'Ghanaian first': Nationality, Race and the Slippery Side of Belonging for Mixed-Race Ghanaians

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Abstract

This article explores the multifaceted ways in which race impacts on processes of identification with the Ghanaian nation for mixed-race Ghanaians. Using a constructionist approach to identity, which highlights the agency of actors, the article underscores the shifting and racialising nature of national identity in transnational contexts. The article argues that whether they were born and raised in Ghana or they grew up in a Western country, mixed-race Ghanaians mainly identify as 'Ghanaian first'. Their affiliation to Ghana stems both from growing up in the country and from being identified as black outsiders in countries of the white Western world. In both contexts, identifying as a Ghanaian is a source of pride and empowerment. However, their membership of the Ghanaian nation is often contested in their everyday life by the majority black-identified Ghanaian population, based on ethnoracial (non)authenticity premises. As such, mixed-race Ghanaian participants actively shape their Ghanaianness to justify their right to belong.

Keywords: Ghana, mixed-race identities, belonging, citizenship, whiteness, exclusion

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Résumé

Cet article explore les multiples facettes de l'impact de la race sur les processus d'identification à la nation ghanéenne pour les Ghanéens « mixtes ». Dans une approche constructionniste de l'identité, qui met en évidence l'agentivité des acteurs, l'article souligne la nature dynamique et racialisante de l'identité nationale dans des contextes transnationaux. l'article soutient que, qu'ils soient nés et aient grandi au Ghana ou qu'ils aient grandi dans un pays occidental, les Ghanéens « mixtes » se considèrent principalement comme « Ghanéens d'abord ». Leur affiliation au Ghana découle à la fois du fait qu'ils ont grandi dans le pays et qu'ils ont été identifiés comme des étrangers noirs dans les pays du monde occidental blanc. Dans les deux contextes, s'identifier en tant que Ghanéen est une source de fierté et d'émancipation. Cependant, sur la base de prémisses de (non)authenticité ethnoraciale, leur appartenance à la nation ghanéenne est souvent quotidiennement contestée par la population ghanéenne majoritairement identifiée comme noire. En tant que tels, les participants ghanéens « mixtes » façonnent activement leur identité ghanéenne pour justifier leur droit d'appartenance à la nation.

Mots-clés : Ghana, identités métisses, appartenance, citoyenneté, blancheur, exclusion

Understandings of mixedness and mixing – whether these are created through administrative national/racial/ethnic identity categories and political boundaries, or as part of complex everyday local social relations and subtle lived experiences of insider and outsider identity options – need to be situated in the larger complex of ideas about 'race' and ethnicity. (Edwards, Ali, Caballero and Song 2012: 8)

I am a Ghanaian by choice. As I said I chose to be black and so did not see the need to get other citizenship. (Spartacus, mixed-race Ghanaian)

Spartacus is a sixty-six-year-old, university-educated man born in England to a German mother and a Ghanaian father. He moved to Ghana when he was still a toddler and was mostly raised by his paternal grandmother in Accra, Ghana. He identifies as a 'Ga man', a man belonging to one of the main ethnic groups found in the greater Accra region. He had a successful professional career. He says that, when he was young, he and the other mixed-race boys in the school he attended were 'seen as disappointed Europeans'. Despite the punctual acts of exclusion from the Ghanaian national community he experienced growing up, and still experiences from time to time, Spartacus claims both a Ghanaian and a black identity, a statement in which national and racial identities are conflated and interchangeable and where Ghanaian citizenship becomes material evidence of this affiliation. For the mixed-race Ghanaian descendants

of binational couples we interviewed, nationality, citizenship, race, ethnicity and culture were intertwined in complex and shifting ways, depending on where they found themselves, and the people they interacted with.

This article explores the multifaceted ways in which race impacts on processes of identification with the Ghanaian nation for the mixed-race Ghanaians who participated in our study We first dissect questions of national identity and belonging among individuals of mixed origins. We pay attention to how national and racial identity categories have historically intersected in administrative and social processes. Then, building on this literature, and using an approach to identity that highlights the agency of actors, we underscore the shifting and racialising nature of national identity and belonging in transnational contexts.

This article suggests that mixed-race Ghanaian research participants who were born and raised in Ghana and in a Western country identified as 'Ghanaian first'. Their affiliation to Ghana stemmed both from growing up in the country and from being identified as black outsiders in countries of the white Western world. Identifying as a Ghanaian was a source of pride and empowerment. However, their membership in the Ghanaian nation was often contested in their everyday life by the majority black-identified Ghanaian population, based on ethnoracial (non)authenticity premises. As such, mixed-race Ghanaians actively shaped their Ghanaianness to justify their right to belong.

National Identity, Race and Belonging for Mixed Individuals: Questioning Categories

Official modes of identification, such as censuses and other national surveys, contribute to the identity construction of mixed-race individuals by categorising them under clear, uncompromising, largely circulated but often limited, identification labels. Those ready-to-use labels serve to structure how individuals perceive themselves as well as how they are viewed by society (Bratter 2007). Official categories are therefore central to our understanding of national identification processes and belonging, even though these categories can fluctuate in time and place. As Aspinall rightly remarks in the case of the US and Canada (2003: 288): 'The processes of racial formation by the state – through multiculturalism in Canada and the hypodescent policy (and its legacy) in the USA – may influence or limit the identity options available to the mixed race/multiethnic population.' For example, in Canada, one of the countries where we interviewed mixed-race Ghanaians, identity options available in the 2010 census included a

mixture of categories that tended to blur racial and ethnonational lines of identification.[1] As such, despite the institutionalisation of multiculturalism in Canada in 1976 and Canada's political stance towards the inclusion of ethnocultural diversity into the Canadian ethos (Mahtani, Kwan-Lafond and Taylor 2014), studies have shown that nation-building and national imaginaries are often based on the premise of a white settler population of European origins (Mahtani 2006).

Belonging to the Canadian nation is thus often understood in ethnoracial terms, where whiteness is subsumed into the definition of Canadianness. According to Paragg (2017), mixed-race individuals in Canada are confronted with the 'What are you?' question on a regular basis and sometimes several times a day (Hill 2010). This question challenges mixed-race individuals' claim to be Canadian nationals – even if they are citizens of the country – as it refers primarily to the national identity of their parents.

In such cases, mixed-race individuals are perceived as outsiders whose ethnonational 'origins' need to be traced and who, as such, do not share the privileges granted to white, 'legitimate' citizens.[2] Regular micro aggressions foster strategies of identification in mixed-race individuals, which range from mastering local accents and identifying as Canadians (Mahtani 2006; Paragg 2015) to a valorisation of their non-white ethnicity (Mckenzie 2012; Storr 1999; Waring and Purkayastha 2017). For some of the mixed-race Ghanaian participants in our study, claiming a strong national identity – in this case Ghanaian – constituted one strategy of identification that resisted ethnoracial hierarchies of inclusion into and exclusion from the nation in the diaspora.

Of course, the categorisation of mixed-ancestry people with 'ambiguous' phenotypes (Haritaworn 2007, 2009) depends on the gazer and on the history that characterises racial relations in a specific national or regional context (King-O'Riain 2014). For example, most studies conducted on mixed-race individuals in the US still recognise the prevalence of hypodescent in processes of identification (Gullickson and Morning 2011). This 'one-drop rule' posits that individuals who have a black parent and a white parent will identify, and be identified by others, as black (Aspinall 2003; Brunsma 2005), although there seems to be more flexibility in identity options for individuals from middle-class backgrounds (Rockquemore 2006; Twine 1996). How is their national belonging understood and experienced, and their national identity crafted and legitimised in Ghana, where the majority population – and thus, the normative racial identity – is black,[3] and where mixed-race individuals' perceived whiteness marks them as privileged outsiders (Darkwah and Ampofo 2008; Van Zyl-Hermann and Boersema 2017) or 'disappointed Europeans'?

In Ghana, in the 2010 census, the national status options were 'Ghanaian by birth' (93.73 per cent of the total population), 'dual nationality' – Ghanaian and 'other' (2.88 per cent), 'Ghanaian by naturalisation' (0.95 per cent) and other nationals (2.44 per cent) (Ghana Statistical Service 2013: 22–25). These categories suggest different degrees of Ghanaianness based on autochthony (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005; Kobo 2010), where blood and territorial ties account for higher recognition of national belonging (for a categorisation of Ghanaians in the diaspora based on ancestry and migration status, see Mensah et al. 2018; Twumasi-Ankrah 2019). They also reflect the process of nation-building that occurred during the Independence period, which indubitably involved defining clear boundaries of group inclusion and exclusion in the aftermath of colonisation. 'Other' less desirable groups included white colonisers and 'foreigners', such as Fulani herders, Hausa people, and Lebanese and Syrian immigrants (Kobo 2010). These boundaries were shaped by race politics (Mphahlele 1974; Kalua 2009), but also by nationals' connection to the Ghanaian territory:

> From 1968 the word 'indigenous' replaced 'alien' as the key term in the popular and legal discourse of Ghanaian nationality. 'Indigenous' became the defining characteristic of a 'true Ghanaian', based on claims to ancestral provenance within the country's territorial space, in contrast to 'others' whose claims derived from ambiguous and constantly changing legal provisions (Kobo 2010: 77).

Nkrumah's nationalist and pan-Africanist endeavours thus shaped the politics of belonging in Ghana along racial and ethnic lines:

> The concept of the 'stranger' has been used to describe other African sojourners in societies where kinship norms have informed the political structure, and where lineage membership has defined primary citizenship status and conferred rights such as land ownership and use. Residence, for whatever length of time, did not mature into citizenship, although all residents had the protection of the law (Manuh 1998: 482).

In the light of these historical processes, it would not be surprising if mixed-race individuals were excluded from the national discourse in contemporary Ghana, even though the 'Nationality Act' of 1969 granted citizenship to people married to Indigenous Ghanaians and their children (Kobo: 78). We can posit that the specific history of racial relations in Ghana, shaped by colonialism, Independence, Pan-Africanism and Western imperialism, has also marked the collective imaginary and has contributed to define markers of inclusion and exclusion in nation-building processes around ethnoracial

and class lines (Darby 2013). Jemima Pierre's work in Ghana provides a useful point of departure in understanding the construction of whiteness and bodies that are racialised as white:

> By 'Whiteness' I mean historical, cultural and social practices, as well as ideas and codes, which practically and discursively structure the power and privilege of those racialised as White […]Whiteness continues to have currency in this nominally Black postcolonial African nation, revealing a clear discourse of race that is articulated through practices that both reflect global economic, political, and cultural hierarchies, and that reinforce White privilege on the local level (2012: 189–190).

Ideologies that position whiteness as superior thus grant certain forms of power and prestige to mixed-race Ghanaians in Ghana, but they muddy issues and experiences of national belonging.

The controversies that surrounded interracial marriages in the colonial period (Lindner 2009: 63; Ray 2015) have also contributed to structure the perception of mixed-race individuals as privileged insiders-outsiders in Ghana. Even if racist and sexist colonial citizenship laws and policies (Ray 2009) have been revoked, they still shape processes of inclusion and exclusion in the national imaginary for mixed-race individuals, based on racial, national and class categorisations. For example, the children of British colonisers and local women were sent to special schools in Accra (Quayson 2014) and in the UK, and often became the colonisers' intermediaries in the former Gold Coast: 'This process created a mixed-race/multiracial caste mostly referred to as "middlemen" that had the power to act and control resources in the name of the colonisers, giving them social status through the material embodiment of their light skin' (Asante 2016: 88).

The prestige that 'mixed-race' individuals hold in contemporary Ghana is still visible in the political and economic positions held by important figures, such as former president Rawlings, whose father was Scottish, and Nkrumah's daughter (Agyeman and Amoako-Gyampah 2019; Kobo 2010). Asante (2016) talks of a form of 'racial capital' that can be mobilised by Ghanaians, through skin-toning for example, and converted into material gain. His study clearly shows the value of a lighter skin colour in local and global geographies of prestige. However, if whiteness represents a 'promise of modernity and opportunity' in African contexts, Van Zyl-Hermann and Boersema contend that this privilege is not straightforward; it also acts as a 'reminder of colonial era exploitation' (2017: 658).

As ideologies travel across borders from Ghana to the diaspora and vice versa, we have seen that, in some cases, reference to mixed-race individuals' white heritage is also shunned (Storr 1999) or understood as lacking in

'culture' (Paragg 2015). Categories that inform national identifications and belonging thus need to be complexified, in light of sociohistorical contexts and globalisation processes, as an individual's social position shifts in place and during the course of his or her life cycle and allows for increased transnational mobility and ties anchored in more than one national setting.

Researching Mixed-Race Identities: Methodological Insights and Theoretical Bearings

For me, a politics of identity is intrinsically tied to a politics of location, where the question 'Where are you from?' is largely relational, depending on where I am. The ways I am identified depend upon where I am located, at a particular time (Mahtani and Moreno 2001: 65).

This article examines the question of national identity and processes of national inclusion and exclusion among a small sample of self-identifying mixed-race individuals, who have a Ghanaian parent (born and raised in Ghana) and who either lived in Ghana or in Canada. Because identity is contextual and interactional and, for the mixed-race Ghanaian participants in the project, life trajectories involved more than one country, we also explored some of the ways in which ethnoracial and national identity intersect at the transnational level. As the literature shows, national identity, identification and belonging are inseparable from racialisation processes. This article thus aims to shed light on some articulations between national belonging, race and identity,[4] and on strategies developed by mixed-race Ghanaians to justify their claim to Ghanaianness.

The discussion that emerges from this article is based on an exploratory research project that was funded by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), which examined the lived experience of mixed-race Ghanaians in Ghana and Canada. It is grounded in biographical narratives that focused on discrimination, privilege and belonging, using a transnational lens. The themes we covered with the participants were: their experience growing up as mixed-race, their experience of school, their friends, their relationship with their extended family members living abroad, their national affiliations and experiences of citizenship, and their travels and experiences of mobility and settlement.

Overall, we conducted twenty-nine semi-structured individual interviews with self-identified mixed-race young people and adults who had one Ghanaian parent born in Ghana and a 'white'[5] parent (twenty-two in Ghana and seven in Canada). Following Hage's argument against multi-sited ethnography (2005), we view mixed-race participants as one single transnational community, although multifaceted and grounded in various

national contexts. The mixed-race participants in Ghana had transnational lifestyles. Most had travelled significantly and/or had dual citizenship. They also maintained ties with their families outside Ghana. Some were born and had lived in their non-Ghanaian parent's country at one point in their lives. The participants we interviewed in Canada all had one Ghanaian parent born and raised in Ghana, who either had migrated to Canada or still lived in Ghana. The participants had regular and continued contact with Ghana through family networks and communications, travel, regular remittances and religious or ethnic local and transnational affiliations, and with other Ghanaians in Canada, in Ghana and in other parts of the diaspora (mainly the US and the UK).

Although there is a significant Ghanaian diasporic community in Canada (Manuh 1998), mixed marriages are a relatively recent phenomenon. Canadian participants in Canada are thus few and young (between eighteen and thirty years old). Their narratives should be taken as case studies that allow us to question shifting categories of identification in a postcolonial global world (Childs et al. 2021), where imaginings of Africa and African identities are not fixed but rather fluid, relational and cosmopolitan (Appiah 1992; De Witte and Spronk 2014; Kalua 2009; Twumasi-Ankrah 2019). Using a transnational approach has the advantage of highlighting some of the continuities and disruptions within this group of mixed-race Ghanaians who have a high degree of international mobility.

We recruited the participants using the snowball sampling method, and, because the population is hard to reach in Canada, we advertised widely through Ghanaian events and associations, university associations and other religious and cultural associations across the country. The respondents were thus varied in terms of class, but all had access to a university education. In Ghana, most respondents were university educated. The high degree of reflexivity found in their narratives reflects their middle-upper-class upbringing. Since literature on mixed-race individuals in Africa is scarce, our intent was not to draw generalising conclusions, but rather to look at emerging patterns and questions that arose from the narratives.

For the purpose of this article, we use a social construction perspective regarding identity. Identity emerges from the complex interactions between identification by others and self-perception, belonging and reference to the nation (Gallissot 1987). It often involves a divide between 'us' and 'them', creating tensions and even discrimination and exclusion (Anderson 2006; Gallissot 1987; Maalouf 2014). According to this definition, the identity of mixed-race participants is fluid, especially in a transnational world in which they physically and affectively move between a postcolonial society with

a black majority population (Ghana) and Western and Eastern societies (Canada, but also Germany, the UK, China and the US) characterised by racial and ethnic tensions in an otherwise unmarked 'white' majority population. As Childs et al. explain: 'Mixed identities are often fluid, especially when the mixed individuals are not just moving between families and neighborhoods of different racial and ethnic composition but also across countries and hemispheres both online and in real-time' (2021: 6). Everywhere they travel, mixed-race Ghanaians are thus attributed a 'visible minority' status. The result may be exclusion from all groups of origin and a feeling of not belonging anywhere, a state that Park called 'the marginal man' (Park 1928). According to Stonequist (1935), mixed-race individuals' social position carries a permanent state of marginality, which may lead to an identity crisis.

The concept of dissonance is useful here in understanding the lived experience of mixed-race individuals. Grounded in the sociology of child development, this theory argues that children tend to adopt the ethnoracial identity of their mother. According to Choudhry (2010: 112), when mixed-race children start going to primary school, they often confront a different perception of themselves than their own, based on their name, phenotype, religious affiliation or language spoken. This dissonance between their 'subjective' identity (how they identify) and their 'attributed' identity (how they are being identified by others) (Allouche-Benayoun 2008: 71) may provoke an identity crisis or contribute to the creation of alternative routes to identity.

Despite the theoretical pull that may present identity crisis theories, sociologists such as Gordon (1964) contend, rather, that children of mixed couples completely integrate with their society of residence. Their national identity thus reflects their affective connection to place and not to the country of origin of their migrant parent. This theory is supported by Akyeampong's study (2004) among Ghanaian-Lebanese individuals in Ghana. As Yuval-Davis (2006) holds, in transnational settings, belonging reflects affective attachments and desires for attachments that sometimes come into tension with 'politics of belonging' in situated contexts.

Mensah et al., who studied the Ghanaian diaspora in Canada, explain that 'the diasporan is often seen as inauthentic, illegitimate […] compared to people at home who are deemed more authentic' (1998: 3). This is further complicated for mixed-race Ghanaians who are also marked by their perceived whiteness. However, Rocha and Yeoh have noted from their study of mixed-race identities in Indonesia that 'these valuations have shifted over time in tandem with colonial and postcolonial racial politics, not in radical

breaks from the past but by complicating colonial legacies of race welded to "blood" and phenotype' (2021: 17). In effect, 'since the end of white colonial rule in Africa, the racial divide between white and black no longer neatly maps onto the divide between dominator and dominated (Van Zyl-Hermann and Boersema 2017: 651).

Racial identity is not an ontological state of being but is shaped both by interactions between actors and gazers and by systems of inequality. Thus, racialised individuals are not passive victims of discrimination, but actively shape their worldview and reflect on their experiences in a way that creates meaning for them, at a specific time and place. Therefore, throughout this article, we stress participants' agency by highlighting the strategies that mixed-race Ghanaians have developed to make sense of their racial and national positionings in Ghana in relation to 'abroad' and their own self-reflexivity on issues of belonging.

'Ghanaian first': Entanglements of Race and National Identifications for Mixed-Race Individuals of Ghanaian Descent

> Interviewer: 'How do you, hum, like, identify, or present yourself when you introduce yourself?'
>
> Amina: 'I think you kind of have to say "mixed", because people just see you as Black, and you look Black, but then you talk, and they're like, "Wow, you sound super Canadian". You know how they say those things, like, somebody sounds white. And that's not a nice thing to say, like, I know what they're trying to insinuate, right?
>
> […] I always start with Ghanaian first, because it makes the most sense. Or, if I like to play with people's heads, I'll be like, "I'm Scottish!" And then they'll be like, "What the heck?" and I'll be like "Oh, it's just a tan, guys, don't worry."' (Amina, young woman born in Canada of a white Canadian mother and a black Ghanaian father).

This excerpt from Amina's interview is a good example of the entanglements between race, nationality and language that ran through all the mixed-race participants' narratives. Before going forward with the specific types of articulations and conflations that emerge from these identity markers in processes of group inclusion and exclusion, we need to unpack some of the key elements that arise from the quotation.

Amina is a young woman whose father is a Ghanaian immigrant in Canada and whose mother is a Canadian woman of Scottish origin. Amina was born and raised in Canada and, at the time of the interview, had recently

come back from her first trip to Ghana. Amina grew up in a small Canadian town with an overwhelmingly white population. She was considered the 'black girl' in school and has suffered from racism and micro aggressions from her peers and teachers on a regular basis. Even some maternal family members occasionally dropped comments that she considered racist. The transition from the multicultural town where she lived for the first few years of her life with her parents, to a small town, was brutal for Amina, who had a hard time adjusting. The racialisation and otherisation processes she experienced based on her skin colour shaped the way she identifies as 'black' and 'Ghanaian first' – and the way she consciously tunes up her identity to adjust to context-based situations.

The excerpt suggests that, from a white Canadian gazer's perspective, 'black' is *de facto* excluded from the Canadian nation. Indeed, Amina's 'Canadianness' is acknowledged only once she starts talking. Her 'sounding white' is here conflated with 'sounding Canadian'. However, the self-reflective comment that follows – 'that's not a nice thing to say, like, I know what they're trying to insinuate, right' – indicates how painful this ethnoracial construction of national belonging is for Amina. It underscores the precariousness of the national recognition granted to her after she speaks 'white'. Amina takes the discussion further by stating that when she tells inquisitive people she is mixed, she starts with Ghanaian first 'because it makes the most sense'. Her identification as 'Ghanaian first' makes more sense colour-wise, because in Canada people see her as black. But this identification with Ghana also appears as a form of empowerment that distinguishes her from the black Canadian community, in which she also doesn't quite fit in as a lighter-skinned young woman. She is not simply black, she is a black Ghanaian, and she worked hard during her first trip to Ghana to get this part of her identity officially recognised by the Ghanaian administration. Amina also takes pride in, and claims for herself, the ethnicity of her father, a Frafra man. Identifying as a Ghanaian in Canada adds cultural value to a sometimes contested black identity.[6] Through her agency, she thus plays tricks on the otherwise essentialising conflation between race and nationality.

Georgie was born in Ghana to a Canadian-Scottish father and a Ghanaian mother. His parents met when his father travelled to Ghana for business. Georgie was granted Canadian citizenship at birth because his father was a Canadian citizen. When he was four, Georgie, his mother and his half-sister of fourteen all moved to Canada to be with his father. He grew up in Toronto, a multicultural Canadian metropolis, and was raised primarily by his mother and half-sister after his parents separated, about two years after

their arrival. Like Amina, Georgie identifies as a Ghanaian partly because his non-white skin complexion marks him as an outsider in Canada, but also because he has fostered a strong sense of belonging to the Ghanaian community in Canada and to Ghana as a nation through his family ties and travels. According to Georgie, he 'carries himself' like a 'full Ghanaian' due to his Ghanaian socialisation. However, his inclusion into the Ghanaian community both in Canada and in Ghana is challenged at times, mainly because of his lighter skin colour:

> Georgie: 'Most of the time, like once you realise how I act and who I am, like, you can tell that I'm like, Ghanaian. When I meet someone, I tell them I'm Ghanaian first, right? So, like, when I meet someone who goes: "Oh, what's your background?" "Oh, I'm Ghanaian." But then they look at me and like: "Wait, but you don't look Ghanaian …" "But yeah, but because I'm also half Scottish …' Right?'

> Interviewer: 'Ok so you still have to explain, like…'

> Georgie: 'Yeah. I still have to explain how I look like this, because to them when they think Ghanaian, they think like black, you know, like, you have to be … dark, like. And then they see and: "You're not black?" "Yeah I'm half…"'

If Amina's blackness excludes her from the Canadian nation's 'imagined community', Georgie's whiteness excludes him from the Ghanaian's. Their narratives, positioned within the frame of the Canadian national project for Amina and the Ghanaian national project for Georgie, reflect their individual desires, as well as their personal experiences of discrimination. Their socialisation, respectively by a white Canadian mother and by a Ghanaian immigrant mother firmly integrated in the Ghanaian Canadian community, also contributed to shape their identity discourse in terms of inclusion or exclusion. Nonetheless, both discourses emphasise 'Ghanaian first' as a strategy of identification.

From Sight to Sound: Language Proficiency, Accent and National (Non)Belonging

The reliance on the sense of sight to categorise and attribute a national label to mixed-race individuals based on perceived skin colour is sometimes mitigated by the sense of hearing, which brings to the fore other types of identity markers. Languages spoken, way of speech, accent and given names also shape personal trajectories of national inclusion and exclusion in addition to race. A Canadian accent, which Mahtani has called 'Canadianities' (2006), was what helped Amina be (reluctantly) accepted as a Canadian in Canada. However, her lack of proficiency in any of the

Ghanaian languages also marked her as an '*Anasara*/white person' when she visited her family in northern Ghana. Even though she was warned by her Ghanaian uncle living in Canada that it would happen, being called 'white' still came as a shock to Amina, who saw the foundation of her claim to the Ghanaian nation shaken.

Georgie's lack of linguistic proficiency in Twi, one of the most widely spread languages in Ghana, would normally position him as an outsider in the Ghanaian community. But in Canada, this weakness was compensated for by his cultural competence.[7] Most of his friends were the children of Ghanaian immigrants in Canada and he was active in the Ghanaian Chapter of a Christian church. However, when he travelled to Ghana, Georgie often felt excluded because of his perceived whiteness and his lack of fluency in Twi. Indeed, many participants have felt excluded in Ghana and in Ghanaian events in Canada from their Ghanaian family members because they could not speak a Ghanaian language. For example, 'full' Ghanaians, as many participants called people who had two black Ghanaian parents and whose Ghanaian national identity was never challenged, even if they held Canadian citizenship, questioned the claim of mixed-race Ghanaians to be Ghanaian. This became manifest when they told them they should 'know' the language, as if language was biologically inherited.

Amina, Serwaa and CJ all mentioned examples of 'full' Ghanaians who probed their Ghanaian affiliation by speaking to them in Twi, even though they could not understand the language. For CJ, this situation always brought a high level of discomfort and felt like a form of punishment: 'I'm Ghanaian, but I don't speak the language. [They say] "How are you Ghanaian but you don't speak the language?" "Oh, you should learn the language, like, why didn't you learn the language?" [I respond] I'm trying, but it's not my fault that my dad gave up on teaching us the language'. Serwaa, who did some voluntary work in Ghana, further explains: 'So they loved me over there because I was the only volunteer that was Ghanaian, but they used to make fun of me all the time because I didn't speak Twi: [They would say] "Why? Why do you not speak Twi? What is this?"'

The conflation between language proficiency, race and national identity is best illustrated by a vignette of the experience of one of the researchers. In 2011, one of the authors of this article was going out for lunch with an African-American colleague who was working in Ghana. The colleague's skin complexion was dark and resembled that of many Ghanaians. On the way to the restaurant, he made a stop to pay his utility bills. He conducted his transaction in English, but then said '*medaase*' (thank you) to the clerk in Fante, the local language. The clerk responded emphatically: 'I thought

you were a White man!' This first-hand experience emphasises how the racialisation of language affects processes of group inclusion and exclusion and hierarchies of belonging.

Edward Bruner (1996), an anthropologist who conducted a study of roots tourism in Ghana, talks about the 'colour of culture'.[8] Indeed, the African-American tourists he interviewed were often shocked to be called '*obroni*' ('white') by local Ghanaians. We could add to this reflection that the 'colour of language' is also significant in processes of inclusion into and exclusion from Ghanaian society for mixed-race Ghanaians. Sounding 'local' by mastering one of the Ghanaian languages allows mixed-race individuals to be included into the Ghanaian national imaginary, as it shows a degree of embodied cultural savviness that comes with socialisation in the community, whether in Ghana or in the diaspora.

Showing off language skills thus becomes one strategy that some mixed-race Ghanaians used to legitimise their membership to the Ghanaian nation. Alice, a lecturer of mixed German and Ghanaian descent born and raised in Ghana, explained:

> And that's why I mention the accent. If you come with British accent or American accent you could be even darker than me and you come, you are not embraced as Ghanaian. It's like you are a foreigner. So, I guess it is less of the … because how would you know? I am lighter skinned, so it is less of the skin colour, the phenotype, and more about the behaviour and familiarity […] Also, we don't appreciate when we think somebody is doing too … We think that person is better than us and they are better than us because they are foreigners and then we easily remind you that you are not one of us, you are foreigner and that is less about your colour and more about your cultural connections or lack of them.

Alice's contribution is particularly interesting because it draws on ethnocultural boundaries between 'us' and 'them' that seem to transcend skin colour. She chose to identify as a black Ghanaian, albeit with 'lighter skin', and she emphasised her belonging to Ghana by using the pronouns 'we' and 'us' when talking about Ghanaians, and 'them' when talking about 'foreigners' in Ghana. Just as Georgie and Amina say they are 'Ghanaian first'[9] as opposed to 'full' Ghanaians, mixed-race Ghanaians who were raised in Ghana generally claimed to be Ghanaians, an affiliation that was, for most, exclusive. This self-identification built into their discourse, however, seems disconnected from the lived experiences of exclusion based on skin colour that most of them described in their narratives. The idealised cultural 'we-Ghanaians' can suddenly shift into 'white-outsiders' in their daily interactions with 'full' Ghanaians.

Ethnoracial and national identity and identification thus reveal their fluidity and interactional nature for mixed-race individuals. Even though they identified as Ghanaians, held a Ghanaian passport and displayed a high level of patriotism, participants experienced recurring acts of exclusion from the Ghanaian nation based on the colour of their skin and the privilege associated with it. For example, because whiteness is constructed as a symbol of material wealth (Pierre 2012), many taxi drivers and food sellers adjusted the price of their service or goods for white customers, based on their perceived capacity of paying higher fees, which black Africans, according to this logic, could not afford. When they were children, two participants experienced instances when their Ghanaian parents left them waiting in the car while they went to buy something, for fear of having prices jacked up if their '*abrofo* children' (children from abroad) were seen. Later, it was only by mastering local codes, including their fluency in one or several Ghanaian languages, that they would be distinguished from foreign '*obroni*':

> Sometimes especially with taxi drivers. Immediately they see me … I know very well that if I say I am going to the mall from my house it is supposed to be 20 cedis but some drivers will be like 'Sister it is 35 oo'. Then I will be like 'You are playing with me. My colour is deceiving you.' Then I say 'Wofa (uncle) good evening'. Then they know that this lady is a Ghanaian and they cannot cheat her. It happens most often, and I am used to it now and know how to get myself from such situations. (Amanda, Ghanaian citizen, German father and Ghanaian mother. She was born in Germany and moved to Ghana when she was twelve).

> If sometimes I don't have food, and later I'm going to buy food and I'm bargaining, they'll be like … I speak Fante … It depends on where I am: Fante, Twi or I put some Ga in it … As long as I get the price right. (Katha, 23, Ghanaian citizen, Russian mother and Fante father, born and raised in Ghana).

Fluency in local languages is thus one of the most prominent strategies for inclusion for mixed-race Ghanaians in a country where their perceived whiteness often challenges the authenticity of their national claim. As Ike, a young man of Ukrainian and Ghanaian descent, born and raised in Ghana explains, 'Most of my friends are Ghanaians and I am very … I don't speak a lot of English […] When they are speaking Twi, I speak with them, so I think it is … vital.'

Lee, a mixed-race Ghanaian woman who has a Chinese father, changed her Chinese-sounding last name to the Fante-sounding last name of her mother's second husband. She explains that the change was motivated by the strong relationship she developed with her stepfather, but also, because by doing so, children in her school would not mock her Chinese surname.

Lee also admits that her knowledge of the Chinese language was an obstacle to her identification as full-Ghanaian: 'I learnt it, but as I was growing up, the issue is, at a point I didn't want to associated … to be identified as a Chinese'. Furthermore, when Lee received an award for her work in Ghana and showed up at the event, the jury panel doubted that she was a 'real' Ghanaian citizen. They saw her as Chinese and challenged her belonging. She told them she was even more Ghanaian than they were because she could speak several Ghanaian languages:

> I am a Ghanaian. At a point in time, I had to tell the panel that I may be more Ghanaian than a lot of them because conveniently, I can speak very fluent 'Ga', 'Ewe', 'Fante' – because my stepfather [is from] Takoradi, you know, they speak 'Fante' – and 'Ashanti language'. I can speak 'Guan', 'Anum' language, 'Ga-Adangbe'. To me, how many Ghanaians can speak about six languages? So I felt I was more Ghanaian.

Even though fluency in several Ghanaian languages can be understood as a strategy for integration into the Ghanaian nation, which is particularly important for participants who live in Ghana, skin colour still bears the potential of undermining mixed-race Ghanaians' efforts to be recognised as Ghanaian. Indeed, Spartacus admitted that even though Ga was his first language, his Ghanaianness was still questioned because of his perceived whiteness:

> Oh, they assume I am a foreigner. Everywhere I go, if I do not open my mouth to speak Ga, the first thing that comes to mind is that I am a foreigner. You know I started learning English when I was four years. I was with my grandmother at Mamprobi. At that time my parents were still in England. Yet, when I speak, I don't know, people say I don't have a Ga accent but a British one.

Blood and Papers: Racial Dissonance and Administrative Contentions Over Citizenship

> Interviewer: 'So, you carry a Ghanaian passport? […] And Ghanaian citizenship?'
>
> Kukua: 'Yes. But with mobility, even though I carry the Ghanaian passport, if I do travel somewhere, like I've been to Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Togo, they see me as if … They don't see me as a Ghanaian. They see me as a foreigner …'

In this section, we delve further into the Ghanaian identity and official forms of identification of mixed-race Ghanaians, in relation to processes of racialisation. We pay particular attention to formal requests for proof of identification and the denial of citizenship rights for mixed-race individuals.

Akyeampong (2004: 39), who conducted a study of mixed-race families of Lebanese origin in Ghana, argued that 'people develop strong loyalties to place through residence'. However, as developed in the theoretical framework, research on mixed-race families and identities has shown that feelings of dissonance between mixed-race individuals' 'subjective' identity – for example, 'I am a black Ghanaian' – and their 'attributed' identity – for example, 'You are a white foreigner' – are likely to arise at some point during the life of the individual (Allouche-Benayoun 2008; Choudhry 2010). These intersubjective tensions are also experienced in administrative processes related to citizenship.

We mentioned in the previous section that several mixed-race Ghanaians who were raised in Ghana had developed patriotic feelings towards their country of upbringing. Like Alice, they talked about Ghana and Ghanaians using the pronoun 'we', which clearly demarcated their own positionality within the boundaries of the nation. For example, if Lee's Ghanaianness is often doubted by other Ghanaians, she explains that her phenotype is not the source of any conflict over her national identity: 'It doesn't have any impact on me. In my mind I am Ghanaian'. Sada, whose father is Lebanese, also shows her complete affiliation with the Ghanaian society: 'I've always thought myself to be Ghanaian. I was born and bred here, educated here, what else?' Giving strength to Akyeampong's argument (2004) that place matters in the identity and sense of belonging of mixed-race individuals, Ike explains that his socialisation in Ghana, and especially in the Ghanaian educational system, crafted his identity as a Ghanaian, even though he is often made aware that he is not exactly like all others:

> Like you can't run away from it, ok, because as much as you want to be like … just one thing, you are not, so, there is definitely that bit, but I mean I am Ghanaian in the sense that everything that I am now is from Ghana … my passport is Ghanaian, my studies, everything I know, has been from our educational system, the friends I have …

Even if it was not always acknowledged in their identity discourse, the dissonance between participants' self-identification – often bolstered by their strong patriotic views – and the identity attributed to them by other Ghanaians in Ghana and in Ghanaian migrant communities in Canada, did create some form of discomfort, ranging from slight annoyance to deeper identity questionings and feelings of 'being a stranger everywhere'. As such, many formulated the wish to be 'full-blooded Ghanaians', or 'full Blacks'. In the frame of a logic of essentialised ethnoracial national identities, being 'fully' black would effectively dispel the doubt about their authentic belonging to the Ghanaian nation cast by their perceived whiteness. A 'pure'

heteronormative black-Ghanaian lineage would thus bring an immediate recognition of them as fellow Ghanaian citizens. Kobina, a young man who has a Fante mother and a Lebanese father testified:

> It is very upsetting especially when they call you obroni. Upsetting because the fact that I am light-skinned does not make me white. I was born and bred in Ghana, but it looks as if my people want to see the colour black before they believe … I did not choose my race, ethnicity or identity, and it is like I am being punished. Some black-skinned people register [for their voting card], and they are not questioned, meanwhile they are non-Ghanaians. I am being questioned because of my looks. It is sad.

If Ghanaian nationality seemed to be the main source of identification for those mixed-race Ghanaians, belonging to a specific ethnic group and an intimate knowledge of ethnic relations in Ghana was also used as a strategy by a few participants to reinforce their Ghanaianness and distinguish themselves from outsiders. Moreover, it positioned them within a lineage, which is a central social organising principle in Ghana (Ampofo, Okyerefo and Pervarah 2009) and a fundamental principle of citizenship (Kobo 2010). So, in addition to claiming a broader identification to the Ghanaian nation, Amanda, Lina and Emefa respectively asserted: 'I am Ashanti'; 'For me, I always say I am Fante'; and 'They [my family] say I am Ewe so they speak Ewe to me. No one has ever pushed me out.' In Canada, Amina also claims her Frafra heritage when members of the Ghanaian community (mainly Akan) tell her she should bear an Ashanti name and speak Twi.

As such, mixed-race Ghanaians' choice of spouse can also be understood as a strategy to bolster their acceptance into the Ghanaian nation, as much as it reflects their attachment to the country. Several participants have married 'full-black' Ghanaians. In other words, they were consciously or unconsciously attracted to a person who was perceived as an 'authentic' Ghanaian. The alliance served to strengthen their own material and emotional ties to Ghana.

The way some of them socialised their children was also indicative of their desire to bridge the gap between their identity and their identification as white by others. Having full-Ghanaian children brought them closer to belonging to the nation through a bottom-top approach to lineage. Selina explained: 'Because I don't want her to go through what I went through; I have been, and I will continue to socialise her as a full Ghanaian. She is just two years old and I encourage her to speak the local language. Why should I teach her something that is not Ghanaian?' On the other hand, such strategies also reproduced an understanding of authentic national belonging in ethnoracial terms and solidified inter-group boundaries.

The integration into a lineage through a Ghanaian parent is of prime importance when official recognition and citizenship rights are denied to mixed-race individuals because of their skin colour. Several Ghanaian participants had issues with Ghanaian authorities (immigration agents in airports, officials at polling stations, census delegates, registrars in universities) because they did not believe they were 'real' Ghanaian citizens. Sometimes, they had to bring physical proof of their citizenship in order to be allowed to proceed. Even official papers were sometimes questioned, and only the presence of a 'full' Ghanaian parent helped to dispel the contention. For example, Kukua was asked to pay foreign student fees at her university even though she was born in Ghana and carried a Ghanaian passport. She described her encounter with the university administration as a trial. She said the authorities did not believe she was a real Ghanaian citizen because she had fair skin and 'Chinese' eyes. She had to go back home twice: the first time, to collect her birth certificate, which was not enough to convince the authorities, and the second time she came back with her mother, who embodied the living proof of Kukua's Ghanaianness through bloodline.

In extreme circumstances, they were denied formal inclusion into the country, especially if they were not born in Ghana. Emefa, who was born in Germany but moved to Ghana at an early age, explained: 'But I remember one time I was telling a friend that I had to pay resident permit to stay in Ghana and the friend remarked "If you fool around, we will sack you from our country. This is our country." They see me as a foreigner.' Despite the fact that she was born and raised in Ghana, Selina, too, faced blunt exclusion practices at official bureaus:

> There is always contention when I say or tick Ghanaian. With the census, when I tell the enumerators that I am a Ghanaian they look at me with a disbelieving eye. In a rude manner some even ask what shows that I am a Ghanaian. Same with the elections. Just recently, my dad [half Lebanese, half Ghanaian] and I went to register for the Ghana card. Immediately we got there the people in the queue started saying 'Aha here comes the Lebanese, look at them they also want to have the Ghana card. Go back to your country.' The officials did not say anything. Some were laughing and subtly urging the people on. It was very rude, and I felt very sad. It is like everywhere you go you need to explain to people why you are who you are. That is so annoying.

The dissonance between mixed-race Ghanaians' identity and how people *see* them made Lola and Chantell devise strategies of belonging along racial

lines. Indeed, their identity discourses propelled them within the frame of an idealised country where they would look like the majority population:

> It's not fun feeling like a foreigner everywhere because this is supposed to be like my country. There's no country that I can go to and be like 'Oh I fit in', you know. When I go to my mom's side, I'm Black, here I'm White. So, I was thinking maybe I should relocate to Brazil or something. (Lola)

Conclusion

This article has examined the complex articulations between national identity and processes of racialisation for mixed-race Ghanaians living in Ghana and in Canada, using a transnational perspective. We have given weight to their life stories and experiences, and we have highlighted how they navigate, in different ways depending on the national and local context they find themselves in, the fine line between national inclusion and exclusion, and between their own subjective identity and the identifications assigned to them by the majority population.

The narratives show that many participants claimed a strong Ghanaian identity ('Ghanaian first'), whether they were socialised in Ghana or in Canada. However, belonging to the Ghanaian nation was often challenged in their everyday lives by members of Ghanaian communities in Ghana and abroad. It appears that to be accepted as a Ghanaian without question, one should be *seen* as a Ghanaian – be black – and one should *sound* like a Ghanaian – speak one of the local languages.

Even if they felt 'Ghanaian' and held a Ghanaian passport and Ghanaian citizenship, mixed-race participants' national identity was challenged on a regular basis. Their 'embodiment of whiteness' carried a historically constructed notion of superiority and wealth (Pierre 2012) and supposed a certain degree of incompetence in the different cultural codes found in Ghana (Darkwah and Ampofo 2008). Belonging to the Ghanaian nation was thus often slippery as their claim to be Ghanaian (self-identification) often came into tension with how they were perceived by the Ghanaian majority population and by Ghanaian communities in the diaspora.

This perception of mixed-race Ghanaians as outsiders to the Ghanaian 'imagined community' structured their interactions with 'full Ghanaians' and fostered recurrent acts of exclusion, thus creating a form of 'dissonance' between their identity and their identification. However, it is important to stress the agency of the mixed-race Ghanaians, who acted on their ambiguous ethnoracial and national positionality. They developed strategies to legitimise their claim to membership in the Ghanaian nation

and to citizenship rights. For example, they actively shaped and subverted the flexible ethnoracial boundaries of national belonging by mastering several Ghanaian languages, valorising their ethnic group affiliation, emphasising their blood lineage or creating new bottom-top family linkages with fully recognised Ghanaians.

This article thus reiterates the centrality of national belonging in processes of identity formation despite the increased transnational mobility of many individuals at the global level. National belonging was clearly entangled with and structured by ethnoracial imaginaries. Childs et al. (2021) and Waring and Purkayastha (2017) suggested that having a migrant parent does complicate attachments and affiliations. However, despite the challenges they faced in both formal and informal settings, participants still undoubtedly claimed a Ghanaian identity. This perspective, from participants whose transnational family networks and international life experience entitled them to claim as much a Western identity as a Ghanaian one, is important here as it positions Ghana as a significant actor in the contemporary and global scheme of things and situates the country as a symbolic source of pride and cultural capital (McDonnell 2011).

For mixed-race individuals who have a black African parent and a white, Western parent, ethnoracial and national identity can be simultaneously empowering and disenfranchising depending on context, and other factors, such as class, gender and religion (Gilliéron 2022). Even though mixed marriages are not a new phenomenon in African contexts, mixedness has not been the focus of much academic attention. Our study thus highlights the fact that more research on mixedness grounded in African contexts needs to be conducted, keeping in mind that these contexts are increasingly entangled in broader sets of transnational relations.

Notes

1. Official identification categories, as defined by the Canadian government, are problematic as they are based on what is called 'visual minority status'. This group identification status conflates several types of identity markers, such as race, nationality and ethnicity, under specifically designated categories (e.g. "White," "Chinese," "Black," "Filipino," "Latin American" and "Japanese" (https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/006/98-500-x2016006-fra.cfm). Accessed 23 September 2020.

2. If the phenotype of mixed-race individuals is often what triggers 'the question' and its constitutive othering process, ethnicity and nationality are increasingly conflated with race in official discourses in various nation-states (Aspinall and Song 2014; Tsuda 2016; Unterreiner 2015).

3. There is a small population of mixed-race individuals who were born in Ghana and who hold Ghanaian citizenship, and "white" migrants of European, Chinese or Lebanese origin live in Ghana. However, Ghanaians are generally understood to be a black population (Pierre 2012). Nevertheless, some ethnic groups in Ghana are considered "whiter" or "blacker" than others. At the level of individuals, reference to a "black man" could mean a very dark-skinned person and "red" may be said of someone who has a lighter skin complexion. Thus, blackness is a complex local category of reference in Ghana and does not bear the same ideologies of dominance it holds for black people in the US or in other part of the Western world.

4. Literature on mixed-race individuals sometimes use a gendered perspective (Joseph-Salisbury 2019). However, in this study, national identity and experiences of inclusion and exclusion were very similar for men and women.

5. The definition of who is a white person varies in Canada and in Ghana. In Ghana, the definition of whiteness is very inclusive and includes Lebanese, Chinese or other Asians, Europeans, Americans, other Western countries', Indians and East Indians (Bruner 1996; Darkwah and Ampofo 2008; Geoffrion 2016).

6. In the context of multicultural Canada, where cultural diversity is positively connotated, at least in theory and in governmental policies, ethnocultural mixedness is often considered a form of capital by parents of mixed individuals (Le Gall and Meintel 2015).

7. Serwaa, who identified as a black Ghanaian in Canada, but whose membership into the Ghanaian community was sometimes challenged due to her mixedness and her lack of language proficiency, gained some "authenticity points" over her Ghanaian friends (second generation) who had never visited Ghana, when she came back from her first trip to Ghana. It made her "cooler" among them.

8. Culture is also racialised in Amina's discourse. This is evident when she talks about her younger sister: "But she's very, hum, white, like, she doesn't know anything about her Ghanaian culture …."

9. Mixed-race individuals who were raised in Canada seem to have a wider set of identity options, which include African, Black, Ghanaian, Canadian and hyphenated affiliations (e.g. Ghanaian-Canadian).

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