzed together with data from interviews and participant observation so that I could identify themes that emerged across all three datasets. Accordingly, I combined data collected from women (formal interviews, participant observations, field notes, informal conversations) with data collected from social media content (videos, photos, websites). As such, coding was both concept and data driven (Snelson, 2016). A priori codes were created to reflect categories linked to the research questions while empirical codes were identified to reflect the commonalities, differences, and relationships not previously considered that emerged from the data. Having categories of analysis based on a priori and empirical codes served to integrate the data gathered by different methods.

Subsequently, conceptual themes in the data were then identified and analyzed using critical theories including postcolonial and black feminisms, the public-private dichotomy, gender and nationalism, agency, the African diaspora, and everyday multiculturalism which were embedded into the analysis. The iterative process of data collection along with data analysis was an ongoing dialogue of identifying patterns and themes, comparing and contrasting, and situating incidents and themes into broader social and political contexts. Furthermore, a range of

verification strategies were employed throughout fieldwork to ensure the reliability, validity, and rigor of the project including methodological coherence between the research questions and methods, collecting and analyzing data concurrently, thinking theoretically, and ensuring that as new ideas emerged they were verified in already collected data.

## **Theoretical Framework & Central Arguments**

Along with the mixed methods of data collection and data analysis, an interdisciplinary theoretical framework was developed to answer the key research questions. The value of mainstream feminist theory is often diminished for black women because it evolves out of a white context that tends to overlook the role of race and obscures the multidimensionality of black women's lives. Furthermore, although black feminist scholars have made strides to address these theoretical deficiencies, African women in particular are still mostly excluded from feminist theory, discourses of multiculturalism, and antiracist discussions because these are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that do not fully reflect the complex interaction of migration, globalization, race, gender, diasporic culture, multiculturalism, and nationalism. Consequently, African women are caught between ideological and political currents that combine first to create and then bury their experiences through epistemic, structural, and systemic neglect. Therefore, as a step towards centering African immigrant women's diverse identities and varied experiences within Canadian society, through theoretical recognition that encompasses the complex multidimensional formation of their racialized gendered diasporic identities in the context of multiculturalism, this thesis applies a multidisciplinary framework.

Specifically, this study employs everyday multiculturalism as a theoretical lens for the ways in which it provides a situated approach to capturing the daily realities of negotiating cultural diversity, racial difference, and intercultural encounters in everyday contexts. Although everyday multiculturalism has been critiqued as a micro-analysis approach that can lead to

somewhat exaggerating and romanticizing the meaning of what are highly individualized, banal, and mundane interactions (Harris, 2013; Valentine, 2008), this study goes beyond superficial intercultural encounters and uses this analytical lens to locate these interactions in social spaces, both public and private. Additionally, this analytical lens is employed to highlight some of the contradictions between official Canadian discourses of multiculturalism (and/or common-sense ideas of multiculturalism) and African women's everyday lived experiences. Furthermore, African diaspora as a category of analysis is full of contradictory tensions as it still needs to fully acknowledge the complex and shifting nature of both the historical and contemporary migrations of Africans. However, this study applies African diaspora as an analytical framework to demonstrate specific gendered constructions of African community in Canadian society. The formation of this African diaspora community within the context of multiculturalism is distinguished by internal and external racialization processes signified by the public and private divisions of various social spaces, African patriarchal norms of gender, nationalist culture, and postcolonial racial formations. Consequently, women's racialized diasporic identities are hybridized and contain a layered mix of Blackness and Africanness.

As such, this study also incorporates critical race theory to show how African women's racialized identities are formed and informed not only by interlocking structures of power in the public but also by migration, postcolonial and nationalist racial formations, transnational diasporic culture, global racial regimes, and discourses of multiculturalism that interact and permeate everyday encounters in both the public and private. Furthermore, these racialization processes, intercultural encounters, and community formations occur across certain social

spaces thus this study applies a more fluid understanding of the public-private dichotomy. In other words, rather than a singular dichotomous notion of the public and the private, this study utilises this analytical lens to demonstrate that there are variations of these which coexist in complex combinations based on different racialization processes. Consequently, the public and private are not uniform or fixed but constantly subject to shifting meanings based on the reorganization and reinterpretation of social spaces by the African diaspora community and other racialized/ethnic groups within Canadian society. In short, what is public and private is constantly redefined by intercultural encounters and diaspora intragroup interactions that restructure these spaces through new meanings of race, gender, class, pan-African continentalism, long-distance nationalism, and multiculturalism.

Additionally, this thesis incorporates insights from the women-as-nation premise to show how African women's bodies and beauty practices are positioned within the African diaspora to embody a pan-African identity in Canadian society while also forming new notions of community against the backdrop of multiculturalism. In other words, African women are entrusted as the cultural bearers of the African diaspora through a continental identity and collective cultural representations of the body, femininity, and dress. Subsequently, women's agency is channeled by diasporic culture as well as discourses of multiculturalism within the public and private. As such, this study draws on black/postcolonial feminist conceptions of agency. Specifically, this study adapts the analytical lens to show the multiplicity that exists within notions of agency for African women as the often-contradictory juxtaposition of agency and structures of power mean

women may simultaneously employ multiple complex ways, that include accommodation and/or resistance, of navigating multiculturalism, the African diaspora, race, and space.

Thus, blending analytic categories of everyday multiculturalism with the African diaspora while incorporating concepts from critical race theory, the public-private dichotomy, the women-as-nation premise, and feminist insights on agency as a theoretical framework, this thesis makes three key arguments in answer to the two key research questions: how do African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism in a globalized world shape social spaces and impact processes of gendered racialization as evinced through beauty practices? And how do African diaspora women exercise agency as they navigate these spaces?

Firstly, this thesis argues that the African diaspora and everyday multiculturalism simultaneously reconstitute social spaces and blur their meanings in ways that challenge typical notions of what is considered public and private. Particularly, discourses of multiculturalism and nationalist racial formations coalesce in complex ways to reform the private sphere. Most notably, the African diaspora shapes individual identities, migration journeys, and the home by placing them in the shadow of racial colonial legacies, gendered nationalist projects, and transnational diasporic culture. Moreover, these private spaces are where African patriarchal norms of femininity are revalorized and perpetuated in the midst of a new multicultural society. However, the public remains ever present in the private as official discourses of Canadian multiculturalism and mainstream racialized constructions of beauty filter into migration journeys

and the home through new intercultural encounters and cultural exchanges, thereby reshaping African women's identities.

Specifically, "exoticizing racisms"<sup>36</sup> (Meszaros & Bazzaroni, 2014:1258) expressed by diverse groups of men within Canadian society seep into the private through heterosexual relationships. Accordingly, African women's heterosexual relationships become a site where they are intimately racialized through historical colonial fantasies of Blackness and systemically rooted practices of racism. Consequently, African women's racialized identities are fetishized, exoticized, and eroticized both within the private as well as the public. At the same time, continental aesthetic nationalism and postcolonial racial formations, internalized by African families within the home, privately perpetuate an American-Eurocentric image of light skin, long hair, and slim bodies considered the most acceptable to minimize experiences of racism while navigating the public sphere in a predominantly white society. As such, in African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism, the private is shaped by gendered nationalist projects and postcolonial racial formations within the African diaspora. Furthermore, the private is never completely so as the public filters into this sphere through social interactions and interlocking structures of power. In other words, the private is reshaped by the public through intercultural encounters, official multiculturalism policy, globalization, consumerism, and raced-classed constructions of beauty. Consequently, African women internalize these new public

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<sup>36</sup> The ways in which black sexuality is fetishized through racist portrayals of Blackness as an indicator of sexual prowess, athleticism, and coolness reflecting numerous colonial fantasies of Blackness.

norms which transform their racialized identities as well as experiences of migration, the home, race, and beauty in the private.

Additionally, the public is shaped by the diaspora as a new African community reconstructs publicly accessible spaces, like the church, into semi-private communal places. This exclusive diaspora space within the public is reminiscent of the “homeplace” (Hooks, 1991; Chatterjee; 1990) in its function of revalorizing nationalist values, unity building within the community, and resistance to racist prejudices within Canadian society. As such, the construction of this African diaspora community within the public illustrates the importance of social spaces in the immigrant experience, even if this diasporic community facilitates processes of homogenization in Canada and obscures differences in national-ethnic origins, diverse languages, religious backgrounds, and colonial histories. Nevertheless, a collective culture and continental identity are adopted as a way of forging a more unified African community in the public where intercultural exchanges magnify racial difference and experiences of cultural diversity are most apparent. Accordingly, the African diaspora claims certain public spaces for its own semi-private experiences, namely the formation of a pan-African identity and new forms of community in the midst of a multicultural society. Similarly, beyond this diasporic community in Canada, the global black community transforms public digital spaces into a private “Virtual Homeplace” (Lee, 2015) as the local pan-African identity in Canada is reinscribed by a Black identity through global racial regimes.

Specifically, as I will illustrate in the chapters to follow, the church and social media uniquely demonstrate the nebulous intersection of the public and private as the African diaspora in Canada and the global black community carve out diverse semi-private communal spaces within the public. Moreover, the public-private dichotomy is dismantled further as the African diaspora in Canada often moves beyond its own community to infiltrate other parts of these public spaces as African women carry continental aesthetic nationalism into their intercultural encounters. Additionally, African women also publicly counter their marginalization and exclusion in offline public spaces through the online visual culture of black beauty content creation on social media. In sum, I argue that the dynamic interplay between everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora creates rich combinations of complex experiences that redefine what the public and private mean in various spaces through new meanings of race, beauty, pan-African continentalism, long-distance nationalism, multiculturalism, class, and gender.

Secondly, this thesis argues that everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora are simultaneously embedded in racialization processes so that African women's racialized identities are layered, formed, and informed by a new African diaspora community within Canada, local nationalist and postcolonial racial formations, Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, and globalized meanings of Blackness. Specifically, African women's racialized identities are reconfigured through migration as they enter Canadian society and discourses of multiculturalism that racialize them as Black in new ways. In other words, racialization processes in Canada are different from nationalist racial formations which emphasize ethnic, tribal, and/or

national identities rather than racial classification by phenotypic traits. Migration thus creates supranational diasporic identities as African women's racialized identities shift from exclusively postcolonial and nationalist racial formations to racialization processes in Canadian society, while retaining residues of the former. Furthermore, migration creates a new layer of Africanness within women's racialized identities through immersion in the African diaspora community within Canada that expresses a continental cultural identity through aesthetic nationalism.

Subsequently, while African women are raced as Black through racialization processes within Canada, their beauty practices offer a window into the ways their expressions of their racialized identities are distinctly unique from other black immigrant women in Canada because of the specific gendered nationalist projects, local patriarchal norms, and racial colonial legacies that African women migrate with. Moreover, African women's racialized identities are not homogenous as they are differentiated by colourism, class, age, religion, and ethnicity. Thus, I argue that racialization processes are constantly shifting across social spaces so that women creatively juggle different racialized identities by creating hybrid iterations, of being African and Black, that are layered and informed by discourses of multiculturalism, a new pan-African diaspora community within Canada, nationalist and postcolonial racial formations, and global racial regimes.

Furthermore, racialization processes vary across spaces. For example, within the African diaspora community located in the public, such as the church, articulations of Blackness from racialization processes within Canadian society are reinscribed by a pan-African identity because

the church space is experienced as a distinctly “African thing” that eclipses individual national and ethnic identities, as well as global racial regimes. However, although women’s racialized identities take on a different meaning in the diaspora community, as Blackness is reinscribed by a pan-African identity, the resulting implication is an overemphasis on gender as African women are charged with upholding the African diaspora’s ethnocultural boundaries through a continental identity and diasporic constructions of the female body, dress, and nationalist femininity. Additionally, within black communities in the public digital space, women’s racialized identities shift from a pan-African identity within Canada to a globalized Black identity through transnational structures that connect diverse black populations in shared experiences of racial oppression, as well as practices and ideologies of black beauty. Furthermore, as women navigate the public space of the workplace, the pan-African identity is reinscribed by a Black identity through discourses of multiculturalism. In sum, I argue that everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora interact to structure racialization processes across various spaces so that African women’s racialized identities become a hybridized, complex, and multilayered negotiation of being Black and African in new ways that are layered and fragmented through discourses of multiculturalism, the African diaspora, nationalist racial formations, and global racial regimes.

Lastly, as different social spaces vacillate across the public-private continuum and women’s racialized identities take on new meanings, African women’s agency is often contradictory, conflicting, and ambiguous. As such, I argue that everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora interact in paradoxical fashion to produce a conception of agency reflective of a complex multifaceted process. This process is characterized by various simultaneous

articulations of agency that include complicity with, accommodation to, resistance, and/or reinforcement of the status quo. In short, all these different actions are aimed at navigating various social spaces and gendered racialization processes accordingly. Thus, as African women negotiate their racialized identities within these spaces, they exercise their agency in a variety of ways including utilising new access to beauty tools, skills, knowledge, products, and technologies to navigate Canadian society. Additionally, women also exercise their agency by using their beauty practices for self-expression, enjoyment, cultivating individuality, and experimenting with their own unique styles that are detached from solely nationalist, diasporic, or hegemonic mainstream white norms of beauty. Furthermore, intercultural encounters in the public sphere often interrupt diasporic pressures of continental aesthetic nationalism to create new forms of freedom in the private. This primarily occurs as women are exposed to alternative aesthetics that provide a repertoire of novel looks and opportunities to create new beauty practices.

Moreover, varied racial formations in specific spaces manifest different forms of agency and subject positions. Accordingly, as women navigate gendered racialization processes in their day-to-day lives, they exercise their agency by creating hybrid racialized identities that incorporate nationalist racial formations, a new pan-African identity in Canada, and discourses of multiculturalism. Furthermore, women manifest their agency through their ability to redefine beauty on their own racial and cultural terms by carving out their own visions of beauty in a white dominated society while simultaneously debunking stereotypes that imply black beauty is supposedly ugly, exotic, and unnatural. Subsequently, women become cultural ambassadors of the diaspora by educating others on African culture and black beauty practices. As such, women

also demonstrate their agency in public spaces by upholding a pan-African identity through continental aesthetic nationalism in order to raise cultural awareness and revalorize nationalist values in the midst of intercultural encounters.

However, as alluded to earlier, women's agency is also channeled by African patriarchal norms of gender as women are charged with upholding nationalist constructions of femininity through their bodies and dress within the diaspora. Additionally, agency is channeled by the racial fetishes of diverse groups of men within Canadian society that objectify African women's bodies as their racialized identities becomes an indicator of sexual prowess reminiscent of colonial fantasies. Furthermore, women's agency is channeled by gendered racialization processes in public spaces, such as the workplace, that magnify racial difference. Consequently, women are compelled to contain their Blackness by dressing it up and muting the racialized markers, attached to hair and skin colour, to make their bodies professionally palatable and presentable. Conversely, in other public spaces such as social media, African women's agency is channeled by black nationalist discourses of 'black authenticity' that demand women subscribe to an all-natural appearance, namely wearing natural hair, that promotes a myopic model of black femininity. Additionally, women's agency is also channeled by the nationalist "burden of representation"<sup>37</sup> (Yuval-Davis, 2003:17) from diasporic culture that requires them to publicly perform a distinctive African modernity which is informed by postcolonial racial formations and nationalist discourses of class and gender. Thus, I argue that the ways in which African diaspora

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<sup>37</sup> Women are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honor through their bodies and dress. Thus, women are charged with the responsibility to uphold the collective cultural identity, the nation's boundaries, future, and honour through their embodiment of nationalist femininity.

women use their beauty practices to navigate race and space reveals the context dependent manifestations of different expressions of agency in the public and private. This complex dynamic makes it difficult to neatly generalize and compartmentalize the implications of regarding African women as either completely agentive and empowered or completely oppressed and victimized in any given space.

## Chapter 3: Shifting Identities

### Migrating and 'Becoming Black' in a Multicultural Society

#### ***Background***

“In Addis Ababa since everyone is black, nobody really is.”  
Yamri Taddese

The first time when Yamri, a young Ethiopian immigrant woman, was called the n-word by a white man coming out of the subway station in Toronto, it startled and caught her completely off guard. She expressed her awareness of differences along gender, class, religious and ethnic lines; but the nuance of racial difference was lost on her until she moved to Canada and had a Black identity thrust on her. What mattered most coming from Ethiopia was having enough money, familial status, and belonging to a privileged ethnic tribe<sup>38</sup>. Consequentially, she was oblivious to the negative racial stereotypes and the inferior place of black people that comes with living in a predominantly white society. Still further, her oblivion often led her to ask others to explain their racist jokes about her to her. As such, the anti-Black racism she experienced in regular everyday situations challenged her notions of identity, home, and belonging in Canada. Such experiences included being followed around by security guards in her office building as well as being snubbed at a professional mixer for being an ‘ungrateful immigrant’ because she dared complain about the weather, a universal Canadian pastime. As a result of her multiple experiences as a black African woman living in Toronto, Yamri concluded that although Canada imposes a racialized identity on immigrants and despite the initial post-migration shock and

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<sup>38</sup> While ‘tribe’ as a concept is shaped by colonialism, the term for many Africans is a descriptor and has varied uses across the continent and in the diaspora. Thus, rather than using it as a reified analytical concept, this study retains the word the women in the sample used to describe their experiences.

consistent prejudice, being black in Canada is concurrently about isolation, second guessing, and as I will show, profound belonging with other black women.<sup>39</sup>

Yamri's experiences shed light on the often complicated and ambiguous shifts that occur for African women as they migrate and begin a transnational existence. Furthermore, migrating to Canada is filled with hopes of a better life as well as expectations based on Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, and its language of diversity and inclusion, that brand the country as tolerant and welcoming. However, as Yamri's experiences demonstrate, there are often contradictions between official multiculturalism policy and women's everyday lived experiences. Moreover, African women's experiences of migration and cultural diversity are complicated further as they are also positioned within the diaspora as the cultural bearers of nationalist culture. As such, women are pivotal to the collective establishment, maintenance and negotiation of ethnocultural boundaries and identity in the inherently destabilizing process of migration (Okeke-Ihejirika et. al, 2016; Dewey, 2008; Hoang 2011; Bonifacio, 2012; Parreñas, 2008). In other words, women's bodies become centered in the migratory process as the symbolic sites wherein debates about the trajectory of a nation take form shaped by various factors such as globalization, race, class, gender, multiculturalism, and nationalism. Additionally, the new social, cultural, and political context in the host society offer many ways for women to challenge and transform traditional prescriptions of femininity as well as nationalist identities. Consequently, women are able to overcome raced and gendered systems of power to find new opportunities and ways to negotiate for their advancement through new forms of freedom.

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<sup>39</sup> Taddese, Y. (2017). "I didn't know I was Black until I moved to Canada". *Personal Essay published in CBC online.*

More specifically, how does migrating into a multicultural society influence African immigrant women's perception of their identity both publicly and privately? This chapter begins with the individual internal experience of African women because the core of privateness can be located in the construction of selfhood. In other words, the body, the inner space of subjectivity, and the mind are the ultimate private sphere of the individual (Butler, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Davis, 1995). Furthermore, the self is pivotal to feminist questions about personhood, identity, the body, and agency (Tietjens Meyers, 1997; Wei, 2009). Moreover, the self for black African women is characterized by intersectionality as selfhood is shaped by belonging to a racially subordinated group as well as interlocking structures of domination (Crenshaw, 1991; Lugones, 1992). Additionally, African immigration and diaspora scholars have also studied the ways in which immigrants' identities are formed in North America (Mensah & Williams, 2015; Vertovec, 2009; Clark, 2008; Abdelal et al., 2009; Citrin & Sears, 2009). In particular, these studies on identity formation have shown how self-identification is a truly multifaceted concept embodying complex mutually reinforcing processes that are internal, external, individual, collective, economic, cognitive, and affective (Mensah & Williams, 2015; Abdelal et al., 2009; Citrin & Sears, 2009). Similarly, in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism, African women show that the self shifts in the migratory journey. In other words, their identity is reformed in the gendered context of cultural diversity and in relation to an emergent diaspora community. Therefore, this chapter examines the reconfigurations of femininity, racialized identity, and community against the backdrop of a private self within a multicultural society. In short, it explores how women perceive race, gender, and the meaning of the self as it is situated in the public and the private through various beauty practices.

As such, this chapter argues that migration reconceptualizes meanings of race for African women as their subjectivities are shifted from exclusively postcolonial to globalized multicultural constructions of race while retaining residues of the former. In other words, migration produces multilayered transitions that intersect to recreate supranational identities held together by race, gender, and beauty, and linked to the African diaspora community in the broader Canadian context. Accordingly, a pan-African identity emerges and represents a 'glocal' mix of national and diasporic culture in the context of multiculturalism. Subsequently, African women's Blackness becomes fragmented with the roots of local postcolonial discourses, layered with a new pan-African diaspora community within Canada, and entangled with racialization processes of multicultural practice. Consequently, women begin to form hybrid racial iterations, of being Black and African, as they navigate their new locales. However, these racial iterations are not homogenous as they are influenced by colourism, class, personal character, and ethnicity. Furthermore, the diaspora maintains influence over this internal space as women migrate with local gendered nationalist projects and patriarchal norms of femininity, thereby using them as a cultural reference to filter new understandings of race and gender when they initially arrive in Canada. However, public official discourses of multiculturalism, race, gender, and class seep into this private experience through new intercultural encounters. Consequently, African women internalize these new public norms which shape their private experiences of migration, shifting racialized identities, and subsequent beauty practices.

Moreover, as part of this internal identity renegotiation process initiated by migration, women demonstrate their agency in various ways including utilizing new access to beauty

products and technologies, redefining beauty and race on their own terms (often incorporating nationalist and multicultural aspects), and harnessing their beauty practices for self-expression, enjoyment and individuality. Additionally, public intercultural encounters expose women to alternative aesthetics by providing a repertoire of new looks and opportunities to create new beauty practices in private. However, oftentimes as women are still adjusting, the interaction between the African diaspora and multicultural practice entangles their agency in paradoxes and ambiguity. In short, the migratory process creates an ambivalent sense of self-discovery as new forms of freedom and socioeconomic ability is juxtaposed with a profound feeling of ‘otherness’ thus creating a space to recreate racialized identities and beauty practices.

The chapter moves through this argument by beginning with the ways in which understandings of race alter for African women as they ‘become black’ in a multicultural society. Namely, how they self-identify both when they initially arrived in Canada and in the context of the broader black community. Additionally, the chapter demonstrates how colonial representations, through tropes about Africa, are internalized to shape their sense of self. Following this, the chapter examines how women use beauty to redefine their racialized identities in the public and private through notions of diversity, racial confidence, personal character, and class. The chapter concludes by reiterating the ways in which everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora in Canada are embedded in the migration journey, thereby reshaping women’s racialized identities in the public and private through nationalism, multiculturalism, gender, race, and class. As such, this chapter fits within the overall thesis as it highlights the shifts that occur as women migrate into Canadian society and (re)create racialized

identities, that are a classed hybrid of being black and African, through their everyday beauty practices. Furthermore, the chapter reveals how a pan-African identity emerges, as women connect with the African diaspora community in Canada, as well as how nationalist constructions of femininity are reconfigured as women expand their ethnic and racialized definitions of beauty to incorporate diverse aesthetics inspired by intercultural encounters.

### **Becoming Black**

*“I came from a country where race was not an issue, I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America”*

-Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*

Prior to leaving their home countries African women often have little need to explore the larger African identity and rarely regard themselves Black as national and ethnic identities take precedence. For example, one woman expressed that before arriving in Canada she did not think of herself as Black, like in the way African-American women are regarded Black, because she mainly identified as a Nigerian Igbo woman. In other words, her identity was predominantly shaped by nationalist culture and tribal belonging which were considered far more important in the local context. However, when she migrated to Canada, that is when she learned new meanings of race and community as her nationalist identity was replaced with a Black identity, and tribal belonging was replaced with belonging within a pan-African diaspora. Furthermore, Blackness in Canada is complicated by multiculturalism policy and practice which encourages immigrants to preserve their cultural heritage through open cultural exchange. Consequently, scholars have highlighted that when African individuals migrate to Canada, they enter

hegemonic discourses of Blackness that are steeped in colonial legacies and practices of white privilege (Ibrahim, 1999; Okeke-Ihejirika & Spritzer, 2005). In other words, African's are viewed as backward and in need of civilizing through racialized stereotypes of savagery like war, disease, famine, poverty, corruption, voodoo, and wild animals. In addition to the cultural stereotypes ascribed to the continent, African's are also viewed through American racial colonial legacies which stereotype African-American's as lazy, violent, unintelligent, criminals, and hyper-sexual. Accordingly, "becoming black" and "learning to be black" become central elements of their migration experience in a new context of white domination (Kelly, 2004; Kelly, 1998; Creese, 2011). However, this study further reveals that the process of "becoming black" is highly gendered and differentiated by the emergence of a pan-African diasporic identity characterized by colourism, class, character, and ethnicity. As such, women grapple with this racial shift through their understandings of beauty.

For example, Callista who attended an international French high school in Benin shared that even though she had been exposed to cultural and racial diversity while in her home country, moving to Canada highlighted her Blackness in a new way as it was the first time she realized she was "the exception". In other words, migrating to Canada reoriented her understanding of race as she unexpectedly became a minority and the 'other'. She continued to share that when she initially arrived for university there were other black students like her on campus so she did not feel her status as a "visible minority"<sup>40</sup> until she was off campus where she would get both

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<sup>40</sup> Visible Minority is defined by the Government of Canada as "persons, other than Indigenous peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Statistics Canada, 2015).  
<https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?Function=DEC&Id=45152>

disapproving and inquisitive stares. She explained further that for a long time she could not figure out why people were staring at her on the streets until she spoke to other black students and friends who shared similar experiences. That is when she realized that there was actually nothing wrong with her except for the fact that she was Black and now she was “representing a race of people”. As such, moving to a predominantly white society brought to light her ideas of race in an unfamiliar way as local discourses shifted to multiculturalism’s constructions of Blackness. She thoughtfully elaborated,

*“My idea of beauty was challenged when I moved to Canada ‘cause I was surrounded by different people and I became very self-aware and questioned what is wrong with me. Why am I not like everybody else? This has been difficult for me for years. You just want to be normal. Growing up you knew that beauty is defined in European Caucasian terms but still you’re surrounded by people like you so it’s kind of knowing but not living it. You’re still comfortable cause everybody they either having braids<sup>41</sup> or natural hair<sup>42</sup> or relaxed hair<sup>43</sup>. Skin colour is more or less the same. Yes, some people are fairer but most of us are black people”.*

Likewise, Chinelo, who moved from Zambia for university, shared her experience of being ‘othered’ when she first migrated,

*“There was a bit of fascination around being black. Curiosity around hair and skin. You’re almost exotic dare I say.”*

Similarly, Mbalenhle, a Ugandan woman who migrated to Canada to further her education shared,

*“I never really had to think about being a black woman when I lived in Uganda. Then I moved to Canada and it seems like all I ever did was think about how I am a black woman because I always felt different, not in a good way. Sometimes people weren’t friendly*

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<sup>41</sup> Braids: single plaits, cornrows or any style that weaves together three or more strands of hair extensions.

<sup>42</sup> Natural hair: hair that has not been altered by chemical straighteners, including relaxers and texturizers.

<sup>43</sup> Relaxed: hair that has been straightened by applying a cream mixture to chemically alter the texture of the hair by breaking down the curls and straightening it.

*towards me because of the colour of my skin I think. I had never experienced that in my life.”*

Marini, a Ghanaian woman, shared similar experiences,

*“I have always known that the colour of my skin is black, like I’m a black person, but there are so many other black people around at home that it is nothing special to be black. Okay fine, if you have light skin or something then people will notice but what really matters is what tribe you are from, if you are from a powerful or wealthy family in the country, things like that. When I came to Canada, I didn’t understand that it is not the same. When people would be staring at me or asking to feel my skin or touch my hair like I am a pet, it was very strange to me. Then more and more I learned that being a black person in this country is not the same as being a black person at home.”*

Additionally, Makhosi, a Zimbabwean woman, expressed related sentiments,

*“Growing up in Zimbabwe, race was not the same thing. Of course, we have our country’s politics with white people, even like South Africa, but us black people were the majority people. It was kind of like a shock to me when I moved to Canada. Not because I didn’t know that this is a white people’s country but because it means something different to be black here. I don’t know, like it’s not a good thing. Even simple things like finding the right make up for our skin, it was difficult. I remember when I just arrived, it was a shock to me when I went to a salon to try and get my hair done and the white woman just looked at me like I was asking her to go to the moon or maybe she had never seen black hair like mine before, I don’t know.”*

Amahle, a Cameroonian woman, also elaborated how the meaning of being a black woman changed for her when she migrated,

*“One thing that I can say was difficult for me is understanding why it was hard to find products for black skin. Yes, there are so many white people but there are also other different people from everywhere. It’s why I chose to come to Canada instead of the States because I thought that at least things would be better for me here as a black woman. I guess it’s definitely not like things in the States but it’s also not as better as I was expecting. I couldn’t find the proper skin products, people would look at me with these weird looks, and people would want to touch my hair. These things never happened for me back in Cameroon. It’s almost like I became a celebrity when I moved to Canada but not in a good way because I’m black.”*

As these women show, while discourses of Canadian multiculturalism purport to be welcoming and tolerant, there are contradictions that exist between official policy and everyday intercultural encounters. In other words, women's lived experiences highlight the immediate exoticization and racism they experience once they arrive in Canada, along with the implicit message that being black is somehow a malfeasance. Moreover, this also demonstrates the existing discrepancies between official rhetoric and lived experiences in that official multiculturalism policy is so shallowly rooted within Canadian society's political culture that these everyday encounters of racism and discrimination continue to happen. Accordingly, these experiences intensify women's self-awareness in detrimental ways as they seek to be considered "normal" according to dominant white culture. Furthermore, even women who are considered to approximate whiteness through their light skin tone experience culture shock when they arrive in Canada. For instance, Adaeze, a Nigerian graduate student, shared that growing up in Nigeria she was considered as fair skinned and having Eurocentric facial features strongly shaped her self-image. However, her identity was "drastically altered" when she moved to Canada. While she was considered to have a light skin tone among other black people in Nigeria, she was shocked to discover that she was in fact on the darker end of the skin-tone spectrum in the context of a predominantly white society. She explained her shock further,

*"It was one of the most pivotal culture shocks for me. You're definitely the darkest one in class. Your hair is not the longest anymore. You're not the, quote-unquote, lightest anymore. You're not the most Eurocentric nose anymore. Actually, none of the features you have are very desirable here so bye! It's not about looking like that (white) person but wanting to be valued as much as that person. I want what I have but better. To have what I have but enhanced, nice skin, nicer kinky hair, an even shade of skin."*

Jahmelia, a light skinned Rwandese woman, similarly shared,

*“I was always told that I look like a white person because I have light skin. To be honest with you, I liked it because I was always getting so much attention because of it. I was not expecting that to change when I came to Canada. Like really, I thought it was even better because then I would be able to blend in with the white people. I had heard so many stories of people experiencing racism and I didn’t want that. How I was so very wrong! Being a black person is a black person no matter whether your skin is light or dark.”.*

Likewise, Adina, a Cameroonian woman, also reiterated the same,

*“Even if you are a light skinned black woman, people still only see that you are black. Back home we notice all these things about lighter and darker skin and sometimes the lighter ones get special treatment. But here in Canada, all they see is that you are black. It doesn’t matter if you are light or what, you have that magical melanin in your skin which makes you black and there is no escaping that fact.”.*

Indeed, these examples highlight that African women coming from countries with largely black populations did not self-identify as Black until they relocated to Canada where they were unexpectedly and unknowingly assigned Blackness as an identity marker. Furthermore, although multiculturalism policy is designed to celebrate diversity, in their day-to-day realities’, women repeatedly experienced anti-Black sentiments through the ways in which they were simultaneously exoticized and devalued in their intercultural encounters. However, women such as Callista are often unable to articulate exactly how race has shifted, from exclusively postcolonial nationalist discourses to multiculturalism’s constructions of Blackness, as they usually do not have the “racial literacy”<sup>44</sup> (Twine, 2010) to express what they are experiencing or why they are evidently being racially ‘othered’. Understandably, the absence of racial literacy is

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<sup>44</sup> Racial literacy is the ways in which individuals learn to negotiate and understand race in relation to whiteness, gender, sexuality, and class while developing vocabulary and formal concepts with which to discuss race. It means having the tools with which to converse about race, deconstruct and challenge instances of racism, and interact and work with others to address inequities in relation to race. It facilitates a consciousness of historical structures and works to dismantle their legacies.

because it has not been a requirement prior. In other words, as women's identities have been based on national, ethnic, tribal, and familial notions, formal concepts of race and "being black" have not been a huge part of their vocabulary. Thus, while they may have known about race and white dominance at a distant abstract level before migrating, through the ways in which beauty is defined in "European Caucasian terms", as Callista put it, they did not have to face these racial realities in their daily encounters as they lived in predominantly black populations where local norms of cultural identity are superior.

Additionally, these examples highlight that race for African women is also defined by shades of skin-tone through colourism<sup>45</sup> (Tate, 2015; Phoenix, 2014; Hunter 2007; Monk 2015; Robinson-Moore 2008). Consequently, migration shifts their position within that intragroup racial hierarchy as women like Adaeze show. In other words, while black African women with light skin are ranked at the top within some nationalist and diaspora communities, because they approximate whiteness, once they arrive in Canada that positioning does not hold the same prestige as "being black" in Canadian society is differentiated by skin colour that is not white and not necessarily skin tones in the same way as they are valued in intragroup dynamics. In short, light skin is cultural currency and revered as superior in local postcolonial constructions of race, however, that is significantly altered as lighter skin tones become irrelevant and overshadowed by race more broadly in the presence of whiteness. In this way, African women's readings of race shift once they move to Canada and the initial shock that emerges from new intercultural

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<sup>45</sup> Colourism is a phenomenon of prejudice based on skin shade and manifests as either discrimination against women who have darker skin tones or preferential treatment of those who are of racialized in the same racial group but have lighter skin tones.

encounters post-migration can present an identity crisis and a necessity to relearn what it means to be Black, or even different skin-tones of Black, in a predominantly white society. In short, migration shifts readings of race from specific localized cultural, nationalist, and postcolonial constructions to a multicultural one where Blackness takes on a new meaning as women are 'othered', exoticized, and devalued. Consequently, women's perception of self is altered in direct response to this racialization process.

***"I'm African not African-American"***

Furthermore, readings of race for African women change when they migrate as they are integrated into global articulations of Blackness as well as encounters with the broader black community in Canada and beyond. Scholars have highlighted the links between different black communities in North America and globally as transnational structures of feeling link diverse black populations in a global network of black beauty ideology and practices including media, advertising, and consumerism (Tate, 2009; Thompson 2019; Prince; 2009; Bailey, 2021).

Additionally, this study further reveals that African women's engagement with the broader black community results in the development of a specific and strong pan-African identity which women use to racially differentiate themselves from other black women, particularly African-Americans and black Canadians. For example, Jamelle, who moved from Cameroon to Baltimore before settling in Toronto, shared that she did not experience any major culture shock when she moved to Canada because she had already experienced those racial shifts when she moved to America first. When asked if she experienced any culture shock when she moved to Canada she responded,

*“Not really in Canada. I felt the shock when I moved to the States in Baltimore where I attended an HBCU<sup>46</sup>. I always thought women back home were dedicated to beauty, how that was put to shame in Baltimore! It was easier to tell an African from an African-American in Baltimore. We African women love beauty, but we love affordable beauty. No one had \$200 to just drop on a nice hairdo. \$200 meant registering for a course at least. Money was tight. African-American women spent money a lot and frequently on appearance. We couldn’t afford to look like that.”*

Additionally, Makhosi, a Zimbabwean woman expressed related sentiments,

*“Sometimes people mistake me for an African-American woman. I don’t know what it is about me that makes them think like that, but I have to explain to them that African women are very different to African-American women. Even the way they dress, they are so extra with the long nails, long hair, lots of makeup. I know we also like to dress up as African women, but I think we are not so flashy like them.”*

Likewise, Laila, a Nigerian woman, echoed this point,

*“When I first arrived, I found it hard to find black women in Canada who are into the beauty scene, so I found myself looking at lots of African-American women in the U.S. But I always found African-American women have a different way of presenting themselves than us Africans. They are loud in their expressions if I can put it like that. I think as African women we like to dress and look good but classy, like understated elegance.”*

Similarly, Makanaka, who initially migrated from Zimbabwe to America before settling in Canada, shared that she did not experience much culture shock either because American and Canadian cultures, though fundamentally different, have similar racialization processes. However, like Jamelle, she pointed out her observations of,

*“The different black subcultures and the different spectrum of Blackness in Canada. Black women in America know how to do all kinds of hairstyles but most African women in Canada do their own hair and keep it low maintenance mostly because of the affordability, availability of stylists, and the weather.”*

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<sup>46</sup> HBCU: Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States that were established before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with the intention of primarily serving the African-American community.

Haseena, who moved from Nigeria to Canada, succinctly summed up the differences in African women's racial identities within the context of the broader black community. When she was asked if she has experienced colourism, as a result of having darker skin, from other black women in the community she responded,

*"I don't pay attention to it (the colourism) because I'm African and not African-American. We have tribal discrimination not racial discrimination."*

These examples highlight that in the presence of the broader black community, African women's racial identities shift from national and regional identification within a globalized world to a pan-African identity formed through the diaspora in Canada. Furthermore, this cultural identity is distinct from the black community as it is differentiated by class, through the consumption of beauty products and services, as well as ethnic and nationalist features. In other words, women's pan-African identity is classed based on ethnicity and nationalist constructions of femininity that are described as "understated elegance" in comparison to African-American women who are "flashy" with their appearance. Furthermore, as many women migrate to further their education or begin their careers in Canada, their socioeconomic status plays a role in the reconfiguration of their racial identities because of their limited ability to consume beauty like other black women. As such, African women emphasize their pan-African identity which prioritizes continental culture, nationalist femininity, and ethnicity.

Moreover, it was interesting that African women constantly made the comparison to African-American women, rather than black Canadians, and highlights how black beauty culture within Canada appears less accessible as a reference point for African women, compared to the

American context. On the one hand, this dynamic highlights America's hegemonic cultural influence whereby African-American women are a point of reference for African women living in Canada on issues of beauty and racialized identities. On the other hand, this insight also underscores Thompson's (2019) argument that there has been scarce attention paid to Canada's black beauty culture. As a result, public awareness of black beauty culture in Canada is still relatively unknown. Furthermore, as women in this study noted, the limited range of Black cosmetics and natural hair products in retail stores reveals that black women, especially those who are dark skinned, are not a part of the mainstreaming of black beauty culture in Canada. Accordingly, this highlights the ways in which the rhetoric of multiculturalism continues to obscure gendered issues of race under the language of diversity, thereby keeping African women in a marginalized position both within the beauty culture and Canadian society. Consequently, African women look outside of Canada to black women in America as they redefine their racialized identities through their beauty practices.

Additionally, while black beauty culture in Canada is situated on the fringes of society, women's pan-African identity is also deeply influenced by the global political economy of beauty. Scholars have noted the ways in which the consumption of beauty is connected to the production of gendered racialized identities that exemplify global hegemonic norms of beauty and femininity (Walker, 2007; McCracken 2014; Thompson, 2019; Todd, 2011). Similarly, this study shows how women's pan-African identity is shaped by migration as they are integrated into the global political economy of beauty through new access to and consumption of beauty products, skills, knowledge, tools, and services. In particular, this highlights how globalization and everyday multiculturalism seep into the private to reshape women's identities as they are exposed to new

forms of consumption through their intercultural encounters in the public. For example, Jamelle shared how during the early days of her relocation to Canada her beauty practices became a form of therapy as she navigated the uncertainty and unfamiliarity of being in a new country. Additionally, since she was no longer a student, she could afford to spare no expense when it came to her products and practices. She elaborated further,

*“At some point it wasn’t just about looking beautiful or looking my best, it was therapy. It’s not like the ultimate goal here is the beauty itself, its more about that whole comfort, how it makes me feel. It’s a space for women. The process of taking care of yourself and attending to your body. I count my dollars for everything but my beauty stuff for me, I splurge in that department. I splurge there and I do it without any shame, without any judgment. I know it may have come from the same factory as the drugstore one, but I choose to do this and spend money in my favorite high end beauty stores.”*

On the other hand, Ayana, who moved from Nigeria to start a new life in Canada after receiving permanent residency status, shared how money makes a difference to experiences of beauty and her sense of self. Accordingly, since migrating she has felt saddened that she is not able to afford the practices she would like to. She explained,

*“My impression was when you get to a country like this, your skin begins to shine, gets better. But my skin was reacting so my friends told me ‘try this cream, try that soap’ and they recommended Elizabeth Arden, but I’m still that person that goes into Shoppers Drugmart and picks cheap creams. The truth is money makes you look good, so beauty is also defined by money and comfort. I’m too poor to look that good yet so I feel ordinary most of the time.”*

Similarly, Zuri, who is a Nigerian beauty blogger, explained how the affordability of beauty products has impacted her sense of self. She candidly shared,

*“I wish I had more money for skincare and hair. Having a good skincare routine will help your makeup, so much, so, so, much. Also, my preference would be to change my hair as much as I want but I don’t really have that luxury in this country. Ain’t nobody got a*

*hundred-and-something every month to be spending. It's not worth going broke for beauty here. If I was back home, it would be easier."*

In the same vein, Njeri also shared that when she first moved to Canada, she was excited by the variety of hairstyle choices especially as she was coming from public school in Burundi where girls' hair had to be cut short. However, she could only afford to experiment with braids because she could not afford weaves<sup>47</sup>. Subsequently, she learned how to do her own hair after visiting her aunt who would not accept any of the girls in her household having unkept hair. She elaborated further,

*"You need to be working to afford weave. In Burundi, it's cheap to have someone do your hair but here in Canada, you have to do it on your own or pay someone lots of money to do it for you."*

Chipso, a young Zimbabwean woman who migrated from South Africa, shared that she had to cut her hair once she arrived in Canada because of the expenses. As she put it,

*"I decided to cut my hair bald. Finding someone to do your hair is a challenge here so it's easier and cheaper to cut my own hair. A hair cut costs \$35 so I cut my hair myself. It's easier to maintain and I don't have to stress."*

Shani, a Rwandan woman who has locs,<sup>48</sup> also shared how the costs of styling and upkeep add up which can be a challenge. She shared,

*"It's not that affordable, it costs \$80 per retwist. Sometimes I really beg my friend to do it for me or I can just go months without having it done. There's also some beauty in having it undone for a while."*

Additionally, Ruwa shared how her mother suggested she relax her hair when she was moving to Canada from Zimbabwe because she was likely not going to find someone to do it given the

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<sup>47</sup> Wefts/extensions made from human or synthetic hair are sewn into flat braided cornrows on the head.

<sup>48</sup> Dreadlocks: natural hair is locked into itself by creating rope-like strands.

affordability of products and accessibility of hairdressers. Unfortunately, as a result of not being able to afford a hairdresser, Ruwa's hair was damaged by the chemicals and her inexperience doing her own hair. For many African women, experiences like this are not uncommon as buying beauty products and services can be highly unaffordable and regarded as a luxury. Other women like Ruwa also expressed that "good hair" costs a lot of money so it often takes weeks to search for the right hair extensions at the right price. Moreover, once they purchase their hair, finding a stylist is another expense and women often end up learning to do their own hair. As such, women shared that their beauty practices, especially hairstyling, are often too expensive for them so they become resourceful by finding cheaper beauty product alternatives while learning how to do their own beauty services. In short, the influences of the global political economy of beauty and everyday multiculturalism filter into this private inner space, thereby shaping women's sense of self and pan-African identity through new norms of consumption and class.

Subsequently, African women are included or excluded from "consumer citizenship" (Walker, 2007:6; Roseman, 2017; McCracken, 2009) based on their economic ability, or lack thereof, to participate in the beauty economy where the consumption of beauty products/services becomes the mechanism to express and fulfill their dreams, desires, identity and belonging as immigrant women in Canada. Therefore, in the (re)construction of their selfhood, African women end up 'consuming beauty' as part of the creation of their new sense of selves amidst racialization processes of multicultural practice. It is worth noting that African women's consumption of beauty in Canada is not "new" in the sense that women invest heavily in their hair, skincare, and other beauty products in their home countries. However, the key difference is that women in

their origin countries consume beauty to mostly express individuality, enjoyment, and nationalist/ethnic notions of femininity. Furthermore, as women mentioned, beauty products and services are widely accessible and affordable. Whereas in Canada, the consumption of beauty is located in the context of multiculturalism so that women consume beauty as a means to express gendered diasporic identities as they navigate social spaces and racialization processes within the public and private. Moreover, as women's socioeconomic status shifts after migration, the ability to afford beauty services and products is replaced by resourcefulness and do-it-yourself practices. In short, the commodification of beauty makes belonging within a new society on sale for African women as they can engage in beauty practices that help them redefine their racialized identities while minimizing racial discrimination through the presentation of their bodies.

However, the commodification of beauty also means that some women are inevitably excluded from belonging within Canadian society as they are not able to participate in the beauty economy, thereby affecting their sense of self. Consequently, women feel ill equipped to navigate certain social spaces and racialization processes because they cannot financially afford to engage in the beauty practices that give them confidence in their racial identities. In other words, the (re)formation of African women's racialized identities is deeply classed and excludes many women who see the consumption of beauty as a luxury in light of the other expenses that come with being an immigrant, including relocation costs, living expenses, and supporting family members back home through remittances. As Lela, a young Zimbabwean woman put it, "the priority is survival so there's no time or money for a luxury like beauty." In sum, as African

women migrate and encounter the broader black community in Canada and beyond, a strong pan-African identity develops as women seek to distinguish themselves from other black women. Consequently, this pan-African identity is deeply classed and rooted in nationalist/ethnic constructions of femininity as well as diasporic culture. In other words, African women's racialized identities are differentiated from other black women and redefined by new forms of consumption and access to new beauty products, technologies, knowledge, and skills.

### ***Looking Jungle and Local***

In addition to class, critical race scholars have noted how racism is interwoven into the inner identities of black women through representations of the black female body as well as negative racial stereotypes originating from colonialism and slavery, such as the Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel (Taylor, 1999; hooks, 1995; Fanon, 1967; Tate, 2018; Pyke, 2010). Moreover, scholars have highlighted how multicultural imaginings continue to be firmly racialized in Canada as skin colour is made synonymous with immigrant status (Bannerji, 2000; Pillay, 2015; Abu-Laban & Nath, 2020; Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Akwani, 2002). Similarly, women in this study demonstrated how the psychological dimensions of race shape their sense of self in a multicultural society through the workings of internalized racism<sup>49</sup>. What is particularly unique about the ways in which African women experience and express internalized racism, in the Canadian context, is that it reveals some of the inconsistencies that exist between multiculturalism policy and daily intercultural encounters. As such, the ways in which African

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<sup>49</sup> "The inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by the white dominant society about one's racial group leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust and disrespect for one's race and oneself" (Pyke, 2010:553).

women internalise negative racial stereotypes and (re)create racialized identities distanced from these reveals the systemic, structural, and interpersonal anti-Black racism inherent in the day-to-day realities of multicultural practice. Therefore, while the official rhetoric of multiculturalism encourages immigrants to retain their cultural heritage, some African women seek to disassociate from their racial difference because of “everyday racism” (Essed, 2002), thereby reproducing raced and gendered inequalities in patterns of multiculturalism as women continue to construct their selfhood based on racial inferiority.

As Callista noted earlier, African women often arrive in Canada having already imbibed in their origin countries an ideology of western superiority through cultural imperialism and colonialism exemplified by the global beauty industry. Thus, once women migrate to Canada and they are exposed to discourses of multiculturalism and new intercultural encounters, the need arises to disassociate from local postcolonial constructions of race. In other words, as negative racial stereotypes in Canadian society become more pronounced in women’s experiences, they shared their growing fears of, as one participant put it, “looking jungle and local...because Africans are considered savage and closer to the wild.” These racialized stereotypes of savagery result in women attempting to assimilate and manage visible racial markers, like their hair, to avoid racial discrimination based on such prejudices. For example, Sanaa, who migrated from Zimbabwe, candidly shared how new racialization processes of multicultural practice impacted the way she uses her beauty practices to construct her identity. In her words,

*“I do it because I feel more confident. It’s empowering. Sometimes I also feel it’s necessary because of the external pressure. I feel pressure as an immigrant woman, a foreigner. I*

*don't want people to think she's fresh off the boat, so I find myself fitting in and assimilating."*

Similarly, Lela, another Zimbabwean woman, shared the pressure she feels as an African immigrant woman,

*"I sometimes feel pressure to look as non-African as possible so I can dissociate with negative connotations of being African. You know, be westernized and up to date with the society here. The exposure to different types of men from other races also makes me make more of an effort so it's like 'yeah she's African but she's a hot African. She doesn't look African'".*

Likewise, Haseena, a Nigerian woman, also shared the internal experience she went through when she was cutting her hair considering the different negative racial stereotypes,

*"When going natural<sup>50</sup> you want to look good. You want to invest in good clothes and good makeup otherwise you'll look like you're from the jungle. If you're carrying your natural hair, with the way we were conditioned, you don't look that good. You look like a local girl. If you want to look modern with your natural hair, you have to invest in your clothes so even when people see your 'naturalness' it'll be like 'oh she's a natural girl but she's modern'. Your clothes and makeup have to compensate for natural hair."*

Adaeze, another Nigerian woman, shared similar sentiments,

*"I find there's overcompensation when it comes to natural hair in order to look more feminine because the assumption is that natural hair isn't feminine so accessorizing with earrings and makeup is necessary."*

African women's beauty practices thus highlight the acculturative mechanisms by which they imbue ideologies of white supremacy and racial oppression. Furthermore, the stereotypes these women repeatedly reference reiterate the coloniality of power that continues to exist within everyday multiculturalism in Canadian society. Moreover, while women seek to distance

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<sup>50</sup> "Going natural": removing any chemical straighteners, including relaxers and texturizers so that hair grows in its natural texture and curl pattern.

themselves from the derogatory images, these actions indicate that women likely believe these stereotypes to be true just not for themselves as individuals. Consequently, negative tropes about Africa infiltrate women's inner lives and shape their sense of self so that a local appearance, consisting of natural hair for example, is deemed inappropriate while a modern appearance, largely based on classist beauty consumption, is endorsed as desirable. Put simply, the derogatory racial cliches within Canadian society shape how women think of other African immigrants and influence diasporic identity formation. This racialized identity is somewhat whitewashed and/or not too African, as women seek to fend off the stigma of stereotypes from themselves. Shani summed up the tensions and contradictions that exist for African women as they wrestle with their sense of self, negative racial stereotypes, and the pressure to assimilate,

*"I feel more confident if I look good. If you want opportunities in this life, in this country, as an immigrant as a woman, as a black woman, you need to really be on top of your things and that is including how you present yourself on a daily basis. So, I would like to portray confidence, but I feel like a hypocrite because what are my standards of confidence? At the end of the day, what I'm really after is for these non-black people to accept me the way that I am but to still not be as a shock to them. I still find myself doing things to be as close to them as possible. As in oh, I don't want to be an outsider, I just want to avoid that at the end of the day. That influences how I go about my daily life, the way I talk, the way I interact with people, the way I look, the way I dress. Again, because of where I want to be in life and because of the people I want to meet in life. It just feels like everything is calculated to fit in and be accepted for who I am at the end of the day. Is it who I am if I'm still trying to fit in? There is no authenticity."*

Shani's thoughtful response highlights that African women's realities of internalized racism are not a sign of weakness, ignorance, or psychological defect on an individual level. Rather, women's internalization of negative tropes about Africa reveals the larger structural context and daily dynamics through which racism is reproduced in lived experiences of cultural diversity.

Furthermore, these women's fears suggest that the effects of racialized prejudices within

Canadian society are deeper and broader than acknowledged in multiculturalism policy as women's internal experiences underscore the racist views within everyday intercultural encounters. Consequently, as Shani highlights, women form an ambivalent adaptive response through accommodation of mainstream beauty norms even as this replicates raced-gendered inequality and women grapple with their identity. Moreover, the agentive ways in which women grapple internally with negative racial stereotypes brings light to the contradictory path between resistance and accommodation as the line between wanting to look white and wanting to be accepted in their Blackness is a blurry one for African women since mainstream femininity is synonymous with whiteness. As a result, racialization processes of multicultural practice present African women with the formidable dilemma of either conforming to white gender norms or risk being viewed through negative racial stereotypes.

Accordingly, women often feel the pressure to shed postcolonial constructions of race, and the accompanying negative connotations, in exchange for multiculturalism's interpretations of what it means to be a black woman, so they are deemed appropriate in their racial difference. Furthermore, class continues to be a part of this postcolonial identity shedding as women turn to consuming beauty products and services in order to achieve both a "distinctive African modernity"<sup>51</sup> (Jennings, 2015; Allman, 2004; Hendrickson et al., 1996) and meet the racial standards of multicultural practice. Therefore, the formation of a pan-African identity that adheres to strict and powerful white norms is far more pervasive, complex, and nuanced as

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<sup>51</sup> The ways in which dress is at the core of displaying vernacular African modernities through slavery and freedom, colonialism, ethnicity, cosmopolitanism, state-building, nation, and gender (Allman, 2004:3)

African women become aware of the foreigner survival tactics that lie in assimilating to new racial norms by adhering to mainstream beauty standards. Consequently, women's agency is channeled by gender, race, and class as they attempt to disassociate from postcolonial constructions of race in order to pursue a sense of self that minimizes racism and discrimination in their intercultural encounters.

### **Redefining Race Through Beauty**

So far, the chapter has highlighted the ways in which African women's understanding of race changes when they migrate to Canada. Specifically, these various shifts include being exoticized and 'othered' as they become black in new ways, navigating the fluctuating dynamics of colourism in the broader context of race, and establishing a strong pan-African identity that is differentiated from other black women by class and ethnicity. Additionally, women's sense of self is shaped by internalizing colonial representations of common tropes about Africa as they seek to distance themselves from the negative racial stigma. Therefore, as constructions of race shift through discourses of Canadian multiculturalism and new intercultural encounters, women use beauty as a way to internally work through these monumental developments while they settle into the new society.

Critical race feminists have noted how black women's racial identities are formed by interlocking structures of domination and sociopolitical processes in the public as well individual beauty practices (Thompson, 2019; Walker, 2007; Roseman, 2017; Prince, 2009; Tate, 2009). However, migration also plays a pivotal role in identity (re)formation as African women in this study use

beauty to make sense of the racial shifts that occur during migration. In other words, women develop new racial identities by redefining what beauty means to them. Consequently, race and beauty are inextricably linked for African women as they migrate and maneuver the process of recreating a racialized gendered diasporic self. As such, the self-definition of beauty and self-valuation of their bodily practices play an important role in helping them traverse processes of gendered racialization in a new multicultural society.

Furthermore, given their diverse migratory paths, women in different subject positions experience and redefine conventional standards of beauty differently as culturally hegemonic beauty ideals do not hold the same meaning or power for all women. More specifically, the interactive relationship between everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora results in women constructing wide-ranging multidimensional racialized selves which leads to varied self-definitions of beauty established on new meanings of race. In other words, multiculturalism and transnational diasporic culture simultaneously assign numerous and sometimes conflicting meanings to women's definitions of beauty that are dynamically changing. For women in this study, these meanings of beauty are rooted in self-expression, confidence building, enjoyment, and adherence to a strict and powerful cultural beauty norm as they integrate into new culturally diverse communities. Thus, the following section focuses on the three main ways African women redefine beauty by including diversity, black confidence, and values of personal character.

## **Multicultural Beauties**

Scholars have examined the ways in which the globalization of beauty is resulting in the displacement of Eurocentric beauty ideals that are being replaced by more multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial norms to ensure the embodiment of ideas on progress, development, and modernity that are globally relatable and measurable for nations (McCracken, 2014; Jha, 2016; Jafar & Casanova, 2013). Likewise, African women in this study show that there is not a static universal standard of beauty that exists as intercultural encounters in a multicultural society present multiple possibilities. As Runako, a young Zimbabwean woman who has been living in Canada for almost eight years said,

*“There are a variety of beauties and so many different standards of beauty in Canada that I can’t even bring it down to two to compare.”*

Similarly, Callista, who is in her forties and has been living in Canada for almost two decades exclaimed,

*“There are as many beauty models as we are ready to discover!”*

Likewise, Adina, a Cameroonian woman, also reiterated the same,

*“One thing I like about being in Canada is that you can find so much inspiration for your own style because there are so many different examples of what beauty looks like from other cultures. You don’t just have to look white and skinny anymore.”*

Jahmelia, a Rwandese woman, similarly shared,

*“Wow, beauty in Canada is like being a child in a candy store, you can pick and choose what you want. There are so many beautiful women from all over.”*

Amahle, another Cameroonian woman, also elaborated,

*“I think something I appreciate about being in Canada is that you don’t have to look far to find other examples of beauty. Like Asian, Latina, Arab, white, black, all of them have*

*beauty practices and women that are stunning for different reasons. That kind of exposure means you can choose what beauty means for you as a woman. There is so much diversity that it's not about looking like a white woman anymore. You can proudly rock your culture and see other women doing the same. My own style has influences from women who come from different cultures, and I like it because I have learned so much from other women about beauty."*

However, while discourses of multiculturalism and intercultural encounters in the public provide African women with an abundant "variety of beauties" to choose from in their processes of self-definition, these everyday intercultural encounters simultaneously perpetuate homogenized images of racialized beauty that shape women's sense of self in the private. As Lela, a young Zimbabwean woman, candidly expressed,

*"When I think of beauty, I think of societal standards and people's thoughts about how I look. Like, what do I have to look like that will make me acceptable?"*

Adara, a single Zimbabwean mother based in Toronto, shared a similar opinion,

*"When I hear the word beauty, I think of society's perceptions of acceptability."*

Ayana, a young Nigerian woman in Ottawa, reiterated the other women's opinions as she shared her own experience,

*"When I look in the mirror at home with no makeup on and my pyjamas, many times I think to myself 'I am beautiful!' Then I see adverts, standards of beauty and start to compare myself. Then there are times a person wants to video call and I'm like I'm not looking too good right now, I need to, you know, make up. So, I see beauty as something that is relative and depends on how you choose to see it. When I'm not made up, I look in the mirror and say, 'I know you're beautiful to yourself right now, but you also want to be beautiful to the world.' So, I put some extra effort."*

Likewise, Marini, a Ghanaian woman, expressed similar sentiments,

*"There are two different standards when it comes to beauty. The one I have for myself in my home and the one that I must use when I leave my house. I like when I have little or no make-up on and I'm wearing comfortable clothes, but I wouldn't dare step outside like*

*that because I have to make sure I look good when I am out there, especially because I am a black woman, I have to look good out there."*

In a similar vein, Haseena, another Nigerian woman, admitted that while she is interested in the subject of beauty that interest is not translated into her everyday beauty practices with the same passion. That being said, she went on to explain that she is keenly aware of societal expectations and aims to express her sense of style, even if it is simply the bare minimum. She elaborated further,

*"We live in a world that is influenced by appearance. I might not have that look of desired beauty, but I still want to look a certain way that is going to impress at least on the base-level of a certain beauty standard."*

Therefore, as these examples show, the effects of everyday multiculturalism reveal that the potency of a homogenous definition of beauty, based on a Eurocentric ideal, is indeed weakened by the presence of cultural diversity. As a result, African women are able to broaden their ideas and experiences of beauty to be more inclusive of ideals that cater to their bodies and resonate with their racialized identities and personal styles. Additionally, public intercultural encounters give African women the ability to immerse themselves in cultural and racial pride by privately expanding their definitions of beauty to be more diverse so that they have a broader and a more realistic range of looks to choose from. Consequently, the exposure to cultural diversity within the public sphere provides African women with the possibility to solidify alternative aesthetics, definitions, practices, and experiences of beauty that are fundamentally rooted in the celebration, and not devaluation, of their racial and cultural difference.

On the other hand, the presence of diversity also means that beauty for African women is both rooted in diasporic and multicultural webs of meaning that are always changing, both in public and private, based on competing and cooperating identities, institutions, and ideologies. This composite of various influences requires African women to oscillate between a private self-definition of beauty that is rooted in diversity and an acceptable racialized public image that mirrors externally defined standards of black femininity. As such, even with the positive presence of diversity in their daily lives, African women continue to be surrounded by homogenizing, normalizing, and globalized images of American-Eurocentric beauty that remain pervasive in their private experiences. Furthermore, this underscores what other scholars have noted regarding Canadian discourses of multiculturalism that simultaneously promote diversity but continue to perpetuate a dominant culture of white privilege (Pillay, 2015; Thobani, 2007; Abu-Laban & Nath, 2020; Bannerji, 2000). Consequently, African women are less likely to adopt beauty practices that downplay their femininity. In a dominant culture that already defines them as less attractive and feminine than other women, because of their racialized bodies, they are more likely to embody styles that meet mainstream norms of beauty.

Moreover, in the migration process, African women's beauty practices become fraught with contradictions and ambiguities. In other words, women use beauty as an ambivalent multipurpose resource to both resist and accommodate gendered racialization processes. As a result, African women in this study often continue to use "societal perceptions of acceptability", as Adara put it, to determine their definitions of beauty in the context of cultural diversity. Therefore, their agency cannot be overstated because their beauty choices are often channeled

by discourses of multiculturalism and intercultural encounters. In short, African women are not impervious to dominant beauty standards within the public and this impacts their agency in the private. Although women may not aspire to be white, they are embedded in a society that esteems the white female body as the normative expectation. Consequently, everyday beauty practices are how African women wrestle with conflicting cultural ideas about the black female body by combining accommodation and resistance as they actively grapple with discourses of multiculturalism, belonging in the African diaspora, and constructions of racialized beauty.

For example, Mabel, who is from Benin and in her forties, admitted that she finds beauty practices a “burden” and does not like how those things define her. However, even when she is not participating in any particular beauty practices, she is still quite conscious of the dominant beauty standards and feels the pressure to adhere to the “minimum social expectations”.

Similarly, Naomi, a Nigerian woman in her early thirties, sees beauty practices as a habit that she has not cultivated. Even with her “minimalist beauty routine” she still feels the societal pressure to look good. Seeing other women looking well-groomed and carrying themselves confidently creates ambiguous feelings for her. She candidly elaborated,

*“I’m so minimal. I feel like I’m not the typical girl. I don’t even do my nails. I’m a girly girl but I don’t do all those things I see other girls do. But I’m trying to change cause I’m not taking the initiative to look good. Sometimes you should look good as a human being when you go out the house. Not like changing but making an effort to not look like what the cat dragged in. With the way society is, like when you look outside, every girl that you see, you can’t basically go out just the way you are and not feel like all eyes are staring at you like ‘mmm okay, how does she look’.”*

Likewise, Adara explained that while she indulges in her hair and skin care practices for self-expression, that expression occurs within the constraints of societal expectations that can be limiting,

*“I cannot separate hair from skin care. No matter how good you look, if your hair is unpresentable, the look you might have on your face will cease to matter. The same goes if your hair is laid to the gods and your face is looking like it’s from the pits of hell, then well, ain’t nobody checking for you boo! I see it as a form of self-expression within a constrained environment. Very constrained. So, I can still express myself to a certain extent as per societal norms but I’m expressing myself within the constraints that others have deemed acceptable and manageable. I do that automatically. It’s an automated way of looking at myself.”*

Thus, these examples further highlight the power of multiculturalism discourses and racialized constructions of beauty in shaping women’s sense of self and beauty practices. Even in a Canadian context, which is branded as culturally diverse, African women continue to exist within strict and powerful white cultural standards. As a result, accommodating these dominant norms of beauty is a way to be deemed publicly acceptable within internalized racial paradigms and in a society that does not esteem the black female body. Consequently, although women like Ayana and Haseena may consider themselves beautiful in private, discourses of multiculturalism and constructions of racialized beauty in the public permeate this space thereby determining what is appropriate and acceptable femininity for African women. As such, women are required to continually navigate the juxtaposition of public expectations and private acceptability in their definitions of beauty. In sum, everyday multiculturalism simultaneously provides African women with the opportunity to explore diverse alternative aesthetics that resonate more with their natural looks, personal styles, and racialized identities while also perpetuating hegemonic white standards of beauty. Thus, the presence of diversity and intercultural encounters in the public enable African women to confidently engage in private self-definitions of beauty that help them

negotiate new racialization processes. However, the public is ever-present in this private decisional space as race and hegemonic standards of beauty are internalized and never completely erased, thereby influencing women's beauty practices. Consequently, the public and private self always remain in tension while navigating everyday multiculturalism.

### ***Black is Beautiful***

As highlighted thus far, the presence of diversity enables African women to embody confidence in their own understandings of what beauty means for them through the lens of Blackness.

Therefore, women's practices of redefining beauty reveal the numerous ways they see themselves as capable of beauty that moves beyond the ugly-beautiful binary, which is rooted in racialized constructions of beauty. As a result, beauty for African women becomes a site to experience new forms of freedom that occurs through individual uniqueness that is juxtaposed within the African diaspora and global black community. In other words, women use their everyday beauty practices to (re)shape their racialized identities with elements of Africanness and Blackness. Even more important, in the context of a multicultural society, is their notions of beauty are based on the importance of racial difference and cultural diversity in defining standards of beauty for themselves. Accordingly, African women's definition of beauty also repeatedly included the quality of "being comfortable and confident in your own skin." Since women are racialized in new ways and become "objects of exotic and racial fascination" (hooks, 2000:96) in public when they migrate and they oftentimes internalize negative racial tropes about Africa, confidence in 'being black' is deemed a requirement as a new immigrant woman. In other words, Canadian discourses of multiculturalism and intercultural encounters in public render African women inferior to whiteness and hegemonic standards of beauty. Consequently,

confidence and comfort in their own skin becomes both a necessity to subvert oppressive gendered racialization processes and an opportunity to creatively reform anti-Black racism in Canadian society. Confidence is thus necessary for an African woman in Canada, as the aforementioned refrain highlights, and is particularly poignant as the phrase takes on new meaning. Beauty for African women is not just about being confident in how they present themselves physically— through their body, hairstyles, fashion, accessories etc.— but also being confident in their skin colour, being confident in ‘wearing black skin’. In other words, living in a multicultural society compels African women to be confident in how they embody their racialized identities through beauty. As Kali, who was boldly wearing her blonde-tinted natural hair, jeans, heels and beaded custom jewelry during the interview shared,

*“Beauty is a woman confident in her own skin! The idea of having to choose between an all-natural African and all European standard of beauty has changed.”*

Likewise, Laila, a Nigerian woman, echoed this point,

*“I would say my style is a mix of African and western things. So like, I like the weaves and wigs that give me that straight hair look but I also like to wear lots of African clothing and jewellery. I feel like it’s hard not to incorporate both when you live here. I personally don’t believe in sticking to one look. I think you must wear what you feel most confident in as an African woman. Not to be boxed in by one culture or another. For me, it’s a high-quality bone-straight weave, my kente print duster coat, and a pair of jeans.”*

Like Kali and Laila, other African women are also confidently creating hybrid aesthetics and definitions of racialized beauty that incorporate the traditional and modern, the local and global, the multicultural and nationalist. This reveals that in the presence of diversity, while hegemonic norms prevail in the background, African women do not necessarily choose one aesthetic to adhere to. Rather, they are able to incorporate different aspects to create a bespoke

understanding of beauty rooted in their racialized identities. In other words, diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism are accompanied by new opportunities for self-definition as women are not limited to diasporic, black nationalist, or white supremacist standards of beauty. As Rahia, a young Zimbabwean entertainer based in Toronto, shared,

*“When you’re young, you look at the Eurocentric view definitely as the standard, right. When you ask me about beauty now it has a lot more meaning because I understand it more now. That with my hair straight, with my hair kinky, like I’m beautiful with or without. With the clothes that I wear, I wear the clothes the clothes don’t wear me. Now I’ve gotten to understand that beauty is me. Like what I view as beauty within myself, that’s what is beautiful. If I feel beautiful and today I wanna be natural, I’m still beautiful. If I wanna have makeup on one day, then I’m still beautiful.”*

Mia, a Kenyan mother of four, also shared the importance of confidence when navigating a multicultural society because she is acutely aware of how impressionable her young daughters are to the Eurocentric views of beauty that denigrate black women’s bodies. So, every Saturday she has a morning routine where all her daughters will gather around her and watch her while she does her makeup for the day. In the process, her daughters get to ask her questions about her application techniques while trying on different products. Beyond the sheer enjoyment and pleasure she gets from this, Mia expressed that the importance of this ritual is really to instill confidence in her daughters and affirm their natural African features as beautiful, especially as they navigate a predominantly white culture. Once they are finished with their Saturday morning beauty ritual, they all look in the mirror and Mia makes them repeat their mantra, *“I’m so beautiful! Black is beautiful!”*

Furthermore, regardless of the aesthetic they choose as part of their expression of beauty, whether through fashion, hair, or makeup, confidence is the cornerstone of African women’s

understanding of what it means to be black and beautiful while living in a multicultural society. Buhle, who moved from Zimbabwe to Canada over a decade ago, admitted that when she first migrated she was heavily influenced by societal standards as she felt the pressure not to leave her house without being fully dolled up with makeup and straightened hair in order to live up to dominant standards of beauty. As she has grown in her sense of self and self-definitions of beauty, her beauty practices have shifted to a more Afrocentric appearance to reflect what works best for her and gives her the most confidence. As she further shared,

*“I like wearing my short natural hair now. I do it because it adds to me feeling good and confident. It’s that extra confidence and pep in my step.”*

Shaina shared similar sentiments for the reasons she engages in her beauty practices. She explained that when she looks good, she feels more confident about showing up in different social spaces as a black woman. In her words,

*“I definitely do it for confidence cause when I look good, I feel good. I feel more confident in what I’m doing as well.”*

Malaika, a Nigerian woman who commanded the room with the confidence she exuded during the interview, echoed the same views,

*“I see beauty as confidence. You can be beautiful but if you’re not confident, it won’t show. It’s not about how you look but how you carry yourself and your voice.”*

Njeri, a Burundian single mother in her thirties, shared similar feelings,

*“Beauty is the person itself and not what others perceive. You need to be comfortable with you.”*

Shaina, a Kenyan woman in her early thirties, also echoed the other women’s views with her perspective,

*“I think of beauty as looking good without actually trying too hard. It can be being naturally beautiful or just putting in some effort to cover your flaws but not necessarily cover everything. You’re supposed to not necessarily cover your flaws, but like, make yourself look, like, not tired. Look like you’re present. Look well-kept. Beauty is just being confident in what you look like!”*

Adaeze explained that before taking care of her skin, she felt uncomfortable without wearing makeup every time she left the house. If she was not wearing makeup, she did not want to be noticed and she felt her presence did not register in any room. She further elaborated why skincare is now her most important beauty practice,

*“Skincare is hands down the most important because it bleeds into everything else. Taking care of my skin improved how I looked at myself. I’m more comfortable in my skin. As long as my skincare routine is good, doesn’t matter if I wear sweatpants or no makeup or have imperfections. I find it empowering! It changed the way I move around the space. I felt more comfortable once I started taking care of my skin and myself.”*

However, the expectation to be “comfortable in your own skin” is not always easy given how black skin is often discriminated against and devalued. This can make it especially challenging for African women to build the inherent confidence that they need to navigate a predominantly white culture. As Mekanaka, a young Zimbabwean woman, highlighted,

*“Black women are expected to have inherent confidence. Learning to feel comfortable in your own skin as a black woman is a challenge because of the comparisons with women from other from other races.”*

Subsequently, as women take care of their appearance through bodily choices, they are able to use their beauty practices as a shield against instances of racism that are a reality in Canadian society. Thus, looking good and exuding confidence serve as a protective mechanism for African women against the racism inherent in everyday multiculturalism. Moreover, the presence of diversity also challenges African women’s confidence as they are no longer just being compared

to white women but also other racialized women from the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America. Consequently, discourses of multiculturalism, new racialization processes, and the reality of not measuring up to white hegemonic standards of beauty is a catalyst for African women confidently engaging in self-definitions of beauty that are more diverse and inclusive of their own racialized identities, bodies, and styles. Furthermore, as Canadian discourses of multiculturalism in the public reshape meanings of race, women's definitions of racialized beauty shift in private. As such, these redefinitions of beauty are often accompanied with nuances, inflections, and accentuations which emphasize difference to as well as similarities with the dominant white beauty culture. However, the process of deconstructing raced stereotypical images of femininity and publicly redefining beauty in broader black terms with confidence allows women to exercise a substantial degree of agency and control over their bodies as well as address questions regarding what black beauty means as adorned by African women.

Moreover, while dominant standards of beauty continue to have a powerful influence on African women's definitions of beauty, the presence of diversity enables them to resist and cultivate a more anti-racist and afro-centric beauty aesthetic based on the broader global black community and the local African diaspora in Canada respectively. As Makanaka, a Zimbabwean graduate student in Ottawa, shared,

*"When I think of beauty, I think of black women. We really embody beauty. We're so diverse. We set trends that are not appreciated on our bodies like being curvy. The way we move through the world, take care of each other, survive, and still love. Being beautiful is nuanced and so complicated and complex."*

Ruwa, a young Zimbabwean entrepreneur in Ottawa, also echoed similar sentiments,

*"I feel like it's changed over the years. I feel like now, you know with things like Beyoncé's album 'The Gift', like the song Brown Skin girl, that's what I see now. Brown skin beauty. You know, just chocolate goodness!"*

Adaeze, a Nigerian beauty blogger and graduate student, agreed with the other women,

*"Beauty for me changes on how people carry themselves. How they take care of themselves. How they carry themselves matters more than how they look. But then again, I'm biased towards black women, y'all are gorgeous all the time!"*

Adia, a Congolese woman, shared similar thoughts,

*"Beauty is that #BlackGirlMagic. Black women are beautiful. For so long we have been told that we are ugly and our bodies are too dark, too fat, too whatever but I think we are coming into a time where people are seeing, or black women are believing, that no, actually, we are so beautiful in all our different shapes, sizes, skin-tones. We are beautiful black women."*

It is interesting to note that women kept referring to black women more generally and highlights how, once they migrate, their racial identities become globalized through the broader black community as everyday multiculturalism is experienced on a racial rather than national level. In short, through their definitions of beauty and identification with other black women, African women's pan-African identity sometimes shifts to a broader Black identity. In other words, women embrace their pan-African identity to distinguish themselves from other black women for class, ethnic, and/or nationalist reasons. However, women also switch to embrace their Black identity to connect with other black women. As such, whether women express their racial or cultural identity depends on the purpose and situation. Regardless, by choosing to define beauty in anti-racist terms that include them, African women are embodying practices of decolonization (hooks, 1991; Tate 2019) within this private space even if they are not self-consciously articulating the theoretical principles of decolonization. In other words, along with other black

women, African women are engaging in a particular type of race performativity that produces a centering of black beauty (Thompson 2019; Rooks, 1996; Roseman 2017; Banks, 2000). Consequently, African women's "decolonial attitude" (Tate, 2018:128) towards beauty, through their (re)definitions of beauty and self, allows them to rewrite their subjectivities by interrogating raced and gendered structures of power that produce their othering, as well as challenging those discourses and structures through alternative aesthetics. As such, African women's redefinitions of beauty reveal an inner space that is never fully determined by structures of power and processes but is also always a site of emancipatory moments and counter-hegemonic struggles.

### ***Beauty of Inner Character***

In addition to the broader black community, the diaspora in Canada also shapes this private inner space for African women. Scholars have highlighted the ways in which nationalist discourses of gender, regarding being a "beautiful woman", are not just defined by physical appearance but also by character shaped by African values that contribute to the community through the home and family (Faria, 2010; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003; Lowe, 2013). In other words, diasporic values of beauty are not solely based on commodification but on character and confidence. As such, African-influenced perspectives of beauty move beyond the physical appearance to include the soul and spirit; "how people are on the inside". From this perspective, beauty has less to do with the products and adornments, and more to do with what is on the inside. Similarly, women in the study defined beauty in terms of one's personal character. For example, Naomi, a newly wed Nigerian woman shared,

*“When I hear the word beauty, I don’t only think about your outside appearance. I think about what’s within because I feel like you can be beautiful and look amazing drop dead gorgeous but if you have a very bad attitude or you’re not pretty within, you’re just not a nice person, you’re mean, I feel like that is not beauty. I feel like the whole package to me is looking good but mostly having a good attitude and having a good spirit within because that’s the most important thing. You can’t be pretty and have a stinky attitude!”*

Aiysha, a Ghanaian woman based in Toronto, expressed similar sentiments,

*“I think of beauty as an inner and outer state of mind and way of being. How you choose to put yourself together. The inner and outer combined creates an aura. It’s a whole package. I see holistic beauty as wellness, soundness of mind, body, and spirit. Inner confidence, inner wisdom, and love of self will come through.”*

Likewise, Mia, a Kenyan wife and mother in her forties, shared,

*“I think of inner and outer beauty. You can be best dressed but if your heart is ugly it shows. I’ve come to learn from experience that beauty comes in different shapes. Beauty is not defined by one thing. Overall, its being a good person.”*

Similarly, Jamelle, a Cameroonian woman in her mid-thirties, reiterated this theme,

*“The meaning of that word (beauty) changes over time. It’s how you look outside and all the things we put together to get the outside package looking ready like hair, skin, nails, face, and clothing. Beauty is also within with character, honesty, and kindness.”*

Furthermore, along with personal character, religion is also a part of what defines beauty for some African women. As Zuri, a devout Christian Nigerian woman in Ottawa explained,

*“I think of beauty in light of the Gospel and looking at beauty from the lens of God’s definition. God says you are beautiful. And on the superficial side, I think of makeup products, skincare and nails.”*

Additionally, Makhosi, a Zimbabwean woman shared,

*“When God created you, He created a beautiful woman. It is society and our culture that makes us believe we are ugly, especially because of our skin but I always remind myself that I am divinely created and because of that I am beautiful.”*

Likewise, Adina, a Cameroonian woman, also reiterated the same,

*“Don’t get me wrong, if there is anyone who likes all this makeup and beauty stuff it’s me, but I found that I was becoming too heavily reliant on it and because of that it started to affect my self-esteem. I found that if I was not wearing makeup or weave then I would feel ugly. So I started to meditate on what God says about me, that I am beautiful, that I am fearfully and wonderfully made, and it has really helped me. Now even when I am not wearing makeup, I can still say I am beautiful. I have learned that it is easy to buy products and look for beauty in a cream, but I believe that if you are going to have lasting beauty then that can only come from inside and from a loving God who says you are beautiful, and nothing will change that.”*

After they migrate, women’s sense of self is also shaped by personal values and intangible qualities like kindness, faith, mental health, and emotional well-being. While it does not completely obliterate the superficial indulgences of physical appearance that are provided by “consumer citizenship”, this valuation of character and personal values sets African women apart from other black women and reinforces a pan-African identity defined by kindness, community, the family, and religion. As such, the synergistic relationship between everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora provides African women with intercultural exposure and the freedom to decolonize definitions of beauty while redefining their sense of self based on personal values. Therefore, by creating their own hybrid definitions of self and beauty, African women are not rejecting mainstream norms of attractiveness but broadening and expanding definitions of beauty to include appearances that appear naturally for them based on their racial difference, cultural diversity, and personal values. Consequently, migration affords African women with a new level of agency and control over their bodies, albeit complicated, as they redefine their identity and beauty practices (semi)independently of cultural standards of beauty in the public. Furthermore, confidently engaging in identity (re)formation processes explicitly challenges

ideologies that define black beauty as inferior and allows women to exercise agency in various ways. Accordingly, everyday intercultural encounters expose women to alternative aesthetics thereby enabling them to broaden and expand limited hegemonic definitions of beauty to include facets of their own natural black beauty and inner character. Thus, African women's beauty practices are not always strictly about rejecting or accommodating mainstream norms of race and beauty but rather they express a desire for embodied femininity and expression of black beauty through African womanhood. Therefore, these practices of redefining their racialized identities through beauty can be seen as an ongoing diasporic decolonization of beauty through their refusal to accept constricting definitions that do not include them. In short, African women use their reformed racialized identities and definitions of beauty to subvert, elide, refigure, and otherwise temper with the constraints of new gendered racialization processes within Canadian society.

## **Conclusion**

Although it has been a while since I disembarked the Air Canada flight as a new immigrant in May 2010, I can still remember the jarring disorientation that came from the multiple shifts which occurred in those first few months. Aside from adjusting to a new country and university life, my sense of self was shaken on several levels as I grappled with experiences outside the classroom that I couldn't seem to articulate at the time. Why were random white people staring at me every time I walked into a store or down the street? Why did they want to touch my hair? Being a Zimbabwean in a multicultural society, was I mostly black, Zimbabwean, or African now? Most of these questions have been sufficiently answered throughout the years

as my racial literacy has improved but migrating as a black African woman has shaped my sense of self in profound ways to this day. As such, migration for African women in this study is filled with raced and gendered power relations, entangled in contradictions, and filled with ambivalent moments.

As such, this chapter has sought to show how the migration journey is a tempestuous one that shapes women's sense of self in numerous ways. Particularly, everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora are synchronously embedded in African women's migratory journeys as they (re)create racialized identities that incorporate Blackness and Africanness. In other words, as African women migrate, a strong pan-African identity emerges that is classed and rooted in diasporic culture as well as nationalist/ethnic constructions of femininity. Accordingly, this cultural identity is used to differentiate themselves from other black women while also minimizing racial discrimination within Canadian society. On the other hand, women also emphasize their Blackness as a way to connect with other black women on experiences of racialized constructions of beauty. Consequently, as women reshape their racialized identities, their beauty practices are not necessarily coherent or complete but incorporate their own hybrid sense of self through new understandings of race and beauty in new locales within globalized contexts. In other words, "diaspora consciousness" (Vertovec, 2009:6) for African women is marked by multiple identifications, of being black and African, which contain conflicted and contradictory characteristics.

As such, this chapter has argued that everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora collide to shape African women's sense of self as the clash of the local and global, discourses of multiculturalism, nationalist discourses of gender, and intercultural encounters in the public create new gendered diasporic identities, practices, and experiences. Specifically, readings of race for African women shift from exclusively nationalist and postcolonial constructions to Canadian discourses of multiculturalism where Blackness takes on a new meaning as women are 'othered' and exoticized once they migrate. Subsequently, women adopt a pan-African identity as they seek to differentiate themselves from other women in the broader black community. Additionally, racialization processes of multicultural practice pressure women to shed postcolonial constructions of race so they can minimize the negative racial stereotyping that accompanies African immigrants. Consequently, as women's racial identities shift, they engage in the exercise of redefining beauty. These fresh definitions of beauty are based on new meanings of their racialized identities that incorporate multiculturalism, racial confidence, and values regarding personal character. However, this inner space of women's individuality and decision-making is frequently infiltrated by discourses of multiculturalism and intercultural encounters in the public which simultaneously provide alternative aesthetics while perpetuating hegemonic standards of beauty, thereby shaping African women's experiences in the private sphere and impacting their agency.

In sum, since everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora affect women's migration journeys in complicated and contradictory ways, women navigate this internal space by recreating racialized identities, through their beauty practices, that amorously blend pan-

African continentalism, long-distance nationalism, multiculturalism, and Blackness. However, the empowering implications of this private space mediate but do not change the racial challenges that African women continue to face in the public sphere as they settle into Canadian society. Furthermore, African women's migration journeys highlight the dynamic, layered, and elusive way that social structures intersect with agency, as well as the ways in which everyday multiculturalism infiltrates the private through new intercultural encounters in the public. Consequently, women's racialized identities and definitions of beauty are simultaneously embedded with personal choice and adherence to pervasive dominant cultural norms. Thus, African women's agency carries with it themes of subservience and subtexts of defiance and resistance to white norms.

## **Chapter 4: The Home**

### **African Families & Heterosexual Relationships**

#### ***Background***

As I continued to grapple with the migration-induced shifts within my identity, the accompanying homesickness I experienced was equally unrelenting. Amidst the overwhelming changes, I yearned for the belonging, familiarity, and comfort that could only be found in my family home and country's culture. I made frequent trips back to Zimbabwe in those early years partly as an attempt to cure the discomfort of being an outsider and manage the implications of my newly acquired status as a minority, a foreigner, the 'other' in Canadian society. However, "home" quickly became a much more complicated notion. For me, among other things, home in Canada meant I had the freedom to live an independent life including choosing to experiment with hair, makeup, and fashion styles that I wouldn't have dared worn back at home. Characteristic of living in a multicultural society, I was exposed to more variety in terms of women's different aesthetics as well as accessibility to a wide range of beauty products and services. Additionally, constantly seeing women's slender athletic bodies everywhere, as opposed to curvier fuller bodies, led to a brief attempt to emulate these new cultural trends. However, whenever I returned to Zimbabwe, I was repeatedly plagued with worrying looks and remarks of concern about my apparent poor eating habits because I looked "too skinny for a Zimbo<sup>52</sup> woman". At the same time, my intercultural heterosexual encounters also became a place of confusion. I was often completely bewildered when white Canadian men would blatantly ask racially loaded sexual questions like "is it true what they say about African women

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<sup>52</sup> Local colloquialism referring to someone who is also Zimbabwean.

and that jungle fever?” Or they would propose “going Dutch”<sup>53</sup> while eating out at a restaurant. When I attempted the same antics while on another visit back home, I was met with vehement refusals and lamentations of how “Canada has made you too much of an independent woman with all this gender equality business”. Admittedly, the racial, gendered, and cultural nuances of these situations eluded me for several years as I was still learning to withstand the whiplash of navigating two cultures with opposing values on family, intimate relationships, race, and beauty practices. As such, through my experiences of living between two countries, the concept of home has come to hold multiple and oftentimes conflicting meaning.

After the individual self, the home for African women in this study is the next private space where they navigate their identities in the context of their personal residences as well as in relation to their families and heterosexual relationships. The previous chapter explored the shifts that occur within women’s sense of self as they migrate into Canadian society and recreate hybrid racialized identities as well as reconfigurations of nationalist femininity. On the other hand, the home is where individual identities are negotiated in the context of the private sphere, families, and heterosexual relationships. As such, the home has historically been a sacred space of great importance in the postcolonial and black nationalist mind as it is the principal site to retain femininity, national culture, and resist racial domination and oppression in public (Chatterjee, 1990; hooks, 1991). For example, during colonialism, postcolonial societies had to carve out “zones of freedom” where there was no colonial rule so they could imagine

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<sup>53</sup> Splitting the bill and everyone paying for their own share. In many African cultures, while traditional gender norms are shifting, it is still customary for the man to pay for the meal while in the early stages of dating.

themselves as free even amid daily colonial humiliation and oppression. The nationalist project thus made the inner-outer distinction where the inner was the home and the domain occupied by women and the outer was the world occupied by men. Accordingly, imitation and adaptation to western norms were a necessity for men's survival as they navigated the public sphere, but at home, where women were regarded as the protectors of culture, it was tantamount to identity annihilation (Chatterjee, 1990). Similarly, the "homeplace" (hooks, 1991) in black feminist thought is defined not so much by women conforming to sexist norms but more by the struggles and necessity to resist racist domination and oppression in the public. It is thus reconceptualized as a site of subversion and resistance, a political space for defiance and affirmation denied on the outside in the public world, as well as a space of reclamation, solidarity, renewal, and safety from other spaces that enhance 'otherness' while stripping away agency.

Similarly, for African women, the home becomes another important space in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism. However, in addition to nationalist conceptions of this private space, the home for African women is inherently defined by transnationality as it is located in multiple places. In other words, many of the women in this study maintain strong ties to their home countries as their nuclear and extended families live there. Subsequently, African women navigate this private space on a global level through their family homes in their countries of origin as well as within the African diaspora in Canada. As such, the home becomes a space where the global, local, national, and multicultural intersect. How then do African women's transnational family bonds and intercultural heterosexual relationships (re)shape the meaning of the home as a private space? This chapter highlights that,

because of migration, the home takes on multiple 'glocal' meanings for African women in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism. Firstly, while located in the private sphere, the home supersedes the public-private dichotomy in practice as women engage with cross-border homes through globalization and new technologies. Secondly, the home is the most private space where women navigate their personal identities, families, heterosexual relationships, and beauty practices within the confines of their living quarters. Lastly, this space continues to promote a pan-African identity as local nationalist culture is integrated into a broader continental identity through the African diaspora community. In other words, the home is where diasporic culture is revalorized in the context of multiculturalism as the African diaspora constructs notions of femininity through patriarchal practices in private. In short, the home in this thesis is defined as a private relational space with family and heterosexual ties across transnational places.

More specifically, this chapter argues that the African diaspora shapes the home as a private space that exists in the shadow of colonial legacies, gendered nationalist projects, and transnational diasporic culture where African patriarchal norms of womanhood are perpetuated through the continental male gaze. This occurs primarily through family and heterosexual relationships where long-distance nationalism, transnational diasporic culture, and postcolonial constructions of race intersect to create tensions and contradictory experiences for women. In particular, African women's family relationships in the home often demand that they uphold gendered cultural values of nationalist femininity while simultaneously perpetuating postcolonial constructions of race by encouraging an American-Eurocentric image of straight hair, slim

bodies, and light skin, that are considered appropriate for minimizing experiences of racism while navigating public spaces within Canadian society.

Furthermore, the public is ever present in the home through “exoticizing racisms” (Meszaros & Bazzaroni, 2014:1258), displayed by diverse groups of men in Canadian society, which seep into intimate heterosexual relationships, thereby racializing women through historical colonial fantasies of Blackness which results in them being fetishized and eroticized. As such, the public systemic practices of “everyday racism” (Essed, 2002) that reinforce underlying relations of gendered and racialized power between dominant and minority groups also exist within African women’s private heterosexual intercultural encounters. Additionally, the home is shaped by the African diaspora and nationalist patriarchal norms as African men’s racialized identities also shift during migration and in response to new intercultural encounters. Consequently, the transitions that African men go through impact women in various ways within their heterosexual relationships, as this chapter will show. Simply put, in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism, the home is never completely private as it is infiltrated and reshaped by the African diaspora, official Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, race, gender, class and sexuality through African families and heterosexual relationships.

Consequently, as this chapter argues, African women’s agency in the home is channeled by patriarchal nationalist norms of gender as women are charged with “the burden of representation” (Yuval-Davis, 2003:17) to uphold diasporic constructions of African femininity. Additionally, women’s agency is channeled by the racial fetishes of diverse groups of men that

objectify them as their racialized bodies become an indicator of sexual prowess reminiscent of colonial fantasies. However, women are able to exercise their agency in other ways as the geographical and cultural distance from their families provides them with new forms of freedom to experiment with their beauty practices by cultivating their own racialized identities and unique styles. Furthermore, while public intercultural encounters in the home impact their agency through gendered racialization processes, these encounters also provide women with access to new beauty products, skills, knowledge, and technology that they continue to use in their personal identity reformation practices as they settle down in Canadian society.

The chapter moves through the arguments by starting with the role of transnational African families in (re)shaping the home, including the presence of cultural diversity and the intergenerational transmission of internalized racism. Following this, the chapter proceeds to the discussion on the role of heterosexual relationships in (re)shaping the home including the continental male gaze and the ways in which African women, as opposed to white and other racialized women, are viewed as the cultural ideal in nationalist patriarchy. Next, the chapter progresses to the practice and impacts of long-distance nationalism as manifested through long distance relationships. Subsequently, it highlights the ways in which African men's identities are altered in the migration process through class, sexuality, and constructions of masculinity, thereby impacting women's racialized identities and beauty practices. Following this, the chapter ends by highlighting women's experiences with diverse groups of men and the accompanying "exoticizing racisms" through dark skin fetishes and light skin privilege. Finally, the chapter concludes by reiterating the ways in which the private sphere of the home is shaped by the

African diaspora as well as the public through everyday intercultural encounters, race, gender, class, and sexuality. As such, this chapter fits in the overall thesis as it highlights the ways in which the home and women's racialized identities are shaped by the public through official discourses of multiculturalism, postcolonial racial formations, nationalist constructions of femininity, African patriarchy, class, and sexuality that filter into this space through African families and heterosexual relationships.

### **Transnational African Families**

As a primary feature of women's immediate personal private space, their families have a big influence on identity reformation post-migration. Furthermore, the narrow western notion of "family" is contrasted by the multifaceted varieties of African families including polygamous marriages, female-headed households, patriarchal families, practices of child fostering, nuclear and extended families. In other words, the meaning of "family" for many African immigrants does not only refer to household co-residents tied by blood or legal marriage. Moreover, most African families share a collectivist family ideology in sharp contrast with the individualist values and practices associated with mainstream Canadian culture. There is limited scholarship on African immigrant/transnational families in the diaspora, but existing studies highlight several key characteristics including: the ways in which the family is a vital element in the African worldview and the bedrock of socialization; how family ties are renewed, changed, and sometimes shattered by migration; how family is central to the continuity of culture and lineages; and the various ways family shapes the identities of individuals and communities. Furthermore, these studies highlight various common themes such as the gendered and

intergenerational ties and tensions within families, the emotional and non-economic aspects of family dynamics in migration, parent-child relationships, and marriages (Uwakweh et al., 2015; Parreñas, 2005; Vertovec, 1999; König & De Regt, 2009; Beyers et al., 2009; Caarlisk et al., 2018). In short, these studies begin linking the historical perspective of African family dynamics in relation to contemporary migration and the emerging African diasporas including their impact on transnational relationships. In addition to these studies, this section highlights how immigrant women's transnational African families (re)shape the private space of the home as "family racial socialization"<sup>54</sup> (Hughes et al., 2006) in Canadian society is affected by cultural diversity in the public, historical colonial hierarchies, and gendered postcolonial inequalities in the private.

### ***Gender & Cultural Diversity in the Home***

For African women in this study, the home explicitly highlights how local nationalist norms of gender are confronted by new racialization processes as they must relearn what it means to be a black African woman in a multicultural context. As previously discussed, migration reorients African women's racialized identities through beauty practices, discourses of multiculturalism, new intercultural encounters in the public as well as notions of race, gender, and class. Additionally, migration provides new freedoms and access to new beauty products, technologies, skills, and knowledge in a way that they did not otherwise have in their home countries. Consequently, this exposure in the public continues to shape women's experiences and meaning of the home. Many of the women interviewed expressed that coming from families and

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<sup>54</sup> Highlights the ways in which ethnic identity is a family driven process whereby the African family imparts information, values, acceptable behaviour, and perspectives regarding race.

cultures that were either more conservative or prescriptive in their ideas of nationalist femininity made them value new intercultural encounters and the ability to access new beauty tools to express themselves in novel ways through their appearances. For example, Lela, who moved from Zimbabwe, expressed the sense of freedom that she enjoys through her beauty practices being away from her family,

*“Moving to Canada has given me more freedom to express my fashion sense because I don’t have my parents dictating what I wear. I have exposure to different environments and different people who dress differently which influences my sense of style. I also find there is more availability and variety of products that I can afford.”*

Zuri, who moved from Nigeria to study in Ottawa, shared similar sentiments of being away from her family where appearances are important,

*“I find that Ottawa is chill. Nobody is looking at you like ‘what’s she wearing? Why does she look like that?’ I never felt like I was not beautiful in Canada.”*

Additionally, Marini, who moved to Canada from Ghana, shared,

*“I come from a very strict family. When it came to beauty and fashion, my mother was very strict, and we couldn’t wear a lot of things that other young girls were wearing. When I came to Canada, it was like a whole new world because now my mother was no longer here telling me what not to wear. I could go and buy all the clothes and products that I wanted. It was such a good feeling.”*

Adina, a Cameroonian woman, similarly shared,

*“It was completely freeing when I moved to here because I could do what I wanted to do. Growing up, we had to follow our mothers’, grandmothers’, and aunties’ versions about beauty. Many of the things, like relaxing my hair, I didn’t like so when I came to Canada, I completely let go of all those things. I could do exactly what I wanted to do. There were more shops and products and things I didn’t have growing up in Cameroon.”*

Thus, the freedom that results from migration and the exposure through everyday

multiculturalism in the public gives African women the opportunity to be more laid back in their

beauty practices rather than succumbing to the pressure to maintain gendered nationalist constructions of femininity in the home. Furthermore, women are able to cultivate their beauty practices in a way that promotes their individuality and uniqueness without being limited by cultural values or family standards of beauty. For example, Callista, who is in her mid-forties, shared how she's happy her family lives in Benin because it made the decision to cut her hair and begin her natural hair journey one that was not influenced by the opinions of family members who believe long straight hair is the definition of beauty. She further explained,

*"Going natural was easier here alone. It's what I think, what I decide without the pressure of family."*

Likewise, Laila, a Nigerian woman, shared,

*"When I shaved my hair for the first time, I did it without telling anyone in my family because I knew that it would either give my mother a heart attack at just the thought of having a bald daughter or they would all try and stop me."*

Mbalenhle, a Ugandan woman, echoed similar sentiments,

*"Growing up, I was told that makeup was for adults only so even when I turned 18, I still couldn't wear makeup while living with my parents but when I moved to Canada, I saw all the makeup products and I just became obsessed with all of it! I was now far away from home, so it was easier to experiment and try new styles even if my parents didn't approve."*

Similarly, Chinelo, who has what she described as an "edgy personal style" including a tapered haircut, shared how living in Canada away from her family in Zambia has given her boldness to experiment with her beauty practices in a way that she would not be able to do at home. As she put it,

*"Being around more different people and seeing different perspectives has given me exposure to different ways of thinking and I can draw from those different forms to create*

*my own brand of self-expression. So definitely being comfortable with myself because I wouldn't cut my hair like this if I was still in my father's house back in Zambia."*

Therefore, in addition to the physical and cultural distance from their family homes, new intercultural encounters in the public, and the accompanying practices, enable African women to develop their own beauty practices in a way that they could not otherwise do in their home countries. As such, these women's experiences highlight how everyday multiculturalism filters into the private space of the home to interrupt diasporic culture and nationalist norms of gender by providing African women with diverse novel looks and alternative practices. Consequently, migrating to Canada and leaving the family home, figuratively and literally, allows women to gain a deeper sense of agency over their identities, bodies, and beauty practices. In other words, African women gain the ability to grow and develop in their personal style and individuality without having to strictly adhere to family and cultural norms. As such, discourses of multiculturalism and new norms of gender experienced in their intercultural encounters in the public shape the home for African women as they trade nationalist constructions of femininity for more diverse and personalized beauty practices.

Furthermore, through the influences of everyday multiculturalism, the home also becomes a space where African women are able to actively rebel against family and cultural standards of beauty. For example, Adaeze's Nigerian family in Ontario was not happy when she decided to cut her hair and stop straightening it. They frustratingly told her, "You're going to look like we don't take care of you!" However, although her mother and aunt did not approve of her decision, Adaeze candidly explained why she still went ahead with it,

*“My mum and aunt have made me conscious of what I do for myself. They grew up in a very European colonization mindset of beauty with straight hair permed and they use bleaching creams. It’s more about aesthetics than care. I’ve watched them do horrible things to their hair to look good. They don’t think about hair health but what looks good. I’m rebelling against my mum and aunt’s perception of self because it’s normally about how self looks than taking care of yourself. A lot of my identity comes from not wanting to be like my mum and my aunt ‘cause they grew up with toxic mindsets regarding how you should look.”*

Similarly, Fahari, a Beninese woman, shared,

*“The thing with our cultures is that unfortunately colonialism had a very big impact on us especially when it comes to beauty, so our mothers and grandmothers have passed down some of these ideas that are just not okay. It’s harder to change that when you are still living at home but now I find that I am seeing different standards of beauty so I can change some of the harmful ideas our mothers have been doing.”*

Njeri, who admitted she enjoys wearing risqué outfits, also shared how she has grown to appreciate the freedom she has in Canada to express herself and rebel against Burundian culture after an incident, while she was visiting her family in Burundi, where she was stopped on the streets by a mob of people for wearing clothes that were considered too revealing by the dominant cultural standards. She further shared that here in Canada she can express herself through her fashion choices and does not have to worry about the familial and cultural censorship she experienced at home. In her words,

*“I have more freedom here to wear what I want. I take pride in my beauty practices for expression. I express myself more through my clothes and I like to wear sexy revealing clothing.”*

For many women like Adeaze, Fahari, and Njeri, public exposure through intercultural encounters and diverse aesthetics shapes the private as the home also becomes a space of counter-narratives against stifling cultural, nationalist, diasporic, and familial standards rather

than racial oppression. This twist on traditional uses of the “homeplace” (hooks, 1991; Chatterjee, 1990) highlights the distinct ways in which the home in diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism does not remain entirely private as it is shaped by cultural exchanges and intercultural encounters in the public that disrupt diasporic gender norms and local nationalist constructions of femininity by providing additional possibilities that are more aligned with women’s personal identities and preferences. In short, African women shed nationalist and familial constructions of femininity as discourses of multiculturalism introduce alternative gender norms and images of femininity that resonate with women’s racialized and gendered identities. Additionally, the home is also a space of acceptance for women’s cultural counter-narratives as their beauty practices are affirmed and supported by their families. For example, Shaina’s Kenyan mother and sister decided to cut their hair and go natural after they saw how healthy Shaina’s hair was growing without any straightening chemicals in it. Shaina explained that her confidence to wear her natural hair with pride also gave her mother and sister the courage to let go of constricting cultural constructions of beauty defined by straight hair. Similarly, Lela shared that her parents influenced her beauty practices, which included not wearing pants or makeup, when she was growing up in Zimbabwe. However, migrating to Canada has enabled her to discover her own sense of style and when she sends pictures of herself wearing makeup and jeans to her family in Zimbabwe, she enjoys the “positive reassurance and affirmation” that she gets from them on her appearance. Likewise, Malaika’s Nigerian family supports her newfound beauty practices. She shared of the time when she wore a bright yellow pant suit and her family members in Nigeria posted it as their profile pictures on their social media accounts because they were so proud of how, even if it was not a traditionally conservative outfit, she could pull

off such a bold look. She further expressed that while her mother supports her beauty practices, she continues to encourage Malaika to be well rounded and holistic because, in the words of her mother, *“beauty will fade. Fashion is good but brain is more important.”*

As such, after African women migrate, their families and nationalist culture no longer retain the same level of influence as they did before which gives women the ability to break out of inhibiting gender moulds through various beauty counter-narratives. Furthermore, as in the case of Lela and Malaika, African families are sometimes welcoming of these changes as they accept that living in Canadian society inevitably challenges traditional gender norms as women are exposed to different cultural practices. However, as Malaika’s mother’s comment highlights, while families are open to women taking on new norms, they continue to encourage personal/familial values of womanhood and beauty, including good character and intelligence, that go beyond superficial appearances as highlighted in the previous chapter. Additionally, women’s exposure through cultural exchanges and intercultural encounters in the public also has a ripple effect as other women within the family are inspired to try different aesthetics. As such, just as some women in the diaspora community enforce particular beauty norms, there are others, like Shaina, who can also challenge these. In other words, everyday multiculturalism shapes the home as women gain a repertoire of novel looks, thereby equipping them to shed nationalist constructions of femininity.

In sum, the home for African women living in Canada is shaped by everyday multiculturalism which allows them to explore diverse beauty practices and aesthetics that are different from familial

standards, diasporic culture, and gendered nationalist constructions of femininity. In some instances, families are protective of nationalist discourses of gender thus expressing their displeasure as women choose to cut their hair or wear non-conservative fashion. On the other hand, some families are more accepting of women adopting new norms of multicultural practice, through their beauty practices, and view it as an inevitable consequence of migration and living in a culturally diverse society. In short, the home is infiltrated by discourses of multiculturalism through intercultural encounters and cultural exchanges in the public which interrupt familial standards, diasporic culture, and nationalist constructions of femininity. Consequently, this space is never completely private as the public shapes the home by destabilizing nationalist gender norms thereby providing women with alternative practices to create cultural counter-narrative appearances and identities.

### ***Postcolonial Racial Formations in the Home***

However, while women are able to break away from gendered cultural norms, postcolonial constructions of race, relayed intergenerationally, continue to persist strongly in the home through transnational diasporic culture and long-distance nationalism. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, many women expressed that their families continued to perpetuate American-Eurocentric aesthetics consisting of long straight hair, slim bodies, and light skin that are best suited for minimizing racism while navigating public spaces within Canadian society. Thus, as internalized racism manifests at the individual and communal level of collective social practices which instill racial inferiority (Pyke, 2010; Tate, 2018; Taylor, 1999), women's African families further highlight the intergenerational transmission of internalized racism as conformist beauty

practices are encouraged to prepare women for the racism they will encounter while living in a western country and minimize the impacts. Furthermore, these familial adaptive mechanisms underscore the inherent racism in day-to-day multicultural practice as a dominant culture that privileges whiteness continues to prevail institutionally, systemically, societally, and interpersonally.

For example, Alika, whose family lives in Uganda, shared that when she arrived in Canada, she decided to cut her hair and stop putting chemicals to straighten it. However, when her family saw pictures of her they were shocked and expressed their disapproval of her natural hair which they claimed was not appropriate, especially when looking for a job in Canada. Similarly, Njeri mentioned that her family in Burundi does not approve of her “crazy hairstyles”, but they chalk it up to her profession. As she explained,

*“Cause I’m a hairdresser they just close their eyes and say ‘Njeri is crazy cause she’s a hairdresser!’ Like when I cut and colour my hair. I feel I’m always explaining myself and live outside the lines of the definition of a respectable Burundi woman. Burundians are not open minded.”*

Shani, whose Rwandese family lives in Ottawa with her, also explained that her family was not happy when she decided to stop straightening her hair. She shared,

*“When I made that decision to get locs<sup>55</sup>, not everybody was happy ‘cause I feel like they still thought that the standard of beauty comes in straight hair even when it’s not yours. But I tried the straight hair and relaxing<sup>56</sup>, and then went natural and it was a lot of work, and by now you know that I’m lazy. Natural hair<sup>57</sup> requires a lot. You have to braid it at*

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<sup>55</sup> Dreadlocks: natural hair is locked into itself by creating rope-like strands.

<sup>56</sup> Relaxing: the process of applying a cream mixture to chemically alter the texture of the hair by breaking down the curls and straightening it.

<sup>57</sup> Natural hair: hair that has not been altered by chemical straighteners, including relaxers and texturizers.

*night, you have to give it more time in the morning before you step outside and sometimes it doesn't cooperate."*

Chipso, who cut her hair when she moved to Canada, shared similar sentiments,

*"I decided to cut my hair bald. Finding someone to do your hair is a challenge here so it's easier and cheaper to cut my own hair. I cut it because I knew I was going to struggle finding someone. But when I cut my hair, my family's reaction back home was "nhamo iyayatanga" (the struggle has begun) because in Zimbabwe, short hair is associated with poverty."*

As other scholars have noted, the American-Eurocentric beauty standard defined by long flowing straight hair has a sociocultural effect on black women (Thompson 2009; Majali et. al 2017; Robinson 2011; Barnett 2016; Tate 2007). Specifically, in the case of African women, their families have also internalized these standards as these examples show. After migrating, women tend to find it tedious and expensive to keep chemically straightening their hair and subsequently choose to "go natural". Additionally, they are exposed to new styles and products, through intercultural encounters, that allow them to experiment with their hair by cutting and/or colouring it, whether for stylish or economic reasons. However, some African families disapprove of these new looks as they have internalized postcolonial constructions of race and regard long straight hair especially important for navigating public spaces within a predominantly white society as well as to uphold nationalist constructions of femininity. Thus, the ways in which African families shape the home, through postcolonial constructions of race, highlights the longevity of racist ideologies that are passed down generationally and remain alive through migration as ethnic appearances, like natural hair, are deemed inappropriate in favour of a "white-washed look" that minimizes racial discrimination and prejudice while navigating Canadian society. Moreover, African families' influence on women is complicated further since

many of them live in African countries, thereby drawing on local as well as global racial formations. Accordingly, this highlights the tensions that arise as women navigate racialization processes within Canadian society as well as their home countries through their families.

Furthermore, African women also face similar cultural pressure when it comes to their fashion choices. For example, Kali, whose family lives in Zimbabwe and whose mother is a “girly girl”, shared how her mother repeatedly tells her that she must always look good everywhere she goes. Kali further explained that time and again she has tried to make her mother understand that the culture in Canada is different and people do not dress up the same way as they do back home. However, her explanations have been futile as her mother continues to insist that she dress up each time she leaves the house no matter where she is going, even if only the grocery store. Similarly, Naomi, whose mother lives in Nigeria but regularly visits her in Toronto, shared that her mother does not approve of her minimalist beauty practices and constantly pressures her to always dress up and look presentable every time she leaves the house, especially when her mother is visiting. She candidly elaborated,

*“She (mother) doesn’t like my natural hair but as long as I look presentable with it gelled down and smoothed out then it’s okay. People in Nigeria, regardless of where they’re going, always, always, look good. People take it very seriously to look good. The average Nigerian girl is looking good whether she has money or not. How she gets the ability to get those things, whether she has money or not, I don’t know but majority of them are always looking good. Like they will come out dressed up with nice hair, like you know, those expensive hair and stuff and then they might go home and just eat garri<sup>58</sup>. That’s going to be their meal for the day. But the point is they’ve gone out, people have seen them, and they look good. So, for my mum you can’t look like what the cat dragged in because you have to uphold the family status. You have to be presentable when you go out.”*

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<sup>58</sup> Pan fried cassava flakes, a popular staple food in West Africa. The implied meaning being that women are prepared to spend more on their beauty products than they are on food.

Aiysha, a young Ghanaian woman, shared similar sentiments for why she believes African's always dress up,

*"It's a standard way of being, not just for our family, but for black people. Hair and fashion are always on point or super presentable. I see it as a cultural imagery of confidence and taking pride in oneself."*

Similarly, Adia, a Congolese woman, shared,

*"My family is very big on dressing up. In Congo, it is a big deal to dress and we always like to look good. Us Congolese people we are known for dressing well and then Africans as well like to dress so it's like we dress well in our culture and as a people on the continent. Dressing up is in our blood and we do it everywhere we go."*

Thus, African families view fashion as another way to validate and exemplify family status, nationalist identity, and demonstrate a "distinctive African modernity" (Allman 2004:3), particularly in Canadian society where gendered racialization processes discriminate against, exclude, and marginalize African women. Accordingly, African families highly value dressing up as it becomes a way for women to articulate forms of power by simultaneously carrying continental aesthetic nationalism while countering everyday racism that inherently diminishes them.

Additionally, although women spoke of specific familial or nationalist practices around dressing up, those local practices are incorporated into a larger pan-African identity as we will see in the church. However, even well-dressed fashion does not take away the colour of African women's black skin, which continues to be a source of racial discrimination in a multicultural society.

Consequently, as part of the intergenerational internalized racism, African families also grapple with colourism (Tate, 2015; Phoenix, 2014; Hunter 2007; Robinson-Moore 2008) as skin tone prejudices continue to be a feature of African women's lives after they migrate. However, these

skin-tone prejudices mainly occur at an intragroup level, within the black and African diaspora communities, as the cultural currency of light skin appreciates while dark skin depreciates in the presence of whiteness within Canada.

For example, Adara, whose Zimbabwean family lives in Toronto, expressed that her mother frequently mentions when she puts on weight or when her complexion starts to get darker during the summer months. As a result, Adara admitted to using skin lightening products and exercising more to remedy her complexion and lose weight so her mother would stop making critical comments. She further shared how she sees similar behaviour to her mother in her own ambivalent feelings about her daughter's dark skin tone. She went on to recollect an incident when her former African-American in-laws remarked on her daughter "going to the Africans" because her skin colour kept darkening. Adara, upset by the remark, indignantly reminded them that her daughter had in fact inherited her blue-black skin tone from their paternal grandmother and uncle. This exchange between Adara and her in-laws poignantly highlights the effects of internalized racism more broadly and colourism more specifically within black and African communities as light skin continues to be greatly esteemed while dark skin continues to be feared and rejected while navigating a predominantly white society. Furthermore, this also reveals the tensions that exist between the African diaspora and everyday multiculturalism. In other words, while African families continue to make distinctions based on skin tones, everyday multiculturalism categorizes women based on race more broadly so that whether a woman has light or dark skin colour does not hold the same value as within intragroup dynamics because all that matters is the fact that she is a black woman.

Additionally, thinness has been central to the American-Eurocentric feminine ideal of beauty, but the construction of the black female body has been the antithesis of this through images of a body that is unwomanly and voluptuous (Collins, 2004; Hooks 1992). As such, African families have internalized these body standards as well. In addition to Adara, Zuri, whose family lives in Nigeria, shared the story of her rapid weight loss over four months after her mother saw her on a holiday visit and disapprovingly commented on her weight gain. The first thing her mother said to her upon seeing her at the airport was *“Orobo<sup>59</sup>! Ah! Ah! This Canada doesn’t fit you-o. So, you’re still eating when you’re fat like this?”* Her mother’s remarks prompted her to go on a rapid weight loss program because she did not want to embarrass her family when she went home to Nigeria for the Christmas holiday. Similarly, Njeri shared how her Burundian mother disapproves of her fuller figure after gaining considerable weight when she moved to Canada. She further explained that the change in food, from organic healthy Burundian dishes, contributed to her weight gain and as a single mother it has been challenging to find the time to take care of her body. These women’s experiences highlight the local contested norms of body image as expressed by African families. On the one hand, while body image preferences depend on the country of origin and class, ethnic/nationalist constructions of femininity are generally based on shapely and/or heavier bodies (Toselli et al., 2016; Benkeser et al., 2012; Okoro et al., 2014). In other words, “plumpness” in local contexts is seen as a sign of health and wealth especially amid wide-spread food scarcity and economic challenges. However, as women migrate, fuller figures do not hold the same prestige in Canadian society. On the one hand, this reveals how the

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<sup>59</sup> Nigerian slang for a fuller-figured woman, sometimes used in a derogatory way.

globalization of Western beauty ideals, demonstrated by slim bodies, has spread in national contexts and the African diaspora so that women's mothers' and other female family members perpetuate this body image. On the other hand, it also reveals how everyday multiculturalism shapes the home as it reinforces the image of the 'thin ideal' through intercultural encounters.

In sum, women's African families strongly highlight how internalized postcolonial constructions of race continue to shape the home as women are pressured to embody an American-Eurocentric image of beauty through straight hair, light skin, and slim bodies appropriate for minimizing everyday racism while navigating public social spaces. Additionally, nationalist constructions of femininity are woven into women's pan-African identity through perceptions on hair and fashion that are bolstered within the African diaspora. However, the home is also shaped by everyday multiculturalism as intercultural encounters in the public expose women to alternative aesthetics, thereby providing new beauty tools, skills, and products to challenge nationalist gender norms in the private. As such, the home is a private space shaped by transnational family bonds that simultaneously encourage ethnic/nationalist constructions of femininity as well as globalized American-Eurocentric beauty ideals. Additionally, the home is shaped by cultural exchanges and intercultural encounters in the public that simultaneously reinforce hegemonic white standards of beauty while also providing alternative beauty practices to challenge nationalist constructions of femininity.

## **Heterosexual Relationships**

In addition to transnational African families, women's heterosexual relationships play an important role in shaping the meaning of the home. Scholars have studied the ways in which heterosexual relationships for black women are deeply implicated in the ideological processes by which gendered racialization is constructed and maintained (Collins, 2004; Ratele, 2004; Walker, 2007; Roseman, 2017; hooks, 2005; Pyke 2010). In other words, these studies highlight the effects of global inequalities on relationships and intimate exchanges between white and black men with black women. Furthermore, the construction of masculinities in the context of heterosexual relationships relies on the processes of signification and the regulation of women's bodies. In particular, hegemonic masculinity requires emphasized femininity and is thus differentiated and defined by access to women's bodies through narratives of race and gender that act as a service to white, patriarchal, and heterosexual dictates as well as nationalist masculinity projects (Chancer, 1999; Saraswati, 2011; Connell, 1987). Furthermore, the historical association of whiteness as a yardstick of beauty has been internalized by men, thereby impacting their choices for partners and inevitably women's beauty practices (Roseman, 2017; Collins, 2002; Childs, 2005). As such, the intimate interpersonal nature of these relationships relegates them to the home space as they are often experienced within the private sphere. However, as African women's heterosexual relationships reveal, Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, race, class, sexuality, and masculinity filter into this space and influence how women navigate their intimate relationships.

For example, Lela, a young Zimbabwean woman who shared how she has dated men from different races, admitted that when she is in a relationship it is men's ideas of beauty that tend to influence her beauty practices. Resultantly, her beauty practices change based on the racial and/or cultural heritage of the man she is dating. She further described the ways in which she is conscious of wearing too much or too little makeup, and often asks herself questions such as *"is this outfit sexually appealing or too boring for him? Is he tired of my hair? Even if I'm not tired of my hair"*. She subsequently added that she would rather apply her makeup and style her consistent hairstyle at her workplace bathroom before going over to her partner's home because she does not care to endure some of the irksome questions she has repeatedly received from previous partners like *"why don't you love yourself? Why do you look lighter? Why did you change your hair again?"* when she chooses to wear makeup or style her hair with wigs and weaves. Additionally, Adara, a single Zimbabwean mother, shared how African patriarchal gender norms socialize women to cater to the tastes of men. As she put it,

*"We've been so socialized to please our men in many different ways so that as long as we are satisfying the gaze of a particular man, not all men, it has to be a particular man, as long as his gaze is satisfied by how you look then that's all that matters. And when his gaze is dissatisfied, you at that point must appease that gaze once more."*

Similarly, Dara, a single Burundian woman, shared,

*"Everything we are taught as women and looking good is about getting and keeping a man. It's about making sure that you are attractive in their eyes, not what feels good for you or what you like but how he will look at you."*

Likewise, Sauda, a Kenyan woman dating a (white) Canadian man, elaborated this point,

*"I know this happens in most African cultures but as women we are raised to cater to men. We are always being told 'look good, cook good, sex good, clean good, mother good so you keep your man'. The biggest one is that you must not let yourself go in how you*

*look because there will always be another woman willing to take care of both her body and your man.”*

These women show that, whether dating interculturally or other African men, the home continues to be deeply gendered and shaped by both local nationalist gender norms and discourses of multiculturalism as women navigate the tensions between upholding nationalist constructions of femininity in a relationship as well as what beauty means for different men. Additionally, African women’s heterosexual relationships highlight the ways in which the public persistently shapes this private space as the interplay between everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora structures the home through colonial and contemporary constructions of race. Within this context, African women’s agency is manifested in, constituted, and channeled by their intimate interpersonal relationships. As such, this section explores these ideas further by shedding light on the continental male gaze, long-distance nationalism, African masculinities, and men’s racial fetishes with women’s dark and light skin.

### ***The Continental Male Gaze***

Beauty is a crucial narrative for male nationalists while they continue to reclaim their masculinity as leaders of the postcolonial nation. Thus, the construction of nationalist/ethnic masculinities is based on colonial legacies and relies on the processes of signification and the regulation of the feminine nationalist body as beauty becomes the structure through which manhood is articulated, naturalized, and heterosexualized (Saraswati, 2011; Roces, 2005; Ratele, 2004; Connell, 2016). Consequently, for African women, the outside public “white male gaze” (hooks, 1992:117) is replaced by the continental male gaze as African patriarchy and nationalist

masculinities shape the home through gendered nationalist norms and ethnic constructions of femininity. This idea was particularly demonstrated through some African men's preference for a "natural" aesthetic, in contrast to dominant standards of beauty, that did not include the consumption of too many beauty products. For example, Chipo, who is married to a Zimbabwean man, shared,

*"My husband likes me natural because it saves money. There is no fake hair everywhere and I have no additives".*

She further stressed this point, of the natural aesthetic that saves money, by sharing a story of her Canadian work colleague who is married to a Nigerian woman and complains frequently because he apparently spends over \$7,000 a year on his wife's beauty products. "That's a down payment on a house!" Chipo exclaimed, as she further continued, "and when you have hair like that you want the products, someone to do it, a nice bag and other things to match the whole look. It's a lot!" Similarly, Naomi, who is married to a Nigerian man, also mentioned that her husband is a minimalist and likes her without makeup. He constantly tells her that he prefers her natural look and does not want any "pretend camouflage" (makeup). While African men may prefer their wives with a natural aesthetic, much of this is also driven by class as immigrant families have to forgo the luxury of "consuming beauty" in the pursuit of other priorities. However, for some black men, such as those who are Ghanaian, Nigerian, and Zimbabwean, this natural aesthetic is considered the closest ideal to nationalist norms of gender which also positively impacts women as they can resist dominant white standards of beauty in the public. Additionally, some Arab men also expressed similar preferences. For example, Aiysha, who was

in a long-term relationship with a Lebanese-Italian man, shared her own experiences of how her partner preferred her with her natural hair,

*“My ex knows more about Black history than me, so he exposed me to a different side of myself that maybe I wasn’t aware of or wasn’t fully accepting. He helped me embrace my natural hair a lot more and caused me to dig deeper and find out why I wasn’t comfortable with my natural hair.”*

Likewise, Mia has found the confidence to accept more of her natural beauty because her Ghanaian husband is her “cheerleader” and finds her most beautiful when she wears her natural hair. In her words,

*“He loves my hair natural which is very odd cause men tend to like long hair. He’ll tell me, ‘I love when your hair is natural cause it brings out your features’. This affirmation comment from him made me want to wear my hair out natural more! Before I got married, I NEVER wore my natural hair besides with my siblings and my hairdresser. My husband didn’t even see my natural hair for a whole year when we started dating!”*

Thus, these examples highlight how men’s preferences for a natural aesthetic, that embodies nationalist constructions of femininity as well as women’s racialized identities, is driven both by class and cultural/racial pride. As such, women’s heterosexual relationships inevitably shape this space by disrupting dominant standards of beauty and subsequently provide women with the opportunity to disregard them and embrace nationalist discourses of gender and racialized constructions of beauty that celebrate their own bodies, appeal to their partners, and saves money. Furthermore, these examples highlight how everyday multiculturalism does not always hold the same level of appeal or influence in the home as nationalist culture is revalorized through women’s beauty practices. Specifically, this nationalist feminine ideal is characterized by natural hair and minimal-to-no makeup which is contrasted by the mainstream ideal of straight hair and layers of meticulously done makeup. In this way, the home retains moments of

privateness that reinforce and esteem women's racialized identities and nationalist femininity in the midst of cultural diversity.

Moreover, even men who remain in African women's countries of origin continue to perpetuate this nationalist ideal. In other words, the home is also shaped by transnational diasporic culture and long-distance nationalism as women maintain long distance relationships with their partners. For example, Zuri shared that when she first moved to Canada, her boyfriend at the time was living in Nigeria and wanted her to stop wearing makeup even though she had just started earning an income as a beauty influencer<sup>60</sup>. She wistfully shared how this impacted her,

*"I stopped wearing makeup because I wanted him to be comfortable so he would know I wasn't trying to cheat on him and men weren't looking at me. But even the days when I wore makeup men here were not looking at me! \*Kisses teeth\*"*

For Kali, her boyfriend in Zimbabwe, is a personal trainer and she shared how his ideas of beauty have influenced her as he continues to send her fitness programs and work-out routines so she can maintain her fit physique. In her words,

*"My boyfriend's idea of beauty is a fit woman. He has a preference to how my body looks because he is a personal trainer. So, beauty for me is fitness, eating, and working out."*

Women such as Zuri and Kali highlight how the home is indeed shaped by hybrid masculinities that are local and global, traditional and modern and mediated by new technologies. As women are exposed to cultural diversity in Canadian society while continuing long distance relationships, they thus experience the "burden of representation" (Yuval-Davis, 2003:17) to uphold a type of globalized nationalist femininity. In other words, women's heterosexual relationships highlight

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<sup>60</sup> Beauty Influencer: an individual who creates and posts videos online about cosmetics, fashion, hairstyling, nail art and other beauty-related topics.

the tensions that exist within the home as they attempt to navigate new intercultural encounters and cultural exchanges in the public while maintaining aesthetics that cater to their partners' preferences of the ideal African feminine body through long-distance nationalism. As a result, the home is a private space where the local and global, traditional and modern, ethnic and multicultural intersect to create conflicting experiences for women.

Additionally, the influence of long-distance nationalism in the home also impacts women whose partners' families are still in their home country. For example, Chinelo, a Zambian woman dating a Nigerian man, shared her concerns about how her edgy haircut would come across to her boyfriend's conservative Nigerian parents. She further explained her challenges of wanting to be what she described as 'authentic in her style' while being respectful to his parents without being boxed in,

*"I've walked into the relationship like 'this is my haircut, this is me as I come'. But I was nervous about meeting my boyfriend's Nigerian parents and how they would perceive me because people come to all these conclusions about you based on your haircut, like you're a rebel or something. Like how am I rebelling? What am I rebelling against? Just because I like doing it my way?"*

Chinelo, like other African women in this study, shows the link that exists between African transnational families and heterosexual relationships in the home. Specifically, African families' values of how the women in the family should look is replicated in women's intimate relationships and used as a marker to determine suitability, or lack thereof, as a marriage partner and a good respectable daughter-in-law. At the same time, as men continue to choose their own preferences for a natural aesthetic over family and cultural standards, women are emboldened

to release nationalist constructions and familial expectations of femininity in pursuit of more “authentic” appearances that resonate with their individual styles and relational preferences.

However, African men’s preferences for a more natural/minimal-cosmetic aesthetic can be a burden for some women like Rahia, a young Zimbabwean woman dating a Nigerian man. Her Nigerian partner prefers her natural look so much that he feels she does not love herself because she is always wearing makeup and different types of wigs that hide her natural hair. Yet, the assumption of her internalized racism and black beauty shame (Fanon, 1967; Tate, 2019) exhibited in these practices is not the case for Rahia. She further shared that she often chides her partner for only wanting to see her Afro<sup>61</sup> because of how strongly he prefers the natural aesthetic on her. She sassily elaborated,

*“Ahhh ima wear my ‘fro if I want to and if I choose to and if he gets blessed to see it then, yeah, he will see it! But if I don’t want to, he still gonna see me and he’s gonna deal with whatever hair I have on ‘cause I’m not my hair!”*

Similarly, Chinelo, the Zambian woman dating a Nigerian man, shared how oppressive the continental male gaze can be as she recalled being previously reprimanded by other African men for being “too Americanized” in how she chooses to present herself. She continued describing her impressions of one such incident while at an African networking social event when some of the gentlemen present questioned her about her unconventional appearance. As she explained,

*“It was like ‘oh, I want you to be 100% African, I don’t want you to behave like you’ve been influenced by anything else’. Which is impossible because by virtue of living here obviously I’ve been influenced by other things.”*

Thus, women like Rahia and Chinelo reveal how such nationalist preferences can be stifling as women are expected to reject other cultural influences in order to maintain nationalist

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<sup>61</sup> Afro: a natural hair hairstyle in which the hair is thick, curly, and has a rounded shape.

constructions of femininity that appease the continental male gaze. As such, these women's experiences highlight how the interactive relationship between the African diaspora and everyday multiculturalism creates tension in the home as women's participation in cultural exchanges and intercultural encounters, by adopting alternative aesthetics and novel looks, is viewed as a loss of nationalist pride and black beauty shame. Moreover, women in the study expressed that African men say they want a "natural looking woman" but tend to date white women instead, thereby leaving African women confused and feeling undesirable. For example, Sanaa, a single Zimbabwean woman, shared how dating African men has been a challenge because their beauty norms shift once they migrate,

*"African men are confused! They want a meaty black woman who looks like the white one who runs 10k a day."*

Additionally, Adara noted how African men find features of black beauty more appealing on other non-African women's bodies,

*"African men who we are told like fuller curvy women still go outside their race and the black woman is still undesirable. If it were true that a curvy woman is truly what everybody wants, if that were true as it is advertised by Blac Chyna, Kim Kardashian<sup>62</sup>, and the crew, then we would not have a disproportionate amount of black women being ignored, being subjugated, and being abused as we continue to see today. So, I think it's what men claim but even despite the curviness there's still the issue of the race. So, excuse my French to say, but you can put lipstick on a pig but it's still a pig. And I think that is the curse of the black woman. No matter how you pretty it up and other races take what our everyday is, the fact that the other race is more appealing by that very nature, even though they've appropriated something that is natural to us, means that it's not about that thing. It's not about the cornrows, it's not about the hips, it's about the fact that this Caucasian or this racially ambiguous person has suddenly become more appealing and exotic with black features."*

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<sup>62</sup> Popular socialites, reality TV stars, and beauty influencers.

As such, Sanaa's and Adara's experiences highlight some of the contradictions that exist within the continental male gaze. Specifically, while some men prefer an all-natural aesthetic, others want the features of African women on non-black bodies. In other words, the continental male gaze is also heavily influenced by discourses of multiculturalism and racialized constructions of beauty that simultaneously denigrate black women while celebrating certain black body features on non-black women. Furthermore, these insightful observations reveal the ways in which African men also internalize racist ideologies and dominant standards of beauty as they replicate these ideas in their intimate relationships, thereby influencing their personal and relationship preferences once they migrate. Consequently, the public shapes the home as African men continue to perpetuate anti-Black racism beauty norms on a private level through their heterosexual relationships. Moreover, as Sanaa's comment highlights, African men are also creating blended versions of femininity, to complement their shifting racialized masculinities, that incorporate nationalist gender norms (meaty woman) and American-Eurocentric ideals (fit physique). As a result, women's agency is impacted and complicated in several ways. On the one hand, African men retaining nationalist values while rejecting dominant standards of beauty and discourses of gender creates new opportunities for women to also disregard hegemonic white standards of beauty and embrace their natural bodies. However, women's agency is also impacted by the pressure to strictly adhere to nationalist constructions of femininity. Furthermore, as men's preferences change and incorporate different cultural features of beauty, African women can feel marginalized and excluded by male members of the African diaspora as they seek heterosexual relationships. In sum, the home is shaped by African patriarchy and nationalist as well as hybrid masculinities as the continental male gaze reinforces nationalist

constructions of femininity which both enhance and stifle women's agency. The home thus becomes a private space simultaneously insulated from the external influences of cultural diversity in the public as well as a space where raced and gendered ideals of femininity, containing nationalist and multicultural traits, are strongly reproduced through globalization and new technologies.

### ***African Masculinities, Class, and Sexuality***

As migration impacts African men, through new racialization processes and constructions of masculinity, the home is subsequently reshaped by these multilayered shifts. Specifically, men's new intercultural encounters and Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, sexuality, masculinity, and class seep into this space and revise the meaning of the home. Consequently, African women's agency is impacted by these developments as they continue to be the center of the continental male gaze. For example, Haseena frankly shared that being short and dark made it difficult for her to find a partner while living in Nigeria but after moving to Canada the pool of eligible Nigerian men interested in her increased because of the change in their standards. She shared,

*“Nigerian men like fair tall ladies and want you to look extra elegant. But what goes in Nigeria does not go here. Nigerian men here want a smart woman, and they won't take care of your beauty practices except for good Igbo<sup>63</sup> men. The Yoruba<sup>64</sup> ones are selfish and want you to look good but don't want to spend money on you! But for me, I like men that are nerds, so I dress for those guys who don't really care much about appearance.”*

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<sup>63</sup> An ethnic group of south-central and southeastern Nigeria.

<sup>64</sup> An ethnic group of southwestern Nigeria

Shaina, a single Kenyan woman, also made the observation of how African men's tastes shift once they migrate. She expressed that when dating African men, who she described as "sociable and into brand labels", she often feels compelled to make more of an effort and doll herself up. In her dating experiences, it was the men whom she described as "materialistic" that were into a specific black femininity that mirrored dominant standards of beauty through long hair, light skin, and slim bodies. On the other hand, the men who were supposedly not materialistic liked her natural aesthetic, minimalist beauty style, and intelligence. As such, these women's experiences show that just as African women also (re)define beauty in terms of personal character traits and good values, African men come to value qualities beyond physical appearance like intelligence, domestic skills, and financial acumen once they migrate. As Neliah, a Congolese woman put it,

*"Men come to Canada and see that a woman's beauty alone will not help you survive in this country."*

In other words, some men desire a woman who will help them navigate the challenges and opportunities of being an African immigrant, rather than mere eye candy. Furthermore, certain African masculinities are distinguished by ethnic characteristics, such as financial responsibility for women's practices and/or desire for a more natural beauty style, while other African masculinities align more with dominant race, gender, and class norms of mainstream culture. Additionally, access to new technologies and globalized images continue to shape heterosexual relationships in this space, thereby impacting nationalist masculinities and the type of femininity they desire. As Naomi pensively shared,

*"There's a standard of Nigerian women probably made by Nigerian women, I don't know, or made by Nigerian men, I'm not sure, to look good. A lot of men do prefer women with*

*more meat on their bodies. Round. Curvy. There are still the typical Nigerian men that do like their curves. If a woman is plump, it's a reflection of being taken care of by her husband. But African men are changing their standards, what they consider beauty, the natural curves. They want that 'model type wife' from social media that they can show off to friends and she's gorgeous. That's what they're seeing and that's what they are attracted to. They go on Instagram<sup>65</sup> and they're like, 'oh my gosh, this girl is so gorgeous'. But she has makeup on, so you don't really know whether she is really gorgeous or if it's the makeup, but that's what they're falling in love with. Men now are changing what they like because they are seeing the way women are portrayed and they want that standard."*

Naomi's observation thus summarises how globalized mainstream beauty images unsettle nationalist gender norms as men shed local nationalist and ethnic preferences, such as curvier women, for more globalized, modernised, and cosmopolitan versions of femininity that represent their elevated status as members of the African diaspora. In short, African masculinities remain attached to emphasized femininity based both on nationalist discourses of gender and globalized standards of racialized beauty. However, postcolonial constructions of race and nationalist gender ideals, through the display of a particular cultural femininity, are diluted and classed by other markers of modernity, such as education and careers, within the context of a new pan-African identity and diaspora community in Canada. Furthermore, the entrance into a predominantly middle-class society and "consumer citizenship" impacts African masculinities as many men are no longer able to give women financial support for their beauty practices as they previously could in their home countries. Nevertheless, some women admitted that while African men may not be able to be as generous with them regarding their beauty practices once they migrate to Canada, the introduction of budget-friendly alternatives, like

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<sup>65</sup> A photo and video sharing social networking service.

thrift stores, makes it possible to still invest in their beauty practices to attract men depending on their preferences. As Ayana, a young single Nigerian woman, explained,

*“You can look good on a budget here so there’s a higher chance of wanting to look good for your partner. There’s a tendency of looking good no matter how hard you try to look horrible in a place like this. You can look good on a budget because of things like thrift stores. ‘Shopping on a budget’ in Nigeria means you have to go to the market whereas here there are fitting rooms and washing machines so looking good for your partner is easier here.”*

While migration for many men and women means a downward shift in class, for some women in the sample migration provides new access to beauty products, skills, and tools they previously did not have. As such, even if they are not able to afford the beauty practices they truly desire, they are still able to participate in global and cosmopolitan versions of femininity by consuming beauty and looking good for their partners. In addition to class, new public discourses of sexuality shape this space and women’s practices as Ayana continued,

*“Plus, in a western country like this, the naked girls here make it easy for men to cheat. There’s also a higher level of gays and lesbianism so you want to look good to the person you want to be attracted to you. You want the person to know, ‘I’m for you, I’m not a lesbian, I like men!’ You just have to be more. The culture here is different so you just always want to look good.”*

While Ayana was the only woman to blatantly articulate this point, many women expressed versions of this sentiment. Firstly, the hyper-sexualized culture in Canada sharply contrasts with conservative African cultures where sex is a mostly taboo topic and modesty is prized as part of being a “good African woman” (Tamale, 2011; Gontijo, 2021; Reid & Walker, 2006; Arnfred, 2004). Secondly, homophobia is rampant within most African cultures as heterosexuality is publicly promoted as the nationalist norm (Tamale, 2013; Dlamini, 2006; Epprecht, 2009). Thus, women like Ayana expressed initial intimidation, when they first migrated, by all the “naked

girls” that symbolize the sexual liberation they supposedly lack and which African men apparently desire. This further highlights the ways in which African women have internalized racist feminist tropes about the “Third World woman” (Mohanty, 1991:51) as sexually constrained and tradition-bound compared with the representation of Western women as modern, liberated, and having control over their bodies and sexualities. Furthermore, the visible extensive presence of LGBTQ2+<sup>66</sup> individuals, communities, and their rights challenges African women’s heteronormativity values which oftentimes leads to gendered displays of hyper-femininity, through beauty consumption, that lets men know they are available for heterosexual relationships. In sum, migration, discourses of multiculturalism, race, gender, class, masculinity, and sexuality infiltrate the private, through men’s intercultural encounters in public, by reforming nationalist masculinities thereby shaping interpersonal relationships and influencing how women navigate the home.

### ***Diverse Men & Exoticizing Racisms***

While some women in the study engage in heterosexual relationships with African and black men only, others find that new intercultural encounters in the public expand their choices for prospective partners once they migrate to Canada. Furthermore, racialized constructions of beauty play a role in the formation of African women’s heterosexual interracial/intercultural intimacies as their bodies become “objects of exotic and racial fascination” (hooks, 2000:96). In other words, racial difference and cultural diversity have historically been a source of erotic fascination and black women’s contemporary romances are implicated in this longstanding

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<sup>66</sup> Canadian acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Two-spirited.

sexualized attraction (Ratele, 2004; Meszaros & Bazzaroni, 2014; Pyke 2010). Accordingly, these intimate intercultural encounters highlight the paradox of the black female body as bad and ugly, exotic and sexually desirable, feared and yet desired, and sought out in forbidden white sexual adventures and fantasies (Meszaros & Bazzaroni 2014; hooks, 2005; Ratele, 2004; Seck, 2013). Many women in this study echoed similar experiences of having their bodies eroticized, exoticized, and fetishized by diverse groups of men in Canadian society. Consequently, this section highlights how the public is ever present in the private space of the home through men's "exoticizing racisms" which seep into heterosexual intercultural relationships, thereby racializing women through historical colonial fantasies of Blackness which results in them being fetishized and eroticized.

### ***Dark Skin fetishes***

This racialization process in heterosexual relationships occurs primarily through colourism as some white, black, Arab and Asian men express strong preferences for either dark or light black skin. For example, Adaeze, a single Nigerian woman, shared how she has observed that her experiences with white men tend to be "shrouded in blatant fetishization" as hyper-focus on the colour of her skin is a part of her dating experiences. She also observed how women with lighter skin are treated better and further elaborated,

*"Men tend to be colour struck, like a fetishization, with the 'other'. I find white men fetishize dark skin and black men fetishize light/white skin."*

Similarly, Sanaa, a single Zimbabwean woman who admitted that her beauty practices change based on whether she is with a black or white man, shared that she found many white men in

Canada tend to prefer dark skinned girls with natural hair while African and black men tend to prefer white women. As she shared,

*“I hadn’t relaxed my hair since dating an Italian man who liked the natural look and less makeup. Then I started dating a black man who liked the more dolled up look. I do it for the need of approval. Especially because in Canada white men like the darker skin and natural hair like a fetish. Dark skin has a niche here with men wanting to date the darkest girl.”*

Shani, a single Rwandese woman, also expressed that she has experienced white men’s fascination with her dark skin and dreadlocks,

*“I find my natural hair and dark skin are what attract white men. Maybe they are fascinated? This one white man even told me ‘your skin is beautiful’, like who says that? I find myself wondering do they like me for me, or they want to experience dating a black woman? Am I an experience for them? What are we really doing here? So, I ask them, ‘have you been with a black woman?’ And the way they answer that question points to what’s really going on.”*

Likewise, Aiysha, a newly single Ghanaian woman, shared similar concerns of men wanting to be with her simply because she is a black woman and how she navigates interracial encounters now that she is single. She candidly shared her worries that, after being in a seven-year relationship, dating with her natural hair and her darker skin on dating apps may either not attract any men or attract men that are more fascinated in her difference than genuinely interested in who she is as a woman and potential partner. She further elaborated,

*“When I say I’ve dated outside of my race I’m very conscious and cautious of the type of person that I’m dating. I will only date the types that are not dating me because you think that it’s a fad or trend or some sort of fetish for you to be with a black woman. These men respect and understand diversity, racism, stereotyping. There’s an appreciation, curiosity and sensitivity for black culture and heritage. Like when I have short hair, I get more compliments from white men and the black men who are more conscious that natural beauty is beautiful.”*

Adding to this, Makanaka, a Zimbabwean woman dating a Ghanaian man, also shared the tensions that she has experienced while navigating intercultural relationships,

*“Black men want a natural hair woman but don’t like the reality of the natural look ‘cause they are attracted to the Cardi B and Niki Minaj<sup>67</sup>. On the flip side, white men will say things to me like ‘I don’t usually like black girls, but I like you’. Or ‘I’m not attracted to black girls, but I find you attractive.’ I see these as insults and not the compliments they are meant as! But maybe they tend to be comfortable with my natural hair ‘cause of my Eurocentric features and being conventionally beautiful by Eurocentric standards along with my articulate accent compared to darker skinned women. So, I recognize I’m able to be comfortable in my own skin ‘cause I’m conventionally attractive as opposed to other women who have to perform a certain type of beauty or femininity to be considered beautiful.”*

Furthermore, in addition to their hair and skin being fetishized, women shared their experiences of men’s eroticization of black female sexuality. For example, Haseena, a single Nigerian woman, shared her experience of a dating an Iranian man who blatantly admitted that he only wanted to be intimate with her simply because he had never been with an African woman,

*“They can’t differentiate between Blackness and sex. He wanted to sleep with me because he said he had never been with a black woman. They just want to say they have been with a black girl. They sexualize that Blackness, you know.”*

Ayana, another single Nigerian woman, also chimed in the conversation sharing her own experience with an older white Canadian man who took an interest in her and relentlessly pursued her, expressing his desires to have her as his companion on international trips. As she put it,

*“I think white adult men are attracted to young black women because they see black women as sexual.”*

Likewise, Makhosi, a Zimbabwean woman, shared

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<sup>67</sup> Popular Hip-Hop black female artists.

*“Back home when a man is pursuing you, you kind of know that he probably wants to sleep with you but at least he makes an effort to buy you dinner, take you to movies, this and that sweet nothings. Here it’s like automatically because I am a black woman that they think I will easily sleep with them, they don’t even try. It’s just all about wanting to be with me because they think I’m a freak like all the things they’ve heard about black women in bed.”*

Jahmelia, a Rwandese woman, similarly explained,

*“Being a black woman is like an aphrodisiac for some of these men I tell you. All you need to do to be sexy is be black, that’s it. Before they get to know me, they are already asking all these sexual questions. It’s confusing because they don’t like black people, but they find black women sexy, I don’t understand that.”*

Thus, African women’s intimate interracial encounters highlight the ways in which the historical eroticization of the ‘other’ is prevailing and evokes fascination and curiosity within the home. Moreover, these women’s experiences highlight several key themes regarding the ways in which racialized sexuality shapes the home through heterosexual relationships. Firstly, the women in this study who have dated non-African men noted the distinct differences between white men and African men’s preferences. According to these women, white men want darker skinned women with natural short hair and black men want lighter skinned/white women with long straight hair. Given that dark skin in local nationalist contexts is discriminated against, African women who have darker skin tones find more interest from men once they arrive in Canada. As Sanaa put it, dark skin has a niche in Canada. However, it is interesting to note that the same negative stereotypes and tropes about Africa that women seek to distance themselves from when they migrate, like “looking jungle and local”, are the very same ones that are reinforced in their heterosexual relationships. In other words, white men’s preferences for darker skinned women with natural hair is the type of femininity that African women in the previous chapter referred to as “a local girl who looks like she’s from the jungle”. As such, intercultural

heterosexual relationships shape the home through negative racial stereotypes that reinforce the notion that African women are inferior, wild, uncivilized, promiscuous, and over-sexed. These stereotypes also influence perceptions of sexuality as women's Blackness is sexualized through colonial tropes and fantasies (Meszaros & Bazzaroni 2014; hooks, 2005; Ratele, 2004; Seck, 2013). Moreover, while many women admitted to enjoying the newfound notoriety from men's increased attention and interest, they remained wary as they question whether men are attracted to them as individuals or if they are merely interested in being with a black woman for the first time. Furthermore, not all dark-skinned African women enjoy the same attentions as white men are more comfortable with black women that approximate white standards, like Eurocentric features and good accents, whereas other black women still grapple with limiting gendered racialization processes in their intimate relationships. In short, women's racialized identities are sexualized and erotic fascination becomes the overarching theme in these relationships, as well as the source of much angst and apprehension, as women's other personal qualities are relegated to the background.

### ***"Light Skin is the Right Skin"***

While diverse groups of men find dark skin appealing, light skin continues to be "the right skin" especially while navigating predominantly white norms. Consequently, African women end up engaging in skin bleaching to achieve the desired lighter skin tone. For example, Naomi, who is a light skinned Nigerian woman married to a Nigerian man, shared her thoughts on the pervasiveness of colourism in intimate relationships,

*“It’s more acceptable to be lighter. It makes me more beautiful to be lighter. People don’t wanna be dark. They are still skin bleaching to be lighter so it’s clear that lighter is more desirable and even the lighter ones are trying to look even lighter.”*

Ruwa, a young Zimbabwean woman dating a Nigerian man, shared similar sentiments of how whiteness and light skin are highly esteemed,

*“People still see lighter skin as more beautiful and its subconscious too. Like people wanting white partners when first arriving in Canada. I used to be like that but over time I’ve started to realize where that comes from. It’s a bit of the colonial mindset. It’s fine to love whoever but for the right reasons.”*

Lela, a single dark-skinned Zimbabwean woman, shared her ambiguous feelings about skin bleaching. When asked if she has bleached her skin she responded,

*“No, ‘cause I’m conscious of the health risks and don’t want to be associated with not loving my skin even though lighter skin colour is perceived as better. I don’t see different treatment from men as a darker skinned woman but I find I’m not as appealing, welcomed, of a certain caliber compared to women with whiter or lighter skin.”*

On the other hand, Shani, a single Rwandese woman, shared how she had in fact received different treatment as a darker skinned woman through comments from some white men who make it apparent that women who are white, tall, blonde, and have blue eyes are the standard of beauty. This further highlights the contradictions women face in their heterosexual relationships as they are simultaneously fetishized, as highlighted earlier, and excluded/deemed unattractive for having dark skin. As such, Shani’s incidents have made her feel like she is frequently and indirectly being told, “you are not the standard”, leaving her questioning why the standard of beauty cannot be something else other than white women. She further went onto share how this rejection of black women generally and dark skin specifically leads African women

to pursue light skin at all costs as she knows women who use bleaching creams regularly. She elaborated,

*“I know women who are still using lightening creams to fit in as an immigrant, foreigner, black woman. We live in a society that is bombarding you with all these things you should be. Truth be told, we all want to be confident. We all want to be beautiful. We all want to feel like we fit in. So, if we live in a society that is telling us ‘you are not enough’, they (the women who use lightening creams) are obviously going to pursue what it takes to feel like they are enough to be chosen by men and given opportunities.”*

Therefore, in addition to men’s “exoticizing racisms” shaping this private space, colourism more specifically does so too as light skin is highly valued by certain groups of men, thereby leading some women to pursue lighter skin at all costs. For the women who choose not to bleach their skin for various personal and health reasons, the public consensus that light skin is more beautiful continues to leave them with ambivalent feelings in their heterosexual relationships. However, rather than the manifestations of a “colonial mindset”, as Ruwa put it, some women see men’s preferences for certain skin-tones like any other preferences one has. For example, Chinelo, a Zambian woman who is tall and dark skinned, noted how she has experienced different treatment as a black woman but not necessarily as a dark-skinned woman. She gave the example of how when her and her best friend, a petite light skinned Ethiopian woman, go out to social events men will tend to gravitate towards her friend. However, rather than taking offense, she explained that men could be drawn to her friend for a myriad of layered reasons other than her skin tone including her personality, body shape, and nationality. Similarly, Shaina, a single Kenyan woman, also shared how rather than skin tone discrimination, it may be more about men’s personal preferences,

*“I don’t even know what’s normal and what’s not anymore when it comes to skin tones. Maybe I’m blind to it. Like if there were seven black men and fifty white men, I’d go for the*

*black men, so I see it as preference. Even for men who like light skinned women, I see that as preference.”*

Likewise, Zuri, a single Nigerian woman, explained that she has not experienced any skin tone discrimination as a dark-skinned Nigerian woman and rather attributed the reasons men were not pursuing her in Canada to cultural differences. As she put it,

*“I never felt like I was not beautiful in Canada. I just noticed men were not checking for me like they do back home and maybe it’s not cause of the beauty standards here but that Nigerian men are more expressive and persistent about approaching you and getting your number.”*

Thus, these examples reveal that although some men may find darker skinned African women more attractive, for other men light skin in heterosexual partnership selection is still prioritised. This preference for light skin inevitably results in some women feeling the pressure to bleach their skin so they can find romantic partners and other professional/personal opportunities in Canada. Furthermore, as Ruwa noted, some African women also do whatever they need to do to attract white partners as white privilege is believed to offer them protection from racism while providing access to opportunities that are not available to black immigrants. While on the one hand women’s intimate desires for white partners is partly symptomatic of internalized racism (Pyke, 2010), it also highlights the ways in which everyday racism is inherent in intercultural encounters such that women strategically engage with white hegemonic masculinity so they can subvert interlocking structures of power through their heterosexual relationships. However, for some women, the ambivalent feelings and tensions that arise from these intimate racial nuances are too complex and cause women to disregard racial undertones in their relationships. Consequently, women chalk up their challenges of finding a romantic partner to men’s personal

preferences and differences in masculinities as African men back home are considered more expressive and persistent in their pursuits of women compared to men in Canada.

In sum, African women's heterosexual encounters of difference are intimately characterized by everyday exoticizing racisms (Essed, 2002; Nakagawa & Arzubaga, 2014; Meszaros & Bazzaroni, 2014) that manifest as their bodies are fetishized, eroticized and exoticized. Thus, the above section has highlighted the paradox that exists in this private space as discourses of race, gender, colourism, class, and sexuality reshape the meaning of the home through heterosexual relationships. On the one hand, African women's dark skin is fetishized while on the other, light skin continues to be highly esteemed. Therefore, these relationships in the private sphere shed light on the ways in which systemic racism seeps into the everyday intimacies of African women's lives and affects their heterosexual relationships thereby impacting their agency. Consequently, the home, in diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism, underscores the ways in which normalized public acts of everyday racism, those systematic practices of discrimination, also reinforce underlying relations of gendered and racialized power between dominant and minority groups on an intimate intercultural level in the private.

## **Conclusion**

Through processes of migration, globalization, and new technologies the meaning of the home in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism is reshaped on multiple levels through African transnational families and intercultural heterosexual relationships.

Subsequently, tensions inevitably arise within this space as the interplay between everyday

multiculturalism and the African diaspora cause the local and global, traditional and modern, public and private to collide in complex ways. Consequently, these symbiotic collisions are manifested in different combinations depending on whether African women are navigating their family or heterosexual relationships. As such, this chapter has endeavored to highlight the ways in which nationalist constructions of femininity and postcolonial constructions of race, asserted by African transnational families, unfold and reshape the significance the of home. Furthermore, discourses of multiculturalism manifest in contradictory ways, through skin tone fetishes and sexualized colonial tropes of Blackness within intercultural encounters, so that this space is never completely private or impervious to larger racist structures inherent in multicultural practice.

Thus, this chapter has argued that new intercultural encounters and discourses of multiculturalism, race, and gender permeate the home thereby enabling women to move beyond the confines of diasporic culture, nationalist norms, and familial standards to demonstrate agency over their bodies through new freedoms. In other words, the home is where African women are able to enjoy decisional privacy and continued identity reformation practices as public discourses of multiculturalism, race, class, and gender perforate this space to provide women with alternative appearance options so they can shed nationalist constructions of femininity. Furthermore, the geographical and cultural distance created through migration allows women a degree of agency over their bodies because their families do not have as much sway over their appearances unless the women choose to send them pictures. In this way, the home is a private space where African women are able to cultivate their individuality and identity, separate from nationalist/ethnic expectations, in the context of a new multicultural

society. However, the influence of African transnational families, through diasporic culture and long-distance nationalism, is not entirely effaced as women navigate nationalist norms of gender and postcolonial constructions of race perpetuated by the family. As such, African women show that their racialized identities and beauty practices can be exclusively nationalist, pan-African, multicultural, or an amalgamation so that the home is also characterised by these different and sometimes contradicting features. Furthermore, racist norms are often generationally internalized and reproduced by the women within African families as they too prescribe to a specific American-Eurocentric image of straight long hair, slim bodies, and light skin. However, beyond internalized racism, this African immigrant woman archetype is considered a tactical adaptation and what many families believe will enable their female relatives to successfully navigate a predominantly white society while minimizing racism and discrimination in Canadian society. In short, as African femininity is reconstructed in the private there is a simultaneous revalorization and destabilizing of diasporic culture and nationalist gender norms within the home through both the presence of cultural diversity in the public and the distance from homes on the continent that migration creates.

Moreover, this chapter has argued that the public shapes the home as African men are implicated in migration and racialization processes within Canadian society through new forms of heterosexualized masculinity, class, and sexuality. In other words, everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora simultaneously influence African men, through globalization and access to new technologies, thereby reshaping this space through African patriarchy, nationalist norms of gender and diverse hybrid masculinities. Furthermore, this interactive relationship between the

diaspora and everyday multiculturalism creates tensions and contradictions as African men desire a type of blended 'glocal' African femininity that is both globalized and nationalist. In other words, African women's heterosexual relationships shape the home through transnational diasporic culture expressed by long-distance nationalism, the continental male gaze that becomes globalized, as well as nationalist constructions of femininity and respectability. As such, the home is synchronously a private space shaped by Canadian discourses of multiculturalism and black femininity as well as a space where nationalist gender norms are revalorized, reproduced, and rejected. Consequently, women's agency in this space is channeled by gendered nationalist projects as well as exoticizing racisms from diverse groups of men. Therefore, while the home is recognised as a private space in feminist and postcolonial scholarship, in the context of African women's experiences within this study, it is not impervious to the influence of Canadian discourses of multiculturalism which seep in through intercultural encounters in the public to interrupt the pressures of diasporic culture while perpetuating racist gender ideologies and negative stereotypes of African women. Thus, in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism, the home is shaped by nationalist norms of gender, postcolonial constructions of race, discourses of multiculturalism, race, gender, class and sexuality through African transnational families and heterosexual relationships.

# Chapter 5: The Church

## The African Diaspora Through Aesthetic Nationalism

### *Background*

“I don’t know if I can say that I am so religious like that but one thing I know for sure is that when I miss home, I go to church. It’s where I feel the most comfortable to be an African woman, like that proper African woman that is all dressed up and extra, you feel me?”  
-Marini, Ghanaian woman

Marini, a 30-something Ghanaian woman, admitted she has a complex relationship with religion but growing up in Ghana and in a Christian home meant that church attendance every Sunday was mandatory. Although she went out of duty and obligation, she shared that once she moved to Canada she stopped going and reclaimed her Sundays as her own so she could sleep in, catch up on domestic chores, and watch her favourite shows. However, after a couple of years when the novelty of independence as a new immigrant wore off, she found herself searching for a church where she now willingly attends every week. When asked what changed since she first arrived in Canada, she candidly explained that although she does not consider herself religious in the formal sense of the word, church has been the only place that satiates her yearning for home while also providing her a sense of community, belonging, and reprieve from some of the challenges black women face living in a multicultural society. Particularly, she enjoys the liberty to dress to the nines, something she feels she is not able to do during the week in other spaces, and be among other African women who are doing the same while celebrating each other. As such, the church in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism becomes a space where women are able to use their beauty practices to cultivate kinship and a “home away from home.”

Africans have a world-renowned reputation for being “notoriously religious” (Mbiti, 1969:1). Consequently, religion is a key feature for African immigrants in the diaspora as it provides a vital sense of self-identity conveyed through a sanctuary of diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic communities. As such, studies on religion in the African diaspora have conceptualized it in the context of decolonisation, migration, and transnationality (Barber, 2011; Cohen, 1999; Geertz, 1993; Schuler, 2008; Counted, 2019; Aechtner, 2015; Adogame, 2008). Specifically, the church within the context of the African diaspora is a place for immigrants to find social and spiritual integration as well as achieve a sense of belonging through Africanized values in a globalized context (Cazarin, 2019; Akyeampong, 2000; Adogame & Spickard, 2010). As such, the church fosters integration into a new society and establishes a frame of reference for the preservation, transformation, and transmission of moral, national, and evolving cultural identities. However, in some instances, the church also intensifies balkanization as immigrants remain within their ethnic/nationalist communities, thereby impeding social cohesion within the broader host society. Nevertheless, the church offers belonging into collective, individual, and transformative nationalist projects within a diasporic network. In short, the church for African immigrants serves as the loci for identity and community as well as the avenue for adapting into the host country through social networks that create community (Creese, 2011; Tettey & Pupilampu, 2005; Griffith & Savage).

More specifically, African women tend to migrate with their religion in a way that reinforces their gendered racialized identity in the diaspora. Therefore, while only just over half of the women in the sample identified as “practicing Christians” who attend church services and

gatherings weekly, most of the other women in the study were still able to speak to the relevance of religion in African culture and the role of the church in their lives as immigrants in Canada. Accordingly, this chapter focuses more on the social and nationalist, rather than religious, meaning of the church. In particular, the church is relevant for African women in Canada as one of the “niches of belonging” (Creese, 2011:210) while they face racialized exclusion and marginalization in other social spaces. In other words, beyond its religious role, the church in the context of the African diaspora is also an important social location for women through experiences of diasporic community. As such, the black African immigrant experience in a multicultural context shapes emerging notions of community and struggles over belonging in unique ways (Creese, 2011). Thus, scholars have theorised the “new African diaspora in Canada” as referring to black African immigrants and imagined notions of Africa as a continental homeland in the context of similar experiences of unbelonging in new spaces of settlement (Creese, 2011; Tettey & Pampalu, 2005; Aechtner, 2015). These studies distinctly focus on recent migrants from Africa, rather than the larger population of African descent, in a multicultural, liberal individualistic, and white privilege context that produces distinct forms of transnational community and identity through the diaspora.

Additionally, as this chapter will highlight, the formation of the diaspora community within Canadian society is also deeply gendered as it is created through postcolonial constructions of race and manifested in nationalist practices of femininity as cultural and national identities are transformed. The previous chapter pointed out the ways in which the home is a transnational private space shaped by the public through discourses of

multiculturalism, African patriarchy, race, gender, class, and sexuality. Moreover, the home is where African women navigate their racialized identities, transnational families, and heterosexual relationships as an emerging pan-African identity and diasporic culture constructs femininity in the private through nationalist gendered projects. On the other hand, as this chapter will reveal, the church is a public space where the African diaspora moves beyond the private individual and interpersonal contexts to deliberately shape broader notions of a visible pan-African community within Canadian society.

As such, how does the African diaspora publicly forge notions of community and a collective identity through women's beauty practices within the church? This chapter argues that migration invokes a pan-African identity through new notions of the African diaspora community in Canada which is profoundly gendered, bound by postcolonial racial formations, embodied through continental aesthetic nationalism, and linked to the broader Canadian society in several ways. Firstly, the African diaspora claims this public space as it constructs the church into a semi-private place for community. In other words, while everyday multiculturalism infiltrates the private to challenge and interrupt diasporic culture in the home and personal self, the African diaspora takes prominence through the church as it occupies this public space for its own cultural practice, identity, and collective community formation in the presence of cultural diversity. In short, ethnic-national identities are prioritised over a Black identity as nationalist culture is revalorized. Moreover, the public-private dichotomy is dismantled further as the diaspora often moves beyond its own community by permeating other parts of this public space through African women carrying continental aesthetic nationalism into other congregations with

racially and ethnically diverse members. Secondly, the church illustrates how everyday multiculturalism, and some of its racist prejudices, reframes Africanness and reconceptualizes nationalities into a larger pan-African identity. In other words, articulations of Blackness from racialization processes within Canadian society are traded for a pan-African identity because the church space is experienced as a distinctly “African thing” that eclipses individual national and ethnic identities, as well as globalized constructions of race. This racial shift is best demonstrated in what I refer to as the collective “African gospel of dress to impress” which is used to cultivate a strong diasporic community and identity through continental aesthetic nationalism. As such, the African diaspora utilizes the church as a communal space for the resistance of racialized marginalization in the broader Canadian society while shaping a new sense of belonging through notions of community and a larger inclusive continental identity. In short, the church is the playground for the pan-African identity as well as a public space to rethink and reimagine the African diaspora’s relationship to Canadian society and its own community through gendered nationalist practices.

While processes of homogenization and socio-economic marginalization within multicultural practice facilitates this pan-African identity, it does not erase ethnic and national features. Rather, this pan-African identity captures the diaspora’s racial and cultural commonalities despite vast differences in language, ethnicity, and geographical origin. Accordingly, the African diaspora is defined by a collective identity that binds it to the homeland continent and to each other through new forms of community within Canada. As such, the pan-African identity of this diaspora community is marked by intersectionality and hybridization as

racial, national, and ethnic identities are layered into a broader collective identity. Consequently, this complex identity impacts women's agency in the church. Thus, as this chapter argues, women's agency in the church is conflicting and ambiguous as it is channeled by postcolonial racial formations, African patriarchy, and nationalist norms of gender including piety, modesty, and respectability. However, women exercise their agency in other parts of this public space, particularly non-African churches, by choosing to still practice continental aesthetic nationalism to raise cultural awareness and revalorize cultural values in the midst of intercultural encounters. Furthermore, these public intercultural encounters interrupt diasporic pressures to provide African women with new forms of freedom through causal alternatives of dress to Sunday church services.

Accordingly, this chapter unfolds by starting with the African "gospel of dress to impress" followed by the accompanying diasporic pressures, nationalist norms of gender, and African women's presence in other congregations with racially and ethnically diverse members. The chapter concludes by reiterating how the African diaspora transforms the public space of the church into a semi-private one where a pan-African identity and new notions of community emerge as racialization processes within Canadian society are resisted and nationalist culture is revalorized in the midst of intercultural encounters. As such, this chapter fits in the overall thesis as it highlights how women's racialized identities are reinscribed by a pan-African one which incorporates ethnic and national features into a broader continental identity. Furthermore, the African diaspora redefines this public space for semi-private purposes through new forms of

community and belonging within Canadian society as demonstrated through nationalist constructions of femininity and continental aesthetic nationalism.

### **The African Gospel of Dress to Impress**

African women migrate with cultural norms of dressing up in their finest attire for church and this powerful practice reveals that there is not a complete disconnect between women's religious experiences and nationalist expressions in the African diaspora and the continent itself (Griffith & Savage, 2006; Akyeampong, 2000; Howard, 2011; Pinn, 2009; Adogame, 2008). In other words, African expressions of religion and embodiment are shaped by theology as well as aesthetics where fashion and faith are conflated into a "theology of aesthetics" (Pinn, 2009:175). This theology of aesthetics for African Christians is about presenting "your best self before God". Furthermore, in the context of a multicultural society that has historically depicted black people as inferior and unattractive, dressing up in Sunday Best is an opportunity for African women to look good and feel significant given negative stereotypes and racialized tropes about Africa that women mentioned in previous chapters. In other words, this public space becomes a place of belonging and sentimental recollection of the continent through fashionable aesthetic nationalism. This collective African experience 'preaches a common gospel of dressing to impress' on Sunday mornings which women in the sample faithfully adhered to. As Malaika, a Nigerian woman who attends a predominantly African church, exclaimed,

*"I find as Africans Sunday is that day to dress up!"*

Callista, a Beninese woman who attends a racially and culturally diverse congregation, shared similar sentiments,

*“Church I think is an African thing. You dress as fancy as possible!”*

Additionally, Chinelo, a Zambian woman who attends a predominantly white Canadian congregation, remarked,

*“It’s a culture thing going to church dressed to the nines.”*

Marini, the Ghanaian woman who identified as non-religious but still attends an African church, shared,

*“If there is a way to say someone is African without looking at their skin or I.D., it’s to look at how we dress. Just go to any church and you will see. Sometimes it’s like Africa Fashion Week! Even for myself, I find that dressing up in Canada is not the same as back home but when I go to church, I can dress up and don’t have to worry about being the only African cause we are many who look the same. We are black and we look good!”*

Likewise, Fahari, a Beninese woman who attends a racially and culturally diverse congregation, shared,

*“Africans are known for all sorts of negative things like poverty, corruption, diseases, war, famine, all of that but one of the good things we can claim with proud confidence is that we KNOW how to dress! Haaaa, that we do very well. Just look for us in any church and you will see that we are always the best dressed no matter what, it’s like our signature.”*

Similarly, Makhosi, a Zimbabwean Christian woman who attends a black church, elaborated,

*“Yes, church is very important to me. Not only for my faith because this immigrant life is hard sometimes, but also just to have a bit of home with me. I don’t know where it came from but what I know is we dress up for church, that is the way we do things. Obviously, Africa is not a country but even still with all our differences I find that we are on one same page when it comes to dressing up for church.”*

Furthermore, Adia, a devout Christian Congolese woman, shared,

*“I dress up when going to church because it is the House of God and I believe it’s important to always dress up. Also like since moving to Canada, I find continuing to dress up keeps home alive for me and reminds me that I am an African and I can be proud of it because we always look so good when we are all dressed up.”*

As such, these examples highlight how women associate being African with dressing well for church. In other words, belonging to the African diaspora community in Canada is marked by gendered practices of continental aesthetic nationalism through fashion. While African men also dress up for church to a certain extent, mainly in suits or smart casual attire, there is certainly not the same emphasis placed on men's bodies as there is on women through religious-nationalist constructions of femininity. Accordingly, what is unique about African women's conception of the diaspora community is that it moves beyond simplistic connections through racialized identities, as well as ethnic and nationalist culture to prioritise women's experiences. Given that constructions of the nation and diaspora are founded on patriarchal norms, women are able to identify with the community and participate as members by making the pan-African identity synonymous with being fashionable. Furthermore, in the context of racialization processes within Canadian society, the church is one of the few spaces where women feel comfortable expressing this African identity without fear of racial discrimination or exclusion. As Adina, a Cameroonian woman who occasionally attends church, shared,

*"I like to go to church because the moment you walk in, it's all these beautiful colourful clothes that everyone is wearing, Africa in one room. Their hair is on point, the clothes are stunning, everything looks good. I like when I dress up for church because nobody is looking at me funny or asking me questions. You just see your African sister and right away it's all compliments, compliments, compliments! Everywhere else people can look down on us because we are black but when we come to the church, it's like we are the queens, it's our territory."*

Laila, a Nigerian woman, added,

*"I like lots of bold colours and have many traditional outfits but every time I wear them to some places, I can see people looking at me like I am weird or maybe they are just not used to seeing so many colours on one person, I don't know. I feel like when I go on*

*Sundays that is the best place for me to wear them because everyone there is dressing fancy. It's our people, our culture as Africans to dress up but sometimes I see that in many of these places everybody else is not dressing up the same so church is that one place where we can dress up."*

Likewise, Lela, a Zimbabwean woman who has to dress conservatively for her government job, shared that Sunday is the day when she gets to dress up the most,

*"Going to church is when I dress up and put on the most makeup to express my creativity because my work in the provincial government is restrictive."*

Furthermore, Mbalenhle, a Ugandan woman who attends an Ottawa church regularly, shared,

*"There is nowhere else in this city that I can go where I can dress up the way I do at church. It's like going to a big event where there is a red carpet and everything. I look forward to it on Sundays and during the week I'm already thinking about what outfit I'm going to wear. It makes me feel good because even though we all come from different countries, dressing up makes me feel connected to other African women. It's one of the places in Canada where we can say it is ours because we can do things like we do at home, and we don't have to follow a foreign culture."*

In sum, African women see the church as the main space where they are able to express their African identity through cultural practices of dressing up. Accordingly, the church provides women with a space to escape racialization processes within Canadian society while connecting with the diaspora community based on those very differences that are unwelcome in other public places. Furthermore, the collective gospel of dress to impress highlights the gendered formation of the diaspora community, through its expression in the church, as women repeatedly referred to the cultural, rather than religious, reasons for dressing up. Consequently, women regarding the church as "an African thing" bears witness to how this space comes to strongly represent the pan-African identity and new forms of diasporic community within Canadian society. In short, the church becomes a space that exclusively belongs to the diaspora

in the midst of cultural diversity. This is demonstrated by the fact that whether women are attending a predominantly African, Canadian, or multiethnic church they continue to sustain this pan-African identity and gendered nationalist practice as a form of personal and cultural pride. In other words, as women attend primarily African or black congregations, the pan-African identity is used to connect to the diaspora community by embodying nationalist constructions of femininity. Moreover, as women navigate white Canadian or multiethnic/racial churches, the pan-African identity is a way to resist racial discrimination by embodying a racialized identity that has positive cultural connotations. In short, the pan-African identity, as displayed through fashion, is a way for women to revalorize nationalist culture within the diaspora community and Canadian society.

This reveals that, unlike other spaces in the immigrant experience within Canada, the church is one of the key places where the African diaspora is able to establish a strong sense of home and community within the public, as well as display continental aesthetic nationalism through women's bodies. Moreover, the adoption of a pan-African identity allows women to momentarily escape gendered racialization processes of multicultural practice in order to indulge in the full expression of African femininity. As such, Sunday is the one day that the women are able to adorn and immerse themselves in their beauty practices as church services usually start after ten in the morning, unlike weekdays when their workdays start much earlier, so they have more time to dress themselves and fully engage in their beauty rituals which women said can take anywhere from an hour and a half to two hours. Furthermore, women noted that during the week they often have to be more practical and conservative in the way

they dress in order to accommodate the weather, public transportation, professional dress codes, and other public spaces. Thus, this highlights how the church also briefly suspends the daily influence of intercultural encounters to prioritize the diasporic community and African values. In short, the presence of the African diaspora in this space allows women to embody a pan-African identity, expressed through continental aesthetic nationalism, as a way to connect to the diaspora community while subverting gendered racialization processes within Canadian society.

### ***African Diaspora Pressures***

However, while women are able to enjoyably cultivate this pan-African identity through fashion, the church can also be a space of great tension and pressure for women as they endure the “burden of representation” (Yuval-Davis, 2003:17). Like the home, the ‘church family’ has a vested interest in how women uphold the diaspora’s ethnocultural boundaries and identity as African patriarchy reproduces nationalist constructions of femininity, piety, modesty, class, and sexuality within this space. Furthermore, discourses of multiculturalism do not hold much value in this space as women negotiate the pan-African identity through the lens of postcolonial racial formations, ethnic identities, and gendered nationalist projects instead. In short, while the church gives African women a reprieve from the challenges of navigating racialization processes within Canadian society, it replaces those with localized pressure for them to adhere to diasporic cultural values. Subsequently, this impacts women’s agency as tension arises between upholding the pan-African identity, displayed through nationalist constructions of femininity, and African women’s individual beauty practices.

As such, this tension highlights African women's ongoing struggles with a collective cultural identity, individual beauty practices, and representations of community. For example, Naomi, who attends a Nigerian church in Toronto, expressed the immense pressure that she experiences every Sunday. She shared how she feels more pressure in the Nigerian church she attends than at her workplace, where she is a Customer Service representative, because in her words, *"at work I feel like they don't mind how you look! Whereas the overall appearance of the Nigerian church is one where I have to dress up and wear makeup"*. Resultantly, every Sunday she goes through the stress of feeling like she doesn't have anything to wear to church (even with a wardrobe full of choices) because she doesn't want to repeat outfits and show up looking unpresentable. She further elaborated,

*"Over here in Canada, I don't think they pay too much attention to how you look. Maybe they do, I'm not sure. But I know back home, in Africa for sure, it's a big thing. That culture is still in you of looking good everywhere you go. Even here in Canada especially to church. Because I go to a Nigerian church, I won't lie, it kind of puts pressure on me cause I'm like 'oh my gosh, what am I going to wear?' Because I find the majority of the people who come to church are always in heels, always hair done, hair laid, and stuff like that. So, I'm always always trying to figure out what to wear all the time. I can't show up like what the cat dragged in, so I wake up extra early on Sundays."*

Similarly, Runako, a Zimbabwean woman who attends an African church and works in the not-for-profit industry, shared,

*"What's important regarding my beauty practices depends on where I am going. When I'm going to work, I place low priority on hair and makeup. Whereas when I'm going to church, hair, makeup, and clothes are a lot more important for me. In church, makeup is a must because of other African women whereas at work it's mostly white women."*

Likewise, Amahle, a Cameroonian woman who attends a black church, expressed similar sentiments,

*“I don’t really dress up during the week because I’m surrounded by white people who are always dressing casually but when it comes to Sunday, that is one day I must really dress up. I have to, otherwise what type of African am I?”*

These women’s experiences reveal the ways in which the overall African diaspora community’s dressy appearance is juxtaposed with casual white Canadian dress culture. Furthermore, it highlights how the pan-African identity for women is so deeply rooted in dressing up such that one’s African identity is even brought into question if women follow the influence of intercultural encounters and choose to dress casually to church. Thus, women who choose to dress casually are considered “not African enough”. For example, Mabel, who attends a multiethnic congregation in Ottawa and works for the Government of Canada, expressed that she feels people are more accepting of her as an African woman in the workplace than at church. The reason for this, she went on to elaborate, is because even though she wears jeans to church and dresses more casually as per the congregational dress code, she often gets disapproving comments from the African community in the church like *“really girl, are you okay?”* when they see her outfits on Sundays. Similarly, Jahmelia, a Rwandese woman who attends different congregations shared,

*“I think church is for us Africans. In a country like this where there are so many people from everywhere, sometimes it’s hard to find your people and where you fit. But at church, at church we come together and it’s usually where I see so many black people in one place. I even make sure I put a bit more effort with how I look because otherwise they might take away my African card if they see me dressing too Canadian \*laughing\*”.*

Dara, a Burundian woman who attends a multiethnic church, expressed similar sentiments,

*“Personally, I am not one who likes to dress up much because it’s just not my thing. I like simple things that don’t cause too much headache or time, but Sundays are a whole different story. I make an effort for those days because I know everyone is going to be dressed up at church. I think it’s like an African thing to take dressing up in church so seriously, I don’t know. All I know is that it is better to dress up and avoid all the church*

*mothers and aunties carrying on about how you have been possessed by the Canadian spirits because you refuse to dress up.”*

Likewise, Sauda, a Kenyan woman who attends a multiethnic congregation, shared, *“I would say that generally I dress well. It’s nothing extra but I do make sure that I carry myself well. I find with our people though, there is that extra pressure to dress exceptionally good on Sunday. Like you have to prove you are African by dressing well. One time I made the mistake of wearing jeans and everyone was asking where I was from because they were shocked to see me not dressing up. From that day I learned that it is best to dress up when going to church. For me it’s too much pressure but I also understand because when you are living out here, you need to stick together and show these vazungu (white people) that not all black people are bad.”*

Thus, these women’s experiences reveal that at certain times navigating racial difference in other public spaces like the workplace, or predominantly white Canadian and multiethnic congregations, is less complicated and freeing than navigating the pan-African identity in the diaspora community with its cultural expectations within the church. Furthermore, in the absence of cultural diversity and everyday intercultural encounters, women felt more burdened in the church as collective cultural practices are intensified, thereby pressuring women to strictly adhere to nationalist constructions of femininity. As such, this “burden of representation” highlights that there are occasions in the public where the African diaspora retains more relevance than discourses of multiculturalism and mainstream white norms of gender and race. However, this is not necessarily a beneficial thing for all women as the pressures of the diaspora community come with its own challenges. For example, Shaina, who attends different congregations in Toronto, articulated the pressure of diasporic culture when she shared the differences between attending African/black versus white/multiethnic churches. Referring to how casual the white Canadian church dress code is she laughingly admitted,

*"I could roll out of my bed and go to church if I wanted to with a white mixed church. I look good but don't have to try too hard. I go to a very casual church but try to look better on Sunday with a conservative style."*

Whereas when she attends predominantly African congregations, she treats it more like an event and dresses up because she feels people there are looking at each other more. As she put it,

*"I feel like a lot of them do dress up for status to show they are doing good in Toronto. They are going there to look good. It's a whole event being in a black church! I don't know, like, you gotta try a little bit more than when I'm going to a white church or a mixed church or whatever. I don't know if they're dressed up to look like they've got money, or they really just wanted to look good that day. Maybe it just comes down to church being an event. They're treating church as an event to which you dress up at as opposed to status."*

Likewise, Kali, a Zimbabwean woman who attends an African church, expressed similar sentiments,

*"Church I find is the one place where all of us Africans are together. During the week we are with so many other white people and maybe you see one or two black people here and there but at church, it is the one place where we all come together. I think that's why people dress up, come with expensive cars, to show everybody else that they are doing well in this country. Like they can afford nice clothes, nice things, and everything."*

Similarly, Adia, a Congolese woman who attends a black church, also shared,

*"I like dressing up but going to church can be too stressful sometimes! I can't just wake up and go, I have to spend some hours getting ready because these African women, those women they will put you to shame if you are not dressed well. The hair, the shoes, the clothes, the nails, everything must look good. Sometimes I think to myself 'which religion are we coming for here, church or fashion?'"*

Thus, women unanimously agreed that the casual dress code for most predominantly white Canadian and multiethnic congregations meant that they did not have to spend as much time on their beauty practices in preparation to attend church services. In other words, going to church was simply a matter of attending service rather than also proving their Africanness and

membership within the African diaspora community through the collective cultural practice of dressing up. However, it repeatedly came up that because most women were “raised to look exceptionally good on Sunday”, they still made minimal effort on their appearance.

Consequently, this highlights how the pan-African identity has historical roots in home countries on the continent and it is deepened and intensified in the context of everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora in Canada through nationalist constructions of femininity. As a result, even when women have the option to forgo formal dress while they attend congregations with casual dress codes, they choose not to as being African is made synonymous with dressing exceptionally well on Sundays. Furthermore, the casual-roll-out-of-bed approach associated with white Canadian congregations is contrasted by the idea of African/black churches being an “event” that one has to, as one young woman put it, “*wake up early and sacrifice at the altar of the beauty gods to prepare for.*” In other words, the pan-African identity within this space is also performative in that this continental identity is characterized by cultural spectacularism as women feel compelled to regard church attendance as an important community occasion that requires much time and preparation in fashioning their identities accordingly.

Moreover, several women brought up the point of African women dressing up for church to symbolize status and as a marker of the success they are having as immigrants in Canada. This theme highlights how class and participating in “consumer citizenship” (Walker, 2007:6) are hallmark features of the diaspora community in achieving a “distinctive African modernity” (Allman, 2004:3). As such, the pan-African identity is also defined by class and imbricated through the church into processes of globalization and modernity by the image of being in

trendy clothes with very successful and prosperous looks. Consequently, upholding the gospel of dress to impress becomes a way to display continental aesthetic nationalism, upward class mobility, and African modernity within Canadian society, the diaspora community, and to those who are still in the homeland. In other words, the church is a space where the diaspora community can create hybrid forms of community and identity that are classed, nationalist, local, and global. In short, the pan-African identity is also contextualized within origin countries on the continent so that dressing fashionably for church is another way for women to show the coveted status of living overseas as dressing well is also associated with material and economic success while living in a foreign country.

### ***African Patriarchal Norms of Gender***

Additionally, the church is a space where the African diaspora revalorizes patriarchal nationalist norms of sexuality through a particular model of femininity that is modest and respectable. For example, Mia, a Kenyan mother, shared why she moved from a white Canadian congregation to a predominantly black church that esteems African values,

*“The culture in Canada is more hyper-sexual than back home so *the more skin you show the sexier you are, and I don’t want that for my daughters. I want them to know they can be fully clothed and still beautiful.*”*

Similarly, Nea, a single Congolese woman, explained,

*“Moving to any country out of Africa, the western ones, you are going to be exposed to so many different things, especially when it comes to sex and nudity. You see how these cultures are more liberal than ours. Because of that, I find that dressing up for church reminds me that I can dress modestly and still be beautiful. I think that is what you get from going to a black church, you are reminded that a good African woman is not going around showing all her breasts and bums to the world. She is covered up with dignity.”*

Furthermore, Thema, a Zambian woman, expressed similar sentiments,

*“I remember when I first came to Canada and I saw women who had very little clothes on, like mini-skirts, boob-tubes, booty shorts, those types of clothing where it looks like the rest of the material was forgotten somewhere at the factory. It made me nervous when going out in public because I don’t dress like that. I used to worry that maybe I won’t find a man who will want me because I am not sexy enough. Going to church is how I remember that my body is a temple, it is sacred, and I cannot just be showing everything to every man. There is some beauty in mystery, keep the man guessing what is underneath. Church has really instilled that value of dressing like a lady, especially here where the temptation is to dress anyhow.”*

Likewise, Laila, a Nigerian woman, shared,

*“The challenge with being an African woman in Canada is that there is all this sexual liberation and feminism like gender equality. Yes, it’s good in some ways and I also like some parts of it, but I think there is too much looseness with how women tend to dress. Maybe I am out of touch with fashion, but everything is about being sexy this, sexy that, and flaunting it. Going to a Nigerian church helps me to see that it is important to carry yourself with high value as a woman by the way you dress. Men they don’t respect you really if you don’t, they might like it for one night but men respect and marry the women who behave like a lady and dress classy. That’s part of what being a good Nigerian woman is to me.”*

As African women migrate, they enter a society characterized by liberal sexual values which are in stark contrast to conservative African norms where even talking about sex openly is taboo in most families and nationalist cultures (Tamale, 2013; Gontijo, 2021; Reid & Walker, 2006).

Consequently, women’s pan-African identity in the church is constructed by religious and nationalist values of being lady-like including modesty, dignity, and classiness. Therefore, these examples highlight how nationalist constructions of femininity contrast with other white and racialized women in Canadian society who are viewed as “too sexually liberated” because of mainstream feminism and cultural white norms of gender equality. In other words, women’s continental identity is grounded in Africanized values that are mixed with nationalism and religion to portray a version of diasporic womanhood that is relatively conservative compared to other women in Canadian society. Furthermore, the diaspora community continues to shape the

pan-African identity through heterosexual relationships that value non-westernized women as the ideal of African patriarchy. As such, women center their racialized identities and beauty practices around heterosexual desire and the need to be attractive in the eyes of the continental male gaze. Thus, the diaspora shapes this space by revalorizing nationalist norms of sexuality so that a “good African woman” is one that is fully clothed, modest, dignified, and classy.

Additionally, beyond being a good respectable African woman in the diaspora community, dressing up modestly is a way to also counter exclusionary gendered racialization processes in Canadian society so that Blackness becomes about being regal and disassociating from negative racial stereotypes that deem African women inferior. For example, Dara, a Burundian woman who goes to an African church, shared,

*“When I think of an African woman, the first thing that comes to mind is queen. Like in the way that we dress and carry ourselves. During our women’s group, our First Lady<sup>68</sup> constantly tells us that we must dress as daughters of God, as black women who value our bodies because out there, they don’t always show us the respect we deserve.”*

Similarly, Jahmelia, a Rwandese woman who attends a multiethnic congregation, shared,

*“I think that dressing up in a classy and elegant way as an African woman is a huge statement. Being black in this country is not always easy and as a woman, the men just want you for sex because you are black, and the other women don’t think you are beautiful because you are black. So when we dress up, we are saying that we are valuable, we are worthy of respect, we are not sex objects, we are respectable women and we are worthy of being treated as such.”*

Additionally, several older women, also known as “Church Mothers”<sup>69</sup>, in different congregations all echoed similar sentiments of the importance of teaching their daughters and other young

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<sup>68</sup> Title given to the Pastor’s wife.

<sup>69</sup> Church Mothers are the matriarchs of the community, usually elderly women, who display the epitome of faith, wisdom, life-experience, and femininity. They are considered role models, educators, and mentors of family life and the home. They devote their time to church and its ministries and provide cultural guidance and spiritual support (Gilkes, 1986:50-51).

women in the church the cultural significance of dressing to reflect “the modesty and respectability becoming of African womanhood and femininity” within the church and outside of it. As Mama Flo, a Senegalese woman, shared,

*“When we come to this country, we have to look out for each other, so I am a mother to many, and I take it very seriously to remind you young ones that our traditions are very important. Especially for you girls, I know that there are many exciting things here, but you must never forget that you are a godly African woman, and you must hold yourself in such a way that you will bring honor to us and not disgrace our name.”*

Aunty Abeni, a Cameroonian woman, chimed in,

*“I see it happen so many times when girls come here and they start behaving like the wild ones here. I understand it because this is normal when you are in a new country, but I always say you must not see being an African as a bad thing to be abandoned as soon as you arrive here. Of course, be in this country and try all the different things you want to but know where you come from. Dress well so that when they see you are African, they respect you. Dress well so that when a man wants to make you his wife, he can see a good Christian woman who values her body.”*

Mama Bisa, a Nigerian woman, added,

*“All I ask is that you young women dress well when you are outside there. You might think our traditions are old-fashioned and out of date, but your culture is part of who you are. Dress well so they give you jobs instead of taking you to a brothel. Dress properly so they don’t harass you because of the colour of your skin.”*

As such, while women expressed mostly cultural and/or social reasons for attending church, nationalist values are inevitably interlaced with religious teachings so that the type of African womanhood promoted in the diaspora community is a particular faithed, asexual, and class-based femininity. Furthermore, church mothers show that nationalist gendered values are not just perpetuated by men but by older women who reproduce these values generationally and place the “burden of representation” on one another. Many of the church mothers were

distinctively different from other women in the congregation as they all had a stately elegance to their appearance. The elder women, affectionately known as “Mama” or “Aunty”, were dressed in elaborate hats, headwraps, and cultural attire that showcased their ethnic identities and national traditional dress. African church mothers thus have great influence over the diaspora community as they provide spiritual support and cultural guidance for immigrants navigating a new society. In other words, through their nurturing and strong characters they provide unity in the ever-changing and fragmenting experiences of migration. Additionally, they provide continuity of diasporic culture by passing down gendered roles and nationalist cultural values of African femininity which incorporate ethnic and religious qualities. In other words, the role of elder African women in the diaspora community is critical for changing, developing, and reinforcing “diaspora consciousness” (Vertovec, 2009:6) while living in Canadian society. As such, the church is a space where the revalorization of nationalist culture occurs most strongly through intergenerational ties as women are able to pass it down without the interference of antithetical cultural white norms. Accordingly, the church highlights that the influence of everyday multiculturalism on the African diaspora is weakened, thereby remaining one of the only spaces in the immigrant experience that the diaspora is able to retain some cultural exclusivity and power in a public space. This cultural transmission and revalorization become even more vital in the context of intercultural encounters and white gender norms.

Moreover, the qualities of respectability and modesty embedded in nationalist constructions of femininity was emphasized by several women who saw it as their responsibility to represent their husbands in church. In other words, African patriarchy within the family unit is manifested

in the church and reveals the ways in which the diaspora community is also shaped by African patriarchal norms of gender that women have internalized as their own. Consequently, women's pan-African identity and beauty practices in the church are not just influenced by other women but also by a sense of duty to their husbands. As such, the women in the study repeatedly mentioned that dressing well on Sundays is important because it also reflects on their husbands as leaders in the diaspora community. For example, Naomi, who had just been newly wed to a Nigerian man at the time of the interview, shared that she feels additional pressure on Sundays because her "not looking good" in church also affects her husband,

*"People may think 'oh, is he not taking care of her?' I feel I need to look good for the both of us so people are not like 'mmm, look at this guy's wife, she can't take care of herself'."*

Similarly, Runako, a Zimbabwean woman married to a West African man, explained,

*"I participate in my beauty practices at church because it's the standard of beauty that has to be met and I don't want to let down the standard. How I look at church is also reflective of my husband because no man wants his wife to be perceived as 'not beautiful.'"*

Furthermore, Mbalenhle, a Ugandan woman married to a Senegalese man, shared,

*"My husband likes to dress well. Everywhere he goes, even to collect groceries, he is always dressing well. When we go to church, he is always wearing a suit, even in winter when it's freezing. Everyone is always complimenting him at church, but it means that me too I must also dress well because I don't want to disgrace him. I don't want them to pity him because his wife can't dress. Also, in a church full of beautiful women who are always dressed up, I have to keep my man and make sure that I look on point so that his eyes don't wander too far."*

Likewise, Adia, a Congolese woman, reiterated similar views,

*"My husband is a leader in our church and as his wife, he is always asking that I dress good. He knows I find it stressful already because of all the women who are always dressing up. I feel like I need to do the same so that I am not seen as a bad African woman and also so that other church members don't talk about him negatively. I think it is part of my duty as a good wife to make sure I am representing my husband well."*

These married women highlight the way nationalist constructions of femininity are connected to wifehood and African masculinities that are also expressed through fashion. Accordingly, women see it as their “duty as a good wife” to dress up so that their husbands maintain their good reputation and status within the community. Consequently, several themes about the formation of the diaspora community emerge. Firstly, while the pan-African identity displayed through continental aesthetic nationalism is sometimes adopted by men, women face the added burden of upholding nationalist constructions of femininity at multiple levels. In other words, women are expected to simultaneously represent their husbands and the diaspora community through their bodies so that the pan-African identity is articulated on individual, interpersonal, and collective levels. Although this identity is mostly uniform, there are still differences within the various levels so that women’s ethnic and continental identities shift to appease the individual male nationalist gaze, through their marriages, and the broader community accordingly. Secondly, we see that some African masculinities in Canada are defined by having a beautiful African wife who takes care of her physical appearance. In this way, African men are viewed as “manly men” who can attract a beautiful woman and provide for her. This is particularly important as African men experience a “crisis of masculinity” when they migrate and encounter racialization processes that result in deskilling, downward class mobility, and discrimination (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Houle, 2020; Creese, 2011). In short, African women dressing well for their husbands safeguards their masculinity which is otherwise devalued in other spaces within Canadian society. Lastly, African wives also noted the presence of other well-dressed women as a reason to make the effort with their beauty practices so that their husbands are not tempted to stray. As such, constructions of ethnic femininity are inextricably linked to hybrid African

masculinities as women must balance religion and nationalism by being modest while dressing attractively enough so their husbands are not enticed by other women. Even some single women shared their thoughts on this. For example, Fahari, a single Beninese woman, expressed her opinion of why African women need to dress for their husbands,

*“When you get married, I believe that as a wife, you are an extension of your husband. It will be my duty as his wife to do everything I can to look good so that when he is among his other friends and other men at church, he can hold his head high that I am his wife. I am not just dressing up and looking good for myself but also for my husband, I think that is important.”*

Likewise, Amahle, a single Cameroonian woman, shared,

*“I am still single, so I don’t have to do any of this but something that I have observed is that there is a lot of emphasis that is put on being a good wife which also means dressing well on behalf of your husband. I don’t understand why it is so important but even back home my mother and aunties all dress well and say that it is part of keeping their husbands happy and making sure that they have a good reputation in the community.”*

However, Makhosi, a Zimbabwean woman engaged to an East African man, expressed her conflicting feelings on the practice,

*“I am not yet married, just engaged, and all the pre-marital counselling I have been doing with some of the leaders in our women’s group, they are all teaching us that it is important to look good for our husbands when we are dressing to come to church. I never said it out loud, but I wanted to ask if my fiancé is also expected to dress well for me. I don’t see the point of putting some of these expectations. We are just going to be married not becoming Siamese twins so why should the way I dress have anything to do with him? Is he marrying me for my fashion and beauty only? Anyway, I think that is how that generation sees things, like, as an African wife your sole purpose is to cater to your husband including making sure you dress well so that others can speak well of him.”*

In short, the African diaspora community through the church characterizes women’s pan-African identity as being a good respectable woman who dresses modestly. In other words, the continental identity is shaped by constructions of ethnic femininity that are mixed with religion and nationalism. Furthermore, women are expected to cater to the continental male gaze as

emphasis is placed on being a good wife which means dressing well in order to represent their husbands within the diaspora community. Consequently, the church is where postcolonial constructions of sexuality are reinforced through conservative practices of dress and heterosexual relationships predicated on nationalist masculinities. Additionally, the church is a space to counter racialized stereotypes of African women's sexuality, as promiscuous and hypersexual, by reaffirming their value and dignity. Moreover, not only does the diaspora reinforce cultural values around sexuality through the church, but it is also where African masculinities are bolstered in the presence of women who embody nationalist femininity. Accordingly, as in the home, beauty in the church is the structure through which African manhood is articulated, naturalized, and heterosexualized (Chancer, 1999; Saraswati, 2011; Roces, 2005). Women thus become the symbols of the nation collectively and symbols of class and status individually through continental aesthetic nationalism. As a result, African women's agency is impacted as they negotiate the "burden of representation" tied to the pan-African identity and heterosexual relationships in the church.

### **Spreading the Gospel of Dress to Impress**

The chapter thus far has focused on the role of the diaspora in forming new notions of community and women's pan-African identity in African and predominantly black congregations. However, several women in the sample also expressed their decisions not to attend predominantly African/black churches for various reasons. Nevertheless, even in the midst of intercultural encounters in ethnically and racially diverse congregations, they continue to express a pan-African identity through continental aesthetic nationalism. This practice of women

continuing to dress in their finest attire in multiethnic congregations highlights the ways in which the diaspora community uses the church to make itself visible within Canadian society and discourses of multiculturalism by spreading nationalist customs throughout the public. Furthermore, while African immigrants are present in Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, through constructions of Blackness that reinforce colonial legacies and marginalization, the African diaspora utilizes the church to challenge its exclusion within mainstream culture by making the community visible through positive nationalist traits rather than negative racial clichés about Africans. As such, the diaspora community straddles the intricate complexities of exclusion and belonging by reforming the public-private dichotomy within the church space. In other words, since church is an “African thing”, the diaspora makes use of this space to publicly construct a collective identity and semi-private community that simultaneously fosters unity and counters segregation within Canadian society.

Furthermore, while navigating other spaces of cultural exchange and intercultural encounters often presents various difficulties for African immigrants, the diaspora community emboldens members to navigate other congregations in this public space and still maintain their Africanness. In other words, ‘spreading the gospel of dress to impress’ means that women are able to hold onto their pan-African identity, through aesthetic nationalism, in their intercultural encounters. As such, the diaspora community interrupts racialization processes of multicultural practice to reinforce nationalist culture and prioritize the pan-African identity throughout this space, both in African/black churches and multiethnic/multiracial congregations. Consequently, the formation of the African diaspora in the context of everyday multiculturalism is marked by

internal gendered racialization processes which convert this public space into a visible semi-private community marked by new meanings of race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationalism, religion, and African patriarchal norms.

Furthermore, the church is where the African diaspora and everyday multiculturalism are most clearly juxtaposed as the clash of cultures is evident through opposing fashion practices. In other words, the diaspora's 'gospel of dress to impress' is contrasted with the white Canadian casual dress code of most congregations. Accordingly, as women joined multiethnic congregations, they shared how the stark differences between diasporic culture and Canadian society elicited much culture shock for them noting that they were not accustomed to such a casual attitude in church. For example, Makanaka, a Zimbabwean who occasionally attends a predominantly white Canadian church, shared her disbelief and disapproval for the jeans, shorts, and t-shirts that tend to fill the congregation on Sunday morning. As she put it,

*"You would not go to meet Justin Trudeau dressed like that so why would you come to church dressed like that?"*

Similarly, Mia, a Kenyan woman, also expressed how she experienced culture shock when she first started attending church in Canada,

*"The way people dress here for church, saying culture shock is an understatement. We couldn't even pay attention to the priest. People dressing like they going to the beach in short shorts and tank tops. When you go to church before God you need to dress up, especially as a woman."*

Likewise, Adina, a Cameroonian woman, noted her confusion the first time she attended a predominantly white Canadian church,

*“When I first attended a Canadian church, I remember I had to double check if I had walked into the correct address because even though I could see the pastor and the pulpit, the church members were not dressed how I am used to. It was the first time in my whole life that I saw jeans in church!”*

Furthermore, Lela, a Zimbabwean woman, shared her experiences,

*“Attending a Canadian church was very hard at the beginning because I just was not used to seeing people who are dressing so casual. I mean you see it in the workplace, but I just didn’t think that it would also happen in church. Church for us as black people is this very sacred place where dressing up is so important. When I was young, I used to be so afraid to even get so much as a crease in my dress because my mother would get so angry. To go from that to where people don’t even iron their clothes and wear jeans and sandals, yeah, it was a big culture shock.”*

When the women were probed further as to why they were shocked when they saw jeans, shorts, and sandals in the church they did not have a clear reason as to why it was inappropriate, only that in African culture dressing up for church is imperative. As such, the different dress cultures between Canadian society and the African diaspora highlights that fashion practices in the church are historical, contextual, racialized, and located in time and place. In other words, beyond any religious reasons, women’s values of dressing up for church in Canada are linked to multiple intersecting racialization and cultural processes. Consequently, women’s pan-African identity, exhibited through aesthetic nationalism, in the church is used to create a sense of community and belonging, as well as a distinct racialized identity based on diasporic culture that is different from discourses of multiculturalism and racialized beauty standards. Furthermore, not all women were shocked by these differences as they additionally shared their comparisons between the African diaspora and Canadian society’s practices of dress in the church. For example, Kali, a Zimbabwean woman who attends a white Canadian church, noted,

*“I can’t say that I was really shocked because what else can you expect from Canadians? They have a different way to dressing than us, but it definitely didn’t feel right to be all*

*dressed up while everyone was looking very casual. I don't know why but church doesn't feel like church unless you are fully dressed up, maybe because that is how I grew up."*

Similarly, Thema, a Zambian woman, shared,

*"When you go to a Canadian church, that is when you see that for real, church is really an African thing in the way that we dress and all of that because they just don't take it seriously to dress up when going to church. It's so chilled compared to going to a black church where it's like going to a fashion event! I can't tell you why, but I think maybe it's just how we do things as Africans, to always look as good as possible."*

Indeed, the visual of the cultural contrast is like night and day with formal dressed Africans alongside casually dressed congregants. This makes it fairly easy to identify African women in these congregations because they tend to be dressed exceptionally well, usually in some form of outstanding cultural attire. Accordingly, the African diaspora in Canada is most visible within the church through fashion as intercultural encounters intensify the community's cultural practice. Furthermore, women's experiences with culture shock emphasize the shifting meanings that the church holds in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism. When asked about their beauty practices in the church, and their reasons for doing it, none of the women mentioned a single religious reason for dressing up. Every answer was a version of "because it's an African thing" and highlights how the pan-African identity within the church holds more value for African women than their Black identity imposed by racialization processes in Canadian society. However, in multiethnic and white Canadian congregations where nationalist norms don't hold the same uniting authority, women revert to religious reasons for dressing up noting that church is a sacred space and the "House of God" where one must dress with reverence and respect. As such, this dual meaning of fashion's importance in the church highlights how the pan-African identity shifts between nationalist and religious characteristics depending on the location and context of the congregation. Furthermore, it highlights how diasporic practices of dressing up for

church become a statement of religiosity, virtuous womanhood, and nationalist pride as women navigate intercultural encounters. In short, this contrast between the African diaspora and Canadian society's norms of church dress reveals that even in the presence of cultural diversity where casual attire is introduced into the church repertoire through intercultural encounters, African women still maintain their diasporic practice of dressing up because it is attached to their pan-African identity. Thus, this pattern speaks to the strength of diasporic culture that renders it impenetrable to the influences of everyday multiculturalism as the African diaspora holds more influence in this public space. Furthermore, it highlights the cultural value of the pan-African identity and community in the context of multiculturalism as it enables women to escape racialization processes in Canadian society by redefining their racialized identities on their own terms.

Moreover, as women negotiate intercultural encounters within the church, they become even more rooted in diasporic practices of dressing up for personal reasons including style preference and attachment to the pan-African identity that makes their presence outstanding in multiethnic and white Canadian congregations. For example, Chipo, who attends a predominantly white Canadian Catholic church, shared that she still dresses up when going to church on Sundays because her family and the priest are the only black people in the congregation. As such, she regularly chooses to wear African print dresses on Sundays which unfailingly results in attention, questions, and compliments on her outfits. In her words,

*"I am always asked questions when I wear African print because African print is not common. You want to stand out because you will be the only one wearing something so unique."*

Similarly, Sauda, a Kenyan woman who attends a predominantly white Canadian church, shared,

*“Even though everybody else will be dressing casually, I still choose to dress up like I usually would when going to church because I just can’t not dress up for church. So, I make sure I wear my heels and makeup and all of that. I always get people coming to me and asking questions because it’s like I’m the only black woman there and I’m wearing all this colourful attire, it’s too hard not to see me.”*

Furthermore, when asked if and why she continues to dress up for church when attending a non-African congregation, Sade, a Nigerian woman, explained,

*“Yes, even when I am going to a Canadian church I still choose to dress up because I think it is important not to be swayed by the culture here. People can dress however they want to when they go to church and I will not judge them but as Africans, church is our place, and we must always dress up accordingly. The only thing is you become one of the very few black people in the room and because you are so well dressed it brings even more attention to you but at least its good attention.”*

Chiamaka, a Zimbabwean woman who attends a black church but frequently visits her

boyfriend’s multiethnic congregation, echoed similar sentiments,

*“Whenever I am going to my regular church, I choose to just dress up but it’s more like western style, like I don’t put too much emphasis on making sure I wear traditional attire and all of that. But when I visit a Canadian church, I make it a point to wear African outfits because I find if I am going to be the only well-dressed one then I might as well represent the best of my culture. There is always this thing that Africans are not good, but we have so much beauty and that is what I like to show when I go to Canadian churches.”*

Likewise, Nea, a Congolese woman who attends both African and multiethnic congregations

shared,

*“I go to different churches and no matter what I always make sure that I dress up. In the black churches it’s no problem to be so dressy. Actually, I can even say that it is a requirement to be always dressed to the nines. But in the Canadian churches it is the complete opposite. This is where you see how different our cultures are, the different ways of doing things. Until I moved to Canada, I never thought that there was any other way you could go to church expect for looking so well put together. Then I came here and it’s like they don’t really focus too much on the dressing part. For me, I still choose to dress up even when I am the only one because it was how I did it growing up, but it is also a way to say that I am proud to be an African and I am proud of my culture and how we*

*dress up. Whenever I do it, I find that the comments and remarks are positive, and people really like it. It gives them a different perception of Africans and shows them the good side that yes, we are beautiful, yes, we have beautiful culture."*

These examples highlight that women choose to continue expressing their distinct pan-African identity in multiethnic and white Canadian congregations in order to stand out and resist mainstream beauty norms and racialization processes while representing African culture. Furthermore, the fact that women are comfortable standing out as some of the few black women in the congregation also sheds light on how the diaspora shapes this space. There are spaces in women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism, such as the workplace, where being one of the few black women in the room draws unfavourable attention and women seek to avoid this, as we will see in later chapters. However, since the African diaspora takes ownership of this space, women deliberately lean into their pan-African identity thereby further underscoring how Africanness and Blackness have different meanings and relevance for women based on the space they are navigating. In other words, within the church, internal racialization processes and gendered nationalist projects of the African diaspora trump Canadian discourses of multiculturalism and racialization processes within Canadian society. As such, women navigate multiethnic and white Canadian congregations by confidently showcasing their racial difference and cultural diversity with pride. For example, African prints and accessories are often bold in colour, patterns, and fabric so wearing them inevitably attracts attention to women. Not only does this highlight how colourful 'African attire' has become traditional for African immigrants over the years, but this continued usage of their fashion practices reveals that women choose to clothe their difference in a way that challenges negative racialized stereotypes of African women within Canadian society. Thus, rather than merely standing out for their racial difference they

can turn this attention into an opportunity to show the beauty and uniqueness of African culture.

Consequently, multiethnic and multiracial congregations become a public space where African women educate others on their ethnic, nationalist, or diasporic cultures and dispel myths about black beauty because the questions they are asked, about African print outfits, head-wraps, hairstyles or accessories, lead to moments of positive and empowering cultural exchange. Such positive intercultural encounters allow women to embrace the pan-African identity and celebrate diasporic culture with boldness. Given that they stand out because of their racialized identities in culturally diverse congregations, dressing up allows them to turn some of the negative attention from their difference into displays of cultural pride. Furthermore, it gives women a sense of agency in being able to change the perceptions of their difference through confident expressions of fashion that challenges negative stereotypes about African women and black beauty. Thus, women's difference within the church becomes something that is beautiful and unique rather than something deviant from the norm. In short, the clash of church cultures often results in deeper cultural pride for women and greater cultural awareness for non-Africans.

### ***Diverse Multiethnic Congregations***

On the other hand, one of the reasons stated by women for choosing to attend non-African/black churches was because the pressure to uphold the diaspora's pan-African identity through aesthetic nationalism can be too demanding to maintain. The price to portray this ethnic-nationalist femininity requires individual women to bear the "burden of representation"

through their beauty practices in order to meet and maintain the community's expectations. Furthermore, some women also shared that the pan-African identity did not resonate with them because they did not fit into the mould of what a typical African woman should be. Whether because they were considered a "coconut"<sup>70</sup> or too liberal because of mainstream feminist ideologies/practices, some women preferred to distance themselves from the diaspora community by emphasising other aspects of their identity like being Black or specifically Congolese/Burundian/Nigerian etc. Since the diaspora's pan-African identity is displayed through aesthetic continentalism, some women are thus inevitably excluded from the community. In other words, the dress to impress culture of the diaspora church becomes too stifling for some women leading them to seek out multiethnic, multiracial, or white Canadian congregations where the dress code is more casual, and they can leave behind nationalist practices and disassociate from the pan-African identity by choosing to express other aspects of their racialized identities. In other words, women emphasize their personal individuality, style, and preferences. Consequently, although the diaspora community has prominence through the church, everyday multiculturalism punctuates this space as religious intercultural encounters provide women with a reprieve from the pressures of the African diaspora community.

For example, while Chinelo dressed up for the predominantly African church she attended while living in Ottawa, now that she lives in Toronto she prefers going to a church where she can dress casually and "come as you are". She went on to further share that she feels dressing up for

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<sup>70</sup> A derogatory term for a black person who conforms to white culture at the expense of racial and cultural heritage. Like a coconut, they are dark on the outside and white on the inside.

church within the African diaspora is pretentious because she sees it as presenting this “fake self rather than coming as you are”. Chinelo’s comments echo Shaina’s earlier remarks on the church being a place to demonstrate a distinctive African modernity and class as portrayed through African women’s Sunday fashion. In other words, membership in this diaspora community is perceived to require that women wear the success of being in a western country even if it does not accurately reflect the realities of immigrant life including racism, discrimination, precarious employment, and a decline in socioeconomic status. Consequently, the pan-African identity is also transnational as dressing to impress in the diaspora community is a way to subvert racialization processes within Canadian society while demonstrating to family and friends on the continent that life in Canada looks good on them. Furthermore, like Chinelo, Shani shared that it was only by moving from Toronto to Ottawa and changing to a multiethnic non-denominational church that she was able to have more freedom and comfort to dress how she wanted to. She explained,

*“In Rwanda it was a whole event. Definitely no jeans, only dresses, and high heels. You dress to impress. For two years I was part of a Rwandese church in Toronto and so was the dressing to impress culture. When I moved to Ottawa, I came out of the Rwandese bubble, that’s when I started to see beauty in the eyes of the western world. I felt like ‘oof this is good, I can actually relax and not pay as much attention on what I’m wearing because I don’t want to dress up all the time. I want to relax and wear jeans and sneakers sometimes.’”*

Similarly, Haseena, who attends the same congregation as Shani, shared,

*“One of the reasons I left Nigeria is ‘cause I couldn’t keep up and I see Canada as a safe haven. With Lagos church culture you have to have a different outfit every Sunday. You have your audience you have to dress for at church in Nigeria ‘cause that’s where business deals and so forth happen. You have to show you are of a certain class. To find a husband in church you can’t look basic. I wouldn’t attend a Nigerian church here ‘cause I don’t*

*want to compete, wear trendy clothes, high heels, and be asked about my hair. Here, I can wear the same sweater every Sunday without being asked about it or people noticing.”*

Zuri, a Nigerian woman who attends the same congregation, emphatically agreed,

*“Ottawa is very chilled with their beauty standards and the way they dress. You can get away with looking like a bum 24/7. Even at church I look and see people like ‘eh, you people are wearing shorts to church? Eh! What’s that? If my parents catch me here looking like that, I’m disowned, like its over between us! Back home everyone is always looking hip. You have to wear your finest attire. But here I like the fact that I can go to church without thinking ‘oh, who has seen me? who hasn’t?’ I like that freedom of even on my not-so-good days I can still go and worship Jesus. There’s nobody looking at me like ‘what is she wearing?’”*

While women attended different denominations and different African/black churches, there was agreement throughout the sample that attending church for Africans was an “event” with the accompanying cultural dress code that requires women to fashionably impress with their “finest attire, trendy clothes, heels, hair, and makeup”. However, this pan-African standard impacts women’s agency and as a result they seek out alternative options for fellowship and community. As such, multiethnic and white Canadian congregations tend to have a casual dress code, or at least one not as formal as the African diaspora in church, that allows women not to be hyper-focused on their appearances. Accordingly, attending these congregations and shedding continental aesthetic nationalism restores African women’s agency over their beauty practices as they have more freedom to relax, dress comfortably, and focus on the actual church services. Therefore, everyday multiculturalism within the church alleviates African women’s diasporic pressures around their pan-African identity and beauty practices within the diaspora community by providing them with other alternative options as multiethnic congregations offer women

refuge from the African diaspora's "burden of representation" that they are expected to uphold on Sundays. For example, Themba, a Zimbabwean woman who changed congregations, shared,

*"After going to a black church for a few years, I decided to change because the pressure was becoming too much. It was now about how I am looking instead of going to worship God. I think in the early years I wanted to be close to home through the African community, those practices of dressing up, but after a while it gets tiring, and you accept that you are no longer living at home, so you do as the Romans do when in Rome and you accept a more casual approach to church. At first it felt very uncomfortable but now I even wonder how I was spending all that time on Sunday morning to dress up and making sure that I had a new outfit for every Sunday. It was a lot of work and if that's what it takes to be an African woman, then maybe that is no longer for me."*

Similarly, Marini, a Ghanaian woman, explained,

*"I decided to move to a more Canadian church because I like how they are less focused on how you dress. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy dressing up and it is part of our African culture but after a while it's exhausting. Maybe because you are exposed to other ways of doing things that you thought you would never be exposed to, but it just feels good to try something different. It has not changed my faith or my relationship with God. In fact, it has probably made it even better because now I am not focused on all this other stuff like which shoes am I wearing or what if they see me repeating an outfit. I am free."*

Additionally, Amahle, a Cameroonian woman, shared,

*"I changed churches and now I go to a more mixed church. What I like is that they still like to dress up but there is also the option that you don't have to. Like in the church I was going to before with all the black people, it felt like it was compulsory, like you were being judged on how African you are based on what you were wearing. I know it is part of us to always look good and dress well, but it can be difficult to maintain that every single week."*

Thus, these women highlight that in the early stages post-migration, the diaspora provides a sense of community and women feel at home within a pan-African identity expressed through aesthetic nationalism in the church. However, over time this signature nationalist practice becomes exhausting for some women, and they begin to break away from the pan-African identity as it is defined by dressing to impress. Furthermore, the presence of cultural diversity exposes women to other forms of identity, such as being Black, so that women can choose to

express a racialized identity that best reflects their personal style and resonates with their experiences. In other words, rather than being intensified, the pan-African identity loses appeal for some women. Particularly, everyday multiculturalism introduces women to a more casual approach to dressing in church. Consequently, this reveals that women's pan-African identity is not static, but it is dynamic overtime as different phases of migration and resettlement produce varied forms of identity and needs for community. For example, when women initially migrate, they form a strong attachment to the diaspora community and find solace in the pan-African identity so that dressing to impress provides belonging. Furthermore, new racialization processes within Canadian society exclude and marginalize women so that a cultural identity holds more value than the racial one. However, as women settle into their new locales, maintaining aesthetic nationalism becomes more challenging in the face of everyday multiculturalism's appealing alternatives. Thus, while the African diaspora shapes the church space through notions of community in prominent ways, the significance of women's pan-African identity is determined by time and place so that what it means to be an African woman is eventually expanded beyond the 'gospel of dress to impress' as women are further exposed to cultural diversity and navigate intercultural encounters.

Moreover, multiethnic congregations become a space where women can build confidence in their individuality, personal sense of style, and become comfortable in their own skin without the nationalist influences of the diaspora community. For example, Zuri, a Nigerian woman, shared how being in a multiethnic congregation helped her to overcome some of her insecurities, that arose from racialization processes within Canadian society, to become more

confident. As a consequence of not needing to always look “put together” for an African audience, she felt more freedom to try different fashion and hair styles,

*“When I moved to Canada, I would wear a hairstyle longer than I wanted to because I didn’t want to start explaining. I would wear a wig for so long cause I didn’t want people to start asking me, ‘oh, is that a wig?’ I would keep wearing that wig even if I was tired of it. Caucasian people identify others by their hair color so when black women change their hairstyles it confuses them. I want to be free to change my hair and not worry about what people think. I had to be comfortable in my skin and church really helped with my confidence.”*

Similarly, Jahmelia, a Rwandese woman, noted,

*“I couldn’t do it anymore, so I now go to a different church. I have found that I like dressing more casually when going to church. I can try different styles that I wouldn’t at my old church. Like hairstyles, clothes which some of the other black people might say that it makes me less African, but I think there are many ways to be African and not in fashion alone. I think it is a good thing, especially when there is so much racism here, it’s a good thing that we are showing ourselves with pride but it’s more the family politics, if I can call it that, of being in the community.”*

Likewise, Dara, a Burundian woman, shared,

*“I like that I can switch between going to an African church where I can dress up and going to a Canadian one where its casual. Because there is not really a dress code, I can dress how I want, and it has been fun trying to see what kinds of styles suit me. I don’t want to always dress up every week because after some time it gets boring, but I also like that it is the place where I can go and be my full African self and I will be with others who are like me. But I also like to go to places where I don’t have to be so formal. I guess I like both types of churches for different reasons.”*

As these examples show, multiethnic congregations thus become a safe space where women can simultaneously resist diasporic practices while determining what it means to be a black woman in Canada while gaining more confidence to navigate racialization processes in other social spaces. In other words, although the African diaspora provides community and belonging by way of a pan-African identity, expressed through continental aesthetic nationalism, it does not equip women to deal with the challenges of multiculturalism’s gendered racialization processes.

However, multiethnic congregations provide a welcoming space where women can wrestle with some of these complexities by experimenting with different looks while being cultural ambassadors and enlightening others on nationalist practices of diasporic culture. Moreover, as Jahmelia noted, there are many ways to be an African woman and everyday multiculturalism equips women to explore what being African and black mean in the context of their personal racialized identities as well as their relationship to the diaspora community in the larger Canadian society. That being said, the pan-African identity remains principal in this space, thereby diluting the power of racialization processes within Canadian society. As such, this continues to highlight the ways in which the African diaspora's collective practice of dressing to impress holds primary power and suppresses everyday multiculturalism's influence as it visibly dominates the church through the community's aesthetic nationalism.

## **Conclusion**

The church provides a new “place to feel at home” in Canadian society as African immigrants straddle the intricate complexities of integration and adaptation, inclusion and exclusion, sameness and difference, and perceptions of ‘we’ versus ‘other’. Particularly, it is a home and a “bastion of ethnic, cultural and religious identities” (Adogame, 2007:17) against the background of its social civic and religious relevance for immigrants (Adogame, 2008; Griffith & Savage; Adogame & Spickard, 2010). In other words, the church helps immigrants with social integration by helping with the negotiation of evolving racialized identities as well as the establishment of kinship and family networks. Accordingly, the church provides a rich space for African immigrants in Canada to wrestle with the global and local tensions regarding identity and

community that arise in the migratory process. Specifically, in women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism, this space demonstrates less of a religious role and more of how a pan-African identity is created within the public as a way to retain nationalist attachments in the midst of intercultural encounters. In other words, race and ethnicity transcend geographic boundaries to connect broad cultural similarities in the construction of an emerging African diaspora community defined by continental aesthetic nationalism. As such, the church allows women a brief hiatus from racialization processes within Canadian society because racial identities are revalorized as women equate the pan-African identity with being black in that it is racialized, but it is positively understood in defiance of the anti-Black racism they face in Canada.

Furthermore, since everyday multiculturalism is more focused on race than specific ethnicities and cultures, this pan-African identity emerges as women are racialized Black, with little to no ethnic and national nuances, within discourses of multiculturalism. Accordingly, this space fosters a pan-African identity as women are fully able to embrace a collective culture despite ethnic and nationalist differences. Even in multiethnic congregations, racialization processes are reinscribed by this pan-African identity. In other words, while Canadian discourses of multiculturalism impose a Black identity on women, the African diaspora can prioritize its own internal racialization processes of Africanness that incorporate nationalist and ethnic identities to form a shared community through the church. Thus, whether in African/black or multiethnic/white Canadian congregations, the diaspora community claims the church space for its own semi-private experiences, namely the revalorization of a pan-African identity, diasporic

culture, nationalist practices, unity building within the community, and resistance to dominant racialist norms within Canadian society.

Moreover, although the African diaspora has postcolonial characteristics similar to the home, it offers African women belonging within the broader community through aesthetic nationalism. As such, women are able to rethink and reimagine, critique and challenge derogatory notions of race through cultural practices, like dressing to impress, that counter negative racial stereotypes about African women and black beauty. In short, the church is a collective space for the African diaspora's resistance of racialized marginalization in Canadian society while shaping a new sense of belonging, continental identity, and practice of relying on diverse transnational social structures for new forms of community. However, in spite of these "decolonizing practices" (hooks, 1991; Tate 2019), it is a space marked by conflict, contradiction, and ambiguity for many women as diasporic culture is simultaneously liberating and oppressive. On the one hand, women's agency is reinforced as they are able to fully embrace cultural practices without repercussions like racist comments or discrimination. Consequently, women exercise their agency by upholding cultural standards of dressing to impress, expressing cultural pride, and raising cultural awareness in the midst of intercultural encounters. Furthermore, women are able to embody a distinctive African modernity and the full expression of black beauty by countering dominant mainstream standards of beauty.

On the other hand, women's agency is channeled by African patriarchal gender norms that require a particular femininity that is religious, nationalist, and classed. As a result,

constrictive cultural standards are reproduced which creates pressure for women as they uphold the “burden of representation” through the diaspora’s pan-African identity and attendant beauty practices. Furthermore, the “gospel of dress to impress” is one that cannot be maintained by all women for various reasons. Consequently, everyday multiculturalism interrupts the church space by providing women with alternative casual dress codes that challenge nationalist practices. Furthermore, intercultural encounters also provide women with the opportunity for positive cultural exchanges that promote African cultural awareness. However, the presence of everyday multiculturalism is weakened in this space as diasporic practices hold unwavering power, demonstrated in the ways in which women continue to carry continental aesthetic nationalism into their intercultural encounters. All the same, these multiethnic congregations allow women to escape diaspora pressures and reclaim their agency by focusing on their own beauty practices or actual church services rather than what everyone is wearing.

## Chapter 6: The Workplace

### Multiculturalism & Everyday Racisms

#### *Background*

“It was kind of awkward because right away I could see by her face she wasn’t expecting a black woman like me when I walked in for the interview”. Jahmelia, a Rwandese finance professional, shared how she had spent her job hunt agonizing about whether or not to use her cultural first name or her middle English name. She had read the articles about how ethnic sounding names can impact the job search, so she decided to use her English name. When she finally got called in for an interview, she had just started her natural hair journey and was getting comfortable in her skin as she wore her hair out in public. However, she shared that she was also aware of the stigmatization of natural hair in the workplace, so she didn’t dare wear her “kinky hair” for the job interview. Instead, she spent over \$300 to have long straight hair extensions installed but suddenly changed her mind the week before the interview after she reasoned that she wouldn’t be able to maintain the look once she got the job. Accordingly, she wore her natural hair in a sleeked up puffy bun along with her favourite power suit accented by pieces of beaded jewellery. When she arrived for the interview, her interviewer was noticeably surprised that Jahmelia was in fact a black woman with an “unconventional appearance” and proceeded to express fascination over her hair by asking to touch it. Despite the awkward first moments, the interview went well, and she got the job. However, what she experienced at her interview was amplified in the workplace as the focus on her appearance brought unwanted attention to her with all manner of questions and comments like “Oh wow, your hair looks different!” “How long did it take to do that style?” “Oh, your hair is curly now?” “What do you call that thing wrapped

on your head in your country?” “Can I touch your hair?” “What does your traditional attire mean?” “How did your hair grow so fast?” “Can you teach me how to wrap my head like that?”

These are just some examples of the numerous comments and questions that African women like Jahmelia are daily inundated with when it comes to their intercultural encounters in the workplace. A study of 2000 women in corporate America revealed that societal norms and corporate grooming policies unfairly impact black women in the workplace including how they are judged unfairly based on the appearance of their hair (C.R.O.W.N. Coalition, 2019). Furthermore, although “diversity is Canada’s strengths”, many black women still face exclusion and marginalization in the workplace because of gender, racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural difference (Ng & Gagnon, 2020; Moyser, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2018). Furthermore, the intersectionality of race, gender, class, nationality, and citizenship(s) positions racialized women as outsiders, thereby reinforcing discrimination in the workplace and wider society (Pillay, 2015:69). In other words, despite an increasingly diverse population, systemic and institutional resistance to difference persists within organizations as racial discrimination is still an issue in the Canadian labour force (Environics Institute, 2017; Roderique, 2017; Christus-Ranjan, 2019). For black women, this is particularly exemplified by explicit racism, unnecessary comments, uncomfortable workplace culture and microaggressions regarding their appearance. Consequently, the office is another important space in African women’s diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism. Specifically, the workplace is a key site of cultural exchange, intercultural engagement and encounters emphasizing everyday negotiations of cultural

difference (Orbe, 1998; Wise and Velayutham, 2009; Greene, 2013; Brown, 2018; Rosette & Dumas, 2007).

The previous chapter looked at how the African diaspora occupies the church, a public space, in order to construct new forms of community and a pan-African identity displayed through continental aesthetic nationalism. In that public space, women's cultural identity of Africanness is prioritized over being Black as nationalist culture is revalorized and racialization processes within Canadian society are resisted. In contrast, the workplace is a public space where everyday multiculturalism takes prominence. In other words, the workplace is where discourses of multiculturalism and intercultural encounters are amplified as women navigate the labour force outside the confines of the African diaspora community and its nationalist norms as exemplified in the church. As such, how do constructions of Blackness represented in Canadian discourses of multiculturalism reshape African women's racialized identities and notions of professional femininity through everyday beauty practices in the workplace? This chapter highlights that the workplace is a public space where women's pan-African identity is reinscribed by gendered racialization processes that assign a Black identity as they are incorporated into the broader Canadian society through their professional roles. In other words, the workplace is where women's racialized identity and perceptions of Blackness as well as 'otherness' are shaped by the immediate work environment. In short, the workplace is a space that reveals how difference is constructed and puts it into relation with the micro (daily mundane beauty practices and intercultural encounters) and macro structures (race, class, multiculturalism, and globalization) that make such constructions possible. The workplace in this chapter represents

the different industries that women are employed in including the government, banking and finance, entertainment, beauty and fashion, entrepreneurship, academia, technology, law, health, and customer service. As such, the places where women work range from corporate, to small businesses, and retail. Their positions within the organizations also range from entry-level to executives. Accordingly, constructions of Blackness and women's experiences in the workplace vary based on these factors and this chapter highlights some of those nuances.

Specifically, this chapter argues that the workplace is a public space steeped in cultural diversity with African women's racialized identities as a pervasive source of difference. Subsequently, as women navigate this space, their pan-African identity is reinscribed by a Black identity through Canadian discourses of multiculturalism and racialization processes within Canadian society that are embedded in professionalism and refracted through global articulations of race as well as American racial politics and popular culture. Consequently, the micro inequities of "everyday racism" (Essed, 2002) are the medium through which African women are often stigmatized, fetishized, and discriminated against through their intercultural encounters in the workplace. In short, this is a key site shaped by everyday multiculturalism where difference and 'otherness' are reproduced, contested, and redefined through everyday beauty practices and conceptions of professional femininity. Furthermore, the African diaspora briefly punctuates this space as women migrate with ethnic-nationalist constructions of professional femininity that are based on achieving a distinctive African modernity through fashion in the workplace. As such, this space highlights the complicated ways women's professional bodies are entangled in racialized and nationalist notions of femininity and

professionalism as they negotiate the emphasis placed on their ethnocultural differences and racialized identities in the workplace.

Consequently, Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, race, and gender intersect in dynamic ways to inform how African women negotiate body politics in the workplace as they maneuver their 'otherness' and how they fit and belong in contexts where their cultural experiences and racialized identities are outside the norm. Accordingly, women's agency is channeled by discourses of multiculturalism that magnify African women's difference and compels them to contain their Blackness by dressing it up to make it more professionally palatable and presentable. In other words, their agency is stifled by a professional ideal that is raced and gendered so that African women have to make their racialized identities less visible by muting the racialized markers attached to hair and skin colour. On the other hand, these public professional intercultural encounters also create new forms of freedom, by alleviating pressures of diasporic culture and nationalist norms to dress formally in the workplace, through exposure to new business-causal alternatives. Furthermore, African women are emboldened as they adopt ways to become cultural ambassadors of black beauty by maximizing intercultural encounters to educate their colleagues on African culture, as well as black hair and fashion practices.

The chapter is divided into the following sections, namely women's fashion and hair practices in the workplace. Firstly, it begins with fashion and the nationalist imaging of women, followed by looking professional in a cold climate, the casual white Canadian dress culture, race and fashion, and everyday racisms through comments on their appearance. Following this, the

chapter moves to hair by starting with professional hairstyle choices, the accompanying comments and questions on these styles, perceptions of professional credibility, and women's role as cultural ambassadors of black hair in the workplace. The chapter concludes by reiterating how women's racialized identities and difference are constructed in the workplace through intercultural encounters and constructions of professional femininity based on their hair and skin colour. As such, this chapter fits in the overall thesis as it highlights how women's pan-African identity is reinscribed by a Black identity in the public through Canadian discourses of multiculturalism. Furthermore, this chapter shows how intercultural encounters and everyday racisms shape women's racialized identities as a source of ethnocultural difference so that they are simultaneously marginalized and hyper-visible in the workplace.

## **FASHION**

Through discourses of multiculturalism manifested in the workplace, black women are subject of and subjected to a Eurocentric gaze while facing the challenge of simultaneously transforming stereotypical images and creating new professional roles (Brown, 2018; Thompson, 2019; Pillay, 2015; Bannerji, 2000; Akwani, 2002). As their bodies exist outside mainstream white norms of femininity, African women also feel increased pressure while navigating the workplace and adjusting to what it means to be a racialized professional woman. Consequently, they employ fashion as a transformative tool to navigate intercultural encounters in the workplace. In particular, fashion is an important element in the diasporic experience as it represents a communicative act through which power is represented, constituted, articulated, and contested (Jennings, 2015; Allman, 2004; Barnes & Eicher, 1992). Accordingly, African women migrate with

local gendered nationalist constructions of professional femininity and the workplace becomes a space where they serve as symbols of modernization practicing aesthetic nationalism through discourses of work. As such, this section highlights the nationalist constructions of femininity in the workplace, the casual white Canadian dress culture, skin colour and fashion, the accompanying comments and questions women face as well as the climate changes that affect their fashion choices.

### ***Nationalist Constructions of Femininity***

Similar to the church, the African diaspora momentarily shapes this space as women carry the “burden of representation” (Yuval-Davis, 2003:17) to achieve a distinctive African modernity and uphold diasporic culture and nationalist norms of professional, rather than religious, femininity.

As Naomi, a Nigerian customer service representative, noted,

*“I find majority of the Caucasians I’ve worked with have literally just, you know, they just wear sweatpants. When it comes to the professional environment, still I find they don’t wear makeup, not a lot of makeup per se. It’s not like ‘oh, we’re coming to do a runway!’ The only person who dresses like that is a Nigerian and Filipino. They wear heels and stuff but the rest of the office they’re like ‘yeah whatever we just don’t care’. With the Nigerian girl it’s a casual environment but she wears nice corporate stuff ‘cause maybe it’s how she’s always seen the office environment especially in Nigeria.”*

Likewise, Themba, a Zimbabwean finance professional, shared,

*“Maybe it’s a black people thing but back home when you are going for work, you get dressed up. That’s what we are told is a good professional. Maybe for white people that’s not their style because here people dress anyhow for their jobs. Like very relaxed and casual all the time. Mind you, when you are living in a place with so many white people, you have to dress up even more so they give you the job in the first place. Me, I still dress up and I see it with the other black people too, they dress very smart at work.”*

Additionally, women also feel they need to dress well to represent the diaspora community. For example, Njeri, a Burundian hairstylist, noted the pressures she feels navigating this space,

*“I feel like I always need to represent. It’s always the whole African community I feel like I’m representing all the time. When they see us it’s like we’re representing all the time. It’s not you they see, it’s every black person on the planet they see through you. So, if you look raggedy, they always think every black person are raggedy. If you looking nice they’ll be like oh, suddenly it’s like some black people might be nice.”*

Similarly, Nia, a Cameroonian woman who works in the not-for-profit industry, explained,

*“When I moved here my mother would always call me to see what I was wearing just before going to work. She was afraid that getting jobs here would be difficult because of being black so she wanted to make sure I was always dressing well. She doesn’t care if others don’t dress the same at our office, she tells me I have to stand out for being well-dressed so they know we may come from Africa, but we know how to dress good and work very hard!”*

As such, these women’s examples highlight how white privilege is institutionalized so that white Canadians are able to dress up in a casual way that African women feel they are not able to do because of how they are racialized Black. Furthermore, while women may continue cultural practices of dressing up for work, there is an aspect of using fashion to counter systemic racism and institutional whiteness in the workplace, so they actually get the jobs and avoid negative stereotypes while working. As will be highlighted through this chapter, sometimes using fashion was an effective strategy for women to accomplish these goals and other times, fashion simply did not change the challenges they face in the workplace because of their skin colour and racialized identities. Moreover, being surrounded by so many white people makes women feel that they need to dress well not only for themselves but also for the African community. In other words, women expressed the similar pressures they feel to uphold the pan-African identity while countering negative racial stereotypes in the workplace. As such, the formation of the African

diaspora community is carried over from the church into the workplace so that women continue to express their pan-African identity through continental aesthetic nationalism. Thus, as women migrate, discourses of multiculturalism, nationalist constructions of professional femininity, and gendered racialization processes collide to compel African women to continue dressing to impress both to uphold the pan-African identity through aesthetic nationalism and to manage the limitations or exclusions of their racialized identities in the workplace. In sum, women feel a different kind of pressure to dress up in the workplace because in the African diaspora dressing up is about community and cultural identity while dressing up in the workplace is about avoiding anti-Black racism. In other words, women continue to carry out nationalist cultural practices of professional dress to cover up their skin colour and also set them apart as Africans.

Additionally, African families perpetuate postcolonial racial formations in the workplace by encouraging an American-Eurocentric image of straight hair. As highlighted in the earlier chapter on the home, women's families were disapproving of their choices to wear natural hairstyles mostly because it was not deemed appropriate for navigating the workplace. For example, when Callista, a Beninese public servant, got a new job as an analyst for the Government of Canada, her mother insisted that she could not start her new job with her natural hair. While on a visit from Benin, her mother insisted on escorting her to the salon to make sure her hair was straightened for her first day of work. Similarly, Sade, a Nigerian woman in the health industry, shared,

*“When I told my family that I got a new job, the first thing my mother did was send me money to get my hair done right away. You know, that straight hair look so I don't stand*

*out too much because of my kinky hair. Things are changing but our parents' generation still have it in them that natural hair is not like that professional."*

Additionally, Nakimera, a Ugandan woman in the banking sector, elaborated,

*"No way I can wear my own hair at work, my mother would kill me if she knew! She is always telling me that they can fire me for that. I don't think it's true because we have too many rights in this country, but you never know. Better not to give them a reason to fire me, so I just wear weaves and wigs when I am going to work."*

As such, diasporic culture remains present in the workplace and postcolonial constructions of race are perpetuated in this space as African women's families encourage them to straighten their hair because natural hair is deemed inappropriate for the workplace. Consequently, African women uphold nationalist norms of professional femininity rooted in dressing formally and an American-Eurocentric image of straight hair considered suitable for the workplace. Furthermore, these examples continue to highlight the links between institutionalized white privilege and internalized racism as women are encouraged to shed parts of their Africanness, particularly their hair, in order to assimilate into the work environment. In other words, where the African diaspora encourages its own separate identity and community in the church, at work this is seen as an invitation for racial discrimination. Moreover, the workplace is more of a high-stakes environment in that it is directly connected to women's ability to financially survive as immigrants, so families advocate for an appearance that allows women to assimilate so they can get and maintain jobs by avoiding the effects of systemic racism and discrimination.

### ***"Canadians Don't Care How You Look!"***

However, diasporic culture and the "burden of representation" for women navigating professional spaces can also be taxing. Consequently, cultural diversity in the workplace provides

African women with a welcome reprieve from having to maintain demanding cultural practices and nationalist norms. As such, the presence of everyday multiculturalism in the workplace interrupts diasporic pressures and provides women with alternative casual professional attire through exposure within their intercultural encounters. This was encapsulated in the repeated sentiment women shared that, “Canadians don’t care how you look” as the existence of diversity somewhat mitigates racial scrutiny and alleviates some of the pressures associated with dressing formally in the workplace. As Malaika, a Nigerian senior risk analyst in the government, succinctly put it,

*“Canadians have the minimalist laid back approach. They don’t pay attention to fashion.”*

Similarly, Imamu, a Beninese woman in academia, noted,

*“Canadians are very relaxed when they come to the office. Obviously, there are the few people who dress up, mostly us black people, but I see that generally the offices are more casual when it comes to dressing. I am more used to seeing everyone always dressed up.”*

Likewise, Onika, a Burundian digital marketer, shared,

*“I was not expecting people at their work to always be dressing like that when I moved here. I was shocked when I went for my first interview ever to see people wearing jeans and no ties at work. Maybe because of the type of work we do but nobody is really checking my outfit, nobody really cares about that stuff so I kind of like adopted that too.”*

Chipso, a Zimbabwean accounting professional in a private firm, shared similar sentiments,

*“One thing I like about Canadians is it’s a village of different people from different backgrounds, so they don’t care how you look. Canadians don’t really notice what shoes you are wearing, just your output.”*

Furthermore, Chipso noted how her Canadian female boss often goes to work without a brassiere and her other bosses come to work with non-ironed golf shirts. While sharing this observation she excitedly quipped, “See, if you just be yourself you can be happy!” This statement highlights

how intercultural encounters in the workplace expose African women to different notions of femininity and alternative ways of dressing in the workplace so that they can dress for themselves and not consistently uphold nationalist culture and a pan-African identity. In other words, women can cultivate their individuality separate from the diaspora community and their families. From Chipo's experience, witnessing the freedom that white Canadian women feel to not be overly concerned with their appearance in the workplace liberates African women from the pressures of excessively managing their difference through fashion and allows them to make more choices aligned with their personal style regarding their appearance. In other words, intercultural encounters in the workplace permit race and gender to intersect in ways that create new freedoms for African women to reform their racialized identities and make alternative fashion choices by seeing diverse versions of professional femininity. In this way, everyday multiculturalism in the workplace, as in the church, interrupts diasporic culture and nationalist constructions of femininity to give women options that resonate with their professional context, personal preferences, and position within the organization. Furthermore, these new freedoms bleed into other areas of women's beauty practices in the workplace. For example, Zuri, a Nigerian communications professional, recalled an incident when she went to work without makeup while working as a receptionist in Nigeria. Upon seeing her, Zuri's boss told her to go back home and refused to have a meeting with her until she came back with her makeup on. She shared how this upsetting incident left such an impression on her that when she moved to Canada, she was waking up significantly earlier just to get ready and put on her makeup for work. However, she quickly grew tired of her vigilant practice after seeing her colleagues were not wearing makeup, thereby liberating her to do the same. In her own words,

*“To not wear makeup to work is big. I have more freedom ‘cause people don’t care. I feel like we black people put too much pressure on ourselves.”*

Similarly, Ruwa, a Zimbabwean digital marketing specialist, also shared that for work she is able to wear minimal makeup because the opposite, too much makeup, draws unwarranted attention. As she put it,

*“Its more toned-down cause people are laid back at work so having my face (makeup) on all the time, it kinda makes you stick out.”*

Likewise, Amina, a Rwandese lawyer, shared,

*“I stopped wearing makeup when I came here. I used to wear so, so, soooo much makeup, like layers and layers of makeup to get that face beat but with where I work now, I will actually bring attention to myself if I do that. Now I just put minimal so I at least look put together.”*

In short, as African women are exposed to cultural diversity in the workplace and the attendant casual dress culture, they discard nationalist practices to assimilate and embody a rendition of professional femininity that resonates with their individuality. However, the statement that “Canadians don’t care how you look” reflects the specific local expressions of everyday multiculturalism in the cities these women work in. Specifically, women in Ottawa who work in the government, finance, and non-profit industries for example expressed this opinion strongest and shared similar experiences of not feeling pressured to dress a certain way for the workplace. Moreover, Malaika’s earlier comment that Canadians don’t pay attention to fashion was contradicted when she went on to explain how even though she works in Ottawa she is able to tell which of her colleagues are from the Toronto office just by looking at them because they often come to work dressed in luxury brands like Louis Vuitton, Chanel, and Christian Louboutin. This contradiction highlights how African women’s diasporic experiences of everyday

multiculturalism in the workplace are determined by local contexts and class depending on which city they are working in. The women in Ottawa had experiences that led them to repeatedly express that Canadians don't care how they look and as a result they were able to make fashion choices in the workplace with more freedom. However, the women coming from and working in Toronto have different experiences as we shall see. In other words, everyday multiculturalism manifests in different ways within the workplace based on various factors including the city, organizational culture, women's job position, and the weather. Nonetheless, intercultural encounters in the workplace interrupt diasporic pressures and provide women with alternative aesthetics in the workplace so they don't have to keep upholding nationalist practices. Additionally, these intercultural encounters also expose women to other forms of femininity and allows them to let go of cultural practices to embrace new gender norms as continuing diasporic customs of dress in the workplace actually makes women stand out. In short, everyday multiculturalism in the workplace alleviates the "burden of representation" from the African diaspora by exposing women to new professional aesthetics.

### ***Skin Colour and Fashion***

However, while everyday multiculturalism provides women with alternative aesthetics and interrupts diasporic pressures, Canadian discourses of multiculturalism and gendered racialization processes still significantly impact African women in the workplace. Particularly, women's pan-African identity is replaced by articulations of Blackness thus compelling them to dress not for cultural but racist reasons. In other words, dressing up within the context of the pan-African identity is associated with belonging to the diaspora community and cultural pride

while dressing up within the context of a Black identity is associated with avoiding racism and discrimination. Therefore, while Canadians may not care how African women look (fashion) some women's experiences, especially those who work in Toronto, showed that how they look (skin colour) is a source of immense pressure when it comes to navigating their difference in the workplace. Simply put, no matter how well-dressed African women are, their fashion does not always cover their skin colour. As Ayana, a Nigerian lawyer, expressed,

*"If I look unruly, I have to prove myself more than a Caucasian who looks unruly. You have to make yourself presentable to be listened to. You're trying to distract people from your accent and trying to prove yourself. They want people in tune with their culture. A Caucasian who's basic has a higher chance than an African who's well dressed."*

Furthermore, Sanaa, a Zimbabwean banker, shared a similar opinion,

*"If I deliver work but don't look good, it's irrelevant! Women get far more ear when they look good. People are more likely to listen to me."*

Likewise, Shani, a Rwandese nurse working to get into med school, echoed the same sentiments,

*"If they don't see me as a leader, a physician, as put together, they don't feel any need to help me or to just do me any favour in helping me pursue my dreams."*

Adara, a Zimbabwean community coordinator for the Ontario government, summed up these women's experiences,

*"As an African woman in Canada, depending on the space I am trying to infiltrate or occupy, um, I feel pressure to change or contour my beauty to fit that space. In corporate or academic spaces, I feel a tremendous amount of pressure to lose weight. To maybe make sure my teeth are white. Really making sure my skin is clear. Getting my edges laid<sup>71</sup> and all that. As a black woman I think I have to be over and above. So not only do I have to look good, do I have to smell good, I have to speak well, and I think that all comes into that play of 'she's beautiful'. So that polished clean look that is befitting with a strong*

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<sup>71</sup> Edges laid-styling the baby hairs by slicking them down with an edge control product and toothbrush for a sleek finish to the hairstyle.

*powerful Caucasian woman. Even if your hair is not of a Caucasian texture then it resembles it in some way. Whether it's that you're gelling it down or sleeking it back, putting it in a ponytail. Having that flawless skin or the appearance of flawless skin at the very least."*

Moreover, Makanaka, a Zimbabwean graduate student, also shared the pressures she has experienced and revealed that she chooses not to wear her natural hair for job interviews or at work. As she put it,

*"It's not that I hate myself, but I have to live in this society."*

Similarly, Neliah, a Congolese graduate student who works in the government noted,

*"Being a black woman is not so easy at work 'cause people are always judging you by your hair and skin. Sometimes you just have to do what you can to follow the rules here so you can just survive. There are things I don't like to wear like formal and all of that, but I feel like I must make sure I dress extra so they don't question me about my work or anything. Other people may not have to dress up but they are not Black, so they don't have the same problems we have. We just have to follow the rules."*

As such, women's experiences as a result of their racialized identities and fashion highlight several insights. Firstly, women expressed that they felt pressure to dress well so as to avoid negative stereotypes of Africans. While in the previous chapters those stereotypes are associated with being "savage, local, wild, and primitive", in the workplace the stereotypes women seek to distance themselves from are those about their perceived professional abilities, credibility, and intelligence. Furthermore, women repeatedly mentioned that they dressed well to distract from their thick accents which are made commensurate with levels of intelligence, including the ability to be heard and understood. Secondly, women thus feel they need to dress extra well to prove themselves and be over and above because a casually dressed white Canadian has a higher chance of getting the jobs and promotions than a well-dressed African

because of racial discrimination. Therefore, women seek to assimilate and conform to the standards of this space not out of internalized racism or self-hatred, as Makanaka mentioned, but as a strategic way of navigating their difference. Lastly, this further highlights the tensions between race and fashion on African women's bodies in the workplace. On the one hand, being in Canada alleviates the diasporic pressures of femininity through fashion. However, the emphasis on women's racialized identities reveals that skin colour matters more than fashion when working in the Canadian workplace. As Osaze, a Kenyan customer service representative, shared,

*"One of the best things about being in this country is people are not all over you about what you are wearing. It is casual and chilled which is something rare for places back home 'cause we Africans like to dress no matter what country you are coming from. The problem is not the dressing part, it's my skin colour. Now that is where the problem is, so not like I am trying to hide my skin or something, but I just keep dressing well so at least they give me the jobs and take me seriously."*

Shani summed up the tensions of this dilemma,

*"Coming to Canada definitely freed me. I feel like a lot of the times people don't care about looking amazingly good they just care that you look okay. The standard is to look okay but not smell. But I feel like as a person of colour, a black woman, you have to go a step above that to actually have a voice. To actually be listened to. To actually be taken seriously especially in a work environment."*

Therefore, while cultural diversity in the workplace provides women with alternatives to adopt causal professional styles, their racialized identities mean they still have to dress more formally than others to counter negative racial stereotypes, avoid racism and discrimination, and be taken seriously. Consequently, fashion becomes a way to clothe their Blackness in an attempt to make it more palatable and presentable. In other words, everyday multiculturalism in the

workplace both provides women with new freedoms, through alternative aesthetics, and impacts their agency through constructions of Blackness.

### ***Comments, Questions & Everyday Racisms***

Thus, the emphasis on women's racialized identities no matter how fashionably dressed, is also followed by everyday racism<sup>72</sup> (Essed, 2002) that takes the form of questions, comments, misconceptions, and stereotypes. For example, in reflecting on an incident when her supervisor asked her why she is "always dressing differently" Callista, a Beninese public servant, shared how her ideas of beauty and fashion were challenged when she entered the Canadian workforce because of the comments she would get. In her words,

*"It's funny 'cause they're supposed to be compliments but then you wonder why are you always complimenting me like I'm the only black person here? This is as white people clothes as they get, like I'm not coming here with my boubou<sup>73</sup> or anything. So, I did not understand the 'differently'. Yeah, I'm African so yes, I have different, I guess, concept of beauty and different concept of how people should dress professionally. Like coming in jeans at work is not good enough for me that's how I was raised. Even in small things, even if you wear things that are conventional, it's still your view of beauty or the way you appear is always, I don't know, challenged or questioned. So, it started a revolution in me, 'ah you know what, I might as well own that I'm different \*Laughs\* 'cause clearly I've been trying to blend in and it's not working over the last ten years so I'll just be different, I'll just be me. Like, yeah, I like dressing correctly and I'm very sorry if it makes you feel not good but that's what it is."*

Similarly, Nakimera, a Ugandan woman, shared,

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<sup>72</sup> Everyday racism encapsulates the way discrimination is perpetuated through society combining both individual action and institutional structures. It is the recurrent, systematic, and familiar practices within society that disadvantage ethnic minorities. It's not about extreme incidents but mundane cumulative practices embedded in routine and everyday practice so that it's covert and experienced as amorphous and difficult to explicitly identify.

<sup>73</sup> Boubou: a long flowing garment worn in parts of Africa.

*“I don’t do it often but whenever I decide to wear something from home, I already know the comments that day will be so many. I don’t mind it or anything but sometimes I think to myself, ‘are we not here to do a job? Why is what I’m wearing today a topic of discussion?’”*

Furthermore, Kiojah, a Zambian finance manager woman, noted,

*“My boss is always asking me questions whenever I wear something with my traditional chitenje<sup>74</sup> print suit. He doesn’t mean any disrespect, but I don’t see it happening with others. Yes, my culture is different with all the jewellery and patterns so maybe it’s just curiosity, but I always just feel like I stand out and bring attention to myself because of those things.”*

Likewise, Adeola, a Kenyan government worker, shared,

*“I know things at offices here are different, but I always still make sure I dress as smart as I can. I just like looking good when I go to the office. The people I work with are always saying that I am dressed nicely. Sometimes they are compliments but sometimes it’s like they are confused about why I am always dressing up.”*

These women’s experiences highlight the earlier themes of upholding the pan-African identity and continental aesthetic nationalism in the workplace, as well as the tensions between race and fashion whereby no matter how well dressed in conventional “as white people clothes as they get”, African women’s foreignness is still evident and their difference is called out, challenged, and questioned. Consequently, women are singled out and become the topic of discussions based on their racialized identities. Additionally, compliments from coworkers have undertones of everyday racism based on how women feel they are the only ones getting that type of attention, even if the questions are seemingly innocent or co-workers have good intentions. Therefore, whether women are wearing conventional western clothes or cultural attire, they are still made the center of attention, thereby revealing that it’s not women’s clothes per se but

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<sup>74</sup> Zambian traditional dress.

their racialized identities and cultural difference that makes them stand out as their 'otherness' is magnified in intercultural encounters. Whereas Chipó's encounter with her non-brassiere wearing boss enabled her to feel more freedom in her work fashion choices, some women are left confused and self-conscious by their colleagues' comments, thereby intensifying their need to dress well and distract from their racialized identities and African culture. However, co-workers' confusion also inspires a sense of agency and ownership over their fashion choices as women choose to stand out and be different despite the comments. This highlights how, whether encounters of difference in the workplace are negative or positive, African women are still able to claim and express varying degrees of agency over their identities and fashion practices. As Machel, a Congolese marketing executive, shared,

*"Since coming to Canada, it has been even more important for me to show my culture in the way I dress. So, my style is a mix of traditional clothes from different countries and professional attire. Though with the dressing here, I always stand out at work and there is not a day when someone does not say something about what I am wearing or ask a question. Sometimes I just want to be left alone to do my work, but I also see it as a good chance to tell people about my culture. If I am going to be the only black woman on the team then I might as well show them something beautiful beyond what they see in our skin colour and the bad news on our countries."*

As such, women's experiences emphasize the ways in which everyday multiculturalism in the workplace simultaneously creates room for cultural self-expression while magnifying difference. In other words, cultural diversity in the workplace allows African women to embody hybrid styles of femininity that are Canadian and African inspired. However, intercultural encounters also magnify women's difference as their racialized identities are a constant reminder of their 'otherness' through colleagues' comments and questions. In short, African women use their

fashion practices to overcome racialized perceptions of 'otherness' and the comments that bring attention to their difference in order to express themselves and their agency.

### ***Looking Professional or Staying Warm?***

Furthermore, the climate is another factor that intersects with discourses of multiculturalism and racialization processes to impact women's fashion choices and shape their racialized identities in the workplace. Specifically, the frigid Canadian winters affect women's abilities to keep upholding formal nationalist professional dress codes as the climate and use of public transportation make it challenging. As Alika, who moved from Uganda for university and now works as an accountant, noted,

*"The weather here was a big culture shock, it's so cold! Now my outfits for the workday take the longest because it's based on the weather, especially in winter."*

Haseena, a Nigerian financier, also explained how the weather has significantly impacted her abilities to continue dressing formally. She shared an occasion when she was going for a job interview in the middle of a bitter Ottawa winter, and she was forced to wear *"ugly winter boots while carrying a backpack which is unladylike but convenient"*. Fortunately, her unladylike attire did not impact the interview process, but she had to adapt her outfit choice to the weather and not what she believed would make the best first impression. As such, navigating looking professional while staying warm is an art that many African women have had to master. As Haseena further noted,

*"There are certain things you can't wear if you don't have a car. Sometimes I look at the weather and think 'oh Haseena, you are going to look messed up today!'"*

The shift to using public transportation and the weather combined means women are not able to wear formal work outfits that they could in their home countries where many of them owned their own vehicles and the climate was warmer. For example, Ayana, a Nigerian lawyer, expressed how she had work dresses tailored in Nigeria before she moved but she has not been able to wear them since arriving in Canada two years prior because she does not yet have the status that would warrant her to wear such formal clothes. She wistfully continued that if she had a good job, she'd constantly look chic. In her words,

*"I'm too poor to look that good yet. I don't have a car yet. I'd look so good in it with heels and a car. I don't have a job that will make me dress that glamorous yet so let me just be ordinary for now. So, I feel ordinary most of the time when I dress for work."*

Similarly, Chiamaka, a Zimbabwean woman in the private sector, shared,

*"I miss my car so much! I would always wear heels to work because I was driving. Now I can't even do that because I take the bus and I don't want to carry another extra bag for my shoes, so I usually just wear flats. It's not the look I want in the office but what else can I do since I don't have a car here. I just make it work like that casual formal look."*

As such, the changes in socioeconomic status, reflected in women no longer owning cars and getting jobs that don't make them dress glamorous, affects women's choice of dress in the workplace resulting in many of them feeling "ordinary" or "unladylike". Considering that the workplace dress culture is casual and "Canadians don't care how you look", this would not be such an issue for women since their coworkers are also dressed down. However, due to diasporic practices, African women still carry the burden to dress up as their definitions of nationalist professional femininity are attached to both diaspora culture and the necessity to navigate institutionalized racism in the workplace. Furthermore, Chinelo, a Zambian fashion entrepreneur, confirmed the benefits of owning a car during the winter months for sartorial reasons. She

shared of the time when she attended a taping of the television show *The Social* in Toronto for work. While she had picked out her outfit of the day and she liked her shoes, it was too cold for the pair she had chosen but she did not want to change her shoes because it would mean changing her whole outfit. Rather than change her outfit or take public transit, she decided to drive forty minutes downtown in traffic and pay extra money for parking instead of changing her shoes. Justifying her actions, she shared,

*“I want to wear what looks good with the outfit not what’s practical for work. I hate having to carry things and to change boots that don’t look good with the ensemble.”*

Likewise, Masego, a Ghanaian woman in the private sector, noted,

*“The time I got my first big promotion at work, the first thing I decided to invest in was a car and a new wardrobe. There was no way I could keep taking the bus since I was now a director. I wanted to make sure I could wear exactly what I want to wear to work so they can see that I’m a real boss lady even how I dress and stuff. I can tell you that the way I used to dress waiting for the bus and how I dress now driving, you would not recognize me-o!”*

Accordingly, being able to dress well in the office is impacted by class as some women have access to jobs and resources that enable them to purchase cars and professional wardrobes so neither the weather nor taking public transport affects their work outfits. Furthermore, women are willing to pay extra money on parking, endure traffic, and buy cars all so that they do not have to compromise their sense of fashion in the office. On the contrary, other women shared that winter is a time when all sense of fashion goes out the window and they are only dressing to be warm and comfortable because “there is no fashion in Canada during winter!”. As such, African women’s professional fashion practices are influenced by institutionalized anti-Black

racism in the workplace, nationalist constructions of femininity, the African diaspora, the Canadian climate, and class.

In sum, women migrate with nationalist professional norms of femininity as symbols of modernity. However, the weather and shifts in socioeconomic status impacts their abilities to maintain these cultural practices. Furthermore, everyday multiculturalism interrupts diasporic pressures and provides women with alternative aesthetics from gendered nationalist norms as “Canadians don’t care how you look”, thereby allowing women more agency over their fashion practices and enabling them to focus more on their jobs rather than appearance. However, while everyday multiculturalism does not make fashion style an issue, women’s racialized identities remain an omnipresent source of difference in the workplace as they feel they must clothe their Blackness to make it more palatable and presentable so as to avoid negative racial stereotypes. Subsequently, women experience the inequities of everyday racism as they face comments and questions that magnify their difference.

## **HAIR**

In addition to skin colour and fashion, hair is also an obvious marker of difference that African women have to navigate in the workplace. Broadly, black women’s hair has been racialized in diverse ways and shapes the cultural significance of women’s racial identity as well as constructions of femininity in the workplace (Greene, 2013; Brown, 2018; Banks, 2000; Tate, 2018). In other words, women are marked as racialized “other” through their hairstyles that do not represent the prevailing white female normative standard of professional femininity.

Similarly, this study shows that the attention given to African women's hair practices in the workplace highlights how Canadian discourses of multiculturalism and mainstream standards of beauty often exclude black women based on their racial difference as exemplified through their hair. Accordingly, this section looks at women's professional hairstyle choices, the attendant comments from colleagues, perceptions of professional credibility, and their role as cultural ambassadors of black hair and beauty in the workplace.

### ***Professional Hairstyle Choices***

As a result of gendered constructions of Blackness within the workplace, African women face conflicting and sometimes contradictory struggles when it comes to their hair choices in this space. While other women generally face these issues, the extent to which these decisions are personal, political, and professional are historically and contemporarily unique to black African women. In other words, hair choices for African women are rooted in constructs of their racialized identities and the resulting stigmatization, discrimination, and marginalization of black beauty in the private and public spheres. Consequently, the juxtapositions at the center of their professional hairstyle choices are the difference between professional inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and stigmatization, employment and unemployment. Respectively, women shared various ways the workplace environment determines their hairstyle choices including what style they choose and when they decide to do their hair. For example, Ruwa, a Zimbabwean digital marketing specialist, shared of a time when she wanted to get her hair braided<sup>75</sup> in her home country while she was on vacation because the hair extensions and service are cheaper there,

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<sup>75</sup> Braids: single plaits, cornrows or any style that weaves together three or more strands of hair extensions.

but she struggled with the choice because she did not want to “switch it up on them too soon” as she had just started the job. She was torn between wanting to maintain the look she had when she was interviewed for her new position and saving money by getting her preferred hairstyle done in her home country.

Similarly, Shaina, a Kenyan financial advisor, expressed how she often feels “less awkward” going in to work with a new style on a Monday rather than in the middle of the week because of the attention and questions that come with a change of hairstyle. As such, she often waits until the weekend to have her hair done rather than enduring the comments that come with a sudden hair change midweek. These women’s experiences thus highlight that often the choice of what style and when to do their hair is determined by their work environments and the perceived consequences of changing hairstyles including attracting unwanted attention. Therefore, rather than the preferred, cheaper, or convenient hairstyle options, women went with what would allow them to blend in the most at work. As Neema, a Rwandese woman who works in the tech industry, shared,

*“Whenever I want to change my hairstyle for work it’s such a struggle. Living in Rwanda everybody is always changing their hair, so nobody asks questions except to say it looks nice, this and that. It’s not the case at work where the minute I change my hairstyle and everybody notices. Now to do my hair its always to ask what is the best for the office.”*

Similarly, Dara, a Burundian accountant, noted,

*“Since I started working in this environment, I can say that my hair does not belong to me. It belongs to the job and what is the best for that because the styles I like to do are not maybe so good for the professional look. Already people see us black women like something else, so I just keep the hairstyles straight and all. Even when I change my hair, I just keep the same look for consistency.”*

Furthermore, Mbalenhle, a Ugandan woman who works in the private sector, shared,

*“I am even embarrassed to tell you this, but I have kept a hairstyle for almost five months because I had just started the new job and that was the hairstyle I had when I went for the interview. I was afraid that if I changed the hairstyle, they would regret hiring me. So, I kept that weave in for sooooo long. Now I have been at the job for a while so I am not so scared like before, but I always decide my hairstyles based on what is okay for work so that when I change, people at work are not too shocked by me.”*

Thus, these examples illustrate how African women make everyday hair choices that seek to minimize the attention drawn to their difference through their hairstyles in the workplace. Furthermore, choosing their hairstyles becomes a “struggle” as they dread the attention, misrecognition, and exclusion. As such, women forgo their own preferences and select hairstyles that are best for assimilating into the workplace environment. Accordingly, like black Canadian women (Brown, 2018), African women in this sample attempt to contain their Blackness by muting the racialized markers attached to their hair as a way to make their racialized identities less visible. Consequently, their agency is impacted by discourses of multiculturalism and gendered racialization processes in Canadian society as they engage with respectability politics that inherently promote the invisibility of their difference as shown through the hairstyles they use to fit in at work. Furthermore, these women’s experiences highlight the disconnect between women’s everyday experiences and Canadian multiculturalism policy that encourages institutions to “promote practices that enhance the understanding of and respect for the diversity of the members of Canadian society [and to] carry on their activities in a manner that is sensitive and responsive to the multicultural reality of Canada” (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988). However, women’s lived experiences show that in the reality of everyday intercultural encounters, there is some sensitivity lacking as African women’s racial difference and cultural diversity invites racial discrimination, stigmatization, and/or hyper-focus.

### ***Comments, Questions & Everyday Racisms***

Moreover, when they do decide to change their hairstyles, African women often have to deal with experiences in their intercultural encounters that range from daily micro-aggressions, rude behavior, and dismissive statements to outright disrespect which can cumulatively have adverse effects on their well-being. In other words, African women experience “everyday racisms”<sup>76</sup> (Essed, 2002; Nakagawa & Arzubiaga, 2014) that come in the form of dismissals, exclusion, biased comments, and unwanted attention. For example, Callista, a Beninese public servant, shared how at one point she attended a professional development function with her natural hair because she was not able to get a hair appointment in time. During the offsite event, none of her immediate colleagues were in attendance so she did not receive much attention. However, when she returned to the office she was bombarded with attention and questions as colleagues were seeing her natural hair for the first time. She went on to further share that the attention she received that day was so overwhelming that she went back to straightening her hair so she would not be the center of attention in the office again. Similarly, Ruwa also shared that whenever she changes her hairstyle from her natural hair to wigs, her colleagues constantly ask questions. Before, this attention would make her hesitant to change her hairstyles but after a while she resigned herself to the fact that she would constantly be getting attention and she just accepts the situation. As Ayana, a Nigerian lawyer, put it,

*“They notice us because African women are able to change their look from wigs to weaves to braids to natural. Our looks are always changing.”*

Similarly, Jahmelia, a Rwandese woman, noted,

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<sup>76</sup> The normalized acts that reinforce underlying relations of power between dominant and minority groups as well as the “forever foreigner” comments and questions.

*“Us black women we can wear this hairstyle, that one, and there are so many things we can do with it. But all the changing hairstyles also confuses these white people because they don’t know how we do it, so they want to learn, they ask questions.”*

Likewise, Adia, a Congolese woman, echoed similar sentiments,

*“I am the only black woman on my team and my colleagues are always joking that they work with like twenty-five different black women because I am always changing my hairstyle and like a brand-new woman every time. We laugh about it and I tell them that is why we black women are special, because nobody else can change their hair fifty times like we do!”*

As such, women are noticed for their versatile ever-changing looks which often confuses their colleagues and elicits comments around their hairstyles. For some women like Callista, the attention is too overwhelming, so they go back to wearing hairstyles that blend in. For other women like Adia, the attention is an opportunity to have intercultural conversations and change negative perceptions of women’s racialized identities as well as the narratives on black beauty and hair at an interpersonal level. On the other hand, African women’s changing hairstyles also demonstrate how this racial marker is a site of exclusion and marginalization within intercultural encounters in the workplace. For example, some of the women in the sample noted how their colleagues are often unable to recognize them when they change their hairstyles. For example, Adara, a Zimbabwean community coordinator, shared of an occasion when she had changed her hairstyle, from straight hair to braids, and one of her co-workers denied her access into their office building when she had forgotten her key card. After a brief exchange, with Adara convincing her co-worker that it was indeed her, her colleague exclaimed in shock, *“oh my gosh, you’ve changed! You’ve completely changed!”* before letting her into the building. Similarly, Malaika, a Nigerian risk analyst, shared her experience when she changed her hair, from long wavy extensions to a pixie cut wig, and one of her colleagues approached her to introduce

themselves leading with “*oh, I don’t think we’ve met before*”. Malaika thought it was a joke until it became clear that her colleague truly did not recognize her. Accordingly, these experiences of misrecognition and exclusion are personally injurious and professionally embarrassing leading women to think twice before changing their hair. As Makhosi, a Zimbabwean woman, noted,

*“I like that I can change my hair but after one time when some people from my work didn’t recognize me, I decided it’s just safer to stick to one hairstyle type and use that like my signature look because it didn’t feel good to not be recognized at my job.”*

Furthermore, Amahle, a Cameroonian woman, similarly expressed,

*“I guess for some white people, we all look the same as black women so they can’t tell who we are when we change our hairstyle. So many times, some of our clients don’t notice me at first because I have changed my hairstyle. I almost thought of making a name-tag so people can see that it’s me even if my hair is different.”*

Likewise, Sauda, a Kenyan woman, shared,

*“I used to think twice before changing my hair because there is always that risk people may not recognize you. Our people are used to us changing hairstyles all the time, but I noticed with my white friends, people at work and all over, they sometimes don’t recognize you at first when you change your hair. I don’t blame them because our hairstyles go from kinky to straight to black to blonde to long to short. I would be confused too if I wasn’t black!”*

Moreover, even with countless quality YouTube tutorials on hair care, numerous products, and styles as part of the Natural Hair Movement lexicon, many African women still struggle to wear their natural hair<sup>77</sup> out at work for fear of judgment, professional reprimand, and unwanted attention. As Alika, an accounting professional, put it,

*“Navigating natural hair where straight hair is the norm takes more effort to make it look neat and professional!”*

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<sup>77</sup> Natural hair: hair that has not been altered by chemical straighteners, including relaxers and texturizers.

Haseena, a Nigerian finance professional, affirmed this point when she shared an incident when her Canadian manager commented that she finally looked professional because her “afro was now cute and well tamed”. Similarly, Mabel, a Beninese public servant, shared the various types of comments she gets depending on her hairstyle. When her hair is natural, the comments she gets from colleagues include “*can I touch it?*” and “*oh that’s different*”. Whereas when her hair is relaxed<sup>78</sup> she gets comments like “*oh that’s beautiful*” and “*oh that’s nice*”. She further noted how rare it is to get the “it’s beautiful” compliment on her natural hair unless she defines her curls making her hair look like she is interracial. As such, these examples highlight the ways in which natural hair in the workplace is still seen as exotic and unprofessional while straight hair is seen as a necessary component of femininity in the workplace because it is hair associated with competence, professionalism, and the organizational fit of African women. Additionally, Naomi, a Nigerian customer service representative, expressed one of the reasons she does not wear her natural hair at work is because she does not want people touching her hair without her permission. In her words,

*“It’s so annoying! Again, I’m sure they don’t intentionally do it. It’s not something they think is wrong. I think they just want to figure out what’s on your hair.”*

Similarly, Sanaa, a Zimbabwean financier, shared,

*“I don’t go to work with natural hair because I would be perceived as artistic, and I don’t want to talk about it at the coffee machine.”*

Additionally, Masego, a Ghanaian woman, articulated her struggles,

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<sup>78</sup> Relaxed: hair that has been straightened by applying a cream mixture to chemically alter the texture of the hair by breaking down the curls and straightening it.

*“I have to confess, I am still finding it hard to wear my natural hair at work because of all the stigma that is around it still. Like you aren’t seen as a professional when your hair is that way.”*

Likewise, Laila, a Nigerian woman, shared,

*“Now you see more black women wearing natural hair in the workplace and it’s great because we have come a long way so natural hair is no longer associated with your work abilities. Still, it takes confidence to wear your hair at work because you are not in your country so any office will have mostly white people and I think they are still getting used to all this black women’s stuff.”*

Therefore, the curiosity and stigma placed on African women’s racialized identities as displayed by their natural hairstyles, through unwanted attention, biased comments, and unsolicited touching, affects which hairstyles women choose to wear to work. Consequently, this is symptomatic of the pejorative sociopolitical meaning attached to African women’s natural hair as well as the associated stereotyping and bias at the intersections of race and gender within everyday multiculturalism in the workplace. However, some of the women in the study expressed confidence and agency when it comes to their hair choices in the workplace, despite the accompanying comments and questions reflective of everyday racisms. As Haseena shared,

*“I wouldn’t rock natural hair in Nigeria, but I can get away with it here ‘cause I’m surrounded by white people. I can be original with white people. I like that you can do so much with your hair. Canadians are more interested in intelligence. I feel this is a safer place for me to dress appropriately and say the right thing. But when people don’t comment on my natural hair, I know no comment means they’re trying not to offend me.”*

Similarly, Callista noted how she has gained confidence to wear her natural hair at work,

*“Some mornings I wake up and it’s like ‘you know what, I don’t have time and it will stay this way and I don’t care. I know it’s weird right now, but I choose not to care’ \*laughing\*. But sometimes throughout the day you feel the looks, and this has been people I’ve been working with for few years right, so they saw me with the relaxed hair and the braids and*

*now they're seeing the afro<sup>79</sup>. You have the funny looks, but people don't dare ask but they're still trying to like figure out what is going on, if this is this a phase. Like no, this is the new me! \*Laughs\*. I grew in my confidence. When you know who you are people dare less challenge you."*

Along with natural hair, headwraps are also another cultural and fashion statement African women choose to wear in the workplace. For example, Chinelo, a Zambian personal stylist, shared why she wears headwraps in the workplace even when she gets so many questions and comments. In fact, one of the first questions she asked when she got her job and was told that she had to wear all black as an office uniform, was if she could wear her headwraps. In her words,

*"People are gonna ask questions anyway. Even if I just say my name, it's like 'oh that's an interesting name, where's that from?' So if I'm going to get the questions anyway I might as well wear an outfit that looks bomb and is expressive."*

Similarly, Runako, a Zimbabwean non-for-profit worker, shared,

*"I like to wear headwraps to work because its practical but also to really disturb the Eurocentric theme with African elements!"*

In sum, African women's hair choices are laden with tensions, contradictions, and struggles because these choices are often accompanied by exclusions and judgments about their professionalism and femininity as well as the appropriateness of their personal grooming choices. Subsequently, women use their hair choices to minimize their difference and make their racialized identities less visible as the attention they receive is often overwhelming. Additionally, they also use their hair choices to fit into mainstream white standards of beauty as a way of managing the effects of encounters steeped in everyday racisms which they have to navigate.

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<sup>79</sup> Afro: a natural hair hairstyle in which the hair is thick, curly and has a rounded shape.

This is primarily demonstrated in the way their natural hair is exoticized and fetishized through unwanted touching and attention. Consequently, African women's agency regarding their hair choices in the workplace is complicated and sometimes impacted in unique ways as race, gender, discourses of multiculturalism, stereotyping and stigmatization, power and privilege, inclusion and exclusion are at the heart of workplace hairstyle choices. However, women are still able to demonstrate agency by choosing to confidently wear styles that are counter cultural like their natural hair and headwraps. Since "Canadians are more interested in intelligence", as Haseena put it, some women experience liberties to shed the American-Eurocentric image of straight hair, perpetuated by their families, to embrace their personal preferences. Furthermore, women are also able to wear headwraps to challenge systemic anti-Black racism within the workplace. Thus, wearing headwraps is a way of inserting their pan-African identity and cultural pride into the workplace as they subvert gendered racialization processes within Canadian society.

### ***Perceptions of Professional Credibility***

However, even as women find moments of agency to express themselves and challenge everyday racisms experienced interpersonally and institutionally, racialized perceptions of professional credibility continue to determine women's hair practices in the workplace. While most African women are formally educated and have extensive work experience both in their home countries and Canada, the prevailing notion is that because of their racialized identities they must work harder than their Canadian colleagues to prove themselves competent, capable, and more knowledgeable. One way to maintain that sense of credibility is to manage their hair

choices as hair is often made synonymous with qualifications and job performance (Greene, 2013; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Brown, 2018). In other words, African women's hair calls attention to their racial difference and reduces their perceived competence as well as their social acceptability among colleagues in the workplace. As such, women are caught in both raced and gendered notions of femininity as well as discourses of multiculturalism that draw focus to their "otherness" and impacts some of their workplace hairstyle choices. For example, Mia, a Kenyan woman in the provincial government, shared how she makes a conscious decision to wear weaves<sup>80</sup> to work seminars so everyone takes her seriously. In her words,

*"I find the pressure I feel is at work if I'm doing seminars. I find myself not wanting to wear my natural hair 'cause I feel like they don't pay attention to me as much as they do when I'm wearing the weave. Having my natural hair, I don't catch everyone's attention. I find with any woman once you have short hair, they don't take you as seriously as having the long hair. Having short hair as a woman, it takes away a lot of that respect from people."*

Sade, a Nigerian woman, similarly shared,

*"They definitely treat you differently when you don't look like other women with straight hair. When I wear my natural hair, people are more asking me questions about how to take care of it and how it grows and whatever. I feel like sometimes maybe they are focused on that and they are not listening to my ideas. So now I just wear mostly weaves so that my life at work is easier. It's what we have to do to survive in this place."*

Moreover, even the women who still choose to wear their natural hair in the workplace go to great lengths to ensure that it mimics an American-Eurocentric image of straightness. For example, Shaina explained that when she wears her natural hair to work, she does it in a way

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<sup>80</sup> Weave: wefts/extensions made from human or synthetic hair are sewn into flat braided cornrows on the head.

that looks professional because of the negative stereotypes that are attached to her and her competence if she doesn't take the time to style it properly. As she put it,

*"Like even if I have natural hair, it's in a sleek bun and I wouldn't have it all over the place."*

These examples thus reveal the ways in which African women's hair is caught in multiple intersections of race, gender, length, and texture. In other words, natural hairstyles, which are usually short and coily/curly/kinky, are denigrated and rejected as not conforming to hegemonic white notions of femininity, attractiveness, and professionalism. Consequently, African women feel the need to eliminate racial difference markers through their hair choices so they can assimilate in the workplace. Accordingly, African women are more likely to seek out hairstyles that look professional and meet the mainstream white norms of femininity in a dominant culture that already defines them as less attractive, feminine, intelligent, professional, and capable than other women because of their racialized identities. Therefore, women's adaptation of an American-Eurocentric image defined by straight hair is guided by a pragmatic and survivalist requirement to maintain professional credibility and avoid being excluded in the culturally diverse workplace. As Adara noted,

*"If a person is not appealing to the eye there is an automatic assumption of their capabilities. You are incapable of performing a task because you have already displayed you are incapable of maintaining certain aspects of your appearance."*

Similarly, Amahle, a Cameroonian woman, shared,

*"I can't really say that it's my favourite style, but I think that weaves and wigs or like any straight hair makes other people feel comfortable. Like they don't see you as stupid because your hair is kinky. I just feel it's better to have straight hair at work so I look like I know what I am doing with my job."*

Thus, African women feel they must compensate for their gendered racialized identities by attempting to present a professional image that will render them credible to their co-workers. Therefore, conforming to mainstream white standards of femininity and professionalism is a necessity for career success, rather than internalized racism, because of the limited alternatives for African women. In other words, blending in by mirroring mainstream constructions of femininity is more about prudence and the practicalities of knowing how to navigate difference in the workplace, and less about rejecting their pan-African identity and aesthetic nationalism. Women's experiences in the workplace thus reveal that the gendered racialization processes in the workplace tie the appropriate professional look to having straight hair as natural hair is attached to perceptions of diminished intelligence and capabilities. Furthermore, the curiosity and stereotypes that coworkers attach to women's hair overshadows their jobs and leads them to feeling like their ideas and contributions are not valued as they are reduced to objects of racial fascination and curiosity. Consequently, African women's hair choices are pushed into a mold that waters down their Blackness into a more acceptable state, thereby showing the ways in which whiteness is institutionalized and continues to be preferred as the status quo in the multicultural workplace. In short, African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism show that racial difference and cultural diversity are allowed into the workplace mainly by exoticizing and regulating it.

### ***Cultural Ambassadors of Black Hair***

However, as the American-Eurocentric image of professional femininity relegates African women's bodies to "objects of exotic and racial fascination" (hooks, 2000:96) in the workplace, women negotiate their racialized identities and the constructions of professional femininity by

engaging with questions and comments as cultural educators of black hair. For example, Aiysha, a Ghanaian executive assistant, explained that she does not take offense when her boss and colleagues ask her questions about her different hairstyles because she sees it more as curiosity around the versatility of what African women can do with their hair and she indulges their curiosities by answering their questions and sharing about her hair. Similarly, Jamelle, a Cameroonian epidemiologist, allows her colleagues to touch her hair and takes the time to answer their questions because she expressed how she understands the inquisitiveness around her hair, and she wants to ease the process of “unlearning the ignorance around black hair” for her colleagues. Furthermore, Makhosi, a Zimbabwean woman shared,

*“Things about black women’s hair is not easy, you know, so I just take the time to tell them about it so that they can also learn. I don’t see it like racism or anything like that, I just see it as something that is different and people want to learn about it, but maybe that’s just me.”*

Likewise, Marini, a Ghanaian woman, echoed similar sentiments,

*“My coworkers make me laugh because they are always wanting to know details when I change my hair. At first it used to annoy me so much but now I just share with them since things about black women are becoming more and more acceptable. Some of our people say that it’s not our job to explain to others but if we don’t tell them then the TV and all these other places will show the bad side about us. So even if it annoys me sometimes, I think it’s good to also do what I can so they see black women are good, we are beautiful, we are hardworking, and smart.”*

However, while some of the women welcomed the curiosity of their co-workers with understanding, because ignorance about black hairstyles can in part be attributed to a lack of public awareness about black hair as there are such few representations in the media, for others this curiosity elicited ambiguous feelings. As Shaina expressed,

*“I don’t mind answering the questions ‘cause I understand they’re just fascinated but I would prefer to just do my hair anyhow I’d like without anybody asking what I did. Just*

*give me the compliment and go, especially 'cause I know you're not asking to go try it yourself. That would be a different conversation. But more so you're just fascinated with what I did. I really don't mind educating people on it, I just don't care to talk about it."*

Similarly, Shani passionately shared her response to the questions she gets from her colleagues when they cannot tell the difference between her own hair and extensions. As she put it,

*"I know they mean well but it pisses me off! \*Banging on table\* I want them to know this is my hair, don't you dare think that I added something to it."*

She went on to tell of an occasion where her Canadian co-worker was describing her to another nurse and how her locs<sup>81</sup> were confused for braids. In her words,

*"I was infuriated! I understand where she was coming from, a lot of black women have braids and a lot of white people can't tell. We were in a group of seven people so I couldn't stop her. I just smiled and nodded but inside I was dying. I didn't want to be that weird person who's really sensitive about hair because I feel like black women are like really supersensitive about hair. You can never touch a black woman's hair, you can never say anything about her hair, their head. That is just a different territory that non-black people don't usually talk about. I would like people to know I'm okay talking about these things, that I'm comfortable in my skin and what I look like and them to be comfortable to talk to me about whatever they don't understand about black women."*

Other women also expressed that often their colleagues cannot tell the difference between their own natural hair and the different types of extensions, braids, wigs, and weaves these women wear. As such, women's reactions to the fascination and curiosity of colleagues are expressed with mixed feelings. On the one hand, African women do not mind accommodating their colleagues' fascination and curiosity. However, this accommodation is sometimes accompanied by anger and frustration with the ignorance around their hair. As a result, not all African women take the opportunity to be cultural ambassadors of black hair because they don't like the

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<sup>81</sup> Dreadlocks: natural hair is locked into itself by creating rope-like strands.

“othering” in the workplace. As Adaeze, a Nigerian graduate student and analyst in the government, shared,

*“I don’t ever facilitate the conversation because it’s not my problem to explain my existence to you or my hair to you in the workplace. I’m here to do a job and I’ve done the job. I’m not a spectacle as a black woman satisfying curiosity”*

Women’s mixed experiences and emotions thus highlight the ways in which different women adopt various strategies to survive in an institutionalized white culture that places emphasis on their racialized identities and bodies. Firstly, there are women who do not associate these comments and questions with everyday racisms but rather with curiosity for that which is different. From this perspective, women see it as an opportunity to remove ignorance by demystifying black beauty culture and enlightening their colleagues on black hairstyles. In other words, women feel emboldened to become educators of their culture and perceptions of racism are replaced with fascination of the unknown. Furthermore, women see themselves as symbols of positive representation in their intercultural encounters, thereby challenging negative racial stereotypes in the public, media, popular culture and so on. However, other women receive the curiosity around their hair with indifference, anger, as well as the desire to be accepted and disassociate from negative stereotypes about black women. In other words, women like Shani swallow microaggressions and don’t speak up to colleagues when these things happen because they simultaneously understand the unfamiliarity that exists with black beauty culture, and they also don’t want to be associated with the other negative stereotypes like “the angry black woman”. Thus, women delicately balance being cultural educators within the confines of their racialized identities, thereby leading them to still want to fit in and not rock the boat too much at work. Moreover, there are also women like Adaeze who do not tolerate any curiosity as they

refuse to be fetishized and exoticized in the workplace. Accordingly, women are able to escape some forms of everyday racism by choosing not to indulge their colleagues' curiosity and instead focusing solely on their jobs. Furthermore, the differences in women's responses to their colleagues' curiosity also highlights the ways in which women's abilities to engage as cultural ambassadors is determined by different factors such as age, occupation, position, and length of time in the organization, as well as comfort with the dominant culture. Put simply, resistance to respectability politics in the workplace, by either choosing to wear bold natural hairstyles or refusing to be fetishized, is linked to privilege as most women assimilate to survive and ensure continued employment and career success. In short, African women adopt various strategies, such as becoming cultural ambassadors of black hair, as a tactical way of negotiating their racialized identities as well as managing and challenging racial stereotypes, discourses of multiculturalism, and dominant cultural manifestations of black beauty. However, engaging in these educational explanations often creates ambivalent feelings for women as some choose to resist racist encounters by declining to engage their colleagues' curiosities.

## **Conclusion**

The ethos of multiculturalism in the workplace is articulated through equal opportunities and "diversity management" as emphasis is placed on the cultural richness and socioeconomic contributions promised by the incorporation of diverse groups into the Canadian labor force. Accordingly, the workplace is an important site in African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism as their daily professional lives illuminate the ways in which diversity shapes this space through Canadian discourses of multiculturalism and daily intercultural

encounters. Thus, as women move from the home through the church and into the workplace, their racial identities shift from a pan-African identity to a Black identity as they are incorporated into the broader Canadian society. Accordingly, as African women are racialized Black, they stand out for their diasporic cultural practices of dressing formally as some women continue to maintain nationalist constructions of professional femininity when they migrate. This is demonstrated as they seek to achieve a distinctive African modernity through fashion and discourses of work in this space. Additionally, women also uphold postcolonial constructions of race, through their families' recommendations to have the professional look of straight hair, as part of the pan-African identity in the workplace. Like the "gospel of dress to impress" in the church, dressing formally in the workplace is a way of signaling their Africanness in a professional context especially as the internal racialization processes of the diaspora community are replaced by Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, race, and gender. In short, dressing formally to work is a way to continue upholding the pan-African identity through continental aesthetic nationalism. Thus, diasporic culture and embodying the pan-African identity provides women with ways to uphold nationalist constructions of femininity, albeit challenging to do sometimes, while clothing their racial difference in power as they signify their cultural identities and career ambitions in the workplace.

This chapter has shown that, on the one hand, the presence of everyday multiculturalism both intensifies and interrupts the burden of representation from the African diaspora, to dress formally in the workplace, by providing alternative aesthetics for women to create hybrid professional looks because of their exposure to other forms of femininity. However, cultural

diversity simultaneously magnifies difference as women's racialized identities become an omnipresent source of difference in the workplace. As a result, this space requires that women learn to shift and conceal their difference in order to manage discourses of multiculturalism and racialization processes in the workplace as they navigate institutionalized whiteness through the American-Eurocentric image of professionalism. This is highlighted in the ways in which women feel the need to fashionably clothe their bodies while muting racialized markers of hair and skin colour to contain their Blackness because of the everyday racisms, through questions and comments, that they are exposed to. This overwhelming attention to their skin colour, fashion, and hair makes women feel 'othered', policed, marginalized, excluded, and discriminated against in various ways when it comes to their appearances. As such, this highlights the continued existence of anti-Black racism within discourses of multiculturalism and daily intercultural encounters in the workplace.

Furthermore, this space highlights the complicated ways African women negotiate body politics and the emphasis placed on their ethnocultural differences in the workplace as their bodies are entangled in nationalist, multicultural, and racialized constructions of femininity and professionalism. In particular, gendered racialization processes simultaneously push African women's bodies into marginalized and excluded positions as well into the spotlight of hyper-focus and visibility in the workplace. Consequently, women's agency is channeled by everyday multiculturalism as they negotiate their 'otherness' and how they fit and belong in professional contexts where their racialized identities and cultural experiences are outside the norm. As such, women navigate the intersectional impediments of race and gender in this space by emulating a

professional beauty ideal that can often stifle rather than support their racial difference and cultural diversity. However, women also wear hairstyles and clothing that boldly proclaim their presence, through their pan-African identity, and rejects the habitual suppression of Blackness in the office. In this way, women are establishing their own forms of recognition and hybrid professional femininity that incorporates Africanness and Blackness into their style and identity. Nonetheless, women's ability to participate in this kind of cultural expression and resistance is determined by their positionality and subjectivities as age, class, and occupations all intersect to create or close the opportunities to do so. In short, as daily intercultural encounters impose negative racial stereotypes, African women are less likely to adopt beauty practices that downplay their femininity in the workplace thus accommodation and resistance of dominant white professional norms are buried in women's beauty practices and racialized identities. This highlights the complex role of the black female body in sustaining and challenging subordination in the workplace, as well as the ways in which discourses of multiculturalism and racialization processes both create new freedoms and impacts women's agency.

# Chapter 7: Social Media

## #BlackGirlMagic in Canada & Beyond

### *Background*

“The internet is your best friend when you start in a new place like this. Google, Instagram, YouTube is where you find everything like how to dress warm and stylish for the crazy cold winter, where to find the right types of makeup for dark skin, good quality hair, hairstylists, and all of that. It’s like the local market where to find everything. On top of that you can find so many other beautiful black women who can help you with learning how to rock that #BlackGirlMagic!”  
- Amahle, Cameroonian woman

The hashtag “BlackGirlMagic” is not one you will find in the dictionary, at least not yet. The term was created by Cashawn Thompson to celebrate the beauty, power, and resilience of black women. This hashtag has taken over social media as a movement that creates a platform for black women to stand together against stereotyping, colourism, misogyny, and racism (Wilson, 2016; Adewunmi, 2017; Bailey, 2021). As such, women use hashtags like “BlackGirlMagic” to communicate and create a collective cultural community, as well as represent positive affirmation and radical statements that black women are more than tropes and tragic stories. Accordingly, scholars have critiqued discourses about representation that neglect raced and gendered identities within media and digital technologies including the Web (Grasmuck et al., 2009; Noble, 2013; Bradley, 2015). These works highlight the various ways white privilege and racialization processes are a salient factor in digital technology, represented in virtual spaces, as white cultural hegemony and racial hierarchies in North America prioritise white capitalist interests rather than the social, political, and economic interests of other groups. Therefore, since mainstream media and the internet promote stereotypical images of black

women as ugly and promiscuous for example, there has been a rise in social media<sup>82</sup> usage amongst black women because it is self-generated thereby enabling women to challenge and resist racialist tropes (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015; Noble, 2013).

Furthermore, studies have examined the ways in which culture shapes technologies as black people structure certain platforms like “social publics” that are culturally specific, nurture a collective identity, provide participation in community, and serve as a user-generated source of culturally relevant online content (Brock, 2012; Bradley, 2015; Keller, 2012). Specifically, scholars argue that digital spaces amplify and buffer contemporary discussions on race, identity, and agency by bringing awareness to issues otherwise marginalized in offline spaces. For example, the “Blackosphere” is a community of black bloggers raising awareness of racial and gender injustice, empowering each other, and mobilizing communal action by providing a range of perspectives and experiences that may be constructive and meaningful for black women. In short, social media enables marginalized groups to form a collective digital black community as they participate in digital racial (re)formation via acts of technological appropriation.

In particular, African women’s technological appropriation and participation in digital spaces through various communities and movements such as #BlackGirlMagic is worth noting. For example, when Amahle first migrated from Cameroon, she had no friends or family to help

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<sup>82</sup> Social media: Any web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build a community by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share, and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible. In particular, it’s a digital public sphere where the black community is well equipped to achieve some degree of power over public discourse to voice their racialized experiences and perspectives (McCay-Peet & Quan-Hasse, 2017:23; Carney, 2016).

her adjust as a new immigrant while she also started university in a small town in Ontario. Simple things like finding the right facial moisturizer, makeup cream to match her skin tone, and a hairstylist who could handle her long thick kinky hair became an ordeal. Furthermore, she struggled to find in-person representative images that celebrated her dark skin and African features beyond the exoticization and fetishization she regularly encountered being in a predominantly white town. Consequently, social media and other virtual platforms became her “best friend”, as she put it. She was able to specifically search for other African women who had migrated to Canada so she could learn the best places to order hair online, local drugstores to buy skin care products for black skin, and reputable black stylists in Toronto who could do her hair. Although the women she connected with mostly lived in other Canadian cities, they were all familiar with the key retail and drugstores that sell black women’s products, as well as the experiences of navigating a society where they are the minority. In short, social media became a place where Amahle was able to find community and the beauty necessities she needed as an African immigrant woman transitioning to her new life in Canada.

Thus, while studies have examined the different ways black women use social media, this chapter focuses specifically on African women because their unique sociocultural locations, varying colonial histories, socioeconomic status, nationalist traditions, and amorphous racial identities in the context of a multicultural society influence their reasons and practices of engaging in digital spaces. As such, what role does social media play in the formation of African women’s globalized racial identities and virtual communities against the backdrop of everyday multiculturalism? In the context of globalization, African women’s diasporic experiences of

everyday multiculturalism become open and connected to dimensions which go above and beyond local daily realities of cultural diversity. Accordingly, this chapter highlights the ways social media emphasises how the processes, realities, and complexities of doing multiculturalism are experienced and mediated by large-scale structural processes, such as globalization and technology, which filter into the everyday thereby shaping other social spaces part of this study and women's racialized identities. In other words, social media is a key feature in African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism because it has been part of preceding spaces albeit silently. As such, women use social media throughout the home, church, workplace, and in their personal identity reformation as new racialization processes in Canadian society and an emergent African diaspora community create hybrid racialized identities. Subsequently, women use social media to figure out what outfits to wear to church, how to do their makeup for a romantic date, the best hairstyles to get done for work, and how to find the beauty products they need. Therefore, in contrast to other spaces analysed thus far, this chapter highlights how social media is the space where women's racial and cultural identities are merged virtually as the public and private are unmade and remade through notions of self and community.

Specifically, this chapter argues that the public digital sphere of social media is shaped by the global black community as a semi-private "Virtual Homeplace"<sup>83</sup> as it carves out various

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<sup>83</sup> The "Virtual Homeplace" (Lee, 2015) is a site of affirmation, networking, economic freedom and healing where women can share knowledge and recreate a renewed self-identity. It serves to recreate and redefine Black women's sense of self by challenging dominant ideologies of racial and gendered bias.

exclusive communal spaces, through different social movements and practices, where gendered constructions of racialized identities are challenged and resisted. Consequently, racial formations for African women shift from a local pan-African identity within Canada to a globalized Black identity through transnational structures that link diverse black populations in shared experiences of racial oppression as well as practices and ideologies of black beauty. In addition to serving as a “Virtual Homeplace”, this space is shaped by black women as a semi-private Virtual Beauty Parlour where they seek to learn new beauty tools, skills, technology, knowledge, and products as they migrate and navigate new intercultural encounters and gendered racialization processes within Canadian society. Moreover, as with the African diaspora in the church, black communities in this digital space demonstrate the nebulous intersection of the public and the private. Specifically, this community moves into other areas of the digital public sphere to openly counter and resist their marginalization and exclusion in offline spaces through the online visual culture of black beauty content creation that counters white hegemonic standards of beauty by showing real black women and diverse beauties. Thus, by participating in their everyday beauty practices online, African women transcend and transform the public-private dichotomy, which characterizes mainstream beauty discussions, by turning intimate beauty looks into public view by use of a simple ‘share’ button. In short, women’s online beauty practices dismantle the public-private dichotomy as they use public digital spaces to create semi-private communities and publicly counter the marginalization and exclusion of their racialized identities in other offline spaces.

Accordingly, women exercise their agency in various ways that include using this space to connect to new communities and learn beauty tools, skills, products, knowledge, and technology to navigate intercultural encounters, social spaces, and gendered racialization processes in Canadian society. Furthermore, through their “photographic agency” (Harris, 2015:132), African women create user generated images to celebrate, empower, and affirm black women’s bodies. These counter narratives offer quiet resistance and powerfully position African women as cultural readers and producers who are able to carve out their own meanings of their racialized identities and visions of beauty in a white dominated society while debunking myths and stereotypes that black beauty is ugly, exotic, and unnatural. However, sometimes this agency is channeled by black nationalist discourses that demand women subscribe to an all-natural look, particularly natural hair, that promotes a myopic model of black womanhood. Furthermore, women’s agency is channeled by the “burden of representation” (Yuval-Davis, 2003:17) from diasporic culture that requires them to perform a distinctive African modernity informed by postcolonial constructions of race and gendered nationalist projects.

The chapter unfolds in three parts. Firstly, it begins with how media and migration intersect to shift African women’s racial identity thereby, and secondly, leading them to seek out virtual spaces they can learn the appropriate beauty products, tools, and skills for navigating diasporic nationalist culture and multicultural constructions of Blackness. This is done in the Virtual Beauty Parlour through African beauty influencers and YouTube as hair and makeup are the main practices women seek information on. The third section looks at the Virtual Homeplace where women integrate into the black and African communities in Canada and beyond. The

chapter concludes by reiterating how social media is a key site of identity (re)formation and new forms of community online for African women. As such, this chapter fits in the overall thesis as it highlights how social media is a space where women's pan-African and Black identities and communities are merged virtually online. Thus, this digital public sphere becomes a space for positive racialized self-identification and community formation. Consequently, women can be equipped with new beauty knowledge to navigate intercultural encounters and gendered racialization processes in Canadian society while countering their marginalization and resistance in offline spaces.

### **Globalization, Media, and Migration**

Globalization plays a role in the way beauty is constructed for black women as racial divisions and gendered power are reproduced through the global political economy of beauty including media. Consequently, black women are erased from representations of beauty through the global linkages between structural racism, mass media,<sup>84</sup> the economy, and the cultural production of beauty through white dominant globalized discourses (Poran, 2006; Roseman, 2017; Peiss, 2011; Walker, 2007). However, rather than a "universality of beauty" (Jones, 2011:889), scholars have noted that globalization simultaneously spreads white hegemonic standards of beauty while diversifying beauty images and ideals through local contexts so that they are more multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic (Jones 2011, 2008; Saraswati, 2013, 2011; McCracken, 2014).

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<sup>84</sup> Mass media: radio, television, film, print and Internet.

Thus, by the time African women migrate to Canada, they have been exposed to both white hegemonic and local nationalist racial formations through norms of beauty. Consequently, although some women expressed acute culture shock as they encountered new racialization processes in Canadian society by “becoming black”, other women shared that because they were exposed to Western media back home, they were familiar with notions of race and beauty to a certain extent. Therefore, while it did not completely erase the discomfort of transitioning into new constructions of Blackness within Canada, it certainly provided sufficient “racial literacy” (Twine, 2010) to initially navigate these new norms and intercultural encounters. As Runako, a Zimbabwean woman who moved to Canada for university, explained,

*“There was no culture shock when I moved to Canada because I was exposed to Western standards of beauty growing up in Zimbabwe.”*

Sanaa, another young Zimbabwean woman who moved to Toronto for work, expressed similar sentiments,

*“There was no culture shock for me because of globalization and the media so I have a decent understanding of what the average Westerner considers beautiful.”*

Haseena, who is in her mid-thirties and moved from Nigeria to work in Ottawa, echoed the other women’s opinions,

*“I wasn’t surprised when I came to Canada ‘cause the whole world watches Hollywood. I wasn’t surprised because Nigerians are very fashionable, vain, and materialistic. We wear our fortunes. The difference was black girls of different shades and hair texture not like our spongy African hair.”*

Other women also shared that having been exposed to mostly American television and beauty culture that they were aware, even if only subconsciously, of the privilege that is given to whiteness and the exclusion of black women. However, this was not a universal experience in the

sample and highlights several themes. Firstly, it reveals the digital divide that exists among women and the ways in which this prepares them, or fails to, as they enter new racialization processes once they migrate. All the women who experienced no culture shock once they arrived in Canada came from middle-upper and upper-class families that could, for example, afford good Internet services and direct broadcast satellite services such as *DSTV Africa*. Therefore, access to Hollywood movies and Western media, including advertising and the beauty culture, provided the basic knowledge of how white societies are framed. However, some women admitted that most of this information was merely theoretical until they actually had to live through the daily complexities of being black in a white society. All the same, women's socioeconomic status in their home countries affects their access to and usage of the Internet and technology thus determining how adequately prepared they are to navigate new racialization processes and intercultural encounters in Canadian society. Secondly, it reveals the generational digital divide as most of the women who expressed the above sentiments migrated after 2000 and are mostly below 40. As such, younger women "into" popular culture were more likely to familiarize themselves with Hollywood, fashion, and beauty trends while living in their origin countries. Furthermore, these women can be classified as "Modern girls"<sup>85</sup> (Barlow, 2005) as opposed to conceptions of the 'traditional' African woman, thereby revealing how globalization and gendered modernity produce and implicate women in racialization processes and national racial formations even before they migrate. In other words, the global political economy of beauty and

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<sup>85</sup> "Modern girls" (Barlow, 2005) are young women concerned with ostentatiously refashioning their appearance and refining their bodies. These are young women with the wherewithal and desire to define themselves in terms that exceed conventional traditional female roles and that transgress national, imperial, and racial boundaries. Thus, they combine aesthetic elements drawn from the national and international to create a cosmopolitan look.

cultural flows from the Global North to South shape modern femininity for African women by incorporating them into global racial regimes even before they arrive in Canada. However, as nationalist racial formations trump global articulations of race, women's racialized identities are still shaped by the local context while in their home countries so the effects of this global racism, as there are also nationally inflected versions of racism, are not a daily reality for women yet. Lastly, the culture shock women experience when they migrate comes from intragroup differences with black and other racialized immigrant women who have different skin tones and hair textures. As such, this is one of the ways in which globalization and technology reinforce the formation of a pan-African identity once women arrive in Canada as they seek to differentiate themselves from other women, and forge belonging in the diaspora community, by invoking their cultural identities that combine nationalist and ethnic features as well as class into a broader continental identity. In sum, globalization plays a role in exposing and priming African women to dominant discourses of race through beauty so that they are better equipped to navigate new racialization processes and intercultural encounters in Canadian society once they migrate. However, this process is determined by class and age as not all women have the same experiences because of the digital divide.

Furthermore, for older women like Mia, who moved from Kenya to Canada in the 1990s before cultural diversity was normalized in society beyond multiculturalism policy, exposure to white hegemonic standards of beauty did not ease the migration process and the accompanying pain of being 'othered' for their racial difference. Mia candidly shared one particular memory of being told by her group of white friends that the red lipstick she had worn that day made her "look

blacker". The ridiculing and mean comments she received made her not want to go out with her friends anymore. Understandably, the loneliness and isolation she experienced for being different left an impression on her. As she put it,

*"In 1998 things weren't like they are in terms of multiculturalism, even with makeup. I remember being told 'you can't wear that (lipstick), it makes you look even blacker!' Coming from Kenya, you don't realize you're different from other kids and being a kid, you don't see no colour. But I think that was the moment where I realized that my skin colour is different from them. It made me feel different even if it wasn't meant maliciously. In Kenya, everyone was the same so no one wanted to do the hair touching thing. It was always challenging with your features and what's considered beautiful here."*

Moreover, other older women also shared that the lack of diverse representation in the global media when they were growing up in their home countries combined with nascent multicultural practice in the 1990s did not promote a seamless integration into their new locales. For example, Callista remembers growing up in Benin and reading magazine interviews with well-known black models like Iman and Naomi Campbell who would be sharing the challenges of being in the modelling industry during the 1980s. Even though they were "tiny and skinny enough by model standards", their Afrocentric features nullified them from fitting into the dominant standards of beauty at the time. Thus, reading their challenges in the modeling industry and struggles to fit into mainstream standards of beauty affected Callista as she relocated to Canada. She reflectively noted,

*"I remember thinking 'if they're not good enough then who else is? 'Cause they're as close as possible to that model that we were being imposed upon'. There was a standard of beauty and that was not something that African or black women would fit in. It was more the blonde, long hair, silky hair, very tiny but still curvy. Like nothing that we'd fit into."*

Furthermore, this feeling of being excluded from dominant standards of beauty because of their racialized bodies was a theme that cut across generations as Rahia, a twenty-five-year-old

who grew up in Zimbabwe, shared a similar experience,

*“Now you start to see the #BlackGirlMagic being celebrated but when I was younger, that was not the case! I grew up in Zimbabwe, but you are still looking at the television and what’s being marketed to you is a completely different version from what you look like. So, you kinda start looking at yourself, like well, am I meant to look like that? So then you get the perms right, cause you think your hair’s meant to be straightened. Before you even make that decision to perm your hair, your mum already makes it for you, so you don’t really have a decision at that point because already the message that’s being fed to you is ‘this hair’s a little bit better than already the natural state that you have’. You’re being told ‘you as a little black girl, you have so much to do to even fit that standard. So, you’re doing everything in your power to like keep up right. There’s definitely something being marketed to you that Black is not the standard for sure.”*

Other women also noted that not seeing enough media representation of black women affected their sense of self and shaped their understandings of where they fit (or do not fit) in discourses of race, gender, and multiculturalism. Furthermore, as mainstream media excludes representations of black beauty, women internalize this racism and exclusion as manifested through feelings of inadequacy and behaviors to significantly alter their bodies in order to try and approximate a standard of beauty—light skin, straight hair, slim body—that was never designed to be attainable for them because the way they are racialized Black precludes inclusion. As such, being excluded from mainstream representations of beauty affects the formation of African women’s racialized identities as they grapple with “black beauty shame”<sup>86</sup> (Tate, 2018:122) pre-migration and throughout their experiences of everyday multiculturalism. As Ruwa, a twenty-four-year-old who grew up in Zimbabwe, also noted,

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<sup>86</sup> Black beauty shame exists within racialized societies which situate white beauty as iconic, and as a result produce black ‘ugliness’ as a counterpoint. Constructed through enslavement and colonialism, it drags the coloniality of power, being, knowledge and affect into the present day by branding Black women with dishonor, thereby producing a visceral reaction of abjection to self and other Black women.

*“Back home you see more of yourself around even though there may be these conscious things like lighter is better, straighten your hair, like relax it. You have other people to look at who look like you, who can influence how you view beauty. Local ads back home have more of ‘us’ which makes sense cause that’s who they’re selling to. Whereas here, if you open the magazines, there’s always a white person. There’s a very specific standard of beauty. Like smaller, long blond hair. I feel like it’s more blatant here. Although I feel like some companies are trying now, especially in the marketing of their products, to show more diversity.”*

Shani, who moved from Rwanda for university, also shared some of the challenging aspects of being a black woman as she detailed her experiences of not fitting into mainstream standards of beauty once she arrived in Canada. In her words,

*“Being curvy and a bit overweight in Rwanda was a sign of being rich and having enough to eat, so the goal was to be curvy and then I moved here and it all changed. You have to be skinny to be beautiful. You have to be tall to be beautiful. You have to have light skin to be beautiful. I don’t feel beautiful all the time and it plays with our emotions and affects how we go about our lives. It’s an everyday battle. I feel like when we moved here everything changed. Even in Rwanda, the standard is changing to be skinny but not Westernized skinny.”*

These women’s experiences thus highlight several key insights into the connections between globalization, technology, race, and multiculturalism. Firstly, the role of globalization in preparing African women to migrate and navigate new racialization processes of multicultural practice differs across place, age, and time. For example, the handful of women who migrated before the 2000s to smaller cities in Canada, like Antigonish Nova Scotia and Windsor Ontario, experienced negative racial shifts as practices of cultural diversity were still gaining traction in the day-to-day realities of these predominantly white cities and global articulations of race in the beauty industry were also still based on whiteness. As such, “becoming black” was accompanied by blatant racism, exclusion, loneliness, and isolation. While white cultural hegemony characterized

the beauty industry even before the 1990s, women were only distant observers of global discourses on race as local nationalist racial formations are prioritized. In other words, as these women highlight, the power of homogenizing images of beauty and whiteness is countered by local culture where racial formations are mixed with national and ethnic identities so women can reaffirm each other as the dominant racial group. However, women's experiences once they arrive in Canada show how global racialization processes inform discourses of multiculturalism and constructions of Blackness as the same features of anti-Black racism in the global political economy of beauty are transferred into intercultural encounters and multicultural practice. Therefore, and secondly, globalization reveals the ways in which Canadian discourses of multiculturalism perpetuate global racial regimes through its own local maintenance of white privilege so that the familiar "black beauty shame" women sometimes experienced in their origin countries takes on a greater form as "being black" in Canadian society is imbued with insinuations of racial inferiority at best and painful acts of racism at the worst as women are excluded and marginalized because of their racialized identities.

As such, globalization and new technologies play different roles in African women's migration journeys. On the one hand, globalization and access to technology creates awareness for women so that by the time they migrate to Canada they are familiar with globalized discourses of race through beauty norms and popular culture. Subsequently, this exposure and knowledge aids women as they learn to navigate new racialization processes and intercultural encounters with some level of confidence and certainty. However, while globalization eases the culture shock of new racialization processes in Canadian society, it also continues to spread homogenizing images

of beauty and whiteness that affect African women with “black beauty shame” when they arrive in Canada. Furthermore, once women migrate and become racial minorities in Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, these homogenized images become more powerful, thereby requiring women to reckon with the loss of local nationalist racial formations as global articulations of race take precedence, inform multicultural constructions of Blackness, and intensify their racial difference through the politics of imagery as well as new meanings of race and beauty. Consequently, African women seek out digital spaces to learn how to negotiate their racialized identities, new racialization processes, and intercultural encounters by finding the beauty skills, tools, and products that they need to navigate offline spaces.

### **Virtual Beauty Parlour**

As women integrate into Canadian society, they encounter racism, exclusion, and marginalization because of their Blackness. Consequently, women go online and use social media as a Virtual Beauty Parlour where they can come together to share, learn, and connect with each other and other black women. These digital spaces thus provide women with the semi-private communities for connection, a mobilization of interests, and belonging by empowering them to center their racialized identities and narratives in the midst of racial discrimination (Tassie & Givens, 2015; Harris, 2015; Lee, 2015; Savali, 2014). More specifically, migrating and navigating a new society can be challenging and African women expressed how they were able to find different online communities to discuss the issues experienced as new immigrants within the African diaspora in Canada. Therefore, social media and other virtual spaces provide women with the beauty tools, skills, and knowledge necessary for (re)creating their racialized identities and

negotiating racialization processes as well as intercultural encounters offline. In other words, by way of virtual connectedness, African women are able to find new ways of managing their hybrid racial identities across digital and offline spaces through content creation, support, and resource provision found within diverse black communities globally. Thus, the ability to network, learn, and share knowledge with other black women produces affirmation for Blackness and black beauty by creating the opportunity for African women to recreate racialized identities that reflect agency as they harness the power of encouragement and resilience found within these online communities.

However, while women are able to find communities online to connect with through the Virtual Beauty Parlour, it raises questions about the inclusiveness of Canadian discourses of multiculturalism if women need to go online to express their racial and cultural identities. In other words, the race-based exclusionary practices of everyday multiculturalism within Canadian society propel women to find online communities where white cultural hegemony cannot reach and where they can find belonging and inclusion because of their racialized identities. Moreover, the Virtual Beauty Parlour also highlights the different ways that Canadian society is not entirely accommodating to non-white women as African women have to go online to find the beauty products that they need, through other black communities, because these products are not easily available in stores. Furthermore, a close analysis of the platforms women choose to engage with through videos, websites, and blogs highlights the ambivalence African women have with their hybrid racial identities and choosing resonating communities in this space. For example, some women choose to watch only other African women as they can relate to the

beauty challenges of being an immigrant while other African women choose to watch black women in general because of the broader similarities in hair texture, skin tone, and overall racial discrimination. Consequently, this reveals what occurs when women's pan-African and Black identities coexist. Specifically, the church emphasises women's pan-African identity through internal racialization processes of the African diaspora while the workplace accentuates women's Blackness through Canadian discourses of multiculturalism. In contrast, the Virtual Beauty Parlour is a space where these identities manifest concurrently. Accordingly, women's racial and/or cultural identity is invoked depending on the situation, that is, whether they are looking for beauty products and stylists in local stores or if they are wanting to learn hair and makeup skills. As such, this section looks at how women recreate their racialized identities and communities of belonging by learning new beauty skills through Beauty Influencers and YouTube.

### ***The "University of YouTube" & Beauty Influencers***

Beauty consumption, ideals, and production are not naturally occurring but produced through teaching, advice, and practice among black women online (Walker, 2007; Mbilishaka, 2018; McCracken, 2014). Accordingly, the exponential growth in beautification techniques drives women to seek more beauty expertise and products to successfully achieve the quintessential black feminine body. In particular, YouTube offers women the opportunity for self-education as it provides a digital platform to share information, tips, education, training and beauty grooming through video journal entries. Rahia, who watches YouTube religiously, dubbed it "*the University of YouTube*". She continued,

*“YouTube has been one of the greatest things! I learned to conceal and highlight<sup>87</sup>. Slay my edges<sup>88</sup>, and make wigs. There are lots of content creators with different methods so lots of people to learn from. As an artist I also go on YouTube to learn how to do makeup so I can cut costs by not hiring a makeup artist.”*

Likewise, Kiojah, a Zambian woman, shared,

*“YouTube is like a free Masterclass on anything and everything you need for beauty. Whatever you are looking for from hair to makeup to skincare products for dark skin, you can find it all there. I can just sit for hours watching videos and learning new tricks.”*

Adeola, a Kenyan woman similarly expressed,

*“Whatever you are looking for, Google and YouTube have the answer! One of the challenges I found being a black woman when I moved here was that it was hard to find someone to do my hair and I never really grew up doing makeup, but YouTube has taught me everything I need.”*

Furthermore, Machel, a Congolese woman, added,

*“I am usually always one of the few black women in the room at work and many of my friends don’t live here so I go to YouTube so I can find other black women like me who can teach me what I need to know because they know our skin, our hair, exactly what we need.”*

As such, these women’s reasons for using YouTube varied. Firstly, given the expenses of “consuming beauty”, YouTube provides a platform where women can learn Do-It-Yourself hair styling and makeup application so as to save costs while still looking stylish. As noted in earlier chapters, between the changes in socioeconomic status and the financial costs of being an immigrant, not all women can afford to spend money on beauty products. As such, globalization and technology provide African women with affordable ways to engage with their racialized identities and beauty practices while navigating other social spaces and intercultural encounters

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<sup>87</sup> Makeup products and techniques to shape the face.

<sup>88</sup> Styling baby hairs by slicking them down with edge control and toothbrush (or other fine styling instrument).

in Canadian society. Secondly, as African women experience the marginalization of being a racial-ethnic minority, the lack of availability of beauty products, and accessibility of hairstylists, YouTube becomes a space where they can both learn new beauty skills and techniques while cultivating communities of belonging around their unique experiences. In short, YouTube is a key space in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism as it provides women with the empowering tools to recreate their racialized identities on their terms while momentarily escaping racialization processes within Canadian society. In this way, the Virtual Beauty Parlour is like the church in that it has its own internal racial formations even if the distinction between women's racial and cultural identities is not explicit in this space.

Furthermore, women are exposed to different black content creators that they can learn from, thereby expanding their repertoire of looks through these globalized virtual encounters. These women are commonly referred to as "beauty influencers".<sup>89</sup> As such, the commercialization and commodification of beauty's invented 'necessities' such as hair, makeup, and nails has given rise to beauty influencers who position themselves as the "experts" on black women's beauty products. African beauty influencers in particular, like Dimma Umeh, Vongai Mapfo, Nyma Tang and Toni Olaoye are women based in the African diaspora across the globe as well as on the continent and they have knowledge of beauty products and the appropriate application methods, they are good at fixing themselves up, they are considered beautiful, and they are regarded as the fashionistas to follow for the latest trends. These women can be considered

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<sup>89</sup> Beauty Influencer: an individual who creates and posts videos online about cosmetics, fashion, hairstyling, nail art and other beauty-related topics.

public virtual performers of privileged identities such as the “fashionista” or knowledgeable beauty consumer as they use their status and influence to raise awareness on the challenges of race within the beauty industry as well as the ways in which racial discrimination affects the availability of products for African women’s different skin tones and hair textures. However, these women are also entrepreneurs whose platforms are a business. Consequently, much of their content creation is marketing for brands, through paid partnerships, that serves capitalist interests such that they also financially benefit from viewers watching their videos and buying the recommended products. Nevertheless, beauty influencers are able to drive the centralization of African women’s bodies in discussions on beauty by providing space for a community around their unique experiences as African diaspora women living in Canada. Furthermore, these women are teachers passing on knowledge and techniques on beauty practices while challenging racialized stereotypes about black women and beauty by offering counter-narratives. In short, beauty influencers are able to progress global movements for racial equality through black beauty in terms of knowledge, aesthetic value, and stylization so as to establish new power relations that they are denied to African women offline.

Accordingly, watching these women’s YouTube videos, observing their Instagram posts, and reading their beauty blogs highlighted how African beauty influencers combine race politics and business in fascinating ways as they commodify the political (racial equality) and politicize beauty commodities. On the one hand, this reflects the ways globalization and technology promote African women’s economic power as they attain “consumer citizenship” (Walker, 2007:6). Subsequently, African women are able to successfully participate in the entrepreneurship of

black beauty culture that promotes both racial solidarity among black women and economic success for beauty influencers. However, and on the other hand, the black beauty culture reflects the continuing racial hierarchies that exist in the global political economy of beauty and Canadian discourses of multiculturalism that create the very economic niche and social need for these women to begin with as black women are excluded from globalized racial regimes and marginalized in Canadian society.

Moreover, beyond racial divisions, class and gendered inequalities are reproduced among African and black women as not all women have the capacity to be beauty influencers or afford to buy the beauty products these women are promoting. For example, Zuri, a Canadian-based Nigerian beauty blogger, shared that she watches another American-based Nigerian beauty influencer, but she cannot afford the products used so she just watches for the techniques and knowledge. In her words,

*“I like watching her stories when she’s taking off her makeup. More than half of her skincare I can’t afford but like, I like to watch her to have the knowledge.”*

Women like Zuri shared that they appreciate having other black women to look up online who can recommend products for their particular skin tones and hair textures while being based in predominantly white societies. However, many of the women interviewed shared that they are often not able to afford many of the products they watch beauty influencers using due to the fact that these women are brand ambassadors for cosmetic, skin care, and hair brands that are considered too expensive. As a result, most of the women watch these beauty influencers and

then look for the cheaper version of the products in their local drugstores. For example, Ayana, a Nigerian avid YouTube watcher, shared,

*“I watch different African beauty influencers to find products for my skincare. I usually search things like ‘foundations for African skin’, ‘hair mask for 4c hair<sup>90</sup>’, or ‘moisturizer for dark dry African skin’, then watch different videos and go to a nearby drugstore to find products that are cheap but suit my budget and skin tone.”*

Similarly, Osaze, a Kenyan woman, expressed,

*“I could never afford what these women use but I still watch because I learn techniques and talk to other women in the comments section. There are also videos of women who do the cheaper version of the same products, so I look at those also.”*

Thus, while brand advertisement, product recommendations, and beautification technique teachings are essential parts of African beauty influencers’ role in the diaspora community, African women watch their videos less for the sometimes unaffordable products and more to learn the beauty knowledge, skills, and techniques to enhance their various everyday beauty practices so they can navigate racial difference and cultural diversity across offline spaces more seamlessly. In short, while the commodification of beauty products is not accessible to all African women, they are still able to glean guidance and the appropriate application skills as they look for cheaper alternatives that complement their racialized identities and everyday beauty practices. Furthermore, these examples highlight the lack of black representation within discourses of multiculturalism and the lack of mainstreaming of black beauty culture in Canadian society as African women go online to seek out communities where they can find racial and cultural affirmation. Thus, as noted in earlier chapters, the absence of African women’s reference to black beauty culture in Canada reveals how Canadian discourses of multiculturalism

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<sup>90</sup> Known as the kinkiest hair texture of all hair types, very tightly curled and delicate.

silence racialized experiences as black women are invisible and lost in the rhetoric of cultural diversity.

As such, due to this lack of representation, women also expressed that they create beauty content for other African women simply because they enjoy it, and they recognize the need for communities around their racialized experiences while living in Canada. As Neliah, a Congolese woman, shared,

*“I wouldn’t say I’m a celebrity beauty influencer like Patricia Bright<sup>91</sup> or Jackie Aina<sup>92</sup> but I have a small beauty blog and I started it because when I first moved here, I couldn’t find anything at all. It was so, so, hard. So, I wanted to share my experiences and put together recommendations so other women who come here don’t struggle the way I did those first months.”*

Similarly, Laila, a Nigerian woman, expressed,

*“When I was a student, I was so broke all the time! I was good at doing hair so I did that on the side and then when YouTube became popular, I thought why not teach women how to do their own hair so they can still look good even if they can’t afford someone to do their hair. This immigrant life can be expensive like you well know so I wanted to build women’s confidence and save them time and money.”*

As such, these women’s experiences reveal that while women’s pan-African and Black identities blur in this space, there are certain instances where one emerges stronger. For example, women’s racial identity is marked by class, skin tones, hair textures, and personal preferences regarding the Beauty Influencers they choose to watch. However, the pan-African identity is differentiated by migration and discourses of multiculturalism as the immigrant experience in

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<sup>91</sup> Nigerian-British Beauty Influencer based in the U.K. <https://www.youtube.com/user/BritPopPrincess>

<sup>92</sup> Nigerian-American Beauty Influencer based in America <https://www.youtube.com/user/lilpumpkinpie05>

Canadian society adds distinct challenges leading women to seek out the African diaspora community online. Thus, like the Church Mothers, Beauty Influencers reinforce the ethnocultural boundaries of the African diaspora community by passing on their skills, knowledge, and helping women to navigate their racialized identities in a new society. Furthermore, these Influencers serve as advocates for racial equality through their participation in the beauty industry. In this way, online black communities continue to be gendered and classed in multiple ways.

### ***YT Class 1001: Introduction to Do-Your-Own-Hair***

Hair is a contentious topic in black beauty culture because of the various ways it is politicized and racialized (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Rooks, 1996; Banks, 2000; Jacobs-Huey, 2006). Furthermore, as noted in the previous chapter, the racialized markers attached to hair implicate African women in racialization processes as one of the most visible indicators of their difference within Canadian society. Accordingly, African women look to YouTube for help in hair care practice and aesthetic values that resonate with black beauty. As such, YouTube promotes Do-It-Yourself hair practices and creates a digital community of ‘curlfriends’<sup>93</sup> through video tutorials providing social support for African women as many lack proficiencies in caring for their own natural hair textures after years of chemically straightening it. Subsequently, the sharing of information, tips, education, and hair grooming through video journal entries offers the opportunity to learn and embrace their natural hair. For example, Mbalenhle, a Ugandan woman, shared,

*“YouTube is where I go for everything! One time I remember the girl who was going to do my hair cancelled four days before the wedding I was attending. I couldn’t find anyone else to do the style, so I went on YouTube and watched some few hours until I learnt to do*

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<sup>93</sup> Black women with tightly coiled natural hair (Mbilishaka, 2018).

*the hairstyle I wanted by myself. Since then, I just go to YouTube and that's where I have learned to do my hair and different styles."*

Makanaka, a young Zimbabwean woman who considers herself a pro-black naturalista<sup>94</sup>, admitted,

*"When I stopped relaxing my hair and transitioned to my natural texture, I didn't know how to take care of it or what products to use so I spent a lot of time on YouTube watching videos and tutorials to learn."*

Similarly, Callista, who is in her early forties and stopped using chemical straighteners to transition to her natural hair five years prior, shared how she spent countless hours watching YouTube tutorials to research the products and methods of taking care of her hair because for almost twenty-five years she had been using chemical straighteners. She mainly followed African-American women at the time but admits that now there are more African women with YouTube channels that she can watch which she is grateful for. As she noted,

*"YouTube helped because on YouTube there is a lot of people like me so it's very comforting. It was very helpful when I decided to venture out to natural hair. It was comforting to hear people share their experiences, how it was. Some people were starting the journey almost at the same time as I did. So, it was very good to have a community of people who you'll hear stories that are similar to yours. So, it makes you feel less like a freak. It also helps knowing how do I take care of this, what can I try, things like that."*

Likewise, Nea, a Congolese woman, shared,

*"The first time I cut my hair and went natural, I don't think there is any way I could have done it without YouTube and Instagram to show me all the tips and styles to look after my hair. I think maybe one of the reasons more and more women are going natural now is because of things like YouTube. You can just go and look for yourself examples of how other women are doing it and it helps give you confidence for your own hair."*

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<sup>94</sup> A Black woman who proudly promotes the growth of her natural hair texture (curly, coily, or kinky) without the use of chemical straighteners and usually wears protective styles like braids and twists.

Thus, as a result of postcolonial constructions of race within African families and American-Eurocentric standards of beauty which perpetuate the image of long straight hair, African women spend many years chemically altering their hair to achieve the look. Be that as it may, women are able to take advantage of the cultural distance from their families and countries to explore alternative aesthetics once they migrate to Canada. Namely, to stop straightening their hair and embrace their natural hair texture. Consequently, YouTube becomes a major resource in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism as women can become self-sufficient, learn new styles, and find a “community of sisterhood” to share their journey with and be affirmed in their individual expressions of their racialized identities. Therefore, as public discourses of race and multiculturalism surround women’s natural hair with negative stereotypes, globalization and new technologies disrupt racialization processes within Canadian society to provide women with the tools they need to reshape their notions of self through the lens of Blackness. However, this Do-It-Yourself natural hair discovery process can be frustrating because it is so time consuming and expensive that not all women enjoy engaging with social media in this way. For example, Fahari, a Beninese woman, noted,

*“Since moving to Ottawa, I haven’t been able to find someone to do my hair the way I like because it’s so expensive! I can’t afford that. I am always doing my hair by myself and doing searches on YouTube to find what works best but it gets tiring and boring. Trying all the products is expensive and then on top of that the hairstyle doesn’t even come out the same way. Ah, I just want someone to do my hair for me sometimes.”*

As such, while YouTube helps women navigate their natural hair journeys within community and with information on products and styles, it can be a tedious process that not all women can participate in for various reasons including time, money, and availability of the recommended products in their local stores. However, beyond the frustrations, the primary reason women

turned to YouTube is to find community because some of the cities they initially lived in when they first migrated did not have many African women to connect with through the journey of transitioning to natural hair and they lacked accessibility to hairstylists that could manage natural hair. Accordingly, women turn to social media which makes it easier for them to connect with other women around the world and get hairstyle ideas, shared experiences, and product recommendations for their hair.

Moreover, women also shared that they use YouTube, Instagram, and Google to search for products and hairstylists. Adara, a Zimbabwean woman who had been struggling to find a stylist to braid her hair for months when she first moved to Toronto, finally turned to Instagram<sup>95</sup> and searched hashtags like “#TorontoBraider” and “#BlackBraider” to find profiles of hairstylists who could do her hair. She shared that she now uses social media to find what she needs regarding her everyday beauty practices. In her words,

*“Whether it’s hair or skin I hashtag it. Instagram is pervasive because it’s become the google to your problems as defined by media.”*

Like Adara, Ruwa, who prefers to wear wigs, watches the natural hair and wig wearing community on YouTube. As she shared,

*“I use Instagram to find the hair products I need. Moving to Canada is what made me turn to YouTube to learn how to do my hair ‘cause I couldn’t find hairstylists who would do my hair at affordable prices like back home. I look on YouTube and Instagram for reviews and product recommendations with key phrases like ‘best vendor for curly hair’ or ‘where to buy burgundy straight hair 2019’ and then watch whichever latest video is in the results.”*

Similarly, Amahle, a Cameroonian woman, noted,

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<sup>95</sup> A photo and video sharing social networking service.

*“The fastest way to find something is to go on Instagram and search there, especially in Toronto, there are so many choices, and the black community is more visible there since we look out for each other.”*

As such, since technology and commercial search engines like Google prioritise white capitalist interests in North America (Noble, 2013), African women turn to social media where they are able to find search results that are relevant for their racialized and gendered identities.

Furthermore, as African women navigate a new multicultural society, spaces like YouTube and Instagram are useful as a connectivity tool. Women’s participation on YouTube thus highlights a couple of insights. Firstly, YouTube used to be a space mostly dominated by African-American Influencers so African women would watch them because although there are significant cultural differences there are enough racial similarities that women could relate to, as Callista noted.

However, now that more African Influencers in the diaspora and on the continent have YouTube channels, many women shared their preferences for watching these women. Since these videos are not just about hair styling but also include discussions on contemporary social issues and personal experiences, African women find it easier to connect with other immigrant women who are going through the same experience particularly in Canada where racialization processes differ from the American, European, Asian, and African context mainly due to discourses of multiculturalism. Secondly, the Virtual Beauty Parlour highlights how globalization and technology are appropriated in diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism as they equip African women with the necessary beauty tools by interrupting exclusionary practices of cultural diversity in other spaces. Furthermore, this space facilitates the formation of diverse online communities that provide the black representation women need to positively (re)shape their racialized identities as expressed through their hair practices.

### ***YT Class 1002: Makeup and Slay***

Additionally, since skin colour is another visible racial identifier, African women are also using YouTube to learn how to properly apply their makeup and find the appropriate cosmetic products available in Canadian stores for their skin tones. Many of the women in the sample expressed that what led them to seeking makeup tutorials on YouTube was a combination of moving to Canada, not having anyone to teach them how to apply their makeup while growing up, and being in a predominantly white society that did not have a wider range of products that cater to their skin tones. For example, Naomi admitted that while she does not wear much makeup currently, when she first moved to Canada ten years ago, she experimented with makeup because growing up in Nigeria she was not exposed to much of it as her grandmother did not allow her to wear makeup. Being in a new country and seeing other women wearing more makeup than she had seen in her life, she went on YouTube to learn the techniques of application and the right cosmetic products to use. In her words,

*“I saw other women always looking good when they went out and thought maybe this is how they keep their man. So, I went on YouTube but I never looked like what the person on the video was looking like! \*laughing\*”*

Similarly, Marini, a Ghanaian woman, shared how YouTube has helped in her romantic relationships,

*“I remember when this guy I really liked was pursuing me and asked me to go out with him. I won’t even lie to you, the first thing I did was go on YouTube and Instagram to find out how to do my makeup. With all these fine girls out in these streets, I didn’t want to show up looking anyhow like I’m just some basic chick. I spent over \$100 and the whole afternoon watching videos trying to get the look. All I can say is he asked for another date, so I think it worked!”*

Additionally, Adina, a Cameroonian woman, shared how she has used YouTube for career related reasons,

*“Something that I noticed here is that people don’t wear makeup so much to work, I mean not like the way they do back home. So, I didn’t want to stand out by applying too much that’s why I went to watch online videos to see how to do that no-makeup-makeup look so that it’s chilled and neutral but I still look put together. I can’t stop them talking about the colour of my skin but let them not say anything about this face beat<sup>96</sup>!”*

More generally, Buhle, a Zimbabwean woman, shared,

*“I just go on YouTube to learn how to be more confident with doing my makeup and looking good, all of that. I saw that when I had my face well done that I was more comfortable showing up to places as a black woman.”*

Similarly, when Adaeze migrated from Nigeria she shared that she went through such a “drastic sense of self-image altering” because she was now the darkest skinned girl in her classes.

Subsequently, she turned to YouTube and Instagram to research products for her skincare routine which also shifted dramatically with the Canadian weather. Learning about the different products for her skin type improved her skin care routine and increased her confidence to navigate her racial difference within daily intercultural encounters. As such, these women’s experiences highlight that the Virtual Beauty Parlour is a space where women can integrate into commodified notions of beauty, a new climate, and a multicultural society by adopting new makeup and skincare practices. Thus, on the one hand, some women expressed that before migrating, makeup was not a big part of their beauty regime as an “au naturelle” aesthetic was valued in local nationalist contexts. However, once they arrived in Canada, they encountered more women wearing makeup and the availability of cosmetic products unlike in their home

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<sup>96</sup> Face Beat is an expression used when makeup application is so meticulous and amazing that it makes one look truly stunning.

countries. On the other hand, women also shared that makeup practices are space specific because, for example, nationalist professional norms of femininity include layers of makeup while that is not the case in Canada. As such, the Virtual Beauty Parlour incorporates women into the global political economy of beauty through the consumption of more skin care/cosmetic products while also helping women navigate their hybrid racial identities and new racialization processes within Canadian society by providing them with the beauty tools and knowledge to blend in or confidently resist the racism, discrimination, and exclusion they may encounter in other social spaces.

Furthermore, women expressed that they do not go on YouTube solely to learn new techniques and find products, but they find the process of watching other women apply makeup relaxing and “therapeutic”. For example, Jamelle, a Cameroonian epidemiologist who spends most of her days doing analytical work, shared that she enjoys watching makeup tutorials because it de-stresses her. She added that she particularly enjoys the transformation from “basic” to “glamorous” and appreciates that YouTube has provided a space for women like her to learn about beauty products and skills in order to boost their own confidence as they navigate new locales. Speaking of YouTube’s global reach in teaching women everywhere, including back home, she elaborated,

*“With the likes of YouTube, the likes of everybody can go on YouTube and learn a trick here and there. You can essentially get a good look with cheaper makeup. Even in Cameroon, you can recreate that same look but with more affordable products. So, we may look alike but you’re walking around with \$1000 on your face and I’m doing the same with \$5.”*

Adeola, a Kenyan woman, shared,

*“I went through many different changes when I moved here. It was not easy to be far away from my family, looking for a job, and also everything here was just new, so YouTube was that happy place for me where I learnt my style and how to do my makeup. It also helped because then when I got a job interview, I knew exactly how to look good.”*

Similarly, Sade, a Nigerian woman, noted,

*“YouTube is my therapist! Like when I feel sad or lonely or even just stressed, I go and find some videos to just watch. I like listening to the women talk about their lives and what’s happening while they make themselves beautiful. Then I also want to look beautiful, next thing I’m putting on my makeup then I’m already starting to be in a good mood again.”*

In short, as women encounter racialization processes in other public spaces, like the workplace, that can be exhausting and discouraging to navigate, women use social media as an escape and place of self-care. Accordingly, the Virtual Beauty Parlour becomes a space where women can momentarily subvert racialization processes and disregard the daily stressors of immigrant life to feel beautiful and relax. Thus, African women are able to watch YouTube and learn skills to recreate affordable makeup looks in ways that enhance their racialized identities and everyday beauty practices while helping them to navigate their racial difference and cultural diversity in other spaces offline. Furthermore, the semi-private nature of online black communities means African women can decide how to incorporate other standards of beauty by selecting which content creators they learn from and where they draw inspiration from. As such, the Virtual Beauty Parlour is an important site for African women as a space for inclusive and equitable visual culture where they can celebrate self in communities of difference that provide them with the racial affirmation, beauty resources, and tools for dealing with gendered racialization processes and intercultural encounters in Canadian society.

## **Virtual Homeplace**

Thus far, the chapter has highlighted how social media is used by women like a Virtual Beauty Parlour where they can seek out diverse black communities online to learn the necessary beauty tools, skills, knowledge, and products as they recreate their hybrid racialized identities and navigate other social spaces and intercultural encounters in Canadian society. As such, women are turning to social media because mainstream media-defined and propagated notions of beauty inevitably impact black women as they struggle to attain a beauty standard that is inherently designed to exclude them. In other words, notions of mainstream media beauty are rooted in hegemonically prescribed white standards which result in the institutionalized unacceptability of black female bodies in their natural state and the penalization of these bodies in the push for American-Eurocentric beauty aesthetics (Lee, 2015; Roseman, 2017; Poran, 2006; Richardson-Stovall, 2012; Noble, 2013). Consequently, black women are using social media to create positive racial identities, new cultural narratives, images, and diverse definitions of black womanhood (Bradley, 2015; McArthur, 2016). Similarly, African women in this sample turn to social media, which has changed the consumption of beauty in mass media to a more personal experience, in search of user generated counter-narratives and communities of belonging as they grapple with their complex and layered racialized identities. As such, the Virtual Homeplace is another important space in African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism as it allows for alternative positioning within Canadian society, by bringing them from the margins so they can be included, and a creative vernacular discourse of racialized beauty for women who are left out of mainstream media. Furthermore, it fosters collective community and social networks that cross boundaries and borders offering visibility and voice.

Lastly, the Virtual Homeplace generates culturally specific content and perspectives that are otherwise absent from discourses of multiculturalism and broader societal discussions about race and beauty.

### ***#BlackGirlMagic: Community & New Forms of Freedom***

As such, this digital public space is shaped by diverse black communities globally as African women join other black women, through social movements and practices, in countering the shame of exclusion by carving out semi-private communities to create hybrid racialized identities as well as their own visions of beauty and style within the context of a white dominated beauty culture. Accordingly, these private community spaces allow for the “oppositional gaze” (hooks, 1992) thereby enabling African women to look away from the intersectional structural oppression that comes from discourses of multiculturalism and everyday racisms that exclude and/or marginalize them. Therefore, social media becomes a space for new forms of freedom so that women can simultaneously celebrate counter-cultural black aesthetics while drawing attention to black beauty’s range of skin tones and hair textures that are considered beautiful. Through their online beauty practices, African women in Canada thus become part of the larger global movement for racial equality as they redefine black beauty representation by challenging the white normative cultural standards of beauty. In particular, African women in this sample strongly identified with the “#BlackGirlMagic” movement in their day-to-day experiences as evidenced by their photo and video posts. The movement resonates with women, as they grapple with shifting racial identities once they migrate, because it maintains its rhetorical and visual power in race politics by insisting on making black women’s bodies visible in contexts of beauty, desirability, and dignity online. In other words, this community is steeped in the visibility

politics of beauty and resistance by giving aesthetic appreciation to black women. Accordingly, African women's pan-African identity is reinscribed by globalized articulations of Blackness through counter-narratives of beauty. For example, Nakimera, a Ugandan woman, shared,

*"We are now living in a time when being a black woman is cool, just look at things like #BlackGirlMagic. Seeing us be proud and loud makes me proud to be a black woman! I finally feel like there is also a place for me to belong with other women where having that goddess chocolate melanin is a good thing!"*

Similarly, Imamu, a Beninese woman, noted,

*"I wouldn't say that I'm a really big social media user but when I do, I go to those posts and people who are trying to celebrate #BlackGirlMagic. It just makes me feel good to see the way other women are being so happy to be black and I want that too because I have experienced some hurtful situations with racism, like at work, and it just feels good to find that place where we don't have to worry about that."*

Furthermore, Onika, a Burundian woman, added,

*"I moved to Canada before social media really became a thing, so it was hard always feeling like there is something wrong with you for being a black person. Now it's everywhere and I know for sure that being a black woman is not a bad thing because how can it be when we are so beautiful? Just look at all our pictures. You can see yourself in other women and we just support and hype each other up because if we don't do it for each other, nobody else will tell us that we are beautiful."*

Lela, a Zimbabwean woman, succinctly summed up her reasons for participating in the #BlackGirlMagic movement online,

*"I want to be part of the beauty movement that empowers black women! I want to be identified with that."*

As such, given Canadian discourses of multiculturalism that racialize women Black, African women subsequently express themselves through their racial, rather than cultural, identity as a way to connect with other black women who are going through similar racialization experiences.

Accordingly, the Virtual Homeplace is shaped by global articulations of race as the black community reframes what “being Black” entails for African women. In other words, women come to understand “being Black” as something to be proud of as negative racial stereotypes from intercultural encounters in Canadian society are redefined through an affirming lens of Blackness like referring to their skin as “goddess chocolate melanin”, as Nakimera put it. In short, women take pride in the colour of their skin by reclaiming derogatory racial narratives about their bodies and identities. As such, African women subvert gendered racialization processes in Canadian society by giving new positive meaning to Blackness. Furthermore, where structures and interpersonal instances of anti-Black racism may make them feel excluded in other spaces, such as the workplace, in the Virtual Homeplace women find a safe retreat where they can explore new forms of freedom and affirm one another. Therefore, while “becoming black” is experienced negatively when women migrate and undergo racial shifts, “being black” becomes more of a positive identity as women engage on social media and connect with women from diverse black communities. Moreover, women highlighted the importance of representation that comes from belonging to the black community. As Callista, a forty-something Beninese woman, noted,

*“We don’t have a lot of positive images of people just being black. I believe black little girls should see black women just being black. The whole variety of black natural beauty. We live in interesting times where black women are starting to own their own definition of beauty.”*

Similarly, Amina, a Rwandese woman, shared,

*“For me, #BlackGirlMagic is about being proud to be a black woman and being part of that community. Raising a baby girl in this country is not easy because people will always see her different because of her skin. I want to raise her up seeing these pictures so she*

*knows that she is powerful and beautiful and strong and that she doesn't have to be ashamed to be black."*

Additionally, Makhosi, a Zimbabwean woman, explained,

*"I feel like one of the best things that #BlackGirlMagic has done is show us representation. Okay, so like we come from countries where you are the majority as the black person right? Then you come here and suddenly you are not and all you are seeing is white people on the TV, in the papers, the magazines, even the beauty products are for white women. So, I'm happy to be part of that community where I can see that actually, it's good to be a black woman because you see so many different faces, bodies, hair types, and skin tones. You can see yourself."*

Therefore, by owning their Black identity, through self-defined notions of racialized beauty, and posting these images and videos online, African women are able to engage in "photographic agency" (Harris, 2015:132) which is essential in affirming women's racialized identities, countering mainstream representations of black beauty, and providing black women with representation. As such, this form of agency enables women to create inclusive constructions of beauty through the lens of Blackness that are user-generated rather than mainstream.

Furthermore, these user-generated images of beauty serve a dual purpose as they affirm the "whole variety of black natural beauty" for African women while simultaneously providing Canadian society with counter-cultural aesthetics of black women. In other words, photographic agency allows African women to resist offline racial exclusion and discrimination within multicultural contexts by enabling them to recreate positive racialized identities through images of black beauty that are representative and inclusive, rather than merely consuming and living out of mainstream homogenized images of beauty constructed for them but that exclude them. In short, by using their beauty practices online to create positive racialized identities and

alternative aesthetics that celebrate black beauty, African women are agentive in the ways that they are cultural readers and producers.

Furthermore, the images and videos of black beauty that African women produce online can be seen as narratives signifying a maximized perception of racial identity that adds to discourses of multiculturalism and wider meanings of racialized gendered existence in Canada. Accordingly, African women use this space to disrupt hegemonic beauty standards while concretizing their presence and identities in Canadian society by offering belonging and acceptance into discourses of race and multiculturalism through the beauty culture. Additionally, the various social media sites that women display their content on become a space where their marginalized bodies and voices are visually propelled into discussions on race, beauty, and cultural diversity. For example, the “art of the selfie” featured extensively on every online profile of the women observed. These self-portraits showcased the women in a variety of looks from glamorous, meticulously done makeup and well-coiffed hair to casual, no makeup, and natural hair looks. While these women all have different skin tones, hair textures and facial features, the presence of these selfies across social media allows African women in Canada, along with other black women globally, to become visible with proud and unapologetic spectacular portrayals celebrating Blackness and the experiences of black women that say, “we are here, and we are beautiful!”<sup>97</sup> Consequently, virtual spaces become a place of affirmation and community through shared experiences of racial discrimination and exclusion where African women can reposition their racialized bodies to

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<sup>97</sup> McFadden, S. (2015). “Selfies allow black women to say we are here, and we are beautiful.” *The Guardian* & Zagorski, A. (2021). “Carleton student photographer’s work ‘spectacular portrayal of the Black woman’s experience.’” *Ottawa Citizen*

be included within discourses of multiculturalism by powerfully and positively engaging with beauty. In this way, African women are using social media to establish their own forms of racial recognition by developing alternative aesthetics online that freely broaden and expand norms of beauty to include aesthetics that come naturally to them, thereby transforming their racialized identities and 'otherness' into social and symbolic capital as they navigate racial difference and cultural diversity offline.

Subsequently, the Virtual Homeplace is also a space where the decolonizing of beauty occurs as women challenge negative racial stereotypes. For example, Mia, who is in her early forties and a mother of three daughters, shared the impact that seeing dominant standards of beauty has had on her and her daughters. She noted,

*“Constantly seeing black women copying society’s beauty, with light skin, long straight wigs and weaves, reinforces that thing that black is ugly and shameful. To be honest, I also struggle as well but it was a wakeup call when one of my teenage daughters started questioning her own dark skin and hair texture because of the images she was seeing online. Right away I decided to start wearing my natural hair and posting more pictures so my daughter could see that it’s okay, black is beautiful.”*

Mia also admitted that it was uncomfortable to show her natural hair online at first but the message she was sending her daughter, by embodying a black beauty aesthetic in the midst of dominant standards of beauty, was far more important and impactful. Similarly, Aiysha, a Ghanaian woman in her mid-thirties, shared that when she cut her hair and started wearing it natural, her teenage cousin repeatedly questioned why she would cut her hair because she “looked better with long straight hair”. Rather than take offense at the comment, Aiysha took it as an opportunity to cultivate an appreciation of black beauty by spending time on social media

showing her cousin pictures of other women who were proudly wearing their natural hair. At the end of their browsing session online, Aiysha reinforced the lesson to her cousin,

*“Don’t be fooled in thinking that if you wear your hair straight and long that that’s the only way you’ll be considered beautiful.”*

Similarly, Sauda, a Kenyan woman, shared,

*“I don’t have my own kids yet and I’m still learning all of this social media stuff because I grew up when this wasn’t a big deal like now but because my nieces all have it, I’m more and more getting onto it. There are always images of the slay queens<sup>98</sup>, and you know young girls want to look like that, so I try to post pictures that my nieces can see that even a woman with natural hair and little makeup is also beautiful. Yah, they can still choose to look like those women but at least they will also see Auntie Sauda rockin’ her natural hair, still looking good, still going on dates with men, still confident. There are many ways to be beautiful.”*

Thus, the Virtual Homeplace also becomes a decolonial space, particularly as an intergenerational gendered nationalist project, where women with daughters, nieces, and young cousins seek to show the younger impressionable generation that they do not have to adhere to dominant standards of beauty that cause black beauty shame. Accordingly, older women seek to cultivate an appreciation of black beauty by highlighting that there are multiple ways for black women to be beautiful. Therefore, social media is an important space for African women to revalorize nationalist culture and redefine their racialized identities through self-defined perceptions of black beauty. As such, while mainstream media excludes black women, often leaving many with feelings of racial inadequacy and shame, the Virtual Homeplace enables women to reclaim their agency by creating counter-cultural aesthetics of black beauty.

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<sup>98</sup> Slay queens are hyper-feminine women who display an expensive and luxurious lifestyle through excessive care for their appearance with makeup, wigs, extensions, long nails, and fashionable clothes. Women with curvy hourglass figures are also placed in this category. They are always on social media, partying, and into the latest trends.

Moreover, this space functions to enable African women to challenge negative constructions of their racialized identities in ways that are seldom experienced during intercultural encounters as the 'other' in offline spaces within a multicultural context. Therefore, the Virtual Homeplace is a space for counter-storytelling and counter narratives where African women can join other black women globally in producing and circulating counter discourses that formulate oppositional interpretation of their racialized identities through beauty. As other formal channels of recognition are denied to black women, this type of agency thus provides new forms of freedom and affirmation of Blackness in the midst a tumultuous racial climate.

In sum, the counter public nature of this Virtual Homeplace enables African women to participate in quiet resistance to the racial prejudice and systemic anti-Black racism that occur through Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, racialization processes in other spaces, intercultural encounters, and the global promotion of white privilege through hegemonic beauty images that exclude them. Consequently, this space has dual meaning as a place to publicly counter dominant standards of beauty while allowing women to create semi-private communities of belonging that foster consciousness raising and dialogue where African women can recreate, validate, and challenge existing knowledge about their racialized identities. As such, although globalization informs discourses of multiculturalism and constructions of Blackness, combined with technology, it also provides women the tools and community to resist and challenge these very structures and processes. In short, social media becomes a space where women find reprieve from racialization processes within Canadian society and the

freedom to create positive racialized identities, through their beauty practices, within affirmative spaces.

### ***Black Nationalist and Diasporic Cultural Pressures***

However, African women's agency online is complicated by the various ways that they feel pressured to conform to images of black beauty prescribed by black nationalist "authenticity" discourses as well as nationalist constructions of femininity perpetuated by transnational diasporic culture. As such, while most women in the sample highlighted all the ways in which social media has provided them with greater appreciation for their racialized identities by engaging with diverse black communities through social media, they also shared some of the ways in which they find online images of black beauty burdensome because of the pressure to conform to those standards. For example, Kali, a thirty-year-old Zimbabwean woman who engages with social media regularly, noted,

*"Now there's more pressure to have natural hair or a full lace wig, eyelashes, and lots of makeup. You have to pick between being a naturalista<sup>99</sup> or a slay queen<sup>100</sup>!"*

Similarly, Amahle, a Cameroonian woman, shared,

*"You know the pressure doesn't just come from white people's beauty, we ourselves put pressure on each other to always be dressed so good, that African good-looking woman."*

Likewise, Jahmelia, a Rwandese woman, explained,

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<sup>99</sup> Natuaralista: a woman who wears and promotes the growth of her own natural healthy hair by not chemically altering her hair texture and choosing instead to wear protective styles such as braids.

<sup>100</sup> Slay Queen: the versions and perspectives of what 'slay queen' refers to are diverse but Kali meant it in the sense of a woman who is always dressed stylishly with trendy fashions, hair and makeup; and posts herself on social media regularly.

*"I actually find more pressure from our own people when it comes to how I look. With the Rwandese it's about being that good traditional African woman that's not too westernized. With the black women it's about the wigs, weaves, eyelashes, nails and all those things. If I don't want to dress traditional and I don't like weaves, then I've suddenly turned into a white person. You can't win."*

These women's insights highlight that while there has been a rise in black beauty pride online, through the dissemination of counter-cultural aesthetics, it has also come with intragroup pressure to adhere to the black community's standard of beauty. In other words, women's racialized identities are shaped as much by white hegemonic beauty norms as well as by those who police and enforce the aesthetic collective identity within the black community. On the one hand, this black beauty standard entails the rejection of the long straight hair, light skin, slim body image perpetuated by dominant discourses of beauty. Given that dominant beauty standards inherently exclude African women, trying to emulate those standards results in being a "sell out" in the black community. In other words, women are perceived as ashamed of being black as evidenced by their apparent attempts to approximate whiteness in their appearances. On the other hand, the black beauty standard requires women embrace either the excessively glamorous and hyper-feminine "slay queen" aesthetic that is highly classed or the all-natural look, mainly natural hair, that rejects the commodification of beauty. However, not all women like or are able to maintain the natural aesthetic required to be considered "authentically black" for various reasons including time and money. As such, African women may have the freedom to not abide by the dominant and exclusionary white beauty standards, but this freedom is replaced by pressure to uphold a particular black aesthetic. Consequently, African women are caught at the complicated intersection of navigating black beauty standards and nationalist constructions of femininity because while more images of black beauty online have a positive

influence on women, they also create additional pressure for African women who feel the burden to *“be a Beyonce all day without the glam squad”*, as Sanaa summed up. Moreover, what is interesting is that this black beauty standard also conflicts with aspects of diasporic culture that adopt postcolonial constructions of race which actually encourage an American-Eurocentric image of straight hair, light skin, and slim bodies. As such, this reveals some of the intragroup tensions that exist within the black community and African diaspora as these differences are based on varying colonial legacies, the migratory process of immigrants, and the host country’s racial politics. Subsequently, women’s racialized identities are dichotomized into naturalista and slay queen or ‘traditional’ and modern westernized woman. These essentializing categories and myopic views of black womanhood can be confusing for African women as they express ambivalence over their Black identity and their local pan-African identity in the diaspora.

Furthermore, as in the church, the African diaspora community online perpetuates its own nationalist constructions of femininity that women in Canada must adhere to. In particular, it is a beauty standard that pushes for a distinctive African modernity through displays of upward class mobility and consumerism. For example, Chipso, a Zimbabwean woman, spoke of the pressure that comes with having to maintain a certain appearance that reflects her presence in Canada. She shared of the time when she cut her hair a few months after arriving in Canada because she could not find a hairdresser and it was too expensive and time consuming to maintain her natural hair. When she posted pictures of herself online with her new bald look, she received concerned comments from her family back home because, as she was put it, *“the natural look is not appropriate for being in Canada”*. She further elaborated,

*“They expect when you are in Canada, obviously, they expect you to be looking good because you are in Canada otherwise what are you doing in Canada? You have to be someone else. When you are in the village people don’t care but when you are in Canada, you are being judged more. The diversity in Canada means there is no pressure to look a certain way but in the African community there is pressure to look good because you are in Canada.”*

Zuri, a Nigerian woman, shared similar sentiments of seeing other African women online,

*“I don’t feel that pressure in Ottawa, I feel I can be more comfortable in my own skin, and I’ve never felt less than not beautiful here. If I moved to Toronto or Montreal, I feel I’d have pressure to wear makeup more especially as a Beauty Influencer. Here in Ottawa, sometimes I actually have to check myself and say ‘aye, you’re becoming too comfortable. You ain’t got no man, you can’t afford this luxury of looking too comfortable and not making an effort’. But I feel the pressure from other black people. African sisters they be doing things! They be doing a lot! I then question myself, ‘should I be this calm as an African woman?’”*

Similarly, referring to this pressure to look a certain way because she is in Canada, Shaina, a Kenyan woman noted,

*“There is pressure to look like you’ve come out of a magazine every day! That constant need to look good. If I was in the Kenyan countryside, I’d be more okay being natural and never needing makeup and having short hair. I would feel okay with how I was born. And then if I were to step into Canada again, I would quickly recognize that I don’t look good. It would be like, ‘damn! Okay, time to go back to make up’.”*

Furthermore, Callista, a Beninese woman, also expressed how this online pressure translates offline. She shared of the time she visited her home country to attend a high-profile wedding but chose not to wear heels or straighten her hair. When one of her long-time friends bumped into her with her natural hair and sandals, her friend laughed and quipped, *“which side of the white people’s country are you in?”* implying that she did not look like she was living in a Western country. African women living in Canada thus feel the diasporic expectations to aspire to and represent a particular type of “distinctive African modernity” (Allman, 2004:3). In other words,

this is another way the diaspora community shapes women's pan-African identity and new forms of community. In the church, the continental identity is expressed through the "gospel of dress to impress" while online, women are imbricated into processes of globalization and modernity through this pan-African identity expressed by the images of themselves in trendy clothes, hairstyles, and makeup. Consequently, women feel the "burden of representation" (Yuval-Davis, 2003:17) to exhibit a version of ethnic femininity that is nationalist, classed, modern, and befitting of an African woman living in Canada. Additionally, several women shared how this pressure to project an image of success online has led them to purchasing and using products that they do not necessarily need or can afford. For example, Shani, a Rwandese woman, shared how the need to retain postcolonial constructions of race through the image of a slim body has impacted her as she uses access to new beauty tools and technology, like the gym, to achieve this image. In her words

*"Back then in Rwanda, I did not wake up obsessed about how my tummy looks. I did not, you know, walk home thinking about the kinds of food I was going to eat or not eat because of the way I wanted to look. I wasn't obsessing about going to the gym. I didn't even know a 'gym' was a thing."*

Similarly, Malaika, a Nigerian fashionista, confessed how at one point she got caught up in the pressure to project herself exhibiting this African diasporic notion of gendered modernity online. Between the pressure to achieve and portray a distinctive African modernity as well as the promotion of a glamorous black beauty standard and luxurious lifestyle, she started buying things that were well beyond what she could afford in order to maintain the appearance. In particular, she shared of the time she put a \$5000 Chanel bag on layaway and as she was saving for it, she began questioning why she even wanted it. While she didn't disclose whether or not

she went on to purchase the bag, she admitted that the pressures of being part of the African diaspora create a desire and additional expenses for things that one cannot afford, and often does not really need, all to show that they are living successful immigrant lives in Canada. Therefore, while the presence of everyday multiculturalism offline alleviates women of the pressures from nationalist culture, the diaspora continues to claim a pan-African identity that is classed and expressed through continental aesthetic nationalism. However, globalization and technology intensify this identity through norms of gendered modernity and consumerism as transnational diasporic culture is experienced locally and globally. Thus, while African women find new forms of freedom in the Virtual Homeplace by connecting with other black women in semi-private community spaces, as well as the abundance of images celebrating black beauty, they are also encumbered by black community discourses of “black authenticity” and nationalist cultural pressures to portray a distinctive African modernity.

## **Conclusion**

African women’s complex and nuanced digital self-presentations show the ways in which social media is a key site for their Black and pan-African identity formations collectively and individually. Accordingly, social media enhances positive racial self-identification so that African women are able to cultivate communities of belonging and create cultural and racialized identities that resist gendered racialization processes and discourses of multiculturalism that exclude them in other social spaces within Canadian society. Thus, while readings of race change for African women once they migrate, the exposure to global racial regimes, through globalized western standards of beauty, provides them with a level of “racial literacy” (Twine, 2010) that becomes useful as they navigate intercultural encounters and constructions of Blackness within

discourses of multiculturalism. Furthermore, once women arrive in Canada, social media is a digital space shaped by the global black community that links women from diverse black populations in experiences of racial discrimination and exclusion, as well as practices and ideologies of black beauty. This is manifested through what this chapter has articulated as the “Virtual Homeplace” and Virtual Beauty Parlour. Consequently, women’s pan-African identity is subsumed into the broader black community as women identify with their Blackness, rather than national and ethnic identities, in this global virtual context. However, while women’s pan-African and Black identities coexist in this space, there is often ambivalence as to which identity women invoke as evidenced by the different communities they choose online.

Furthermore, this chapter has highlighted how this digital space complicates understandings of the public-private dichotomy because women use this space to create semi-private communities of belonging while also publicly contesting their marginalization and exclusion in Canadian society by turning intimate beauty looks into public view. Moreover, this space is where women counter gendered racialization processes by reframing and repositioning their racialized identities in Canadian discourses of multiculturalism. Additionally, social media reveals the ways in which constructions of Blackness in discourses of multiculturalism are mediated by technology and informed by global articulations of race. As such, this space is where women publicly re-envision their racialized identities and bodies while building their own transnational diverse communities of belonging that offer comfort through affirmations, support, networking, resource sharing, and economic independence. In short, African women use social media to cultivate semi-private digital communities that provide connection, aesthetic

validation, and the exchange of beauty tools, skills, knowledge, and products to help them navigate intercultural encounters, racialization processes, and social spaces in Canadian society.

However, while these virtual communities are a space of comfort for many African women as they escape racialization processes offline, the positive effects of this digital community are complicated by the black community's "authenticity" discourses, gendered nationalist projects of the African diaspora in Canada, and transnational diasporic culture. Additionally, the positive effects of social media are limited to those with regular internet access, those who are technologically savvy, and those who have economic leverage. Moreover, seeking communities of belonging online gives African women some control over the representation of their racialized identities and bodies albeit in the precarious public context of open-access digital ecologies that may leave them vulnerable to profit-driven capitalist interests and the global political economy of beauty that reproduces raced, gendered, and classed inequalities. All the same, social media's accessibility, ubiquity, and influence can mitigate offline racial discrimination by allowing African women to reclaim their racialized identities from marginalizing and exclusionary discourses of multiculturalism. In other words, social media constitutes an important mode of resistance to marginalization and erasure for African women living in Canada. Thus, social media can be a positive space that amplifies African women's voices against exclusion and racial discrimination by propelling the presence of their racialized identities into discussions on multiculturalism, race, and beauty.

## **Conclusion: Contributions, Future Research, & Policy Work**

This thesis has journeyed through African women's varied and complex immigrant experiences in Canada. Specifically, migration induces multilayered transitions that intersect to create opportunities and challenges for African women's new gendered diasporic identities in the context of multiculturalism. Consequently, beauty becomes a multipurpose resource that women use to make sense of and maneuver these cultural changes. Furthermore, a new notion of community through the African diaspora emerges in the migratory journey that helps women navigate these changes and feel a sense of "home away from home" against the backdrop of increased cultural diversity, shifts in their racialized identities, new forms of nationalist community, and intercultural encounters. Accordingly, the African diaspora community provides women with a sense of familiarity as it is birthed out of a collective shared experience of 'otherness', a priority for the revalorization of diasporic culture, a pan-African identity demonstrated through continental aesthetic nationalism, and a sense of belonging in the midst of new intercultural encounters with other ethnic groups and the dominant white Canadian culture. Moreover, race is a central feature of African women's migration experience as discourses of multiculturalism are racialized with immigrant status being signified by skin colour. Subsequently, the African diaspora is also characterized by the interlinked structures of local, global, and national racial formations. As such, African women enter Canada and into discourses of multiculturalism and constructions of Blackness through which their bodies are marked by colonial legacies.

Furthermore, while racial politics in the United States remain prominent and highly charged, Canada's national narrative of multiculturalism rigorously omits issues of race and racism as it focuses more on the non-controversial aspects of culture like food, clothing, dance, and music. However, black immigrant women in Canada tend to wrestle with the ways in which their racialized identities are constructed through negative racial stereotypes and tropes about Africa. Additionally, women also experience anti-Black racism as their racialized bodies are embedded in discourses of beauty and interlocking structures of power that intersect along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Furthermore, ethnicity and nationality are additional elements for African women as their bodies are appropriated by the African diaspora to uphold the community's ethnocultural boundaries and define diasporic loyalty through continental aesthetic nationalism as well as nationalist constructions of femininity. In short, African women's bodies become the site where the tensions between discourses of multiculturalism, race, and nationalism, as well as the collective continental identity and women's individual choices are pronounced.

Moreover, these tensions are most explicit as women occupy and navigate different social spaces. Thus, once African immigrant women settle into new multicultural locales their cultural engagement, intercultural encounters, as well as sense of identity, belonging, and the African diaspora community are negotiated in different social spaces such as neighborhoods, workplaces, churches, homes, schools, and shopping malls. Consequently, the boundaries between what is public and private are increasingly contested and yet remain a crucial issue for immigrants and their communities as social spaces are constructed and inscribed with collective

norms, institutions, and imaginations that reflect implicit and dominant ideologies of the host country. Accordingly, different social spaces in Canadian society become a place of excitement and curiosity, struggle and contestation where different identities and communities are represented and compete for the continuous process of place-making and the appropriation of the public and private. As such, living in Canadian society means African immigrant women are often compelled to grapple daily with the pressures that arise between maintaining diasporic loyalty or incorporating into mainstream society by forging new intercultural connections and multicultural practices as they navigate public and private spaces. Accordingly, women exercise their agency in multifaceted and complex ways by accommodating and/or resisting various cultural and nationalist norms that occur across different social spaces.

Therefore, while the affirmative connotations associated with Canadian discourses of multiculturalism evoke images of cultural hybridity, harmonious coexistence, and colourful heterogeneity, African women's relationship with Canada's celebrated values of cultural diversity, openness, acceptance, progressiveness, and inclusiveness<sup>101</sup> is indeed complicated and fraught with joys and conflicts. As such, the aim of this thesis has been to unpack some of these complexities particularly by examining how everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora interact to shape racialization processes in multiple spaces, both public and private, through an exploration of African women's beauty practices. The thesis moved through five main

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<sup>101</sup> Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, 2015. "Diversity Is Canada's Strength". Speech Given at Canada House, London, November 26. <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2015/11/26/diversity-canadas-strength>

spaces that are important in African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism. Firstly, it started with the self highlighting the shifts that occur as African women migrate into Canadian society and (re)create racialized identities, that are a classed hybrid of being Black and African, through their everyday beauty practices. Furthermore, the chapter revealed how a pan-African identity emerges as women connect with the African diaspora community in Canada and the global black community, as well as how nationalist constructions of femininity are reconfigured as women expand their ethnic and racialized definitions of beauty to incorporate diverse aesthetics inspired by new intercultural encounters. Secondly, the thesis analysed the home highlighting the ways in which the private sphere of the home and women's racialized identities are shaped by the public through official Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, postcolonial racial formations, nationalist constructions of femininity, African patriarchy, class, and sexuality that filter into this space through African families and heterosexual relationships.

Thirdly, the thesis examined the church highlighting how women's racialized identities are reinscribed by a pan-African identity which incorporates ethnic and national features into a broader continental identity. Furthermore, the African diaspora redefines this public space for semi-private purposes through new forms of community and belonging within Canadian society as demonstrated through nationalist constructions of femininity and continental aesthetic nationalism. Fourth, the thesis analysed the workplace highlighting how women's pan-African identity is reinscribed by a Black identity in the public through Canadian discourses of multiculturalism. Furthermore, this chapter showed how intercultural encounters and everyday

racisms shape women's racialized identities as a pervasive source of ethnocultural difference so that they are simultaneously marginalized and hyper-visible in the workplace. Finally, the thesis examined social media highlighting how social media is a space where women's pan-African and Black identities and communities are merged virtually. Thus, this digital public sphere becomes a space for positive racialized self-identification and new forms of belonging within community. Consequently, women can be equipped with new beauty knowledge, tools, skills, and products to navigate intercultural encounters and gendered racialization processes in Canadian society while countering their marginalization and exclusion in offline spaces.

As such, in answer to the questions: how do African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism in a globalized world shape social spaces and impact gendered racialization processes as evinced through women's beauty practices? And how do women exercise their agency navigating these spaces? the thesis made three key arguments. Firstly, I have argued that the dynamic interplay between everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora simultaneously reconstitutes social spaces by creating rich combinations of complex experiences that challenge and redefine what the "public" and "private" mean in various spaces through new meanings of race, beauty, pan-African continentalism, long-distance nationalism, multiculturalism, class, sexuality, and gender. Secondly, I have argued that everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora simultaneously structure racialization processes so that African women's racialized identities are layered, formed, and informed by a new African diaspora community within Canada, local nationalist and postcolonial racial formations, Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, and globalized meanings of Blackness. Furthermore, racialization

processes are constantly shifting across social spaces so that women creatively juggle different racialized identities by creating hybrid iterations, of being African and Black, that are complex and multilayered. Finally, I argued that everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora interact in paradoxical fashion to produce a conception of agency reflective of a complex multifaceted process with various simultaneous articulations including accommodation and resistance. Consequently, the ways in which African diaspora women use their beauty practices to navigate race and space reveals the context-dependent manifestations of different forms and expressions of agency in the public and private. This convoluted dynamic makes it difficult to neatly generalize and compartmentalize the implications of regarding African women as both completely agentive and empowered or completely oppressed and victimized in any given space at any given time.

It was beyond the scope of this study to provide an all-encompassing exploration of African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism. Rather, it sought to provide a glimpse into the lived experiences of cultural diversity for these women, through their beauty practices, in five key spaces that are relevant to their everyday realities. In particular, the strength of this study lies in the explicit connections it has endeavored to highlight between the *micro* (social spaces, diaspora communities, intercultural encounters, everyday beauty practices) and the *macro* (official Canadian multiculturalism policy, structural contexts such as globalization, and large-scale sociopolitical processes such as race, class, and consumerism) in the everyday. As such, this study makes several key contributions to the literature on everyday

multiculturalism, the public and private dichotomy, critical race theory, and feminist scholarship on beauty.

Firstly, Africans are seldom the specific focus of research endeavours regarding discourses of multiculturalism and as African immigrants are becoming a conspicuous element of Canada's societal landscape, it is vital for Canadian society to understand their history in Canada, the social constructions that have shaped that history, and the specific features that characterise African diaspora communities (Aechtner, 2015; Tettey, 2001). Accordingly, this thesis has sought to contribute to this undertaking. Particularly, this study adds to our theoretical understanding of everyday multiculturalism by providing a gendered analysis through an exploration of African women's beauty practices, hitherto lacking in the literature, thereby enhancing our empirical understanding of gendered racialization processes in the context of cultural diversity.

Furthermore, this thesis has sought to shed light on some of the tensions and contradictions that exist between official Canadian multiculturalism policy and women's everyday lived experiences of cultural diversity. In other words, since formal public channels of expression are often denied to black women more generally and African women specifically, and many women may struggle to express their everyday lived experience of cultural diversity in terms of the formal rhetoric of multiculturalism, we can understand how they live with, produce, and contest their racial difference by looking at how they dress and hold their bodies in intercultural contexts. Beauty is intrinsic to the daily mundane lived experiences of cultural diversity and African women's everyday beauty practices highlight how their racialized identities

are carried out within categories of difference, while also reframing and escaping them as they are calcified in academic discourses of racism and multiculturalism. In short, this study has illuminated the gendered micro level processes of everyday multiculturalism through which women's racialized identities take shape against the backdrop of cultural diversity.

Therefore, a focus on African women's beauty practices, within the context of the dynamic relationship between the African diaspora and everyday multiculturalism, is a way to shift from a normative Western-centric political understanding of multiculturalism to show how it is a lived gendered and racialized phenomenon that takes place in everyday life. Furthermore, to the extent that the discipline of Political Science does not take up gendered diasporic identities and racialized experiences in the politics of the everyday, this thesis moves beyond federal government policies to focus on multiculturalism from below. In other words, this thesis has shown that for African diaspora women in Canada, the everyday becomes a site of power relations and a continually contested political space filled with ambivalent moments. It is never fully determined by structures of power and official processes but also always a site of emancipatory moments and counter-hegemonic struggles as women navigate race and space.

As such, this thesis begins to demarginalize African women in discourses of multiculturalism by emphasising their vernacular diasporic expressions of lived cultural diversity and racialized identities through ordinary everyday beauty practices. Accordingly, by participating in a closer engagement with the lived realities of African women, this thesis provides a step towards a more nuanced, holistic, and empirically rooted understanding of the

ways in which African women's racialized identities and social spaces are constructed and contested within the public and private diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism.

Secondly, this study has challenged the simplistic public-private dichotomy of social spaces which oversimplifies how African immigrant women actually navigate these spaces in daily practice. As I argued, through migration and new racialization processes within Canada, African women transcend and transform the public-private dichotomy which characterizes mainstream feminist debates on beauty. In particular, the public and private become destabilized, permeable, or altogether irrelevant in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism because African women in Canada, as with other racialized immigrant women, do not stand in the same relation to the dichotomy as they are distributed differently across a series of spaces due to their complex intersectional identities. Thus, for African women, the public and private are not only fluid, contextual, and relational as highlighted in the literature, but this study goes a step further by highlighting the ways in which everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora dynamically interact to challenge this dichotomy/continuum completely. Furthermore, as I argued, in the diasporic experience of everyday multiculturalism the private is shaped by nationalist constructions of femininity, transnational diasporic culture, postcolonial racial formations, African patriarchy, and "exoticizing racisms".

Additionally, the private is never completely so as the public filters into this sphere and (re)shapes it through Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, intercultural encounters, race, gender, class, and beauty, as well as structural processes like globalization and consumerism.

Moreover, as this thesis illustrated, the church and social media uniquely demonstrate the nebulous intersection of the public and private as the African diaspora in Canada and the global black community carve out diverse semi-private communal spaces within the public. In addition to this, the public-private dichotomy is dismantled further as the African diaspora often moves beyond its own community to infiltrate other parts of these public spaces through African women carrying continental aesthetic nationalism into their intercultural encounters in the church, as well as publicly countering their marginalization and exclusion through the online visual culture of black beauty content creation. In short, this study contributes to the literature on the public-private dichotomy by highlighting how the dynamic interplay between everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora transforms the boundaries of the public and private by blurring the divisions and reshaping them through new meanings of race, gender, class, sexuality, pan-African continentalism, long-distance nationalism, and multiculturalism.

Moreover, this study contributes to the scholarship on critical race theory by highlighting how African women's racialized identities are complex, layered, and repositioned within the African diaspora through migration, evolving global racial regimes, as well as differentiated patterns of racialization within Canadian discourses of multiculturalism. Furthermore, this study is valuable because black Africans have received the most frugal research attention in the emergent scholarship on immigrant identity formation in Canada. Thus, this study contributes to growing studies on cultural diversity and the ways in which African immigrant women negotiate their racialized ethnic and national identities in a diasporic context. As I argued, when African women migrate their racialized identities from exclusively nationalist racial formations to

discourses of multiculturalism as Blackness takes on a new meaning. As such, women's racialized identities become fragmented with the roots of local postcolonial and nationalist racial formations, layered with a new pan-African identity within Canada, global racial regimes, and entangled with racialization processes in Canadian society so that women begin to form hybrid racial iterations, of being Black and African, as they navigate their new locales. Furthermore, articulations of Blackness from racialization processes in Canadian society are reinscribed by a pan-African identity in the church. This racial shift is best demonstrated in what I referred to as the collective "African gospel of dress to impress" which is used to revalorize diasporic culture through continental aesthetic nationalism. In short, fashion in the church is the unifier and the tangible identifier of community and Africanness beyond the colour of women's skin.

Additionally, as women navigate social media, their racialized identities shift from a local pan-African identity within Canada to a globalized Black identity through transnational structures that link diverse black populations in shared experiences of racial discrimination, as well as practices and ideologies of black beauty. Still further, as women navigate the workplace, the pan-African identity is reinscribed by a Black identity through local racialization processes that are embedded in specific Canadian constructions of Blackness and refracted through global racial regimes. In short, African women's racialized identities are hybridized, dynamic, and heterogenous as they blend Africanness and Blackness in compelling ways.

Lastly, this thesis adds to the feminist scholarship on beauty and agency by showing that African women's beauty practices are imbued with diasporic influences of "aesthetic nationalism" and cultural diversity, and not just universalized hegemonic white standards of

beauty or black beauty norms. Additionally, this thesis expands the information on black beauty culture beyond the black Canadian and African-American narrative to interpolate African immigrant women into the global regime of beauty through everyday lived experiences that span across multiple social spaces. Thus, although African women's realities are similar to other black immigrant women, fundamentally they differ as women are situated in the African diaspora within the context of multiculturalism. Furthermore, African women migrate with local patriarchal norms, gendered nationalist projects, and postcolonial racial formations that uniquely affect how they experience racialization processes and accordingly use their beauty practices to recreate their racialized identities. Consequently, as part of this identity reformation process, women demonstrate their agency in complicated and contradictory ways across social spaces including utilizing new access to beauty products and technologies, redefining beauty on their own terms (often incorporating racial, nationalist, and multicultural aspects), and harnessing their beauty practices for self-expression, enjoyment, and individuality.

Moreover, as I argued, women exercise their agency in various ways including creating online communities of belonging, learning the appropriate beauty skills to navigate gendered racialization processes in Canada, and using "photographic agency" (Harris, 2015:132) to create user generated images of their own expressions of their racialized identities and visions of beauty. In short, African women exercise their agency to resist marginalization and exclusion by making themselves visible in discussions on race, beauty, and multiculturalism. However, African women's agency is also channeled by other factors including black nationalist discourses of "black authenticity", African patriarchy, and transnational diasporic culture online. In short, this

thesis has shown that African women's relationship with agency is one that is complex, ambivalent, and nuanced as agency is situated and not untethered from the sociocultural landscape, thereby always intersecting with interlocking structures of race, class, gender, nationalism, and multiculturalism.

### ***Future Research and Policy Work***

In addition to the preceding findings, this study points to several areas where future research would be worthwhile. Firstly, multiculturalism in Canada is not experienced equally by all minority groups because of the global hierarchy of races, cultures, and religions (Schueller, 2003). Accordingly, it would be valuable to do a comparative analysis of African immigrant women and women from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East diasporas to understand how differentiated patterns of racialization embedded within discourses of multiculturalism, beyond constructions of Blackness, affect immigrant women from other countries in Canadian society. Moreover, while there have been studies done on black women in Canada (Thompson, 2019; Prince, 2009; Brown, 2018), because the 'Black experience' is not homogeneous, future studies can comparatively look at African women and other black immigrant women, from the Caribbean for example, to see how intragroup differences, due to varying colonial legacies and gendered nationalist projects, intersect to inform their racialized experiences of nationalism and everyday multiculturalism. Furthermore, an international comparative analysis of African women in Canada and other countries where multiculturalism is institutionalized, like Australia, can reveal how differences in immigration histories, policies, and approaches affect women's

migration experiences and subsequent constructions of the African diaspora community and pan-African identity in the context of cultural diversity.

Secondly, future studies can dissect the pan-African identity by looking at specific nationalities and doing an analysis of the larger African diasporas in Canada including Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, Ghana, and Cameroon (*Statistics Canada*, 2016). While this study focused on the broader continental identity, there were specific nationalist themes and practices that began emerging among the women thus it would be productive to examine how specific nationalities engage with everyday multiculturalism based on nationalist histories, ethnic identities, and beauty culture. Furthermore, studying women from North Africa can also provide additional regional nuances to discussions on the African diaspora and everyday multiculturalism as immigrants from this region are racialized differently. As such, examining beauty practices from this region may highlight the ways in which North African women's racialized and nationalist identities are reshaped by cultural diversity within Canadian society in divergent or similar ways to women from Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, future studies can explore the bodily practices of African men and African individuals from the LGBTQ+ community in order to understand how diverse constructions of masculinity and sexuality complicate the formations of diasporic identities and racialized experiences of everyday multiculturalism. Moreover, this project has contributed to studies of the African diaspora in Canada including British Columbia and Ontario (Creese, 2011; Aechtner, 2015; Tettey & Pampalu, 2005). However, future studies could expand the provincial analysis to look at African women in Quebec in order to emphasise the distinctions

between anglophone and francophone diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism in the formations of racialized diasporic identities and collective community.

Finally, given the current cultural landscape after widespread Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, the subsequent global social movement to fight anti-Black racism<sup>102</sup>, and Canada's ongoing commitment to advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion in society<sup>103</sup>, this thesis is timely and relevant for practitioners, policymakers, program officers, and other knowledge stakeholders who specialise in multiculturalism, race, gender, and immigration. As such, this thesis has highlighted the ways in which African women's racialized identities are shaped in the context of multiculturalism, as well as how they interact with cultural diversity as part of their daily lived experiences. Accordingly, this empirical knowledge can aid policymakers and program officers so they can continue to achieve a more realistic representation of what social cohesion looks like for African immigrants in different Canadian cities. Furthermore, by challenging the public-private dichotomy, this project has offered a unique understanding of African women's conceptualizations and experiences of social spaces as they settle into their new locales. For policy makers, this provides deeper knowledge of how women think about, use, and value their space in the context of cultural diversity but also how they define, express, and utilize their cultural needs while transforming spaces. Thus, understanding the nuances and complexities of

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2.Mackinnon, M. (2020). "Huge crowds turn anti-racism demonstrations into global protest movement" <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-anti-racism-becomes-a-global-movement-as-cities-around-the-world-are/>

<sup>103</sup> Specifically, by employing Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), an analytical process intended for government policy and program development to assess how diverse groups of women and men may experience policies, programs and initiatives. It permits an understanding of how various intersecting identity factors could and do impact the effectiveness of government initiatives. Government of Canada's Approach to Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+): <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-accs/approach-approche-en.html>

African women's hybrid racialized identities as they form across social spaces can help promote better integration policies and programs that foster greater social cohesion post-migration. Additionally, while Canada's brand of multiculturalism is well established and has its noteworthy characteristics, future studies and policies on immigrant groups would be bolstered further by adapting more features of *everyday multiculturalism* as an analytical lens for the ways in which it remedies existing weaknesses of the former mainly by bringing racialized experiences to the forefront.

Furthermore, Canadian employment equity policies and practices need to be reevaluated. Specifically, as I argued, the micro inequities of "everyday racism" (Essed, 2002) are the medium through which African women are often stigmatized, fetishized, and discriminated against through their intercultural encounters in the workplace. This public space is a key site of multiculturalism where women's racialized identities are a pervasive source of difference and notions of 'otherness' are reproduced, contested, and redefined. As such, the workplace magnifies African women's racial difference and compels them to contain their Blackness by dressing it up to make it more professionally palatable and presentable by muting racialized markers of hair and skin colour to contain their Blackness. Therefore, reassessing workplace policies is a necessary step towards addressing some of multiculturalism's failings in the workplace so African women can experience less anti-Black racism and more professional equity and inclusion. Moreover, as the workplace becomes increasingly virtual, it would be worthwhile to examine how new technologies and digital spaces affect experiences of anti-Black racism and racialization processes in the workplace. Thus, as multiple intersecting identities increase

discrimination for African women, an intersectional lens is much needed when developing policies to improve inclusion in the workforce and reduce racialized experiences of marginalization and exclusion for African women.

While these types of cultural and systemic changes take time for deep meaningful transformation to materialize within society, this thesis has sought to bring attention to African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism in order to increase cultural awareness and racial engagement on these issues at multiple levels. Navigating race and space will certainly continue to be a complicated and multifaceted daily practice for African women but this project has sought to celebrate their beauty and diversity while contributing towards greater equity and inclusion for them while living in Canada. Thus, it is my hope that this project begins to demystify African women in discussions about race and Canadian discourses of multiculturalism by making them visible and emphasizing their cultural and racialized identities as displayed through everyday beauty practices. Questions of race, identity, belonging, agency, and community will continue to be challenging, inspiring, messy, and complicated but African women will continue navigating these one hairstyle, one lipstick shade, and one outfit at a time.

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## Appendix A: One-on-One Formal Interviews with African Women

<b>African woman (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>City of Residence</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Relationship Status</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Years in Canada</b>	<b>Date Interviewed</b>
Callista	Beninese	Ottawa	40s	Single	Government of Canada analyst	10+	March 2019.
Chinelo	Zambian	Toronto	30s	In a relationship	Personal Stylist & entrepreneur	10+	April 2019
Makanaka	Zimbabwean	Ottawa	20s	In a relationship	Graduate student (Masters)	2	March 2019.
Jamelle	Cameroonian	Toronto	30s	Single	Epidemiologist	4	April 2019.
Haseena	Nigerian	Ottawa	30s	Single	Finance professional	4	March 2019.
Ayana	Nigerian	Ottawa	20s	Single	Lawyer	2	March 2019.
Zuri	Nigerian	Ottawa	20s	Single	Communications professional/Beauty blogger	3	July 2019.
Chipso	Zimbabwean	Ottawa	20s	Married with kids	Accountant	2	January 2019.
Shani	Rwandese	Ottawa	20s	Single	Nurse	5+	February 2019.
Ruwa	Zimbabwean	Ottawa	20s	In a relationship	Digital marketing & entrepreneur	6	August 2019.
Sanaa	Zimbabwean	Toronto	20s	Single	Finance professional	2	April 2019.
Adara	Zimbabwean	Toronto	30s	Single mother	Community services	10+	August 2019.
Kali	Zimbabwean	Toronto	30s	In a relationship	Accountant	3	April 2019.
Rahia	Zimbabwean	Toronto	20s	In a relationship	Finance professional/entertainer	10+	August 2019.
Mia	Kenyan	Toronto	40s	Married with kids	Social worker	10+	April 2019.
Shaina	Kenyan	Toronto	30s	Single	Undisclosed	10+	April 2019.
Malaika	Nigerian	Ottawa	30s	Single	Government of Canada analyst	4	September 2019.

Naomi	Nigerian	Toronto	30s	Married	Customer service representative	5	August 2019.
Adaeze	Nigerian	Ottawa	20s	Single	Graduate student (Masters)/Beauty blogger	10+	February 2019.
Mabel	Beninese	Ottawa	40s	Single	Government of Canada analyst	10+	March 2019.
Aiysha	Ghanaian	Toronto	30s	In a relationship	Administrative assistant	10+	August 2019
Onika	Burundian	Toronto	30s	Single	IT specialist	4	August 2019.
Marini	Ghanaian	Ottawa	40s	Single	Accountant	6	July 2019.
Nea	Congolese	Ottawa	20s	In a relationship	Manager in a not-for-profit	7	May 2019.
Amahle	Cameroonian	Ottawa	30s	Single	Manager in retail	5	May 2019.
Jahmelia	Rwandese	Ottawa	20s	Single	Graduate student (Masters)	3	September 2019.
Kiojah	Zambian	Toronto	40s	Married	Finance professional	10+	August 2019.
Nakimera	Ugandan	Ottawa	30s	In a relationship	Marketing executive	5	September 2019.
Adia	Congolese	Ottawa	40s	Married with kids	Government of Canada analyst	7	September 2019.
Njeri	Burundian	Ottawa	30s	In a relationship & a mother	Hairstylist & salon owner	10+	February 2019.



## CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE

The Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (CUREB-A) has granted ethics clearance for the research project described below and research may now proceed. CUREB-A is constituted and operates in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2).

**Ethics Protocol Clearance ID:** Project # 109811

**Project Team Members: Ms. Rumbidzai Chimhanda (Primary Investigator)**  
Gopika Solanki (Research Supervisor)

**Project Title:** "#BlackGirlMagic: Racializing Beauty for African Diaspora Women Living in Canada"

**Funding Source** (If applicable):

Effective: **December 13, 2018**

Expires: **December 31, 2019.**

**Please ensure the study clearance number is prominently placed in all recruitment and consent materials: CUREB-A Clearance # 109811.**

**Restrictions:** This certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Clearance is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to CUREB-A via a Change to Protocol Form. All changes must be cleared prior to the continuance of the research.
3. An Annual Status Report for the renewal of ethics clearance must be submitted and cleared by the renewal date listed above. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the closure of the file. If funding is associated, funds will be frozen.
4. A closure request must be sent to CUREB-A when the research is complete or terminated.
5. During the course of the study, if you encounter an adverse event, material incidental finding, protocol deviation or other unanticipated problem, you must complete and submit a Report of Adverse Events and Unanticipated Problems Form, found here:  
<https://carleton.ca/researchethics/forms-and-templates/>

Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2nd edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project. Upon reasonable request, it is the policy of CUREB, for cleared protocols, to release the name of the PI, the title of the project, and the date of clearance and any renewal(s). Please contact the Research Compliance Coordinators, at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca), if you have any questions.

**CLEARED BY:**

**Date: December 13, 2018**

Bernadette Campbell, PhD, Chair, CUREB-A

Natasha Artemeva, PhD, Vice-Chair, CUREB-A



## **LOOKING FOR AFRICAN WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY ON BEAUTY**

To participate in this study, you must be:

- ✓ An African Woman
- ✓ Over 18 years old
- ✓ Have lived in Ottawa or Toronto for a minimum of 2 years.

You will be asked to participate in a 60 minute one-on-one interview. The interview will consist of questions aimed at prompting you to freely express your experiences and tell your story regarding standards of beauty and beauty practices as an African woman living in Canada.

The ethics protocol for this project (#109811) has been reviewed and cleared by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Dr. Bernadette Campbell, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)).

Please contact the researcher, Rumbi, for more details on this study at 613-355-0543 or [rumbidzaichimhanda@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:rumbidzaichimhanda@cmail.carleton.ca)



Dear Ms. (Name),

My name is Rumbi Chimhanda and I am a PhD candidate in the Political Science Department at Carleton University. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Dr. Gopika Solanki.

I am writing to you today to invite you, as an African woman, to participate in a study on race and beauty. This study aims to understand the unique and dynamic ways African women are affected by racialized constructions of beauty by giving African women a platform to share their experiences in order to contribute to broader academic and non-academic discussions on beauty.

This study involves a one-on-one interview that will require a minimum of 60 minutes for the key questions. If you are available to go beyond the required time, additional questions will be asked but you are not obligated to stay. This interview will take place in a mutually convenient, safe location to be determined. With your consent, interviews will be audio-recorded. Once the recording has been transcribed by me as the researcher, the audio recording will be destroyed.

While this project does not involve any professional, personal or emotional risks, care will be taken to protect your identity. This will be done by keeping all responses anonymous and allowing you to request that certain responses not be included in the final project. I will treat your personal information as confidential, although absolute privacy and anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

You will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason, up until 31 December 2019. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will still be used in the study unless you request otherwise.

As a token of appreciation, I will be providing you with refreshments during the interview. No other compensation will be provided.

All research data, including audio-recordings and any notes will be encrypted. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a secure cabinet in my home. Research data will only be accessible by the researcher and the research supervisor.

This ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research. Should you have questions or concerns related to your involvement in this research, please contact Dr. Bernadette Campbell,

Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)).

If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions, please contact me at 613-355-0543 or [rumbidzaichimhanda@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:rumbidzaichimhanda@cmail.carleton.ca)

Sincerely,

Rumbi Chimhanda  
PhD Candidate  
Department of Political Science  
Carleton University



## Appendix E: One-on-One Interview Research Consent Form

### **Name and Contact Information of Researcher:**

Rumbidzai Chimhanda, Carleton University, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Public Affairs.

Phone: 613-355-0543

Email: [rumbidzaichimhanda@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:rumbidzaichimhanda@cmail.carleton.ca)

### **Supervisor:**

Dr. Gopika Solanki

Phone: 613-520-2600 x 1752

Email: [gopika.solanki@carleton.ca](mailto:gopika.solanki@carleton.ca)

### **Project Title:**

#BlackGirlMagic: Racializing Beauty for African Diaspora Women in Canada  
(Project #109811)

### **Project Sponsor and Funder (if any):**

Not Applicable

### **Carleton University Project Clearance:**

Clearance #: 109811

Date of Clearance: December 13, 2018

### **Invitation:**

You are invited to take part in a research project on race and beauty because you are an African woman living in Canada. The information in this form is intended to help you understand what I am asking of you so that you can decide whether you agree to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and a decision not to participate will not be used against you in any way. As you read this form, and decide whether to participate, please ask all the questions you might have, take whatever time you need, and consult with others as you wish.

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

African women living in Canada face unique challenges when it comes to standards of beauty. This project aims to explore how ideas of being Black/African and standards of beauty are understood and experienced by African women living in Canada by giving them a platform to

share their experiences in order to contribute to broader academic and non-academic discussions on beauty.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a one-on-one interview
- These interviews will require a minimum of 60 minutes with questions aimed at prompting you to freely express your experiences and tell your story regarding constructions of beauty and beauty practices as an African woman living in Canada
- If you are available to go beyond the required time, additional questions will be asked but you are not obligated to stay
- Interviews will be scheduled during a day and time that best suits you
- The interviews will take place in a mutually convenient and safe location
- The interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. However, if you are uncomfortable with this, you can request not to be recorded
- A follow up interview may be requested to clarify responses and ensure accurate data and analysis.

### **Risks and Inconveniences:**

I do not anticipate any risks to participating in this study. You may skip any questions you are uncomfortable answering and/or stop the interview at any time.

### **Possible Benefits:**

You may not receive any direct benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation may allow the researcher to better understand the unique and dynamic ways African women living in Canada are impacted by racialized constructions of beauty.

### **Compensation/Incentives:**

As a token of appreciation, I will be providing you with refreshments during the interview. No other compensation will be provided.

### **No waiver of your rights:**

By signing this form, you are not waiving any rights or releasing the researchers from any liability.

### **Withdrawing from the study:**

If you withdraw your consent during the course of the study, all information collected from you before your withdrawal will still be used, unless you request that it be removed completely from the study data. You have until 31 August 2019 to withdraw from the study.

### **Confidentiality:**

I will remove all identifying information from the study data as soon as possible, which will be after 6 months from the date of initial interview. I will treat your personal information as confidential, although absolute privacy and anonymity cannot be guaranteed. No information

that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent. However, research records identifying you may be accessed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board to monitor the research.

The results of this study may be published or presented at an academic conference or meeting, but the data will be presented so that it will not be possible to identify any participants unless you give your express consent.

You will be assigned a pseudonym so that your identity will not be directly associated with the data you have provided. All data, including coded information, will be kept in a password-protected file on a secure computer. Furthermore, I will password protect any research data that I store or transfer.

**Data Retention:**

After the study is completed, your de-identified data will be retained for future research use. However, upon request, your de-identified data will be retained for a period of 2 years and then securely destroyed.

**New information during the study:**

In the event that any changes could affect your decision to continue participating in this study, you will be promptly informed.

**Ethics review:**

This project was reviewed and cleared by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board A. If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Dr. Bernadette Campbell, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or by email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca).

\*\*\*

**Statement of consent – print and sign name**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
I agree to be audio-recorded	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
I agree to be contacted for follow up research	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

_____	_____
Signature of participant	Date

**Research team member who interacted with the subject**

I have explained the study to the participant and answered any and all of their questions. The participant appeared to understand and agree. I provided a copy of the consent form to the participant for their reference.

_____	_____
Signature of researcher	Date

**Appendix F: One-on-One Interview Guide**  
**#BlackGirlMagic: Racializing Beauty for African Diaspora Women in Canada**  
**(Project #109811)**

**Main Research Questions:**

- What role does race play in framing how African diaspora women in Canada experience beauty?
- How do these women navigate the structures at the intersection of race and beauty?

**One-on-One Interview Question Guide**

**INTRODUCTION**

- **Your name? Where are you from? When did you move to Canada? Why did you move? What is your occupation? How old are you? What is your ethnicity/tribe? Are you religious? What is your relationship status? Do you have children?**
- **Can you tell me a bit about how you got ready today? How long does it take you to get ready? Is this your daily routine when it comes to your appearance?**  
*Prompt: choice of outfit? Make-up? Hairstyle?*

**MAIN QUESTIONS (REQUIRED 60 MINUTES)**

- **What comes to mind when you hear the word “beauty”? Or the phrase “beauty culture”**  
*Prompt: How would you define it, describe it? Physical features? Weight? Fashion? Make-up?*
- **Did you experience any “culture shock” with regards to the beauty culture when you moved to Canada? Could you share your experiences with me?**  
*Prompt: weather? Different clothing? More access to technology? More access to beauty brands/products?*
- **What aspects of your beauty practices are most important to you? Can you tell me why?**  
*Prompt: hair? Makeup? body image? skin care? fashion?*
- **Why do you spend the time, money and effort that you do on your beauty practices?**  
*Prompt: Self-expression? Enjoyment? Empowering? Necessity? Requirement? Daily?*
- **What are some of the challenges you face when it comes to your beauty practices?**  
*Prompt: time? Expenses? Availability of products?*

- **What would you say influences your beauty practices the most? Could you share examples with me?**  
*Prompt: yourself? Your culture? Your Family? The media? Society? Your peers? Workplace? School?*
- **Are there any online sources that inspire your beauty practices?**  
*Prompt: YouTube beauty vloggers, beauty bloggers, social media “beauty influencers” or beauty websites*
- **How has your family- parents/siblings/relatives-influenced your beauty practices/choices? In what ways? Could you share your experiences and some examples with me?**
- **Do your beauty practices change when you are in a romantic relationship? Can you share your experiences with me?**  
*Prompt: How did getting married/getting into a relationship affect your beauty practices and choices? Does your husband/boyfriend have a preference when it comes to your appearance? Is he an African or non-African man?*
- **How do you prefer to wear your hair? Can you tell me why?**  
*Prompt: do you prefer your hair natural? Relaxed? Wigs? Weaves? Braids?*
- **Where do you shop for your hair? Why these places in particular? How did you find them?**  
*Prompt: Where online? what stores? Accessibility? Availability of desired hair?*
- **Do you get comments and questions about your hair and your different hairstyles? Could you share any stories with me?**  
*Prompt: from whom mainly do these questions and comments come from- men, women, white/non-white people?*
- **How often do you wear makeup?**  
*Prompt: daily? Weekly? Rarely? Special occasions?*
- **Are you able to find makeup products that match your skin tone easily here in Canada? Where do you buy your makeup products? What stores/websites?**
- **Have you used any skin lightening products before? Why or why not?**
- **Have you experienced different treatment from people as a light skinned/dark skinned woman?**

- **Have you struggled with any body image issues? Could you share your experiences with me?**
- **How would you describe your fashion style?**  
*Prompt: practical? Glamorous? Chic? Classy? Elegant? Contemporary?*
- **How has moving to Canada affected your sense of fashion style?**  
*Prompt: weather? Street fashion? Office/professional settings? Community functions? Is it different to your home country?*
- **Where/what occasions do you wear your African traditional attire/African print? Do you get comments and questions on it? Could you share your experiences with me?**
- **How do you dress when going to church/the mosque—is it different from how you dress going to church or the mosque in your home country?**
- **Have you attended or participated in any beauty pageants and/or fashion shows while here in Canada or back in your home country? Could you tell me about your experience?**
- **What is the standard of beauty for the women in your culture?**  
*Prompt: Are there specific qualities and/or characteristics? Physical? Character?*
- **What are some similarities and/or differences that exist between African notions of beauty and Canadian/international ones? Can you share how this has impacted you?**
- **How has moving to Canada affected your beauty practices?**  
*Prompt: what are some of the ways the moving process has challenged and/or changed your understanding and experience of beauty ideals and standards?*
- **Overall, do you feel any pressure to look a certain way being an African woman living in Canada?**

### CLOSING QUESTIONS

- **Are there any questions I haven't covered that you think I should?**
- **Are there aspects of your experience my questions haven't covered that you'd like to tell me about?**
  - **Do you have any questions for me?**

### **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS (IF AVAILABLE TO ANSWER)**

- **Would you say African women are well represented in the media when it comes to ideals and standards of beauty?**
- **How important are beauty practices in your everyday routines? Has this always been the case for each of you? Please share your experiences with me**  
*Prompt: do you have a skin care regimen? Do you exercise? Use make-up every day?*
- **Do the women in your family (mother/sisters/aunts/cousins/grandmothers) have any beauty practices (or ideals of what makes an African woman beautiful) that they passed onto you? Could you share them with me? Do you still follow their passed-down-beauty-traditions here in Canada?**
- **How did having children change your beauty practices? Could you share these changes with me in more detail?**
- **How do your friends influence your beauty practices/choices?**  
*Prompt: Do you share/exchange ideas? Product Reviews? Beauty advice? Are they African or non-African?*
- **What do you think about the “Natural Hair Movement” that many black women around the world are taking part in? Do you think African women are represented in this movement?**
- **Does your family comment on how you look? What aspects do they comment on the most? How has this impacted you?**  
*Prompt: is it negative? Positive? Shaming? Complimentary? Hair? Outfits? Weight?*
- **Is there any beauty advice the women in your family have given you to follow when in a romantic relationship? Does this advice apply to relationships with non-African men too?**
- **How did your hair care change when you moved to Canada? Can you share why?**  
*Prompt: climate? Expense? Availability of stylists? Availability of hair products?*
- **How easy or difficult was it to find someone to do your hair here in Canada?**
- **When it comes to doing your hair do you: go to a beauty salon, does someone you know do your hair, or do you do your own hair? Why?**
- **Do you read or watch any YouTube videos/blogs/websites that help with your hair-care? Could you share with me which ones?**

- **When you change your hairstyle, do your co-workers comment and/or ask questions? Can you share your experiences with me?**
- **Are your hair products here in Canada readily available in the shops?**
- **What are some of the skin-care products you use here in Canada? Are they different from the brands back home?**
- **What are some of the makeup brands you use? Are they different from back home?**
- **How did you learn how to do your makeup?**  
*Prompt: Mother? Aunts? Friends? Online? Self?*
- **Do you watch any makeup tutorials online? Could you share with me which ones?**
- **Do you exercise regularly? Has this been something you have always done or did it develop when you moved to Canada?**
- **Is the body image standard for women in your culture different to what you have experienced living here in Canada?**  
*Prompt: thinness? Curvy? Voluptuous?*
- **What influences your fashion choices?**  
*Prompt: Media- TV, magazines? Social media? Fashion brands? Your culture?*
- **When you go out with your friends to restaurants/movies/clubs/lounges etc., what do you usually like to wear? Is it the same or different to when you would go out back in your home country?**
- **How do you dress when you are going to work/and or school? Do you follow a particular dress code? How do you decide what to wear?**
- **In your African community, is there a particular dress code to follow when you attend community and/or cultural events?**
- **Does the way you commute-- bus/walk/drive--affect your beauty choices in any way?**  
*Prompt: are there certain items of clothing you do/don't wear e.g. Heels? types of coats? Weather?*
- **What are some of the places you shop for your clothes? Is there a particular reason why?**