

## **African Australian Youth: Homogenisation and the Dynamics of Identity**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the dynamics through which young migrant youth, in this case African Australian youth, deal with the complexities of developing a new identity and vernacular, which incorporate a sense of 'belonging' in Australia while being distinctly African. The very idea of being 'African' or indeed 'African Australian' involves problematic assumptions about the homogeneity of these identities and my particular concern in this article is with this problem of forced homogenisation. Based on ethnographic research into African Australian youth in Canberra I explore the influence of large scale migration of African refugees into Australia throughout the last decade and particularly those discourses that depict Africans as unable to integrate into Australian society. Focusing on a range of responses to the migration of African refugees, the paper explores how young African youth who arrived to, or were born in, Australia prior to this recent refugee intake, resist the process of homogenisation by distancing themselves from newly arriving refugee youth. The result is that differences are polarised rather than productively engaged in the development of a distinct identity. I contextualise the homogenisation of Africans as a particular racial group within a history of responses by the dominant culture to migrations in Australia's past. At the structural level we might see this as a rite of passage into hegemonic relations through which 'minorities' are positioned as 'Other' to the dominant culture and may also subsequently engage in 'othering' minorities. At

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the experiential subjective level this creates emotional and embodied anxieties within youth as well as the potential for everyday racism.

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