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Conceptualizing the Differences in the Perception and Internalization of Racism Between Black African Immigrants and African Americans in the United States

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Abstract

The existing literature on the differences in the internalization and perception of racism between Black African immigrants and African Americans in the United States has produced myriad data. However, what is lacking is a systematic conceptualization of the revealed patterns and trends. Moreover, the few attempts in this regard are primarily based on a single geopolitical understanding of space in the United States, relegating the geopolitical space of Africa to the back burner. This paper attempts to bridge these gaps by proposing not just a multidisciplinary framework for conceptualization, but also a multi-space plane that cuts across both the American and African geopolitical spaces. The framework proposed in this paper consists of concepts drawn from sociology, negotiation studies, conflict resolution, and international studies. With this, I argued that the differences in self-conception, the availability of BATNA and externalities owing to the transnational identity of Black African immigrants grant them (Black African immigrants) the leverage of a relatively less internalized base of racism than their Afro-American counterparts. Within this context, this paper aims to provide one of many frameworks for assessing racism in the American context. Concomitantly, it adds to the growing body of literature advocating for intersectionality and a multidisciplinary approach as ideally suited to exploring and understanding the complexities associated with racial discourses.

Keywords: African Americans; Black African immigrants; perception; racism; space

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1. Introduction

The organized use of racial templates as a regular instrument in the social discourse of the United States has existed since the foundation of the American society. Before the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, cases of rampant racial segregation occurred in virtually every sphere of the American social construct. The state institutions were freely employed by the elite groups, primarily the white majority, to entrench this status quo. The result has been the underlying of the black minority to violence, discrimination, and even death. The recent incident involving the death of George Floyd under the most vicious and cruel circumstances and the subsequent protests (looting and violence in some cases) add to the long list of manifestations of the extent to which American society still grapples with racism and racial discrimination, segregation, and suppression.

According to Carmichael and Hamilton (1968), racism involves "the advancement of predictions, decisions, and policies in consideration of race for the purposes of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group" (Carmichael and Hamilton

1968, p. 2). Whenever the term is evoked, particularly in the context of the United States (US), it is communicated in terms of the relationship between Black and White people—a pathway leading it into a discourse on white supremacy as underpinned in the intellectual labor of many early race scholars, including Du Bois, Franz Fanon, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison, among others. For example, Du Bois intimated this binary in the forethought of his infamous *The Souls of Black Folk* when he noted: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colorline" (Du Bois and Marable 2015, p. vii). In this context, many analysts have tended to treat the reaction to racism as simply a general black-and-white discourse (Guess 2006, p. 650).

Later scholars such as Bell Hooks, Angela Davis, Edna Bonacich, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Stuart Hall challenged this binary, drawing on the Marxist charge against global capitalism to address racism and racial inequalities. Kimberle Crenshaw, for instance, through her intersectionality framework, drew attention to how the intersection between race and other social identities produces nuanced racism within the black racial category (see Cho et al. 2013; Ferber 2012; Crenshaw et al. 1995). As Perez and Hirschman (2009) rightly observed in their analysis of the US Census Bureau's methodology, the black category in the US, like the white category, has evolved over the years into a complex web. As a result of the growing population of black immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa, the diversity of the black category has become more glaring and apparent today (Tamir 2022). With this growing diversity, addressing the issue of racism cannot be benchmarked just on the "Black" and "White" pedestal, akin to past expeditions. Thus, to understand Black peoples' perception and internalization of racism, we must examine the diversity of the black category (Waters 2022; Higham 2002; Arthur 2000; Blum 2002). With an examination of this diversity, we will be able to have a clearer picture of the extent, scope, and nature of racism in the general American society. This is brilliantly advanced in scholarships such as Blum (2002), Harrell et al. (2003), Read and Emerson (2005), where the authors contend that the sensitivity to racism and racial discrimination varies across different black subgroups in the USA.

In line with this, Okonofua (2013) contended that the contestations and lack of coalition between the diverse black groups point to the differences in how each perceives and internalizes the racial issues in society. In addressing this diversity in the Black racism category, efforts were directed at understanding the factors that account for this difference and the internalization mechanisms that propel it. Intersectionality, a framework popularized by Kimberle Crenshaw, became one of the most potent tools used in this endeavor. According to Syed, with this, scholars got to "make sense of the interlocking societal oppression experienced by subordinated groups" (Syed 2010, p. 61). In a way, the emphasis is on underscoring the experiences of these groups as stemming from the interplay of various interlocking identities aligned with the expression of power and domination (see Williams-Butler 2022; Purkayastha 2012; Waters 2022).

Building on this foundation, this concept paper expands upon previous research on intra-black differences in racism internalization, focusing on Black African immigrants and Black African Americans in the United States. It employs a conceptual synthesis distinct from those used in most existing studies, particularly those grounded in multidisciplinary approaches. Accordingly, I do not intend to provide a new set of data through any primary source, as there are many studies and data on this issue. Therefore, I argue that while the existing studies seek to expose the oppressive aspects of the power structures as pertains to the United States and the experiences of minorities such as black people under the banner of domination and especially within the prism of a uni-space understanding, the framework I employed seeks to expose how differences in self-making sanctioned by access

to multi-space grant power to individuals to maneuver oppressive structures resulting in different resonance of suppression and oppression across or within a group or category.

Significantly, this understanding is bounded by an appreciation of power as complexed by networks of spaces (both distant and close), the interaction of which both enhances and diminishes the potency of the close space within which one finds oneself. In other words, the strength of this paper lies in the argument that most studies on the differences in the internalization of racism across different black groups accord very little space to the effects and impact of the home country in shaping the relationship, particularly immigrant black peoples' relationship with American society and its manifest racism. I argue that drawing in this dimension of the black immigrant allows us to assess the expanded bargaining space available to them due to the existence of a BATNA,[1] which consequently fuels how they perceive, react, and interact with racism in American society. What I mean by BATNA is not the literary terms used in negotiation studies. Essentially, I draw on the logical foundation of the concept, which suggests that when individuals already have an equally valuable alternative to what they seek to acquire, they are less likely to undertake the risks involved in that acquisition, as failure is not perceived as a major loss. In this sense, in trying to integrate into American society, Black African immigrants do this within the context of an alternative space in their home countries in Africa. Therefore, the failure to integrate into the American space does not come as a major loss since they already have an alternative in Africa. This is not an attempt to downplay the complexities inherent in this plane, but rather to underscore the psychological ground at play, considering the existence of an alternative. Thus, the fact that the black immigrant has an alternative space that they can return to shapes a different conception of self in more economic terms than political, hence looking to engage less with the thorny issue of racism in the United States. More significantly, it enables us to attempt to conceptualize the phenomenon, thereby moving it a step further beyond the descriptive and exploratory framework associated with most existing studies.

To extract this different self-conception, I utilized a synthesis of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of social reality construction and Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration. While the former allows us to delve into the micro-level construction of self as an explanatory variable of the differences in internalization of racism, the latter provides a perfect window into the macro-level discourses. Internalization of racism has been defined by Williams and Williams-Morris (2000), "the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves" (p. 255). It involves a process culminating in the acceptance of the structures of domination and oppression as normal, with little resistance against the narrative that sustains these oppressive structures. In a way, it mostly underpins a normalization process of the way things are, admitting defeat and powerlessness in challenging them. Connecting the two frameworks, I worked my way into exposing the meso-level process sanctioned in the multi-space understanding that lies between. This level lies in the processes involved in the internalization of the schemas of racism, which structures both the filters underpinning both acceptance and resistance to racism and its derivatives. Based on this framework, I developed four conceptual bases for my analysis: self-conception, bargaining power, commitment problem, and externalities. This conceptual framework addresses not only the interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach of this study, but also comprehensively addresses the varied layers at play, which converge at the estate of self-making.

This paper is structured into four sections. The first section briefly addresses the historical background of black people in the US. With this done, I proceeded to review existing literature on the subject, expanding on the strengths and weaknesses of the three general categories identified: binary studies focusing on the dualism of the racial discourse,

focused-group studies on specific races such as "blackness" or "whiteness" studies, and within-group studies. This enabled me to highlight the strength of this study within the appropriate context. The third section examines the theoretical foundations of the study, laying the groundwork for the three-layered framework employed to address the core of this research. Finally, I delve into the analysis of the problem based on the framework developed. The analysis is structured under three bases: self-conception, bargaining space, commitment problems, and externalities.

2. Brief Historical Background of Black People in the USA

Before delving into the discussion of the differences in perception and internalization of racism between Black African immigrants and African Americans, a brief note on the historical background of the migration of black people to the USA is a desideratum. The history of the migration of black people lies within the broader context of the migration of black people to the North American continent. Therefore, the connection between black immigrants from Africa and North America goes back to the period of the transatlantic slave trade (Gilroy 1993). The first Africans to set foot on the American continent were persons captured and forcefully sold to slave masters to be shipped to work on plantations for European industries (Gilroy 1993). It is estimated that this wave settled close to 20 million Africans in the United States of America (Kolawole 2016).

Employing their skill sets, these Africans played critical roles in the construction and reconstruction of American society as it is known today. These Black groupings form the root of today's African Americans in the USA. It must be underscored how cruel, brutal, and inhumane this first flow of black people in the USA was, and the consequent institutionalization of the same in today's America. In fact, this is connected to the global colonial and anticolonial movements that emerged in the twentieth century. Many scholars have underscored how this brutish past has been deliberately institutionalized in the USA today to further the domination of whites over black people and other minority groups. Many, such as Bell Hooks, Edward Said, and Franz Fanon, have documented firsthand accounts of the workings of this institutionalized racism in their works, highlighting how they both spur and even harden the past constitution of race, both in the subtle and the open. Indeed, academia and the news spaces are replete with cases of police and judicial racial profiling, discrimination, and suppression. The continuous struggle against these oppressive institutions, including the movements such as Black Lives Matter, blends with today's struggle against neocolonialism and its currents.

The term "African immigrant" broadly refers to mostly black Africans who voluntarily entered the US. The first wave of this flow from the African continent to the U.S. can be traced to a group of Cape Verdeans who arrived to work as seamen and agricultural laborers in the 19th century, escaping the debilitating economic situation in Cape Verde (Hing 1965). In the contemporary period, changes in America's immigration laws revolutionized the voluntary movements of black Africans into the USA. These legal reforms included the Immigration Act of 1929, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the Refugee Act of 1980, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986), and the Immigration Act of 1990 (the base acts establishing the Diversity Visa lottery). Of all these legal reforms, the most significant in changing America's migration landscape was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (also known as the Hart-Cellar Immigration Reform Act), which was enacted on the heels of the civil rights movement (Chin 1996)—a movement by Black people in the USA against racial practices and beliefs, as well as systems that perpetuated racial inequality in the USA. More importantly, this regulation provided an opportunity for family reunification and the entry of individuals based on their professional qualifications. The act also permitted the entry of Asians by lifting the ban contained in the 1924 Act. At the core of these changes sat the effort to attract cheap

labor to bolster the American economy. Also, it formed part of the efforts to contain the global spread of communism and consequently facilitate and consolidate America's rising global power status (Laosebikan 2012).

The net effect of these reforms lies in the current number of Black African immigrants in the US. With just about 130,000 in the 1980s, Black African immigrants currently stand at over 2 million, representing 4.5 percent of the American immigrant population (Tamir 2022). Compared to other immigrant groups, this growth is a recent phenomenon. Indeed, over the last two decades, the growth rate of Black African immigrants arriving in the US has been the fastest, at 41 percent (Lorenzi and Batalova 2022, para. 2). According to the Pew Research center, "between 2000 and 2019, the Black African immigrant population grew 246 percent, from about 600,000 to 2 million" (Tamir 2022, para. 6). Similarly, "three-quarters of African-born Black immigrants immigrated in 2000 or later, with four-in-ten 43% arriving between 2010 and 2019" (Tamir 2022, para. 5). This growth has contributed to the dramatic and glaring black diversity in the US today. Table 1 (adapted from Lorenzi and Batalova 2022) below provides a breakdown of the figure by nationality.

Table 1. Breakdown of African migrants by nationalities in the United States.

Region and Country	Number of Immigrants	Share (%)
TOTAL SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	2,094,000	100.0%
Eastern Africa	737,000	35.2%
Eritrea	49,000	2.4%
Ethiopia	256,000	12.2%
Kenya	153,000	7.3%
Somalia	115,000	5.5%
Uganda	44,000	2.1%
Zimbabwe	21,000	1.0%
Other Eastern Africa	99,000	4.7%
Middle Africa	195,000	9.3%
Cameroon	73,000	3.5%
Republic of the Congo	39,000	1.9%
Democratic Republic of Congo	61,000	2.9%
Other Middle Africa	23,000	1.1%
Southern Africa	116,000	5.5%
South Africa	111,000	5.3%
Other Southern Africa	5000	0.2%
Western Africa	926,000	44.2%
Cabo Verde	36,000	1.7%
Ghana	199,000	9.5%
Liberia	98,000	4.7%
Nigeria	393,000	18.8%
Senegal	31,000	1.5%
Sierra Leone	46,000	2.2%
Other Western Africa	123,000	5.9%
Africa (not elsewhere classified)	120,000	5.7%

Source: Lorenzi and Batalova (2022). Migration Policy Institute (MPI).

Although Black African immigrants can be found in many states across the U.S, available data shows that they are "more likely to settle in the South (39%) or the Northeast (25%), than in the Midwest (18%) or West (17%), while the largest numbers of Black African immigrants are found in Texas, New York, California, Maryland, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Virginia. Each of these states is home to at least 100,000 foreign-born Africans" (Tamir 2022, para 8). The basis of this concentration could be due to networks based on nationality. Table 2 (adapted from Lorenzi and Batalova 2022) below shows the state concentration of Black African immigrants in the US.

Table 2. Distribution of Sub-Saharan African Immigrants.

Metropolitan Area	Immigrant Population from Sub-Saharan Africa	% of Metro Area Population
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area	187,600	0.9
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area	181,700	3.0
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI Metro Area	84,100	2.4
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX Metro Area	83,000	1.2
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA Metro Area	82,000	1.4
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX Metro Area	74,600	1.1
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH Metro Area	63,700	1.3
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metro Area	49,100	0.8
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA Metro Area	47,400	0.4
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA Metro Area	45,400	1.2

Source: Lorenzi and Batalova (2022). Migration Policy Institute (MPI).

The impact of these movements in the perpetuation of the underdevelopment of the African continent and subjugating the black race under some of the most inhuman and unjust systems of domination cannot be underestimated. Through these myriad reforms, the U.S. succeeded in increasingly widening its doorways for the passage of Africans into American society. In many cases, these have been highly skilled individuals who have benefited from significant investments from the resources of the people. In a way, these reforms simply constitute a drive to deprive the continent of vital human resources needed to spur the development of Africa and the black community, in general, in an unfair world designed by imperialism. In any case, it continues the "double consciousness" of black people and makes it challenging to develop the right middle class to drive development on the continent. Achiume (2019) makes this forcefully in his analysis of schemes in place in Europe to attract mostly economic migrants as a continuation of the colonial imperialist agenda.

In any case, the sincerity behind these openings has come under great scrutiny. Indeed, recent politicking in the US has shown how Black African immigrants and other immigrant groups have been transformed into pawns in the chess game of American politics. Although former President Donald Trump took this a notch higher through his populist rhetoric against migration, this has always been part of contemporary American politics. Aside from this, America has not shown readiness to accommodate this group differently from the way it has treated other minority groups, especially black people in general. Despite the similarity in treatments, several studies have reported differences in how these groups perceive and take these treatments. How can we conceptualize these differences in the internalization of racism? Before my conceptualization, I intend to review existing literature on the subject matter.

3. Brief Literature Review

The existing literature on racial relations in American society can be broadly categorized into three types: binary studies that focus on the dualism of racial discourse, focused-group studies on specific races such as "blackness" or "whiteness," and within-

group studies. Most of the literature belongs to the first category; and they appreciate the discourse on race in terms of the inequalities between "Black people" and "White people" (examples: Anderson et al. 2020; Causadias and Korous 2019; Alcoff 2015; Rohde and Guest 2013; Oliver and Shapiro 2006; Western 2006; Katznelson 2005; Jensen 2005; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2009). The analytical framework employed in such studies rests on problematizing the "other". Specifically, the emphasis in these studies is the application of a broad categorization of race into black and white, and treating the relevance of one within the frame of the other. Most of the studies in this category, such as Jensen (2005), problematize whiteness (white supremacy) and construct it as the basis for the racial ills bedeviling American society today.

In a somewhat Foucauldian sense, what is made more explicit in these studies is the consolidation of past racial constructions with quite transformations in the instruments of power that propel and sustain these disturbing acts. Significantly, the framework of the studies in this category provides insights into the broader and general framework of racial relations in American Society and their transformation over time, with a focus on power relations and domination at the macro level. The trickle-down effects of these racist instruments of power on the individual and how different groups within the general black group, such as Black African immigrants, Black Caribbeans, Black Asians, and even mixed Black groups, perceive, react, and internalize them in their daily activities are lost in this overly focused on meta-narratives and macro-level discourses of power and power relations.

The second category of the literature ostensibly emerged to address this gap by focusing more on group dynamics. This group of literature focuses on a specific racial categorization such as "whiteness" (Cave and Dihal 2020; David and Forbes 2016; Alcoff 2015; Guess 2006; Bhabha 1998; Bonnett 1998; Delgado 1995; Vera et al. 1995; Ignatiev 1997; Kincheloe 1999) or "blackness" (Bird et al. 2021; Carter and Peters 2016; Brock 2020; Foner 2016; Davis and Stevenson 2006; Showers 2015; Sanchez-Hucles and Davis 2010). Although these studies begin with the exploration of macro-level discourse on racism in the United States, at the core is the historical understanding of the social construction of specific racial groups through the examination of the socialization processes and the social schemas employed in the construction of both group identity and the idea of "Other". This approach provides a better framework for understanding group dynamics and complexities (Forsyth 2018). However, just like the studies in the first category, they are also weak in exploring subgroup dynamics. Specifically, the studies on "blackness" are limited in scope to predominantly African Americans with little focus on other Black groups such as African migrants and Black migrants from the Caribbean.

Recently, some studies (Waters 2022; Lee et al. 2019; Hayward and Krause 2015; Okonofua 2013; Rogers 2004; Arthur 2000; Blum 2002; Waters et al. 2014; Read and Emerson 2005), among others, have attempted to fill this gap by examining the growing diversity within the Black population. Unfortunately, the focus has been to understand the relational distance and contestation of blackness between the diverse Black groups (Okonofua 2013), and not the framework of differentials in the conceptualization and internalization of racism. This study seeks to bridge this gap by adopting powerful sociological tools bound in Giddens's theory of structuration and Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction of reality. The focus of this study goes beyond relational differences to account for the internalization of racism among different Black groups.

In addition, the idea of space underpinning the existing studies is primarily focused on American society. While these could apply to African Americans, Black African immigrants transcend this limited, narrow idea of space. Even the second and third generations of black immigrants from Africa are socialized into these dual or sometimes multi-space understanding of self and identity. This, granted, the explication of power and power

relations underpinning the discourse on racism is significantly impacted, which calls for theoretical and analytical frameworks conducive and responsive to this multi-space understanding of power and power relations, the focus of the next section.

4. Conceptual Framework

In addressing the central piece of this paper, a synthesis of Berger and Luckmann's theory of social reality construction and Giddens' theory of structuration would be employed as the theoretical base. According to social construction theory, Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasize individuals and groups as the "definers of reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 116). Placing this in the context of this paper, the differentials in the appreciation of reality stem from the "historical products of human activity... brought about by the concrete actions of human beings" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 134). By this, "the success of particular conceptual machineries is related to the power possessed by those who operate them" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 108). This perspective emphasizes intersubjectivity. Aware of somewhat independent functionality and often the dominant character of social institutions, it sets the mark on how individuals are the bearers of this collectivity. In other words, the collective comprises a web of individual energies and faculties in a constant and continuous mutual interaction network. Thus, collective structures and systems, such as beliefs, norms, and values, exist through the interaction and negotiation between social beings involving multiple spaces. And most importantly, how the interactions between the individual and the collective define reality. This marks the socialization processes as critical in how different groups of people perceive and create their realities, as well as mark how they react to others.

With this, reality cannot be dealt with as an independent construction waiting to be uncovered by scientific and theoretical tools, but through the prism of the interactionism of multiplex contexts and realities. Not downplaying the relevance of theoretical and scientific knowledge, the authors clarified the basis of primary knowledge about intuitional order to be "... the sum of 'what everybody knows' about a social world, an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths, and so forth" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 65). The significance of this is that to understand the intra-black differential in terms of racism in American society would require an examination of how individuals from the group approach the discourse on racism in their daily interaction with the larger American culture. It also explains how the individual assigns value and significance to the macrostructure of power relations, connecting the realities of the macro (public space) to their micro (private space). In a way, the theory helps us to understand the micro level of the individual construction and deconstruction of discourses.

Giddens's theory of structuration is relevant in placing the study within the broader context (macro-level) of racial relations in American society. In one way, Giddens's theory appears like Berger and Luckmann's in terms of the role of agency in defining reality. On the other hand, Giddens' emphasis on structure as the defining base of social relations and the dialectical relations between structure and the individual sets him apart (Giddens 1984). In contextualizing this, Turner (1991) observed that "people in interaction use the rules and resources that constitute social structure in their day-to-day routines in contexts of co-presence, and in so doing, they reproduce these rules and resources of structure. Thus, individual action, interaction, and social structure are all implicated in one another" (Turner 1991, p. 521). From this perspective, rules, norms, and social structures once created cease to be a representation of individuals but themselves. They tend to exercise their agency and function independently of the logic that created them. They structure their own security concerns, survival, and defense mechanisms, which could produce either deliberate domination or unintended ones. Usually, the friction between individuals and

these social structures lies not simply in the domination per se, but in how to achieve the mix of interaction that fits into the logical base of the defense and survival mechanism of both. Thus, this theory helps understand the macro-level construction and deconstruction of racial relationships and their institutionalization.

Crucial to this understanding is the place of space as a constitutive base of power relations. While many have analyzed space primarily through a focus on either the global or local dimension, combining these two perspectives enables us to adopt a multi-space focus exploring dynamics at the local and global levels, including the interrelationality and intra-relations within. Based on a synthesis of these two theoretical perspectives, the paper built a three-layered model for the analysis: self-concept, bargaining space and commitment problems, and externalities. With this framework, we could dig down from the macro to the micro level, not just in their own accounts but in a mutual interactive prism akin to the glocalization framework explored in recent theses on globalization and moderation, among others. With this theoretical foundation set, the following sections present the attempt to conceptualize the differences in the perception and internalization of racism between African Americans and Black African immigrants in the USA, based on the conceptual model.

4.1. The Self-Concept

Self-concept defines the multifarious image individuals hold about themselves, which tends to underlie their attitudes, behaviors, reactions, and relationships with others (Weiten et al. 2014). In other words, self-concept defines how the individual perceives and attaches meaning to references regarding his/her person or group. The term depicts a multi-dimensional foundation on which individuals construct their perception based on competing identities and beliefs, including race, gender, ideology, religion, and status. The conception of self is underpinned by two constructs: the individual level and the social level (Hattie 2014). The combination of these two levels determines the nature of group solidarity and the relationship between different groups or categories.

The differentials in the internalization and perception of racism by African Americans on one hand and Black African immigrants on the other are linked to how the two groups define themselves and how this definition is reinforced by their membership in different communities and shared history (Nsangou and Dundes 2018). It is stubbornly far-fetched to assume that by shared physical appearance, every black person in the U.S is bound to face similar kinds of and produce similar reactions to racism. To sustain this would imply an assumption that the same conception of self bounds the two groups. However, careful examination and analysis reveal that different self-concepts cloud them. Several studies, including Joseph and Hunter (2011), Mwangi and English (2017), Rivers (2012), and Doucet (2005), among others, have pointed out the bicultural tendencies of Black immigrants as against the somewhat monocultural base of the African American.

First, unlike the African immigrant. The African American depicts and defines him/herself more as American. Apart from shared roots, the lived experiences of members of these groups differ (Mwangi 2016; Mthethwa-Sommers and Harushimana 2016). Undoubtedly, African Americans have a greater stake in American society than Black African immigrants. In fact, they have contributed significantly to that society and have earned a place similar to their white counterparts and coequals. By this, they appreciate their contribution to the building of what America is today in the same way as their white, privileged compatriots. In that sense, they expect equal treatment and benefits from society. Therefore, any distortion in the treatment and distribution of benefits raises a great alarm of injustice. Mwangi and Fries-Britt (2015), in a study on the college experience of Black students, found among others that "... immigrant Black students described U.S.-born Black people as too quick to assume that negative incidents occurring on campus and/or in their

interactions with faculty, staff, and classmates were based on race or racism. Generally, they felt that U.S.-born Black people were more inclined to see issues from a racial lens" (Mwangi and Fries-Britt 2015, p. 17). This finding shows that behind the reactions lie some social schemas that either reinforce or diminish resonance.

Black African immigrants, on the other hand, are not, and rightly so, do not see themselves as major stakeholders in the construction of the American society. Indeed, many of them view America as more benevolent to them than their home countries (Musoni et al. 2020). Their expectations are not premised on the postulate of equal treatment. Rather, they (expectations) are anchored in the opportunity America provides for them to make a living, compared to their home country. Consequently, Black African immigrants might be less sensitive to racial discrimination than their African American counterparts. Mitchell and her colleague's study (Mitchell et al. 2017) highlighted the shock most Black African immigrants experienced after moving to the US. They reported that "after traveling to the United States, many participants were surprised to witness the extent to which race and racism are emphasized" (Mitchell et al. 2017, p. 8).

What this implies is that while race and racism appear to the African American as a lived practical experience and a part of their everyday lives, the African migrant sees the whole discourse as a learning process, an adaptation to a new system. The fact that the majority of the Black African immigrants arrived in the USA in the last two decades, as highlighted by some research centers, including the Pew Research Center and the Migration Policy Institute, underscores this point. For example, according to the latter's analysis of population of Black African immigrants in the USA, "the 2.5 million immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa in 2024 represented well more than triple the number present in 2000" (Rutland and Batalova 2025, para. 3). Against this, it is less likely that an African immigrant would seek to challenge an American institution based on perceived racism than an African American. Indeed, the African immigrant appreciates his stay in the U.S. to be contingent on an overwhelming acceptance of and obedience to the American social setup as it is (Rumbaut and Ewing 2007). Moreover, not being fully abreast with the full racial setup and racism in the USA, siding with the status quo becomes a much better rational decision than seeking to challenge or undermine it. Clark (2008) has advanced that the challenge faced by Black African immigrants in defining their racial category propels them to ground their self-definition on ethnicity and culture rather than race. In this vein, so long as they do not seek to challenge the status quo or attempt to recast it, the status quo would have no qualms with them. To use the language of physics (Newton's Third Law of motion), action and reaction are equal and opposite. In the absence of one, the other ceases to function.

Further, self-conception is facilitated by social level factors accentuated by history, lived experiences, and myths passed down from one generation to another (Brown et al. 2007). The narratives, including symbols passed down to African Americans by their ancestors, were cast with the existing institutions as the enemy, perpetuating their subjugation under White dominance (Hughes and Chen 1997). These produce schemas and frames by which future pieces of information are processed (Posen 1993). So long as these institutions exist, African Americans will always be in chains. To set themselves free requires a concerted effort to recast and reconfigure the system and its constituent institutions. Nevertheless, as institutions of discrimination produce benefits to some people (in this case, the white majority), a move to recast them would produce a counterreaction in support of the status quo, thereby producing an enemy imagery on both sides. This situation produces mutual mistrust akin to the security dilemma (Jervis 1978), hence a spiral of fear and hatred (Kaufman 2011). This mutual mistrust rests on concerns about whether attempts to recast the system are borne out of germane concern for justice or to establish a new system of domination where the past kings become subjects.

On the other hand, Black African immigrants have no such history with the American system. For most of them, immigrating to America enabled them to escape the grips of conflicts, poverty, economic hardships, and bad governance. Given this, they are more likely to seek to adapt to the existing system than seek to overthrow it. Recent studies have revealed the tension between Black African immigrants and American Americans to be contingent on this. Indeed, Thelamour (2017) highlighted how African Americans perceive Black African immigrants' demeanor and behavior as attempts to seek accommodation with whiteness rather than to assert their shared black experience with African Americans. As Habecker (2012) observed, some Black African immigrants reject even the 'Black label as a way of asserting their distinctive ethnic and cultural roots (Habecker 2012). A famous story of the late Kofi Annan's (former Secretary-General of the United Nations) encounter with racism during his studies in the United States during the days of the Jim Crow era illustrates this. During a tour of some Southern States with fellow international students, Mr. Annan sought the service of a white barber. The barber refused young Annan his service on the basis that "we don't cut niggers' hair," with Kofi replying, "I'm not a nigger. I'm from Africa" (Meisler 2007, p. 20). A response that would gain him the service at the end. These differences in perspectives highlight the extent to which racial issues have been internalized in American society. To some extent, it also underscores the poor communication and the lack of coalition between Black African immigrants and African Americans, which could be explained by this (Nsangou and Dundes 2018, p. 3).

The differences in self-definition and socialization processes between Black African immigrants and African Americans underscore consequent differences in social schemas by which reality is filtered. These schemas have psychological and emotional dimensions, allowing them to continually shape and reshape one's personal and interpersonal relations with others. Thus, it structures the material and non-material aspects of human relations with the environment. By differences in self-definition accentuated by cultural frames, it would be far-fetched to expect or advance an argument that the same perception and internalization of racism binds all Black people. But what underpins these different socialization processes shaping self-definition? The next subsection addresses this within the context of BATNA and its impacts on shaping the perception of risk.

4.2. Bargaining Space and Commitment Problem

Another explanatory factor underlining the differentiated perception, reaction, and application to racism in the U.S. resides in the nature of the bargaining space. Bargaining space literary depicts the range within which settlement is possible (Gallarotti 2010). The wider the space between the parties, the less the probability of a settlement. In most negotiation literature, the ability of a party to obtain a more favorable settlement is attributed to the strategies employed by the parties. A critical component of an effective strategy lies in the availability of the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Settlement (BATNA). The availability of a strong BATNA is a powerful tool in negotiations that enhances the bargaining power of a party (Fisher et al. 2011). The possession of BATNA by parties enables them to draw more from the negotiation table. The reverse is true as the lack of a BATNA renders a party weak and vulnerable in a negotiation process (Kim and Fragale 2005). This likely produces hostility and a feeling of injustice, as the party (lacking BATNA) would have to make greater concessions to get the settlement done. In addition, in cases where more than one party sits on a side at the negotiation table, there are bound to be instances of free riding as the partner with a BATNA on the same side holds little eagerness for settlement, hence a commitment problem (Fearon 1994; Carraro and Siniscalco 1993; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). In all of this, the logic is that having an alternative equal in value to what one seeks to acquire fuels a different rational calculation than not having any. This sets the boundaries

of the risk an individual would be willing to take to acquire what they seek, since losing out does not appear too costly, as the alternative can fill the void.

Applying this logic to the explication of the subject matter under review, it emerges that Black African immigrants have a different space to negotiate racism because they have an alternative (going back to their home countries). The alternative structures the boundaries of their racial engagements in the U.S., including their calculation of the risks involved in participating in anti-racial movements. Even though they sit on the same side of the race as the African Americans on the postulate of skin color, their perception of it is somewhat impacted by the BATNA at their disposal. It is worth noting that the mainstay of the African immigrant is premised on benefiting from the 'American dream', a dream they know well they contributed little to making, compared to their African American counterparts, in most cases, who are the direct descendants of former enslaved and subjugated black folks. This is also supported by data that "Black African immigrants have the highest civilian labor force participation rate of 77 percent in 2024, significantly higher than that of both the overall foreign-born (68 percent) and U.S.-born (63 percent) populations" (Fearon 1994; Carraro and Siniscalco 1993; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). Interestingly, Nsangou and Dundes found in their study that children of Black African Immigrants tend to "focus more on their education than their race [owing to] intense family pressure to attend college" (Nsangou and Dundes 2018, p. 1; Jensen 2005). Thus, even the socialization process at home reechoes this disinterest in racial issues compared to what they seek to achieve in material terms from the American society.

Given this, the logical deduction would be to free ride "—receive the benefits of a public good without contributing to the costs" (Nordhaus 2015, p. 1339). The effect would be a case of limited engagement with the party on the other side (the racial institution), thereby minimizing confrontations thereof. Recent studies have even underscored the tendency of Black African immigrants to seek accommodation with whites rather than fellow black Africans, as illustrated by a respondent named Ekpe in Okonofua's study:

> *The greatest mistake any African can make is to live among these Black people. If they try that, then, they will remain poor for a long time unless there is divine intervention. The value of the property instead of appreciating will depreciate. I did not come to America to look at the bridge. I came to make enough money to support myself and my family back home in Nigeria. I sold my property in Nigeria and deprive myself here to be able to afford the down payment of my home in a White neighborhood where the property value will always appreciate. I have nothing personal against the African American. This is about survival*. (Okonofua 2013, p. 7)

The incentive to free ride becomes even more attractive if the cost variable is high. Unfortunately, this appears to be the case in the fight for equality and justice in every society. As underscored by Mukpo (2020), "because of harsh laws that mandate severe penalties for non-citizens who come into contact with the criminal justice system, an arrest that might typically lead only to probation or a few weeks in jail can trigger months or years spent in immigration detention and eventually, deportation to a country they may barely know" (Mukpo 2020, para. 5). Thus, the risk is far higher for African immigrants compared to African Americans, hence avoidable. Taking the example of police engagements, it is commonplace to find an African American confronting the police to understand the legality of his engagement with the institution and would not hesitate to label the confrontation as "racial profiling" when the explanations appear unconvincing. The Black immigrants, on the other hand, would usually submit to the system and not seek to have any confrontation with it because they view that as inviting unnecessary trouble for themselves, which is likely to end their economic pursuits. Several studies on cross-black relationships have underscored this relative lack of interest of Black African immigrants to engage in the

thorny discourse of racism (see Thelamour and Mwangi 2021; Thornton et al. 2017; Alex-Assensoh 2009). This does not mean they are disinterested in having a society free of racism, but the concern resides in the relative cost attached to such engagements.

4.3. Externalities

The differentials in the internalization and perception of racism in the USA cannot be fully appreciated when cast outside the framework of globalization (Costello 2016). The increasing interconnectedness of people and systems worldwide presents a complex sphere in any analysis of race and ethnicity. Globalization means that state actions are bounded by two spheres in the application of power: purely internal and a combination of internal and external (Giddens 2003). Although the absence of an international leviathan provides states with some leverage to ignore external concerns, the protocols and cooperation established by the states and guided by international, regional, and sub-regional institutions have rendered the appetite to ignore global concerns costly (Guzman 2002). While international protocols and laws allow states sufficient room to maneuver in internal affairs, there is relatively little room for maneuver in external issues. In this context, while one can safely conclude that the issue of racism against African Americans in the U.S. resides purely in internal constructions, that of African migrants goes beyond the internal dictate of the American state. It assumes more external effects than internal ones. Therefore, such issues are held by both internal and external laws and watchers.

Today, one is more likely to find citizens of virtually every country across the world in their own countries. Therefore, the ill treatment of citizens of other states would have repercussions or ripple effects on the treatment of one's own citizens in a host country. States have become increasingly sensitive to these issues, and given international laws that protect internal sovereignty, states tend to rely mostly on mutual trust and understanding in this context (Brouwer and Gerard 2016). The fear of reprisal attacks prompts states to treat citizens of other countries fairly. Particularly compelling in this regard are relations that states regard highly. Black African immigrants are fortunate to fall into this category. Luckily, several African states are in the good graces of the U.S., with both parties especially keen on protecting and advancing their relations. The ill-treatment of citizens of any partner country is likely to derail and negatively impact the relations they cherish so much. For example, the recent announcement of travel bans by the Trump administration on some African countries based on their policies on LGBTQI was greeted with strong words by the governments of the affected countries. Indeed, the Eritrean government described it as an unacceptable political provocation likely to affect relations with the US (Burke 2020). Given this, there appears to be a high likelihood of state institutions treating African migrants better than their African American counterparts since the appearance, demeanor, and mannerisms of these two groups are easily distinguishable.

Although similar experiences are likely to prevail at the societal level, the likelihood of differentiation at the macro-level cannot be relegated to the back burner. The differences in economic and social achievements highlighted in works such as Dodoo (1997) and Djamba (1999) partly stem from this external construction lens. In addition, data from Pew shows that "Black immigrants are also more likely to be U.S. citizens than immigrants overall (54% versus 47%)" (Anderson 2015, para. 4). This implies how benevolent and lenient the system appears to black immigrants, which impacts their internalization of racism in American society. It must be underscored that this analysis does not suggest that the American society is more gracious to Black African immigrants than to African Americans. Rather, it underscores the openings it has provided for the successes of the former compared to the latter.

5. Conclusions

The racial landscape of the United States is changing and transforming in very significant ways: both within groups and between different racial groups. This study evaluated the differentials in racial internalization and perception of racism in American society between Black African immigrants and African Americans. It employed a multidisciplinary approach, involving a synthesis of concepts from conflict resolution, negotiation, sociology, and other related fields. The author argues that what has been done represents a surface dressing of an overwhelmingly multifaceted issue and supports the calls for more examination of the within-group diversity of the black community in the United States. National population statistics show a constant growth in the number of Black immigrants entering the U.S., which consequently continues to shape the diversity within the Black community. Against this, it is important to examine the encounters of these diverse groups with racial issues and how they process these encounters, including the schemas they employ. How are their views on racism shaped? To what extent are their perceptions and experiences of racism shaped by other groups' experiences in the same society? How have their experiences transformed over the years? Of significance lies the critical place of space. We should examine how the transformation of space, particularly the multifaceted nature of public spaces in contemporary times, in terms of both virtual and real aspects, influences the discourse on race, not just across different racial groups but within the same group. This stands to enrich the literature on race and racism beyond the narrow cleavages of 'Black' and 'White'.

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Note

[1] Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) is a term popularized in negotiated studies to address the psychological processes involved when a party has an alternative similar in value to the one being negotiated. Significantly, it indicates that BATNA takes out the fear of losing out with diminishes a parties desire to commit wholeheartedly to the negotiation process.

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