Exploring Young Black/ African Canadian Women's Practices of Engagement and Resistance: Towards an Anticolonial Solidarity Building

by

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Abstract

The experiences of young women of Black/ African descent living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan – in what is currently Canada – are mediated by relations and structures of power as constructed through settler colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, and neoliberalism. These political, economic, social, and cultural structures and systems organize the world and influence young women's responses, both as individuals and as collectives. Young women of African descent are also influenced by African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS), a philosophy rooted in a relational worldview and culture in which knowledge is collectively and community oriented. A critical analysis of these interlocking structures and worldviews is integral to understanding the process through which the emergence and formation of subjects and selves as well as the collective occurs.

This study is positioned within an Indigenous hermeneutics and draws on the work of Manulani Aluli Meyer as well as Desmond Tutu's conceptualization of Ubuntu. Using a critical qualitative research design that included focus group and semi-structured interviews with nine young women participants and analysis of relevant documents, I explored the following research questions:

1. What challenges, barriers, and marginalizations do young African Canadian women face as they understand and enact their agency and citizenship?
   1a. How are these challenges and subsequent responses, resistances, and subversions communicated among and between young African Canadian women?
2. How do African Indigenous systems of knowing, seeing, and being influence young African Canadian's women's practices of understanding, engagement, and resistance

in their local, national, and extra-local communities?

3. What educational and activist platforms are needed to construct new possibilities for individual and collective resistances?

My analysis and discussion revealed the emergence of a shared collective consciousness, an African Canadian onto-epistemology of justice, and has illustrated that young Black/ African Canadian women's systems of knowing, seeing, and being in this world and of how they respond to their experiences and lives are drawn, in part, from their understandings of indigeneity, culture, and traditional ways of being, knowing, and seeing. This shared vision is also influenced by shared experiences of colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal subjugations that unify women in their resistance to economic, political, social, and cultural exploitation. I also assert that this shared onto-epistemology requires spaces of engagement. Community, then, becomes an emergent space for decolonial and anti-colonial resistance that must be engaged for educative purposes through a *pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism.* I suggest that these revisioned spaces of engagement, education, resistance, solidarity, and activism as well as the processes of engagement can produce an agenda to resist patriarchy, capitalism, (settler)colonialism, and neoliberalism.

Within the context of this research project, AIK represents a distinctive knowledge system that can be understood as a collective philosophical consciousness, as embodied though a shared epistemology and ontology rooted in the collective ethic of young women. This collective sense of responsibility women displayed for each other is rooted in a distinctive cultural philosophy that encompasses a shared historical consciousness, collective experiences of marginalization, oppression, and resistance, and, therefore, a collective vision of justice that is feminist and anticolonial.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Thashika Pillay. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "EXPLORING AFRICAN CANADIAN WOMEN'S AGENCY AND ENGAGEMENT: THE CREATION OF THE DECOLONIZING/ DECOLONIZED SUBJECT", No. 54178, MARCH 3, 2015.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

~ Maya Angelou (1978)

Situating and Explaining the Research Project

This research project has been an exploration of what it means to live as woman of the African diaspora. My family immigrated to Canada from South Africa when I was eight years old. My identity as diasporic was made more complicated as my ancestors had migrated to South Africa from India as indentured labourers in the late 1800s. Echoing poet Meena Alexander, I am also a "woman cracked by multiple migrations…. Everything that comes to me is hyphenated" (as cited in Brah, 2003, p. 633). It was initially this question of what does it mean to always be hyphenated, to have only lived and walked on land that I was not Indigenous to that sparked my engagement with the topic. However, the decision to pursue it as a research study came after attending a number of conversation cafes and forums held at an African Canadian[1] community organization in Edmonton, Alberta/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan.

It was during the conversation cafés and forums that I realized almost all of the women of the African diaspora present were also "cracked by multiple migrations." As I listened to the experiences being shared, it became increasingly evident that these types of events were unique in that the women present were being asked to speak about their experiences in totality, without having to contextualize them into a specific issue. This allowed the participants to better illustrate the connections among what may seem to be disparate issues and the underlying structural, institutional, and systemic forces that result in experiences of marginalization and oppression. Not only were the women present more

[1] Within the context of this research project, the research participants have direct connections to sub-Saharan Africa, either having immigrated from sub-Saharan Africa or as members of families who have immigrated. However, statistics referring to African Canadians is based on self-identification during census taking. Therefore, any statistics reported may include peoples from diverse backgrounds who identify as African Canadian and not just peoples with direct connections to sub-Saharan Africa.

than willing to share their stories, experiences, and analysis, their narratives and calls for change were shared regardless of whether the participants were also of a common origin. In these community discussions, it became apparent that this was seen as an opportunity to speak, be heard, and to work together on a collective vision for change; this had become one physical site on which these women of the African diaspora were engaging with, experiencing, subverting, and resisting hegemonic tendencies, marginalizations, and oppressions.

The conversation cafes sparked a deeper introspection around questions of knowledge, cognitive justice, epistemicide, and African knowledge systems. I became interested in examining knowledge transfers, transformations, and assemblages among young African Canadian women, as mediated via young women's understandings, experiences, and enactments of community and political engagement, resistance, and as diaspora. The vast majority of women present at the conversation cafes were leaders in the community as well as elders as opposed to young women who would not have the same status or extensive experiences in the community. As an educator, I became extremely curious as to the practices, experiences, resistances, and knowledges of younger women in this process of community engagement as they challenged marginalization. This research asked both the ontological and epistemological questions around systems and ways of knowing, seeing, and being in the world. These ontological and epistemological questions are also critical questions regarding power and power relations as constructed through the structures and processes of settler colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, and neoliberalism. These political, economic, social, and cultural structures and systems organize our world and influence our responses, both as individuals and as collectives.

This research illustrates the connections, negotiations, similarities, and differences among young women of African descent living in the diaspora with regards to their utilization of Indigenous, traditional, familial, cultural, and formal knowledges[2], the

[2] In section 3 of chapter 2 (entitled *Connecting African Indigenous Knowledges (AIK) and the Experiences of African Canadian Women*, pp. 15-26), I explore Indigenous knowledges, specifically within an African context, and provide the context through which it is understood for the purposes of this research project.

subsequent engendering of political and community engagement, and the connections to the politics of everyday life (Mama, 2007; Minh-ha, 1989). This study draws on document analysis, interviews, focus groups, and oral stories, methods with the capacity to be analyzed through an Indigenous hermeneutics that is based on the scholarship of Manulani Aluli-Meyer and incorporates the African philosophy of being, Ubuntu. This project is, consequently, framed within the epistemological and ontological perspectives of diasporic African women living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan.

In this research project, an Indigenous hermeneutics emphasizes human actions, experiences, and meanings as constituting the world; as such, it is possible to think of the social and life world as a text (Flick, 2003; Smith, 1991; Wagenaar, 2011; Yanow, 1996) as well as the actions, experiences, and the meanings we bestow to them. "We exist, therefore we interpret" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003b, p. 59). It is those interpretations, as a result of our distinct social, cultural, and political contexts as well as our historical consciousness that illustrate how "power, hegemony, colonization, racism, and oppression" as well as capitalism act to deny the epistemological truths that our collective experiences know to be our material reality (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 218).

The critical components of an Indigenous hermeneutics are "cultural continuity, distinct identity, and understanding systems of power that would deter these truths from existing" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003a, p. 210). The purpose of interpretation, then, is a radical emancipation that calls on us to examine not only structural, systemic, and institutional inequities, but also the policies, practices, and systems of knowing, being, and seeing in our own communities. It is an act of reinvention of the self and our communities that is intractably connected to the materiality of the social world and relations of power (Grande, 2014). Through Ubuntu, individuals become conscious of their being, privileges, and responsibilities towards self and others, and each individual is able to say, "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969). Therefore, central to an Indigenous hermeneutics is understanding collective actions as well as the notion of relationality. This critical reinterpretation is the function of this study: It is the creation and construction of a "space of engagement" where peoples work to "remember, redefine, and reverse the devastation of … colonialist encounter[s]" (Grande, 2014, p.

234) by thinking together and by opening our minds and exploring "the purpose of our lives, our work, our particular ways of viewing" (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, p. 99).

Locating Myself

I was born in Apartheid South Africa to descendants of indentured labourers who had arrived in South Africa between 1860 and 1898 from Tamil Nadu in southern India. My paternal grandmother's family was amongst one of the earliest groups of indentured labourers to work and live in South Africa. My family settled first on the East Coast of South Africa along the Indian Ocean in what is currently Kwa-Zulu Natal. Racist laws prior to 1948 and the official policy of Apartheid from 1948 onwards meant that my family, like most South African Indian families, lived in segregated areas. My family, who were predominantly farmers and small business owners, lived in Langalibelele, named after Zulu King Langalibelele, in an area that was inhabited both by Zulu peoples as well as those of South Asian descent. Langalibelele was different from other areas as due to its rural setting the area continued to be inhabited by both Zulu peoples and South African Indians. In many ways, I was fortunate that I was able to live in such a community as my family and I were fluent in the local language – Zulu as well as English. However, the apartheid system was present in all aspect of our lives. I also attended a segregated school and lived within the formalized system of Apartheid which was often very violent towards racialized peoples, though those of South Asian descent were allowed greater privileges under Apartheid. It was this political reality that led my parents to decide to immigrate to Canada.

My family immigrated to what is currently Canada when I was 8 years old, and I have lived in a number of different locales in Alberta as well as Ontario. I, however, have formed a bond to Edmonton and to Treaty Six land as a result of living on this land for much of that time. I recognize myself as a racialized settler to two different lands – Langalibelele/ South Africa and Treaty 6. I also identify as someone of Tamil heritage and culture as my family continues to practice many of those traditions and ceremonies even whilst living in South Africa and on Treaty Six land. As a racialized settler, I have also been the recipient of certain structures and systems of privilege whilst also being marginalized by these very systems and structures. Over the years, I have come to realize

that while I locate myself on three different lands as these have influenced my ways of being, knowing, and seeing, I am also most profoundly centred on the land on which I was born. It was there that this research project started to crystallize for me. It is when I return there that I feel closest to my ancestors, the Gods, the land. Yet, I believe that it is possible to also be storied into this land. That has been a process that I am slowly embarking on, to learn the histories, cultures, traditions, and stories of this land.

It is important for me to note that the lens through which I experienced, understood, and contextualized the stories and knowledges shared, was mediated through my class and ethnicity. My ethnic background (as my ancestors are from India) means that I am not always considered to be from "Africa." My longstanding engagement with the African Canadian community in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan has facilitated my relationship with the community. Furthermore, I do not and cannot claim to be Black; this identifier/non-identifier sets me apart from the majority of people who are active members of the African Canadian community in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan. As such, I must always be aware that my status as "brown" and South Asian shields me from experiencing anti-blackness while offering material privileges not accorded to those who are identified as and who themselves identify as Black.

Context of the Study

The unemployment rate for African Canadians is 12.9 percent (Statistics Canada, 2014a); for African Canadian women, the unemployment rate ranges from 11.2 percent for women identifying as African Canadian (Hudon, 2016) to 22.6 percent for women identifying as Somali Canadian (Statistics Canada, 2014a), two to four times higher than the 5.3 percent unemployment rate of White Canadian woman (Hudon, 2016). Young Black women between the ages of 20 to 24 without a university certificate, diploma, or degree have the highest unemployment rate amongst racialized peoples at 25.9 percent as compared to 21.5 percent for the White population (Statistics Canada, 2017d). Young Black women aged 20 to 24 years with a university certificate, diploma, degree at bachelor level or higher have an unemployment rate of 18.8 percent, significantly higher than those young people identifying as South Asian – 8.9 percent and White – 10.7 percent (Statistics Canada, 2017d). Furthermore, the unemployment rate of young Black

women in Alberta is 20.2 percent, as compared to that of White women – 13.1 percent (Statistics Canada, 2017e).

African Canadian women also earn less than the national average for women even though they have a higher labour force participation rate (Knight, 2004). The average employment income for young Black women is $10,301 while White women earn an average of $13,006 (Statistics Canada, 2017d). Given that Edmonton has the lowest median age in Canada (Kent, 2014) and a growing Black/ African Canadian population and racialized population, generally, the discrepancies in unemployment and earnings for racialized young peoples is troubling. Furthermore, while five percent of Edmonton's population is African Canadian (Statistics Canada, 2017a), African Canadian women in Edmonton have not been elected to Parliament, the Alberta Legislative Assembly, or Edmonton City Council. There is currently one male of African Canadian descent currently elected to the Alberta Legislative Assembly. This absence is noteworthy as it suggests that there are currently limited numbers of racialized and Black peoples in positions of leadership to advocate and fight for equity and justice for African Canadian peoples who are increasingly marginalized by the larger society.

This research focuses on young African Canadian women between the ages of 18 and 30 who are either currently enrolled in post-secondary education or have completed post-secondary education. Reflecting on research by Kobayashi (2008), this project targets young second generation African Canadian women, whereby "the second generation is a demographic group that includes both children born in Canada to immigrant parents and those (often referred to as the 1.5 generation) who immigrated to Canada as children" (p. 3). Research by Picot and Hou (2011) found that the education levels of young people whose parents had immigrated was higher than their peers of Canadian-born parents. Researchers contend that while this relationship can be partly explained by the fact that the children of more educated parents are more likely to procure a university degree, this element does not completely account for the occurrence that young people with less educated parents also achieve higher education levels when compared to their peers with Canadian-born parents (Hudon, 2016; Picot & Hou, 2011). Furthermore, this finding must be further interrogated for young peoples who identify as Black. Boyd (2008) found that 81 percent of those identifying as Black graduate from

high school in comparison to other groups: Chinese descent – 93 percent, South Asian descent – 90 percent, White – 83 percent, and Latin American descent – 78 percent. Furthermore, 15 percent of those identifying as Black graduate with a Bachelor's degree or higher, in comparison to 24 percent who identify as White, 40 percent identifying as Chinese, and 32 percent identifying as South Asian (Boyd, 2008). In addition, while "two in every five (41%) African/ Latin American Canadians had enrolled in community college, representing the highest proportion of any population group, they are underrepresented in university programs and overrepresented in failing to pursue [post-secondary education] of any kind" (Thiessen, 2009, p. 14).

However, these statistics are proffered without context; research by a number of scholars explicate on the factors behind these disturbing statistics as young Black/ African Canadian peoples are alienated and oppressed in formal educational spaces and in the larger society (Creese, 2013; Dei & James, 1998; Henry, 1995; Kelly, 1998). Young learners who require the most support from the school system are failed by the system and its policy priorities as the policies and practices of the educational system are structured to perpetuate the hegemonic subjectivities of those who already "fit its linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic categorizations" (Abdi, 2016, p. 52). However, young Black/ African Canadians recognize the interlocking of race, class, sexuality, and gender and are cognizant of how these systems of oppression operate and are structured in their schools, families, and communities within national, transnational, and historical contexts (Dei & James, 1998). As such, young peoples develop ways to resist and subvert these marginalizations.

The vast majority of research on young Black/African Canadian students' educational experiences targets students in kindergarten to grade twelve. Furthermore, while gender disparities and, specifically, the experiences of women, are studied, this tends to also be directed towards those students in primary and secondary schools. As such, there exists a substantial gap in the research with respect to the experiences of young Black/ African Canadian women who are attending post-secondary, an absence this research is rectifying, in small part. In addition, as this research also elucidates, non-representation and disengagement often personifies African Canadian women's continuous resistance and subversions despite challenges and oppression (Hamilton,

2004; Wane, 2004, 2011). Women's spatio-temporal contexts along with their gender, class, religion, ethnicity, culture, and citizenships transform the knowledges they hold, transform their identities and systems of being, knowing, and seeing.

Acts of resistance illustrate a determination and refusal to be victims of patriarchy, classism, capitalism, racism, sexism, and (settler)colonialism, thereby allowing for the transforming and continual production of new knowledges encompassing what women are, see, and know. As in the case of the African Canadian diaspora, this global migration has resulted in the creation and formation of new knowledges and "survival strategies" (Hamilton, 2004, p. 10) and the dismantling of hegemonic knowledge claims (McEwan, 2001). Migration, then, through the workings and interlocking of sexism, classism, racism, (settler)colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy creates new cultures, new traditions (Boyce Davies & Jardine, 2010). It results in the creation of the decoloniz-ing/ed subject who is, then, engaged in a project of anticolonial resistance. Mignolo (2011) contends that the creation of this decolonial/ decolonized subject is premised on the notion of "I am where I do and think," (p. xvi) meaning that one constitutes oneself in the "place that has been configured by the colonial matrix of power" (p. xvi), the place where one is "located within the epistemic and ontological racial coordinates of imperial knowledge" (p. xvi). This localized constitution of self, then, sets the groundwork for the grassroots building of anticolonial solidarity movements that embolden communities of resistance.

Purpose: The Development of the Decolonizing Subject and the Potential of an Anticolonial Solidarity Building

My primary objective in this research project was to explore and extrapolate the myriad ways in which the systems and structures of (settler)colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, and patriarchy interlock[3] with young African Canadian women's understandings, experiences, and enactments of community and political engagement,

[3] Drawing on Patricia Hill Collins (1990), this research understands distinctive systems of oppression as "part of one overarching structure of domination" (p. 222). This "expands the analysis from "describing the similarities and differences distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect" (p. 222). It presumes that each system needs the other to function.

resistance, and as diaspora. An examination of the process and structures of knowledge transfers, transformations, and assemblages among young African Canadian women illustrated young women's development as the decolonizing subject through their engagement with the politics of everyday life as interlocking with questions of belonging, cognitive justice, epistemicide, and resistance. Young African Canadian women's practices of resistance, solidarity, and community engagement, cannot be separated from understanding the process through which the emergence and formation of subjects and selves occurs (Massaquoi, 2004); these experiences, meanings, practices, and actions that shape the formation of the decolonized subject also spur the creation of communities of anticolonial resistance. Thus, my research questions for this study are:

1. What challenges, barriers, and marginalizations do young African Canadian women face as they understand and enact their agency and citizenship?
   1a. How are these challenges and subsequent responses, resistances, and subversions communicated among and between young African Canadian women?
2. How do African Indigenous systems of knowing, seeing, and being influence young African Canadian's women's practices of understanding, engagement, and resistance in their local, national, and extra-local communities
3. What educational and activist platforms are needed to construct new possibilities for individual and collective resistances?

Significance

First, this study examines the systems of being, knowing, and seeing that young women of the African diaspora (women either born in sub-Saharan Africa or whose families have migrated from sub-Saharan Africa) use in enacting their citizenship and agency. Research conducted on women of African descent in Canada tends to first examine identity and second, their human capital capacity within the neoliberal social, cultural, and economic life world. This asks women to fit into an already established box in which a specific worldview is valued, a worldview that may often be at odds with the already established ontologies and epistemologies held by women. This research illustrates oppressions, resistance, challenges, and subversion of the process at various junctures (Mohanty, 2003b). Women of African descent have a long history of resistance to patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and various other oppressions (Donkor, 2005; Okeke-Ihejirika,

2009; Wane, 2004). As illustrated in the review of literature in chapter two, women have resisted these oppressions in multiple ways. However, the vast majority of available literature is situated within the African context. This research explores the ways in which women living with a settler colonial state apparatus resist, challenge, and subvert within their specific spatio-temporal modes of being and through the utilisation of Indigenous, traditional, cultural, familial, and gendered knowledges.

Second, this study fills a gap in literature regarding community and political engagement and resistance by young women of diasporic communities living in Canada. There exists a dearth of literature on this field of study. The vast majority of work examines issues of identity among diasporic communities, without examining the ways in which identity affects informal and formal engagement at community, political, or other levels. Furthermore, this research considers the multiple ways women do engage that are not statistically proven. Young African Canadian women are not visible in the usual decision-making agencies – sitting on municipal boards or chairing governance committees, for example; however, this does not mean that they are not politically engaged; the forms, contexts, and purposes of engagement that do occur are illustrated through this study.

Limitations & De-limitations

This research examines political and community engagement among young women of the African diaspora living in the city of Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan and the interlocking of political and community engagement with experiences in formal educational spaces, processes, and policies. This study is delimited to women of the African diaspora living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan from the following countries: Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Mozambique (countries with some of the largest percentages of people of African descent living in Edmonton) (Statistics Canada, 2017a).

The study is limited to young women of the African Canadian diaspora who have been living in Canada for a minimum of six years. Six to eight years is the average time spent between arriving in Canada and becoming a citizen (Keung, 2014) and, thus, being allowed to formally participate in Canadian political life. While it is of importance to examine the community and political engagement of women who are not yet official

Canadian citizens, this does not fall within the parameters of the research project, given that this research is attempting to understand young African Canadian women's community and political engagement that occurs on the margins as opposed to in the formal political arena. Furthermore, this research aimed to consider the barriers to formal political participation for those who had attained the legal right to do so as well as the purpose and motivations behind the decision to not participate in formal political life.

Chapter 2: Setting the Stage – A Critical Review of the Literature

Introduction

In this literature review, I am aiming to show the connections and interlocking of diverse ways and systems of knowing from the perspectives of women of the African diaspora, living in a particular localized settler colonial territoriality of what is currently Canada. This chapter illustrates the effects of such systems of knowing, seeing, and being on young women's identities as diasporic, racialized, and gendered beings living in a settler colonial state that is structured around the logic of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism. This literature review is intended to provide both the context and foundations for understanding the emergence of hybrid and diasporic knowledge systems among young African Canadian women living in Edmonton, Alberta/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan, as related to practices and understandings of political and community engagement and resistance.

I examine these themes through the study of knowledge transfers, transformations, and assemblages among young African Canadian women in order to explore women's agentic engagement with citizenship, belonging, and identity through political and community engagement. I begin by illustrating the ways in which the Canadian settler colonial state has used the migration of peoples from Africa, in particular women, as a strategy in their logic of elimination of Indigenous peoples and their claims to the land. I then provide a review of literature[4] crucial to this research project on the following topics: African epistemologies and ontologies; the effects of patriarchy, colonialism, neoliberalism, and capitalism on African Indigenous knowledges (AIK); AIK and African feminist knowledges; AIK, hybridity and diasporic communities; African women in the diaspora, focusing on identity formation amongst young peoples of African descent living in the diaspora; and political agency, resistance, and responses by African Canadian women. While the research participants did not use the language of "Indigenous knowedge(s)" to describe their ways and systems of knowing, being, and seeing the world, the literature categorizes such ontologies and

[4] Due to the absence of research that specifically explores the experiences of women from Africa, this literature review begins with a broader review of the literature around the experiences of peoples from Africa.

epistemologies as Indigenous knowledge. It is, therefore, the language used in this chapter.

Contextualizing the African Diaspora in Canada

Canadian immigration policies since Confederation in 1867 highlight the mass inequities faced by minoritized immigrants. While official Canadian heritage documents, school curricula, and immigration and education policies showcase the British, French, and to a much lesser extent, the Indigenous heritage of Canada, the history of minoritized Canadians is invisible in Canadian history books and current policy documents. This is particularly salient in contemporary times, given that minoritized peoples constitute the majority of new immigrants to Canada. Furthermore, understanding the historical context with regards to minoritized peoples in Canada is integral to understanding the experiences of minoritized women who, from the moment they come to Canada, are constituted as other. Their contributions to the Canadian narrative are deemed unsuitable as it depicts a story that is different from that which has been officially taken up.

The rise in numbers of minoritized peoples has not occurred without dissension and contention; an examination of the history of Canadian immigration policy illustrates that it was Whites of European descent, who were viewed as model citizens for the Canadian state (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002). Furthermore, minoritized peoples allowed admission into Canada were a result of the need for labour as when Canada required Chinese workers to construct the railway to the West in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This group of migrants was considered "not ideal" (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002, p. 38) and deemed unsuitable (Kelly & Wossen-Taffesse, 2012); furthermore, the government envisaged that they would or could return to their native countries once they were no longer exploited as cheap labour.

Minoritized peoples were admitted into Canada due to the racialization of labour wherein non-White, non-European immigrants were considered to be suitable to work in unskilled and often extremely dangerous situations as was the case of Chinese labourers. Furthermore, while Chinese male workers were allowed admission into Canada, policies such as the Chinese Immigration Act officially discouraged Chinese women and children from entering Canada through the introduction of a head tax that ensured that the cost would be prohibitive, thus limiting the number of Chinese who could settle in Canada

(Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002). This racialization of labour was the third and necessary step in the creation of the settler colonial state.

> Settler colonialism operates through a triad of relationships, between the (White [but not always]) settlers, the Indigenous inhabitants, and chattel slaves who are removed from their homelands to work stolen land. … Settlers must also import chattel slaves, who must be kept landless, and who also become property, to be used, abused, and managed. (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 74)

Consequently, settler colonialism is a structure operating on a "logic of elimination" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 338). It is both historical and contemporary while the ongoing migration of racialized peoples provides the cheap labour that enables the settler state to violently oppress both Indigenous peoples and those of racialized diasporic communities.

Furthermore, official government statements and policies articulate the inherent racism of the Canadian state. In Parliament in 1908, Mackenzie King stated, "that Canada should remain a white man's country is believed to be not only desirable for economic and social reasons, but highly necessary on political and national grounds" (Walker, 1992, p. 3, as cited in Ghosh & Abdi, 2004, p. 96). Thereafter, the Immigration Act of 1910 overtly used racial/racist criteria to exclude minoritized peoples from immigrating to Canada (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004).

These racist discourses also played out within the provinces and in the media. Kelly and Wossen-Taffesse's (2012) analysis of "The Black Canadian," an article written by Britton B. Cooke and published in MacLean's Magazine in November 1911, highlights these racist discourses. Cooke (1911) describes Black women and men as "lacking" initiative, with a "sense of humour and predisposition to a life of ease [that] render[s] [their] presence undesirable" (as cited in Kelly & Wossen-Taffesse, 2012, p. 186). Between 1905 and 1912, immigration authorities employed various strategies to discourage Black Americans from moving to Canada. In Edmonton, official organizations "such as the Board of Trade and the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire gathered petitions of protest to send to Ottawa" (Kelly, 1998, p. 38), and resolutions were passed in Edmonton in 1910 asking for the immigration of Blacks to cease (Abdi, 2005).

According to Brand (2008), the racialization of labour can be viewed through the experiences of Black/African immigrants, the vast majority of whom were employed as unskilled labour. Brand (2008) describes the experiences of Black/African women living in Canada after escaping slavery in the United States; during World War II, Black/ African women left the confines of domestic employment to work in factories and other low-skilled and semi-skilled positions. Once the war was over, these women were not willing to return to being employed as domestic labourers, ensuring a labour shortage for domestic workers that was filled by Black/African women from the Caribbean (Kelly, 1998). The Canadian government's solution to the need for domestic workers was immigration, first from Europe and later from the Caribbean. However, while Caribbean women entered Canada as "domestics," European women were "nannies" (Brand, 2008, p. 248), reinforcing the discourse in which the labour of Whites is considered to be more valuable than that of minoritized peoples, in particular Blacks/Africans (Kelly, 1998). This image of Blacks/Africans as labourers and domestic workers continues into the present day. The experiences of minoritized women in Canada depict their positions as "second class" citizens, and as deficient.

African Canadian women are marginalized by the larger society. They experience high unemployment rates, high levels of poverty, and face tremendous obstacles in accessing healthcare, housing, employment, and social services. Furthermore, African Canadian women have become invisible in the economic and political world of Canada. They are rarely showcased as leaders in business or on the political scene. The lack of African Canadian women in the policymaking environment further illustrates their marginalization in Canadian society.

Connecting African Indigenous Knowledges (AIK) and the Experiences of African Canadian Women

"Indigenous knowledge systems" are referred to in a number of different ways in different parts of the world and based on different circumstances (Odora Hoppers, 2009). In the African context, Indigenous knowledge systems are considered

> systems of knowledge in philosophy, science, technology, astronomy, education, mathematics, engineering etc. that are grounded in the total "cultural" heritage of a nation or society and maintained by communities over centuries. These systems

> are under-laid by an interlocking web of ethical, social, religious and philosophical sub-systems that determine broad cognition patterns and provide it with the rational essence and emotional tone. (Odora Hoppers, 2009, p. 609)

African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) are, therefore, a philosophy rooted in a relational worldview and culture.

> The spirit of the African worldview includes wholeness, community and harmony which are deeply embedded in cultural values. A person becomes human only in the midst of others and seeks both individual and collective harmony as the primary task in the process of becoming a true person (Sarpong, 2002; Sarpong, 1991). Like its peoples, acquisition of knowledge is collective and community oriented. Central to the African worldview is the strong orientation to collective values and harmony rooted in a collective sense of responsibility – a "collective ethic" – which acknowledges that survival of the group derives from harmony through interdependence and interconnectedness (Mkabela, 2005; Sarong, 2002; Sarpong, 1991). (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013, pp. 30-31)

It is this relational worldview and culture where knowledge is collectively and community oriented that centres this research project. It is the knowledge of the liberation struggles and allows for the opening of new spaces of collective cultural and cognitive engagement and praxis for a project of collective emancipation and liberation (Odora Hoppers, 2002).

Within the context of this research project that explored the transferences, transformations, and assemblages[5] of knowledges in myriad forms among young Black/African Canadian women in order to understand young women's community and political engagement, I contend that while interlocking systems – colonialism, neoliberalism, capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy – dominate and oppress, they can also become forces of transformation in conjunction with other interlocking aspects such

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[5] Deleuze and Guattari (1988) state that assemblages can be defined along two axes: On a first, horizontal axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand, it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand, it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. (p. 88)

as cultural and familial traditions and the renewal of once suppressed knowledges. This is also expressed by Romero, a participant in a 2003 study conducted by Wane (2004):

> For me, Black Canadian feminism is everything about me ... my experiences in school, at work, at home, on the streets. It is the stories that my grandmother used to tell me about her struggles and the struggle of her community. It is about my mother's experience as a domestic worker. It is my mother's sacrifice, her spirituality, her tenacity, and her resilience. Black Canadian feminism is about the way I constantly negotiate my shifting identities, my sexuality, and my struggles with other Black women. Black feminism is everything about my history, my ancestors' struggles, their resistance, and me.... (p.145)

Romero's statement demonstrates her continual negotiation of the self as she works to reimagine herself as the decolonized subject and deconstruct the ways in which colonization has constructed her as the stereotypical African women.

Thus, the sections to follow will explore Indigenous knowledges in the African context in order to illustrate the connections and linkages between knowledge systems and the experiences and practices of young African Canadian women. An exploration of African Indigenous knowledges will also depict the possibility of distinct systems of being, seeing, and knowing that teach women to resist, subvert, and engage within an African and localized diasporic context. An examination of African Indigenous knowledges also illustrates the connections, negotiations, similarities, and differences among women of African descent with regards to their utilization of Indigenous, cultural, traditional, and formal knowledges and the subsequent political and community engagement that is engendered.

AIK: The epistemological and ontological

It would be simple to paint a romanticized depiction of AIK, portraying westernized knowledges as individualistic, capitalist, hierarchical, and patriarchal and AIK, in contrast, as communal, non-hierarchical, organic, and non-patriarchal. These romanticized depictions of AIK are harmful as they portray AIK as singularly positive and the universal opposite to western knowledges systems and do not represent the ways in which AIK have been taken up to oppress and marginalize (Reddock, 2007). Nor do

these romanticized depictions highlight the fluidity and ever-evolving nature of African knowledge systems (Odora Hoppers, 2003; Wane, 2001). Knowledges cannot remain static; they must transform and grow with and through the peoples who engage with and utilize these diverse knowledge systems.

In order to be a tool for decolonization, Indigenous knowledge systems should take into consideration the ways in which all knowledges can perpetuate epistemic violence and work against marginalization and oppression. As a tool for decolonization, Indigenous knowledges must endeavor to be the result of the "collective epistemological understanding[s] of the community" (Reynar, 1999, p. 290) and accessible only through participation in specific communities (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Within this context, Indigenous knowledges are comprised of the coming together of innovations, "knowledges, know-how, practices, and representations maintained and developed" (Talaat, Tahir, & Husain, 2012, p. 184) by communities in order to develop collective epistemologies and ontologies that do not exist within hierarchical structures (Brant-Castellano, 2000; Maurial, 1999; Shiva, 2000; Wane, 2008; Wangoola, 2000). As such, Indigenous knowledges have the potential to encompass shared and multiple understandings of seeing, knowing, and being, focusing on relationships among people and between people and their world and varying from community to community (Dei, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Jiménez- Estrada, 2005; Kovach, 2005, 2009; Kurtz, 2013).

Indigenous knowledges are lived experiences (Wane, 2008); they are ways and systems of being and seeing – knowledge – gathered throughout time and space, transmitted over generations and connecting and adapting to the past, present, and future of the social and life world (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Kurtz, 2013; Makhubele, 2011; Talaat, Tahir & Husain, 2012; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). According to Stewart (2004), the Ghanaian concept of Sankofa teaches us to "go back to our roots in order to move forward ... and gather the best of what our past has to teach us, so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward" (p. 3, as cited in Muwati, Gambahaya & Gwekwerere, 2011, p. 4). Indigenous knowledges are, therefore, "a means and process for articulating what local people know" (Olatokun & Ayanbode, 2009, p. 293); "it is also about recasting the potentialities they represent in a context of democratic participation for community, national, and global development in real time" (Odora Hoppers, 2003, p.

411). Indigenous knowledges, therefore, are the various acts, practices, experiences, discourses, knowings, learnings, symbols through which beings are constructed.

AIK and feminist knowledges

African perspectives must be rooted in the cultural image and interest of African people, thereby reflecting the life experiences, histories, cultures, and traditions of African peoples (Nobles, as cited in Amgborale Blay, 2008). African Indigenous knowledges consist of African belief systems or perspectives that acknowledge the "historical and contemporary contributions of African women in knowledge production and dissemination," thus "restoring African women's socio-cultural standpoint and serv[ing] as a convergence for both men and women's struggle for emancipation from the colonial yoke" (Wane, 2011, p. 116). In numerous African societies and cultural systems, African women had roles similar to those held by men; they participated in the production and reproduction of the society through defined social, political, and economic roles, holding a variety of positions, such as chiefs, monarchs, healers, and farmers (Steady, 1987). Women contributed to society in all of the ways that they had the capacity to do so.

The central role of women in African societies is also depicted through the ways in which community life is organized (Steady, 1987; Wane, 2011). In southern Sudan, for example, women are responsible for ensuring food security and, therefore, directly responsible for ensuring the survival of the community (Olatokun & Ayanbode, 2009). Research conducted by Wane (2011) explores the various ways in which women in various communities in eastern Africa have organized enterprises in order to ensure the survival of their families and communities; furthermore, politically, these women have been at the forefront of the anti-colonial struggle in order to ensure that their interests were served (Mikell, 1997). Women are also central to ensuring the continued physical health of the community, performing healing roles in preventing and curing infectious diseases, gynecological problems, performing midwifery, and creating remedies and potions through the use of traditional knowledges related to medicinal herbs (Steady, 1987). Women get involved in every aspect of community life: economical, cultural, social, political, and educational. They know their community and work hard to ensure its continued survival, well-being, growth, and health (Wane, 2011).

The gender equality of pre-colonial African societies is partially supported by

Reddock (2007) who asserts that while these traditions of African gender equality were destroyed by colonial structures and practices, there also existed traditional practices that reinforced patriarchal structures that were strengthened by the colonial experience. Consequently, regardless of the capacity of women to contribute and their participation in all aspects of the society, there still exists in many African societies a patriarchal desire to control women and their services in which men often triumph (Amadiume, 1987a). In many cases, women resist these attempts to control them on the basis of their gender by presenting themselves as masculinized in order to be accepted (Amadiume, 1987b). However, women also refuse to be labelled and resist through engaged activism and social movements (Amgborale Blay, 2008; Nnaemeka, 1998). As a participant in a study by Wane (2011) articulated:

> The women in this community act–they do not sit and watch their children starve. … We have seen how the price for coffee and tea has gone down. … And that is why you find a lot coffee plots had been cleared. Women who have coffee and tea plots have cut them down and used the trigs to ignite their morning fire. … My husband and I were the first to cut our coffee trees. The chief was very angry with me; however, when other families followed suite. (p. 16)

In Kenya, for example, women organized social and welfare groups, and in Nigeria, Igbo women organized and governed through women's counsels (Wane, 2011). Therefore, these acts of resistance by African women must be understood within their specific socio-cultural-historical and generational contexts as they illustrate the various ways in which women negotiate and access power and resist patriarchy, colonialism, racism, sexism, and classism (Amgborale Blay, 2008; Steady, 2005).

For these women, their womanhood is not a liability but emanates from a cultural and philosophical specificity rooted in the African environment – of societies that stress the communal, rather than individual, societies that value the community as a whole (Amgborale Blay, 2008; Wane, 2011). Their understandings of the world are not reactive, but proactive (Amgborale Blay, 2008; Nnaemeka, 1998). Therefore, as Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) contend, a framework for a just society in which not only are men and women equal but which values a diversity of ways of knowing, seeing, and being is central to many African worldviews. That is not to say that the societies and communities

that emerge from the participation of women are egalitarian societies in which issues of class, ethnicity, patriarchy, or colonialism do not play a role. However, the participation of and influence by women is an important factor in considering the ways in which African Indigenous, traditional, and familial knowledges impact the lives of people and are the result of a diversity of epistemologies and ontologies.

Process of AIK construction and transmission

Indigenous and traditional knowledges are transmitted through unique and multiple ways of being, seeing, and knowing, through acts and practices, dreams and visions, passed down over generations and from Elders to subsequent generations (Arthur, 2010; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Ray, 2012). These knowledges are not linked to individuals or even to a particular historical period or place, but link multiple generations (McGadney-Douglass & Douglass, 2008), transmitting knowledges on culture, economics, social histories, education, and governance (to name a few) (Arthur, 2010). These knowledges, in the form of memories, often passed down in oral traditions, can be a tool to rectify distortions in history and to produce new understandings of the ways in which communities, families, clans, and societies engage with one another (Newell, 1996). Berkes (2009) contends that understanding the intergenerational contexts of Indigenous and traditional knowledges should focus not on content but on process. Therefore, what is transmitted may not simply be information but an illustration of a community's understandings of how people are in the world, the myriad ways people know and see the various parts of their worlds, of the interconnections that exist, of what it means to question, to live,

> to understand better the complex power relations associated with knowledge at the local level, to think about ways in which the power which currently exists, both implicitly and explicitly… can be negotiated, and how individuals at the community level can be involved in the process. (Briggs, 2013, p. 240)

Stories as knowledge

Indigenous knowledges are "an indigenous cultural synthesis" (Wane, 2011, p. 8). These are knowledges generated by communities over generations, stored in people's minds, and transmitted orally and experientially through storytelling, observation, songs, proverbs ceremonies, traditional rituals, or everyday practices (Wane, 2008). These oral

knowledges are not recorded and, thus, they cannot be owned, and are, therefore, accessible to everyone (Dei, 2000; Harding, 1998; Nandy, 1987; Nathani, 1996). Furthermore, given their oral nature and transmission over generations, these knowledges are "applied, not abstracted, and particular to the environment and to other specific needs" (Wane, 2008, p. 192) of particular communities and people; they are flexible, never static. Research conducted by Olatokun and Ayanbode (2009) in the mid-2000s in a rural Nigerian community found that 81.6% of respondents use Indigenous knowledges inherited through oral traditions on a regular basis and 16.2% of respondents occasionally. Chilisa (2012) contends that proverbs, cultural artifacts, legends, stories, practices, songs, poems, dances, tattoos, lived experiences, personal stories, ritual songs, and dances as well community stories told at weddings, funerals, celebrations, and wars – are "our language" (p. 193); these are the languages through which experiences of colonized peoples are voiced. Therefore, Indigenous knowledges are not only viewed as purposeful and important to the lives of the majority of respondents but so too are the methods used to transmit such knowledges in contemporary times.

There exists a tremendous amount of research that details the role of African women in preserving cultural beliefs, practices, and acts through storytelling, the arts, poetry, music, dancing, and cooking. Oral traditions, dancing, and food are often viewed as methods used by women to ensure the survival of cultural practices from one generation to another and to teach later generations the rules of the society (Olatokun & Ayanbode, 2009). LaBennett (2009) asserts that women often use oral methods such as poetry to share "hidden narratives," (p. 117) with the next generation, thereby acting as a mother, grandmother, and teacher. Highlighting these roles played by women as well as the socio-cultural contexts and components can lead to renewed appreciation of African systems of being, seeing, and knowing and the reclamation and recognition of the importance of the work of women (Mobolanle Ebunoluwa, 2009; Wane 2001), while ensuring the legitimization and reprivileging of subjugated knowledges (Elabor-Idemudia, 2001; Wane, 2001). This encourages women to value their personal knowledge bases, thereby becoming a "tool of resistance to all forms of their subordination" (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 186).

The cooptation and transformation of Indigenous knowledges: The effects of colonialism, patriarchy, neoliberalism, and capitalism

Colonialism, patriarchy, neoliberalism, and capitalism have had disparate effects on Indigenous knowledges. First, the knowledge economy that operates through neoliberalism continues to marginalize Indigenous knowledges and traditional systems of being, seeing, and knowing; these are not considered valid knowledge forms as they do not "produce profit" (Stewart-Harawira, 2013, p. 47). And when Indigenous knowledges are seen as profitable – as in the case of traditional medicines – this knowledge is stolen, taken away from these knowledge holders by corporations that patent ancient medicines and often will not permit communities access to these medications nor reimburse communities for the appropriated knowledges (van der Westhuisen, 2012). In effect, "the commoditization of such knowledge can be seen to serve the needs of capitalism and neoliberalism" (Briggs, 2013, p. 236). Briggs (2013) explains that the commoditization of Indigenous knowledges is strikingly similar to that of modern scientific knowledge as the acceptance of both is not attributed to scientific power but related to the possibilities for serving the needs of capitalism, especially in the context of intellectual property rights and patents with specific regards to commercially valuable knowledge as described above. Pérez-Aguilera and Figueroa-Helland (2011), however, expound on the sentiment that Indigenous knowledges have been coopted, arguing that Indigenous knowledges have actually been "ghettoized into "ethnic" spheres," not only because "they don't "fit" the epistemic expectations of hegemonic science, but because they don't participate in the definition and redesign of validation criteria" (p. 288).

Second, according to McFarlane (2006), the value of Indigenous knowledge lies in its cultural and economic embeddedness within localized communities as these knowledges are produced through spatially and materially relational practices. However, cooptation into a neoliberal, capitalist framework has the potential to decenter and delocate Indigenous knowledges, making them aspatial and universal, without a "local" context (Briggs, 2013). The universalization of specific knowledges in order to fit within a neoliberal paradigm of being, seeing, and knowing results in the devaluation of Indigenous systems of being, seeing, and knowing. However, the question of Indigenous knowledges which are delocated from a specific place is an important issue to consider,

given the large numbers of peoples who hold Indigenous knowledges have and are in the process of migrating to new localities; do their knowledges cease to exist, transform, fade (or some combination of the three)?

Our systems of being in, knowing, and seeing the world cannot remain static over time (Nkealah, 2006); adaptation, change, and transformation of knowledges and cultures will alter the ways in which individuals, communities, and nation states engage with one another and in the world. However, this adaptation, change, and transformation can follow three patterns: first, it can be harmonious and the systemic result of change over time or, second, forceful, brought about by discord and oppression. However, a third pattern that combines the first two emerges among women writers of African descent. Writing about African women writers, Nkealah (2006) concludes that women of African descent should be continually fighting to change and transform their cultural traditions. For Nkealah (2006), transformation is not only inevitable, it is a necessity to the liberation and empowerment of African women from "colonization, oppression, and [the] systemic discrimination that [has] disoriented Indigenous peoples…. Colonization has detached Indigenous peoples from their cultural ways of understanding their experiences" (Wane & Simmons, 2011, p. 3). Sofola (1998) appears to support this third option in her description and analysis of contemporary African women as victims of patriarchy as a result of colonization by Western and Arab societies and the resulting marginalization of African women by African men who refused to be on the bottom of the proverbial ladder. Sofola (1998) contends that the actions of African men to elude the bottom have not only rendered women weak, ineffective, and irrelevant but also led to the marginalization of the entire society. The subordination of women hurts men as well, resulting in the devastation of the entire community.

Colonization, then, while a tool for the forceful marginalization of groups of people can also become a suture point for transformation.

> When you force people to abandon their ways of knowing, their ways of seeing the world, you literally destroy their spirit and once that spirit is destroyed it is very, very difficult to embrace anything**…** because that person is never complete. (Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2012, p. 336)

This leads to the realization that the only possible way forward is the recovery of

Indigenous knowledge systems (Odora Hoppers, 2003). This recovery must involve the raising of consciousness and the resurrection of old traditions, of Indigenous systems of knowing, seeing, and being, of "non-Western survival strategies" (McGadney-Douglass & Douglass, 2008, p. 150). However, there cannot simply be a return to the old, to the past. What is produced, assembled, and constructed is a result of an engagement among communities, their epistemologies, and ontologies, and the environment in which they exist; it should address "multiple ways of seeing, justice, power, and community" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 45).

Indigenous knowledges as hybrid

Indigenous knowledges must be contextualized to a specific place and time as well as a specific cultural, economic, social, and environmental setting (Briggs, 2013: Sillitoe, 2010) through which the experiences, beliefs, practices, and traditions of a group can be expressed (Dei, 2000). However, it is vital to note that cultures are not static; they are dynamic and continually immersed in a process of gradual change (Viergever, 1999). Therefore, Mekgwe (2010) contends that African cultures – and by extension, knowledges – are constantly evolving, rendering them as hybrid, plural, and fluid. McGadney-Douglass and Douglass (2008) point out that colonization had a profound effect on many African cultures, often at the expense of traditional Indigenous beliefs; the subsequent religious conversion to Christianity of large numbers of Africans is a case in point (Adyanga, 2011; Akena, 2012). With colonialism and Christianity came the onslaught of rigid gender ideologies that supported and reinforced the exclusion of women from governance and religion; political and religious power came to rest in the hands of men while women were placed in subservient roles – such as through members of Church congregations who were spoken down to from the pulpit (Amadiume, 1987b). African communities were transformed substantially, absorbing new systems of seeing, being, and knowing (Mekgwe, 2010).

Can these hybrid, plural, fluid societies be regarded as Indigenous, even though created within a colonial regime and incorporating colonial systems of being, seeing, and knowing? Akena (2012) argues that the inculcation of colonial attitudes and values "was a powerful tool of ideological indoctrination and control that greatly undermined African Indigenous knowledge and its production" (p. 613). Vandana Shiva (1993) concurs,

forcefully arguing that privileged, dominant knowledges – Western-based, capitalist, patriarchal knowledge systems – have the potential to "destroy the very conditions for [local] alternatives to exist" (p. 9) and to the disappearance of "local knowledge" (p. 12), as subjugated knowledges cannot exist in conditions in which Indigenous systems of knowing are contradictory to colonial systems of knowing (Reynar, 1999). According to Akena (2012) and Adyanga (2011), Africans were stripped of their traditional and cultural systems of knowing; African knowledges were deemed inferior, and schools were created to divest Africans of their knowledges and traditional ways of being and seeing. Furthermore, these new hybrid colonial-Indigenous societies have come about through force and coercion (Spivak, 1993), thereby ensuring that the ensuing identities and systems of being, seeing, and knowing did not develop organically. This "epistemicide" (de Sousa Santos, 2007a, p. 74) calls for political resistance to be premised upon epistemological resistance (de Sousa Santos, 2007a, p. 63).

However, African men and women did not and do not passively accept the marginalization of all that they are. Claiming both indigeneity and Indigenous knowledges have been two ways through which African women have been able to resist domination and subjugation (Wane, 2000, 2001). Wane (2001) contends that given the socio-cultural-historical contexts, both this indigeneity and the corresponding Indigenous knowledges are in a constant state of change and flux. Writing within the context of Indigenous peoples living within the settler-colonial state of Canada, Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall (2012) refer to this as "two-eyed seeing" (p. 332). It is

> to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western (or Eurocentric or mainstream) knowledges and ways of knowing … and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all. (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335)

This state of flux and hybridity constitutes "a politics of everyday life, … re-writing the [African woman] as site of differences" (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 44). The concerns faced by African women illustrate the evolution of the communities they come from when impacted by colonialism, patriarchy, neoliberal globalization, class, socio-cultural expectations, and history.

Diaspora and Feminism(s): Identities, Hybridity, and Transformation(s)

Identity formation for young Black/ African Canadian peoples

Identity formation is extremely complex among young racialized peoples living in Canada. Research by Gallant (2008) found that ethnicity, for example, is not considered an important dimension of identity for young racialized peoples growing up in Canada; however, these young peoples also articulated a continuous and contextual negotiation wherein identity is "constructed through a way of life, values, cultural practices (such as cuisine or music) or through participation in the group's community activities. Therefore, they may understand these [identities] as cultural as opposed to ethnic constructs" (Gallant, 2008, p. 48). Identity is fluid, evolving, context dependent, and is also the result of

> immersion in Canadian culture, especially through the school system and relationships with non-African peers, [thereby] foster[ing] ambivalences about their "Africanness" … [and] also question[ing] their "Canadianness". … Emphasis on their Canadianness simultaneously distances them from … their parents. But at the same time, being Black … renders tenuous a straightforward claim to Canadian identity. … [They are] frequently questioned about their origins, interrogations that even their locally produced English accents do not deter. Hence "Canadianness," like "Africanness," is often asserted and doubted in the same breath. (Creese, 2013, p. 168).

Identity, therefore, for young racialized peoples is fragmented, contextual, and is

> about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming, rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we came from" so much as what we might become, how we have been represented, and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (Hall, 1996, p. 4)

According to Dlamini, Wolfe, Anucha, & Yan (2009), such an articulation of identity can enable understanding the resources young peoples "use to "become" engaged citizens in their new Canadian space, as well as how these resources interact with their past experiences in the countries in which they have lived" (p. 408). After all, the nation states

selected in the construction of identities of young peoples of African descent are strategically decided;

> it is sometimes about a "re-creation" of the (imagined) homeland as well as about constructing ways of becoming part of the diaspora within defined national boundaries (Canada) and accepted local [municipal] practices. … What this use of geography also suggests is that space/land/country is socially constructed. Africa's location is changed in that it gets re-created, redefined.... [Africa] becomes not only just land but also stories, histories and culture. (Dlamini, & Anucha, 2009, p. 238).

As such, it becomes clear that young peoples of African descent living in Canada often construct their identity/ies strategically and embody complex and fragmented identities that encompass diverse histories, cultures, languages, knowledges, and ideologies.

The creation of diasporic communities

The creation of an African diaspora enables members of the diasporic community to confront, resist, and rewrite experiences of marginalization as a result of immigration, racism, (settler)colonialism, and over questions of belonging (Davis, 2004; Massaquoi, 2004). Massaquoi (2004) defines the African diaspora as:

> a place where the points of departure and the points of arrival are constantly shifting and the search for certainty, stability, and fixidity are overshadowed by the dynamic nature of transnational flows. … Diaspora is an environment that fosters the invention of tradition, ethnicity, kinship, and other identity markers. It is a place where multiple African communities become a monolithic entity and ethnic differences are replaced with national pride. It is also a place where it becomes more advantageous to identify with the homogenous group, "Black people," as opposed to ethnic or national identities; and regional differences become less important than our shared experience of immigration, racism, and search for belonging in Canadian society. (p. 140)

Therefore, the construction of diaspora is more significant than Kendrix-Williams' (2006) metaphor of diaspora as journey; in actuality, the construction of diaspora challenges or reaffirms power relations (Brah, 2003). Diaspora is formed, then, as a result

of particular knowledges – systems and ways of being, seeing, and knowing and is always represented in relation to past and present colonial narratives that are continually re-articulating colonial experiences and stories as experienced by diasporic peoples (Simmons, 2011). The construction of diaspora offers a rethinking, rewriting, and renarrating around issues of difference, belonging, identity, privilege, and power (Davis, 2004).

The African diaspora, therefore, has emerged from the legacies of colonialism and is a product of colonialism; thus, there exists a conflictual relationship – one in which the diaspora is intimately intertwined with colonialism, thus producing the developed world they have migrated to while attempting to dissociate from the legacies of colonialism that may conflict with the traditions, cultures, and worldviews of many of the African diaspora (Simmons, 2011). After all, the structures and institutions that define Canadian society are colonial, and they influence the lives, systems of being, seeing, and knowing of all those who inhabit the Canadian life world. African diasporic communities create hybrid cultures – a mix of Western, pre-colonial African, and postcolonial African worldviews (B. Cooper, 2007).

These colonial structures and institutions also influence diasporic peoples' conception of themselves "within the cognitive grid of a western paradigm of identity reconceived from a marginal position" (Roberts, 1999, p. 188). It is for this reason that the concept of home, of returning home remains an integral aspect of diasporic consciousness and has the capacity to inspire political engagement (Massaquoi, 2004; Roberts, 1999). "Back home" is viewed as a space of equality and, furthermore, a space in which many diasporic peoples are not marginalized but powerful. Marginalization is a new experience for many and an experience that creates a shared bond with other marginalized peoples (Simmons, 2011), thus helping in the formation of a diasporic identity.

Migration, however, can create a distorted image of "home;" home is rewritten based on the emotional forces at play: homesickness, homelessness, or the rejection of home (Boyce Davies, 1994). Furthermore, as noted by Kendrix-Williams (2006), an uncritical examination of home, of one's origins, often invokes shared "racial," ethnic, and national identities, often at the expense of other interlocking markers of identity such

as class and gender. Brah (2003), on the other hand, contends that for many, the focus is not a desire to return home but a desire for a home; consequently, the phenomenon of diaspora is performed through migration, memory, and forgetting. “Home” is, thus, a creation of the imaginative space, not physical (Choudhry & Asif, 2013). Therefore, experiences of marginalization are not confined solely to physical homelands but traverse all spaces – the physical, spiritual, and imaginative.

Additionally, the enduring institutional, cultural, and structural relationships between/among new and old homelands are the spaces “where immigrant identities are propagated and given specific predetermined contents or meaning” (Arthur, 2010, p. 3). In these spaces, members of diasporic communities can participate in the societies of both their old and new home countries (Osirim, 2008; Swigart, 2001), engaging in practices that involve:

> multi-stranded social relations along family, economic, and political lines that link together migrants’ societies of origin and settlement. In this way, migrants are said to build transnational social fields that crosses geographic, cultural, and political borders (Basch, 2001, as cited in Osirim, 2008, p. 370).

At the heart of the development and assembling of new diasporic identities lies the quest for the creation of a new community where peoples who can no longer claim specific identities come together to find a renewed sense of belonging and shared worldviews (Arthur, 2010). However, the African diaspora cannot be described as a homogenous community in which all members of the diaspora share a similar identity. Processes of colonization in Africa led to the development of myriad identities, based on ethnicity, culture, geography, country of origin, and language(s) spoken (Alex-Assensoh, 2009; Appiah, 1992). What is created are multiple understandings of the diasporic experience and of the ways in which one must negotiate multiple homelands, multiple systems of seeing, being, and knowing, multiple ways of resisting oppression and marginalization. The identities constructed resist assimilating into one homogenous peoples characterized as sharing one identity. "Even within single diasporas, simultaneous diasporan identities are possible" (Butler, 2001, as cited in Boothe, 2009); they have multiple identities.

The formation of a diasporic identity is also the result of cultural understandings of family and community that travel with African migrant populations. With respect to

the African diaspora, migration strengthens familial and community bonds, thus ensuring the economic and social wellbeing of families and communities (Arthur, 2010; Osirim, 2008). The formation of an African diaspora can be attributed to "a multigenerational process of transformation occurring over time," a "re-formation" (Terborg-Penn, 2011) that results from the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of culture (Massaquoi, 2007).

African women in the diaspora

A number of female scholars of African descent critique those who continue to ignore the experiences of women in the creation of a Black or African diasporic culture (Boyce Davies, 1994; Choudhry & Asif, 2013; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2009, 2010; Wilentz, 1992) and for assuming that the experiences of men speak for the experiences of women (Morgan, Mwegelo & Turner, 2002). Research on the issues facing minoritized diasporic communities tends to consider race or ethnicity as a factor while ignoring African womanhood – gender (Hua, 2013). Furthermore, the exclusion of the experiences of women disregards the multiple levels at which women are oppressed: through patriarchy, colonialism, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, language ability, and class (to name a few). This "matrix of domination" (Hill Collins, 1990) negates the experiences of African women and leaves them invisible and silent (Morgan et al., 2002). African women, therefore, are either supporting characters in their own stories or simply part of the background, supporting the status quo (Rohrleitner & Ryan, 2013). They embody Spivak's (1988) characterization of "the subaltern [who] cannot speak." This is extremely problematic given the gendered nature of migration (Boyce Davies, 2007b; Kibria, 1994; Purkayastha, Raman & Bhide, 1997; Reddock, 2007; Yesufu, 2005).

Young women of African descent face numerous problems in Canada – from racism, sexism, and classism to multiple other oppressions. Understanding the realities of the lives of young African Canadian women must be based on acknowledging the specific materiality of their lives, recognizing displacement, placement, and movement while also questioning the gendered and racialized discourses of life in Canada (Massaquoi, 2004). Understanding the experiences of young women of the African diaspora necessitates rethinking, rewriting, and renarrating issues of identity as interlocking issues on a continuum instead of in binaries (Kendrix-Williams, 2006).

African Canadian women's experiences must be analyzed based on the myriad interlocking characteristics (patriarchy, (settler)colonialism, gender, sexuality, classism, racism, capitalism, ethnicity, religion, culture, language) that constitute the totality of their experiences as opposed to confining the analysis to issues facing women or issues facing African Canadians only.

Nevertheless, African Canadian women are resilient (Terborg-Penn, 2011) and self-reliant. Women came together to create organizations dedicated to addressing the hardships of life for women in Canada (Osirim, 2008). Ghanian men and women helped create a network of people to work together against the Canadian immigration system in order to help friends and family from back home migrate to Canada (Donkor, 2005). Furthermore, the problems faced by women led to the establishment of organizations that provided women with educational, employment, healthcare, and social support (Boyce Davies, 2007b; Yesufu, 2005). In her study on African women in Alberta, Okeke-Ihejirika (2009) found that:

> women bear most of the burden of reintegrating the family into the social and communal life of the new society with little or none of the support systems they left behind. As caregivers, educators, and ritual overseers, they embody the cultural identity of their group, responsible for enacting and transmitting this identity. They are also pivotal to the establishment, maintenance and negotiation of ethnocultural boundaries. They play an important role in recreating culture, and formulating new patterns of social interaction and aggressive strategies for the families' economic survival. (p. 155)

For the women in Okeke-Ihejirika's study, community, thus, becomes those they associate with, feel they can benefit from, and they can help in return. The making of community is a response to the need to forge an African identity and a political presence through which to harness collective support, agency, and power (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2010). According to Osirim (2008), these organizations took the place of the extended family in the countries of origin and helped women to rebuild their social, cultural, and familial environments, thus "recreating home" (p. 392).

As can be seen from the examples provided above, the experiences of

African Canadian women are multifaceted; not only are African Canadian women oppressed on multiple levels but they also resist and negotiate issues of power and privilege in highly complex ways (Massaquoi, 2004) in order to better understand the implications of oppression, power, and privilege (Hua, 2013). African Canadian women engage in a continual process of healing, trespass, and resistance (Davis, 2004) by:

> critiquing patriarchy; resisting repression; questioning racism, classism, and ethnocentrism within Western feminism; initiating the discussion about intersectionality and diversity within the women's movement; and challenging sexism and homophobia within and outside their particular ethnic and diasporic communities. (Hua, 2013, p. 30)

For example, Arthur (2010) found that diasporic African women are cognizant of the external and internal forces affecting their communities' economic, social, political, and cultural structures and the necessary ameliorative actions. However, regardless of the capacity of women to resist their oppression, the continued marginalization of women reflects a patriarchal perspective based on "relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude, and disempower women as a social group" (Lazar, 2007, p.145). This illustrates "an attempt to maintain the gendered hierarchical structure" (Makoni, 2013, p. 217) of numerous societies of the global North and South.

Thus, diaspora is a space where multiple identities of women are contested, a space in which women are constituted as both subjects and objects (Anzaldúa, 1991; Choudhry & Asif, 2013; Davis, 2004). Within this space, women investigate issues of race, class, gender oppressions, self-definition, motherhood, and activism, issues that are fluid, not fixed and defined by traditions, cultures, customs, societal norms, institutional structures, and (settler)colonialism. Within this space of multiple identities, women depict the various strategies they deploy in exercising their agency (Choudhry & Asif, 2013).

Spivak (1993), however, specifically opposes the notion of the multiple subject, favouring the notion of the fractured subject. According to Spivak (1993), the unitary category of "women" is unsustainable; the unitary category is a concept in crisis, in

fracture. There can be no unitary category of women or African women, even when described as having multiple identities and multiple subjectivities (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2010) because "woman" as a category is a "historical artifact constructed by an oppressive social situation" (Sugnet, 2005, p. 38).

"Becoming Black"

Racialized young peoples who have grown up in Canada tend to construct and develop complex, fluid, and hybrid identities. In addition to identifying according to nationality or ethnic community, culture, religion, language, and the nation state, the vast majority of young peoples of African descent must also negotiate and navigate their "racialized Black identities" (Creese, 2013). Furthermore, while most young peoples of African descent

> identify themselves by nationality or ethnic community when speaking with each other, [they] adopt continental subjectivities when speaking with everyone else. "Learning to be Black" is central to the emergence of this pan-African identity. … [R]ace often trumps national origins (Sierra Leon and Nigeria respectively) for reshaping their lives in Canada. (Creese, 2013, p. 162)

Bhatia's (2010) research with young peoples of the Somali diaspora reinforces these findings of "learning to be Black," whereby these young people's identities are reinscribed as a result of their schooling, popular culture, their peers, and the larger society. Dei and James (1998) insist that young people's constructions of their identity in terms of "being" and "becoming" Black are extremely complex and must be understood as a "politically engendered identification" and "a process of negotiating the social locations of race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability to make sense of domination and subordination in Canadian society" (p. 91).

To identify as Black, therefore, is dependent on social, cultural, and historical constructions and contexts (Dei & James, 1998; Litchmore, Safdar, & O'Doherty, 2016). According to Potvin (2008), a shared Black identity proffers a shared meaning and historical base within North America. It

> fosters symbolic solidarity with different cultures, histories, heroes, schools of thought, and fighting methods and movements. It provides images of success and resistance, a historical foundation, fragments of memory, and the sense of a

> shared experience. ... It supports liberating and collective action that builds belonging rather than subjection to belonging. … It enables people to counter domination by rediscovering their roots, defining themselves, freeing their minds of the chains imposed by their relationship with whites, and so on. Racism becomes a cognitive category that rebuilds identity around the Black diaspora and a globalized memory of Black movements and culture, enabling these young people to make the analogy between their situation and that of black people around the world. Leaders in American struggles like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, with their post-modern plasticity, make it possible to reconcile the individuation process with membership in a collective entity. Their cultural resources give the young people a feeling of belonging to this emotional community with non-national historical referents. (p. 102)

Young peoples are constructing a Black identity; yet, they must reconcile that these constructions are negotiated by external forces over which they have little control (Kelly, 2004) – social, cultural, and historical contexts through which their experiences and ways of knowing, being, and seeing are mediated. Therefore, while some young peoples of African descent adopt a Black identity, others may resist this homogenous identity by identifying as African Canadian or through their respective and plural nation state identities (Nketiah, 2014; Okeke-Ihejirika & Spitzer, 2005).

Nevertheless, to claim a Black identity – to become Black – can also be understood as a counter-hegemonic stance for many young peoples; such an acknowledgement "is to become an ethnographer who translates and looks around in an effort to understand what it means to be Black in Canada" (Ibrahim, 2000, p. 130). It is a radical perspective from which to interpret the world. Young peoples who identify as Black are, therefore, taking on "political agency and collective resistance" (Dei & James, 1998, p. 93) in order to, often times, collectively resist and subvert the "erasures, negations, and devaluation of the African-Canadian experience that occurs in schools and in the wider Canadian society" (Dei & James, 1998, p. 94).

Political Agency, Resistance, and Response(s)

Political & community engagement

The legacies of colonialism and imperialism cast African women as passive, as victims, as subordinates, and as subjugated (Brennan, 1997), depictions far from the reality of lives lived. However, shared experiences of colonial and imperial subjugations also unify women in their resistance to "economic, political, and cultural exploitation" (Norwood, 2013, p. 225). That is not to say that communities – past or present, in Africa or the diaspora – are immune to patriarchy. Women living within these communities must also resist patriarchy (Wane, 2011). According to Barter (2012), women's social capital through acts associated with volunteerism or women's traditional roles, such as child-care and carpooling, is not mobilized into political efficacy, and therefore, "women's culture yields less political returns on their social capital investment" (p. 35) than men's culture. Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) reject the notion that motherhood is detrimental to women's political engagement and contend that the centrality of motherhood in the lives of African women has actually been taken up as a source of solidarity, and African women have countermanded understandings of patriarchal gender roles into sites of resistance and empowerment. Amadiume (1997) concurs, arguing that African women constructed "motherhood" as a means of institutional and ideological empowerment. The strong Black mother is presented as a "devoted, self-sacrificing, understanding, and wise" woman, whose "love is enduring, unconditional, and without error" (Wade-Gayles, 1984, p. 8) and whose unwavering advocacy of her daughter(s) plays a significant role in countering oppression by "helping them to develop a positive racial[ized] identity and consciousness that countered the dominant narrative" (Flynn, 2015, p. 380). Furthermore, Onuora (2012) contends that African motherhood is in reality maternal activism as the African mother, through her embodied Afro-Indigenous knowledges, becomes a site from which the child discovers meaning and through which the transference of cultural knowledges occurs (hooks, 2007).

The construction of "motherhood" as a means of empowerment illustrates the ways in which Afua Cooper's (2000) concepts of self-reliance and strategies of survival are utilized by Canadian women of the African diaspora to better their lives and that of their communities through the continual negotiation of patriarchal societal structures.

Cooper (2000) also describes the experiences of African Canadian teachers in Ontario who not only founded a school for African children because no such school existed but who were also at the forefront of the charge to feminize the teaching profession, viewing teaching as a viable long-term career option for African Canadian women long before many White Canadian women did.

These examples of political and community engagement by African Canadian women are also examples of resistance. Barter (2012), however, defines these not as political activities but as "survival mechanisms in the day-to-day management" of living (p. 35). The question, then is, if these acts are not political activities, what is meant by political? Can a political act not also be equated to an act of resistance or strategy of survival? Studies by Bristow (1994) and Hamilton (1994) describe the varied roles women of African Canadian descent played in community development, both their own ethnic communities as well as the broader community. Research by Donkor (2005), for example, depicts community engagement by the Ghanaian Canadian community. Women used churches to organize and assume leadership roles and better the lives of their families and community; this was not possible with cultural associations and development organizations run by men, as they were concerned with development in the homeland (Osirim, 2008). While church pastors were predominantly men, these organizations provided spaces to meet, to learn about Canadian society, and to learn ways in which to negotiate old and new ways of being. Churches, as those operated by Ghanaian Canadians in Toronto, and ethnic stores, owned by African Canadians, became sites for the cultural transmission of new orientations and social patterns, allowing for women to be mobilized for collective action to solve specific social problems (Arthur, 2010).

Through these acts of networking, women of the African diaspora navigate the often tumultuous path of being in Canada. Networking allows women to achieve personal and professional goals while building personal, professional, and community support structures through solidarity movements (Ojo, 2009). Polletta and Jasper (2001) refer to these sites of struggle, resistance, and networking as free space "in which counter hegemonic ideas and oppositional identities can be nurtured" (as cited in Bernard & Agozino, 2012, p. 64). According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), women of the African

diaspora have utilized activism and political engagement to resist injustice.

> As mothers, other mothers, teachers and churchwomen in essentially all-Black rural communities and urban neighborhoods, U.S. Black women participated in constructing and reconstructing these oppositional knowledge systems. Through the lived experiences gained within their extended families and communities, individual African-American women fashioned their own ideas about the meaning of Black womanhood. When these ideas found collective expression, Black women's self-definitions enabled them to refashion African-influenced conceptions of self and community. These self-definitions of Black womanhood were designed to resist the negative controlling images of Black womanhood advanced by Whites as well as the discriminatory social practices that these controlling images supported. In all, Black woman's participation in crafting a constantly changing African-American culture fostered distinctively Black and women-centered worldviews. (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 13)

As seen from the literature, research around community and political engagement of African women is primarily concentrated on the ways in which women negotiate acts of community and political engagement through religious institutions or the home. Engagement occurs in confined spaces and is not public. Shultz (2013) contends that this is due to neoliberalism which has created a retraction of what is considered "public," resulting in fewer spaces where the social and collective goals of a society can be "recognized, negotiated, and enacted" (p. 45). However, while the diminishment of the public sphere has a vicious effect of the capacity of women's agentic engagement, women, in particular, do continue to resist. Analyzing census statistics, Hudon (2016) found that Black women (72 percent) are more likely than Black men (66 percent), White women (66 percent), and White men (67 percent) to participate in informal community organizations and associations. These acts of resistance are noteworthy as they can also illustrate complex understandings of the ways in which neoliberalism, capitalism, (settler)colonialism, racism, patriarchy, religion, and ethnicity affect women's being, seeing, and knowing of the world.

The formal education system as a site of racism, exclusion, and alienation

Racism is an insidious reality in the lives of racialized peoples, and young peoples of African descent face systemic, structural, and institutional racism and discrimination in all areas of their lives. Such oppressions limit young African Canadian's "access to social and economic opportunities" (Dlamini, Wolfe, Anucha, & Yan, 2009, p. 406). Young African Canadians are aware of how racism is perpetuated as a result of knowledge gained from their parents' experiences as well as from their own experiences in schooling and due to other daily realities (Brooks, 2008). Formal education, however, is the pre-eminent space in which young African Canadian peoples encounter racism and discriminatory practices and policies.

Institutional, structural, and systemic racism is formalized in the school system through policies and practices. Whiteness is the norm, and it is reproduced by educational practices and policies, thereby reifying and normalizing racism (Dei, 2008). Young racialized peoples are placed on the margins of the education system and the larger society. Black/ African Canadian students reported three primary concerns as a result of such experiences: "differential treatment because of their race, the lack of Black and African-Canadian history and culture in the curriculum, and the absence of Black teachers" (Hampton, 2010, p. 103). Young African Canadians' feelings of alienation are emphasized by educators who identify students as deficient as opposed to the education system (Hampton, 2010). Furthermore, through its policies and practices that work to reproduce whiteness, schooling propagates a defacto process of assimilation for racialized students (Codjoe, 2006). Henry (1995) discusses "high achieving black middle-class girls … [who] resist the dominant stereotypical images of being "loud" black girls by adopting "passing" behaviors such as invisibility and silence," thereby denoting "a larger set of Euro-American patriarchal norms imposed on [Black] girls to "de-Africanize" (p. 294). In research conducted almost two decades later, Creese (2013) concurs with Henry (1995) that Black female students are expected to resist harmful negative and stereotypical representations of Black women in order to find success in formal educational spaces. Young Black women must, therefore, take up as little space as possible to be "seen" as successful in such normative White educational spaces and must be willing to conform to whiteness, all the while acknowledging that they can never in

actuality be White.

The expectation placed on young African Canadian women to de-Africanize in order to excel in formal education is, in fact, contradictory to the findings of a number of prolific researchers regarding the requirements for educational success for racialized students (Codjoe, 2006; Cummings, 1986; Deyhle, 1995). According to Codjoe (2006), "ethnic and cultural identity provides a sense of social connectedness that is the basis for psychological well-being" and "the educational successes of youth of colour" (p. 45). Furthermore,

> Knowing about African cultural values and traditions can be an important buffer against racism. More importantly, it can provide students with the requisite coping and surviving skills and serve as significant sources of youth empowerment to deal with the competitiveness and the rugged individualism that arguably are the hallmarks of the Eurocentred school system. (Dei, 1996, p. 58)

As such, minoritized students and young peoples require both the presence of diverse bodies in their educational spaces as well as diverse processes of knowledge production; this "represents a "structural hegemonic rupturing" (James & Mannette, 1996) and power sharing. It is a process of dislocating spaces" (Dei & James, 1998, p. 105). The presence of educators who are of diverse physical representations and who also embody and possess non-hegemonic, non-European, non-American knowledges that can be reproduced, applied, and transferred in formal educational spaces is vital to ensuring the well-being of young minoritized and Black/ African Canadian peoples.

"Race" (as constituted through experiences of racism, (settler) colonialism, and imperialism), gender, sexuality, and class differences

> influence how knowledge is constructed, interpreted, and institutionalized…. Knowledge is valid when it is contextualized in the knower's subject position and location. Race and difference are subjective lived experiences. Subject locations are important in informing the individual's cultural frame of reference, interpretations, analyses, and understandings of society. (Dei, & James, 1998, p. 92)

Therefore, educational spaces and the cultures engendered through the presence of educators and the knowledges that they embody provide minoritized students with a

framework through which to interpret knowledges and contribute to identity formation (Bhatia, 2010). The knowledges students are expected to master as well as disregard and the knowledges young peoples are told do not belong in educational spaces contribute greatly to young peoples' successes and/or supposed deficiencies in formal educational spaces. Consequently, formal educational policies and practices should require young racialized peoples to cultivate "non-hegemonic forms of knowledge … [that] require the questioning and critique of what has come to constitute "valid knowledge" and how such knowledge is produced and disseminated internally and globally" (Dei, & James, 1998, p. 105).

Community education & engagement as a response to marginalization for young Black/ African Canadians

Formal education systems perpetuate (settler) colonialism, capitalism, racism, and patriarchy through policies and practices that exclude and alienate Black/ African Canadian students. In response to this, many students and parents turn to community-based education initiatives. Hampton (2010) contends that such educators "have a sophisticated understanding of race, racism, and the contemporary contexts of schooling … as a result of living and working in the same under-resourced communities [as] students" (p. 109). Therefore, educators would also understand how the logic of capitalism is utilized, thus enabling the under resourcing of schools, in particular schools with large numbers of racialized students.

Community education programs and community building are essential to the economic and social well-being of young African Canadians (Yesufu, 2009; cited in Nketiah, 2014); consequently, community engagement can also be seen as a political strategy (Nketiah, 2014). Amongst those of African descent, the construction of pan-African networks that engender solidarities and multiple constructions of identity are a strategy to navigate the challenges faced in Canada (Creese, 2013). As such, people of African descent are recreating an identity; they are redefining what it means to: 1) be African, 2) be from a particular nation state or ethnic group, 3) speak a shared language, and/or 4) have the same religious affiliation. This creation of diaspora

> span[s] multiple nations and global spaces and are described as transforming institutional, economic, and political structures and cultures in both the host

> society and the homeland. Diaspora refers to … communities that distinctly attempt to maintain real and/or imagined connections and commitments to their homeland and that recognize themselves and act as a collective community. In other words, people who simply live outside their ancestral homeland cannot automatically be considered diasporas (Tölöyan, 1996). (Bhatia, 2010, p. 68).

The making of a diasporic identity, then, is facilitated through community building and engagement and constitutes a specific consciousness (Vertovec, 1999), a "double consciousness" (Du Bois, cited in Hampton, 2010, p. 109) that Black/ African Canadians are required to construct in order to mediate settler colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism. Community building and programs rooted in their communities enable Black/ African Canadians to collectively "embrace their histories and cultural traditions, while drawing on the multiple cultural identifications that make them unique" (Hampton, 2010, p. 109). This taking up of a diasporic identity is a complex process. Research by Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer (2005) found that young peoples of African descent have increasingly multifaceted understandings of community and the collective – an understanding that embraces their African homelands, the African continent, their Black networks, and the larger Edmonton community. According to Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer (2005), young peoples of African descent living in Edmonton operate as a social network, drawing on each other for support even though they may not interact on a daily basis. I question whether this context has changed in the last decade as a result of a rapidly growing African-Canadian population in Edmonton.

Resistance: Recentring AIK as a decolonizing practice

This specific "double consciousness" (Du Bois, cited in Hampton, 2010) may ensue as a result of African Indigenous knowledges that are communal and holistic (Wane, 2008). Despite the attempted erosion of a shared identity and sense of belonging due to colonization, colonialism, Euro-American hegemony, neoliberal globalization, capitalism, and patriarchy (Maracle, 1993), communities have countered through an active re-engagement and acknowledgment of the integrality of traditional knowledges to their future well-being (Makhubele, 2011). Therefore, the importance in preserving, utilizing, respecting, and modifying Indigenous knowledges – systems and ways of being,

seeing, and knowing – can be viewed as part of an effort to recentre "cultural difference into a political advantage," as an attempt to create just social, cultural, economic, and political environments through "the codification of tradition" (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2010, p. 113). Additionally, such efforts "establish a powerful historical continuity with ancestral anti-colonial struggles and current movement-motivation through spiritual sanction and political nourishment" (Kapoor, 2011, p. 140).

Odora Hoppers (2003) argues that this recentring of Indigenous systems of being, seeing, and knowing should be viewed as a way to instill respect for that which has previously been disrespected, denigrated, and despised by empowering local actors and communities and privileging practices, traditions, and acts that have been subjugated. However, Odora Hoppers (2003) clarifies that this recentring is not an unconscious attempt to unthinkingly bring back the past, but about "reaching the point where it is possible to ask questions that would serve to recentre Africa and the Third World" (p. 412), thus enabling an engaged questioning, discussion, and possible reconciliation of the contradictory nature of traditional positions with the principles of modernity and an appreciation of "the power of collective responsibility to tackle social issues" (Wane, 2011, p. 8). Therefore, democracy, epistemology, and sustainable human development are all connected in the multi-varied efforts to recentre Indigenous knowledges by examining:

1) The knowledge base informing policy
2) Knowledge legitimation and accreditation culture and procedures
3) The shortfalls in disciplinary arrangements in universities in their responsiveness to diversity (including cosmological)
4) The issue of introducing legislation on intellectual property in a context of cultural diversity on the one hand and the forces of globalization on the other; the issues of protection of indigenous technologies from one-sided exploitative extraction; the issue of economic benefits of the reversal of ownership to indigenous communities of products that would otherwise be extracted unchecked by global multinational corporations; and the issue of human rights and identity. (Odora Hoppers, 2003, p. 415)

Such a recentring honours traditional systems of seeing, being, and knowing as well as

the creation of knowledges, ensuring that traditional and cultural values are given a voice in the reprivileging of marginalized knowledges. This recentring is an anticolonial and decolonial project that calls for "epistemic disobedience and delinking from the colonial matrix [of power] in order to open up decolonial options—a vision of life and society that requires decolonial subjects, decolonial knowledges, and decolonial institutions" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 9). This "decolonizing epistemology" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 92) "requires one to engage in rebuilding what was destroyed and to build what doesn't yet exist" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 109).

Conclusion

The struggles faced by young Black/ African Canadian women may be within the everyday practices of their lives – the stories they share – or larger, more political forms of resistance that call for community, national, or global action against the subjugation of African Canadian women. After all, "the spirit, determination, and organization of resistant Africans has [historically] stemmed from, and [has been] fueled by, the Indigenous values of self and collective worth" that result from Indigenous, cultural, and familial knowledge systems (Assie-Lumumba, 2012, p. 26). Women of African descent utilize various mediums: fiction, academic texts, film, sport, tradition, culture, and spirituality in their resistance and calls for change.

These acts of resistance and revolt have been and continue to be integral to ensuring a new type of society. Audre Lorde (2007/1984) asserts that

> The future of our earth may depend on the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation and suspicion. (p. 123)

What is needed, as Razack (2001) points out is an understanding of the ways in which the "dailiness of women's lives structures a different way of knowing and a different way of thinking" (p. 46).

Knowledges cannot be divorced from the lived realities of people's lives. The

hegemony of a particular western, "scientific," "objective" knowledge over all other systems of knowing, systems of seeing, and systems of living has resulted in the severe exclusion of the vast majority of people from engagement in knowledge construction. The exclusion of vast numbers of people will create a situation in which society will simply regurgitate old ways of knowing, seeing, being, and living; it will be a world without creativity, without thinking (Odora Hoppers & Richards, 2012). Society must respond to the growing reality of a world of "lives lived differently, lives constituted around different metaphysics of economics, of law, of science, of healing, of marriage, of joy, of dying, and of co-existence" (Odora Hoppers & Richards, 2012, p. 10). Therefore, the resistance offered by African Canadian women affects not only African Canadians but all of society.

A recentring of African Canadian women's knowledges and scholarship is needed. This review of literature shows a clear lack of research on community and political engagement of racialized, and in particular, young women of the African diaspora, living in Canada, especially as connected to distinct African Canadian Indigenous onto-epistemologies, a gap that this research responds to.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Perspectives – Interlocking Oppressions and Resistances

Interlocking Oppressions and Resistances: Implications for Identity and Knowledge Politics (Patriarchy, Gender, Race, and Class)

The theoretical framework for this study draws on the works of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Sherene Razack (2001). This research project understands distinctive systems of oppression as "part of one overarching structure of domination" (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 222), expanding "the focus of analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences distinguishing these systems of oppression and focus[ing] greater attention on how they interconnect" (p. 222). It presumes that each system needs the other to function. Razack (2001) concurs that "it is vitally important to explore in a historical and site-specific way the meaning of race, economic status, class, disability, sexuality, and gender as they come together to structure in different and shifting positions of power and privilege" (p. 11). According to Razack (2001) within interlocking systems of domination, "each system of oppression relie[s] on the other to give it meaning, and that this interlocking effect could only be traced in historically specific ways" (Razack, 2001, p. 11). An interlocking systems analysis also expands on Amina Mama's (1995) explanation of the "triple oppression," (p. 145) wherein the lives of African women are structured by class divisions of capitalism and neoliberalism and also by race and gender oppression. Through an analysis of interlocking systems, of the ways in which power is structured, produced, and organized through interlocking systems, we learn how women are produced in positions that exist both symbiotically and hierarchically. Hill Collins (1990) and Razack (2001) assert that we could not have racism without sexism, heterosexism, and capitalism; each person, therefore, must confront the complexities of race, (settler)colonialism, sexuality, capitalism, patriarchy, religion, citizenship status, and disability in a way that recognizes our own complicity in oppression. These systems of oppression and domination not only regulate the lives of women but also sustain one another, though we are not always aware of the existence of these interdependencies even when we are complicit in upholding race and class privileges, for example, through our own actions.

A theory of interlocking systems of domination alongside the need to include interlocking systems of resistance – which I will simply refer to as "interlocking systems

of domination and resistance" is central to exploring the oppressions faced by African Canadian women and also the ways in which these women resist, challenge, and subvert the process. I will, therefore, focus on interlocking systems with regards to history, spatio-temporal existence, race, class, ethnicity, culture, and gender among African Canadian women and in relation to the larger society. This perspective brings together ideas of hybridity and identity construction as espoused by Stuart Hall (1996, 1999), and Brah (2003); African feminism as discussed and explored by Ifi Amadiume (1987a, 1987b, 1997), Okereke (2003), Assie-Lumumba (2000, 2012) and Nkealah (2006); Black feminism through an African Canadian lens as espoused by Wane (2004, 2008, 2011), Davis (2004), and Massaquoi (2004, 2007); postcolonial feminism as articulated by Mohanty (1997, 2003a, 2003b), Li (2012), Chowdhury (2009), Weedon (2002), Bannerji (1995), and Narayan (2000), intersectionality/ triple oppression/ interlocking systems analysis through the works of Razack (2001), Bannerji (1995), Mies (1991), hooks (1994, 2004, 2007), Mama (1995, 2007), Boyce Davies (1994, 2007a, 2007b), and Butler (2002), and theories of decoloniality as discussed by Mignolo (2002, 2011) and de Sousa Santos (2007a, 2007b) and cognitive justice (de Sousa Santos, 2007a, 2007b; Odora Hoppers, 2003, 2009, 2015; Visvanathan, 2009). The use of postcolonial,[6] anti-colonial,[7] and radical feminisms[8] allows for competing and disparate voices among women who are otherwise seen as homogeneous (Amadiume, 1997), while Black/African feminism tells the lived story of Black/African Canadian women's agency and the ways through which they resist oppression in a world that "seeks to exploit, denigrate, and dehumanize their very existence" (Wane, 2004, p. 151). This method of analysis insists

[6] Postcolonial feminism argues that by using the term "woman" as a universal group, women are then only defined by their gender and not by social class, race, ethnicity, or sexual preference (Narayan, 2000).

[7] Anti-colonial feminists reclaim self and space, thereby countering colonialism by posing a critical challenge to the key ideological basis of colonialism – patriarchy and capitalism (Cordova, 1998; Mohanty, 2003a).

[8] Radical feminism views patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships based on the assertion that male supremacy oppresses women. It aims to challenge and overthrow patriarchy by opposing standard gender roles and oppression of women and calls for a radical reordering of society (Willis, 1992).

> on being constantly alert to the politics of location and diversities of class, race, culture, sexuality and so on. [It] also seeks to build understanding of the connections between the local and global, between the micro-politics of subjectivity and everyday life, and the macro-politics of global political economy. This reflects a commitment to a certain holism, to challenging and subverting the disciplinary and locational fragmentations which have tended to demarcate and circumscribe the theorizing of gender and gender relations. (Mama, 2007, p. 152)

Patriarchy, racism, economic status, class, ethnicity, culture, gender, and spirituality constitute these interlocking systems of domination and resistance for African women of the diaspora. These constructs and their effects on women are numerous, producing a different set of circumstances for each woman. No two women who live their lives within the violence of the patriarchal system endure the same experiences as each is "discursively constructed" by her own history and context (Mohanty, 2003b). There is no singular experience of being a minoritized woman, much less a woman.

Using an interlocking systems' analysis problematizes and complexifies the concept of "woman" through the use of categories of class, culture, ethnicity, sexuality, and other aspects of identity (Butler, 2002). Analysis lies within understandings of difference as depicted through women's struggles with patriarchal structures of domination. Therefore, the struggle for women's emancipation is not simply limited to a liberal feminist notion of equality in which equality continues to be defined by patriarchal constructs. Within this theoretical framework, the solution to women's emancipation is a result of a multitude of perspectives in which issues of power and power relations are understood through interlocking systems. Furthermore, the resistance and empowerment that emerges out from these diverse expressions of African womanhood articulate alternative definitions and understandings of femininity (Mama, 1995).

The inclusion of disparate voices ensures that a multitude of experiences and systems of knowing are presented and demonstrates, not only, "how the production of western knowledge forms is inseparable from the exercise of western power" but also the values of African and diasporic knowledges, of new knowledges created by women of the diaspora (McEwan, 2001). These new knowledges are, therefore, constructive and combine "material concerns and emphasis on local knowledges with postcolonial and

poststructuralist dismantling of knowledge claims" (McEwan, 2001, p. 106) while undergoing a comprehensive project of remoulding a new conceptual framework. Whitney French articulates this dismantling and recasting of what constitutes knowledge in her poem "a wish."

> the language i speak spits fire
>
> from the tongue, stories tougher than steel
> stealing secrets from centuries of darkness and black
> our resources broken but pieced together a mosaic
> of natural manufactured evidences of the domestic
> packaged Mother Nature's tongue from the skin of a tree
>
> plant a word like a seed in hopes that a tree will take root and spread like a fire
> bridging the language of the natural and domestic
> unifying branches and steel
> together, broken horizons trace a mosaic
> rainbow that flashes for a moment, then folds into black
>
> into something so black that it darkens in the shadow of a tree
> and while under the mosaic of light – the leaves, pieces of fire,
> i declare my opponent: steel, my enemy: all things domestic.

The migration of people across the globe has resulted in the creation and formation of new identities, new knowledges, new systems of seeing, being, and knowing. Migration, then, through the workings and interlocking of sexism, spirituality, classism, racism, and patriarchy also creates new cultures, new traditions (Boyce Davies & Jardine, 2010). The creation and transformation of identities and knowledges is often times daunting for many who see these changes as a loss and struggle to hold onto old traditions and systems of being and knowing. It is this process of transformation and creation, built on the foundations of old knowledges and traditions which creates hybrid systems and ways of seeing, being, and knowing.

An interlocking systems' analysis reveals the ways in which women's struggles are local and specific as opposed to totalizing. As a result of these complex, constantly shifting, and changing relations of power, the daily, ongoing struggles, experiences, and victories of women are signalled by resistance and freedom (St. Pierre, 2000). Butler (2002) contends that instances of resistance, the ability of women to challenge their marginalization, and possibilities of agency occur through the reconceptualization of identity in which women understand that the structures of their oppression are in fact a

result of existing and constructed power relations which can be dismantled as opposed to natural and everlasting. The dismantling of structures of oppression requires locating local strategies with which to affirm agency in the localized environment as opposed to fighting a global war on patriarchy (Butler, 2002).

Cognitive justice and decoloniality are central to being able to locate local strategies of resistance. Cognitive justice is a response to epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2007b) and "recognizes the right of different forms of knowledge to co-exist. … Knowledge is not something to be abstracted from a culture as a life form; it is connected to livelihood, a life cycle, a lifestyle" (Visvanathan, 2009, ¶ 21). Furthermore, locating local strategies requires both "rebuilding what was destroyed and to build what doesn't yet exist" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 109) in order to ensure that the dismantling of oppressive structures is the result of an engagement among diasporic and Indigenous communities, their epistemologies and ontologies, the environment in which they exist, and addresses "multiple ways of seeing, justice, power, and community" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 45).

The construction of racism, sexism, classism, colonialism, and imperialism through patriarchy

Patriarchy is the social, legal, political, and economic system in which violence is institutionalized and perpetuated by those in power, exploiting and oppressing women and other minoritized peoples (hooks, 2004). It operates through the structures, systems, and institutions of the law, education, employment, religion, the family, and cultural practices. Within these self-sustaining structures of power, women's interests are always ultimately subordinated to male interests (Nkealah, 2006). Nkealah (2006) argues that the imposition of a patriarchal social, political, economic, and legal order subjugates women and "transcends borders, peoples, and cultures" (p. 136). The logic of patriarchy, in its basic structure, is exploitative; it appropriates everything within society with a violence that is unmatched (Amadiume, 1997). Patriarchy, furthermore, shapes gender into a social construction that oppresses women (Humm, 1998, as cited in Chowdhury, 2009). Lorde (2003) contends that patriarchy structures the world in such a way so that the only power allowed to women is that of maternity. Her only power resides in her role as a

mother and wife and inside the home, a space also marginalized within liberal feminist conceptions of womanhood and gender equality (Enang, 2001). However, even motherhood has come under attack from the settler colonial state as racialized and Indigenous parents are continually found deficient by state structures. These effects of patriarchy are visible in the lives of minoritized women. They have been taught that they belong within specific confines, confines which Morgan Beckford (2011) views as unnatural and alienating, as patriarchy, as a "social prison" for women (p. 169). The labour of women outside the home, especially minoritized women, is limited and restricted to low-paying, temporary employment opportunities. It is not that the work women perform inside the home should not be valued but viewing the home as the *sole* arena of women's power is constraining, restricting, and denies women an equal status to men in society, family, community, and political life. Furthermore, the continued devaluation of the work of the home marginalizes all women, and in particular minoritized women for whom family and home are centres of power.

Maracle (1993) writing on patriarchy, gender, and racism connects the structures, systems, and institutions that perpetuate patriarchy to those that led to imperialism and outlines the connections between patriarchy, imperialism, colonialism, and racism. She argues that "imperialism is a maddened patriarchy gone wild" (p. 127) that "requires a definite lack of unity between North Americans and third world people. Racism is the fulcrum of this dis-unity" (Maracle, 1993, p. 127). According to Maracle (1993), patriarchy is defined as power over someone and is, therefore, the unifying philosophy binding together sexism and racism. Weedon (2002) concurs that the legacies of imperialism and colonialism were and continue to be racism and sexism.

The effects of interlocking systems on the lives of African Canadian women: Connecting patriarchy, colonialism, settler colonialism, racism, and neoliberalism

The links between patriarchy – at all levels (family, cultural, systemic), racism, economic status, and gender are illustrated through the experiences of minoritized women living in Canada. Approximately 19 percent of minoritized women in Canada are living in poverty: 43 percent of women of Middle Eastern heritage, 40 percent of women of West Asian origin, and 30 percent of Black Canadian women live in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2018). Research by scholars (Daley, 1996; Giscombe & Mattis, 2002) has

consistently shown that women are discriminated against more, relative to men, and minoritized men and women are disadvantaged more, compared to majority populations; therefore, minoritized females appear to be the most disadvantaged group (Ambwani & Dyke, 2007). They are the victims of patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism.

The overall labour force participation rate of young Black women living in Alberta is approximately 71 percent; however, their unemployment rate is 17.3 percent, significantly higher than the 11.9 percent of non-minoritized peoples (Statistics Canada, 2017e). These statistics are significantly altered for young Black women with a university certificate, diploma, or degree at bachelor level or above; their overall labour force participation is 85.6 percent, and their unemployment rate in 12.1 percent, lower than a number of other minoritized groups. However, despite the increased rates of employment and decreased rates of unemployment for young educated Black/ African Canadian women, there appears to be no corresponding correlation with average employment income. The average employment income of young Black women is lower than all other minoritized groups, with the exception of those of Korean descent (Statistics Canada, 2017d). Calliste (1996) contends that African Canadian women are the first to be suspended, demoted, and fired from their jobs due to subtle and not-so-subtle forms of racism within employment structures. Women are oppressed in multiple ways, first, due to their race, second, due to their gender and, thereafter, due to a variety of other reasons. These numbers illustrate a growing problem in Canadian society, one in which minoritized women, in particular African Canadian women, are increasingly marginalized by the larger society and by the neoliberal world order.

Neoliberalism also works in tandem with settler colonialism – a form of colonialism where the colonizer never leaves and violently oppresses in order to become the "sovereign, and the arbiter of citizenship, civility, and knowing" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 73). The logic of settler colonialism is dispossession of land and unrestricted "access to territory" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 338) which is accomplished in contemporary times through the neoliberal and capitalist ideologies of the racialized hierarchization of labour. Furthermore, this stolen land is then "protected" from the original inhabitants through the creation of the colonial state and colonial governance

structure; stolen land is made into private property in order to allow the ongoing perpetuation of settler colonialism. Consequently, setter colonialism is a structure, an ongoing invasion (Wolfe, 2006). It operates by "imposing a hegemonic logic from the inside" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 74) that "aims to vanish Indigenous peoples and replace them with settlers, who see themselves as the rightful claimants to land" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 73). Racialized peoples become part of the structure as they are brought into the settler colonial state as cheap labour; neoliberalism actively produces and reproduces other forms of oppression, in particular oppressions as a result of race, gender, and class hierarchies (Mies, 1991; Mohanty, 1997, 2003b; Sa'ar, 2005). Neoliberalism and capitalism create class hierarchies as well as the myth through its focus on competition and individual success "in spite of the odds" that allows people to believe that they too can become members of the middle and elite classes. These middle class and upper class, while gendered and ethnicized, does include women and ethnic minorities. It is demographically inclusive at the same time that it is structurally exclusive. According to Sa'ar (2005), this legitimizes the neoliberal ideology. It is this tenet that makes neoliberalism so dangerous and corrosive to the ideal of the social and common good and a tool for the recolonization of previously colonized peoples (Abdi, 2013). Racialized peoples become casualties of the settler colonial state and through the desire for material benefits and their own share of private property of what is stolen land can become complicit in the perpetuation of the settler colonial state.

Neoliberalism asks individuals to disregard their histories, old systems of knowing and seeing, their understandings of the world and adopt modernity, a new and "better" way of thinking, living, knowing, and seeing. Assie-Lumumba's (2000) explanation of the changing nature of knowledge transformation and transference in African communities illustrates this. According to Assie-Lumumba (2000), every member of the African community, regardless of gender, was expected to contribute to the community's social activities from a very young age, and the skills to perform such activities were acquired through formal, informal, and nonformal education. However, contemporary education systems attempt to fulfill a neoliberal agenda that values the knowledge needed for the market; as such, the ways in which people acquire knowledge and the knowledge acquired is no longer relevant to many African and diasporic

communities. Furthermore, this education is used to ensure the ongoing survival of the settler colonial state.

Neoliberalism has succeeded in extending its tentacles into every aspect of existence, into not just the structures and systems that organize our world but into the deepest recesses of our minds. It is a tool of colonization in that for "the other" it is only "the acquisition of those tools of dominant knowledge systems that might empower them to envision and implement a viable future" (Escobar, 2008, p. 176) or a future as deemed viable by those who have been colonized by neoliberalism to see no other path.

African Canadian Feminism

Interlocking systems, hybrid identities, and knowledge transformations

African Canadian women are continually subjugated due to the belief that their traditional systems of understanding the world, their traditional knowledges are "backwards," thus perpetuating the illusion of everything associated with Africa (especially its people) as in need of knowledge, support, aid, and educational practices from those in the global North. This ideology of the African and Africa as deficient is a legacy of colonialism as colonial powers "suppressed any ideas that could be considered subversive to the colonial agenda, particularly in the face of persistent African resistance to various colonial impositions" (Assie-Lumumba, 2012, p. 26). Colonialism was and continues to be a tool to control the capacity for resistance amongst peoples of African descent. However, as Chilisa & Ntseane (2010) point out, knowledges held by African cultures often times tell the stories that liberal feminists in Canada, the United States, and Europe are calling out for. Chilisa & Ntseane (2010) share the Tswana story of origin: when the people came from the hill of Lowe, men and women were walking side-by-side driving sheep, goats, and cattle. This origin story, unlike that of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis offers an understanding of the creation of the world that places men and women as equals. It also raises questions as to why African societies continue to be portrayed as in need of western feminism when there are clearly elements of gender equality within African knowledge systems. Oyěwùmí (2005) informs readers on gender in traditional Yorùbá society where until recently there were no women or men. According to Oyěwùmí, while people in Yoruba society had different anatomies, this did not privilege one to a

particular social position or disadvantage one. Such knowledge is absent from contemporary teachings about gender and equity but could provide a powerful counter-narrative to the totalising image of Africa and people of African descent with regards to equity for sexual and gender minorities.

The sites and acts of resistance performed by women may occur on a personal level or may have a wider impact, affecting more than their individual selves, transforming families, communities, cities, nations. Resistance, however, is also "not always identifiable through organized movements but must be looked for in the "gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives" (Mohanty, 1992, p. 38, as cited in Li, 2012, p. 16). These acts of resistance also illustrate the determination and refusal of women to be victims of patriarchy, classism, capitalism, racism, sexism, imperialism, (settler) colonialism, etc. These acts of resistance occur within a specific spatio-temporal context and, therefore, are not solely constructed from so-called traditional knowledges but from all that encompasses what each woman is, sees, and knows, thus transforming and, thereby, continually producing new knowledges. Bannerji (1995) articulates the emergence of this new understanding of the world, of new systems of seeing and being through her telling of experiencing racism for the first time after moving to Canada:

> I learned to name the new violence that I encountered in Canada – different from other violences that had structured my life in India, of patriarchy and class, but alongside them. This new violence I learnt was "racism," a product of colonial capitalism rooted in slavery and genocide.… I looked to Black history, to history of Indigenous people of the Americas, and re-read the anti-colonial struggles… The word Black then a political metaphor rather than a territorial politics, filled me with a sense of pride and dignity, spelling a shared culture and politics of resistance. Those who dismiss so disdainfully all projects of self-naming and self-empowerment as "identity politics" have not needed to affirm themselves through the creative strength that comes from finding missing parts of one's self in experiences and histories similar to others…. This process of discovering the many names of my oppression in all its complexity brought sanity. (p. 9)

And through this newfound "sanity," Bannerji is, thus, able to illustrate for others the ways in which oppression and domination work to subjugate, the importance of naming

the oppressions she faces, and of using new knowledges to help resist the violences inflicted upon her by capitalism, settler colonialism, racism, sexism, and patriarchy.

It is also the infliction of those very oppressions that propels transformations in ways of being, seeing, and knowing and that leads to calls for change. Judith McKeown does exactly this in her poem DECOLONISE *YOUR* MIND … *NOT* MINE!!!! McKeown's words and experiences highlight the subjugation faced by African Canadian women even in those spaces that are supposedly sites of resistance, of liberation. However, instead of allowing herself to be dominated by those who hold considerable power over her, McKeown chooses to resist in the most formidable manner she can – she resists through her poetry, thereby using the very medium (English literature) which is being used to oppress and colonize her to call out her colonizers.

DECOLONISE *YOUR* MIND … *NOT* MINE!!!!

by Judith McKeown

every week I walk into your classroom
waiting... waiting for my mind to be
decolonised
I read the fanon,the achebe, the ngugi
truly
the spivak, the suleri, and the said
only to find out what you really believe

my body is text within the context of your
classroom
it seems there is no room
for me, in a sea, of white femininity
black femininity is swallowed up, erased,
and
spit out
I can't help but to stand out (nor would I
want
not to)
my skin, my hair, my comments--scary--
are
incongruous with those of my classmates
--a word I use here loosely--
I am told I can't say that, I'm too angry, I
thrive on conflict
when I respond to a comment which
conflicts
with my politics
NO! Africa is not merely an "imagined
space"
and NO! it is not "backward" and
"primitive"
simply because a PHD 1 says so
again, I say NO

at home
I sit and wonder if this is the plan
to alienate, aggravate, or simply assimilate
me
a black Canadian woman
into the irony
which is this academy
should I flee?
unappreciated, unwanted
I think
maybe
and this is why
there will be no phd

I refuse to fragment my multifaceted social
locations and identities
I will not compartmentalise the multiple
essences which make up my "judyness"
that would be ridiculous
and all of this
just to make the grade
I do not wish to degrade
who I have come to be
in order to be accepted in this here
world of academe,
which is ultimately just an imaginary space
to me

I am told that my demeanour in class is
"off-putting"
(for whommm, I wonder)
I am labeled "inattentive at best and
disrespectful at worst"
So, what can I do with my thirst
for knowledge
but continue to come to your class
pretend that my mind is being decolonised
instead of confronting the blatant fact
that
I am being strategically recolonised and
deliberately ostracised
for embracing my black female subjectivity
to this I can only say simply
you will understand my individuality in
time
but first you must...

DECOLONISE *YOUR* MIND ... *NOT*
MINE!!!!

As illustrated by Himani Bannerji and Judith McKeown, their identities and existences are redefined through their migration to Canada. The intermingling of different cultures, whether by choice, force, or necessity, as well as settler colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy brings about change and transformation. “What emerges is a transformation and transmutation, a pastiche of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, in effect, a new cultural configuration that becomes the subject for exploration by another generation” (Okereke, 2003, p. 504). Akhaji Zakiya (2013) describes this new cultural configuration in her poem “we are.”

> we are…
> fluid forming space into stories
> hybrid healing thru influences
> immigrant & indigenous
> universal syncopating blends
> dialects, accents, imagination
> voiced mosaics
> Brand, Allen, Elliott
> foundation for
> Young, Morgan, Kamau
> and beyond
>
> we are …
> diasporic deep
> renaissance rhythmic
> streaming slaps, snaps and smiles
> on
> stages, pages
> anywhere we hear
> roots rocking our ready
>
> ready?

Zakiya’s words depict this intermingling of not just old and new, but of various spaces of existence, of new understandings and ways of being. Speaking, existing alongside and creating relationships with people from other places and cultures invites not only their influence but the strong possibility of them speaking back, thus allowing for other ways of knowing and being (McEwan, 2001; Spivak, 1990). The diasporic space in which this knowledge transformation occurs is the interlocking of

> diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political,

> cultural and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle. (Brah, 2003, p. 61)

According to Stuart Hall (1996), this diasporic space is the "suture point" between the experiences, meanings, discourses, practices, and acts which identify diasporic peoples as the social subjects of particular structures and the processes of transformation that produce subjectivities, and, thereby, construct people as subjects. van Meijl (2006) furthers this argument and contends that this construction of subjects is an ongoing, ever evolving, ever changing process as diasporic peoples are constantly "suturing" themselves to varying articulations of meaning, discourse, action, and practice. Therefore, the subjectivities produced are multiple, ever changing, dependent on distinct spatio-temporal modalities, and both fluid and in a constant state of flux. These subjectivities are constructed, shaped, and transformed by history, contemporary economic and global forces, and citizenships (Hall, 1999) in addition to modalities of settler colonialism, racism, sexism, patriarchy, and classism. Research by Mensah and Williams (2015) found that experiences of racism and classism led to ongoing resistance and a refusal to identify as Canadian. Boyce Davies and Jardine (2010) concur that this transnationalism reflects a series of movements of shifting cultures as well as shifting socio-economic and political practices.

The creation of these hybrid systems of being, seeing, and knowing could be considered as indigenous as those of the Yoruba peoples living in their original lands. They are both diasporic and indigenous[9] because they could not be created elsewhere. They are a product of space and time, of experiences in old lands and new, of knowledges from the original homeland and of the new homeland. It is a result of asserting one's identity and cultural heritage and, at the same time, opening one's self to "external influences without allowing these influences to dominate" (Okereke, 2003, p. 508), but to

[9] I am not claiming that African Canadian women are Indigenous peoples of Canada or have the same rights as Indigenous peoples of Canada. However, their knowledges which are constructed through their relations within a specific spatio-temporal context may be considered indigenous as they could not be constructed in any other time or any other place.

complement and transform. Brah (2003) asserts that all diasporic journeys are "embarked upon, lived, and re-lived through multiple modalities" (p. 618) such as sexism, racism, classism, religion, language, and citizenship (to name a few). Most important, these knowledges must come about in solidarity with Indigenous peoples of this land and share a commitment to dismantling the settler colonial state structures that continue to oppress.

African Canadian women are constructed through their histories as African women, through their knowledges, practices, and traditions of culture, ethnicity, spirituality, life experiences, family as well as their migratory experiences of diaspora, citizenship, and (un)belonging. Within all of these are their experiences of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, patriarchy, imperialism, and settler colonialism that redefine and transform their beings. Within the Canadian context, many of these women still "work double and triple days within the home and outside to provide for their families," suffering from violence, poverty, and health concerns during all of this (Hamilton, 2004, p. 10). Their lives are ones of continual challenges and oppression due to the violence inflicted upon them. However, these women continue to resist and subvert. Through stories which Sylvia Hamilton has termed "survival strategies," Dr. Marie Hamilton, in the short film *Black mother, Black daughter,* depicts systems of negotiating identity and independence in a society that has erected race and gender barriers. Hamilton (2004) illustrates how women through oral legacies and traditions of committed work have struggled to ensure their own survival and that of their families and communities. Finlayson (2015) asserts that these survival strategies as well as specific cultural practices and beliefs constitute a distinct African Canadian culture and heritage and must become part of official schooling curriculum in order to institutionalize these learnings, thereby ensuring cultural sustainability.

The spoken word poetry, written poetry, literary fiction, academic non-fiction on diaspora, citizenships, identity, hybridity, "Canadianness," "Africanness," and so forth by African Canadian women such as those used in this paper can be described as continued moments of resistance by African Canadian women who have been the victims of "hegemonic patriarchal control of geographical, political, and cultural borders" (Davis, 2004, p. 65). For African Canadian women who have been subjected to border control, and, thereby, restricted and contained within specific boundaries due to racism, sexism,

classism, imperialism, (settler)colonialism, and patriarchy, these literary articulations through concepts of hybridity and diaspora illustrate their ability to resist attempts to imprison them within specific physical and intellectual borders. These are some of the transformative platforms through which women express their freedom; these are some of the sites of their resistance.

Conclusion

African Canadian women are breaking new ground on a daily basis, transforming, creating, and constructing new systems and ways of living, being, seeing, and knowing. These transformations and assemblages occur when African Canadian women acknowledge that current systems of patriarchy, imperialism, and settler colonialism continue to dominate, subjugate, and oppress and respond through a politics and process of resistance and revolution. This chapter provides a contextual understanding of Indigenous knowledges from an African/ Black Canadian perspective and a conceptual and theoretical framework through which I consider the interlocking of community and political engagement, identity, belonging, and citizenship of young African/ Black Canadian women with the larger structural forces of (settler) colonialism, patriarchy, neoliberalism, capitalism, and imperialism. This exploration is an attempt to put forward the highly complex relationships among peoples and the ways in which the constructions, uses, depictions, valuation, and devaluation of knowledges offer an understanding of the epistemological and ontological positionings of young women of the African diaspora living in Canada.

Chapter 4: Methodology – An Indigenous Hermeneutics

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the methodology used for this research project. The first section of the chapter considers the qualitative nature of the research project. I, then, discuss Indigenous hermeneutics as a qualitative research methodology. I begin by exploring the hermeneutic imagination, as realized by Hawaiian scholar, Manulani Aluli-Meyer. Next, I discuss the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of an Indigenous hermeneutics – as a system of knowing and a system of being, integrating the African philosophy of Ubuntu with Aluli-Meyer's conceptualization of hermeneutic interpretivism. This culminates with a critical description and analysis of the three facets of research analysis based on an Indigenous hermeneutics: the roles of history, intention, and function in knowing. Next, I probe my positionality as the researcher in this endeavor and with respect to utilizing a research methodology that calls for reflexive, critical engagement, and relational learning of local knowledges, local systems of being, knowing, and seeing. In the final section of the chapter, I discuss the process of data collection and data analysis. This chapter should be seen as the guiding processes through which I approached, organized, and engaged with this study, the participants, and the community.

Qualitative Research

This research is critical qualitative research. Qualitative research allows researchers to study the world from a human perspective, thereby making meaning through human experiences (Stake & Rosu, 2012). Qualitative research investigates how social experience is created and given meaning through an examination of historical, interactional, and structural forces, enabling the linking of lived experience with larger social and cultural structures and the past and present (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Thus, qualitative research posits that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world and aims to understand the meaning individuals attach to certain phenomena they have experienced (Merriam, 2002). Denzin & Lincoln (2011) elaborate, defining qualitative research as

> a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual's lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide-range of interconnected interpretative practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way. (pp. 3-4)

The range of methods employed enables qualitative research to be an emancipatory method. Furthermore, qualitative research allows participants to tell their stories without interruption from outsiders, and participants empower themselves by sharing their stories (Creswell, 2007), thus providing opportunities for individuals who have been marginalized to voice their resistance and share their knowledges.

Merriam (2002, 2009) outlines four characteristics of qualitative research:

1. Researchers strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences; that is, how do people make sense of their experience.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis.
3. The research process is inductive; researchers gather data to build new concepts, hypotheses, or theories as opposed to proving already existing concepts or theories. Qualitative researchers should build theory from observations and intuitive understandings gleaned from being in the field.
4. The product is richly descriptive. Words and pictures, rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon.

Alongside these four characteristics, Merriam (2009) contends that qualitative researchers are primarily interested in "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 23). Furthermore, qualitative research enables a complex, detailed understanding of issues and requires talking directly with people in the spaces in which they live, work, and play as "we cannot separate what people say from the context in which they say it" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Given that multiple constructions and interpretations of reality are in constant flux, changing over time, qualitative research can enable researchers in understanding those interpretations within particular socio-historical contexts (Merriam, 2002).

Understanding the multiple, ever-changing interpretations and constructions of reality is central to critical qualitative research. Denzin and Giardina (2009) argue that critical qualitative research allows for emancipatory, transformative research that enables individuals to resist and rise above their marginalization. This emancipatory, transformative research illuminates on

> the historical origins of socially and politically reified social arrangements [and] … seeks to understand how victims of such social arrangements come to accept and even collaborate in maintaining oppressive aspects of the system. Further, critical perspectives seek to illuminate the hidden structures of power deployed in the construction and maintenance of its own power, and the disempowerment of others (e.g., groups, knowledges, ways of being, perspectives). … Critical perspectives are profoundly engaged with issues of race, gender, and socioeconomic level as major shapers as well as components of historically reified structures of oppression. (Cannella & Lincoln, 2009, p. 55)

Critical qualitative research, therefore, can be utilized by researchers and participants to question structures of power as well as the role of power in knowledge creation, transfer, and valuation.

Manulani Aluli-Meyer and an Indigenous Hermeneutics

Defining Indigenous hermeneutics

Manulani Aluli-Meyer's conceptualization of an Indigenous hermeneutics draws on a distinctive Indigenous Hawaiian epistemology and on Indigenous "voices, imagery, and words to expose the festering wounds of colonial influence, to direct our research in ways that are important to us, and to enter into dialogue with the burden of self-inflicted compromise" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003a, p. xvi). Aluli-Meyer (2003a, 2003b, 2008, 2013) establishes three facets for an Indigenous hermeneutics that will provide the foundations for the methodology used in this research project: 1) History and its role in knowing something; 2) Intention and its role in knowing something; and 3) Function and its role in knowing something. Aluli-Meyer's conceptualization of an Indigenous hermeneutics is grounded in understanding hermeneutics and interpretivism as drawing on distinctive Indigenous epistemologies and articulated as interconnected theories of meaning, action, and experience. Given that the participants in this research project are of African descent, an Indigenous hermeneutics will also draw on the philosophy of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is about being.

> [Ubuntu] offers hope of engendering pedagogies of possibility away from dichotomous discourse and positivist approaches to qualitative research. By confronting the constructed meanings of our knowledges, identities, and ways of seeing, and by attempting to "resource" these through co-construction and "humble togetherness," … Ubuntu contributes to disrupting and decolonizing hegemonic meanings, and provides an opportunity for renewal and transformation in our desire for egalitarianism and human dignity. It affords a way of knowing that helps us learn to become human. (Swanson, 2007, pp. 64-65)

An Indigenous hermeneutics, as articulated through this research project, is concerned both with systems of knowing and systems of being.

Initially, hermeneutics was the interpretation of written texts, such as the Bible; however, over time, acts were considered to be "text-analogues" (Taylor, 1971, as cited in Yanow, 2015a, p. 15), meaning that in order to understand the everyday behaviour and experiences of people, human acts were also deemed the equivalent of written texts for

the purpose of interpretive analysis. Human actions, experiences, and meaning constitute the world; as such, it is possible to think of the social and life world as a text (Flick, 2003; Smith, 1991; Wagenaar, 2011; Yanow, 1996) as well as our actions, experiences, and the meanings we bestow to them. "We exist, therefore we interpret" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003b, p. 59). It is those interpretations, as a result of our distinct social, cultural, and political contexts as well as our historical consciousness that illustrate how "power, hegemony, colonization, racism, and oppression" as well as capitalism act to deny the epistemological truths that our collective experiences know to be our material reality (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 218).

Hermeneutics is "analysis [that] focuses on interpretive approaches to collective actions … [whereby] social constructionist processes … provide a context within which individuals create and shape their identities, in interaction with that context" (Yanow, 2015b, p. 115). Yanow (2015b) contends that given that the collective is reflected in the individual, we must also view the "individual as society writ small" as this provides insight of "social, cultural and political contexts" wherein collective constructions are realized, reinforced, and altered (p. 115). It must be noted that hermeneutics as a theory of meaning, action, and experience is very much concerned with learning how knowledge is preserved, altered, and transferred over multiple generations (Serequeberhan, 2015). Furthermore, "the hermeneutic imagination … challenge[s us] to ask what makes it possible for us to speak, think, and act in the ways we do" (Smith, 1991, p. 188) while enabling us to not merely report meaning but to create and construct meaning (Smith, 1991; Wagenaar, 2011). This creative and collective sense-making "provoke[s] new ways of seeing and thinking within a deep sense of tradition, bringing about new forms of engagement and dialogue about the world we face together" (Smith, 1991, p. 200). Aluli-Meyer (2003b) contends that an Indigenous hermeneutics calls on us to ask different questions. As we come to understand that "all knowledge is interpretation" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003b, p. 58), we also become cognizant of the institutional, structural, and systemic forces that dominate, control, and oppress. This realization can be emancipatory as it can lead to a reinterpretation of knowledges through an Indigenous hermeneutic tradition.

Locating Indigenous Hermeneutics: Discussion on Epistemology and Ontology

The epistemological foundations of Indigenous hermeneutics

Epistemology encompasses what can be, what is known, and how knowing occurs (Paul, 2005). Epistemology, however, can also be understood as a "system of knowing" with an "internal logic and external validity" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 257). Dunbar (2014) asserts that such an epistemological reference means that "what there is to know is inextricably linked to an individual's past, present, and future. It is shaped by historical, social, political, and economic experiences" (p. 87). Epistemology, consequently, embodies more than "ways of knowing," as it is fundamental to "cultural continuity, distinct identity, and understanding systems of power that would deter these truths from existing" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003a, p. 210).

The epistemological underpinnings of an Indigenous hermeneutics, therefore, ask us to understand knowledge as interpretation. Knowledge refers to the ways in which people interpret and shape their environment through meanings; "knowledge is therefore conditional" and dependent "on people's location in history, geography, class relations" (Jager & Maier, 2009, p. 39). What is considered knowledge is not part of an objective truth but rather a subjective reality. Therefore, what is knowledge, what constitutes knowledge, and the transmission of knowledge are interpretations embedded within the relations and structures of power. We must, therefore, ask a number of questions: 1) "Whose knowledge are we talking about?"; 2) Who is talking and sharing their experiences, meanings, and actions; and 3) Who is the I that is listening and observing? (Aluli-Meyer, 2003b, p. 56). These questions are central to understanding and examining the dialectical relations between structures of power and knowledge and have been significant in my quest to expose social inequities and power imbalances that result in domination and subjugation of women of the African diaspora as well as their acts of engagement and resistance.

Indigenous hermeneutics: An epistemological and ontological dialectic

Within Indigenous worldviews, ontology and epistemology are interrelated and co-dependent as our systems of knowing influence and are influenced by our systems of being. In my use of Aluli-Meyer's Indigenous hermeneutics, I also draw on the African

philosophy of Ubuntu: Ubuntu is about being. It is a way of understanding the world and seeks to ensure the well-being of others (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005). Through Ubuntu, individuals become conscious of their being, privileges, and responsibilities towards self and others, and each individual is able to say, "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969). Central to an Indigenous hermeneutics is understanding collective actions as well as the notion of relationality. Within such a worldview, relationships are verbs, not nouns, and the well-being of the individual is bound in the larger collective. "I am human because I belong. I participate, I share" (Tutu, 1999, p. 31). Therefore, relationships and the collective that exist as a result are the intention and function of our systems of knowing and the ways in which we interpret the world and exist in the world.

An Indigenous hermeneutics that draws on Ubuntu ensures a consideration of the social, political, intellectual, and cultural legitimacy of people. Furthermore, as an "intersubjective humanist philosophy" (A. Abdi, personal communication, March 6, 2018), Ubuntu encourages a restorative justice where

> the central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offense. (Tutu, 1999, p. 54)

As such, Ubuntu calls on us to understand that our humanity as victims of oppression interlocks with the humanity of those who are the perpetrators of violence and marginalization. Ubuntu reminds us that "in the process of dehumanizing another, in inflicting untold harm and suffering, inexorably the perpetrator was being dehumanized as well" (Tutu, 1999. p. 103). The capacity and yearning to recognize the humanity of the oppressor is the act of rehumanizing, of calling for accountability, but also of lighting a way forward that negates the cycle of violence and potentially brings all into a shared collective consciousness. Therefore, "in this regard, research maintains community and the collective as central" (Mkabela, 2005).

Consequently, within an Indigenous hermeneutics, "the integration of an idea *is* the understanding of it" (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, p. 99). As such, our ways of seeing are

immersed within culture (Aluli-Meyer, 2013), and meaning is created through our interactions with others and the world (Wagenaar, 2011).

> As soon as we act upon the world it will resist, talk back, defy our expectations.… The world connects with us through our actions, whether we like it or not. … We move from a philosophy of representation to a philosophy of *intervention* (Hacking, 1983). By "intervention," I mean any activity that purposely aspires to change an aspect of the world. … The emphasis is always on actionable realism. On the necessity to engage purposefully and actively with the empirical world, the world of entities. (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 60)

The purpose of interpretation, then, is a radical emancipation which calls on us to examine not only structural, systemic, and institutional inequities, but also the policies, practices, and systems of knowing, being, and seeing in our own communities. It is an act of reinvention of the self and our communities that is intractably connected to the materiality of the social world and relations of power (Grande, 2014). This critical reinterpretation is a "space of engagement" where peoples work to "remember, redefine, and reverse the devastation of … colonialist encounter[s]" (Grande, 2014, p. 234) by thinking together and by opening our minds and exploring "the purpose of our lives, our work, our particular ways of viewing" (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, p. 99).

An Indigenous Hermeneutic Imagination: History, Intention, and Function

History and its role in knowing something

Hermeneutics as a methodology requires that history and culture be understood as interdependent aspects in interpreting the social world and people's experiences, understandings, and actions. According to Aluli-Meyer (2008), the presumption that "all ideas, all histories, all laws, all facts, and all theories are simply interpretations helps us see where to go from here. To understand this one idea has brought me to this point of liberation" (p. 230). For Aluli-Meyer (2008), to acknowledge all that we "know" as interpretation allows us to reject mainstream expectations and come to see "that knowledge, shaped by space and time, is open to historic influences" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003a, p. 53).

> This is why history lives in our current understanding of consciousness and why it is an invaluable tool to direct our future. We have seen what has come before us, we have experiences what went wrong, we know the truth in actions that did not exist in the larger context of spirit. These ideas have a role to play in what intelligence is in our modern world shaped by capitalistic priorities. History teaches us how we are to behave with regard to what is worth knowing and how that knowledge helps us. (Aluli-Meyer, 2003a, p. 54)

It is through a historical consciousness that we can better understand the role of colonialism, settler colonialism, patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism in shaping the world we inhabit. Furthermore, a historical consciousness, allows us to understand that if all history and ideas are interpretations, then that which has been thrown out as "trash" has the potential to be re-interpreted. Aluli-Meyer (2003a) accomplishes this in her centering of an Indigenous Hawaiian history which enables historical understanding to be "shaped by those who speak it, write it, teach it," thus leading to "a new era of clarity" as a result of "seeing it and … speaking it. This history will inevitably change our present understanding and alter our future directions if we allow its truth to soak deep" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003a, p. 54). In other words, historical consciousness influences current social, political, economic, and legal structures and systems as well as responses to it. This notion is echoed by Haunani-Kay Trask (1993) who maintains that "thinking in one's own cultural referents leads to conceptualizing in one's own worldview which, in turn, leads to disagreement with and eventual opposition to the dominant ideology" (p. 54). Grande (2014) expands on this, stating that given that "knowledge is related historically, culturally, and institutionally to the processes of production and consumption ... compels … question[ing] how knowledge is related to the processes of colonization" (p. 240).

The interlocking of culture and community is central to Aluli-Meyer's hermeneutic tradition. According to Yanow (2015a), culture can be described as a

> community's traditions, practices, language, and other … elements [that] provide the material out of which individuals craft their meaning making of everyday events. Understandings of "race" and "ethnicity," for example, are specific to political communities and sanctioned and maintained through institutionalized

> state practices…. These collective understandings provide the backdrop for individuals' constructions of their own meanings; individual subjectivity, in other words—the contents of individual consciousness (or mind)—is embedded within social practices and collective presuppositions. … It generates explanation that is context specific, rather than a set of generalized predictive laws. (pp. 10-11)

Aluli-Meyer (2013) observes that an Indigenous interpretivism calls for historical and "critical consciousness and respect for other ways of knowing" (p. 95) that is in much the same vein as the scholarship of Smith (1991) and Yanow (2015a). It is a call for "a knowledge ethic shaped by the needs of place and people… the sharing of ideas with others … steeped in ancestral memory. … We just have different priorities and names for how we experience and express it" (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, pp. 97).

History and a historical consciousness are, therefore, deeply interconnected with culture. According to Aluli-Meyer (2003a),

> Culture has been described as actions, beliefs, and values that a group of people agree are "best practices." It is specific to place, climate, and time. Culture has an origin, a present expression, and a future design. With regard to knowledge, the specifics of culture are what springs from scores of generations living in a location. That knowledge, shaped by space and time, is open to historic influences and becomes "current" because it is the nature of culture to survive. … the form of knowledge adapts but the "essence" remains strong, vital, and swims into a cultural stream that has never stopped flowing even though some of us no longer linger on its shorelines. (p. 53)

This interconnection is reiterated by David Smith (1991) who contends that the culture, beliefs, and values into which people are born are reflective of the "political, economic, and social changes in which [our] forebearers engaged through the course of their personal and collective lives" (p. 193). This collectivity, according to Smith (1991), is "the story of who we are as people. It is reflective of our desires, our regrets, and our dreams; in its silences, it even tells us of what we would forget" (p. 199). It reveals the systemic, structural, and institutional violences and marginalizations which inform our experiences and, thus, our interpretations of history as well as the political, economic, and social world we inhabit. Smith (1991) contends, further, that

> Good interpretation is a creative act on the side of sharpening identity with the play of differences, and we thereby give voice to and show features of our lives ordinarily suppressed under the weight of the dominant economic, political and pedagogical fundamentalisms of the times. (p. 199)

As such, "good interpretation" is about more than expressing the ways in which systemic, structural, and institutional marginalizations and barriers impact peoples' lives negatively but should also illustrate the divergences, differences, and resistances that emerge in order to subvert hegemonic dominance.

Intention and its role in knowing something

Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2003a) asks the following question in grounding an Indigenous hermeneutics: "What is the intention of our lives and how will we best thrive" (p. 55)? Through this query, Aluli-Meyer (2003a) reiterates that Indigenous and marginalized peoples "have let others answer those questions" (p. 55) in the past, and it is now time for they, themselves, to reinterpret history, to shape it through their own minds. This reinterpretation of history will create a new historical consciousness as it will make visible "the relative truth of what is not seen but yet available via thought, idea, and reflection" (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, p. 96), and it will provide "the capacity to review an idea, to link what is known to new patterns, and to offer fresh understanding to reoccurring problems" (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, p. 97).

Intentionality, therefore, rests simultaneously in both mind and body (Aluli-Meyer, 2013; Wagenaar, 2011) as it is the mind that "constructs the world" (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 43). It is the mind that "illuminates experience and brings forth meta-conscious awareness and purpose [intent] to detail meaning and interconnection. It is the maturing agency of collective and individual *thinking*" (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, p. 96). As such, intentionality is contained within peoples' conscious and unconscious experiences and in the acts that also construct the world (Fay, 1996; Wagenaar, 2011) because "thought creates" as it is then "expressed as action" (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 222). Action must be considered synonymous with thought and, as such, with intention (Aluli-Meyer, 2008). With regards to this research project, the acts and actions are determined by the participants ways and systems of seeing, knowing, and being in the world; as such,

intentionality is determined by examining their processes of being, knowing, and seeing in their social world.

As Aluli-Meyer (2008) points out, for Indigenous communities, intentionality rests through the process by which knowledge is created and produced. Knowledge should be

> the by-product of slow and deliberate dialogue with an idea, with others' knowing, or with one's own experience with the world…. The focus is with connection and our capacity to be changed with the exchange. ... Vivid interconnection was valued, a lived dialectic. (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 221)

The intentionality behind the production of knowledges rests on the desire for ideas that liberate, ideas that instruct and transform, of *conscientization* (Freire, 2003/1970), and that enlargen our "capacity to reflect, to think, to *use* our minds" (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, pp. 96). Aluli-Meyer (2008) is calling for knowledges with the intention to heal, bring peoples and communities together, as well as surprise, encourage, and expand awareness. Furthermore, knowledges that centre "justice as a way of life—justice as practicing the responsibilities of being good relatives to each other" (McCaslin & Breton, 2014, p. 519) is integral to an Indigenous hermeneutic tradition. This framework is supported by postcolonial feminist interpretive scholars working from other colonized locations. Kwok Pui-lan (2000) writes on the necessity of 1) challenging the universalizing forms of Western interpretations, 2) offering a counter-hegemonic discourse, and (3) marginalized, diasporic and Indigenous peoples voicing their concerns (as cited in Joy, 2014); Sugirtharajah (2000) offers a fourth imperative for interpretive research: hermeneutics must understand the voice of resistance. An Indigenous hermeneutics must, therefore, consider the intention behind the thoughts and actions of peoples and communities through a transformative and emancipatory rationality.

Function and its role in knowing something

This transformative and emancipatory rationality comes into being through a shared consciousness. Aluli-Meyer (2008) asserts that this is the cultural context of knowledge wherein knowledge "is a life force connected to all other life forces" (p. 230). Wagenaar (2011) concurs: knowledge projects "some form of transcendental meaning that informs

subjective acts of consciousness and that takes us beyond individual experience" (p. 44). Culture, consequently, is central to function. According to Hall (1981), culture is

> *both* the meanings and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they "handle" and respond to the conditions of existence; *and* the lived traditions and practices through which those "understandings" are expressed and in which they are embodied. (p. 22)

A shared cultural consciousness denotes that the meaning of an individual's thoughts, actions, as well as systems of being, knowing, and seeing can be perceived only by understanding the shared consciousness of that culture. Furthermore, understanding the overall spirit of that culture can only be realized by learning the meaning of all that is individually produced and created by that culture (Jacobs, 2014). As such, "the process of understanding goes beyond logic and analysis and is … intuitive and divinatory" (Jacobs, 2014, p. 302).

The intuitive and divinatory nature of knowledge is intrinsically tied to culture and cultural consciousness as Indigenous knowledges are deeply connected to place (Aluli-Meyer, 2008). However, within Indigenous systems of knowing, seeing, and being, place is in actuality a metaphysical construct that "engages knowledge and contextualizes knowing"; it is a "conscious-shaping space. Space-shaped consciousness" (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 219). Place, then, is interconnected with culture. "Unseen connecting patterns exist," and people inhabit the "casual linkages that alter its capacity" (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 229). Within such a worldview,

> relationships are not nouns, they are *verbs*. … Relationship as verb infers the *intentional quality* of connection that is *experienced* and remembered. Here we begin our walk into Indigenous epistemology; into the simultaneity of the unseen and seen. We are entering a wide-open field of knowledge production and exchange with priorities in *practice, relevance, context, consciousness,* and *shared common sense.* It is knowledge through *experience,* individual or collective, and a way of being via site-specific familiarity through years, generations, and life-times…. It is knowing shaped by purpose and knowledge

> prioritized by function. Finally, it is an understanding that has *endured* for a *reason.* (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, p. 98)

The central tenet within such a worldview and this particular hermeneutic tradition lies with the function of knowledges. When the function of knowledges is related to a shared cultural consciousness that is deeply connected to history and intention, such knowledges often lead to action, to contributing to the disruption and decolonization of hegemonic meanings (Swanson, 2007), to a restorative justice concerned with the healing of breaches (Tutu, 1999), and to working "towards a more equitable future" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003a, p. 56).

The Position of the Researcher

An important imperative of Indigenous hermeneutics is a transformative and emancipatory rationality. According to Aluli-Meyer (2003b), such a rationality necessitates asking different questions in order to reinterpret knowledges to expose the structures of power which are used to dominate and oppress and better understand the emergent resistances to hegemonic dominance. Such a project should compel researchers, participants, and the larger collective to "engage a process of unthinking our colonial roots and rethinking democracy. … [W]e must be willing to act as agents of transgression, posing critical questions, and engaging dangerous discourse[s]" and dangerous interpretations of the world (Grande, 2014, p. 251). Furthermore, as articulated by Aluli-Meyer (2003a, 2003b, 2008, 2013) and Yanow (2015a), this unlearning of (settler) colonialism as well as capitalism and patriarchy demands not only accessing but also a relational learning of local knowledges, local systems of being, knowing, and seeing.

As an interpretive researcher, this project required me to undergo a process of unlearing and relearning as I engaged in a process of dialogical sense-making with the participants, and as such, the larger community. This process of unlearning and transformation required leaving behind old assumptions and prejudices while also incorporating news ways of understanding the world as I navigated the ravages of settler colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy on the collective consciousness of the community, a community in which I have been granted membership.

As such, it was integral that I incorporate Ubuntu in the research study. Swanson (2007) confirms this assertion:

> By embracing Ubuntu in reflexive narrative in its contribution to understanding positions of dominance and deficit, a dialogue becomes possible about the nature of transformation and transcendence beyond personal, political paradoxes informed by neo-colonial and neoliberal ideology. It creates a rootedness with the daily, local, and lived. It assists with reflexive, critical engagement that explores less objectifying ways of being in research, through the inclusion of the self and the self's role in achieving humble togetherness with the research community. (pp. 64-65)

Ubuntu is, thus, an empowering philosophy when the researcher takes responsibility for ensuring that the process is critical, dialectical, and a coming together of diverse views. As the researcher in this endeavor, it would have been easy to consign my views and ideologies upon the participants, to interpret the participants' experiences through my own experiences, to view the participants as less knowledgeable. However, this research was specifically designed so that does not occur. First, the questions answered in this project could only be articulated through a reflexive, critical engagement, and dialogue among the participants. The focus groups and interviews brought together disparate and similar voices in order to explore the experiences of the participants and the ways forward, as seen by them. My responsibility in this endeavour lay in ensuring that the dialogue and knowledges created are acknowledged as constructed through the "humble togetherness" of the research participants and the researcher. Second, given my position as a member of the collective taking part in this research project and as a result of using an Indigenous hermeneutic methodology, my experiences, actions, and meanings have been articulated in the collective understandings of the phenomenon.

Given my status as a member of the community at the centre of this research project, I purposefully chose to recruit participants whom I did not have a prior relationship with. While I had met one of the research participants prior to the research project, I would have described her as an acquaintance whom I had only interacted with at select community events, as opposed to the close relationship which has developed during and after the research project with a number of the participants. My relationships

with a number of those who participated in the research project changed from nebulous community member to one of deep friendship and caring as well as mentor. I have written reference letters for graduate school and medical school, co-written funding proposals, and developed a deep and abiding friendship with a number of the participants. Yet, while my relationship with the participants has deepened as a result of their decision to entrust me with their stories, experiences, meanings, and actions, what this research made clear is that we were and continue to be a collective committed to a common future that has been constructed from a shared historical and cultural consciousness.

Research Site

The site of this research project was Edmonton, Alberta/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan. The number of people identifying as African/ Black Canadian living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan has grown steadily, with an increase from 19,020 in 2006 to 56,970 in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Given this significant increase in population over a ten year period as well as the early history of African Canadians in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan (Kelly, 1998), Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan provided a rich site for an in-depth study of political and community engagement of African Canadian women. African Canadian women were recruited from various community and cultural organizations as well as immigrant-serving agencies and through strategic sampling.

Participants

This research project has been an exploration of what it means to live as a young woman of the African diaspora within Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan and what is currently Canada. Nine Black/ African Canadian women participated in this study. As a result of my ongoing engagement with the Black/ African Canadian community, I was somewhat aware of distinctions and differences between young adult and older adult women and had initially planned to include older adult women in the study; however, this became unfeasible. Furthermore, I was interested in the absence of young women from the decision-making circles that I had been exposed to. This lead me to question the ways through which young women were engaged in their communities and how these processes of engagement supported and possibly resisted those of the older women and elders. For purpose of recruitment, young women were those aged 18 to 30.

I conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with nine young African Canadian women from the following countries in Sub Saharan Africa – Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe, (countries with some of the largest percentages of people of African descent living in Edmonton) (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Based on the research questions, I recruited participants aged 18 to 30 years of age who had spent a significant part of their lives in Canada.

Chart of Participants

This critical qualitative study consisted of nine young women participants of African descent. Below is the chart of participants. The nine women represented varied socio-economic backgrounds and seven sub-Saharan African nation states.

Young women – between 18 to 30 years of age					
Pseudonym		Educational Qualifications	Country of birth	Citizenships	Identifies as
1.	Azara	Bachelor of Arts (in progress)	Zimbabwe	Canadian; Eritrean, Zimbabwean	Black; African; Canadian; Eritrean
2.	Edna	Bachelor of Arts (in progress)	Stateless; born as a refugee	Canadian	Black; African; Canadian; Sudanese
3.	Felicia	Bachelor of Science (in progress)	Nigeria	Canadian; Nigerian	Black; African; Canadian; Nigerian
4.	Layla	Bachelor of Arts (in progress)	Ethiopia	Ethiopian	Black; African; Canadian; Ethiopian
5.	Maita	Bachelor of Arts (in progress)	Zimbabwe	Canadian; Zimbabwe	Black; African; Canadian; Zimbabwean
6.	Nala	Bachelor of Education (in progress)	Canada	Canada	Black; African; Canadian; Somali
7.	Nyassa	Bachelor of Arts (completed)	Canada	Canadian	Black; African; Canadian; Sena

8.	Sahra	Bachelor of Science (in progress)	India	Canada; India	Black; African; Canadian; Somali
9.	Subira	Bachelor of Education (in progress)	Ethiopia	Canada; Ethiopia	Black; African; Canadian; Ethiopian

The Study Methods

This study drew on an Indigenous hermeneutics; I analyzed public documents, interviews, and focus groups.

Document analysis

I began data collection through the collection and analysis of relevant public documents (Sarantakos, 2005); namely census statistics through Statistics Canada, records through Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Elections Canada, Elections Alberta, and City of Edmonton municipal records were collected and analysed. These documents provided the necessary background, statistical information, and foundations upon which I, then, developed the focus group and interview questions. Government documents such as those detailed above offered an accounting of political and community engagement by various cultural, religious, and ethnic groups and across genders. As such, these documents provided the necessary background from which to begin analysis of the questions regarding political and community engagement of African Canadian women and allowed for more focused and in-depth interviews.

These public documents provided official government statistics regarding peoples who self-identified as being “Black” or of African descent. My interest in these statistics was piqued by the high unemployment numbers recorded for the African/ Black Canadian community. Aluli-Meyer’s (2003a) assertion that “we are more than the sum of our empirical parts and liabilities, and more than the average of someone else’s norm, and we are certainly more than our incomes” (p. 55) became the entry point into examining the experiences of African-Canadian women living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan. The purpose of this research was not to learn the supposed deficiencies of the research participants but to explore the experiences, meanings, and actions of the participants by asking questions which centred their knowledges and experiences as valuable and

important in engaging in a process of unlearning the power of (settler) colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy on how women of African descent are known, seen, and understood.

Furthermore, it was my intention to question the validity and reliability of the statistics provided as they did not explain the real experiences of the participants and, consequently, had not passed Aluli-Meyer's (2013) rigour test.

> The question I have when our own indigenous researchers return with gloomy statistics is: Why nihilism? Why aren't these negative statistics concerning our people viewed as symptoms of something larger and potentially healing? Why not experience these statistics as philosophical, or cultural? Really, why is it that we wish to assimilate into a mainstream society that believes in the accumulation of material goods as the highest indicator of "wealth," or senseless death and war as more appropriate than life? Why, again, are we seen and labeled "deficient?" Do you see that when we understand larger systems that are working, we begin to understand more of what is happening within and around ourselves? Because of that knowing, we are singing our own liberation. (Aluli-Meyer, 2003b, p. 55)

Hence, interpreting the statistics within these public documents through an Indigenous hermeneutics led to questioning the purpose of these numbers, to questioning their function, and, thus, compelled me, as researcher, to explore the systemic, institutional, and structural marginalizations that were creating this supposed deficiency and the responses from the community as they resisted and subverted this hegemonic dominance.

Focus groups

I facilitated three focus groups with the young adult participants – those aged 18 to 30 years of age. Focus group one had four participants, all of whom had been born outside of Canada. The participants in focus group one identified as Eritrean (she also had Canadian citizenship and had lived in Canada since one year of age), Nigerian Canadian (her family immigrated to Canada when she was six years of age), Mozambiquan Canadian (she was born in Canada but later lived in Mozambique), and Somali Canadian (she immigrated while in elementary school). The focus group occurred over two sessions and were a total of 3.5 hours. The second young women focus group should have originally

had five participants but only two participants attended the session: one participant identified as South Sudanese and Canadian and came to Canada at the age of 6, and the second participant identified as Zimbabwean Canadian and immigrated to Canada in elementary school. This second focus group ran for two hours. The third focus group originally had four participants; however, only two participants attended the session: both participants identified as Ethiopian Canadian. One had been adopted by a White Canadian family at the age of six whereas the other had immigrated with her biological mother and brother at the age of 16. The third focus group ran for just under two hours. There was one final young woman participant who declined to take part in the focus groups but who agreed to taking part in the one-on-one interview.

The focus groups proved to be an ideal method to initiate the data collection as they enabled multiple research participants to simultaneously produce knowledge (Chilisa, 2012). In my role as researcher of the focus group, I steered and facilitated the process of the discussion, ensuring that the participants led the discussion (Krzyżanowski, 2008). Furthermore, the focus groups elicited a diversity of viewpoints on a number of issues. This provided me, as the researcher, the opportunity to understand how individuals collectively come together (Bryman & Teevan, 2005; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; Sarantakos, 2005) to "make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it" as focus groups have the ability to "reflect the processes through which meaning is constructed in everyday life" (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 195) while also depicting the processes through which individuals and groups resist and subvert.

There were a number of disadvantages to focus groups that had to be considered prior to their use as a research method. One of the primary concerns was around the issue of confidentiality. As the researcher, I informed the participants that there was no guarantee that confidences shared while in the focus group would not be shared outside the group by other participants but also advised them to respect the confidentiality of the other participants (Cameron, 2005; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999); I, therefore, followed, Kitzinger and Barbour's (1999), suggestion regarding the setting of ground rules prior to sharing knowledge and information and engaged in a thorough debriefing after as one measure to guarantee confidentiality. I also suggested to participants that they only share information that they feel comfortable being repeated outside of the group (Cameron,

2005). As I was conducting both focus groups and interviews, I also suggested to focus group participants that should they wish to share information in a more confidential manner, such information could be shared during the one-on-one interviews should they so desire. In this way, participants were still able to share the information and knowledge they deemed relevant without the added concern regarding group confidentiality. All but one of the young adult participants agreed to take part in the focus group discussions. I interpreted the decision from the one young adult participant to only engage in one-on-one interview as related to their concerns over confidentiality as well as a natural unwillingness to share their life stories with individuals they may not know or be in a relationship with. Furthermore, taking part in a focus group would have necessitated the young woman organizing her schedule around a number of other individuals which given her busy live and varied commitments would have proven both difficult and frustrating. However, as the findings illustrate, the young women participants' experiences illustrate a number of regularities, variations, and singularities.

Despite the number of pre-cautions which were required to hold focus groups, the interactions in the focus groups were "synergistic" (Cameron, 2005, p. 117) as these dynamic dialogues appeared to encourage the research participants to talk to one another, ask questions, exchange anecdotes, comment "on each other's experiences and points of views" and "create an audience for one another" (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999, p. 7). Furthermore, "participants did not just agree with each other. They also misunderstood one another, questioned one another, tried to persuade each other of the justice of their point of view, and sometimes they vehemently disagreed" (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 113). Therefore, the focus group, itself, became a social context that provided the opportunity to consider participants engagement in meaning-generation and the process through which opinions are formed, expressed, and modified through a discussion and debate with others (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001; Wilkinson, 1999). A collective sense-making occurred (Wilkinson, 1999) as meanings generated through the focus group discussions were constantly negotiated and renegotiated (Kitzinger, 1994).

Interviews

Based on the discussions, conversations, conflicts, and knowledges that emerged and were constructed in the focus groups, I invited interested participants to participate in

semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The semi-structured interviews were both flexible and emphasized how participants "frame and understand issues and events – that is, what they view as important in explaining and understanding patterns and forms of their behaviour" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 184). Davies (2000) contends that semi-structured interviews do not seek to exploit the position and experiences of women, especially those who have been marginalized, but are appreciative of the position and experiences of women (as cited in Sarantakos, 2005, p. 188), thus making them an ideal method for this research project.

One-on-one interviews were held with five young females as a follow up to their focus group discussions. The one-on-one interviews with the young women ran from one hour and fifteen minutes to two hours in length and were all conducted face-to-face. While the information letters invited participants to take part in a 45-60 minute interview, the vast majority of the participants continued to share their stories well after the one hour mark, despite being informed by me that we had reached the end of our designated interview time.

Oral stories

Many of the participants shared oral stories during the focus groups and interviews. Through an Indigenous hermeneutics, oral stories can allow for the creation of a critical awareness and development of strategies for resistance and change (Mucina, 2011). Chilisa (2012) contends that literature – proverbs, cultural artifacts, legends, stories, practices, songs, poems, dances, tattoos, lived experiences, personal stories, ritual songs, and dances as well community stories told at weddings, funerals, celebrations, and wars – are "our language" (p. 193); these are the languages through which experiences of colonized peoples are voiced. According to Mucina (2011):

> Oral storytelling is done with the purpose of maintaining cultural continuity, while at other times stories allow for cultural directional change. A story can allow a culture to regenerate itself. Storytelling honours our memory (sacred history) while validating our Ubuntu spirit of change, because the only constant in our lives is change. Put simply, our stories are our efforts to create shared interpretation structures about experience so that change has shared meaning. (p. 6)

Stories, then, are a means of obtaining the knowledge needed to create just social change (Freire & Faundez, 1989; Razack, 2001; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999).

Data collection

Focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews were recorded on two different devices in order to limit any technical glitches that could compromise the data. All nine participants consented to having their participation recorded on auditory devices. Collection of data occurred over a period of nine months.

Data analysis

> [Qualitative data] analysis is a complex and dynamic craft, with as much creative artistry as technical exactitude, and it requires an abundance of patient plodding, fortitude, and discipline. There are many changing rhythms; multiple steps; moments of jubilation, revelation, and exasperation…. The dance of interpretation is a dance for two, but those two are often multiple and frequently changing, and there is always an audience, even if it is not always visible. Two dancers are the interpreters and the texts. (Miller & Crabtree, 1999, pp. 138-139)

In practical terms, analysis of data followed an iterative qualitative analysis and began following the first focus group. Following a process of an iterative qualitative analysis ensured that the data collected was not unfocused and repetitious (Merriam, 2009). Data was collected through focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and oral storytelling and was coded, conceptually organized, interrelated, analyzed, evaluated, and then used as a spring-board for further data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 2000: Sarantakos, 2005) Once the data was classified, I examined for regularities, variations, and singularities in the data (Dey, 1993). It is through this search for regularities, variations, and singularities that the stories and narratives of the participants emerged.

Process of analysis

The process of data analysis was iterative and began with relevant public document documents, namely census statistics through Statistics Canada, records through Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Elections Canada, Elections Alberta, and City of

Edmonton municipal records. An analysis of these documents allowed me to gain an understanding of the larger context of official government recording of peoples of various African and Black descent. Of particular note were the official government statistics regarding immigration numbers from particular nations in sub-Saharan Africa, un/employment statistics, formal educational qualifications, average earnings, as well as population changes in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan and Alberta over the past ten years. These statistics told a particular story regarding the Black/African Canadian population living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan where despite an increasing population, people of African descent appeared to be dealing with high unemployment regardless of higher than average educational qualifications and proficiency in English. Those of African descent from Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan were also not represented in elected government positions at the municipal, provincial, or federal levels. During the period of data collection, one male of African descent was elected to the provincial legislature. These findings also became prompts for the focus group and one-on-one interview questions as they provided the initial stimulus to probing further as to the actual lived experiences of participants and spurred an examination of the reasons behind such phenomenon, such as lack of representation and poverty facing the African Canadian community.

The process for analysis of the interviews and focus groups was adapted from Patterson and William's (2002) system for hermeneutic data analysis. Transcriptions were completed within a two week period following each focus group and interview. Transcripts were read and re-read in order to understand issues and themes that were emerging in earlier interviews and that should be inquired after in subsequent interviews. The next step was to identify and mark meaning units within each transcript. This was accomplished a number of times, first during the initial reading of the transcript as well as during the periods of re-reading once all data had been collected. Identifying and marking meaning units provided the capacity to develop and create thematic labels under which the meaning units could be grouped. "These themes were identified on the basis of the "forestructure of understanding" developed through the ongoing review of the existing literature…; the research goals, questions, and themes used to develop the interview guide; and the emergent insights generated" (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 48). Given

the methodology of this project was an Indigenous hermeneutics, of key importance in the creation of themes was a consideration of the interrelations among themes. A number of visual aids were created in order to aid in interpretation and analysis of the data which could illuminate the interrelationships and collective meanings from the data collected while also demonstrating the holistic nature of the phenomenon being explored.

The process for data analysis – in particular the identification of themes as well as noting the interrelation and holistic nature of the themes – required a steady engagement with new literature as ideas emerged from the data that could not have been foreseen in the initial planning stages of the project. Of particular significance was the literature on settler colonialism, solidarity, and cognitive justice – which provided the foundation from which to understand the larger relationships found in the participants' experiences, actions, practices, and meanings.

Observations about the Study

This study project, my participants, as well as the larger community have forced me to abandon a number of preconceived notions regarding the questions and assumptions that initially guided this research. Initially, I imagined that those who agreed to take part in the research project would illustrate both a conscious and unconscious understanding of African Indigenous knowledge systems as illustrated through their experiences, discourses, and understandings. What became quickly apparent was that AIK was not a tangible concept for the majority of the participants in that they did not immediately attribute their experiences and understandings to AIK nor think about their experiences, understandings, and meanings in response to AIK.

Rather, the participants' responses illustrated a deeper connection to AIK, than that merely of discourse/language; they expressed the role of AIK in their lives through their articulations of systems of being, knowing, and seeing of the world. A number of concepts emerged through our discussions that centred family, community, the collective, education, and justice. The participants illustrated their systems of being, knowing, and seeing though their distinctive articulations of their experiences and subsequent understandings of those experiences, and the meanings that they ascribe to their experiences as well as the common and uncommon encounters of their lives.

The nature of the responses from the participants called for me to reconsider the original methodology proposed for this research study – critical discourse analysis. While power and structures of power remain of central concern within this study as they interlock with settler colonialism, colonialism, neoliberalism, patriarchy, and capitalism, the participants' language and discourse were not the primary tool through which these systems and structures that perpetuate power and inequity were explored. Instead, these concepts were implicitly and explicitly shared through the meanings and understandings the participants ascribed to their experiences and to their systems and ways of knowing, being in, and seeing the world they inhabit and must survive.

This realization led me to review the methodology being utilized in this study. Through discussions with my supervisor, I concluded that my research questions and subsequent findings necessitated employing a hermeneutical analytical process, as opposed to critical discourse analysis. An Indigenous hermeneutics premised on the scholarship of Manulani Aluli-Meyer offered a system of analysis that could be employed to understand the potential of a shared collective consciousness that reflects the interlocking of (settler) colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism as structures of power on the systems of knowing, being, and seeing of peoples of African descent. An Indigenous hermeneutics offered the most reliability and validity for meeting the specific goals of this project, with regards to guiding the intent (purpose) and function of the study – a shared cultural consciousness deeply connected to history, intention, and leading to action, the disruption and decolonization of hegemonic meanings, and a more equitable future.

Activities of Indigenous hermeneutics

Fulfilling the aims of Indigenous hermeneutics required designing a study that

a) centred relationships and the collective
b) encouraged and centred restorative justice
c) emphasised critical reinterpretation as a "space of engagement" to "remember, redefine, and reverse the devastation of … colonialist encounter[s]" (Grande, 2014, p. 234)

d) fostered a transformative and emancipatory rationality by asking different questions in order to expose the structures of power used to dominate and oppress
e) reinterpreted those statistics and data that label racialized peoples as deficient
f) illustrated the divergences, differences, and resistances that emerge in order to subvert hegemonic dominance.

The first activity undertaken was the collection and analysis of public documents such as census statistics through Statistics Canada, records through Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Elections Canada, Elections Alberta, and City of Edmonton municipal records. These public documents depict African Canadian women as deficient, as not being as academically successful nor finding the same employment successes as White Canadians or a number of other racialized groups. The solution has tended to be that the women and culture must transform. This research attempted to reinterpret these documents and statistics, thereby becoming a point of departure for the questions asked in the one-on-one interviews and focus groups. As opposed to considering the participants as deficient, this research asked participants to discuss how they subverted and resisted the ongoing myth of deficiency. The participants' understandings, experiences, and interpretations of these concepts was illustrated through their engagement in the focus group sessions, in particular, whereby a collective sense-making occurred. While the data collection protocol initially called for all participants to be involved in a focus group session, one participant stated their preference to not participate in the focus group and to, instead, only be interviewed through a one-on-one interview. In keeping with the tenets of an Indigenous hermeneutics that privileged the needs of the participants, acceding to the request of the participant was vital in ensuring that the research process was just and equitable.

The interview and focus group questions were purposeful in centring concepts of justice, equity, and relationality. The questions asked during data collection were open-ended; the use of a semi-structured interview technique enabled me to ask the participants particular follow-up questions based on their responses; this enabled the participants to provide more in-depth responses. Furthermore, the protocol followed in the focus groups allowed participants to ask each other questions as well as to debate, concur, or disagree. This ensured that the focus groups, in particular, were opportunities for the participants to

also learn from one another, thereby building their own relationships through their engagement in the research project. I would contend that the focus groups can, therefore, be defined as spaces of engagement (Grande, 2014); a number of the participants indicated that they found their experience in the focus group to be transformative and emancipatory.

As the researcher in this endeavour, I have continued to engage with the participants in various capacities after the data collection stage concluded. I have supported individual and group community undertakings, written reference letters for graduate school and medical school, mentored participants for academic and community leadership positions, and above all, developed strong and abiding friendships with a number of the young women. The relationships created as a result of this project are vital to ensuring that the research conducted for the dissertation is the starting point for long-term relationship building while working for a collective and decolonial solidarity centred on justice and equity.

Conclusion

"We exist, therefore we interpret" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003b, p. 59). It is those interpretations, as a result of our distinct social, cultural, and political contexts as well as our historical consciousness that illustrate how "power, hegemony, colonization, racism, and oppression" as well as capitalism act to deny the epistemological truths that our collective experiences know to be our material reality (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 218). This understanding establishes Indigenous hermeneutics as a powerful research methodology that can produce much-needed counter-hegemonic meanings. The central tenet of Indigenous hermeneutics is the function of knowledges. It is a shared cultural consciousness that is deeply connected to history and intention; therefore, such knowledges often lead to action, contributing to the disruption and decolonization of hegemonic meanings (Swanson, 2007), a restorative justice concerned with the healing of breaches (Tutu, 1999), and working "towards a more equitable future" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003a, p. 56).

Chapter 5: Data Chapter I – Challenges, Barriers, and Marginalizations Faced by Young Black/ African Canadian Women

Introduction

The conversations with the research participants through interviews and focus groups allowed me to gain a depth and breadth of understanding of their varied life experiences, understandings of the world, and they ways in which they negotiated, mediated, resisted, and challenged interlocking systems of oppression and domination. The knowledges generated and shared through the conversations provided a number of themes for analysis. In response to the large amount of data and knowledges generated and shared as well as the particular research questions of this study, the findings have been divided into three chapters, with each chapter rendering one of the major themes that the knowledges generated and shared by the young women participants detail. This chapter is organized around the challenges, barriers, and marginalizations faced by young African Canadian women. This chapter is divided into the following four sections: 1) Explorations of identity construction; 2) Outsider within: Hybridity as unbelonging; 3) Power is an illusion; and 4) Cognitive injustice and the devaluation of knowledges.

Challenges, Barriers, and Marginalizations

The young women discussed a myriad number of experiences they have lived through. What becomes apparent as each woman shared her varied life stories was the interconnected nature of the experiences they discussed in both the focus groups and the individual interviews. For these young women, gender and racism, as connected to colonialism and patriarchy, played a central role in how they navigated and negotiated their experiences in formal education, with their careers, in community engagement, in volunteering, with friends, and through their conceptualizations of their identities.

Explorations of identity construction

As articulated by all nine young women participants, their identities are the result of various intersectionalities: race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, citizenships, education level, and sexuality. While race and gender were the two most prominently discussed, class, ethnicity, religion, citizenships, education, and sexuality were also deliberated and

played a significant role in their articulations and negotiations of their identities. Felicia articulates this intersectional identity by sharing her frustrations that due to their intersectional identities, they are "still never seen." Even the media does not

> *portray anything other than the stereotypes on TV other than like an Oprah or Beyoncé. What other Black women do you see doing positive things? … Oprah got it based on the merits of her hard work. I'm not saying that Beyoncé didn't work hard but it was still played off of another stereotype – oh she can sing, she can dance, she's beautiful. … [Oprah] built her own empire based on her mind rather than her body or her singing ability. …We just need more representation, outside of the entertainment industry or the athletic field*. (Felicia, individual interview)

Furthermore, as Nyassa eloquently states, Black representation in the media is limited to those who are "*appealing to the masses*" (Nyassa, focus group 1). Musicians such as Beyonc*é* appeal to non-Black audiences and as such "*fit into a model that is kind of safe*" for mass appeal (Nyassa, focus group 1). Nyassa questions the reasons for this and responds that these representations of blackness are based in capitalism and consumerism which utilize white dominance to reinforce extremely negative stereotypes about blackness and Black males, in particular.

> *Most of the consumers of rap music are white boys, white males. I feel like that is also part of the entertainment of like white dominance. … that sparks that debate of what is empowerment vs being like being used or reinforcing those stereotypes*. (Nyassa, Focus group 1)

Sahra echoes these sentiments, countering that much of the focus on people such as Oprah, Beyonc*é*, and Obama is accompanied by the statement "*Oh, we live in a post racial society*" (focus group 1). As the young women agreed, these statements were quite shallow.

> *I guess you're not saying the "N" word to my face in the middle of the street like you would thirty years ago. But like the institution is still there; it's in our education system. It's like in the health care system. It's like in the enforcement system. You see that.* (Sahra, focus group 1)

Furthermore, as articulated by the examples shared by these young women of powerful, rich African-Americans, it is only the experiences of those African-Americans with a particular class identity who are viewed as proof that we now live in a post-racial/ post-racist society.

It becomes apparent in the conversations with the young women participants that their understandings of their identity as well as their compatriots are complex and being constantly negotiated. The participants are all extremely careful in how they negotiate their complex identities, including being constantly aware to avoid harmful and stereotypical representations. Layla felt as though she was representing all Black people all the time. "*I feel like if I do something it will be … "Yeah, it's because she's Black*." (Layla, focus group 3). Sahra shared these concerns, stating, "*You have to be super careful with what you say,"* continuing that she and a graduate student from the Congo *"were just discussing race and how to navigate the education system, being a Black woman."* In addition to learning how to navigate the system, women like Sahra

> *have to be really cautious of how you say things or how you respond to certain things because people might be like "oh she's so sassy."… I was taking a research course. … There was a problem with the Power Point presentation, and she was freaking out. So, I was like it's okay just relax. It is not a big deal. We can sort this out. … another group came in … and they were curious as to why my friend was freaking out. … And she's like it's so funny, like I'm freaking out and Sahra is being so sassy. … I was like I am not being sassy. That's not even what sassy is. Then after there was another guy that came in and he was like "but there's nothing wrong with a little bit of sassy." … You have to be super careful with what you say.* (Sahra, Individual interview)

For these young women, these cautious natures have been learned due to the systemic discrimination they have had to endure over their lives. Often, they cannot understand why they must fight so hard to be recognized as human beings worthy of living comparable lives to their White counterparts.

> *It makes you feel so bad that you can't speak up on things like that because your grade will depend on it…. I feel like it would open a Pandora's box of problems. … A lot of the people in my faculty are like from farm backgrounds. They are really conservative in how they view the world and the only thing that matters — and it's not a bad thing that they care about the environment and animals – but it's like what about people of colour. And it's so annoying. Sometimes all their fights are for animals only, and it's like but there are humans too. Worry about us.* (Sahra, individual interview)

For these young women, intersectionality is the core of their identities. Their experiences, choices, and lives must constantly be understood through a complex web wherein various facets of their identities intersect: race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, citizenships. As such, the language each woman utilizes to describes herself varies due to each person's

unique experiences. Azara sees herself as African and Eritrean first, even though she has lived in Canada since the age of one. Azara contends that she cannot feel "Canadian," going so far to say that she does not even identify as African Canadian. Azara also does not romanticize her trips back to Eritrea, openly identifying some of the issues she has faced in Eritrea, including feelings of being a foreigner at times, of not belonging. However, those feelings are amplified in Canada. "*I have felt more foreign here than I will ever feel back home*" (Azara, focus group 1).

Nyassa, on the other hand, does not see a strong connection back to Mozambique, the country of her parent's birth and asserts,

> *I think it's important for me to identify as Canadian because … Canadian does not have a colour, and it is not whiteness because that is not fair to people of African descent in Nova Scotia, … Chinese people, Japanese people, and Indigenous people*. (Nyassa, focus group 1)

Nyassa's refusal to be hyphenated in her classification of her identity is due to her understanding that Canada is all she knows. If she were not Canadian, she would not belong anywhere else, including Mozambique in which she is considered a foreigner, despite having moved back from Canada to live there as child. In addition, Nyassa asserts that the hyphenated identity and of belonging elsewhere is only expected for racialized peoples and not White Canadians. For Nyassa, identifying as African or Mozambican is also not possible due to her understanding of the role of European colonization in Africa wherein these identities based on national boundaries were created as a result of the actions of European colonization. As such, Nyassa's connection to her roots are related to her identity as "*a Sena person*" (Nyassa, focus group 1) and to her Indigenous roots. She also continues to identity as African and black. Nyassa is articulating the complexity of identity in her refusal to allow colonial legacies to shape her identity.

Of the nine young women participants, Felicia was the most comfortable with identifying as African Canadian, viewing it as the consolidation of her Nigerian roots and the identity she built while living in Canada. Felicia contended that in her estimation,

> *…The whole idea of being African Canadian or Caribbean Canadian is becoming its own culture within itself, similar to how African Americans who were slaves created their own culture from the Americans and the African; they made it into one kind of thing…. Obviously, it's going to take generations. … Maybe our great-grandchildren, they are going to see Africa as a distant thing. … I think as*

> *Africans we're going to form our own identity in the same way that African-Americans formed it.* (Felicia, focus group 1)

For Felicia, it also became evident that her strong connection to the Canadian side of her identity was a result of feeling a lack of belonging when she travelled back to her country of birth; yet, her identity as a Black woman, as a person of colour, and the corresponding struggles with that identity have resulted in a somewhat hyphenated identity where she is both African and Canadian.

Sahra appears to agree with Felicia in that she also identifies as African Canadian. For Sahra, however, her identity as a Somali woman, as a Black, Muslim woman has resulted in always being "*made to feel different*," of coming to terms with the realization that her experiences "*are not the same as what a White girl would go through*." For Sahra, coming to terms with her experiences, with being different has resulted in being forced to go through a process of unlearning which she describes as "*really liberating as well*." "*Yeah, I'm Black and I'm proud. Even though you think this and that of me, that is not going to change*" (Sahra, focus group 1).

Unlike the other eight participants, Layla was already in high school when she immigrated to Canada. As such, Layla had only been in Canada for six years at the time of the focus group and had not as yet applied for Canadian citizenship. However, despite not having Canadian citizenship, Layla also describes herself as African, Ethiopian, and Canadian. According to Layla, she views her transformation to a hyphenated identity to be the result of a change in her views and mentality since moving to Canada, stating that she has become **"***more open-minded about everything. … I'm connecting with people outside of my culture, and I'm actually starting to like this culture too*". For Layla, identifying as both Ethiopian and Canadian has also meant making the difficult decision to apply for Canadian citizenship, as

> *Ethiopia doesn't allow the dual citizenship thing. ... I don't want to lose my Ethiopian [citizenship] because I was like so connected; I'm so Ethiopian. Then I realized, it's not about the paper. It's about what you have in you I guess. ... Having this [Canadian] passport is beneficial, even in your own country. Even when you go back home, they respect you more if you have Canadian passport than Ethiopian. That's sad but that is the reality*. (Layla, individual interview)

Subira's story is extremely unique among the participants, At the age of six, Subira was adopted by a white Canadian family and moved to Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan from Ethiopia. Growing up in a family with white parents meant that

> *my parents never talked about my heritage, my history, my culture, my anything. So, I grew up very, very Canadian. Very Canadian, White household. I would say I am Ethiopian Canadian because that is what I look like, that is what I identify as. I am Ethiopian Canadian. But I am so much more Canadian than I am Ethiopian now at this point in my life. ... I am like my parents' product, and they are white and fourth-generation Canadian. Now... I need to find the other half of my being. So, I guess that is what I have been doing for the past three years as well. It's just finding that healthy balance because I went through a phase where I just completely rejected being Canadian. ... And now I'm like no actually I need to have a healthy balance because I am both. and I just need to ...find that balance.* (Subira, focus group 3)

Subira and Layla both identify as Ethiopian Canadian. However, their experiences and differing life stories illustrate that while they may use a common language in the description of their identity, their conceptualizations of their identities differ widely and are based on their own unique set of life experiences.

Edna came to Canada as a refugee at the age of six. And while Edna identifies as Sudanese and Canadian, she also questions the need of people to identify according to nation states. Edna's understanding of her identity highlights the ways in which participants were constantly negotiating and navigating their conceptualizations of their identities and the role of larger structural and systemic forces in their definitions of identity. As Edna shares, "*Sometimes I feel like I'm not Canadian because of politics right now. I feel like my voice is not heard*" (Edna, focus group 2). It is important to note that these young women's identities are affected by the political forces in their lives.

Maita, who immigrated to Canada from Zimbabwe at the age of 9, describes being Canadian as a title. Much like Nyassa, Maita views being Canadian as an identity which she can call upon depending on the context. For all nine women, discussed in this section, their identities are complex and interwoven in their understandings are their race, gender, citizenships, and ethnicities.

The final research participant, Nala, was the second research participant born in Canada. Nala describes herself as "*super Canadian. ... I mean it's all I really know, the*

land here, the people here, the culture, way of life, way of speaking" (Nala, individual interview). Nala's exposition on who she is depicted a young woman who was constantly negotiating her identity.

> *I identify very strongly as Canadian and female ... because that is where my perspectives are rooted. I also identify primarily as what the context needs me to be and that's why I think, problematically, I've been given these opportunities [for leadership]. Because when I need to be a Black woman I will be, when I need to be a very whitewashed Black woman I will be. Whenever I need to be … an accomplished Somali girl, I will be. I exist in the context that people need me to be. I think that my identity exists just as diasporic.* (Nala, individual interview)

This continual state of flux does have limits, however. While Nala, herself, still identifies as Muslim, her understanding of what being Muslim does not fit with the perspectives of others, resulting in becoming "*tired of being hated for things that I loved*," that which may be considered unIslamic by some. Furthermore, Nala describes a tension in the ways in which she was perceived by non-Muslims when she wore a hijab, resulting in a questioning of her identity. Nala's decision to no longer wear a hijab has meant coming to terms with who she is with regards to her skin colour, her religion, ethnicity, and citizenships. "*... I only became Black when I took my hijab off."* Furthermore, she states,

> *Being a Muslim woman was a struggle for a long time. It wasn't who I was but I made it who I was because everyone from my social circle to my family to school – it didn't matter what facet of life, that was who I was. I decided I wasn't that – the Muslim part of it anyway.* (Nala, individual interview)

An important consideration in understanding the various ways in which the young women participants describe their identities comes from the realization that despite the racism and marginalization faced by these young women, all nine women view their experiences and their continued resistance to marginalization as integral to their growth and the development of their identities.

Outsider within: Hybridity as (un)belonging

It is important to note that despite describing themselves through the terminology of hybridity, these young women are essentially creating their own understandings of identity. Furthermore, their identities differ greatly from their parents. All nine women shared the belief that their hybrid identities were a form of resistance against a society which attempted to box them into one way of being. However, what also became quickly

apparent was that these young women also continually question their sense of belonging as there are many moments in which they are perceived or consider themselves to be outsiders, of not belonging to a particular place or group of people. Nala was the only young woman participant to not participate in the focus groups, choosing instead to partake only through an one-on-one interview. Nala's decision did not seem particularly relevant at the time. However, during our conversation it became apparent that Nala often felt like an outsider around other racialized peoples, as she, herself, points out.

> *I went to … a Black girl party or girls of color or whatever. And that was fun but I still felt isolated in all the conversations they were having about sisterhood and feeling like togetherness. … I've never felt included. … Maybe my hesitancy does come from feeling like I'm being judged or feeling like I'm being put on a pedestal or whatnot. When you do get into circles of Sisterhood because we're all like Black and we are all together …, there tends to be a comparison thing. And there tends to be a competitive thing. ... I hate that. I don't want that. ... I find joy in my accomplishments and my successes, and I will express that with my friends and celebrate them but I ask these friends not to expose it.* (Nala, individual interview)

Nala shared a lot about her past and present in her interview, including her dissatisfaction with some of her peer group while in high school, young people who often discouraged her from her academic pursuits and who she has not stayed in contact with after starting university. Due to her decision to join a faculty that is predominantly white, Nala has not had many opportunities to interact with other minoritized students in her courses or through her engagement in community projects which are connected to her university studies. Yet, it is also clear that Nala does have some regrets over her lack of close relationships with other racialized and Somali Canadian women.

> *I ran with the Somali group in high school and [my sister] ran with a geeky white and brown folks, was very smart and in full IB, and my parents loved her. ... I came to university and lost all of it. She came to University, and she went into the Arts and Sciences, so they were all there. A lot of them were there with her. They graduated with her. And they all made that transition together into realizing that the Muslim womanhood role was not going to fit what they want. Muslim culture is an interesting one in the way that it really encourages education. But the education contradicts where the culture wants you to end up. Her and her girlfriends kind of realized that together. … They're kind of living the lifestyle that I wanted, but I just didn't have access to*. (Nala, individual interview)

For Nala, the decision to unveil herself and no longer visibly identify as a Muslim woman was especially difficult, as unlike her sister, she did not have the support of friends who

were also going through such a process. Nala, instead, found herself identifying with those outside of her ethno-cultural/ ethno-religious group, most of whom are white and share some of her interests in art, literature, and sports. It is important to note that Nala's unveiling of herself and decision to re-evaluate what being Muslim meant occurred publicly whereas Subira who no longer identifies as Christian has still not shared her decision with her family a year later. Living in a Judeo-Christian society often requires those of other faiths, in particular women from Islamic families, to publicly denounce their faiths, and is not expected of others to the same extent. While this can be partly attributed to the visible act of removing her hijab, Islamophobia results in the act of removing one's hijab being interpreted as a denouncement of the entire religion by the larger society. This is often not the case for those who cease practicing other religions.

Nala's sense of regret over her lack of connection with other Somali Canadians was palpable, especially when asked to discuss where she saw herself fitting in as a diasporic being.

> *Hmmm. Surviving? Existing? Surviving. Surviving. Yeah, there is not a minute of any day where I feel like the things that I do are long-term, intentional, if that makes any sense. In terms of where do I see myself fitting, at that moment wherever I am. … Even when I'm in Black circles and I'm able to do the things and say the things that make me fit because it is a perception thing. When I am able to do those things is when I feel like I fit for a minute. There is nothing long term about it though. I know that if I stay in the circles for prolonged periods of time, they would be able to pick out the parts that don't fit.* (Nala, individual interview)

Nala personifies one type of hybrid being, that who can never find belonging in any community. She is not Black enough, Somali enough, or Muslim enough to not eventually start to feel like an outsider with other minoritized peoples. And she is too Black, too Somali, too Muslim to ever fit fully in with a majority White community.

Subira did not have the opportunity to fully explore the Ethiopian side of her identity, as she was adopted at the age of six by a White Canadian family. In university, she made the decision to learn more about her ethno-cultural heritage and her mother tongue, a language that she spoke fluently when she first arrived in Canada but which she lost through years of non-use. "*I learned English very, very fast, but I lost my Amharic – all of it. … If I could go back I'd be like what you should do is like keep my culture in*

me" (Subira, focus group 3). Unlike Nala who had a number of minoritized and Black friends in high school, Subira did not became friends with other young African Canadians who shared her worldviews until university. Subira described her high school as "*very white*."

> *The only Black people were just like the ESL [students], … the gangster Black group; the ones who think they are tough. … And then the ratchet*[10] *… girls. … I tried to sit as far away from those girls so that no one would associate me with them. … So, in high school, there was never a Black group of people that I wanted to chill with. I just didn't fit.* (Subira, Focus group 3)

Like Nala, Subira also did not see herself as fitting in with any group. Though, she has recently come to terms with the fact that her identity is a compilation of both the Ethio-African and Canadian aspects which she learned from her parents.

This inability to fit into any society was a recurring theme for many of the participants. Azara, who immigrated to Canada at the age of one and who has not lived outside of Canada since then, feels like a constant outsider in Canada and sees herself eventually moving back to Eritrea. It is interesting that Layla, who has only lived in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan for six years as compared to Azara's 22, showed more interest in remaining in Canada permanently. While Layla also felt moments of not fitting in, of being an outsider, Layla also asserted that she now also had those sentiments when she returns to Ethiopia for visits. As such, a sense of belonging could no longer be the determining factor as to where to live.

As pointed out earlier by Nala, there are times when the status of outsider has been conferred upon the research participants by other racialized, Black, or African Canadian peoples. According to Nyassa, "*shadism issues [and] hierarchies of who is African*" also exist within African/Black communities. As Nyassa explains:

> *People tell me "You're not African because you were born here, and you don't speak your language." But these were people from West Africa telling me that. And then I've talked to other Africans and they're like "You have an accent." And sometimes I hear myself and I do, and other days I feel like I sound white. So, that kind of pressure, wanting to fit in.* (Nyassa, focus group 1)

Sahra discusses what she sees as a divide amongst people of people of African descent.

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[10] A pejorative term used as slang to describe Black women who are "seen" as displaying certain "negative" qualities such as being "too" loud, overtly sexual, angry.

> *I feel like there's also a divide between the African-American community and Africans, right? The whole idea of them versus us. They look down on us sometimes. And there's the idea of Africans believing they are better than African Americans. Because you hear some Africans "Oh we are not like African Americans because we're not ghetto."* (Sahra, focus group 1)

For the majority of the young women, the quest to "fit in" is an ongoing struggle, and what may create a sense of belonging at one time may not work in quite the same manner at another time. As such identity becomes ever-evolving, fluid, dynamic, and contextualized to different spaces and groups of people. "*We kind of just made our own identities*" (Nyassa, focus group 1).

Power is an illusion

The concept of power was a theme which regularly came up in the interviews and focus groups. However, it remained a contested term for many of the participants and was often a result of a discussion detailing societal conflict, focusing on the social basis around which the notion of power may exist. The participants, also, briefly explored the concept of power beyond the actions of the individual as it relates to institutional, systemic, and structural barriers.

The connection of power to racialization, gender, and class was repeatedly discussed by the participants, as intersectional identities must navigate relationships of power in much more complex ways. Azara's account of her experiences as a community support worker highlight the challenges faced by poor racialized "*youth*".

> *I call 911 at least once a day. ... "Are they native? Are they Black?" That's their first question they ask. I asked the superintendent and he said ... "They have to ask what the backgrounds are. How are you going to know when you walk into the building?" I'm like I'm giving you their name ... I'm [also] there to show you. ... And if they are sleeping, what do they do? How do they wake them up? They have their hands at their necks or they have literally torture methods that I've read in books of like colonial Ethiopia. They get their hands and they tie them like pigs. ... Would they wake their own kids up like that? No! But they wake up homeless youth like that…. So, I asked him "Is that part of protocol? And how can we change that?" His response was "We can't. You have to know their description. That's really critical, and that's really critical for our safety."* (Azara, individual interview)

Azara goes on to explain her attempts to alter police protocol when dealing with homeless and racialized "*youth*"?

> *So, then I went to… the guy who is in charge of homicide. …I was like is there any way that you guys can … deal with every situation humanly … like how I approach our [organization's] kids. They have knives on them. They have everything on them, and they have all these drugs in them. But if you as a person approach a person, then they will treat you like a person in return. They are not going to come and choke me, even if they are on meth and all this other stuff. … So, I explained that. Is there a way for you to come and say hey, my name is this officer whatever? This is my badge number. … Is that a possibility? Then I gave him the example of the phone call. He was like … I can't believe this. He was like that is not protocol. … He gave me his information and told me to text him any time that happened. … and then he would look into that dispatch person. But that is not the issue. There is a bigger systemic issue. But that is not even part of protocol*. (Azara, individual interview)

Azara's account illustrates the ways in which official government organizations institute protocols which are racist and further marginalize racialized peoples. While these discriminatory acts are not written, they are still often taught in the training process for 911 responders, for example. As such, they become part of the daily operational strategies, reinforcing institutional marginalization of racialized peoples. The challenges faced by minoritized peoples who are often the victims of institutional racism are described by Nala in her account of her elder brother's experiences with the law.

> *[My brother] … was taken to court essentially for attacking police. The video came out and all charges were dropped because that wasn't the case. [My brother's] lawyer was like you guys don't have a case here and showed the hospital's video. …He had his hands up, and he was walking backwards when he was attacked by these cops.* (Nala, individual interview)

As Azara theorizes: "*These are the biases that get people in shit whereas if you were just some White kid just being whatever, … you're not going to be asked or stopped or looked at*" (Azara, individual interview).

The young women's analysis of the issues facing African Canadians and other minoritized populations is extremely nuanced, as can be seen from their discussions on the role that class plays in structural and systemic racism.

> *Azara: I read this article that spoke about how hip hop and how R&B started off like as resistance and how it was part of the struggle but it got picked up by White audiences and off course that became entertainment ….*
> *Felicia: … I notice with hip hop that there's two kinds – that main stream [and]… also the underground. There is still the element of hip hop that is so not mainstream. … but that is not what they're investing in. They're investing in men with bags of money – excuse my language – fleets of ho's, pants down to here,*

driving lamborghini, weed in one hand, a gun in the other hand in their music video. That's what's selling. Not so much JCole or Kendrick Lamar. JCole and Kendrick Lamar – white people don't listen to them or Common. We listen to that because they speak to our struggles. White people like Little Wayne, Tyga, Nicki Minaj.
Nyassa: It's bubblegum rap. Like top 40s.
Sahra: It's whitewashed.
Felicia: It's whitewashed. And it's comfortable for them because they perpetuate these stereotypes.
Nyassa: Ratchet ghetto.
Sahra: Yup. That's ok to listen to but like I remember. Was it in the late 80s or 90s? The NWA and how they came out and like they started rapping about police brutality and like the struggle and how keeping Black people in the hood makes Black people violent. You have to find underground ways to make money because you have a family to feed. You have people to support and they didn't want that. The FBI sent them death threats and wanted to shut them down. But this kind of rap is okay because it's not making people socially aware of what is actually going on.
Nyassa: But the weird thing about Tyga is … he comes from a middle-class family, right? They sing that bubble gum. I call it bubble gum rap. But don't even have that experience. They're just coming from middle class families or whatever and then they talk about being ghetto and hood and those kind of stereotypes just because it's cool.
Sahra: I think even though he comes from a middle-class background, he's still subject to the same injustices or like the same things.
Felicia: To an extent
Sahra: Yes. To an extent. But because he has money, it's because...
Felicia: A rich Black man is not the same. A rich Black man who dribbles a ball or raps into a microphone is not the same thing as a Black man because... I feel like even professional athletes to a certain extent, they're a slave to the system. Because you know who owns those big NBA corporations, it's not Black people. It's old white men. All those record companies, it's not Black people who own it. It's old white men. They tell you what sells. They tell you what to do. Because there is a reason that a lot of really good rappers are not popular. Because they refuse to be in a video degrading women, promoting violence and rape and horrible things; painting Black men and women in a certain light. They want to maintain their integrity. And they're not going to make money because the white man at the top are the ones dictating what we consume on a daily basis. In a weird way, they're still slaves even though they're making millions of dollars. They're still slaves to a white man in my opinion.
Sahra: Chris Rock. He's been taking photos of how many times he's been stopped by the police. I think it is like 9 … now, and it's like money can only take you so far. You are still subject to the same things if they do not know who you are. I guess it is different to a certain extent but it is still prevalent. You're still Black so it doesn't make a difference if you have money.

According to these four young women, while class privilege and success within a capitalist system can result in some element of power, one's racialized identity as a Black person often ensures that any sense of power is an illusion.

As the research participants articulated, power is often an illusion for African Canadian peoples, as in many cases those who may end up in so-called positions of power are often tokenized based on their identity. Nyassa, Sahra, and Felicia use Obama as their example of this phenomenon.

> *Sahra: Even with Barack Obama, he has been in office for almost eight years and there are things going on in America that you wouldn't think would go on with a Black president. He's kind of like a puppet. ... Even with the Trayvon Martin thing, he had to wait a few weeks before he could say how he felt, and I don't think that he actually said everything that he wanted to because that could incite violence or cause other things. ... He said if I had a son that looked like Trayvon Martin, ... he has the possibility of being shot too.*
>
> *Felicia: That's pretty much the same comment he made about Mike Brown too and what was even the point because he has to appease white people, and I think that's what fears me about Black people in politics. Because you can never be genuine. Because you have the majority that you have to keep them happy. .... In that way, you have to compromise a lot of the happiness of the minorities. Because you always have to appease those people, those white men, those corporate people, shareholders, big organizations. ... It's really funny how you can have a Black man in office but you may as well have Bush there.*
>
> *Sahra: That's what everybody says "Obama is a white guy painted Black."*
>
> *Felicia: ... But it's super disappointing when it seems that all these things are happening, and it seems a Black man is sitting in this big chair, and it seems he cannot [sic] do absolutely nothing. [His power is] an illusion.* (focus group 1)

This tokenization is also discussed by Nala as she describes her own experiences as a young Black woman who operates in white spaces. Maita's analysis of this issue is extremely apt. "*Your oppression cancels your power out, and you are just left with nothing. Because I don't think if we had that much power, we would still be having all these issues*" (Maita, focus group 2). This illusion of power results in minoritized peoples being tokenized which then corresponds with a liberalizing discourse wherein representation is mistakenly equated with achieving social and cognitive justice.

Cognitive injustice and the devaluation of knowledges

The conversations held with the participants yielded a lot of interesting data. It quickly became apparent as the young women shared their stories and experiences that many of

the issues of racism and marginalization faced by the participants could not be explained away as the misbehaviour of a few individuals but instead illustrated deep-seated racism that was allowed to occur due to normalized and legitimized range of policies, practices, and attitudes – in other words, systemic, institutional, and structural racism.

For the majority of the young women, language was cited as a significant factor and was utilized by the mainstream in order to exclude and marginalize people of colour. Edna shared the story of a close friend, a young African Canadian woman who had been born in Canada and who spoke English as her first language, yet who was automatically put into an English as an additional language (EAL) class while a student who had recently immigrated from Poland and did not speak English was not. Felicia, despite speaking English as a first language, was advised by a teacher to consider EAL classes *"because she saw my name".* A number of other participants also indicated that they were often met with the assumption that they must be EAL learners, regardless of how long they had lived in Canada and often due to a lack of understanding of colonialism and the widespread use of English as a first language in a number of African nation states.

Furthermore, the experiences of those who are EAL learners illustrates the extent to which EAL learners are often at a disadvantage in many classrooms. Edna compares her own experiences as an EAL learner with that of a student she met while volunteering at a local elementary school. Edna praises her own experiences, believing that her school's decision to place her in a separate classroom with other EAL learners proved extremely beneficial in the long-run, especially in comparison to a student who was being integrated into the regular classroom and constantly being made to feel like an outsider and as deficient. Edna saw herself in this student and could imagine how her own experiences would have been very different had her path been similar. Sadly, Edna who was initially planning to become a teacher changed her mind, deciding to pursue a different career path as her experiences volunteering in a school and in her education courses led her to believe that she could not in good faith be supportive of a system which normalized the exclusion of racialized students through its policies and practices.

A number of the participants referred to the lack of representation among both K-12 and university teachers. Yet, only two of the participants indicated an interest in pursuing a career as a teacher, despite the fact that all nine participants declared that it

was important to see more teachers who looked like them and who shared their experiences and worldviews. According to Sahra, extremely few racialized peoples choose to become teachers because *"the likelihood of them getting a job is like slim to nothing.... [But] I don't think whether I get a job would be an issue if education was subsidized. Because people are worried about paying off student loans."* Given that teachers such as Edna hold unique insights that have the potential to impact other racialized children's educational experiences, the lack of institutional and systemic support to recruit greater numbers of racialized teachers is troubling. Sahra's account of the myriad ways in which students of colour are marginalized in schools illustrates this.

> *I remember my younger sister telling me a story where one of her friends was trying to get into 10-1 and she was in 10-2 and the counselor was like No, I don't think you're suitable for 10-1 and you should stay in 10-2. Rather than encouraging students to strive for success, it was more "No, you belong here." More like stay stagnant. I don't know. They weren't really like inspiring students. Or even counseling in a sense. They weren't willing to help students get into higher education.* (Sahra, Individual interview)

This further illustrates the marginalization of the diverse knowledges held by racialized peoples who could bring new ways and systems of being, knowing, and seeing into classrooms and who are less likely to dissuade racialized students from higher education.

The lack of institutional, systemic, and structural support to encourage greater representation of African Canadians in careers which they have been excluded from goes beyond education. Two of the participants also discussed their desire to pursue law school and the barriers which dissuaded them from following their dreams, including the ways in which the LSAT exam has made them to feel like failures while also acknowledging that neither they nor their families have the social capital to opens doors.

Furthermore, Azara's and Maita's experiences further highlight the ways in which the knowledges held by women of colour are often devalued. Both these women's attempts to write the LSATs resulted in them feeling like "failure[s]," despite the fact that they are both extremely intelligent, hardworking women. For Maita, this devaluation of her knowledges has been a recurring theme throughout her university experiences.

> *[It] was a Shakespeare class, and I felt like I had to think the way the teacher wanted me to think. That was really difficult for me, and so I rarely even went to class. ... If I didn't say something that she agreed with, then I was wrong. ... I just felt like I had to think a certain way, the way she thought, and I could never*

> *get anything right. … Can I have a different point of view of what I am picking up from this text? And it was like no, that is the wrong reading of what you are doing. So, that was really frustrating for me.* (Maita, focus group 2)

The inability of educators to acknowledge alternate systems of seeing and knowing results in a lack of creativity in classrooms and in the ways we understand or conceptualize the world. While Maita's experiences were extremely traumatic for her, even those participants who viewed these types of behaviours by educators as less harmful indicated that openness in teaching and learning would be welcomed by them. Layla shares her experiences with code switching, stating that while it is "*automatic for me to just mix both languages*" (focus group 3) while texting and talking, she would never do so for a class assignment out of fear that it would compromise her mark. Yet, often times, code switching is not the result of a speaker or writer not knowing the right word in English but is the result of the word or phrase not existing in English. As such, the limits we place in education often end up viewing difference as deficiency, thus stifling creativity and new ideas.

Revisioning our educational systems

The systemic exclusion of knowledges related to the experiences of marginalized peoples was a significant theme that emerged from the interviews and focus groups with the young women. These participants were quick to identify the lack of curricular content – at both the K-12 and university levels – about Indigenous peoples. This is especially troubling given historical and current settler colonial practices which continue to marginalize Indigenous peoples in Canada. These young women were cognizant of the gap in their education, especially with regards to their learning about Indigenous populations in Canada. They were also able to connect the erasure of Indigenous peoples from the education system to the continued marginalization of other racialized groups in Canada, noting that this was a systemic and structural issue.

Edna and Maita also connected their educational experiences regarding learning about Indigenous peoples in Canada to issues which are taken up in the Canadian education system in quite a significant manner. They questioned how the decision as to which genocides to teach was determined, concluding that they do not appreciate or agree with the focus on teaching about the Holocaust and to a lesser extent, Rwanda, at the

expense of learning about genocides which occurred in Namibia, Armenia, or even in Canada, for example. Edna concluded that of course this is what our education system focuses on as

> *It's mostly white people who are killed. … And also because the USA was seen as the saviors, right? Like after it happened, the Allies were seen as the saviors. That narrative then puts them in a good light. We came in and we rescued them. And the same with Rwanda. Canada is seen as a peacekeeper because we came in and still tried to save them.* (Edna, focus group 2)

These young women are highly critical of an education system which they see as having failed them and other racialized peoples in many regards. Furthermore, their willingness to label the violence enacted against Indigenous peoples in Canada as *genocide* signals their deep understanding of how state sanctioned violence underlies the policies of the settler colonial state.

Furthermore, even when educators attempt to diversify the curriculum, a lack of knowledge as well as understanding of the role of power and privilege can result in these attempts backfiring.

> *I was in an English class when I was in high school, and I was the only Black girl. The teacher was talking about Africa, and he was talking about Black people and he was talking about it in a very negative way. And at that moment that's when I really, really felt [uncomfortable]. I looked around and it's all white people and it's just me. And I just wished that the Earth could open and swallow me or something like that. I just didn't want to be there at that moment. … He was actually talking about Ethiopia. He was talking about; he had this picture – the famine. It's kind of a popular picture. There's a kid. … He wasn't crying. He's just laying down, and there's a bird waiting for him to die. And [the teacher] was just talking about, … and the whole topic was just all about Black people. … It was English class. I don't know why he was showing pictures and why he picked that.* (Layla, focus group 3)

Such educators are engaging in actions which can be deeply traumatizing for students. Their lack of recognition over the potential harm caused by a lack of understanding of historical, colonial, and racist forces must be probed further. A number of participants shared their belief that such incidences may decrease in frequency should a more diverse group of educators be recruited into teacher education programs and hired as teachers. Under these circumstances, greater representation would result in a diversity of viewpoints and knowledges which could also be used as an educative tool for mainstream

teachers to be better prepared to teach in multicultural classrooms in order to ensure that fewer students shared Layla and Edna's experiences in school wherein if they "*didn't speak up in class, those Black perspectives would never be heard*" (Edna, focus group 2).

As Nala's experiences illustrate, the exists a dearth of knowledge among educators as to the differing needs of a diverse student population. For many educators, there appears to be a belief that equity can be achieved only through an understanding of class divisions amongst students. As Nala's anecdote shows, while taking into account student's financial capacity is extremely important, equally integral to student success is understanding the diverse cultural backgrounds and needs of students and being willing to also address those.

> *In 10th grade … the whole entire school went on a trip to New York. … It was $2,500 to go. Everybody went. …Obviously, my mom being like an immigrant, "Hells no you're not going on a trip to the states with a bunch of white people. Like no." … My older brother … kind of lobbied for me and was like "Hey what if I go with her." … My parents were like yeah maybe, if you got on as a chaperone or something. … I got called down to the office by the principal … and then she asked why aren't you going. …if it's a money issue, we got you. …. I said can my brother come? Then they said yes but he would have to pay for his own way. … He was like I can't afford that right now.* (Nala, individual interview)

Nala's experience depicts the extent to which schools are only willing to accommodate students when students are facing barriers schools can understand and illustrate an inability to see cultural difference as a call to diversify protocol in order to better meet the needs of all students.

The need for increased numbers of racialized educators is discussed by Nala who was in her final year of the Bachelor of Education program at the time of our interview. Nala responded to questions around what it means to be a racialized woman in a predominantly White faculty by admitting that she has become the "*tokenized… Black girl*" and that *"there's a problem with the fact that opportunity keeps being given to me for the sake that I am here, for the purpose that I am here"* (Nala, individual interview). Nala discusses how she negotiates her blackness in order to fit in with the mainstream. Nala views her tokenization as deeply problematic, given that it is simply a result of her presence and to illustrate that "diversity" does exist in what is in reality a predominantly white space. Furthermore, based on the conversations with the participants, Nala appears

to be the type of racialized pre-service teacher who is considered a prime candidate as she is accepted by her mainstream counterparts. Edna's experience in the education program has been vastly different, as she described the year she spent as a pre-service teacher:

> "*I felt like I was kinda like being brainwashed. ... I was brainwashed in the sense that like the way I should teach should be this way. ...I felt like I wasn't prepared, even going into the practicum. ... That is why I switched to MacEwan. I want to be pushed. I want to explore. I want to expand my knowledge. I don't want to just be stagnant. It's all so restrictive.* (Edna, focus group 2)

Edna's life experiences have been vastly different from Nala's, having immigrated to Canada at the age of 6 after living as a refugee for years. Edna has not had the stability of Nala's life and her blackness is more complex and harder to negotiate. Whereas Nala's life experiences as a racialized woman born in Canada are lauded, Edna's life experiences have often been shunned. She is – as she herself claims – *too Black* (in appearance and ways of thinking) for easy acceptance into Canadian society.

Conclusion

The data and knowledges generated and shared in this research study indicate that there are a number of challenges, barriers, and marginalizations faced by young women of African Canadian background. Young women indicated feelings of unbelonging, not just to Canada but also to the nation states they or their parents had migrated from. Young women discussed the connection of power to racialization, gender, and class, illustrating how as a result of their intersectional identities, they navigate relationships of power in much more complex ways. The last theme discussed by participants was that of living a life of constant disrespect, cognitive injustice, and the devaluation of knowledges. Young women described their experiences of knowledge devaluation; systemic, structural, and institutional policies and behaviours were used as tools of exclusion from educative spaces. It is important to also note that all of the participants described themselves, their families, and their communities as "Black". They viewed the marginalizations they faced not as connected to being of African descent but as associated with the colour of their skin. This chapter lay the groundwork for the remaining two findings chapters. Chapter six will provide the responses and resistances from young women to these marginalizations, barriers, and challenges. In chapter seven, I will turn my attention to the

role of formal and informal education in building community, resistance, and in the participants' quest for justice.

Chapter 6: Data Chapter II – Responses and Resistances by Young African Canadian Women

Introduction

Chapter six is the second of the findings chapters and follows up on the data presented in chapter five: Challenges, barriers, and marginalizations faced by young women. In this chapter, I delineate the responses and resistances by young African Canadian women to the injustices discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter communicates the knowledges shared by young women and is systematized according to the following themes: 1) Parents as agitators: Generating responses and resistances among young women; 2) Knowing as resistance; 3) Young Black women's struggles for justice; and 4) Community engagement: A response and resistance to marginalization.

Responses and Resistances by Young African Canadian Women

This section will expand on the findings described in chapter five that detailed the marginalizations faced by young African Canadian women. The stories and experiences of the young adult participants indicated the myriad and diverse ways in which young women countered systemic, structural, and institutionalized injustice, marginalization, and oppression. The responses and resistances of the young female participants are categorized thematically: Parents as agitators: Generating responses and resistances among young women; Knowing as resistance; Young Black women's struggles for justice; and Community engagement: A response and resistance to marginalization.

Parents as agitators: Generating responses and resistances among young women

All nine young women participants were either currently in post-secondary or had already graduated from higher education. For all nine participants, it was a cultural expectation, supported by family and community that *"Once you're done [high]school, you just go to [university]… You just pursue your higher education and try to get a professional program whether it is engineering or you want to be a doctor or this or that*" (Felicia, focus group 1). Nala talked about her high school peer group, many of whom were Black and/or African Canadian who were not interested in attending university, sharing that her family helped propel her on the path to higher education. The participants shared their

understandings that as women, especially Black women they would face challenges. However, none of the young women indicated any resistance from their families regarding their desire to pursue higher education.

While all nine participants had chosen to follow this path into higher education, the support they received from family differed greatly. Azara, Nyassa, Sahra, Nala, Layla, and Edna all paid for university through student loans. Maita, Felicia, and Subira were more fortunate in that their parents paid the majority of the costs associated with them attending university. Yet, even those young women receiving financial support from their families faced tremendous pressures.

> *Originally when I was applying to [university], I actually wanted to apply to nursing. ... And my dad got ... agitated with the idea of me being a nurse because in his mind, nursing is so below me. ...My mom is a nurse so I don't know why that's a different story. ... He was like look at your marks, you can study anything you want in this university. ... Why would you do nursing? So ... all honors neuroscience. ... And I ended up switching out because I realized it wasn't my thing. So, I actually regret not doing nursing. ... It was basically because of my dad. I really don't have a lot of say because I am not paying for my education. ... It really kind of sucks because it means I can't do everything that I want to do. I still have to run everything with my parents. Every course that I had to take I still have to run it past my parents, and they'll say if it is an acceptable course for me to take this semester. And my parents don't believe in anything less than a five course load per semester.* (Felicia, focus group 1)

Maita shared very similar sentiments regarding the pressures she faced from her parents in relation to schooling.

> *It's like just go to grad school. Do this. Maybe go into nursing. Then you can branch out and maybe you can still get into law. And I'm like Oh my goodness. I just can't catch a break anywhere. I have my own issues. I need to get this right, and at the same time it's you need to do this, the economy is like this. You need to be able to make money.* (Maita, focus group 2)

For these two women, financial support from families meant that parental advice was often seen as obligatory or placed an inordinate amount on pressure on young women to follow a particular path with little room to explore their options. Parental advice often called on young people to choose specific educational paths and careers, those with greater income generation potential as well as more status occupations, thereby reinforcing capitalist teachings and the knowledge economy. The experiences of Felicia and Maita illustrate that those families with greater economic capital and class privilege

expected their children to secure similar class positions through their educational and occupational choices.

Nala and Azara's parents have had somewhat differing contributions to their respective daughter's education. Azara indicated that she can never meet her parents' or extended family's educational or career expectations of her. Nala's parents appear to be even less involved in her life, with little understanding of her education and career path or the importance of her community work to meeting their expectations of her or with regards to the satisfaction these endeavours bring her.

> *My mom will try to minimize anything that I tell her. It doesn't matter if I'm with friends, ... student groups. There isn't a single thing in my life my parents are proud of. My dad will say things like "are you still working hard?" Or I'm so happy for you .... That's just surface level though. When are you going to start making money? Get out of my house.* (Nala, individual interview)

On the other hand, Edna's mother, a single mother to five children and who was also the primary caregiver for her grandson, was immensely supportive of Edna's educational and career aspirations.

> *I usually [only] work in the summers. My mom has this whole thing where she doesn't want me to work, so she always helps me. She's amazing. She would always help me, and then I would come home to Edmonton and work for the summer. And then go back to school. ... I volunteered last year when I was at [university] just because I wanted to be more involved, just to be around the school environment and see if I wanted to do it still.* (Edna, focus group 2)

Edna's mother worked two or three jobs in order to support her children and ensure their success, including encouraging them to become engaged with various community initiatives. In addition, Edna credits her mother for helping her deal with her clinical depression and finding her an alternate degree to pursue once she realized that a bachelor of education degree was not the right career path for her. For Edna, her mother – whilst not perfect – has been instrumental in helping her in her quest towards health and well-being.

A number of the young women described their parents, both mothers and fathers, as extremely supportive. However, they also shared that despite the extensive support they received from parents, they sometimes had to forge their own path.

> *I think regardless of what I choose to study, my parents would be proud of me as*

> *long as I did, as long as I live up to my full potential. … But I think my dad, sometimes he is a little too strict in his ways because I went to England for a semester abroad and my dad and my brother were like "Why would you do that. That is a waste of money. It's so expensive." But I need that for me; that is the best opportunity for me to travel that is more affordable because I don't have to pay tuition there, and I realized that as a woman I will be limited once I have kids. … I was like this is my opportunity. I should do this.* (Nyassa, focus group 1)

Nyassa is fully cognizant that as a woman, patriarchy has the potential to limit her opportunities. For Sahra, her identity as an African woman, as a Black Muslim woman must always be mediated, and her mother has been instrumental in advising her along the way.

> *My mom … knows about being a Black, Muslim woman, but there is different layers, levels, I guess, ways that the system will not let you through to certain things. So, she's still like "Do you still want to do dentistry? That is more stable. Like they always need dentists." ...My mom is kind of like "You are going to face discrimination; you are going to encounter this. So just pick something that is more stable, and you are going to have something at the end. You are going to be guaranteed something, a stable job and income…. I don't want to say that my dad is naïve but to a certain extent he is like everything is okay in the world; if you work hard then you are guaranteed something in the end. But my mom has seen the world; she's traveled. … Because I'm a woman, I'm Muslim, I'm Somali. My mom has encountered all of those things too. So, I'm sure her experiences have shaped her perspective on education.* (Sahra, focus group 1)

The advice Sahra has received from her mother is shaped by her understanding of the challenges Sahra will face as a result of her intersectional identity and the best ways to mitigate marginalization.

> *Even though the environmental industry is a booming sector right now because we are always going to have problems to fix, [my mom] always been like "I think that you should focus on a degree where you are guaranteed a job." ... My mom has always told me, you always have to be better, two or three times better than white people to get the same position – because I am a woman, because I am Black and a Muslim and also wear a hijab. So, it's like I'm the big elephant in the room, right. I stand out, especially in my classes. ...Dentistry … it's a medical based field, so I feel like with parents of color or immigrant parents, I feel like they believe… you are guaranteed a job because no one can sort of deny you from that. Because they are always going to need doctors and dentists, right? But in like a social field where they are going to give priority to a white male, for instance, there's always this fear of that you are going to be denied the job because you're different and people aren't going to accommodate for difference sometimes. In the medical field, you do see a lot more people of color whereas in the environment, it is very sparse and there aren't many people of color. I think*

> *it's breaking that glass ceiling, per se. Maybe I need to be that first Black Muslim woman who decides to pursue a career in Environmental Sciences in Alberta. I think my mom and my dad just want me to be secure in the job I get and have a solid income because they have heard of horror stories of other people of color who are denied jobs despite their qualifications.* (Sahra, individual interview)

These teachings from parents was also expressed by Felicia.

> *In terms of actual education and academics, … my parents always pushed me, saying that I have to work 25 times harder than anybody else because first I'm Black and I'm a woman. So, they always strived for me to be better than the best. So, I was getting a lot of push from home you know academic wise. So, if I brought home a 95%, they would say why didn't you get a hundred. what happened to the other 5%? … Standard immigrant talk. You just have to work harder than everybody else, whether it's in academics or leadership or sports. You have to prove yourself to be the best. That is kind of the mentality I carry through*. (Felicia, individual interview)

Felicia's parents' involvement in their daughter's education and career plans can also be explained by their concerns that her status as a Black woman will result in far greater challenges for her and their desire to help her mitigate those challenges to the best of their ability.

Knowing as resistance

The conversations with the young women yielded important findings with regards to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the various factors at play in the construction of their distinctive and respective identities. Furthermore, the young women all shared diverse understandings of knowledges they considered integral to their growth and that of future generations of African Canadian women.

Of the nine women, Azara was the most vocal regarding her deep desire to learn more about her cultural and ethnic heritage. Azara contended that the learning of such knowledge is extremely powerful.

> *Let's say you are an identity but you are overpowered by another dominant identity or you were colonized before. The knowledge that you passed down is really important. Like my parents are not political, and I had to do all my research. I mean political is what people say it is but really it's just historical knowledge that you should know, or historical knowledge that is just important and that is your right but it is looked down upon or it is labeled political. Because when you act upon these things, you are resisting whatever dominant identity that is being put upon you.* (Azara, focus group 1)

Azara articulates the importance of understanding one's cultural and ethnic heritage as an act of resistance and anti-colonialism.

While Azara is focused on resistance and engaging in decolonizing and anti-colonial practices, a number of the other participants are more focused on explaining how they can engage in such practices while continuing to exist in a society that normalizes the marginalization of racialized peoples, in particular Black/ African Canadians. For numerous participants, such resistance starts with critical thinking. Nyassa credits her years in university with teaching her to think critically. While Felicia and Sahra disagreed with Nyassa's contention that university had taught them critical thinking skills, they agreed that such skills were imperative for not only surviving life but also improving it for many and taking up an educator role with regards to teaching about oppression. Nyassa's anecdote regarding a friend engaging in blackface provoked a conversation around the responsibility that these young women have often felt forced to take up.

> *Sahra: Why do I have to explain it? Why is it my responsibility to inform them.*
> *Azara: I think it is not our responsibility but we have to do it because if we don't do it who is going to do it.*
> *Felicia: And because it's not really integrated into our education system. … I think for Black people and a lot of different cultures and colors all around the world, their history is never told. So, I don't really have the expectation for a lot of people to know why blackface is offensive or you know even why the N word is offensive. … Maybe the education system should teach more about African and African American history or more about Indian history and Asian history and Chinese history,… not just give the white perspective and Aboriginal history. Obviously, [Aboriginal] history is very important because this is their land but this is a pluralistic society. There are other people who have come here and said we are going to make Canada our home. So, why can't our story be told as well.*

These young women, then, take up the burden of having to educate anyone they come in contact with because our formal education system is severely lacking with regards to teaching about the diversity of peoples that constitute Canada. This is also evident from Felicia's assumption that Aboriginal history is given the same status as British and French history in Canada; in actuality, that is most often not the reality.

The task to be educators has been taken up by these young research participants, as Edna and Maita illustrated with a discussion on consent wherein Edna shared some of her conversations with her mother around sexual consent and rape. As Edna explained her interaction with her mother, Maita admitted to having a similar epiphany to Edna's

mother as she sat through a women's studies course. For Edna, these experiences along with others made her adamant that sexual education needed to be added to the program for a conference for racialized "*youth*". With the exception of Felicia, the other women all agreed that their knowledge regarding sex and sexual health comes from friends as opposed to parents, many of whom have never spoken to their daughters about these issues. As such, young women such as Edna and Maita are attempting to fill this educational gap through their involvement in community initiatives and projects.

It was interesting to witness the focus group conversations. At several instances, the young women carried out entire conversations without any interruptions from me. Their continuous back and forth as they engaged one another, debated, and extended each other's points illustrated the importance of critical thinking in action. It is apparent that for these young women, learning is an ongoing process that occurs continually as a result of constant critical reflection.

Young Black women's struggles for justice

Speaking to the nine young women led to some important results. All nine women indicated that their experiences with marginalization and oppression influenced their own social justice work. While the extent of their involvement varied due to a number of factors, all nine women illustrated a deep commitment to improving the lives of others, especially marginalized "*youth*" and regardless of a shared "Black" or African Canadian identity.

Nyassa, Azara, and Sahra reiterated their belief that many of the issues faced by African Canadians is a result of systemic and structural racism which also affects other racialized groups, in particular Indigenous peoples of Canada. For Nyassa, this means being an ally, opening her mind and challenging her own stereotypes to see how she may be reinforcing them and "*being part of the system that oppresses*" (Nyassa, focus group 1). Azara agrees and points out that it is important to be aware of the role of colonialism in many of the issues people face, including ethno-cultural and tribal tensions that migrate with diasporic populations. However, they also agree that diaspora has the potential to have a positive impact in that it provides a shared language – English – through which people can communicate and discuss the problems they face. For these young women, being diaspora is an opportunity for solidarity.

The nine participants were outstanding and engaged in their respective communities in diverse ways that allowed them to engage in work that was meaningful to them but that was also related to their own desires for career mobility. As the President of an organization working towards female empowerment, Felicia's impetus for getting involved was the recognition of the extent of sexual assault on university campuses. During her time on the executive, she attempted to widen the mandate of the group, taking up issues such as female genital mutilation in other countries. Interestingly, this cause created some tension in the organization.

> *We did a lot of things relating to being Black and not a lot of things generally related to being a woman. So, there was definitely that conflict with are we a Black female group and are we just a feminist group. … Women of color have a completely different struggle and a completely different story than white females. … Various issues going on all around us, and we as women in North America really want to talk about free the nipple.* (Felicia, focus group 1)

Felicia's argument is important because as Sahra reminded us all, "*free the nipple*" is not seen as an issue in African or most African Canadian cultures. Caring for a child and breastfeeding are not issues that African Canadians have had to fight for, as it is already accepted practice within their communities.

The conversation also referenced the fight for equal wages for men and women and the argument that women earn 77 cents for every dollar a man earns for the same job. Felicia once again critiqued this argument by reasoning that, in fact, these numbers were only accurate for white women and once again excluded women of colour. Felicia and her three focus group compatriots maintained that wage equality is actually an argument which is irrelevant as first; it does not really consider the issues facing racialized peoples – regardless of gender – and second, is based on the belief that capitalism can be altered to be neither patriarchal nor colonial.

While Felicia, Azara, Nyassa, and Sahra appeared to be in agreement during the focus group and their individual interviews regarding the aims of female empowerment, other participants were more focused on survival within the capitalist system. For Layla, who immigrated to Canada at seventeen years old and who has faced different struggles upon immigrating, her energies have been focused on working with an organization that will help young people who faced similar struggles as her through a mentorship program

for young racialized peoples. As someone who immigrated to Canada later in her educational career – in grade eleven – and who had limited networks, this type of support was deemed much more important than for those young people who had had much more time to cultivate the networks and relationships to meet those needs.

The degree of commitment given by these young women towards community engagement differed greatly. At the time of data collection, Azara was a university student and also working part time for an ethno-cultural organization. In her role as coordinator, Azara organized a number of community events, including a gender equity conference, a conference for racialized young people to speak about the challenges they face, an African celebration event as well as a series of conversation cafes with Edmonton Police Services (there were a number of other events planned that are not included in this list). Azara described the mandate of these projects as building *"unity among our communities. So, community building, … [creating] a strong relationship between the city and our youth, … and more involvement from our youth"* (Azara, individual interview). The young women are deeply committed to ensuring that the work they engage in resists colonialism by actively working towards decolonial and anticolonial practices.

> *Like the gender equity conference tomorrow, … we could have just done it looking at girls but then just talking about, inviting diversity, kind of like how it was last year. But this year it's like you have to talk about this, you have to talk about that; you have to include this. The facilitators are different and they have to be. Even the panel: I really wanted to see someone who is Black because I never see that type of diversity. [I see] everyone and then a Black person, everyone and then this. You know what I mean? … At least the moderator now is someone who is Black or having people of color as the majority in our entire conference – the makeup speakers or facilitators or even participants, is what we kind of hope for.* (Azara, focus group 1)

Later, after having learned lessons from the gender equity conference, Azara ensured that the next conference was organized in totality by racialized "*youth*" who came together to decide the aims and goals of the event.

> *This conference … is for us to talk about our challenges, the system, etc. The purpose of it is at the end anyways, the think tank that will have us develop our own program for ourselves after. So, we have the ability to lead these conferences or find whoever we need that has the ability to speak on it. And if we are unable to speak on this because we are the ones with the experience. So, if we are able to*

> *we'll speak on it. If not, we'll be able to facilitate it. So, it's us talking about these issues, not our professors, or whoever thinks they know about it. It's our experiences. So, we either speak on it or facilitate on it as well as in the think tank. We're coming up with the solution, and it's not someone older, someone else. ... Conferences are just usually white people talking about our issues. That bothers me.* (Azara, individual interview)

Azara's experiences illustrate that with each event, she gets pulled deeper into the world of social justice and community organizing. As a result of the weekly Friday meetings young community members take part in, a decision was made to engage with Edmonton Police Services (EPS) regarding a number of issues affecting African Canadian peoples with regards to the structural, systemic, and institutional racism in the justice system.

> *We did an EPS event, ... and we brought 60 community leaders together and youth. ... Kids from [Youth Emergency Services] came as well. ... They were able to question EPS. They were able to talk about personal experiences. [We had] anonymous questions from our youth and from Indigenous youth from YES. ... People were crying. I brought one girl whose brother was missing, labeled like high-risk. ... They didn't handle it in the best way for a homicide or for a missing and murdered youth, and they are still not saying that he's dead ... but we were able to connect her with the superintendent and the chief.* (Azara, individual interview)

Azara is the only young woman whose work with community organizing had become a career.

Sahra volunteered for two different organizations during the data collection period. She first sat on the board of an organization that supports student- and community- based research, education, and activism. Her decision to join the organization was partly the result of recognizing that a number of students in her program held deeply racist beliefs and wanting to be part of an organization that provided funding for anti-racist education and programming. After completing her term on the board, Sahra decided to join a second organization, one that was more likely to aid her in finding a job in her chosen career of Environmental Sciences.

> *We go around stickering light switches, reminding people to flip the switch and like reminding people to be more sustainable. I guess be more aware of like their ecological footprint at a global stage scale*. (Sahra, individual interview)

Sahra describes her new volunteer position as less emotionally draining as her previous volunteer environment was extremely hostile towards racialized peoples and not safe or healthy for her emotional well-being.

Like Sahra, Nala's extra-curricular pursuits were initially about a desire to make friends as a new student in a university where she knew no one and later became connected to her education and career trajectory.

> *I became so passionate about education while in education, because I do feel that there is a level of motivation and knowledge that I have that I didn't realize that other education students don't have. ... I was taught a lot about how the program works. [As a student group member], I flew out to BC and saw and talked about education there in circles that blew my mind, about how big the concepts of education are and the way that it's different in the West Coast. Then I flew to Winnipeg the following year and did a presentation there. ... Without the [student group], I wouldn't have been funded and sponsored to do those things and to have those conversations with people and to gain that perspective ... on like the mosaic of multiculturalism that really doesn't exist and diasporic narratives as well as the lack of representation in education. ... It essentially has given me a lot of microphone time. ... That's why I want to work in curriculum.* (Nala, individual interview)

Nala contends that she is often given opportunities to speak as a result of her minority status in a space where very few racialized peoples exist. However, having held a two hour conversation with Nala, it became evident that Nala is both highly accomplished as well as extremely articulate, and unafraid to speak openly about lack of representation and the problematic lack of onto-epistemological diversity within her faculty.

The young women's forays in community organizing and social justice work tended to be organized around their own educational and career interests as well as their personal experiences in order to alleviate similar problems for future generations. It was interesting to note that even though the interviews occurred while there were two major elections occurring, the 2015 Albertan provincial election and 2015 Canadian federal election, only one of the participants was engaged with formal politics. Edna discussed her involvement in the federal election where she was volunteering for a Black woman who was running to become a Member of Parliament. Edna responded to my query as to whether she felt a greater urge to volunteer for a Black woman by admitting that while she was initially interested due to a shared racialized identity, many other factors influenced her decision.

> *The[y] … have like 45 women [running for] positions right now as opposed to other people who have like 6 or 12. And the fact that she is a person of color also, but also based in what she cares about, like Aboriginal rights. She cares about immigration. She cares about environmental issues. And that is all things that I think that we should focus on right now because global warming is a real issue. Animals being extinct that is a real issue. So, in that sense I'm all down.* (Edna, focus group 2)

Edna's response makes it clear that while representation is important to young women whether it be in politics or in the classroom, their support is predicated on more than a shared racialized identity and must also incorporate a shared worldview.

Community engagement: A response and resistance to marginalization

In search for community: A Black collective

The focus groups and interviews with participants indicated that many of the young women had embarked on their various community engagements as an attempt to meet their own desire to be a part of a group of likeminded peoples and in the hopes of forging connections, networks, and friendships.

For a few of the participants, their community engagements were linked to a need to build deeper cultural and ethnic connections. Azara first connected with the ethno-cultural organization she is now employed with when she approached the organization's director regarding a potential project in Eritrea. While her initial inquiry did not pan out, Azara took up the director's suggestion to volunteer which led her to becoming more involved in a number of locally based activities for diasporic "*youth*," including a series of conversation cafes. The conversation cafes indicated that young people were interested in creating a separate but connected coalition, which Azara then helped establish and run. Azara's initial inquiry regarding a potential project in Eritrea appears to be connected to her desire to cement the link she feels to her heritage and possibly establish even closer ties. The desire to retain stronger cultural connections is also shared by Layla who revealed that most of her friends are fellow Ethiopian Canadians, and her decision to take part in events such as Heritage Days is connected to a desire to feel closer to her Ethiopian culture.

Not being able to connect to her Ethiopian culture while living in Canada would result in sentiments of "*I'm Canadian too but I'm not really Canadian. I'm Ethiopian but*

not really Ethiopian. Who am I? Where do I belong" (Layla, individual interview). Layla believes that this lack of belonging would result in "*psychological conflict.*" Furthermore, Layla's experiences taught her that people come together to join community organizations that are identity based.

> *because people want to belong … somewhere accepting [of] their diversity and just appreciating it. … I speak Amharic, and the person next to me might speak Congolese or French. The other one speaks KiSwahili so sometimes when we are having meetings two people are sitting here and they start speaking in their Swahili, and we start speaking in Amharic and they start speaking in French. So even [there], people still try to connect with their own people. … It's appreciating the differences.* (Layla, individual interview)

Subira affirms these sentiments shared by both Azara and Layla. For Subira, university offered her the opportunity to explore her African and Black identity, something she had not been able to do as her kindergarten until high school classes were composed predominantly of white students. For Subira, her participation in these organizations was due to a desire to learn more about who she was as an African Canadian and as a Black woman. A search for a sense of belonging appears to have lead Azara, Subira, and Layla to become engaged in these community organizations.

It is important to note that for those women who were also involved with community organizations such as Sahra, Felicia, Nyassa, and Edna, a sense of belonging was not their raison d'etre for involvement as they had strong cultural connections due to their parents' involvement with such organizations. As Felicia notes "*Well as a Nigerian, I've been sort of blessed in a way. We have such a strong diasporic community. … I've always grown up with the knowledge and the understanding and the integration into my Nigerian roots."* For Edna, her mother's involvement with the Sudanese Canadian community has helped her retain strong ties. As such, a strong sense of belonging to one's cultural heritage is seen as vitally important to the participants.

A number of the young women stressed that their involvement with community organizations had the added benefit of widening their networks. Nala admitted that her initial desire to join a student group was not the result of wanting to be involved in student politics but in order to make friends. It was through her involvement with the group that she became more politicized. Layla's interest in joining a community organization was triggered, first, by wanting to create a greater sense of belonging and,

second, as a result of wanting to ensure that other young people were spared some of the problems she had had to deal with. Layla's decision to help create an organization for young people who had immigrated to Canada from Africa was based on the decision to offer support and tools that could help young people better integrate into life in Canada and to have mentors who could provide knowledge and advice, especially with regards to educational planning.

This quest for belonging can sometimes create unexpected conflict, as attempting to bring together diverse peoples into one collective can often be fraught with tension. Azara shares her experiences with attempting to organize an event for Black artists.

> *An artist had emailed us. … of how we shouldn't identify ourselves as Black or a Black collective. … We've moved past that but [should] identify ourselves as African and Caribbean and the French Africana-Caribbean. I mean I don't go to her and tell her how to identify herself. Our entire collective, every single person there identifies as Black. … One of our questions is "Do you identify as Black?" We're not projecting this resistant Black energy or whatever it is that she's worried about. We're not trying to separate yourself from society. We are Black. Our entire experience of being here, we are Black. … So, us embracing that and loving ourselves and our blackness should never be put down. It's so stupid. At first, I was like … she's one of our elders; she's so great. … But then I was like you don't need to tell us how to identify ourselves. I'm more conscious now of including African and Caribbean but I've always been conscious of Indian African identities and Asian African identities, … making sure that there's visibility there. But I am not going to say that we are not a Black collective because we are. … We don't even speak on Caribbean experiences because we can't account for them. So, we're very careful. It's not like we're just throwing around terms.* (Azara, individual interview)

For these women, the work that they do often brings unintended consequences that they must learn to navigate and respond to.

Their engagement in community groups has resulted in all participants becoming more engaged and, therefore, critical of the status quo and led to greater interest in examining issues through the lenses of social and cognitive justice. Furthermore, participants such as Nala who did join more mainstream organizations found that issues related to racism and white supremacy were quite often still at play in the organizations' structures and processes. This led to disappointment regarding the inability of these organizations to live up their own institutional visions and aims to educate and work for equity and justice. Sahra was particularly disillusioned with the organization she was a

board member of; she had actually been recruited to the organization by one of its employees, a racialized woman. Sahra's decision to join the organization was due to the presence of this one racialized woman.

> *[She] made it a little safer because she was like a person of color, and she was a woman of color too. ... [She] has definitely experienced racism and things like that, and that is something that [the white employees] will never be able to experience. ... I feel like with [her] being there, it's almost like a security blanket. It's easier to open up and discuss things. She won't be confused or be like why are you so sensitive. I feel like she can relate to that so that was one of the reasons that I joined. And there were a lot of people of color too on the board.* (Sahra, individual interview)

As president of another student group, Felicia used her position and that of the vice-president, both of whom identified as African Canadian women, to push for the organization to work on issues related to racialized women, in particular women in Africa. However, other members of the executive as well as the membership did not agree and felt that a focus on these issues excluded them and more attention needed to be placed on issues relevant to "all" women living in Canada, referring to White women. As Sahra, Felicia, and Nala's experiences illustrate, while the presence of other racialized individuals may at times provide safe spaces in which to organize, educate, and build solidarity, it often cannot overcome the ways in which structural, institutional, and systemic racism continues to marginalize and oppress. Furthermore, it cannot overcome the entitled nature created by white supremacy.

Disengagement as resistance

As highlighted previously in this chapter, these young women navigate and negotiate complex relationships on a continual basis. As a result, they often find themselves in situations wherein the organizations they are involved in no longer meets their needs and in actuality are deeply harmful on both a personal level as well as at the institutional, systemic, or structural levels. At those times, a number of these women have had to make the difficult decision to disengage in order to ensure that their labour is not negatively affecting their emotional, physical, and psychological well-being.

Felicia's experiences as president of a student group offer an excellent starting point through which to begin to understand this issue.

> *I cannot be at the forefront of a group that is supposed to promote Western feminism. … White feminism is also based off of white privilege.* **…** *We had a very diverse executive team in terms of racial representation. … The white people … felt like their issues weren't being heard because I was like pushing more of things that affect POCs and they felt like it should be representative of all women, and I feel like you can never have an organization that represents all women because not all women go through the same experiences. …They wanted me to do more things with the LGBTQ community which is fair. They wanted me to focus things about like … free the nipple and stuff like that. So, it was things that … I didn't personally feel passionate about; I didn't feel that I could speak on. So, I felt it was better for me to just to step down from it. So, if they wanted to have someone who they felt was more fair to represent all women … like wage disparity and things like that. Yeah, it affects all women but I feel like that is still coming from an element of privilege.* (Felicia, individual interview)

This conversation became even more interesting when I learned that after Felicia had stepped down, no one had stepped up to take her place. There was an expectation by those who argued that the organization was not doing enough to represent "all women," in other words – White women – that a Black woman should be willing to expend her labour for issues that were not of importance to her. Yet once she stepped down, no one stepped in to take over and lead the organization into the direction that some had clearly been calling for. This raises important questions as to the labour expected of Black women by White women.

The issue of what is seen as acceptable with regards to diversity and education around diversity and removing structural, institutional, and systemic barriers is really at the centre of many of the issues faced by these young women. As Felicia acknowledged, part of the reason she was considered unfit to lead was because she was unwilling to focus on empowerment as related to LGBTQ rights; she reasoned that there were two other university organizations already dedicated solely to this mandate. Sahra's experiences with her organization illustrate that while she and other boards members openly engaged in a process of education with regards to learning more about queerness as well as expanding their understanding of sexuality, the educative process was not a two-way process. While the two white queer individuals employed by her organization wanted the board to become more educated about their identities, they themselves were not open to engaging in the same learning about their board members, with regards to gaining a better understanding of the process of racialization and the structures that

perpetuate racism. Sahra describes the resulting environment as "*hostile*." In this situation, it becomes very clear that the gap between the board members and employees was not an inability to be educated about and understand queer identities but an inability for the employees to understand how their whiteness continued to privilege them despite holding marginalized positions through their queer identities. The inner workings of this organization can be considered even more illustrative of the role of white supremacy when one realizes that the board is in actuality the bosses of the employees; yet, the board who are predominantly young racialized women are "*guided to the answers*" the employees want. This is further proof of the ways in which the knowledges of Black women like Sahra are marginalized.

For Sahra, it became very clear that this was not going to be a safe space, despite the presence of the one racialized employee who had encouraged her to join and who continued to support Sahra. Sahra, therefore, chose to disengage from the environment and find a space less harmful in which to expend her labour. In many ways, the attitudes of Sahra and Felicia's peers resulted in them losing their interest in continuing their community engagement work, thus reinforcing Subira's contention: "*I'm the type of person where if I'm not really interested in something I just don't; I zone out. I just don't do anything*" (Subira, focus group 3). As such, the only response possible when that occurs is to leave the situation as Maita did when she changed high schools for three months. The option to disengage often allowed the participants to re-evaluate and find new spaces in which to engage their energies and continue their work in healthier environments.

For some of the participants, however, disengagement was not an option, not because they were not disappointed with their treatment by fellow members or supervisors, but because they had played such integral roles in creating the organizations that they could not disengage if they felt it would hurt the organization's ability to do what they viewed as vitally important work. This was the case of Nala who even after losing the election to become president of a student group to a White woman with less experience continued to support the organization, including agreeing to stand as president the next year even though she simply did not have the time to give to both the position as well as her other commitments. Azara has found herself in a similar position in that she

has started to feel as though her organization has become too large to be run by just one person. Azara contends that her volunteers are simply not as committed as she is. However, as she explained the work they do, it also became clear that Azara was capable of seeing the potential of her ideas in ways very few people could. "*People are always like Azara, you're twenty steps ahead right now. ... I understand but it can be done in this, in this, and this way*" (Azara, individual interview). It is apparent that Azara has a gift that very few people have, as can be understand from Azara's explanation of the planning of a community conversation café with Edmonton Police Services wherein they purposefully invited individuals and groups who would never have such access and also changed the structure of the event to ensure that it was appropriate for the communities having to once again undergo trauma in order have their voices and concerns heard.

> *We were able to scratch like the whole structure and say that we want spoken word from like our community to start it, and then we want table talks. And they were saying "We want to police at each table so they're talking and stuff." I was like no, I don't think so. I wouldn't even talk to them if they were beside me. But we still met halfway, and it turned out to be great and that was something that we carried on to the next event. ... Even if they're going to give bullshit responses, it's better to have conversation. So, we had that. We had question and answer. We had our own versions of icebreakers. So, we got to know each person at the table. We strategically brought certain people. We brought some people from the Somali community. We've brought certain people who experienced missing their family members. ... They were able to speak on their experiences and like called out; they yelled. ... It was so public. And she needed that. ... One of the police, a young woman – she works more in the community, and she was like I never knew you guys experienced this and that. I was like "You're a liar." But it's okay. ... Because it was a start at least.* (Azara, individual interview)

In Azara's case, it becomes very clear that her organization would quite possibly cease to exist without her continued presence, as very few individuals have the skills to do such work and have not been mentored into these types of positions.

Nala's experiences with the arts community substantiated my assessment that Nala viewed disengagement as a statement and an act of resistance.

> *The arts community is an amazing and engaging one. ... Gaining the experience I have from the English part of my degree - that and the creative writing part and using it in a circle of other people passionate about their art, that is amazing. ... In that circle, I am Nala the poet. And then removing myself from that because I need to be a teacher, because I need to be still focusing on my studies is devalued by that group. Because the system is problematic. Because the system of*

> *education is problematic. So, for me to feed into that is - it's the same thing as if it's high school again.* (Nala, individual interview)

Nala's choice of which community to disengage from has been purposeful, and the subsequent response from the arts community has forced her to move even further away. Yet, one can see that the arts community is already populated with a number of people not very different from Nala. She is not needed in that community to the extent that she is needed in education and teaching spaces. It became apparent after my brief conversations with Nala and Azara, that these two women, in particular, were aware that should they leave their community organizations, that the work they had started would not continue and that they must first put structures in place which would allow the initiatives and processes they have put into effect to continue.

Decolonial and anti-colonial resistance

I would contend that these young women are attempting to engage in decolonial and anti-colonial resistance. Azara openly states this as her mandate.

> *[We are] different from … all these integration based [groups]. … [We] focus on decolonization. All of us in our backgrounds are different, and the conversations we have are completely different. … That is what I want – … to be able to take a platform on equity, decolonization, education, career development. That's why these people need to be organized so that we can start doing action-based work. … I just want to be able to say: this is how we are changing the school system; this is what we are doing for this. These safe spaces for white kids need to be abolished. That room needs to go.* (Azara, individual interview)

Nala sees her presence in a predominantly white education and career space, as an opportunity to use her voice to call for diversity, not simply in terms of the skin colour of educators but also in terms of their worldviews and the curriculum content. Sahra has transferred her learnings around social and cognitive justice from her first community volunteer organization and is now a member of a different community space; she is learning how to navigate as a Black woman in a space that does yet view Black women as "worthy." Edna has chosen to engage through involvement in formal politics by volunteering in the campaigns of Black women who share her worldviews and political outlook. Edna argues that representation is an important step towards equity and social and cognitive justice. Subira has engaged in a continual process of unlearning and learning, working through the traumatic realization that she has no connection to her

ethno-cultural identity and feeling a need to unlearn the white, Christian values that she was brought up in. Subira has also immersed herself in relearning her roots, in rediscovering her connections to her brother back in Ethiopia, and in reclaiming aspects of her African and Black identity as she realizes that her dual identities are a combination of all these aspects of her history, ethnicity, citizenships, and gender.

The experiences of these young women and the importance of their community organizations in the production of these diverse identities illustrate the significance of these institutions in the lives of the participants. Yet, these organizations face tremendous challenges in their attempts to carry out such important work. Azara contends that organizations such as hers which are operated by a group of young Black/ African Canadians – all of whom with the exception of her are volunteers – could not exist without the support (financial, institutional, and structural) of a larger, more recognized institution. Nala, Felicia, and Sahra were all members of organizations that fall under the mandate of their respective post-secondary institutions. Edna was volunteering on a political campaign for a candidate of a national political party. It is ironic that these young women, all of whom, speak of the ways in which they have been marginalized by the system, continue to see potential for change – decolonial and anti-colonial change – through the very institutions that perpetuate colonialism and marginalization. The question to be asked is if this is a response of hope or an inability to rethink the world outside of its current strictures and constructs?

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the responses and resistances to injustice, marginalization, and oppression that impact the lives of African Canadian women. The young women participants addressed the ways in which living in a liberal democracy has offered them a degree of freedom from the burdens of patriarchy. In addition, participants discussed their negotiations and mediations of the capitalist and colonial state structures in order to counteract the injustices endemic to how the state functions; this knowledge was also shared with the larger community, enabling a more engaged and educated community. Young women and their communities utilized these knowledges to engage in a decolonial resistance that challenged colonialism, patriarchy, and the knowledge economy. The young women also discussed the role parents and families played in career and education

plans; conflict between young people and parents was much greater when parents paid for their children's education as young people found that their choices were narrowed as a result of the financial involvement of their parents. The young women responded to the limitations placed on them by their families as well as their other educational experiences by indicating that the problem was a larger structural issue wherein the knowledges learned in formal education must be diversified. The young women's varied experiences with marginalization and injustice as a result of larger forces of colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism significantly influenced their commitment to working on issues of justice at various levels: political, community, and family. Their wide-ranging practices of engagement and disengagement revealed their extensive search for community, belonging, and justice. This chapter illustrated the ways in which young African Canadian women subvert and resist injustice and marginalization. In chapter seven – the final chapter outlining findings from this study – I turn my attention to the role of formal and informal education in building community and resistance as well as the participants' quest for justice.

Chapter 7: Data Chapter III – Role(s) of Formal and Informal Education in the Lives of Young African Canadian Women

Introduction

The deep exchanges with the research participants through interviews and focus groups allowed me to gain a profound understanding of their varied life experiences, understandings of the world, and they ways in which they negotiated, mediated, resisted, and challenged interlocking systems of oppression and domination. The knowledges produced through these encounters provided a number of themes for analysis; of particular significance was the role played by formal and informal education in the lives of the participants and in their responses to and navigation of interlocking systems of oppression. The data suggests that the young women participants were becoming increasingly more aware of the importance of cultural, traditional, and Indigenous knowledges as well as informal process of education in shaping their lives and also their communities as well as the connections among education, resistance, and injustice. This chapter focuses on the erudite young women's observations and learnings around the interlocking of informal education, Indigenous knowledges, and racial and material injustice.

Formal and Informal Education in the Lives of Young African Canadian Women

This chapter outlines 1) the young women's understandings of indigeneity and Indigenous knowledges; 2) understandings of how class, capitalism, liberalism, and neoliberalism structure their lives and society; and 3) their learnings from and responses to anti-blackness and injustice. While the young women did initially disclose their negative perceptions around Indigenous knowledges, they also related a desire to learn more about their cultural histories and traditions and spoke about the oral traditions and stories which had been passed down to them through intergenerational relationships. However, as the young women shared, their access to such knowledges were often mediated through their ancestral languages and noted that time would only further hasten the loss of these knowledges as each successive generation was also losing their language. The young women also shared the ways in which Indigenous, cultural, and traditional knowledges were passed down from their mothers, grandmothers, and women

in their communities through their conscious and unconscious teachings, in particular around their navigation of Black womanhood.

Understandings of Indigeneity, Indigenous knowledge systems, and culture

At first when we began to discuss the concept of Indigenous knowledges, it was interesting to see that many of the initial comments were not dissimilar to what one would hear from the mainstream with the conversation centred around witch doctors and curses. While that can certainly be one aspect of how Indigenous knowledges are understood, witch doctors or medicine men/ medicine women are in actuality healers and can hold important knowledges that have been devalued through colonialism and western hegemony. It is interesting to note that for the young women participants in this study, this non-formal knowledge is considered inferior to medicine as understood within Canadian society.

The young female participants' understandings of traditional forms of medicine and healing appeared to conflate Indigenous knowledges and culture and see both as pre-modern and as the views of uneducated peoples.

> *During winter break last year, I went back to Nigeria. I spent most of my time in the city … and I spent Christmas with my grandparents in my father's village. When you are in Lagos, especially when you are in Victoria Island which is the more developed part, it is literally the same or better than living here. So, you are really around affluence and money and just extravagance. But the moment, I stepped into the village, it was a culture shock for me. Even certain mentalities: … in terms of health care, … people would still do things like go to a witch doctor, and I can never imagine telling my children "go to a witch doctor". If someone got sick, it's like some spirit or someone cursed you, … [not] maybe you got a bacterial infection.* (Felicia, focus group 1)

Sahra shares a similar belief system held by family members living in Canada.

> *My grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2005. At first people thought it was evil eye. They used to read the Quran on her. They thought "Oh someone has like cursed her." But only like when it progressed and got really, really bad, to the point where she can't use the washroom by herself and she doesn't even eat anymore, … my mom was like "Oh wait maybe she does have Alzheimer's because her mother was forgetful as well." I think that [those beliefs] has definitely migrated. A lot of people still do believe like if someone gets sick, it's because someone was jealous of you and they gave you an indirect curse.* (Sahra, focus group 1)

The young women demonstrate a tendency to dismiss the knowledges that come from traditional forms of medicine. Their opinions imply that because certain viewpoints are not valid, all knowledges that comes from these sources – such as traditional healers – are circumspect and devalued.

The participants brought up a number of issues that were impacting their communities. Both Edna and Maita spoke about mental health and the refusal of other African Canadians to see the issue as a crisis within African Canadian communities.

> *It's like a mentality that a lot of Africans have – that whole idea that you can pray it away. … They just don't think that exists within our culture. … It happened to my sister. And then after her, my mom realized it actually is an illness. So, with me she was a lot more different in terms of approaching it because she was really great with me.* (Edna, focus group 2)

There exists a conviction that mental health issues are a choice, and if individuals are strong enough, they can will it away or pray it away. There is little acknowledgement that mental health and depression are medical issues, requiring medical intervention. The female participants link the belief systems around mental health to cultural and religious beliefs and, therefore, as one more strike against Indigenous knowledge as it connects to health and medicine.

However, these young women do not dismiss all forms of Indigenous knowledges. Nyassa discusses her learnings from a university course.

> *I took a course last semester, and it was talking about women in Latin America. At the beginning of the course, we learned about precolonial history. I think it was Mayan people. … They believed that the world was a cycle so disease and all that was brought on by not respecting the gods or giving offerings to the Gods. And it's funny because …to me, that kind of made sense to me because I believe that how we are treating the earth and how we are extracting resources, that breeds diseases and other things. So even though logically that doesn't make sense, that isn't spiritual, but I believe that it's true. That's like how people were living before and now we're seeing these global warming issues and all this other stuff. It makes sense to me. So, I think Indigenous knowledge is very powerful because that is how people were living before industrial revolution and it was good for the earth. They were in tune with that. But then with colonialism and imperialism people said no, that's backwards; let's not do that.* (Nyassa, focus group 1)

Nyassa contends that having the opportunity to take such courses allowed her to learn and think critically about how people understand themselves and engage relationally. In her

experience, African studies (along with the colonial history) taught in Canada tends to be sensationalized and is often taught by White instructors. This experience led Nyassa to question why racialized peoples, in particular Black peoples, never own their histories and why these stories, histories, and knowledges are being retold and taught by those who are outside the communities they are studying, researching, and teaching about.

The young female participants do connect Indigenous knowledges to oral storytelling as represented by the oral histories, stories, and folk tales passed down over generations.

> *I am Eritrean, and we were colonized by the Ethiopian peoples. ... I think it is important to know that kind of history because yes there was European colonialism but there is all the stuff that is swallowing up so much beautiful history that I should know about myself, that you should know about your roots. ... People here forget where they come from and just kind of conform to the dominant identity of being Habesha, like it's all the same anyway. But when you go back home whether it be the capital or you're going into the villages, people know everything. It doesn't need to be written. ... That type of history is really important, that we disregard here. ... I knew my tribe. I knew my language, and I knew that it was different from Amharic which is the dominant language within Ethiopia itself. ...So, I researched on my own because it was a political thing that my parents didn't really want me to be involved in. ... When I would go back home I would ask and everyone had those answers. ...There are means of learning here but it is not as powerful as asking our grandparents back home.* (Azara, focus group 1)

This desire to know and learn more about one's history and culture is shared by other participants.

> *When I was younger, my parents used to tell us stories too. Not necessarily about our history but my mom used to make up stories. I just assumed that they were based in Africa, the names and the setting. The sad thing is I don't know my family history very well. I only know up to my grandparents on each side. But I think I've learned more by being curious and through the internet. Because when I learned about* ***hotntot venus*** *and how people were so fascinated by her genitalia and her labia being elongated, I went and asked my mom about this. Did you know this happens? And she said "Yah, we do this too, in our group too." So, questions like that.* (Nyassa, focus group 1)

Nyassa and Azara's experiences highlight the desire among the young women to learn more about their cultural histories and traditions, which is often challenging for diasporic young peoples living thousands of miles away from those peoples who hold and have the capacity to share such knowledges. Furthermore, political turmoil and war in either the

participants' or their parents' places of birth has impacted the knowledges, histories, and stories they have access to. As Nyassa points out, the refugee experience meant that families fleeing war and instability were unable to collect family photos or documents. This severely impacts the participants' access to intergenerational knowledge. Yet, participants clearly desired access to this knowledge. As Nyassa, acknowledges, when she cannot find out the information regarding her own family or tribe she "*imagine[s] things and take pieces from other cultures and kind of make that my own*." Other participants, such as Felicia and Sahra, note that growing up around a robust population from their origin countries has provided opportunities to learn about their culture and traditions without facing the same struggles as Azara or Nyassa. Sahra describes these oral traditions as a pedagogical tool through which she can learn and better understand, her history, culture, religion, ethnicity, family life, and mother tongue.

> *We don't really write down much. It's just passed down from your grandma or your mother. That's where I've learned a lot of things. It's through storytelling and my mom telling me stories of Somalia and when she had to leave when she was nine because of the war. Or from my grandmother, telling me old folk tales or storytelling when I was younger. Most of it was passed down in our mother tongue. ... They helped me realize, because I spent most of my younger years moving around a lot so there was a disconnect between where am I from, where was I born. I was born in India but I'm not Indian. ... So, I guess [the stories] reaffirmed my identity. ... It shaped who I am today.* (Sahra, focus group 1)

Oral storytelling has, therefore, become one of the only ways in which to educate young racialized peoples as these knowledges not only do not exist in other formats but would lose their impact. Sahra shares her younger sister's experiences; while Sahra's younger sister understands the Somali language, she has not had the same exposure to the stories Sahra learned from her mother and grandmother. As such, her connection to her culture, identity, systems of knowing, seeing, and being have been influenced by the lack of existence of the familial intergenerational relationship through which such narratives are mediated.

For a number of the young women, language was an integral factor with regards to their continued connection to their cultures, to learning and being recipients and holders of such knowledges, and to ensuring that these knowledges could be passed on to future generations.

> *With language, I know I won't forget it completely. But when I hear some words. … I'm like wait what does that mean? I used to know what it meant but now it's too much of a complicated word for me to understand or remember. … I've only been here for like 6 years and let's add another six years, and I'm going to forget some of the words. … And when I try to write my own language, … I just get stuck. … And I think for me it might not be that bad because like I said most of my teenage years were back home but for people who come at an earlier stage, it can be really difficult because they might even really completely forget the language. … I'll tell you about this person that I met. … We could tell that he is … Ethiopian. But he wasn't in a good place in life. … He is dependent on maybe some medicine and he has to just stay in the care of someone and he is having a hard time on the streets. … And he said, "If I knew the language or the culture, at least I would be able to connect to people here" but right now … he has no one. …And I just made me realize "if this person knew even some Amharic or whatever, then I would just take him to connect him with other people and then he would just be able to form a sense of [community] because that's all he needs right. … So, that made me realize wow I am so lucky to know the language, the culture, everything and how important it is.* (Layla, individual interview)

Layla's fears about the loss of language can be seen through the experiences of Subira who was adopted from Ethiopia at the age of six by a family who did not speak Amharic. Subira expressed a deep regret over what she saw not only as an inability to communicate in Amharic but as connected to the loss of her culture, roots, and history and noted a desire to relearn her native language. For Layla, these experiences have instilled a commitment to retaining her native language capacity.

> *I watch movies from back home. … There are all these new words that they have created, those street slangs or whatever it is. The young people you know they like to play with words. So now I'm like I don't understand some of the words. So, I have to keep up. … All the street language. … It's almost like a new language.* (Layla, individual interview)

Felicia, Azara, Sahra, and Edna also described the importance of the continued use of their mother tongues in their communications with family and ethno-cultural communities as well as with regards to their connection to their identities, cultures, and systems of being and knowing.

> *My parents are always like you have to speak [Somali]. They try to speak to us in Somali. Actually, they always do, especially if they are angry. So, it is very important. When I was younger my grandma always used to tell us these old folk tales and stories, sort of like Little Red Riding Hood but Somali versions of it. So, I definitely grew up appreciating that. My mom wears traditional clothing. She always speaks Somali to her siblings and to us too, and we also have to speak*

> *Somali because my grandmother only speaks Somali.* (Sahra, individual interview)

For these young women, folk tales and oral storytelling offer a way to connect to their cultures, place of origin, and heritage. In many cases, language capacity is equated with having access to this knowledge as it often loses meaning when translated.

For the majority of these young women, there exists a distinct connection between culture and their understandings of Indigenous knowledges. Both Layla and Sahra spoke at length about the connections between culture, traditional knowledges, and food. Layla conveys that an important cultural act is performing the coffee ceremony where the making of coffee is a process – beginning with the roasting of coffee beans, grinding the beans (by hand or with a coffee grinder), steeping the coffee over hot coals, and finally serving it. A traditional coffee ceremony includes three rounds wherein with each successive round, the coffee becomes weaker. This is a ceremony as there exists a protocol which tends to be followed. The art of the coffee ceremony is passed down over generations by women and is a knowledge held and acted upon by women.

It is important to note that many of the women indicated that as females, much of the responsibility around food and cooking fell to them, and they were predominantly tasked with the duty to feed family members, relatives, and guests. This expectation did not change with their residence in Canada. However, as most of the young women indicated, they also tended to get reprieves from household chores such as cooking if they were in school as education was of utmost importance.

> *My mom is "You know what: I see how busy you are." So, she is totally okay with doing everything by herself. She's like "you know what go study." If I have to get up early, "go sleep; it's okay, I'll do this." I am very lucky that I have a supportive family but there are expectations. If I wasn't going to school or something. My brother … maybe he's expected to do the dishes but not like cook, not even take out the food from the fridge and warm it up.* (Layla, individual interview)

This focus on education at the expense of other learnings and responsibilities is also described by other participants such as Sahra and Edna. What is interesting is that many of the young women indicated that their mothers had reprieved their daughters from household duties in order to allow them to concentrate on school; the young women noted that their exemptions from domestic caretaking was often regarded as parental

support for their daughters educational success while mothers who released their sons from such duty did not view it as providing additional support to their sons. This depicts the inherently patriarchal nature of many families while also illustrating that mothers understand that young women require such support in order to ensure educational success.

An important finding from this research has been the belief among young women that their respective cultures teach women to take care of themselves and does not do this for men. Furthermore, formal education now means that women are being educated in both similar ways to men and as well as in additional ways with regards to the non-formal/ informal learnings they receive. Layla contends that while this is true, it is a result of male privilege "*because they know that someone else is going to take care of them. … If your mom is not there, then your sister is there. If your sister is not there, then your girlfriend or your wife is there*." While these young women do depict some antagonism towards cultures that place greater expectations on them as a result of their identities as women, they also argue that their experiences of hardship, of struggle, of having to overcome patriarchy, racism, poverty have helped them to grow. "*It helped me a lot in terms of growth. … The last three years were really hard on me but in terms of building my strength, my confidence and now I know who I am*" (Edna, focus group 2). These young women equate the struggles they have had to face with the building of character, believing that they are now stronger and more capable of handling the difficulties of life. What is apparent from the interviews is that while these women lament some of the hardships they face, they see them as inevitable. They view each successive struggle and triumph as part of the process of living their lives on their accord, of never giving into racism, colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy.

Our conversations also illustrated that many of these young women's self-determination is learned from their families, in particular their mothers. While their mothers are often agents of patriarchy, their experiences and knowledges illustrate the complex ways in which they have learned to negotiate and resist patriarchy and capitalism. This can be seen from Layla's narration of a conversation with her mother.

> *I think [my mom] does believe that the woman is supposed to cook and serve the husband. She even says even in the Bible it says the woman is there to help the guy or something like that. … But one day I asked her do you have work*

> *tomorrow? And she said, "Yeah, I have work at home, unpaid." And I was like "Oh, that's true; you're right." And then she said well what can you do, it's always been this way for women, right…. The only difference is now women are also expected to work outside of home at the same time as men do and still expected to work at home. And she's like that's because the men started controlling the women, and the women said enough is enough. I am going to go out and take control of my own financial goals, financial needs but they still have to do this house work. She doesn't see it as a negative thing but at the same time she knows why it is this way. Sometimes she works all day and she comes home and she still has to work, and she's like yeah all women do this; I'm no different.* (Layla, individual interview)

Layla's mother decision to join the formal labour force is connected to a desire to untie herself from patriarchal constraints wherein men who are the sole income earners control women whose work at home is often devalued and unpaid. A number of other participants articulated similar teachings from their mothers regarding the importance of financial independence. Nala, Felicia, Sahra, Nyassa, Edna, and Maita all shared similar sentiments put forward to them by their mothers. For Edna, this is further evidence of the strength of African women.

> *Older Africans have this – especially the women – have such a strong marble view of life that they're just so strong. They always know the alternatives, options within anything. ... That's what I seen from my mom and that's what I see in a lot of African women.* (Edna, focus group 2)

The young women, regardless of conflicts within their families, tended to appreciate the sacrifices they believed their mothers and other women of African descent had made for their families.

The participants also indicated holding a number of disparate views from their parents and families. While the majority of the young women appreciated the interest their parents had in their education and career decisions, conflict emerged as a result of differing worldviews, in particular around issues related to social, economic, political, cultural, and cognitive justice. Felicia, Sahra, and Azara viewed their parents' generation as lost.

> *I honestly feel that our parents' generation is lost. ... I remember when the Mike Brown incident happened, when the police officer ... was never charged, and I was having a discussion with my parents. ... "This is so disgusting. This was an 18 year old boy. He was 40 feet away. He got shot point-blank. This and that." And my parents are like "Do you know why were his pants sagging?" And I was*

> *like "that is beside the point". And my parents were going on this whole tangent, "If the police says, you should put your hands up, you should put your hands up. If the police say you should jump, you should say how high. This and that." But I am like people are doing this but evidence has shown that people are still getting shot down. It is not a thing about you obeying or disobeying the police, it's a thing about you not being valued in the system. And we had this whole two hour debate about this. And I just realized that our mentalities are polar opposite, and they are not going to change that. They already see the world as a certain way.* (Felicia, focus group 1)

Sahra shared a similar conversation she had had with her father.

> *I had that conversation with my dad. And my dad is like, "Yah, but they're always doing this and that." I'm like but do you understand why they're doing that, like? And I think my Dad is just "If you work hard enough. If you invest time into school everything is going to work out for you." There's different levels of racism and things like that. But he's like if you work hard enough... He's still living the American dream.* (Sahra, focus group 1)

While Nyassa agrees that the conversation should not be around victim blaming individuals such as Mike Brown, she also recognizes that many parents are attempting to prevent such incidents from impacting their own families through their reactions. Nyassa contends that parental responses are often reflective of their upbringing and experiences. As such, Nyassa disagrees that they are a "lost generation," arguing that they see the world differently as a result of their experiences. Azara, however, does not agree with Nyassa's analysis.

> *There's a video on facebook. … And he is preparing his children to not fulfill those stereotypes but I think that if it's systematic or institutional, it's hard. This is still your skin; you're still that identity, and they're still going to treat you as that or paint you as that or... You fit that identity. It's like you're still a target you know. My parents say the exact same thing. If they had sons, it would be the same thing. But I feel like I would rather that we resist than like being what they want us to be. That's what they want, and they'll still kill us for that. They'll still target us for that.* (Azara, focus group 1)

Their parents appear to be acquiescing to the "politics of respectability" (Alexander, 2012, p. 227); However, as Roberts (1994) notes, their blackness places all Black/ African Canadian peoples "beyond the bounds of respectability" (p. 227; cited in Maynard, 2017, p. 13). The female participants appear to concur with Roberts (1994) and Maynard (2017), as they understand the issues they and other racialized peoples are

dealing with, in particular Black men and women, can only be rectified through systemic and structural change. As such, the responses from parents are often met with respectful incredulity as they would not allow young people to engage in any form of resistance to bring about change and are a response for survival as opposed to justice.

Understandings of how class, capitalism, liberalism, and neoliberalism structure their lives and society

The focus groups and interviews with the participants yielded significant data around their experiences as racialized African Canadian women while also delineating their observations of the role of local, national, and global economic, social, political, and governance structures on their lives. In reviewing the participants' comments, it becomes clear that class, capitalism, liberalism, and neoliberalism are tandem forces, working in conjunction with one another to influence the lives and systems of being, seeing, and knowing of peoples.

As articulated by the young female participants, every aspect of their lives is mediated via these forces. Felicia, Sahra, and Azara's explorations of the experiences of their siblings highlight this. Felicia, Sahra, and Azara sees a distinct generational gap between the experiences of their younger siblings as compared to their own. As voiced by Felicia, her sister who is seven years younger than her, grew up in an environment that included many middle- and upper middle- class people of colour. The growing numbers of racialized peoples with rising class privilege has the capacity to inoculate those with such privilege from the harsher realities of everyday racism and discrimination. In some cases, class differences, then, can either exacerbate or ameliorate – as in this case – oppression and marginalization.

Furthermore, Felicia's sister's class privilege appears to allow her to perform blackness in a manner acceptable to her white peers. Subira, on the other hand, had a different experience of high school in that she attended a high school where students came from a variety of class backgrounds. Her fellow Black Canadian/ African Canadian peers did not appear to share her class privilege, and she viewed their performance of blackness as antithetical to her own interests.

> *The only Black people were just like the ESL [students], like the newcomers, and there were only like three of them. And then there were the gangster Black group,*

> *the ones who think they are tough. There were maybe three of them. And then the ratchet ones, maybe three of them, and I just didn't fit in with any of them. … I tried to sit as far away from those girls so that no one would associate me with them. It was so bad. So, in high school there was never a Black group of people that I wanted to chill with. I just didn't fit.* (Subira, focus group 3)

For Subira, it was not until university when she met other Black/African Canadians with similar social and class backgrounds, that she was able to make connections and create meaningful relationships with other young Black/ African Canadians. This is also partly due to her own upbringing with white parents who were not members of a larger Black/African Canadian community, which differs from the experiences of the other participants.

The interlocking/intersecting of race and class and of colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism plays out not just in personal lives and relationships of the young female participants, but is also evident in the work they are engaged in, particularly with regards to community engagement. Azara shared her experiences as a community organizer.

> *There was one Black woman, one … Southeast Asian and the other is Indian. The three of them were saying that [the event] was completely different from what they thought it would be. They thought it was going to be a high-class event, and we brought the "bougie," and like the lowest class Black people. We brought the lowest class Black people to the event because we brought high school students; we brought people they saw at the club. … They were upset that we didn't bring high class people. But … we had prominent people; we had high school kids. Why not? We ended up not having alcohol, which worked. We were able to still have high school kids and not fear anything about it. … But they thought that it was supposed to be something completely different. … I think they expected more high class, and they were going to meet the top of the top.* (Azara, individual interview)

Class, therefore, mediates relationships and shared community engagement, even amongst those with a common ethno-cultural identity. According to Azara, this response from a fellow community member highlighted the ways in which class privilege can negate solidarity among the larger Black/African Canadian community. Azara's understanding of the comments made by a fellow community member was that "*She was embarrassed of her own community. … That's what it is. That's so sad. The main purpose of our event was to bring all of our youth together..., and I was like you missed the point."*

The participants' stories also revealed that the process of neoliberalization has resulted in "creative destruction not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers … but also of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart" (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). For those participants who were engaged in formal work with community organizations, competition for resources appears to sow division.

> *You don't want to be like, I only want to do this work by myself or create that whole competition atmosphere. Nobody is competing with anyone because there are actually a lot of people who need help. Even if there are ten more people doing the same thing, it might not even be enough. [But] I guess there has been a comment [from another community organization] that said, "Oh I think we are doing the same thing" and stuff like that or we are planning to do the same thing. … I don't see any problem with that even if we do the same thing. … It seems like they want their words to reach people but then when we say okay let's meet and let's sit down and let's see how we can actually work together, then there isn't as much response as compared to their focus which is more "Can you please help us share this event or can you please get the word out or whatever." We are like sure, whatever; there is no problem with that but when we say "Ok, do you want to come to this event, there is nothing.* (Layla, individual interview)

This competition among community organizations is the result of limited resources which a large number of groups are fighting over. Capitalism and neoliberalism result not in solidarity but in groups with similar values fighting one another as opposed to working together. Furthermore, the two organizations discussed by Layla work with different groups. As such, the context of their work differs. Layla's organization works with those who are relative newcomers to Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan and Canada, and who require specific socio-cultural supports in their endeavours. The second organization is composed predominantly of African Canadian young people who were born in Canada or who have spent a significant part of their lives in Canada. As such the contexts within which these two organizations operate is vastly different. While there exists a commonality with the ethno-cultural identity of their respective members, the contexts within which they work are different. As such, it is problematic that they are seen to be serving the same population and in competition for resources. Also illustrated through this example, is the ways in which the politics of liberalism influence community engagement work. Both these populations are in effect the victims of neoliberalism and capitalism. However, this inability to see the complex manner in which these global

forces sow division as opposed to finding spaces for solidarity ensures that coming together to find shared solutions is not seen as a possibility.

The inherent problems of capitalism and neoliberalism appear to be quite evident to a number of the young women. Edna and Maita's exchange over the importance of voting led them into a discussion on the problems of capitalism. While Edna has been engaged in the formal political sphere through voting in elections and volunteering on various election campaigns, she also recognizes that electoral politics refuse to consider an alternative to capitalism, which she views as problematic, given the ways in which capitalism excludes people from sharing in wealth. According to Edna, our elections are about continuing a problematic system – capitalism – not changing it. As such, when we take part in elections, for example, are we not directly showing our tacit agreement with an oppressive system. These questions are important ones which need to be asked and pondered over, as I witnessed the young women doing during the focus groups.

Learning and responding to anti-blackness and injustice

The nine female participants were all either currently attending post-secondary or had completed post-secondary. They were also involved in various community initiatives while participating in this research project. As such, the discussions among and with the women indicated their journeys of learning through formal and informal means and, in particular, through being required to address issues of marginalization and oppression for their own communities as well as the larger society.

For the majority of the participants, considerable time and effort was spent on addressing and reframing the *"angry Black woman"* narrative that accompanied many of their experiences with injustice. Sahra shares her story during the focus group.

> Sahra: *This summer I went to field school …. It was interesting to hear the things that [the white students] thought actually come out because I was interacting with them on such a close basis so a lot of things that they obviously did not find offensive. Like… "Hey Sahra, you would probably be so pretty without your scarf." … Was that a compliment? … We had this one washroom which everyone had to share. So, you had these shower stalls that were just like in a workout gym. I would go in there and shower. You would just clean up after yourself and that is what I did. But I guess that there was one strand of hair or something. And on Sundays we would have our group discussion about just house issues and things like that. Someone was like it looked like a bear shaved in there. I was like*

> *seriously? And I spoke to [a friend] about it and [she] was like, "you have to be calm because they are going to see you as" (starts crying)*
> Nyassa: T*hey might perceive you as an angry Black woman right?*
> Sahra: *Yeah. [My friend] was like, you have to separate your emotions from all of it and that was so hard. She was like, you're kind of like paving a path for the next Black person that come*. (Focus group 1)

Nyassa and Felicia also shared their thoughts on the angry Black woman narrative.

> *When I was in primary school …, I was always the only Black girl. And I had an incident where [someone] called me [the N word]. …Off course, all the staff were white. They didn't really know how to deal with it and things like that. So, … it's sometimes very difficult to react and stand up for ourselves. … It became uncomfortable because "You can't say these types of things because Nyassa is Black and she's hyper sensitive"*. (Nyassa, focus group 1)

> *The whole hypersensitive thing, it just irritates me, irks me. No! Like you have the right to say that something offends you. …You shouldn't be calling anybody hypersensitive for any reason because everybody has different things that irritates them, … that hurts them.* (Felicia, focus group 1)

As these women's experiences show, any attempt for them to counteract negative and racist ideologies are often met with resistance, with the response that it is the marginalized who are over-sensitive and/or angry. Furthermore, the response indicates that people react with more abhorrence to the accusation of racism than to actual acts of racism. To be called out for one's racism is worse than being racist!

Therefore, women such as Sahra must learn subversiveness in how they respond to oppression. As Sahra's friend and Nyassa pointed out, racialized people are expected to always be calm, or they will be vilified as the *"angry Black woman"*. Tears and anger are not considered acceptable emotions. Nala agrees with these suggestions, arguing that for her, subversiveness comes through her agreement to being tokenized and invited to take part in predominantly white spaces due to the presence of her Black body. Yet for Nala, this presents an opportunity to address the issues because her presence in those spaces offers her the opening to say what may otherwise be absent.

While Nala views her subversiveness as a tool against oppression, other participants decry the ways in which these experiences devalue the labour of Black minds and bodies. They view their inclusion in these white spaces as well as the need to temper their responses to racism as an additional burden wherein they are expected to provide

free intellectual and emotional labour while taking responsibility for teaching about racism and marginalization to the perpetrators. Sahra, Nyassa, Azara, and Felicia discussed the reasons that this responsibility is taken up by those who are oppressed:

> Sahra: *Why do I have to explain it? Why is it my responsibility to inform them.*
> *Nyassa: I don't think that it is our responsibility. But … I do understand in certain situations we are not all informed about everything and it would be nice if someone explained it but how sometimes, I struggle with that.*
> Azara: *I think it is not our responsibility but we have to do it because if we don't do it who is going to do it.*
> Felicia: *Because it's not really integrated into our education system. … I think for Black people and a lot of different cultures and colors all around the world, their history is never told. So, I don't really have the expectation for a lot of people to know why blackface is offensive or you know even why the N word is offensive. But if I told you I don't like it, just don't say it. Maybe the education system should teach more about African and African American history or more about Indian history and Asian history and Chinese history, like different kinds of histories.* (focus group 1)

As these young women explain, when our educational systems are failing minoritized youngsters, responsibility for this education falls on marginalized populations.

The young adult participants discussed at length their views on the failures of the educational system to address marginalization as a result of racism, colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy and their subsequent responses aimed at decolonial and anti-colonial practices of resistances. For Azara, decolonization is at the root of her community engagement work.

> *It's the changing of mindsets. When our youth talk it's so sad. But after meetings or after conversations with [other] members, they like see things differently at least. There is [name of organization] everywhere I go now. There are people within [the organization] all the time. So, they have our conversations everywhere they go. … I think that's decolonizing because our conversations … have created different projects too. … Our Somali community liaison – he goes to [a post-secondary institution] and he created a Black male group, like a Somali group [there]. And so, they have these conversations too. …And it's just having these conversations. … That type of decolonizing the mind is really important.* (Azara, individual interview)

The participants are engaged in this process of decolonization in a number of ways. Nala and Subira, for example, are attempting to engage in decolonial possibilities through their careers; both are undergraduate students in education, training to be educators in schools. Nala contends that representation is important, and her presence in schools has the

potential to encourage other minoritized students to consider teaching as a career choice; furthermore, Nala sees the mis/lack of representation of minoritized peoples in curriculum and educational policy as a major issue that must be addressed. Nala's long-term goal is to address the gaps in curriculum and policy by ensuring a seat at those tables.

Layla's commitment to a group composed of immigrants and newcomers who are young adults is further testimony of the ways in which these participants made conscious choices to devote their mental, physical, and emotional energies to projects aimed at supporting other minoritized youngsters, as opposed to educating mainstream White communities about the effects of colonialism and racism. Opportunities for solidarity, learning, and resistance among minoritized young peoples were Layla and Azara's primary objectives. Edna employed her labour through formal political engagement, choosing to only support minoritized candidates who shared her values.

Education and advocacy around issues facing minoritized peoples, in particular women, were at the forefront of Felicia and Sahra's respective decisions to become members of and lead particular organizations; however, their organizations were composed of both minoritized and white members, resulting in resistance and pushback from White members and employees around the participants' calls for change and justice. Both Felicia and Sahra chose to disassociate themselves from their respective organizations due to the inability of the White members to understand that structural, institutional, and systemic racism often benefitted them as a result of their whiteness, regardless of their commitment to "social justice." Felicia and Sahra disengaged from these organizations, choosing instead to focus their energies on community work that provided experience related to their future careers.

Conclusion

Chapter seven is the final chapter in which I present the findings from this research project. In this chapter, I focused on discussing and sharing young women's knowledges as related to the role of informal education – cultural, familial, traditional, and Indigenous knowledges as well as practices, meanings, enactment, pedagogies, and understandings of community engagement. The learnings that have been produced from this research study indicate that a severe lack of formal education spaces for engagement and education

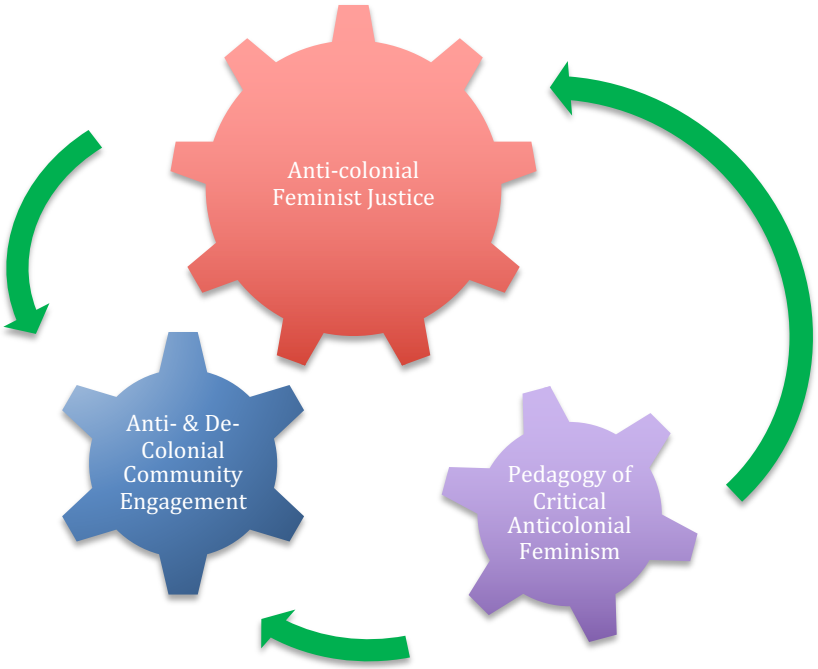
around resistance to injustice compelled the participants to find and create alternative spaces of resistance in their families and communities. Furthermore, despite not considering themselves Black until moving to Canada (for those seven women not born in Canada), these women claim blackness as a collective identity and throughout the interviews and focus groups regularly described themselves, their families, and their communities as Black and their experiences through the lens of blackness.

Chapters five, six, and seven provided an extensive and thorough depiction of the experiences of young African Canadian women as related to: 1) experiences of injustice due to interlocking systems of oppression; 2) questions of belonging and identity construction; 3) responses and resistance to injustice; and 4) community engagement for the nurturing of resistance. The next two chapters will illustrate the interconnections among these four themes described above. Chapter eight will focus on the ways in which the practices, actions, understandings, and meanings with regards to these themes denote the emergence of a collective ontology and epistemology rooted in justice. Chapter nine will present a possible path forward and potential platforms for an ongoing and more transformative project of justice.

Chapter 8: Towards an African Canadian Onto-epistemology of Justice

Introduction

The findings from this research study depict participants who are forced to deal with issues of racism, discrimination, and marginalization that are the result of structural, institutional, and systemic inequities. The results of this are multifaceted: the devaluation of participants' education and work experiences; low feelings of belonging to Canada as well as their countries of birth (for the seven participants born outside of Canada); continued marginalization as a result of lack of class and "race" privileges; the devaluation of their formal Canadian education which also acts as a barrier to participating in Canadian social, political, and economic life; and the role of capitalism and colonialism in invalidating the experiences and knowledges of those of African descent, even when their education credentials and employment experiences are within the Canadian context. These findings echo research conducted by a number of researchers (Carty, 1994; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2009, 2010; Wane, 2009, 2011; Yesufu, 2005) on African Canadian populations that detail the various marginalizations faced by African Canadian women. Yet, as outlined in research by several scholars, shared experiences of colonial subjugations also unify women in their resistance to economic, political, and cultural exploitation (Hamilton, 2004; Norwood, 2013; Wane, 2004, 2011). Through migration, new knowledges and "survival strategies" (Hamilton, 2004, p. 10) are created, resulting in the dismantling of hegemonic knowledge claims (McEwan, 2001) and the creation of new cultures, traditions, and methods of political and community engagement (Boyce Davies & Jardine, 2010). This study has illustrated that for young women of African descent living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan, their systems of knowing, seeing, and being in this world, of how they respond to their experiences and lives are drawn, in part, from their understandings of indigeneity, culture, and traditional ways of being, knowing, and seeing. It is my contention that this research has revealed the existence of an African Canadian onto-epistemology, based in the interlocking of *anti-colonial feminist justice, community engagement*, and the call for a *pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism.*



Indigenous knowledges are "a means and process for articulating what local people know" (Olatokun & Ayanbode, 2009, p. 293); "it is also about recasting the potentialities they represent in a context of democratic participation for community, national, and global development in real time" (Odora Hoppers, 2003, p. 411). Indigenous knowledges, therefore, are the various acts, practices, meanings, discourses, knowings, learnings, symbols through which beings are constructed. It is this understanding of Indigenous knowledges, then, that has become the foundation for this chapter and through which the research participants in this study disclosed an African Canadian onto-epistemology of justice.

Towards an Anti-colonial Feminist Justice

Social, economic, political, cultural, and cognitive justice from an anti-colonial feminist lens influences how the participants understand and respond to their experiences as racialized Black/ African Canadian women. In keeping with an Indigenous hermeneutics, the data from this project has been interpreted with the purpose of engaging in a radical emancipation that calls on us to examine not only structural, systemic, and institutional inequities, but also the policies, practices, and systems of knowing, being, and seeing in

our own communities. The analysis that follows can be understood as an act of reinvention of the self and our communities that is intractably connected to the materiality of the social world and relations of power (Grande, 2014). Sahra and Layla shared their concerns regarding how they negotiated their complex identities, including being made constantly aware to avoid harmful and stereotypical representations of Black women; as such, these young women were extremely careful in how they negotiated their complex identities. Their cautious natures have been learned due to the systemic discrimination they have endured over their lives. Often, they cannot understand why they must fight so hard to be recognized as human beings worthy of living comparable lives to their White counterparts. As such, central to their building of a just world is the understanding that such an action is "both a process and a goal" (Bell, 1997, p. 3). This requires creating environments that empower historically marginalized people, while challenging inequitable social arrangements and institutions, and offering strategies and visions for creating a more just world (Bell, 1997). As articulated by Bell, then, creating a just world entails a re-envisioning and reconceptualization of societies wherein we must imagine a world that is not hierarchical and in which marginalized peoples' systems of seeing, being, and knowing the world are centered. This necessitates a rethinking of how we conceptualize and organize our worlds.

The necessity for justice

As articulated by the participants, the marginalizations and oppressions they face can only be remedied through social, economic, political, cultural, and cognitive justice wherein society has to recognize the various ways in which minoritized peoples are marginalized through the practices, enactments, and policies of institutions, systems, and structures and work to eradicate these oppressions (Murrell, 2006). The young women's experiences with formal education, including primary, secondary, and tertiary education, illustrate the extensive barriers young racialized Black women must navigate in order to pursue and find success within formal educational spaces. With the exception of Felicia, eight of the participants indicated that their kindergarten through grade twelve schooling experiences were rife with inequities. None of these eight women were considered to have the potential to attend and be successful in higher education. Azara, Nyassa, and Sahra admit that their teachers never pushed them "*to try harder*" (focus group 1). Felicia

and Sahra contend that it was not until they joined advanced placement and the international baccalaureate program in high school did their teachers invest in their education. Felicia notes that this pedagogical approach is antithetical to good teaching practices.

> *To be in an IB or an AP program, you have to show a certain aptitude, and then the teachers will even invest more to take you to that next level. In a way, it's unfair because every child needs that kind of attention, especially the kids who are not even doing that well are the ones who even need it the most.* (Felicia, focus group 1)

As observed by all nine young women, their parents played a pivotal role in encouraging their educational pursuits, as opposed to educators. However, not only did the young women speak about the lack of support they received from educators, they also commented on the myriad ways in which curricular content and educators' pedagogical approaches alienated minoritized and, in particular, Black students. Layla's experiences with a grade 12 teacher who presented their English class with an iconic image of a young starving child during the Ethiopian famine of 1984 but did not engage in a critical discussion of the photograph nor the local political, cultural, social, and economic contexts further illustrate the ways in which educators who lack the professional skills to teach such difficult knowledge inflict greater harm on marginalized students. The young women's educational experiences call for us to consider how difference and multiplicity can be acknowledged and valued in formal educational spaces without further marginalizing minoritized students or placing expectations on students to have to take up the mantle of educating their teachers and classmates. Educators who do not have the knowledge to teach such content cannot put the onus on students. Minoritized students must navigate precarious positions of power in classrooms which must be acknowledged; furthermore, such content can also be extremely traumatizing, and this must be taken into consideration by educators. In addition, such a pedagogical strategy has the potential to further subjugate certain knowledges as there is no epistemic base upon which to validate and honour the knowledges being brought forward while students continue "to be perennial strangers in their classrooms" (Brown, 2008, p. 379).

For the participants, their experiences with knowledge devaluation, racial/racist stereotyping, language barriers (both perceived and actual), access to formal education,

patriarchy, capitalism, and experiences within formal education spaces illustrate the systemic, hegemonic, and structural nature of oppression, as oppression is built into policies, procedures, and institutions; oppression and marginalization are more than simply the result of individual actions. The causes of oppression and marginalization "are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules" (Young, 1990, p. 41). Azara's account of the institutional, structural, and systemic violence inflicted upon Black and Indigenous homeless youth illuminates the ways in which the rights of Black and Indigenous youth are violated by those who are paid to be their protectors.

> *I call 911 at least once a day. … "Are they native? Are they Black?" That's their first question they ask. I asked the superintendent and he said … "They have to ask what the backgrounds are. How are you going to know when you walk into the building?" I'm like I'm giving you their name … but I'm [also] there to show you. …And if they are sleeping, … how do they wake them up? They have their hands at their necks or they … get their hands and they tie them like pigs. … Would they wake their own kids up like that? No! But they wake up homeless youth like that…. So, I asked him "Is that part of protocol? And how can we change that?" His response was "We can't. You have to know their description. That's really critical, and that's really critical for our safety." … I was like is there any other way that you can ask for a description though? Can you not say what is the description of the person? Can you not ask that question? And he was like, "No, you have to know specifically." … So, then I went to… the guy who is in charge of homicide. …I was like is there any way that you guys can … deal with every situation humanly … like how I approach our [organization's] kids. They have knives on them. They have everything on them, and they have all these drugs in them. But if you as a person approach a person, then they will treat you like a person in return. They are not going to come and choke me, even if they are on meth and all this other stuff. … So, I explained that. Is there a way for you to come and say hey, my name is this officer whatever? This is my badge number. … Is that a possibility? Then I gave him the example of the phone call. He was like … I can't believe this. He was like that is not protocol. … He gave me his information and told me to text him any time that happened. … and then he would look into that dispatch person. But that is not the issue. There is a bigger systemic issue. But that is not even part of protocol*. (Azara, individual interview)

These youth who have already been failed by their governments are placed in violent precariousness when those who are responsible for keeping them safe are instead enabled by what must be described as a violent police state to violate their basic rights as outlined in the Canadian Charter of Human Rights. These incidences force us to question in whose

interests the state and its coercive arm – the police – are acting when the most vulnerable in society – minoritized homeless youth – are violently abused by their "would be" state appointed protectors. Data obtained by CBC News from the Edmonton Police Services (EPS) provided evidence of racial/racist profiling by the police; Black peoples were five times and Aboriginal[11] peoples were six times more likely than White people to be stopped by EPS. In addition, Aboriginal women were ten times more likely to be stopped by EPS than White women (Huncar, 2017). Furthermore, a report by Black Lives Matter – Edmonton and Area Chapter (2017) revealed that the data collected from street checks further criminalizes those affected as their personal information is documented into a number of law enforcement databases and shared with agents of the police state, such as Canadian Border Services, CSIS, the RCMP, and other security bodies. This illustrates how violence enacted by the state is not "perceived as violence. … [T]he state is granted the moral and legal authority over those who fall under its jurisdiction[;] it is granted a monopoly over the use of violence in society, so the use of violence is generally seen as legitimate" (Maynard, 2017, pp. 6-7). Consequently, this signifies how oppression is pervasive, restricting, hierarchical, complex, internalized, and systemic (Bell, 1997).

These experiences have provided a number of the young women with a thorough understanding of the pervasive and systemic nature of oppression and the awareness that they have a responsibility to engage in labour that calls out such policies and actions while also providing informal and formal educative opportunities around such issues. Felicia, Sahra, Azara, Layla, Nala, and Edna discussed their abiding commitment to engaging in organizing work that recognizes the necessity of social, economic, political, cultural, and cognitive justice to eradicate such oppressions, thereby recognizing that racialized peoples are marginalized through the practices, enactments, and policies of institutions, systems, and structures.

The experiences of the participants as highlighted by the anecdotes shared by Layla, Felicia, Nyassa, Sahra, and Azara reiterate Razack's (2001) argument of the ways in which the "dailiness of women's lives structures a different way of knowing and a different way of thinking" (p. 46). As summarized from the ways in which these women

[11] CBC uses the term Aboriginal as opposed to Indigenous as this is the term reported by EPS and Statistics Canada (Huncar, 2017).

engage with their communities in decolonial and anti-colonial resistance, they are working to re-centre women's knowledges and scholarship. This further reinforces how knowledges cannot be divorced from the lived realities of people's lives. While the hegemony of a particular Western, "scientific," "objective" knowledge, that of the neoliberal mindset over all other systems of knowing, systems of seeing, and systems of living has resulted in the severe exclusion of the vast majority of people from engagement in knowledge construction, the young women participants are depicting the various ways in which they resist in order to engage in social, political, economic, cultural, and cognitive justice. This encompasses different ways of knowing, seeing, and being: it is the variety of ways in which young Black/ African Canadian women subvert and resist, from gaining knowledge about how the system works in order to allow them to better support themselves and their communities and by using their educational, volunteer, and community engagement experiences to work for justice and equity. These young women are actively fighting against a world wherein the exclusion of vast numbers of people will create a situation in which society will simply regurgitate old ways of knowing, seeing, and living, a world without creativity, without thinking (Odora Hoppers & Richards, 2012).

Justice and resistance: An anticolonial feminist response

The participants indicated their awareness that living in a country wherein policies, processes, and systems of knowing were regulated through a westernized hegemonic worldview called on them to respond to this reality in a number of ways. For many participants, this was enacted through their refusal to be silent victims of oppression and/or by performing their blackness/Africanness in specific ways. Nala, for example, chose to perform her blackness in particular ways in spaces that she viewed as predominantly White, claiming,

> *I also identify primarily as what the context needs me to be and that's why I think, problematically, I've been given these opportunities [for leadership]. Because when I need to be a Black woman I will be, when I need to be a very whitewashed Black woman I will be. Whenever I need to be … an accomplished Somali girl, I will be. I exist in the context that people need me to be. I think that my identity exists just as diasporic.* (Nala, individual interview)

Felicia and Sahra made conscious choices as to which spaces they needed to withdraw from due to concerns over their emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. Felicia and Sahra found that spaces and organizations that were supposedly created to improve the lives of racialized and minoritized peoples were often the most resistant to organizational, structural, and systemic change. Their respective organizations were more interested in change outside as opposed to starting change from inside. As such, Felicia and Sahra's decisions to disengage and re-engage in spaces that were not predominantly concerned with equity issues but in which they could find the gaps and fissures (Mohanty, 1991) through which to insert ideas of social, cultural, political, economic, and cognitive justice are further examples of how the participants chose specific spaces in which to engage in subversive acts in order to bring about change while also ensuring that they were gaining direct social and cultural capital needed to be successful in their chosen careers. These young women reify Audre Lorde's (2007/1984) assertion:

> The future of our earth may depend on the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation and suspicion. (p. 123)

The young women participants illustrated the growing realization that there were almost no safe spaces in which they could exist without being constantly made aware that their racialized identities and gender othered them. For the vast majority that meant that they often chose to disengage from those mainstream spaces that claimed to be working on issues of equity; instead, they found new spaces – often related to their careers – where they could slowly interject issues of equity into the conversations and discussions in the hopes that 1) their work towards social, economic, political, cultural, and cognitive justice could directly impact their lives; and 2) others (predominantly White Canadians) may be more willing to work towards social, political, and economic, cultural, and cognitive justice when they could see the direct benefits to them, as it related to their careers. It is important to note that these participants did not stop working for equity when faced with opposition but instead altered their strategies.

The young women's experiences and stories exemplify Black/African Canadian feminism and tells the lived story of Black/African Canadian women's agency and the ways through which they resist oppression in a world that "seeks to exploit, denigrate, and dehumanize their very existence" (Wane, 2004, p. 151). Oppression as a result of the participants' intersectional identities and the contributing global forces of capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and colonialism is a motivating factor in their responses. Furthermore, as a result of these complex, constantly shifting and changing relations of power, the daily, ongoing struggles, experiences and victories of women are signalled by resistance and freedom (St. Pierre, 2000). The young women spoke of a number of issues: family violence, mental health, economic well-being, negotiating the education system, settlement, political representation, career mentoring, issues that contributed to social, economic, cultural, political, and cognitive injustice. The participants indicated not just the need for such support but discussed how they, themselves, went about addressing some of these issues. The responses from the participants illustrated the ways in which women's struggles are local and specific as opposed to totalizing. Butler (1999/2002) contends that instances of resistance, the ability of women to challenge their marginalization, and possibilities of agency occur through the reconceptualization of identity in which women understand that the structures of their oppression are in fact a result of existing and constructed power relations that can be dismantled as opposed to natural and everlasting. The dismantling of structures of oppression requires locating local strategies with which to affirm agency in the localized environment as opposed to fighting a global war on patriarchy (Butler, 2002). The participants' responses highlight the ways in which they engage locally – in their families, ethno-cultural, religious, and professional organizations, as well as through civic participation – in order to affirm their agency. These localized resistance projects do contribute to the larger global war on patriarchy. However, the participants actions and experiences indicate that while they understand the connections between the global war on patriarchy and their local struggles, they have come to realize that it is their resistance to the everyday marginalizations that must be the focus of their time and energy and where exists possibilities for creating fissure points.

The research participants all embarked on credentialization programs after completing high school. The young women were either currently in post-secondary education or had completed post-secondary. As such, formal education was viewed as the panacea for economic marginalization. This corresponds with the rise of neoliberalism wherein formal education is seen to lead to economic prosperity. Yet economic prosperity was not the ultimate goal of the participants: the majority of participants acknowledged that their worlds were one of social, economic, political, cultural, and cognitive injustice, recognizing the deep inequities that exist that cause individuals to go into survival mode wherein homogeneity is celebrated. The participants respond to this world by engaging in work that calls for social, political, cultural, and cognitive justice, through their community engagement and activism. Their actions echo Odora Hoppers' (2009) argument which links the rise of neoliberalism to the growth of a world that subjugates difference and multiplicity. Odora Hoppers (2009) contends that society is in actuality "becoming more varied and culturally diverse" which "pose[s] major challenges to old ways of thinking and acting." She propels this argument further by claiming that the responses by individuals and communities to these challenges will "determine whether our communities become nurturing, cohesive, and progressive; or increasingly inhospitable, divided, and unsustainable" (Odora Hoppers, 2005, as cited in Odora Hoppers, 2009, p. 607), such as through moves towards isolationism, ethno-centrism, and intolerance towards family, community, and the nation state, as all of these concepts are created by "exclusions – i.e. by excluding others, or by being excluded by others" (Alpherson, 2002; Odora Hoppers, 2009, p. 607). In other words, Odora Hoppers (2009) is asking if society can engage with different systems of knowing, seeing, and being in working towards justice. This necessity of such a query is transparent when examining the actions of the majority of the participants. Azara, for example, indicated her frustration that another organization for young adults had applied for the same grants in order to deliver similar programming and services as her organization. In this case, the logic of neoliberalism demands that these organizations and their members view one another as competitors fighting for the same limited resources as opposed to working together. The participants are, therefore, both complicit in neoliberalism as a method of survival whilst also working in resistance to those forces.

Knowledge as emancipation

De Sousa Santos' (2007b) differentiation between knowledge-as-regulation and knowledge-as-emancipation provides an explanation for such complicitness; de Sousa Santos (2007b) argues that knowledge-as-emancipation progresses from colonialism towards solidarity whereas knowledge-as-regulation progresses from chaos towards order. "Order became the hegemonic way of knowing" (de Sousa Santos, 2007b, p. 410). A movement towards cognitive justice, then, demands a paradigmatic transition whereby knowledge-as-emancipation is granted primacy over knowledge-as-regulation. According to de Sousa Santos (2007b), solidarity must, therefore, be transformed into "the hegemonic form of knowing" (p. 410) in order to rectify the epistemicide that has occurred. It is only through this "epistemology of seeing" (de Sousa Santos, 2007b, p. 428) that we can rectify this epistemicide by engaging in dialogic relationships that allows us to see "form[s] of knowledge whose point of ignorance is colonialism and whose point of knowing is solidarity" (de Sousa Santos, 2007b, p. 428).

Knowledge as emancipation leads us from colonialism to solidarity. Azara articulates this as she describes the project of building *"unity among our communities"* in order to resist colonialism by actively working towards decolonial and anticolonial practices. These solidarity projects are borne from a desire to address structural, systemic, and institutionally created inequities. As the experiences of the participants indicate, the response required in order to create a socially just world can only occur through a framework that infuses social, political, cultural, economic, and cognitive justice into all aspects of life and in which cognitive justice is understood in the following way:

> Cognitive justice recognizes the right of different forms of knowledge to co-exist, but adds that this plurality needs to go beyond tolerance or liberalism to an active recognition of the need for diversity. It demands recognition of knowledges, not only as methods but as ways of life. This presupposes that knowledge is embedded in ecology of knowledges where each knowledge has its place, its claim to a cosmology, its sense as a form of life. In this sense knowledge is not something to be abstracted from a culture as a life form; it is connected to livelihood, a life cycle, a lifestyle; it determines life chances. (Visvanathan, 2009, ¶ 21)

Visvanathan's articulation of cognitive justice is embodied in the multiple ways in which the participants reacted to and thought about capitalism, neoliberalism, and materialism as they interlock with colonialism, patriarchy, and racism. As such, cognitive justice, then, becomes the underlying foundation upon which all other forms of justice – economic, political, cultural, and social – can be enacted.

Azara and Layla's differing mandates regarding their community engagement illustrate the interconnections between formal and informal education with regards to the knowledge economy. Layla's work with an ethnocultural organization focused on ensuring economic and social integration illustrates the ways in which the settler colonial state asks racialized others to place their hopes for equity and justice within the confines of state structures that privilege capitalism as the only plausible system through which peoples can live. Through her focus on mentoring programs that advise young people on how to navigate the formal education system, Layla is committed to work that prepares young people such as herself for inclusion into the current system and structures. Azara is extremely critical of such endeavours, arguing:

> *[We are] different from … all these integration based [groups]. … [We] focus on decolonization. All of us in our backgrounds are different, and the conversations we have are completely different. … That is what I want – … to be able to take a platform on equity, decolonization, education, career development. That's why these people need to be organized so that we can start doing action-based work. … I just want to be able to say: this is how we are changing the school system; this is what we are doing for this. These safe spaces for white kids need to be abolished. That room needs to go.* (Azara, individual interview)

Yet, both of their strategies are valid. Layla who has only been living in Canada for six years wants to ensure that minoritized students are given the knowledges needed to survive a settler colonial state apparatus that uses formal education to further enable the racialization and subsequent hierarchization of labour. Layla is seeking survival that allows those who "were never meant to survive" (Lorde, 1978/1995, p. 32) to be here tomorrow. Azara, on the other hand, is calling for systemic and structural change and "seeking a now that can breed futures" (Lorde, 1978/1995, p. 31) outside of settler colonialism.

The participants' experiences and actions highlight the concept of an ecology of

knowledges as described by Visvanathan and de Sousa Santos. While all nine participants from the study acknowledged their diasporic identities as constituted from their connections to both Africa and Canada, the participants' class identities were extremely wide-ranging. Azara and Layla identify as Eritrean and Ethiopian, two states in which peoples share many common cultural traditions and histories. However, their experiences as racialized peoples living in the global North as well as their insights from their locations in Eritrea and Ethiopia, respectively, led them to understand issues around the knowledge economy and capitalism in increasingly complex ways. In her call for decolonization and specific structural changes, Azara is calling for a paradigm shift in how we understand who we are and what it is that we value in our lives; she is calling for a shift in our ways of knowing, seeing, and being in the world as she is reiterating that equity is not possible within the settler colonial state. The diverse systems of knowing that these women hold illustrates the necessity for a diversity and plurality of knowledges and practices for cognitive justice (de Sousa Santos, 2007b) that would lead to the "formation of constellations of knowledges geared to create surplus solidarity" which de Sousa Santos (2007b) refers to as the ecology of knowledges (p. 429). According to Visvanathan (2009), the proof of this is evident in the study of evolution.

> Evolution sought not the capitalist survival of the fittest but diversity. … Diversity was a mode of being in and for itself. In a cultural sense, diversity has a bigger rationale, not just as a mode of survival but as an axiomatic of difference that makes democracy possible. A diversity of knowledges, unmuseumized and dialogic, becomes an anchor for an inventive democratic imagination (¶ 28).

This inventive democratic imagination is evidenced through the myriad ways in which the participants engage in resistance, activism, and decoloniality.

Much of the literature around community and political engagement of African women is primarily concentrated on the ways in which women negotiate acts of community and political engagement through religious institutions or the home. Engagement occurs in confined spaces and is not public. Shultz (2013) contends that this is due to neoliberalism which has created a retraction of what is considered "public," resulting in fewer spaces where the social and collective goals of a society can be "recognized, negotiated, and enacted" (p. 45). However, while the diminishment of the

public sphere has a vicious effect on the capacity of women's agentic engagement, women, in particular, do continue to resist. These acts of resistance are noteworthy as they can also illustrate complex understandings of the ways in which neoliberalism, colonialism, capitalism, racism, patriarchy, religion, and ethnicity affect women's being, seeing, and knowing of the world.

While none of the nine women revealed any personal violent encounters with police or law enforcement, they did indicate the prevalence of such confrontations amongst siblings, parents, extended family, friends, and members of the community, pointing out that these incidences predominantly affected Black and Indigenous peoples. The reality that these violent hostilities are targeted towards those racialized peoples whom the young women held relationships with depicts an ecology of knowledges as this knowing is taken up as a collective memory and a shared experience. Once the participants had been made aware of the ways in which the violent settler colonial state operated to oppress and marginalize, they could not unknow this information. This knowledge is now held within their collective memories, influencing their ways of knowing, being, and seeing. This is knowledge as emancipation.

In addition, the young female participants in this study are confronting what de Sousa Santos (2007a, 2007b) refers to as "epistemicide" as their knowledges are constantly devalued, and they are expected to use their time and energy not to follow their dreams, but to actually illustrate their humanity to their oppressors, to teach that they are worthy of being equal to their oppressors. Yet, as can be seen from their actions, the participants are engaging in both the political and epistemological resistance which de Sousa Santos calls for. Their decision to hold a conference for "*racialized youth*," for example, to talk about issues of importance to them, issues around colonization, decolonization, and racism illustrates the ways in which they are engaging in what Mignolo (2011) calls "epistemic disobedience and delinking from the colonial matrix [of power] in order to open up decolonial options—a vision of life and society that requires decolonial subjects, decolonial knowledges, and decolonial institutions" (p. 9). This "decolonizing epistemology," according to Mignolo (2011) "requires one to engage in rebuilding what was destroyed and to build what doesn't yet exist" (p. 109). While the work they are engaging in may still be free labour, they have made the conscious choice

that while they may be expected to engage in teaching their oppressors about their humanity, their resistance lies in also growing the numbers of young peoples who will actively resist marginalization and colonization, who are learning the language of colonialism and decolonization to also take up the mantle. The participants are actively engaged in working for justice and equity through a vision of social, cultural, political, economic, and cognitive justice that encompasses

> diverse communities of problem solving. What one offers then is a democratic imagination with a non-market, non-competitive view of the world, where conversation, reciprocity, translation create knowledge not as an expert, almost zero-sum view of the world but as a collaboration of memories, legacies, heritages, a manifold heuristics of problem solving, where citizen[s] takes both power and knowledge into [their] own hands. (Visvanathan, 2009, ¶ 38)

Cognitive justice, then, is the invention of individual and collective subjectivities capable of basing their social practice on the ecology of knowledges and willing to do so (de Sousa Santos, 2007b, p. 431). In effect,

> by incorporating the dynamics of knowledge into democracy, we reframe the axiomatics of knowledge based on hospitality, community, non-violence, humility and a multiple idea of time, where the citizen as trustee and inventor visualizes and creates a new self-reflexive idea of democracy around actual communities of practice. (Visvanathan, 2009, ¶ 39)

As such, cognitive justice is understood as an integral principle for the creation of a just society, as it offers a way of situating actors in a dialogic relationship as opposed to a competition or dominance between or among knowledge systems, thereby generating "an inclusive knowledge base from which actions, imperatives, and priorities are shared" (Davies, 2016, p. 65). This dialogic relationship permits marginalized peoples "direct space for engaging with the structures and manifestations of colonialism… [and] insert[s] into the discourse arena totally different meanings and registers from other traditions," thus enabling "a process of engaging with colonialism in a manner that produces a programme for its dislocation" (Prakash, 1995, p. 6, as cited in Odora Hoppers, 2009, p. 609).

Towards a collective consciousness

As the experiences of the young women participants illustrate, while the legacies of colonialism and imperialism cast African Canadian women as passive, as victims, as subordinates, and as subjugated (Brennan, 1997), these depictions are far from the reality of their lived experiences. In actuality, this research shows that the shared experiences of colonial and imperial subjugations also unify women in their resistance to "economic, political, and cultural exploitation" (Norwood, 2013, p. 225). As African Canadian women, the participants utilize self-care, self-reliance, and strategies of survival to better themselves and their communities through the continual negotiation of patriarchal societal structures. Furthermore, these acts of resistances can also be termed solidarity movements through which occurs the building of personal, professional, and community support structures that are aimed towards working for an anti-colonial feminist project of justice that is founded upon the specific temporal, spatial, and material realities of women's lives. As such, these resistances involve the raising of consciousness and the resurrection of old traditions, of Indigenous systems and ways of knowing, seeing, and being, of "non-Western survival strategies" (McGadney-Douglass & Douglass, 2008, p. 150) but are not simply a return to the old, to the past. What is produced, assembled, and constructed is a result of an engagement among communities created in diaspora, their epistemologies and ontologies, and the environment in which they exist and addresses multiple systems of knowing, seeing, being, justice, power, and community.

The experiences, actions, meanings, responses, and knowledges of the participants of this research project depicted the emergence of a "collective epistemological understanding of the community" (Reynar, 1999, p. 290). The majority of participants illustrated engagement in a process of rethinking how the world is organized and conceptualized, one that centres marginalized peoples' systems of seeing, being, and knowing the world. Their perspectives around social, political, economic, cultural, and cognitive justice were rooted in their life experiences, histories, cultures, and traditions as peoples of African descent (Nobles, as cited in Amgborale Blay, 2008) who must contend with oppression that is pervasive, restricting, hierarchical, complex, internalized, and systemic due to their identities as Black women of the African diaspora living in a settler-colonial state. Yet, as the responses from the participants articulate,

their racialized, feminized, diasporic identities are not liabilities; they are, in fact, a point of departure for engagement in a politics of epistemic disobedience. Their shared experiences of marginalization and oppression serve as a point of convergence for a "struggle for emancipation from the colonial yoke" (Wane, 2011, p. 116). From within the experiences, actions, meanings, responses, and knowledges of the participants, there emerged a shared worldview rooted in ensuring the well-being of the collective. This worldview "includes wholeness, community and harmony," all of "which are deeply embedded in [the shared] cultural values" (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013, pp. 30-31) of the young women participants. This collective consciousness allows for the opening of new spaces of collective cultural and cognitive engagement and praxis for a project of collective emancipation and liberation (Odora Hoppers, 2002), as is exemplified by the experiences, actions, meanings, responses, and knowledges of the participants. It is their shared history of colonization, settler-colonialism, racism, marginalization, and social, cultural, economic, political, and cognitive injustice as both peoples of African descent and of the African diaspora living in a settler-colonial state that enables the possibility of a shared collective consciousness of justice as this systemic oppression and marginalization calls for epistemic and political resistance.

The participants revealed the existence of some degree of epistemic resistance to their marginalization and oppression. The female participants displayed discomfort over social and class disparities within their communities. Furthermore, participants illustrated an array of analyses, ranging from complete disregard of the role of class in influencing their subjectivities to a deep critical reflexivity that connected the perpetuation of class inequities to the structures of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. Yet despite these divergences in understanding, those young women who critiqued social and class hierarchies saw these disparities in knowing as substantiating their commitment to working for justice and equity. Therefore, these young women initiated community wide projects of resistance such as a "*racialized youth*" conference on decolonization and supporting Black/ African Canadian women running for political office. The actions of a few often galvanized the many. As such, I would contend that the vast majority of the nine participants were also engaged in political resistance as the struggles of members of the community often became a collective movement. In addition, while the participants

exhibit the tendencies of a collective consciousness in their understandings of justice, their reactions and responses depict multiple systems of resistance to marginalization and oppression. Therefore, the participants exhibited that their knowledges are constantly evolving, rendering them as hybrid, plural, and fluid (Mekgwe, 2010). What has been produced, assembled, and constructed is a result of engagement among communities, their epistemologies, their ontologies, and the environments in which they exist.

"Community" as a Space for Decolonial and Anti-colonial Resistance

Using Indigenous hermeneutics, this research project can be understood as a critical reinterpretation and, consequently, a "space of engagement" where peoples work to "remember, redefine, and reverse the devastation of … colonialist encounter[s]" (Grande, 2014, p. 234) by thinking together and by opening our minds and exploring "the purpose of our lives, our work, our particular ways of viewing" (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, p. 99). The dialogic relationship which is at the heart of cognitive justice, as articulated by Odora Hoppers (2009), de Sousa Santos (2007b), and Visvanathan (2009), calls for "space[s[of engagement" (Grande, 2014, p. 234) with (settler)colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, racism, imperialism, and neoliberalism. According to Prakash (1995), this process of engagement – as called for through cognitive justice – produces an agenda to resist colonialism (as cited in Odora Hoppers, 2009, p. 609). Within the constraints of this research project, community engagement encompasses human beings as "connected not only by ties of kinship but also by the bond of reciprocity rooted in the interweaving and interdependence of all humanity" (Goduka, 2000, p. 70). With regards to this research, community engagement and activism occurs in multiple ways and is often a response while acting as sites of resistance to the marginalization faced by racialized peoples due to language barriers, de-credentialization, lack of social and cultural capital, lack of time, and fatigue (Aizlewood, Bevelander, & Pendakur, 2006; Rahder & McLean, 2013) as well as deeper institutional, structural, and systemic barriers to justice. This research suggests that community engagement is comprised of three distinct aspects: 1) the impossibility of belonging to the settler colonial state; 2) solidarity building for decolonial resistance; and 3) knowledge production for solidarity building. While the pursuit for belonging is the initial harbinger for community engagement, this research suggests that this then leads to solidarity building that incorporates both community

education (knowledge production) practices and calls for more expansive educational platforms.

Community Engagement as a Response to Structural, Institutional, and Systemic Inequities

Constructing and conceptualizing (un)belonging in a settler colonial context

Belonging can be understood as "personal involvement in a social system so that persons feel themselves to be an indispensable and integral part of the system" (Anant, 1966, p. 21). It is a feeling of being connected to the environment, people, or places and includes feeling secure, recognized (Caxai & Berman, 2010; Hagerty, Williams, Coyne & Early, 1996), and able to participate in society in meaningful ways. Research examining the experiences of racialized peoples in Canada found that while racialized Canadians, in particular those whose families are more recent immigrants to Canada, do develop a sense of belonging, it is generally lower than that of the non-racialized Canadian born population (Burton & Phipps, 2010; Jedwab, 2008). Furthermore, greater feelings of belonging are strongly linked to greater participation in Canadian social, political, and economic life (Canefe, 2007).

Previous research studies suggest that a sense of belonging is initially heightened as a result of "informal interactions, such as visiting with neighbours, group activities, such as joining support groups, and activities in public spaces, such as attending community fairs or street parties" (Lai & Hynie, 2010, p. 93). As the responses from the research participants in this study indicate, these informal interactions – which include time spent with family (as articulated by Sahra's interest in learning her language, culture, and family history from her grandmother), group activities (as seen from Subira's desire to join a "*youth group*" in order to learn more about her African ethnicity and Layla's experiences with the necessity of identity-based groups which provide spaces for "*youth wanting to belong*,") and activities in public spaces (as illustrated through Layla's participation in large municipally organized multicultural events or Felicia's with events organized by those who shared her country of origin) – play a significant role in affecting the participants' sense of belonging. Furthermore, such interactions increase the likelihood of participation in civic, community, and political life (Wang & Hardy, 2014).

The participants in this study were members of a number of different types of organizations and structures: ethnocultural organizations, settlement organizations, religious organizations, student groups, formal political parties, local neighbourhood community groups, "*youth*" organizations, feminist organizations, and groups working predominantly with racialized peoples. These organizations are viewed as an integral conduit through which the participants could engage in those activities that increase sense of belonging. All of the participants indicated either prior or current engagement with ethno-cultural organizations. A number of the participants initially accessed ethnocultural organizations in order to access specific services intended to 1) aid in integration; 2) preserve culture, religion, and family values; 3) maintain ethnic identity; and 4) preserve ancestral languages. The findings echo those of a number of researchers (Bucklaschuk & Sormova, 2011; Chekki 2006; Owusu, 2000). According to the Canadian Ethnocultural Council (2004,) ethnocultural organizations appear to "strengthen the development of structures that form the underpinning of the economic, cultural, and social well-being of our society. The structures become part of the vital Canadian voluntary sector and contribute to nation building in Canada" (as cited in Bucklaschuk & Sormova, 2011, p. 1).

As such, ethnocultural organizations appear to serve a dual purpose; while they can contribute to developing an initial sense of belonging among racialized peoples in Canada and may initially provide spaces in which marginalized peoples can come together in order to find support, many tend to approach the issues facing racialized peoples' through the lens of deficiency and work towards providing racialized peoples with knowledge of how the system works in order to allow those who are oppressed to be included in the system that oppresses them. It is often the case that the organizations themselves are unable to see the ways in which they maintain structural, systemic, and institutional barriers. Layla's examination of the ethnocultural organization that she had helped found exemplifies the ways in which such organizations work to maintain the status quo. Both Felicia and Sahra were also members of organizations whose purpose was to work for equity for women and for racialized peoples. As we can extrapolate from Felicia and Sahra's experiences, the sense of belonging that they may initially have gained did not translate into long-term feelings where the participants viewed "themselves to be an indispensable and integral part of the system" (Anant, 1966, p. 21). What the participants do come to realize is that the system, as it currently operates, is deeply troubled and requires change, reorganization, and structural reforms, and/or simply the understanding that for some, the only option would be to operate outside of the system.

A vast majority of the participants indicated their continual negotiation of working both within and outside the system. After all, the social networks, such as those created through such organizations, "encompass the social, cultural, and economic relationships that define the dynamics of integration and settlement" (Lochhead, 2005, p. 38). Furthermore, establishing a sense of belonging to an ethno-cultural community as well as to the feminist, anti-racist, and political organizations the participants were members of is a necessary act of survival (Aizlewood et al., 2006). For the majority of the research participants, participation in various organizations and groups provided them with the social and cultural capital required to survive economic, political, social, cultural, and cognitive injustice. However, what becomes clear is that the participants desire more than survival; therefore, it may be more accurate to assert that the study participants had an increased sense of unbelonging, as opposed to belonging.

Unbelonging, then, calls on the participants to practice varied ways of knowing, seeing, and being in the communities in order to endure and resist injustice.

An emerging decolonial subjectivity & the impossibility of belonging

The research findings indicate that many participants are systematically excluded from the decision-making processes that impact their lives. Participants, for example, outlined the myriad ways in which educational curriculum and processes as well as existing legal, economic, and governance structures and processes did not take into account their needs or experiences. Participants shared the continual devaluation of their knowledges and the inability of governance structures to transform racist processes and practices. The young women participants highlighted the necessity of rethinking the ways in which society was organized economically, politically, socially, and culturally. For a number of the participants, this desire for change led to personal involvement in working towards justice. The findings from this study reiterate Fernandes (2010) assertion that "observing the social injustices and harsh living conditions of their own working-class families and immigrant peers" (p. 69) contributed to greater activism and politicization. Therefore, experiences of racism, marginalization, and discrimination also had an unforeseen effect, prompting "a reconstitution of self and community" (Toney, 2010, p. 84), a new way of knowing, seeing, and being.

As articulated by the young women participants, their identity as Canadian often had to be mediated as a result of the various exclusions they faced. As such, while they could vote in elections, they also had to come to terms with the daily injustices faced as a result of their ethnicity, religion, credentials, and gender. These injustices often resulted in working to find spaces of belonging outside of the mainstream. Therefore, it is clear that the young women participants do not meet Anant's criteria for increased sense of belonging: "involvement in a social system so that persons feel themselves to be an indispensable and integral part of the system" (Anant, 1966, p. 21). For the majority of the nine participants, this resulted in a desire for change, and this desire for change led to personal involvement in working towards justice as they came to the realization that a majority of the organizations and the individuals who worked in or led them were unable to imagine systemic transformation. As such, a number of the young women participants felt that they had to become leaders and agents of change.

The research findings indicate that the injustices faced by the young women research participants foster feelings of unbelonging to the settler colonial state. However, these feelings of unbelonging can also be taken as the foundations for greater engagement in justice work. As the participants' stories illustrate, even those participants who claim "Canadian" as an identity, do so while acknowledging that the settler colonial state is not meeting their needs. Their articulation of a Canadian identity, both hybrid and diasporic, is based on the question of *if not here, where?* The nation state has a powerful pull on their psyche; yet, this desire to belong to the nation state is actually in contradiction to what their experiences of injustice and responses and resistances to these experiences are articulating: increased feelings of unbelonging to the state.

The young women participants revealed this sense of unbelonging through their continued self-identification as "Black." Participants conveyed their understandings of their blackness as the cause of their oppression. However, they also found in this a common identity through which to identify, one that was not connected to nationalism or the settler colonial state. Therefore, "being" and "becoming" Black are extremely complex and must be understood as a "politically engendered identification" and "a process of negotiating the social locations of race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability to make sense of domination and subordination in Canadian society" (Dei & James, 1998, p. 91). They "become" Black, then, to voice their opposition to the settler colonial state.

> The word "black" becomes an object, which gathers us around as a regathering and helps ground the work that we do, in part by redescribing the ground as the ground of whiteness. Such a word, claimed in this way, points toward the future and toward a world that we have yet to inhabit: a world that is not orientated around whiteness. We don't know, as yet, what shape such a world might take, or what mixtures might be possible, when we no longer reproduce the lines we follow. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 156)

Manifested also in the participants' responses and resistances to injustice is that injustice creates spaces of engagement – often within marginalized communities – where transformation can occur and where lies the potential to reimagine and revision a sense of belonging – a way of being – that is unrestricted by the settler colonial state. This reimagining and revisioning of belonging can lead us to new movements for solidarity

building.

This collective and shared consciousness is embedded in the act of claiming a Black identity. It is the enactment of knowledge-as-emancipation and illustrates the movement from colonialism towards solidarity. Solidarity – through the engendering of a collective consciousness – provides an antidote that enables the fruition of an "epistemology of seeing" (de Sousa Santos, 2007b, p. 428) whereby unbelonging and a shared Black identity should be understood as "form[s] of knowledge … whose point of knowing is solidarity" (de Sousa Santos, 2007b, p. 428). Solidarity is, therefore, transformed into "the hegemonic form of knowing" (de Sousa Santos, 2007b, p. 410) in order to rectify the epistemicide that has occurred as a result of (settler)colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy.

Solidarity building for decolonial resistance

This quest for belonging and community often led the research participants to joining organizations committed to fighting injustice. The young women participants indicated involvement not only with their specific ethno-cultural communities but also to organizations that are specifically committed to fighting injustice as a larger societal issue and not just from within their own ethno-cultural communities. I would contend that the participants were actively engaged in a practice of solidarity building for decolonial resistance.

Solidarities of decolonial resistance are, I would contend, a response used by the research participants towards active systemic, structural, and institutional exclusion and in response to refusals by those in power to reimagine and work towards decolonialization on a systemic level. I use Gaztambide-Fernández's (2012) conception of "a relational solidarity committed to decolonization [that] takes the experience of colonization and the racialized other as a point of departure" (p. 53). Solidarity, then is a term of engagement, a pedagogy, praxis (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). Solidarity, according to Rorty (1989), has a political objective of creating a more expansive sense of solidarity, of continually bringing marginalized peoples into community, instinctively thinking of people as "us" rather than "they" (Featherstone, 2012, p. 29). Furthermore, as defined by Mohanty (2003a), solidarity is based in finding common ways of being in and knowing the world, a common onto-epistemology in terms of

> mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis of relationships among diverse communities…. [T]he practice of solidarity foregrounds people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here – to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances. (p. 7)

What does become clear is that the building of solidarity must then be seen as a "generative process" (Gilmore, 2008, p. 238) wherein solidarity is actively produced and shaped, wherein shared values are created and "collective work produce[s] community solidarity (Gilmore, 2008, p. 238). Solidarity, then, is a creative process bringing together relations and trajectories and "actively generating and shaping shared values and identifications" (Featherstone, 2012, p. 29).

Solidarity permanently seeks transformation, and, as such, cannot "largely work to exculpate and exonerate or to ignore complicity on ongoing colonization" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 54). Therefore, solidarity aims for decolonization through various forms of resistance. According to Mohanty (2003a), these forms of resistance are anchored in a "culture of subversion" (p. 164). Consequently, as solidarity aims for decolonial transformation, Featherstone (2012) contends that this behooves us to ask particular questions:

1. What kinds of relations do they generate between different actors?
2. What kinds of power relations are crafted through solidarities?
3. What kinds of different political trajectories do they shape? (p. 28)

The experiences, actions, and stories shared by the research participants illustrate their expansive engagement for decolonial transformation through the building of solidarity movements and groups as well as the ways in which colonial and capitalist systems, structures, and institutions inhibit such forms of resistance.

The responses from the research participants illustrate that the vast majority of the participants understand that their own experiences with colonial and capitalist systems, structures, and institutions are points of learning from which to educate others as to how to navigate the system in order to be spared the injustices faced by the participants. Such networking allows women to achieve personal and professional goals while building personal, professional, and community support structures through solidarity movements

(Ojo, 2009). Layla, Azara, Felicia, Sahra, and Nala discussed their respective work with racialized communities. Layla joined other racialized young people to create an organization that mentored "*youth*" with similar migration histories in order to offer support and tools that would help "*youth*" better integrate into life in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan and Canada. Layla provided "*youth*" with the tools and knowledge needed to achieve educational and career success in Canada, thereby ensuring that "*youth*" had the mentorship that she and many of her peers had lacked and which would ensure that "*youth*" did not end up as negative statistics with regards to the educational qualifications or employment, as was the reality for many African Canadians. Nala's engagement with a student organization and community service eventually lead her to assume a formal leadership position in an organization that would allow Nala to better the lives of fellow racialized peoples by influencing policy and through advocating for particular structural, systemic, and institutional reforms, in particular with regards to formal educational curriculum and policies. The contributions of the vast majority of the research participants indicate a commitment to solidarity building for decolonial resistance, and these sites of struggle, resistance, and networking act as free space "in which counter hegemonic ideas and oppositional identities can be nurtured" (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, as cited in Bernard & Agozino, 2012, p. 64) and to resist injustice (Hill Collins, 2000).

The majority of the young women research participants are working in various ways and with a number of different organizations and at different levels of formal and informal engagement – with elected officials, in ethno-cultural communities, through community and work leadership positions, and with equity oriented organizations through their post-secondary institutions. Yet, what becomes clear is that the vast majority of the participants are committed to bringing about change that they believe has the potential to better the lives of marginalized peoples. Therefore, while the participants were not working with each other on the same projects, their engagement can still be described as a relational solidarity that "takes the experience of colonization and the racialized other as a point of departure" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 53). Solidarity, understood from this perspective, is a term of engagement, a pedagogy, praxis (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012), and has a political objective of creating a more expansive

sense of solidarity, of continually bringing marginalized peoples into community, of instinctively thinking of people as "us" rather than "they" (Featherstone, 2012; Rorty, 1989). Solidarity emerges as a system of knowing, seeing, and being for the participants. For the research participants, their racialized identities provide a departure point from which a space (both physical and conceptual) for engagement comes into being. As such, their endeavours for justice and equity are constructed from their own experiences of marginalization and resistance and from a determination to ensure that the injustices of settler colonialism are not foisted upon other racialized peoples, with regards to the devaluation of their labour, knowledges, experiences, and their right to exist and live according to their systems and ways of being, seeing, and knowing.

As illustrated by the young women participants, to engage in solidarity building for decolonial resistance, then, asks that the work of decoloniality occurs in various spaces, is widespread, and engages at various levels of formal and informal life. This decolonial resistance is work that individuals engage in throughout their lives and may at times bring them into conflict with others engaging in decolonial resistance, as articulated by Azara who shared her frustrations with having to compete for "limited" resources with other organizations. Yet, this enforced competition should in actuality be viewed as the ways in which formal systems that are structured by colonialism and capitalism come together to prevent those engaged in decolonial resistance from engaging in solidarity building. The discourse of limited resources, as analysed from a critical anticolonial feminism, places racialized peoples in a continuous struggle against an institutional and structural brick wall (Ahmed, 2012). This brick wall is constructed by colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, and uses the "logic" of capitalism and colonialism to fracture solidarities. It places those attempting to splinter the brick wall in conflict with one another in order to diminish their potential power and capacity to come together in union. After all, if different peoples were chipping away at the brick wall at different fissure points, it could eventually give away. However, capitalism and colonialism work in conjunction to keep people fighting one another for limited resources in order to manage and, thereby, limit their power and capacity for transformation.

Solidarity for decolonial resistance is founded upon a premise of relationality and the understanding that engaging in decolonial resistance is a life-long project, a system of

knowing, seeing, and being that can be described as a collective consciousness. Consequently, a number of the participants had to navigate their active involvement with such projects and movements. Due to a number of issues and constraints – education, psychological and physical well-being, work, discrimination, and economic limitations – participants had to consciously disengage for various periods. Edna's mother was prevented from being actively involved in community as she worked two jobs to support her family and care for her grandson; however, she encouraged Edna to join other organizations struggling for equity by ensuring that she could offer Edna financial help. This commitment from Edna's mother appears to be related both to the desire to see her daughter engaged in work around justice and equity as well as due to the understanding that such activities would boost Edna's curriculum vitae, giving her experiences that would aid her when searching for a job post-graduation.

The participants' responses to marginalization faced in Canada were extremely varied. Maita displayed a high degree of concern that she was wasting time as she had competed her Bachelor of Arts degree but had not secured a professional job nor gotten accepted into law school or graduate school. Maita's family's response to her precarious situation post-graduation caused her much stress as both she and her family viewed her university degree as a natural stepping stone in achieving career success. Maita, unlike the other eight participants, was not engaged in her community, nor in work around justice and equity, focusing instead on getting an education, finding a stable career, and having a family. Maita was working as a receptionist for a security company, despite having completed a university degree. The labour of women like Maita enables Canada to engage in an economic colonialism as Maita who had been hoping to attend law school and become one of a limited number of racialized lawyers practicing law in Canada instead worked at a company whose mandate was the protection of property as opposed to the rights of peoples. Maita's educational and career path speaks to the dangers of capitalism and colonialism. Capitalism and colonialism promise that if newer Canadians work hard enough, they too will benefit from the settler-colonial state. Yet, this is a false promise as, in actuality, the labour of racialized individuals, such as Maita, alongside broader structures of settler colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, imperialism, and patriarchy perpetuate the systemic and structural forces that continue to devalue

racialized and Indigenous peoples. This places racialized women, in particular, in difficult positions, wherein they must survive within the settler-colonial state whilst also coming to the understanding that it must be dismantled. Furthermore, for some of the research participants, dismantling the settler colonial state is not viewed as an option; it goes beyond their imagination to conceive of such a world. For others, the settler colonial state has offered them a life they consider better than that which their families left behind. This once again is how colonialism and capitalism continue to operate; these structures ensure that people are so busy surviving injustice that they cannot imagine a world premised on equity and justice, whether it be social, economic, cultural, political, or cognitive justice. The question that becomes important for educators is what platforms are needed to imagine alternate possibilities for being that are rooted in equity and justice.

The dismantling of the settler-colonial state did appeal in differing ways to many of the young women participants. While a number of the young women displayed little willingness to work from within formal structures, arguing that transforming the system required like-minded individuals coming together to exert pressure from outside, there were also young women, such as Nala, who believed that change from the inside was possible. However, it is important to note that the majority of the young women contended that transformation called for people to work from a diversity of spaces towards similar goals. As such, these forms of resistance are anchored in a "culture of subversion" (Mohanty, 2003a, p. 164).

Knowledge production for solidarity building: A response to marginalization

Intergenerational learning

Solidarity building must be a process where intergenerational learning is encouraged and cultivated. Intergenerational learning within communities has the capacity to be lasting and influential, resulting in mutual learning and the flow of ideas for the community (Ho, 2010). It is multi-directional knowledge production, occurring within families, ethno-cultural communities, and for community organizing and solidarity movements. The use of dialogical pedagogies that combine individual and collective learning allows an examination and engagement with social inequalities (Freire, 2003/1970) and for

facilitating social change through developing individual's and group's critical consciousness (Yep, 2014). This community engagement helps in developing a "vision for an alternate, more just society and fostering the skills to transform this vision into reality" (Yep, 2014, p. 51). Yep (2014) contends that this is a political engagement that looks "beyond politics in relation to the state" (p. 51).

Intergenerational learning within communities as a process for solidarity building should constitute knowledge production as a collective and dialogical process "developed through a common political practice" (Ziadah & Hanieh, 2010, p. 94). Research by Kapoor (2011) and Choudry (2010) that examines knowledge production within social movements illustrates the intrinsic struggles over knowledge and power which are necessary for "active engagement, reflection, and action" (Choudry, 2010, p. 32) as well as to redefine justice not as a project of liberal inclusion but in order to take exception to colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism (Kapoor, 2011). This critical and revolutionary praxis calls for a critical questioning of "existing relations and conditions and actively seek[s] to transform or abolish them and to create relations and conditions that will lead to a better future for all human beings" (Allman, 2001, pp. 167-168). According to Ziadah and Hanieh (2010), this means fully internalizing the necessity of collective engagement for solidarity building as this allows both individual reflexivity as well as a more expansive understanding of historical and contemporary struggles for justice. Knowledge production, then, is a collective responsibility with a broader educative purpose; consequently, activists and community see their continued engagement as integral to the longevity and capacity of a movement for change. Furthermore, this continual engagement for solidarity building generates a culture of resistance that can impact the daily struggles for justice and equity as well as larger structural and more systemic struggles. Solidarity, then, is "experienced as a deep commitment" as opposed to "a fleeting interest in doing good" (Chovanec, Gordon, Underwood, Butt, & Smith Diaz, 2015, p. 168). As bell hooks (2000) articulates:

> Solidarity is not the same as support. To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood. Support can be occasional. It can be given and just as easily withdrawn. Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment. (p. 67)

As such, solidarity and knowledge production are deeply interwoven and must occur simultaneously while ensuring an ongoing process of reflexivity, action, and dialogue.

Family interactions are the foremost environment in which intergenerational knowledge production occurs, as is evident from the interview and focus group data. The young women participants shared the ways in which familial interactions and discussions shaped not only how they understand the world but their attempts to transform what they viewed as traditional, patriarchal, and biased thinking from their parents. This is evident in the focus group discussion amongst Azara, Felicia, Nyassa, and Sahra around the injustices faced by young Black men; while their parents placed some of the responsibility on Black men to act and dress in specific and more acceptable ways, the focus group participants were quick to highlight that it is the men's blackness that is the root of the injustice, regardless of their dress or demeanour. Edna's and Maita's focus group also highlighted the ways in which young women are attempting to transform patriarchal and colonial systems of being and knowing; Edna's description of a conversation with her mother around preconceived notions of being a wife with regards to sexual assault and consent also depicts the ways in which young women are attempting to forge new narratives around the role of women within African Canadian cultures. These interchanges also occurred with parents as the educators. Layla's mother's explanation that she preferred life in Canada as it gave her financial independence while still having the responsibility of taking care of the household illustrated to Layla that her mother is very well aware of the necessity of mediating culture and patriarchy. It was not that she was unaware that her status as a woman and wife placed additional burdens on her; she was making what she saw as the only viable choice for independence – taking on a role outside of the home. Sahra's mother's and Felcia's father's advice to their daughters regarding their career choices illustrate the necessity felt by many parents to teach their children how to navigate colonial and capitalist structures that value certain forms of labour.

> *My mom has always told me, you always have to be better, two or three times better than white people to get the same position – because I am a woman, because I am Black and a Muslim and also wear a hijab. (Sahra, individual interview)*

> *In terms of actual education and academics, ... my parents always pushed me, saying that I have to work 25 times harder than anybody else because first I'm Black and I'm a woman. (Felicia, individual interview)*

The advice given to these young women from their parents illustrate the ways in which family spaces are being used to share knowledge and produce different understandings of the world. These familial exchanges allow the research participants in engage in the important work of educating others to also take exception to colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism (Kapoor, 2011). These parents took on substantive roles as educators within their families and their communities, thus reaffirming numerous scholars' assertions that motherhood/parenthood and care-taking can be equated with immense political engagement and as vital to solidarity building (Amadiume, 1997; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; A. Cooper, 2000; hooks, 2007; Onuora, 2012).

A number of the research participants were attracted to careers that allowed them to work in solidarity with other marginalized peoples. The young women participants all shared that to some extent their choice of career was related to being able to work towards helping ensure social, political/legal, cultural, cognitive, or economic justice for marginalized peoples. These individuals are, in fact, embodying bell hook's (2000) conception of solidarity, as "a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood. ... Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment" (p. 67). For these participants, working to restructure society requires not only their engagement outside of work but is intricately tied to their formal education and choices of career: it encompasses every aspect of their lives. Their ways of knowing, seeing, and being in the world has engendered a culture of resistance that must pervade every aspect of their lives.

Community engagement through ethno-cultural organizations, anti-racist organizations, as well as involvement in formal political work as seen through being on committees and volunteering on political campaigns also encompass the myriad ways that the research participants are working for justice. Ethno-cultural organizations are the most cognizant tool through which intergenerational knowledge is shared and produced for greater community engagement. A number of the young women participants viewed the adults in their lives as community mentors as a result of their service to their local

ethno-cultural communities, seeing their sustained commitment to fighting for justice as a call to also do the same; however, the young women were also quick to point out the divergences in understandings, enactments, and practices of engagement and solidarity between them and adults. For the young women, community engagement and solidarity required community education wherein young peoples could come together to learn from adult mentors as well as one another, discuss, and work together towards equity. Layla, Sahra, Felicia, and Azara were instrumental in creating groups where being in solidarity also required a physical presence on a regular basis, often weekly. According to these four participants, the physical act of coming together allowed both individuals and the larger group to engage in continuous reflexivity as well as a more expansive understanding of historical and contemporary struggles for justice (Ziadah & Hanieh, 2010) where knowledge production is, then, recognized as a collective responsibility with a broader educative purpose and, subsequently, leads activists and community to see their continued engagement as integral to the success of the group and larger movement for change. The young women organized for the express purpose of challenging systemic, institutional, and structural barriers while also engaging in anti-colonial and decolonizing projects that forced them to critically question and discuss issues of settler colonialism, patriarchy, imperialism, and economic precariousness. The young women participated in political and community engagement and solidarity building that can be described as "beyond politics in relation to the state" (Yep, 2014, p. 51), signifying a different system of knowing and being with regards to their relationship to the state.

Stories as a pedagogy of resistance and solidarity

Stories and oral knowledges are considered an Indigenous form of truth-telling that relay the historical and contemporary experiences of African peoples and peoples of African descent. Chilisa (2012) described storytelling as "our language" (p. 193), as the language through which the experiences of colonized peoples are voiced. While storytelling was used within families to pass on cultural knowledge to the next generation, storytelling and the oral sharing of experiences was also a primary tool for community education, engagement, and solidarity building. The majority of the focus group and interview participants spoke of the importance of sharing their experiences of marginalization and resistance through oral stories. Azara, Layla, Subira, Felicia, and Sahra shared the

importance of the re-telling of their experiences in order to find and build community. In these instances, storytelling was not altered to be viewed as a fiction with a moral/ learning but was an authentic re-telling of their experiences. For these young women, the coming together of a like-minded community to share their experiences with others provided a space of comfort and belonging as well as the impetus to work for transformation, as can be seen from Azara's campaign for the police to take seriously the dangers being faced by the African Canadian community.

A number of the young women participants discussed the importance of spaces in which peoples could come together to share their experiences as this provided both an outlet for frustrations as well as advice on how to navigate systemic, structural, and institutional barriers. Furthermore, the sharing of stories laid the foundation upon which to create policies and programs that could bestow the support being requested from community members. Storytelling, therefore, becomes a "tool of resistance to all forms of their subordination" (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 186) as it provides an alternative to the usual call from policymakers for specific kinds of research to prove that the requests from community are necessary. Nala conducted workshops for in-service teachers around the necessity for marginalized voices and curricular changes in kindergarten to grade twelve educational policy. Nala based many of these workshops on her own experiences as a pre-service teacher and racialized student. Azara ensured that community members attended community organized meetings with a law enforcement body in order to share their experiences and frustrations with this organization and the justice system, in particular with regards to missing Black/ African Canadian men and women, whose families had been unable to locate their sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles.

> *I brought one girl whose brother was missing, labeled like high-risk. ... They didn't handle it in the best way for a homicide or for a missing and murdered youth, and they are still not saying that he's dead ... but we were able to connect her with the superintendent and the chief.* (Azara, individual interview)

While these incidents did not affect policy changes, the young women are utilizing extremely public platforms to highlight to those in positions of power the ways in which their communities are negatively impacted by structural, institutional, and systemic oppressions. As such, it becomes difficult for policymakers and those in positions of

power to claim ignorance. These examples delineate the ways in which practices of community story-telling can affect policy-making. Azara ensured that the experiences and narratives of community members became evidence and "officially" gathered by law enforcement, thereby rendering a true reflection of the experiences of the communities she worked with as well as the ways in which such communities are further failed by the state structures put in place to protect them. The experiences of the participants in this research program illustrate that when communities are working towards their own change, they, themselves, are able to decide what qualifies as "evidence" and work from within their own knowledge systems, thus also engaging in counter-hegemonic praxis. These practices do not and are unable to bring large scale change; however, they allow marginalized communities to subvert hegemonic and colonial practices, creating fissures around knowledge valuation. Knowledge production from within communities and movements can, therefore, be a catalyst for more informed decision-making practices that are centred around the lives and experiences of actual peoples.

Conclusion

As evidenced by the participants' stories, actions, meanings, and experiences – that articulate a specific and localized African Canadian onto-epistemology of justice, community can be revisioned into a space for decolonial and anti-colonial resistance. It is a new way of seeing and knowing community. For these research participants, the impossibility of feeling a sense of belonging to a system that excludes, marginalizes, and oppresses forced the young women to search for alternative spaces of community wherein they could come together in solidarity, taking their experience of colonization and as the racialized other as a point of departure to engage in decolonial and anticolonial resistance (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). It is within these community spaces as well as within families that intergenerational knowledge is learned and generated. This process of learning is often multi-directional, as knowledge is lived (Wane, 2008), transformed, and generated within community; they are systems of being and seeing, knowledge gathered throughout time and space, transmitted over generations and connecting and adapting to the past, present, and future of the social and life world (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Kurtz, 2013; Makhubele, 2011; Talaat, Tahir & Husain, 2012; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). It

is within this context that community is articulated as a site of decolonial resistance for these research participants.

An African Canadian onto-epistemology of justice is based on the interlocking of a project of an *anti-colonial feminist justice, community engagement* – as encompassed through solidarity building for decolonial resistance and community education that presumes intergenerational knowledges as its building blocks, and the call for a *pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism* – which is premised on enlarging the spaces and limits of our understandings of solidarity building. This chapter delineated on the first two of these interlocking components – an *anti-colonial feminist justice* and *community engagement* in order to illustrate the ways in which the dismantling of structures of oppression requires locating local strategies with which to affirm agency in the localized environment (Butler, 2002). It is through the locating of local strategies and practices of resistance that we can work towards rectifying the epistemicide that has occurred and continues to oppress and marginalize peoples. These local strategies and practices of resistance are both the actions of individuals but also illustrate collective strategies of subversion and resistance. They are the enactment of political and epistemological defiance. The following chapter will offer a *pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism* that has the potential to answer de Sousa Santos' (2007b) request for local strategies and practices of resistances to be transformed into an "hegemonic form of knowing" (de Sousa Santos, 2007b, p. 410).

Chapter 9: A Pedagogy of Critical Anticolonial Feminism

Introduction

As articulated in the previous chapter, an African Canadian onto-epistemology of justice is based on the interlocking of a project of an anti-colonial feminist justice, community engagement – as encompassed through solidarity building for decolonial resistance and community education that presumes intergenerational knowledges as its building blocks, and the call for a pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism – which presumes enlarging the spaces and limits of our understandings of solidarity building. Furthermore, a pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism is grounded on acknowledging and resisting the hegemony of settler colonialism, patriarchy, neoliberalism, and capitalism (or economic colonialism) as interlocking systems of oppression and domination in the lives of marginalized peoples living within a Canadian context. While capitalism and class inequities have been an emerging theme in the experiences shared by the research participants, their practices of resistance and decolonization have been focused on issues of justice for racialized peoples while viewing economic equity within capitalism as emancipatory. However, these systems of oppression and domination – capitalism, settler colonialism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism – not only regulate the lives of women but also sustain one another, though we are not always aware of the existence of these interdependencies even when we are complicit in upholding race and class privileges, for example, through our own actions. This chapter, then, will present a *pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism* in order to depict a project of solidarity building towards a decolonial and anticolonial project of justice. Through the embodiment of cognitive justice as the foundation of an anticolonial feminist project of justice, this project responds to Mignolo's (2011) calls for epistemic disobedience and delinking from the colonial matrix of power – which is centred on the hegemony of capitalism, colonialism, neoliberalism, and patriarchy whilst in conjunction working to transform solidarity into "the hegemonic form of knowing" (p. 410).

Contextualizing the Injustices of Capitalism, (Settler)Colonialism, Patriarchy, and Neoliberalism in the Lives of Young African Canadian Women

The participants articulated two very different notions for Black/ African Canadian women's equality – one that could fit within the capitalist, neoliberal framework and one that called for them to exist outside of this worldview. The issues concerning the women were not those that concern liberal feminists. Women did not talk about the fight for pay equity, child care spaces, or freedom to breastfeed in public as their fights. While the young women lamented the racist practices they encountered in their educational spaces and workplaces, they also viewed these experiences as an inherent aspect of their lives, finding ways in which to subvert the oppressions they faced. I would contend that even though the vast majority of the participants did not use academic language to critique capitalism and neoliberalism, the issues that they discussed and the meanings associated with their understandings and practices illustrated that the participants displayed complex understandings of their educational and career trajectories. The participants educational and career paths were influenced by a desire to ensure equity, justice, and well-being of peoples, in particular those who are marginalized by the larger society. However, it is important to note that a number of the young women also felt that their self-worth was inextricably tied to their education and professional successes, as evidenced by Maita's struggles after not passing the LSATs and Edna's recognition that teaching was not the appropriate career path. This realization severely impacted Edna and contributed to her struggles with depression; Maita confided that the adversity she faced in passing the LSATs led her to question her capability to be successful in such a career and caused psychological distress. These young women had been working towards these goals for much of their lives and signalled deep internal turmoil when the realities of these careers did not match their expectations. However, as Edna and Maita's experiences emphasize, both of these professions would have benefitted tremendously from the active presence of these young women. The severe devaluation of Maita and Edna's knowledges had forced them to engage in a difficult journey of reimagining their identities outside of these professions. While Maita was still very much immersed in this difficult journey, Edna, with the support of her mother, was working to develop her identity and ways of knowing and being outside that of a specific professional career that she described as attempting to

indoctrinate her into hegemonic ways of knowing while destroying the diverse ways of knowing, being, and seeing she would bring to the classroom.

A number of the young women depicted the experiences of their parents whose lives consisted of long periods of precariousness as a result of war, famine, political instability, and economic instability due to capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, and colonialism. Azara, Nala, and Edna both spoke of their families' gruelling journeys as refugees in order to escape political instability and war. Even those parents who immigrated as skilled workers, as portrayed by Felicia, or who were sponsored by spouses already established in Canada, such as Sahra's mother, faced tremendous difficulties after immigrating, spending long periods of their lives trying to survive and ensuring that their children can live in safety. Edna and Nala detail their parents' struggles in Canada, working multiple minimum paying jobs in order to house, feed, and clothe their family. As such, a number of the parents see the struggles they faced as necessary and want to ensure that their children face fewer struggles, in particular with regards to their professional and career successes. This is evidenced by the advice given by parents regarding the types of careers their daughters should pursue, careers that parents believe would minimize the hardships their daughters face, such as medicine or dentistry. The young women's depictions of their parents' insights illustrate the predominance of capitalist discourses. Capitalism, after all, is attractive because many of these parents have already been failed by their governments, societies, and communities; as such, a discourse that promises success for individuals who work "hard enough" is attractive not only to those who have been oppressed and marginalized but also to those who have achieved class privilege as a result of professional careers, for example. In many cases, imperialism, colonialism, and patriarchy have forced families from their homes and communities and resulted in the deaths of children, spouses, family members and community members. Settler colonialism, therefore, can provide a level of safety.

What becomes apparent is that these young women access white liberal feminism when it suits their purposes while discarding it when it does not. Patriarchy and capitalism are central ideologies for how the participants understand and negotiate their lives. Some of the participants are not trying to create an alternative to the capitalistic, colonial, patriarchal world in which they live. These participants do not see a viable

alternative. Instead, they are merely attempting to survive, to create the best possible world within the limits of (settler)colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism. For these participants, marginalization is a reality of their lives, predominantly as a result of patriarchy and regardless of where they live. They, therefore, view their lives in Canada through a lens of economic emancipation. Liberal democracies, therefore, permit the "freedom" to be responsible for their own economic security; this has often not been the case in their countries of origin. That is not to say that the participants view this as a ringing endorsement of life in liberal democracies or under capitalism; however, capitalism is pervasive no matter where in the world they live, and liberal feminism – which is more deeply entrenched in the Canadian state – has left some of the participants with the illusion of "freedom" regarding their capacity for economic security and access to education – two issues of the most importance, as articulated by the participants. I would contend that a number of the participants could not – in reality – conceive of a society that was not organized through capitalism, patriarchy, and (settler)colonialism. This inability to envision a different world, one founded upon equity and justice, is in part directly related to their feelings of unbelonging and to their contribution (albeit unknowingly) to the perpetuation of settler colonialism.

It is colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy that has led many of the participants' families to move away from their homes, in search for a better life in Canada, whether due to war, economic insecurity, imperialism, or colonialism. Yet, these issues continue to pervade all aspects of life after migration. The settler colonial state operates through the racialization of labour and the promise that the successful immigrant must also play their part in continuing the practices of dispossession of Indigenous peoples as well as all those who are placed at the bottom of the capitalist hierarchy; this empowers the system to continue to operate. Subscribing to settler colonialism necessitates buying into a belief system that upholds two viewpoints that are in actuality contradictory to the logic of settler colonialism: 1) the inclusion of racialized peoples into electoral politics signifies the best method through which to ensure a voice in the structures of decision-making; and 2) credential validation/valuation will bring about equity. Racialized peoples are, therefore, co-opted into contributing to the violence of the settler colonial state, as they embark on a quest for belonging, a quest they can only partially successfully complete,

and only by enacting violence upon others. The current electoral system as well as labour policies are premised on a neoliberal and capitalist system of governance that strategically excludes and is based on the hierarchization of peoples wherein their only value is seen through their identity as workers and through their capacity to be economically productive. This is in line with the central tenet of neoliberalism: making labour more productive through the argument that 1) factors of production (labour and capital) get paid what they are worth; and 2) markets are efficient and do not allow wastage (Palley, 2005). Racialized peoples' labour (in all capacities) and knowledges are devalued. There exists a contestation of ideas where quality is not usually the demarcation point between the knowledges that win and gain dominance and the knowledges that lose. The knowledges that win are those supported by "the power of finance and politics, and specific class and institutional interests" (Guttal, 2006, p. 39). In this knowledge economy, knowledge is valued on the basis of who has access to particular forms of knowledge. Historically, tenets inherent within neoliberal and capitalistic ideologies were valued and reproduced socially through the powers of systems and structures of governance.

The responses from the young women participants highlight the complex ways in which they must also navigate the capitalist and colonial governance and economic systems that structure their lives. The experiences of young women such as Maita, Layla, and Nala, for example, illustrate the extent to which their identities and relationships are forged around ensuring they have successful careers. Maita's anxiety regarding passing the LSATs as well as her fear that she was wasting time working in a job that could not contribute to helping her achieve her ultimate goal exemplifies the pressures placed on young racialized women to find career and economic success. They are the hopes of their families, who have often made a number of sacrifices in order to ensure that their children— who were educated in Canada— would not face the same barriers as their parents. Layla has identified this struggle in other racialized young people and chose to volunteer her time to ensuring that young people could have the social and cultural capital needed to know how to navigate such systemic inequities. For example, one could make the argument that having lawyers, social workers, elected representatives, board members, and teachers who are representative of the diversity that currently constitutes

Canada will ensure that racialized peoples are better represented and served by our legal system, governance structures, and education system. However, this argument ignores the reality that these are colonial structures that enable those who benefit from settler colonialism to continue to do so at the expense of Indigenous and /other marginalized peoples. Furthermore, we must acknowledge the ways in which the knowledge economy affirms the predatory nature of capital, allowing it to seize value that is produced through the production of biopolitical exploitation (Hardt & Negri, 2009). As such, greater emphasis is placed on westernized formal education which has become the main means through which we determine what knowledge is valued. Furthermore, as can be seen from Edna and Maita's experiences with formal education, for example, the constraints placed upon workers, labourers, and students within this context leads away from creativity towards rote, mechanical thinking processes in which true knowledge is subsumed (Hardt & Negri, 2009). Schooling and credentializing can now be utilized as a means with which to foster exclusion against the powerless; hence, those whose knowledge is deemed inferior either through schooling or the process of credentializing have their knowledge and labour devalued. This is how capitalism operates, as the expansion of capitalism in the West "implie[s] the expansion of Western epistemology in all its ramifications" (Mignolo, 2002, p. 59), and, thus, the "subalternization of [non-Western] knowledge" (Mignolo, 2000, p. 4).

However, survival within these colonial structures does require that those who are able to work towards justice and equity are in position/s to ensure that marginalized peoples are represented, thereby ensuring that they have the social and cultural capital as well as knowledge necessary to fight the violence enacted by the structures of the colonial nation state. Representation within the structures that enable the colonial nation state to continue to operate can be viewed as a pedagogical tool in decolonial solidarity movements. Furthermore, as noted by Amadiume (1987b) and Steady (1987), historically, African women in traditional African societies exercised real authority and fully participated in traditional political institutions. As such, their continued participation in formal politics can also be seen as the continuation of such traditional activities through the only means afforded to them.

As illustrated by participants such as Azara, Sahra, Nyassa, and Felicia, a second pedagogical tool in decolonial solidarity movements would involve calling out the colonial state for the violence is enacts on racialized peoples while also engaging in work that envisions a different way of being, seeing, and knowing outside of the colonial state, one also premised upon being in community with Indigenous peoples.

A third pedagogical tool, then, calls for those involved in decolonial solidarity movements to move beyond operating within the "interstices of capitalism" (Wood, 1995, p. 1) and instead work to transform the (settler) colonial *and* capitalist system. Such a mandate calls for education and action. While a process of solidarity building can already be seen emerging from within racialized communities' practices of resistance, such practices must continue to be nurtured. This pedagogical tool calls on those who are engaged in decolonial and anticolonial work to see the connections between capitalism and colonialism and to understand that the colonial nation state's power is based in capitalism. As such, the injustices faced by racialized peoples cannot be adequately addressed if our critiques of (settler)colonialism do not explicitly include a critique of capitalism.

A Pedagogy for Critical Anticolonial Feminism

The majority of participants of this study were actively engaged in their various communities and working towards ensuring that members of their communities had opportunities for a better life, one where they faced fewer barriers. For some of the participants, they were engaged through paid work with settlement organizations, community organizations, or ethno-cultural organizations. Others volunteered their time and skills in order to ensure that they were working towards these goals. Two of the participants saw opportunities to make change through involvement with formal electoral politics, deciding to volunteer on political campaigns. Communities need to have peoples who are engaged in such work at various levels; however, solidarity building requires active organizing and a long-term plan of action. Furthermore, this work cannot be undertaken in piecemeal fashion; rather, the various skills and capacities of communities should be harnessed through the collective in a joint effort towards a more equitable and justice oriented society for all peoples in the community and in relation with other marginalized groups. The settler colonial state benefits when marginalized peoples and

groups are incapable of collective action for change. Therefore, this research project compels me to propose three steps we can embark on for this much-needed radical project of solidarity in order to construct "alternative systems which subvert the logic of capitalism, racism, and sexism" (Ferguson, 2009, p. 171, as cited in Chovanec et al., 2015, p. 167). A radical project of solidarity calls on people to engage in different systems of knowing, seeing, and being and begins when people "transform their own identities so that they re-conceive what their common interests are" (Ferguson, 2009, p. 172, as cited in Chovanec et al., 2015, p. 167). This radical project of solidarity is grounded within an Indigenous hermeneutics. First, such an endeavour echoes Manulani Aluli-Meyer's call for a historical consciousness – the coming together of history and culture – to understand current social, political, economic, and legal structures and systems as well as responses to it, leading to "question[ing] how knowledge is related to the processes of colonization" (Grande, 2014, p. 240) and, consequently, "disagreement with and eventual opposition to the dominant ideology" (Trask, 1993, p. 54). Second, the intentionality behind the critical production and consumption of knowledges rests on the desire for ideas that liberate, instruct, and transform, of *conscientization* (Freire, 2003/1970). These are knowledges that bring peoples and communities together (Aluli-Meyer, 2008) and centre "justice as a way of life—justice as practicing the responsibilities of being good relatives to each other" (McCaslin & Breton, 2014, p. 519). Third, place is in actuality a metaphysical construct that "engages knowledge and contextualizes knowing" (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 219) within a radical project of solidarity. Place, within the context of this research – nation states/regions in sub-Saharan Africa, Amiskwaciwaskahikan, and Turtle Island – is a "conscious-shaping space," a "space-shaped consciousness" (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 219) influenced by culture and history (colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, patriarchy). Place and our interpretations and reinterpretations of it, therefore, significantly influences the potential for a shared cultural consciousness.

As the research shows, there is a distinct lack of knowledge and education, illustrating the connections between the violence and marginalizations faced by the research participants and the larger project of the interlocking of (settler) colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and neoliberalism. As such, much of the resistance that has been

articulated and enacted by a number of the research participants and their communities tends to call for an end to racist practices without linking racism to capitalism, for example. As Maita and Edna point out in their focus group, capitalism is viewed as problematic because it asks people to live beyond their means and not because it succeeds through the exploitation of Indigenous and racialized minds and bodies. Consequently, the movements of solidarity and resistance emerging from within communities may require educative opportunities wherein racialized peoples can come together to share stories on their experiences and, thereby, also explore for themselves and as communities looking for change, the connections among their experiences and the structural forces that enact such violence. This would enable communities to engage in a process of re-interpretation, unlearning, and relearning – different systems of knowing, seeing, and being – the relationship between the structures of power and the endemic violence faced by racialized peoples. A pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism is premised, then, on articulating the lived stories of Black/ African Canadian women's agency and the ways through which they resist oppression in a world that "seeks to exploit, denigrate, and dehumanize their very existence" (Wane, 2004, p. 151) while also educating on

> "the politics of location and diversities of class, race, culture, sexuality and so on. [It] also seeks to build understanding of the connections between the local and global, between the micro-politics of subjectivity and everyday life, and the macro-politics of global political economy. This reflects a commitment to a certain holism, to challenging and subverting the disciplinary and locational fragmentations which have tended to demarcate and circumscribe the theorizing of gender and gender relations." (Mama, 2007, p. 152)

Furthermore, given that the value of Indigenous knowledges lies in their cultural and economic embeddedness with localized Indigenous communities as these knowledges are produced through spatially and materially relational practices (McFarlane, 2006), a pedagogy for a critical anticolonial feminism that calls for marginalized peoples to work in solidarity has the potential to impede the current cooptation of Indigenous knowledges into a neoliberal, capitalist framework. Working in solidarity could potentially reinvigorate Indigenous systems of being and knowing for those of the African diaspora by connecting them to a local context.

This connection to the local is vital for the survival of an African diaspora living in Canada. Given that Indigenous knowledges are "a means and process for articulating what local people know" (Olatokun & Ayanbode, 2009, p. 293), the process through which such an articulation occurs should demonstrate a community's understandings of how people are in the world, the myriad ways people know and see the various parts of their worlds, of the interconnections that exist, and of what it means to question, to live. The process should enable peoples

> to understand better the complex power relations associated with knowledge at the local level, to think about ways in which the power which currently exists, both implicitly and explicitly… can be negotiated, and how individuals at the community level can be involved in the process. (Briggs, 2013, p. 240)

For those living in Canada, who have themselves or whose families have migrated from elsewhere, such a connection to the local, must be premised upon cultural and economic embeddedness with localized Indigenous communities (Weber-Pillwax, 2016). For the participants of this research project, that would necessitate making connection to localized Indigenous communities of Amiskwaciwaskahikan. Colonization, then, while a tool for the forceful marginalization of groups of people can also become a suture point for transformation. **"**When you force people to abandon their ways of knowing, their ways of seeing the world, you literally destroy their spirit and once that spirit is destroyed it is very, very difficult to embrace anything**…** because that person is never complete" (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 336), thus leading to the realization that the only possible way forward is the recovery of Indigenous systems on being, knowing, and seeing (Odora Hoppers, 2003).

Learning the language(s) of marginalization

People coming together to engage in a process of sharing, learning, and unlearning around the following issues and ideologies must be the first step: colonialism, capitalism (economic colonialism), settler colonialism, neoliberalism, patriarchy, racism, and homophobia. It is imperative that this project begins with diasporic groups, and ethno-cultural organizations are one space in which such a project could be initiated as the infrastructure and knowledge already exists within these spaces. As the research found, a number of the participants articulated in-depth explanations of the ways in which these

ideologies work to oppress racialized peoples. However, when opportunities arise for peoples to come together to share their stories of oppression, they often become the stories of individuals, as opposed to the understanding that these issues and the resulting oppressions are a result of ideological forces and power structures working together. There is a belief that changes from within the existing structures, including policy changes are a viable means through which to bring about change. Yet, research continues to show that working from within the existing structures that are based in colonialism and capitalism abets the continued hierarchization of labour, placing racialized and Indigenous peoples at the bottom of the ladder; even when marginalized peoples in the global North are "successful," this success if often premised on the subordination of other racialized peoples, in particular those still living in the global South. As such, it is imperative that community organizations and ethno-cultural community groups use their mandates for community empowerment as a space in which to illustrate the connections of the experiences faced by their peoples to larger ideological and structural forces. After all, there is significant research and anecdotal evidence to prove such an association (Pillay, 2018).

This also calls for an unlearning of how we define our worth and understandings of "success," of revisioning different ways of knowing and seeing success. As the research highlights, successfully completing higher education and finding professional careers is viewed as the ultimate aspiration. This is true, even for those young women currently engaged in decolonial work. Yet, this prioritizes a particular form of knowledge, one that, in actuality, categorizes the individual as superior to the community as opposed to viewing the success of the individual as related to the needs of the community.

Understanding settler colonialism

Settler colonialism is structured and operates both similarly and differently from colonialism in the vast majority of countries that the participants originate from and is an ongoing process through the continued dispossession of Indigenous peoples from the land. It is tied to a transnational pattern of labor substitution and slavery and the inception of racial categories which continue to normalize these historical processes into the present (Wolfe, 2016). Furthermore, research indicates that the vast majority of

newcomers and immigrants to Canada as well as racialized peoples in Canada hold extremely negative perceptions of Indigenous peoples; newcomers to Canada reveal the same degree of racism towards Indigenous peoples as White Canadians as soon as three months after arriving in Canada (Weber-Pillwax, 2016) As such, engaging in decolonial solidarity building necessitates learning and understanding how settler-colonialism operates, how racialized peoples in Canada are both implicated in the structures that perpetuate settler colonialism, how racialized peoples are also casualties/victims of settler colonialism, and connecting their own experiences of marginalization and dispossession to the larger structure and ideology of settler colonialism.

Vital to understanding and exploring settler colonialism is the questioning of what constitutes belonging within the settler colonial state and an analysis of how the quest for belonging for racialized diasporic peoples is tied to settler colonialism and economic colonialism. Belonging to the settler colonial state is only possible when those attempting to belong are willing to also play a role in subordinating other racialized and Indigenous peoples through cultural, political, social, legal, and economic hegemonization practices. As such, the project for belonging for racialized peoples is deeply embedded in colonial structures and processes, and there must be a re-articulation of belonging from outside the structures of settler colonialism and from within practices of community that bring together disparate peoples in a shared project for equity and justice. This is a call for a different way of seeing, knowing, and being in community and in relation with peoples. It is integral that the project of unlearning and learning that this calls for is taken up first by racialized peoples and is not premised upon the free labour of Indigenous peoples to provide this education. Further, this process of unlearning and learning must occur outside of the structures of the settler colonial state or by finding ways in which to subvert the hegemonic tendencies and practices of the settler colonial nation state.

Solidarity building with Indigenous peoples and other marginalized peoples

The third step in building a pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism involves the "long-term processes of grassroots education and organizing that may not have immediate results" (Choudry, 2010, p. 29) through the coming together of racialized and Indigenous peoples in community as well as other marginalized groups such as temporary

foreign workers (TFWs) and undocumented peoples in order to work in solidarity for decolonization and against economic colonialism. According to bell hooks (1994),

> Black women who "get it together," who deal with sexism and racism, develop important strategies for survival and resistance that need to be shared within Black communities, especially since (as they put it) the Black woman who gets past all this and discovers herself "holds the key to liberation". (p. 118)

Within the Canadian context, racialized and Indigenous communities have a long history of fighting against colonialism and for equity. The learnings that have emerged from this long struggle must be shared in order to build towards long-term possibilities for change. Friedel (2015) highlights the learnings from the Idle No More movement that utilized a pedagogy "interlaced by cultural and political activism" and, therefore, prepared young Indigenous peoples for making connections (p. 889). Such a pedagogy was "deeply tied to lived experience across multiple eras, oriented to past Indigenous resistance to the unfolding of the settler colonial enterprise, and premised on a collective memory that is recuperative, intergenerational, and innately political" (Friedel, 2015, p. 889). The theorizations by hooks (1994) and Friedel (2015) illustrate the possibilities for learning from our collective communities through the coming together of historical, social, cultural, and political knowledges; furthermore, such opportunities for solidarity building creates the potential for ethical spaces where dialogue among all those who are suffering as a result of colonialism can "take control of our humanity again, our visioning, our conversations" (Ermine, 2011).

A critical anticolonial feminism is premised on those who have been victims of (settler) colonization recognizing Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous systems of knowing, being, and seeing as the "collective epistemological understanding[s] of the community" (Reynar, 1999, p. 290) and as accessible only through participation in specific communities (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Within this context, Indigenous knowledges are comprised of the coming together of innovations, "knowledges, know-how, practices, and representations maintained and developed" (Talaat, Tahir & Husain, 2012, p. 184) by communities in order to develop collective epistemologies and ontologies that do not exist within hierarchical structures (Brant-Castellano, 2000; Maurial, 1999; Shiva, 2000; Wane, 2008; Wangoola, 2000) and operate in solidarity to

resist the settler colonial state and its machinations. As such, Indigenous knowledges have the potential to encompass shared and multiple understandings of seeing, knowing, and being, focusing on relationships among people and between people and their world (Dei, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Jiménez-Estrada, 2005; Kovach, 2005, 2009; Kurtz, 2013) in order to give life to a collective struggle.

Conclusion

A *pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism*, as presented in this chapter, is the final component of an African Canadian onto-epistemology of justice that was first articulated in chapter seven. It demands the assemblage and revisioning of spaces for decolonial and anticolonial resistance for solidarity building. This revisioning is cognitive justice in action; it "recognizes the right of different forms of knowledge to co-exist. … In this sense knowledge is not something to be abstracted from a culture as a life form; it is connected to livelihood, a life cycle, a lifestyle; it determines life chances" (Visvanathan, 2009, ¶ 21). These revisioned spaces of engagement, education, resistance, solidarity, and activism as well as the processes of engagement produce an agenda to resist patriarchy, capitalism, (settler)colonialism, and neoliberalism through a lens of justice and by working in solidarity with other marginalized beings. It is a call for the deliberate creation not only of decolonized subjects but of a decolonized collective.

Chapter 10: Concluding Thoughts

Some mornings i remember a border is a line
Some mornings i remember gender is a border
Some mornings I taste the sweat of sun and dance
and there is no thirsting man or sacrifice or gun
Although i've known it all

Some mornings i say truth and reconciliation
And i look up the history of whose spine I have crushed under my boot
And i take a step of
And i ask for forgiveness
And i do not celebrate the day my boot made contact
At the very least
i learn my demon's language

~ Nasra (2018)

Study Summary

A review of the literature and theoretical perspective

In chapters two and three of this study, I explore the connections and interlocking of diverse systems of knowing from the perspectives of young women of the African diaspora living in a particular localized settler colonial territoriality of Canada – Amiskwaciwaskahikan – with the effects of such systems of knowing, seeing, and being on their identities as diasporic, racialized, and gendered beings living in a settler colonial state which is structured around the logic of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism. This literature review is intended to provide both the context and foundations for understanding the emergence of hybrid and diasporic knowledge systems among young African Canadian women living in Edmonton, Alberta/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan as related to their understandings and practices of political and community engagement and resistance.

The literature illustrates that very little scholarship exists that examines African Indigenous knowledge (AIK) systems among young women of the African diaspora. As such, a major focus of the chapter is in articulating the specificities of AIK and exploring the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of AIK in order to establish the effects of structures of power – (settler) colonialism, patriarchy, neoliberalism, and capitalism –

on these systems of being and knowing. Of particular saliency, is the discussion on the interlocking of diaspora, identity, and belonging amongst Black/ African Canadian women. Diaspora is conceptualized as a space where multiple identities of women are contested; women are constituted as both subjects and objects (Anzaldúa, 1991; Choudhry & Asif, 2013; Davis, 2004). The literature identifies diaspora as a space where women investigate issues of race, class, gender oppressions, self-definition, community, and activism as fluid and demarcated by traditions, cultures, customs, societal norms, institutional structures, capitalism, and (settler)colonialism.

A significant function of chapter three is to lay out the overarching theoretical framework that I employ to guide my analysis of this study. Razack's (2001) theory of interlocking systems of domination alongside interlocking systems of resistance – which I refer to as "interlocking systems of domination and resistance" is significant in my explorations of the oppressions faced by young African Canadian women and also the ways in which these women resist, challenge, and subvert the process. Cognitive justice and decoloniality are central to locating local strategies of resistance. Cognitive justice "recognizes the right of different forms of knowledge to co-exist" (Visvanathan, 2009, ¶. 21). Locating local strategies requires engagement in a process of decoloniality that encompasses both "rebuilding what was destroyed and to build what doesn't yet exist" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 109) in order to ensure that the dismantling of oppressive structures is the result of an engagement among diasporic and Indigenous communities, their epistemologies and ontologies, the environment in which they exist, and addresses "multiple ways of seeing, justice, power, and community" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 45). Therefore, this theoretical perspective illustrates the ways in which power is structured, produced, and organized through interlocking systems, and we learn how women – in particular young Black/ African Canadian women – are produced in positions that exist both symbiotically and hierarchically.

The literature presented in this chapter brings together diverse scholarship on Black/ African Canadian women as related to their connections to Africa, detailing their historical, cultural, and traditional relations and worldviews, as well as space-making attempts within a new diasporic territoriality. The research depicts that young African Canadian women's marginalizations and acts of resistance are mediated through

structures and systems of power: (settler) colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, neoliberalism, and imperialism. Yet, the literature also illustrates that through African Indigenous knowledge systems, young women of African descent access "the power of collective responsibility to tackle social issues" (Wane, 2011, p. 8). While the research clearly outlines the capacity of AIK in tackling social issues on the African continent, there is limited research regarding the connection between peoples of the African diaspora and AIK outside of Africa. This is a significant gap that this study is fulfilling.

Research approach

This research supposes the creation of anticolonial solidarity movements premised on the notion of the decolonial/ decolonized subject. This decolonial subject constitutes oneself in the "place that has been configured by the colonial matrix of power," where one is "located within the epistemic and ontological racial coordinates of imperial knowledge" (Mignolo, 2011, p. xvi). This localized constitution of self, then, sets the groundwork for the grassroots building of anticolonial solidarity movements that embolden communities of resistance.

This is, therefore, a critical qualitative study that is framed through an Indigenous hermeneutics based on the scholarship of Manulani Aluli-Meyer and incorporates the African philosophy of being: Ubuntu. Through Ubuntu, individuals become conscious of their being, privileges, and responsibilities towards self and others, and each individual is able to say, "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969). This project is, consequently, framed within the epistemological and ontological perspectives of women of the African diaspora living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan.

In this research project, an Indigenous hermeneutics emphasizes human actions, experiences, and meanings as constituting the world. "We exist, therefore we interpret" (Aluli-Meyer, 2003b, p. 59). It is those interpretations, as a result of our distinct social, cultural, and political contexts as well as our historical consciousness that illustrate how "power, hegemony, colonization, racism, and oppression" as well as capitalism act to deny the epistemological truths that our collective experiences know to be our material reality (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 218). The purpose of interpretation, then, is a radical emancipation that calls on us to examine not only structural, systemic, and institutional inequities, but also the policies, practices, and systems of knowing, being, and seeing in

our own communities. Consequently, central to an Indigenous hermeneutics is understanding collective actions as well as the notion of relationality. This critical reinterpretation is the function of this study: it is the creation and construction of a collective "space of engagement" where peoples work to "remember, redefine, and reverse the devastation of … colonialist encounter[s]" (Grande, 2014, p. 234) by thinking together and by opening our minds and exploring "the purpose of our lives, our work, our particular ways of viewing" (Aluli-Meyer, 2013, p. 99). The intention and function of this study was the interpretation of the experiences, meanings, practices, and actions of Black/ African Canadian women as related to a collective consciousness; therefore, an Indigenous hermeneutics, as espoused by Aluli-Meyer, proved to be best-suited to meet the intention and function of this research project.

Study purpose and research questions

My primary objective in this research project was to explore and extrapolate the myriad ways in which the systems and structures of (settler)colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, and patriarchy interlock with young African Canadian women's practices of resistance, solidarity, and community engagement, as well as how their experiences, meanings, and actions shape their decolonial subjectivities, and also spur the creation of communities of anticolonial resistance. Thus, my research questions for this study are:

1. What challenges, barriers, and marginalizations do young African Canadian women face as they understand and enact their agency and citizenship?
   1a. How are these challenges and subsequent responses, resistances, and subversions communicated among and between young African Canadian women?
2. How do African Indigenous systems of knowing, seeing, and being influence young African Canadian's women's practices of understanding, engagement, and resistance in their local, national, and extra-local communities
3. What educational and activist platforms are needed to construct new possibilities for individual and collective resistances?

Methods

This critical qualitative study consisted of three sets of focus group interviews with nine young women (women aged 18 to 30), and subsequent one-on-one semi-structured

interviews with five of the young women. Participants were recruited as a result of their connection to countries in Sub Saharan Africa – Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe, (countries with some the largest percentages of people of African descent living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan) (Statistics Canada, 2017a).

I commenced data collection with a series of focus group interviews with the young women participants. The three focus groups consisted of eight young women participants, all of whom were either currently attending post-secondary or had recently completed post-secondary. The focus groups provided an opportunity for the young women to engage with one other as they responded to the interview questions; as such, the focus groups elicited a diversity of viewpoints on a number of issues. As the researcher, the focus groups provided understanding as to how individuals collectively come together (Bryman & Teevan, 2005; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; Sarantakos, 2005) to "make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it" (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 195). Four of the focus group participants and one additional participant were invited to take part in one-on-one interviews in order to delve deeper into their experiences, actions, and understandings of the world. The one-on-one interviews were organized as to allow me to probe further into the responses given by the participants during the focus group conversations. As such, the one-on-one interviews provided context and responses based on their individual subjectivities, thus enabling me to delineate the extent to which the participants' understandings of the world, their actions, and the meanings they ascribe to their social and life world can be attributed to a collective vision, as called for within an Indigenous hermeneutics.

Summary of findings

The conversations with the participants yielded abundant findings detailing participants varied life experiences, actions, understandings of the world, and they ways in which they negotiated, mediated, resisted, and challenged interlocking systems of oppression. The findings illustrate the ways in which structural, institutional, and systemic violence, as a result of settler colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and neoliberalism resulted in injustice for the participants, their families, and their communities; such violence is inflicted on them in order to ensure the survival of the settler colonial state. The participants

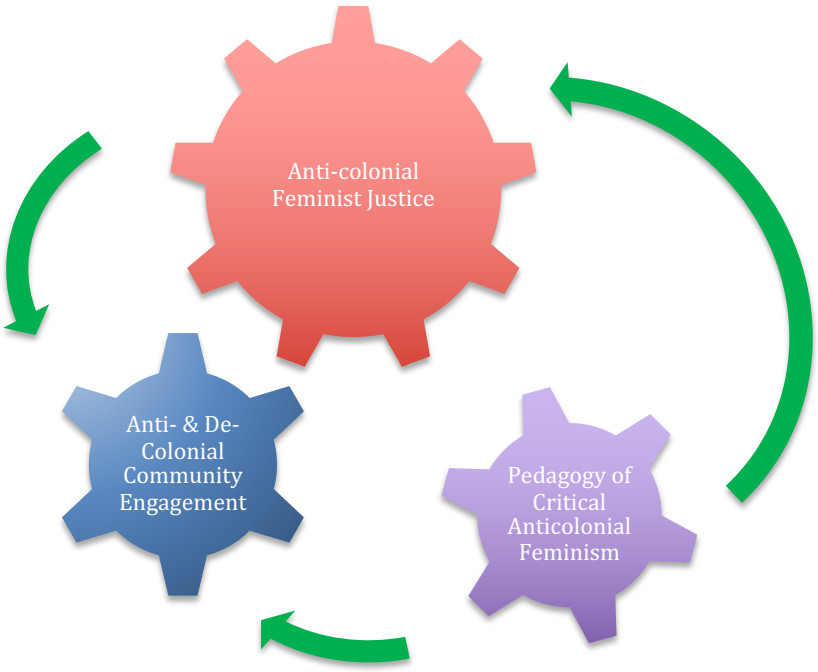
responded to the wounds they received – due to a lack of social and cultural capital and absence of government policies that support Black and other minoritized peoples – by calling for an education system that also privileges non-Euro-Western knowledges and depicts greater inclusion of cultural, historical, social, and political diversity. It was an appeal for racialized peoples to learn and understand the ways in which the violence of the settler colonial state is perpetrated structurally, systemically, and institutionally, thereby continuing to perpetuate injustice in all realms: socially, culturally, politically, economically, and cognitively. The participants noted that understanding how injustice is executed is vital to ensuring their survival; this knowledge provides the tools through which to question and resist as well as the agency to make their own decisions. This knowledge is also shared throughout the community as the participants view the well-being of the community as fundamental to the well-being of the individual. Furthermore, as noted by the participants, education for the community is not merely restricted to fighting injustice perpetrated by those outside the community but in also learning and unlearning the ways in which settler colonialism, neoliberalism, patriarchy, and capitalism are maintained and enabled within their own communities.

The significance of community well-being and the importance of a collective consciousness is illustrated in the participants' shared experiences, actions, and stories. The high value placed on community illustrates the ways in which traditional, cultural, and Indigenous knowledge systems continue to influence the participants systems of seeing, knowing, and being of the world. However, the participants, themselves, often did not make the direct correlation between the value they place on community and collective well-being and a distinctive system of knowing and being that can be located within specific spatio-temporal realities. Yet, it is this system of knowing and being that compelled the young adult participants to find and create alternative spaces of resistance in their families and communities and to claim blackness as a collective identity. One could also contend that it is this system of being, knowing, and seeing, rooted in the well-being of the collective, that enables the participants to continue to see potential for change – decolonial and anti-colonial change – through the very institutions and structures that perpetuate colonialism and marginalization. While it is the settler colonial state that has created a shared identity of blackness, the participants also believe that the

well-being of all peoples is predicated on all communities and peoples living in a just society, including those who benefit from the settler colonial state apparatus.

Key insights

The analysis of the research findings – from the focus group and one-on-one interviews – illustrated that for young women of African descent living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan, their systems of knowing, seeing, and being in this world, of how they respond to their experiences and lives, are drawn, in part, from their conscious and unconscious understandings of indigeneity, culture, and traditional systems of being, knowing, and living. The analysis of the participants responses divulged the existence of an African Canadian onto-epistemology, based in the interlocking of *anti-colonial feminist justice, community engagement*, and the call for a *pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism.*



As I write this final chapter of the dissertation, the African-Canadian community in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan is facing the effects of settler colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and neoliberalism within our walls. A community leader has been

accused of misconduct and harassment. There is fear among community members that this incident, that is prevalent across the country and at all levels of power, has the potential to destroy a prominent community organization. Community members fear that the victims will be condemned for coming forward, and there is trepidation that the structures of colonial power (federal and provincial government ministries) could cease or limit funding to the organization, thus negating the important work being performed. Yet, despite these concerns, women from the community (both young adult women and older adult women) have risen up and taken on the misogynistic practices that are pervasive within all communities. The actions of this group illustrate the ongoing praxis of an African Canadian onto-epistemology, based in the interlocking of *anti-colonial feminist justice, community engagement*, and a *pedagogy of critical anticolonial feminism.*

Those in the community who are calling for justice for the victims are reaffirming de Sousa Santos (2007b) contention that we must work towards knowledge-as-emancipation, thus progressing from colonialism towards solidarity with the marginalized. To choose otherwise, would move us further towards a "hegemonic way of knowing" that chooses order as opposed to emancipation (de Sousa Santos, 2007b, p. 410). The community is enacting a system of knowing and being where solidarity is transformed into "the hegemonic form of knowing" (de Sousa Santos, 2007b, p. 410). This is the enactment of an anticolonial feminist justice.

Those pushing for changes are calling for those in power to reimagine and work towards decolonization on a systemic level, including in their local communities. This is the emergence of a solidarity of decolonial resistance that has a political objective of creating a more expansive sense of solidarity (Rorty, 1989) and of continually bringing marginalized peoples into community, instinctively thinking of people as "us" rather than "they" (Featherstone, 2012, p. 29). This understanding of solidarity views all forms of marginalization and violence as antithetical to transformation and, as such, cannot ignore the complicity from ongoing colonization (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012), or the perpetuation of patriarchy, capitalism, and neoliberalism through violence. Therefore, solidarity aims for decolonization through various forms of resistance. The experiences of the participants in this study as well as in the above example illustrate how when

communities are working towards their own change, they, themselves, are able to decide what qualifies as "evidence" and work from within their own knowledge systems, thus also engaging in a counter-hegemonic praxis. These practices do not and are unable to bring large scale change; however, they allow marginalized communities to subvert hegemonic and colonial practices, creating fissures around what constitutes a just society, while refusing to allow those left at the bottom of the proverbial ladder to continue to be the victims of patriarchy, settler colonialism, and capitalism.

The experiences of the research participants as well as those coming together to protest violence in their community illustrate the importance that those working towards justice and equity are in positions to ensure that marginalized peoples are represented. Representation has the potential to ensure that peoples have the social and cultural capital as well as knowledge necessary to fight the violence enacted by the structures of the settler colonial nation state. This violence is also felt at the local community level, as women and other vulnerable peoples continue to be marginalized in order for others to retain power within colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist structures. As illustrated by the community, the logic of limited financial resources is often used as a justification to not call for change as communities fear that any sense of a lack of cohesion among the community can undermine funding. The logic of limited resources at the centre of capitalism forces individuals and groups to stay quiet out of fear that the community will face repercussions. However, as this anecdote illustrates, the centring of capitalism and financial resources cannot deliver justice. As such, the forces that allow marginalization to occur – settler colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and neoliberalism – must be continually disrupted. As the African Canadian community is attesting through their actions, this demands the assemblage and revisioning of spaces for decolonial and anticolonial resistance. These spaces of engagement, education, resistance, solidarity, and activism as well as the processes of engagement produce an agenda to resist patriarchy, capitalism, (settler)colonialism, and neoliberalism through a lens of justice and by working in solidarity with other marginalized beings. It is the deliberate creation not only of decolonized subjects but of a decolonized collective.

Implications

My decision to explore the topic of African Indigenous knowledges (AIK) among young women of the diaspora living in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan has raised a number of questions around the meaning of the term "Indigenous." How, for example, does this research project define Indigenous and Indigenous knowledges for a group of people without illustrating an explicit connection to land or to spirituality? The literature situates AIK as knowledges "encompassing technology, social, economic, and philosophical learning, or educational, legal, and governance systems. It is knowledge relating to the technological, social, institutional, scientific and developmental, including those used in the liberation struggles" (Odora Hoppers, 2002, p. 8). AIK is a philosophy and a worldview that excavates the technologies behind the practices and artefacts of African peoples (Odora Hoppers, 2002). AIK "is experiential knowledge based on a worldview and a culture that is basically relational. The spirit of the African worldview includes wholeness, community, and harmony which are deeply embedded in cultural values" (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013, pp. 30-31). It is also this worldview of relationality, wholeness, community, and harmony that underlies the research findings of an African-Canadian onto-epistemology of justice – a system of knowing, being, and seeing that is rooted in a specific understanding of justice that has been determined by the participants' experiences with colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, settler colonialism, and as diaspora. The research participants are not a homogenous group of people; their stories, experiences, actions, and practices do not denote a single understanding of the world. However, their stories, experiences, actions, and practices do illustrate an emerging shared collective and relational consciousness around their understandings of justice that is informed in part by their cultural worldview that is referred to as AIK and that is constantly evolving as a result of changing diasporic circumstances.

This research can be described as a snap shot in time; it is one representation of young highly educated women within the Black/ African Canadian community in a given spatio-temporal context, a community that is in a constant state of flux due to ever-changing political dynamics. Yet, this research also illustrates that the underlying tenets of AIK – of living in relationality, in community, and in harmony – call for a politics of solidarity and resistance that traverses identity politics, demanding a collective project for

justice with other racialized peoples and in particular, Indigenous peoples of Amiskwaciwaskahikan, Turtle Island, and globally. It is this collective project of solidarity building that the research participants are beginning to engage in, albeit in a limited manner, that highlights the underlying philosophy held by the research participants – that their actions, responses, practices, and resistances should ensure the liberation of peoples.

This research project explored and extrapolated the interlocking of the systems and structures of (settler)colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, and patriarchy with young African Canadian women's understandings, experiences, and enactments of community and political engagement, resistance, and as diaspora as connected to tradition, cultural, and Indigenous knowledge systems. My interest in this research project emerged from a desire to ascertain the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of young African Canadian women's systems of knowing, seeing, and being in the world. Understanding the ontological and epistemological bedrock of young women's systems of knowing, seeing, and being leads to a critical questioning of power and power relations as constructed through the structures and processes of settler colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, and neoliberalism. These political, economic, social, legal, and cultural structures and systems organize our world and influence our responses, both as individuals and as collectives. Young African Canadian women engage in a collective organizing for transformation that is premised on a shared and distinct ontology and epistemology. This is evidenced by their responses in the focus group sessions and interviews as well as through their everyday actions in the various communities in which they are members.

This study recognizes the existence of a distinct African Canadian onto-epistemology of justice that has emerged as a result of the participants' experiences, actions, practices, and meanings on a new land and a new colonial and capitalist governance structure as well as a result of the participants' historical, cultural, and traditional knowledges. This collective consciousness "takes the experience of colonization and the racialized other as a point of departure" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 53). An examination of the process and structures of knowledge transfers, transformations, and assemblages among African Canadian women illustrated women's development as the decolonizing subject through their engagement with the politics of

everyday life as interlocking with questions of belonging, cognitive justice, epistemicide, and resistance. African Canadian women's practices of resistance, solidarity, and community engagement, cannot be separated from understanding the process through which the emergence and formation of subjects and selves occurs (Massaquoi, 2004) as this localized constitution of the self lays the groundwork for the grassroots building of anticolonial solidarity movements that embolden communities of resistance.

The participants reiterated a collective consciousness that presumes an onto-epistemology of justice. This is significant as it situates the participants systems of knowing, seeing, and being as directly related to a historical consciousness as well as to the present-day experiences, actions, and meanings on a new land. This collective consciousness is, in fact, an artefact of participants ongoing experiences of settler colonialism.

However, as illustrated through AIK, this collective consciousness must also take the next step into becoming a movement of decolonial solidarity building that progresses into a movement in solidarity with Indigenous and other racialized peoples. This necessitates learning the language of settler colonialism while untethering the individual and the collective from the yoke of settler colonialism. The neoliberal quest for "success" can no longer be the intent and function of the community. It must be the radical emancipation of peoples from the structures of power that preserve and develop settler colonialism. Furthermore, learning the language of settler colonialism demands that we understand how the capitalist ideal of dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their land implicates all who engage in the process of dispossession and ownership, thus perpetuating settler colonialism and the continuous marginalization of peoples. This begins through education with the clear intention and function of developing a connection to the land for non-Indigenous peoples. Cora Weber-Pillwax asserts:

> Most Canadians need to be approached through the head, and in order to get to their feet, you have to reach their heads. As the Elders say, you take them to the bush, and give them this connection to the land, and it puts them in a different context. … [N]obody has helped these young people to find their own relationship with the land. That's one reason they need that Canadian history of the people of this land in order to start to understand this land…. [They] do need to know where

> their food is from and their absolute dependency on where they are standing, and include the historical context of that place. For non-Indigenous people, this can frame a whole new relationship with Aboriginal people, but also with their own sense of self. (Shultz, Kelly, & Weber-Pillwax, 2009, pp. 40-41)

Developing a connection to the land for non-Indigenous peoples and, consequently, laying the building blocks for a shared consciousness that propels marginalized peoples into solidarity with Indigenous peoples is integral in the struggle against settler colonialism, global capitalism, and patriarchy. Solidarity may be the only response when engaging in a shared collective struggle against the structures of hegemonic power.

This must also be the impetus for future research projects for those of us committed to a decolonial solidarity building: studies that explore the possibilities for radical emancipation among diverse racialized and Indigenous communities and the impact on colonial institutions, structures, and systems.

1. What are the possibilities for a project of decolonial solidarity building and radical emancipation among racialized and Indigenous students/ youth/ young peoples?
2. How are educators and students/ youth/ young peoples engaged in a project of decolonial solidarity building and radical emancipation, thereby subverting and resisting curriculum that perpetuates the settler colonial state?
3. What educational and activist platforms are needed to construct a shared collective consciousness amongst racialized, Indigenous, and other marginalized peoples living in the settler colonial state?
4. What educational and activist platforms are needed to help youth/ students/ young peoples develop a relationship to the land, and, therefore, contribute to the project of decolonial solidarity building and radical emancipation?

Policy Recommendations

A significant finding from this research project was the experiences of marginalization shared by the young women participants with regards to education and employment, in particular. I am, therefore, outlining a number of policy recommendations that have the potential to address some of the challenges faced by the young women participants.

A number of the young women participants noted that their schooling experiences in elementary and secondary schools as well as while attending post-secondary have been

marked by experiences of racism and marginalization. Not only are students viewed as deficient by educators but they often have to work much harder than their non-racialized peers before being accorded similar opportunities for success. As such, it has become apparent that educators at all levels require training in anti-oppressive pedagogies. Anti-oppressive pedagogies entail that classrooms and schools are spaces where students' lives, experiences, and subjectivities are incorporated into their learning experiences (Acosta, Hudson-Vassel, Johnson, Cherfrere, Harris, Wallace, & Duggins, 2017). However, it is imperative that marginalized peoples' experiences are not engaged through a pedagogical tourism wherein the experiences and knowledges of minoritized peoples become about ensuring positive educational experiences for White students at the expense of minoritized students (Kandaswamy, 2007). All students must be challenged to question how knowing and knowledge comes to be constructed and the ways in which personal subjectivities as created through structures of power – (settler) colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism – are instrumental in the creation of hegemonic power structures.

Research confirms that racialized and Indigenous students prefer being taught by educators who represent a diversity of ways of knowing, being, and seeing as well as who may also be racialized (hooks, 1994; Kelly, 1998; Pillay, 2018). A lack of knowledge diversity in our classroom may propel educators to engage in the dangerous pedagogical strategy of asking students to articulate and teach their own stories and histories, as was Layla's experience. However, such a pedagogy can subjugate certain knowledges as there is no epistemic base upon which to validate and honour the knowledges being brought forward, forcing students "to be perennial strangers in their classrooms" (Brown, 2008, p. 379) It is, therefore, necessary that educators have the background, knowledges, and capacity to support and honour diverse systems of knowing in the classroom. Provincial ministries of education, teacher education programs, and school divisions must work together to ensure greater diversity among K-12 and higher education educators.

As Azara's responses indicate, her community organizing and leadership has ensured that the voices of the most marginalized are heard by those in positions of power. Municipal, provincial, and federal governments must put in place programs that ensure that those who hold such positions of power, such as the Chief of Police, have a diversity of experiences and backgrounds and are actively involved with various ethno-cultural and

community organizations. Furthermore, the decision as to who can hold such leadership positions in the broader society must be made in consultation with ethno-cultural and community organizations. The stories shared by a number of participants detailing the surveillance and violence enacted by the police and security services that legitimates the control and power of the settler colonial state should be viewed as evidence necessitating profound structural, systemic, and institutional transformation. To permit these ongoing abuses of power to continue would be a violation of the social and ethical contract between the state and those who living within its borders.

Final Thoughts

This research project has been a labour of collective passion. It has enabled me to forge a closer relationship to the African Canadian community in Edmonton/ Amiskwaciwaskahikan while allowing me to embody and engage in a practice of relationality and relation building with the participants and the varied communities and groups they are engaged with. I became cognizant that my role as researcher came with privileges and responsibilities towards self and others, in particular the research participants and the larger collective. I would not have referred to any of the research participants as friends prior to embarking on this study, even though I was previously acquainted with one of the participants. However, over the course of the project, a number of these young women became friends and colleagues. Interestingly, in addition to becoming friends, I also became a mentor to a number of the young women. I have been privileged to be in the position to learn from and with these women. They have taught me that the well-being of the collective must be the first imperative of the research so that I can honestly affirm through both the research and my actions that "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969). The relationships that have been built during this project are reflected in this study, in the findings, and in the analysis. They constitute an integral aspect of the lens through which I reflected and analyzed the understandings, actions, practices, and meanings of the participants. This dissertation is, therefore, a testament to the learnings I have undergone as a result of the relationships I have forged throughout this study.

This study has also led me to examine my understandings of Indigenous knowledges and African Indigenous knowledges. Within the context of much of the

literature and this research project, AIK represents a distinctive knowledge system in that it is not always explicitly connected to land but can instead be understood as a collective philosophical consciousness, as embodied though a shared epistemology and ontology rooted in the collective ethic of women. This collective sense of responsibility women displayed for each other "acknowledges that survival of the group derives from harmony through interdependence and interconnectedness" (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013, p. 31) and is rooted in a distinctive cultural philosophy that encompasses a shared historical consciousness, collective experiences of marginalization, oppression, and resistance, and, therefore, a collective vision of justice that is feminist and anticolonial.

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Appendix 1: Focus Group and Interview Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. How did you or your family come to live in Edmonton?
2. How would you describe your connections to Africa?
3. Are you still in contact with family and friends in Africa? How do you keep in contact? Why?
4. What are the benefits and strengths of living here?
5. What are the challenges and/or weaknesses to living here?
6. How do you respond or deal with the challenges of life in Edmonton? How do you family, friends, community respond?
7. Do your family, friends, community help you deal or respond to these challenges? Why or why not?
8. Can you describe the places and organizations that support you or people who support you?
9. Can you talk about how they support you and how they can better support you?
10. How is what you learned from school different from what you learn at home or in your community?
11. What does being “Canadian” mean to you? Has the way you define being “Canadian” changed over time?
12. What does being “African Canadian” mean to you? Has the way you define being “African Canadian” changed over time?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your educational and or work experience background?
2. How has your education prepared you for life?
3. How does being a woman of African descent affect your life, your education? Affect living in Canada?
4. What does being a woman of African descent mean to you?
5. Can you describe your role within your family and/or community?
6. What are your hopes for yourself, your family, your community?
7. What are your family's and/or community's hopes for you?
8. How does your gender impact your life?