

Project Title: *Diasporic Experiences of Everyday Multiculturalism: Navigating Race and Space through African Women's Beauty Practices*

Research Summary, 10 September 2021

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My project examined how everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora mutually interact to shape racialization processes in multiple spaces, both public and private, through an exploration of African women's beauty practices. Five main social spaces were analysed throughout the project including the individual self, the home, the church, social media, and the workplace. Everyday intercultural encounters happen in these spaces that include and exclude as well as connect and marginalise African immigrant women living in Canadian society. As such, building on the Black and Postcolonial feminist literature on race-making through beauty, I asked two key research questions. Firstly, how do African women's diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism in a globalized world shape social spaces and impact gendered racialization processes as evinced through beauty practices? Secondly, how do African diaspora women exercise agency as they navigate these spaces?

The project's overall methodology was guided by a feminist qualitative research framework. This included a mixed methods approach of one-on-one in-depth interviews with African immigrant women based in Ottawa and Toronto, participant observation in the project's key spaces¹, and content analysis of social media photos, videos, and black beauty blogs and websites. Furthermore, blending analytic categories of everyday multiculturalism with the African diaspora while incorporating concepts from critical race theory, the public-private dichotomy, the women-as-nation premise, and feminist insights on agency as a theoretical framework, my project makes three central arguments based on my findings.

¹ Data collected pre COVID-19 lockdowns.

Firstly, I argue the dynamic interplay between everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora simultaneously reconstitutes social spaces by creating rich combinations of complex experiences that challenge and redefine what the “public” and “private” mean in various spaces through new meanings of race, beauty, class, pan-African nationalism, multiculturalism, sexuality, and gender. Secondly, I argue everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora simultaneously structure racialization processes so that African women’s racialized identities are layered, formed, and informed by a new African diaspora community within Canada, local nationalist and postcolonial racial formations, Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, and globalized meanings of Blackness. Furthermore, racialization processes are constantly shifting across social spaces so that women creatively juggle different racialized identities by creating hybrid iterations, of being African and Black, that are complex and multilayered. Lastly, I argue everyday multiculturalism and the African diaspora interact in paradoxical fashion to produce a conception of agency reflective of simultaneous articulations including accommodation and resistance. The ways women use their beauty practices to navigate race and space thus reveal the context dependent manifestations of different expressions of agency in the public and private. This complex dynamic makes it difficult to neatly generalize African women as either completely agentive or completely oppressed in any given space.

This project sought to bring attention to African women’s diasporic experiences of everyday multiculturalism to increase cultural awareness and racial engagement on the issues this group of immigrant women face at multiple levels while living in Canadian society. As such, focusing on African women’s beauty practices has been a way to shift from a normative Western-centric political understanding of multiculturalism to show how it is a lived gendered and racialized phenomenon that takes place in everyday life within various social spaces. Accordingly, it is my hope that this project begins to demarginalize African women in discussions about multiculturalism and race by making them visible and emphasizing their cultural and racialized identities as displayed through everyday beauty practices. Questions of race, identity, belonging, and community will continue to be challenging, inspiring, messy, and complicated but African women are navigating these one hairstyle, one lipstick shade, and one outfit at a time.