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Abstract
This paper examines the cultural identity of ten young people of African descent living in Perth, Western Australia. A dialogical research method known as Ujamaa Circle helped reveal the inner feelings of the participants regarding their cultural identity. The key concerns for the young people were racism and the pressure to assimilate. There was evidence of the need for African cultural education as a means to cultural renewal and connectedness. The research process created a more conscious focus and interest towards African cultural continuity among the participants as means of strengthening their bicultural identities. The paper concludes by proposing that a cultural educational approach known as African cultural literacy, which informs youth of African migrant descent about the relevance of African heritage in their bicultural identity, is essential.

Introduction
Having arrived in Australia in 1991, my young family, wife and three children, missed Africa dearly. With the extended family and village spirit missing in our new place of settlement we felt that our children were destined to be something miserably different. In our new place of settlement everyone was an individual.

At the time of our resettlement in Australia, the images of famine and wars in Africa were frequently seen in the Australian media. The Forty-Hour Famine, a fundraising campaign by World Vision, displayed images of starving Africans in schools our children attended and this was disturbing for us as parents of African background. The humiliation of being African was obvious and we were not sure what impact this would have on our children. Consequently we resolved to focus on teaching our children the positive aspects of African culture and humanity. We sang beautiful songs of Africa and told them stories about their ancestral heritage. The more we did this the more confident our children became. As our children became older we taught them to play musical instruments and they also learned other aspects of
African culture, such as language, dance, family and community values. Occasionally, when we had time, we performed in festivals with our children. Thus they learnt an alternative reality about Africa to that portrayed in the media.

The aspects of African culture learnt through their home environment have enriched their bicultural identity outlook and values. However, as the children grow older, the challenge for them is to practise aspects of their ‘root culture’ in the wider community without hindrance. Will the mainstream accept them for who they are? There is no easy answer to this question.

The root culture is a term I use to describe the cultural traditions and values practised in the ancestral culture of the parents. It is assumed that some of the root culture is retained by the migrant parents and continues to be transmitted to the next generation. Because of the significance of the root culture in the migrants’ homes, I suggest that African values are an essential component of cultural identity negotiation and formation.

African migrants face challenges due to visibility in the Australian context (Udo-Ekpo 1999). As parents we keep asking ourselves: does Australia hold a future for our children or would they be better off in Africa? We do not have the physical image that can easily blend in with the majority of Australians. A dark skin gives you away and you are often asked the common question “By the way, where do you come from?” It is a constant reminder that you do not really belong even if you were born in Australia. These are some of the dilemmas that motivated this study.

The risk of losing connection with the root culture was another concern. Cultural disconnectedness, as noted by Essien-Udom (1962), may limit one’s creative possibilities. Is it possible to have compensatory cultural practices in which some of the African cultural symbols and practices are re-appropriated? How do we configure our identities in the diaspora so that connection to the root culture is continued? Because of the difficulties black African people have experienced in the diaspora (Asante 1988; Udo-Ekpo 1999; Chessum 2000; CMYI 2001) such questions became significant in my initial planning of the research project. The more I examined the literature about the African diaspora the more I found evidence to suggest that the anxieties about the cultural well-being of my children were shared by many other black African migrants. Their root cultural identities could not be
sustained without a conscious approach (Asante 1988). The cultivation of rational and critical inquiry is essential to the revaluation and utilisation of the African heritage in diaspora (Masolo 1994).

The diasporic context

In his book *The Africans in Australia: expectations and shattered dreams* Udo-Ekpo (1999:228) noted two contrasting views about the future of Africans in Australia. The first view was that:

The presence of African migrants in Australia is likely to generate some positive results for both Africa and Australia over the coming decades; provided there is a significant increase in family reunion, new migrant and refugee intake, and cooperation with the African countries across a broad range of interrelated areas such as agriculture, mining, trade transportation, energy technology transfer, and community development projects (emphasis added).

This view takes into account the global context and implies solutions to African migrant settlement linked to policies of international cooperation. This calls for political lobbying by the African community in Australia and African governments through diplomatic channels in order to facilitate the process of international political, economic, social and cultural cooperation. Given that African migrant institutions are still young they do not have much lobbying power. Also, the African diplomatic presence in Australia is limited.

Udo-Ekpo’s (1999:229) second view is that:

The future of African migration and settlement in Australia cannot be conceptualised without a clear understanding of the issues presently confronting the community in Australia: issues of racism, long term unemployment, housing, education, health and family reunion.

This approach suggests a focus on the immediate factors influencing their well-being of African migrants in Australia. While there have been some success stories, a significant number of newly arrived migrants interviewed in Udo-Ekpo’s (1999) study
have painted a bleak picture of their Australian experience. Udo-Ekpo found the feelings of rejection, marginalisation, and a sense of hopelessness in the group he interviewed. Their feeling of hopelessness led to passivity and a sense of fatalism. He further suggested that, if not checked, its cumulative effects could last well into the next generation. These observations as well as my personal and family experiences provided the background for thoughts about facilitating African cultural continuity and renewal.

In this paper I suggest that African cultural education is critical for the successful participation and integration of the African migrant identities in Australian life. Their participation in Australian pluralistic society ought to be rooted in Africanness and their historical and cultural knowledge should be part of their integrative process. This may broaden the understanding of who they are and consequently improve their life chances by drawing on the African heritage.

The significance of culture

One of the major problems confronting Africans resettling in a dominant Eurocentric culture is cultural loss and alienation. Ngugi (1981:77) has suggested that ‘culture carries the values, ethical, moral and aesthetic, by which people conceptualise, or see themselves and their place in history and the universe.’ Culture is a whole way of life, so when we talk about the African culture (or cultures):

It is a complex of ideas, beliefs, values, outlooks, habits, practices, and institutions that can justifiably be said to have been endogenously created as well as those that can be said to have been inherited or appropriated exogenously: the latter having gained footing in the indigenous culture—having taken root in the entire way of life and thought of the African people. (Gyekye 1995:xii)

This definition has implications for African migrants who are confronted with contradictions in cultural, economic and social aspects of life in their new homeland. By moving out of an African value system to an Australian one, they are immediately confronted with dilemmas of cultural change and conformity. What do they retain and what do they abandon? How do they know that
they are making the right decisions about their cultural options given that their past has been grounded in a collective — family, village, clan and ethnic systems? In the new country, the schools, public institutions and media demand cultural conformity. This instant invalidation of one’s culture leads to frustration and disempowerment because the cultural experience embedded in the individual — language and moral values, respect for elders, paternal aunt’s role in the daughters education; song and dance associated with specific ritual ceremonies — assumes apparent irrelevance. This may result in the individual’s abandonment of potentially useful cultural values from his/her root culture. This can be illustrated by the current challenge to preserving African languages in the diaspora. In African migrant communities, African languages are gradually falling out of regular use. This is perhaps understandable because young people spend much time in the English-speaking environments. The problem of language loss is highlighted by Ngugi (1981:13) when he notes that ‘language has a dual character; it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture’. The lack of a systematic sustenance of African languages through some kind of institutional structure will inevitably result in cultural loss.

Resettlement in a different cultural environment calls for compromise, reconciliation, and ongoing evaluation of experiences as part of reframing one’s cultural outlook. For African migrant parents, the major concern is those influences, which contradict or undervalue African heritage. School resources and the curricula are lacking in African knowledge. This is understandable given that Africans are recent migrants to this country. African themes are based predominantly on animals, disease, wars and missionary anthropology. The positive African cultural content, which is essential for strengthening the identity and self-esteem of African children, is absent. This is complicated by negative media stereotypes that are internalised by the Australian public (Sole and Muzuwa 2003:2). Thus the attitudes are created that may affect the relationship between African migrants and the rest of the community. Especially important are the attitudes of other students towards the African youth in schools and the attitudes of potential employers towards African job seekers. Clearly, there is a need to educate the community about African affairs and cultural history, including the positive contributions of Africa. For instance, there
are many multinational companies that do business in Africa and many migrants from different parts of the world living there. Africa has also contributed to the global culture through the arts (Newton 1980).

**Challenges for migrants**

Udo-Ekpo's (1999) findings suggest that the concerns of African Australians range from racial violence, unemployment, poverty and loneliness to the loss of meaning following migration. Similar views were expressed more recently in the Ethnic Youth Forum which was organised by the Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) in Western Australia. The concerns of the youth included a lack of appropriate educational support, racism, unemployment, intergenerational conflict and inadequate public transport (OMI 2005).

Kayrooz and Blunt (2000) have noted that the key issues for parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are intergenerational conflict, the development of bicultural parenting, maintenance of an ethnic identity, clashes between the school system and parental cultural values and a lack of parenting support services. Omar (2004) has confirmed similar challenges amongst the Somali migrant community in Australia.

According to Levine's model of parental behaviour (in Kolar and Soriano 1998), there are three goals shared by all parents, irrespective of culture. The first relates to the health and survival of the child; the second is about teaching the child the skills necessary to survive economically; and the third is to encourage those attributes that are valued by a particular culture. All three goals are relevant to this study due to the challenges involved in providing a culturally appropriate education to Africans in Australia. In a quickly changing environment, the cultural knowledge of parents makes a difference for a migrant child. Rich African history and culture, used creatively and intelligently, can become a basis for empowerment and continued cultural connectedness. Most importantly, they may provide an axis of community development.

The challenge, however, is negotiating cultural continuity within the dominant culture. There is a need for an educational
framework to facilitate the practice and continuity of African culture in the diaspora.

Research Design
This paper is an outcome of Masters degree research based at Murdoch University. In this section I discuss the method used and its rationale, and then, through the voices of participants, I present some of the findings of this research project.

Empowering Research Approach
This research adopted the Ujamaa Circle process, created by Akinyela (1996) as a support group process which focuses on teaching individuals and families to think critically about their daily lives, relationships and behaviour and how they fit into the social, cultural and political environment of American life. It draws on the educational philosophy which advocates a problem-posing approach to teaching and learning. The word Ujamaa means ‘familyhood’ in Kiswahili language. Akinyela developed the Ujamaa Circle process as a means through which to apply the Afrikan-centred theory as pedagogy, to deal with issues of everyday black family life in America. Through this method, marginalized black families in America were encouraged to find collective solutions to community problems. The theory maintains a historical view of knowledge as socially constructed and culturally mediated, and affected by historical context (Akinyela 1996).

Under the guidance of a facilitator the Ujamaa Circle process teaches through structured dialogue. The individual stories supply source material for the curriculum development. The learning problems are then collectively solved by the participants of the Ujamaa Circle. The process emphasises the importance of collective self-help (Akinyela 1996). The Ujamaa Circle process encourages critical and problem-solving strategies as a way of dealing with day-to-day oppressive social relations.

My main research question was: do African migrants in Australia need African cultural education? And if they do, what should be the approach? Other questions included: Who am I? What are the cultural challenges of being African-Australian? How do you deal with the challenges? What does it mean to be an African? How should we examine African history? What are
African ‘elders’ doing about African cultural education? Can you remember any particular time when you felt you should know more about African culture? How did you behave when you felt the need to know more about African culture? What is African diaspora? What is lifelong learning? What are the problems common to all Africans? How would African cultural education benefit the African community? How would it benefit the wider community? What should be the goals of an African cultural education program? How can these goals be achieved?

The research questions and the research process were intended to empower the ten young participants and promote critical reflection and awareness about the issues arising from the research process, so that subsequently they would be in a position to take collective action towards problems of cultural concern. Freire (1970:70) noted that ‘As men, simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena.’ The participants needed to disentangle the issues in a manner that would lead to practical solutions or at least to drawing up a feasible agenda that would facilitate ongoing dialogue about the matters arising from the Ujamaa process. Freire (1970:71) further noted that ‘in problem-posing education, men develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world […] they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation’.

Consequently, the research was simultaneously a data collection and an educational process, in which the researcher and the researched were equal partners in search of answers to the research questions, and in the end leaving with an awareness of individual and collective responsibility to undertake initiatives that would lead to solutions to the problems identified during the research process.

Afrikan-centred pedagogy and the research process

Afrikan-centred pedagogy was a theoretical paradigm that framed the research question and the research process. Afrikan-centred pedagogy places the lived experiences and cultural understanding of African descendants in the diaspora at the centre of social analysis of cultural and political issues which affect the lives of
African people (Madhubuti 1994; Akoto 1992; and Shujaa 1994). It is a critical pedagogy that values the significance of the whole life experience as a part of the educational process. It challenges discourses of power inequality and is concerned with institution building, strengthening and development that will encourage collective action for social change.

Afrikan-centred pedagogy is focussed on the relationship between black individuals and institutions as they develop within the context of a dominant Euro-American/Australian culture and construct strategies of survival, socio-cultural growth and development. This pedagogy is interested in the cultural strengths of everyday black life. It is also interested in ‘black ethos’ — the psycho/spiritual consciousness and sense of connectedness (Akinyela 1996). The Afrikan-centred pedagogy (theory) and the Ujamaa circle process (practise) provided the framework for collecting information from the participants and development of a conscious attitude towards the issues raised during the research process with a view to finding solutions.

**Cultural identity and African values: participants’ perceptions**
This section examines the perceived cultural identities of the participants and discusses the implications of African cultural values for healthy identity development. Of significance are the multiple identities of some of the participants, which will be discussed by drawing on Bhabha’s (1994) theory of borderline politics. Cultural identity negotiation is ongoing and is influenced by various factors including the root culture.

**Migration and root culture**
As a result of migration, many Africans do not live in their ancestral lands. Instead, they are resettled and form a diaspora. Many are not able to follow the traditions of their original cultures in their new surrounding. Like most urban Africans in African cities, their way of life is no longer bound by the ethical and social norms of their original rural cultures. They hold aspirations of individual (as distinct from family and extended family) success. Their decisions on important aspects of their lives are taken without calculation of the interests of their lineage or kin group (Abraham 1992). This is very much the case with the African migrants who
participated in this study. They are either first generation African migrants in Australia or their descendants. Their links with their ancestral land have become remote.

The participants in this study are negotiating new cultural identities, often challenging their present self-definitions. Most of them have ambiguous feelings of being ‘a bit African’ and ‘a bit Australian’ and carrying diverse hyphenations of their duality or biculturality: African-Australian, Ugandan-Australian, Tanzanian, Australian or Australian-African. The cultural identity locations are important because they give people a sense of who they are. Because of the cultural politics prevalent in a multicultural society like Australia, these categories are not static but rather subjected to rival cultural forces. Bhabha (1994) in his theory of borderline cultural politics explores this challenge, demonstrating how those from minority cultures can exploit these tensions to their advantage. Bhabha (1994:54) suggested that:

The intervention of the ‘third space’ of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary past, kept alive in the national tradition of the people.

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. Within the third space the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity, hence the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicised and read anew (Bhabha 1994). Bhabha’s theory demonstrates the possibility that African migrants can appropriate symbols from both the African and other contact culture so as to develop an appropriate bicultural, or multicultural, identity.
Perceived identities by the participants

There was a range of cultural identity dispositions assumed by the participants, which suggests varying responses to the Australian migrant experience. They all claimed some degree of affiliation with their African cultural identity and they were keen on learning and preserving some African values. There is a continuum in these identity categories. I start with those identifying most closely with their African country of origin and proceed to those identifying most closely with Australia. Mtino feels Tanzanian, and for him that is the only identity.

| Nationality: Tanzanian. Born in Dar-es-salaam. I have lived in both Australia and Tanzania. Our parents moved us back to Tanzania so that we could get in touch with our country. Although I have lived a majority of my life in Australia, I still regard Africa as my home. (M/16/14)² |

Despite being raised in Perth, Mtino is strongly attached to his African roots. For him, the African heritage constitutes his cultural identity, despite the influence of the 14 years he has spent in Australia. His school experience and association with Australian peers in the community should have some influence on his identity, but this is the way he feels:

| I don't think that we can ever deny our heritage, because it is an important part of our being. Perth has been very good to our family, but it is not my home. (Mtino/M/16/14). |

Heritage carries the cultural history and values of a people. A heritage contains the ways of making moral judgements and developing social norms. The significance of heritage in influencing the social behaviour of individuals is evident because within a given heritage normative practices are in place in order to maintain the harmony of individuals within their communities. It is this, I suspect, which Mtino treasures so much.

Tofa too perceives his identity to be Tanzanian-African. He believes that there are significant benefits from the root culture.
You can gain priceless things from knowing about your heritage such as inspiration, knowledge, pride, respect and a greater understanding of yourself and your people. (Tofa/M/14/14).

The cultural history of one’s people is a source of inspiration and pride because within this cultural history one finds one’s heroes, stories of wisdom and empowerment. In a traditional African cultural education, these heroes are preserved and passed on to the subsequent generations through written and oral folklore. Moral codes are taught through traditional education. This may be what has enriched and inspired Tofa’s worldview and appreciation of his people’s culture. He seems to be aware of the role that African heritage has played in his well-being. For Tofa, aspects of African culture should be examined in a historical perspective so that an ongoing self-definition is possible.

I feel it is important to learn about African culture so that we know how far we have come. And how far we shall still have to go, personally and as a united people of the world. Though I was born in Australia and have lived most of my life here, I still regard myself as Tanzanian-African. (Tofa/M/14/14)

There are lessons to be learnt from the African culture, which for Tofa may provide possibilities for self and collective improvement. Tofa was born in Australia but nevertheless the movement back and forth to Africa has strengthened his links with his African roots. African cultural renewal has been possible through the physical experience of the Tanzanian culture, and that probably explains why he is well grounded in a Tanzanian cultural consciousness.

Born in Australia, nationality: Tanzanian. We moved back and forth between Australia and Tanzania. Our parents used this time to teach us about our heritage and get us back to our roots. (Tofa/M/14/14).

Kaduli perceives herself as both Ugandan and Australian. In this duality she feels more Ugandan than Australian.
I guess for me it's not confusing but I am more Ugandan, because even if I was not raised there, the culture that I know or the culture that I have been taught is Ugandan. So I see myself more Ugandan than Australian even though I am Australian. (Kaduli/F/26/11)

Kaduli acknowledges that her Ugandan values are at the core of her identity, hence of relevance to her bicultural identity development. In a recent memo from Kaduli, two years after this research was completed, she says:

If you choose to make Australia home, you will never truly feel like you have arrived at your destination until your life becomes intertwined with the natives (the dominant population). Intertwining also means blending your African values together with your ‘chosen’ Australian values to come up with a sense of belonging and understanding of who you are in your new world. (Kaduli 2006).

Darder (quoted in Akinyela 1996:74) identifies four major cultural response patterns in bicultural persons: (1) alienation (2) dualism (3) separatism and (4) critical negotiation. These are not hierarchical but rather dynamic phenomena and ways of socio-cultural engagement, represented in varying degrees at varying times. Kaduli seems to be conceptualising a critical negotiation pattern as she attempts to locate her identity in mainstream Australia.

Ritali (F/20/11), like Kaduli, feels more Ugandan:

I think I am Ugandan and it is more due to the fact that I am proud of where I came from. So I am more willing to say that I am Ugandan than Australian.

She has clearly indicated her pride in her root culture and for her that defines her cultural identity despite residing in Australia for 11 years.

Namu feels that she is a ‘balanced’ African-Australian. Like Kaduli, there is evidence of root cultural influences on Namu, who values both African and Australian cultures despite leaving Africa at the age of four.
I see myself as African-Australian because I was born in Africa but I have grown up here and the values I get are from both cultures. I think they are at the same level. They are at the same level because I have not grown up in Africa. I have grown up here but I still love Africa. (Namu/F/16/12)

Unlike Kaduli who arrived in Australia at the age of 15, Namu’s ‘balanced’ acceptance of both cultures might be expected since she arrived in Australia at the very early age of four. Her appreciation of African culture is probably different from that of Kaduli, as she didn’t live in Africa at an age that would allow her to appreciate and internalise the African heritage.

Hasahya (F/14/12) claims a dual identity too: “I see myself as African-Australian because some of my values are Australian but my parents teach me more African values.” She has acknowledged her parents as the main source of African values, which is indicative of the importance of parents as cultural teachers. Namulwa (F/12/12) similarly perceives a dual identity, saying “I consider myself African-Australian as well because when I need to act Australian I can do so. I feel more African and that’s the way I feel.” Her remarks above seem to suggest that she is developing a unique identity picking values from both the African and Australian cultures.

Balinda (F/14/14) was born and raised in Australia; however, she still identifies with Uganda, the country of her parents’ origin.

Although I have lived practically all my life here and I have never been to Uganda, I still consider myself African-Australian. I have got more Australian culture but I consider myself Ugandan. My culture is Australian, but I am Ugandan. (Balinda/F/14/14)

Balinda is conscious of her Australian identity but still believes that she is Ugandan and values the continued connection to her ancestral heritage. She values both cultures and hence the willingness to assume a dual identity.

Muchere too was born and raised in Australia but feels African as well.
My name is Muchere and because I was born in Australia although I have lived in Africa a bit, I actually see myself more Australian, although I know I am African. Well it’s a bit of both I guess, and well because I don’t know much about African culture I have to say that I am more Australian, culture wise. But kind of as I get older, I begin to feel the importance of having the African in me. Especially when people ask a lot and then you start to feel proud of Africa. And I plan to go back, and learn more about the Ugandan culture as well. I want that to be a real big part of my life. (Muchere/F/19/19)

It is worth noting that Muchere is increasingly valuing her African roots despite being born and raised in Australia. She knows that she is African as well as Australian. So what makes her feel attached to her African roots? It seems to be something to do with her belief that her root culture is part of her identity. Therefore regardless of whether she is well acquainted with the African heritage or not, it is something she considers part of her identity that must be valued and integrated into her bicultural outlook. Muchere notes the significance of African culture to future generations:

The culture may be lost for generations to come. We need to have awareness and an understanding of our culture so that we don’t have conflicts between cultural identities. We are all originally from Africa but we are Australian. (Muchere/F/19/19)

Understanding African culture may help to resolve the contradictions that may arise in the process of cultural identity self-definition. The root culture should not be forgotten and the Australian culture must also be valued as both are important constituents of the migrants’ identity. Total cultural loss of migrants’ heritage is not healthy as it may lead to a loss of self-confidence (CMYI 2001). At the same time, migrants are likely to experience tensions between cultural values and, as Muchere put it, ‘conflicts between cultural identities’. This may be why Muchere is determined to return to Uganda and learn more about the culture of her parents so that she can achieve a greater
appreciation of it. There may be advantages in revisiting her ancestry as the cultural renewal may strengthen her spiritual links to the African heritage.

Napoli (M/16/11), who was born in Uganda, has been living in Australia for eleven years and feels more Australian than African. “I am African-Australian, I see myself more Australian because I have grown up here.” Napoli seems to feel that the African cultural influence is a little bit remote.

In this section I have explored the identity perceptions of the research participants and it seems that most of them, regardless of whether they have lived in Africa or not, value their African roots. Some have good grounding in African culture due to a lengthy experience prior to leaving the continent or through revisitation, while the others are longing to reconnect with the African heritage by visiting their ancestral lands. All participants feel a need to harmonise the African and Australian culture.

Conclusion

How relevant is the African heritage in the diaspora? It seems the identities we assume as migrants are influenced by our root culture as well as experiences in the new environment. The development of migrant identities depends on how migrants and their heritage are accepted and valued in their new environment. There may be tensions that arise from rejection or resentment of the migrant culture, which makes the development of a feeling of belonging difficult. In such a situation, migrants may reciprocally ‘reject’ the majority culture and cling to their original culture through a process of ‘separation’. Migrants can also develop hyphenated identities and retain them for generations if they remain ‘visually different’ or distinct in any other way from the majority. But on the other hand the hyphenated identities may be retained even if you are not ‘visually different’ because of a personal preference to identify with your minority cultural ancestry as is the case with some Aboriginal people in Australia.

African culture contingent to a migrant African community presents a relatively recent phenomenon in this country and consequently it is not likely to be easily accepted in Australia. The case of African Americans is historically unique, but it may be taken as a support for this argument (Coombs 1972). Therefore,
while the preservation of African heritage in the diaspora provides possibilities of self-empowerment and identity, there are real challenges to the actual practice and continuity of some aspects of the African heritage. Nevertheless, there are liberating possibilities through an alternative worldview because the normalised oppressive practices of the dominant culture are challenged. Namu, for example, makes a point with regard to African cultural understanding as a tool for responding to the ignorance of those operating from the mainstream frame of prejudice. ‘African culture makes you feel proud of who you are, so when people talk about you or they ask a question that you find really silly you feel confident to answer back’, she said.

Absence of a functional root cultural knowledge and a critical understanding and meaning of it lets the individual become a victim of assimilation which erases the individual’s root cultural potential. However, what is assumed to be a dominant culture often contains appropriated forms of minority cultures. A conscious migrant should utilise both the root and contact cultures as a means to evolving a strong bicultural identity grounded in critical negotiation of cultures.

African cultural literacy seems to lead to personal pride and consequently a boost in self-esteem that young African migrants need to offset challenges to their identity in diaspora. African cultural literacy may be used to challenge established stereotypes by those who presume to be culturally superior. Cultural literacy through critical appreciation of the Africa/black experience and through creative arts which draw on the African heritage can inform and empower the young African migrant or the Australian-born of African parentage. This may lead to countering racism and assimilation pressures through a critical reappropriation of African cultures as part of their integration into the mainstream.

References


**Notes**

1 This is not to be confused with 'Africa' the continent. Dr. Akinyela's Afrika refers to the theory developed for the black American communities but which may be applied to other communities as well.

2 This represents participants' name/gender/age/period of residence in Australia.