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**Out of Many, One People: The Imagined Communities  
of Second-Generation Jamaicans**

For anyone with Jamaican heritage, identity is easily summed up in the phrase that decorates the Jamaican coat of arms, "Out of many, one people". This phrase, which was borne from the multicultural identity of a nation freshly independent from British colonial power and looking for unity, represents the identity of not only Jamaicans, but the Jamaican diaspora, which has stretched as far as every continent. For the relatively understudied population of Black children of this diaspora in the United States, this phrase holds true as they negotiate their own identity formation. Because their parents migrated from one society mired in hyphenated identities to another, and due to the ubiquitous and globalized nature of social media, the everyday lives of middle-class, Black American children of Jamaican immigrants are mediated with Jamaica and immigrant related social media. This constitutes the question, "How do middle-class Black American children of Jamaicans with multicultural heritage use social media to negotiate their identity?" By examining the use of social media as a tool of identity formation in their everyday lives, we will understand how they negotiate their racialized ethnic, national, and cultural identity. These second-generation immigrants construct, reinforce, and contest ideas that influence their identity through the consumption and sharing of social media. While the national identities they construct are reminiscent of concepts like long-distance nationalism and transnationalism, I intend to argue that there is a distinct difference in the position of being a Black child of Jamaican immigrants in which they are forming a layered, hybrid identity that is rooted in their experience of feeling either accepted or Othered on social media. We will find that this hybrid identity has several layers that allow them to navigate between various imagined communities.

**Gaps in the literature**

The Second-Generation

While most case studies on national identity and migration focus on identity formation of migrants, this case study focuses on Black children of Jamaican immigrants in the U.S. As explained by Litchmore et al. in their study of second-generation Canadians of African and Caribbean heritage, these individuals would have been socialized in Canada (in our case, the United States) and would conceivably, but not necessarily, have some connection to the cultural backgrounds of their parents (9). That being said, remnants of a migrants' national and cultural identity are often passed to the next generation through socialization within their families (Glick Schiller and Fouron 157). Further, these children of immigrants actively construct identities that are rooted neither exclusively in the United States, nor in their parents' countries of birth, but based on their location between the two (Haayen 66). Being middle class also affords access to certain experiences, such as having a smartphone to engage with social media and traveling to their parent's country of birth. This constitutes the study of hybrid identity formation of a generation that is experiencing unprecedented globalization in their mediated everyday life.

### Social Media

As stated by Ferguson et al., media serves as the chief vehicle of remote intercultural contact in recent studies (584). Media use scholarship on second-generation immigrants tends to examine the use of the internet for the purpose of sharing news and current events, maintaining awareness of immigration-related policy (Reyes 25), learning about their cultural history (Aghapouri 181), engaging in political discourse and activism, and maintaining relationships abroad (Hossain 2). The specific role of social media as an identity formation tool for second-generation immigrants to navigate a layered identity through entertainment, such as 'memes' and 'vlogs,' is relatively under-explored, but is a large part of their mediated everyday lives. For children of immigrants, the sharing of media is just as important as the consumption of media as they form identities and communities.

This case study fills gaps in the literature about second-generation immigrants, and specifically the U.S.-born children of Jamaican immigrants, and how they use social media in their everyday lives to construct a distinctly layered hybrid identity.

### **Hyphenated Identity**

Jamaica presents a unique case for the study of mediated identity formation. First, Jamaican culture is widespread. Though the country takes up just over 10,000 square kilometers in the Caribbean Sea (The World Bank Group), Jamaican culture, including phrases from Jamaican Patois, reggae music, and National Heroes such as Marcus Garvey, is familiar worldwide. The global reach and media power of Jamaican popular culture is worthy of study, as explained by Ferguson et al. While exploring the global media power of Jamaican reggae music, they stated that even nonimmigrant individuals can become acculturated to the culture of a geographically and historically separate place through indirect and/or intermittent contact with that culture (58), so it is important to examine the extent to which this truth extends to the Jamaican diaspora as well. This presents a unique study of an under-explored globalized popular culture, as most globalized popular culture studies the proliferation of Western media that originates in politically powerful nations like the United States.

Second, Jamaican identity is multicultural. While the vast majority of the Jamaican population is Black or of African descent, the inconsistent definitions of racial and ethnic categories is problematic (Ramkissoon, McFarlane & Branche 2), as even Black identity in Jamaica contains a rich history of multiculturalism. As noted, “19th and 20th century migration of Chinese people to Jamaica has created a significant Chinese population and Afro-Chinese population in Jamaica” (Bryan 15). Additionally, other unclear categories have appeared on past census reports to accommodate for other groups that have migrated to Jamaica, such as Mixed, East Indian, and Afro-East Indian (Statistical Institute of Jamaica). This multicultural background has resulted in a hyphenated society in which people often describe themselves with a conglomerate of national, cultural, and ethnic identities, for example, “Afro-Chinese,” “Indian-Jamaican,” or “Euro-Jamaican.”

The United States is similar in that identity can be a mashup of racial, national, ethnic, and cultural identity that results in hyphenated labels. Shain explains this, “tolerance for hyphenization,” by noting African American, Asian-American, and Arab-American labels, explaining that this, “affords diasporans a greater opportunity to pursue their cultural identity within the context of their American selves” (Brinkerhoff 32; Shain 1995, 1999). This pursuit involves identity formation of distinct hybrid

identities, especially as it relates to second-generation immigrants who engage with social media related to their parent's home country within the context of the United States. Observing the identity formation of the American children of Jamaican immigrants provides a picture of the unique hybrid identity that is formed between two 'hyphenated' multicultural societies.

### **What are you?**

While talking about hybridity in Jamaica, Shibita discusses the dynamic phenomenon of ethnicity as a socio-culturally constructed concept that is influenced by internal and external forces and contexts (55). Because of the flexible nature of characterizations of racial and ethnic labels (Litchmore et al. 29), the identifications in this case study are a result of self-identification. Observations have been drawn from a conversation with:

1. A non-binary adolescent with a multicultural background rooted in Jamaican, Chinese, Indian, European, and African heritage (they/them);
2. A millennial man with a multicultural background rooted in Jamaican, Jordanian, Indian, European, and African heritage (he/him);
3. A middle-aged woman with a multicultural background rooted in Jamaican, Chinese and African heritage (she/her); and,
4. I, a millennial woman with a multicultural background rooted in Jamaican, Chinese, Indian, European, and African heritage (she/her).

All individuals were born in the U.S. to middle-class, Jamaican immigrant parents and identify as Black.

Quotes from our conversation are attributed using 1, 2, 3, or 4.

Litchmore et al. found that, "'Black' and other racial, ethnic, and national categories are not fixed, but dependent on social context" (28). In tandem with this finding is the notion that meaning, and significance of race and ethnicity are influenced by both geographical location and socialization (Ramkissoon, McFarlane & Branche 12). "I realize that when I define myself at any given time, I use my geographic location to define myself. For instance, race only becomes important to me at particular places" (12) This is represented as we discussed how we identify:

In the U.S., I'm Black and my family is Jamaican. I only identify with the U.S. when I'm not in the U.S. or Jamaica, and even then, I just say I'm from New York, not that I'm 'American'. I only mention Chinese if it comes up. In Jamaica, it's easiest cause I can just say what area my parents are from (4)

None of the participants identify as 'American' when they are asked about their identity. This is comparable to Glick Schiller and Fouron's description of second-generation Haitians in the U.S. who identified as Haitian rather than American, though they were born in the U.S. (161). "People call me 'Blasian' or whatever. *They* identify me as that, but I honestly don't care at this point, cause the people who ask what am I are usually white" (1). In the identification, "Blasian," we see how the mashup of identities has been used to attempt to encompass multicultural and multiracial identity, like the use of 'Jamerican.' "White people mainly ask where I'm from. It's not like I have the accent. They don't realize they're assuming I'm not from here, they're assuming I'm not American. Growing up I used to say I'm Jamerican" (3). Others contested the question, "My response to white people is always asking for more specifics: what do you mean? And keep prodding until they get specific, because usually it's about race" (2). In several instances, they mentioned feeling Othered and not feeling they belong in the U.S. based on race. Throughout the study, there was a consistent exasperation with being asked, "What are you?" especially when discussing who was asking the question (often white people in the U.S.) and the racial undertones of why they ask. This phenomenon is described by Benedict Anderson when he explains, "Even if a black in the United Kingdom was born there, went to schools and university there, pays taxes there, votes there, and will be buried there...she can never be genuinely English" (72). This shows how identity formation of children of immigrants is impacted by feeling Othered in their birth country, and how this is specifically racialized for Black children of immigrants. The racialized experience of being Othered was not just apparent when encountering white Americans.

I'm mixed with so much it'd be kinda hard to keep up. I don't identify with everybody

because...there might be some prejudice within these groups. If I were to go to China, because I'm not pale, I'll stand out and they might treat me different, like I'm not one of them, because I'm not (1).

In this quote, we see how racial tension, even within their own multicultural background, influences identity formation. As discussed, there is a significant history of Chinese heritage in Jamaica, resulting in a Chinese Jamaican community. Many people, including myself, have Chinese last names and Chinese Jamaican grandparents. Mixing of Afro-Jamaican and Chinese culture does not, however, dismiss anti-Blackness that exists on a global, systemic level. Even in Jamaica, where Black people with Chinese last names are common, there have been derogatory terms for mixed-race people in the Chinese community, like 'Half-past Eleven,' whose original Chinese meaning is 'not quite full' but alludes to, "lacking something, intrinsic or absence of some essence to make a whole Chinese" (Shibata 64). This rejection places Black Chinese, or Afro-Chinese, people in a precarious position in which they are constantly navigating a culture that does not always embrace them back:

My brothers send funny videos on WhatsApp that remind me of growing up with our grandma. One time, I joined a family Facebook group by my extended Chinese family, and I sent a funny video about Chinese grandmas on Lunar New Year. All I said was Kung Hei Fat Choy. This real Chinese man who is supposed to be my cousin wrote this rude comment that was obviously about my being Black. I won't even repeat it. You know I made my profile private after that (3).

While Bryan described the Festival of the Harvest Moon, the Chinese New Year, and Gah-San as events that still weld the Chinese community together (24), they also serve as a place of rejection for people who are not accepted by the community. While a funny video is used in one instance as maintenance of her Chinese heritage and traditions (Sinclair and Cunningham 27), it became a catalyst for being Othered once shared with who she called 'real' Chinese people. This speaks to the way identity is not just about the self, but also the consensus and agreement of others (Litchmore et al. 18).

This complex position often leaves Black children of immigrants with a multicultural background as “citizen outsiders”, or people, “who live on the margins of society because of their racial and ethnic status despite being full citizens” (Reyes 17; Baeman 2017). In this case, she is not fully American, though she was born there, not fully Chinese, though she grew up celebrating Lunar New Year with her Chinese grandmother, and not fully Jamaican, though it’s where most of her culture is rooted. Similarly, participant (2), who has an Indian Jamaican grandparent, does not identify with either culture, and neither identifies as fully American nor Jamaican.

### **Us versus Them: A Layered Identity**

We can examine how they identified as part of some groups and not others by observing the flexibility with which pronouns were used to navigate into and out of different identities. The layers of identity observed were: (1) Jamaican; (2) children of Jamaican immigrants; (3) children of Caribbean immigrants; (4) African diaspora, or Black; and (5) children of immigrants.

#### Layer 1: Jamaican Long-Distance Nationalism

“When I’m scrolling just waiting for the bus or eating breakfast and find Jamaican posts, I’m like ‘Oh that’s my culture’. I kinda feel a sense of pride. I don’t have that kind of relationship with America. I love funny Jamaican posts — it kinda feels like an inside joke” (1). While speaking about this, their phone pinged to notify that a Bob Marley poster had been delivered, which prompted laughter about the irony of a Jamaican poster being delivered while talking about Jamaican pride. In itself, this was an inside joke, which is understood only by people with special knowledge of something



Figure 1

(Merriam-Webster). In this case, the ‘insiders’ are Jamaicans who understand traditional Patois and references to Jamaican culture. Figure 1 represents an Instagram post that references a phrase in Patois that participant (3) shared.

"That Verzuz battle on Instagram between Bounty Killer and Beenie Man was a big deal for us. Our culture was displayed in a very American realm where they were also interested, which is really rare" (3). In this instance, “us” places her within Jamaican identity, juxtaposed with Americans as “them”. This was common in the conversation when discussing Jamaican culture within the context of the U.S., and aligns with Litchmore et al.’s observation of second-generation Caribbean and African immigrants who used ‘they’ to refer to Canadians, though they were born in Canada themselves (18). Children of immigrants form a relationship with Jamaica that is comparable to Anderson’s long-distance nationalism. It, “binds together immigrants, their descendants, and those who have remained in their homeland into a single transborder citizenry. Citizens residing in the territorial homeland view emigrants and their descendants as part of the nation, whatever legal citizenship the émigrés may have” (Glick Schiller and Fouron 20). Even Haitians expressed second-generation Haitians who were born abroad are Haitian because of the “language of blood” (167). This placement of Jamaican culture within an ‘America realm’ also exemplifies a negotiated place within a more mainstreamed culture (Sinclair and Cunningham 27).

While they are forming a hybrid identity that involves a degree of long-distance nationalism, the Jamaican culture that immigrant parents are passing on is often based on the version of Jamaica that they left behind. “...like a time capsule of culture, it’s music what my parents listened to when they left Jamaica. Sometimes my parents won’t understand certain Jamaican videos. In a way it’s an entirely different place than what they knew” (2). Jamaican immigrants often refer to their birth country as, “Back Home.” As described by Isis Semaj-Hall, “Unlike home, ‘Back Home’ is not on any map. It is only accessible via nostalgia” (98). This is also exemplified in, “My family will stream videos together of YouTubers sharing their life, spearfishing, cooking, and stuff. They’ll talk about places they recognize, stories from their childhood, and I just take it all in and I’ll ask them to tell me more so I can have the story” (1). YouTube is used as a tool for Jamaican diaspora families to share culture with their children.



Brinkerhoff described how the Internet's interactive components, like social media, become a tool for Diaspora storytelling and sharing that enables members to make sense of their experiences and feelings in the encounter between cultures and identities (85). This allows the children to strengthen their relationship to Jamaica and their long-distance nationalism through a mediated lens.

### Layer 2: Children of the Jamaican Diaspora: Hybrid Identity

"I always make it clear that I'm not Jamaican, that my parents are. Other people introducing me will say that I'm Jamaican more than I will" (2). 'Jamaican' is used with different meanings: to describe his Jamaica-born parents, and himself, as having Jamaican heritage. He is negotiating his identity with labels of identity that are highly flexible (Litchmore et al. 29). "Probably 80% of my Instagram messages with my friends who have Jamaican families is just us sending funny reels and memes back and forth about Jamaican immigrant parents. I think it's just nice when other people can relate to daily life with Jamaican parents" (4). These quotes demonstrate how children of Jamaican immigrants share a common experience that they discover through sharing social media. Figure 2 shows Tweets of children of Jamaicans expressing their specific experiences growing up with Jamaican parents. By sharing relatable videos and making clear distinctions between their parents' 'Jamaican-ness' and their own, they establish their own hybrid identity that is in some ways Jamaican, but only be experienced outside of Jamaica. I share Oh's position that "many of the studies, particularly in the US, argue for transnational connection," and that, "it is not transnational cultural connection but rather the localization of the transnational which is important in forming hybrid identities - identities that are situated in the local and that draw upon the transnational for symbolic ethnic meaning" (262). This case study shows how the hybrid identity of



Figure 2

children of Jamaican immigrants is heavily influenced by their experience at the intersection of multiple identities.

### Layer 3: Globalization and Children of Caribbean Immigrants

Coupled with globalization, geographic proximity and shared colonial history that Jamaica has with Caribbean and West African countries has allowed culture to be transported throughout the region, "Even if it's a Jamaican meme, I'll share it with one of my Haitian friends and we'll be like, 'why are Caribbean parents like this.'

There're traits we share, so it's nice to get to know their culture" (1). Giddens' statement that "Globalisation isn't only about what is 'out there', remote and far away from the individual. It is an 'in here' phenomenon too, influencing intimate and personal aspects of our lives" (12) frames this phenomenon as conceivable that American children whose parents were born in Jamaica, Haiti, or Nigeria, could have parents who share values or behaviors, creating a common identity in their children.

### Layer 4: Black Identity as the African Diaspora

As discussed, the racialized nature of their identity formation can lead to Black American children of Jamaican immigrants feeling Othered by some racial groups, such as Chinese Jamaicans or white Americans. This shared experience of racism, and the understanding that they all have African ancestry; however, also reinforces Black identity, regardless of where their parents were born. For example, "I usually find myself rooting for Jamaica during track and field especially. As for America, I

don't feel as much of a connection, but when I see Black people making records in America, I feel proud. Or if Jamaica didn't win, that's annoying but at least an African country won" (1). In these examples, there is comradeship that is shared with other Black people, regardless of their nationality, which indicates an imagined community based on shared racial experience. "When Issa Rae went viral for saying she was rooting for everybody Black at the Emmy's, I just remember walking into work the next week and my co-worker already had the shirt. We never even spoke before, we just knew" (3).

#### Layer 5: Children of Immigrants in Imagined Communities

Children of immigrants in the U.S., regardless of where their parents are from, can relate through the common experience of having immigrant parents within the U.S. "The Immigrant thing - like I know there's similar experiences to kids who are immigrants or kids of immigrants. Like jokes about discipline like that meme with the 'emotional damage' guy" (2). While Anderson originally coined 'imagined communities' to discuss nationalism, the characteristics of an imagined community can be applied to the intangible community formed by children of immigrants from various nations. Communities imply comradeship, and are imagined because the members will never know, meet, or hear from most of their fellow-members, yet in their minds lives the image of their communion (6-7). Replacing his original notion of print media as the vehicle of imagined communities with social media allows us to see how children of immigrants form an imagined community through Tweets, TikTok videos, and other social media. This supports Brinkerhoff's claim that, "while first generation diasporans may use the Internet to extend their offline social networks, younger diasporans are more likely to connect exclusively online in support of hyphenated identities" (49).

I love the resurgence of immigrant parent videos on TikTok because we used to go on YouTube and search something like 'Jamaican parents be like' to find videos. It's always interesting though when my friends from Brazil, Pakistan, or somewhere can relate to some things and not others. My favorite is the immigrant parents using sliced fruit as an apology thing on Twitter (4)

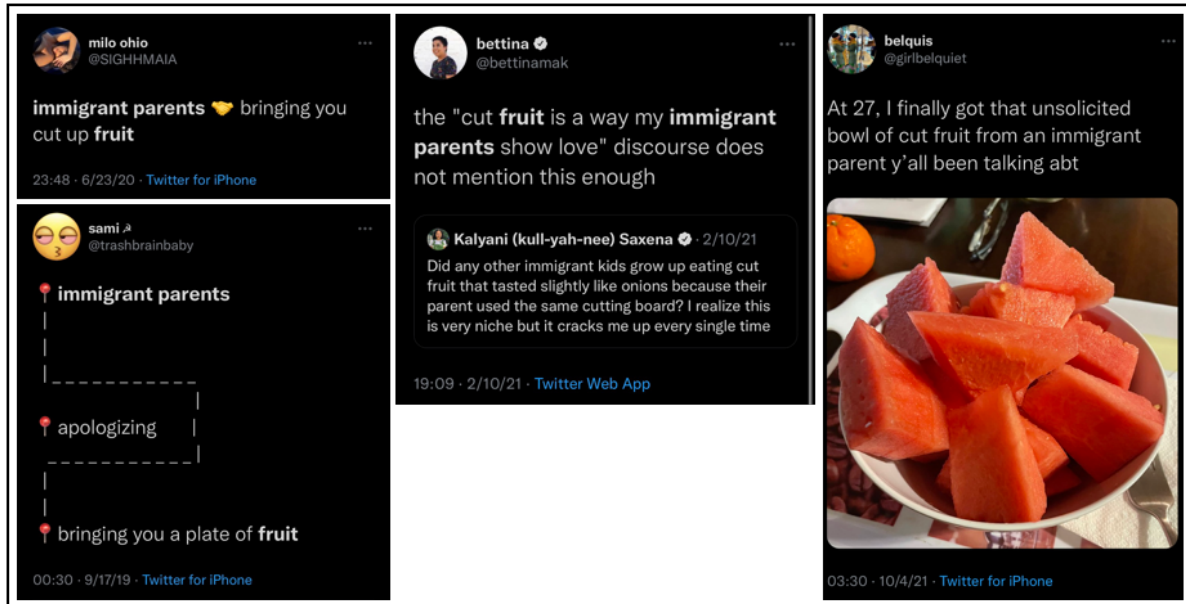


Figure 3

In Figure 3, we can observe the Tweets referenced by participant (4) of children of immigrants of diverse backgrounds sharing their common experience on Twitter.

### Conclusion

Black American children of Jamaican immigrants with a multicultural heritage are born into a society that is constantly asking them to label themselves. Because of their racial identity as Black, their cultural Jamaican identity, their experience as children of immigrants, and the remnants of multiculturalism that live on in their last names and memories of their grandparents, they are constantly negotiating their identity, which is always ‘under construction’ (Hall 2-3). Through this case study, it’s argued that the segments of their identities create a layered, hybrid identity that is used to navigate through various imagined communities. It is argued that social media is the primary tool in the formation of this identity, as it allows these individuals to construct, reinforce, and contest their identity through the consumption and sharing of media. As stated by Jennifer Brinkerhoff, “within diaspora communities, members continuously negotiate their hybrid identities through storytelling, promoting consensus on shared understandings, and sense making” (51). For Black American children of Jamaican immigrants,

social media platforms provide a space for the negotiation of their identities and for the creation of various imagined communities where identity is constructed through shared characteristics and experience (Hall 2). “The internet can also be used to create hybrid identities that, in the view of their creators, offer the best that home and host society may have to offer” (Brinkerhoff 50).

While this case study explores identity in the form of ethnicity, nationality, culture, and race, there is a significant absence in the literature about the intersection of these identities with gender and sexuality. Future study could explore the gendered nuances of hybrid identity of LGBTQ+ children of Jamaican immigrants due to their use of social media as a place to explore their gendered cultural identity experience.



Figure 4

Throughout the conversations in this study, many individuals referenced social media hashtags, including: #GrowingUpCaribbean; #GrowingUpBlack; #JamaicanParentsBeLike; and #ImmigrantParents. Because these hashtags directly correlate with the layered identities

discussed in this case study, further research could explore how these hashtags are used by children of immigrants in the formation their digital imagined communities.

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