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Anne Harris, Ceridwen Spark and Mimmie Ngum Chi Watts

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Anne Harris

Monash University, Clayton

Ceridwen Spark

Australian National University, Canberra

Mimmie Ngum Chi Watts

Victoria University, Melbourne

Abstract

This article argues that African women migrants in Australia are increasingly enrolling in and successfully completing tertiary study, usually at high emotional and financial cost. While this qualitative study has shown that both refugee-background and non-refugee African Australian women's enrolment in higher education is enabling new forms of participation and belonging in resettlement, it continues to challenge the women's more traditional cultural roles and identities. This article argues that these gendered negotiations are noted only cursorily (if at all) within education and health contexts, and, importantly, form a primary obstacle facing African Australian women in migration and refugee resettlement transition.

Keywords

African, education, qualitative, refugee, tertiary, women

Over the past 10 years, researchers have increasingly documented the multitude of obstacles confronting various African Australians endeavouring to participate in paid work (Junankar and Mahuteau, 2004), secondary and – to a lesser extent – tertiary education, particularly those from refugee backgrounds (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011;

Corresponding author:

Anne Harris, Monash University, 100 Clyde Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806, Australia.

Email: anne.harris@monash.edu

VFST, 2009). Research has focused on settlement issues, disease management and support for health professionals working and supporting refugees (LaRRC, 2009; McNevin and Correa-Velez, 2006; VFST, 2007). The contribution made by both skilled and non-skilled African migrants in Australia is often not well acknowledged or not acknowledged at all. African migrants, including those with a refugee background, have contributed to the Australian economy and continue to do so. However it is almost impossible to find scholarly or popular documentation of the many African Australians who are *not* emerging from refugee pasts and interrupted schooling (Harris, 2011a; Majka, 2001; Nunn, 2010; VFST, 2007). Women, more than their male counterparts, continue to struggle with transcultural tensions concerning shifting gender roles, class and race in conjunction with the other challenges they already face as migrants (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2002; Pittaway and Muli, 2009). While in this article and elsewhere (Spark et al., 2013) we have attempted to distinguish between the very different experiences of those from refugee and non-refugee backgrounds, the study discussed here recognises some pervasive patterns that appear to recur for women from a range of African nations, some of whom had tertiary qualifications prior to arriving in Australia, and some of whom are currently enrolled in or have graduated from Australian universities.

Researchers have noted elsewhere the ways in which girls have been elided from education debates and eclipsed by ‘an ongoing international media and policy obsession with the “boys underachievement debate”’ (Archer et al., 2007: 549). Ethnically diverse girls and young women face invisibility that is greater still, both within cultural- and ethnic-specific analyses, and gender-focused discourses (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2002; Pittaway and Muli, 2009; cf. Pavlenko et al., 2001; Yates, 2012). Outhred (2010) draws on a Ghanaian case study to highlight the ways in which rurality, gender and class (in particular, poverty) influence participation in knowledge construction around education and employment; how, even in human rights discourses and within developing nations, ‘poor women are not permitted to participate in discussions concerning their own futures; rather, these discussions take place between the nation’s elite, who tend to be urban residing African males’ (2010: 79). Brown (1986) draws on Hall and others to establish the important differences between race, ethnicity and culture, and the task remains essential today, in new and ever-evolving contexts and intercultural hybridities. Yet we also understand that 21st-century global flows represent challenges and intersectionalities that are not limited to concerns of race, ethnicity and culture alone, but include gender, age, sexuality and class concerns. African diasporic women’s social roles are still often discursively framed to be primarily those of procreator and homemaker (Levi, 2010).

Recent research has noted the ways in which young people from refugee backgrounds ‘arrive in Australia with high aspirations for educational achievement and [for them] being able to attend school is ... what they most look forward to. It is also what makes them most happy’ (Gifford et al., 2009: 11). And yet, the authors also note ‘a range of forms of social exclusion including discrimination are experienced as major barriers to educational participation and success’ (2009: 12). Such exclusion appears to be continuing in tertiary contexts, for a range of diverse reasons. This article examines these multiple forms of social exclusion that many African Australian women are reporting in association with their educational experiences: including race-based exclusion by dominant culture members; language and conceptual knowledge challenges; challenges along

cultural lines, particularly regarding tensions relating to gender role expectations. In doing so this article contributes to discourses that problematise the impact of social exclusion for diasporic African students, rather than the hegemonic focus on low literacy and interrupted schooling. The research presented here is an attempt to narrow the gap in research on gender-based differences as these shape the educational experiences of African Australians.

Counting the costs: education is no panacea

If you educate a man you educate a person but if you educate a woman you educate a nation.
(African proverb)

This saying has been attributed to the famous Ghanaian scholar Dr James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey but is invoked widely by many. Development and aid organisations offer dramatic statistics regarding the value of educating girls and women in developing nations, including 25% lower HIV infection rates, 30% fewer children, and overall poverty reduction. However, as African feminist scholars have noted (Dillard, 2006; Dillard and Okpalaoka, 2011), this kind of ‘endarkened feminist epistemology’ ignores the right of girls and women to be educated for their own benefit, not only for the benefit of others. Moreover, it fails to address the ways in which such rights remain unfulfilled realities in many parts of the world, and are expressed differently (if at all) in educational research discourses (see for example Wright, 2003). Frequently, sayings like these are invoked in regard to developing regions, perhaps persistently regarding Africa. Yet here in Australia and other countries of resettlement, girls and women are also struggling to benefit from the availability of secondary and tertiary education in contexts that often continue to be hostile to girls who wish to continue their education. The attributed reasons for these low achievement levels by African girls are complex and multi-layered, including gender-based family responsibilities such as caring for siblings, cleaning, cooking (Levi, 2010).

In Australia, educational challenges include the ways in which all African Australians are at risk of being conflated into the category of ‘refugees’ by a hegemonising popular media. Despite a period of high immigration of Sudanese Africans over the first decade of the 21st century, and prior to that Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali refugee-background migrants in the 1990s and early 2000s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008), many African Australians have arrived in other ways, from other backgrounds. Those from other African nations who have come under different circumstances and have often been here longer frequently feel erased from public discourse, and have divergent educational needs and abilities (Hatoss and Huijser, 2010).

Further, scholars have noted the need to consider gender, class and culture when addressing the ‘difficult knowledge’ of unequal educational participation among migrant and other marginalised learners (Britzman, 2000; Pitt and Britzman, 2003; Weis et al., 2009). Highlighting the ways in which dominant discourses of integration emphasise ‘education as a pathway to social integration’ (Hatoss and Huijser, 2010: 151), they remind us that the process of empowerment through education is of course ‘far messier and more nuanced’ (2010: 151) and requires the untangling of interwoven influences and

effects. A recent study of the educational experiences of Sudanese Australian young women (Harris, 2012) shows how integration issues, including racism and intercultural gender differences, continue to impact the process of resettlement at least as profoundly as language issues. Similarly, as we have argued elsewhere (Spark et al., 2013), African Australian women's gains in education carry with them interconnected losses which are 'difficult to capture, let alone to represent in a cultural context in which higher education tends to be unambiguously associated with the opportunity for personal development, career prospects and individual gain' (2013: 152).

This article extends current research, most notably through highlighting the ways in which African Australian women's educational challenges are both distinct from their male counterparts, and also bear class- and culture-based distinctions at risk of being elided by a singular discourse about the liberatory role of education in the acculturation process of resettlement. The study drawn upon here investigates some complications of tertiary education for African Australian women of diverse backgrounds, and the socio-cultural contexts in which they are discursively situated.

We use the term 'African Australian' with caution, and with purpose: though others have identified some ways in which such a conflation of diverse identities can be stereotyping and de-identifying (Phillips, 2011), we use the term advisedly to highlight shared struggles that go beyond individual national or ethnic identities. Such strategic essentialising (Spivak, 1996) can be useful in understanding broader patterns of marginalisation, disadvantage and also advantage. We also embrace the term in part to challenge pejorative media constructions of 'African Australians' as synonymous with Sudanese Australians, refugees and an imagined 'threat posed by "ethnic gangs"' (Nunn, 2010: 188).

In addition, by drawing attention to the diversity of 'African Australian' women attending Australian universities, we hope to contribute to a more complex portrait of the African Australian population's relationship to education than the singular 'failure to thrive' narrative which currently dominates popular and scholarly research in this area. For those who experience persistent 'ethnification' (Eide, 2010) at the hands of a western media machine that often conflates distinct ethnicities and nationalities, categories such as 'African Australian' can be risky; for those women who participated in this study, however, the notion of identifying common experiences of other women students from Africa meant there was a space to discuss common feelings of isolation, invisibility (or hyper visibility) and gender role tensions. Such categories, then, can offer a temporary strategic purpose, in service of what Spivak calls 'a scrupulously visible political interest' (1996: 205), if understood in the context of politicising and changing race- and gender-based discourses (and performances of) inequity and social exclusion. We use the terminology to contest a neoliberal utopian imperative about the liberatory effects of so-called democratic education for all, within western contexts. Women from diverse African backgrounds highlight both the advantages and disadvantages that their education in Africa and in Australia has brought them; they know only too clearly what these pedagogies of hope (hooks, 2003) have cost them.

This article elucidates the experiences of those who, because they may tend to be seen as having 'integrated' into Australian society, are less often considered than their 'struggling' counterparts in hegemonic discursive framings of African migrants as tragic, melancholy and traumatised (Ahmed, 2010). While countering ubiquitous tropes like the

'melancholy migrant' (Ahmed, 2010) with the very real success narratives of some participants, we also explore not only the gains but also some of the losses that African Australian women continue to experience as a result of their participation in higher education. In this way, we hope to indicate the limits of discourses that construe migrant women's enrolment in higher education as evidence of their 'successful integration'. We hope to demonstrate that their participation in higher education, while by no means straightforward in familial and community terms, is simultaneously a means by which they gain increased confidence, independence and freedom from more conventional domestically oriented roles. In doing so, this article argues that other determinants besides race and gender play an important role in the lived experiences of African Australian women in tertiary education. The article concludes with a recognition of the ways in which contemporary global discourses usefully distinguish between education-as-knowledge and education-as-credential (Babones, 2010). Babones (2010: 57) argues that 'globalization everywhere increases the economic importance of the knowledge embodied in education at the expense of valuing education merely for the credentials it confers'. In this schema, both personal and societal growth are enhanced when education grows knowledge rather than focusing only on credentials. Drawing on Babones' distinction, we argue that African Australian women are navigating both aspects of education successfully, but at a high personal cost.

The research method

Between March and December of 2011, the three authors of this article and two Sudanese Australian research assistants conducted interviews with 10 African Australian women living in Victoria. University human ethics research approval was gained. The two Sudanese Australian collaborators were young women who were known to one of the authors as a consequence of previous work in this field (Harris, 2011c). With the support of one of the non-African authors, the two young Sudanese women conducted one interview each; the other interviews were conducted by the co-authors (one of African and the other two of Anglo backgrounds).

Each participant (identified here by pseudonyms) was asked a number of demographic questions in order to establish her age, length of time in Australia, education level, country of origin, marital status, number of children, and current living situation. The women then took part in semi-structured interviews that were recorded, transcribed and analysed for emergent themes. The interviews included questions about family background and childhood, in relation to education and equity, as well as questions about whether participants had experienced discrimination at any of the various stages of their education. The participants were also encouraged to reflect on the meaning of tertiary education in their lives, for example, what they felt they had gained or lost as a consequence of their university education. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. The participants were aged between 18 and 38 years old, the majority of whom had arrived in Australia in the last ten years, all citizens but one. Three of the ten were married and four of the ten had children. Half (5) came from Sudan, two from Zimbabwe, two from Nigeria and one from Gabon. All but one was either enrolled in or had completed at least one degree or vocational education certificate course in Australia, with

four of the ten having also completed an Honours, Master's or doctoral degree. The one participant not in tertiary education was enrolled in a TAFE (technical and further education) course learning ESL (English as a Second Language).

The majority (7) spoke English to a high standard. Of the remaining three, one participant spoke English fluently but indicated some difficulty expressing what she was trying to say and two were somewhat limited by virtue of English not being their first language. Of the ten, five of the women had come to Australia as refugees. All of these women were Sudanese. Three of the participants came as students and one came as a minor with her family, who were skilled migrants. One of the women entered Australia as a skilled migrant herself. To illustrate the influence of multiple factors affecting African Australian women's higher educational experience, we draw on two profiles from this research group, profiles which are diverse in economic, cultural and experiential detail. The first story belongs to Awek, a 26-year-old woman born in South Sudan and who arrived under the Australian refugee intake program; the second story to Kamida, a 30-year-old Zimbabwean woman who came as an international student. Both case studies illustrate the profound need to attend to the multiple challenges evident in African women's experiences in higher education, and the great diversity of lived experiences, especially between those from refugee and non-refugee backgrounds.

Bigger dreams for refugee-background women

In this section, we examine the tensions that underlie African Australian women's experiences of higher education. On one hand, this participation represents the best hope for these women's futures, on the other, such participation can constitute a threat to existing gender roles within their families and communities of origin.

Scholars of Sudanese culture have noted the many profound cultural differences between Australian and Sudanese culture, including the ways in which Sudanese culture is most often 'traditionally collectivistic culture with strict gender roles', a far cry from Australia's 'individualistic [culture] with comparatively fluid gender roles' (Hebbani et al., 2010: 39). In addition, an ambivalent relationship with the 'refugee' label often complicates matters for Sudanese migrants in resettlement: on the one hand it has been necessary to access services and educational support (Harris, 2011b; Nunn, 2010). On the other, it has quickly become an unwanted static label which eventually serves to 'remarginalise and exclude' within countries of resettlement (Hebbani et al., 2010: 44).

Awek's family came to Australia as refugees in 1994 when she was 9 years old and she has been a citizen since 1996. Awek attended the upper grades of primary school and all of secondary school in South Australia. Unlike many South Sudanese immigrants in Australia, Awek did not experience the extreme interrupted schooling and long refugee transit period so common to later Sudanese immigrants. Awek has an undergraduate degree from an Australian university and a postgraduate diploma from a prestigious university in Melbourne where she moved in 2007. Awek is employed in her area of expertise, is not married and lives alone. Her story is unusual both because she is a female Sudanese Australian with a tertiary and postgraduate qualification, and because she has always had her family's support to study. Awek says her mother particularly 'pushed [her] to go to uni', despite not being educated herself.

She's spent the whole [time], since I was young ... pushing on about how it's important for me to go to uni. That's why I went and I'm really proud of it because for us it's a huge achievement. Not only is it hard to get an education back home but as a woman in particular it's extremely hard. So when your family's pushing for it ... I think maybe I've been a bit lucky, because they know the importance of education and they understand what it means to be educated and how that affects someone's life here.

Awek's reference to how 'education affects life here' addresses the relationship between education, class and status in western contexts, also noted by others (Babones, 2010; Considine and Zappala, 2002; Greany, 2008). This represents a key recurring tension for African diasporic women in higher education; on one hand, most parents' primary goal for their children in resettlement contexts includes educational aspirations, yet as Awek and other Sudanese respondents attest, there is considerable ambivalence among both men and women regarding education for women being associated with creating 'problems at home'. As scholars have noted (see for example Dillard and Okpalaoka, 2011; Hebbani et al., 2010; Wright, 2003), many African women report feeling conflicted, as though they are 'living between two cultures' (Hebbani et al., 2010: 47). Yet these Sudanese Australian respondents noted the education imperative tied to western living in which 'here you have to learn, you are forced to learn' (Hebbani et al., 2010: 52). And in Awek's words:

I guess [education] is making [us women] aware and maybe they just don't want women to be aware, you know? It's opening up [our] minds, it allows [us] to question the men, and they don't want to be questioned – so there are some men who are against that 'cos they don't believe, you know, a woman has the right to say anything really.

While educated women may pose a threat to conventional notions of labour division, in which women remain and manage the home life while men earn an income outside the home, emigration and the repercussions of diasporic reformations of family mean that gender roles are changing anyway. As another participant in this study confirms, changing gender roles have intergenerational impacts as well:

Credit is given to men – because ... men used to work in farms, used to go hunting for food, they're spending all that time trying to feed their family. So a woman stays home, looks after the kids, waits for the man to come back with food and cooks it. But there's no relevance here.... You're gonna go to the shop and buy the meat, and that's hunting? ... My grandpa and grandma's generation ... misinterpret the whole meaning of a man's role and a woman's role. But it's not back in the day right now, so why is the credit still given? ... Why are they getting credit for something they don't deserve?

Awek also believes that her education makes her less appealing to men because 'there are some African men who probably prefer that you hadn't gained an education because now you're too independent and you think for yourself and some people don't like that.' As Dillard (2006) and others have shown, even non-migrant African women in higher education (whether students or scholars) face role tensions that men do not, even while acknowledging the benefits of enhanced status and greater income capacity for the individual or family.

Awek values her education because it has 'broadened [her] mind', given her increased 'independence', 'courage' and 'propelled [her to] try and get a bit more out of life,' not 'just settle for being a housewife.' Yet she also experiences surprise from those in 'mainstream' Australian society:

Coming from a migrant background ... you're almost expected to fail. So when you've gone to uni and have a degree, people kind of go 'oh ok'; they're a bit surprised. When they know that you've done a degree it's 'oh okay so you've kind of got a career path you know, you want to do something with yourself' as opposed to ... I don't know, ending up on the street somewhere.

While African women may be navigating altered gender roles at home and in cultural communities, it is clear from this study that they are also always navigating non-African preconceptions, stereotypes and expectations in the wider community (Ahmed, 2010; Wright, 2003), something that higher degrees assist with but do not alleviate. Awek identifies additional complexities around education-fuelled class mobility:

There are probably some friends that I grew up with who didn't finish high school or go to uni and ... I think it made things a bit awkward, unfortunately, at the end because they kind of see you as on a different level to them. And I think even though we kind of keep in touch now, it's not ... it's a bit different cos now ... it's like a class thing almost again: where it's almost like you know you've been pushed up to another bracket and everybody looks at you differently and they're like ... it doesn't mean they're not smart but it just ... unfortunately you now have this title and they kind of don't.

Greany (2008: 51) notes how education initiatives (both in Africa and in resettlement) are constructed as a tool of 'empowerment and gender equality', without further attention to a more nuanced examination of other mitigating factors which influence both engagement with educational initiatives, and its real or perceived ability to improve the lives of women. She rightly reveals a dangerous tendency to equate simplistic narratives 'starting with women's oppression and ending with women's liberation' (2008: 51). The narratives offered in this article suggest that there are many versions of the real challenges facing women from diverse backgrounds who are using education as only one tool to improve their lives. The 'multiple identities and multiple struggles' (Greany, 2008: 54) which emerge as characteristic of diverse African women's experiences in Australian education suggest the value of a multi-faceted approach which takes account of the complexity of diverse women's lives.

Awek's comments highlight the sometimes contradictory effects of education on African Australian women's identities, and as such represent the 'difficult knowledge' (Britzman, 2000) of being educated black women. Awek's status as a tertiary-educated African Australian woman ensures her access to some of the privileges of life in Australia, including the possibility of a secure and well-paid job, the freedom to live alone and to have aspirations other than 'just' getting married and bearing children. Yet this status does not ensure her ability to counteract the pervasive effects of racism (Weis et al., 2009), and it is simultaneously what separates her from many of her African Australian peers, both male and female. Her experiences highlight the limits of singular idealised discourses about the relationship between women's participation in education and social inclusion. As Weiner-Levy has written:

Discourses concerning the benefits of education for women – like the related discourse on social mobility – ignore and even deny the hurdles, internal transitions and pain that the inevitable losses entail, overlooking the intrapersonal dynamics and identity transitions associated with processes of change, adoption of an alternative path and detachment from one's previous lifestyle. (2008: 139)

According to Eritrean Australian researcher Berhan Ahmed, when addressing aspiration among African Australians from refugee backgrounds, 'all their eggs are in the education basket' (2008: 25), and if 'they are failed in their education, the outlook is bleak indeed' (2008: 25). Ahmed understandably identifies aspiration and access to mainstream culture as crucial to settlement and success; however, his claim that 'knowledge and education are universally empowering' threatens to take a utopian approach to social capital and over-simplify success pathways. Babones disaggregates the knowledge and credential benefits of education, both in developing and in developed countries. He demonstrates clear correlations between education and income in extremely diverse contexts, yet acknowledges mitigating factors such as support systems, intelligence, and others, yet not gender, ethnicity and race. His findings across 80 countries that 'globalization increase(s) the importance of knowledge for success in today's knowledge-driven global economy' (2010: 57–8) are reflected in the case studies here, yet more research is needed to understand the mitigating factors experienced by these women.

Certainly, despite the challenges associated with their participation in higher education, African Australian women do not dispute the 'increasing importance of education' (Babones, 2010: 58) in an increasingly globalised world. In the next section, we use Babones' strategy of separating the knowledge and credential aspects of tertiary degrees, by looking at the economic benefits and costs of Kamida's educational experience, and its impact on her life since graduation:

'Maybe it's worth it but it came at a price': an international student

Kamida arrived in Australia from Zimbabwe in 2003, at the age of 21. She came to Australia to study commerce and received some support in her first year of study from extended family members here in Australia, yet she noted in her interview how alienating it was to 'come here and find all these other African kids are from wealthy backgrounds' in the international student scene at university, to whom 'I couldn't relate so much'. She became an Australian citizen in 2008, after completing her undergraduate and Master's degrees. To meet the costs of living and studying in Australia, Kamida worked in various jobs, including cleaning and customer service roles. She too is now single and lives alone.

Although Kamida has a full-time job in her area of expertise, she says she sometimes wonders whether the expense has been 'worth it'. She estimates that by the time she finished university she spent AU\$80,000 to study in Australia.

At the time that I came I had to pay something like \$20,000 a year excluding accommodation. So, I think by the time I finished uni, in my Master's, I spent like \$80,000 to study. I had help along the way but I also had to work for it. I think I got help for something like \$20,000 and then I had \$60,000 that I had to take out as a loan and even up until now I'm still trying to pay

off some of the loan. Because you have to live as well so you end up with this huge debt before you even buy a house, before you even do anything and you have to pay for it.

As with Babones, Kamida recognises the credential value of her degrees as an economically independent woman, however, the carry-over debt can be crippling. Additionally, while Babones claims that in western contexts globalising processes ensure that knowledge takes precedence over the credential value of degrees, for African Australian women the credential value may still be primary in reversing stereotypes and other impediments to employment.

Alongside the significant financial burdens of her education, Kamida notes culture-related costs and obligations that tend to remain unacknowledged within western-oriented discourses emphasising the benefits of education for women.

And also at the same time if you have an African background you still have people to support. So you have to juggle those things as well. And if you are single, you're not married, you don't have the extra income sometimes it's hard and ... sometimes I've looked back and said 'Is this really worth it? Ah maybe if I'd stayed in Africa I would have had no debt, maybe I would have been married.' But then I look at all the things that I've learned and got to know and the opportunities – I feel maybe it's worth it but it came at a price.

She alludes to the range of knowledges to which she has been exposed by studying in the West, despite the different types of costs. Like other women in this study too, Kamida directly relates being single and childless to the fact that she is educated. In response to the question of who she is as a result of education that she might not have been, Kamida responds:

I think now I am this successful, independent young woman who is fearless, who, you know, who is strong as well and happy in myself. If I hadn't been here, been educated, maybe, well I would have been married, maybe I would have had three kids by now, um and I wouldn't, I would have been ignorant. I would not have known anything else but my kids. Maybe I would have been happy but I wouldn't have missed that, this, this – what I have now! If I could change it I would do it all over again, you know I would not change a thing, yeah.

Despite the fact that ultimately she appears to conclude that her education has afforded 'long-term benefits', Kamida equates this education with a surrendering of marriage, kids, and then 'ignorance'. Kamida acknowledges that she may have 'sacrificed getting married and having kids because it has been more convenient that way' and notes 'there are few African women who are a good example of people who juggle their career and their family', an absence that has affected her choices. Indeed, several respondents noted how other women contribute to a sense of guilt and family responsibility over personal fulfilment. When asked by her African interviewer whether she thinks 'being an educated African women' attracts discrimination 'by other women in the community', Kamida says 'there's clearly a lack of communication between the successful women and those women who have never had the opportunity...' For Kamida, it is a matter of role models, or 'you have no hero, and you think there's nothing else to do'.

Combined with cultural influences, which sometimes continue to discourage women from fully engaging in higher education (Wright, 2003) or public careers, women 'feel guilty if [they] are successful in career focus', Kamida reports, and notes the constant pressure that 'you have to do this for the family. It's for the family, it's the best thing.' Having studied at university level in both Zimbabwe and Australia, Kamida is well-placed to problematise the status-value of education in diverse contexts, and the role of diasporic educated women in postcolonial contexts as important border-crossers. Studying as an undergraduate in Zimbabwe, Kamida says 'sometimes I felt intimidated' by the males, yet she notes many ways in which Zimbabwe was more 'advanced' in terms of 'equal opportunity' for girls and women.

Such influences combine to maintain what she calls an 'ignorance is bliss' status quo in which 'the culture encourages you a bit not to know and not to care too much about that'. Rejection of such cultural pressures often adds to the stress and high emotional and personal costs of women following individual goals such as higher education and employment. For Kamida, Zimbabweans and other African international students need to become more visible for their own empowerment but also as 'living examples' to other African and international students:

But to make it in my industry, or in any career, you know, you need to step up and speak out for yourself. So I guess for a lot of African women I think this is the greatest challenge: having that confidence; because there are a lot of very talented African women but they don't believe they can do that because they do not have the confidence to sell themselves; to stand in front of a crowd and, you know, conduct a meeting or a seminar. It's too scary because women in Africa are not supposed to be like that. You're supposed to be on the sideline in the kitchen cooking things for people, so it's ... I feel like there is still a long way to go.

Conclusion

Does this consciousness of oppression, and confidence in the future, present the possibility for liberation? Or could it be 'pseudo-liberation'? (Harper, 1974: 93).

Nearly 40 years ago, Harper noted the multi-layered complexities for self-educating women (in Papua New Guinea) who wished to increase their economic independence, social capital and educational possibilities. Today many women navigating higher education as part of a transcultural movement between developing and developed nation contexts see the dual nature of higher education as both a tool for increasing social capital but also at times as a liability within cultural contexts. They often walk a tightrope between belonging and alienation, in multiple contexts, and education is often the cause rather than the solution. Yet none of them in this study have stated that they would wish it otherwise, or would have done it differently. Often though, they ask themselves questions like Harper's, revealing the extent to which questions about whether education amounts to 'liberation' remain a part of the everyday lives of these women.

This article has argued that other determinants besides race and gender play an important role in the lived experiences of African Australian women navigating tertiary education. In doing so, it extends Babones' (2010) recognition of the ways in which

contemporary global discourses usefully distinguish between education-as-knowledge and education-as-credential.

As Outhred has stressed, non-African representations of African women continue to construct them in objectified and unagentic ways, as those who are most 'integral to the morality of the society' (2010: 85) which they are positioned to maintain, or as 'melancholy migrants' (Ahmed, 2010) from without. Such collectivist/individualist tensions are commonplace for many cultural border-crossers, and African women in higher education have much to share about the lived complexities of being highly educated diasporic women in postcolonial contexts today. In this article we have tried to highlight in particular those tertiary-educated women who have 'succeeded' in their studies, to problematise both simplistic liberation discourses, and restrictive narratives of 'failure' that predominate in mainstream policy and academic discourses. In this way we have upheld some patterns identified by Archer et al., in which 'young women can be understood as living positions of gender, class (and for some, racial) subordination that provide them with little opportunity for visibility' (2007: 565); however, in this study, such invisibility does not derive from transgression or disengagement, but primarily through self-sacrifice and achievement.

Despite these costly successes, many African Australian women remain less 'visible' than their male counterparts in educational, employment and cultural community contexts. Their very success in the 'western' context of tertiary education often marginalises them in their own cultural communities by virtue of their seeming abnegation of familial and cultural duties. Simultaneously, their high levels of education often render them invisible in (white) western contexts which frame African Australian women as uneducated, lacking in aspiration or professional accomplishments.

Majka (2001), Nunn (2010), Phillips (2011) and others have noted the inaccurate and limiting discursive category of 'African Australian' itself, and in combination with 'refugee' and sometimes 'Sudanese'. This article has attempted to redefine African Australians as a strategically useful category, made up not only of diverse cultural, ethnic and national identities, but of diverse educational ones as well, for advancing a post-structural understanding of the limitations and potentialities of this label, not as an identity but rather a discursive construct (Spivak, 1996). Nevertheless, the category can be problematised in light of some common educational experiences as noted by 10 African Australian women who have engaged with tertiary education in this country, and who see transcultural tensions which bridge distinct African nationalities, personal individualities and economic backgrounds.

Such commonalities include tensions around gender and family roles, the high personal and financial cost of higher education in resettlement, and a sense of liminality both in African communities and in dominant cultural contexts, both of which apparently struggle to know how to understand, incorporate, or celebrate academically high-achieving African women. In the face of such contradictions and tensions, the two women whose narratives are represented in this article, and the eight others from this study, are but a few of the increasing number of African women in countries of resettlement who are succeeding in crossing not only cultural, but also educational, social and economic boundaries. We co-authors celebrate these women's efforts, and recognise the need for further and more nuanced research into their experiences, and the ways in which they are contributing to their countries of resettlement, their families, and their home countries and cultures as well.

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Author biographies

Anne Harris, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in Education at Monash University (Melbourne), and an interdisciplinary researcher at the intersection of cultural, sexual and gender diversities, including the ways in which creativity, the arts and digital media can be used for educational and social change. She is an Australian Research Council Early Career Research Award (DECRA) Fellow 2014–16 researching the commodification of creativity, and a native New Yorker who has worked professionally as a playwright, teaching artist and journalist in the USA and Australia. She is a co-editor of the journal *Australasian Review of African Studies* and an associate editor of the journals *Curriculum and Pedagogy* and *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*. Her latest book is *The Creative Turn: Toward a New Aesthetic Imaginary* (Sense, 2014).

Ceridwen Spark, PhD, is a Research Fellow in state, society and governance in Melanesia at the Australian National University. She researches and writes about gender and social change in PNG. She has published widely on the subject of educated women, including most recently in the *Australian Journal of Anthropology*.

Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi Watts, PhD is a Lecturer in Community Health, College of Health and Biomedicine, Victoria University, Melbourne Australia. Her PhD in Public Health from La Trobe University was titled *Teenage Pregnancy, Contraception, Motherhood and Culture Issues among African Australian Teenager Mothers with a Refugee Background in Greater Melbourne*. She has presented at many national and international conferences; has served on and continues to serve on several committees and Boards, including the National FGM Reference Group, Board Director Western Health, Learn Access Engage Professions (LEAP) among others.