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Hyphenated Identity and Negotiated Intersectionality: A Memoir of a First-Generation Nigerian-American Male Teacher in an Inner City Title 1 Elementary School in Georgia

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A MEMOIR OF A FIRST-GENERATION NIGERIAN-AMERICAN MALE TEACHER IN AN

INNER-CITY TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN GEORGIA

by

GERALD CHIDIEBERE NWACHUKWU

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a memoir where I tell my stories of negotiating cultures, races, ethnicities, and identities in Nigeria, and in the United States as a first-generation Nigerian-American teacher in an inner-city elementary school in Georgia. As a labeled African American upon entry into the United States, I did not understand the meaning of being Black because everybody in Nigeria is Black. In becoming Black, I became racialized, marginalized, and lumped into the African American ethnicity. I was rejected for not being Black enough in the United States nor Nigerian enough in Nigeria. Theoretically, I draw upon a wide array of works such as *Reframing Blackness and Black Solidarities* (Dei, 2017), *The Rhizome of Blackness* (Ibrahim, 2014), *Americana* (Adichie, 2014), and critical race psychoanalysis regarding the complexity of Black identities (Fanon, 1952/2008). Methodologically, I draw from *A River Forever Flowing* (He, 2003), *What It Means to An American* (Walzer, 1996), *The Education of a British Protected Child* (Achebe, 2009), *Home and Exile* (Achebe, 2000), *The Story of a Young South African Martyr and his Struggle to Raise Black Consciousness* (Woods, 1978), *I Write What I Like* (M. Biko, 1978), *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015), and *Floating in Most Peculiar Ways* (Chude-Sokei, 2012). Five discoveries have emerged from my dissertation inquiry. Experiencing triple marginalization--marginalized in Nigeria as an Igbo, in America as Black, being perceived not to be Black enough as an African American nor as an Igbo/Nigerian American, I feel constantly displaced to be "neither here nor there" (He, 2003, 2010, 2022), which characterizes my Igbo/Nigerian cultural and linguistic existence as a first-Generation Nigerian-American dwelling in-between languages, cultures, and identities (Baldwin, 2008; Dubois, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014; Imoagene, 2019; Greer, 2013). Although my life experience of the ethnic, political, cultural, religious

rivalries and divisive politics in Nigeria did not teach me anything about being Black in the United States, it has shown me that Igbo heritages need to be preserved, protected, and propagated as I struggle to thrive as a Nigerian-America. Linguistic and cultural differences within Black heritages are often obscured, homogenized, or ignored in mainstream curriculum theories, practice, and policies, which colonizes African Diasporas as we struggle for racial, linguistic, and social justice. Although composing a memoir to understand my life experiences in Nigeria, in the United States, and in-between is excruciatingly painful and emotional, it liberates to make meaning out of deep personal experiences which could not be expressed otherwise. There is an increasing need to develop an African Diaspora curriculum (Hall, 2022; King 2022) which draws from historical, cultural, and linguistic experiences of Africans as exemplified in literary texts by African authors to "legitimize [African heritages and] epistemologies," foster the "wellbeing of African-descended people," flourish "human freedom from dehumanizing" (King, 2022) schooling, and create hopes and dreams for all.

INDEX WORDS: Hyphenated identity, Negotiated intersectionality, A First-Generation Nigerian-American Male Teacher, Memoir

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PROLOGUE

In this study, I examine how I negotiate my cultural, racial, and linguistic differences as a first-generation Nigerian-American elementary school teacher in a Georgia inner city elementary school. As a foreign-born teacher of color, and of course, one with an accentuated hyphen, I face several challenges interacting with administrators, parents, students, and colleagues. I find that most of my encounters at work harbor deep layers of ethnocentric pretenses and differences in cultural norms that have ascriptive or codified values.

There is a notable vacuum in literature providing a forum for discussion of the difficulties experienced by educators from diverse geographical origins and language backgrounds. In addition to my stories, I weave in stories of a group of foreign-born teachers to draw implications for teacher education.

In sum, all issues relating to me as a non-native educator such as linguistic, cultural, and social differences tend to have elicited bias, stereotypes, and possibly racist tendencies, and have created an identity crisis. For example, the exposure to cultures in the United States and a sudden shift from my African cultures to cultures in the United States has triple significance: (1) It creates tensions and unresolved questions about ethical considerations. (2) There is ambivalence in allegiance and alienations. (3) Something I perceive as "neither here nor there" (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 2017; He, 2003, 2010; Saïd, 1994) phenomenon, a feeling of hopelessness, which left marks at every intersection or crossroads of my life depicting a world that continues to shape me unevenly.

This feeling of alienation forms the background to my understanding of a new social order and culture. The resolution of these tensions as Cruickshank and Rubina (2012) stated is often seen in double – barreled identity labels such as "Asian-American," "Greek-Australian" etc. The systemic imperative (labeling, forced association), which gave me an identity upon arrival to the United States as an "African American," also gave me a tracking number which further labeled me as not only a Black African immigrant, but also a Black African American. In the African American community, I am perceived as "*different*" and referred to as "*my African brother*." I have discovered I am excluded and "*othered*" by the

African community as not being Black enough, and the White Americans perceive me as an African immigrant. Ironically, my fellow Nigerian countrymen see me as "*Americana*" implying a shift in worldview that is also suggestive of a mixed-culture, not pure or lacking originality. The idea is that being a resident in America has transformed my overall persona and values to a culture that is not only alien to Nigeria, but significantly different. It is this ambivalence of "tripled otherness" and multi-hyphenations that places me in such a precarious situation. I am therefore neither an American, African American or Nigerian.

In my dissertation, I want to rediscover myself amidst contradictions. I want to raise the question: *What has changed and how do those shifts impact my current functioning as a teacher with triple hyphens?* These associations and wavering identity conflicts set the tone and impact my understanding of place, role, and significance as a male, foreign-born African or rather Nigerian-American elementary school teacher with cultural, social, and linguistic differences.

My physical appearance or racial identity is easy to decipher once I engage in a conversation with someone. Occasionally, I come across subtle intimidations when frantic efforts are made by mainstream cultures to identify my racial background. This probe begins when I am given away by my accent, linguistic or cultural difference. I have heard that parents would go to the principal to inquire about my professional competence and later reported that they were worried about my accent, until they were reassured by the principal of my professional competence. This sort of profiling coupled with patronizing remarks are a common occurrence and predisposes me to certain levels of humiliation. Indeed, I entertained all manner of questions such as: "*You speak good English!*" "*I like your accent,*" "*Where is that accent from?*" or "*what is your nationality?*"

In view of the barrage of questions attesting to differences in languages and cultures, it is possible to scurry through such indignations with a mild laughter and a quick response such as "*I am Georgian*" or "*New Yorker.*" This vivid sarcasm would do little to stop the desperation and inquisitiveness of some parents or administrators. Many parents will persist with follow up questions such as: "I understand, but where are you from originally? Or what is your heritage?" Responding to the barrage of questions can be

embarrassing, humiliating or both because these questions highlight the perceived "difference" socially, culturally, linguistically, or otherwise. Alienation is felt when these questions emanate. Thus, I use exile pedagogy (He, 2010) and Anti-colonial theory and decolonial praxis (Dei & Lordan, 2016) to make sense of my identity and positionality as a teacher in the United States.

The cultural, linguistic, and social differences of the teacher pose a communication challenge and is consistent with Hofstede's (1986) conclusion that:

> When teachers and students come from different cultures, such as in the context of economic development programs, many perplexities can arise. These can be due to different social positions of teachers and students in the two societies, to differences in the relevance of the curriculum for the two societies, to differences in profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations of the two societies, or to differences in expected teacher/student and student/student interaction. (pp. 300-320)

There are times when my understanding of students and parents are different. These perceived differences between teachers and students reveal non-congruent cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Sometimes the students are curious and interested in learning about my African heritage and the inquisitiveness is based on cultural and linguistic differences. When students state they have difficulty understanding my accent, they often have trouble conceptualizing and have less academic success in my class. The need and scope of this study is related to my personal professional experience as a foreign-born K-12 teacher and the trends found in literature about foreign-born teachers in the United States.

K-12 teachers of record with English as a second language tend to have rich educational experiences resulting from exposure to multiple cultures and learning across international boundaries. Yet linguistic and cultural differences may influence the perception of students about foreign-born K-12 teacher's pedagogical power. The recent data taken from IPUMS USA reports various years of the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey by the University of Minnesota. In 1950, approximately 4 percent of teachers were foreign-born. The percentage dropped to 2 percent by 1960. Following global recession and economic downturn around the world, the foreign-born fraction has increased steadily, having just topped 8 percent

in the most recent data. In addition, the report pointed to an increase in diversity (i.e., race, ethnicity, language, culture, socio-economic status, religion, disability, sexual orientation) of the overall foreign-born teacher population. Han (2014) citing the work of Banks (2009), Gay (2013), Gay & Kirkland (2003), Grant & Gibson (2011), Ladson-Billing (2011), Lucas (2013), Nieto (2000), Sleeter (2001), and Villagas (2002a) reported how school age students' backgrounds are becoming increasingly diversified. While Hans (2014) advocated for an increase in understanding multicultural strategies to benefit the growing diversity, she did not address the continuum of this diversity which included foreign-born teachers (K-12) with cultural and linguistic differences that can impact the learning of these student populations.

Foreign-born teachers with accents are sometimes misunderstood, some must re-learn English, how to spell in the American way and improve their written expression. For example, in *Voices of Foreign-Born African American Pedagogical Accent in Teacher Education: Narrating Self within/against Pedigrees and Stereotypes of Race and National Origin*, Mutua (2010) reports:

> I found myself having to re-learn not only to speak but to write the English language. I spoke and wrote with an accent; and I learned to be bi-lingual in English. With a lot of complaining and red marks on my graded papers, I re-learned to write English (though ironically, I held a first degree in English and had taught high school English language and English literature for some years in Kenya.) Specifically, I re/unlearned to spell and to rescript my written expression in a way that was distinctly American. I un/relearned English diction (e.g., catalogue became catalog; programme became program; - How do you do? became - How are you doing? and so on). (p.19)

Like Mutua, the order of many foreign-born teachers may contain elements of their native language which further complicates communication. Snippets of her firsthand experiences show utterances where the word in her spoken English sentence is modeled after word order in her Kimeru language further complicating the understanding of what is trying to be said. These experiences and objectifications are

tantamount to codifications or ascriptive identities that conform to lack of equity and unbalanced collegiality (Mutua in Obiakor et al, 2010, p. 29).

Over the recent years, the promotion, retention and recognition of scholarly work and practice for foreign-born teachers continue to be mired with patronizing and often operationalizing neo-liberal and egalitarian idealism, which suggests many foreign-born African teachers who are hired to meet the political correctness of equal employment opportunities are not necessarily based on merit (Obiakor, et al, 2010). Accents create linguistic identities which can be easy tradeoffs among other limiting factors such as stereotypes, colonizing and racializing behaviors that position foreign-born teachers as unequal to their professional peers. It is against this background that Modarressi addresses a significant epithet about foreign accents in the American classroom. Writing with an accent in *Language and Translation in Post-Colonial Literatures Multilingual Contexts, Translation Texts*, Modarressi (1992) stated that:

> The new language of any immigrant writer is obviously accented and, at least initially, inarticulate...writing with an accented voice is organic to the mind of the immigrant writer. It is not something that one can invent. It is frequently buried beneath personal inhibitions and doubts. The accented voice is loaded with hidden messages from our cultural heritage, messages that often reach beyond the capacity of ordinary words of any language. (pp. 32-47)

In terms of positionality, like Mutua & Swadener (2004), due to the maturational age of the students I teach, and the high literacy focus on elementary school age children, as a foreign-born African, I face the same level of challenges and hegemonic power arrangements that work to silence the Other.

There is a concern that the power relationship between the administration and me has a tremendous impact on my collective experience. As a teacher of color, I want to examine the impact it has had on whom I have become. The re-examination of teacher-student relationships in terms of what roles each plays in teaching and learning is relevant to understanding cultural and linguistic differences, even as the power structure tilts to the side of the teacher. In this case, the students and I can be objectified in the face of uneven teacher power structure. In *Fugitive Cultures* (1996), Giroux stated:

Power also resides in the cultural authority of those who name, define, and legitimize how knowledge is selected and framed; and often, the underlying principles that structure teacher student relationships are neither open to critical analysis nor are they legitimated by an alternative set of ethical and political referents. (p.19).

Giroux implies that the decisions about quality and legitimacy of knowledge are not contestable, flexible, or reflexive places. The power resides in mainstream culture which means that the ideals are placed outside of minority norms or influences and placed in spaces of biased assumptions.

In this dissertation, I use memoir as a form of inquiry to tell stories of how I negotiate my cultural and linguistic differences as a first-generation Nigerian-American elementary school teacher in an inner-city school in the state of Georgia.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

As an immigrant and a foreign-born teacher of color, I encountered disrespect within the K-12 education, particularly regarding cultural and linguistic differences. On multiple occasions, some of my colleagues and bosses complain about my accent and cultural disconnect due to my speaking patterns. While in college, my immediate graduate supervisor insisted on calling me by my middle and last name because from her point of view it was original and helpful in defining my heritage. Her recognition of the significance and explanation provided me with a sense of belonging at the college; however, the case was different outside the university.

As a result of racial, cultural, and linguistic differences, my job specification was slightly different in some respects. My job placement indicated the most daunting tasks or arduous jobs— assigned mostly to students deemed unteachable, particularly those with significant mental illness, which felt like professional babysitting. These limitations often made me feel as though I was lacking the skills to teach. While the mispronunciation of my name with little or no effort to learn the correct pronunciation can be significantly understated when critically deconstructed within the context of historical and systemic racism, it illustrates the lack of care for my Nigerian heritage. Moreover, various forms of discrimination continue to create ambiguities suggesting displacement and "alien" status.

The various forms of alienation perpetuate conflicts rooted in human differences such as nationality, race, class, culture, sex, and linguistic differences in society. These differences influenced my supervisors to express a culture of exclusion, disrespect, and racism, sometimes through intent but most often through failure to understand. For example, when I first faced the notion of Blackness, it became fundamental to negotiate intersections of race and ethnicity as well as operate between languages, cultures, and places. I understood I am "neither here nor there" because I am excluded from the African American community as not being Black enough, while being seen not only as a foreigner in the White Community, but on the flipside Nigerians back at home accuse me of cultural heterogeneity thus suggesting a lack of purity or in

other words a mixture of cultures. Like a beast of all nations, I have no defined identity hence the onset of an identity complex.

In this dissertation, I reason how these subtle misrepresentations connected to slavery, colonialism or imperialism, neo-liberal unfair economic exploitation practices in Nigeria, and the British government collaboration with Northern Nigerian Muslims, perpetuate puppetry and dispossession of other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Early British Empire

The abolition of slavery in Britain in the 1800s saw the British colonial trading post in Nigeria make a rapid shift to manufactured goods and expanded agricultural products such as rubber, palm oil, and timber. Thankfully, crude oil was discovered in 1957 after the British had already committed to exiting the Nigerian polity; otherwise, it would have been more than a herculean task to get Britain out of Nigeria and West Africa in general due to the expansive economic value of crude oil.

Further assertions in this dissertation explain how the British colonial government in Nigeria created the present institutions to continue to destabilize Nigeria politically, economically, and religiously. The Macpherson constitution (1951-54) embedded regionalism in the Nigerian Constitution and created a hydra-headed inter-ethnic conflict which has continued unabated today. Britain has much to be blamed for Nigeria's failure because of its acceptance of feudalism in the North and agreeing to work with feudal lords. Culturally established patterns of submissiveness of groups in the North work well with the British Indirect Rule (IR) policy by mainly allowing uneducated Northern Islamic leaders and mediocre politicians to hold onto power. Because the Northern leader was obedient to the British government, Britain put Northern interests above other ethnic groups and subsequently handed authority over to the North upon exiting Nigeria. The Islamic leaders refused education and were not ready to fill positions when the South was ready to take those responsibilities. There were disagreements and violence everywhere, including a violent confrontation between Akintola Williams and Awolowo and the Action Group (AG) division, the massive killing of the Igbos residents in northern Nigeria by the Alamgir's and the Nigeria government allowing the

killing to continue, the Tiv Riot, and the 1966 coup that preceded the Biafran Nigerian War of 1967. The war took three million Igbo lives and brought about marginalization and a state of quandary and neglect of all Igbos in Nigeria. I became a benefactor of the mistreatment because of cultural identity and negotiated my identity to survive in eastern Nigeria. The mistreatment of the Igbos and the draconian leadership of the northern military leaders suppressed all oppositions and promulgated decrees that exacerbated the sufferings of the Igbos.

Furthermore, the enduring dispossession and impasse of the Biafran Nigerian War and the regional and ethnic politics have had a lasting impact on the mass migration of Igbo youth to the United States of America and Europe, respectively. This mass movement of young intellectuals in search of greener pastures has been termed "*Brain Drain*."

This dissertation describes how I was disposed of in Nigeria and highlights how pre- and post-colonial and British government actions in Nigeria have continued to impact me even as an immigrant living in the United States. It speaks to the imbalance, vacillation of my identity, the troubling discovery of racial identity, exclusion, marginalization, racism, and the preparation to being Black in a racially strained American Society.

This dissertation searches for ways to develop a positive racial identity following a multicultural framework, alerting teachers to adapt pedagogical strategies and curricula to foster racial tolerance, understanding, and respect within the classroom for individual, as well as foreign-born, students of color. Having experienced life in-between these landscapes-cultures and curricula as a student and in-service teacher, it is instructive for teachers to research avenues for helping students achieve positive racial identity.

My life struggles help me identify and describe the stressors of my identity based on a historical understanding and the impacts on finding a positive and a productive place in society. To these ends, I firmly believe teachers should help students understand racial and cultural backgrounds, including critical race theory, provide students with a more diverse multicultural curriculum, and generate cooperative and inclusive education by focusing on culturally relevant pedagogy.

I was born in the southeastern part of Nigeria, West Africa. The southeastern Nigeria is mostly inhabited by the Igbo tribe. As an adult Igbo man, I encountered discrimination and marginalization while in Nigeria because of ethnic and religious differences. Examples of these kinds of discrimination are evident in the distribution of infrastructures such as social amenities, industries, and the establishment of tertiary institutions in the country. In addition, new college graduates from Eastern Nigeria are denied employment opportunities on the basis of federal character- "a morally bankrupt and deeply corrupt Nigerian form of the far more successful affirmative action in the United States" (Achebe, 2012, p.78). The impact of the joblessness is noticeable in the way many brilliant graduates from the Igbo tribe emigrate, notably Europe and the United States. On the contrary, new graduates from other parts of Nigeria are gainfully employed upon graduation. There is a systemic imbalance in all sectors of the Nigerian economy.

The current federal character is based on the incorrect census figure of 1963-1964. The census helped to create the present structure of the country. Nigeria is fractured by the impasse of colonial rule and thus structured to thread on a thin ethnic and religious lattice. These events culminated into a civil war between 1967 and 1970, which many observers described as a pogrom or ethnic cleansing of the Igbo tribe. Other issues rocking the stability of Nigeria include the election crisis of 1964 as well as the western Nigeria election of 1965. The Nigerian government created an environment filled with hate and resentment, sponsoring persecutions, and terminations of Nigerian citizens based on their ethnicity. As a result of this ethnic cleansing, the Igbos lost a sense of country and belonging.

According to Waltzer (1992)," the United States is most importantly a union of states but of nations, race, and religion, all of them dispersed and inter-mixed, without ground of their own" (Waltzer, 1992, p. 15). This aberration or unusual mix-up of backgrounds is similar to the social and political arrangement of the Nigerian polity, in that Nigeria is a conglomeration of many nations with diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. These nations are diverse in many other ways, they may inter-mix, but strangely, they also differ in their belief systems and political orientations. The different ethnic groups are nations in their own grounds but brought together by British colonial administration to serve the imperial majesty's

interest. As a result, ethnic groups such as the Igbos and other minority groups who are nations in their own right were tacitly amalgamated to favor the northern Nigeria who are friends with the British. The north became territorially grounded and institutionalized while the rest of the country continued to experience political and economic marginalization.

This unequal distribution of power and resources is the result of British collusion with the Islamic north to the detriment of other regions in Nigeria. Being an Igbo man has its distinctiveness and stereotypes similar to my experiences upon settling in the United States. Examples of these Igbo's stereotypes include, being self-centered, over ambitious, domineering, and greedy. It looks like these inequities, strong hatred and ethnocentrisms followed me to the Southeastern United States. Once again, the problem of ethnic loyalty and displacement seem to have a lot in common with the kind of exclusion I faced with African Americans while in college, and in my teaching career at various school districts in the Southern United States. Basically, Blackness has a different meaning in the West because the term "Black" is associated with negative connotations where Blacks are subjected to racial discrimination, marginalization or even death. In the United States, the government institutions such as the police, courts, immigration, and educational systems are agents of oppression and racism. In contrast, being Black in Nigeria has a caveat of its own since discrimination is based on political, ethnic, tribal and religious differences propagated by British imperialism.

The Nigerian institutions and apparatuses of the government were used to perpetuate mayhem against the Igbo tribe and other minorities in the north prior to the Nigerian civil war. It was reported over thirty thousand innocent Igbos were killed in what many observers classified as a genocide. One thing disturbing is how current Nigerian political practices continue to mirror regional, ethnic, and religious affiliations, which were the key issues causing the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. For example, prior to Nigerian independence in 1960, political parties were established along ethnic and religious lines with Dr. Nmadi Azikiwe (an Igbo leader) setting up the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), which later became the National Council of Nigerian Citizens in 1944, the Action Group (AG) in the west, organized

by Chief Obafemi Awolowo (a Yoruba leader) in 1951, and in the north, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and Amino Kano launched the Northern People's Congress (NPC). According to Achebe (2012), the British were all aware of the inter-ethnic tensions and posturing for power among the three main ethnic groups (The Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa/Fulani). By 1951, "the British had divided the country into the Northern, Eastern and Western Regions with their own respective houses of assembly, to contain this rising threat" (Achebe, 2012, p. 46).

Similarly, in present-day Nigeria, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was constituted by the Southwest, the All-Progressive Congress (APC) - an Igbo political group from the southeast. In retrospect, nothing has really changed in Nigeria regarding the political arrangements, arguing and ethnic tension. These political parties continue to exacerbate economic and political instability due to the preponderance of ethnic tensions and lawlessness. Currently, these ethnic tensions create a platform for resistance and empower ethnic and religious based agitation such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Niger Delta Avengers Militant Group (NDA), Afanifere Group (Omo Oduduwa) and terrorist organizations such as the Herdsmen Group-a domestic based terrorist organization, and Boko Haram, etc.

IPOB and MASSOB are secessionist movements in Nigeria, associated with Igbo nationalism, which supports the recreation of an independent state of Biafra. There are two arms to the government, the Biafra Government in Exile and Biafra Shadow Government. Mohammed Yusuf founded the sect Boko Haram in 2002 in Maiduguri, the capital of the Northeastern state of Bornu. He established a religious complex and school attracting poor Muslim families from across Nigeria and neighboring countries. The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), a militant group in the Niger Delta, publicly announced its existence in March 2016. This group has expressed dissatisfaction with the operations of foreign oil corporations in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. The Niger Delta Militants feel they are being exploited, particularly the Ogoni and the Ijaw people. As a result of this feeling of marginalization, the NDA have attacked oil-producing wells and exploration causing political unrest throughout the Obasanjo presidency to the present Buhari

administration. The government as was the case during the prewar period has failed in maintaining peace and tranquility, resulting in instability, rumors of war, unsafe climate, and mass migration. For example, the Boko Hara group kidnapped 365 young schoolgirls, forcing them into prostitution and accepting the Islamic religion against their will. These ethnic and religious tensions threaten foreign investments and are unhealthy for the economic prosperity and stability of Nigeria.

I grew up under these circumstances navigating the difficult terrain of being a member of the most hated tribe in Nigeria and suffered alienation, discrimination, and marginalization. In retrospect, Nigerians blame Britain for unjustly unifying the disparate cultures into one country without an in-depth understanding of the historic and cultural differences of the independent nations. This tacit amalgamation of Nigeria is the fulcrum of British short sightedness and failure as described by Forsyth (2001/1966):

> At the time of Nigerian independence, Britain was pleased to claim much of the credit for the seemingly early success of the experiment; Britain cannot now avoid much of the responsibility for the failure, for Nigeria was essentially a British and not a Nigerian experiment. (p.25)

The attitude of Whitehall's political thinkers failed to consider the realities of cultural and ethnic differences and brushed under the carpet all the manifestations which tend to prove to the contrary how the theory of Nigeria would not fit into practice.

I return to the impasse of the British government in Nigeria and its effect on the wellbeing of the Igbos. Britain knew the value of their colonies, and the natural resources they possessed such as the profitable Case Oil, coal, gold, tin, columbite, cocoa, palm oil, ground nuts, and rubber as well as the immense human resources and intellectual capital (Achebe, 2012, p.47). As stated earlier, the British government was overly concerned with favoring the north despite limited academic achievement and managerial acumen. The result of this action dismantled the structures in place for meritocracy in favor of mediocrity. To move ahead with the transition to self-governance would necessitate a careful reorganization or grouping of the people of Nigeria in clusters based on region, common ancestry, culture, loyalty to the Crown and human capital. The British discovered how the Yoruba's and the Igbos were extremely smart;

therefore, a coalition of the west and the east would work to forestall British influence and interests. This was greatly feared as the colonies became increasingly important to Great Britain's war effort by providing a steady stream of revenue from exports of agricultural products –palm oil, ground nuts, cocoa, rubber, etc." (Achebe, 212, p.44). An interview given by Mr. Harold Smith, the former British labor officer in Nigeria, confirmed Britain's fear of coalition government involving Awolowo, Enahore (Action Group) and Azikiwe (NCNC), and described these individuals as exceptionally brilliant, and therefore, posed a great danger to British interests in Nigeria. Instead of pairing the East and the West, the British government preferred to pair the NCNC (dominated by Eastern Political Group) with the NPC (Northern political Group) resulting in Azikwe emerging as the ceremonial president of Nigeria, while real government powers reside with the prime minister, Abukakar Tafawa Belewa of the Northern People's Congress (NPC).

The minority groups of the Niger-Delta, the Midwest, and the Middle Belt of Nigeria were always dissatisfied with the notion they had to fit into the tripod of the three larger ethnic groups, the Igbos, Yoruba, and the Hausa/Fulani of the north. This uncomfortable clustering made it apparent the north had become Nigeria's ruling party. Lately, the issue of religious intolerance and the Fulanis ambition to Islamize Nigeria have continued to create further tensions in addition to pre-established British political maneuvers in Nigeria. This historical fact was vividly captured by Achebe (2012): "It is now widely known that Sir James Robertson (governor general of Nigeria) played an important role in overseeing the elections (lack thereof) at independence, throwing his weight behind Abubakar Tafawa Belwa, who was tapped to become Nigeria's first prime minister." Later it was discovered that a courageous English junior civil servant named Harold Smith had been selected by no other than Sir James Robertson to oversee the rigging of the first election in Nigeria so its compliant friends in the [Northern Nigeria] would win power, dominate the country, and serve British interests after independence" (p.59).

Why have the British aggregated Nigeria based on culture and ethnicity and qualitatively assessed each ethnic group prior to Nigeria's independence? Perhaps this aggregation may have helped elicit a larger set of questions pertaining to the "Divide and Rule" policy which aimed at institutionalizing the northern

Nigeria oligarchical dominance, manipulate census figures, tampering of the 1954/1957 election results, and the generalized idea of remotely controlling the natural resources of Nigeria. It is here the physicalness, power structures and dynamics demonstrate the complicity of imperialism and neo-liberal parochial agenda in Nigeria. As evidenced in the current political situation in Nigeria today, the northern ethic groups have dominated the heads of the three arms of government, the leadership of all the security agencies, finance sector and communication in all manner suggestive of a rehash of the planning of genocide against the Tutsis by the Hutus in Rwanda. These complex tensions between diverse ethnic groups or nations explains why I left Nigeria and sheds light on common experiences in Nigeria and in the United States of America-feeling of displacement, oppressive and discriminatory employment practices, differential treatment in the workplace, exclusion or feeling of rejection, stereotypes and misconceptions, and troubled interaction with other ethnic groups. On that note, the key question becomes: What does it mean to be Black in Nigeria and in the United States? Through my past experiences in both Nigeria and the United States of America, this dissertation explores and seeks to provide ways for understanding how I negotiate my dual identities of race and ethnicity in the United States (Greer, 2013).

In this study, I examine how I negotiate my cultural, racial, and linguistic differences as a first-generation Nigerian-American elementary school teacher in a Georgian inner-city elementary school. As a foreign-born teacher of color, and of course, one with an accentuated hyphen, I face several challenges interacting with administrators, parents, students, and colleagues. I find most of my encounters at work harbor deep layers of ethnocentric pretenses and differences in cultural norms and have ascriptive or codified values. There is a notable vacuum in literature providing a forum for discussion of the difficulties experienced by educators from diverse geographical origins, and language backgrounds. In addition to my autobiographical narratives, I would like to weave in stories of a group of foreign -born teachers to draw implications for teacher education. In sum, all issues relating to me as an African/Black educator in the United States such as linguistic, cultural, and social differences tend to have elicited bias, stereotypes, and possibly racist tendencies. These experiences have created an identity crisis. The exposure to United States

culture and sudden shift from my African culture to American culture has triple significance: First, it created tensions and unresolved questions about ethical considerations. Second, there is the ambivalence in allegiance and alienation. Finally, something I perceive as "neither here nor there" (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 2017; He, 2003, 2010; Saïd, 1994) phenomenon, a feeling of hopelessness, which left marks at every intersection or crossroads of my life, depicting a world continuing to shape me unevenly. This feeling of alienation forms the background to my understanding of a new social order and culture. The resolution of these tensions as Cruickshank and Rubina (2012) stated, "is often seen in double-barreled identity labels such as "Asian-American" "Greek-Australian," etc.

This double-barreled identity parallels a systemic marking of immigrants as aliens. As a result, I was labeled from the beginning and given a new identity or image, "African American," along with a tracking number. I quickly discovered how the United States is an ethno-racial country since it groups people based on race and ethnicity. For the purpose of this discussion, I adopt Imogene's (2017) definition of ethnicity as "a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of shared historical past, and a culturally focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood" (p.6). This definition helps me to see the limitations and conflicts within the proximal host and other Black ethnicity groups in the United States. As I show in this study, even in the face of prejudice and racial discrimination, the African American's exclusion of Nigerians creates tensions spilling over to other racial relationships. The interplay of race and ethnicity along with class defines the composition and experiences of the ethno-racial groups. Because African Americans have African ancestry, they become the proximal host of Nigerians and Caribbean's (Imogene, 2017, p.5).

In the African American community, I am perceived as "different" and referred to as "*my African brother*." I have discovered how I am excluded and "Othered" by the African American community as not being Black enough, and the White Americans perceive me as an African immigrant. Ironically, my fellow Nigerian countrymen see me as "*Americana*," implying a shift in worldview that is also suggestive of a mixed-culture, not pure or lacking originality. My experience with African Americans is consistent

with Imogene's conclusion of how African Americans make certain to share how Nigerians are a different Kind of Black (Imogene, 2017, p. 6). This expression of difference or exclusion holds considerable influence on African/Black identities and what it means to be a Nigerian in the United States. Yet, I cannot distance myself from the African American community because there needs to be a way of addressing these conflicts to advance and retheorize Blackness in the United States. Progressively, being a resident in the United States has transformed my overall persona and values to a culture that is not only alien to my Nigerian social cultural experiences, but also significantly different in a variety of ways. It is this ambivalence of "tripled otherness" and multi-hyphenations that places me in such a precarious situation. I am therefore neither fully an American, African American nor Nigerian.

In my dissertation, I want to rediscover myself amidst contradictions. I want to raise the question: What has changed, and how do those shifts impact my current functioning as a teacher with triple hyphens? These associations and multiple identities bring about conflicts, sets the tone for assimilation, or hybridization and informs my understanding of place, role, and speaks to the significance of being an African/Black male teacher in the southern United States.

Some of the notable differences include my physical appearance or racial identity, and linguistic difference, which can be easily deciphered once I engage in a conversation with someone. Occasionally, I come across subtle intimidations when frantic efforts are made by mainstream cultures to identify my racial background. The probe begins when I am given away by either my accent, linguistic or cultural differences. I know parents have gone to the principal to inquire about my professional competence, and later reported how they were worried about my accent, until the principal reassured them of my professional competence. This sort of profiling, coupled with patronizing remarks, are a common occurrence and predisposes me to certain levels of humiliation. Indeed, I entertained all manner of questions such as: You speak good English! I like your accent. Where is that accent from? and What is your nationality?

In view of the barrage of questions attesting to differences in languages and cultures, it is possible to scurry through such indignations with a mild laughter and a quick response such as "I am Georgian" or "New Yorker," etc.! This vivid sarcasm would do little to stop the desperation and inquisitiveness of some parents or administrators. Many parents will persist with follow-up questions such as: "I understand, but where are you from originally? Or what is your heritage?" Responding to the bombardment of questions can be both embarrassing and/or humiliating because these types of questions highlight the perceived "*differences*" socially, culturally, linguistically, or otherwise. Alienation is felt when these questions emanate. Thus, I use exile pedagogy (He, 2010) and Anti-colonial theory and decolonial praxis (Dei & Lordan, 2016) to make sense of my identity and positionality as a teacher in the Southern United States.

The cultural, linguistic, and social differences of the teacher pose a communication challenge and is consistent with Hofstede's (1986) conclusion:

> When teachers and students come from different cultures, such as in the context of economic development programs, many perplexities can arise. These can be due to different social positions of teachers and students in the two societies, to differences in the relevance of the curriculum for the two societies, to differences in profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations of the two societies, or to differences in expected teacher/student and student/student interaction. (pp. 300-320)

There have been times when my understanding of students and parents is different. These perceived differences between teachers and students reveal non-congruent cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Sometimes the students are curious and interested in learning about my African heritage, and the inquisitiveness is based on cultural and linguistic differences. When students state that they have difficulty understanding my accent, they often have trouble conceptualizing and have less academic success in my class. The need and scope of this study is related to my personal and professional experience as a foreign-born K-12 teacher, and the trends in literature about foreign-born teachers in the United States.

K-12 teachers of record, with English as a second language, tend to have rich educational experiences, resulting from exposure to multiple cultures and learning across international boundaries. Yet linguistic and

cultural differences may influence or impact the perception of the student about the foreign-born K-12 teacher's pedagogical power. The recent data taken from IPUMS USA, reports various years of the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey by the University of Minnesota. Reportedly, in 1950, a few years after the end of World War II, approximately 4 percent of teachers were foreign-born. The percentage dropped to 2 by 1960. Following global recession and economic downturn around the world, the foreign-born fraction has increased steadily, having just topped 8 percent in the most recent data. In addition, the report pointed to an increasing diversity (i.e., race, ethnicity, language, culture, socio-economic status, religion, disability, sexual orientation) of the overall population. Han (2014) citing the work of

Banks (2009), Gay (2013), Gay & Kirkland (2003), Grant & Gibson (2011), Ladson-Billing (2011), Lucas (2013), Nieto (2000), Sleeter (2001), and Villagas (2002a) reported that school age students' backgrounds are becoming increasingly diversified. While Hans (2014) advocated for an increasing understanding of multicultural strategies to benefit the growing diversity; however, she did not address the continuum of this diversity which included foreign-born teachers (K-12) with cultural and linguistic differences impacting the teaching and learning.

Foreign-born teachers with accents are often misunderstood, some must re-learn English, how to spell in the American way and improve on written expression. For example, in *Voices of Foreign-Born African American Pedagogical Accent in Teacher Education: Narrating Self within/against Pedigrees and Stereotypes of Race and National Origin*, Mutua (2010) reports:

> I found myself having to re-learn not only to speak, but to write the English language. I spoke and wrote with an accent; and I learned to be bi-lingual in English. With a lot of complaining and red marks on my graded papers, I re-learned to write English (though ironically, I held a first degree in English, and had taught high school English language and literature in English for some years in Kenya). Specifically, I re/unlearned to spell, and to rescript my written expression in an American way, I un/relearned English diction (e.g.,

catalogue became catalog; *programme* became program; — How do you do? became —

How are you doing? and so on) (p. 19).

Like Mutua, the order of language use for many foreign-born teachers may contain elements of their native language, which further complicates difficulty in communication. Snippets of her personal experiences showing utterances where the word in her spoken English sentence is modeled after word order in her Kimeru language, further complicates understanding. These experiences and objectifications are tantamount to codifications or ascriptive identities that conforms to lack of equity and unbalanced collegiality (Mutua in Obiakor et al, 2010, p. 29). Over the recent years, the promotion, retention and recognition of scholarly work and practice for foreign-born teachers, continue to be mired with patronizing, and often operationalizing, neoliberal and egalitarian idealism, which suggests many foreign-born African teachers who are hired to meet the political correctness of equal employment opportunities, are not necessarily based on merit (Obiakor, et al, 2010). Accents create linguistic identities which are easy tradeoffs among other limiting factors such as stereotypes, colonizing and racializing behaviors positioning foreign-born teachers as unequal to their professional peers. It is against this background that Modarressi addresses a significant epithet about foreign accents in the American classroom. Writing with an accent in *Language and Translation in Post-Colonial Literatures Multilingual Contexts, Translation Texts*, Modarressi (1992) stated:

> The new language of any immigrant writer is obviously accented and, at least initially, inarticulate ... writing with an accented voice is organic to the mind of the immigrant writer. It is not something one can invent. It is frequently buried beneath personal inhibitions and doubts. The accented voice is loaded with hidden messages from our cultural heritage; messages often reach beyond the capacity of ordinary words of any language (pp. 32-47).

In terms of positionality, like Mutua & Swadener (2004), due to the maturational age of the students I teach, and the high literacy focus on elementary school age children, as a foreign-born African, I face the same level of challenges and hegemonic power arrangements working to silence the "Other".

In my teaching career, I observed the power relationship between the administration, and I impinge on my collective experience as an African/Black. My experience of Blackness in the United States is collective and normatively structured through my perception of common values, concepts, and practical social and professional relationships. I want to examine the impact of differential treatment on my overall performance as an African/Black teacher in Georgia. I want to comprehend whether or how these kinds of discrimination impact student/teacher relationship. The re-examination of teacher-student relationships in terms of what roles each plays in teaching and learning is relevant to understanding cultural and linguistic differences, even as the power structure tilts to the side of the teacher. This may predispose the "banking system" as described by Paul Freire, thus the students and the teacher can become objectified, particularly in the face of uneven power structure. As a teacher, we are told to follow the curriculum and the pacing guide. This means we are instructed on what to teach, how to teach and often mandated to follow preapproved standards of the board and the state. Teachers are subjected to standardization without regard to the individual differences and cognitive abilities of the students. African/Black teachers may experience a heavy-handed instruction on what to do and how to do it much more than other teachers.

In *Fugitive Cultures*, Giroux (1996) stated:

> Power also resides in the cultural authority of those who name, define, and legitimate how knowledge is selected and framed; and often, the underlying principles structuring teacher student relationships are neither open to critical analysis, nor are they legitimated by an alternative set of ethical and political referents. (p.19)

Giroux implies that the decisions, quality, and legitimacy of knowledge are not contestable, flexible, or reflexive places. The power resides in mainstream culture, which means the ideas are placed outside of minority norms or influences and placed in spaces of biased assumptions. In my current job, the district selects the academic skills set for the quarter and writes model lesson plans for all subjects. Teachers across the district are advised to model their lesson plans according to the standardized plan of the district. My voice as a teacher is constantly silenced or limited and so is my ability to respond to certain mistreatments

at my job and in social spaces. Given the recognition and facing the prospects of a second dethronement through standardization, how do I use my knowledge and experiences as a foreign-born teacher, a student, and an adult naturalized citizen of the United State to tell my story? To that end, I decided the best method to express this knowledge in a unique way is through memoir.

Using memoir as methodology, I will tell stories of how I negotiate my cultural and linguistic differences as a first-generation Nigerian-American elementary school teacher of color in an inner-city school in Georgia. I examine my transatlantic life experience of being Black in Nigeria and being Black in the United States. I delve into how I negotiate races, cultural, and linguistic differences in between different contexts as a first-generation Nigerian-American teacher in an inner-city elementary school in Georgia.

Being Black in Nigeria and in the United States: Contexts of Study

In Nigeria, Blackness has no implicit or explicit sociopolitical or historical definition as explained in racial politics, cultural and linguistic differences, or inequality in the West. Here in the United States, I become defined with stereotypes, known, transposed culturally, linguistically, and socially. As Ibrahim (2017) pointed out in the metaphor of the rhizomatic assemblance, the notion of Blackness is a "new becoming" beginning a new or multiple identities, always fluid and in the middle (p. 2). This finding suggests I encountered Blackness upon emigration or migration to the West, and there is no fixity or end to the impact of racial polarity or divisions. There were imaginary fences and limitations to participating in the Black American culture or my home culture. In order to become a member of a collective group based on racial, ethnic, or religious background, I am compelled to negotiate among the different cultural frameworks.

Change in perspective, as well as the identity, was imminent but uncharacteristically challenging to manage. My identity continues to take different shapes as its malleability is dependent on social forces that may produce incremental easements with the passage of time, interactions within intra- and inter- cultures in the United States. I, therefore, submit how I was caught within the "subjectivity of the interstitials space" (Sefa Dei, 2017, p. ix), and these in-betweenness sets the stage for multidimensional experiences as my

Black body began to be "Othered" and suffer racial discrimination. I lost a part of me which is inherently tied to my African heritage. The race politics and identity crisis in the United States reduced my identity, thus making me feel a profound sense of loss, hopelessness, and persistent disagreement with myself over which aspect of the United States culture, African American or African, is most beneficial. This hopelessness brought about anxiety and a feeling of in-betweenness (He, 2010, p. 475), neither wholly African nor American. Because there has never been any Black nation that is conscious of skin color, Blackness is, therefore, an alien nomenclature to Africans. It means Blackness is discursive and represents a coinage implicit with Western ideas and political cleavages are geopolitical and socio-culturally contextualized.

The meaning of Blackness and its definition, as stated earlier, is alien to a Diaspora Black African as Cheikh Anta Diop expressed in Dei (2012) that the term "Black African" is both a "political and a historical fact." This is particularly instructive and clearer with Dei tracing the meaning of Blackness to the encounter with the Europeans. There is a connection between colonialism and the identity of African Blacks in North America. To a large extent, the vestiges of colonialism are still present in Western institutions leading to race, identity, and diversity issues. Valdes (1996) observed how diversity issues are a global concern and have an unbalanced impact on schooling. The emphasis on the school here dwells on the students and policy but fails to extend to the teachers. Teacher education is saddled with a host of issues, including multiculturalism, diversity, and racism. I see these problems on a daily basis in my workplace as I interact with colleagues, administrators, and parents. I find most of my encounters at work are connected to my skin color, ethnic and cultural differences seem to be normative because it demonstrates a pattern of ascriptive or codified values. It became imperative to negotiate these differences.

This study is also a quest for understanding the seismic shift of being Nigerian to becoming labeled as Black in the United States. It also explores how much I changed, the implication of my new label, and how I negotiated the factors predisposing the process of becoming and acting Black. There is a notable vacuum in literature providing a forum for discussion of the difficulties experienced by educators from

diverse geographical origins and language backgrounds. Through this research, I want to rediscover myself amidst these contradictions, to tell others where I want them to locate me socially, culturally, linguistically, and in terms of race and gender.

In sum, all issues relating to me as a foreign-born African American educator such as linguistic, cultural, and social differences tend to have elicited bias, stereotype, and possible racist tendencies, and may have created multiple identity crises. For example, the exposure to American culture and the sudden shift from my African culture to American culture has triple significance. First, it created tensions and unresolved questions about ethical considerations. There is ambivalence in allegiance and alienation. Additionally, something He (2010) perceived as "neither here nor there" phenomenon, a feeling of hopelessness, leaving marks at every intersection or crossroads of my life, depicting a world that continued to shape my experiences unevenly (p. 475). The systemic imperative (institutional apparatuses of the government, labeling, systemic racial grouping), which gave me an identity upon arrival to the United States as an "African American," also gave me a tracking number which further labeled me as not only a Black African immigrant, but also an African American Black person. This name has weighted established categories. As a result, the self, skin color, and linguistic and cultural differences notwithstanding, I am positioned as one and the same-an African American Black Man. It does not matter what part of the globe I came from, my linguistic difference or culture, every Black person is considered African American. My black body defines who I am. Paradoxically, the African American community, having the same skin color as myself and originating from Africa, has changed so much, our cultures are now incongruent. Despite this unresolved binary and differences, we are all lumped into a category as African Americans, without consideration of the subtleties inherent in the two groups. This forced union is problematic in that there is a crisis of becoming, acting, and acceptance. I am perceived as "different" and referred to as "My African Brother." I discovered I am excluded, and "Othered" by the African community as not being Black enough, and the White Americans perceive me as an African immigrant-an outsider. Ironically, my fellow Nigerian countrymen see me as "*Americana*," implying a shift in the world view which is also suggestive of a mixed-

culture, not pure or lacking originality. The idea of being a resident in America has transformed my overall persona and values into a culture that is not only "alien" to Nigeria, but significantly different. It is this ambivalence of "tripled otherness" and multi-hyphenations that place me in such a precarious situation. I am, therefore, neither an American, African American nor Nigerian. The inexorable question becomes, who am I?

In this study, I want to rediscover myself amidst all contradictions and to raise the question: What has changed, and how do these shifts impact my current functioning as a Nigerian-American and a male teacher with triple hyphens? In what ways do these multiplicities of identities impact my understanding of place, role, and significance as a male, foreign-born African, or rather Nigerian-American elementary school teacher with cultural, social, and linguistic differences? An answer to these questions will help me understand who I am or have become in my new environment.

Furthermore, I explore the pressure associated with my hyphenated identity and the complexities of negotiating slippery intersectionality, i.e., career, social, and intrapersonal lives. Also embedded in this discussion, is how I traverse the limits of triple otherness, constructing configurations of a new identity reconciling the conflicts I continue to experience as a foreign-born-African American male teacher amidst intellectual conversations.

Finally, there is a limited body of knowledge about the way foreign-born male teachers of color with hyphens are treated in Georgia public elementary schools. This lack of knowledge demands teachers with hyphens should get involved and have their experiences and views heard. By doing so, I intend to contribute my autobiographical narrative to the academic discourse in teacher education, to provide prospective foreign Africans who wish to teach in Georgia's K-12 program with the necessary information about the teaching landscape and how to negotiate slippery slopes as they interact in the workplace. It will also contribute to scholarships in immigration studies, identity formation, race, and social integration. This ambition calls for increased research about the impact of disparate cultural identities, challenges, complexities, and benefits to the Georgia public schools.

The elementary schools in Georgia provide an exciting opportunity for these expectations to occur, as well as expose the children of Georgia public schools earlier on to the dynamics of multi-cultures, which is one of the ten United Nations recognized indexes for measuring successful education in the 21st century. A supportive working environment, supportive administrators, supportive peers, and legislation for all is at the root of this research inquiry.

Nigerian youth are a significant portion of the new wave of African immigrants increasingly coming to the United States and Europe (Rumbaut, 1994b). Like other recent immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa, Nigerians reflect diversity in terms of class, languages, cultures, migration histories, and modes of assimilation (Rumbaut, 1994a). Nigeria is a British creation (Forsyth, 2017/1969) located in West Africa. It has the largest population of any African country (Omoyibo, 2002). Djamba (1999) noted a surge in mass migration in 1980 and 1990, reporting approximately one-third of Black immigrants to the United States came from Nigeria. In addition, most of the immigrants from Africa in the 1990s came from Nigeria (Lobo, 2001).

After the Nigerian Civil War, many Nigerian youths, particularly from Igbo extraction were massively unemployed and marginalized, and began to move across borders seeking economic opportunities from Europe and America (John, 2010). This post-colonial transmigration includes Nigeria's most skillful youth. To date, more Nigerian youth have settled in the United States voluntarily than were forcefully brought to the New World. The dramatic flow of Nigerian immigrants created a flow between Nigeria and America in terms of reverse economics, culture, and politics. For example, the 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates 380,785 US residents report Nigerian ancestry. According to the 2012-2016 ACS report estimates 277,027 American residents were born in Nigeria. Nigeria is both the most populous country in Africa with a population of 190.8 million as of 2018 (Omoyibo, 2002), and the African country of origin with the most migrants in the United States as of 2013. The after effect of colonialism positioned Europe and America as sites for mass emigration, cultural reorientation, the manifestation of

new identities, and cultural identities of different intensities. Immigrants from Nigeria were seeking to thrive amidst a complex, and complicated cross-cultural and unfamiliar global setting.

For me, financial indisposition, and struggle to blend with the cultures in the United States, forced me to rely on human capital encompassing extended family circles, and a network of other Nigerian youth with similar or related experiences. I opted to settle in the South, where I have relatives, with the hope life would be more tolerable, but even my extended family had changed both culturally and socially. Also, outside my extended family circles, the situation was no different as I continue to experience cultural and social challenges. I had to devise creative, encompassing, and robust strategies to position or reposition my new identities. It was difficult, at first, to combine Nigerian cultural forms and identities with American cultural expectations or norms, understanding what it means to be Black instigated a "kind of nostalgia" and indecision that, at one point, I wanted to return to Nigeria. I could not go back home; I am not comfortable with the social, economic, and political landscape in America. I became conscious of a new set of roles, norms, and beliefs (following the American way of life) that sometimes conflict with my cultural norms and beliefs, which created a crisis of allegiance (hesitating between American and African cultures or living in the space). It became apparent how I must find a way to read and understand the race, politics, ethnic, and linguistic possibilities. All this task became overwhelming and urgent, to the point I became overtly and unnaturally super conscious of my environment. It became common knowledge I was different and treated differently in social and professional contexts by superiors and peers. My professional superiors prejudged me and displayed glaring surprise when they found I have comparative skills with my peers. For the first time in my 20 years of teaching, I received a written recognition of my professional accomplishment by my principal last year, focusing on the excellent performance of students in reading and writing on the IOWA standardized test. Also, parents and peers seem to be skeptical of my pedagogical power due to my skin color, accent and differences in culture. In every circumstance, how there is an unspoken pressure to prove my competence, which is not an expectation for teachers who are White, or

nonwhite citizens. To add to the complexity, the African American peers have different values, and for some reason, they did not accept me into their group.

This exclusion is remarkably instructive because it follows a history of disunity between the subcultures in the classification of African Americans. As discussed earlier, in Nigeria, I experienced marginality and Otherness, but my experience of Otherness in Nigeria was related to the impact of the ethnic and tribal identity as an Ibo. Black was not the Other, and I could claim my Ibo identity without contradictions. In America, on the other hand, Black is the Other, and there are different shades of Blackness in the way Black Americans who were mostly West Africans have experienced racial and cultural mutilation, predisposing an adulterated culture is remarkably different from African culture. The lack of cultural and social homogeneity between African Americans and foreign-born African Americans, creates another level of alienation and Othering with attendant stereotypes and negative images of foreign-born African Americans. Ironically, I found I must also learn to negotiate the work environment with African Americans as well as White Americans.

Why Do I Study Being Black in Nigeria and Being Black in the United States?

Purposes of Study/Research Questions/Key Research Issues

The purpose of my dissertation study was to explore being Black in Nigeria and being Black in the United States. I also want to understand the meanings attached to the hyphen Nigerian-American with a view to narrating how I negotiate my new identities at the intersections of social, political, linguistic, and cultural differences I notice. I ask four important questions:

1. What cultural and political reasons cause Nigerian immigrants to immigrate to the United States?

2. What does Blackness mean in the United States and how do Nigerian immigrants become Black in the United States?

3. How do Nigerian-Americans negotiate cultural, linguistic, and social differences at school, work, and society?

4. Finally, with these new identities, how do Nigerian immigrants balance their cultural differences with the host country? Do Nigerian immigrants acculturate or assimilate intothe broader United States society?

What Kinds of Work Influence My Dissertation Work? Review of Literature

The United States and Europe portray Nigerians/Black Africans as victims, problems, or in an overall pitiful situation, and present a narrative of a benevolent civilized society helping the impoverished. However, researchers offer a counter argument tracing the origin of human differences to which Black Africans have been subjected to Christian evangelism, race, colonialism/imperialism, the nefarious activities of neo-liberals, and their affinity with the neocolonist in Africa. The impasse of human difference stems from the idea of race and racism, which has historically continued incessantly to punish Black people simply because of the color of their skin. Race has been a contested issue despite scientific findings to the contrary. African/Black people find race to be the front and center of the United society. It is imperative to examine the complex ways in which diasporic Africans navigate the difficult and often contradictory terrain of race and human difference in the United States. Because Black Africans have no experience of racism in Africa, the exposure to the meaning attached to Blackness in the United States, linguistic, cultural difference, and hatred associated with the Black body creates an identity crisis. This identity crisis is experienced in the process of becoming Black and exacerbated by systemic racism, discriminatory practices, and mistreatments of African/Blacks in the United States in both professional and social contexts.

Decolonial and Post-colonial theorists suggest the word "Black" is a political term, which indicates the meaning attached to Blackness was created, sustained, or maintained by the dominant White groups. There is an urgent need to re-theorize Blackness to dispute false narratives and to provide a critical consciousness among the oppressed African/Blacks in the United States. This will help Blacks re-examine their subjective positions and generate genuine strategies for survival and adaptability. Given historical evidence, researchers found how the push and pull factors of Nigerian or African youth migration cannot be blamed on poverty nor on inter-ethnic conflicts alone. These researchers felt first-hand how the African

migration's problem transcends poverty and connects to the overarching idea of the materiality connection, which leads to Nigerians/Africans' dispossession. The amplified narrative shows how the mass migration is directly connected to Africa's economic resources' marginality and usurpation. Mutua (2010) described the experiences of Black/Africans aliens in the United States as one of marginality and hatred, noting Black/Africans are the most despised group in North America.

Consistent with this earlier finding, Dei (2017) noted the reason for this hatred is not because Black/Africans lack the capacity to interact effectively with the majority group, but because they are seen through the lens of colonialism. In addition to colonialism, Black/Africans and Nigerians in particular, experience inter-ethnic group conflict in Nigeria and in the United States. These ethnic differences are culpable for the devastating Nigerian/Biafra civil war which claimed the lives of many Nigerians. Inter-ethnic conflicts are also prevalent in the African American/ Black African ethnicity because of shared racial identity. All Black people are lumped into one group and are not divided like other ethnic groups. Blacks are perceived as a monolithic group, so regardless of ethnicity all Blacks are one (Greer, 2013).

The concept of Blackness is a term that has multiple negative connotations such as criminals, rapists, violence, poverty, poor education, poor socio-economic status, and sometimes perceived as subhuman. Since Black/Africans and Caribbeans are lumped into one category, then it goes as Wittig (2003) stated, "They are seen as black, they are black; they are seen as women, therefore, they are women. But before being seen that way, they first had to be made that way" (Wittig in Ibrahim, 2014, p. 1).

Zora Neale Hurston (1942), in Dust Tracks on a Road, summarized the vast differences and composition of the African American ethnicity in America:

> I maintain I have been a Negro three times-a Negro baby, a Negro girl, and a Negro woman. Still, if you have received no clear-cut impression of what the Negro in America is like, then you are in the same place with me. There is no, The Negro, here. Our lives are so diverse, internal attitudes so varied, appearance and capabilities so different, that there is no possible classification so catholic that it will cover us all, except My people! My people! (p. 1)

Thus, all the Black ethnic groups become Black overnight without asking for it. The experiences of Blackness manifest in a variety of contexts such as encounter with police (police brutality), unfair laws and unbalanced dispensation of justice, unemployment, unethical firing/hiring processes, uncomfortable working relations/situations, denial of loans, miseducation, poor health, and infrastructure to mention but a few. Unfortunately, the various modus operandi utilized by the government agencies against African/Blacks in the United States have become the lens through which the quilt of becoming Black can be examined.

Lumping all Blacks into one category fails to account for differences, diversity, and preimmigration background of Nigerians. This entanglement within the shared racial grouping- African American umbrella, creates conflicts which are similar to the British imposed ethnic dichotomies in Nigeria. As soon as I entered the United States, I began to feel unwanted here suggesting a complex remix or reawakening of my Nigerian experience. The disparities in linguistic and cultural orientation including the perception of an intruder competing for federal and state resources slated for African Americans makes the inter-ethnic conflicts stiff. This is a double barrel rejection and feeling of displacement and loss (He, 2003). Eskay (2010) describes this kind of feeling in this way:

> First, my accent was seen as a disadvantage to getting a meaningful job. Second, the color of my skin was not wanted, despite my wide array of education and experience. And third, the laws in this country appeared divisive and discriminatory, especially to those considered "alien." Nonetheless, I felt fortunate to come to this country. (p. 68).

Blacks are a diverse ethnic group with different social, political, and cultural orientations. This means the ethnic differences are bound to create conflicts within the inter-groups and the paradox is why they are seen as Blacks, regardless of ethnic differences. These kinds of conflict also create distinctions or categories, where members of an ethnic group with the broad Black ethnicity by default becomes the other.

Some researchers have attributed the complex adjustment and integration difficulties of African/Blacks in the United States to colonialism and refuse to accept the term "post" in respect of colonialism. For example, Bhabha's (1994) ideas of the interstice's spaces are being contested particularly

for not going far enough to understand there is nothing "post" about colonialism, since the vestiges of colonialism continue to be prevalent in Western institutions (Dei, 2017). Africans are moving toward Anti-Colonial/decolonial praxis aimed at retheorizing Blackness from the view of Blacks. Dei (2017), Ibrahim (2014), and Adichie (2010) have argued the fate of Black/Africans in North America has been predetermined by the colonial project. In other words, colonialism, and imperialism created structures that placed Africans as the "systemic Other" in North America. Colonialism is still present in a different form in Africa and around the world through the activities of neo-liberals who use the market driven process of globalization to destabilize and marginalize the Black race. In this hegemonic operation, the issue of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and colonialism are used to manipulate the social dynamics such that there are different categories of people. This human difference is based on the bipolarity of humanity exemplified as Black/White dichotomy. My readings show that Africans are not Black in Africa until they emigrate to the United States where there is an abundance of racism (Dei, 2017; Ibrahim, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Black has no meaning in Africa; thus, it is imperative to educate Black/Africans about the process of acquiring new identities and the implications of becoming Black in the United States. It is equally important to understand the cultural and political differences, and how these differences impact day to day teaching and learning. Theoretically, my dissertation draws upon a wide array of works such as reframing *Blackness and Black Solidarities* (Dei, 2017), *The Rhizome of Blackness* (Ibrahim, 2014), *Americana* (Adichie, 2014), and critical race psychoanalysis regarding the complexity of Black identities (Fanon, 1952/2008).

Reframing Blackness and Black Solidarities

In Decolonial Prism, Dei (2017) discusses the impact of colonialism on the lives of diasporic Africans/Blacks in North America. He argues that the transatlantic migration is predicated on by the effect of colonialism and imperialism in Africa. Black/African bodies are given an identity or image by the dominant White and therefore Blackness has to be retheorized from the perspective of African/Blacks. The

African/Black race has undergone decades of discrimination, disorganization, disorientation and has been misled to think that the problem of Africa and mass migration is the result of abject poverty. Contrary to this view, Dei argues that there is a connection between rationalism, modernity and the West in that the West is deemed as constitutive to the hegemonic configuration of colonial power structure that reimages Blackness subjectively. The colonial hegemony creates categories based on race and is conceived as the source of African/Back poverty and othering. This is possible because Whites held an unearned power over their colonial subjects and have influenced their lives in different contexts. Race is relevant and pivotal to the discussion of Blackness and different groups can racialize. Whites use racial distinction to claim power and privilege. However, for African/Blacks racialized subjectivities are meant for punishment. In effect, Dei believes that "racialization is much more than "Othering" human subjects. So, whether "othered" or not in different contexts, White bodies maintain power and privilege which cannot be taken lightly" (p.7).

The dispossession of African/Black is orchestrated by the neo-liberal actors namely the UN, IMF, and the World Bank. The IMF and World Bank subject African/Black countries that are loan recipients to agree to the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). The IMF and the World Bank through the disbursement of these loans create a subordinate relationship where these countries lose their autonomy because they cannot control Brent Woods Institute. The interest on these loans are crippling, making these countries poorer. For example, it is noted that sub-Saharan Africa pays $25,000 per minute to the North, for debt incurred during colonial rule. The narrative that these agencies provide poverty alleviation and urban development is deceptive in that the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) ends up becoming a barrier to the development of Africa and consequently denies poverty alleviation. Despite the acclaimed promise of the IMF and the World Bank, the disparity between the West and the South continues to widen, forcing African/Blacks to migrate in search of better living conditions.

This method of economic strangulation was rationalized by the idea that Africa/Blacks are primitive, uncivilized and need help while the West is superior and benevolent to the African/Black cause. This explains Dei's conclusion that "modernity is imposed through European colonial and colonizing encounters

with the Subaltern" (p.19). The West makes claim to development and progress more than the Subaltern, but this idea of wealth is rooted in imperialism and colonialism. This means that attainment of this wealth was built on slavery, exploration of mineral resources and economic marginalization consequently improvised Africa/Black. Being that African/Black own the resources and slave free labor lay claim to Western wealth, Black/African must demonstrate racial and cultural pride (p.65). This knowledge production calls for active Black racial political awareness including summarizing Black identity rooted in European colonization in order to subvert imaginaries. Dei focuses on anti-colonial praxis to explain re-colonization and the implication of imperial structures. The Black experience of coloniality must be reconfigured to bring to view international perspectives on decolonial politics. The idea of racelessness is an imperial and colonial project which aims to divert attention from the White domination. Addressing race foregrounds anti-racist and anti-colonial practices for the purposes of addressing racism as well as social oppression.

Dei theorizes Blackness by outlining seven principles such as acknowledging the coloniality of White power and Whiteness in order to advance knowledge of the existence of other races, addressing the problem posed by biology where the concept of race is used to categorize people on the basis of perceived differences of intelligence and prowess, critically reading and evaluating embodiment focusing on how the black body is read and perceived and the visceral reaction it evokes, advancing a theory of Blackness which is antithetical to anti-Blackness, affirming Blackness in the context of complexity of identities, reevaluate how the concept of hybridity and in-betweenness as liminal spaces are being used within the context of colonial and post-colonial context, to describe Black experiences, speaking about Blackness and anti-Blackness and the asymmetrical relationship between Whiteness and Blackness and finally to speaking about settled/stolen Lands which connects to "colonial-settler –oppression"(p.74).

These principles align with my view that colonialism and neo-colonialism create instabilities and economic hardship in Nigeria forcing mass migration to the West. Decolonization sensitizes Black/Africans particularly Nigerians to the connection between the colonial experience and the inescapable poverty and

unemployment in the country. At the rate reported by most research agencies of the West, Nigeria will continue to experience an unprecedented shortage of manpower. This gap is notable in the science, technology, and other highly skilled fields.

The Rhizome of Blackness (2014) --Awad Ibrahim

In *The Rhizome of Blackness*, Ibrahim (2014) expresses how Black identity in North America is fluid and has no definite space and therefore shifts perpetually when it encounters racism. This shift always places immigrants in the middle and impacts assimilation trajectory. This book provides a new lens to theorizing Blackness and demonstrates a new way of thinking, talking, and imagining what it means to be Black in North America. African/Blacks are diverse in many ways including language, culture, and religion. Ibrahim felt Blacks immigrants express their identity in both linguistic and performance representations. Conversely, language is one way of expressing ourselves, the body is another. The Black body has an unspoken language which can be interpreted and read. Blackness can be performed through linguistic representations such as "slipping in" or "slipping out" of language referred to as code switching. It shows the egotistic behaviors associated with adulterated culture and shows how African immigrants want to be perceived. Immigrants speak the language of their former colonizers and when migrated to North America, African immigrants live in-between languages and cultures and tend to act in ways making them acceptable in their new place. The mimicking and living in-between are a complex terrain similar to a rhizome (a crab-like grass) which is a dramatic characterization of the growth trajectory of African immigrants encumbered with the processes and politics of becoming Black in North America. Ibrahim argues how the rhizome is a "constant movement of deterioration" which means how it connects to the idea of living in a place (migration) and becoming part of another place (process of assimilation) which can be progressively improved but never completely or fully attained.

Black Skin, White Mask (1952/2008) --Frantz Fanon

In this book, Fanon (1952/2008) explains how the racialized 'other' is constituted in the psychic domain. In the minds of Whites, Blackness is associated with sexuality, violence, crime, poverty, disease and other negative connotations. The skin pigmentation of the Black persons carries negative identification. The dominant colonial culture identifies the black skin of the Negro with impunity (Fanon, 1952/1998) and the Antilleans accept this association and consequently begin to despise themselves. Similarly, the African/Black follow this trend when they use derogatory terms to despise each other or give preference to living in neighborhoods with a predominantly White population over Blacks in fear of crime. This means accepting the stereotypic association of crime with Blackness-an identity I vehemently dislocate as "calling out" since the White race are not immune from the criminality attached to the systemic other. In the same vein, colonial Black women fraternize with and often cohabit with White men; a process Fanon described as "dubbed lactification" (p. ix). The Black man or woman feels inadequate or inferior to a White man and expresses these unresolved tensions in a variety of ways such as becoming and thinking of themselves in some ways as White. For example, Black women use wigs, artificial long hairs to look like white women's hair, some bleach their skin color to become lighter, African/Blacks blend African accent with American or lighten their accents and often code switch to speak their identity. These complexities connect to an identity crisis consistent with Du Bois (1968/2008) double personality or the concept of twoness, and a continuation of the colonial tradition of severing or amputating our cultural affinity and resistance to mental slavery. Part of the resistance to colonialism is to deal with the preconceived notion of sub-humanity of the African and Blacks in general. There is a connection between the Black experience in the Diaspora and the Blacks in Africa in the way the afro mentioned behaviors, slavery and the impact of colonialism cuts across the continent. This historical fact is at the center of the Pan African movement.

Fanon's contention in the *Black Skin, White Mask* hone in on the problem of identity created for the colonial subjects by colonialism with the ultimate goal of escaping from these entanglements or sickness caused by colonialism. This is instructive to Black/African in the United States where the vestiges of

colonialism manifest in the institutions of the government such as the courts, economic systems, education, and police. It connects to the fear, prejudices and danger unleashed by the systemic apparatuses of racism. Today, we see many Black lives lost and several peaceful or violent protests across the country. This passion comes forcefully as Blacks are exhausted, sitting on the edge with numerous murders of unarmed Black men and women in the United States. It has become necessary to resolve the tension between contempt for Blackness and our skin color by coming together to expose hypervisibility of Whiteness in America. Psychoanalysis framework as used by Fanon cannot fully address the cause and effect of racism in today's American society because the trends have shifted to a more complex and sophisticated systems of power. Current happenings show a profound need to debunk stereotypes and affirm our Blackness in particular contexts.

The Soul of Black Folks (1903/2014) --W. E. B. Du Bois

Like Dei, Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903/2014), emphasized on the importance of race as a powerful and useful concept of sorting out human differences in America. Although Dei strongly connected the concept of race and indigeneity to the colonial project, Du Bois on the other hand was more focused on the Black/African race in the United States. Notably, he stated the "problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line" (p.3). This assessment of what it means to be Black/African is truer today than it was in 1903. The challenge of the Black/African is described as double consciousness where there is twoness and a waring mind. As a Nigerian-American, I concur with Du Bois' (1903/2014) reflection on the complex identity of the Black/Africans when he wrote:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others. One never feels his/her twoness, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, and two waring ideas in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his/her double self into a better and truer self…He/she simply wishes to make it possible for man/woman to be both a Negro and an American, without being

cursed and spit upon by his/her fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in

his/her face (pp. 8-9).

Although this statement was written to reference Black/Africans in the United States, the weight of

this analysis explicates the ordeal diasporic Africans experience as exiles and embodiments of the colonial

projects. Black is an identity laden with complexities of negative stereotypes and becoming Black with its

attendant marginalization by both in-group and outgroup pushes the envelope a little further in the circle of

isolation and oppression. Nigerian-Americans are despised within the sub-cultures and ethnic groups under

the African American umbrella. The ethnic rivalries create disunity and isolation. The conception of shared

racial identity or slavery as a common bond between the Black ethnic groups is inaccurate. As Du Bois

stated, Nigerian-Americans become Black upon emigrating to the United States and find themselves caught

between two cultures- one from Africa and the one from America.

Americana (2014) --Ngozi Adichie

Ngozi Adichie's (2014) book, *Americana*, is an extraordinary exploration of diasporic experiences

in America, focusing on the frequent identity conflicts and racism emigres from Nigeria suffer while in

exile. Central to Adichie's novel is the massive transatlantic migration to the West in the 1980s, notably to

the United States and the United Kingdom in search of educational and economic prosperity. Adichie speaks

to the connection between economic and educational migration to post-coloniality and imperialism. The

theme of contemporary emigration effectively entered Nigerian literature in 2013 with the publication of

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americana*, a novel defined by its transcultural concerns. From the outset,

Adichie exposes multifarious forms of Diaspora experience, dislocation, otherness, displacement, identity

and exile. Adichie challenges the experience of Nigerian immigrants to the United States and Britain

comparing both experiences to show how Nigerians seek to affirm, manipulate, and define the multiplicity

of identities they embrace as they encounter Blackness, reclaiming spaces of selfhood where migrant culture

is marginalized.

The complexities of identity, race, economic and cultural problems in America and Great Britain were expanded to show the ambivalence of what it means to be Nigerian in America. As the protagonist Ifemelu and agonist Obinze demonstrated, most Nigerians manipulate universal linguistic features to create a social identity. For example, Adiche noted Emenike changed his character and personality to become relevant to the cultural demands in Britain. This kind of uncertainty shows how Nigerians embody British or American cultures in order to gain access to the model group. Like other cultures, Nigerians work their way through the complexities of alien culture and lifestyles to gain acceptance into American society. Yet Adichie recognizes how the protagonist Ifemelu represents many Nigerians and the absence of choice in Nigeria. This choice lessness coupled with postcolonial impositions cause massive emigrations to the West even as the emigrants traumatic experience and clothed with multiple identities. The discourse of otherness and how these concepts can be understood through trans- culturalism (Trans culturalism is a vision of how the world is coming together and breaking boundaries and geographical barriers--a merge of different cultures beyond national boundaries) is at the core of this novel. Otherness is like a broken limb causing dislocation, where the immigrant continually reorganizes, negotiating intersections in different contexts. The underlying traumatic experience as expressed here captures imaginatively what it means to be Black/ African in America and the attendant marginalization based on race.

A River Forever Flowing (2003) --Ming Fang He

In this book, He (2003) engages in a powerful composite narration of cross-cultural lives of three women's collective experiences in China and in North America. Since these women left China, to live in the West, their previous cultural experiences albeit experiences in the West and the way they perceived others or how they were perceived conflicted. For example, Shaio shared her experiences in both places when she stated regardless of where they were located, they felt different and funny (p.11). These cross-cultural experiences, for example, come with feelings of exile, displacement, otherness and frustration. Although this book was based on the multicultural experiences of these three Chinese women, the in-between cultural experiences, trans culturalism, exile, otherness, identity shifts, the feelings of displacement

and anxiety are similar to my experiences and other diasporic Africans in North America. This idea of loss and feelings of neither here nor there (displacement/exile) expressed in this narrative demonstrates a general feeling of nostalgia that emigre's experience in a foreign land. He and the other two women express this feeling in the form of a "push" and "pull "between the two cultures, that of Chinese and that of American or Canadian. The persistence of this push or pull effect is peculiar to many exiles or emigrants and occurs in the minds or psyches as they navigate between the two sociocultural landscapes. This kind of feeling is predicated in the cultural capital invested in the past and present lived experiences. The stress of living in a foreign land can be complicated resulting in an inordinate ambition of returning to one's home country particularly when the immigrant becomes the systemic other. The complexity of these feelings can gravitate to anxiety and sadness, but the dream of returning home is never achieved.

I will draw upon race, post coloniality, Anti-colonial/decolonial, identity, and cultural studies. Although, historically, race has no scientific justification, yet social stratification or government structures are based on race. Consequently, race defines self and the "Other," which brings about the binary Black/White, Asian/White, or Muslim/White, etc. The idea of race has been traced to a nation-state extending or denying the right to citizenship. The study of race is essential to the education field in respect to exclusionary practices, even though "all people shared the historical process of migration and intermingling" (Castle, 1996, p.21). Thus, as Darder & Torress (2009) narrates, the history of race is a direct outcome of colonialism, which provides an explanation of the "scientific" justification for economic exploitation, slavery, and marginalization of the systemic Other (Darder & Torress, p. 155).

My study also draws upon Bhabha (2004) and Said (2002) *Exploration of Post Coloniality*, Selcuk Sirin and Michelle Fine's (2008) *Intrusion into Hyphenated Identities as it Relates to Muslim Youth* (Carola Suarez-Orozco et al, 2008), *Challenges of Immigrant Students* (Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2007), *The Ethics of Identity and Black Ethnics* (Greer, 2013), *Cultural Identity* (Hall & Du Guy, 1996), *Pedagogy, Modernity and Jewish Identity* (Shapiro, 1999), *Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (Gilroy, 2000), and *Nation* (Hall, 2017). This narrative community allows me to discuss my experiences and how I negotiated a range

of identities as hyphenated Americans who encounter differences and contradictions at the intersections of race, culture, class, and gender, at school, social contexts, and various workplaces.

I am exploring being Black in America and in Nigeria, particularly looking at the impact of the differences in cultures in America, and the complicated experiences that mitigated against my expectations and selfhood at work and school. To that end, I will interrogate the postcolonial (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 58-120) concepts of interstices such as stereotype, hybridity, and mimicry (or in-between spaces), and the contradictions and struggles emanating from being excluded and type casted, replacing it with anti-colonial/decolonial perspectives. Postcolonial perspectives and approaches emerged from a critique of histories of colonization and their human consequences for both the colonized and the colonizers (Said, 2002, pp. 294-295). These perspectives shed light on the aftereffect of the exploitation of colonized people and their lands (Fanon, 2004, p.19). However, postcolonialism has limitations in the way it observes colonialism as historic events that happened in the past and fails to address the different forms colonialism and imperialism. This study will therefore examine how I extrapolated meaning and made sense of my new identities as a highly visible minority with educational potential upon entering the United States.

I am Black and obviously not White. I do not feel I am an African American even though I was assigned to this racial category upon arrival to the United States, and African Americans served as my proximal host. I am of Nigerian ancestry but having lived in America for more than twenty-five years of my life I do not feel I have strong cultural ties with Nigeria. I am therefore caught in-between these landscapes. I think of myself as living in the hyphens. I struggled to define, shape, and balance my cultural affinity (Nigerian identities) with social realities in America in regard to normative political, economic and sociocultural systems. One certain thing is the fact I am of the Black race; every other thing is political.

The Impact of Blackness in Nigeria on Blackness of Immigrants of African Descendants

Nigerian society is unimaginably structured along ethnic and cultural boundaries. Although there are common-shared popular culture, religion and socioeconomic powers and affiliations, divisive norms have crippled economic, political, and social integration in Nigeria. The minority ethnic groups are marginalized

on the basis of ethnicity and religion. Apparently, the homogeneity of our skin color has no bearing on the discrimination and displacement of the Igbos and minority tribes in Nigeria. The schism between the north and the south are mainly undergirded by the relative prosperity of the Igbos, or the deeply unpalatable perception that the Igbos are domineering, greedy, and aggressive in their nature.

Indeed, the Igbos have a communal spirit with shared culture, language, and religion. These rich cultural backgrounds will later become useful in the Diaspora as social relationships between new and old Igbo immigrants to the United States become more intense but take a different turn. Rex (1973) discusses the relationship between new and old immigrants who share the same ethnicity and noted a major problem facing new immigrants to an urban city is loneliness. The causes of this loneliness stems from the fact new immigrants do not immediately understand the meaning attached to the language and culture of the host ethnic group. However, Rex felt how the set of understandings, the shared culture and language necessary for communication is provided by the colony of his fellow countrymen (Rex, 1973, p.11). The average Igbo immigrant is not oblivious of the injustices, marginalization and rejection perpetuated by the Northern Nigerian elites with the support and tutelage of the British government. Igbos then told them to brace themselves with strong cultural and ethnic unions to provide the ambiance for reduction of language and cultural politics of any place outside of Igbo Land. The Northern political oligarchy has ruled Nigeria for more than thirty years since independence, and controls key sectors of the Nigerian economy. The relationship between the British government and northern Nigeria brings to bear the first election fraud of 1954/55, where Harold Smith, an Englishman who was born in Manchester in 1927 and educated at Oxford, was deployed to Nigeria in 1955 and commissioned to undermine the accuracy of the election results and census. Harold Smith lived in Lagos, working in the Ministry of Labor headquarters under the administration of the then Governor-General James Robertson, extending the colonial project to fix the leadership structure and power politics in Nigeria. Britain would not allow a coalition of the Igbos and the Yoruba to favor the uneducated but friendly northern Nigeria. Because of bogus census figures and the monetization of the 1959 election, and to protect British interests, the election was rigged in favor of Tafawa

Balewa, making Nnamdi Azikiwe a ceremonial president. It was culpable to tie the Igbo with the North having full political power, and the president being just a rubber stamp.

Awolowo and the Action group became the opposition. The political antagonism preempted the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970. After the war, ethnic rivalries and economic quandary, including corruption and nepotism, led to several military mutiny and coup d'état which ushered in dictators like Gowon, Murtala Muhammed, Buhari, Sani Abacha, and Babangida. The British influence in Nigerian politics has been immutable with severe economic and political consequences.

The Igbos lost the war and were treated as second class citizens in Nigeria. Several economic recovery programs such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Universal Basic Education (UBE), and Youth Career Training Programs such as NDE and the like, were largely unsuccessful because of ethnic and tribal politics. Nigeria then took loans from the International Monetary Funds in 1979 and 1980, respectively. These loans were intended to help rebuild infrastructures, improve development projects such as building roads, hospitals, and the agricultural sector. Along with this loan came the obligation to adopt the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). The austerity measures associate with the IMF loan was draconian and perpetuated by the neo-liberals through the international lending agencies and the Paris Club — this was an extension of slavery.

Historically, this arrangement gave the neo-liberals power over the country as the remote guidelines from their offices in London, France and the United States put severe pressure on the government of Nigeria and redirected economic and political affairs in Nigeria. The impact of the IMF loan on Nigerians were unimaginable, severe hardships, over 28% unemployment, which amounted to the devaluation of Nigerian currency, and the disintegration of the Nigerian economy. Nigeria became an import-based country with the only export being crude oil. The country's agricultural exports such as rubber, cocoa, palm oil, and groundnuts have become a distant history. The loan had failed to meet the anticipated goal, and instead, made Nigeria poorer. In addition, marginalized ethnic groups were mostly impacted in the massive unemployment and retrenchment scheme; and consequently, these marginalized groups began to emigrate

to the West to escape the absence of choice in Nigeria. The mass migration between the 1980s and 1990s, which many have described as "Brain Drain" dealt a devastating blow to an already ailing Nigerian economy. Again, the impact and vestige of colonialism continue to influence the economic, political, and social lives of Nigerians.

Given the above background, let me put some questions on the table about the Impact of Blackness in Nigeria on Blackness of Immigrants of African Decedents: What does it mean to be Black/Igbo in Nigeria? How are the Black/Igbo represented, and vigorously resisting misrepresentation in Nigeria? What is Biafra in relation to the Igbo identity? How do these identities and experiences of marginality impact diasporic Black/Nigerians in the West? These are good questions to ask, given how many Nigerian scholars have raised the awareness of these discursive matters over ethnic, political, and religious marginality in the country and beyond. My experience connects neo-liberals to systemic racism and the creation of human difference based on race and ethnicity in Africa. As a result, the diasporic Igbo person has a dual narrative of dislocation —- the absence of social justice and peace in Nigeria, and the one of exiled self would return to its own land as an alien and adulterated. Strangely, in Nigeria, the most volatile and mobile group remains the Igbos and the other minority groups. A feeling of the marginality and depressed sense of self is highly overpowering in its apparent inversion of the internalized experience of oppression.

The Igbos began to doubt whether they can be successful in politics or government, without connecting to a powerful politician in Northern Nigeria. Except those Igbos in business, many who seek to stabilize or grow in the federal civil service, government agencies and parastatals, measure their successes by looking at the North. This neurotic complex or schizophrenic existence in which one is defined by the gaze of the Other as described by Fanon (1994); Du Bois (1952/2004) has become the means through which successful Igbo politicians normalize their cling to power. The Igbo youth, disarmed and painfully marginalized, has no choice or hope for economic prosperity in Nigeria. The current politics of identity has become a defining feature of the contemporary Nigerian polity, unfortunately continuing to shape, and

reshape a collective sense of rejection which many Igbo emigrate coincidentally, now or at some point, face in their diasporic experience in the United States.

Similarly, the same fate beseeches the Igbos upon emigrating to the United States where they also become Black, and battle the hateful stereotypes of being Black, common to African Americans in the United States. In the United States, the Igbos struggle to adapt to the process of becoming Black. Upon arrival to the United States, a major obstacle to integration is undergirded by the Igbo dictum and world view, "Igbo enwenyi eze" (the word 'eze' means king). This sentence translates to the Igbo, does not have a king nor recognize any person as king. This collective belief system explains why imperial British government structure did not work in Igbo land and was later replaced by "Indirect Rule" system of government, through the Warrant Chiefs. In asserting the need to embrace Igboness, an inner conflict with the structured and racialized system is antithetical to the conception of a just society in the Igbo philosophy or world view. This philosophy is referred to as the "Igbo thing" which Achebe (2000) further asserts as the recognition for individual freedom, and the uniqueness of the town. The Igbos do not hide their inclination to democratic principles and fairness. This egalitarian principle is commonly expressed in Igbo Land as "Egbe bere Ugo bere nke si ibe yaa ebelaa ngu kwa yaa"-meaning the eagle should allow other birds to perch; any eagle refusing to allow other birds to perch incurs an impaired wing. This egalitarian concept purports how all human beings are born equal and are expected to coexist peacefully. The idea of a just and free society is a core principle or philosophy of the Igbos helping to define the bandwidth of inter- and intra- personal relationships.

To the Igbos, no one is superior to the other regardless of endowment, skin color or financial possessions. In a parallel vein, Achebe offered an anti-particularistic view of Igbo culture exploring the liberative strength of humanism. He states: "Those whose palm-kernel were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble" (p. 26). It is true Whiteness is having palm-kernels cracked even without the beneficiary asking for it. Whites are born into privilege and thus classify and define others.

Igbo philosophy assaults the concept of Whiteness, and the Igbo have innate abilities and perseverance when facing novel or difficult circumstances.

Contrary to the meaning attached to Whiteness, a fearless, desperate, and resourceful Igbo will go miles to compete, discover, rediscover the best route to become successful. Resilience is in our nature and we (here 'we' and 'our' refer to the Igbos) never give up in the face of challenges. This simply means anyone can be king, and if anything has ever been done, the Igbo person believes it can be replicated. This is considered a positive Igbo identity even though mostly misconceived by other African/Black ethnic groups as arrogance and uncanny.

In the face of identity politics in America, the Igbos try to regulate their public performance and private commitments in a way where the balance between the two becomes a new way of life in-between cultures. Thus, life is defined by race, and linguistic differences which now become part of a myriad of identities. These new identities anchor not only on race, intolerance, and sectarianism, but also include physical markers such as accent, appearance, linguistic differences, and names. The meaning attached to Blackness offers the flexibility to change or remake us through strange and exploitative processes, affirming the norm put in place by the dominant group. Race and racism become the pivot on which life in America for the diasporic black revolves. It is impossible to resist the conclusion of race having a profound influence in the way disparate identities develop a sense of self. In fact, racial differences govern distinctive social structures, the misperception and subordination of immigrants. In view of the enduring effect of race, Gilroy (2000) writes: "the currency of race has marginalized these traditions from official histories of modernity and relegated them to the backwaters of primitive and pre political" (p. 2).

These new identities tend to change as immigrants improve on communication and begin to navigate the cultural landscape tactfully. Hall (1997) recognizes these cultural identity shifts and notes how they are incredibly fluid and fixed, particularly when examined through the diasporic lens and when youth are involved (Hall, 1997, p. 85). In essence, cultural identities are always in constant flux, and take complicated dimensions when immigrants begin to interact with peers, and broader members of society in their new

environment. There are also fixed physical characteristics and historic stereotypes which define diasporic Africans. In addition to these brutal characterizations, Sirin & Fine (2008) noted additional factors, "Gender, skin color, religiosity, community, passion, fears, material wealth, fantasies and dreams become indexes used in the construction of identity" (Darber & Fine, 2008, p. 153).

<p align="center">Race</p>

The significance of race as a marker of difference has been widely debated among scholars (Gilroy, 2000, p. 15). Because of the racial polarities in the United States, ethnic minorities, particularly Black people, were positioned on one side of the racial divide opposite White people, and little attention is paid to how first-generation Nigerian immigrants negotiate or relate with the more established Black groups in the United States. Thus, the extermination of race is an important political and social proposition. Gilroy (2000) opined the "pursuit of liberation from "race" is an especially urgent matter for those people who, like modern blacks in the period after transatlantic slavery, were assigned an inferior position in the enduring hierarchies that raciology creates" (Gilroy, 2000, p. 15). Race politics is not limited to black and white dichotomy only. It permeates through other cultures such as Asians, Italians, Irish, Latinos, and Pacific Islanders, to mention a few. The general notion is raciology creates hierarchies. For example, Sirin & Fine (2008) captured this hierarchical structure in a Boondocks cartoon the Teenager Huey announces: African Americans are now only the third most hated group in America … right after Muslims and the French" (Sirin & Fine, 2008, P. 11). This is evidence of the conventions of our world and reminds me of the socially imposed categories and differences ordering our ("our" as used here imply African/Black) world.

Hall (2017) noted "race is a cultural, not a biological fact, a discursive construct, and a sliding signifier" (Hall, 2017, p. 32). When you examine how race is used here, it tends to explore how preexisting ethnic structures are organized in hierarchical order or classifications based on the idea of race. It infers a system of organization in which people are ranked based on skin color or race, according to the dominant authority in an area. What is the implication of these hierarchies, and how does it play into old stereotypes

aligned to the racial classification? This can be instructive to college professors and K-12 teachers who may rely on fixed, narrow concepts of identity and culture, and tend to box students into preconceived categories. Apparently, such insistence on stereotypic representations creates an inferiority complex and shuts out new identities which are helpful in coping with the academic rigor. Nigerian immigrants tend to form new ethnic identities, connect to their heritage by forming /joining local organizations in the United States, and utilizing high-level in-house professional mentorship made up of older Nigerians living in America to bridge social problems. These have facilitated the growth trajectory defiling segmented assimilation theories about immigrant minority, which sort to find how race, along with other factors previously thought to be straight forward, complicated integration or assimilation pathways at least for nonwhite immigrants. It also stressed the parental human capital, family structure, and the context of reception (Onoso, 2017, p. 15).

To grapple with the role of race in identity formation, ethnicity, and class, one must look at how racial discrimination and other structural realities of race impact immigrants with multiple identities. For example, Blackness equates with poverty, disadvantaged class, or criminality. Blackness is also viewed as monolithic. These perceptions form the basis of how Blackness is perceived in America, and since Black is seen as monolithic, it means every black person, regardless of national or ethnic origin, is identified as such. It appears as race production is relative to geographical boundaries and institutions, which suggests all modern societies have some way of representing people primarily on the basis of race and customs. There is also the likelihood that the scientific view, which derives from the philosophical foundation of genetic endowments, have not been sufficiently convincing and unattainable. Thus, race does not seem to hold any tenable explanation scientifically, yet racial categorization certainly foregrounds social structures and actions (Darber & Torres, 2008, p. 152; Ladson-Billing & William F. Tate 1V, 2009).

Raciology, therefore, is a social reality kept alive by the relentless use of race to construct meaning within the social context or academic milieu. So, what is the utility of race and why is race continually the pivot of human difference? Hall (2017) responded to this question by substituting the socio-historical and cultural definition of the race for the biological (Hall, 2017, p. 14).

Race shapes what we do, how we interact and make meaning of things around us in a social setting. Hall argued the explanation of social reality and social behavior concerning race could be termed racist because its root is connected to the same political and philosophical foundation creating this belief system in the first place. This position, therefore, suggests race is a "badge" defining our collective identity based on shared heritage (Du Bois in Hall, 2017, p. 17), and tailored by society with appended meaning. Here race is perceived as a stigma, a mark of some significant nature. Race and racialization theories imply racial discrimination and other systemic imperatives push Black people to the lowest rung of the economic ladder in America. This conclusion is partially correct for many emigrants, including Nigerians, who are regarded as a hyper visible ethnic minority in the United State. According to Immigration studies, 67% of Nigerian youth in the United States have a college degree (Census, 2000).

Although Nigerian youth in the United States attain higher educational status, yet some have difficulty getting jobs, others are hired for political reasons and when hired in that sense, they often experience significant struggle climbing up the professional ladder. This suggests race playing a substantial role determining the capacity at which Nigerian youth are hired. Race, therefore, plays a dominant part in shaping diasporic identity because it is political and constructed discursively (Hall, 2014, p.12).

Hall feels we should not discard or denounce race entirely as a way of looking at human differences, because it is easy and natural to notice differences in skin color. Hall (2014) states: "Nevertheless, the fact that we notice a person's skin color is an outcome of the 'traces' deposited in everyday ways of seeing and knowing by racial discourse" (Hall, 2014, p. 13). Skin color can be visible and cause discrimination as Fanon (2008) noted in *Black Skin, White Mask* stating, "as color is the most obvious outward manifestation of a race, it has been made the criterion by which men are judged, irrespective of their social or educational attainments" (Fanon, 2008, p. 96). Fanon called this phenomenon, "color prejudice" (Fanon, 2004, p. 102).

Race, ethnicity, and class continue to be markers of difference and define social, cultural, and economic boundaries in the United States. In a messy world of racial divide, Du Bois (2014) saw the problem firsthand, stating: "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line —- the

relation of the darker to the lighter race of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (Du Boise, 2014, p. 9).

In the analysis of the problem, Du Bois agreed race could not be substantiated scientifically, yet its impact was peremptory to the preexisting question "What shall be done with the Negro" (Du Bois, 2014, p. 5)? This question has evolved to include: What do we do with Black people from Africa and elsewhere? The apparent omnipotence of racial politics or binaries thus finds itself in a constant state of flow, producing a generalized way of reading Blackness. Race is so much a problem in North America that it does not matter which continent one comes from as long as skin pigmentation or phenotype is black, the "I" becomes a collective plural; therefore, activates the action verb to be in the present tense — I become Black African America with all the attendant constructive detonations and in-betweenness (He, 2010, p. 475).

It is pertinent to note there is a seismic shift in the racial politics which is not analogous to the 'color line' as Du Bois elaborated more than a hundred years ago. What confronts me at this point is a multiplicity of differences such as culture, linguistic, and gender differences, which are interwoven with the modern social interpretations continuing to shape diasporic selfhood and identity in America. These differences and identities have been denoted with a hyphen-Nigerian-American.

Race, Culture and Ethnic Differences

The focus of this section of the literature review is on race, culture, and ethnic differences and how it impacts a diasporic African/Black in America. Although race is perceived as a marker or way of classifying people, there are subtleties within a race which sometimes go unidentified. For example, there are distinctive differences in linguistic and social traditions such that each ethnic group placed under the African American racial group are sometimes incompatible or misconstrued. These subgroups also have significant cultural differences making it difficult for the African American racial group to have a singular world view. When we talk about race, the reference is usually Black and White and its relationship to discrimination. The paradox here is how Black Africans have the same skin color; yet one often hears African Americans treat Africans with contempt and exclude them from their groups. This exclusion often

impinges on a myriad of cultural, social, and political differences keeping the two groups separate. The race is, therefore, a driving contradiction even though it shapes hegemonic and ethnic solidarity in some cases. Every identity has something to do with race and ethnicity despite the anti-scientific explanation (Hall, 2014, p.11). I would like to explore the particularities, and critical connections between African Americans and African Blacks in terms of the subtle differences between the two groups. Upon emigrating to the United States, I became Black and became interwoven with African Americans without any consideration of the subtleties inherent in the two cultures. This is what Gilroy (2000) describes as: "Inevitable consequences of illegitimate naturalization and normalizing hatred and brutality by presenting them as inevitable consequences of illegitimate attempt to mix and amalgamate incompatible primordial groups" (Gilroy, 2000, p.27).

These subtleties and cultural differences have been understudied. I want to look at these subtleties with a critical lens. It is hard to understand what it takes to be a full member or how one can be accepted as a true African American. There are no written rules of engagement or norms. These forced collectivities present stunning challenges to the subgroups. For example, Gilroy (2000) posits: "Exactly what, in cultural terms, it takes to belong, and more importantly, what it takes as belonging, begins to look very uncertain" (Gilroy, 2000, p.25).

As a result of cultural incongruities, inclusivity becomes problematic, and since African Americans bear an umbrella representation of the Black race in America, African Blacks become the systemic "Other" in both cultures. I had to negotiate my identity in both cultures-White or Black and manage conflicts at major intersections of my life. To a large extent, race continues to be the default for hierarchically setting up the American socio-cultural and political groups. Wittig (2003) states: "They are seen as black; therefore, they are black; they are seen as women; therefore, they are women. But before being seen that way, they first had to be made that way" (Wittig, 2003, p.159).

Although Nigerian immigrants are typecast as hyper visible minorities (John, 2010; Imogene, 2017; Greer, 2013), they are however classified as African American because of their skin color not necessarily

culture or heritage. The question becomes, what are the impacts of this kind of dissonance between African Americans and African Blacks, and how did the interplay of race and ethnicity help or mar the development of diasporic identity in a country where black is attributed to derogatory meanings? Du Bois (in Halls, 2017) attempted to provide a solution by stressing a bond between African Americans and African/Blacks. Based on my experience, this bond seems superficial or unrealistic. In Du Bois' words: "These ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history, have suffered a common disaster, and have one long memory. The real essence of this kinship, he concludes, is the social heritage of slavery" (Hall, 2017, p 18).

I want to make three observations about Du Bois' conclusion here. First, the view how African Americans share a common social heritage of slavery with Africans is false. It is an incorrect proposition to think there is parity in the conception of slavery among Blacks. There are false narratives about the origin and causes of slavery, which indoctrinated African Americans their African forebearers created the opportunities and facilitated an enabling environment for slavery to thrive in Africa. This false narrative has sown a seed of discord, including name-calling and the misperception of Africans, particularly, Nigerians as being too proud and having no respect or regard for the African American males' experiences in the United States. There have been attempts to disprove this theory, but it continues to be elusive, particularly among the non-college graduate African American males. Second, the notion of a "bond by blood" and heritage is denied by many African Americans. African Americans feel African born Blacks are not Black enough because of lack of experience with the unimaginable persecution and the African American punitive experiences in the hands of Whites. There are limited studies about the disparities between African American cultures and Black Africans. This gap is evident in the persistence of stereotypic representation of Nigerians in the educational and social contexts. Stereotypic views can be troublesome especially in a highly contested society like the United States. Some of the stereotypes suggest African men are abusive, domineering, aggressive, polygamous and immoral. And African women are docile, domestic, and unintelligent and only sit at home to have babies. Although these representations are skewed and

painfully incorrect, they point to numerous circumstances and sociocultural entanglements predisposing diasporic Africans to an insistence on our own personal and collective responsibility for transformation. The experience of slavery provides another novelty and exclusive factor within the Black race. These experiences secured solidarity and a sense of community among Blacks. There are also differences in religion, particularly with respect to the paternalistic sense of worship which is intricately intertwined with the hybrid culture of African Americans. Du Bois (2014) captured and expressed some of these experiences: "[The] Negro know full well that, whatever their deep convictions may have been, Southern men had fought with desperate energy perpetuate this slavery under which the black masses, with half articulate thought, had writhed and shivered" (Du Boise, 2014, p.16). Since African born Blacks were not privy to these experiences, it is natural to draw a fault line of demarcation between the descendants of Black/ Africans who came to America through forced migration and African born Blacks without this historical experience or background. It means Africans are not considered Black enough to be included in the African American family. For this reason, African American males have a hard time connecting with African born males. This disagreement should form the beginning of an important conversation of what has occurred between Black ethnic groups but has had limited discussions within the political and social apparatuses of the different ethnicities.

In most cases, African Americans deny a common heritage or ancestry with Africans. Often, the response to the question about heritage yields banal responses such as "my forebears have connections with Africa, not me" or "I do not have any connection with Africa." This feeling was echoed by Michael Jackson's continual renouncing of his African heritage, often with great resentments, only to return with a sudden attack of conscience when he participated and performed in "We Are the World" with Lionel Richie in 1985.

A prominent part of African culture and customs identification is based on clan or tribal affiliation- a group of people with a common ancestor. These family units and villages with common blood ties together form an ethno nation. For example, the Igbo nation, the Yoruba or Oduduwa nation, and Benin and Ife

nations. These are the macrocosms representing the African world view in terms of relationships, marriages, commerce, and political affiliations. The dispersal of African Americans in the New World because of slavery does not diminish the profundity of the inner real life of a typical African. I, therefore, propose the current genealogy testing will help reestablish kinship, inclusivity, and forge reunification of African Americans and Africans who are linked by blood or a common heritage. For example, T.D Jakes has just discovered he is from the Igbo tribe in Nigeria. This knowledge will give him a renewed understanding and a new sense of belonging. He will undoubtedly embrace Igbo land and people because of shared heritage and ethnicity. Ethnic solidarity is a prominent African heritage which informs identity formation and a sense of community.

Third, I observed that although I have the same skin pigmentation and are merged politically with African Americans, subtle differences in culture and orientation between African Americans and Africans result in exclusion and "Othering." While in college, I rarely had an African American male close friend: instead, most of my friends were Black females and White males because they were more receptive or accommodating. I found how having the same skin pigmentation and belonging to the same racial group does not foster unity. On the contrary, it engenders conflicts and exclusions. I am aware my skin color is black; but is the question about the pigmentation of my skin or the meaning attached to my black body? Does pigmentation tell us anything about identity, hyphens, intelligence, culture, or the politics of racial polarities? These questions lie at the epicenter of the racial discourse and have increasingly become more relevant in American society now than the pre-civil rights era. A good response to the questions above is documented by Ibrahim (2014) when he retorts: "What does it mean "not to be" a Black man while materially possessing the socially defined Black male body;" Or, If the answer is yes, I am a Black man, when did I become one (Ibrahim, 2014, p.5)?

Answers to these questions can be elaborate and could precipitate nuanced reactionary questions such as: How do I translate and negotiate the intersections and contours of social and professional life with these preexisting social orders in mind? I think posing the questions this way presents what I see as the totalizing

problem of diasporic life in America- the problem of living with many differences or hyphens. What does the hyphen mean or represent? How do these hyphens relate to the racial polarities in America? Does the hyphen mean in-between or combining American and Nigerian values to form a new Identity, or a form of hybrid culture?

My answers to the questions I posed earlier are I was not Black while in Nigeria, and clearly race was not a defining characteristic of my identity because skin pigmentation is the same for everyone. The markers of difference in Nigeria are ethnicity, class, and religion. These are different kinds of "discrimination" with attendant inequities in the distribution of economic resources and "social and the creation of political outcasts." These discriminatory practices have a connection with identity formation-who I am or how others perceive me. I did not know anything about the bipolarity of the races or the meaning of "blackness" in America prior to emigration to the Southern United States. Thus, as a diasporic African, I was not Black prior to migrating to the United States, but became Black after emigration, and one with African Americans (Ibrahim, 2014, p. 5). As Ibrahim (2014) noted, there is hardly any African country except South Africa where the color of one's skin has ever been such a social concern as in North America. In deft ambition to lay the foundation for a renewed understanding of how African Blacks acquire a new identity in the United States, Ibrahim cited the work of H. Wright (2004) thus: "Otherwise conceived, an African does not become Black in an African country where there is no history of racial discrimination" (Ibrahim, 2014, p.5).

This statement supports the idea that the meaning of "Blackness" is novel to diasporic Africans before emigrating to the United States. The identity formation and concept of "Blackness" predisposes one to racial discrimination. Ibrahim (2014) further presented an interpretative analysis of how the West uses race to construct and configure identity for Diaspora Blacks in this way:

Race is not a defining social identity in Africa. However, in direct response to the historical

representation of Blackness and the social processes of racializing where my "Black' body

was (and still is) assembled and mapped in relation to and against the hegemonic White state

of mind ("oh, they all look like Blacks to me!") (Ibrahim, 2014, p. 8).

The race relations in America are created and maintained by the Whites, and I just walked into it unaware and without any premeditated plan. The mischaracterization or misrepresentation associated with my Black body in the United States and unprecedented acquisition of socially constructed narrative and Black identity is based on my skin color, linguistic difference, gender, class, age, and historical background was not only a rude shock to me, but a carnivalesque for the dominant race.

What is Hyphenated Identity? How Do Immigrants Form New Identities and Metamorphose into New Forms of Identities?

Hyphenated identity as defined by the Oxford Dictionary as a label applied to those categorized as belonging to more than one sociocultural group, in terms of culture and ethnicity, where an actual hyphen is used (such as 'Anglo-Welsh'). This definition evokes questions regarding which side of the hyphen the person belongs to, giving the impression the person is oscillating between two cultures. In my case, where do I belong, Nigeria or the United States continues to be a difficult question to answer? While in college, some of my peers asked me whether I consider myself a Nigerian or African American and others insist on calling me African. I am aware when I am in the United States, I am considered African American but when in Nigeria, I am referred to as American and Nigerian in Diaspora. Thus, hyphenated identities are based on culture, nationality, religion, and country of origin or simply refer to skin color. This notion of identities in flux situates the negotiation of identities as part of a process that calls forth past, present, and future within the notion of "being and becoming" (Giampapa, 2004; Han, 2012; Ibrahim, 1999).

Ibrahim (1999) in Qin, Kongji and Li, Guofang (2020) argue that hyphenated identity encompasses "an accumulative memory, an experience, and a conception upon which individuals interact with the world around them, whereas the latter is the process of building this conception" (p. 354). Ibrahim's ideas show that identities are not only about the way others see immigrants but extends to how immigrants see themselves in their host country and what they eventually become upon encountering racism.

Obviously, Whites and other cultures use my skin color as a defining characteristic of my identity. My skin color, in addition to linguistic and cultural differences, create a pathway to a fixed description of who I am or will become in America. The question is, who makes these decisions and why? As a foreign-born African/Black, I agree with Du Bois (2014) reflection of the complex identities of African Americans:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others. One ever feels his/her twoness, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being turned asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-consciousness manhood to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the old selves to be lost. He would not Africanize Americans, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. (p. 5)

Du Bois was addressing the African American community in the United States, but his views here are even more relevant to those categorized as Other, especially African Black professionals like me who have dual and sometimes multiple identities. This duality can be understood as a product of difference and marginality. I experienced a rude cultural and racial shock because it seems I was being socialized to believe the displacement, oppression and racism are inevitably normative ways of subjugating and humiliating immigrants. The world of the immigrant is evocatively charged with sadness, a sense of loss and ambivalence. I am always in-between, not fully American, or Nigerian and returning home to live is farfetched. This kind of feeling of "neither here, nor there" (He, 2010, p.475) complicated with the process of becoming something unexpected synchronized with the views of Hall (2017): "The idea that, because I moved-irrevocably as it turned out from one world to the other, from colony to metropole, there were no connections between them has always seemed inconceivable to me" (Hall, 2017, p.11).

In the face of insecurities and uncertainties in America, Black/African immigrants experience sadness, marginality, and a feeling of hopelessness. These feelings or conditions paint a picture of the complicated life of exile and exposes the relationship between colonialism and neo-liberals to the

destabilization of Africa. The unfair market structures and manipulations of the African economy must be studied to understand the power play between Western institutions and the neocolonialist.

The Impact of Colonialism, Internal Conditions in Nigeria and the Structural Changes Forcing Marginalized Groups or People to Migrate to the West British colonial history is a critical element of understanding human difference and the experience of Nigerian immigrants in the West (John, 2010). The impact of colonialism extends beyond the first-generation Nigerians to the second generation in that it relates to the way diasporic Nigerian youth relate to their host nation and fashion their identity (Dei, 2014; Ibrahim, 2017). Hall & Schwarz (2017) establishes a profound connection between colonialism (Britain) and diasporic life by stating an understanding of diasporic life requires a deeper reflection of the intricate link between colonialism and the experience of African Black in the Diaspora. The impact of colonialism is further addressed by Fanon (2004) in the following excerpt:

> "A colonized person must constantly be aware of his image, jealously protect his position,
>
> Fanon said to Sarte. The defenses of the colonized are tuned like anxious antenna waiting to
>
> pick up hostile signals of a racially divided world" (Fanon, 2004, p. ix).

This kind of psychological feeling or fear of the unknown continues to keep the colonized on the edge, always fighting for the survival of body and spirit. For example, immigrants are denied job opportunities for the reason of being overqualified. There are times when I must tread cautiously to avoid discrimination or being reprimanded, fired, or both. Many experiences bear a connection to the imperial order and the colonial *subaltern hood*. The term *subaltern hood*, as used in this study is consistent with Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), and subsequently, Spivak (2003), which emphasize disparities in social relationship between the colonizer and the colonized where the colonized is perceived as subordinate and inferior socially, politically, and economically.

It is therefore imperative to review Nigerian colonial history and background to bring readers who are unfamiliar with this landscape to par and to show the connection or relationship between colonialism, and my cultural and historical background to the new identity or process of becoming the systemic "Other"

in my self-imposed exile in America. Colonial Nigeria was a period in the history of Nigeria when the West African geopolitical region was governed by the British government from the mid-nineteen century to 1960 at her independence. I agree that the British dominance of the political and economic spheres of Nigeria is implicated in the current massive migration to, and displacement of Nigerians in the West.

The British interest began with the annexation of Lagos in 1861 and the establishment of the Oil River Protectorate in 1884. European nations began to question Britain's unprecedented dominance in Africa, leading to the Berlin Conference of 1884. The transcendence of the Royal Niger Company to prominence by a charter saw Taubman Goldie as the governor and transferred the north and south protectorate to the British crown.

In 1900, at the recommendation of Lord Fredrick Lugard, the northern region, and the southern region amalgamated and became the polity called, The Protectorate of Nigeria. The three major regions, namely: North, South, and West, still had regional authorities, respectively. Achebe (2012), in his final message to Nigeria, decried the impact of the Berlin Conference on the Nigeria polity in this way:

> The controversial gathering of the world's leading European powers precipitated what we now call the Scramble for Africa, which created new boundaries that did violence to Africa's ancient societies and resulted in tension-prone modern states. It took place without consultation or representation, to say the least. (p.1)

This lamentation expresses the perils of African civilization and marginality, highlighting Achebe's assessment of Africa's postcolonial disposition. Thus, Achebe demonstrates how Africa's leadership problems are a manifestation of historically entrenched habits of mind demonstrating people who have "lost the habit of ruling themselves" (Achebe, 2012, p.2).

Colonialism destroyed our nations, political and religious institutions, and made us subjects or subordinates in our land. At the Berlin Conference, Nigeria was handed to Britain, which precipitated merging the 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria with incongruent cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This mistake

(Achebe, 2012, p. 48; Wole Soyinka, 1972, p. 69), which later proved daunting and problematic for the British, continues to create tensions in the stability of Nigeria to date.

Given the vast cultures in the country and many empires and dynasties with characteristics and symbolic artistry or other potentials, the ground for a political economy marred with conflicts was imminent. In the North, the famous Kanem-Born Empire, which was conquered, and Islamized by the Jihadist, Usman Dan Fodio flourished, the Midwestern belt proudly remembered as the Nok kingdom and world-renowned terra-cotta sculptures. In the West, the Oyo and Ife Kingdoms presented an organized and sophisticated civilization. The Midwest represented by the Benin Kingdom carried artistic distinction to unprecedented levels and across the Niger in the eastern part are the Calabar and the Nri Cultures, which flourished and became symbolically attached to the works of Florence Nightingale (Achebe, 2012, p. 25). The British government created policies to prevent any united opposition to its authority. This ambition led the British to adopt a divide-and-rule policy, keeping Nigerian groups separate from one another as much as possible. Primordial political authorities were co-opted in the North, where Muslim leaders strongly resisted the spread of Western education by Christian missionaries. The British government established in 'direct Rule' in the south through warrant chiefs, which many including Achebe, (2012) and Wole Soyinka (1972) thought was flawed and proved particularly challenging to implement in Ibo land. Nigeria began to negotiate more representation in the British government and gained more representation in the Parliament. At this time, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Awolowo, and Akintola Williams, who had just completed studies in the United States and Britain, respectively, returned to Nigeria and exerted more pressure for Nigerian self-governance. Britain yielded to pressure and conducted the first election in 1958. Many political problems were facing Nigeria. First was the minority ethnic groups' demand to be recognized as a regional government. As a result, a commission was constituted to oversee how to accommodate the minority groups in the new country. The areas now known as the South/South (Delta areas), the Calabar/Ogoja, and Rivers were the contemplation of the committee. The final report of the committee delayed granting these demands so the independence of Nigeria slated for October 1, 1960, will not be delayed, or postponed any further.

Because these political problems could not be resolved in a timely manner, it continued to loom and later unfolded into political factions resulting in the first civil war in Nigerian history. Given the ongoing political problems, the Action Group political party rooted in the West had an internal crisis leading to a coalition of the NCNC and the NPC leading to Abubakar Tafawa Balewa becoming the Prime Minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe the first ceremonial President of Nigeria.

By the late 1950s, Britain was ready to exit Nigeria and brought Sir James Robertson to oversee the election, which brought Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to power as the first prime minister of Nigeria. The inordinate ambition of the British in Nigeria politics was recorded as the first election fraud or rigging in Nigeria's history.

Political and regional differences were insurmountable after the 1964 election, where the NCNC won a majority in the Parliament with eight seats, and the Ibadan NCNC Alliance had six seats and deserted Nnamdi Azikiwe leading to Azikiwe being the leader of the opposition in Parliament. This political turmoil led to the civil war in 1967. The war was fought in the Eastern part of Nigeria, and while the war was on, the north, south, and western parts of Nigeria had normal lives. Because the Igbos were defeated in the Biafra/Nigeria war, people of Igbo extraction became second class citizens in their own country. Many of us graduated in numbers with excellent results but could not get a job while our counterparts in the other parts of the country filled positions in the government and private sectors of the economy.

Despite a vast presence of oil explorations predominantly located in the Southeastern region, life was unbearable, particularly with numerous environmental degradations, impact on wildlife, and deforestation in addition to limited funding for college, and lack of opportunities anywhere in the country for the Igbos. The war was fought between 1967 and 1970 with the Igbos defeated, over three million people dead, and the Igbos continually punished and "Othered" by the Hausa/Fulani oligarchy. The war took a toll on the young military officers who were mostly recent graduates of the University of Nigeria Nsukka, including the wanton destruction of Igbo Land. Many pregnant women, children, innocent civilians-men, and women

of varying ages were maimed or killed in what has been described as the worst internal conflict in Africa. Many have called on the international community to classify the war as genocide.

The pernicious presence of Britain in Nigeria, coupled with the economic policies of Awolowo, left every Igbo man regardless of how much money they had in the bank with twenty pounds at the end of the war. This was the total sum of money every Igbo family had at hand to start life afresh. It was a well-calculated punitive measure to economically suffocate or strangulate the systemic "Other"- the Igbos. These circumstances were unbearable and affected our parents and, consequently, the education and life of Igbo school children. Despite the 1970 and 1974 Development Plan, and the 1975 and 1980 respectively, development was uneven and very slow in Igbo land. Political factors were obstacles to rationality in setting the development goals and implementing priorities; of course, the Igbos were relegated to the background concerning the development plan. Even more troubling was the failure of the Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Restructuring (The 3Rs) policy aimed at reintegrating the Igbos in Nigeria. This historic opportunity was flawed, leading to an influx of diseases, malnutrition, and joblessness in Igbo Land (Waterston, 1965, p. 579).

It was at the end of this conflict in June of 1970 and two years after the student riots of 1968 (Chicago Tribune, May 30, 1968) that I was born. I stepped into an unprecedented marginalization of the Igbo tribe, and a divided nation dipped in ethnicity and nepotism. These were the circumstances surrounding my academic and social development, which continues to shape my understanding of the nature of the exceptional hardship that was indubitably preposterous. This hardship makes it explicit how something was certain, namely my consciousness that the only way to survive was to relocate to the West for a better future. This idea of self-imposed exile or emigration became an existential insecurity within Nigeria. However, the reality of a self-imposed exile as I experienced in America is different from the internal subordination in Nigeria. The process of political antagonism and the strategic action of the government provided the evident and troubling insecurities changing my perception of life in general. Thus, the beginning of dispossession, a new diasporic identity and triple hyphenation in the United States. The specific ways in which these

experiences overwhelmed my overall persona forced me to engage with both self-discovery and self-negotiation in order to shape the narrative of my past and present in the United States.

The politics of ethnic marginalization was troubling; therefore, an understanding of the 'political' as a calculated form of societal deformation was a necessary conclusion. Since politics has become a machinery for cultural and ethnic marginalization, the attendant dissipation of self-worth was imminent. There was no trust in the government of Nigeria to protect her citizens since corruption and mass murder go unabated. Life will never be the same again as compromise and living in-between, and sometimes with indescribable fears promote an unpredictable undulating identity. The contemporary Nigerian immigrants, whether on a self-imposed exile or exiled by the government, have been understudied. Currently, the only literary publication capturing the Nigerian diasporic experience is the novel by Chimamanda Adichie, *Americana*, published in 2013. *Americana* exemplifies nuanced traumatic and emotional entanglements of diasporic Nigerians represented by the protagonist "Ifemelu." The narrative invites us to examine firsthand the effect of trans culturalization- a term coined by Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s. According to Nwanyanwu (2017), Adichie's novel is in "another respect, a forceful interrogation of the state of affairs prevailing in the postcolonial era" (Nwanyanwu, 2017, p. 37).

The degree of uncertainty and stereotypic behaviors helping capture a sense of "Otherness" was illuminated through disorganization, reorganization, and as Nwanyanwu (2017) purports in the novel, *American*, "degeneracy" (Nwanyanwu, 2017, p.37). There are significant contested and complicated notions of exile, Otherness, and life in foreign land demonstrated by the protagonist. Migration and exile are often used interchangeably in the Nigerian context, implicates postcolonial missteps, and are concomitantly synchronized with Achille Mbembe's "discontinuities" and "entanglement" (Adichie, 2013, p. 387). In addition, Nwanyanwu's (2017) analysis of Adichie's Americanah, suggest the agonist,Obinze, is an example of the frustration and "lethargy of choice lessness" faced by many Nigerian-Americans (Nwanyanwu, 2017, p.1.).

The characters in the novel *Americana* and I share similar circumstances in ambivalence and feeling of "neither here, nor there" (He, 2010, p. 475), choice lessness and a feeling of displacement and despair are commonplace to a diasporic Nigerian. The same is true with Bhabha's conclusion "the discourse of colonialism is a paradoxical mode of representation" (Bhabha, 1994, p.).

As I engage in this study, I keep wondering why young immigrants from Nigeria are understudied. Given the academic achievements and progress made by the Nigerian youth in America, I feel this youth merit scholarship. John (2010) opined that the presence of African migrants in general requires sustained and systematic scholarship to unravel their histories and lived experiences (John, 2010, p.1). I therefore submit that the understanding of the experiences of young and adult immigrants from Nigeria remains limited and understudied (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2018, p.1).

My experiences are rich and generative, particularly the euphoria of getting on the plane for the first time, the experience of culture shock, linguistic and cultural disorientation, and the loss of old relationships as well as the fear of the unknown relocating to a new horizon. I also had mixed feelings and did not have a clear sense of identity, so it was difficult to adapt to my new environment at first. My experiences have shown there are fixed molds people of color with accents are placed both at the philosophical and practical levels. For example, when I was teaching at an elementary school in Southeast Georgia, we had a reading workshop, and all teachers were required to study Pinnell. In the workshop, we were all given a particular excerpt from the book to read aloud and critique. When it came to my turn, I read the passage flawlessly and explained the theories and limitations I felt would undermine using that text for our purpose. Although everyone who had contributed previously was as eloquent and expanded their thoughts, no one clapped or displayed any emotions. It was when I read the passage the room exploded with clapping and a sudden display of surprise.

The manner or nature of this response may draw several interpretations. One way of looking at this situation is through the lens of stereotype or difference. This may remind us of G.W.F Hegel (1770-1831), a German philosopher who used his mind to assert Africans lack reason (Obenga, 2015, p. 20). It was

obvious Hegel did not procrastinate concerning his promotion of German superiority. Similarly, the acclamation might be suggestive of an expression of surprise anchored in old stereotypes. To return to the August experience and the reading workshop, I felt belittled and ashamed because we are talking about a text written on a 12th-grade level! This kind of reaction is consistent with Bhabha's theory of colonial discourse, which explicitly demonstrates the relationship between ambivalence and colonial discourse of stereotypes. Huddart (2007) interrogation of stereotypes suggesting "stereotypes seem to fix individuals or groups in one place, denying their own sense of identity and presuming to understand them based on prior knowledge and incomplete knowledge" (Huddart, 2007, p.37).

The implication here affirms the different ways of representation or identification is based on a fixed generalization. I concur with this interpretation simply because there is a pattern of representation which is consistent across all age groups I have encountered in my workplace, which tends to thread similar patterns of behavior which Huddart described. Stories told by Africans in K-12 teaching in Georgia seem to be consistent on critical issues of stereotype, racial discrimination, and alienation.

Perhaps because of these differences and discriminatory policies mostly based on race, I was compelled to carve out a hyphenated self. Since America permits the coexistence of many cultures and grants legitimacy of hyphenated identities, this study will offer many stories of sustained social integration and the painful consequences of moral exclusion to illustrate the context of my new becoming (Sirin and Fine, 2008, p.3; Ibrahim, 2017, p.3). This hyphenation is connected to being Black in Nigeria and being Black in America. In asserting the importance of embracing my Nigerian as a part of the search for an authentic self in America, I realize I was made Black in America and the significance of this identity informs the complexity of life in exile and the false assimilation into American cultures. Although I will provide a broad perspective of my experience through memoir, I will try to lay bare the social and psychological feelings I experienced as a designated "Other". My hopes and aspirations are captured by Du Bois' (2008) view:

He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of White Americanism, for he knows Negro

blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be

both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without

having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face (Du Bois, 2008, p.5).

A conscious identity shift upon African diasporic presence in America was immediately necessary in order to navigate the social, economic, and political terrain. I became a Nigerian-American, African American, and African born male teacher. These are my new identities, and I am happy to co-exist with other cultures.

Why memoir? Methodology

I chose memoir as methodology for this inquiry because of the interconnectedness between my lived experiences of being Black in Nigeria and in the United States. I incorporate storytelling based on my firsthand experiences and the stories told by others with similar backgrounds ranging from over 30 years of life in-between the two cultures-Nigeria and America. To understand the present, I must search the past to see what the past experiences mean in the present and in a larger social and professional context. This means I must rely on memory to connect the past events to the present. Memory fades with time and may impact authenticity which can only be captured within the moment. In view of the time lag between events, it becomes imperative to reinvent the circumstances or nature of the events in order to vividly recapture my lived experiences in light of how I wish to convey them (Zinsser, 1998). The significance of memory and remembering the past experiences was lucidly expressed in Krushner's (Krushner, in Shapiro, 1999) description of his Jewish experience:

It is not accidental the great feast of remembering, or redemption is called simply: The order.

The arrangement and interconnectedness of each of the parts preserves the meaning…We

take a memory of four hundred years and see it in a larger context of liberation and

redemption… Through the dynamic search for meaning the past remains eternally fluid

before our very eyes. (p.6).

Krushner delineated memory as a source of connections. The past has connection with the present and thus helps to elucidate or clarify meaning in the present. Past experience can be difficult to analyze through the traditional methodology of a dissertation because of the nature and complexities of the topic and the research questions. In many cases, stories are perceived as theoretical (Ellis, 2004/1950) which means analytical techniques can be applied to interpret the contours of the memoirist world view. There are many ways of analyzing a story such as narrative analyses, thematic analysis of narrative and structural analysis to mention but a few. For the purpose of this study, I will utilize both narrative and thematic analysis of narrative to interpret my experiences in Nigeria and in America. As defined by Ellis, "Thematic analysis refers to treating stories as data and using analysis to arrive at themes that illuminate the content and hold within and across the stories" (p.196).

My story will follow this established tradition of analyzing themes across stories. By doing so, my narrative will treat stories about Nigerian experience and America as data and analyze both experiences to arrive at themes illuminating the trajectory of my lived experiences in Nigeria and America. I will start by telling stories about my lived experience in the United State and in Nigeria, then move to analyzing the stories of others, which connects back to my own story. The emphasis then is on the use of the stories to demonstrate connections or relationship between the themes in the stories and answering the research questions. This means I think through the story exploring how my stories are impacting my experiences and to find in which experience the truth about my life in America and Nigeria. In Ellis' view, thinking about the story reduces the story to content and then analyzes it, hoping to find larger categories, themes, or patterns.

Using memoir as a research methodology offers me the ability to regain agency and power. After all, for many years, Europeans and other Whites, through literary and documentary movies, depicted Nigeria and Africa in general as a "Dark Continent." These hifalutin perceptions are depressing stories or views primarily aimed at rationalizing the dispossession of Nigerians in their land and did not offer any ambiance through which counter stories can emanate to address these ambiguities. I realized words could have the

power or potential to create an imagery of pain, misery including erroneous misconceptions about people. I have no compunction about debasing these stories as literally flawed by recounting my personal experiences dragging witness to the continued disrespect and marginalization of the Igbo youth- me, in Nigeria and how the spillover effect of colonialism and imperialism impacted my identity in the Diaspora. Many of these Europeans were novelists, anthropologists, psychologists, and historians who depicted their opinions without adding contextual evidence. The thread common to these accounts was the idea that slavery and colonialism were acts of charity and therefore justified. However, these master narratives, which pivots around imageries of penury, disease, paganism, and the belief Nigerians do not have souls suggest self-indulgent inclination to avert justice and shows the dept of man's inhumanity to man expressed by Britain and other European powers who colonized Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

Many years after colonialism changed its name, repackaged, and re-emerged as neoliberalism or neocolonialism and imperialism, it became evident the material connection instead of the spiritual was at the heart of colonialism. And it has become increasingly clear that Europeans invented stories we can characterize as realistic fiction to present compelling imagery of backwardness, primitivity, and hopelessness in today's parlance. Although African scholars have identified the motives for using erroneous descriptors, the understanding sheds light on eliminating blame or any form of recrimination for the Europeans whose moral values seemed antithetical to the religion they brought to Africans when judged on face value. There is power in speaking truth to power by using personal experiences and voice- laying down facts to support or draw conclusions. For example, Achebe (2000) states: "In the end, I started to understand. There is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where and as they like. Just as in corrupt totalitarian regimes, those who exercise power over others can do anything" (p. 24).

I do not want the stereotypes about Nigerians to continue unhinged because they will be giving someone else power over my life and wellbeing. A powerful narrative about my experiences of Blackness in Nigeria and America helps tell the story of being in exile, living in between cultures, languages, and

places, and explaining what those hyphens mean. The term Nigerian-American could be interpreted in many ways, different from how I see the term. I desire to express my views, something I consider a privilege- to speak or write my views without fear of arrest or reprimand. I write about my experiences, good or bad, and feel exhilarated to do so because I can! Contrary to Nigeria, where criticizing the systemic flaws of the government could land me in jail, here in America, I am metaphorically "free." This idea of having a voice from exile is concomitant with Ficre's exasperation in *The Light of the World* (2016) when he stated:

"of the few painters that currently live and work in post-war Eritrea, most are relegated to didactic renderings of social/realistic views of the painterly praxis, and inasmuch as they have not done much to instigate critical participation from viewers by speaking for themselves, instead they keep speaking about a presupposed community with presupposed need and solution…about self-exploration and expression, I believe in will be found great seed for healing and peace" (p.20).

Ficre's emotions about his home country are original and will contrast sharply from someone whose narrative experiences were outside of Eritrea. Although Ficre was talking about the totalitarian regime where artists were forbidden from expressing their thoughts through painting or art. This situation is like the social order in Nigeria during military or civilian governments. Like Ficre, I longed to self-reflect on the journey of oppression, the coupes, political thuggery, marginalization, and rejection which kept me in snafus and forced me to migrate to the United States. To tell stories about me from my point of view, therefore, gives me leverage over the burden of keeping these stories surreptitiously in my mind.

I discovered how stories told about personal life experiences can be antithetical to fabrications and evasive actions of mainstream culture. For example, White students in my class (even at the doctoral program) do not like to discuss racism, oppression, marginalization, White privilege, and the actions of neoliberals on the economy of African countries. I discovered how these students felt very uncomfortable about the actions of their forebears and sometimes tried to apologize as though the residual effect of racism will or has gone away. Being overly sympathetic and defying the victor/vanquished relationship mitigates against seeing me as a victim of colonialism/imperialism and neoliberal economic strangulation of the

African economy. To be evasive can be a way to scapegoat, but for someone who is the victim, the only window of opportunity opens when you interrogate yourself, develop a sense of self, a voice, and can tell your own story while letting the axe fall wherever it may. For example, Coates (2015) came to this consciousness when he stated:

> I had thought how I must mirror the outside world, create a carbon copy of white claims to civilization. It was beginning to occur to me to question the logic of the claim itself. I had forgotten my own self interrogations pushed upon me by my mother, or rather I had not yet apprehended their deeper lifelong meaning. I was only beginning to learn to be wary of my own humanity, of my hurt and anger. (p.50)

Coates says it is essential to analyze information based on the context to understand it fully. This assertion further suggests information must be evaluated to provide structure and highlight contradictions to improve meaning-making. I chose memoir as my research methodology so I can put all my experience in context to provide a deeper understanding and the interconnectedness of those events or experiences.

My dissertation topic deals with being Black in Nigeria and being Black in America. The onus of my research questions will address my lived experiences in both cultures. This kind of study will not fit into the scope of the quantitative research tradition using numbers or figures to draw conclusions about a phenomenon. In thinking about how to tell my story and taking into account the weightiness of my cross-cultural experiences and concerns, I consider it necessary to dislocate the conventional methods of inquiry in this case because memoir is more compatible with the expression of memories, emotions, and interpretation of lived experiences. These experiences are a different kind of experience because only those considered aliens experience certain kinds of discrimination, therefore, it is sometimes difficult to express in conventional ways. This is well described by He (2003) when she expressed the view "understanding of our cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities are not easily obtained through conventional ways of thinking" (He, 2003, p.78). I use memoir as a methodology to explore my cross-cultural experiences of life

in Nigeria and in America and in-between to provide an understanding of the research questions I have posed.

As stated elsewhere, lived experiences can be complex both in depth and in representing meaning and connecting such meaning to the present as Mullen & Diamond (1999) also notes the "The standardized research form of writing and report has prevailed in educational inquiry reduces human experience to knowledge claims based on issues of justification, evidence, and evaluation. We have inherited a narrow inquiry space . . . "(Mullen & Diamond, 1999, pp. 3-4). To the contrary, the purpose of using memoir as a method of inquiry clearly interrogates my past and helps to understand what it means to be an exile, displaced, live with hyphenation, marginality, excluded and oppressed, and to do that from a vantage point of hope and possibilities about a world in which exile and a sense of loss and injustice needs to end. It is my hope to broaden the space by contributing my memoir to the realm of educational inquiry. Through the narrative of lived experiences as expressed through memory, I connect my research to the pulse of the discourse of mass emigration, cross-cultural lives, exiles, and ant-colonial praxis. This is well documented by Mullen & Diamond: "Wherever the deeply personal, intimate encounter with experience is courted and expressed in inquiry, there is the beat of the artistic impulse" (Mullen & Diamond, 1999, p. 6).

It has been widely debated whether memoir is a genre of art (fiction) or nonfiction. Researchers are divided on this subject but agree some memoirs require or may include elements of the artistic impressions in its creation. This, then implies how memoir can take the form of a fiction by using pseudonyms and characters delineated to protect privacy. Indeed, there are limits to memory as one only remembers through his/her own perspectives. This is particularly true because when the same memory is communicated through another's perspective the experiences would certainly be skewed from the primary remembrance yet remain valid even though varied. The injunction to remember in the African sense, is a clearly ethical one and it may differ from other cultures. Remembering something in the past should be an accurate depiction of the events and circumstances so in many cases it is imperative to fictionalize memory to avoid stepping on toes or litigation. It is hard to escape the implications considering being politically correct. Therefore, memoir

has an element of fiction, characterization, setting, and plot as the narration is presented from the first persons and sometimes second person's point of view to the reader.

In this study, I use memoir to advocate for the voices of Nigerian immigrants in the United States and hold my lived experiences as added value to anti-colonial/decolonial studies as well as a guide to other Nigerian-American immigrants who wish to teach in K-12 education in the South. I feel using a memoir will be the most relevant methodology that captures my lived experiences and creates the context for my growth, and awareness of myself and experiences in the United States. Immigrants from Nigeria and other cultures face daunting challenges in America as Suárez-Orozco et al (2008) reported: "Both the first and second generations may share challenges and stressors typically associated with lower status, including higher levels of poverty, persistent experiences of ethnic and racial discrimination, community violence and poor schools" (p.4).

Many Nigerian immigrants to the United States are poor and belong to the low socioeconomic status and therefore have no voice and are silenced. Internally, immigrants learn to silence themselves because often we (immigrants) do not have immigration papers and are considered "outsiders" or illegal aliens. Under these circumstances, immigrants silently navigate their world with sealed lips and have no way of transgressing or expressing their worries. At times, some inexplicable experiences are lost in translation such that we (immigrants) do not know what thoughts are originally our own, what we can share, how to share our concerns or express how we really feel or wish to act. The thoughts of economic hardship and returning to the 'choice lessness' (Nwanyanwu, 2014) background from which we came complicates the matter and leaves the immigrant with no realistic alternative. This agony of "choice lessons" and silence is unnatural and well described by Derrick Bell in the famous book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, where poor Black/Africans are systemically relegated to the background because of the permanence of racism in America. Since Blacks are perceived as a monolithic group (Greer, 2013), African/Black immigrants, therefore, are a part of these faces at the bottom of the well.

I finally decided to review my experiences and break the silence and submissiveness to discrimination and racism directed at me at work or socially. In fact, I have been silenced in a variety of contexts and in certain situations where I felt inferior or powerless. In order to reclaim the courage to speak, I need to examine and understand my cross-cultural lived experiences and the influence such experiences have had on my identity as an exile in America. I need to determine how to represent my experiences, actions or inactions and feelings, and how it contributes to my complex and multiple identities. In her memoir, *An Unquiet Mind*, K. Jamison (1995) writes, "I have no idea what the long-term effects of discussing such issues [mental illness] so openly will have on my personal and professional life, but, whatever the consequences, they are bound to be better than continuing to be silent" (Jamison, 1995, p. 7).

Indeed, this truthfulness expresses her struggle with mental illness and enthralls the reader with a deep sense of empathy and respect for her resilience. Silence, regardless of the consequence of revelation, remains a more detrimental disorder than opening our lives to the public and telling the truth of our experiences. This study aims at empowering immigrants and myself to a meaningful life in-between two cultures and accepting a new identity and living my life more authentically.

In retrospect, I came to the realization the only tool in my hand to figure out myself is tied to my past experiences in college, teaching career and socially. Memory is relevant here and the only link to my past revealing the trajectory of my new identity to me. Life can be complicated without being conscious of the self and having a coherent voice. hooks (1989), a contemporary social writer has expressed the notion of free expression this way: "Appropriation of the marginal voice threatens the very core of self-determination and free self-expression for exploited and oppressed people" (hooks, 1989, p. 14). This confirms the increasingly marginalized voices of the systemic other and the powerless. The only way to speak out is to gather courage and to freely express concerns and mistreatments using carefully chosen words. The question remains: How do immigrants' express displeasure, mistreatment or become responsive to the hydra-headed problem of racial difference in the workplace without being reprimanded? The answer lies in the use of

fictional characters and well-crafted language expressed through memoir to tell stories about my experiences in America.

Researchers have reported immigrant voices are increasingly marginalized (He, 2003; Dei, 2017; Mutua, 2010; Greer, 2013; Bhabha, 1994; Ibrahim, 2014). I hope to discover my voice through the examination of my past lived experiences in Nigeria and in America. The attempts at and purpose for my memoir may seem to be selfish or self-serving since it is solely focused on my memory of the past. However, by remembering and telling the stories of others through my voice, I challenge the collective memory of racism "can be thought of as a repository of shared immigrant experiences, narratives, and visions of the past" (Leavy, 2007, p. 7). The narratives of Black/African immigrants and racism are the ones I challenge. This view is consistent with Steven Biko's (1976) response to the question of freedom. Biko (1976) responded thus:

> We can only generate a response from White society when we, as blacks, speak with a black voice and say what we want. The age of the liberals was such that the black voice was not very much heard except in echoing what was said by liberals. Now has come the time when we, as blacks, must articulate what we want, and put it across to the white man, and from a position of strength. (p.185)

This narrative simply reinvigorates the importance of being able to have a voice speaking to the issues of human difference and racism. I want to rewrite the narratives by re-examining my life and how I was impacted by the ideals and the expectations internal and external to myself. This study will address not only my personal experiences but the experiences of other immigrants teaching in K-12 education in the South. When we meet at coffee shops or social gatherings, many immigrant K-12 teachers share similar and unique experiences in very profound ways. Often these shared stories reflect painful racist and discriminatory experiences impacting the psyche and general wellbeing of the immigrant. These shared experiences and stories will be told through my voice, perception, and experience. This means all Black/African immigrant K-12 teachers whose compelling stories reflected the agony of exile, displacement, discrimination, or in

any way like my own experience, are a part of the immigrant experience of K-12 educators in Georgia. They reside in my memory and shape my perception of many shared experiences. My memoir will tell stories about my past experiences and touch on shared stories of other immigrant teachers expressed through my own voice. Certainly, there is ambivalence related to the choice of words, and sometimes I feel my memoir may not attract critical readers, or the truthfulness or veracity may be questioned. These kinds of feelings tend to downgrade my motivation as I constantly battle over my voice, how does it sound to the reader, and whether the pragmatic and syntactic structures of my sentences meet the expectation of my professor or the audience? This fear began after an experience with a professor in graduate school and has continued to haunt me. However, it is imperative I tell my story honestly without fear of contradictions.

In view of my advances in education and research experience thus far, I hope I am deemed a reliable narrator of my lived experiences. This preoccupation with quality and attention to the audience is an ideal I must strive to reach with strong, precise, and effective language. As Weider (1999) noted:

"an academic work must be rooted in the courage to speak honesty and conviction, to, as Mikhail Bakhtin put it, answer with one's life. And this life was about the struggle for authentic human communication and the making of a more loving world" (Weider, 1999, p. 27).

This reflection suggests how a person's best work is done when they connect to one's roots and past lived experiences. It represents the ability to challenge forms of oppression through an active personal voice helping to elicit emancipatory possibilities.

I need to speak through my voice about the meaning of the experiences in America and in Nigeria and how my life touches others in the process of becoming Black in America. For Wittgenstein (1980), too, "You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are . . . You write about yourself from your own height. You don't stand on stilts or on a ladder but on your bare feet" (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 33). Wittgenstein's ideas support the significance of telling one's own story even though Caroline Ellis (2004/1950) argues a story's generalizability is always being tested- not in the traditional way through random samples of respondents, but by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their

experience or about the lives of others the know" (Ellis, 2004/1950, p. 195). This position raises the question of generalization as well as authenticity and whether a story is academic enough to merit readership. To solve this problem, a memoir cannot be written in aberration (Barrington, 2002), but must help the" average person come in " (Karr, 2015). The unmasking of the memoirist personal experiences espouses the reader's interest such that as the reader is carried along an active reader- narrator relationship comes alive.

Another ideal is to ensure my writing thread on academic traditions that espouses the tenets of the curriculum studies program to obtain the approval of my professors. I cannot write from this place of being too academic while undercutting my authentic voice because as much as possible I want to reclaim my voice from the voiceless past of hopelessness and oppression. This memoir speaks to some sensibility about life in the Diaspora which is rich and generative in meaning. I want to make sense of my past by telling my personal experiences and connecting these experiences to the impact of culture and the perception of Blackness in America and in Nigeria. In a sense, my story is a "mode of reasoning "(Ellis, 2004/1950) that looks for a particular connection between being Black in Nigeria and in America. As a mode of representation, I plan to use my voice to tell my story and the story of others following literary conventions such as plot, character development and scene setting. Through a theoretical lens of decolonial/anticolonial praxis, cross cultural and exile pedagogy including race theories, I strive to create awareness of the miserable lives of Nigerians in the Diaspora.

I use a memoir to examine how I explored the social context of being Black in Nigeria and being Black in the United States. The social context here is concomitant with Fanon's idea of how African/ Black experiences in the United States and around the world are tied to race politics. This observation portrays a cycle of race conflict and its impact on humanity thus: "the Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation" (Fanon, 1952/2004). And Martin Luther King also stated race thinking has the capacity to make its beneficiaries inhuman even as it deprives its victims of their humanity (Gilroy, 2000, p.15). Racism is confronted with many tools and strategies including linguistic interplay of code-switching, and the new cultural formation

which ultimately becomes new sites or agency for the negotiation of new identities and positions. How do I study my experience of racism which involves painful memories and emotions using discrete traditional research methodology? This obviously will not capture nature and events in ways which showcases the conceptual scale on which the essential human experience is being calculated. I believe memoir is the only way I can give meaning to my lived experiences in Nigeria and America. This method allows me to focus on my lived experience and to tell my own story within the complex social, cultural, and linguistic contexts. Ellis (2009) expressed optimism about how her experience could help someone going through a similar experience. Ellis (2009) puts it in this way:

> I hope you, the audience, would identify with my plight and gain a heightened emotional sense of what it felt like to live this experience, as well as an intellectual understanding of the contradictions that occurred. In return, I have wanted to offer comfort and companionship in a common venture. (p.116).

Theorizing Memoir

I will write my memoir evocatively narrating my experiences of Blackness in Nigeria and the Southern United States and show how these experiences connect to my new multiple identities. In writing the narrative about my lived experiences, I will focus on important experiences aligning with my theoretical framework. Telling personal stories exposes the depth of personal secrets, and sometimes it is difficult to know the limits of what can be shared, fear of the outcome of the story going public, and what kind of meaning can be attributed to the stories. However, on the positive side, people experiencing or having similar circumstances may find a path to understanding their situation and gaining relief or satisfaction from the experience of the memoirist. In that sense, writing this memoir gives me a way to think and talk about being Black in Nigeria and in America (hyphenated life) in a contextualized manner. Ellis (2009) opined how memoir confronts how much of the way "we view our lives in the past is contextualized by what is going on in the present" (Ellis, 2009, p.116).

From this writing, I intend to understand in a profound sense, how I made meaning out of the experiences, and the challenges of telling the stories I have numerous times stopped halfway. Memoirs and personal narratives urge me to divulge the intimacies of self, and by retelling past experiences, I touch upon the nuances of memory, of finding and telling the truth to the point of disclosing my deepest self. Moreover, a narrative inquiry gives me a voice by providing me with the opportunity to tell, retell, and relive my personal past experiences. In this autobiographical narrative, I will tell my story in chronological order. I explore evocatively all aspects of my personal stories focusing on my lived experiences in Nigeria and the challenges of integrating into the social, political, and economic contexts in the United States (Ellis, 2004, p.45).

Through telling and retelling my personal stories, I intend to understand how my life in Nigeria connects to the new life in the United States and how I navigate the complex sociopolitical and professional landscapes in both contexts as I develop new identities. Being Black in Nigeria explains the entanglement of tribalism or ethnicism with colonialism and imperialism, and further shows how these politically structured differences define the self in a variety of contexts. These political structures are instituted by the colonial masters who were subversive through the creation of racial dichotomies. My stories stem from these experiences and the interactions in college with peers from different cultural backgrounds, and at work where my cultural and linguistic differences became more difficult to manage. It includes life at the brink of the multi-cultures in America, and how I countered inexplicable difficult circumstances where the attachment of hyphens as I understand it helped me to explore the socio-cultural landscape.

Exemplary Works

In the book *What it Means to be an American* (1996), Michael Walzer argues how the United States is not perceived as a "homeland' where a national family might dwell in other countries. The United States is a country of immigrants who, "however grateful they are for this new place, still remembers the old places" (p.25). This implies their children know they have roots elsewhere. Waltz makes the case that even the grandchildren of the immigrant generation, one's patrie, the "native land of one's ancestors is

somewhere else" (p.25). Waltz asks the question, "At what point do the rest of us, native grown, become natives"? The question has not been fully addressed and certainly the silence is at the root of the claim to land ownership and its attendant raciology which many call colonization. The United States is an association of citizens as Waltz noted. He states: "The people are Americans only by virtue of having come together. And whatever identity they had before becoming Americans, they retain (or, better, they are free to retain) afterward" (p.27). This idea of retaining identity is inconsistent with the way immigrants are treated as individuals are tied to a broad category of ethnic groups on the basis of race with preconceived notions. These pluralist views should allow immigrants to remember who they were and to insist also, to express how they would like to be perceived. The multiplicity of identities and the stereotypes are contested areas and can be unsettling to the immigrant communities. The pertinent questions are: Who creates these multifarious forms of diasporic images? In other words, who has the power to define people of any particular race in America and why?

Chinua Achebe--*Home and Exile* (2000)

In *Home and Exile*, Chinua Achebe (2000) revealed the challenges of being Igbo and African in a world that stifles Blackness. He was conscious of the predicament of being Nigerian during the colonial era, emphasizing the impact of these experiences on his own intellectual life. I became attached with this autobiographical account particularly because it ruminates on the power of information, highlighting the myth of dispossession, and the propensity with which short stories confer strength and hope. I am connected to this biographical account because Chinua Achebe and I share the same ethnic identity and in the idea of defying the stranglehold of colonialist or imperialist cultural dispossession. The materiality connection with slavery, mass migration, exile and diasporic troubled lives are historical facts that Chinua Achebe wants to bring to balance through literature that Britain often denies.

There are similarities in cultural patterns and world views often transmitted through informal education. This informal education runs across Igbo land and were mainly stories Igbo youth learned from their parents about the history of their kindred and community. Achebe noted: "it was useful I think to

present one or two more examples of the informal education I garnered in my father's front room and other similar settings in my childhood" (p.13). This excerpt reminded me of my grandmother, who taught me how to speak Igbo language and proverbs. It seems storytelling was a pivot and a part of my culture, given the world view of the Igbo is unique, and each town is unique as well.

An attractive high point about Achebe's *Home and Exile* is its touching on the democratic ideals of the Igbo, where an individual speaks for himself at the village square, contributing to vital policy initiatives for the general good. It clearly shows the Igbos are outspoken and do not make secret their disinclination to kingship. This background goes a long way to explicate the argumentative nature of the Igbo person, which Achebe attempted to explain in the following excerpt: "those who visit the Igbo in their home or run into them abroad or in literature are not always prepared for their tense and cocky temperament. The British called them argumentative" (p.18).

The issue of overreach and conspicuousness is an Igbo identity becoming compromised upon becoming an exile which pushes the weight of the injustices and marginalization a little tighter. The Igbo person is the same as his immediate family such that there is a pattern of expected behavior which is unique and a marker for a particular family. In other words, individuals' identities are tied to both the specific family structure and a collective community worldview. The impression our informal education (the Igbo thing) played significant roles in the development or upbringing of an Igbo youth countered the British juxtaposition and extravagant recognition of the British styled education over an existing informal educational structure.

Donald Woods--*The True Story of the Young South African Martyr and His Struggle to Raise Black Consciousness* (1978)   Steve Biko was a South African martyr who was killed by the South African authorities because he attempted to liberate Blacks from the crutches of the apartheid regime. Biko made clear there was an imbalance of power between whites and Blacks. Although Biko was talking about the situation in South Africa, his dissection of the evils associated with White Supremacist theories extended across the world and received universal acclamation. Thus, his ideas of unequal humanity are important to understanding the dynamics of the power differentials between Whites and Blacks in America. This imbalance stems from the belief how Whites carry universal humanity while Blacks are perceived as unproductive and a subservient race. This imbalance stems from the belief Whites carry a universal humanity while Blacks are unproductive and a subservient race.

According to Biko, White privilege hinges on theodicy which was an insidious arsenal that White Supremacist deploy to perpetuate racism. Theodicy is the effort to account for the compatibility of evil and injustice with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and good God. Biko argues how an-all knowing God should have done something about the injustices in the world if God was all-powerful. Whites Supremacists rationalize modern racism as a consequence of God's favor of white people. Biko disagrees with this belief and instead inspires Black youth to revolt against such anachronistic viewpoint. In his view, the bible should preach repentance and demonstrate how it is sinful to allow oneself to be oppressed. In other words, Biko thinks allowing oneself to be oppressed is a sin and idolatrous because it means racism itself is perceived as a God, and therefore whites have a tough time changing their minds about being racist and unjust. This unequal perception of humans on the basis of color creates a double standard where "if those who are below consider themselves human, then those who are above are superhuman or demigod" (p. viii).

Biko felt racism is asymmetrical and pervasive in nature, a remarkable contradiction, given other comparative analyses. In addition, Biko was not oblivious of the insidiousness of Black liberals because they do not have any power to change the condition of Black people in South Africa. White liberals, on the other hand, were merely theoretical and only interested in protecting their investments, so their actions or

inaction mitigate Black progression toward freedom. Because of the underlying issues in South Africa, Biko was unequivocal about the White-Black power relationship. In Biko's words, "I am against the superior-inferior white, Black stratification that makes white a teacher and the black a perpetual student (and a poor one for at that)" (p. 24). This conclusion elucidates Biko's insistence on thinking and writing what he likes without apologies.

Biko's oversimplification of W.E.B Du Bois' idea of double consciousness is mind boggling given how he aptly described the concept as knowing a lie while living in contradiction. I understand his point of departure here where Blacks are persuaded to accept that Whites are superior to Blacks because I experienced this notion unconsciously while working in the South. However, Biko's point was emphatic about the erroneous misconception indicating this superior-inferior dynamics was a blatant lie which blacks have been led to believe over time. This double consciousness is at the root of Biko's idea of black consciousness.

Black consciousness is connected to the ideas of Martine Delaney's idea of advancing the view how Blacks should appreciate blackness. This idea expanded into love for Blackness and subsequently Negritude first propounded by Nardal sisters in Aime Cesaire, Paris, including Leopold Senghor's rumination of seeking the good and beautiful Black. Biko foresaw a twin problem of racism and black acquiescence in South Africa and pressed for an end to Blacks condescending to Whites. In discussing what he titled "Black Souls in White Skin," Biko defined racism as "discrimination by a group against another for purposes of subjugation" (p.25). Biko vehemently cautioned Blacks who colluded with racism out of fear and those who acquiesced with unconscious racism by letting liberals and leftists ``do things for blacks." Consequently, Black consciousness was "an attitude of mind and a way of life" (p.91) which is another solution to Black inferiority complex. It implies training the mind to counter racism and restructuring the world such that the bipolarity diminishes or reimages.

White supremacist erected a superstructure destroying ethnicity within the white race in that there is only one formidable white race. The removal of boundaries brought all whites into one umbrella, created a

make-belief superior power structure and handed down the false narrative that whites were more intelligent and worthy of respect.

Given the above analysis, I agree with Biko saying Blacks should be conscious and proud of their color. Biko felt that Blacks should embrace negritude (the quality of projecting black as beautiful and unique) and black consciousness first before any positive move can be made toward eradicating the disequilibrium between the blacks and Whites in South Africa. When all Black ethnicities are united and feel good about themselves or proud of being Black, they can confront White supremacy. This sense of unity in diversity is constructive and elevates the status of Blackness both in the political, economic and social structures of the American polity and elsewhere. It means there will be no more possessive adjectives qualifying sub ethnicities within the Black race in America. I look forward to seeing an America where Black is Black and deletion of descriptors such as "my African brother," "my Haitian brother," "my Ethiopian brother," and "my Jamaican brother" to mention but a few, become a norm.

Ta-Nehisi Coates--*Between the World and Me* (2015)

The book *Between the World and Me* was particularly inspirational because Coates laid out the core of Black/African dilemma in America. Coates writes a powerful, evocative letter to his son about the injustices in the United States. His intention was to articulate a litany of unwritten laws of the street and the devices of the government, which together prosecutes the black body to submission. I connect to this evocative sense of love because I am Black, too, and have two sons who will become teenagers sooner than I realize. I also received this kind of tutelage from my uncle when I arrived in New York in 1994, but there was a remarkable gap in the information because of differences in place, orientation, and culture.

While the majority of African American youth may have a run in with the law enforcement, Africans are lectured to be overly conscious of the indiscretions of all the constituted authorities in America regardless of which arm of government is involved. The African youth is not only afraid of the police, but they are also careful with the immigration officers, the customs and border patrol agents, judges, and many other agencies. Although Coates was writing about America's uncanny and dehumanizing mistreatment of

the Black and Brown ethnicities within the northern hemisphere, his analysis especially connects to me because I suffered the same fate in the hands of Nigerian Northern oligarchy and also share in the same racial prejudice in America because of the monolithic view on Blackness. It looks like the marginalization and repressive actions of the government followed me to America. Being afraid to speak for fear of reprisal was no different from my disposition in Nigeria. Given the charges above, Coates challenged American exceptionalism (p.8) suggesting the history of America portrays an array of evil or unjust dispositions and actions against the weak and helpless. This feeling of dispossession and rejection was how I felt as an Igbo youth in Nigeria, where the British Government helped northern Nigeria to purchase arms and provide military logistics to force the minority and the Igbos to total submission. I also have this sense of being overtly careful or afraid of racism or reprisal. I left the ethnic rivalries in Nigeria and jumped into a bigger mess, the superior-inferior dichotomy between White and Black in America. The on-going discrimination by Whites in America was frustrating. Coates left no stones unturned when describing his fears, disappointments, and the double standard he sees in America.

In the case of Nigeria, the Igbos are the victims of injustice and police brutality. I felt the same hopelessness and injustice while in Nigeria. There is also the connection with indiscriminate police killing of unarmed Blacks in the United States. Coates pointed to a litany of police killings such as Eric Garner, Renisha McBride, John Crawford, Tamir Rice, Marlene Pinnock to illustrate a pattern of indiscriminate wasting of innocent Black lives; similarly, Nigerian government threads the same pattern of hate and destruction of the Igbo body in the guise of maintaining peace which does not exist. These types of extrajudicial killing or executions are rampant in Igbo land and often, the culprits elude the scope of international human rights agencies, and therefore no one is held accountable for these lost lives.

Because the Igbos are not represented in the security council, police, and the military intentions such as the Operation Python Dance, the Lagos Toll Gate program are often undisclosed to the nation, so like Coates, I had no choice but to guard my body. I agree with Coates saying the indiscriminate killing of unarmed Blacks is connected to jurisprudence (p.9). While Coates' attestation to these facts represents a

vivid picture of the status quo, the failure to generate an extensive list of all Black ethnicities was shortsighted. He intentionally ignores the monolithic view on Blackness as if to suggest how only Black African Americans suffer from injustice and police brutality in America. Coates departure here is very instructive because it points to the divisive and isolationist attitudes of the host ethnicity against the other sub ethnicities in the Black communities in America. The same way young Black Males such as Ahmadu Albury, Michael Brown and others were shattered with bullets was no different from the death of Amadou Diallo, Chinedu Valentine Okobi, to mention but a few. African-born Blacks killed in America do not receive national attention or support from the Black Lives Matter Movement as African Americans. This shortcoming is colossal because the same way the bodies of African Americans are a target for destruction applies to all Blacks regardless of ethnicity; therefore, all Blacks are subjective to the same "superlative form of dominion whose prerogatives include frisking, detaining, beatings and humiliation" (p.97). Nevertheless, stressing the point that everyone has lost a son to violence, the street, jail, drugs and to guns helped me to connect to the raw emotions demonstrated by African Americans when we discuss current trends in violence and the attendant extant factors underlying being a Black male in America (p.16).

In addition to other high points presented by Coates, the most important advice was proffering coping skills and ways to protect my body. I explored some of the suggested coping skills when my body began to experience racism and the only option left was to exorcize fear by way of "employing our darker sense of humor" (p.17)- an artificial happy face, overtly condescending to the point it seems I was an easy-going person and never cared about the racism surrounding me. In retrospect, I call that supposition laughable and the height of ignominy. Coates emphasized the constitution's limitation and stated he had no fate in the law because it did not protect Black people. Coates was the only person who explained why African American males exhibit rage within moments in a discussion. It became clear how African males are conscious of how they are treated differently from the majority culture. Because African Males have a wide array of mistrust about White police officers and law enforcement generally, African American youth transmit their fears into rage as a natural response to oppression and injustice. I understood why many of my African

American classmates in college had a very short fuse when it came to the debate about race and racism. The knowledge of how most Black Americans are in jail speaks volumes, which adds to Coates' frustration. I agree with Coates on the issue of school and the street as mutually exclusive factors predisposing African American fear.

Chude-Sokei--*Floating in a Most Peculiar Way* (2021)

Chude-Sokei writes an exhilarating and relatable coming- to-America story connecting to me and others who have triple hyphens. Like my father, Chude-Sokei's dad was an Igbo-a Biafran and fought in the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War between 1967 and 1970. Chude-Soki experienced displacement, having lived shortly in Africa, Jamaica, and later relocating to Los Angeles. This instability and attendant emotional trauma or stress are common to exiles or diasporic Africans.

Uncle Daddy and Big Auntie's strict religious household, where he lived with other abandoned children, exemplifies a typical African household and my parents were no different from Uncle Daddy and Big Auntie in their demand for moral rectitude and religiosity. I was intrigued by Chude-Sokei's obsession with becoming African American and wanted to discover why he failed. His involvement with gangs and getting in trouble attempting to prove himself to belong with his African American peers failed to materialize, which led me to believe he was simply rejected because he was not a descendant of former slaves. I discovered other Black ethnicities try to keep a distance from African Americans. Family members who have been in America teach new immigrants how to navigate America's social, political, and economic terrains. The first advice is usually code switching and keeping original accents to differentiate from African Americans. For example, Chude-Sokei recalled:

> "It helped after she told her children to say it for me. They did so easily. They'd memorized it a long time ago in English and French. Should they ever get into any trouble with white Americans, being able to call upon a French accent would be helpful. It would let them know you were not" (p.68).

Similarly, I was told to keep my accent no matter how resentful Blacks or Whites might feel about it at first. It is a marker of difference from African Americans and always helpful in circumstances involving White-Black dispute. For example, Chude-Sokei's mom retorted, "You have to keep your accent" (p.69). This advice is like what two of my uncles gave me the first day I stepped foot into America because they felt being mistaken for a Black American could be a prize of arrival.

Another essential point Chude-Sokei raised was the importance of the macro, and micro family units in helping the new immigrant adjust to life's vicissitudes in the newfound homeland. This experience of having uncles and aunties' advice and monitoring behavior is an existential attribute of many Black ethnicities in America. Indeed, this pan-African spirit provides an informal education teaching Chude-Sokei and I not just the redemptive skills of navigating Blackness, but Blackness in America. Family ties and benefits were clearly expressed in this excerpt: "This world of immigrant nurses and their families would lead to a strange mix of loneliness and community that characterized my childhood-endless aunties and a relentless flow of new cousins" (p.62). Indeed, living as a community was a way of preserving identity and protecting me from African American peers' vicious crimes and aggressive conduct. This high point raised an alarm in my mind, and I began to wonder whether White peers suffer the same fate in the hands of the law or commit crimes at all. It seems to me where I heard about crimes related to Blacks except in school shootings where the culprits are primarily White, while every other crime names an African American youth. For a long time, I thought White kids were so mannerable when they did not commit crimes. So, like Chude-Sokei, my conclusions naturally led me to resist family advice and control. My thinking suggests how analogously, Chude-Sokei must have felt the control was unjust, and there should not be any grounds for isolating from African American peers. However, associating African American youth and criminality cannot be divorced from racism and America's laws. Simplistically, it can be likened to giving a dog a bad name to hang it since, in most cases, some of the Black youth are framed for crimes they did not commit, targeted, mistreated by the police, and often murdered in cold blood for reasons as simple as selling a cigarette on the street or having a break light out. I imagined how given these gross inequities, a sense of

mistrust and fear are bound to form part of the psyche of Black youth, whether African America or other Black ethnicities. As Chude-Sokei, I was labeled and identified as Black or African American, a complicated identity manifests, Black, Black African American, Nigerian or African. In Nigeria, I am "Americana"- a derogatory term for being westernized, describing those who are living in exile in America. I am perceived as living in-between two cultures and therefore lack originality in either of the cultures. It became apparent how African Americans and I share a common racial identity regardless of being excluded from the African/African American communities or having an accent.

Outlines of Chapters

My dissertation consists of a prologue, five chapters, and an epilogue. In the Prologue, I introduce readers to my experience of being Black in Nigeria and in the United States. Through my experience, I share new ways of thinking about multiple layers of being Black across cultures and in a variety of contexts such as in college, teaching experience and other social contexts of everyday racism. The implication of living in-between and cross-cultural experiences which predisposes negotiation at the intersections of race, ethnicity, linguistic and cultural differences are introduced. The Prologue will touch upon the construction of race as a means or way of interpreting people and the connection to deep rooted systems of power linked to the different systems working together to subjugate others. There are multiple ethnic groups within the Black community in Nigeria and in the United States. What has not been systematically addressed is the extent to which these shared racial identity re-shaped understandings of the Black community as a multiethnic group with leadership disputes or tensions between the Black Africans, Afro Caribbean and African Americans. I will cover the lack of aggregation of Black ethnic diversity and the importance of understanding interracial differences. In the Prologue, I elaborate on significant personal experiences in the United States, confronting Blackness with a focus on the impact of linguistic, cultural and social differences in different contexts. I argue I was not Black before emigrating to the United States and how Blackness in Nigeria and Blackness in America are two different concepts.

In Chapter 1, I describe the context of the study and illuminate autobiographical roots of the study. I also include analysis and review of the relevant literature, including a systemic layout of the methodology for this study.

In Chapter 2, I explore my life in Nigeria and the painful experience of being the other. Nigeria has diverse ethnic groups with different cultural, religious, and political affiliations. I offer a framework within which three major ethnic groups in Nigeria can be examined with a view to understanding the conflicts and oligarchical power structures that work to undermine minority ethnic groups and the Igbo tribe in particular. I also address the connection between religion, imperialism, and the Nigerian Biafra War (1967-1970). I

lay out my theory of not being Black in Nigeria prior to emigrating to the United States and linked the fate of becoming Black in America with my experiences in Nigeria (Imogene, 2017; Dei, 2017; Ibrahim, 2014). Nigeria has a long history of ethnic conflicts and pattern of discrimination which will be expanded and developed in this dissertation. In order to better understand the experience of being Black in Nigeria, and the political marginalization that exit in Nigeria today, the causes and impact of the Nigerian Biafran War need to be critically deconstructed to bring readers who are unfamiliar with the Nigerian political and social landscape to par (Achebe, 2004). This chapter highlights how Nigerians are not oblivious to discrimination in their home country (Imogene, 2017), but the reality is that those experiences does not involve skin color (Ibrahim, 2017). In addition, I explore the historical background of Nigeria with a view to understanding why the increasingly contested religious, ethnic, class, and power struggles continue to undermine development and force emigration to the West. It is imperative to discuss my education, differential treatment, and marginalization based on my Igbo ethnicity. I then discuss my lived experience and what it means to be an Igbo man in Nigeria through theoretical explorations and autobiographical reflections. I will also cover the impact of the "brain drain" in Nigeria and why the call by the government of Nigeria requesting Nigerian professionals abroad to return home has largely been unsuccessful. Brain drain is one of the most destructive problems of Nigeria. In this chapter, I discuss in-depth the problem of brain drains in Nigeria, taking a constructivist approach to identifying the causes, effects and solutions to brain drain in Nigeria.

In Chapter 3, I discuss being Black in America-Who is African American in the 21-First Century and how do you identify or define this individual? I explore my life in the United States with a focus on the following questions: How is my sense of self perceived upon arrival in America soil, and how do others see me? If there are meanings attributed to being Black in America, does that meaning encompass diasporic Blacks? If so, what does being Black in America really mean and when and how did I become one? This chapter will focus on the process and politics of becoming Black in America. I begin my narrative and reflections by touching upon many painful and frightening experiences in America, reinvigorating a new

understanding of race and racism as important terminologies that are ingrained in patriarchy, hegemony and inequality (Asante in Dei, 2017). This chapter seeks to understand who is identified as an African American, and how foreign-born Black ethnic groups negotiate their dual identities of race and ethnicity in America. The duality of race and ethnicity for foreign-born Black populations disrupt the in-group and out-group theories in that foreign-born status helped to situate foreign-born ethnic groups as elevated minorities and move them closer to the dominant in-groups. This circumstance is impactful and underscores the collective identity and experience of foreign-born Blacks (Greer, 2013). Furthermore, I explore the complex tensions between shared racial identity and cultural ethnic distinctions within the larger Black communities. It is necessary to explore the impact of good Black versus bad Black in relation to stiff antagonism among Blacks as they continue to compete for limited resources.

In Chapter 4, I present a well-articulated narrative of the experiences of the first versus second generation Nigerian-Americans discussing prospects and challenges vis a vis Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM). This chapter offers a detailed account of the stories, feelings and perceptions expressed by the first-generation Nigerian-Americans in comparison to the second generation. In this chapter, issues about shared racial identity will be discussed. I explore shared Black groups, racial identity and delving into the ethnically diverse Black population while highlighting differences in cultures and attitudes. The branding of Nigerian youth as elevated immigrants comes with contested and complicated synergy portraying these youths as people with distinctive work ethics and educational ambition. The challenges and complicated process of becoming Black in America, in addition to shifting identity and displacements, make it difficult to decide whether to assimilate, acculturate, hybridize, or embrace transatlantic cultures. This chapter will look at how the first- and second-generation Nigerians in America negotiate their identity within the intergroup and the broader American society. In addition, this chapter will examine the impact of cultural conflicts and the role of Nigerian parents and churches in facilitating or limiting assimilation into the American multicultural delta. In this chapter I tell the story of how Nigerian-American youth feel about being lumped into a single ethnic group where race and ethnicity is perceived as interchangeable. Nigerian youth want an

identity where they combine their African heritage and culture with American culture, and still become an integral element of American society rather than being perceived as a qualifying adjective.

In Chapter 5, I focus on being a foreign-born male teacher in an inner-city elementary school in Georgia. I reflect on my twenty years of teaching in different contexts within the K-12 public schools in Georgia. I narrate the painful memories of racism, discrimination, marginalization, and sober moments. I address with a critical lens the impact of linguistic and cultural differences on students, native born African American, White teachers, administrators, and parents. I also focus on how I negotiate intersections of race, culture, and social difference and how these differences have implications for teaching and learning.

Finally, in the Epilogue, I write an evocative letter to all Nigerian children in America, focusing on the Black Lives Matter Movement, and its implication on the diasporic Black community. My hopes are that Nigerian children understand the race politics in America and thread cautiously as they pursue different personal and professional goals. This letter highlights how the hope for a united and progressive Africa is in the Diaspora African/Blacks. While it is imperative for the African/Black Diaspora to work together to destabilize the vestiges of colonialism in Africa, I also wish to encourage the Nigerian Diaspora to continue to strive for excellence and in keeping a strong balance between challenging academic and work situations with family and national development. In the end, I make an open appeal to a fluid cultural affinity striking a balance between Nigerian culture and American culture while participating in political activism and vying for different political positions in America.

CHAPTER 2:

BEING BLACK IN NIGERIA

Living Experience

Chapter two examines my experiences as a young Black Igbo male in Nigeria amidst historical inter-ethnic rivalries and the extent to which I felt a part of my country given the social and cultural cleavages that shaped my identity. As stated earlier, Blackness in Nigeria does not have the same connotation as in the United States because all Black ethnicities have the same phenotype; therefore, color is not a measure of difference. The difference is class, ethnic and religious background of the individual. Being Black in Nigeria is intricately intertwined with my identity including the marginalization of the civil servants, which primarily borders on the nonpayment of workers' salaries and the moratorium on promotions. The government's unpatriotic actions were mainly a tool designed to weaponize hunger and divulge educational opportunities for certain ethnicities in Nigeria. The unbridled competition for power and the failure of the government to deliver democratic dividends evenly across ethnic lines was the core of the problem. I was relegated to the background, suffered at school, and jobless upon graduation from college because there were limited opportunities available to me because of my ethnic background.

It is plausible to wonder why every description of my identity is tied to a historical fact or aspect because these kinds of descriptors are not the norm for civilized countries or elsewhere. This is essentially the case with every young Igbo adult because the foundation of the problems associated with being Black in Nigeria and Igbo is directly related to individual and collective tribal identities, which means a Nigerian youth from the West or North may never experience the kind of difficulties I faced growing up. Ethnic identities mitigate against getting a job at important federal civil service and subsidiaries agencies, which was at the time, the largest employer of labor in the country. While my pants and shoes soaked in water searching for a job, my counterparts from other ethnicities like the Yoruba's, Calabari, Northern and Western States had settled in well-paid jobs in government establishments or subsidiaries. When I speak about my experiences at the elementary, secondary (Middle and High School in the United States), and university levels, I make clear that multiplicity of issues including dispossession, political thuggery,

corruption, academic trade unionism, strikes, the crisis in the tertiary institutions, repressive dictatorial practices of the Nigerian Military Government, and insecurities of life and property negatively impacted my development as a young Igbo youth. The afro mentioned factors made life difficult, even unbearable for me.

What it was like to be poor, but culturally wealthy

My father lived near Marina Street, Lagos Nigeria. Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria and the second most populous city in Africa with an estimated population of fourteen million people. Lagos is an Island with beautiful lakes, surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean and was the first capital of Nigeria. The city has many businesses including seaport, naval base, air force and Nigerian Military Cantonments in Mainland and Island of Lagos. My dad worked at the Customs and Excise office in Lagos Island, Nigeria, between 1963 and 1966. As a young man barely twenty-eight years old, he fell in love and then traditionally married my mother in 1968. They had a wedding in the Catholic Church at Marina Lagos in 1967 celebrated at the heart of the Nigerian-Biafran War.

My parents were young at the time and did not plan to have babies right away, preferring to wait a few years, to work on career advancement and higher education training. Consequently, my father wanted to travel to the United Kingdom to pursue a degree in medical sciences, and my mother had already gained admission and begun studying for a nursing degree at the University Teaching Hospital Lagos (LUTH). At LUTH, my mother was an exemplary student making excellent grades and representing her class at Student Nursing Council Meetings. My father on the other hand was putting his plans together because he had received an admission letter to attend the University of Leeds at Beckett. He was slated to attend Yorkshire College of Science for two years and then proceed to the University of Leeds Campus at Beckett for medical school after successfully completing preliminary exams. However, while planning for departure to the United Kingdom, the Nigerian Biafran War ensued, forcing him to reconsider his plans of traveling to the United Kingdom momentarily, and instead he decided to relocate to Eastern Nigeria, which he deemed safer than Lagos.

The Impact of Nigerian Civil War on My Identity

On the 15th of January 1970, the Biafran War, also known as the Nigerian Civil War, which began on the 6th of July 1967 between the government of Nigeria and the secessionist state of Biafra, ended and facilitated the construction of Otherness-the Igbos. The Igbos survived a civil war that ravaged the Southeast with many bruises. The Nigerian Biafran war devastated the entire Ibo land and reduced our population because more than three million Igbo people died in the war. The Igbos were confronted with many challenges including relocating to their ancestral home from the cities where they were gainfully employed to find a safety net. As a result, my father was forced to make unavoidable changes to his initial plans about familyhood and career. His problems exacerbated when he discovered my mother was pregnant with me in the twilight of immodest and uncertain political turmoil. Under normal circumstances, this knowledge would have been a happy moment instead became a nightmare because of the precarious times. My mother reported despite the uncertainties, my arrival was a great joy though she felt my father exhibited a certain level of apprehension for his young family and me as the prospect of the civil war cast multi-layered dark clouds over the life of every Igbo man. My father's fear of the impending doom in Nigeria opened a broader question of ethnic mistrust, tribalism, nepotism, religious bigotry, the renewed and on-going challenges of an Igbo identity, as well as a general sense of cultural and political hegemonies in Nigeria. My father felt understanding, respecting, and working in constructive ways through these challenges with Britain and other respected international bodies acting as impartial mediators would have yielded different outcomes, perhaps the Nigerian Biafran War would have been averted. This thought of a benevolent Britain was only a figment of imagination as ethnic sentiments rose beyond the notions of disagreement, poverty, greed, or even tolerance to a more extreme contentious ideology of complete annihilation of a group of people-the Igbos. The idea of wiping out a particular ethnic group in a country is known in world political parlance as genocide or ethnic cleansing. My mother has not forgotten how she suffered during her pregnancy with me, and the plethora of sickness befell me during my infancy because of the War. I suffered hunger and starvation as an infant because the Nigerian government would not allow foreign foods to the Biafran

region. Alison Ayida, Head of Nigerian Delegation, Niamey Peace Talks, July 1968 states: "Starvation is a legitimate weapon of war, and we (Nigerian government) have every intention to use it against the rebels (Biafrans)" (Arkresh et al, 2017).

Indeed, the Nigerian government's food blockades were determined to harm children and pregnant mothers. It happened. I am one of those children who suffered due to the abysmal failure of the warring parties to prioritize the provision of food and medicine to my mother and other nursing women in Biafra Land. Alade (1975) in Arkresh et al 2017 reported the level of starvation in Biafra was three times higher than the starvation reported during World War II in Stalingrad and Holland (p. 4). I was malnourished and lost a lot of weight due to protein deficiency. My mother cries every time she comes across my childhood pictures and particularly when she watches documentaries about the aftermath of the war which triggered the international humanitarian movement and the involvement of several religious organizations. My mother recounts how she had lost hope I would survive the devastating starvation and hunger. My mother reported she could count my ribs and some bones were supposed to be buried under the skin but were exposed like the root of a tree missing the proper earthing channel. She had to drink a locally brewed palm wine to generate breast milk and fed me breast milk. She was able to keep me alive. In a deeply emotional voice, my mother said at one point, the international doctors had shortlisted me for an evacuation to the philanthropic hospital in Gabon if I did not add two pounds after a month. It was miraculous how the breast milk therapy in addition to a local black pea called Aki di (Igbo black eye peas or beans) worked and I gained significant poundage. As I was placed on the scale, my mother recalled the smiles on the doctors' faces when they reported there was the probability, I will regain all the lost weight in due time. It was a big relief for my mother, though many children were airlifted to the hospital in Gabon, and many were just returned to Nigeria in the 1990s.

There is a dearth of research about the intergenerational impact of the Nigerian Biafran War on the Igbos. Arkresh et al (2017) enumerated the first evidence of the intergenerational impacts noted how women

exposed to the war in their growing years exhibited reduced adult stature, increased likelihood of being overweight, earlier age at first birth, and lower educational attainment.

Given the role of Britain (attempt to assassinate Azikiwe, deploying fighter planes against Biafrans, hiring foreign fighters on behalf of the North and actually bombing the Igbo Cities and including the British Soldier's execution of the Coal Miners at Enugu who were demonstrating against low wages or the failure to act expeditiously), I conclude the British Government is complicit in the doom befell the Igbos.

As a youth, I always felt insecure mainly because I knew my parents' finances depended on when they received a salary, and these salaries were not paid on time or regularly. Sometimes paychecks are withheld for months on end and families like mine whose only hope is on the salary, stand at the brink and some days will dawn with only two meals or sometimes one and snacks with water throughout many nights. During these times, sleep disappears, and nights seem too long, filled with sounds of rumbling empty stomachs! In addition to the situation in my household, the situation with the state and federal system of government made me cringe because nothing worked, there is corruption everywhere, and I was aware I could not get anything on merit due to tribalism and the federal character policy which was an unparalleled, unpolished, or rustic version of affirmative action in the United States. The educational institutions were not an exception in the way professors and office personnel were poorly paid, the institution was ill-equipped, and teachers were inadequately trained to effect any meaningful change in society. As a result, educational opportunity was limited, and unemployment was astronomically higher than in other states in Nigeria. The state was failing in its duty to protect the life and property of all Imo state citizens. Because of limited or lack of government support, I saw myself as a victim of the prevailing circumstances and a half citizen of Nigeria and Imo State in particular. Although the different ethnic groups have coexisted since independence, subtle hostilities, marginalization, and misappropriation of funds exist. The prospects of significant cultures dominating as in America are evident in Nigeria, where the indigenous tribes are the systemic "other" and must live and deal with life vicissitudes (Achebe, 2000).

Life in Imo State was bane giving the insecurity and nonpayment of workers' salaries. The Nigerian Government weaponized hunger leading to submissiveness and bribery in all quarters.

Based on my father's position as a chief accountant of the governor's office and my mother being a Nursing Sister in charge of the Care Unit and Children's Ward at the Holy Rosary Hospital Emekukwu Imo State, Nigeria, I was supposed to belong to a middle-class family. However, the nonpayment of salaries for protracted months yearly was a mitigating factor. By all accounts, I was poor when compared to other students whose parents were in business because my parents could not afford or provide my basic needs or necessities. When the military ruled with an iron fist, people had to work even with no funds to pay for transport fare. Because a lack of funds, my parents could not pay for my undergraduate fees, and sometimes the fees were paid late. I recount many times I was placed on a withdrawal list for nonpayment and prevented from taking final exams for the year. My father borrowed money wherever he could to ensure we did not drop out of school. This situation of having to borrow, living from paycheck to paycheck, represents the life of many civil servants at the time.

Colonial Dominance/Intergroup Inside Nigeria

As a child, my parents imposed English speaking at home in keeping with the Nigerian idea of doing business in English. It was a status symbol to show off your children or household's ability to speak polished Queen's English in those days. As a result, my parents deliberately spoke English, and I dare not speak vernacular to the hearing of my parents while at home. In those days, my grandmother, who was in her seventies and called "Daa Ogwogo Paul" or "Mama nukwu," always visited and occasionally lived with my family at Emekeukwu in southeastern Nigeria for a span of two to six months. My grandmother had fourteen children, all through normal birthing processes; two of the children, Mary and Martha, died at an early age of six and eight, respectively. Mama Nukwu had twelve living children, six boys and six girls. My mother was the youngest daughter and spent most of her infancy in her care, mainly when my grandfather was preoccupied with the Catholic mission as a teacher and Catechist. When I turned twelve, Daa ogwogo or mama Nukwu felt it was time to teach us the rudiments of our culture and language. My parents were

apprehensive, but mama persisted with the idea of speaking Igbo at home. After much persuasion, she finally convinced my mother to speak to my siblings and me in Igbo.

Each time I tried speaking Igbo, my peers laughed at my mispronunciation and often described my siblings and me as lucky enough to have wealthy parents or backgrounds. I used to think my parents were wealthy because of the job or position they held, and only a few of my friends at the village had educated parents but I later found out how my peers at the village were merely making those comparisons based on having uneducated parents and living conditions in the village and not on any generalized criteria. This assumption can be valid because most people in the village lived in abject poverty with poor housing, feeding, and health facilities, so coming in from the urban city tends to elevate my status in the village. I watched painfully as my grandmother's health deteriorated. My grandmother, a heavily built woman of almost four hundred pounds, struggled with walking because of her excessive weight. Often, she tried to walk with her walking stick shuffling one foot in front of the other, and her back bent almost double until her head nearly touched the top of her walking stick. It was hard to imagine my mother's descriptions of a Mama Nukwu who was as dark as ebony, slim, and the most stunning woman of her time in the Umuofor kindred. In the story my grandfather went on an evangelistic mission and taught her at St. Therese's Mission and from that day never took his eyes off her. He married her, and then they lived loving each other throughout their lives. Mama Nukwu taught my siblings and me how to speak Igbo and a litany of Igbo proverbs helping summarize essential speeches. She taught me how a man should have wisdom, listen more, and speak precisely in well-thought-out sentences.

Mama's favorite pastime was watching the native dance and listening to a famous radio show called Nwa D.C. (a drama about the encounter between the Igbos and the Europeans during the colonial era) and "Soro mu Chia"(Igbo Drama). She had lived almost an entire lifetime with no radio or television, so she often enjoys the voices of the character Lomarji Ugo as Kotima (Sherriff) and the District Commission- a personified White Judge. With her shrill voice, ostensibly elated in stiff suspense, she chuckled loudly and gasped audibly when Lomaji Ugo Orji mischaracterizes D.C. and gave directions to the Plaintiffs and

Defendants to provide material goods and gifts to him instead of paying the correct fine to the District Courts- ways the Igbos sabotaged the British Colonial Government. Mama knows when different programs come on the radio, so she always reminds me to tune in to the radio or TV for her favorite shows. She was also very fond of the drama program "Soro m chia" (which means joining me in laughter). This show was favored because the characters were older men and women with an infectious sense of humor. I enjoyed these shows with mama and my siblings daily as the evening winds down.

Mama also enjoyed telling stories like the Lion and the Leopard, the "Anama Akpoligama" (Igbo Folktale), the Turtle, and the Hare, including other legends and short stories to keep us thrilled each night. Mama did not know many English words, so she spoke in Igbo, which forced me to learn Igbo because I wanted to understand and enjoy all the stories. Because she did not speak much English, this meant her storytelling sessions often involved vivid gesticulations and multiple repetitions so my siblings and I could understand what she was trying to say or so we could say anything that she understood. Stories had it that I learned how to retell stories from my grandmother, a skill I grew up to honor and cherish.

My grandpa was a kind man and an eloquent speaker who represented my community in the District Commissioners Office and became a Warrant Chief. He was also a schoolteacher, husband, and strict disciplinarian. Unlike most of his contemporaries in our hometown, my grandpa passed Standard Six, and with that qualification, he became a schoolteacher. Grandpa enjoys reading religious books but mainly read the Dailies and would often make me read some of the excerpts from the Newspaper and retell the story to him. Like my parents, grandpa speaks English well and constantly communicates with us in English. He writes excellent grammar and often asks me to read letters from his friends to learn new vocabulary, a task I greatly abhorred. In retrospect, I can see the benefit of reading and writing, but then it was more of a chore than a fun activity.

When I was growing up, most people in my village, particularly the elderly, spoke in parables or idioms to avoid directly mocking anyone and sometimes to hide the meaning of certain words in a conversation. I discovered how my peers often mock my parents about their choice of speaking English to

their children or in their homes. It was considered a taboo and disregard of Igbo cultures to use English as a dominant language. I endured people teasing my parents – usually behind their backs – for this decision, accusing them of desiring to anglicize or turn their children into Europeans. Inadvertently, these criticisms coincided with anti-English sentiments as influential African personalities earnestly or painstakingly advocated for speaking the mother tongue in schools, communities, and government offices. For example, the notorious former Ugandan president Idi Amin, in the 70s, brazenly addressed the United Nations in his mother tongue, and so did the Congolese despot Mobutu Sese Seko showing allegiance to their local language and dumping his European name. These pioneers said English is a foreign language and encouraged Africans to embrace African languages. More recently, the internationally acclaimed Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, after a successful career writing in English, decided to switch almost entirely to writing in his native Gikuyu. Upholding one's mother tongue over English appeared to be the ultimate demonstration of one's love of people and country – a blatant display of disrespect and anti-British colonialism.

Class Within the Nigerian Society

A misconstrued sense of self has become a perennial issue among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria was the battle between the mind and the purse, certificate, and cash. My father and other educated peers flaunted their certificates as a mark of superiority to those uneducated. However, people in business in the Igbo communities were recognized for their entrepreneurial spirit and business acumen. From pre-colonial times to today, much of the country's successful traders and transporters have been Igbo. Many of them began as apprentices and worked their way up, never bothering with the school. The Igbo are also known for ostentatiousness and flamboyance – those with great wealth usually find it difficult to be silent about it. On the one hand, the moguls flaunted their cash, while the educated members of my parents' generation flaunted their degrees, many from British and American schools. They might not have had the excess cash to fling at the masses during public functions or to acquire fleets of cars, but they could speak fluent English – an asset not available for purchase in stores. On the other hand, some go too far by appending their

academic qualifications to their names. Apart from academics and medical doctors, it was common to hear people describe themselves as Architect Peter, Engineer Paul, or Pharmacist Okoro.

As stated earlier, my parents met at Lagos shortly before the Civil War broke out between the Government of Nigeria and the secessionist Igbo state of Biafra. My parents loved each other very much and conversed with each other mainly in English. My mom fondly called my dad, Christy and stated to us how "my father's pleasing voice and ability to speak English fluently were the things that attracted your daddy to me." My mom was lucky to have an education because, at that time, only a few women were allowed to go to school. She was allowed to go to school because my grandpa went to school and passed standard six education. Because of his exposure, he wanted all his female or male children to get an education. My mom stated the way she spoke English fluently was worrisome to the villagers, so many villagers made fun of my father for his choice of wife. The old folks admonished my dad for marrying a nurse and argued nurses knew everything about medicine and would dictate when or whether they would carry children to term or not. There were all sorts of gossip, but that did not deter my father, who stated that "even if my mother was uneducated that he would have sent her to school because he could not marry an uneducated woman." The seething bitterness or disagreements between those with certificates and cash became evident in the 1990s when the Nigerian economy plunged. Suddenly, it was not so difficult to find an educated wife willing to marry a man who could also take on the responsibility of her parents' and siblings' welfare. Whether or not he could speak English or read and write was immaterial.

Around the same time, a significant number of uneducated but daring Igbo men found infamy and fortune by swindling westerners of millions through advance fee fraud, known locally as 419 frauds. There were stories of learned men – professors, engineers, and accountants – being openly scorned during community meetings. "Thank you for your speech, but how much money are you going to contribute?" they would be asked. "We are not here to eat English. Please, sit down and keep quiet." There were also stories of 419 scammers sneering back at those who mocked their incorrect English and inability to pronounce the names of their luxury cars. "You know the name; I own the car," they would say. Conflicts between the

mind and the wallet cause the denigration of the Igbo language in Nigeria. Many families, even in the villages, force their children to communicate in English at home. Many children who admired people like my family grew up determined how their children would also speak English. Igbo language, according to the United Nations, is among the languages on the verge of extinction. The other two major tribes in Nigeria, Yoruba and Hausa, do not face threats from English and seem not to be doing as badly. Yoruba is one of the languages on a list of suggestions for London police officers to learn, while the BBC World Service's Hausa-language operation has a larger audience than any other. Meanwhile, Igbo is among the world's endangered languages, and there is a rising cry, especially among Igbo intellectuals, for drastic action to preserve and promote our mother tongue.

<div align="center">Root and Statehood</div>

Imo State came into existence in 1976 along with other new states created under the leadership of the late military ruler of Nigeria, Murtala Muhammad, having been previously part of East-Central State. Imo state was named after Imo River, which flows around the perimeters of the core Igbo habitation of the Niger river areas and empties in the Atlantic Ocean. Statehood is part of Nigerian political culture likened to gerrymandering in the United States. Indeed, states are created periodically as a political favor aimed at winning followership. As a result, the new round of state creation split off Imo State in 1991 as Abia State, and another part became Ebonyi State. The main cities in Imo State are Owerri, Orlu, Mbaise, and Okigwe. The Arashi River has its source in this state. The local language is Igbo, and Christianity is the predominant religion. Imo state is predominantly Igbo-speaking, with Igbo people constituting a majority and other tribes coexisting in the area. Imo state was created in 1976 following reconciliatory pressure on the Nigerian Government to fully implement the 3Rs (reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reintegration), equal representation, and equitable redistribution of infrastructures. Imo State has 27 local governments with complete jurisdiction of municipal and probate responsibilities.

Mbaise-My Local Government Area

At the inception, Mbaise had only one local government area until the 1980s when Ahiazu Mbaise Local government was carved out of Aboh Mbaise Local Government. Ahiazu Mbaise Local Government Area in Imo State came because of a merger between Ahiara and Ekwerazu. Its headquarters are in the town of Afo Oru. There are fourteen (14) towns that makeup Ahiazu Mbaise. They are Mpam, Ihitte Afor Ukwu, Opara-Nadim, Obo Ohia, Ogbe, Aguleze, Otulu, Oru, Narambia, Akabor, Ogwuama, Obodo Ahaira, Obodo Ujichi, and Amuzi.

Amuzi Community

The Amuzi community is one of the main towns in Ahiazu Mbaise Local government area of Imo State, Nigeria. This small town now has two autonomous communities and is governed by two traditional rulers. I was born in this small town in the heat of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. The Amuzi community has two elementary schools owned by the Christian Missionaries and St. Jude's Primary School instituted by the Roman Catholic Church. St. Jude's Elementary School was the largest and most prestigious of the two elementary schools in Amuzi town. I attended St. Jude's Elementary School from my village, Umuokisi, three kilometers from my residence. I remember walking barefooted, carrying my slate and chalk box along with my handwork (project or technology artifact) to school daily. I will return to handwork and its relationship to modern-day science and Technology Day in America. The school was built in the early part of the 19th century, shortly after the Catholic Missionaries arrived at the Ahiara Dioceses. The walls of the school building were made from red earth and roofed with metal zinc. There were no ceilings, but the cathedral height and trees helped maintain a manageable temperature in a region where the average daily temperature was in the 100s. There were twelve classrooms in the main building, with two classrooms for each grade level, grades one through six. A small office called the Headmaster's Office was attached to the L-shaped school building. This office has a small room where our sporting equipment and school band were stored. St. Jude's was noted for producing the best soccer team in the area and marching band, which was more of a tradition than an activity. In this school, discipline was foremost, and students complied with the

teacher's request for fear of being spanked with long sticks by their teacher and receiving additional punishment at home for being disrespectful to the teacher. Parents were quicker to accept the teacher's explanation than the child's, which often caused resentments and sadness when teachers lied or exaggerated students' behavior to subdue that student.

<center>Primary Education</center>

Indigenous language was not used versus English in the delivery of instruction at the elementary and post-elementary school levels. Teachers were imperious and forced other students and me to submission, obedience, where I dare not speak out, let alone ask questions even when I thought the question was cogent. The impact of bottling up my perspectives and accepting hook lines and sinker everything my teacher says has had a long-lasting effect on me. I continued to wonder whether asking critical questions was disrespectful or an essential part of my learning, culture, or both. Is my teacher always, right? If they were as bright as they claim, why do they consider a child who frequently asks questions a distraction or disturbance? I was talkative, inquisitive, or somewhat impulsive and always bored because my teachers regurgitated almost everything, I learned from my home tutors. As a result, I would blurt out answers to questions meant for other kids. I expressed my boredom by speaking out directly to my teacher's intelligibility and tactically expressing how I know the material by helping other students answer questions in class.

Sometimes I display inevitable mood swings to demonstrate I was unmotivated and unwilling to relearn a material repeatedly. I was always punished and judged as a behavior problem child. Impulsivity got me into severe troubles with most of my teachers, particularly at the elementary school. It was considered rude, disrespectful, or out of line to question a teacher's authority, and to make matters worse, my parents supported the teacher's version of whatever was reported about me. It translates to school being where information was received, eternalized hook, line and sinker or crammed. As a student, I read the teacher's note and accepted every information the teacher fed me even when I was not confident it was credible. Paulo Freire's "banking concept" of education finds meaning in Nigeria, where the teacher-student

relationship was marked by oppressive and depositing of information by the teacher into their students. Teachers spanked me recklessly because I was hyperactive and unable to conform to the formal classroom rules. When I did not understand the lesson, I dared not ask questions; the teacher would make fun of me and report to my parents, which caused more problems when I returned home. I learned in fear and became unnaturally quiet even when I had the most pressing need to stand and move around; I self-indulgently remained seated for the entire length of the lesson. During those situations, which I nicknamed "confinement," I sat down and thought about how soon the lesson might end and inwardly distracted myself to stay seated, pretending to focus on the instruction. In retrospect, I would have been placed on medication if it were the United States or another industrialized nation. In my estimation, it was indeed a kind of torture, even though the cultural context would consider these kinds of situations as disciplinary and culturally relevant to the Igbo perception of good Child-rearing practices. The Igbos strongly believe in the dictum: spare the rod and spoil the child, I think, lost meaning in translation and extended to abuse in most circumstances. This voicelessness I experienced as a child or young adult I came to realize transcends my immediate vicinity to a much broader spectrum internationally.

In 1976, Nigeria committed itself to Universal Primary Education (UPE) for its children. An essential six years of education were envisaged to foster unity and parity between the many disparate groups in Nigeria. According to Ozigi and Ocho (1981), the UPE provided a minimum level to which all children will be educated to equalize educational opportunities throughout the nation. The UPE did not immensely benefit me, rather complicated matters. My experience at the elementary school demonstrates the myriad of problems of the UPE, including poor quality of education and teacher strikes, which soon become a normative balance of power arrangement between the teacher union and the Government. Bray (1981) qualifies the UPE program as a low-quality education and an accompaniment of quantity education. I was in primary one at the inception of the UPE program.

At elementary school, I received instruction in English and our native Igbo language. Despite the use of physical punishment, I enjoyed school for the most part because I always looked forward to playing with

peers during recess and nap time in the middle of the school day. The midday nap helped my young brain relax and persevere through the remainder of the sweltering day. It is worthy of note teaching and learning in English and the native Igbo language were also helpful in conceptualizing complex concepts. The native tongue provides a more profound understanding because it draws culturally relevant images and brings learning into my purview. In retrospect, I learned that the missionaries invented the Igbo alphabet and paralleled the English language alphabet in the invention of the Igbo Language. All Igbo alphabets follow English alphabets patterns which means my name and other Igbo words are spelled based on the sound combination of the English alphabet. I remember asking my grandfather, who helped bring the first missionary school and church to the Amuzi community, and the first Catechist, teacher, and titled chief in my community, about how his parents communicated with each other. He explained his father had plenty of yams and money and was considered a wealthy man in those days. My grandfather stated that my great grandfather loans money to people from different clans in Amuzi and made records of his debtors in our native alphabets. My grandfather remembers a record of debtors written on a smooth animal skin then hung on an open area between the kitchen and his bedroom. This document contained marks of different shapes and lengths. My great grandfather used this record to document the name of his debtors and how much was owed. The record also included the promised date to pay off the loan.

Colonial Dominance (External) and Its Impact on Self-Identity

The advent of Christianity and schools eliminated most of our cultures, including language and customs. The impact of learning an alien language in a novel and often unrelated schemata was a disconnect and limiting factor to exploration and discovery learning. In Kindergarten and K-12, we sang and danced in both English and Igbo and had nap times. I listened to poems such as Jack and Jill and others mostly talking about apples, snow, animals like reindeers, and the likes. I had no clue what they were talking about because these topics did not connect to my repertoire of knowledge and were therefore not relevant. Because these topics were alien to me, I had difficulty making a connection, or the connection was lost in translation, and my culture did not support children asking many questions, so there was no way to communicate

ambiguities without being labeled a troublemaker or facing reprisal. In most cases, I resort to sitting down filled with energy, feeling bored waiting for the recess time to let out excess energy. Little wonder my most favorite school activity was P.E. and recess.

As stated earlier, I was talkative, inquisitive, or curious about many things I could not understand. One important question I had growing up was why I could not be allowed to speak our native language in class or why teaching and learning in Igbo was such a taboo. I hated punishment of any kind, whether from teachers, parents, or church, and tried to avoid punishment by all means necessary. This reprisal or fear of teachers and punishment followed me to this day, and while in America, my unusual- almost unnatural quietness and overly respectful attitude were misinterpreted as indolent, submissive, or passive. I will return to this issue in the upcoming chapters about being Black in America. While punishment at school and home was considered punitive by the students, parents, teachers, and the Government encouraged punishment even at the mere mention. Paradoxically, the punishment was instrumental in shaping my understanding of constituted authority, personality development, and the thinking process. It is pertinent to note all the famous intellectuals in Igbo land and elsewhere in Southern Nigeria had similar training. I learned to respect the teacher even when I thought the teacher was wrong. Indeed, the student was supposed to accept hook, line and sinker the teacher's perspective and do as directed. I have carefully reported this docile culture of acceptance without question as pivotal to the differential experience as a student and a teacher in America. This experience is instructive for teachers of other cultures who may encounter Africans in their classrooms. How does the experience of not looking up to meet the teacher's eye gaze, challenging teachers with critical questions, or asking questions about my learning impact my teaching and learning in America? I will return to this question when I write about the American experience of being Black.

English is the lingua Franca and school language, but in lower grades Pre-K -2nd grade, when I have trouble understanding a concept, my teachers often use vernacular to explain the concept, emphasizing the familiar cultural experience aligning to the new knowledge. The use of vernacular was natural and helpful at the earlier stage of my education. I remember once feeling very upset about a concept that seemed difficult

but turned out to be a practically daily occurrence. It was such a common theme in my culture where the only hindrance to conceptualizing was the complex English vocabulary. An excellent example of the relevance of indigenous language to learning in literary concepts is evident in onomatopoeia, personification, alliteration, and simile. In Africa, many festivals incorporate dance and songs. The Igbo language has elements of literature, particularly in the rhythm of our cultural dances and many songs. Take onomatopoeia for an example; raindrops on a thatch or zinc house in Africa produce an excellent repetitious and undulating sound that can illustrate the concept of onomatopoeia.

As a child, I heard different sounds, from crickets chirping to the birds and raindrops from thatched roofs as they find their way into water pots or containers. Culture is relevant and meaningful in building connections to previous knowledge or learning. What I already knew would have been a vital link to new knowledge, but the British-styled Education ignoring background knowledge painfully underscored a critical aspect of teaching and learning. By so doing, the connection between language, culture, and learning was lost. For a child rich in cultural experiences and knowledge of everyday circumstances, mental pictures of coordinated sounds and imageries could have provided pedagogical leverage for new concepts to be introduced or taught. The highfalutin or superfluous names given to these concepts end up making British-styled education alien and complex.

Also, the concept of alliteration known in the Igbo language as " Okwu nta bi ire" or tongue twister is another excellent example. The Igbos played with such lines and stanzas since hidden history. For example: "nwanyi na Akwa, Kwara Akwa na okuko Kwara Akwa n'elu Akwa akwara akwa" This translates to a woman that sow cries because a hen laid an egg on a cloth she had sown.

Indeed, there is no difference in meaning from the English interpretation. Another example is: "ukochukwu Ikechukwu kwuru okwu Chukwu n'ulo Chukwu do n'Arochukwu." Please note that my native language is written in the English alphabet begging the question: what happened to my native alphabets dating back centuries? My great grandfather recorded the names of his debtors on the wall of a small room inside his bedroom using our native alphabets. The British scholars and Government destroyed our language

and culture. These alphabets are different kinds of special marks representing our native tongue. This form of writing is now lost, but I hope to rediscover the letters following oral history and tradition. British Education thus provided a monolithic way of teaching and learning in imperialist Nigeria. This shortcoming is problematic in two folds: first, reordering a strange language and understanding the complexities of an alien culture embedded in language and transposed through literary concepts. It means our culture and language could have been helpful in all levels of education. Achebe (2009) commented on the idea of speaking of African literature in European languages as an absurdity and a perfect scheme of Western imperialism to hold Africa in perpetual bondage. I perfectly agree with Achebe's conclusion because the difficulty of conceptualizing complex vocabulary or topics that are not relevant to me as an African added to teaching and learning problems. I understood folktales, fables and poems told in my native language much more than English tales.

I read books like *Ali and the Angel*, *Tea without Sugar*-a classic tale of profound dishonesty, and *So long a Letter* (Mariama Bar)- a letter written by Ramatoulaye, a Senegalese woman living in Dakar to her friend in America. I also read *Things Fall Apart* (Chinua Achebe)-resisting African tradition on the one hand and embracing imperialist traditions on the other, *No longer at Easy* to mention but a few and Chinwe Nwa Izu. The plot was much more relatable than, for example, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest*, and all other Shakespearian fiction representing Eurocentric thoughts and expressions. I learned better in my native language or rather a combination of native and English, but learning was not sustainable when teaching in vernacular changed in high school and university education.

My educational experiences at the primary school level helped to substantiate learning in my native tongue and curriculum based on my culture cannot compare to learning English. For example, Kikuyu Ngu'gi experienced tremendous success in school when he received instruction in his Kikuyu language. Achebe (2009) reported: "Even at school, young Ngugi' is taught in Kikuyu, in which he excels to the extent of winning an infant ovation for his composition in that language" (pg. 103). The effectiveness of my mother tongue is particularly true for me in math, science, and literature. I struggled to understand the language of

math and science during my elementary and junior secondary school days. The resolve to lean toward the Igbo language for a more profound understanding was proscribed as we entered senior secondary. The principal, who was pro-English, instructed teachers to spank me for speaking vernacular in class. For many students, this rule exacerbated withdrawal and lack of active engagement in teaching and learning.

I had difficulty asking questions for fear of being punished for speaking vernacular. I then realized there was something wrong with the operationalized meaning of the word as its meaning! What does the word vernacular mean? It turned out I was right to question the meaning of this word! Wikipedia has the meaning as a vernacular, or vernacular language, is the speech variety, a term generally used to refer to a local language or dialect, as distinct from the standard language. The online dictionary also defined vernacular as the language or dialect spoken by ordinary people in a particular country or region. The problem became understanding which language was standard and or ordinary. It was absurd and unbelievable to underestimate such a debatable point, given that the Igbo language is not the vernacular but English. I could not reconcile why I subscribed to learn English then, but now I understand the language politics. The point in all of this was how Nigeria transacts a considerable portion of its daily business in the English Language (pg. 100). I must learn English only as a matter of compunction because I was trained to maintain the status quo and not think for myself in a meaningful sense of being educated. There is much politics relating to language use, and the imperialistic ambition of the European oppressors underscores the impact on the indigenous community. This problem was evident in Kenya when the imperialist structs in 1952. Ngugi states in Achebe (2009) says the imperialist declared a state of emergency in Kenya, and his world became shattered. Ngugi depicted his experience in this way:

> All the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and were placed under the District Education Board chaired by Englishmen. English became the language of my formal education. Kenya, English became more than a language: it was the language, and all others had to bow before its indifference. (103)

This heartfelt expression of the innermost part of Ngugi' was strewn with the Phelps-Stokes Commission report in West Africa in 1922, which favored the native tongue to English. The official British Advisory Committee readily adopted the recommendation of this report on Native Education in Tropical Africa. What is somewhat perplexing is the Committee's limited effort in advancing the recommendations of the Phelps-Stokes report. Although Achebe felt the demand for English was already present and in high demand by nineteenth-century Nigeria, there is no indigenous literature to substantiate this position. It appears Achebe, having received criticism from peers regarding writing African literature in English, sought to defend himself by corroborating European research with his pessimism about using the indigenous African language to write African literature. Hence adopting the English Language threatens the collective will spelled out in the Phelps-Stokes Commission report. Caught in the tension, Achebe opined in a paper presentation in 2018 thus: "While waiting for one or two common African languages to be adopted and standardized, African literature should be written in both foreign and native languages provided such literature depicts African experiences and peculiarities. (Achebe, C. ... The African writer and the English language. Jun 18, 2018).

Such shortsightedness may have lasting consequences as I look back on the impediments to my learning. It appears Achebe was indifferent to the development of a centralized African language or felt it was unachievable. It was Achebe who remarked Basil Davidson's apprehension of the truth about Africa in this way: "The records are copious" … but "mainly the European records and they are colored indelibly by the myth and prejudice which the (slave) trade itself did so much to promote " (134).

Given this background, the argument that the British colonial policy in Africa did not emphasize a preference for native language use in schools or demonstrate sufficient evidence to the contrary is plausible. It was a lost opportunity because Achebe's influence would have been enough to garner support across the continent. I had dreamt of a universal African language coopted with a related proximal tribal and cultural affinity of well-meaning people with lexical, syntactic, and morphologically congruent language structures and patterns. My observation is worthy of note because many tribes living near one another often have

blood relationships or, through many years of interaction (economic and social), inter and intra communication were established because of typical patterns of language forms and understanding. The lack of native language use in the teaching of school children fed the African child with marketplace expectations anchored in the mercantilist ideology of the West. Therefore, it is plausible that my education had no purpose other than theoretical and clerical. Since I could not understand it, the only option was cramming my schoolwork and regurgitating teacher notes during tests and exams. There was a famous parlance in the dormitories, which marked the beginning of serious exams called "TDB," which means to study until the daybreak. This idea of studying without being analytical was the norm for all college students in the university I attended and in other parts of Igbo land. Little wonder college graduates cannot apply or extend their theoretical learning to technology or the development of natural resources in Nigeria. How can one study for 12 hours nonstop and yet understand what he or she is reading? It was practically impossible, except that we cram instead of learning the materials to pass exams and get promoted to the next level in the academic echelon. During these exams, the expectation was to have students produce elaborate prose with no real-life application. Indeed, no learning had occurred since all I did was cram and reproduce or regurgitate the lessons taught verbatim! I realized I had received a functional education that carters for office jobs were writing reports, sorting files, and following protocols was only the job expectation. The spillover effect of this functional or limited education is no doubt mitigated against an innovative workforce and sustainable development.

Therefore, today's Nigeria has engineers who can tell you all that is needed about construction but cannot build a bridge, computer engineers who have not used computers during their entire graduate or undergraduate program, and optometrists who may have heard about ophthalmoscopes but never laid hands on one for practice. The list is endless, but such was my experience and continues to be the nature of our British-style education system in Nigeria to this day. The purpose of my British Styled education was not to develop competent skills for my overall wellbeing but to serve a functional purpose. This type of education was purposeful for the British colonies and only an affirmation of common knowledge, lacking

originality, or the intention to create critical problem-solving approaches and pathways to teaching and learning. Thus, it corroborates Achebe's frustration: "the picture of Africa and Africans which they(colonizers) carried in their minds did not grow there adventitiously, but was planted and watered by careful social, mental, and educational husbandry" (p. 115). Functional education was one tool or arsenal in British colonial Nigeria that undermined the development of human potential and forced dependence on Europe and the West in general. Today, I imagine how education that alienated my culture and language could have been of any benefit. This alienation that I speak of represents the underpinning of an embroidered education that not only undermined my ability to think for myself or use my native language but significantly stifled my liberating spirit. I mentioned the language debacle and hindrance to the liberating potential to emphasize the English education system's paradox and show how that effort continues to impact the development of education in Nigeria. For example, my teacher taught me to read the text, highlight the vocabulary, and write about my reading in my English reading class, but thinking or extending my thoughts was not part of the learning. It is common knowledge that the need to read within the text, notice and use explicitly stated information, analyze, and think critically about the whole text supports practical reading comprehension skills. These strategies were absent, so I learned to read for meaning on my own using the Oxford English Dictionary and reading fiction.

Education Experience

Two-Year College and University Education

Everything about life in Nigerian tertiary institutions connects to one's parent's financial background; from that perspective I represent my parents' wealth or financial standing. It does not matter how handsome or intelligent I am, but what counts is the kind of clothing I wore, my shoes, whether I drive a car at school or had money to throw lavish parties, and how many girls hang around me. I was judged based on how many of these factors were displayed and not on any personal merit. However, when evaluated against the status quo in Imo State, my parents were not deathly poor, but I felt dispossessed because I had no extra money to take care of all the youthful exuberances exacerbated by peer pressure. I wanted to have enough

money for extras, so I organized a fundraising party to pay for college. It happened when my uncle was being ordained as a priest in the Claratian Missionary Fathers (CMF); I seized the chance to organize a fundraising event. In the process of rallying friends and family to join in this fundraising effort, I came across an old classmate who later became my anchor in America. As the scores of friends and family members were busy celebrating the ordination of my uncle, I focused on the party. I rented a space and music instruments and took some of the drinks meant for the ordination to serve my friends at the party.

At the end of the party, I raised one thousand six hundred and fifty Naira from the gifts and sale of souvenirs. This money was a significantly huge sum in Nigeria in the 1980s when the Naira had much value. The money realized from this party helped to pay my school fees at Alvan Ikoku the College of Education- a prestigious two-year college affiliated with the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). Compared to other students whose parents were in the business sector or politics, I was relatively poor. Since my father was a Civil Servant, he was not paid on time, and sometimes salaries are not paid in full after many months of delay. As a result, it was difficult to afford school supplies, pay school fees on time, procure personal effects, and even to feed well at school or home, have access to good medical care or medication was quite abysmal. As a result, I lived a fake life for the many years I spent on Nigerian campuses. The real me was poor on the inside and wealthy on the outside. Because politicians and military officers swindle most public funds for ostentatious living, workers and the public suffer.

My father was the chief accountant of Imo State of Nigeria between 1981-1996. Every year through college, he would borrow money from the treasurer's office and sign a promissory note to repay a couple of hundreds in installments whenever salaries were paid. Living paycheck to paycheck was stifling, so I did not have many material possessions while in college. Although my dad and mom held prestigious jobs or positions, they struggled all through their lives to take care of my siblings and me. Given this background, passing the entrance to college or university came with mixed feelings because of the financial involvement.

The college was a place of fantasy, reformation, post-adolescent adjustment, and factious or contentious where I always wanted to hide behind friends who had wealthy parents to cover my poverty.

There was always steep and unhealthy competition, so I wanted to belong to visible groups, flocked with campus celebrities, and borrowed clothes and shoes to suit the girls. There were many clubs at school: the Rotary Club, the Palm Wine Drinkers Club, the Dollar Club, Reggae Club, and the Drama club. The student union and clandestine student organizations such as the Black Ass, Pirates, Buccaneers, Blue Berates, Two Men Group, and the Gamblers caused significant disruption. They attempted to instill fear in everyone by making death threats, shooting sporadically, sometimes publicly beating up someone. The Plethora of clubs offered the opportunity to socialize. However, Nigeria is a class society where students tend to stick around students with wealthy parents. I knew students from rich parents are arrogant, tend to hang with students in the same class, and look down on students from humble backgrounds. Being together and driving flashy cars on campus, these students display their parents' wealth in several ways to show they were born with silver spoons in their mouths and therefore commanded lots of influence and won the hearts of many of the pretty girls on campus.

For me, my parents were Civil servants and regarded as elites or middle class. In order to fit in at school, I registered with the Dollar Club. On the one hand, belonging to such a prestigious club amounted to flamboyance, respect, and the ability to win the heart of many girls, and on the other, this kind of make-belief life forced me to go against the training I received from parents and allow peer pressure to govern my conduct. My first semester at junior college was a very dark period of my life, and I dreaded reminiscing about this part of my life even in articulating this memoir.

<div align="center">College</div>

Upon graduation from the two-year college, I gained admission to a four-year college at Abia state University, Uturu, to study education with a minor in political science. This milestone was an outstanding achievement but came at a cost. My dad had to sell his car to pay for my college tuition, room, and board. I felt like the earth opened up and swallowed me because I could not stand the shame of my family not having a vehicle which further diminishes my status at school. I had always had a strong ego and was playing a compensatory game to keep afloat, and the sale of our only car further shed light on my financial

background. I remembered when my father received a promotion that qualified him for a car loan. He went to Lagos to look for a car and ended up with a Volkswagen Igala-a four-door sedan car with sporty looks. We were all excited, and my sister and I slept inside the car overnight. We could not stop admiring the car the next day, so we called our neighbors to see our new car. It was a huge celebration and a mark of upward mobility owning a brand-new car. The idea of selling the only car we had to pay for my education was unimaginable and dampened my spirit. The sacrifice my father made for my education was enormous and profound, and to this day, the memory of that day continues to be evergreen in my mind. I was motivated beyond measure, so my way of paying for this action was to take my education very seriously. I imagined my father walking one kilometer to catch a bus to and from work daily. One day, I came home on the weekend, and it had rained heavily. I discovered my father had not returned from work, and it was getting dark, so my brother and I took a flashlight and walked the lonely road he usually plies daily. Coincidentally, the bus had broken down, and he was sitting on one corner of the stores at the market square, perhaps contemplating how to go home without light as everywhere was dark when my brother and I called out. We all embraced each other with heavy tears in my eyes. We walked through the dark alley back home.

Despite the twists and turns of life, my father made clear his intentions how I was the hope of the family. He further stated he is passing on the responsibility of ensuring my siblings go to college. This advice synchronizes with the general Igbo view about education. The Igbos embraced education in the 1900s and made collective efforts within the towns and villages to send their children to school overseas and some significant Nigerian Universities. The underlying implicit assumptions and philosophy they desire to educate primarily males were based on learning life skills and staying connected with the changing world. One thing that has changed is the stories and skills due to the influence of other cultures or more advanced countries. The Igbos have great hope that life can become better with quality education. The belief in education to effect change, notwithstanding all the outside influences, will permanently change the Igbo perception of education. Nevertheless, all the gathered skills and values will be valued for generations to come. However, with our only car gone, I owe my parents a debt of gratitude, and the dividend has taken

an emotional toll on me, ushered in the sense of reason and maturity which spurred me to achieve greater academic heights.

My father paid my tuition and an apartment which I shared with three other students. This apartment has one bedroom and a living space of about ten by ten square feet, so we pitched our double bunk bed on either side of the room. Six students were living in the one-room apartment because we each had a less privileged student squatter. Squatting refers to students who live for free and sleep on a mattress laid on the bare floor each night. Conflict sometimes broke out between the three of us or between the squatter and their landlord. We always find a way to resolve issues. We lived relatively peacefully with each other and studied hard for our exams.

My father bought all my books and regularly gave me feeding money, often referred to as "pocket money" in Nigeria. I managed the limited funds much better than when I was at the two-year college. I had to skip breakfast and eat lunch and dinner to save money for other daily needs to survive. The university offered many opportunities for academic growth, including a library stocked by the College Council and donations from European Countries (E.U.). I spent most of my time at the library and studied for several hours each day. Because reality has set in, I became a changed person, focused on my classes, and withdrew from friends who spent more time socializing. I called these students ``social butterflies" because they always attend parties and at every social event. My first-semester exam result showed a range of scores within the second-class upper division, so I was proud to share the good news with my father.

Corrupt Dictators

U.S Repatriates over $311.7 Million in Assets to the Nigerian People were Stolen by Former Nigerian Dictator and His Associates (The United States Department of Justice News published Monday, May 4, 2020). On February 3, 2020, the United States government, and the Bailiwick of Jersey (Jersey) repatriated assets in the United States forfeited were traceable to the kleptocracy of former Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha and his co-conspirators. The Justice News also reported how in 2014, District Judge John D. Bates for the District of Columbia entered a judgment forfeiting approximately $500 million located in accounts

around the world against more than $625 million traceable to money laundering involving the proceeds of Abacha's corruption. This is just one of many examples of how the military has bankrupted Nigerians.

The nefarious, unscrupulous, and unpatriotic actions of the military impacted me at school and adults from different walks of life in Nigeria. There are many ways the corrupt practices of the Nigerian dictators impacted as a student and upon graduation from college. First, teachers' strike due to nonpayment of salaries or better wages, poor infrastructure, parents are not paid in time, price of goods and services skyrocketed, and the unsanitary condition in and around the schools.

I was getting ready to go back to school for the second semester when news broke out that there was a disagreement between the military Government headed by General Sani Abacha and the Association of University Professors (ASSU). The Daily Newspapers reported several high-powered meetings between ASSU and the Government, stating the two sides could not reach an agreement by the deadline. The deadlock meant the ASSU would strike, and therefore, the school would be closed until the matter was resolved.

Challenges at College

Nigerian Academic Staff Union: Strikes or work stoppages and the collapse of University Education in Nigeria and Imo state in particular: In 1988, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) organized a National Strike to obtain fair wages and university autonomy. As a result, the ASUU was proscribed on Aug 7, 1988, and the military Government seized all its property (Anugwom, 2002). The ASUU organized further strikes in 1991, 1992, 1994, and 1996, protesting the dismissal of staff by the Sani Abacha military regime. The military Government's action and the ASUU Strike were pivotal to the decay of education and loss of instruction in Nigeria to date. According to Jega (1996), ASUU Strike action harmed the application of university curricula. Moreover, Atteh (1996) in Anugwom (2002) suggested "having been hailed in the 1960s as agents of modernization, social mobilization and economic growth, most African universities are now totally tumbling down under the pressures of diminishing financial resources." This means the dilapidation of termitaria institutions has become an African dilemma.

The ASUU Strike Between 1991 and 1993

One of the most excruciating experiences I had in Nigeria was the incessant strikes by college professors orchestrated by the Nigerian University Teachers Association (ASSU) against the military Government of General Babangida and subsequently General Abacha. ASSU is a pressure group representing the Nigerian college professors' interests. Because Nigerian military and civilian governments often delay salaries and benefits to professors, the ASSU is constantly negotiating with the Government, and often negotiations fail. The resultant effect is a strike- a form of extreme civil disobedience against the Government where professors refuse to teach or work, and colleges and universities are forced to close for a protracted period of time. This is consistent with Albert's (2015) observation that universities in Nigeria embarked on a nationwide strike to pressure the Government for a pay increase for the second time between 1991 and 1992. In addition, Albar and Onye (2016) state: "strikes had become synonymous with university education systems more than two decades ago," and the truth of the matter is both the university staff, and the students have the right to exercise their civil rights. There is a proverb that says when two elephants fight, the grasses suffer. In this metaphor, the elephants suggest the ASSU and the Government while the grass represents the students, me. I suffered significant setbacks due to a plethora of unprecedented strikes, which seemed to have no end in sight. This quagmire went unabated and stretched for several months without the factions coming close to a compromise within a foreseeable timeframe. Nigerian Education hit a big rock, and the only hope was to search internationally for quality education given Nigerian Education was engulfed with frequent strikes, described as dead, disappointing to parents and society at large, and stressful to both students and teachers (Wole Soyinka in Hughes, 2005; Olajuwon, 2002; Ajadi, 2012). Moreover, Ukwu (2013) also noted the strikes caused unprecedented damages to the nation and other stakeholders in education in Nigeria. Damage, as used here, is connected to the loss of adequate education and workforce development, mediocrity, or "popcorn education" producing half-baked educated citizens of Nigeria. The learning gap I experienced in Nigeria had a spillover effect on my graduate education in the United States in the way my writing ability and aptitude for learning were seriously diminished. The

following conversation adapted from Chimamadu's "Americanah" (2013) can illustrate both the perceptive schema of the quality of education and the loss of confidence by the international community and prominent Nigerians in the quality of Nigerian Education. In Americanah, the agonist Obinze confronted Kosi's admiration of the "Sidcot Hall " -an English primary school in Nigeria, suggesting she might consider sending her daughter to the school because Sidcot Hall taught the British instead of a Nigerian curriculum. Obinze retorted his disappointment: "Didn't we all go to primary schools that taught the Nigerian curriculum?" (p.35). Obinze's disappointment sterns from the cherished high standard of education before the government takeover of Missionary and foreign schools in Nigeria. The new norm characterizes the puzzled expression on Mrs. Ajayi and the other women's faces implying that Obinze could not possibly be serious to consider a Nigerian curriculum for his daughter. In a summative designation, the woman commented: "If you decide to disadvantage your child by sending her to one of these schools with half-baked Nigerian teachers, then you only have yourself to blame" (p.36).

This dialogue illuminates the depleted condition of the Nigeria academy while I was in Nigeria. It is either strikes or another military mutiny halting school or forcing students to go on forced holidays in Nigeria. The ASUU Strike of 1991 affected the university curricula and delayed my graduation from college for one year. I was supposed to graduate in 1992 before enrolling for the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), but this goal did not materialize until 1993. In the end, I had languorously lost a whole year partying and hoping for a return to normalcy.

Ultimately, one delay can have a domino effect on the admission process of new students. The process of becoming an educated Igbo youth, to continue with the redefinition of our history through organic knowledge production, becomes gloomy, particularly with the start date of universities remaining uncertain. Until the Government and ASUU resolved their differences, the strike would not be called off, and there was no plan to offset the learning gap in place. The strike created a backlog of students who were otherwise supposed to graduate on time or as scheduled. It impacted my graduation, and I failed to see a common purpose- in a way, the strike was selfish and unpatriotic as it did little to divest autocracy or restore our

quasi-democracy. The military governed incoherently, destroying the fabric of our culture and dismantling the tenets of the Nigerian constitution. I think the nefarious actions of the military rulership in Nigeria invented a reality which was novel to our collective experience.

Given the unpredictability of the Government, foreign investments came to zero, and inflation skyrocketed. I was wary of the strikers, and boredom frequently caused my heart to race or swing like a pendulum searching for answers. This rhythmic pattern of loss and pain had a psychological impact because, by the time the ASUU strike was called off, it would have accumulated a significant amount of academic stress on me and my instructors collectively.

The remaining courses I needed to achieve the degree or Baccalaureate degree in political science and education were quickly squeezed into manageable components to fit into the limited time allowed for the strikes to be called off momentarily. As the university rushed my program, those who should have graduated one year before me were still actively working on their graduation, yet others were preparing to enter the school. It was a big mess and quite unconscionable! I sadly forfeited my annual boarding or apartment rental fees to landlords and could not afford to pay for accommodation when the strike was momentarily called off. Universities and landlords do not consider refunding money to either students or their parents for fees they have already been charged before the strikes. I became deeply distressed, and no law or public outcry could justify the sensibility behind this senseless haranguing of power. I squatted with friends in a one-room apartment housing eight students. The boredom from staying idle without any activity to occupy my time lured me to reading crime fact novels authored by James Hadley Chase- an English man. These books were a series of unbelievable and unscrupulous police officers and mischievous people in the United States. This series included fictional stories like *A Coffin from Hong Kong*, *It is Safer Dead*, *Fear is the Key that Unlocks the Rich Man's Wallet*, and *Do Me a Favor and Drop Dead*. These novels were thrillers with the twist of characters like Pokoto Holo and other misfits or miscreants terrorizing the rich in some parts of the United States.

The books were loaded with suspense and entertaining with a well-crafted plot that made them irresistible to read. I was glued to these books, and somehow the fantasy managed to sustain my young, restless mind. I discovered there is a connection between reading and writing. My aptitude for reading and writing increased exponentially. It was these captivating themes laden with street language, captivating photos of half-naked women with guns, and highfalutin words helped me build reading stamina and paved the way for literacy. The unparalleled vivid images or raw descriptions of popular United States cities were tantalizing, raising my curiosity to a height I longed to migrate to the United States. Despite becoming an avid reader, the angst following the dangerous and unpredictable nature of the strike was increasingly exasperating and worrisome. The question loomed in the air was how and when would the universities open? I was unequivocally troubled by the experiences and the hardships in Nigeria, which placed me in a very precarious situation. This whole era of "stop, resume learning, then abrupt closure now and again, and subsequent inconsistencies are comparative to "neither here nor there," a phenomenon which He (2003) used to describe a state of ambivalence and loss in exile but in this case, it was a feeling of loss within the boundaries of my country of birth. This feeling of doubt and uncertainty can be instructive, even synonymous with a sense of alienation and exile precipitated looking elsewhere to find hope and fulfillment.

How Military Dictatorship Undermined My Educational Advancement

While considering what to do with my life, another palace coupe in Nigeria ushered the worst military dictator in human history, General Sani Abacha, a core Fulani with Jihadist ambition. Military rule has always been a space of terror, intimidation, slow economic progress, and suspension of the constitution of Nigeria. During this military rulership, the constitution was replaced by military decrees, freedom of the press, and civil liberties undermined and restricted by an intimidating military task force.

Following General Abacha's coup de 'etat and General Babangida's palace coup, all democratic apparatuses and institutions were demolished or undermined by decrees. The inordinate ambition of Babangida particularly violated human rights and mismanaged educational funds, unable to pay teachers and federal and state civil servants. This coup d'état led to the massive strike of 1991 through 1993 and

subsequent strikes. The military regimes embodied religious bigotry, forced Nigeria into the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), ethnic dominance, and corruption. The usurpation of power by the military and registration of Nigeria as an IOC member ushered the Islamization agenda, which was at one point considered phantom. In no time, the Abacha administration constituted a panel of military and northern leaders to make the ill-fated 1993 constitution mutilated trust and divided the country, creating a bipolarity of north/south dichotomy. The adverse outcomes of military rule included the strike action by the University staff, inflation, school closing indefinitely, and market women rioting over the high cost of living, economic strangulation, or untold hardship following the outcome of loans that the military governments took from International Monetary Funds (IMF).

<div align="center">IMF Austerity Measures</div>

The IMF gave a list of austerity measures as a precondition for the loan. These austerity measures include the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), devaluation of the Naira, and investment in agriculture, basically focusing on importing genetic breeds. Needless to say, these actions were tantamount to the most severe economic crunch in Nigerian history, created a dependency on oil, and opened up our country to flooding of different kinds of inferior goods from China, India, and other Asia Minor countries. While the Nigerian populace, on the one hand, was agonizing over these strangulating economic realities, the Nigerian military ruler, Sani Abacha, siphoned significant amount of public funds and deposited the money in some of the most important banks in the United States, Great Britain, and other European countries. Throughout his five years of rule, Abacha was involved in a series of corruption scandals, however, it was not until he died when it was discovered he had taken around one billion United States Dollars from Nigeria's public resources. According to the United States Department of Justice, the money stolen by Abacha was laundered through purchase of government bonds which were backed by US financial institutions (Transparency, 2014). I make the case of complacency on the Nigerian populace and complicity for any country that advertently or inadvertently helped, accommodated, or created a haven for international nocturnal money laundry from dictators or politicians from poor African nations or elsewhere, suggesting moral flaws and

lack of human spirit. This information has a huge relevance as it shows the intensity of the deprivation and exposes global financial institutions in relation to money laundering. Given this information, I stopped wondering why our schools were underfunded, schools in dilapidated conditions and the government unable to fulfill its responsibility. This is how unprecedented corruption perpetrated by a government can have devastating effects on the public and why I suffered while in college. The Nigerian experience must serve as a lesson to implement more efficient measures against public officials that behave in corrupt manners.

I lost one solid year of school, and many students became deviant, dropped out of college, and became disillusioned because of how the military managed the economy. The military rule led to Nigerian education decay and offered no alternative to closing the educational gaps or revitalizing tertiary institutions. Nigerians lost faith in the education system because public education was extraordinarily underfunded, and teachers were poorly trained. Many Nigerians prefer to send their children to private schools with foreign curriculum and better-trained teachers hence the collapse of public education and the poorest of the poor becoming even more impoverished than ever. This new idea of patronage of private foreign schools over Nigerian public schools' transfers power to educate Nigeria's youth to schools with foreign curriculum or affiliations- a neoliberalist agenda and a new form of colonization. It created an inferiority complex that undermined patriotism while glorifying the colonial masters. To obtain a college degree from a foreign university, imbibing foreign customs, culture, mainly linguistic structures, and foreign accents became a yardstick to measure our successes or intended success. The effect of this assumed inferiority is evident in the way Nigerians prefer their children to speak a foreign language instead of a local dialect or language. Currently, media organizations cannot hire a newscaster that does not have a British or American accent. Indeed, a high premium is placed on the ability to mimic the "whites," so the complex continues to expand significantly. As noted earlier, Chimamanda Adichie captured this unresolved sense of inadequacy in the dialogue between Obinze's wife, Kosi, and Mrs. Akin Cole at Chief's birthday party in this way:

"How is your child? Has she started school? "You must send her to the French School. They are very good, very rigorous. Of course, they teach French, but it can only be good for the child to

learn another language since she already learns English at home… Kosi said French schools are not, but I prefer Sidcot Hall. They teach an English curriculum" (p.35).

This dialogue expresses the minds of many Nigerians, and Obinze will hastily disagree with sanctimonious recognition of western culture: Didn't we all go to primary schools that taught the Nigerian curriculum?" And this remark would bring about a venomous and puzzled expression from those women suggesting he could not possibly be serious about sending his daughter to a Nigeria school. Furthermore, in some ways, the above conversation demonstrates Nigeria is a class society, which is another intriguing factor at the intersection of ethnicity, religious fanaticism, and politics. This implies that when I talk about the dominance of one culture over the other, marginality, oppression, and favoritism or nepotism, the definition and practicality is not consistent across social circles or with the English word version of each term. In Nigeria, there are two classes of people, the wealthy political class and their affiliates and the very poorest of the poor. This class consciousness breeds unhealthy competition, and some Nigerians with poor or limited education settled for Advanced Fee Fraud referred to as 419. These Nigerian fraudsters who earned a fortune through various dubious means settled for politics took chieftaincy titles and became traditional rulers in their various communities. Insatiable political power led to these groups of people ascending to governor, senator, or elected members of the houses of senate and representative. Being those poorly educated men now flooding the political group with limited vision for economic, political, or business, the upward mobility of the Nigerian economy continues to suffer. As a result, there is an unrealistic expectation and limited vision for education and nation building because of the cumulative effect of systemic and unpatriotic political influence.

The onslaught of unpatriotic politicians' spells doom and illustrates a historical struggle, marginalization, and oppressive government rule throughout my secondary and college years in Nigeria. Our political climate and schools are spaces of marginalization and oppression that obliterate the historical experiences of unfavorable ethnic and other minority groups. Today, we are in the twenty-first century, yet Nigeria cannot feed its citizens with more than one-half of the country hungry and poor. The current impasse

of the Hausa/Fulani oligarchy backed by the British Government continues to dehumanize and objectify the Igbos. This subjective and oppressive inclination manifests itself in the resurgence of Islamic Jihad through mercenaries from Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Islamic nations, including Egypt.

As stated earlier, the bipolarity of Nigeria goes beyond the Nigerian/Biafran War and extends to other cultural, social, and religious issues. Other contributing factors include tribalism, nepotism, and the hatred of the Igbo ingenuity in trade or commerce across Nigeria. The steep divisions among the ethnic groups started in 1900 when the Northern leader, the Sultan of Sokoto, threatened to secede from the Nigerian polity citing the North's lack of preparedness for self-rule or independence. It was a clear indication the goal of Islamization had been at the forefront while nation-building and integration of the federating units were considered ephemeral. Since the amalgamations of the Southern and Northern protectorates in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper; it is still far from being united. During the Appropriation debate of the Legislative Council in 1947, Mallam Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1969) stated:

> We would like the world to know that in the Northern Provinces, we have our leaders whom we have chosen ourselves, to be rulers and voices. We do not want, Sir, our Southern neighbors to interfere in our development. If the Southern people feel they are representative for what they are agitating for, well they must know that the case of the Northern Province is different, but I should like to make it clear to you that if the British quitted Nigeria now, the Northern people would continue their interrupted conquest to the sea. (Cited in Nwankwo and Ifejika, 1969, p.30)

This core value and faulty perception of the Northern Nigerian people that have continued to create tensions and disunity in Nigeria caused the civil war and the Plethora of mutinies in Nigeria, leaving the education system damaged. Because the Southeast was defeated in the Nigerian/Biafran War of 1970, the dominant Fulani/Hausa tribe in alliance with Great Britain marginalized Igbos and other minor ethnic groups, including students.

I am Igbo or Biafran- a country that did not exist long enough to be on a map. This extinct country became a cultural penchant for redemption songs demonstrating the weight of agony experienced by the

South Easterners in Nigeria. My recollection of Kwashiorkor – a disease resulting from starvation that affected mainly children causing emaciation, swollen head, and stomach was a typical example of using hunger as a weapon of War. I was born at the end of the War and suffered malnutrition because of food blockage and medicine coming to the Eastern region. My mother reported that she had given up on me because I lost so much weight and looked pale that she prayed that God should take me rather than keep me alive to suffer. My mother cried daily for her dying son while seeking the assistance of the United Nations to have me flown to Gabon for medical treatment. My mother recounts her agony looking at my fragility daily and still could not explain how my ill health turned around miraculously. This inhuman disposition of the Nigerian side was advocated by Chief Obafemi Awolowo (the economic minister of Nigeria during the Civil War), who was released from the Calabar prisons by the Igbo military personnel and later joined the Nigeria faction, totally deceiving the Igbos and defying the memorandum of understanding which he signed before his release.

The deplorable health conditions of many Biafran children flown by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international humanitarian agencies to Gabon- a neighboring country, raised questions about how far the moral latitude of the world's greatest powers can go to prevent gross injustices perpetrated by the northern Nigeria soldiers with sophisticated weapons sponsored by the British Government, Egypt, France and supported secretly by the United States. By the way, the Biafran/Nigerian War was the first televised war in African history. The world cried when the pictures of children like me, almost starved, to death showed up in Europe and American T.V. networks and newspapers! The curtains of genocide were unveiled and quickly stymied by Britain so the world could not deliberate on the events and massacres in the Nigeria/Biafran War to call it what it is - a genocidal war. It was all Britain's ploy and marriage with the Northern Nigerian people to punish the Igbo disobedience during colonial rule!

I enumerated all these issues and painfully narrated how impactful losing this War has been on me and other Igbo youth to this day because it was the pendulum upon which my suffering and marginalization revolved. It exacerbated the reemergence of neocolonialism because the cost of the War had to be paid back

in some form. The military dictator at the time, General Gowon, declared an end to the War stating there were no victors nor vanquished to suggest an irreparable loss to all sides. Despite this concluding statement, there were victors and the vanquished. It was clear how the Igbos, me, were vanquished! The poverty or the poor condition of living, systemic economic strangulation, and political debacle connected to the marginalization of the Igbos led to a massive exile from Nigeria in what has been coined- "Brain Drain." The college professors whom the various military rulers marginalized during the ASUU Strikes left Nigeria in drones to Europe's and America, leaving the country to the perils of half-baked educators and the devastation of the specificities of different cultures in Nigeria.

Looking back now at the travails of imperialism and the dominance of the North, I concluded the leadership structure of Nigeria was disinterested in the success of education in the entire south, which transcends the troubling impression it might otherwise create a West/South alliance to the detriment of the North. This narrative is historic and a significant source of friction continuing to create tensions between the North and the south since pre-independence to this day. Nigeria has since struggled through a series of military dictatorships ending in May of 1999 with the democratic election of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The Government seems determined to restore the damaged educational system over the last two decades of the twentieth century. Although much has not changed to date, I have not lost hope in the ability of Nigeria to reconceptualize its educational policy and make the necessary changes for the general good.

Reflections

Life in Nigeria was very difficult for an average Igbo youth like me because the Igbos lost the civil war. For example, before the war began, the Federal government promulgated a punitive decree to federal civil servants of Igbo extraction, including my father, a senior officer. Also, the Public Officers (Special Provisions Decree no. 46 of 1970): With the Decree, many Igbo officers who participated in the civil war on the part of Biafra were summarily dismissed or compulsorily retired (Federal Ministry of Information 1971). This was against the earlier directive and assurance to the world by the Head of State that all officers

would be reabsorbed to their former positions before the escalation of hostilities. This hostility affected social, economic development, and education in the Igbo-speaking area.

In addition, the Banking Obligation (Eastern States Decree): Banks in the Igbo region were made to pay all account owners a flat rate of twenty pounds independent of what they deposited in the banks before the war. This affected my father and other educated Igbo families, and the impact lingered for many years. The economic stifling of the Igbos and the economy improvised my father and inhibited his ability to provide the best education for my siblings and me.

I also wonder whether my father would have had a better future if he had the opportunity to participate in the indigenization program. The Indigenization Decree of 1972: With this law, Nigerians were allowed to participate in the country's productive enterprises. Because of their postwar situation, Igbo people felt they were not ready for such exercise and were alienated from the nation's economy. Other war-related difficulties included the Abandoned Property Policy: The state government's confiscating properties in the Rivers state was seen as an economic attack on Igbo people, who fled the state during the war. My family lost two rented properties in the area, which was a significant source of income for the family.

Igboland, which used to be one of the country's three major regions, became the region with the least number of states of the six geopolitical zones in the federation. The defeat of the Igbo people also impacted their political, economic, and religious lives. Consequently, the lack of leadership in Nigeria resulted in Military dictatorships and the impasse of regionalism. The economic downturn made it difficult for the military to pay teachers and college professors. The Nigerian Association of University Staff (ASUU) was constantly at loggerheads with the federal government, leading to several strike actions between 1989 and today. The university closed its doors for eighteen months in 2003, and currently, ASUU has been on strike since the March of 2022 and has not yet been resolved. The lack of continuity in teaching created gaps in my learning- the impact of which continues to this day. Nigeria taught me nothing about being black in America. I was accustomed to the ethnic, political, cultural, and religious rivalries and continue to wonder whether appropriate education can cure the divisiveness in the Nigerian polity.

CHAPTER 3:

BEING BLACK IN THE UNITED STATES

Living Experience

"We are all informed by our histories, experiences, location and situatedness" (Hall, 1996).

Hall's assertion mirrors my personal experiences and reminds me of the complexities of schooling in Nigeria under a dictatorial military leadership, corrupt government, lawlessness, and the dearth of education, particularly for the Igbo youth. It also informs me how those experiences had significant implications for my life here in the United States. I learned about race relations in contemporary America and felt the impacts of racism on my Black body and my psyche through personal experiences. Having experienced a revolution, coups, exile, ethnocentrism, starvation, genocide, betrayal, union strikes, protracted school closures, and a sense of loss in Nigeria, I thought migration to America would be the vortex of a prospective and meaningful survival journey. Given the plethora of human rights violations, I lost freedom, even the naturally endowed human rights, so anywhere but Nigeria was worth the adventure. It was that failure which brought me to the United States as an immigrant.

While in Nigeria, student union activism had created tensions and an unsafe environment for me. It was apparent how any form of exile, whether temporary or indefinite, was urgent to protect my life. Being I had escaped Imo State of Nigeria to the border town of Lagos (West of Nigeria) and managed to secure a domicile in the neighboring country of Benin Republic- a small country northeast of Lagos, it became necessary to start the process of applying for refugee status outside the continent of Africa. Following the student union activism and riots, the military junta, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, was all out to silence any form of student opposition, particularly in Igbo-speaking states. It was necessary to evade any form of apprehension, so self-imposed exile was necessary.

While domiciled at Cotonou, the capital city of Benin Republic, miraculously, I received a letter from a cousin of mine who is a resident at Houston, Texas, concerning winning a visa lottery. Since I did not enter any visa lottery contest myself, I thought it was a hoax until my uncle contacted me with an urgent

message to proceed to the nearest United States Embassy to process my visa to the United States. I felt a goosebump all over my body, and when I recollected myself, I made the detailed plan to return to Lagos by bus at night. Part of the plan was to disguise, maintain a low profile, and avoid military checkpoints while going to the United States Embassy at Victoria Island, Lagos. Luckily, with the support of my family members resident in the United States, my papers were expedited, and I safely received an entry visa into the United States on May 29, 1995. It was an unexpected relief- a miraculous escape was indeed unnatural and timely intervention.

I arrived at New York JFK Airport June 1995 aboard Royal Dutch Airline (KLM) and was stranded at the airport for several hours because none of my family members were available to pick me up from the airport, so I had to take a limousine to White Plains New York where my first cousin lives. I started feeling a fast-paced society where individuals first took care of their business before extending family members. Coming to America was the first time I flew across the Atlantic, so everything was strange and novel to me. The airport was huge and busy and finding someone to ask how to navigate the airport was difficult. I did not know or recognize the information centers where I could have gotten the information, I needed so I stood at the corner watching the flow of people with great amazement as everyone I tried to speak with seemed to be in a hurry. I experienced the first cultural shock hours after arriving. Finally, the trip to my cousin's house took two and a half hours because of traffic. The driver of the Limo was a middle- aged Haitian man, spoke softly and was very nice. It seems he noticed I was a newcomer, so he took the time to show me some landmarks. I saw the New Jersey Turnpike and the Manhattan Bridge. Although I am always afraid of height, these bridges were amazingly ecstatic and different from any bridge I ever saw in Africa. I noticed the roads were too narrow and sometimes I was afraid of how close the cars were to each other. The driver has been around many Nigerians because he understood every question I asked, and we had a good conversation from New York City to White Plains. As I emerged from the Limo, my cousin's wife rushed outside and embraced me; the children all came to help me with my luggage to the basement. I enjoyed a warm reception that evening with other relatives congregating at my cousin's house to welcome

me. There were lots to eat and drink, and everyone wanted to know the situation at home, so I briefed them on the military impasse and how I managed to survive. The evening ended with fervent prayers and well wishes from everyone. I then took a shower and was led to the basement, where I will be staying for the time being. After two weeks, I flew to South Carolina to join another family member, where I plan to make my home. I arrived at Myrtle Beach during the summer months, and my uncle picked me up from the local airport. We arrived at his house to another gathering of family members and a warm reception. The challenges of incorporating or acculturation into American society started from here on as I began to experience the complexities of life in America.

In the early part of 2018, a Haitian friend called to report the current president of his country was suing the United States and demanding an apology from President Donald Trump concerning a vulgar comment he made to congress in a close-door meeting. United States lawmakers reported the president said in a meeting, "why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?" (Dawsey, 2018). The report was making rounds in social media and immigrants from Africa and other black nations around the world were very upset, disappointed, and felt disrespected. Despite the international outcry, nothing came out of it, no apologies were offered, and business continued as usual. This statement is instructive and provides a gateway to understanding how the dominant culture in America sometimes views immigrants. Indeed, the statement could not have come at a better time as I articulate the "heart and body" of this dissertation-Hyphenated Identity and Negotiated Intersectionality of a Second-Generation Nigerian immigrant.

I came to America with a green card, having won the diversity visa lottery (DV-1) in 1995- at a time I was desperate to escape the shores of Nigeria for fear of persecution. However, other Nigerians or Africans may have had different legal statuses when they entered America. McCabe et al (2011) report twenty-one percent of immigrants from the Sub-Saharan region enter the US as refugees, while seventeen percent were admitted through the Dv-1 lottery visa program. Like many immigrants, I became a naturalized citizen of

the United States in June 2000. According to US immigrations, 49% of sub-Saharan immigrants compared to 17% of immigrants from other nationalities became naturalized United States citizens upon qualifying.

In 2013, almost all Sub-Saharan immigrants who became lawful permanent residents were immediate relatives of United States citizens, meaning most immigrants came to settle in America. My intention was to acquire graduate degrees and return to Nigeria when Nigeria returns to a democratic system of government. Given how the political and economic situation in Nigeria degenerated continually, a change in my initial plan became unavoidable. I decided to settle in America. However, settling in America has numerous challenges and requires significant support from immediate relatives. I experienced challenges communicating with both African Americans and Whites. I had the worst time with uneducated Blacks or whites because I could not understand their accents or intonation, and they also had a difficult time understanding what I wanted to communicate because of my accent. Ironically, the country boy whites and blacks tend to have deeper and more challenging accents than they realize because their speaking patterns differ from educated blacks or whites. In addition to silly attitudes which were often so grotesque and nauseating making my stomach turn, they lacked care for the "other." No sooner than I arrived in America and started interacting with African Americans, the Caribbean, Asians, non-white, and white ethnicity, I understood the implication of being an immigrant and Black. As stated earlier, the term Black has a negative connotation in America, and Whites seem to have a monolithic view of Blackness despite the apparent diversity of Blackness in America (Greer, 2003; Ibrahim, 2014).

Things would undoubtedly begin with newcomers asking a certain fundamental but often loaded question, what does it mean to be Black in America? Moreover, I had thought the most important thing at stake was to figure out the process of becoming Black-that is, being accepted into the African American community or assimilating into the American culture. I did not realize the term Black is a loaded word with a political undertone. I discovered all black people are lumped into the same category as African Americans without regard to the diversity of the different ethnicities making up the African American Community. I am now classified as African American based on skin color and for statistical reasons.

Despite my initial enigma, the progressive encounters with the different ethnicities in the black and White community created confusion or chaos often exacerbated by a feeling of in betweenness, and uncertainty. I became overwhelmed when I encountered racism. It became clear Blackness is associated with race, racism, and slavery. However, the ethnic diversity within the Blacks and the often-antagonistic remarks from Black of American descent on Black of African or Caribbean heritage was another intriguing part of the puzzle. There were apparent differences in culture, and acceptance into the groups was impossible for so many reasons. Although all Blacks in the United States have the same phenotype, there were barriers between them creating tensions among the different Black ethnic groups. In Black Ethnicity, Greer (2013) raised the question: why do Black American and Afro-Caribbean and African immigrants sometimes fail to get along? It seems this situation is a known fact as Green also noted "Everyone knows we don't always get along. And we know they can be"(p.3). This suggests the rift between Africans and native-born Blacks has existed over a decade. *In Floating in Most Peculiar Way*, Chude-Sokei (2021), recounting his experience in the early part of his relocation from Jamaica to New York, states: Even then it was clear how there was a barrier between them and us despite the similarity of skin color. It was never discussed, but rigidly maintained and would not be explained until I started school (p.61).

I could see the bipolarity in America, one White and one Black, but I kept getting hung up on the issue of Black ethnicity and differences they brought about rivalries among Blacks in America. These differences impose various restrictions in social and political interactions, including relationships, marriage, and other forms of social associations. For example, Africans, Caribbean, Haitians, Jamaicans, and other Black ethnic groups in America rarely inter marry for fear of cultural differences. While I rehearsed these realities, I received a letter from my father emphasizing the peculiarities in America, and above all remarked despite how others might see me, I must understand I am not African American and should not act like them. This advice was intriguing and left me wondering what it means to be African American and the differences between African Americans and African-born Blacks? However, as puzzling as this advice was, what remained complicated and unexplained or unanswered regarding what I am at present (my identity)

or what I should not attempt to become (African American) remains what I should become in the years to come (my new identity). Similarly, my father had previously warned me about the ethnic diversity in Nigeria, suggesting I should understand the implication of my identity when interacting with the Hausa/Fulani or Yoruba's. It was ironic he felt the same way with African Americans. I found this valorization of one Black culture over another that my father talks about to be consistent with the inter-Black ethnic cultures and communities in the United States. The racial and ethnic populations of the United States are so distinct it appears there are different layers of citizenship, and the Black ethnicity is placed at the lowest rung of the ladder (Kozol, 2004).

My first observation was African immigrants are clumped with African Americans as a racial group. The impact of this grouping undermines the study and understanding of the disparate groups within the African American umbrella. It solidifies the absoluteness of "Blackness" in being Black is used interchangeably with African American. The truth is African born immigrants have different experiences and outcomes from African Americans. Because of this situation, I had difficulty describing or stating who I am (Daniel and Poe 2013). This experience is also tied to the segmented assimilation theory, which offers a framework for understanding how second-generation immigrants become incorporated into the host society and the different outcomes (Zhoy, 1997). Incorporating implies how children of immigrants are grouped with the most congruent race, so the most plausible race to African-born immigrants is African Americans. This means as an African-born immigrant, I am treated as an African American. This monolithic view of Blackness impacted my economic well-being as well as social integration. For example, while working for a retail group in South Carolina, I earned $5.50 per hour. I discovered how immigrant whites and females were making $6.75 per hour in the exact job specification. The wage difference could not be explained any other way than through the lens of race, nationality, or cultural differences.

This experience is consistent with Borch and Chora's (2010) finding "being white" transcends the disadvantage of gender. When I interviewed other Africans who were light skinned such as people from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco who worked in the same place, they were all paid higher wages than myself

which led me to believe there were other extant factors contributing to discrimination than race. For example, language, culture, and gender may impact wage differences. Because of my race and speaking patterns, I had difficulty finding a job befitting my educational qualification. For five years, I was forced to work in positions I was overqualified for to keep body and soul together. When I interviewed for new jobs, the feedback was the usual- you are overqualified even though I was ready to take the job. The lower-paying jobs of salesmanship, cashiering, and factory work were always available. These jobs paid very little; as a result, I was unable to pay my bills or feed well. However, what startled me most was how I was not treated any differently from the African Americans-so on paper, I am African American, but in practical sense, I am not. The Whites treat me in the same way as an African American, but I am excluded and referred to as "My African Brother" in the African American community. Furthermore, most referents from African Americans, primarily males, would begin with, "you people come here" ... "you have no place here," or "you don't get it." It became clear there is a deep mistrust and conflict because of significant cultural, historical, and linguistic differences or factors. I began to struggle with my identity trying to understand who I am or will become amidst these complexities. How do I find or create a space for myself within the socio-economic and political milieu of America? I am not African American or White, and my Nigerian heritage and culture have disintegrated while in America so Nigerians now see me as a half Nigerian having assimilated some of America's culture. Ibrahim (2014) corroborated this quandary when he asked the question: "So, what happened to my old identity in the new geopolitical, linguistic and social space?"

In this chapter, I ask the same question connecting to the three-partied dispossession and marginalization I experienced as an immigrant elementary school teacher in Georgia. When I open my mouth to speak, the audience or whomever I am speaking with looks puzzled and wants to know my heritage or nationality. Sometimes, it is not only the accent they are interested in but nationality and making condescending remarks about my country of origin. It appears I had to speak my identity, which was one way of recognizing or performing my identity. The degree to which condescending remarks about my accent

persisted everywhere I go, regardless of whether I am conversing with an African American or White person, was beginning to be worrisome.

I felt the need to blend in with African Americans as a way of avoiding rehearsing or rephrasing my sentences repeatedly but changing my accent would make me sound so unnatural and which would otherwise or, in some sense, mean assimilation, acculturalization or hybridization (Bhabha,2004). By acculturalization, I mean what W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's 1918 study, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* defined as a process in which an individual adopts, acquires, and adjusts to a new cultural environment because of being placed into a new culture, or when another culture is brought to you. Individuals of a differing culture try to incorporate themselves into the new, more prevalent culture by participating in aspects of the more prevalent culture, such as their traditions, but still hold onto their original cultural values and traditions. Hybridization here adopts Bhabha's idea of how no cultures come together to form a hybrid, but cultures minimize the impact of cultural hybridity. In other words, there are no pure cultures but something happening in between cultures which he calls the liminal space or in-between cultures. I use these terms loosely here because I experienced life in the interstices and liminal spaces, suggesting that my utmost desire is to keep my culture while adapting to American culture. I wanted to become African American, but under what social conditions did I learn to be Black African American? Is it something I can learn or blend into? If it is not something that can be learned, what does it mean not to be Black? (Ibrahim, 2014) Although there are some cultural similarities between African-born blacks and Caribbean blacks; however, these shared values, codes, and norms are not evident in African American culture. The absence of congruent cultural practices and norms makes it hard to relate or understand the culture of African Americans.

As a young Black male, I embraced Hip Hop and enjoyed the beats but did not understand the cultural implication or symbolism. I interact with African American males and females as we meet in social spaces and school, but when it comes to meaningful discussions, I see a vast distance slowly translating to exclusion. My accent was always in the way just as Ibrahim (2014) previously stated: "As they become

Black, however, they have to translate, negotiate and answer questions (p. 24). I use Ibrahim's (2014) sets of fundamental questions about being Black in North America as a framework to understanding what it means to be Black. Thus, Ibrahim asks:

> what does being black mean in North America when Blackness is spoken, either through the body or otherwise? What kind of history and social order does being black invoke? Furthermore, what does this call for, entail, and hence produce if one is becoming black? I learned from these questions how's the hard truth is a Eurocentric and White Supremacist construction of Blackness and Black identity that has been mired in the subjugation of Black bodies and Black lives (p.12).

These questions need answers, particularly in the present dispensation where the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) has illuminated gross discrimination against Black people in general. Although the ethnic composition of Black America continues to change as immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean migrate to the United States, Blacks share a common fate based on their phenotype. As I interact with Blacks from different ethnicities, I realize there are subtle differences in the ethnic composition of the Black communities in America. These ethnic differences create tensions and often exclusionary practices, that is, the inability to cross-interact or inclusivity among Blacks without limitations (Greer, 2013).

Intersectionality and Negotiation:

Implications for Identity Development, Social and Economic Integration

Intersectionality is a framework rising out of Black feminist activist scholarships confronting the importance of taking a deeper look at the issues impacting identities such as race, gender, class, and sexuality. According to Choudhury et al (2020), Kimberley Crenshaw (1989, 1991) is credited with first calling attention to intersectionality in legal scholarship surrounding anti-discrimination laws, which treated sexism and racism as separate rather than intertwined system of operation in the process of marginalized Black women's experience with discrimination. I draw from the intersectional theory because it contributes to a body of knowledge aiding with the understanding of the experiences of discrimination and inequity. This framework highlights the comorbidity of racism and other forms of discrimination as different methods

of marginalization which all disadvantaged groups suffer. The most disheartening aspect of managing to survive with these discriminatory arsenals is immigrants like me did not have a voice or agency such that we suffer in silence. This voicelessness and lack of agency are supported by Rosenthal's (2016) idea about how intersectional identities have not been accompanied by activism to undo the systemic inequalities and how operations create oppression. Intersectionality is a social lens through which justice and equity are guarded from which immigrant experiences can be understood and discussed. My personal experiences hinge on differential treatments and unimaginable hardships associated with racism and discrimination in the workplace and social spaces. When I aggregated these experiences, I saw different modes and patterns characteristically structured to undermine fairness and equity.

How Does It Feel to Be Nigerian in the United States?

The African American community seems to be a close-knit ethnic group focusing on combating White America and mitigating against the usurpation of opportunities, particularly resource allocation and economic and political power. While most issues relate primarily to education and social justice, race and racism are inextricably tied to the idea of Blackness. As a racially and culturally complex society, Nigerians are undervalued and viewed as primitive or unpolished. The perception Nigerian-born Blacks are not well educated or lack adequate preparation to fill jobs in America makes it difficult for graduates from Nigeria, for instance, to become gainfully employed with degrees acquired from Nigerian universities. Because of the wavering attitudes and devaluation of Nigerian degrees, I had no choice but to go back to college for a master's degree in education with an emphasis on Special Education and Learning Disabilities. I graduated in May of 2000 with a Master of Science in Education (MSED). I then began to seek employment at various K-12 schools within South Carolina and Georgia. I had trouble finding a teaching position at predominantly White districts while diverse communities offered jobs with daunting responsibilities. I suffered the same fate in Black neighborhoods with more agonizing recapitulations of expectations or the kind of teacher they thought I would be. I had difficulty reading those cues and only realized they were only playing politics and giving false hope with those patronizing remarks afterward. At this point, I developed a deeper

understanding of the tensions and collective interest, and burden of being Black and foreign in America. Being Black as Cheikh Anta Diop reminds us in Dei (2017) is a "political as well as a historical fact" (p. vii). The term Black identifies or classifies African Americans as descendants of slaves and creates racial dichotomies or bipolarities divide the world into White or Black, amplifying the significance of race. Therefore, black racial identity creates varying political, social, political, economic marginalization and discrimination at various levels. For me, the necessity for a racial identity was imminent, though complicated and presented differing degrees of obstacles. The problems associated with the duality of my race and ethnicity were evident everywhere, whether it was educational pursuit or seeking employment. As stated earlier, workplace discrimination, racism, and marginalization are rampant for both foreign-born Blacks and African American males because they are seen and treated in the same way. I discovered how the Black population in the United States historically faced widespread discrimination in the labor market, and studies reveal how employers continue to discriminate based on race. Hiring practices, upward mobility in the workplace, and race disparities continue to reflect racial and cultural backgrounds. According to Greer, in the United States, African and Caribbean immigrants encounter racial barriers similar to those facing their native-born Black American counterparts (p.54). Even though Whites have a monolithic view of Blackness, I cannot entirely agree with Greer conclusion because every subgroup in the Black community is sometimes treated differently by the White community. There is variation in the unemployment rate within the Black population. Regarding employment opportunities and managerial positions, at 9 and 11 percent respectively, Blacks of North and Sub-Saharan African ancestry have the lowest unemployment rates within the Black population (National Equity Atlas Report 2021).

Both groups are predominantly immigrant communities. Nevertheless, even within the Sub-Saharan population, rates vary widely, from as low as 6 percent for Blacks of Kenyan ancestry to as high as 21 percent for Blacks of Somali ancestry. Blacks of Nigerian and Ethiopian/Eritrean ancestry – the two most significant subgroups of Sub-Saharan immigrants residing in the U.S. — have unemployment rates of 9 percent, well below the average for all Blacks in the U.S. (National Equity Atlas report 2021). According

to the National Equity Atlas, as with unemployment, the various Black subgroups differ in levels of educational attainment. Black immigrants tend to have higher levels of education: Among Black immigrants in the U.S., 29 percent reported having a B.A. or higher, compared with 18 percent for U.S.-born Blacks. Some Black communities have much higher education levels. For instance, 63 percent Blacks of Nigerian ancestry, 49 percent Blacks of Egyptian ancestry, 47 percent Blacks of Kenyan ancestry indicated they have a B.A. or higher, compared with 34 percent of Whites. The statistics are baffling, if not confounding, foreign-born Blacks seem to have more successes in the U.S. labor market. I believe the competition among Blacks is a major source of the tension between black ethnic groups. However, it is inconclusive to state categorically how all the disagreements or tensions stem from the economic sphere only. However, it is pertinent to ascertain whether this wide margin of employed and unemployed African Americans versus African Blacks can explain some of the tensions between the two groups. For example, an exploration of causative factors on a case-by-case basis might help to explain the big picture. I never had any luck with the Black male principal but fared well with Black female principals. Black males from other ethnicities who are not descendants of former slaves in America I interacted with confirmed how African American males in a position of authority are discriminated against foreign-born Black males while Black females identified favorably with them. I can attest to this situation because, in thirty-five years of sojourn in America, I interviewed with Black male principals eight times and was never considered worthy of the position while Black females, white males, and White female principals I interviewed with were favorable and offered me a position in their schools. I wonder what the White administrators and Black female administrators saw how eluded Black male principals are. These experiences are consistent with Greer's idea about how ethnicity remains a significant determinant of interracial attitudes and policy stance for Black populations, especially for newly arrived groups (p.54). If Greer (2013) is correct in stating that ethnicity within the Black race impacts interracial attitudes, to what extent were new immigrants like myself impacted by these entrenched habits of mind? In that regard, I have a story to tell, but before I do so, I would like to state I had already completed a first degree in political science and education with honors in

Nigeria before relocating to the United States. However, the degree was worthless as I could not find a respectable job in my area of specialization. When I arrived in the United States, I could only find a cashier job at two retail stores in the South. I used the two jobs as a steppingstone while looking for better jobs. One day, I attended an interview for a managerial position in a retail outfit. At the middle of the interview, my accent became a laughingstock, and the two male managers who were middle-aged Black males could not stop laughing at how I pronounced certain words. It was such a dehumanizing experience, but despite the provocation, I kept calm for the duration of the interview, and returned to my poorly paid hourly job. The managers had this gaze at my accent, which suggests a remarkable difference from the locals. This episode reminds me of the gaze Ibrahim (2014) talks about in the Rhizomes of Blackness, where he answers how I am perceived or imagined has an impact on how I am gazed upon, consumed, and related to. This proposition goes to support Rousseau's assertion in Taylor (1994) mentions we live very much in the public gaze (p.12). This gaze or perception is related to racial identity and history, which often become a tool for marginalization and exclusion.

Despite the dearth of research on Nigerian immigrants and Black ethnicity in America, the inclusion of Nigerians in substantive academic and political conversations has become increasingly necessary to understand each ethnicity because of variations in patterns of an academic engagement or disengagement and achievement among the different black ethnicity and between genders. According to the Biden-Harris transition website, which has announced over one key administration post, Nigerian-American Funmi Olorunnipa Badejo has been appointed as an Associate White House Counsel. In contrast, Osaremen Okolo was appointed a presidential COVID-19 response team member, and Adewale Adeyemo was nominated as the Deputy Treasury Secretary (International. Center for Investigative Reporting). This appointment is a step in the right direction and should be extended to the academy and other aspects of the United States economy. Only through education, antiracist behaviors, and the demise of special gazes can America expand the prospects of human freedom. Nigerian-Americans are brilliant and willing to contribute to the development of all human races.

A significant percentage of professional students at Ivy League universities in America are Diasporic Africans or their offspring. This knowledge can be helpful to closing the academic gaps in K-12 through communal mentorship and cooperation among Blacks in America. It is time to address the questions why are African-born Blacks relative to African Americans successful at American colleges and universities? How can foreign-born Black collaborate with African Americans to increase academic success rates at colleges and universities? To answer these questions requires structured academic discussion and research. For example, there is evidence of success in Nigerian academic power, resulting from solid study habits and culture. Therefore, it is an inaccurate perception or gazes to underscore Nigerian immigrants; educational power and foundation to improving the United States economy. Beyond race and racism, other factors predisposing the undervalue of African-born Blacks or Nigerians in America are connected to colonialism and imperialism (Sefa Dei, 2017). It is plausible to conclude based on lived experiences how these multiple gazes, which include slavery, race, ethnicity, linguistic and cultural differences, colonialism, and imperialism, are the basis for the mistreatment and struggle I experienced as a Nigerian immigrant.

Concerning these hostile attitudes and gazes, Achebe (2000) expressed an opinion that foreign authors contribute to the dehumanization of Africans in the Diaspora and in the African continent. He concludes the perception of foreign authors about Africans, in general, is deplorable. Achebe states: "African behavior, institutions, and characters were not merely disparaged but presented as the negation of all human decency. He (Achebe) further prefaced Dalzel's apology for slavery to buttress his conclusion. Achebe ostensibly decried this apology: "whatever evils the slave trade may be attended with … it is mercy... to poor wretches, who would otherwise suffer from the butcher's knife" (p.29).

Although Dalzel is a European, his views are relevant in America's worldview in that Whiteness is almost a religion, and Eurocentric views are married to American exceptionalism. It is necessary to repudiate Dalzel for this kind of rhetoric because of its complicity in dehumanizing the African race. These kinds of perceptions are notoriously undermining the smooth acceptance of Nigerians into American society and Europe. The more I live in America, the more coherent and objective vision of race relations would

emerge as well as could be antithetical to those lived experiences in Africa. I was wrong by inadmissibly believing my experience with Whites in Nigeria will be the same in America. Because more and more inadequacies were revealed in my day-to-day experience, thus hinging on the versions of historical beliefs, traditions, and attitudes were not going to go away very soon, the conclusion of racial superiority and indifference became obvious. This conclusion was akin to Derrick Bells' conclusion about the permanence of racism in America as I became one of these "*Faces at the Bottom of the Well*."

Nevertheless, the optimism for a better future in America, and the contradictions and hopelessness of the conditions in Nigeria, left me in-between these spaces and hence the confusion about identity. It appears racism in some ways sought to sustain slavery and subsequent forms of subjugation or discrimination as tools for keeping Whites as a superior race. I continue to see a connection between these past infamous historical experiences of Africa infused in my recent experiences in America. Davidson (1980) in Achebe's *Home and Exile* (2001) makes the point about how men of Europe were accustomed to seeing Africans only as men in chains, captives without power, and they transferred their impressions to Africa and the states from which these slaves had come. The belief in African inferiority was already in full bloom (p.5). Davidson's assertion aptly echoes most of my predicament as a new African immigrant with an accent and foreign degree.

At college, I witnessed the first shocking experience when fellow Blacks and often whites made no effort to understand my accent. Despite the classes I took to lighten my accent, pronunciations of some vowel teams, blends, diphthongs, and fricatives continue to sound unnatural and make me feel uneasy about speaking in public. For example, I had difficulty with words like fork, which sounds awfully like the inappropriate version "fuck" and beach (bitch). Also, some words have cultural or social usage that was alien to me in a social or pragmatic sense.

For example, when I was in graduate school, I visited a Kenyan professor's apartment to turn in my assignment. As I knocked at the door, she opened the door, and her cat ran outside. When I saw the cat, I asked her if that was her "pussy." She frowned at first and then laughed admitting in fact it was hers. A cat

is called "pussy" in Nigeria, and I did not think anything of it. Because she was African and understood how I was new to America, she displayed mild laughter. It is possible cat and pussy are also used interchangeably in Kenya. Imagine if she were American how embarrassing it could have been. However, because I couldn't read her facial countenance, and laughter, I asked my colleagues for an explanation, but to my amazement everyone laughed at me instead of explaining. It was later someone schooled me about the social meaning of the word, I was tickled to say the least. There was a lot to ponder about understanding social cues and understanding the meaning attached to certain kinds of words. It takes time for immigrants to learn the social meaning or application of certain words in America, so many will experience embarrassing situations when they misspoke or use inappropriate social language. Nevertheless, I ask for patience and insist on the same humanity accorded to other races and treating one another as equal human beings beyond differences of nationality, race, religion or culture, and linguistic differences.

Due to some of these challenges, I did not think assimilation would be beneficial or solve my problems. In terms of acculturation, the idea of behaving like middle class Blacks- like my uncle, as Mary Waters (1994) purported, was quite absurd as I considered some of the things my uncle did as old-fashioned. For example, I felt that keeping a distance from African Americans was not the right thing to do. I also did not want to identify exclusively with white or Black culture or marry the two cultures. I thought the best option was to preserve my cultural heritage or keep my Nigerian identity while adapting to the newly acquired identities in America. In an article titled "Triple Acculturation: The Role of African Americans in the Acculturation of Kenya Immigrants," Wakiuru Wamwaa Mbugua and other researchers (2008) write on triple acculturation. These researchers concluded African immigrants seem to preserve their ethnic identities in the United States, although they also become aware of their identity in the United States. I did not have any knowledge of the different cultures in America or the automatic incorporation into the African American subgroup while in Africa. The only knowledge I had about African Americans were from movies and documentaries.

Stereotypes and the Depictions of African-Born Immigrants as Primitive: American Media

Culture and Black Ethnocentrism

The American media did a good job creating doubts and division among blacks. In *Home and Exile*, Achebe writes: "It began to dawn on me that although fiction was undoubtedly fictitious, it could also be true or false, not with the truth or falsehood of a news item but as to its disinterestedness, its intention, its integrity" (Achebe, 2000). The above extract helps me understand which social issues, cultural values, current problems, or solutions, and how they are represented influence how people perceive reality. The link between media representation and stereotype is inextricably tied to the most scandalous depiction of Africa and its people.

It will be abysmal to discuss my experiences in America without referencing how the stereotypes hunted me along the way. Whether a coincidence or fate, it is hard to tell but my arrival in 1995 coincided with a series of international advance fee fraud perpetrated by Nigerians. Every Sunday, CBS will televise a documentary showcasing the nefarious activities of these gangs and interviewing some of the culprits caught in the act. Given the experience of discrimination everywhere around me, it became pertinent to hide my Nigerian identity even though my accent clearly gave me away. I intended to do anything in my power to avoid bias.

I first noticed this stereotype when working at a retail store in South Carolina. Sometimes, when I am the only associate in the department, I must close the register and return credit card, cash receipts, and cash to the general office for the evening before leaving the store. I usually recount the money by myself and sign the slip before signing off for the shift. One day one of the white female managers asked me what part of Africa I came from, and I did not hesitate to share my secret with since we have been working together going on seven months. I felt how she can attest to my character, having observed me for a length of time. However, I was mistaken! As soon as she learned I was Nigerian, her countenance toward me began to change rapidly. From that time on, she recommended two other managers must count my register and sign off each night I worked before I could go home. Sometimes, recounting the drawer twice takes an additional

two hours, and when I receive my paycheck, I found out she had in fact clocked me out prior to the counting so I will not be paid for that time. The environment became so hostile I had to quit the job. The second incident happened when I met an African American lady working for Bank of America and wanted to befriend her. I really liked her a lot, and we went out for lunch a couple of times. When she found out I was Nigerian, her countenance changed, and she began to pull back from me. So, one day I asked her why she suddenly became disinterested in being a friend. She stated in a quiet voice how her peers at the bank advised her to be careful with me being a Nigerian. She felt I may want to arrange an illegal or fraudulent transaction causing her to be in trouble. She recounted several emails she received from corporations about the activities of Nigerians. Sadly, we had to break up because every effort I made to redirect her thinking did not convince her.

Stereotypes about Nigerians and Africans in general can be expressed through documentaries, movies, and literature. The movie Good Times is a typical example of how the media characterized the African American community to the African audience. Although Good Times is perceived as an irony of white privilege in America, the movie documents the life of Blacks in a Chicago project or at least represents the way Africans began to characterize African Americans. The central theme emphasizes poverty and the struggle to make the best of limited resources. This embellishment of gang violence, poverty, unemployment, discrimination, laziness, and child abuse changed the perception of many Africans about the conditions, culture, or lifestyle of the African Americans. Although the genre focused on such nuanced social issues and still added humor-laughter and love among the close-knit family, it was still open to various interpretations across the Atlantic. While Africans cringed to the stereotype, the U.S. media showed documentaries of naked pictures of African children, some looking so malnourished and other kids as thin as bags of bones, animal kingdoms, crude and rustic cultural practices, ethnic wars, and cannibalistic attitudes to the American audience. At the same time, in Africa, we saw the dilapidation of black homes and laziness. By these media actions, the dichotomy or divided line between African- born blacks and African Americans was drawn. The media representation laid the foundation for this deep mistrust and

division between African Americans and Africans Black. Regarding the ambivalence of documentary representation, Bill Nicholas (1991) in Representing Reality warns how documentaries of these kinds of issues deserve critical attention. The implication is that documentary films and other forms of media are fictional because self- perpetuating and betrayed intentions can be written as a powerful narrative or represented as a movie but may be true or false. The media report on these issues is influenced by personal experiences, convictions, presuppositions, or biases, so in a sense, falsehood or veracity of issues are subject to interpretation or a variety of interpretations. This gap between reality and bias demonstrates how media reports or documentary films can be fictional; therefore, most of the information about Africa is based on biased assumptions. As noted earlier, there is an enormous chasm between African Americans and African-born blacks.

The United States media exacerbate this tension. The intolerance stems from deep misconceptions and stereotypes making African Americans believe Africans are backward and primitive. Because of fictionalized narratives and the twist and turns of documentary films, many African Americans believe Africans are crude, marry many wives, have numerous unhealthy children, and are uncivilized. These perceptions culminate in making crude jokes about Africans which often do not acknowledge Africa's significant contribution to the world. The assumption that all Africans are poor and diseased makes it difficult for African Americans to recognize or associate with Africans. The mischaracterization of Africans impacted the way I was treated in college. For example, Baldwin's (1998) Collected Essays-Notes of a Native Son captured this abysmal perception and image of Africa. James Baldwin expressed a helpless feeling about his connection with Africa. Baldwin stated: I know in my case how the most crucial time in my development came when I was forced to recognize I was a kind of bastard of the West when I followed the lines of my past, I did not find myself in Europe but in Africa. Furthermore, this meant in some subtle way, profoundly, I brought to Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt, to the stones of Paris, to the cathedral of Chartres, and the Empire State Building, a special attitude. These were not really my creation, and they did not contain my history; I might search in them in vain for any reflection of myself, I was an interloper; at

the same time, I had no other heritage which I could possibly hope to use-I had undoubtedly been unfitted from the jungle or the tribe… I hated and feared white people. This does not mean I love Black people; on the contrary, I despised them, possibly because they failed to produce Rembrandt (p.8).

Baldwin showed how Africa had not contributed meaningfully to the development of humankind and thus portraying a diminished affection for his heritage and connection with Africa. Furthermore, in the *Education of a British Protected Child*, Achebe (2009) commented on the stories told about Africa in many European fictional books suggesting how the stories depicted the complex psychology of imperial vocation. He expressed his concerns in this way: "The picture of Africa and Africans which they carried in their minds did not grow there adventitiously, but was planted and watered by careful social, mental and educational husbandry" (p.114).

In this excerpt, Achebe expressed profound disappointment about the myriad of European books, which cast a dark shadow on Africa's importance to the world. The media portrayed Africa as an untouched virgin land rich with resources but lacking the intellectual capability to change her destiny. These views represent how African Americans perceive someone from Africa, and whether in exile or otherwise, the underpinning difference was not skin color but nationality. On the other hand, Africans are also predisposed to the age-long stereotype about how African Americans are lazy, as seen on Good Times. These misunderstandings are rooted in how the U.S. media represented Africans in the Diaspora and those in Africa. These well-crafted ill-fated documentaries or anthropological accounts fueled substantial confusion about the state of Blacks in America and Africa in particular.

Contributing to the debate on the rift between African Americans and African immigrants, the Globalist of November 13, 2013, Conteh discusses the rift between African American and recent African immigrants to the United States in this way:

> For their part, many African immigrants buy into the erroneous notion that African Americans are lazy and violent. They do not appreciate the great sacrifice African Americans made, through advocating for their civil rights, to lay the foundation for Africans to be able to come to the United

States and live in a country where both blacks and whites have equal rights, at least in theory if not always in practice (p. 3).

As a Nigerian immigrant to the United States, I experienced an unspoken chasm when I encountered African Americans in social spaces and the labor market. The deep divisions and exclusions have widened over the years. I first experienced this deep animosity between many African Americans and their African immigrant cousins when I worked for a retail store as a cashier and in college. I entertained many unbelievable questions about Africa's economic, political, and social conditions from the African American population. Some of the questions were as bizarre as Do you see elephants on the streets? Do Africans live on trees? Are Africans cannibals? Why did you come here if Africa was all that? I am not African; my great-grandparents are? In addition, other venomous comments such as you guys sold us to slavery in this land and now coming over here to take our jobs. These remarks stem from deep misconceptions, sometimes exacerbated by the U.S. media.

Regrettably, many African Americans believe Africans are uncivilized and primitive. This perception of backwardness made it difficult for me to make friends from the African American community and, therefore, predisposed to the White Community. While in Nigeria, I had previously encountered Whites at various private schools, and we played as children, attended parties together without any preconditions. As a result, when I relocated to the United States, I did not know the White/Black dichotomy, or the kind of mistrust African Americans had about Whites. It was puzzling to notice how there was an apparent division in America based on skin color. I see groups of white students cling to one another at college, sitting away from African Americans and African Americans floating among themselves. Whites in our class accepted Indians, other Asian nationalities, and Europeans while keeping a distance from the African American students. It appears the attitudes or demeanor of Whites who live and work in Africa are different from those in America. This understanding prompts the following questions: why was the perception of Whiteness different within geographical boundaries and elsewhere? Is this difference in perception of Whiteness in America and Africa mutually exclusive because of location, outlook, race, and racism? An

attempt to understand these questions finds answers in Coates (2015), who believes the process is connected to social etiquettes and brutality of racism inflicted on the Black body through slavery, lynching, and decimation of the Black family. According to Coates, Americans are trained to look at Whiteness from two perspectives: (1) Looking at racism from the viewpoint it was a momentary or historic miscalculation or mistake and (2) the incompatibility of American exceptionalism to racism as morally flawed extremes (p.9). The absence of any moral explanation of racism led to the recourse of an untrustworthy and precarious White/Black relationship in America. Whiteness across boundaries is different- a humane race in Africa instead of an uncompromising racist White Society in America.

Because I have a direct positive experience with Whiteness judging from my interactions with white Americans who came to Nigeria as Peace Corps volunteers, missionaries, doctors, or teachers at most of the mission and private schools and my white peers who were friendly, I felt very free around Whites and developed positive relationships with them in college. However, having lived in America for so many years now, my Black body began to experience racism and subtle intimidations at work and social spaces, the once innocent and placid disposition toward Whiteness fizzled out. I realized I was treated no differently than any person with a similar phenotype regardless of ethnicity. The process of becoming Black has started to unfold. Blacks in America, as I discovered, have different shoulders, but they bore the same chip. I must now live in the present, but the present means I must take mental pictures of a change of adjective to represent myself. I ask the question: "who am I, what have I become- the Dream! Furthermore, to live in the present (the journey of becoming Black), I discovered it is bereft of peace, relaxation, and joyful coexistence.

Identity Development and My Experience of Discrimination in America

Despite all odds, I tried making new friends among Blacks, but there were unseen glass ceilings with each Black ethnicity clinging or trusting Blacks with congruent cultural, linguistic, and often religious affiliations. Thus, as I have witnessed, it is even more complex for African-born males and African American males to work together than a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Coming from Nigeria

as an outside, I could see the many faces of Black ethnicity suggesting there was no cohesive affinity either with assimilating the American culture or embracing the rebirth of Black Cultural transplant now seen through the lens of Hip-hop culture and other traditions associated with diasporic existence in the New World.

<div align="center">What is in a Name?</div>

In the New World, convenience matters in everything, including renaming or creating shortcuts to pronouncing non-English names. I have a unique surname which singled me out as someone from somewhere other than the United States. Because of the great difficulty many people had to pronounce my name, I devised an Anglicized pronunciation I learned from my professors and fellow students, rather than the one I learned from my parents. My full name is Gerald Chidiebere Nwachukwu. Chidebere and Nwachukwu are Igbo names from southeast Nigeria, which means God is merciful and son of God. Igbo is a tonal language, so words with the wrong stresses and tones either change their meaning or, worse, become unintelligible. For example, the word Akwa can mean crying, cloth, egg, or bridge, depending on the context. As stated earlier, I am an Igbo from southeastern Nigeria, so in Igboland, there is something in a name because names have meanings and history. In Igboland, circumstances of a child's birth can determine the name given to a child; situations and life events are considered when naming a child.

For example, names can be prayers or pronouncements on the child. Allowing mispronunciation signifies the beginning of a shift in perspective or a sense of loss and in-betweenness. In retrospect, it wants to allow the mispronunciation of my name and sometimes substituting my Igbo name with my English name, Gerald redefined me, creating an ambivalence about my identity. Thus, admittance suggests a sense of becoming emanating from the duality of citizenship and pressures from the school community or work. This name with no meaning but a Saint in the Catholic Church can be interpreted as throwing everything I stand for away, including my heritage and a total disregard for my parents' careful choice.

Linguistic Differences

I was always conscious of my accent, wondering whether I understood or carried my audience along. As a result, I try to accentuate the positive aspects of speaking differently. Despite the persistence to improve my sentences and syntactic and morphological structures, it made very little difference though the recurrent request for repetition of what I said was somewhat reduced. I quickly learned that no matter how much I tried, my native tongue could not change. I realized I am in-between accents and invisible spaces of patronizing remarks and marginality. This in-betweenness is not only felt when I interact with Blacks or Whites, and it extends to African communities here and in Nigeria. I still speak with an accent, maybe not as heavy, but different from how I speak English while in Nigeria. I am perceived as different- not pure Igbo; not thoroughly American, and excluded from the African American community; thus, a crisis of identity is one way of explaining my experiences.

Cultural Shock and Reverse Culture

As I reflect on patterns and particularities (Georgiou, 2001; Adeniyi, 2008), my experience of cultural differences characteristically fits within the purview of cultural and reverse culture shock (Naficy, 1999). I came to America in 1995, hoping to return if Nigeria returned to a democratic government in 1999. This intention is captured in the three major classifications of Nigerian immigrants to the United States (Adeniyi; Onyeukwu, 2021). When aggregating Nigerian immigrants to the United States, Adeniyi & Onyeukwu based their classifications on the intent of the immigrant, the excerpt below aptly enlivens this discourse:

The first involves those who migrate and fail to look back after they integrate into the host society and rule out a return, thoughts of it, or any emotional relationship with the source. The second category is those already mentioned above. These resort to circulation between homeland and host-land, trying to get the best of both worlds. They do not want to lose touch with their place of residence while also exploring possibilities of the original country. A few even get into top government positions or are appointed to committees, ministries, departments, and agencies as technocrats or advisers. They do these while sustaining their relationship with location. The third category are those who return. These have probably

had a complete feel of the West and are now done with it. Some might be interested in returning to practice expertise they learned abroad, while some might be responding to family pressures (p.2) I belong to the third or last category because I had initially intended to return upon graduation and a return to civilian government in Nigeria. On several occasions, I reconsidered my initial idea of returning to Nigeria upon acquiring a postgraduate degree, and this plan continued to change back and forth, which is an area I felt Adeniyi and Onyeukwu had not reasonably considered. My leave plans seemed to gain more steam when my body began to experience racism and discrimination from whites or Blacks. I realized quickly there was something about the Blacks not getting along with each other that did not fully agree with my most profound sense or understanding of Blackness. I, therefore, began an exploration to discover the reasons for these conflicts.

The first encounter was temperament, which ties in with the experience of slavery and police brutality in America. I realized my college classmates could not engage in a positive discussion about race and slavery without getting infuriated. The brutal nature of the discussions and boiling points were a big surprise to me. On the contrary, the White students did not display such venomous responses but were subtle and evasive in discussing race relations. Many times, the answers obtained from White students reflect my experiences outside of school. The very idea of Blacks being rash, lazy, and continue to dwell on slavery which happened many centuries ago to the White students, is no longer a relevant explanation for being unproductive. This story posits America as a momentary mistake created by limitations of historical Americans, which Coates (2015) deconstructs as an error in judgment and posits how America is not innocent of the same charge levied against terrorists (p.1). Coates (2015) felt how the Whites create the problems that provoke Black people to anger and yet downplay it as normal behavior in this heartfelt opinion. Coates emphasizes how systemic racism and violence perpetrated by the police through the White dominated system is no different from terrorists since both actions involve massive destruction of lives. I experienced racism firsthand when I worked at grocery stores and big retail companies in South Carolina. As an immigrant, I had no choice but to accept lower-status jobs to survive. This is evident in Adeniyi and

Onyeukwu's opinion: "determination to emigrate also leads many to accept a lower status job in the first instance on arrival in the host society" (p.3). As a result, I endured racial slurs, a reduction in my work hours making it hard to pay my bills or creating the schedule in such a way that my hours for attending lectures will be compromised or conflicted.

Sometimes these cutting of hours is intentional to pressure or force me out or to make the working condition less economically viable so that I am forced to leave the job. For example, these work pressures may come in the form of assigning complex tasks such as pushing the buggy, cashiering, cleaning the bathrooms, and doing other tasks not in my job description as a sales associate and tasks that Americans refuse to do. In the end, a manager fired me on my off day, and no cogent reason was proffered other than a customer complaining I was not helpful the previous night I worked. This action was a big surprise because I know such a dehumanizing treatment is far-fetched even with Nigeria's economic and security issues. It was times like these where my desire to return home was at its peak. I discovered from the interviews how African Americans were in the same or even worse position at work. I then understood why the African American students in my class were always angry and had a very shut fuse regarding racism or discrimination. So, at this point, I decided it was best to leave apologies for inciting the already tense and delicate nerves alone. Furthermore, I thought it was best to leave the anger issue alone and proceed with unintended residual regret understanding the differences and conflicts within the sub-ethnic Black groups in America.

The Impact of Extend Family and Community or Neighborhood Mentorship (Church and Community Advocates)

The building blocks contributing to my stability in America were my extended family members living in the United States. My uncle, a college professor, offered financial support and room and board, time and guidance, and so did my cousins. I learned many things from my uncle, including how to drive. The church and Africa community offer some financial assistance and scholarships to students. I benefited from mentorship offered at the catholic church and the Igbo ethnic and cultural groups. While in college, I was

assigned a mentor who often called to encourage and check on me. These resources were invaluable given the precarious nature of being a young Nigerian immigrant and navigating the cultural and social landscape in the deep South.

<center>Black Lives Matter Movement</center>

Black Lives Matter Movement touches on issues of great significance, the continual fight for mutual rights and respect for Blacks in America. This movement traces Black Americans past and ongoing struggles for civil rights and equality using the generation tools available to help affect change. These tools are social media, hashtags, and social rallies to protest discrimination and racial injustice in America. An understanding of the history of police violence against Blacks in America is evident in the murder of Amadou Diallo, Matthew Ajibade, Prince Carmen Jones, Mike Brown, Travon Martin, Eric Garner, Renisha McBride, John Crawford, Tamir Rice, Ahmad Albury, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Daunte Wright, and the list is not exhaustive and continues to grow. The Pew Research 2020 poll suggests Black Americans have long understood the look and feel of systemic racism, with 83% of Black Americans experiencing discrimination based on race. Accordingly, police had stopped African Americans for no reason, mistreated them when seeking medical treatment, singled them out for their race when shopping and racist slurs were hurled at them (Akuno, 2015).

Because of the monolithic view of Blackness and the lack of aggregation of the Black race, every Black person is perceived as a criminal suspect, so I suffered a fair share of police intimidation and brutality. As an emigrant student, the police stopped me at a corner between Conway and Myrtle Beach in 1999 with many other cars lined up on the roadside. A police officer walked to my car and asked for my driver's license, which I gladly offered to him. He took my license and returned to the police cruiser for several hours. When he returned, I pleaded how I needed to be at work at 6 pm and was already running late. He ignored my request and instead asked for vehicle registration and insurance card, which I provided to him respectfully. He walked away and sat down in his car for another hour and a half before slowly walking back to my car. His actions were intentional; looking from the rear-view mirror, I could see in fact he had

completed verification and was just sitting in his car. It was past six now, and each car parked on the curbside left one after the other, and I began to sweat and became afraid. I could not bring out my cell phone to contact my Job or uncle because I was afraid, I might be shot or accused of possessing a weapon.

On the contrary, I held the steering wheel and affixed my eyes to the view mirror. The story of Amadou Diallo and many others who were stopped by police for no reason and minutes later were killed in cold blood exacerbated the tension. Finally, he came back with my paper and said there was a recorded line on the vehicle that I was driving and how he was satisfied the car was not stolen after a second check and asked me to leave. I breathed a sigh of relief and drove off. I then called my job to report what had happened, but the manager was unsympathetic and instead was reprehensive, cutting my hours to bare bones. This experience confirms Straut's (2020) view of how the police in the United States discriminate against people of color (p.8). The story of Michael Brown's death was a testimony to police conduct in and around major cities in the United States. Despite Michael Brown's effort to run away from the police with hands up in the air to show he had no weapon, officer Wilson shot him six times from the back and left his body lying on the street for more than 4 hours before cell phone images went viral on Twitter and Facebook. Hashtags included #hands Up, do not Shoot, No Justice No Peace, and #Black Lives Matter. Since migrating to the United States in 1995, there is no movement that has been such a captivating movement and rallying point than #Black Lives Matter. This conclusion begs the question: why did Black Lives Matter become a rallying slogan for all Blacks regardless of ethnicity and garnered Whites and Asians support? In my view, Black Lives Matter has become a new nomenclature for the Civil Rights Movement and affirmative action. It is simply a way of exposing the injustice perpetrated by the police, the value of all human lives, equality in the workplace, and much more.

There are gaps between Blacks and Whites in both the educational and economic spheres of the U.S. economy which needs to be addressed legislatively. For example, in a poll conducted by the Brookings Institute in 2020, White families held ten times more wealth than the average Black family, Black families are twice as likely as White families to lack health insurance and three times more likely to live in poverty.

In Black Lives Matter: Grassroot Movement to Global Phenomenon, Straut (2020) referenced Eddie S. Glaude Jr's description of systemic racism as a value gap rooted in the idea of Whites being more valued than Blacks. The abysmal neglect of Black lives is propagated by draconian limits of the law, which targets Blacks in America. A study conducted at Stanford University in 2019 sampled one hundred million police issued traffic tickets. The study revealed Blacks were two times more likely to be pulled over and three times more likely to be searched for drugs or weapons. This uninhibited action was corroborated by yet another study by the *New York Times* in 2015 which focused on the militarized zone in Ferguson and in 2014 a study of 350 police shootings by *USA Today* respectively and found how Blacks encounter with the police can have deadly or fatal consequences. The *USA Today* study revealed 96 percent of arrests were black, suggesting Black people have a higher rate of arrests than other groups in the United States. The statistic also shows an average of thirty Blacks shot by police during traffic stops each year. The *Washington Post* Newspaper reported police had fatally shot one thousand people in the United States each year since 2015 when the Newspaper started collecting data. When the data is aggregated based on race and gender, it was found that the killing of Blacks were two times as high as Whites and Black Males were three times more likely to be killed by police than whites or any other race, which means one in every thousand Black Males in the United States can be expected to be killed by police. These killings, with their attendant recourse, have implications for all Blacks and Black Americans in particular. Therefore, it is plausible to assess the impact of police discrimination and prejudice on Blacks and develop strategic social and political willpower to eradicate injustice against Blacks. These actions should call for unity of all Black ethnic groups and evaluate how discrimination extends to foreign-born Blacks in America. To walk this tight rope requires an understanding of the expected boundaries and why reimaging Black has become a collective responsibility for all Blacks across the globe and the Black Lives Matter Movement in particular. I believe solidarity among Black ethnicity in the United States is a central factor in the Black Lives Matter struggle- a position which is encapsulated in the dictum: "Ujamaa" – the African collective fighting spirit. Recognizing and creating life-affirming praxis amidst these campaigns can culminate ostensibly into a

formidable new Civil Rights Movement incorporating genuine Black issues in the twenty-first century and beyond.

<div align="center">Education Experience</div>

As stated elsewhere, my second port of call was Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, where I sojourned with an uncle who was a college professor. My uncle has a four-bedroom ranch house with a long driveway and tall pine trees around the compound. He was a professor of Biology and, like most Nigerians, very proud of his educational accomplishments. He takes offense if you address him without recognizing his doctorate title, so I added that to his name. He has four children and an even split, two boys and two girls. I shared a room with his two young boys. There were two bunk beds in the room, so I was allowed to sleep on the bottom layer of the one adjacent to the playroom door.

Soon after I arrived, my uncle's summer school teaching began, and being his wife is a nurse and works night shifts, I was left to babysit the youngest child, who was six months old so she could get some sleep. I did other chores, including washing dishes, cleaning the bathrooms, vacuuming the whole house, and mowing the lawn during the weekend. My uncle provided room and board and fed me throughout the time when I lived with the family. He purchased a Nissan Sentra 1998 for me on the agreement I would pay monthly when I started working. He also taught me how to drive and took particular interest in showing me around the city to make sure I could become independent before the spring semester started. The living conditions in my uncle's house were different from our extended family lifestyles in Nigeria, where you can go to any family member's home unannounced and still receive a warm welcome. Given this background, it was a shock that my uncle asked me to repay him for the car. However, I began to understand financial independence as a unique feature of American culture and how one is considered old enough to fern for himself at a certain age. I struggled with the new food and vegetables commonly enjoyed around the south. I ate cauliflowers and broccoli the first time I vomited, and my stomach rumbled for hours. I was so ashamed that I could not share my experience. I did not realize my uncle noticed how uncomfortable I felt after eating those vegetables and walked into the room with Pepto Bismol, which turned out to be a saving grace that

evening. This situation taught me about the counter medication and prescription medicines. I began to note what to do next time I experienced severe stomach upset. My life began to change. I gradually followed all the guidelines and ideas my uncle and his wife shared with me.

I started a massive job hunt because I then had a debt to repay like most people in America. I was introduced to helpful credit cards, but without good lecturing on the pros and cons of using a credit card, it soon became a nightmare. I owe my uncle and the credit card company; therefore, I must work regardless of work conditions. I started to contradict all the advice my grandfather gave me prior to leaving Nigeria about staying debt-free and making sure whatever I earned is managed to take me through the month until I receive the next paycheck. My financial indiscretions forced me to remember a metaphorical story my grandfather shared with me about Mr. Porter, who borrowed money against his salary with the hope of repayment, and just before the end of the month, he would take additional loans until his wife and children all deserted him. This story became an allegory to me in that I saw myself in a hole, struggling without any guidance.

I took the first job with a grocery store and found a second job with a gas station two weeks later. I was working round the clock, and there was no time to do the chores in my uncle's house as usual. Because of my work and preparation to attend a nearby community school in Myrtle Beach, I was always out of the house and only came in late at night to sleep and leave early in the morning. The relationship between my uncle and me began to shift, and things would change for the worst in a few months. At this time, I was just six months in the United States and unfamiliar with the social and economic landscape in Myrtle Beach. As the spring semester approached, my uncle called me to a meeting and strongly advised me to take pre-nursing classes. I took the advice even though I knew I had no passion for nursing. I made the decision to take pre nursing classes in a huff and the outcome was so dramatic the stress was written all over my body. I began to lose weight over the volume of work I had to do within a limited timeframe. While in high school, I was not grounded in science but was told American education was oversimplified while in Nigeria. The slogan was, if you could scale through a university degree in Nigeria, any educational endeavor in the

United States would be easy. This notion about American education has been proven wrong based on my experience. I struggled with microbiology and anatomy and Physiognomy I and II. I enjoyed philosophy, psychology, English, and public speaking. Although I managed to pass these classes, the instructor for Physiognomy II thought I was deaf or had a disability. She also approached my uncle with the question, which meant trouble for me. The moment she realized I was professor x's nephew, she kept track of my behavior in class, and more questions landed on me, which was unusual, though it helped keep me awake.

I was getting ready to register for the second-year first-semester class when my uncle informed me licensed practical nursing (LPN) registration was open, and I could apply if I liked. I made the second mistake in life by also accepting this proposition without researching the program well before committing. I then registered for the class only to discover the distance from my uncle's house to the second campus is 1hour and 15minutes one way. The following month, the living conditions with my uncle worsened, and I decided to find an apartment of my own. I moved out in November of 1997 to a government-subsidized apartment in south Myrtle Beach. This apartment offered the opportunity to older people and students who maintained a certain GPA. I enjoyed my newfound freedom, and a renewed sense of self reappeared. Now, I can sit down and reflect on my life and make the right decision.

I am still working two jobs and shuttling between the two jobs and the school. I took the first-semester exam and was successful. There were no breaks in the program. It was a crash program where the student was expected to be in attendance for the entire 24-month program. I worked at a retail store from 2 pm to 12:00 midnight and then left my house at 5 am to resume classes at 7 am in the morning. The stress began to take a toll on me. One day, I slept while driving to school and came very close to running under a fourteen-wheeler truck. It was miraculous there was a box that flew out of the truck and made a loud noise when I climbed on top of it waking me up to inches between my small Nissan Sentra and the fourteen-wheeler truck. I was frightened, slammed the brake, swerved to the right, and a vehicle coming fast behind me could not stop and smashed the rear end of my car.

I was shivering like a patient with pneumonia and went to the corner of the road and sat down. The police came, took my driver's license, and asked me to make a statement about the accident. I indicated I heard a bang on the back of the car and swerved to the right to make a stop. A white lady in her sixties packed a distance from the accident and walked to me. After asking a few questions, she was very sympathetic and handed me a card and asked me to contact her. When I looked at the card, I discovered that she was an attorney, and her office was not too far from when the accident happened. I had a panic attack and gradually began to develop a phobia of driving.

Even as a passenger, when I see an oncoming vehicle, I fear it will strike the car I was in. In the meantime, I stood there confused, not knowing what to do. The police returned my driver's license and told me the other driver was responsible for following too closely. He stated the accident could have been averted had he maintained a safe speed and followed at least one car length apart. This was all new to me! How could this be, I questioned? I thought I was at fault for abruptly slamming the breaks, but the law had a different interpretation. I learned there is something called a "system, "as onlookers keep referring to the phrase "that is how the system works." A man gave me a card to contact his company if I wanted to take my items in the car at a later time. I accepted the card and said thank you but did not know where the garage was located. I was confused and thought I would not be able to get my car back.

The man was kind. He realized I did not understand the process and asked me whether this was my first accident ever. I replied in the affirmative! He let out a glimpse of mild laughter and told me the vehicle would be taken to a garage and remain there until the case was settled between the insurance company and my attorney. He advised me to contact the lady who gave me a card earlier and added she was good at getting money from the insurance company. These were novel to me until I went into a gas station and contacted my uncle. My uncle then explained the situation to me, and the next day we went to the garage to pick up my belongings from the car.

The next day I contacted the attorney who invited me to her office on a Monday following the accident. When I met with her, she explained she would charge 33% of the entire settlement and how I do

not have to pay her anything until the case was settled. The good part, or so I thought, was the fact that if she lost the case, I would not have an obligation to pay her for the service. I learned another lesson; insurance charges people so high, so when they are responsible, the innocent party makes sure he/she gets the maximum settlement.

Finally, the insurance settled for the car and paid for my medical expenses. I was able to pay off all my credit cards and the money I owed my uncle. A new financial life with a little more knowledge of how things work helped me stay afloat. I quickly revisited my LPN program and decided to quit, which amounted to a second failure. I was downcast because it seemed all hopes were lost, and even planning was complex. I had attempted to go into other fields of study but was afraid I might fail, which foreshadowed outright quitting the program if the previous circumstances reemerged. In the twilight of these precarious situations, I decided to reflect on myself, making a list of my likes and dislikes. I realized I needed to do something to clear my mind and revisit a career option later. Because I have a good temperament and have always wanted to help people in need, I decided to volunteer for a nonprofit organization catering to kids with varying degrees of disability. I went to the organization and applied to become a volunteer. The organization's president was glad to have me on his team, so I would volunteer for 2 hours three days a week for 24 hours per month. At this place, kids with disabilities have some type of jobs to do that are not mentally challenging. They pack envelopes, count buttons, and place them in boxes. At the end of the month, they were paid a stipend. At this organization, I met a young man known as Jeffrey, who was a natural mathematician. I was amazed he could tell what day anyone was born if you gave him your date of birth. I did not believe it until one day he asked for my date of birth and told me precisely the day of the month I was born! This led me to wonder whether there are different types of intelligence that are not necessarily about being bookish, being competent in science or mathematics. He challenged me to read about different kinds of intelligence and to find out how people with autism or other disabling conditions can be educated. His characteristics were not only intriguing but instilled the curiosity to find teaching and learning strategies making a difference for people with disabilities.

This curiosity led me to Marion and Charleston, the two institutions offering special education programs in the area. I researched which of them had a more rigorous education program that could help me acquire the skills and competencies to teach students like Jeoffrey. Luckily, I applied to the two universities and was admitted into the graduate program for both schools. However, I decided on a college in Charleston, South Carolina, because it has better opportunities, including the availability of graduate assistantship positions. The two most important factors influencing my decision to attend Charleston over Francis Marion were the location and the demographics of the students and faculty. The College of Charleston was more cosmopolitan and diverse. This 'aha' moment was the missing link to my vocation-teaching students with disabilities.

I moved to Charleston in August of 1998. The Charleston area has beautiful vegetation and the serenity of the Atlantic Ocean just a few distances from the Charleston Battery. The College of Charleston is located at the center of the historic district with all the tourist attractions. The college was different from the work environment where I met students from different parts of the world. The faculty was welcoming and willing to show us how to navigate the terrain, but two professors, a female, and a male, were peculiar characters. In one of my educational statistics classes, the professor was a middle-aged white male. One day, I went to his office to discuss my final papers during his office hours. He looked at me intently when I entered his office and said, "Oh! my God, he is so hairy." It was so embarrassing to me because, in Africa, a man cannot compliment another man's body. He invited me to a party at his house that weekend which was so out of place I had to share this experience with my graduate supervisor. That same week, my cousin visited me in Charleston, and we decided to go into a bar around the campus to have a drink. I was not familiar with the gay or lesbian clubs, so we walked inside the place; and some men were dressed in unusual costumes, some speaking so softly and holding their partner's hand, and some were kissing and touching each other. I was shocked as most of the people there were about my face's expression. We ran out quickly of the place, and when we got to the car, we were both out of breath, frightened, and speechless. I then connected this experience to my interaction with my statistics teacher, and phobia began to develop. I started

avoiding this professor, and whenever I saw him coming in the opposite direction, I would take off through a different route. He may have noticed I was afraid of him, so he picked on me in class and cracked a lot of jokes attempting to make us all comfortable. While my understanding of gay and lesbianism has evolved, at the time, I did not understand what that meant because I had never experienced that type of scenario in Nigeria. If there were gay men or women in Nigeria, they were invisible in social spaces.

I felt isolated and lonely at college because only one person liked to work with me while others clung to students with congruent cultures and skin colors. There was an African lady in my class, so she is the only one I work with during group or paired activities. We were like an outcast the entire first semester. In the second semester, I met other students, and the relationship was much better the first semester. I noticed White males and African females were more receptive and accommodating than white females or Black males. I was invisible to White females and Black men, who rarely spoke or acknowledged me, so I decided to break the silence by interrogating the reason for the exclusion. At first, everyone was laughing at my questions, but when I requested my teacher use one class period to address the uncooperative attitudes in our classroom, they were surprised, and some decided to partake in the discussion. I acted like one from outside, so I posed one question to the general class: what can we do so everyone can work cooperatively to benefit more from this class? The answer I received was perplexing; the White students argued there were no problems and if people wanted to talk or mingle, we should respect individual differences. The African males in the class were silent and did not respond; they just listened.

In my mind, I wondered what was going on in the African American students as they sat down watching this blatant denial of our lived experiences. This impression resonates with Gordon (2019) when he retorts being (in)visible is a peculiar technology of racist distancing and nonrationality. As I might have expected, Gordon affirmed, "There are many ways to look without seeing, and for those caught in the web of oppression, not being seen is so familiar that it, too, ceases to function as a seen circumstance" (p.114). The denial of anything happening ascribes to the fact "race and racism continue to be constant interlocutors in black/white relationships within "post-race" aspirations so black "racial feelings" is itself forced into

(in)visibility as it is too unsettling for whiteness" (p. 114). This class meeting was a revelation to the big problem of race and racism. Gordon's observation demonstrates the unaccounted privileges creating the dichotomy between White/Black, minority or immigrant, and native-born. The vexation in our class that day showed the micro-aggressive tendencies of the privileged students and the passive and "bottled emotions or anger" of the African American students. I guess a way to interpret the interactions during the class meeting was that it opened a window of opportunity to discuss issues about race and raciology in the classroom.

In this regard, the idea of exculpating the recent legislative attempts to stop the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is fundamentally flawed. Many people are misled about the theoretical framework of CRT. The narrative about critical race theory is grossly exaggerated because CRT recognizes the interconnection between the United States social institutions such as the legal system, education system, labor market, housing, and the healthcare system. I believe schools should not be discouraged from discussing race matters openly to understand better how racism permeated the fabric of the United States society. The first round of this discussion was fierce and uncomfortable for different races in the class. I am from Africa and have an alternative, so if it comes to the worst, I can pack my things and return to my father's house, where I will be welcomed with an open hand. I understand that was not the case for African Americans, which means they had no other choice than to face all adversity to survive. I learned this survival comes at a "Big" cost which was why the abject silence in the class during this discussion. The professor was intrigued by the outcome of this simple question and decided he would devise a strategy to create diverse groups for the next project. As the time approached for our midterm project, he created a number system, so each person picks a number, and those with similar numbers sit together for the project. This idea worked well as the students began to associate with each other, even at a superficial level.

Another intriguing experience at Charleston was when the professor I was working with within her office as a graduate assistant asked me to help a teacher at the high school who was teaching about Africa. She wanted me to teach the Chinua's Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*- highly technical books with three main

themes. I accepted the request without factoring in the complexity, preparation, and understanding of the intricacies of each theme. The presentation was deplorable, and I felt I had wasted all that time in vain. I did not envisage what would happen. Next, my professor felt embarrassed and perhaps thought I had no academic future. She subtly became unwelcoming and finally decided to stop me from working at her office. This reaction took a heavy toll on my emotions, and I have not spoken to her to this day. I began to piece together some of the stories she shared when my relationship with her was good. I recount the story of a young priest from the Islands who happened to be in Charleston and became friends with the professor's family. She stated they took the young priest to a family gathering and introduced him as their son one Christmas. Other family members and friends who had not met Paul at the time turned sharp looking, puzzled. They all laughed about it, and to the family, it was a big joke. Later, I realized the priest was black, and since the professor is Catholic, she met him and thus invited him to meet her family. I had no voice and could not have a dialogue with her, so the relationship died.

On the contrary, the second professor I was attached to in her office was open-minded and a pure academic. She discovered though I had rough edges in my academic background, and that learning was in my DNA. She started to give me several of her research papers to critique, and we would sit down to argue a point or two about her paper. I don't know whether my contribution helped her writing or thinking, but she prepared me for graduate-level work beyond a master's degree. She was not paying attention to my accent or skin color; she focused on my aptitude and my strengths to put me on the path to academic life. I, therefore, give her credit for motivating or inspiring me to pursue graduate work.

I graduated in May of 2000 and secured a teaching position at Mauldin, South Carolina. I was also offered an opportunity to work for Walmart as an assistant manager, but I chose the teaching path. I taught only one year at Mauldin and then relocated to Georgia. While in Georgia, I obtained a specialist degree in curriculum and instruction from a college in Demorest and, in 2015 accepted into the doctoral program at Georgia Southern.

Georgia Southern was a learning experience for me. When I started summer 2015, I thought I would not make it. I discovered there were defects in my reading speed, so I had a hard time reading all the recommended text in time for class discussion and paper. It was so challenging a few of my classmates quit, and others were still in the program. Another area of weakness was my writing patterns and structure. I noticed I write the way I speak, so it took me more words to illustrate a point. This cultural factor made my sentences so lengthy and drew the attention of my professors and plenty of bleeding red inks. It was a learning curve that needed to be addressed, so I began to pressure myself-reading fast by timing myself and making sure I read at least 4 hours a stretch. My effort began to yield fruit when I realized I now read about 80 words a minute. My writing began to improve as I read. This was another intriguing fact I had learned in theory and saw in myself reading is connected to writing and as you read, your writing becomes much better. It became second nature to recognize the writings of different authors or researchers, including researchers in various fields. I took particular interest in reading John Dewey's work and Horace Mann, understanding the history of education in the United States, Ladson Billings, books written by my professors, and research about disparate groups. I realized a wide gap between the education I received in Nigeria and the United States. There is value in education here in the United States because it attempts to develop the overall person. In contrast, the education from the Nigerian side is functional and based on the colonizer's ideals.

<div align="center">Reflections</div>

I was not Black until I relocated to the United States in 1995. My experiences in Nigeria about whiteness were different from the reality when I stepped foot in the United States. The majority race seems to have a monolithic view of blackness in America. This does not seem right because African Americans are an umbrella group for different black ethnicities in the United States. The disparate groups have incongruent cultures and languages and have differences that cannot be overlooked. I could not believe that American society is stratified and racially fragmented, yet it looks like an open hand to embrace multiculturalism on the outside. While concerted effort has been made toward multiculturalism, the focus

of that integration has not included people whose ancestry is relegated to the lowest rung in American society, particularly Africans. This contradicts my understanding of whiteness before relocating to the United States. The colonial project did a clever maneuver to sway Africans into believing that all whites are humane and benevolent and treat others with respect, just, and equitable. Having lived in America for twenty-seven years, that belief has shifted, and I now realize that those views were grossly incorrect. On the individual level, I have lots of white friends who are opposed to injustice, but racism and other forms of discrimination seem to be embedded in government systems.

At work and in the general society, I felt humiliated when people made fun of my accent, linguistic or cultural differences, or were sarcastic inferences. As an immigrant from an English-speaking part of the West African country of Nigeria, code-switching became an inherent and artful negotiation at the intersection of culture and linguistic differences. It was puzzling to discover that there are different shades of Blackness, native Blacks, African Americans, and Blacks from other countries or ethnicity. I also notice that Blackness is a loaded word, and all Black is perceived as monolithic despite the disparate groups under the African American umbrella. Black is the same for the whites and other races, but this generalization angers African Americans, Caribbeans, and African-born Blacks.

African Americans feel that other Blacks are not black enough. The consideration for reparation has put another twist on a new reconceptualization of who is African American or Just Black. This exclusionary clause places other Blacks as different people, though all blacks have the same heritage. In this regard, the overarching idea to galvanize collective black strength for political, economic, and social transformation becomes a far cry. There is no unity among the Black ethnicities, which is antithetical to the civil rights struggles. The media stymies the effort of the unit by playing on both sides of the divide. In Africa, the United States, and other western countries' media, through movies (Coming to America), anthropological accounts, and Geographical, portray Africa as a virgin, uncultivated and uncivilized land. On the other hand, present Africa Americas (Good Times) as Lazy or indolent, oversexed, poor, and people whose lives depend on government assistance. I know now that these are false because I am here; what happens to African

Americans who are stuck with this stereotype because they have not been to Africa to know that civilization has not eluded Africa and that we do not live on the trees.

I suffered discrimination in the workplace, and sometimes, it feels as though there is no blood in the vein of those who made my life miserable. I felt that some co-workers are following along to please their peers. When this occurs, I become an outcast, and it is not a good place to be regardless of the circumstance. The majority groups are responsible for nipping all forms of racial discrimination in the bud by disavowing the systemic foundations. This has not been the case in the institutions where I worked. It is worthy to note that discrimination is based not only on race alone, but researchers have also indicated that language and culture are forms of discrimination. In retrospect, I feel that after many years of teaching, the ice began to thaw between me and my co-teachers and the grade level team. The effort of engaging personally and privately negotiating the intersections of race, linguistic and cultural differences worked. There is a probationary period before being accepted, at least at the professional level. Part of this acceptance shows the beginning of "becoming black" and marriage between Africans and the United States Culture.

The Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM), interspersed internationally as a united face of all Black people, is a way forward. At least it has a collective purpose of preventing the killing of innocent Blacks by the police and dismantling all forms of systemic racism. However, the goal post cannot be moved when Blacks kill other Blacks. In a recent incident in New York City, a Black man killed many unarmed civilians on the train to Manhattan. It would have been a balanced act if the BLM protested the lives of those innocent people killed in New York, Chicago, LA, and other places because their lives matter too. When it becomes selective or fixed to White Corp vs. Black folks, it diminishes or defeats the humanistic nature of their cause and the universal sacredness of life. I was expecting a rally to protest gun violence, confronting gun rights legislation and those supporting owning a gun without a background check. I ask whether Black lives only matter when Whites or police officers kill Blacks? Does not commenting or acting against Black improprieties imply that it is okay for Blacks to kill fellow Blacks or perpetuate mayhem against each other in the name of gang violence or "Drive-By Shootings"? The inaction on the part of BLM is flawed. In my

opinion, BLM should be against all manner of violence against Black people regardless of the perpetrator's race.

CHAPTER 4:

COMPARING THE EXPERIENCE OF FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION

NIGERIAN-AMERICAN

A First-Generation Nigerian-American

I consider myself a first-generation Nigerian-American, but some may classify me as in-between first and second or (1.5) Nigerian-American because I came to the United States after graduation from college and was raised by a relative who has been living in America for several years. I therefore benefited from his experiences, which often come in phases of deep cultural and sociolinguistic lectures, financial and moral support. Other first-generation Nigerians are immigrants who enjoyed life in Nigeria or escaped the dangers of ethnic cleansing and immigrated to the United States for better socioeconomic opportunities. While growing up, I embraced Ibo cultural values woven with the beautiful native language which mostly is tonal and has a variety of idioms and linguistic patterns. I tried to merge my Nigerian culture with the American culture, but it was a big struggle. While relocating to America was quite a unique experience, it had its challenges which felt like being trapped in a difficult situation. This was mainly due the pain of being excluded from African American peers at college, experiencing racism and discrimination at work and in social spaces. In a way, being a first-generation Nigerian-American pulls me in two different directions. On the one hand, it pulls me to my native country in which my ancestors established an economic trajectory- a place where I have landed property that could be easily converted to cash, social networking, and an identity. On the other hand, the new country (United States of America), where I am recognized as an alien, requires me to pave the way for myself(individuality) and offspring. This phenomenon where I am neither an African American, Ibo, or Black is exacerbated with increasing insecurity of life and property in Nigerian. Since relocating to the United States in 1995, I travel to Nigeria at least once in two years. There is a sense of relief that comes with the realization that when my new home (USA) becomes unbearable, I can escape to the home that is thriving   at the time (Nigeria), but with the increasing police brutality for

Blacks in the United States and the indiscriminate shooting of male or female, infant or adults by the different branches of uniformed men in Nigeria, I lost a sense of security everywhere (double marginality).

The Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) which was spurred by the media coverage on George Floyd's murder and subsequent police indiscriminate killing of Black folks in America heightened my fears. My feeling of insecurity and the phobia associated with the lack of discipline and human decency made me cringe. It was a dramatized "Apartheid" beyond the magnitude of South Africa's record. This perception is substantiated by the report that 28% of people killed by police in 2020 were Black Americans even though we only make up 13% of the United States population (Washington Post, April 5, 2022). The barrage of media coverage on the event caused me psychological trauma and made it difficult for me to leave my house for anywhere except if there is extenuating circumstance or something necessary. I rarely exercised my freedom of expression or went out to the park to walk because I did not feel safe anywhere. It was petulant to be indoors, but I had no choice but to create a safe haven for myself and family because of the persistent challenges to the existence of Blacks, particularly Black males in America. Although the BLM exposed these vices in 2020 through social media platforms, the problem of racism and the anguish of the black male in the United States dates to the Slavery era. For two months, I was agonized and felt that the situation could not be ameliorated. I have dealt with most of my worries and some of the inexplicable circumstances, but I still have waves of anxiety when I encounter the police for any reason whatsoever. The way I navigate the world around me has forever changed. I resolved to show bravery and cautiously use my voice to regain the part of humanity that was stolen from me. This idea that Black lives are worthless is part of an identity that heaps on numerous negative vibes my black body and accent generates.

<div align="center">A Second-Generation Nigerian-American</div>

Second-generation Nigerian-American children are also known as "American born children of foreign-born parents" (Kao & Tienda, 1995). For the purposes of this study, second generation Nigerian refers to children born in the United States to Nigerian parents and children who immigrated from Nigeria before the age of five or have a relative adopted parents who is a naturalized citizen of the United States.

Socioeconomic and Ethnic Advancement of the Second-Generation Nigerian-American

In light of these precarious situations, both first- and second-generation Nigerians suffer existential threats that are constructive within the institutionalized racist system. The United States has been denoted as a class society. The classification is based on economic prosperity, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and religion. In view of the economic stratification, some diasporic immigrants such as Nigerians, Chinese, Indians, and Eritreans have been described as model immigrants. I take notice of the Nigerian classification as a model minority immigrant group in the United States. I will return to this erroneous misconception later as I take a deep nosedive to describing and understanding the second-generation Nigerian-Americans.

Second Generation Nigerians

Second-generation Nigerian-Americans are exceptional students, they attend prestigious colleges and graduate in highly specialized fields (Trans et al, 2018, Imoagene, 2017). Recent studies show that second generation Africans and Afro-Caribbeans make up 1% of the U.S population (Logan & Dean, 2003), and comprise 43% of Blacks in Ivy league colleges (Massey et al., 2007). A New York Times January first, 2014, Opinion Editorial titled, "What Drives Success", reported that second generation Nigerian-Americans make up one quarter of the Black students at Harvard Business school and over a fourth have a graduate or professional degree as compared to eleven percent of whites. Joanna Walter reports in the Guardian, May 29, 2013, that the joint report of the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University found that although immigrant-origin students make up only 13 percent of the black population in the US, these students now comprise 27 percent of the Black student population at the top 28 US universities surveyed. The report further indicates that African Americans are losing out at selective colleges across the country, particularly at elite universities, and their place being taken by first- or second-generation American immigrants, at least one of whose parents was born in the Caribbean or Africa.

When aggregated based on education and wages, first generation Nigerian-Americans exceed second generation Black Americans, third generation African Americans, third generation Whites and second-

generation Asian Americans (Sakamoto et al, 2021). Second generation Nigerians are notable regarding educational attainments and labor. Also, when controlled for age, education, and disability, second generation Nigerians have reached parity with the third-generation whites and higher generation whites (Arthur, 2017, Gamiir, 2018, Chua and Rubenfeld, 2014, Imoagene, 2017, Adichie, 2013). The socioeconomic and educational attainment have increased visibility of the second-generation Blacks (Portes & Macleod, 1999). The afro mentioned disparities elaborate the diversity within the Black ethnic groups and explains some of the sources of conflicts between the sub-ethnicities under the African American umbrella. Many native Blacks believe that Affirmative Action was created to redress the racial injustices in America and native blacks should be the beneficiary. There are plethora of reasons why African Americans express raw emotions toward the achievements and accomplishments of second-generation Nigerian-Americans. African Americans often view second-generation Nigeran-Americans as opportunists rather than hard workers. These opinions tend to cause rifts between native Blacks and immigrant Blacks.

The above statistic is instructive and can become compelling anecdotal evidence that the Black community must adopt a unity in diversity approach to close the educational gaps within the black ethnicity and the whites. There is an opportunity for negotiation here that speaks to the problem of locating the systemic imbalance in the achievement gaps within the ethnocultural aggregations and conflicts. Why aggregate on one hand when it comes to achievement and then disaggregate politically and racially? Do achievement gaps stem from within the systemic resource imbalance (outside factor) or within the ethnocultural inhibitions (internal ethnic factors)? Can racism and a presumptive culture of inferiority complex reproduce disparities in achievement across the United States? The answer to these questions may be found in progressive collaborative in-house (Black on Black) exchange of ideas, cooperation and embracing diversity and inclusiveness of all Blacks in America. Thus, this marriage or union of immigrant Blacks and native Blacks could metamorphosize into asking the right types of questions: What factors help Africans succeed in the American educational systems despite racism and other insubordinations and how

could African Americans and other black ethnicities key into those strategies to expand academic potentials?

There is obviously a different reality in culture and parenting between immigrant parents and the native-born Black parents that cannot be ignored even when socioeconomic status is controlled. It has become increasingly necessary to adopt a model of African Diaspora literacy across the world, not just in the United States. Blacks in all parts of the world should think together about how to ensure that black people's welfare is protected. In *We Be Lovin' Black Children* (2021), Boutte et al quoting Ladson-Billings states that "black parents can no longer settle for 'the Talk' as defense for our children. They need information, strategies, and tactics for ensuring Black Children survive and thrive in an increasingly hostile world" (p.1). It is time to face the facts and make transformative changes for the benefit of all black children across the world. In particular, as Gloria and Kaminia, along with George Johnson and Udo Uyoata suggested in *We Be Lovin Black Children* (2021), learning African and African American culture can be an ongoing antidote to many of the difficulties Black children face in the United States (p.7).

Factors that Determine Economic and Educational Outcomes of the Second-Generation Nigerian-Americans

There is few or limited research about the socioeconomic attainment of second-generation Nigerians in the United States (Sakamotor et al, 2021; Kebede 2018; Imogoagne 2017; Kwarteng 2016; Adjepong 2018, Balogun 2011; Onuzulike 2016). To understand the economic success and achievement of Nigerian-American second generation in America, it is pertinent to take a cursory look at the socioeconomic profile of their parents (first-generation Nigerians) and the assistance they received from the Federal Republic of Nigeria from 1960s through the 80s. It has been a rhetorical question as to why second-generation Nigerian-Americans are being more successful than other Black ethnicity in America if the United States is judged to be deeply racist. Apparently, if the presumption is that the cards would be heavily stacked against people of color, then it becomes pertinent to ask the question: How could Nigerian immigrants outperform Black Americans and Whites? Is the concept of "model minority" a true reflection of the status quo or an aberration? Based on current research, the second generation of Nigerians in the United States are making

advances in education and careers. But the background to these success stories have been understudied (Nibbs and Brettell, 2016). It has become necessary to find out the factors that predispose second generation Nigerian-Americans thriving in the United States and to debunk the myth of a model minority.

Model Minority: A Myth

Historically, the political scenario in Africa in the 1960s was one of revolution and military dictatorships. As stated earlier, after Great Britain decolonized Nigeria in 1960, the country plunged into a civil war (Nigerian/Biafran War). At the end of the Nigerian/Biafran War, unbalanced and rancorous sham fronted as the reunified Nigerian government profited from a favorable trade partnership with the United States of America. Nigeria and the U.S became peas in a pod with Nigeria agreeing to sell oil to the U.S. during the 1973 oil embargo crisis. This marriage brought about an economic boom to Nigeria as evidenced in the remarks of the governor of then East Central States, Ukpabi Asika who was quoted as saying: "onye ube ruru yaa ra cha" meaning if one has ripe pears, he or she should go ahead and eat or enjoy it. This metaphor suggests that Nigerians should enjoy the excessive wealth from the oil boom while it lasts. Because of the buoyancy of the economy, the Nigerian government provided scholarships for Nigerian students who wanted to study abroad in America. These scholarships covered the cost of education at state schools like the University of Nebraska or Ivy's like Harvard and Yale.

As documented in the Nigerian Educational gazette, many Nigerian-Americans who got an all-expense-paid trip to an Ivy League University were expected to return to Nigeria upon graduation to help build Nigeria, but many did not return. The beneficiaries of this government benevolent act who remained in America to this day are regarded as the first-generation Nigerians. These Nigerians knew that going to graduate school and becoming a doctor, lawyer or engineer was the best way for them to become American citizens. Many of the benefactors explored the part of citizenship through employment visas while others applied for special considerations based on rare academic skills. There are some who obtained residency status through marriage with an American citizen or religious work. After becoming citizens, they could

sponsor relatives for citizenship, relatives who were able to enter the United States as legacies at top universities.

First-generation Nigerian-Americans who came in the '90s had a different type of advantage. The Immigration Act of 1990 introduced EB-1, EB-2, EB-3 and Diversity Immigrant Visas. In a nutshell, EB 1–3 Visas made it easier for immigrants who were doctors and lawyers to become citizens or permanent residents than immigrants who were, say, janitors or freelance musicians. Diversity Immigrant Visas, also known as the green card lottery, were for immigrants who didn't qualify for EB 1, 2 or 3 visas" (Hales, 2021). I am a beneficiary of the Dv-1 visa lottery program and went through all the processes and requirements as set forth in the American Immigration Act of the 90s. According to Hales, (2021) in a paper titled: *Race in America: But What About Nigerian Americans? Deconstructing the 'model minority' myth* states that: "second generation Nigerian-Americans didn't 'rise to the top' so much as they were cherry-picked from the top. I'm not discounting the hard work it takes to become a doctor or lawyer, nor am I saying that Nigerian-Americans don't deserve their success. I'm saying there's a bigger picture that we often ignore in favor of the 'model minority' stereotype and continuing to ignore that picture harms and demeans us all" (p.1). Hales further illustrates her conclusion with a hypothetical situation with the NBA game suggesting that Cherry-picking creates a false sample size, and this skewed sample size is the heart and soul of the model minority myth.

Given this background, second generation Nigerian-Americans have strong family ties anchored on mostly middle-class backgrounds. Because of financial, and family support, most second-generation Nigerians excel at school and ultimately in the labor market. These successes are overblown given that the arrogance of the status of model minority circumvents the painful systemic bottlenecks that diasporic blacks face in America. It underscores the painful identity crisis, marginalization, stereotypes and social and political exclusionary practices within the black ethnicities and the entire American society. I am yet to see the so-called model minority who is a chief executive officer of a fortune 500 company in America. Like many other modes of interpretation, the ethos of the majority race has been to give a dog a good name to

hang it. In effort to conceptualize the systemic digression and diffusion of blames about the real cause of discrimination, Rosa (2019) states that "the inability to apprehend the role of coloniality in shaping these modes of perception and identification lead to the indictment of the individual and the populations…rather than the indictment of colonialism as a historic and historic power formation that profoundly circumscribes desirable and possible subjectivities" (p.5). These kinds of embellishments are intended to accommodate rather than equalize. I am interested in a just and equitable workforce where individuals regardless of national origin rise to the top in all aspects of public and private establishments. At this point, this is a tall dream, and can be considered preemptive which suggests that the iteration "model minority" is a sham.

Similarly, the same descriptors are accorded to Asians and South Asian Americans portraying them as an example of American meritocracy while erasing the experience of Asian and South Asian immigrants who came to this country as refugees, Chinese Americans who were lynched or deported during the nativist period surrounding the Chinese Exclusion Act, or Japanese Americans who lost homes and businesses during America's internment of its citizens with even 'one drop' of Japanese blood. This designation fits into what Bhabha (1994/2004) and Fanon (1968:18) describe in the Location of Culture and the colonial theory of Antilles respectively as the Subaltern mimicry. Nigerian-Americans should find ways of presenting the on-going struggle in the workplace rather than mimicking whiteness and accepting a name that conforms to systemic expectation.

At the end of the day, the success of Nigerian-Americans and other so-called 'model minorities' cannot explain away Black Americans' lack of success. "It cannot erase the fact that white Americans have received explicit advantages in this country from 1776 until 1968 and continue to benefit from implicit advantages of whiteness to this day" (Hales, 2021). The counter questions I ask here are: How do you define model minority? Is the so-called model minority same as employability or having skills that attract higher wages? "How are Nigerian-Americans a 'model' if they can only be an assistant to the top management? What is "model" about Nigerian-Americans if there is no evidence of that representation in the top management echelon?" Why are most of the comparisons about educational and economic achievement

centered on Nigerians second generation and African Americans Blacks given that these disparate groups have different historical, cultural, and economic experiences? These intriguing questions were reechoed in Kebede' (2017) deconstructing Walters (2001, p. 325) analysis of second-generation Africans and felt that comparing second generation Africans to African American is saddled with biased assumptions since it largely glosses over their cultural uniqueness. Rather than contrasting them with other immigrant children (for example, contrasting how Nigerian-American second generation are doing as compared with Mexican American second generation), the Black second generation is commonly compared to African Americans (p.5).

The overemphasis on 'racio-ethnicity' and focusing on racial discontent or the negative effect of racial categorization (Imoagene, 2017; Onuzulike, 2016; Adejepong, 2018) are linked to the ethnic conflicts within the black communities. These biased assumptions perpetuate the idea that Africans or Nigerian-American are better or enlivens the claim that Nigerian-American second generation are better workers than African American second generation which has been debunked severally as false. There is no study comparing African Americans second generation and Nigerian-Americans second generations work ethics and productivity therefore the model minority label cannot be substantiated based on sample size without recourse to the myriad of social structures, inequalities, racism, and on-going inter-ethnic conflicts. Moreover, second generation Nigerians crosscut these bottlenecks and create new dimensions in the on-going debates about identity and race in America. It is plausible that all the analysis or denotation does is derail real conversations about American anti-Blackness and the enduring legacy of white supremacy in the United States. Essentially, such comparisons construct race and ethnicity as the defining variable for black people.

Transnational Lives and Experiences of Second-Generation Nigerian-Americans

In recent years, the economies of many African nations including Nigeria have been augmented by the support of the diasporic population in the United States and elsewhere. The support of extended family members, development of business facilities that provides employment for home and ethnic communities

has been described as a reverse economy. It is a common practice by the first-generation Nigerian-Americans to maintain transnational ties, send remittance, create a bridge between ancestral home and America by supporting cultural activities and helping finance local projects.

Kebede (2018) found that second generation Nigerian-Americans strive to develop identities, experiences, and transatlantic practices that connect them in different ways to Nigeria or African continent. According to Kebede, some of these practices encompasses sending remittance, entrepreneurship, and participating in the economy, ancestral home politics, visiting, and maintaining contacts in homeland, philanthropy in the host and ancestral home, and participating in cultural activities (p.2). These actions in many ways reflect, thread, or build upon the transnational activities of the second-generation Nigerian-Americans' parents. Second generation Nigerian-Americans define and redefine being and becoming black in the United States and contest being boxed into embracing a Black identity. Research shows that they prefer to connect African histories, values and experiences shared through social and multimedia, music, direct participation in political dialogue and other forms of engagement (Kebede, 2018; Imoagene, 2017). These assertions cast doubts about the two primary theoretical postulations, segmented assimilation and straight-line assimilation, in that these theories underscored the background of the offspring of post 1960s Nigerian-American immigrants by failing to take into account their unbelievable optimism and can-do culture as described in Imoagene (2017): it is "unNigerian not to go to college" (p.1). In addition, the researchers failed to examine what shapes the experiences of second-generation Nigerian-Americans, the connections with home or host country's culture, and other internal and external factors that predispose their successes in social and economic spaces in the United States. Because of the advantages from parents' better socio-economic status and other variables such as improved race relations in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, second generation Nigerians have muscled up the economic ladder on par with middle-class Americans (Kasnitz et al, 2009; Kebede, 2018). Although most second-generation Nigerian-Americans retain their parents' social capital, the educational and economic advancement seem to follow

ethnic lines. It seems each ethnic group has different levels of motivation that is uniquely based on culture and class composition of individual families.

Researchers found that second generation Nigerian-Americans have strong traditional transnational connections with Nigeria. For example, inviting Nigerian artists to perform in America, getting involved with Nollywood (Nigerian version of Hollywood), sending remittance home, participating in local politics and social media. For example, during the End SARS movement in Nigeria, the second-generation Nigerian-Americans joined ranks with their Nigerian counterparts offering technological and financial support. For example, the second-generation Nigerian-Americans and their peers in Nigeria produced an alternative to rerouting internet connection and access to social media when the Nigerian government blocked Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The two groups teamed up to circumvent all the disabled networks and transmitted throughout the whole world. It was this effort that led to the indictment of the Nigerian Army for killing unarmed civilians at the Lekki Tow Gate. These transnational engagements provide an ambiance upon which personality development and individual identities rest. Thus, the increased level of transatlantic socialization creates transnational identities which empowers hybrid identity negotiation (Lee 2009, Kwateng 2016, Onuzulike, 2016).

The Complexities of Life In-Between Ethnicities, Cultures, and Races in the United States--A "Beast of All Nations"

Upon settling in the Southern United States, I began to experience cultural shock, racial discrimination, and exclusion from my African American peers. Even though I did not initially want to be associated with slavery or placed in the same category as African Americans, my experiences in the South redirected my thinking and understanding about ethnic and racial injustices. These experiences opened questions about African race relations and attendant recourse to immigrants of African descent living in the South.

During these precarious circumstances, I engaged in a fact-finding mission discussing with my uncles and other relatives to ascertain the meaning of specific language or gesticulations, attitudes, and patterns of

discrimination. I summarize the central themes of these discussions to highlight the peculiarities and circumstantial parallels that precluded the first-generation Nigerian-Americans' plan to relocate to Nigeria and how it connects to the second-generation Nigerian-Americans and me. Further assertions indicate that my uncle's experience represents the experience of the first generation of Nigerian-Americans concerning the connection with their ancestral home.

From our discussions, I gathered that my uncle was subconsciously confronted with the most daunting and sensitive cultural issues that many people his age naturally thinks about. These most perplexing and deep reflections seem contemporaneous with the abysmal decay of the Nigerian polity and churn in his heart as he contemplates the limited options to tackle the burning and intractable issues about retirement and family lineage. I share these sentiments and face similar existential paradoxes.

I arrived in the United States in 1995 and recently turned fifty-two years old. My uncle is in his early seventies and most of his peers are rapidly aging with obvious trepidation arising from uncertainties that trail death. The indecision whether to relocate to Nigerian and at what age has many of the first generation worried about upholding tradition. This suggests that the length of our sojourn in the United States did not diminish our appreciation of Ibo culture. This wort of dilemma becomes pronounced at certain critical age brackets (50 years and up) when the likelihood of death is increasingly becoming a reality. The finality in death predisposes certain levels of housekeeping, particularly concerning the heir to my estate in Nigeria. Indeed, the aging condition precedes the inevitable end. Therefore, as a first-generation Nigerian, I am understandably worried about the seeming spike in deaths due to old age among Nigerians in the big cities in the United States, where there are large concentrations of Nigerians. The decision about where to be buried upon death has been difficult and still indecisive for me. Some first-generation Nigerians who died in the United States were buried here partly because of their loss of family ties to Nigeria and lack of preparation for old age.

The sense of loss and grief arising from being in-between cultures made it difficult for many first-generation Nigerian-Americans to consider or even build a house in their respective villages or homes.

Some of us lost hope entirely and never really wanted anything to do with our place of birthplace. Others wanted to shuttle and live between the best of the two worlds. I resolved to live in-between cultures- Nigeria and America without assimilating the United States Culture, rather creating an authentic self-identity. There is a danger that comes with being unprepared for the finality of life or undecided. First-generation Nigerian-Americans that fit this kind of mold becomes old with little preparation or no investment in Nigeria, such that the anguish or agony of choice precipitated by denial demonstrates a triple triangulation of sorrow- to remain here in the United States, return in a coffin, or to retire in an older people home in the United States. The choice to die and be buried in America and lose all ancestral spirit connections has cultural and social restraints. An accomplished first-generation Ibo/Nigerian-American person should be buried in his compound in Ibo Land according to the Ibo cosmology except when extenuating circumstances such as a plane crash or war exist.

On the contrary, an Ibo man over fifty years of age or above who died and was buried in a foreign land is regarded as an "efu le fu" (a lost and disgraceful son). While men are held to deeply rooted cultural standards, women have sometimes been exonerated from the disdainful remarks associated with not keeping with traditional values, especially those living outside Ibo Land. This distinction or mark differential expectation demonstrates the significance of masculinity and patriarchy in Ibo Culture. It means that a woman can be buried wherever her husband desires but not the other way round. There may be an exception when the family of the woman demands that her remains be returned and, in most cases, this happens when a preexisting conflict has been reported to the family of the woman.

My uncle and I reflected on his decision to build a home to obscure the inherent contradiction that could become apparent at old age. This connection between Nigeria and here is another difference between the second and the first-generation Nigerian-Americans. As a first-generation, I am worried about the heir to my estate-whether my children will return to Igboland to take over the family estate, and the end of my life or where I would be buried. I connect to Nigeria by visiting and participating in social relations regardless of whether those at home accept my decision to participate in the community or not. I subscribe

to building a befitting structure at my fathers' compound and have the same level of attachment to possession and property in Nigeria as my uncle. I subscribe to co-existing in America with other cultures while maintaining relevant Nigerian cultural heritage, thus carving out a space for myself here in the south United States and at home.

However, my uncle is older, and more worried about being trapped between a rock and hard place because of the unpalatable conditions to relocate. This feeling of loss seems to describe the paradox and inherent conundrum that highlight first-generation Nigerian diasporic experiences, mainly as they grow older in the United States of America.

Our collective experiences speak for most of our peers and represent how the first-generation Nigerian- Americans from Ibo extraction represent their experiences. Unlike the first-generation Nigerians, the second-generation Nigerian-Americans carved a niche among their peers from other African or Black ethnicity in the United States by organizing social and cultural platforms to make an Igbo Land in Diaspora.

The first generation gathers for various reasons, celebrations of birthdays, marriages, baby showers, naming ceremonies, graduations, and funerals. So, in every gathering among first generation Nigerian-American men, especially at the wake keepings, intense discussions about the frightening reality that many will die here and, unfortunately, without heirs to their estate in Nigeria, loom larger. The same thought worries the women from Nigerian ancestry, but they are very comfortable in America for different reasons. Therefore, the mere mention of relocating to Nigeria annoys most of them who feel their freedom would be lost. Most first-generation Nigerian males married women from Nigeria, and few settled with African Americans or women from other parts of Africa. There seems to be a significant shift in perspective for first-generation Nigerian women concerning culture related to marriage. Patriarchy is a prevalent culture in Africa as in many parts of the world, including the United States of America. Thus, men hold power, and women are largely excluded from it. This idea of freedom and equality principle is challenging for most first-generation Nigerian men despite living many years in the United States. In addition, Nigerian- first-generation males in the Diaspora, especially in the United States, are reluctantly coming to terms that their

children may visit but never live in their ancestral homes when they pass on to glory. Thus, whatever properties they have in Nigeria are at the disposal of their relatives. Based on current events, this level of fear for the first-generation Nigerians has precipitated uncanny actions by a broad swath of Nigerian men living in the United States.

Because of a strong affinity with Igbo culture and traditions, continuity of the family lineage, that is, the idea of returning home without an heir is synonymous with "emptiness" or "losing everything important in life." The lack of an heir to an estate can lead to the moral question "kedu zi ihe m jetara na America" - meaning If I return without my children, what sense did it make to live in the United States for so many years. Thus, this sense of loss embitters most first-generation aging Nigerians in the United States because none wants his lineage broken or desolate due to their children abandoning their ancestral homes to the delight of their siblings or relatives in Nigeria.

Given the prevailing conditions in Nigeria today, first and second generation Nigerian-Americans will never return to Nigeria to live permanently for obvious reasons such as having little or no ties to Nigeria, insecurities of live and property, religious wars, gang and ethnic rivalries (Boko Haram, Cattle Herdsman, Kidnapping, armed robberies, political thuggery), lack of steady power supply (electricity), no modern family house in the ancestral home, and death of immediate relatives or parents or grandparents. Sometimes, first-generation Nigerians may take their children to Nigeria to help them establish a friendship or build ties to home; most of the time, these ventures do not work. For example, a friend took their children to Nigeria to expose them to local Nigerian culture and schools. These children resided with his sister's family in Lagos. A couple of problems cropped up including his children accusing his sister of cruelty, and abuse. The children felt their aunt was mean and only focused on raising their biological children using funds from my friend. The children also complained of poor feeding and hygiene. At the end of the three years, his children returned to the United States highly disillusioned and vowed never to return to Nigeria. The goal was defeated and created disunity among the family members. Judging from this case, the kids did not have a good relationship with family members due to differences in perspective and exposure to American

culture. In addition, the second-generation kids often feel how the relatives in Nigeria preyed on them by exploiting their parents and not providing food rich with nutrients or maintaining the same level of care that they enjoyed while living with their parents. In many cases, the connection sought for was not established, and the kids return to the United States disgruntled. In other cases, second generation kids might establish a good relationship, but the ties are always broken when the father passes away. With this frightening reality in mind and the attendant reverse cultural shock, some second-generation Nigerians are not only finding it hard returning home because many of the events that create stress in the United States also create stress when they return home. This existential dilemma of losing one's heirs in the United States creates problems in that some Igbo men are going to Nigeria to procreate.

First-Generation Nigerian-Americans in Search of Continuity of Their Lineage: Pros and Cons

In some cases, the decision of mating in Nigeria has disparate results. Nevertheless, this emerging solution to the perceived problem is gradually gaining ground among first-generation Nigerian-American males. Although my uncle and I do not subscribe to the view that men should find a mate in Nigeria, the envisioned "emptiness" is a significant cause for concern. The cultural mix and diffusion of humanizing principles open the page to a constructive discussion about the possibility of a remedy.

Other first-generation relatives I hung around with also voiced their frustration about the cross-cultural issues and the apparent fact that the perceived "emptiness" could be a reality suggesting that living in the Diaspora has many limitations. They are beginning to come to terms with the fact that retiring in Nigeria may not be plausible due to the unwillingness of their kids and wives to join them in the effort. This leads to many questions: Where would I prefer to be buried when I die? How do I establish a connection with home and America? What are the possibilities that some or at least one my children may decide to live in-between if not settle wholly? These questions remain unsatisfactorily answered in the present.

Additionally, the relocation to Nigeria, particularly for first-generation Nigerian-Americans who have lived in the United States for a long time, can be a daunting task and adjustment given the uncertainty stemming from security to amenities and inadequate income. Financial indisposition and other logistics

bring untold hardship to individuals and kill the relocation plan in the tracks. Because such moves require many resources, some have tried to maneuver that through politics or political appointments. That also does not seem so easy as they compete for those positions with people at home who know the terrain better than they do. The failure to bring this idea of returning home to fruition now brings most first-generation Nigerian-Americans, especially people of Igbo ethnicity, to a humiliating crossroad where they are forced to negotiate the intersection of race, culture, and age in a society that preys on the elderly.

To an Igbo man, nothing is as essential as having a male child to continue the family name after his exit to eternity. Having a son(s) means having someone take the name in his ancestral home to continue the lineage. The other ethnic groups in Nigeria do not care much where they are buried or who takes the name or inherits their ancestral property, but having an heir to a family, keeping the name or throne is the foundation of Ibo Culture. This existential characteristic of the Ibo is distinct from other races and ingrained in the bona fide Ibo male regardless of where they sojourn.

As a first-generation Nigerian-Americans in the United States, especially from Igbo ethnic groups, I see that we are running out of options, and many do not want to retire to an Old People's Home in the United States. Although many first-generation Nigerians are struggling to produce different solutions to the problem, reported cases of some who secretly went behind their wife's backs to get another wife or divorced so that they could marry a younger wife resident in Nigeria failed woefully. Some who thought they outsmarted their spouses at some point got in trouble, resulting in a broken home. A few first-generation Nigerians who tried to engage another woman even with the knowledge of their wives could not meet up with the stress of traveling to and from Nigeria in a bid to keep two homes. This situation goes with the Igbo proverb that shows how difficult it is to deal with a tsetse fly perched on the scrotum. If you leave it, it sucks up your blood, and if you hit it hard to kill it, you might end up breaking your testicles." This debacle can be dramatic when husbands and wives engage in verbal confrontations over the perceived insecurities or outright betrayal. Often there is physical altercation leading to involving the police and litigation.

Another challenge to the first-generation Nigerian-American relocation plan, I believe, is poor health challenges and a lack of good hospitals in Nigeria. Some first-generation Nigerian-Americans who came here in the Seventies and nineties as students pursuing the proverbial golden fleece scoffed at the idea that they would be trapped in this country today. Ironically, most of them cannot even leave this country for a week either because their kidney dialysis or cancer chemotherapy treatment regimen cannot be replicated in Nigeria during their brief, casual excursion to Nigeria. Because of the inadequacies of the hospitals and the poor sanitary conditions in some government and private hospitals, first-generation Nigerians are unwilling to experiment with their lives in the hospitals in Nigeria.

Furthermore, financial indisposition is another pertinent factor that mitigates against the relocation plan. For example, a friend of my family who came here in 1980 as a student, as most of my uncles, lost his job a few years ago, after over 20 years on the job, cannot afford to produce at least $10,000.00 to take his family of six (himself, his wife and four children) to Nigeria for vacation and to see his 98 years old father. His situation exemplifies the new reality for most first-generation Nigerians, which implies choice lessness.

There have been questions whether starting a parallel family back home in Nigeria at midlife or sometimes twilight of life answers this vexatious of a new reality. Current events show that having a parallel family has its hazardous challenges as some people have been duped by women who led them to believe that they were the father of other men's children. For example, a good friend of a relative reported that after his retirement in New Jersey, he plans to move back to Nigeria. He actualized his plans by abandoning his wife and three adult children and moved back to Nigeria to spend the diamond and remaining phase of his life with a younger woman that he went to Nigeria and married three years before his retirement. This young meretricious spouse led him to believe that she was pregnant with his son, as my relative's friend rented and furnished a comfortable three-bedroom flat for her in Owerri (capital of Imo State Nigeria) for five years.

When, after his retirement, he arrived at the flat with his suitcases, he was met at the door by a potbelly middle-aged man carrying a two-year-old baby, who asked him, "oga, onye ka I na-acho (Sir, who are you

looking for)? When my relative's friend replied that he was looking for his wife, Ultima (name fictionalized), and his son, the man told him that he must be out of his mind because Ultima is his wife, and the baby is his son. Suffice it to say that throughout this harrowing experience of my relative's friend, Ultima, who was in the flat and overheard the colloquy between her live-in husband and my relative's friend never came to the door. When my relative's friend recovered from the shock, gathered his suitcases, and took a tricycle (locally called Keke Napepe) to a hotel, he was too ashamed and humiliated that he did not dare to visit his people in his village as he headed back to New Jersey from his hotel.

My relative reported, "While most of us thought that he was in Nigeria, little did we know that he had come back for over two years until his real and the only family announced his death about a month ago from complications from an opportunistic disease that got hold of him after his ill-fated trip to Nigeria about three years ago." This incident was sad and instructive to many contemplating the same idea.

My uncle and I ended with a recollection of America's good and bad experiences. My uncle recalled his youthful days detailing how he blossomed with energy and shattered academic glass ceilings. He further highlighted the ambition of most of his peers who came to the United States in the seventies, eighties and nineties, with lofty plans to return to Nigeria and help transform it to what President Ronald Reagan once described as the "Shining City on the Hill," "who would have known and how could anyone convince any of us that this will be our new reality." I am sure my children love to visit their ancestral home in Ibo land but doubt that they might relocate to Nigeria in the future. This knowledge continues to be an internal battle that seems to have no solution in the present time.

Reflections

In this chapter, I share my concerns about the continuity of my lineage in Nigeria because my kids, who are the second-generation Nigerian-Americans, have no plans of returning to Nigeria to live permanently. While it was difficult for me to relocate back to Nigeria, given the insecurities of life and property and the total breakdown of law and order, it is an unreasonable expectation to think that my

children will one day pack up and relocate to Nigeria. However, there must be a way to ensure continuity of lineage; otherwise, grasses will take over when I leave this earth.

I have multiple identities, and so do my children. However, there are significant differences in that my children have no accents. Their linguistic patterns reflect American social language norms. Therefore, the likelihood of being racialized based on their language is limited. Also, they tend to have embodied a mixture of American and African cultures. My children hold dear — to faith, family, and food, which are essential African cultural values. I remember asking my daughter, a college student, what she thought was a significant difference between African and American culture. She stated that the African belief system is rooted in high morals and respect for parents and elders.

In contrast, American culture may permit certain flexibilities tabooed in Africa (dating, parents' acceptance of spouse prior to engagement, going out at night for parties without family members and coming home at will, bringing male friends to the family home while in high school or beginning college, parents setting their children up for a blind date, religiosity and connection to God through sound worship). Also, she can see why an African may have difficulty understanding the culture of African Americans because of different value systems and that she was open to diversity and had many African, African American, Asian and other nationalities as friends- male and female. On the question of how she connects to her root or Igbo/Nigerian culture, she stated that she belongs to the international cultural group "Umu Igbo Unite." This group engages with the motherland through social media (NiaraLand) and contributes to the discussion about Nigeria, watches Nigerian movies, and listens to African Afro beats and pop.

Interestingly, my children have not experienced any form of racism while in school. However, I recount one incident where a guardian counselor suggested honors classes and did not encourage my daughter to take Advanced Classes (AP) until I intervened. When she realized I am also in education, she added AP chemistry and math, which was not surprising when my daughter scored an "A" in AP math and AP Chemistry and went on to Georgia State for Biomedical Sciences.

On the other hand, my son is more into connecting to his African roots than his sister. He researches the different ethnic groups and tends to have a deeper understanding of each ethnic group than I do. Due to my experience, I am not free-minded and only concentrate on things concerning the Igbos. In a sense, his versatility helped me reflect on my biased assumptions about other ethnic groups. In addition to research, he reads various books about Nigeria. He focuses mainly on essential topics such as the origin of certain tribes and their connection to the Igbo. My son enjoys Nigerian music and can demonstrate the dancing steps effectively. On whether he might relocate to live permanently in Igbo land, his answer was intriguing and disturbing. He will only visit but cannot promise to live there permanently. In other words, when I leave this world, my family lineage is in jeopardy, and all the gigantic structures I put in the village will go to my extended family members. This answer is worrisome since having an heir to take over one's estate is a fundamental or core value of the Igbos.

The second-generation Nigerian-Americans resist being forced into embracing the identity of group-African Americans-whose values and experiences are not their own. The notion that members of the New African Diaspora will forge their African identities to prevent the ethnic stigma mainstream whites impose on African Americans is simply incorrect. First, most second-generation Nigerian-Americans come from middle-class homes and have ongoing powerful transnational connections that shape their self-identity and group membership. Due to modernity, communication has been made easy so the second generation can easily stay in touch with their home country without physically visiting. Besides, adopting multicultural values makes it possible for second-generation Nigerians to keep their culture while embracing relevant American cultures.

CHAPTER 5:

TEACHING EXPERIENCE IN UNITED STATES

My experience as a male Igbo/ Black/African American special education teacher in Georgia is strewn with different emotions. Sometimes, there are reasons to be happy and celebrate; other situations present contrasts ranging from anger, sadness, disappointment, rejection, marginalization, as well as disrespect. Over my 23 years of teaching there are subtle ethnic and racial politics in the schools I have taught in Georgia. Georgia has a constitutional and moral responsibility to provide not only adequate but also equitable education to all races, including African Diaspora children. Currently, this obligation falls short of meeting the expectation since the resources are selectively distributed based on race, family income, and property value.

Moreover, low-income African Diaspora and African American children who live in low-income areas obtain limited funding and services. Without a balanced approach to resource allocation and funding these students face difficulty integrating academically, socially, culturally, among others. African Diaspora children experience difficulty navigating through school when confronted with the same stereotypes adult African Diaspora have to face. Teachers underappreciate the intellectual ability of Diaspora children and often place them in regular education programs rather than on accelerated programs. A large number of these kids often get into trouble because they are not challenged enough resulting in disciplinary actions that could have been averted if the right attention and care would have been placed on them.

I worked in a high poverty area school defined as a "Title 3 school", where more than 75% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. This County consists of 22 schools in total, with approximately 20,579 students. The district's minority enrollment was 70%. In addition, 48.9% of students are economically disadvantaged. The student body at the schools served by this County consisted of 28.1% White, 57% Black, 0.7% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 9.4% Hispanic/Latino, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.2% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (USnews.com, April 2022). There are nearly 1300 teachers in the district. Despite the fact there are more significant number of economically

disadvantaged and Black/African American students, white teachers are overrepresented in the district (about 64%) (USNews.com). Although Georgia schools have integrated more effectively since Brown vs. Board of Education (1954), current issues show how the integration does not guarantee equal resources for Black or low-income area schools.

In this chapter, I share my experiences and challenges being a male teacher and a foreign-born Black-with cultural, social, and linguistic differences. I examine my professional relationships with peers, administrators, students, and parents. I also discuss my pedagogical approach and strategies as well as how these perceived differences and wavering identity have impacted my job as a teacher. I touch upon my experiences with African Diaspora students in K12, focusing on their multiple perspectives as well as understanding their shared stories, including their difficulties integrating within the social and cultural landscape in the school community and how this might have impacted their academic growth. For that purpose, I articulate my personal suggested teachings and learning strategies aimed at reaching and assisting Black/African Diaspora students become more successful in Georgia schools.

I begin by looking at peer relationships and the perception of native-born teachers of me. I generally speak with a noticeable accent, and my speaking patterns became the hallmark of my identity. My language follows the phonological, syntactical, semantical, and pragmatical rules of British-styled English. However, to understand the significance of my speaking patterns, it is essential to show the linkage between my British education (colonial education), culture (Africaness), and integration into the American system (American Culture). Therefore, the accent and speaking patterns deepen an understanding of my new identity as an African Diaspora teacher and show how these marked differences can be a place of terror, marginalization, friction, or negotiation (Samy Alim et al., 2016).

During my 23 years of teaching experience, I noticed when native teachers told me I was "speaking good English," they were being derogatory towards me. This experience was reechoed in the analysis of the general mainstream perception of Barack Obama's speaking patterns or language in Radio Linguistics thus: "America's varied and passionate response to Barack Obama's language- from monitoring to mocking to

"marveling" ("he's so articulate!") (p.3). The relationship between language, race, and culture has been an important topic of interest to researchers (Hall,2017; Adichie, 2013; Achebe,2001; Smitherman, 1977; 2000).

Language and accent are a system of differences (Hall, 2017, p. 42), bringing out a form of racism and an uninhibited comparison between people such as inferior/superior, civilized/uncivilized, educated/uneducated. These comparisons are not only about language and accents but also touch on other markers of differences such as name, class, race, ethnicity, and sex. In K-12 teaching, all the enumerated markers play a role in stigmatizing the Diaspora teacher. These perceptions, whether about linguistic differences, culture, or race, manifested themselves in various ways thus impacting the Diaspora teacher. For example, the perception of linguistic difference has a spillover effect in that native teachers perceive or equate it as pedagogical weakness, inadequate teacher education training, or English knowledge, notably when the Diaspora teacher received a first or second degree in their native country. Because I hold a baccalaureate in Political Science and Education from a Nigerian University, my peers often markdown my educational qualification as inadequate. It is expected that I present my identity and prove myself through language usage, which then activates some form of code-switching (Ibrahim, 2014) or some other way of demonstrating astute Knowledge of British English.

Sometimes, teachers initiate a discussion to gauge my understanding or comprehension of English. Multiple times, native teachers refer to my accent as heavy, insinuating the need to increase performance, while some others claim the accent sounds unique or different; therefore, they enjoy hearing a different accent. Thus, failure to act as "expected" or perform my accent configures to the belief that I have limited expressive pedagogical power. For example, when I engage in broad discussions about the curriculum or the pacing guide, most of my peers come into the discussion with an expectation that I know very little about the content. Consequently, they believe they have the onerous task of schooling me on "how things should be done" within the grade level or department. In particular, they refer to few men teaching at the elementary school level and express concern of how men tend to be disorganized. The preconceived

stereotypes predispose negotiation through heated discussions and "*acting out*." They left the discussion befuddled on many occasions, and their opinions began to change positively toward me. In some cases, some will confess to learning a new concept or idea, while others will blatantly voice out their surprise or objection. These types of discussions, including working in small groups, sponsoring clubs (International Students Club and participating in the organization and planning of Black History Month), and helping in grade level lesson planning, provide an avenue for negotiation and collaboration.

Specifically, I take positive relationships very seriously because I make it a personal effort to reach out to each and every member of the teaching crew one teacher at a time. This approach hints at how a Diaspora teacher is constantly looking behind themselves to build relationships and mitigate damage. The burden of friendship seems to rest on the African Diaspora teacher. This constant expectation of scoring a point on image-making or social acceptance while native-born teachers continuously monitor and decide whether to accept me, hampers self-definition and can be overwhelming. I have fantasized multiple times the desperate act of packing my bags and returning to Nigeria. This feeling of worthlessness in a foreign land is captured by Baldwin (1998/1949) in *A Question About Identity* when he stated that: "His brief period of enchantment having ended, he cannot wait, it seems, to look again on his native-land- the virtue of which, if not less crude, have also become, abruptly, simple, and vital" (p. 95).

Baldwin (1998/1949) reacts to how he felt in France compared to the United States. This self-evaluation sparks the recognition that the benefit of living in a foreign land may be infinitesimal and insufficient to discount one's own country. While in a foreign land, it becomes a constant struggle to construct a positive self within the economic, political, and social context that relegates " its members to static and disparaged ethnic, racial, and class identities… and disparaged language codes and practices"(Alim et al., 2016, p.19).

<div align="center">The Unstructured/Invisible Teacher Groups in My School</div>

In my school, there are small unstructured invisible teacher groups who can influence the administration, district, and other teachers to make things comfortable or uncomfortable for new or veteran

teachers, particularly African Diaspora teachers. Invisible teachers' groups sometimes gossip about things that have come to be represented in popular parlance as "small teacher talks." The actions of these invisible groups are part of the school's culture and nontraditional or transgressive teacher platforms. These teachers attack curriculum issues, get new teachers, and evaluate administrators' performances within the school. These micro-units are not an officially recognized structure of the school community, but they play a massive role in creating a positive or negative school climate; sometimes pointing fingers and gossiping about teachers and administration, acting as whistleblowers, and secretly writing petitions to the board on issues about the school. The role and impact of these invisible teacher groups can be expansive in that they often influence grade-level teams to go along with a transgressive action. For example, they demonstrated subtle insubordination while acting as unsolicited agents. They lured the whole 5th and 4th-grade teachers into transferring or looking elsewhere for jobs and at the end of the school year resulting in an all-brand-new staff for the entire grade level with all the attendant challenges. In addition, teachers are constantly structurally and socially scrutinized, evaluated, condemned, or accepted in the fold. This unconventional culture is where teachers are accepted, ridiculed, critiqued, nitpicked, or racialized. These unconventional teacher groups are part of my school's unseen "fetish culture" and seem to be pervasive across other schools within the district. There is a strong bond between the school's social climate and academics where a balance between the two contributes to the overall school atmosphere. I felt how the performance of students and staff at this school hinged these "*small talks*" and low morale orchestrated by different grade level micro groups. On the surface, it is hard to capture the depth of influence these micro-units wield on their peers, parents, and administration. Typically, they influence opinions, sensitize parents and sway teacher's responses to surveys, school culture, and who should be excluded or included as a good or bad teacher. A better way of describing this group is a group of like-minded teachers who engage in various activities and use unobtrusive methods to infiltrate a group of teachers in order to force their views or opinions on the school's community. Some of their methods include gossiping, offering unsolicited advice to any administration member they are friends with, writing letters of complaint to the district, as well as

anonymous social media posts. While the description of the activities of this ubiquitous group may not fully capture the power play here, it demonstrates how other power blocks within the school create additional burdens to foreign-born Black teachers and others within a school's community.

The actions of this group impacted me because I have incongruent linguistic patterns, culture, and race. First, gossip started about Nigeria being so backward that no schools could meet the standard expected of any graduate program in the United States. Despite my abilities and results from the College of Charleston, South Carolina, where I graduated top of my class with a GPA of 3.89 on a 4-point scale, these teachers questioned my teaching credentials. As I was working hard on damage control, I overheard a complaint made to the administration about my accent. Several teachers reported to the administration how my students were struggling to understand my accent. I was called for a meeting at the principal's office mainly to engage in a discussion to ascertain whether the rumor was true. The principal concluded my accent was not an issue. When this plot failed, they levied another accusation pointing to my ineffective discipline management plan suggesting an ineffective teacher and recommending that I should not be rehired. These three unsuccessful attempts show that this group could be anti-Diaspora, Black/African immigrant teachers.

While reeling from these allegations, a female Diaspora teacher walked into my class to complain about how other teachers and some administrators treated her. The exchange between her and these teachers prompted the assistant principals to frequent her classroom to observe her teaching. The teacher complained how sometimes before she could sit down to check her email, an assistant principal was already seated before her students came into the classroom. According to Georgia's teacher observation instrument, she is supposed to receive only two visits. The female teacher was in tears as she could not understand why she was subjected to this level of intimidation. She recounts that her students scored the highest in all district and state tests. The growth percentile for her students in reading and math was much higher than all four of the fourth-grade class that year combined. Despite these blatant facts, she was accused of having a heavy accent, having difficulty managing student behavior, and having limited content knowledge. For these

reasons, they did not rehire her, and she left the district for a neighboring district where she currently teaches fourth-grade math and science.

Another similar situation occurred in my immediate vicinity, where an African Diaspora teacher was asked to resign by the assistant principal or accept a paraprofessional proposition. The assistant principal referenced ineffective class management skills and content delivery in the same pattern. However, behind the scenes, micro-units raised the concern that her accent or language inhibits her students' learning. The discussion spread like wildfire and made life uncomfortable for this teacher. When she requested a one-on-one meeting with the assistant principal, her feedback was unprofessional and disappointing. Accordingly, other assistant principals started to frequent her classroom to observe her teaching. This was unprecedented and humiliating, given that this female teacher was a first-year teacher in the district and had not even completed new hire orientations. The teacher was distraught and hired an attorney to at least manage the situation until her contract expired in August of 2021. Eventually, on the expiration of her contract, she was not renewed though she sought employment in another school district.

This kind of humiliation is not peculiar to the woman alone; men are treated similarly. There are overwhelming accounts of discrimination and racism against African Diaspora teachers in the district due to differences in linguistics, culture, and race. Given similarities in the way discrimination was constructed through linguistic and mainstream cultures as "model norms" demonstrates that "rather than stable and predetermined, racial identities can shift across context and even with specific interactions" (Bailey 2000, Buchholz 1995).

While working at another school district in the 2014/2015 school year, I walked into my principal's office excited to share my success story of being admitted into the doctoral program at Georgia Southern University. His reaction to the news was perplexing and foregrounded the perception of some mainstream administrators on language, accents, and race. He quietly asked me: "what are you going to do with a doctorate, given that your accent could be a mitigating factor in finding jobs at that level?" This conversation

demonstrates his mindset and reveals the complex role language, and accent plays in racializing people of color, particularly Black/Africans in the southern United States.

As in Racio Linguistic, Samy Alim et al. (2016) described racialization as a continuous process of socialization in and through language and as an ongoing project of becoming instead of being (p.2). The native-born teachers racialized me by mimicking or stigmatizing my accent and other African Diaspora teachers. Further layers of racializing instruments include monitoring, scrutinizing, evaluating, and stereotypes. Samy Alim et al. (2016) noted that many Americans who are racialized as "Black," particularly those on the margins of what many view as normative Black identity, are very familiar with this process (p.2). These authors believe that the recognition that linguistic difference predicates some form of discrimination shows that there are many contours of contemporary forms of linguistic racism (p.3). Because of "*linguistic racism*" I began to entertain the idea of lightening my accent. The feeling of inadequacy and inferiority has started to creep into my psyche. I tried to follow American speaking patterns to avert the trepidation that comes with a different language pattern and accent. I discontinued this effort because the outcome sounded so unnatural and was laughable.   Alim et al. (2016) further note similar traits in the Hispanic youth as they invest in the ability to speak unmarked or 'unaccented' English to blend into Whiteness. This hybrid language- inverted Spanglish attempts to voice in-group Knowledge of English and Spanish "while simultaneously parodying aspirational, assimilationist ideologies that covertly linked appropriateness and professionalism to middle-class whiteness" (p.10).

Similarly, I engaged in accent reduction training to transition into middle-class expectations but realized that I must maintain my identity regardless of the social pressure. Because of linguistic differences, I was excluded from native-born teachers, including African Americans. The above excerpt is concomitant to Rosa's (2019) remarks referencing Brown's (2006, p.28) analysis of Latinxs. She felt that the deceptive form of inclusion mobilized by tolerance "crucially sustains a status of outsiderness for those it manages [though incorporation]; it even sustains them as a potential danger to the civic or political body" (p.66).

The maltreatment and stigmatization of African Diaspora teachers is not a coincidence. While the African Black teacher is treated as an outsider, the micro-groups seem to be the political twist reducing the foreign-born teacher of color's being to a matter of tolerance rather than competence. Does the problem of acceptance rest with the micro in-group or outside the sphere of "unseen forces" in the teaching staff? The question about tolerance or competence begs an answer and needs to be deconstructed? This ambivalence can be linked to identity crisis and sadness. It involves negotiation concerning the stories to foster a positive characterization of African Diaspora teachers. I challenge Africans' inverse conceptualization and marginality as people with limited teaching and learning skills to a more robust identity as outstanding people with suitable educational qualifications and understanding of content and professional knowledge.

Relationship and Interaction with Administration

The relationship between a teacher and his or her principal can be stressful or acceptable depending on the general perception of the teacher's ability to deliver instruction, manage students, and contribute to the school's overall academic and social climate. My story will attempt to explore some of the key issues and stressors that influenced the dynamics between the principals I worked with and myself.

This section explores strategies that helped me build a solid professional bond with my principal and how I got what I needed from the principals and assistant principals to succeed at my teaching job. I touch on building a positive relationship with principals and assistant principals.

Teachers and principals should have a positive working relationship to increase the teaching and learning outcomes. I understood that my identity plays a significant role in the way I am perceived; therefore, I must be proactive tread cautiously by weighing on many critical variables. some of these variables include building a robust skillset, employing didactic strategies that are supported by the district and current research, handling parents' complaint timely and fairly, determining what kind of discipline problem to bring to the attention of the assistant principal or administration, avoiding any issues that could trigger mistrust and loss of confidence and participating in after-school activities.

The assessment I make about relationships with my principals or assistant principals are based on job satisfaction, perception of my work- whether there were biased assumptions or other contributing factors that intersect culture, language, and identify factors. The stressors I experienced are mainly related to the implicit feeling of marginalization and racialization. At times, these stressors may reflect a familiar tension between bosses and employees, but many circumstances suggest a strong relationship to the issue of "difference" and stereotypes.

I had to get out of the complaint mindset, making it a point to engage with students and administrators. For example, one morning in April of 2020, I had just introduced a lesson in reading, and one of two assistant principals came into my classroom unannounced with stacks of papers on a clipboard. He sat down in a corner and continued writing but did not speak to the students or me. He spent well over 15 minutes in my classroom, looking around and checking what the students were doing. Finally, he stood up and walked away without altering a word! A couple of things churned in my mind as I contemplated whether this was a formal evaluation or a regular visit. First, it was not very comforting for an assistant principal to walk into my classroom with many papers and did not communicate the purpose of his visit. In seconds, he settled in a chair and began taking notes, but did not share his experience, ask for clarification or talk to the students, so the suspense was overwhelming! I realized that my encounter with other teachers, coupled with isolating myself from administration, kept me on edge so that whenever they walked into my class, I tended to have stage fright. I learned from this experience and decided to fix my little fears and uncertainties. To that end, I took steps to familiarize myself with the principal and assistant principals by walking to their offices and sparking a conversation at least twice a week. This increased presence and interaction helped to reduce the stress when they walked into my classroom for an evaluation. I no longer felt boxed into the boss/teacher relationship idea. However, I saw supervision as a part of many opportunities to prove myself- the kind of opportunity I always sought to 'shine' or prove my expertise. As usual, I began to see their visits and followed my daily procedure and teaching when they walked into my class as though it was my usual

conversation. I then made it a point to communicate any issues that could make a difference in my teaching and found ways to minimize the distractions from students with severe behavior problems.

Interaction/Relationship with Parents

When I was a student in Nigeria, my parents were not a problem for my teachers, nor were the parents of my friends. I was afraid of what my parents would do if a teacher reported a problem to them; therefore, I did my best not to provoke such reports. The way parents interact with teachers is different from Nigeria. While teaching in this district, my encounter with many parents was a big cultural shock. Parents seem to have more power than the principals and the district in that the parents take exception to their child's action; the district responds to the parent's demand and sometimes relegates the teacher to the background. This voicelessness of teachers has become so entrenched, resulting in teacher attrition. There are some influential parents that tend to react at the slightest whiff of a classroom. Sometimes teachers are warned about such parents, and this problem has continued unabated and even become ubiquitous. Nowadays, parents advocate for their children and are ready to put on their fighting gloves at the slightest provocation. The following factors contribute to parent/teacher conflict, including SST letters requesting parent permission to assess or evaluate students, eligibility report, placement in special education, grades, promotion or retention, request for additional services, and discipline.

In the special education area, parents sometimes struggle with accepting the results of an evaluation, and many will opt for a private evaluation. Parents of Black students often complain about the eligibility criteria and service delivery model. The hottest issue is the class size when students with disabilities are in the same class with emotional behavior disorder (EBD). These issues are mostly connected with district policy; however, the teacher is in the front line, so the parents tend to take their anger out on the teacher. These issues could escalate to litigation or referral to the district SPED when not managed well. In my 23 years' experience, I have been in the middle of three-parent/teacher/district dispute where the parent hired an attorney, and the district attorney represented the school district.

The first case involved a Hispanic parent and me. The parents sent a form from the department of social services to prequalify my student for disability so parents can receive Social Security Checks (SS). However, when I read the form, I could not help but disagree because the girl did not meet the criteria set forth in the form. The most intriguing question centered on Intelligent Quotient (IQ) and Adaptive Skills. While the IQ test and other cognitive screeners indicate that average intelligence and adaptive skills were appropriate for her age, the parents wanted me to ignore the records and give my consent to the request. I disagreed, and a "war" was guaranteed. Parents went to the principal, and when they did not realize their objective, they proceeded to the district. The district agreed with my decision, but parents disagreed and hired an attorney. The parents also went after me in a variety of ways. Finally, they agreed to a meeting with their attorney, the district attorney, a representative from the district, Special Education Coordinator, the principal, and regular education teachers who have taught this student in the past two years.

At the beginning of the meeting, I requested permission to speak. I had decided to walk out of the meeting and go home. I started my address by stating that the only reason all these people convened here is for one reason, to work out a strategy to support this student's education. Anyone present at this meeting for reasons other than advancing this child's academics is in the wrong meeting. I shared samples of the student's work and how much progress she has made in reading despite the pandemic. I concluded by saying that I am convinced that she can learn and that her struggles and learning problems are not about her brain only; other existent factors or intervening variables contribute to her current deficiencies. I am sure they will improve with practice and good teaching. I pleaded with my parents to give me a chance to address her deficiencies. To my greatest surprise, her mother asked to speak with her attorney. They returned and requested that the meeting be rescheduled to a later date. The parent finally dropped the case and did not proceed to the courts as anticipated.

In another situation, a mentally challenged student who was misdiagnosed with Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) and Moderately Intellectual Disorder (MOID) while, he has a significant mental illness.

It is essential to provide a vivid mental picture of the precarious situation that confronted me at the time. This student was 6ft 4in tall and about 650 pounds. On a good day, he may break one chair or push stuff off his desk; when he is experiencing his moments, the computer is pushed off the desk, the TV, and other electronic devices. I cannot count the number of items this student destroyed property, but I was told to keep it a secret. I began recording the incident and noting down events, the triggers, and how long it took to deescalate him. I then discovered no predictable pattern to his behavior; his aggression can be unprecedented or unprovoked.

I noted the following trigger: First, his eyes start to turn, then change color to a reddish, wet glassy look. Then he stood six feet tall, allowing his whole body to collapse on the floor; sometimes, he started to masturbate, laughing profusely; other times, he just lay down there farting profusely and got amused by it. He makes all sorts of sounds, and farting is a way to demonstrate his disapproval of any help from the teacher. All the teachers were afraid of him and wondered why he was not placed in a mental hospital. Everyone concerned with their assessment except the district coordinator for special education felt otherwise. All my appeals fell on deaf ears, so I decided to take time off because my stress level was very high. My paraprofessional and student teacher quit for reasons of imminent danger this student posed. I had contemplated quitting several times, but my greatest worry was my wife, still in medical school at Memphis, including my three children, the youngest barely three months. I thought roles..., feeding my children, and taking care of my wife's expenses were more critical. I continued working with this student with the trepidation that comes with always having to look over my back. I devised so many safety and de-escalation techniques. Sometimes it worked, and other times, it did not work. The student chased me around the room, trying to hurt me.

One faithful day, I was off, and a White assistant principal in charge of SPED went to my classroom because no one agreed to work with this student. The student suddenly jumped at him and squeezed him by the neck, attempting to choke him. According to the other teachers, the assistant principal turned purple before the police officer tased the student, and he lost grip on his neck. The news went to the district, and

immediately, the student was placed on permanent homeschooling with me as the service provider. Again, I had to figure out how to be safe in his house environment because they lived in an apartment. Although this was risky, I felt this could be the opportunity to speak with his single mother, who was a single parent. I began to have meaningful discussions with his mother. During this discussion, the parent opened up to me that he tore up the house and was standing in front of her with a kitchen knife. According to his mother, she was fast asleep, and something suddenly woke her up. She then saw him through the door with a knife. She stated that he had broken wardrobe doors in the past, so she called the police. The police took him to Augusta- a place for mentally deranged people.

I then seized this opportunity to talk to her. I told her it was vital that she was alive to take care of him or advocate for him. I continued, and she stopped me in between to say that the state asked her to sign him over to the state. I quietly nodded and asked her to consider the option. His mother signed him over to the state, and he was confined in the mental hospital at Augusta.

These two incidents taught me that parents could be rational when approaching professional and inexplicable cases; the teacher expressed empathy and a caring attitude. Other issues are overrepresentation, discipline, and tests.

Parents of Black students complain about over-representation in special education. As a teacher and a parent, I understand the agony parents go through when they realize their child has difficulty learning at school. So, I transgress at eligibility meetings, ensuring the least restrictive environment applies. The test of that commitment came when a Black female was found eligible for (MOID) Moderately Intellectual Disabled. I refused to sign because that was the end of the road for her. I instead felt that we could place her on MID, which was not as restrictive. The district was unhappy with me, the other teacher, and the psychologist. In the end, there were no dissents for the MID classification.

Another major area of disagreement was testing. Some parents argue that too much testing is emotionally tasking for students with disabilities. Until recently, the parents could not opt out of the state standardized test and district assessments. I am not in favor of excessive student testing. I support moderate

testing where students are prescreened at the beginning of the semester to determine weaknesses and strengths.

I had excellent relationships with my parents. A colleague and I developed a parent workshop to empower parents with knowledge about SPED so they can read, understand IEPS and become strong advocates for their children.

African Diaspora Students: Challenges and Suggestions

Students like me from West Africa inherit a bunch of stereotypes and sometimes are seen through the eyes of other congruent races. Nigerian Diaspora students, in particular, suffer marginalization and loss within the K-12 curriculum because there is nothing in the curriculum that relates to African culture, or the way Africans learn in the American system. Allen, Jackson & Knight (2012), citing the work of Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti (2005), stated that "although attempts to incorporate immigrant students' cultural ways of knowing have been made in educational scholarship, students are frequently marginalized by teaching and curriculum that do not speak to who they are and what they know (p.2).

It means that each student must figure out a way to conceptualize content on his/her own, which is often complicated and rigorous. When I was working on my graduate program, I was isolated and felt lost and frustrated because I had to figure out how to cope with the curriculum and the divergent cultures at my school. It took a toll on me to understand the speaking patterns, culture, and content, especially in larger classes. As a teacher, I see students from Igbo/Nigeria/Africa trailing the same 'isle of sorrow' with trepidation and sadness written all over them. The cultural aspect of not speaking up to adults complicates the matter in that these students have no voice and therefore suffer in silence. Current research suggests that immigrant students bring into schools "a wealth of diverse cultural knowledge, values, and ideologies that are unrecognized or under-utilized in classroom instruction" (Allen et al., 2012). Despite the rich, diverse cultural knowledge and values which are a part of the learning behaviors and ways of being for the African Diaspora student, American K-12 education has not embedded the tenets of these research outcomes in the curriculum.

Consequently, Nigerian-American Diaspora students are left at the periphery with the potential impact of unavoidable confusion, isolation, marginalization, frustration, and identity development. For example, African students in my school complain that they do not have a variety of African Literature or books by African authors in the school library. The social studies class focuses on American history, and Africa is not represented in any positive way in some of the African story books written by American authors. For example, *Ashanti to Zulu*, a children's book that won the Caldecott Medal of Honor for Children's books, was packed with illustrations that reinforce the old stereotypes about Africa being remote village dwellers, wearing skins, carrying spears and shields, untouched by recent technological innovations. As stated elsewhere, these stereotypes are reinforced daily by television shows, movies, and news media, and this forms the basis of how teachers in K-12 schools perceive Igbo/Nigerian/African students in their classrooms.

In light of these experiences, Ibrahim (2003) concluded that the African immigrant experience within America is fraught with what he described as a "social imaginary" within which individuals who have not been racialized within their country of origin are "constructed, imagined, and positioned" (p.58). Ibrahim (2003) illustrated how stereotypes of Africans and their cultures pervade many of our perceptions and teaching materials. As teachers, it is our job to evaluate our mental picture of Africa to determine if we are caught in the old stereotypes about Africa. If the teacher finds that he/she is behind the times, it is professionally admissible to invest in current literature written by an African author.

The Pedagogical Approach to Teaching African Diaspora Students

West African students in K-12 are understudies. The extant literature on West African immigrant students has yet to fully explore strategies for supporting them in the classroom (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). Many teachers treat African students as a homogenous group because they do not have background knowledge of African history. Too often, geographical studies focus on China, India, and Africa, which creates the misconception of Africa as a country. This is a fundamental problem because Africa is so catholic that each indigenous ethnic group is multifaceted and different from the other. In a case study of

18 second-and 1.5 generation West African students, Allen, Jackson & Knight (2012) interviewed Kaya and documented the incongruencies in African cultures and ideologies in this way:

> First of all, every country [in Africa] has their own, you know, ideologies and just…every country is different. It is not just one continent… it is more than just West Africa, East Africa, and South Africa, and it's more than just that, you know"? (Kaya, Interview, 11/29/2008 in Allen et al, 2012).

Because West African students are considered black due to skin color, they are often lumped in the same category as African Americans and other Black ethnicities, making teaching and learning difficult.

<div align="center">Explore Debating/Public Speaking Strategies</div>

In order to teach West African students/ Igbo Nigerian-Americans, it is essential to explore some common traits. First, Igbo culture is centered on egalitarianism and democracy; therefore, common interests are debated, and decisions are based on consensus. It means, in a sense, that the Igbos can be described as argumentative. To accommodate the emphasis on this value, secondary and primary schools in Nigeria form Debating Clubs, also called Debating Society. In the context of Nigerian schools, debating is a discussion between two parties, and sometimes students are paired to face off with different schools. The debater is given a topic ahead of time to prepare before the competition. What is the purpose of debating, and why is debating helpful to a Nigerian student?

Debate is an important teaching and learning skill because it helps develop critical thinking skills connected to opinion writing an argumentative essay. Because some Nigerian students might show reservations in class due to cultural differences, a way to bring them out of their shells is to engage them in a debate. In addition, debating helps students be more engaged citizens, discuss current political and global issues, understand opposing views, cooperate with others, make informed decisions and think critically. These skills are helpful in elementary school, at different academic levels, and in society.

Integrating African Stories and Literature Into Reading Curricula

Expose Nigerian students to African Literature written by African authors, such as *Chicken in the Kitchen* by Nnedi Okorafor and Mehrdoht Amini. What would you do if you saw a gigantic chicken making a..., *Catch that Goat! A Market Day in Nigeria* by Polly Alakija, just before leaving, Ayoka's mother tells her to look after..., *My Grandfather is a Magician: Work and Wisdom in an African Village* by Ifeoma Onyefulu, *Too Small Tola* by Atinuke and Onyinye Iwu, *I Am Enough- Adventure of Ada* by Keturah A Bobo, and a host of others. These literary works can be incorporated into the teaching of reading or simply advancing literacy. African Literature can reinforce literary ideas taught in other segments of the curriculum.

In *We Be Lovin' Black Children* (2021), Boutte, Elaine King, Lee Johnson & King suggested that reading African Literature counters curricular violence, intentionally and routinely providing books and other media that liberate the Black spirits by providing stories written by Black authors and including Black people's perspectives through every historical period (p.8). They also suggested that it is necessary to link the economic viability of Africa to the success of the United States and Europe through social studies or history curricula. Teachers can connect kids or allow them to discover the economic linkage between the United States and Africa. For example, kids can be led to understand that Nigeria, for example, has crude oil and gas, which is an essential commodity needed to drive cars in the United States and around the world. Also, chocolate bars that the kids eat come from cocoa beans seeds from Africa. This kind of knowledge helps the students to be proud of their heritage.

Teach Nigerian-American Students' African History and Culture Across *t*he Curriculum

The colonial project distorted African culture and history. It first began with the missionaries who denigrated African cultural religion as idol worship and recreated the supreme being in the person of Jesus Christ and Almighty God. However, before the coming of Europeans to Nigeria, for example, the Ibos had complete political, educational, religious, language, economic, cultural, and other systems in place. It is laughable to argue that African history began with the slave trade in the 1500s (Boutte et al., 2021) because

Africans had an established system of government long before this time. To that end, teachers must teach authentic African history by focusing on oral tradition, education, and discussing slavery and the relationship between African Blacks and American Blacks as kins. I believe that an understanding and appreciation of African history will cure the ethnic rivalries between African immigrants and African Americans. Use a map to locate Africa and highlight Egypt.

My philosophy about teaching is not the usual "every child can learn, but one that defines teaching as a vocation and not a profession. I adopted this definition because I discovered that a good teacher plays many roles that are outside of the professional, pedagogical guideline or framework. In my case, there are times that I am perceived as a teacher, and sometimes as a surrogate or father figure. I spent countless hours listening to students' personal stories and daily experiences. The challenges that come with each situation and how to solve peculiarities are neither taught in teacher education nor contained in any teaching strategy or method book. By the way, how do you teach a child who is mentally ill, pregnant, queer, suffered neglect, has both parents living in the streets heavily on drugs, crack babies, sexually abused kids, incest victims and many more secrets that students carry with them every day.

While writing this dissertation, I wanted to avoid 'emotional penitentiary' which is where my reflections draw on retrospective ambiances of very inexplicable and often painful experiences in my teaching career. Thus, naturally, no one likes pain, so I wanted to scale around the periphery to avoid going through the painful exercise of having to remember past experiences, but that was quickly discovered by my dissertation Chair. She wanted to know the length and breadth of my teaching experiences in Georgia schools. Again, I underscored the emotional roller-coaster of writing a personal memoir. Though, I never thought it would be easy, the extent to which this writing has reached inside of me is dramatically unbelievable! However, I will remain truthful believing that these experiences can be instructive to others who dare to teach special education in Georgia.

I was trained to be an educator within the walls of Alvan Ikoku College of Education and Abia State University in Nigeria, but I vowed to never be a 'teacher' in the United States. I completed a teaching

practice at elite schools of high repute in Nigeria. Upon graduation, I went into private business refusing to research for teaching jobs because of the deplorable condition of schools and poor teacher salaries. I lost interest in teaching at any level, though I previously enjoyed teaching and had won awards at the teaching practice level in Nigeria. However, I changed my mind when I relocated to the United States because my priorities changed. I failed in many ways and those failures taught me humility and service. I became more interested in things that advance humanity. I came to understand that human differences are prevalent in the United States and saw firsthand the need to help individuals with disability to a life of hope and work- in fact, self fulfilment. Altruism became an elevated ambition, so I lost interest in the pursuit of wealth often glorified as the "American Dream."

However, it amazes me when I tell friends that I decided to go into teaching and how much I learn from my students, and the next thing I hear from them is, "Wow! Chidi, that is a lot, man!" Some would even go on to say, "Hey! I knew it! You know you are always classy in your own way. Guy, I envy you ooo." Others would say "how do you plan to deal with American children who are mostly over pampered and have no respect for elders"? I found these comments very disturbing though there are truths to their views. These remarks can be construed in a variety of ways, but it points to a lack of commitment to the development of children and a general apathy towards teaching. It could be regarded as expressions of fellows who fail to recognize their worth and values, but when teacher salaries are compared to their counterparts in other professions, it really sucks! As a master's degree holder my yearly salary was $38,000. Yet, I felt on top of the world amidst others. My friends thought I was insane to live with such a small amount, but to me I was okay with it. I also discovered that once I tell people I am a teacher the immediately begin to show pity! Some would blatantly ask me how I manage to survive on a meager teacher salary. When they quote entry point salaries of web designers with just a diploma, I wondered if I was living in the same nation that a man with a diploma certificate earns his own income in multiples of thousands or six figures and I have peanuts! Nevertheless, it is times like these that I realize the impact my strong cultural background has had on my development as a teacher in the United States. There is tremendous beauty that

comes with my culture that is often ignored or unappreciated. This trait comes in handy when I have trouble in my teaching career in the United States. In fact, my life experience and values about human life helped me when I was assigned to teach a student who was incarcerated at a local jail house, and the police station. Other situations where my values and cultural background played a huge role was when I encountered students who had no father figure and developed extreme behaviors because of the absence of a father in the home.

My first teaching experience with a student who was incarcerated for six months taught me a lot about what it means to be a teacher and a lot about myself, as a future educator. I thought that the most important job of a special education teacher was producing structured behavior plans, writing an effective Individualized Educational Program (IEP), and strategic lesson plans that really work with the special education population, so I was glad to have these experiences including the ability to create learning experiences and facilitating learning. I also learned that I do not have a good sense of timing when I am teaching, so I now know to make sure to make a schedule of what will be done at what time. However, when I was asked to prepare for a meeting with a student and his parents, the resource officer, the county sheriff, and the director of special education at a location other than the school, I began to feel nervous about this job description. I began to wonder, why me, was the question I asked and what requisite background knowledge prepared me for this kind of teaching with a high-stake responsibility and quite frankly risk. The answers were as elusive as my experience during the meeting. The meeting was set for the first day of school in August of 2014. I was going to teach this student after the Individualized Educational Program meeting.

On the day of the meeting, myself, a regular education teacher, parent, the student, director of special education and the sheriff were present. The team members were seated at 9am in a small office room at the Sherriff's Department, around an oval table facing each other. The meeting commenced with the sheriff welcoming the attendees and expressing his belief in providing the opportunity for a second chance. The director of special education introduced me to Kevin (Fictionalized name) as his special education teacher

and case manager. We exchanged greetings and a half-baked intermittent smile; I could see from the corner of my eyes. The director proceeds to say that he will be receiving instruction five days a week from 9:05 through 11:45 daily beginning the next Monday. Kevin will only receive instructions in Language Arts and Mathematics, lunch and recess were provided by the jail. After enumerating my responsibility and Kevin's classes, the director asked the parents if they had any questions or concerns.

It was like ice dripping on me when Kevin's mother began to speak about Kevin's background. I could not control my emotions; tears began to gradually drip from the corner of my eyes and my countenance flipped ten times over as she began to narrate in vivid raw details the events that brought Kevin to the jail house. She began by stating that Kevin was born premature because she had used crack cocaine during her pregnancy with Kevin. She was seventeen years at the time and orphaned at the age of seven due to fire in the apartment her parents lived in the projects of New York killing both parents while she was on a sleep over party at an aunt's house. She then went to live with an aunt in upstate New York. She was mistreated and unable to stay with the family. As a result, another relative at Georgia gained custody of her and brought her to Georgia. She went to high school in Georgia and barely six months from graduation, she fell in love with a man from Florida who lavished gifts and money on her. In the middle of summer, her senior year, she ran away from home with this man to Florida. Being a teenager, she did not know any better, so the man gradually introduced her to drugs. She became addicted to cocaine, and then the man would use the cocaine as bait. At the time, her life depended on the drug, so this man exploited this appetite for cocaine to hold her hostage for many years.

While she lost herself, identity, and self-worth, she found out she was pregnant for this man! Her relatives had gone to the police and filed a missing person report, and the police were looking for her in Georgia not knowing that she had eloped with a man two times her age. I saw firsthand expression of feelings of guilt and shame as an important factor hindering the ability of persons with drug-addiction to adapt in society. It felt like acceptance that her son's negative behaviors were a result of her mistakes in life, and she used past tense all through to describe herself even for things happening in the present. The

awareness of her own defect and feelings of guilt, I thought, she attributed to her son the causality of her misconduct. She had Kevin under a heavy influence of drugs and did not even realize the baby had been pushed out because she was high at the time. Because she had no skills, no relatives and or a job, she depended on SSI check which the government paid her to take care of Kevin. The money was not enough, so she had to run the streets for many years to provide for her two children which often was risky and dangerous. She had been arrested for sex trafficking or hawking on two occasions when she did not realize she was dealing with a plain clothes officer and that landed her in jail.

She stated that those two incidents coupled with her kids becoming teenagers gave her a sudden attack of conscience which led to an abrupt end to prostitution and street life. Then she was advised to join the Alcohol and Drug Anonymous (AA). Kevin's mom, however, did explore possible ways out of drug and alcohol addiction based on government resources and programs. She identified four factors that predisposed her to drug and alcohol addiction and consequently prostitution as: running away from home, using drugs, becoming a sex hawker for the drug deal man friend in Florida and the early death of her parents. Based on introspection, she stated that communication with healthy relatives and friends, joining the Alcohol and Drug Anonymous group, hobbies; and the ability to make positive plans has helped her to regain her self-consciousness and pride. The climax of her narrative came when she dropped on her knees, tears flowing down her cheek, and eyes that were glassy, dazed with grief like someone at a funeral, and begged me to help save her son's life. She stated that the only hope she had left to safeguard her son's future is when he remains in school. I look at her pitifully, my eyes had dried up, I did not know how to respond to the plea, but I felt a rush of anger or rage inside of me about the cruelty she had faced and wondered how many kids could have similar experience in my class.

I turned to Kevin and inquired what he thought about his mother's plea? His response was stunning to us all as he stood up six feet tall from the floor, searched around the room and stated that there was no use to talking about school as there are no benefits for him in school. He questioned the usefulness of education when he had already lost many years and now needed to make money to take care of himself. I

asked him what he plans to do in the future to take care of the perceived needs he was alluding to in his statement. He said he is working on a plan to figure out what to do as a career. I saw an opportunity and a place to begin a fresh dialogue on the possibility of an intrinsic return to school with positive outcomes. I did not ask any further questions but informed him that school starts on Monday of the following week, and I will be in touch before then.

The next segment of the meeting was to develop an IEP and segments for each subject area including creating a behavior plan to address extreme behaviors that were noted in the previous IEP such as physical and verbal aggression, and task avoidance behaviors. At this point my Igbo culture which is humane, subtly assertive and child friendly began to kick in as the discussion progressed. I declined having an IEP for six weeks so that we could collect data on his present levels of academic performance. I stated that we have no knowledge of his baseline academic skills right now, so we can start at zero and then use the goals of the previous IEP to begin instruction while monitoring progress. I did not believe that the standardized test scores and psychological testing reports fully captured his strengths and weaknesses. Given my brief observation, I could see Kevin has the tendency to give smart answers and can be evasive if uninterested in the testing. To that end, I wanted to find out for myself so that I can better understand Kevin's intellectual functioning.

The district supervisor was very impressed and approved an update while I collect data to write new goals and objectives. The meeting was tabled to reconvene after six weeks. In the meantime, I had to develop lessons to teach Kevin. I thought less of a behavior plan because his behavior was a function of his immediate environment and the personality of the teacher or administrators he had encountered. I then called a meeting between Kevin and me to lay down the plan and schedules for teaching and learning sessions. He agreed to a meeting and came to the meeting with a big smile which held promise that we might have a good conversation. I began the meeting by sharing my personal stories and informed him that we share similar experiences. I informed him that I was poor when I was his age and struggled with most of the things he shared at the meeting. I told him that I also had poor education because the military

government ruling over my country were dishonest and punitive to the Igbo ethnic group. I shared that my parents sold their belongings to send me to school, so I had no choice except to make them proud otherwise at some point like you I wanted to quit school.

Kevin was astonished hearing my personal stories and could not believe that I went through such a difficult time growing up. He wanted to know how I managed to relocate to the United States given that I had no money. I explained that some of my relatives living in the United States helped me with the finances, and I remain grateful to them. He replied, "good for you Mr. Watakuku… or…" look here" … "What's your name again?" He did not even give me a chance to respond, he continued… "You see, at least you have relatives! I have no one but my mom and all the useless people that come to my house to buy beer and liquor"! I did not respond but felt I had somewhat connected with him through sharing my personal stories with him and being honest about my own life and life in general. I then invited Kevin to teach and learn and shared that I have already learned many things from the discussion I had with him and his mother thus far.

Next thing I know, Kevin bent down and began to express strong emotions, sobbing and weeping profusely. I provided him with a tissue paper and for the first time he said thanks! He did not make any further statement and I did not ask any more questions. We both sat down there quietly for a while before I handed a daily schedule to him. He took the schedule and said thanks. I turned around sharply as I stood up to leave the building and stated that he was kind. He laughed so heartily and replied, "do not let that fool yaa."

At 9:00am Monday morning, I arrived at the jail house ready to teach and went straight to the room prepared for Kevin and me at the Sheriff's department. I had my moveable whiteboard with me so I could easily write or illustrate some things on the board if needed. The first day was uneventful because all we did was review the outline of what we are going to learn for the entire week. I also went over the plan, detailing my role (what I was going to do as a teacher), and the student's role (what Kevin will be doing as the student). I built in a time when we can have a conference about his learning, or where he could have the

opportunity to ask for help with his learning or anything including non-educational issues. Kevin liked the idea, but the next day was different. He came into the room, sat down, and did not say hello or anything, immediately put his face down on the desk and pretended to be sleeping. He had expected that I would report him to the officer on duty, but I did not because I wanted to gain his trust, build a relationship so I could impact knowledge.

The next day was like the day before, he was still adamantly refusing to cooperate with me. I sat down the entire three and a half hours talking to myself and leaving homework or rather jail work to be completed after I had left. Needless to say, none of the homework was completed or returned for review. The first week went without Kevin doing any work, he looked at the paper, shoved it to the side and pretended like he was sleeping. On that Friday, he showed no interest to do anything but sleep. All he said to me was, "what did I tell you about me and school?" "We are not friends and never will!" "You be wasting your time." I wanted to leave him alone, but on a second thought I decided to address the deadlock. Kevin, I called, "do you know I did not share your misconduct with anyone including the officers here?" He replied, "I don't care" so I asked him could you tell me what you care about? He stated, "I do not care about anything." I asked him, "do you not care about your mother too?" It was like a thunderbolt knocked him, he grumbly sat up, clearing his throat, and wiping his eyes, said "what! -what do you want me to do?" I placed a small notebook in front of him, I want you to write anything that bothers you in this notebook. I reminded him of the promise he made about telling me all about his case and he agreed.

The next week he had written only one sentence in the notebook, "some people think I am stupid, but I know what I want is to end this life because there is no use to it" and drew a cross below the sentence. Frankly, I did not know how to address this situation, but I knew it was something I could not handle alone. I decided to make a copy of this sentence immediately and send it to the director of special education, then the officer on duty that day. I have done what the teacher code of ethics demands of me as a teacher, but I did not stop there. I continued to talk to him about life and the good things that make life worth living. He seemed interested in the discussion but wanted to talk about girls instead. I asked him if he had a girlfriend.

He stated that he broke up with his first girlfriend because she though he was not a good provider. He is now working on a new girl who often comes to visit him in jail. I asked him whether being able to provide for his girlfriend was the reason he wanted to take to the streets. He blushed… "how you know. Mr. Wakukachuk" Okay can I call you by your first name, Gerald? It is easier! I replied with a resounding yes! He nodded and then continued to express his desire to meet with this girl when he leaves the jail house. I replied, I am glad that at least you care about two people so life must worth living, is it not? He nodded in affirmation which made me feel that we are headed somewhere though I perceive a long tough journey ahead.

At this time Kevin has five more weeks before he can go home. The next week, I went to work as usual and was not informed about further actions regarding the statement. I met with Kevin in our usual classroom, and he was extremely calm. I started a conversation; at this time, we have not made any progress toward his IEP goal or had any formal learning. I asked Kevin if he was okay, he shook his head and stated that he wanted to go home. I replied stating I thought you go home in five weeks if you demonstrate good behavior. Why are you in much of a hurry as the time to go continues to draw nearer? It is best to do your very best so that the date will not be pushed back. He stated, "I do not belong here." "I want to go to school-a real school not in the jail house"! The old saying, "Patience is a virtue," has never been truer in my entire teaching career than when I met Kevin! I realized working with Kevin requires an intense sense of understanding, having the wherewithal to accept that everyone's needs are different, and that each person requires their own sort of attention.

These difficulties played out on many occasions with Kevin where he had difficulty asking for help, completing a task, and instead shifts his focus onto nonacademic stuff like women or street life. Having been out of school for a while, Kevin demands attention, and in most cases potentially lashes out at me for any reason whatsoever. If I were not careful, these kinds of extreme pandemonium where he lashes out, throws or shove books to the side of his desk, or pretends sleep could have led to highly stressful situations. I thought the best thing I could do to alleviate the pressure was to remain calm and put out one fire at a time.

This means that I took advantage of my cultural affinity with children where nothing is taken personal, and a new day begins with fresh minds to handle Kevin's emotionality and behavior difficulties. This love for children helped me get to know Kevin's behavioral patterns and utilize time management to compensate for any setbacks.

Essentially, my job as a special educator requires me to be familiar with all types of disabilities, as well as how to properly handle issues surrounding each student, but Kevin was a rare breed of student! On a daily basis, I assumed the roles of a teacher, a counselor, a support system, or an event coordinator. In addition to these changing jobs, I interacted with Kevin who demonstrated a wide range of personalities and developmental struggles. One minute I might be assisting Kevin with a math project or writing, the next moment he may be experiencing a withdrawal episode which sometimes is fake and other times may need immediate attention.

After four weeks, Kevin began to show interest in his learning, engaging in academic discussions and completing his math assignments independently. I started to collect work samples gradually and would occasionally take them home to analyze. I began to see a pattern of intellect showing he has strengths in math. It appears the protracted behavior difficulties had been a fence between Kevin and his teachers. Kevin knew how to add, subtract, multiply any number. He was having difficulty with division and word problems. Based on previous records, I discovered he started having issues toward the end of fourth grade which meant that he was not exposed to division and geometry. This projection proved accurate when I interviewed Kevin a few weeks later. On one occasion, I asked Kevin whether he saw any relationship between multiplication and division? He felt there is but that long division is boring and a waste of time. This presented an opportunity to show him a strategy that is based on place value and multiplication. He was very open to the idea, so I drew a table on the white makeshift board and wrote the problem 1904 divided by 16. Then I used his multiplicative ability to drive the lesson.

I then proceeded, today, we are going to learn how to use our understanding of the relationship between multiplication and division to solve division problems with one- and two-digit divisors. In fourth

grade you worked on dividing when you had one digit in the divisor, and we are going to use the strategies we learned then to help us with two-digit divisors.

I told Kevin I was going to think through and model how I would solve this problem. I have a problem written in the notebook. Problem: The California Mountain Skyride can comfortably carry sixteen passengers up the mountain. If 1,904 people visit the park over the weekend, how many trips will it make to carry all of the passengers?

The first step was to read the problem aloud with Kevin and then think aloud to understanding the situation. So, this problem is about the skyride at California Mountain, I said. Kevin nodded in agreement. Then I said, I know how many people the skyride can carry at a time (circle 'carry sixteen passengers') and how many people visited the park over the weekend (circle '1,904 people'). I need to figure out how many times the skyride will go up the mountain during the whole weekend to carry all of those people (underline 'how many trips will it make to carry all of the passengers').

I know if I divide the total number of people by the number of people the skyride can carry each time I will be able to figure out how many trips it makes. I am going to write out my equation $1,904 \div 16 = ?$

First, I am going to estimate about how many trips it will take to carry all 1,904 people so I know if my answer is reasonable. $16 \times 100 = 1,600$ which is close to 1,904, so I know it will take about 100 trips. My answer should be a little more than 100.

I am thinking about how I can use an area model to determine the number of trips. Draw a rectangular area model on chart paper. This area model represents the 1,904 people who went to Stone Mountain over the weekend. In multiplication, I know the lengths of both sides of the rectangle, and I multiply to find the total area. In division, only the length of one side is known, 16, and the total area is known, 1,904. However, the length of the other side is the unknown.

That represents the number of trips the skyride will make to carry of the people/the quotient. Label the model with total # of people/1,904, people per ride/16, and? /number of trips.

Now I am ready to solve by using what I know about multiplication to help me divide. Write 16 x? = 1,904 under the division equation 1,904 ÷16 =?. I need to determine what factor I multiply by 16 to get an area of 1,904, so I am going to work backwards. I am thinking I know 16 x 1 = 16, 16 x 10 = 160, and 16 x 100 = 1,600. Write on chart paper. I want to use the largest possible product I can make my division more efficient, so I will use 16 x 100 = 1,600 first, 100 trips of 16 people each (When you multiply by 100s ad two zeros). Draw and label the first section on the model and record the partial quotient equation along the side (see below). Subtract 1,600 from 1,904. I see that I have 304 left to divide/those are the people that still need to ride. I cannot divide using another group of 1,600, so I am going to use 16 x 10 = 160. Draw and label the second section on the model and record the partial quotient equation along the side (see below). Subtract 160 from 304.

Now I have 144 left to divide, that is less than 160 so I cannot use 16 x 10 again. I could subtract groups of 16, but that would take a long time, so I am going to think about more than 1 group of 16. I know 5 is half of 10 and half of 160 is 80, so I know 16 x 5 = 80. I can subtract 5 groups of 16. Draw and label third section on the model and record on partial quotient equation along the side (see below). Subtract 80 from 144.

I have 64 people left to go on the skyride. Instead of only subtracting 1 group of 16, I am going to use 2 groups of 16. Draw and label fourth and fifth section on the model and record on partial quotient equation along the side (see below). Subtract 32 from 64 and then another group of 32. I could have also used 4 groups of 16 by doubling 16 x 2, 16 x 4 = 64. (https:/www.generationgenius.com)

```
              1 1 9
        1 6 )  1 9 0 4
  1 0 0 x 1 6  - 1 6 0 0
              ─────────
                3 0 4
   1 0 x 1 6  -   1 6 0
              ─────────
                1 4 4
    5 x 1 6   -     8 0
              ─────────
                  6 4
    2 x 1 6   -     3 2
              ─────────
                  3 2
 +  2 x 1 6   -     3 2
              ─────────
      1 1 9            0
```

1904 ÷ 16

100	1600
10	160
5	80
2	32
2	32
119	

All 1,904 people have gone on the skyride in groups of 16. I see on my area model and in my partial quotient equation that $100 + 10 + 5 + 2 + 2 = 119$ groups of people, or 119 trips have been taken up California Mountain over the weekend. That makes sense because my estimate was about 100 trips.

At the end of the lesson, Kevin liked these methods, and two attempts was all it took for him to grasp the concept. I was very excited; learning took off well and Kevin began to look forward to seeing me each day. He returned to school at the completion of six weeks but unfortunately, I left the district for another district. Despite leaving the district, Kevin's mom still consults with me via email about concerns or issues Kevin experiences at school or home. I am never upset or felt like she was bothering me, I understood the need for a parent who wants the best for his or her child. I also realized that she may not have specialized experience to help Kevin as much as she might have desired. The last time I heard from her, Kevin was getting ready to graduate from high school and guess what? He wanted me to be there, and I did. Nonetheless, knowing that I have many hoops to jump through teaching special education and preparing my mind in advance enhanced my ability to adapt, as well as staying ahead of any future complicated teaching situation. There are many students like Kevin and teachers cannot prepare for every odd situation but can adapt themselves to help the student.

Reflections

Writing about my teaching experiences was one of the most challenging areas of this dissertation. The reason was that I saw things firsthand, which seems to be the tradition in most schools. The idea of the

"New kid in the block" is prevalent among teachers. The initiation into the field seems to have many clichés and more so for diasporic Africans than other nationalities. Teaching is not as simple as society sees it since the role of the teacher is constantly changing based on the uniqueness of each student. Each teacher candidate must be able to respond, navigate as well as anticipate the challenges each student will present in order to help them reach their maximum potential. The most common role of a teacher is imparting knowledge or academic content. However, this role expands to new uncharted areas that are necessary but not explicitly defined in the curriculum. For example, in mathematics, students should be able to solve various real-world problems. However, the complexity and the extent the teacher is willing to challenge their students beyond the recommended text and curriculum varies from teacher to teacher.

Many studies speak to teacher bias and inequity, and some argue that it does not exist. The conclusion seems to center on the effect of such bias on the part of the student. Teacher implicit bias was a key complaint from the Diaspora kids that often come to discuss their concerns with me. Whether or not a teacher believes in their student and expects them to succeed has been shown to affect how well that student does in school, particularly among disadvantaged students. This is where the implicit racial bias comes into play. Teachers are human beings, and everyone has some degree or level of bias, so the key is to find ways to reduce implicit bias. My recommendations are as follows:

a) Begin the training in teacher education programs and have student teachers complete a teaching practicum in schools with mixed demographics.

b) Focus on culturally relevant pedagogy by having teachers explore the neighborhoods where they plan to teach to understand the cultural and economic background of the students.

c) Self-reflection and cultivating awareness of personal bias, develop a cross-group friendship in their personal lives and work to increase empath and empathetic communications. By working at countering implicit bias, teachers can truly make a difference in the lives of their diasporic students, African Americans, and all children. Perhaps teachers should get more support than they do, and ideally, school districts should review complaint letters and address the concern in a fair,

equitable and timely manner. As I reflect on the circumstances surrounding teaching Kevin, the positive outcome tends to overshadow the experience of being the teacher in the entire district doing the odd jobs. The way I was singled out, from a group of four hundred teachers in the district, points to how most diasporic teachers are treated in the south. It took the replacement of the special education coordinator and one of many letters of complaints I wrote to break this circle of being the teacher on the itinerant train to every problematic and challenging student.

CHAPTER 6:

REFLECTIONS: HYPHENATED IDENTITY AND NEGOTIATED INTERSECTIONALITY-

BEING BLACK IN NIGERIA AND IN THE UNITED STATES

When I came to the United States, I did not know or understand what it meant to be Black. Although I was immediately given the title African American, I did not understand what it meant to be Black or the process of becoming Black in the United States. I thought Blackness referred to the pigmentation of my skin, but I noticed how my skin color is not Black but Brown. Based on these experiences, I have realized that the ways mainstream Whites, African Americans and other nonwhites interact with me have something to do with this concept of Blackness in the United States. The African American folks excluded me, Whites classified me as African American Black Diaspora, and my fellow Nigerians at home thought I no longer fit the mold of a pure Igbo man/Nigerian having lived in the United States for a while. Like Baldwin (1998/1949), I became a beast of at least two nations. It is this triple marginalization that sparked my inquiry.

In order to theorize my experiences, I decided to reflect on my life by putting together a memoir about my lived experience, examining themes from each experience and making meaning of the experiences to understand myself here in the United States as well as learn whether my experiences in Nigeria had significant impacts on my life in the United States. As I explored my experiences and literature, I recognized patterns of mistreatment in both my teaching job and my social spaces, which affirms that we need to engage in more of the research on the life experiences of Nigerian-Americans since they have been critically understudied. It has become necessary to research Nigerian-Americans' identity development and their assimilation and acculturalization processes.

The literature connects to the stories I told in this dissertation in many ways. I begin to find meaningful ways of articulating my thoughts and connecting my dissertation research to curriculum studies. Through the exploration of my life living in-between spaces and hyphens, I wanted to understand the

implications of these hyphens. I believe strongly that excavating the hyphens could substantially fit into the field of curriculum studies.

Researching hyphenated identity, negotiating identity at intersections of racial, cultural, and linguistic differences have led me to the following discoveries: **(1)** Experiencing triple marginalization--marginalized in Nigeria as an Igbo, marginalized in America as Black, and marginalized by the African American community, as well as being perceived not to be Black enough as an African American nor as an Igbo/Nigerian-American, I feel constantly displaced to be "neither here nor there" (He, 2003, 2010, 2022), which characterizes my Igbo/Nigerian cultural and linguistic existence as a first-generation Nigeria-American teacher in a Georgia inner city elementary school dwelling in-between languages, cultures, and identities as I make choices to sustain my heritages (Baldwin, 2008; Dubois, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014; Imoagene, 2019; Greer, 2013). **(2)** Although my life experience of the ethnic, political, cultural, religious rivalries and divisive politics in Nigeria did not teach me anything about being Black in the United States, it has shown me that Igbo heritages, which are intuitively humane, subtly assertive, and child centered, need to be preserved, protected, and propagated for me to draw upon as I struggle and thrive as a Nigeria-American teacher/educator in-between the contested landscapes of education in the United States. **(3)** Linguistic or cultural differences within Black heritages are often obscured, homogenized, or ignored in mainstream curriculum theories, practice, and policies. Such actions colonize immigrants from African Diasporas as we struggle for racial, linguistic, and social justice for ourselves and our families in hard times in the United States when white supremacy, anti-Black/anti-Latinx/anti-Indigeneity/anti-Asian/anti-People of Color/anti-Diaspora racism and pandemics, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, and settler colonialism are perpetuated by hatred of differences (He & Yu, 2017; Hill, 2016; Matias & Newlove, 2017; Ngo & Lee, 2019). **(4)** Although composing a memoir to understand, articulate, and share my life experiences in Nigeria, in the United States, and in-between is excruciatingly painful and emotional, it uproots deep personal experiences which could not have been expressed otherwise and liberates from all forms of oppression. **(5)** There is an increasing need to develop an African Diaspora

curriculum (Hall, 2022; King 2022) which draws from the historical, cultural, and linguistic experiences of Africans as exemplified in literary texts by African authors to "legitimize [African heritages and] epistemologies," foster the "wellbeing of African-descended people," flourish "human freedom from dehumanizing" (King, 2022) schooling, and create hopes and dreams for everyone.

Curriculum theorists make many contributions to the field of curriculum studies through life experiences, stories, autobiographical accounts, or memoirs. In this chapter, I illuminate how I make meaning out of my personal life experiences drawn upon the work of theorists in and outside of the field of curriculum studies (e.g., Fanon, 2004; Dubious, ; Ibrahim, 2014 ; Sefa Dei, 2017, 2004, 2005; Biko, 1978; Coates, 2015; Adichie, ; Achebe, 2009; Bhabha, 2004; 2008; Sirin and Fine, 2008). Using memoir, I explore the boundaries between race, identity, intersections between linguistic, cultural and ethnic differences to develop a better understanding of who I am as an Igbo/Nigerian-American in the Diaspora.

Experiencing triple marginalization--marginalized in Nigeria as an Igbo, marginalized in America as Black, and marginalized by the African American community, as well as being perceived not to be Black enough as an African American nor as an Igbo/Nigerian-American, I feel constantly displaced to be "neither here nor there" (He, 2003, 2010, 2022), which characterizes my Igbo/Nigerian cultural and linguistic existence as a 1st Generation Nigerian-American teacher in a Georgia inner city elementary school dwelling in-between languages, cultures, and identities as I make choices to sustain my heritages (Baldwin, 2008; Dubois, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014; Imoagene, 2019; Greer, 2013) (Discovery 1). My automatic status as African American indeed is a socially constructed nomenclature that has nothing to do with my sense of self and therefore perceived as a forced identity. My identities at the intersection of mainstream Nigerian and United States societies parallel oppression and marginalization. It was hard to imagine why I was excluded from my community in Nigeria, the African American community and interpersonal as well as professional relationships. The experience of such moral exclusions from the perspective of a young African youth who did not have any information about the racial stratification, embodied institutional, social, community,

interpersonal discriminations and negative social mirroring of myself as inadequate or coming from an underdeveloped/uncivilized culture.

There is a shortage of information or research highlighting the Igbo/Nigerian and American experience, and how individuals with hyphenated identity negotiated their identities at the intersections of races, cultures, ethnicities, and languages in the United States. I began searching works from a variety of sources including political science, psychology, anthropology and sociology. The double jeopardy is that I was marginalized in Nigeria and the United States. First, I discuss the marginalization of the Igbo-me in Nigeria and the impact this inequity has had on my identity development and wellbeing in the United States. The marginalization of the Igbos is without doubt a pervasive and recurring phenomenon in the socio-political life of the Igbo in Nigeria. The predicament of the Igbo is connected to the Nigerian Biafran War of 1970. After the war, the Nigerian government expelled the missionaries, took over the private primary and secondary schools run by these religious groups and turned around to underfund them. The inability of the Nigerian government to provide adequate funding for universities and secondary and primary schools in southeastern Nigeria created a big educational gap between the Igbos and for example the western part of Nigeria. After the war, Nigeria was plagued by homegrown enemies- the political ineptitude, mediocrity, indiscipline, ethnic bigotry, corrupt ruling class and military dictatorship. I became a victim of these circumstances because of my Igbo identity. The condition of the elementary schools were deplorable. There were no libraries nor books for students. I was fortunate to have parents who had high school and A- levels education so I had books which my father and uncles read. The most interesting as I mentioned elsewhere were the books written by James Hadely Chase who was British. I managed to write down vocabulary from this book and would often discuss the theme of different fictionalized plots with great enthusiasm. These books became handy when the universities went on strike as often the case. The military juntas did not care about the future of any Igbo or Nigerian youth. Another significant impact of the ASUU strike was an unstable educational calendar which impairs students' personal plans. Teaching and learning process flow was negatively impacted.

These experiences impacted the quality of education I received in Nigeria and ultimately, I was unprepared for jobs. The effect of my poor and rushed education could be felt when a white female friend retorted that my spelling was very poor, though she did not take into consideration that my spelling patterns were modeled after British English, so I needed to adapt to the US English. I relocated to the United States searching for freedom, peace and economic prosperity. Although the United States presents a sharp contrast from Nigeria, there are fundamental issues bordering on identity, acceptance and integration into the system that were quite frankly surprising because I had no inclination nor knowledge of the role race, cultural or linguistic difference plays in acerbating human difference.

The basis of this dissertation is to discover how I developed a hyphenated identity, how I am perceived based on ethnicity, nationality and speaking patterns. It became obvious that these social contours and physical characteristics have begun to define me in many ways with my involvement- as African American, Black, African Diaspora or migrant, male, African born special education teacher. My dissertation seeks to free me from the systemic aggregation that has become vehicles of oppression. As a new immigrant to the United States, I was ready to shift identity parameters in an attempt to find where I belong or stand in relation, and in reaction to the cultural, historical and social context (Sirin & Fine, 2008). I was classified as African American on paper but recognized as Nigerian or African immigrant socially and professionally. Despite inadequate educational foundations, I had great appreciation for American education because I recognize that whether my looks, voice, or physical and cultural attributes are different or not, growth and development can only come incrementally. I must embrace the task designed by history and providence to perform well. This ambition, which is tied to my Igbo cultural background, led me to postgraduate studies in the South. Graduate studies exposed me to the fact that understanding the races, ethnicities, and identities of the relatively separate groups of Blacks is imperative because we all look alike but exhibit shared distinct identities in the United States (Greer, 2013). These distinctions, for example, elevated minority, which infuses ethnic superiority whether real or imagined, often perpetuates mistrust and exclusionary practices. Although ethnic identification for Black immigrant populations is not abandoned

but maintained alongside racial identification, African Americans sometimes consider immigrant Blacks not Black enough and therefore excluded me from real discussions pertaining to our shared ethnic identities. I began to question my membership status and affiliation with the name African American, which was unsettling for the lack of choice in the processes of membership and incorporation. I feel displaced and sought for agency through complex negotiation and frustration navigating the process of integration, segregation and assimilation of desirable U. S. cultures.

Although my life experience of the ethnic, political, cultural, religious rivalries and divisive politics in Nigeria did not teach me anything about being Black in the United States, it has shown me that Igbo heritages, which are intuitively humane, subtly assertive, and child centered, need to be preserved, protected, and propagated for me to draw upon as I struggle and thrive as a Nigeria-American teacher/educator in-between the contested landscapes of education in the United States (Discovery 2). The Igbos recognize the primary necessity of individual freedom as well as the virtually impossibility of its practical realization (Achebe, 2001). To assert the worth of the individual by making them not as the product, or by production of a social construction, or an on-going generic creativity, rather as a particular once-and-for-all divine activity, is about as far as human imagination can go on the road of uniqueness. The Igbo communities are autonomous, deeply suspicious of political amalgamations in their quest to prevent anarchy, domination, or marginalization. Although they live in a world of constant struggles, displacements, and changes, their world view is deeply rooted in the love for children because they believe that continuity of a lineage depends on marriage where procreation is at the center of Igbo marriages. To these ends, the Igbo heritages, intuitively humane, subtly assertive, and child centered, need to be propagated and preserved. Education is perceived as the "*Igbo thing*" though its acquisition is painful since the Igbos see tremendous benefit to education to make sure that the Igbo things do not simply disappear from the face of the earth. I was taught to respect both my teachers and peers and make no excuses about incomplete schoolwork or having a smug temperament, which the British call argumentative with your teacher(s). On occasions where misbehavior is noted, my parents usually walked me back to the teacher to apologize to

them, which seemed to be embarrassing to me. Nevertheless, these experiences taught me humility and respect, and made me realized how all behaviors could change with persistent humane education and redirection. As a special education teacher, I draw from this humane culture when I relate to my students who were locked up in jail. I was able to redirect his thinking by sharing with him through my personal stories of childhood poverty a humane and assertive teaching and empathy.

I believe that my cultural and linguistic heritages, anchored on Afrocentric ideas or ideals, affirm the primacy of the African experience for the African people. The exploration of my African backgrounds and cultures gives me my African "victorious consciousness" back which means that I do not have to accept or focus on Eurocentric views, values, methods in my teaching or handling students' behaviors (Ama Mazama, 2003 in Schubert and He, 2021).

Linguistic or cultural differences within Black heritages are often obscured, homogenized, or ignored in mainstream curriculum theories, practice, and policies. Such actions colonize immigrants from African Diasporas as we struggle for racial, linguistic, and social justice for ourselves and our families in hard times in the United States when white supremacy, antiBlack/anti-Latinx/anti-Indigeneity/anti-Asian/anti-People of Color/anti-Diaspora racism and pandemics, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, and settler colonialism are perpetuated by hatred of differences (He & Yu, 2017; Hill, 2016; Matias & Newlove, 2017; Ngo & Lee, 2019) (Discovery 3). Blacks are perceived as monolithic and consequently all African immigrants are perceived as homogeneous given that they all originate from Africa. However, it is important to note that Africans can be aggregated among other variables on the basis of colonial's languages or linguistic patterns. There are a few English-speaking countries in West Africa. The most notable are Nigeria, Ghana, Southern Cameroon formerly under the protectorate of Nigeria, Gambia. These countries are all former British colonies and share common language but different cultures. English is the official language in all these countries, which is used as the means to transfer knowledge, in business transactions, and government inter and intra relationships and business. Other West African countries include Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde. These countries including Nigeria have English as their

primary language. In the case of French speaking West Africa, there are English schools where dual language immersion programs are used for both education and business. The impact of colonialism continues to follow me and other African Diaspora to the United States. In distinguishing between post-colonial and multicultural political context, Povinelli (2019) explains that whereas:

> [Colonial] domination worked by inspiring in colonized subjects desire to identify their colonizer…multicultural dominance seem to work seem to work by inspiring the subaltern and minority subjects to identify with the impossible object of an authentic self-identity. It is this inferiority complex leading to code switch I discovered was an ambiguous cry for acceptance and desire to belong. I do not have to be white to be accepted into my profession or socially. (p. 113)

This resolute determination is concomitant with Fanon's (1967) analysis of the language and subaltern mimicry in colonial Antilles when he theorized in relation to Povinelli's contention that "[t]he negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter- that is he will come closer to being a real human being- in direct ratio to his mastery of the French Language" (Fanon, 1967, p. 8). In contrast, Black English, American or British should be an expressive and organic vehicle of conveying meaning but not as an end in themselves as universal languages. Africans explore a version of spoken and written English called pidgin English. Its use has been to defy the Queen's English as standard criteria or any other form or linguistic patterns. Since Africans are connected in many ways including sharing a common identity, African American, it is the intent of this dissertation to call for unity and solidarity for all Black ethnicities in America. This creates, in turn, the ultimate portrait of bonding wherein Africans in the Diaspora…understand what it means to be enslaved and living under abject colonial dehumanizing conditions (Ibrahim, 2014). As I delve further into the misunderstandings, mispronunciations, and perception of the way the native-born teachers evaluate my linguistic capabilities, I began to understand how they seem to generalize my abilities with other Africans who have French, Italian or German language backgrounds. This misconception explains why my children were identified as having English as a second language (ESL) until my timely intervention. This memoir offered me the opportunity to address these

misunderstandings, misidentification, and mischaracterization which often result in anti-settler colonialism perpetuated by hatred of differences.

Although composing a memoir, an unconventional mode of inquiry, to understand, articulate, and share my life experience in Nigeria, in the United States, and in-between is excruciatingly painful and emotional, it uproots deep firsthand experiences that could not have been expressed otherwise and liberates from all forms of oppression (Discovery 4). I have spent countless hours reflecting on my past and present experiences. Although writing my memoir is very complex and revealing, it makes the most sense to my audience. This mental exercise reached deep inside of me and pulled out the events to illustrate difficulties, which were less than flattering, which generated fear, self-doubt, and emotional pain. Then there is the vulnerability of revealing the deepest part of myself, not being able to take back what I have written or having control over how readers may interpret my stories (Ellis, 2004/1950). It is hard not to feel that the entire world is reading my work which seems like washing one's dirty linen in public. For example, revealing that my father sold his only vehicle to send me to school and also helped my uncle with his school fees in Canada was really difficult as it hurt inside to fully reflect on how this action may have impacted my father's quality of life. This kindness embodies perpetual gratitude in a way that sensitizes me to make sacrifices for my children and students. I concur with (Achebe, 2000) when I began to understand that there is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like which makes it imperative that I tell my own undiluted stories. Writing this memoir helped me to understand myself and others at a much deeper level. This entire reflection about my life in the United States provided an avenue for doing something meaningful for myself and the world at large.

There is an increasing need to develop an African Diaspora curriculum (Hall, 2022; King 2022) which draws from the historical, cultural, and linguistic experiences of Africans as exemplified in literary texts by African authors to "legitimize [African heritages and] epistemologies," foster the "wellbeing of African-descended people," flourish "human freedom from dehumanizing" (King, 2022) schooling, and create

hopes and dreams for everyone (Discovery 5). The exploration and adoption of Diaspora literacy and heritage knowledge as a way to revolutionize and inculcate African-centered or Afrocentric curriculum for K-12 schools in the United States of America is an overdue development. Education should encapsulate how African Americans and Diaspora people see themselves employing the epistemological foundations of African cultures and histories. As Kings (2005) states:

> We exist as African People, an ethnic family. Our perspective must be centered in that reality… The priority is on the African ethnic family over the individual; our collective survival and enhancement must be our highest priorities. (p.20)

For example, my Diaspora students ask me why African History is not part of the U.S. K-12 social studies curriculum stating that they want to know about the origin of black people. My students ask several questions which point to lack of knowledge of African History and literature. For example, do all black people come from Africa? When did slavery start, and which countries started to go to Africa to hunt for human beings to serve as their slaves? Where did hierographic writing and Abacus originate from? If Africa was the origin of civilization, how and why did they fall? Why is Africa poor and yet they have all the minerals that developed countries of the West use in their factories? Do the Western countries obtain these raw materials for free or pay for it, and these raw materials if they pay for it, why is Africa still impoverished?

The essence of this memoir is to connect to Africa's history and to demonstrate that Africa is beautiful and rich, sensitize African Diaspora and African Americans to be proud of their identities. To that end, I call on all Blacks to embody a Pan-African spirit exemplified in Aime' Cesaire titled *Negritude and Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal* theorized as shared cultural values and expressions of the Black world. I also discovered the emphasis on Black curriculum in the works of Carter G Woodson's theorizing of T*he Miseducation of the Negro* and the community activism of 3500 Black junior and high school students in Philadelphia in 1967. Afrocentrism and the evolution of black ways of knowing have been on the rise most in higher education but more recently interspersed in elementary schools. I spare the argument of the

centrality of Egypt to African History as Diop contended to focus on what need to happen now with the K-12 curriculum so that Afrocentric curriculum incorporating the views, values, interest, and ideological framework can flourish within the context of literature, history as social studies and writing. In fact, it is confusing to teach mostly white nationalist in our social studies curriculum which asserts to the view of curriculum as a racial text where the majority race is portrayed as superior. This idea of whiteness the confusion is stirred in Blacks are evident in for example, James Baldwin (1998/1949) who felt that blacks equate evil, and whites equates grace…and that blacks have no contribution to civilization which invariably means that whiteness can be viewed as superior to the black race. Reading Baldwin made me feel incomplete inside. I felt that he should have sort to critically deconstruct Eurocentric values and juxtapositions of Blackness to symbolize negatives and other debasing information prevalent about blacks in his time to providing a path for the future generation; instead, his conclusions were organically transferred and evident in the mindset of many Blacks and at all levels of education in the United States. The time has come to reverse these kinds of thinking moving toward Diaspora literacy which encompasses the African world view (cultural ethos, values, sensibilities) that inform Black perspectives and build the foundation for a progressive Diaspora curriculum.

The curriculum studies program has redirected my inner struggles to an inquiry into how people like me with hyphenated identity, who are curious or perplexed about the process of becoming Black, develop a voice of curiosity, strength, compassion, and new knowledge in the form of a memoir. The stories I share in this dissertation reveal my innermost worries and demonstrate how much I have grown over the years in redefining the course of my destiny in the United States where I now call home away from home. These stories reveal growth from being forced to accept a common racial identity-African American to carving a space in-between the two spaces and accepting myself for who I am--Igbo/Nigerian-American. I have learned that language is part of one's cognitive and cultural identity (Li, 2015), which is to overcoming intimidation and incompetence. Gee (1989) cited in in (Li 2015, p.61) connects identity to language stating how language is an "identity kit" through which we not only define ourselves and our own identities but

also are defined and identified by others. I am not only in-between cultures. I am also in-between languages as Weaver (2009) opined that Non-European English people are in a constant state of identity negotiation. For example, an English citizen who is originally from Jamaican or has a Jamaican heritage or descendants from that land is constantly reminded that they are neither Jamaican nor British; therefore, they are constantly inventing who they are, what roots mean, and what it means to be English citizen (p.45). Weaver's analogy describes me in that my speaking patterns does not reflect my British education background, American or Nigerian. In similar vein, I am neither fully African American nor Igbo/Nigerian Diaspora. I have observed that accents and race are inexplicably tied together to define or give me an African Diaspora identity though in actuality African peers think I have changed and become Americanized. Despite the contradictions, there are increased attention to the sociolinguistic behaviors of Black ethnics or those that fell outside of hegemonic definition of what it means to be "Black" in the United States, particularly children of African or Caribbean immigrants. The interlacing of race and linguistics and the attendant marginalization create the opportunity for othering (Rosa, 2019). I am a great teacher and want to live a happy life in the United States. To live a happy life means has significant relationship to the way people perceive and receive me (my identity) which is instrumental to the development of self and overcoming repression and incompetence (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Tubman, 1995). I learned how hyphens signify ambiguous contested spaces where people with accents like me are defined historically, socially, and culturally. Instead of double consciousness, my memoir identifies triple othering or marginalization. I want to be viewed as an Igbo/Nigerian-American.

EPILOGUE

A Letter to Igbo/Nigerian-Americans Who Dare to Teach Special Education in the U. S. South My Fellow Igbo/Nigerian-Americans:

I am a special education teacher and have been teaching in a variety of settings since 2000. Teaching special education in the Southeast U.S., like any other profession, has many benefits as well as challenges. If you are interested in amassing tremendous wealth, then this profession is not where you need to be. Teachers in the southeast survive on an average annual income of between 41,090 entry salary to about 78,020 depending on qualification and years of service. Thus, compared to other professions, the annual salaries of teachers do not measure up favorably. However, there are intrinsic benefits that outweigh high financial renumeration such as helping to progressively advance humanity, develop the talent of individual students and inspiring students to patriotic auctions.

These altruistic values are immeasurable and without teachers' society will not advance technologically, socially, and politically. Along with these benefits comes challenges that often prevent many from considering to be a part of the most fulfilling profession in the world--- teaching. These challenges could be attributed to difficulty managing parents, administrators and often interaction with other teachers. The indifference to teaching or becoming a teacher, as I noted from my discussion with teacher aspirants and my own personal experience, indicates that the most pressing challenges extend to the manifestations of human differences. In teacher education as well as in service teachers, human differences are connected to racial, cultural, and linguistic differences.

As a teacher of color, particularly Igbo/Nigerian-Americans or African Diaspora teachers, you will experience some form of discrimination, racism, or exclusion in the workplace, but there are many ways to overcome this situation when it arises. It is imperative that you develop a personal philosophy about why you teach. It becomes imperative that you focus on the why, set personal goals and above all, place the love for children above all the challenges you face at work. As an Igbo/Nigerian-American, you might want to draw from your humane cultural and ethical standards which is child centered, altruistic, and focuses on the dictums: "Igwe bu ike"(there is strength in group action), "onye aghala nwa nne yaa"(do not abandon your

friends and relatives in times of difficulty), and the apex of educational philosophy and epistemological genius of the Igbo, "It takes a village to raise a child." The most valuable tool in your teaching arsenal is patience and a good sense of humor. This tool will prove invaluable when you encounter angry parents, students with gross behavior issues, administrators, and peers.

It is common knowledge that behavior problems are on the rise in the United States. However, it is worth nothing that each behavior demonstrated by a student is a function of certain variables. The key is to follow your school's procedure to collect data to help with the development of a behavior plan. Think about documenting what happened before the incident. For example, what subjects, time, context of the behavior and then write down your response to the behavior i.e., prompting (how many times you gave the students prompt), what the student did after the prompt, how long it took the student to deescalate, whether the administrator was called and what was the final response of the student or how was the behavior addressed.

 The collection of this kind of behavior data over a time period should give you an idea of the antecedents and function of behavior. Often, there may be factors outside of the classroom causing behavior issues in children such as something that started at home. An effective way to know the difference between a home and a classroom-initiated behavior is to develop good relationships with the student and unobtrusively engage the student in frequent discussions about home setting or life.

It is my advice that you do not take any behavior exhibited by your students personally or feel offended as if it were directed at you or you were the target of a student's misbehavior. You should be empathetic, make the time to read students record, and do not swallow all the information in the record completely because there are elements of bias in personal observations, particularly teachers tend to be highly opinionated when a student has severe behaviors or conduct. It is not always about race, sometimes certain students who are stubborn or resistant to the teacher directions are usually not the teacher's favorite. Again, a student might be stubborn, dislike teacher A but does not present any behavior for teacher B. It all depends on many variables, but always keep in mind that students can measure the level of your personal commitment and how you feel about their wellbeing, and this determines how they respond to you.

When you have a severe behavior student, try a home visit, work with the parents by proactively providing information about the student in a timely manner. It is nice to make a big deal of even a minute positive behavior by writing notes home, followed by a phone call, providing tangible rewards, and publishing it in your Newsletter.

Home visits are an important strategy if done correctly because it offers the teacher an opportunity to observe the student in the most comfortable and less intrusive environment. The visit can provide an opportunity to learn more about the student and his or her parents. This knowledge is important because most of the extant causative factors contributing to the child's misbehavior are from home so having this knowledge can help the teacher strategize. Although these extant factors may be beyond the teacher's control, they are relevant indicators to future gross misbehavior dispositions and therefore provide the opportunity to remediate the behavior.

The home situation should be factored in prior to the commencement of a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). For example, a student who sleeps in class and gets obnoxious when redirected by the teacher could be handled differently if the teacher discovers the student and his/her parents are homeless. This is the reason observation and unobtrusive interaction with your students can be extremely necessary. In this kind of situation, it is okay for the teacher to discuss with his or her administrators, complete all paperwork so the student and the parent can receive help. On the class level, the student can be allowed to sleep for a certain period then begin his or her schoolwork. When there are no extenuating circumstances, proceed with FBA and write a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). Make sure to follow your plan and if you find that your plan needs modification, it is okay to reconvene a meeting to discuss needed changes.

Some days you might experience frustration but rest assured that you can always overcome it because each day is a new day. The most important thing I like about teaching is that when my lessons did not go according to my plan for unforeseen reasons, I set my mind on buffer because I can always start from where you leave off the next day. This aspect of the teacher's life is concomitant with Bob Marley's postulation that he who fights and runs leaves the fight for another day. My advice to adopt this philosophy,

be flexible and practical, nothing is written in stone that you cannot change or modify. So, do not be a burden to yourself by resisting change.

A good teaching practice is to write daily reflections at the end of every school day. Reflections are the professional moral high court where the teacher pauses to take mental pictures or recollections of how the day went. When you reflect on your teaching in terms of the learning or practice, please do not feel bad if you need to criticize yourself constructively. In fact, you will find that self-criticism or evaluation when done well can be a tough act to follow. However, making out time to reflect on your teaching is an invaluable asset as it prepares the teacher for midyear and other evaluations within the year. It also gives confidence and self-assurance about pedagogical power and ability to understand and interpret content. Reflections make you a better teacher and allows you to stay true to your values.

I usually draw two columns, label one my Glows and the other Greys. The glows represent areas where I thought I excelled, and the Greys are areas I need to improve or change. After reviewing the Glows and Greys, I then go back to redraw my plan, reteach, or implement new strategies.

Skills You Need to Work with Students with Disabilities

It is imperative that you understand and evaluate the challenges that come with teaching special education students before joining the profession. As a guide, review the suggestions listed below:

1. Be patient and empathetic:

A general cliche, "Patience is a virtue," has never been truer than when applied to your special education teaching job. Teaching students with special needs requires empathy and a strong sense of understanding of the uniqueness of each student. Each student's need is different, and each person may need various levels of attention. For example, a student may demonstrate severe behavior difficulties and class disruption that requires immediate attention, while others may ask for your help completing a task. Meanwhile, other students are demanding attention, potentially lashing out in their own way. These kinds of situations when played out daily can lead to teacher burn out if you are not careful; however, the best

approach is to remain calm and take it one at a time. This means that you take advantage of any extra assistance, get to know behavioral patterns, and utilize time management to compensate for any setbacks.

2. Be flexible and reflexive:

Essentially, your job as a special educator will require you to be familiar with all types of disabilities, as well as how to properly handle issues surrounding each one. In many districts you may be required to be certified to teach students with Learning Disabilities (LD), Emotional Disabilities (EBD), Autism levels 1-4, and Adaptive Curriculum which is a general certification for students with lower IQs who have a significant moderate to severe intellectual functioning. Usually, districts will ask foreign-born teachers to be part of the certification program because it covers a range of disabilities in the mild to moderate range to make it easier to assign or place you in areas with daunting responsibilities often rejected by native born teachers. This certification is also good because of job security. Be open to a variety of certifications but choose your teaching positions very carefully avoiding districts that do not have diverse populations in the student population and teaching staff.

3. Use correct language and voice when addressing special needs students:

Students with extreme behavior sometimes yell or weep profusely when angry or upset. Do not raise your voice at them no matter how provoked you may be, try to always guard your emotions and anger so that you are always in control of your classroom. As in many fields, there are many words that should never be used. In the past, adopting a person-first language was accepted as the correct way to address those with disabilities, offering a form of respect that separates them from the disability itself. However, as time went on, a new form emerged that place's identity with the disability at the forefront of the conversation. Identity-first language has become a mainstream practice among disabled communities, adopting a personal claim to the circumstances one faces. Both practices are still used when speaking and referring to others with disabilities but knowing which one your students has is important.

4. Prioritize and use a variety of strategies to address severe behavioral issues:

It can be easy to get caught up in odd behaviors or outbursts when dealing with many students, but best practice is to prioritize behavioral issues into certain levels of importance and acceptance. For instance, if a student is exhibiting a behavior that does not warrant any major concern, it may be best for you to overlook without taking away time and energy from situations that are more pressing. Just think, if you wasted time catering to every single issue that surfaces, you would most likely fall behind on your schedule or make little to no progress in areas that matter most. Prioritizing behaviors are a great way to keep things moving, plus, you can always discuss your concerns with parents and students during individual meetings where personal attention is more acceptable.

5. Work out a system to help you manage and complete confidential paperwork:

One of your main responsibilities as a special educator is to create individualized educational plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities. Aside from grading papers, creating homework assignments, and developing other interactive tasks, IEPs require extra time to prepare and review since each one is specifically designed to challenge and improve a single student's educational career. A regular K-12 teacher will have the luxury of standardized tests and textbook guidelines, but your expertise will call for unique lesson plans and performance reviews that will then need to be presented to parents and school boards. Your materials are not something that can be duplicated or applied to all students, so accepting that additional paperwork and time is a part of the job will help keep you sane during those long nights at the printer.

6. Develop strategies to work with each student as every student is unique:

Since you will be creating IEPs for your students, it is crucial to accept each one as a unique person with their own set of actions and responses. They will come from all walks of life, having faced different challenges and struggles with the support of a family that is different in their own way. These differences rely on the awareness and compassion of someone who can appreciate the individual paths leading to a better future, and more importantly, that person must have the strength to honor the rarity that each student has to offer to the classroom. Throughout your career as a special educator, you cannot assume that one student with Downs Syndrome will behave the same way as another, but instead, it is your duty to take the

time to learn their troubles, to set a course of action, and guide them to the finish line. Doing so will undoubtedly make a lasting change in their life, as well as instilling a sense of confidence for many years to come.

7. Be assertive, relax and enjoy the special education teaching profession:

As the saying goes, "nothing good comes easy." Special education is a fulfilling career but has its challenges. I cannot underestimate these challenges to create an all-rosy picture because special educator can be difficult. There are many aspects to celebrate throughout the journey- teaching special education. Every day, you will experience a sense of fulfillment that stems from recognizing the impact of your tutelage upon students in need. Whether it is the satisfaction of helping a student to give a presentation or encouraging them to try something new, it is the small achievements along that way that add up to enormous success parents prefer will help you to become a better leader and advocate for everyone overall.

Finally, I want to encourage you to follow your heart's desire and to do what you think is right-supporting justice, fairness, and equity not just for you alone, but for all humankind. Good luck in any career you may wish to consider, but teaching is my first love and I feel humbled to invite you to join me for this love.

A Letter to My Sons and Daughters

My Dear Children:

I am delighted to write this letter to you, my children, demonstrating my love and hopes and sharing vital information about life generally and, most importantly, being Black in the United States as a diasporic male or female. Again, I thank you--Gen, Emmanuel, Olachi, Udochi, and Ikem for your understanding and encouragement in completing this dissertation. It was surprising that Ikemsinachi (KK) asked me this morning whether my doctorate program had ended because he had not seen me studying in the living room lately. His observation sent chills to my spine because I then realized that even at five years old, he experiences the gap in the time I spent with him, so in a sense, he feels like he lost something in this process. So, in this letter, I iterate that the end of this process is near, so my children, including KK, you will soon enjoy my undivided attention.

My extraordinary and relentless drive to achieve success at everything I do in life situates or illustrates the onus of this letter. I write because I want my children to avoid making some of the mistakes I made and to be well informed about their immediate environment. To all my children, you come from a solid cultural background; your mom, grandmothers, grandfathers, and many uncles, all hard-working men, and women, talented and generous, demonstrate that you too can achieve your dreams in this country regardless of your skin pigmentation or name. Thus far, all of you have shown very great promise regarding educational accomplishments and finding a way to stay on top of things at school, socially, and in interpersonal relationships. However, I want you to know that beyond educational accomplishments, the most crucial aspect of life in America for diasporic or Black persons, in general, is to safeguard your life.

As your father, who is raising young Black males and females, I am very fearful about what the future holds in the racial politics of this country. Your mom and I are worried that nothing is impossible in the face of a society that perceives every Black person as the same. We are fearful because you have an African heritage and bear a different or unique name. You are no different from Tamir, Trayvon, Mike, Emmitt, Eric, Sean, Phiando, and even Diallo. As you can see, the burden of fatal police violence is an urgent public health crisis in the USA. These lives cut short were evidence that deaths caused by the police

disproportionately impact people of certain races and ethnicities, pointing to systemic racism in policing. In view of the pervasive nature of these killings, your upbringing alone cannot be a sufficient safety net.

I lay this emphasis because high-profile killings by police in the USA have become very prevalent to the point that every time you watch the news, there is something about a Black man murdered by police. My heart would skip a beat with every news story, and tears would begin to fall. What if it was any of you? I do not know these people individually, but we have shared identities and futures, so we are all connected at heart. The prevalence of the indiscriminate killings of unarmed Black men by police prompted Black families across the United States to have conversations beyond the kitchen table. I tell this story because it is my charge to keep you safe and teach you the complexities of the race politics and other human differences in the United States.

It is also essential to understand the hate that divides the world in many ways originated from race politics and the classification of humans into--Black vs. Whites, poor vs. rich, developed countries vs. underdeveloped, and men vs. women are systems of subjugation. I share Coates' (2015) contention that despite civil rights, despite the symbolism of Obama, violence towards, and subjugation of, Black men and women remains ingrained in American culture from slavery. Coates' (2015) postulation parallels Toni Morrison's (2008) summation that the language of provocation and wisdom suggests that "its examination of the hazards and hopes of the Black male life is as profound as it is revelatory" (p. 7). This suggests that the Black male is targeted because more males are shot than Black females. To this end, I ask you to be cognizant of these facts and understand you must strive to protect your body at all costs. I use the word protect here not in physical confrontation but mental or applying mental capacity to deal with every circumstance that could lead to vexation or provide treacherous rationalization or justification for an illegal action over your body. You must not confront law enforcement; instead, follow all orders and take the matter up in court if you so decide, for the street has no legal authority over your peers. However, the courts do, so why try your case without safeguarding your right to life first and foremost.

I am sure you must have heard about the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM), an umbrella organization that agitates against the killing of unarmed Black men in the United States. The Black Lives Matter movement gained significant traction when police murdered George Floyd. The death of George Floyd made rounds on social media, and so many emotions ran through many parents and me in the United States. Sadness, anger, and fear were the most prominent emotions. Although there is no justification for the police action, I ask you to avoid any confrontation with the police. Whenever the police stop you, be courteous, firm, and resolute about your answers. Listen to requests and comply accordingly, providing any document requested by the officer. Do not fiddle with your keys or put your hands in the glove compartment looking for a license or paperwork. If you must do so, ask the officer for permission. If he declines, do not proceed. It is best to keep both your hands visible on the steering wheel. If the officer decides to take you to jail for any reason, it is better to go to the jailhouse alive than to be shot and blamed for defiance. You should never run from a police officer because you may not make it alive. Remember, you must be alive to defend yourself because no dead person can speak or argue wrongdoing. I do not imply being weak or indolent but to use wisdom and tact whenever you encounter law enforcement, Black or White.

As I try to produce words to tell you what is going on in the United States about racial inequalities, discrimination, and othering, I am falling short. However, I need to tell you about systemic racism and its meaning to being Black in America. I want to also tell you my hopes and dreams for you and how to develop an Igbo diasporic identity that will help you navigate the race, culture, and "Afrophobia" in the United States.

It is true that the Whites associate African immigrants with African Americans and therefore treat everyone with a dark skin like one. Nevertheless, I want to let you know that being Black is not just about your skin color, and it has something to do with the myriad of stereotypes and the attendant racial discrimination that are heaped on the Black body. You must know that systemic racism is a real thing that hinders Black people's economic, political, and social development in the United States. This means that

you may not receive justice and a fair trial, have a job that you qualify for, or attend the college of your choice, among other values in life.

These issues originate from the distinctions drawn between humans where there is a divide between the White/Black races, which some call a dichotomy. I know you wonder why some of the issues I discuss here are not taught in school. Indeed, the United States history is not a compendium of all that the Blacks have experienced in the slavery era or more recent events. So, it would be best if you augmented the defective historical education by becoming a voracious reader. African/African American Authors write many books that will fill the gaps. For example, authors such as David Simons, James Baldwin, Malcolm X, T. Coates, Sonia Sanchez, Cornell West, Henry Louis Gates, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, and Marcus Garvey are rich historical texts. You can find some of the books mentioned above in my library, others are on Amazon for reasonable prices. Be available to read these books and learn the intricacies of being Black in the United States.

The racial divide exacerbated by biologists and aired by the media caused many problems, so I am warning you to be an objective consumer of media products because news is often anchored on biased assumptions. For example, many news organizations and TV channels have political affiliations. Some are liberals, and others are conservative networks. The portrayal of African Americans as lazy and criminal, and Africans as crude, rustic, devilish, and cannibals is a western media creation. Always find out facts through many sources and do not depend on the media to answer every societal issue.

Finally, be smart, strong, kind, patient, and hard working. These virtues will take you to unprecedented heights as you work for progress. It is not up to you to change other people's minds, so only focus on being yourself--the best possible version of yourself even if it looks unpopular. Your mom and I have strong faith in you--our children and look forward to you helping in no small measures to make this world a better place for humankind.

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