Identity Negotiation of the Black African Diaspora through Discourse with Singaporeans

Sri Ranjini Mei Hua, Vivian Hsueh-hua Chen

Abstract— The African Diaspora in Singapore (and larger Asia) is a topic that has received little scholarly attention and research. This exploratory study will analyze the changing identity of Africans throughout the process of cultural adaptation in Singapore. For the focus of this study, "black Africans" will be defined as any black Africans from sub-Saharan Africa who have lived in Singapore for at least six months. The dialectic relationship between Singaporean conceptions of black African identity and African self-consciousness will be analyzed from the perspective of black Africans so as to evaluate the impact of intercultural discourse on the evolution of the African identity in Singapore.

Keywords—African, Diaspora, identity negotiation, intercultural communication

I. INTRODUCTION

THIS paper aims to identify how black Africans negotiate their identity within a confined space of intercultural discourse. There are about 3000 Africans in Singapore, according to The Straits Times (8th March 2008), with a majority of Nigerians, who constitute about 3/4 of the total number.

Singapore has a total population of 4,987,600, of whom 3,733,900 are Singapore residents (as at 2009) [1]. Singaporeans make up a conglomeration of Chinese (76.8%), Malays (13.9%), Indians (7.9%) and Others (1.4%) according to the Singapore Census of Population 2000. Compared to most Asian foreigners in Singapore, who are ethnically similar to Singaporeans, Africans are perceived to be different in terms of ethnicity, nationality, language, and culture. These differences influence the way Singaporeans react to this new wave of migrants.

As Singapore's immigration policy has been described as 'one that tries to maximize the economic benefits of immigration while minimizing its social and economic costs' [2], it has been argued that besides taking into consideration the potential that immigrants have to contribute to the economy, an early strategy had also been to 'selectively open its doors to people from countries that bore cultural similarity to the local population' [3]. Therefore, at the outset, foreign workers were recruited from traditional sources such as

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Malaysia [4].

However, as labor needs expand with Singapore's declining birth rate and graying population, the country has adopted a more expansive approach to immigrants. The recruitment of skilled workers and professionals has extended worldwide, with the former coming from countries like India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Thailand, which have established bilateral agreements with Singapore [4].

According to the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA), from January to November 2007, a record number of 58,600 persons were granted Singapore Permanent Residence, and 15,700 persons were granted Singapore Citizenship (ICA, 2008). Hence, with more foreigners making Singapore home through applying to be permanent residents or Singapore citizens, they will cease to be a mere transitory feature in the island state. It will become increasingly important and necessary to weave immigrants into the fabric of Singapore's identity, culture, politics and community so as to maintain a harmonious multicultural society.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) How interaction between Africans and Singaporeans influence the former's self-concept and identity construction
2) How Africans in Singapore negotiate their identity through intercultural communication with Singaporeans

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. History of Africans in Asia

Africans have been in Asia since 800 AD [5]. They were transported to Asia as slaves until 1900 AD. Historically, it appears that Africans were accepted, rather than alienated from existing social structures (within the socio-cultural parameters of their positions in society as slaves). Reference [6] notes, "…in Asia, 'slave' was never equated with African or Black".

Moreover, reference [6] points out that, in contrast to the Americas, most slaves "were subject to forces promoting assimilation into local society rather than separateness and alienation from it". In fact, some Africans even intermarried with locals, creating an entirely new race, as was the case in Sri Lanka when the *kaffir* soldiers serving the British government married Sri Lankan women in large numbers [7].

However, in Singapore, as in other economically developed Asian countries, many factors weigh in when examining representations and perceptions of Africans. American-

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:4, No:6, 2010

dominated media, with its own cultural representations of black identity, is prevalent in Singapore, where cable television consumption is high, and most of the English-language entertainment channels broadcast syndicated programs from the US.

The dominant media portrayal of Africans as starved children with HIV/AIDS, or as beneficiaries of aid given by richer nations perpetuates stereotypes as well. The images and stories shown in the media gradually become part of "common sense" knowledge [8] and contribute to a narrow perception of Africans.

B. Discourses on the Black African Diaspora

The word 'Africa' has been used as a 'unifying and identifying construct' since the origins of all black people can be traced back to a landmass the Europeans called 'Africa'. However, the inherent artificiality and complexity of the term make it ineffective as an identifying construct. A pattern of increasing historiography of the black Diaspora highlights the superficiality of identity constructs such as race and Africa [9].

African scholar, Ali Mazrui, contends that "the term Africa, the consciousness of being African which united Africans was a colonial creation" [10]. In the same vein, the late Julius Nyerere of Tanzania once argued that, "The sentiment of Africa, the sense of fellowship between Africans, was something which came from outside" (ibid). It was colonialism that engendered "a sentiment of oneness" among Africans (ibid). These ultimately point to the overarching notion that Africa seems to be the weakest basis for identity construction for black African diasporans.

The term Diaspora refers to "a kind of passage, yet a passage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving." Diaspora is a journey, not simply a trip from one point to the other, neither is it defined by the act of travel [11]. Some authorities believe that Africa is the continent with the most mobile population in the world today. This means a higher proportion of its population lives at some distance from its place of birth or follows a pattern of seasonal or semi-annual migration than do populations on any other continent [12].

Instead of seeking to assimilate, Diaspora is a way of retaining the status of "other" among the established, of keeping alive the spirit of "otherness" in worlds that seek likeness and homogeneity. In the experiences of black Africans, throughout the historical trajectory of which the Atlantic slave trade was a significant period, the blacks in Diaspora have invariably been subjected to subtly communicated ascriptions of inferior status. This was because the dominant discourse on black Africans was predominantly western, thus the concept of "primitive Africa" was "invented" which substantiated "philosophical interpretations about a hierarchy of civilizations" [13].

However, as there was a paradigmatic shift to cultural relativity, African thought, traditions and cultures became more recognized in the field of social science [13]-[14]. It is this "resilience" that enabled African people of the Diaspora and the African continent to "survive the strong onslaught of western acculturation, cultural genocide and historicide," [14] hence giving rise to the notion of blackness as a political and cultural construction "which cannot be based on a fixed set of transcultural or transcendental racial categories" [15].

C. Labels and Cultural Identity: Racial Classification

Singapore's administration categorizes its residents according to the following racial groups: Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others (CMIO). The 'Others' category offers several issues as a framework to examine the African identity in Singapore. Firstly, it neglects the cultural significance of the individual ethnicities that are clustered in an ambiguous manner. It could be argued that this effectively erodes one's cultural identity within already constricted parameters of Singaporean society. For such a culturally diverse group of ethnicities, being defined by an indistinct ethnic label would hinder rather than harm cultural integration.

In this era of globalization, "cosmopolitanism becomes a proteanism," [16] signifying a willingness to learn more about and experience the plurality and diversity of transcultural identities [17]. Hence, the traditional CMIO model of multiculturalism that has hitherto been used to define Singaporean national identity becomes restrictive and arbitrary.

From preliminary interviews with Singaporeans and in-depth interviews with Africans, it was found that both labels 'black' and 'African' carry different connotations and implications; the term 'African' was predominantly used in intercultural discourse between Singaporeans and Africans, and carried stronger connotations of 'poverty' and 'primitivism' than the more generic term 'black', which was adopted less often as an ascribed identification label. Persons were identified as 'black' based on their physical appearance and the term was generally used by Singaporeans to describe and represent a broader group of Africans whom they were exposed to, which comprises mostly African Americans and African Europeans. In this paper, the terms 'black' and 'African' will be used interchangeably and will refer to any black African from sub-Saharan Africa.

D. Communication of Identity through Ascription & Avowal

Identity can be "invoked, used, interpreted with, displayed, performed, and so on in particular social scenes" [18]. However, people communicate their cultural identities in varying intensities according to (i) scope; the number of people sharing the same identity, (ii) salience; its relative importance in relation to other aspects of their identity in a particular situation, and (iii) intensity; the strength with which this identity is communicated [19].

According to Sussman, few people "recognize the imprint of their own culture and its ubiquitous nature" [20]. People do not necessarily communicate all parts of their cultural identity even when they are aware of it. While some elements of cultural identity such as race and gender are salient in face-to-face encounters, many elements are invisible, such as occupation, class and religious affiliation. Africans in

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:4, No:6, 2010

Singapore are constantly made aware of their cultural identity because the color of their skin sets them apart from most Singaporeans. As their physical appearance is the most easily observable indication of identity, the existence of other invisible aspects is little acknowledged by Singaporeans even during intercultural interaction and communication.

Being conscious of and choosing to communicate about their cultural identity to Singaporeans, Africans may negotiate their cultural identities in discourse [21]. Collier used the terms 'avowal' and 'ascription' to express the disparity between private and public perceptions of one's cultural identity [19]. The cultural identity an African avows may not necessarily be congruent with that which is ascribed by Singaporeans. This study aims to explore the tension between the processes of avowal and ascription encountered by Africans in Singapore.

E. Acculturation into Singapore Society

Acculturation is defined as 'the processes by which individuals, families, communities, and societies react to inter-cultural contact' [22]. Africans living in Singapore are in constant contact with various aspects of Singaporean culture.

A useful framework with which to analyze findings on acculturation would be Rudmin's classes of acculturation [22]. These include: assimilation, separation, integration, marginalization, and multiculturalism.

Assimilation occurs when 'the minority is positive towards the behaviors, values, and identity of the dominant group and is negative towards the own minority culture.' Separation happens when the minority group is positive towards the minority culture and rejects the dominant. Integration is the process where the minority group has positive attitudes towards both the dominant and minority cultures, although it cannot apply to 'deeper aspects of culture, such as religion, gender roles, or child rearing'. Marginalization occurs when individuals want to be part of the dominant or minority culture, but fail to do so. Lastly, multiculturalism occurs when the minority adopts cultural practices that are neither the dominant nor the minority culture. Examples of these would be sub-cultures, or a third culture.

These different categories of acculturation are not intended to be rigid measurements of the extent of acculturation among the African community in Singapore. Instead, the acculturation process will be used as a theoretical framework with which to analyze the reciprocal relationship between cultural adaptation and negotiation of African identity.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative analysis was conducted to gain deeper insight into Singaporean perceptions toward Africans and Africans' negotiation of identities through communication with Singaporeans. A guide of interview questions was devised which set the structure for the progression of the interview, and various follow-up questions were asked depending on the direction the interview took from the responses garnered.

A total of 34 in-depth interviews were conducted with Africans from a range of occupations such as students, teachers, lecturers, professionals, footballers, traders, etc. The majority of respondents, 41%, were from Nigeria (14). The rest were from Ghana (5), Tanzania (4), South Africa (3), Kenya (2), Ivory Coast (2), Zimbabwe (2), Ethiopia (1), and Sierra Leone (1). Given the larger African male population in Singapore, females accounted for 30% and males for 70% of the total sample. All African interviewees were between the ages 10 to 65 and had lived in Singapore for at least six months. The method of selection was through the non-random sampling technique of convenience sampling. Interviews were conducted at the interviewees' homes, places of work, or in casual settings i.e. in a café.

V. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The identity negotiation process will be discussed according to three distinct themes: (i) strong vs. tenuous diasporic identity, (ii) ascription vs. avowal, and (iii) acculturation strategies of integration vs. separation. Each section highlights the ongoing dialectical tensions in the identity negotiation of the black African Diaspora in Singapore. It also depicts the struggles faced in trying to resolve the discrepancy between avowal and ascription (institutional and interpersonal) within an often-circumscribed space for negotiation. Excerpts from the interviews will be drawn upon to illustrate the interviewees' experiences of intercultural discourse with Singaporeans and cultural adaptation in Singapore, and how that influenced their self-concept.

A. Strong vs. Tenuous Black African Diasporic Identity

Postcolonial thought on the African Diaspora is critical of earlier discourse, which claims that Africans are all connected by a common history, heritage and racial ancestry. Such notions of an "automatic solidarity based on either blood or land" [23] serve to homogenize differences and create a kind of "ethnic absolutism" [24]. In her book, 'Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora', Wright argues that any claim to an African diasporic identity must "show how and why such a unity can be asserted despite the diversity and lived specificities of people's lives" [25]. Hence, there is a need to revisit the notion of diasporic identity and evaluate whether it has substantive value in the formation of the African identity in Singapore.

As Africans in Singapore constitute a diverse community, the processes of their diasporic identity construction are understandably complex and fraught with tension. Yet they find that they have been ascribed with the collective identity of being 'African' and 'from Africa' despite the fact that they identify themselves along the lines of nationality (i.e. Nigerian, South African, Ghanaian, Kenyan, Tanzanian, Zimbabwean, Ivorian, etc.), tribe (i.e. yoruba, igbo, kikuyu, xhosa, etc.), gender, profession, and so on. Thus the 'salience' [19] of their black African identity takes precedence over all other aspects of their individuality in the context of discourse with

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:4, No:6, 2010

Singaporeans, severely constraining any avenue for identity negotiation.

Most of the interviewees did not experience a strong commonality that connected them to each other and thus did not feel a sense of African identity. 34-year-old Ghanaian, John[1], had prejudgements about Nigerians in Singapore because of what he knew about them from his country. Before he came to Singapore, he used to valorise his Ghanaian identity while stereotyping all Nigerians as 'bad' people as 'there are a lot of Nigerians in Ghana and they do the 419 scam.' However, he admits that his perceptions had changed after living in Singapore and experiencing the same prejudices that Nigerians face.

Some Africans prefer to avoid discrimination by disavowing the collective black African identity. Hence, there are those like Nigerian, Peter, who try to evade Singaporean-imposed ascriptions by cutting all ties with their Nigerian brethren. Peter does not enjoy convening at the ABC African restaurant located in 'Little India' (an ethnic precinct in Singapore) even though most of the patrons who congregate there are from his native country:

"I don't hang out with Africans (from Africa) much. I prefer African Americans or UK Africans. The ones giving us a bad name are those in XYZ Street. They play the pity card, dressing badly. They should keep themselves clean. Don't give the impression that they're bad. I went with my brother to ABC African restaurant but I would never bring my wife there."

In contrast, Nigerian, Paul, a third-year student at a public university does not feel like he needs to distance himself from places like ABC African restaurant which remind him of his African heritage and identity. In fact, he goes there almost every day to have Nigerian cuisine, and chats with other Nigerian patrons at the restaurant. Unlike most of the interviewees, he is one of a few who feel that Africans in Singapore share an experience of solidarity:

"Whichever country you are from, when you're outside, at least for the fact that you're from Africa, we're still one. That is why you can see people sitting together at chains like ABC, that's why you can see them together. If I see an African, I have a very good perception about him/her as he/she is an African person coming from Africa."

His sentiments are reminiscent of the black Diaspora in the past, which was bound by a strong African consciousness and perceived a strong affiliation with Africa [26]. This Afrocentric consciousness has become popular among black Americans today, particularly "in consequence of a pervasive consciousness of alienation" [26]. Similarly, black Africans in Singapore who face estrangement from the society find that this common consciousness unites them.

B. Ascription vs. Avowal in Identity Formation

1) Macro-level Analysis

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[1] Names have been changed to protect confidentiality of research participants.

Despite the diversity of Africans in Singapore, the recognition of Africa as a single homogenous entity still predominates Singaporean discourse, thus compelling Africans to disavow such ideas of oneness and similitude so as to assert and maintain their unique self-identification. This idea of homogeneity is in part influenced by the historically inherited idea that 'Africa' is one collective, undiversified entity, which is also perpetuated in the Singapore media about Africa and Africans through television, magazines and newspapers.

Even in national discourse such as Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally 2004 Speech, the theme of which was "Our Future of Opportunity and Promise"[27], Africa's significance was slighted while Southeast Asia and Asia were lionized to the Singapore audience. The following is a brief excerpt from the speech.

'We are now in Singapore in a region where opportunities abound. It's the most dynamic region in the world. There is no other place where we would prefer to be. You want to be in Latin America, you have your problems. You want to be in Africa, God help you. But in Southeast Asia and Asia, for all the problems, for all the uncertainties and risks, I think this is a dynamic, exciting, challenging part of the world.'

A close examination of the tone and angle of an article about Africans in Singapore which appeared in *The Straits Times* two years ago (29th January 2006) is another example of how negative stereotypes are reinforced through national media. In the article, locals' 'unhappiness' caused by Africans at Sam Leong Road in Little India was heavily emphasized [28]. The reporter highlighted the following stereotypes of African behavior as listed by locals in the article: noisiness, drunkenness, violence, crime, and even sexual harassment of local and foreign women in the Little India area.

Another example of how the Singapore media depicts Africa and Africans was a feature on Africans in Singapore titled 'Money Safari', in the Saturday Special Report of *The Straits Times* (p. S2-S7) on 8th March 2008. A week after the feature was published, many readers wrote in to *The Straits Times* to comment. One letter by Alex M. Mutebi outlined the negative stereotyping of the coverage and argued that the sample of Africans in the article was 'far from representative'. Below is an excerpt from his letter, which was published in the Saturday Special Report of *The Straits Times* (p. S6) on 15th March 2008.

'Your coverage suggests (i) that Africans are essentially Nigerians…and that Nigerians are bad people; (ii) that violence and Africans are almost interlinked; (iii) that Africans are loud and obnoxious; (iv) that tribal sentiments are teeming just below the surface of every African; (v) that marrying Singaporeans is an intent of many Africans who want to live in Singapore; (vi) that Africans are somewhat hyper-sexual; and (vii) that there are few if any African professionals in Singapore while the rest of them live on the margins of society.'

With the predominantly negative slant on coverage and commentary about Africa and Africans in the media, none of

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:4, No:6, 2010

the interviewees cited the media as a tool facilitating social integration in Singapore. Hence, it is clear that the media has in part contributed to the limited understanding that Singaporeans have of Africa and Africans.

2) Micro-level Analysis

There is a high level of race consciousness in Singapore transmitted through education, the media, and the government's multiculturalism narrative. The concept of race is 'essentialized' [29] not just at the institutional level but also in interpersonal interaction and communication.

In this sense, identity is configured substantially through race, and impression formation is often influenced by a racial lens, as depicted by Nigerian, David, who is now a Singapore Permanent Resident:

"People here tend to ask you, 'where you from?' I have traveled to quite a number of countries and this question actually shouldn't come up, no one will ask that kind of question if you go to Europe or America because it is irrelevant. This is something that is different from what I would experience in Africa, Europe or America. It's still a challenge for people here to accept the fact that there is no need to ask someone where you're from."

Many African interviewees found that the oft-asked question, 'where you from?' was actually a prelude to further questions based on stereotypic assumptions Singaporeans have of Africans and the occupations they are typically believed to hold. Some Singaporeans believe they are here as blue-collar workers, or for trade in second-hand car parts, computers and electronic goods, while others admit to not having any idea of what they do. None mentioned the fact that there are Africans in Singapore who are in white collar-positions such as professionals, managers, executives, and businesspeople.

Hence, the rigidity of social structures was perceived to be a significant barrier to the social integration of Africans as it ascribed them an inferior place in society. This struggle was even faced by those who were in positions of power and authority. One such view was expressed by South African, Stella, Group CEO of a minerals and energy company:

"It's not all a bed of roses in Singapore, especially as an African, right now we are in our second year in Singapore as a company, Singaporeans are not used to dealing with blacks, they've got very few black bosses, so I belong to the minority and it was not easy for me. Singaporeans are used to having a Mr Tan or Mr Chua as their boss, now they have Ms Stella. How am I going to cope? You know, it's a bit of a culture shock and if you are not a trained manager, it will be very difficult for you to manage the situation, you will feel inferior, you will feel that they are not respecting you."

In general, the interviewees felt that they did not have a clearly defined place in the social hierarchy of Singaporean society. In fact, many of them perceived a clear-cut, ethnically based social hierarchy in Singapore as South African, *Belle*, a 27-year-old interior designer pointed out:

"They (The Chinese) tend to…apart from white people, they see themselves as superior to others. So even if the guy is cleaning the streets and you are in a suit, he's still superior to

you in his own head. And it's not necessarily superior specifically to black people, it's superior to others as well, especially Indians, Bangladeshi workers and Malays."

In addition to their perceived social immobility in Singapore society, their self-image was confounded by the inaccurate but widespread notion of Africa as a primitive and poverty-stricken place. Hence the African interviewees sought to disavow such denigrating and parochial ascriptions by explaining the facts about their respective countries i.e. the history, society and culture, so as to provide Singaporeans with a more objective and informed view of Africa and Africans.

They also sought to avow other aspects of their identities which they felt were more reflective of themselves i.e. nationality, gender, political ideology, race, tribe, occupation, religion, etc. Hence, it was found that the stereotypes about Africans disseminated via the media and folk ideology, were moderated and counterbalanced by interpersonal interaction and communication.

C. Integration vs. Separation

1) Integration

While economic integration is more or less de facto as one's economic survival hinges on it, societal and linguistic integration are more complex and multi-faceted issues.

The historical influence of Africans in Asia since 800 AD [5] seems to have virtually zero effect on their integration here, simply due to the fact that their numbers here were too small, and thus there was no 'scope' [19] to have any lasting impact on culture that would translate as a cultural bridge for the new wave of economically-motivated Africans in Singapore. Hence, the African community here does not have any existing cultural base to facilitate their social integration.

The way one speaks is a prime indicator of the degree of solidarity sought and achieved [30]. The most easily distinguishable feature of Singaporean culture that is evident across the multi-racial population is presumably its linguistic form known as Singlish, an English-based creole language. Africans more readily picked up this linguistic facet of Singaporean culture, Singlish, so as to fit in. In some cases, linguistic integration was both conscious and intentional.

When asked if she consciously spoke Singlish as a way to better connect with Singaporeans, 19-year-old Nigerian student, Annie, readily affirmed:

"I stay with a Chinese family, so that means there's the 'ah ma', so I speak some Chinese, some Singlish, because if I speak my own kind of English she's like "Huh? Huh?" My African friends actually don't like it. But you're in Singapore, I want to be able to connect and learn the language."

Although Annie's attitude toward linguistic adaptation appears to be consistent with Rudmin's definition of integration [22], it is not an accurate indicator of cultural integration. She had only accepted one facet of the dominant culture (here in the form of language) by consciously choosing to speak Singlish whereas she expressed that did not imbibe other aspects of Singaporean culture. Such a reaction would be

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:4, No:6, 2010

classified as separation [22], where the minority rejects the dominant culture.

2) Separation

The majority of interviewees, despite integrating linguistically through the use of Singlish, could not accept, approve or endorse the culture, values and traditions they perceived to be Singaporean. In fact, they rejected the more entrenched aspects of Singaporean culture that did not coincide with their cultural values. Some cited the endless rat race to pursue materialism and wealth as unsuited to their doctrines, value system, and life philosophy.

In addition, many African interviewees find that Singapore society has so readily and eagerly assimilated Western values to the extent that it has lost an appreciation for its own ethnic languages, traditions and customs. Zimbabwean, Irene, 40, feels strongly that her and her children's tradition, heritage and values should be protected and that their native language should be preserved in spite of the influences of globalization, transnational migration and cross-cultural exchange:

"As mothers, if we have children we should instill in them African values, so that the children don't get mixed up or confused. We must make sure that the kids respect their elders, the manners and the language. When kids go back home, they should still be able to speak in their native language. As Africans, we have values that we need to uphold even when we are away from home. Fight assimilation."

Another interviewee, 32-year-old Sylvester, a Ghanaian, feels that he would not be able to integrate into Singaporean culture because of its general acquiescence and resistance to confrontation and conflict, even when a circumstance, policy, or legislation curtails its natural liberties and rights:

"There is no social justice in Singapore, it has become part of the community, they don't want to fight for anything, whatever happens, it's okay, and nobody questions anything. Sometimes my body itches when something like that happens."

In this sense, their behavior seems to mirror the separation category in Rudmin's classes of acculturation [22]. The 'intensity' [19] with which they communicate and avow their African cultural identity during intercultural discourse with Singaporeans shows the stark contrast that is perceived between African and Singaporean culture, and the discernibly low probability of African integration into the latter. Hence even though the black African diasporic identity was considered by most interviewees to be tenuous, there appeared to be an undercurrent of congruency and solidarity in African cultural values that transcended national boundaries.

To bolster their cultural identity and counteract any possible influence of Singaporean culture, they were committed to maintain their African authenticity by celebrating traditional festivals, listening to local music, and gathering regularly with the African community in Singapore. They also prevented apathy by keeping abreast of developments in Africa and discussing issues affecting the people in their native country, as well as in other parts of the vast continent.

VI. CONCLUSION

Through a constant process of identity negotiation in intercultural communication with Singaporeans, Africans find that the space for negotiation can be expanded and intensified as they continue to disavow ascriptions and affirm their cultural values and heritage, which are important to the understanding of black African identity in Singapore.

Acculturation can "no longer be thought of as a series of linear phases where one goes from being different to being assimilated" [31]. Instead, it is a fluid and dynamic process that is "continuous and not viewed as a static, finite end product" (ibid). The acculturation strategy adopted by Africans in Singapore generally resembled a hybrid of integration in some respects and separation in others.

In terms of integration, the largest barrier appeared to be the existing social hierarchy in Singapore, perceivably formed according to ethnicity. The most facilitative factor in integration was language; Singlish was most widely connected to social integration. However, just taking linguistic integration to mean cultural integration would be a very cosmetic analysis of the extent of Africans' integration into Singaporean culture.

In conclusion, despite a strong linguistic integration, deeper cultural values which were perceived to be intrinsic to the African self-consciousness, were actively preserved and protected, while aspects of Singaporean culture were deemed different and thus rejected. Hence, even though the African diasporic identity was observed to be tenuous, there was a strong sense of collective African cultural identity, which was generally perceived as negating the values and culture inherent in Singapore.

There is much scope for future study on this topic; one area worth researching in detail would be the identity construction and acculturation process of second-generation Africans who are born and raised in Singapore. Along the vein of integration, it would be useful to investigate whether linguistic integration could precede successful cultural integration in the future, as well as the extent to which the former serves as an effective initial step toward integration into Singaporean society.

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:4, No:6, 2010

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