

RESEARCH PROJECT:

How the Third space identity is changing the
narrative and relationship with Africa.

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Personal Profile

African Diaspora Women: How the third space identity is changing the narrative and relationship with Africa.

My main interest is education and development. I have always been inspired to help others carve their own path and found spaces like coaching, mentoring or development programme to help individuals re-establish their relationship with learning. Finding opportunities to empower people outside of traditional education.

My education experience was filled with feeling of insecurity and not be able see myself as anything outside of Art. I wasn't considered either academic or "problematic" and this impacted my identity.

Once I was introduced behavioural sciences in Leadership Development, I started to consider my own potential for growth and I felt that it was vital I take this learning to young people, so, when I launched my company in 2014, I committed to working with organisations that support young people.

As a freelancer, I have become accustomed to working with different Cultures and Communities.

I think one of my biggest skills is understanding how to work with different people. Building relationships has been integral to the success of anything I have worked on.

Although I have only been developing my Artist practice over the last couple years, my work in learning intervention has developed into the creative sector. I relish the opportunity to support other creatives. As I grow as an artist and I realise more and more I was utilising my creativity throughout my career to achieve results.

I bring the perspective of an African diaspora that had to navigate a lot of stereotypes...

I wasn't African enough

I wasn't east London enough

I wasn't black enough

I wasn't really English

Once I let go of people's expectations, I was able to carve my own journey and develop the ability to navigate cross-cultural spaces.

I believe my lived experience and passion for behaviour intervention equip me to be a good Community Researcher.

Presenting the PROBLEM:

Having spent most of my life living and working in UK & Europe, I recognise how disconnected we were from our heritage.

The more I succeeded in the western world, the less connected and more removed I felt from my mother country. I wasn't conscious that I held onto third world narratives until I visited Africa for the first time at the age of 18. I had internalised these negative and-diminishing tropes of Africa so much, I believed that we would land in a wild forest where an airport should be.

Then discovering, despite my outwardly African appearance, I was othered in my mother country, because of my culturally British upbringing.

I recognise that in our fight to survive and assimilate, we are all too willing to let go of our heritage, to give us a sense of belonging. This is far more unconscious when you are second or third generation. The cycle of survival has led to identity crisis that was a result of the media, our educators, and communities. We absorbed the shameful image of Africa and unknowingly were trying to distance ourselves from it.

Additionally, because of the unique cross-cultural experiences, a new identity has been formed that deserves more exploration. With children of African descent going into the third generation in the UK, how do we explore and celebrate this evolved identity and use that to build better relationship with the African continent?

Researching the diaspora identity (Third space identity) allows us the opportunity to explore belonging and the value of these hybrid identities.

I chose to focus on African Diaspora Women, as it relates to my lived experience and I believe it will challenge the perception of not only African Women, but black women in general. This has inspired me to develop my research question as: African Diaspora Women: How the Third space identity is changing the narrative and relationship with Africa.

Literature Review:

I have chosen to review three pieces of literature that explore the Diaspora identity, through the writing and lived experience of each writer, capturing different identity positions in western society. I am interested to particularly explore the impact of colonisation and the post-colonial identities that have yet to be fully explored.

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, then I found myself an object amongst other things.

The chapter, Fact of blackness, (Fanon, 1952, p 109) starts out by exploring objecthood and the lived experienced of being othered. The following excerpt stands out to me...

As long as the Black Man is amongst his own, he will never have occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others, there is of course the moment of "being for others" of which Hegel speaks, but every ontology is made unattainable in colonized and civilised society.

This is particularly interesting, as it speaks to the pressure of conforming to societies ideas and the burden of representation. How does this impact our identity when we grow up in spaces in which we are always the minority?

The chapter also introduces the term denegrification refers to a black person realizing their identity, the innate affirmation of the priceless value of black heritage and culture. Which touches on colourism, which has impacted the diaspora community.

Fanon believed that the white-dominated society managed to maintain and ... wishes to "denigrify" (83), "denaturalize" and "deracialize" himself,

Essentially, that assimilation is imposed as a means to maintain power structure while preserving Whiteness. Diaspora children seeking social acceptance absorb the idea of whiteness as a means of progression.

This chapter also explores the burden of recognising not only that your being is a representation for a whole race, but also examines the lens we are perceived with. This is depicted in his "third person" experience on a train journey where he recognised...

I was responsible at the same time, for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. (Fanon, 1952, p112)

When people like me, they say it's in spite of my colour. When they dislike me, they point out in not because of my colour. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle. (Fanon, 1952, p 116)

This can be shown clearly with the recent Euro finals (summer 2021), where the black players were barraged with racist commentary, as well as ordinary members of the public being assaulted, simple because they were black or reminded them of the players. This made me evaluate my personal experience and the privilege I have experienced based on my accent and my distance from the ideal of an African woman. I recognise that there were some internalised narratives that were based on the negative perception of Africa. Additionally, I have experienced moments within and out of the minority community, where I have been branded an "Oreo" to mean I am black on the outside, but white on the inside. I became accustomed to this label, as I recognised that I didn't meet the stereotype of a black women, but I questioned why my behaviour was associated with whiteness?

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Another piece of literature of interest to me was *Natives*, written by Akala (2018), which explores the experience of the African & Caribbean diaspora growing in the UK. This book is a wonderful reflection of how a new identity has emerged out of oppression and how the Black British experience is one that has often been overshadowed by the Black America experience. Pointing out how people of colour were unable to form a recognisable culture in the UK and took our lead from our brothers and sisters in the USA. It is a great exploration of the legacy of anti-colonial struggle and how our perceptions of success (as people of colour) are based on our westernised identity and the privilege and comfort of being a black westerner.

Unlike *Black Skin White Mask* (Fanon, 1952), Akala explores the Diasporas' experience of being othered in our mother countries of our ancestral origins, due to our westernised upbringing. as

"As long as whiteness is a metaphor for power, blackness must of course function as a metaphor for powerlessness, and as long as money whitens, poverty must blacken."

However, it is a privilege to know where our ancestors came from and have some connection, however small, to our mother cultures. As opposed to black Americans who although labelled African, have no knowledge of their roots and have forged a black American identity in its place. Akala documents how black British culture as he was growing up was heavily influenced in a one-way direction by America.

This excerpt highlights the impact of socialisation...

"With the development of the Internet as well as other worldwide platforms, the transaction has become two way."

Akala explores the Caribbean diaspora as it's his heritage, which is not too dissimilar to African Diaspora, the Black British experience is often a shared one. He started out as a rapper turned lecturer this is a wonderful example of Third space identity. Someone who's cross cultural upbringing has shaped the type of activist he has become. His musical experience is threaded through this book highlights the traditions of resistance and creativity among the diasporas.

The last piece of literature I wish to explore is *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo, (2019). This book wonderfully explores female diaspora identities and the journey to find themselves while encountering racism, sexism, and feminism. Exploring the different relationships, they all have with their heritage, while they try to carve an identity that gives them a sense of belonging. Identity, otherness, and togetherness define their stories. Based on Black British women, this book counters the near invisibility of women of colour in literature. Gender and sexuality are explored in depth and offers a different perspective from the stereotypical representation of black women.

Various characters in the book have different relationships to and understandings of feminism, demonstrating that although they are all women, the feminist movement can mean different things to different people. This book brilliantly highlights how the female identity is a truly intersectional experience. Representing each character with their hyphenated identities present them to us as complex, flawed, and messy beings, each with their own distinct voice. This book offers us an opportunity to amplify the voices of womxn of colour without turning them into a monolithic category. It speaks to and from womxn from diverse contexts without diminishing their differences and lived experience. While it speaks specifically of a black British feminist politics, it is as relevant for any other minority feminist activists struggling for a more

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inclusionary feminist politics that is conscious of difference, looks for shared interests without erasing difference, and refuses feminism(s) which won't address exclusions based on difference.

Lastly, the author uses African symbolism throughout the book. They're West African (Ghanaian) Adinkra symbols, and the symbol at the start of each chapter represents aspects of that character's life and/or personality. For example, Okodee Mmowere symbol, representing Amma, appears on the title page for Chapter 1. It evokes an eagle's talons and signifies strength, bravery, and power. I believe the purpose of this was not only because of the enriching the aesthetics, but to convey a message of wisdom. Celebrating African symbolism allows African diaspora women to connect with African spirituality. This is something I explore in my research, as more diaspora women move away from traditional religious ideas and practice their own idea of spirituality.

Research Methods:

I approached Diaspora contacts that live in both Brighton and London. I choose to expand my search area to London, as that's where my strongest diaspora connections are, and I recognised the limited connection I had to the African diaspora community in Sussex. Realising that my relationship with African diaspora women outside of my family and network made me reflect on my own personal relationships. My connection may have reduced when I relocated to Sussex from East London, but not from lack of trying. I have endeavoured on a couple of occasions to identify and or develop a networking community that allowed me access and connection to people of colour. The organisations I encountered were limited, underfunded, or disengaged.

Interviews:

I interviewed 3 women aged between 30 and 60 years of age over 20-minute zoom video calls. Each of the interview participants had varied experience and relationship with Africa and provided a wide perspective around the narrative and relationship with Africa. One of the participants had substantial experience working in the UK & Africa and provided some great perspective.

Focus Group:

The focus group session was delivered over 1.15 mins at GROW venue in London.

As I had access to more African Diaspora women in London, it made sense to hold the focus group there.

The group consisted of 6 African Diaspora women aged between 21 and 40 with either east African or west African heritage. Half of the participants were born in the UK/ Europe and the other half was born in Africa.

All the participants had been educated and socialised in the UK by the time they had reached their adolescence.

Below are the interview questions I asked at both the 1-2-1 interviews and focus group session.

1. What's your heritage and where do you call home?
2. How would you describe your identity?
3. How has your identity been impacted by your experiences growing up?
4. Do you consider yourself to have a hybrid identity and how has it impacted your sense of belonging? belonging in UK spaces and in African spaces?
5. What is your relationship or experience with Africa?
6. What is your relationship with your culture(s)?
7. How has your third space identity contributed to your life? Third place being someone with cross cultural bringing?
8. How do you express your creativity?

Each of the participants were provided with the following definitions to help them understand key terminologies in my research around Diaspora Identity, Hybridity, Essentialism.

Third Space definition:

The Third Space is postcolonial sociolinguistic theory of identity and community realized through language or education. It is attributed to Homi K. Bhabha. Third Space Theory explains the uniqueness of each person, actor, or context as a "hybrid".

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Hybridity definition:

Hybridity, in its most basic sense, refers to mixture. The term originates from biology and was subsequently employed in linguistics and in racial theory in the nineteenth century.

Essentialism definition:

Werbner and Modood's definition of "essentialism", in relation to how 'race' is imagined in contemporary culture Debating Cultural Hybridity, Werbner and Modood, 1997, p228

To essentialise is to impute a fundamental, basic, absolutely necessary constitutive quality to a person, social category, ethnic group, religious community, or nation. It is to posit falsely a timeless continuity, a discreteness or boundedness in space, and an organic unity. It is to imply an internal sameness and external difference or otherness.

I engaged 8 people in total for my research, with 2 of the interview participants unable to take part in the focus group, as they were Sussex based.

Ethical Considerations:

To make this a mutual learning experience for all involved, I made sure to take the following ethical considerations which are taken from Ethics of Care principles (Ward and Gahagan, 2010)

Responsibility:

I had assigned each participant a letter and number to help protect their privacy and omitting any specific information that doesn't protect anonymity.

I offered the participants opportunity to not participate, as I understand that some of the subject matter could impact their wellbeing.

The participants recognised the importance of the discussion and respected the rules of listening and respecting one another in the discussion.

After the focus group, I signposted the participants to relevant resources that could allow them to continue their learning.

In a follow up email, I thanked them for their participation, and provided links to recommended reading: the three books I reviewed in my research and the Gloria Nziba Pindi article on *Hybridity and Identity Performance in Diasporic Context: An Autoethnographic Journey of the Self Across Cultures*

Competence:

The discussion on identity had the potential to touch on many topics, so I ensured that I stuck to the questions, omitted my opinions or commentary, and made sure to keep to time.

Prior to the interviews and focus group, each participant was sent a consent form with my diaspora questions. I also made a call where possible to discuss the relevance of their perspective and lived experience.

Trust:

I recognise how much trust was needed in order for us to be able to have these complex discussions.

As a fellow African Diaspora woman, the participants could trust that they were sharing with someone with a lived experience. This allowed them to feel the psychological safety to be able to be vulnerable and share their experiences.

The discussion brought up difficult topics that they all recognise they wouldn't or haven't shared within their own personal networks and communities. The participants respected the rules and each other to help share without judgement. Above all, the participants not only understood my intentions for this research, but they too were motivated to find ways to develop the narrative and relationship with African identity.

Finding & Analysis:

This research has allowed me to explore identity in a way that supports the communities that I am researching. I recognise how these are important discussions that needed to be had, but still need more exploration.

The following are the key themes I identified in my research:

Meaning of Home: Self-identification and the way others identify you

I wanted to research belonging and where diaspora women call home. The responses highlighted the complexity of this question, even for those born in the UK and Europe. Much like the question, where are you 'really' from? The question about where they called home, elicited many responses depending on heritage, culture and socialisation. The environments we grew up in have as much impact on our identity and they do on our sense of belonging

When you say home, what do you mean by that? I think home for me is difficult. The UK what my socialisation is about, but home in the essence of my identity, but my African values and culture I still feel that is home.

This highlights that they not only find belonging in one place, but they also don't feel the need to necessarily belong in any one place. The Diaspora recognise their heritage as an innate part of their identity, but not all of their identity, recognising the fluid aspect of their identity.

I think Nigeria's part of me, but I wouldn't call it home just yet because I haven't had enough opportunities to connect with. I still feel like I need more to discover where Nigeria is as a place of home for me.

home is always trying to return back to and it's my outlook on life is go back to this safe space for me. That's everything I am is pulled back to there.

These extracts also highlight the deep pull back to their heritage as a form of owning their identities, despite the limited experience they have all had in Africa. As they take ownership of their identity, they seek to find a stronger connection with their countries of ancestral origin.

Intersections of identity: Multiple identities we assume

Some participants struggled with connecting to their African identities when so far removed from their first countries and immersed in a majority white culture. Those who have had a predominant lived experience in countries where they are othered, yet know no other socialisation or culture, as highlighted in the following extract

Why do I feel like is really complicated? I was born and raised here (Europe) and that's my culture and all I know; I still get that question; But where you really from? So that kind of reminds me that I'm not actually Austrian?

With African diaspora going into 3 generations removed, they are assuming the general identity of Black as it represents the intersectionality of their identity and is closer to their western identity than African as seen in the extract below.

Because there's like an influx of like, black people, African people born and raised in Europe. But what is our identity? Who are we?

Additionally, the term 'Black' allows African diaspora more freedom to form an identity that represent their hybrid identities...

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black woman and black in terms of everything. (I am) I think my identity is based in everything that is not strict(rigid). So black woman we are just the free to have identity.

If I was going to identify myself with someone who's free to be whoever she wants it, that can change. And that's absolutely fine.

The discussion on female identity allowed us to explore topics such as sexuality and gender growing up in African households. The discussion touched on not only stereotypes, but the type of representation they were seeing in their communities.

I've had a lot back and forth in my identity growing up, I always I found it difficult being a woman. Looking at the black women that I had around me and how they were being treated. And I was like, this is not what I want to grow up to be. And so, in my mind, being a man is the best, is the best alternative for me.

This is an example of how the negative perception of black women impacts how we form our identity and may drive us to want to develop an alternative. This adding to the negative narrative of Africans, the diaspora could unconsciously work to form a new identity that breaks away from the already established stereotypes.

Strength was another key descriptor when it came to identity for the participants, but more as a means of resilience and survival. This reveals how moving in the world and through the world as a black woman requires strength...

I have to be strong, there's really no other choice, I have to be to survive, especially as a black woman in the western world.

The discussion of hybrid identity allowed us to explore the freedom of forming your own identity, rather than having your identity prescribed and taking ownership of whatever, that identity may be.

consider hybridity to be the same thing as my duality. if anything, it's like duality, almost limits how complex I am as a person. . Every time. I think I'm in my last draft, there's a new version of me to discover and I've just come to understand

I'm grateful that I have all these identities and diverse experiences because it actually makes (gives) me slightly a little bit more (to offer)

Some participants challenged the limitation of hybrid identities and how they feel that too could be a limiting for potential growth. Recognising fluid identities is an opportunity to continue developing your identity without reaching a defined identity. All in all, the participants recognised that the experiences they have had, though complex, are valuable in forming their identity.

Representation: How we are perceived

A key topic of the discussion was the representations of black women they grew up seeing and how these impacted their behaviour. Although all participants agreed on identifying as black, the relationships with African identity varied, depending on the type of contact they had with their heritage. The participants who had spent time in Africa or had access to African communities were more comfortable identifying as African. The stronger the relationship with their heritage and first country, the prouder they were of their African heritage.

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I'm a Somalian black woman living in a western country. My identity as a Somali is strong in comparison to all my identities, purely for the simple fact that that's the place that I connect with. That's where my ancestors, my bloodline, the history that my parents talk about, and it gives me a sense of pride.

Although this participant recognised, she has been socialised in the UK, due to her proactive approach to learning about her country's history, she has formed an almost singular African identity.

The conversation continues to explore stereotypes of black women in media. As highlighted in my review of Akala's book, *Natives* (2018) the participants agreed that they had been influenced by the American model of 'Black'. This yielded great exploration of how negative representations have fed into the stereotypes they have all encountered. Touching on how identity is something that the Diaspora must find, negotiate, or invent.

Growing up in Europe, I kind of felt like I had to live up to that stereotype of a black woman to feel accepted. like being independent and confrontational...token levels. I feel like, if you like live in a predominantly white area, you are very much forced to live up to that stereotype because you yourself, are not seeing a lot of black people represented.

what's really interesting is also if you look at the stereotype of what black women are, it's almost they take the positivity and turn it into a negative. i.e., your confidence/self-belief becomes arrogance. Yeah. So, it's, it's almost like the greatest manipulation...

We are threatening, you know, and that's why everything has been put in place to try and keep us in our lane. put us in a box because of how threatening we are just living our lives as normal. These discussions highlighted the limitation of black representation and how whiteness is not represented in the same way. Some feeling pressure to inhabit the stereotype as a form of survival. The participants argued how the stereotypes were constructed to damage the psyche of black women. Reflecting on their lived experiences to try and understand racism from the inside. These negative impacts on the black women's psyche is highlighted in the extract below. The influence of these stereotypes touch on blackness and gender politics.

I get nervous before interviews. What is they find out I'm black? I'm like terrified for people to find out that we are black, because I usually apply for like financial roles, you know, male dominated, white male dominated kind of role.

This also touches on battling the biases we encounter, even unspoken bias, has an impact on how we believe we will be perceived.

I have to be the designated Beyonce on every dance floor, because some people have never been this close to a black woman. when I was younger, I probably even played into certain stereotypes, because that's what people expected of me.

These discussions emphasised the complexities of identity for African Diaspora women. While having to navigate their own journey to identity/ identities, you have to navigate others' experience of your being, knowing how you respond will influence their perception of all black women, never allowing you space to represent yourself an individual, and not on behalf of your race.

CONCLUSIONS

My core finding within this research is the complex relationships with belonging and identity. Although the participants claim their African identity, despite limited experience, they also enjoy the freedom that comes with their western identity of Black British, particularly when it comes to gender sexuality and religion.

The participants all expressed their beliefs around religion and spirituality, some pointing out that their journey to find identity is connected to their spiritual journey.

It was great to conduct research with participants who celebrated their sexuality openly, but there was an unspoken recognition that this is a safety that wouldn't be available to them in Africa. The fear of being persecuted for who you love is one of the biggest deterrents for African Diaspora who have grown up in societies that provided them with that freedom.

Another contributing factor to the detachment from their country of heritage is down to how they have been socialised, impacting the lens by which they view Africa. There is more to explore on how we may have unconscious bias developed from our experiences in UK & Europe. The participants with greater knowledge, access, and experience in Africa, were more willing to recognise the negative narrative that is pushed out and imposed on them about Africa in general.

This furthered the discussion on why so many of the diaspora are not driven to return to Africa. Outside of feeling "othered" because of their western upbringings, do the diaspora unconsciously look down on Africa?

Although belonging and representation were key themes, after exploring the complexity of identity for African Diaspora women, its clear that these third space individuals are no longer looking for belonging through acceptance, but through the freedom to develop their own identity.

In trying to explore the factors that shape the identity African Diaspora women, I discovered that isn't what WE want. We want to be recognised for all that we are and not what people expect us to be. We want the freedom to be whoever we are, a freedom that other races are afforded more easily.

Recommendations:

This research has highlighted how our sense of identity impacts all areas of our lives, and how complex it is for the African Diaspora community that have grown up in the UK and Europe. I believe access to more information and education around heritage will help us reprogramme our perspective, attitude, and relationship to Africa.

For Diaspora whose only connection is to distant relatives in Africa, its important to decolonise their education. Although the UK refuses to recognise the need to decolonise the curriculum, there needs to be additional learning environments for minority communities. This would be particularly valuable to diaspora children with mixed heritage, but with limited access to communities of heritage. The reality is, if those with clear African heritage suffer identity crisis, then this is bound to have an impact on those with mixed heritage as well.

There is a hunger amongst the diaspora aged 30+ to connect with Africa, but don't know how to find somewhere to belong there. Outside of the western socialisation and freedoms, African

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Diaspora may struggle to communicate their value in African spaces that are not based on their privilege. I think opportunities to collaborate from a space of mutual respect and letting go of the idea that Africa needs to be saved by the West. A sentiment that makes Africans unwilling to trust opportunities to collaborate with each other.

Lastly, I think it's important to recognise the value of the experiences of these Third-space identities, allowing us the freedom to share and recognise all aspects of our identity.

Instead of thinking of identity as a destination, we need to look at it as a journey as suggested in Hall's 1996 essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', cultural identity is not only a matter of 'being' but of 'becoming', 'belonging as much to the future as it does to the past'. (Hall, 1996). Hall theorises that identities undergo constant transformation, transcending time and space.

Discussion:

This research highlights the need to raise awareness of the journey of identity for African diaspora inside and outside of the community.

The participants openly discussed how Africans weren't always proud of their heritage, however as we have seen with the growing success of Afro beat music, that's shaping the "new Africa" movement and prompting young diaspora to want to go back to Africa. Is the recent success of Afro beats due to the outside world recognising African talent, or down to the African diaspora building better connections with their African brothers and sisters and embracing new identities of Africa? Either way, this shift has seen a burst of African pride and unity that wasn't there during any of the participants' upbringing. I explored some of these points in my literature review.

Identity issues impact our mental health, something that is still a taboo to discuss in African communities. It's important to not only promote mental health within the communities, but to also educate practitioners with the awareness and resources to support Third space identity.

There is a growing focus on mental health in the black community, with more recognising their experiences and the value of mental health support, but practitioners need to understand the intersectional experiences to adapt their assessment and support of mental health in the African community.

Celebrating and recognising the value of cross-cultural upbringing will allow individuals that have complex identities to celebrate and bring forward all of what shapes them, as opposed to deciding what part of their identity they feel safe enough to share.

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Appendix

The following are transcriptions of 1-2-1 interview and focus group discussions.

D1 Interview:

How do you see your identity?

I am African British in the first place. I'm African and I am a human being. I know you came here as an international student, so you had more time in Africa

How has your hybrid identity and how has that impacted your sense of belonging in the UK and in Africa?

I'm always proud of where I am. And I think that helped me quite a lot to plough through life. I think that for motive, confidence in, in who I am, where I come from my own family, my own identity, my own history. I feel bad for, you know, the, the second generation here that they don't have that.

when I go to Africa Yeah. I mean, you know, there is a teasing in, you know, you change, you know, we must understand as well, you know, we are influenced by the environment. We live here.

I always go to Africa, not to educate Africa.

Not to, to feel because I, here I am in the west that I am better and I'm, you know, better educated. I think to me, that's a lot of people make that mistake, you know. it'll try to, is it a trial-and-error trial will behave like a trial, you know, and it. We'll be happy to share with me if I have a good knowledge but does not have to be copy me the way I live in the UK and the way I speak in the UK.

I'm sorry to say that, but I think we've been the kind of misled by what we see and how we live our life here.

The diaspora trying to Influence and adapt Africa to the UK or to the Western life, then uphold and inspire by it.

We come from different spaces, but we can work together. We can come up with something together instead of trying to recreate.

am a social entrepreneur, my creativity is I see opportunity, but I think the main thing is when I see opportunity, I take people with me.

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D2 Interview:

What's your Heritage and where do you call home?

:I guess for me, I, it has many different meanings. I think my first thought is London. Cause it's the first, so it's the last place that we were together as a family. When I think of HOME, I probably think of like, depends on how I'm speaking to you, but I probably think of Africa.

how has your identity been impacted by your experiences growing up?

sometimes it could be negative, like being the only black person or person of colour and certain spaces, or not necessarily feeling hundred percent British, Or the other way round, but I may be in a room with, you know, some people who are all black or ethnic minority and sometimes I feel like I don't have anything to bring to the table.

A lot of, um, children of immigrants are now going into like the fourth generation and some, some families. So black British culture is becoming its own sort of entity. And I feel like that is the space that I probably feel. Mostly connected to.

"I'm lost in a concept of fixing a brew
Identity crisis for me and my crew
We're Black and we're British and African, too
But so far removed.²

- Song 'I want' by Enny – Black British singer & song writer

D3 Interview

How do you identify?

I would identify as being Ugandan. Like that's very important to me. Um, and then obviously I think being a woman.

I'm comfortable I am with like a hundred percent I'm Somalian because I, for me. Even though, like if I go back to Uganda, like it, you know, they call us fish and chips. Like I'm clearly culturally not fully African.

in my head quite simple and quite formed, which is I'm an African woman who has grown up in this country who happens to be Muslim and who happens to be gay. And to me, that's not so complicated, so I don't really see it.

it's for other people that it becomes far more complex and detailed and therefore my other questions perceptions of you might be

I listened to Ugandan music. So, I don't forget my language so that I practice it. so that like, if I go back home, you know, I can speak like them almost like try and fake it.

Black African identity, which is merging, is like through our friendship(with other Africans). So, we're learning about other parts of Africa from another diaspora.

in a white Western country, A lot of the things(messages) that you receive are not just only from your friends of different cultures, but the general knowledge of Africa isn't sold in a positive manner. So, you are looking for a sense of pride about your African heritage s and your identity.

How has your third space identity contributed to your life?

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I'm sort of almost like the most non-offensive black person in any space. It's not something I've done consciously. Right. Um, I think partly it's to do with the fact that I don't fit into the stereotype of what they're expecting. Okay. I'm a bit quirky in my own ways, but I think also what happens is, is if you're, if you are a person that have like, like genuine confidence in general, Like, um, genuine, genuinely confident of your identity.

there's nothing to integrate, like in the same way that you've picked other British culture. Even if you're a white English guy.

So, for me, my blackness...people define your blackness for you once again. I don't think it's a shared experience as much as people like to sell it as a shared experience.

Focus Group Transcription:

Q: What's your Heritage and where do you call home?

S6: I come from Somaliland, to Somalia. That's very important to me. When you say home, what do you mean by that? I think home for me is difficult. Why? So, home for me is obviously where I live, which is the UK, which is London, which is most of what my socialisation is about, but home in the essence of my identity. And my so called I suppose my values and outlook to an extent is in between. So, I'd say a bit of Somaliland as well. And by Somali culture, I still feel that home.

C5: I am from Uganda. And I would say, by default, London is home, you know, I've not spent very much time anywhere else. There's nowhere else that I feel so comfortable navigating. So, in touch with the culture, however, you know, recent visits to Uganda have made me feel at home in a different way. Even though I'm kind of an alien. They're just as much as I am in the UK. But it's a different kind of belonging in Uganda, it's different to see a sea of black faces. And a lot of people take that for granted because they're so used to a lot people that have grown up in Africa and stuff, they don't realise what it is to grow up around a sea of white faces. So, when I went back to Uganda, I was like, I've never thought so immediately at home somewhere without really being my home. So yeah, a little bit of both.

C4: I'm from Uganda. I call home both Uganda and London. It's a different type of feeling. Because I think in Uganda is a completely different type of lifestyle, you know, mostly most of the time, it's a holiday type. So, you're gonna enjoy it a lot more is different. Whereas London is so connected to working making money, paying bills, all of that stuff. So, I would like to call both home I don't know whether I'm fully comfortable in either place, like fully comfortable. But in Uganda, they just something so magical about being so close to your roots, you know, so if I had to choose one, it would definitely be Uganda.

Q3: I'm from Nigeria. In terms of home, where my family is, I would have to say, London, but 've recently been connected with Leeds. And I really do love the life I have ever had and will have a need just because I love going back. So, I definitely caught at home for me being an independent person. But if I was to say like where I was raised, it would be London as much as I don't connect to London. What I also think Nigeria's part of me as well, but I wouldn't call it home just yet because I haven't had enough opportunities to connect with the area that whereas going back about seven years ago, that is, I really did fall in love with the people that the atmosphere, the culture, and the climate, really, it was really good. But I still feel like I need more to discover where Nigeria is as a place of home for me.

A2: I'm from Nigeria. And I think home for me is Nigeria because I think home is always trying to return back to. And I do go back to Nigeria, I'm just mean in terms of where like, all your all

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my references, and my outlook on life is go back to this safe space for me. And I think that's Nigeria, is what I know. And I think is so black without, without what black means, because it's naturally black. That's everything I am is pulled back to there.

D1: And I'm Nigerian as well. I was born in Austria, actually. And I moved to the UK when I was like 17/18. So, this is a very difficult one. Why do I feel like it's really complicated? Because if people ask me, where were you from? The first thing I would say, is Austria, because I was born and raised there. You know, like, that's my culture. And that's what I know, but then you always get like a follow up question, especially if you talk to Nigerians... Then you kind of get a follow up question like, well, where are you really from where your parents from and all these things. So that kind of reminds me that I'm not actually Austrian? Because if I was white, we probably wouldn't ask a question, right? Because I'm black. That's the reason why I asked the question. And I said, I'm Nigerian. So, I do feel Nigerian as well, because of my culture and my family. Obviously, I, I feel Austrian, too, so difficult because I love the UK as well. So, if you feel that I wouldn't, I wouldn't say that I'm British. So yeah, I really don't know. I don't know.

Q: How would you describe your identity?

D1: How would I describe my identity, I would say identify as black, because I am black then I also identify as a Christian. Black Christian born in Australia, living in London, I think that's how I would describe my identity, it was quite long, you know, I don't know how else to say it. I don't think there's like a word for it. And I think that's what we talked about. Like, there's no word for it, like, how would I call myself? Is this really weird? Because there's like an influx of like, black people, African people born and raised in Europe. But what is our identity? Who are we? You know, but I would definitely say I would start with being a black woman.

A2: my identity, I think, black, black woman and black in terms of every I think my identity is based in everything that is not strict. So black woman we are just the freedom to have identity. And I think blackness is the word to describe that rather than as race or skin tone, actually, as a way of being is worthwhile and identifiers.

Q3: So, in terms of my identity, I've definitely. I'm black and I'm woman. Well, obviously, the reason why I'm slower now is because I've had a lot of like, back, and forth in my identity growing up. It's a sensitive thing... And so, growing up, I always I found it difficult being a woman and thinking that this is seen the examples of women, black women that I had around me and how they were being treated. And I was like, this is not what I want to grow up to be. And so, I had this in my mind where being a man is the best is the best alternative for me. Oh, God, okay.

S6: Yeah. And seeing the women around you and how they were treated.

Q3: Yes. And also, what was expected on me. And I felt like the expectation was just made with, with the knowledge they had from the culture. If that back home is all you have to learn how to cook, because you're a woman and you get married. As always, I don't want to get married. Oh, you have to you have to learn how to clean the house so that your house is clean their husband, when it comes back from work, I'm like, Okay, if I'm the one who's going to work?

C4: It's an African thing Yeah, woman's job. Even my mom in this day and age having been in London for how many years? Exactly? As a woman you're supposed to clean.

Q3: Exactly. And that was difficult for me because I was just like and seeing how my mom struggled as well. Coming from Nigeria having not having a family around. And I was like, Oh, I have to support it. And also, I was expecting a boy. So, when he got me, he was like oh it's a girl.

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And that's what they kept telling me when I was growing up, and they will Oh, you should love his child as Okay, so being the first one, I was expected to be strong, I was expected to be to be, you know, not showing my emotions, not crying, not be so sensitive, really? Yeah, to lead. And the only way I could do that was to think, Okay, this feminine part, this is associated with being a woman, so I had to be a man. So always been to a young age, I learned about bodybuilding being strong, because the fights protecting myself protecting my sibling, protect my mom. And I was like, God, the female body, I still get limited, still get comments, I still get this. But I had my stroke, physical. And it wasn't healthy. Because mentally, it was really hard. And I was really hard on myself if I messed up. But now I'm slowly trying to accept what I am. And it's been a really hard,

C4:I guess the way that I would describe myself, like most of you, most of you identify, yeah, my identity, I identify as a black, spiritual, and thirdly, independent woman. That's how I identify that's what I know, I'm definitely am. But at the same time, I'm constantly changing, I'm on a journey, and I want the freedom to be able to change my mind about certain things. I know, when I was younger, I thought by this point, I would be married with babies and doing all that usual thing. But I realised that that's not really something I've aspired to, I've been more interested in trying to learn how to love myself in order to try to teach people how to be around me, like, you know, you can't tell anyone how to love you, unless you know how to love yourself, that truly is the most important thing. So, for me, it's a, it's a journey, you know, I'm constantly learning, I don't want to, like say that I'm this or that. But the three things I definitely know I am is a black woman that is very spiritual, and very independent. And the rest of the stuff, let's just see what happens watch this space.

C5:Um, I would describe my identities, kind of, there's a duality, because there's things that I am that are a result of my environment that I cannot avoid. So, to say, I'm independent, or to be strong and stuff, there's not really any other choice, you know, those are things that I have to be to survive, especially as a black woman in the Western world, you know. But for me, my identity is more things that I've chosen for myself, the things that weren't easy choices to make like to come to terms with my sexuality and being able to own it and tell people immediately as part of me that I'm bisexual that I like to argue and debate and be able to hold my ground and that and not feel ashamed of it in any way. And to not even take it personally. When people say things that don't go with that ethos. I'm like, that doesn't make any difference. I still know who I am. Or it's the choice to, to maybe have my identities kind of choosing a lifestyle that is maybe alternative. It's not what other people would necessarily go for, because I've been in a polyamorous relationship before for instance, so there's a certain level of, you know, feeling that liberty and making choices for me that I know that other people find it hard to, and that's part of my identity, it's doing things that I know will turn some people like raise an eyebrow to what I need to do for myself. So, it's become more part of any conversation I have my sexuality and who I am and the values that I have and the things I want but other people like the freedom to be themselves. So, If I was going to identify myself with someone who's free to be whoever she wants it, that can change. And that's absolutely fine.

S6:That's powerful. how do I identify right? So, in a generic kind of manner, the first identity that I feel is that I'm a Somalian black woman living in a western country. My identity, as a Somali is really strong in comparison to all my identity, purely for the simple fact that that's the place that I connect with. That's where my ancestors, my bloodline, the history that my parents talk about, and it gives me a sense of pride, to read about the history of my country, because I'm not in my country. So, it draws me closer. I definitely identify as a black woman. To an extent, I think, I don't know whether it's my autism or not, I'm not so conscious of my physical

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being as much as maybe other people are, and that's in relation to my sexuality. unconscious of the essence that like, I really don't see myself in a physical, physical manner, like, so whatever prejudices that may occur around me, it's not something that really like I can commute or understand when you're trying to protect yourself. No, I think it's part of my autism to an extent. So, it's not something that like, I could be in any environment and not really be like, like, conscious of other people. And like, what their opinion Yeah, like, so for me, I don't know whether it's because of my autism that I don't have that sort of like, where I'm conscious of certain, like, my physical being. I've really sort of felt when you were talking about the ability of your freedom and making that decision for yourself and your sexuality. And even though I am a gay woman in a really healthy relationship, and I still don't even see myself in that essence, like so in that. So, the only thing that I can really grasp mentally is actually what I can mentally understand, rather than my physical activities, or what I look like, or who I sleep with? Yeah, so my main identity, and I think my only identity is my bloodline, and my faith.

Q: How was your identity impacted your experiences growing up?

D1: So, I identify as a black woman. , but I would say growing up, it was not easy to identify as that. Especially growing up in Austria, identify as a black woman, you know, when you are the only black person in your friend circle or any black person school until you're like 16? I mean, I wouldn't. I mean, everyone knew I was black, but I don't I would not, I don't know if I was proud of it. Because like, black people, the way it was associated with it was like corners being broke, being criminal drugs, like it was so much negativity attached to it. And then, you know, all these reality TV shows did not help it. It just kind of felt a bit lost and too, how do I identify? And I've definitely made a lot of mistakes during the way

Yeah, no, definitely. I kind of felt like I had to live up to that stereotype if that makes sense. So, feel accepted. I kind of felt like I had to live up to the stereotype level tokens wrong, independent. And then on top of that, like, you know, being confrontation on stuff even though my nature is not necessary...Really, I'm a libra, okay. But if you don't know, we don't want we don't want like confrontation, but like, I forced myself to certain situations and like trying to portray that strong person. and stuff. I feel like now that I'm getting older, I feel like there is a lot of strongest in being calm as well as situations. I think that is that's actually the strength. Yeah, you know, and being calm and taking situations like, there's something wrong with horrible happens, you are just taking a different level of calmness, if you like, that is strength. Yeah, you know, so I'm getting older, and I'm understanding this more and more, but before it was not the case at all, you know, would be very impulsive, reactive, because I kind of felt like I had to be the person to live up to the idea. And I feel like that is I think a lot of people, especially if you like live in a predominantly white area, you are a field that people are very much forced to live up to that stereotype because you yourself, are not seeing a lot of black people representation. I mean, I saw my mother representing...She was quite confrontational as well, she kind of lived up to that stereotype without wanting to live up to a stereotype.

D1: People would see me, and they would probably not want to mess with me, because the thing that I'm going to flip and do all that stuff.

A2: I went to boarding school, and in Winchester, so I was in countryside for white girls, one on 11 black people. And my personality naturally is very, like, if you told me to do something, I'm going to do the exact opposite. And it kind of defies things. And so being in that space and being judged for blackness by like, you know, all of my nickname tools rowdy one, and one of my best friend's was rowdy two. explode, like several times going my friend, I didn't do anything, but just because your perception. Yeah. And so, I think those things made me in a weird way. Very

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strong, and my identity because everything I am was saying, I'm going to do this because you can't tell me who I can and can't be I'm going to do this because you can't see this as like my favourite line. Everybody can't tell me who I can and cannot be exactly like, one thing, I think I think broke, the way I grew up, holds my identity was because, like how to come into my identities. Because every I sort of lived by the present and be proud, right? Like, I'm in a space and I take up space. People around the room to take up space by concern myself with what you want to take up or not take up because I take up space because I am space. So, you know. Exactly. And so that's exactly who I am. And that's a direct result of my upbringing.

Q3:And what I would add from what I've said, and what I've experienced is the power of my mind. And the power having, and the power have within me, I've been confident in what I can or can't do what I want to achieve where I want to go, who I see myself to be and even if that may not have a physical part to it, I know who I wants to become who I see myself to be. And if I carry myself that way, that's my identity. And I have to believe that people will treat me that way. Yeah, it's had an impact it has because before many people would say Oh, you don't like a black person you don't like a Nigerian...

D1:That's the like the compliment when they say that they kind of associated with something good as like all yours so friendly, nice, cultural...I'm kind of thinking, what other black people you met are not? I don't think they've met enough people to make that kind of judgement. That's the stereotype I was talking about. And that's annoying. Yeah. It's annoying.

C5:Someone's been around black people, but they haven't been around someone that has made them feel comfortable to ask them certain stuff. So, like, they're so excited to be this close to two. You can work with them and you can be around black people. But have you met one that is cool enough that you can say what do you do to your hair? I've been that Black lady?

D1:Unpopular opinion, I think that American or black American TV ruined it for many black women.

C4:Exactly. And one thing I know about black woman is that we honestly do have black women magic, black girl, magic, everyone. Everyone, everyone, I'm full of black girl magic. It's just the way we hold ourselves. It's evidence, it's evidence. We don't have to try to be the Queen's that we are. In our blood. It's just a very natural thing. And people are drawn to that. But at the same time, they're very scared. You know, I mean, so it's in its back confused, you know, I mean, but we're just doing all right. Well, they crimes coming from what they tried to just get rid of our magic, and they never can unless you, you have melanin in your skin. It's just not. It's just not something you know. And I think we're realising that a lot more and we're kind of paving the way for the way that we want to see black women moving the world, you know, and so, for me, I've never fit that stereotype of a black woman I have and then it doesn't bother me because I can't I've never felt the need to live up to. I can't, even if I wanted to.

S6: what's really interesting is also if you look at the stereotype of what black women are, it's almost they take the positivity and turn it into a negative. i.e., your confidence becomes. Yeah, your self - belief becomes arrogance. Yeah. So, it's, it's almost like if the greatest manipulation...

C4: yeah, yeah, it's all applied to just make us feel less than we are because we are threatening, you know, and that's why everything has been put in place to try and keep us in our lane. put us in a box because of how threatening we are just living our lives as normal. Everything that we do, honestly, everything that we do, like, I've been in so many situations, like, for instance, my last role I left and they had to get three people to replace me, but do you think I could get a pay rise while I was there, you know, even though it's in three people's jobs, and I did it so

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effortless, you know, but it's like, I know that naturally. We just work a lot harder. We think outside the box.

D1: I get nervous during interviews. What is they find out I'm black? You know, I mean, because I don't want to explain it like I go to interviews and I'm like, especially like because I've got my role during a Coronavirus. It was a lot of video interviews and I was terrified. You find out on black I don't know just pay my sister for example. She didn't even like to turn on the camera during interviews. That's really good. Yeah. That's kind of like the problem. Like I feel like we are probably doing a group of people where we are terrified. I personally my experience, it's terrified for people to find out that we are black, because I usually apply for like financial roles, you know, male dominated white male dominated kind of role. So, I was very terrified to apply.

C4: yeah, the same thing in HR, you think you're going to find a black HR person? all white women, even that in itself is different. But again, it's just like, it's a perfect role for black woman. It really is, you know, I mean, the way that we think the fact that we're just natural caretakers, we naturally just love we're so much more open, we're so much more empowered. Exactly.

C5: And when people embrace diversity was my key. Yeah, we will come and then not only are small with only black people, but why there is no Asian people. Yeah, we think about everybody, it's not only about me, being a black person in here is like, why isn't there any kind of diversity?

c4 I mean, you know, the kind of person I am, I've always, like been locked into a room and I know people are going to like me, I just have one of those personalities where it's just, you know, it's amenable in a way maybe that's not a negative word to use, but it's a very adaptable person. very adaptable. That's definitely one of my strengths. And I know that I can come in somewhere and even if they, you know, I remember getting a job because I was black, and they thought I was going to come in and like, walk in, you know, snapping my fingers and like shaking my head, and I was the complete opposite. But they couldn't say that to me. Yeah. I want to be a bit more black and shout up people. And you're not doing that because I don't shout. I'm a very, very calm person.

C5: I have to be the designated Beyonce and every dance floor, because some people have never been this close to a black woman. I think, I always remember the first crush I ever had on anybody was this little white, blond Aryan boy, and I think that that says a little bit about where I was at the time and how I and I didn't realise what that meant until much later about my identity. Because that's evidently part of me about just wants to fit in and just wants to be just like any other girl that just wants to have straight ham be really automatically skinny. I was none of those things. I was dark skinned, black in the face and body. Okay, unapologetically black, you know, the kind that you can't hide away from. Okay, not like, oh, ambiguous. No, I'm black. Okay. So, when I was like, when I was younger, I probably even played into certain stereotypes, because that's what people expected of me. So, from what my sister's kind of saw of me, but which is funny, because in my black circles, I was like, kind of always like, why do you so articulate? Well, I have weird views and stuff like that. So yeah, that's just me wondering. What does that mean in those black people playing into that stereotype? So, it's like, what kind of set of whereas now, the older the older I got, I started challenging people over that, like, went an extra mile always used to say, Oh, you're so articulate you so all you have those right friends and stuff. And like you need to ask yourself why you don't have more of a mixture in your social group and stuff. And I embrace the diversity of my community whereas before I did feel like I had to fit in somewhere so fitting with the black people, I went to college and I've

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never felt so at home and yet so alienated as well by I've gone to like, I've gone to Asian school, and then a white school basically so I was dying to be around black people. I was like, please, I just want to go to you know, so that's probably why I chose this college, because I just want to be around other black people, then I got there and thought I don't really like this. And so now I've realised that my community is whatever I forge it.

D1: I feel like a lot of black people feel like they have to live up to the stereotype, that's why they act the stereotype. They're not helping themselves.

C5: it taught me how to how to defend myself, which is something I needed to learn.

C4: Everybody else wants to reject that they're rejected. The same reason why they get with a white person. Yeah. I think it's going to bring them a bit closer to proximity to whiteness. Yes, exactly. They think plays a bigger because of what we've been told growing up the narrative that we see everywhere.

C5: this conversation has completely evolved. Now the average person, everybody grows up with different cultures now. Being African wasn't cool, so you have to kind of pretend that you're not, but now I'm proud of that. one thing I'll say, in that conversation, we have evolved. It might be banter. banter will continue.

S6: think I've always had a strong identity. So, I've never really had any issue. Yeah, like, I've never really had any issues with my identity. Like, I grew up in a household where my parents were super proud about, like, you know, told me my history of my home, like where I'm from, and like, you know, the strength and the beauty of being Somalian. I think the only identity I've ever struggled with was my sexuality. And that was based on my culture. But also, I think I'm a person that's inevitably I don't know, whether you believe in fate or whatever, I've always been a person that is always been, you know, what if this feels right, it feels right. Like I haven't, you know, I didn't tell my parents to make me, but they did it anyway. And yeah, you know, I don't tell any of my family members how to live their life. So therefore, none of them also asked me any permission and how they live their life, therefore, I don't need to. And I think it's given me strength. Like, I think I've always had that in strides. So, I think my identity is being once again, I don't know if it's my autism, but I've never really gave a shit about the space I'm in and what other people think. I mean, I suffer from anxiety but not based on my identity. No, that's that is a physic physical logical thing.

D1: Because my anxiety is more based on what I think people say. That's my anxiety. So, if you have anxiety, then that means you do think or care about what other people think about anxiety. Do you not have sleepless nights about decisions you have made?

C5: I think it's typical things like fuel your anxiety...

S6: okay, we're getting really personal fine. Grain my anxiety is my dad passed away. That was like an on and then I fainted in a train station on a busy day. So that's what fuelled my anxiety but in relation to humans and space. I, I'm really pretty much comfortable in every space. I think it's also the best lines of our life situations or decisions you've made and I'm not even conscious of it. I know it sounds weird, but it's basically like, I don't know whether it's my I suppose you sim or whatever. But no, that's why I was also asking her, I genuinely

don't know if you know me on the spectrum. So having a certain level of just Because I can send you just naturally, I care about people

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S6: I care about people and I care about people. Well, I just don't really consider myself in the essence of like, well, staff said to me, one time, she's the most unoffensive black person where people leave her. She's like the most unoffensive Baptist. And I think that has a lot to do with it. Yeah, I think so. I don't really, I mean, yeah. I've had situations where people are like, oh my God, like you speak and it's offensive because it's like, I'm not a child.

Like what the hell did you expect? to me, it's fucking ridiculous that I don't, even if someone says that to me, I'm just like, I see you for who you are. Like, you have no impact on my life.

It's important thing to, to, to sort of, uh, sort of see the differences. It's not necessarily about. Perception of my identity, as opposed to someone else's identity on me. And often in those situations, it is those people that are trying to define me and create this division of what blackness is sound, because then she could just like your idea of me. t's not my business.

Q: Do you consider yourself to have a hybrid identity, and how has it impacted your sense of belonging? belonging in UK spaces and in African spaces?

D1: Okay. So yes, I do consider myself to have a hybrid identity because of more than one identity. I hope everyone has more than one identity because why would be talking right now? I'd hope you also have multiple identities.

like boxes, you know. Cause it's hard because if not everything fits in a box like we're human beings, we're not just in a box, you know, opinions change. We change, you know, they're not always in a box.

oh my God was so surprised, but it's all black people. Yeah. The first time. Yeah. I was just like black people in the news, like total gang. Like I couldn't believe it, but I was so very motivated at the same time. I was like, yeah, UK is the place to be. You can actually do all these things. I'm telling you, like I say, we'll bring obstacles. In my town specifically, there was a black bus driver. He was front page News for a week, for a week. It was a big, huge thing that that was the first black bus driver. This was around 2012?

A2: I think everyone's identity is a hybrid, cause we're all made up of different parts and different stories and different parts doing the same thing. And maybe it's a thing is okay. So, um, I don't really know. Effected or, or perhaps it has by don't pay attention to the impacts it does because I am also on the autistic spectrum.

it has had an impact in certain places and my different identities. Definitely. Like, definitely like, going back to that, you've been in Nigeria and, you know, even when you go to like the, when you go to like the markets, like quote unquote poor as a fact poorer places the treatment is different and there's this privilege. It's a privilege, but it's also like the way you're treated is a very, like, like very special way. I think part of our identity is based on our social economic background.

I think it has made me recognize first of all, privilege, but also where we, how different every, how. Wide identity is I think that's the main impact it's had on me rather than anything in any other way, but just rather by exposing me to what life really is and getting outside of the real bubble of what you understand and what you, who you are around and what.

Q3: definitely hybrid identity, definitely. Um, but it's also helped me to understand how to, um, how to differentiate, whether that's my choice for accepting it or whatever that's been based on me. And that's what, that's why I'm doing it. If that makes sense. So, I don't know if that makes sense.

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So, whether it's, it's my choice or wherever it I'm doing it because yeah. And that's why I'm doing it because it's acceptable. But, um, what is, what is, how has impacted me? It's yeah, but really, it's also made me realize, I don't need people to tell me that this is okay, because if it works for me and if it's been working.

my hybrid identity has helped me to understand growing up, especially now, cause there's a lot of personal development happening over here.

C4: Yeah, I definitely consider myself to have a, you know, hybrid identity. I, I mean, I think I've, I've always struggled a little bit just because you know, that feeling of not belonging, you know, both, both. I probably feel like I belong here a lot more than I do in Uganda, just because yeah. Open your mouth and things go get 10 times more expensive, or, you know, this, that I'm spoiled.

I'm spoiled because I'm used to a certain level of service and professionalism in the UK. And when I go there, I realize how sport I am, everything irritates me. I'm like, I've been waiting 15 minutes for a drink, you know?

You know, but at the same time, as I grow older, I learned, but I don't need to feel like I belong anywhere. You know, I can choose where I belong and what I feel, you know, and I'm very much I go with my instinct, if something feels right, it doesn't matter where I am. If my, if my gut is telling me that something isn't right here, that's what I'm going to find with first and foremost, it doesn't mean it doesn't really what messages I'm getting from anyone I've always been pretty good.

So, you know, for me, it's more been trying to find where I belong. Like, you know, I feel like I have a good. People around me. I'm lucky to have sisters.

I'm so close to there have definitely been, you know, my it's true that I'm very lucky in that sense. You know what I mean? I've never really had to look for anything outside of my own family. Miss friends will tell you the truth.

I don't need . I might have seen me at my worst when I've gone through this journey of trying to be a bit more, you know, a little more, a little less, more palatable than a bit stronger in my opinions and not being afraid. They are not just going with it because they're just, just to be the peacemaker, you know?

So, I think, you know, having that kind of support system and having strong yeah. Black women around you will always bring you back. You know that we're sending you going to bring you back when you start losing yourself, because that's what happens.

C5: I consider hybridity to be the same thing as my duality. if anything, but it's like duality, almost limits how complex I am as a person, you know, and I'm certainly a hybrid, but I'm more than that. I'm a connector. Every time. I think I'm in my last draft, there's a new version of me to discover and I've just come to understand that I'm never in my final version, that I'll probably only be my final version when I'm on my death bed, I will, I will continue to change and evolve and do what I feel is right for me.

And to own who I am and be more unapologetic even more than I am now, which I think is possible. But yeah, but, uh, but yeah. Just knowing that, you know, just being brutally honest with who I am and the people around me so that they know who I have and then being authentic, being authentic. And as long as I continue to do that, I don't really care.

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I decide who I want to be, who my community and my ethos. So, for the time I spent trying to do anything else or anything else, there's like a person I always wanted to be. Over the last few years, I've realized I've already become that person. Young, Coco would never believe who I have my head to never believe how confident I am, who I am.

S6: so definitely a hundred percent. I would say that like, based on the fact that I take like five boxes yes. That would literally blow up the daily mail if I walked in... So, I'm a black man of an immigrant background. I'm also a homosexual.

I'm also of an Islamic faith. I also have autism, so my identity is Jam packed. Some people may even say I was greedy.

And you know what? I own all of those things because they are. A part of me. And in some ways, I see them as beautiful because if I look at the people that I have in my life, those are the things that have attracted those people to me, or I feel attracted to them or whatever, life, friendship, and relationships.

I think humanity, I think there is no simple identity in this world. Uh, everyone has their own complex identity and, in some ways, for me, like I'm really grateful that I have all those things because it actually makes me slightly a little bit more, I guess, grateful that I can have all these diverse experiences.

Without being forced to look for it...

Q: What is your relationship with your culture(s)?

D1: I Love my culture and I love being Nigerian. I love the fact that I'm Austrian. I love the fact I speak German. I speak German every day at work as well. I love it. I feel like if you can only speak English then your limited.

A2: think it's who I am. So, they are one in the same thing. There's no difference to me.

Q3: I really, really appreciate it. And moving to LEEDS is when I actually found out about being a Nigerian, which is the funniest thing. all my friends are actually in their families and they were telling me like, you've got to be solid your roots in Nigeria and be proud of it because it's a privilege.

C4: I think my relationship could be better definitely. And I don't think it's no fault of my own. Um, and it's not, there's no fault in my parents. You know, they, you know, come into a country, but coming to a country where racism was rife, and it was hard for them to just get something and not knowing anyone and not having that community they grew up with.

we stopped talking out mother tongue in the house because the teachers at school were like, oh, they need to do it. If they cannot make friends, you know, they fell for it. and they fell for that. I know they did it for our own benefit.

Q: How do you express your creativity?

C5: through everything, I, the way I see myself is that especially as a creative, as an artist, as a singer Creative in multiple ways, I express myself through the way that I draw my eyebrows, the wig that I choose, the words I choose etc. There's no part of my life where It's not impacted by my creativity.

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C4: In general, I find creativity in cooking, male creativity and, and reading a book, you know, creativity, just, just dancing, like crazy by myself, which I do quite a lot. So, I think as long as you come into everything with a playful nature, that is, that is creativity in itself.

Q3: through my arts. I know how I connect with people. Um, so I paint in acrylic - portraits. I feel like when I look at people, there's a there's a story behind you. And I think the only way that I can express that is by finding a way to connect to you as a person.

it makes me feel connected, but also makes you see that I'm unique.

A2: through everything. I believe that my identity and who I am, there's a difference in with my creative side. Like my creativity is everything. And so, everything I do is me trying to express that because it's not something I, I wants to do necessarily, but something I need to do because it's who I am. It's how I survive. so how I express it through. Releasing it every, every opportunity I guess, because that's all I ask really right now to approach things from that angle. And so, I express it by just allowing it to be and coming to a situation and allowing myself to handle the situation, how I'm brain knows how to handle that, which is in a creative way, which is me in a conscious way, in a way that is, that is FULL MAGIC, BLACKNESS, SPIRITUALITY.

D1: I feel like growing up with Nigerian parents, like always like forced like education. So, they kind of creativity was beaten out of me. You couldn't just be a child. Don't play around, be serious, you need to be mature.