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IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION AMONG SECOND-GENERATION IGBO YOUNG ADULTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract

Second-generation Igbo (SGI) young adults are a rapidly growing population in the United States, yet the role of Igbo culture in the construction and negotiation of their identity remains little studied. The aim of this pilot study is to begin filling this research gap by examining SGI young adults' identity construction and negotiation in the United States, to serve as a template for a larger project. Responses were gathered through a qualitative research approach, using data from face-to-face, in-depth interviews with two participants. They recount how children born in the United States to Igbo parents attempt to articulate their identities. Eight themes emerge from the analysis. Even though the findings demonstrate that the participants encounter identity struggles, they also found Igbo culture empowering because it stands out among their multiple identities. The participants offer suggestions for how to teach the Igbo language, a central component of Igbo culture, to Igbo children born in the diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

MIGRATION AMONG THE IGBO has produced generations of Igbo across Nigeria, other parts of Africa, and beyond. In the United States, the children (second generation) of Igbo immigrants (first generation) are a rapidly growing population, yet little attention has been given to their experiences in terms of their identity struggles, which remains a matter of debate.[1] Most of the existing research on the Igbo in America tends to focus on the first generation. This study concentrates on second-generation Igbo young adults who are between 18 and 34 years of age. The reason for choosing this age range is to capture one of the earliest groups of Igbo born in the United States. For this study, the second generation is defined as those who were born in the United States or migrated to the United States by the age of five.[2]

While there is a significant body of research focusing on Asians, Europeans, Latin Americans, and the Caribbean second-generation in the United States,[3] little attention has been paid to their African counterparts.[4] Even though Africans may have some similarities, more culturally-specific studies are needed since African societies are not monolithic.[5]

There are available studies that have investigated second-generation Igbo including whether the impact of cultural identity and pride were correlated positively or negatively with the psychological well-being of study participants,[6] the difference between the Igbo and Americans in terms of cultural levels,[7] and Igbo parent participation in their children's education.[8] There is a little research on the second-generation in the context of identity construction and negotiation.

The present study seeks to understand how SGI young adults in the United States construct and negotiate their ethnic and transnational identities. Because some members of this group are approaching their 40s, there is an urgent need to capture the experiences of these young adults at this time, as they may be considered the "first" second-generation Igbo in the United States.

IGBO MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

The migration of Igbo-Nigerians to the United States can be divided into four stages. The first phase was the early colonial period (1925-1952). The second phase was the late colonial period; this period of immigration occurred from 1952 to1960. The third period of immigration occurred between 1960 and 1970; and the fourth period of immigration began in 1970.[9] Many Igbo immigrants of the first, second, and third stages returned to Nigeria. Because many of them returned, SGI from the first three stages are rare in America (I have yet to encounter a single one). As a result, SGIs started emerging in the U.S. during the 1970s, when many stayed in the United States after their education. Further, many Igbo immigrants that came to study in the United States in the 1980s never went back; their children are also now part of the "first" group of second-generation. One reason many remained in the U.S. was due to a series of military dictatorships and the economic deterioration of Nigeria.[10] Estimated at 30 million, the Igbo are one of three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The other two are the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani. In 1980, Nigeria accounted for 37 percent of all Black African immigrants, although by 2009 that figure fell to 19 percent. Currently, no single Black African country predominates as the origin for Black African immigrants. This study is invaluable for the data it provides about the history of Black African migration to the United States from a time when Nigerians accounted for a plurality of immigrants.[11]

According to Min Zhou, the fastest-growing segments of the United States population are children of immigrants and immigrant children. That study documents some direct and indirect experiences of those children. The author used existing empirical research to demonstrate that even though these immigrant children and the children of immigrants

often face traumatic confrontations with their identities, they are generally eager to embrace American culture and identity. This research serves as a more specific analysis of what immigrant children experience as they try to negotiate their multiple identities in the United States.[12]

Transnational parenting is not a new phenomenon for African immigrants living in the diaspora.[13] For example, Cato Coe explores the transnational parenting and fostering between Ghanaian immigrants in the United States and in Ghana. Likewise, he examines "the practice of child fostering and its implications for parent-child separations among immigrants from Ghana."[14] Coe argues that the transnational family arrangement which influences a child's development and well-being has been ignored and understudied. The research found that many Ghanaians do not raise their children just in the United States but also in Ghana. Coe uses ethnographic data obtained in both the United States and Ghana, which includes participant observation in Ghanaian churches and communities in Philadelphia and New Jersey from 2004 to 2007. Some parents stated that the reason they send their children to Ghana is because of difficulties balancing work and childcare and the cost of raising a child in the United States.[15]

Kavita Ramdya examined identify negotiation for a sample of middle-to-upper-class second-generation Indian-American Hindus. Ramdya's work emerged from her 2007 dissertation, in which she explored how this group negotiated their wedding rituals (including dating and engagement procedures). Many of these second-generation Indian-American Hindus are what Ramdya calls "occasional Hindus" – which means that they embrace their Hindu religious background only on special occasions such as around marriage.[16] The study demonstrates that dialectical tensions are inevitable during the wedding process because American culture and Hindu religious culture both come into play – and into conflict. This type of tension is relevant to SGI young adults who are experiencing and negotiating their identities in the United States.[17]

In the same vein, Diane Wolf explored interactions between parents and their children. Wolf examined some of the issues and problems second-generation Filipino youths living in California face. She found that parent-child communication varies. Some lines of communications are closed, others are open, and there is some estrangement. Some respondents had contemplated suicide as a result of deep despair and alienation because of a family ideology of keeping problems secret. Given their hybrid (or multiple) identities, these second-generation Filipino youth struggled with their transnational lives.[18]

Research on second-generation Nigerians in the United States has been gaining some attention.[19] Oluwakemi Balogun examined Nigerian young adults residing in the San Francisco Bay Area concerning their ar-

ticulation of racial, ethnic, and national identities.[20] The findings show the participants embracing black racial identity that is neither oppositional nor associated with a downward trajectory, providing "empirical support for the minority cultures of mobility thesis that minority middle classes"[21] have a common culture associating with upward mobility. Even though this study does not shed direct light on the transnationalism of second-generation Nigerians, it highlights identity construction and negotiation in the United States.[22]

Few studies have emerged on second-generation Igbo in the United States. Felicia Ibezim researched marriages among Igbo people in the U.S., and discusses the plight of Igbo children in America in the context of Igbo ethnic culture. In addition to conducting interviews to find out how marriages of Igbo people in the New York City area collapse, she also claimed that "the Igbo children have little or no interest in their parents' ethnic culture hence their inability to understand or speak the Igbo language and unwillingness to eat the Igbo traditional food."[23]

In contrast, Johnson Njoku studies the lamenting of the abandonment of the Igbo language by first-generation Igbo. He notes that the Igbo in Igboland in Nigeria allow the language to decline. Schools in Igboland show no keen interest in teaching and or advancing the language. Even though this study does not articulate the issue in terms of parent-child relationships, it gives insight into the decline of the language.[24]

Obiefuna Onwughalu sought to understand how Igbo parents in Chicago are involved in their children's education.[25] He found that one of the unique attributes of Igbo parents who are residing in Chicago is that they want their children to be more successful than them. He found that the parents engaged in extra-curricular activities with their children. The Igbo language and culture are considered as extra curriculum. The parents volunteer at school-related activities and they teach their children about life lessons outside of school.[26] These findings are essential in studying how SGIs articulate their Igboness in the United States while negotiating their transnational identity.[27]

Chinyere Ukomadu conducted the most recent study dealing with Igbo young adults in America. Her dissertation explored the connection that cultural identity and pride have with the psychological well-being of SGI young adults in the United States. In this qualitative study, the author found that cultural identity and bicultural pride are positively correlated with well-being. Her dissertation is the closest to the current study.[28]

This current pilot study serves as useful background for understanding SGIs in the United States, and how parent-child communication impacts ethnic and transnational identities in relation to their well-being. The study uses an exploratory approach by focusing on SGI ethnic and trans-

national identity construction and negotiation and it addressed five research questions:

RQ1: How do SGI young adults describe and experience their Igboness in America?
RQ2: How does SGI young adults' communication with their parents shape their ethnic and transnational identity development?
RQ3: How do SGI young adults perceive the Igbo language in the context of ethnic and transnational identities?
RQ 4: How do SGI young adults use social media to articulate their ethnic and transnational identities?
RQ 5: How do transnational media (e.g., Nollywood movies and Igbo music) influence SGI young adults' ethnic and transnational identities?

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This pilot study utilizes the method of open-ended (in-depth) interviewing to investigate how SGI young adults articulate their ethnic and transnational identities in the United States. It aims to understand their lived experiences in the diaspora. In this pilot study, the participants were two female SGIs who were in their mid-to-late twenties, were born in the United States to Igbo parents, and were residing in the state of Ohio at the time of the interviews. However, the interviews took place in Bowie, Maryland. They were recruited through purposive sampling. In order for the second-generation participants to be eligible for the study, both their parents must be Igbo and speak the Igbo language.

This qualitative study uses Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss'[29] inductive thematic approach to explore SGI lived experiences in the United States in relation to their identity constructions and negotiations. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. In the process of coding and focusing on potential themes and their characteristics, eight major themes emerged from the data. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and pseudo names are used here. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before the author embarked on the study. The participants granted consent and answered some preliminary questions in order to ensure that they fit the demographic profile required for the study. Pseudo names were used to identify the two participants' names.

FINDINGS

Close reviews of the interview transcripts led to findings that underline how these SGI articulate their ancestral and transnational identities. The major themes relevant to the research questions are discussed here.

Desire to Learn Igbo Language and Culture

Interview data from the first research question reveal that SGI young adults have a passion for Igbo culture and language; hence they faced some challenges to their Igbo identity in school. The two major themes that emerged from these questions are "desire to learn Igbo language and culture" and "challenges in school in relation to ethnicity."

The participants expressed their desire to learn about Igbo culture. When I asked Ngozi to tell me about her experience with Igbo culture as an SGI born in the United States, she asserted:

> Igbo culture is something that you have to have the desire to learn. It's hard to understand why a lot of the culture still continues on, especially if you don't know the backstory. And if you don't know the backstory, then it's easy to see it as being irrelevant and easy not to continue it. I think that's why a lot of the cultural aspects of being Nigerian usually fade away, because the purpose of it becomes irrelevant. So it dies out.[30]

The following is Ngozi's response when she was asked what it means to her to be an Igbo person:

> Right now it just means that I have a background. I have a heritage of mine that I can actually trace back; and for a lot of people, they can't say that much. Especially because both [of my] parents are Igbo, it makes tracing my lineage that much easier.[31]

Challenges in Schools in Relation to Ethnicity

Research participants cited challenges during their school days. They describe schooling in the United States as a hurdle due to their ethnic identity. Ngozi gave the following account of her schooling experiences:

> Schooling was difficult at times because of the requirements my parents put on me that were different than what society requested of me. When I was younger it was difficult to understand why my parents were strict, but as I got older it made sense. I was comparative to being on the fence. ...On one side you have the Nigerian community complaining about the Americans. On the other side, you have the American community com-

> plaining about the Nigerians or Africans. Neither party saw me as the other party. … The Nigerians would speak openly to me about how they had issues with the Americans; and Americans would speak openly with me about Africans, because they didn't know that I was African. Early on, I didn't tell them that I was African, so I used my American name. And I'm kind of glad [I] did, because then I was able to get both perspectives.[32]

Ijeoma's response was similar:

> Well, some of them really, I guess, because of my experience when I was younger. I pretty much do not hang out with non-, I guess, immigrants or non-native people. My experience is they don't really allow you to come in. You basically have to prove yourself before they bring you in and with all the harshness I got with that little –I was afraid of befriending American people, especially Black Americans. Most of the time, most of my friends are Nigerians or from Ghana or even I have [a] Jewish friend, [a] Pakistani. But when it comes to American people, I typically, I only have one American friend.[33]

Ijeoma, who came to the United States when she was two years old, said that she has relatives around.

> I was raised in the Nigerian community ... [and was] basically brought here knowing about the culture, at least as much as they [could] give me. I always have [had] uncles and aunties that surround me. I always had to make sure that I was doing the right thing because you don't know who can tell your parents. The only thing I found difficult was schooling because [of] the different environment from the Nigerian community and then you also have to be ready ... [for] American society, where being different wasn't embraced. So you also had to not only learn about your culture, and not only do the things that your parents want you to do but also at the same time be able to fit in American society.[34]

Ijeoma stated that when she was in kindergarten and maybe until first grade, she was in ESL classes because of her lack of proficiency with written English. She articulated:

> My main struggle was dealing with American kids because they teased me a lot. They didn't understand why you did certain stuff. For example, my mom cut our hair when we were six years old, because that's how she was raised in the village; and because of that, we were teased all the way up to the third grade.... Not wearing the right clothing, not understanding what not to do, what to do. It's hard to tell your friends, "Well, I can't

> hang out with you- one, because ... my parents don't know you, and I can't go to certain parties because we don't do that in our household."[35]

Close Relationship with Parents

Responses to the second research question indicate that communication between the SGI and their parents in relation to Igbo culture is prevalent. The analysis of the data uncovered two prevalent themes, including a cordial relationship with parents and being rejected by two cultures.

The participants indicated that they have a cordial relationship with their parents in relation to Igbo culture and history. They felt that their parents exemplified Igbo culture to them. As Ngozi noted:

> I have a good relationship with my parents. They made sure that I knew what they felt I needed to know about our culture, but then they were also willing to accept that they have to allow me to experience American culture, too. They made sure I knew how to cook and behave and all the stuff that they felt was important; but on smaller issues they allowed me the opportunity to be more into society and for that I'm grateful for them. I think that helped build our relationship even more.

Ijeoma has a similar cordial experience:

> I have a very good relationship with my parents. A little bit different from other ... I think my parents are a little bit more lenient compared to other Nigerian parents. ... I've seen parents that ... [are] not strict enough, I've seen parents that ... [are] too strict and then my parents. They always [made] sure that school [was] number one but I guess ... [at] the same time they understood their ... "Okay, maybe this ... she wants to go out with her friends. Okay, you can go out but you have to call me every hour to let me know where you are at. Or you can go to the prom but you better make A's and you better...."[36]

As Ijeoma continued: "We have a good relationship, we make fun of each other, it's not really a dictatorship. I can go to my mom say, 'Okay, this is what I think you should do, you can ... [come] to me with anything.' You still have the respect. It's not your friends but it's not [your] boss, I guess; it's not a dictatorship."

Even though the relationship between the SGI and their parents is cordial, they indicated that there are differences because they come from separate generations. Ijeoma expressed the need to accommodate inter-ethnic marriage between Igbo and other ethnic groups as well other eth-

nic/racial groups in the United States. Otherwise one might turn 40 years old without a spouse. She articulated the following:

> One, relationship. My parent's culture, I guess how they grew up, was easier. I believe that it was easier. Everyone is [a] Nigerian [and] most of the people are Igbo. If you say you want to marry an Igbo person, you just go out and pick someone, finish. Whereas here [United States], it's a little bit different. Whereas yes, there are Igbo people, there are Yoruba people. But at the same time, there ... [are] other races and you have to compete and it's hard. At the same time, you have to make adjustments to where you are at because if you're waiting until you're 40 looking for Igbo man or girl you might never get married. Sooner or later you have to be like "Do I want to get married to this person because I love him or do I want to get married to this person because he's Igbo?"[37]

Rejected by Two Cultures

The participants struggle with two cultures, which has resulted in them forming their own culture—a third culture. One of the participants was depressed because of the challenge of not being either Igbo enough or American enough. To be connected to both worlds involves dialectics, and as a result they feel rejected by both, according to Ngozi:

> I [belong to] several Nigerian groups and I do a lot of outreach for Nigeria, but being connected to Nigeria physically, I'm not. That has a lot to do with, I don't want to say desire, but I feel like I'm too removed from Nigeria to have much of an impact in Nigeria. I will support them when ... need[ed], but I don't want to directly involve myself in any activities in Nigeria. I'd much rather focus on Nigerians in America.[38]

Ijeoma articulated the following:

> I feel more connected to the Igbo community in the United States because they went through the same struggles we have. Most of the stuff I grew up with, they dealt with. They might have gone through a different path, but we still have the same ... the same event happened to us so we can understand each other. It's a little bit harder to identify with people back home because one, sometimes they believe that, "Oh, we're not full Nigerians." Oh, because I was ... because I came when I was two, they call me American, which I get offended [from].... That's one of my pet peeves and they don't realize how hard it is for us.

> They think that ... well people that I've dealt with ... think that our lives are easy but... [they're] not. It's actually ... I would say I'm living in two worlds.[39]

When she was asked about the two worlds she is living in, as far as which one she finds more comfortable:

> For me, I know when I was little, I was depressed because I felt that two worlds do not accept me, that I was stuck in the middle and I was being denied by both sides. I guess ... but I try hard to approach the Nigerian side, because at the end of the day that's where I'm from and even if they accept me or not, they can't deny me because I'm a citizen of that country. I guess I made my own third world ... I made my own world in the middle so the people that can ... I only bring those ... the people that can accept me into my circle and the ones that can't accept me, they can just move on.[40]

The Importance of the Igbo Language

Responses to the third research question reveal that language is the most important component of culture for the participants and they encourage the teaching of Igbo language. The two major themes are the importance of the Igbo language as well as the necessity for teaching Igbo to SGI in the United States.

The major concern with Igbo culture for the participants was the language. The participants desire and wish they could speak Igbo language. Even though they do not speak the language fluently, they believe that knowing other aspects of Igbo culture also make them Igbo. Ngozi said the following:

> I don't speak fluently. I only know certain words and phrases. I understand Igbo, but only in a conversational way; so if a person says a phrase, it's harder for me to understand what that phrase … [is]. But if someone is having a conversation with me, it's easier for me to understand and pick up what they are saying.[41]

When she was asked if she considers the Igbo language an important aspect of her ethnic identity, she replied, "It's important, but it's not necessary. It's important for the language to continue, but I think you can still have a connection with Nigeria without the language." When she was asked what aspects or characteristics of Igbo culture she thinks or feels are most important to maintain, she offered this:

> I don't know. I think respect of elders is very important as well as the whole nuclear family. A child is [the] responsibility of all, not just the parents, so the entire community is in charge of making sure that the child is brought up correctly. I think that's extremely important and … [with] that first community you can tell that morale in the community … too. That's something that not only needs to continue, but it needs to become stronger.[42]

When she was asked about the role the Igbo language plays in her life, she offered the following:

> The only real role it plays in my life is that it allows me to understand communication that occurs between my parents and their friends. Because a lot of conversations that they have, they don't really include me or people my age. They just talk amongst themselves, but they say things that are very important. Because I can pick it up and I can sometimes even join [in] the conversation. But if I didn't know Igbo, at all, then I would have completely been oblivious to it. It's good that I can understand. I've been able to learn a lot from them, just based off the side conversations that they have.[43]

Ngozi continued to say that her parents inconsistently spoke Igbo to her and her siblings while she was growing up. This is why she is "able to pick it up conversationally. There are maybe key words here and there that I can understand. Occasionally my parents include English while speaking Igbo." She said that sometimes she can formulate what her parents are talking about by having picked up language style over time.

For Ijeoma, it is basically the same: "I do not speak Igbo language. I understand little, but I speak a broken language but I do not speak it."

> First okay, my parents typically ... in our case since we ... [were] having trouble understanding, keep in touch with English. They start[ed] speaking it in our home because they wanted us to learn English so that we ... [could] be better in school. Before they knew it, we forgot the language completely but I do understand when they give commands. "Give me water!" "Turn off the lights!" "Bring something!" "Go": ... the command stuff but not the full conversations. I can pick [up on] little stuff here and there, but when it comes to full[-]blown conversation, I can't do it.[44]

When Ijeoma was asked whether she considers the Igbo language an important aspect of her ethnic identity, she offered the following:

> I believe it's important but it's not everything. I believe because ... I don't speak it but I still consider I have identity: ... [an] Igbo identity. One of my regrets is not speaking the language. I know it's harder for me especially since I'm older so I believe since I wasn't able to grow up learning my language, one of my goals in life is to have my children learn the language.[45]

THE NECESSITY OF TEACHING SGI THE IGBO LANGUAGE

The findings suggest that the Igbo language should be taught to SGI when they are children. Ijeoma suggested that she would send her own children back home for this purpose. She was asked if she were to advise parents here from Igboland who just had a baby, "When it comes to language, what would you tell them?" She responded, "I would tell them. 'Don't stop speaking your language. It's hard but if you can give anything to your kids, at least give them their language.'" When she was asked if they were struggling with English and Igbo languages, she said the following:

> They would be . . . for example, my cousin [who is four years old], she . . . if you talk to her, you think she's speaking something that we said ... she's speaking Chinese or what not because you can't really identify her with English or Igbo or something else. She was mixing everything together so in the beginning . . . my sister [and I] were saying, "Well, you just . . . [speak] more English to her because soon she will be going to school." Then the parents refused and I actually . . . I'm glad that they did because after a while she started . . . now she can . . . [speak] English, she can speak Igbo and she . . . learned . . . she has two languages.[46]

> Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's a struggle in the beginning. Yes, it's a struggling in the beginning because they're hearing two sides of two different parts; but sooner or later, they will put these parts together and they will understand it. I believe that she will have greater ... she will practice ... she will keep that in part but she knows the language. No matter what, she needs to know where she's from.

> When it comes to [the] Igbo language, typically it's my parents that speak it for ... my parents' friends. Some of my friends speak it. Sometimes it is negative and sometimes it is positive. Me personally, I like the Igbo language. I really like [the] Igbo language. I think it sounds very nice but at the same time, it does make me feel like the outsider when everybody else is speaking a language that I don't know and they can push you away by that as well.[47]

Social Media as a Vehicle for Cultural Expression

Responses to the fourth research question reveal that social media serve as a tool to discuss and partake of Igbo culture. It helps Ijeoma connect to people around the United States and Nigeria. A major emergent theme is the "social media as a vehicle for cultural expression."

The participants answered a question regarding the role that social media may play in their ethnic and transnational identity formation. Additional questions were posed to ascertain if they are active participants.

The participants indicated that social media is an avenue that can be used to promote Igbo culture and language among SGIs in United States. Ngozi asserted:

> Yes, yeah. Yeah, because even though I don't discuss social media or discuss Igbo topic[s] in social media, I do proclaim my nationality through social media. I'll change my Facebook page to the eagle or the Nigerian flag; or if there's an issue in Nigeria, then I'll put "I support you." It's surprising how a lot of my high school friends didn't even know I was Nigerian; so once I started a post or changing my pictures and all that stuff, that's when they realized that I'm Nigerian and [said], "Oh, we didn't know."[48]

She said that social media helped identify her as a Nigerian. She added that all her "immediate friends are all Nigerian, so … [they] help each other [through utilization of social media]."

> I know how to cook Igbo dishes and my friends don't, so every once in a while, if I'm cooking something, then I'll invite them over and then teach them. I have another friend [who] can sew traditional clothes, so she's supposed to be teaching me how to sew traditional clothes. So we all have our own thing that we have specific for Igbo culture that we try to share amongst ourselves (Ngozi).[49]

For Ijeoma, social media helps sustain Igbo culture: "I'm in an organization, NIDO, where we use group talk. I do not know if that won't be a social...." She said," Most of the people in my Facebook are Africans. I typically don't accept you unless I know you or you're African. Yeah, so it informs me..." When she was asked whether she uses social media to discuss Igbo culture or history, she said that she does not discuss Igbo culture on Facebook. Rather, it's "more [of] keeping in touch with my friends. I'm not usually on it anyway. I just see how they're doing and things like that so if there [are] events coming up, that's where I go." "Therefore I figure out what's happening and stuff like that. Basically where I learn about my culture and events is the group that I am in." Ijeoma offered this:

> I was in ACF. I help bring people into that group: African Christian Fellowship. I'm in NIDO right now. I'm thinking of becoming the treasurer so you speak of how to have other people embrace us. I'm also … I also have [an] African group that we perform different places. I try to help my … well, I've helped my family back home, I've donated to my mom, [who] is also in the organization. I've donated to motherless children. Stuff like that.[50]

When Ijeoma was asked about using social media to connect with home, she said that she donates and sends money home to Nigeria. She mentioned that Facebook connects fellow Nigerians in Nigeria and in the diaspora, and that this mechanism is cost-effective.

> Yeah, I think social media, it helps with Igbo identity. Especially being in the U.S., the only people that you see [are] people that … [are] here. Whereas if you go into social media you can talk to people back in Nigeria without using a phone call. You can talk to people from different countries and you don't have to worry about your phone bill and things like that. Instead of buying a card and calling such and such hoping they will be awake at that moment, I just go on Facebook, send them a message and wait for their reply. It helps to keep connected to people that are not in my immediate circle or immediate area.[51]

Participants felt that social media can be used for connecting with friends as well as contributing to, promoting, and partaking in Igbo affairs.

Love for Igbo Music and Nollywood Films

Answers to the fifth research question disclose that participants enjoy Nollywood movies, as well as Igbo, Nigerian, and African music. The main emergent theme was, "love for Igbo music and Nollywood films." Findings indicate that the participants love Igbo, Nigerian, and other African (and American) music. Ngozi indicates the following: "… Igbo music, I like. I think that they've gotten better throughout the years to the point where I think they can compete with mainstream media." She added this: "I don't think I've listened to music that is in [the] Igbo language. I just listen to Igbo rappers or Igbo hip-hop artists." Furthermore, Ngozi stated:

> And they're good, so I can only speak on that instance. As far as, what's his name, P Square and a few people. But from my experience, those mainstream tend to be in American music and a lot of my American friends listen to those people, too, especially, had they been able to mix in with American rappers, has helped them come into American music. As far as Nollywood, Nollywood is getting better. I still think it has a little

> ways to go before it becomes mainstream, at least, in America. But they've come a long way, so I'll give them their credit.

When she was asked how often she watches Nollywood movies, Ngozi said the following: "Maybe once every two months, but that's usually not my choice. My sister watches them every day, so if I have nothing better to do with my time, then I'll sit and watch it, but ..." She said that she only watches the Igbo-language movies when they are subtitled. She said, "Yeah, only then and if I have a choice, I would not, because it would be too hard to follow what's happening in the movie than reading it and enjoying it." When she was asked if she knew how to sing any Igbo songs, she replied, "If I studied it, yeah, but there's no song that I know in Igbo that I've memorized to sing."

Ijeoma had similar ideas, and asserted the following:

> I like Nollywood movies and music. I think I would ... I'm really into the movies because I guess that's my only way of seeing how it is back home. Even though it might be the glamorous version of back home or unrealistic. I watch it because it makes me feel like, "Okay I might know . . . it might give me something that I might not learn from my parents or people around me." It just keeps me connected, I guess.

When she was asked if and/or how Nollywood influences her identity, she offered the following:

> I guess I'm a dancer and so I love to be in touch with the dance styles. I do African dance so that also helps me connect to my roots and stuff like that. Nollywood movies, media stuff like that . . . no, let me see . . . I guess that it helps me when it comes to bringing people like American people into my environment. What they might see on TV, for example, the nature film, they think that Africa is just filled with animals and we don't have any kind of . . . I guess good society and stuff like that. Whereas the Nollywood movies can also portray positive, like, "Look. We are number three in the movie industry. We're big. We're not just a Third World country. Look what we have. We have buildings, we have people that can . . . that is influential. We have like . . . we have things that [America] might not even have."
>
> Don't just think that because we're from Africa, we have nothing. We do have something and even the music. I can say, "Look. All this rap music that you listen to, this is where you get it from." We're also doing art class, too. Like, for example, we also assign Peace Corps; when I tell that to American people they are like, "Okay, we should try that, too. Maybe Ni-

> geria is just not a Third World country that has 419 ['advance fee fraud scam and suggests one way of reducing its impact on the internet'[52]] and stuff like that. They're actually doing something."

When Ijeoma was asked how often she watches Nollywood movies, she said that she "used to watch [them] every day; but because of work ... [she had] to cut it down." She said that now she probably watches them "a couple times a month or so." When she was asked if she has ever watched an Igbo-language film, she replied, "I haven't watched Igbo ... full-out Igbo. I've watched movies that they might have certain parts [in] Igbo; stuff like that. Or they might speak it and they have the subtitles underneath it but I've never watched a movie just [in] Igbo." She said that she listens to every kind of music. As she put it, "I don't discriminate what music I listen to. I listen to African music." She concluded by saying the following:

> They could be . . . I have some music that's just full-out Igbo, I have some music that is full-out Yoruba, from Ghana, all that stuff. Even though I don't really understand what they are saying, you could still get a little bit of the gist of it. I like the beat, I like . . . and sometimes they put English in it so just because I don't understand what they're saying does not mean that I would not listen to it. I even listen to Ghana's music that speaks their language. As long as I like it, I listen to it.

PARTICIPANTS' SUGGESTIONS

The interviewees were given the opportunity to add to or supplement the discussion of Igbo identity. The participants predominantly expressed their concern about the Igbo language and they offered input regarding how to teach the language to children born to Igbo parents in United States. The recurring recommendation offered revolved around "early involvement in language and culture."

Early Involvement in Language and Culture

When Ngozi was asked if she had anything to add, she replied:

> I'd say Igbo culture is important, but you have to understand why we do what we do. Everything that we do originated from something or originated for a purpose and I totally understand my purpose. It's going to die out with the next generation, so it's one thing for the parents to say, "Do this because I say so," but it's wholly another thing for the parents to say, "Do this, because this is why and this is why our people do what we do." Even if the purpose is no longer relevant, the fact that they understand

why they do what they do, it makes it that much stronger, so history [matters].

When Ijeoma was asked whether she had anything to add, she stated:

> Our part … okay, what is our viewpoint when it comes to our Nigerian culture? Do we personally believe that it's going to hold strong? I guess not that person individually but their friends. How … what have you noticed when it comes to your circle of friends? When you're coming to identifying yourself … for me I have Nigerian friends so … I guess other people might not but how have they influenced you compared to your African culture? I guess, what is your viewpoint about maintaining your culture in this western world? What would be changed? If we could replace our parents, what would we change different from what they are? That might … or what would we have changed?

When Ijeoma was asked what she would like to change, she said that she would pay more attention to the Igbo language, unlike her parents, who neglected it. She added:

> I would change what they focus on when [I was]… younger. I believe when I was younger my parents' main focus was school, especially when it … [came] to the female side and … get the grades, forget it. While you're focusing on that aspect, they do not pay attention on other areas.
>
> She gave an example of her brothers, her sister, and herself, saying, "Whenever we went out it had to be with Nigerian people or if not we … [had] to be calling them every hour. Whereas my brothers, they … [could] just go out, come back whenever they want[ed] to. … It … [was] just 'boys being boys."
>
> Now that we are in marriage age and then they come to them saying, "Well, you have to marry Nigerian." They're fighting it because one, they didn't care who they're hanging out with, who they are associating themselves with when they were younger and now you want them to change just make a 360 [degree turn] or whatever. Yeah, a flip just like that. I told my parents that, "Now that they are marriage age that's when you want to speak up and tell them about their culture. When they were younger, you could have stopped this nonsense beforehand." Which my brothers, I think, they are aware because … well at least they are marrying. My younger brother is dating Benin Nigerian and my other brother is dating someone from Africa.
>
> I've seen other … [families] where their main focus was school and then one day they bring "Oyibo" [in this context, it stands for primarily white]

> women and they say this is the person I want to marry and they starting shouting and screaming and casting and praying.

When Ijeoma was asked about the influence of her parents regarding Igbo culture in her life, she articulated the following:

> I would say, "How did your friends, your immediate circle, influence your culture?" Sometimes I think … what helped my family was because we were brought up in a Nigerian community and our friends, most of our friends were Nigerian. When we had struggles in school and were dealing with the culture and the two different worlds, they were my…. I said my third country. They were my country that supported me so that I … [could] still be able to be accepted in the American side but I … [could] still … [keep] my identity strong. Whereas some people … don't have other Nigerians or African friends and stuff. They have American friends and of course that will push them to the American side and no matter … how much your family tells you [to] do this, do that, do that. Your friends influence you more than your parents do, unfortunately.

The participants basically suggested that parents should endeavor to teach their children Igbo, because if they do not pass it down to their children it will become extinct.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this pilot study was to examine how the second-generation Igbo (SGI) young adults who are residing in the United States, in this case the State of Ohio, perceive their ancestral and transnational identities. The findings indicate that SGI young adults have some desire to learn the Igbo language and culture despite some challenges including geographical distance and lukewarm parental attitudes toward the language. The first theme that emerged from the study is based on the desire for Igboness. The participants lamented that even though their parents tried to instill the culture in them, they ignored the importance of the Igbo language. They said that they made Igbo and other African friends that helped them validate their Igboness and Africanness.

The results contradict Ibezim's assertion that children born to Igbo parents in the United States are not interested in learning Igbo.[53] The participants vehemently hold their parents responsible for their lack of fluency in Igbo. They suggested that parents should teach their children Igbo at an early age. "Research has shown that heritage language maintenance is associated with positive outcomes for immigrant children across different communities."[54] The findings also indicated that if they (participants) could alter one aspect of their upbringing, it would involve learning the

Igbo language. They intend to speak the Igbo language to their children, even though they are not fluent at present. This is similar with Katrina Jurva and Peruvemba Jaya's work, in which they found that second-generation Finnish Canadians who do not speak Finnish regretted and felt embarrassed about not speaking the language.[55]

The participants expressed some of the challenges specifically about their African ancestry. This is consistent with Janet Awokoya's study on 1.5 and second-generation Nigerians in the United States.[56] She found that

> Participants felt that their non-African peers often associated Africanness with backwardness, primitiveness, and ugliness. They described being persistently stereotyped and derisively teased about their African background, and they mentioned that they commonly heard the word *African* slung as an epithet. They discussed being taunted with derogatory names like 'African booty scratcher' and being asked hurtful questions such as, 'Do you live in trees?' or "Do you wear clothes in Africa?"[57]

The findings demonstrate that they have a close relationship with their parents. They indicated that even though their parents are not dictatorial, they still are strict. The findings revealed that the generation gap exists between the SGI young adult participants and their parents. They claimed that Igbo marriage is about maintaining a close relationship with families. They expressed that even though their ideal spouses might be Igbo, they should be able to marry outside of their ethnicity, waiting until the age of 40 to marry an Igbo man or woman might unwisely result in never getting married.

The participants indicated that they communicate with other Igbo in the United States and in Nigeria. They noted that even though they are removed from their homeland/Nigeria, they participate in Igbo organizations in the United States. This is supported by Rachel Reynolds' study of the Igbo hometown association in Chicago. She found that the majority of SGI "have strong connections with Nigeria and Igboland; all those whom … [she] know[s] have dated or even married Igbo speakers or other Nigerians who were brought up abroad."[58] In other words, the participants use Igbo associations and co-ethnics groups for Igbo cultural reproduction and socialization. There are, of course, challenges in living as part of two cultures in the United States. One of the participants reported that she felt depressed growing up in America because of cultural dialectic tensions. This is consistent with Awokoya's study, whose "findings suggest that African immigrant youth experience a complex and contradictory process in constructing and negotiating their racial and ethnic identities."[59] Likewise, Zhou's study showed that "in the United States, immigrant children

often become Americanized so quickly that their parents cannot keep up with them."[60] This divergence creates challenges to both generations.

When it comes to the transnational media, the findings indicated that they use this avenue to help them sustain their identity, enjoying Igbo, Nigerian, and other African music. This is consistent with David Oh, who found that second-generation Korean youth in the USA use their transnational Korean media in forming hybrid identities. The participants felt an affinity to their primordial homeland through transnational media.[61] They also enjoy Nollywood movies. They prefer the films that show Igbo traditional culture as opposed to those that copy the West. Social media serve as an avenue for the SGI to promote, sustain, and enjoy their culture. This finding is in line with Natalia Rybas, who indicates that "[t]echnologies carry meaning by providing a leverage for identity presentation and interpretation; thus, digital spaces like Facebook contribute to negotiating issues critical for life in society: power, authority, knowledge, and representation."[62] Social media, as the study suggested, provide the platform for ethnic constructions and negotiations as well as a channel for cultural expression for the participants.

Even though the results of this pilot study offer useful directions for scholars and parents, the findings are limited by the qualitative nature of the pilot. The results cannot be generalized to SGI young adults at large. Future research would benefit from including both genders and involving a greater number of participants in order to yield a better understanding of how SGI young adults articulate their identities and the cultural communication that takes place between them and their parents.[63]

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