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No necessary tradeoff: Context, life course, and social networks in the identity formation of second-generation Nigerians in the USA

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Abstract
Based on 25 semi-structured interviews, this article examines the racial, ethnic and national identities of second-generation Nigerian immigrants from the San Francisco Bay Area. I elaborate on the segmented-assimilation literature that considers economic circumstances to be a key determinant in identity formation. I show that participants form highly fluid identities throughout the life cycle, pinpointing factors that often get overlooked or de-emphasized in the second-generation incorporation literature such as youth co-ethnic community access, the college integrative experience and transnational social connections, particularly in adulthood. This article extends the black immigration literature that contends that ethnic identity is primarily used as a means of distancing from 'downwardly mobile' African-Americans. My findings highlight that respondents embrace a black racial identity that is neither oppositional nor associated with a downward trajectory, lending empirical support for the 'minority cultures of mobility' thesis that the minority middle classes share a culture of upward mobility.

Keywords
African immigrants, assimilation, black immigrants, identity, Nigerian-Americans, second-generation, transnationalism

Introduction

> Nigerian/African/African-American, just throw everything in there I guess … I think it's changed. When I was little I had never been to Nigeria so I never saw it as

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> important in terms of identifying myself with it. But the older I got, it became more and more important to me. (Shola, male, 26, lawyer)

> I have never identified myself as just a Nigerian. I'm Nigerian, but you know, I think of a Nigerian as someone that is born in Nigeria, raised in Nigeria, knows the Nigerian ways … I'm Nigerian, but I don't know what it's like to live there, I wasn't raised there. I was born there, but I can't remember living there. So I can't say I'm Nigerian … I'm American because I'm Americanized. Because I've lived here, it's all I know. I don't know how it's like to live there. (Deola, female, 18, college student, migrated to the USA at the age of two years old)

> My socialization is African-American. I've really been into hip hop since I was in high school and its part of my culture. (Idris, male, 19, college student)

These are some of the responses I received when I asked second-generation Nigerians about their identities. Although these people grew up for the most part in the San Francisco Bay Area, are mostly middle class, and share a Nigerian background, their responses to questions about their identity formation varied. This belies the segmented-assimilation literature that would expect a common set of responses, based primarily on their shared class status. Through a case study of second-generation Nigerian immigrants from the Bay Area, this article questions two contentions in the second-generation immigrant incorporation literature. First is the argument within the black immigration literature that presumes that upwardly mobile black immigrants forgo a black racial identity in order to highlight their ethnic identity, using it as a protective force against a black underclass. Concomitantly, the segmented assimilation framework presumes that when black second-generation immigrants do adopt a black identity it remains linked to downward mobility. In contrast, my respondents actively negotiated between a black racial identity, an ethnic Nigerian identity and an American national identity. They embraced a black racial identity that is neither oppositional nor associated with a downward trajectory, supporting the 'minority cultures of mobility' thesis that the minority middle classes share a culture of upward mobility (Neckerman et al., 1999). Second, the second-generation incorporation literature assumes that assimilation and transnationalism work as separate trajectories, but my interviewees' identities spanned both processes, particularly during adulthood.

Identities are an important indicator of the incorporation processes of immigrants and their children (Feliciano, 2009; Gordon, 1964; Jimenez, 2004; Waters, 1994). Segmented assimilation, the dominant theory which helps to explain second-generation immigrant identity formation, associates identity choices with specific mobility prospects. I argue that class-based explanations for the variation in racial and ethnic identities within the second-generation are not sufficient. My findings highlight that identities vary even among those who are economically successful, highlighting how incorporation of the second-generation is a much more contextual process. Second-generation Nigerians' identities change over time so that they

need not trade off among their racial, ethnic and national identities. I focus on identity shifts across the life course at three key moments: youth, college and post-college adulthood, examining factors that are often overlooked or de-emphasized in discussions of second-generation immigrant identity, such as youth co-ethnic community access, the college integrative experience and increased transnational social connections in adulthood.

Assimilation, transnationalism, and second-generation identity

The segmented assimilation paradigm describes three patterns of adaptation, which are associated with specific identity choices (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1994). Consonant acculturation occurs when both immigrant parents and their children integrate into the middle class of the host society, attaining upward mobility and securing greater access to resources. The second-generation gradually abandon their home language and culture, identifying as American, with little reference to ethnic or racial distinctions. They are well incorporated economically, structurally and culturally (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut and Portes, 2001). Selective incorporation occurs when immigrants resist both a mainstream American and a racialized American identity and instead emphasize their ethnic origins, which provide economic opportunities and upward mobility within ethnic-based communities. Second-generation individuals identify strongly with their parents' national origins and maintain ethnic identities, partially retaining their parents' language and norms and sustaining bicultural lives (Gibson, 1998; Zhou and Bankston, 1998). In the third scenario, the second-generation are less socially and economically mobile than their immigrant parents. The 'downwardly mobile' individuals identify with American racial minorities and may adopt an 'oppositional' identity; that is, accept characteristics opposed by the national majority. They possess limited educational and economic skills, learn English at a faster pace than their parents, and integrate into an inner-city urban 'underclass' (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Gans, 1992; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

By accounting for factors such as language ability, human capital, social capital and educational trajectories, segmented-assimilation offers a persuasive model for understanding differences in second-generation immigrant incorporation. However by associating identity formation with particular rates of acculturation and mobility prospects, the model does not offer a fully nuanced treatment of the variation in identity among people of the same ethnic group who share similar class backgrounds. Recent critiques of the segmented-assimilation model (Alba and Nee, 2003; Kasinitz et al., 2008; Waldinger and Feliciano, 2004) similarly argue for a more contextualized understanding of assimilation. For example, Kasinitz et al. (2008) argue against the 'second-generation decline' thesis that contends that poor minority immigrants will automatically downwardly assimilate into an urban underclass alongside US-based minorities. Instead they make a case for 'second-generation advantage' in which adult children of immigrants do better than their immigrant parents and native minorities, gaining access to the mainstream

economy and identifying with a hybrid second-generation identity not focused on 'Americanizing' into the mainstream (Kasinitz et al., 2008). This finding is contra the segmented-assimilation theory that would assume that the second-generation use an ethnic enclave economy to gain resources and upward mobility. Similarly, my research decouples the presumed connection between identity and mobility, yet unlike Kasinitz et al. (2008), who focus primarily on poorer immigrant minorities whose parents migrate with relatively low socioeconomic status, I focus on second-generation immigrants whose parents have high levels of human capital and economic resources, complicating segmented-assimilation in two ways.

First, the segmented-assimilation paradigm omits upwardly mobile minorities as a viable pathway of assimilation among the second-generation. Neckerman et al.'s (1999) 'minority cultures of mobility' thesis proposes that immigrants may incorporate and identify with a middle-class minority group while maintaining upward mobility. A focus on middle-class immigrants highlights the unique set of circumstances they must navigate as a result of their racial/ethnic minority and middle-class status (Vallejo and Lee, 2009).The assimilation process of black immigrants is of interest because the question of how black immigrants integrate has been viewed as a marker of the potency of racism, as black immigrants' upward mobility has been viewed as a sign that factors other than racism hinder the progress of African-Americans (Foner, 2001; Kasinitz, 1992). Drawing from segmented-assimilation theory, the dominant assumption is that black immigrants attain their upward mobility by divorcing themselves from a larger black racial identity and emphasizing their ethnicity. This perspective effectively equates downward mobility with embracing a black identity. Yet, I provide empirical support for Neckerman et al.'s (1999) alternative model by showing how black immigrants can secure upward mobility while identifying with a black racial identity. I demonstrate that integration into a racial minority culture is not necessarily downwardly mobile or oppositional. As Kasinitz et al. note, 'the real cultural 'action' may not be in the interplay of immigrant cultures with a homogenous and dominant American culture, but in the interaction between first- and second-generation and native minorities (2004: 16). My research shows that identifying and associating with middle class African-Americans is part of the range of options in second-generation Nigerians' identity construction.

Moreover, the different paths observed in the segmented-assimilation paradigm dichotomize assimilation and transnationalism. For instance, in Waters's (1999a) work on West Indian second-generation youth identities, she shows that the Black-American identified group focuses on assimilating into and identifying with the culture of their black American peers while the ethnically identified align themselves with co-ethnics as a means of differentiating themselves from black Americans. As such, both racial and ethnic identities are formed through the process of assimilation.

In contrast, Waters pinpoints another group, the immigrant-identified, who describe themselves in a way that does not take into account American-defined racial and ethnic categories. Instead, their identities are sustained through transnational ties, in which a combination of strong family roots on the Islands,

frequent visits and plans to return there to live when they are older, allows them to think of themselves as not truly American. Waters contends, 'Indeed if there is any evidence in this study of a transnational identity it is among this group', stressing that they resist American ways of thinking (1999). However, this indication of a transnational identity assumes that such an identity encompasses a resistance to 'American ways of thinking,' or assimilation, and assumes complete orientation towards their countries of origin. While Waters acknowledges that the immigrant-identified group is unstable and unlikely to last, her model still divides the experiences of the ethnic and racially identified who embrace an American-based identity through the process of assimilation from the immigrant-identified who are labeled transnational, and outside the assimilation process. Further, she does not discuss the transnational links among those that are assimilated.

By focusing on how identity formation shifts across the life course within a group who share a middle-class background, this study contributes to the existing literature by detailing how other factors beyond mobility prospects impact identity. While past literature on black immigration have established their upward mobility, thus refuting segmented-assimilation theory's association of blacks with downward mobility (Foner, 2001; Kasinitz, 1992), the assumption has been that they attain this mobility by dissociating themselves from African-Americans. My findings highlight how second-generation black immigrants embrace a black racial identity that they associate with upward mobility, negotiating the tension between black, Nigerian and American identities. It also highlights how transnationalism and assimilation can overlap throughout identity formation. Through a focus on youth community, the college experience and the strength of transnational ties, this article extends the second-generation incorporation literature.

Sub-Saharan African immigration to the USA: A snapshot

A 2005 New York Times article noted, 'Since 1990, according to immigration figures, more (Africans) have arrived voluntarily than the total who disembarked in chains before the United States outlawed international slave trafficking in 1807' (Roberts, 2005). These rising numbers of migrants from Africa have prompted a small, but growing research agenda focused on how African migration to the West contributes to the 'new African Diaspora' (Gordon, 1998; Konadu-Agyemang et al., 2006; Koser, 2003; Okpewho and Nzegwu, 2009), with many noting their invisibility in academic scholarship and the American racial landscape (Bryce-Laporte, 1972; Kamya, 1997; Obiakor and Grant, 2002). African immigrants to the USA comprise a heterogeneous group with a mixture of economic migrants, refugees and those seeking to reunite with their families (Arthur, 2000; Gordon, 1998; Konadu-Agyemang and Takyi, 2006).

The African immigrant population has grown over 40-fold between 1960 and 2007, with much of the growth occurring since 1990 (Konadu-Agyemang and Takyi, 2006; Terrazas, 2009; USA Census Bureau, 2002) This increased migration can be explained through the confluence of economic and political instability of the

region, a desire for increased educational opportunities and changing immigration policies of the USA, especially the 1990 Diversity Visa Program (Arthur, 2000; Okome, 2006; Takyi, 2002). Despite their rising numbers, African immigrants and their children in particular have received scant attention from the literature on immigrant incorporation. Studies focused on African migration have examined their cultural adaptation and social integration, showing that they tend to have strong social networks with other African immigrants, struggle with race relations in the USA, often want to repatriate to their homelands, have strong religious beliefs, and place high value on educational attainment (Arthur, 2000). Other studies examine their labor market outcomes (Amissa, 1996; Dodoo, 1997; Kposowa, 2002), and other general socio-demographic information (Apraku, 1991; Djamba, 1999; Kposowa, 2002; Takougang, 1995; Takyi, 2002) within the context of the USA. African immigrants are widely dispersed throughout the USA, but the highest numbers exist in New York, California and Texas.

Nigerian immigrants in the USA

Nigerians represent the largest group of immigrants from Africa. According to the 2005–09 United States Census American Community Survey there are 191,203 foreign-born Nigerians in the USA, with an additional 42,216 who were born in the USA and claim Nigerian ancestry, a large bulk of which would constitute the second-generation (USA Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2010a; USA Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2010b). Scholars and community organizers, however, estimate the numbers to be as high as double the official counts (Halter, 2007). About 40 percent of Nigerians are concentrated in the following metropolitan areas: New York City/New Jersey, Washington DC, Atlanta, Dallas/Houston, and Chicago (Takyi, 2009). However, the majority of Nigerian immigrants and their children live outside of these emerging 'ethnic enclaves' residing in communities without a large and well-established co-ethnic community.

I chose the San Francisco Bay Area as the site of my research because it has a large enough pool of Nigerian immigrants to draw from (about 3 percent of foreign-born Nigerians live here), but remains outside of these developing ethnic communities. There are approximately 5000 Nigerian immigrants residing in the Bay Area, with an additional 1800 claiming Nigerian ancestry (i.e. the second generation). They are the second-largest African immigrant group in the Bay Area after Ethiopians who number about 10,000 (first and second generation) (USA Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2010a; USA Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2010b). I drew my sample from four counties in the San Francisco Bay Area: Alameda County where about 40 percent of Nigerians in the Bay Area live, and Contra Costa, Santa Clara and San Francisco counties, which have comparatively lower levels of Nigerians. This residential pattern allowed me to examine how different levels of co-ethnic contact impacted identity formation. My personal contacts also greatly facilitated my access to second-generation Nigerians in the area.

Nigerian immigrants and their children pose an intriguing case. Nigerian immigrants in particular generally have high levels of human and economic capital, and are the most educated immigrant group in the USA (Okome, 2002; Takyi, 2009).[1] Their economic and human capital both provide the resources for maintaining ties to the homeland while also facilitating economic incorporation into the USA. The second-generation Nigerian immigrants whom I interviewed emerge from a cohort of Nigerian immigrants who came to the USA during the late 1960s to early 1980s in pursuit of an education (in most cases advanced degrees).

Research design and sample

I interviewed a total of 25 second-generation Nigerian immigrants in 2005–2006. The participants have at least one parent who is from Nigeria and were either born in the USA or came to the USA before the age of 12. All of the participants were raised in and/or were residents of the San Francisco Bay Area at the time of the research. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 39 (see the appendix for demographic information). I chose to focus on adults because they are better able to articulate their sense of identity, belonging and broader life experiences than children. Further, adults have the ability to reflect upon the crystallization of identity that often begins and develops during the adolescent years. I conducted semi-structured interviews that focused on three areas: social networks, family and community; self-perceptions of identity and transnationality.[2] Interviews were open-ended, lasting between 45 minutes and two hours, and averaged approximately an hour in length. They were recorded with the permission of the participants, transcribed, and then analyzed and coded to ascertain relevant themes and patterns.

Interviews are useful because they capture a nuanced account of *the ways in which* participants adopt and contest identities. Interviews best allowed me to analyze the underlying processes, meanings and implications of identity construction that is missed out in most survey research. Also, participants were able to convey how their identities changed over time and outline the trajectory of their identity formation starting from their experiences as youths, which cannot be fully obtained through ethnographic observations. Although my claims are not empirically generalizeable to the Nigerian second-generation at large, this article does provide theoretical insight into a slice of this population, extending the debate on second-generation incorporation. My interview data situates a specific case within a particular context, and follows choices of similar studies on second-generation identity formation that employ semi-structured interviews (Kibria, 2002; Vickerman, 2002; Waters, 1994).

I used a 'snowball sampling' method to identify and recruit participants. Snowball sampling is an effective way to access respondents who are members of a specific group or meet particular criteria (Weiss, 1994). While there is a risk of sample-selection bias, I relied on a multiple entry snowball strategy to minimize such bias.[3] The range of experiences and responses generated leads me to believe that the sample was sufficiently diverse for the purposes of this study (Small, 2009). I initially began with personal contacts but expanded and altered my sampling

frame in an attempt to locate a diverse group in terms of age, gender and educational/professional status. I also used published directories, such as student directories, general online directories and phonebooks, to identify 'Nigerian-sounding' last names and then contacted them to discuss my project, asking if they fit the specified criteria and were interested in participating.

Lastly, I obtained contacts through organizations.[4] There are a number of Bay Area Nigerian associations, which serve a variety of orientations. For instance, there are ethnic-based groups such as the Oduduwa Heritage Organization of Oakland/SF Bay Area, a Yoruba cultural group founded in 1996 that is a member of the umbrella Egbe Omo Yoruba National Association of Yoruba descendants in North America. There are Nigerian Student Associations at San Jose State University, Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley. The Nigerians in the Diaspora Organization of the Americas has a branch in San Francisco. The organization, which caters to Nigerian professionals, has other chapters throughout the USA, Canada, and a few in Latin America and the Caribbean. Places of worship such as the Igbo Catholic Community in Alameda County, the Nigerian-based Pentecostal Redeemed Christian Church of God which has three parishes in Alameda Country alone, and Nasrul-lahi-il-Fathi Society of Nigeria, an Islamic Society that has other branches in Houston, Atlanta, West Africa, and Europe, are all places of worship targeted towards Nigerians in the Bay Area.

The respondents were mostly middle class and college educated, reflecting the high human capital of their Nigerian parents. Focusing on a group from a specific country and residing in the same geographic area allows me to better understand how participants navigate the same general social setting. Although my sample is limited, by focusing on participants from the same middle-class background, my study can best consider how other factors in addition to class affect identity formation. The scholarship on second-generation identity would assume that my participants would adopt fairly similar identities because they emerge from the same context and socioeconomic circumstances. More specifically, high-status immigrants are expected to adopt either American-based identities with little reference to ethnic or racial differences in line with the consonant category of the segmented-assimilation model (this is acknowledged as the less likely option due to racism) or ethnic-based identities, yet my findings show that their identities varied.

Extended identities: Context, social networks and life course in identity formation

My findings highlight that participants adopt multiple identities that are highly fluid and subject to change. Andrea, a 21-year-old college student, articulates the flexible quality of identity formation:

> I think I've gone through all these phases . . . I remember sitting there trying to pick my label. Am I Nigerian? Am I African-American? Am I black? You know trying to think of that label and I would just like okay I'm Nigerian-American, I remember

> consciously making that decision. And when it really comes down to it – I mean it matters who's looking at you. For some people I'm black, for others I'm African-American. I just know that I do have a love for Nigeria that was instilled in me growing up. But I am in America so there's no way I can just label myself one thing and try to live the lifestyle of that label.

Andrea notes that despite her efforts to deliberately choose a label, the process of selecting a precise label was largely contextual and not uniform. It remains dependent on 'who's looking at you' and negotiating between racial, ethnic and national delineations. Contrary to the dominant conceptualization within the black immigrant literature (Kasinitz, 1992; Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow, 1987; Waters, 1994; Waters, 1999a; Woldemikael, 1989), I show that there is no necessary tradeoff between a black racial identity and an ethnic Nigerian identity.[5] I found that although all my participants are middle class and upwardly mobile, they do not all identify similarly. Moreover, transnational ties permeate the assimilative process in identity formation throughout a number of social contexts, most notably during adulthood. I focus on how interviewees' identities are formed within particular contexts and in response to social networks, focusing on three key moments of the life course: adolescence, the college integrative experience and post-college adulthood.

Co-ethnic communities and connections to the homeland as youths

In this section I discuss adult recollections of their adolescent years. As respondents narrated their experiences growing up, they stressed that the key influences on their identity formation included friendship networks, familial networks (e.g. extended family, parental social networks), neighborhoods and schools (elementary school through high school) that together formed the core community that shaped participants' experiences as youths. I consider the racial and ethnic composition of their youth communities based on respondent-reported information. Most grew up in middle-class communities, or gradually moved into middle-class environments as they grew older.

Many of the interviewees revealed that exposure to a co-ethnic community from a young age played a critical role in their identity formation not only as children but also throughout their lives. I argue that both the size and the frequency of co-ethnic contact matter. When participants had access to a large co-ethnic community in their neighborhoods or through parental social networks, but had little contact with the community as a result of alternative friendship networks formed through school, they tended to refer to their levels of co-ethnic contact as marginal. On the other hand, frequent contact with a small co-ethnic community consisting primarily of extended family members or fictive kin drawn from their parent's social networks were often cited as a source of connecting them to ethnic and cultural traditions. Most respondents formed their co-ethnic communities as youths through their parents' social networks, which were primarily organized

by ethnic-Nigerian groupings. Below I detail three levels of interaction with co-ethnics and discuss how they impact identity formation: self-selected, imposed and marginal ethnic communities.

Self-selected ethnic community: Congruent identity formation

Participants who had frequent contact with a close-knit Nigerian community tended to emphasize their ethnic identity. These individuals (16 percent) were able to construct *self-selected* ethnic communities because their access to a Nigerian community closely integrated the institutional contexts of school and neighborhood life as well as their friendship networks. Such communities, which allowed for a feeling of congruence among their youth contexts, enabled them to embrace an ethnic community from a younger age and also feel less ambivalent about their identities as they grew older. That is, those with self-selected Nigerian youth communities expressed a greater degree of control over their associations with co-ethnics, as they were given the option to self-craft friendship networks that included co-ethnic members. They had a greater sense of alignment between their identities while navigating their schools, neighborhoods and interacting with their friendship networks and those of their parents. Their sense of attachment to an ethnic community remained largely consistent and spanned a variety of institutional contexts. The ability to access such a community impacted the identity options that respondents viewed as viable choices in their youth. Their ethnic identities remained closely tied to a desire to maintain their cultural ties to Nigerians and the presence of a consistent ethnic community in their lives served as a means of validating this identity.

For instance, Ebi, a 21-year-old student in her final year of college with plans to attend graduate school, recounts that much of her social network as a child encompassed members of the relatively large Nigerian community around which she grew up. As a child, Ebi regularly attended cultural immersion summer camps where attendees learned the language of their parents' Nigerian ethnic group and investigated the origins of their families. Ebi did not highlight the separation between her participation in such cultural events and her neighborhood and school life, because her experiences between these environments remained relatively constant in terms of the presence of other Nigerians. Because of this direct access Ebi stresses that she was able to carve out friendship networks that included other Nigerians. Ebi is what scholars of segmented-assimilation would term 'selectively assimilated' (Gibson, 1998; Portes et al., 2005; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut and Portes, 2001) in that the majority of her social networks encompass members of a Nigerian ethnic community in the USA; she has a middle-class background and had a bilingual upbringing. The dilemma of maintaining and cultivating 'cultural heritage' while navigating the American context is the oft-cited challenge of immigrant communities, one that Ebi also noted in our interview, expressing:

> I've met quite a few Nigerians that come here and they embrace that assimilation thing a little too much. My parents did not do it. They assimilated where they needed to

> assimilate, but they remained Nigerians. They held onto their culture. They passed it to us, and I'm going to pass it to my kids and they better pass it too.

Ebi stresses that embracing assimilation 'too much' entails losing your culture. She placed particular emphasis on language. Language is considered an important marker of assimilation (Rumbaut, 1994). This topic often came up in the conversations I had with second-generation Nigerians, specifically as a factor in how some Nigerian-Americans policed the boundaries of an 'authentic' ethnic Nigerian identity. Some described how fluent Nigerian language speakers would mark those without Nigerian language skills as not 'truly' Nigerian. Most respondents reported that their parents were fluent speakers of their native languages and spoke the language with other first-generation Nigerian immigrants, but they themselves spoke the language either minimally or not at all. American-English is the dominant language spoken by my second-generation respondents in most contexts, although a few could speak and/or understand pidgin-English, mostly because of extensive travel to Nigeria as children. Those who could speak their specific Nigerian language fluently shared that it was due to the efforts of their parents who exposed them to the language at a young age, and required that they speak the language in the home as they were growing up.

Nigerians migrate to the USA with high levels of English speaking ability because of Nigeria's status as a former British colony. About 12 percent of those born in Nigeria currently living in the USA speak English 'less than very well' compared to about 52 percent of the general foreign-born population. This pre-existing knowledge of English may eliminate their desire to communicate to their children in their native language. There is also some evidence of a generational divide when looking at US Census data. Of the total population who claim Nigerian ancestry (which would include both first-generation and second-generation immigrants), about 43 percent report that only English is spoken in the home, compared to approximately 26 percent of first-generation Nigerian immigrants (USA Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2010c). However, more research is required to explain variation in linguistic ability between different generations of African immigrants, including how fluency in diverse languages impacts language ability and whether language choices shift across a variety of social situations.

Returning to Ebi, who notes that the sense of holding onto culture within the context of the USA is critical to her identity. She continues:

> When someone says oh what are you? I say I'm Nigerian, that is the first thing that comes to my mind. I don't think to say I'm Nigerian American. Nigerian American means that I am half Nigerian. And I'm not half Nigerian, I'm 100 percent Nigerian, raised in America, that's it. So to say you are Nigerian American just means half to me. It means you don't have the language. You're just Nigerian by birth.

Ebi's ethnic identity is closely tied to her sense of culture in which being '100 percent Nigerian' means having the cultural knowledge, evident through familiarity with traditions and the ability to speak the language of her parents, to assert an 'authentic' Nigerian identity. For her, the fact that she was raised in America does not preclude her from affirming this identity. In fact, it is in part the social connections to a Nigerian ethnic community in the USA, one that Ebi has cultivated and sustained from her youth, that allows her to strongly adopt an ethnic identity.

Imposed ethnic community: Conflicted identity formation

In contrast, those with *imposed* Nigerian youth communities (52 percent) were often primarily exposed to co-ethnics through the social networks of their parents and did not have access to such communities within their school setting or immediate neighborhood. They often expressed a sense of conflict between their racial, ethnic and national identities as tied to their interaction with other Nigerians in comparison to their identities within other institutional contexts. Their sense of attachment to a Nigerian community remained separate from their own self-crafted friendship networks at school and in their own neighborhoods.

They were largely exposed to a Nigerian ethnic community through the efforts of their parents in which their associations with other Nigerians remained directly linked to the social networks of their parents or through their interaction with extended family members. They tended to emphasize a sense of separation between their neighborhood and school environments and their interactions with other Nigerians. While their friendship networks might have included other Nigerians, their contact with co-ethnics was infrequent because co-ethnic friendships were mostly formed through their parents' social networks, which were often outside of their neighborhood or school environments. They did not feel a strong presence of or strong attachment to Nigerians in their school or neighborhood settings and thus experienced a divide between their contact with Nigerians through familial social events and their experiences in their neighborhoods and schools. This feeling of navigating a divided set of youth contexts often sparked a conflicted identity.

For instance, Nneka, a 19-year-old college student recalls that she did have contact with other Nigerians while she was growing up, but they remained dispersed throughout the city she resided in:

> Nneka: There were some [Nigerians], we didn't live next door to each other, but they lived in different parts throughout [the city]. We always tried to get together, during parties we would mingle and socialize. That's how we children formed friendships and bonds with each other and we knew ourselves and we knew the culture. [Her voice rises slightly] That's really important.
> Interviewer: Why is that?
> Nneka: Just to know that there are other people like yourself . . . other Nigerians in the community, in [city] . . . you don't feel like you're different, that you are the only one that is Nigerian.

Interviewer: Did you have this at school as well?
Nneka: In high school is was [more] about being the only black person and also being Nigerian made me stand out. It made me feel different.

Nneka stresses that while her neighborhood or school did not include a large number of Nigerians, she did have opportunities to socialize with other Nigerian children. She emphasizes that these connections with other Nigerians in her youth remained important to establishing that her Nigerian heritage was not out of the ordinary. However, when questioned as to whether or not she had this same feeling of belonging at school, Nneka stresses that within another context her Nigerian identity felt out of place. Nneka explained that due in part to the advanced classes she took that included few African-Americans she did not have much interaction with other black children in her youth. As a result she often felt singled out and expressed feelings of tension about her identity. There is a striking contrast between the previously identified *self-selected* group who express a strong sense of ethnic identity as compared to the ambivalence played out in Nneka's expression of tension among a variety of identities. This goes against the conventional wisdom of the segmented-assimilation model, which would predict that Nneka's positive educational trajectory and economic mobility would have her using her ethnic identity in the same manner as the *self-selected* group who establish clear ethnic identification. In Nneka's case, identity becomes further complicated by navigating multiple institutional contexts that did not have a uniform presence of co-ethnics.

Marginal ethnic community: Mismatched identity formation

Finally, those who had little to no interaction with co-ethnics (32 percent) expressed a fundamental mismatch between their own identities and that of their Nigerian parents. These individuals either were not exposed to Nigerian co-ethnics through a variety of institutional contexts or felt that their contact with Nigerian co-ethnics was *marginal*.[6] They viewed their own friendship networks and experiences within schools and their neighborhoods as largely incompatible with a Nigerian ethnic community. They tended to emphasize their identities as separate from their parents' ethnic background, either emphasizing their national American identities or racial black identities, particularly during their youths. They tended to live in majority white or majority black environments.

For example, Ayo, a 39-year-old researcher recounts that when growing up, being Nigerian felt like a burden, as her sense of what it meant to be Nigerian remained couched in her contentious relationship with her 'overbearing Nigerian mother.' Ayo recalls being troubled by the sweeping generalizations her mother made about the 'poor values' of Americans as opposed to the 'superior morals' of Nigerians. Ayo saw herself as an American and, as such, was personally offended by these remarks. As she declared: 'I think of myself as being much more American and independent spirited, wanting to make my own decisions and chart my own course.' At the age of 14, Ayo's mother left for Nigeria for what was supposed to be a short trip but she

was forced to stay for a much more extended period. Upon the departure of her single-parent mother, Ayo moved in with the family of one of her wealthy white classmates at a prestigious high school that she was attending at the time. This experience in part cemented the formation of what she calls a 'first generation African-American' identity. Later on, when Ayo's mother expressed some discomfort with her marrying a Black-American man instead of a Nigerian one, she counters:

> Given who I was, I'm not sure I would be going to Nigeria trying to find a husband, it would have to be someone who was Nigerian American and given that I haven't lived with my mom since I was 14, it wasn't like I felt that I had this extensive Nigerian-American community of people to engage with or introduce me to other people. It wasn't like that.

Intermarriage is often cited as an important gauge of assimilation (Alba and Nee, 2003), and questions about marriage emerged as a salient issue in some of my interviews. Although only three of my respondents were married, and all were married to African-Americans, some of my respondents expressed a desire to marry co-ethnics or talked about pressure from their parents to marry a Nigerian, specifically those who shared their ethnic and religious backgrounds. This pressure was especially pronounced for female participants, who often complained that they did not have a large enough pool of ethnic-Nigerians to choose from. As Nigerians and other African immigrants continue to immigrate from Nigeria and the second-generation establish transnational links to Nigeria in adulthood, questions about marriage choices will be an important assessment of their assimilation.

In Ayo's case she directly ties her marriage prospects to her lack of access to a co-ethnic community in her youth. She also establishes that she felt much more comfortable asserting an American identity, stemming from her lack of attachment to an 'extensive Nigerian-American community' from her youth. Ayo's distancing from a Nigerian ethnic identity and further integration into an American (mostly white) social network remains consistent with the predictions of a consonant category of incorporation prospects. Yet I will show that transnational ties are also relevant in complicating our understanding of second-generation identities.

Incorporating the strength of transnational ties

Beyond their communities in the USA, the strength of transnational ties during their youth also played a role in identity formation. I primarily conceive of transnationalism through social networks and familial ties that cut across national borders. This framework is especially apt for understanding the second generation, as it accounts for other factors, beyond direct material engagement, through which they may remain embedded within transnational social fields (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004). Transnational social connections to the homeland can serve as the building blocks for other forms of material and symbolic engagement. I focus on three levels of transnational social connections: indirect, emergent and sustained.

Connections to the homeland take on a number of forms such as trips back to Nigeria, contact with relatives or friends abroad, and symbolic expressions towards the homeland. Although I did not find high levels of material connections such as the sending of remittances among respondents, I did discover that their symbolic and social connections were much stronger. In particular, travel to Nigeria as a child figured prominently in their identity formation. But I found that travel during adulthood was a stronger factor in determining the development of further connections to the homeland (I discuss transnational connections in adulthood in a later section). Respondents talked about their parents' desires to return to Nigeria, with some reporting that their parents had established businesses or bought homes in Nigeria, backing up this 'myth of return' and rooting them to a concrete place. But some of this desire to return may be dampened as more relatives migrate to the USA and other destinations and their parents confront the economic and political realities of Nigeria.

African immigrants are often termed 'sojourners' who express strong desires to return home (Arthur, 2000). In Apraku's study (1991) of 250 African émigrés, over 90 percent of the Nigerians surveyed claimed that they plan on permanently resettling in their country of origin sometime in the future. The results of Apraku's research further shows that most Nigerian immigrants travel back regularly, send remittances and have personal investment projects in their homeland. However, none of my second-generation respondents expressed a strong desire to live in Nigeria permanently, although they wanted to contribute to Nigeria through charity work and regular visits. Apraku's survey of African immigrant professionals reported feelings of being 'torn' between the USA and their country of origin. While they enjoy the political freedom and economic prosperity of the USA, they also feel a sense of alienation and discrimination. At the same time, they resent the political corruption and economic mismanagement in their countries of origin yet desire the family, friends and cultural ties left behind.

For some participants, more *indirect* social ties to Nigeria were an important factor. For example, Asabe characterized the period of high school as a time in which visits from extended family members in Nigeria were a constant part of her life. In some cases, her home was the stepping stone for relatives that had decided to move permanently to the USA. Members of her immediate and extended family often went back and forth between Nigeria and the USA. Although her family is the key institution that keeps her connected to Nigeria, these transnational connections undertaken by others within her social network, indirectly connect her to Nigeria. I argue that these indirect ties are not considered by the dominant literature, but should be. More indirect ties to the homeland, for example through parental exposure to Nigeria at a young age and the presence of extended family members abroad, may play a critical role in building more direct transnational ties later on in life.

Asabe usually only communicates with her family abroad when her parents are talking to relatives and they invite her to greet them, or when her parents buy her

an international calling card and instruct her to telephone one of her relatives living in Nigeria. However, Asabe imagines living in Nigeria someday because her parents have expressed interest in returning there to live. She does remark, however, that she would most likely not live in Nigeria permanently. Asabe shares: 'Although I was born here, my roots are in Nigeria. I just happened to have been born here … Although I've never been [to Nigeria].' In her mind, the fact that she has never been to Nigeria (a critical form of material engagement that figures prominently in the stories of the majority of my participants), does establish a void in her identity as Nigerian. However, for Asabe particular familial customs such as wearing traditional Nigerian clothes during special occasions or going to the mosque on Fridays, establish indirect cultural ties to Nigeria, represented through 'roots' that give meaning to her Nigerian identity in the USA.

In contrast, Chukwu's youth was characterized by more *sustained* transnational connections to Nigeria. Chukwu, a 23-year-old engineering student, spent the first year of his life in Nigeria, before his parents decided to move to California in order for his father to attend graduate school. After living in the USA for seven years, he moved back to Nigeria with his now divorced father and brother, staying for a period of eight years, before returning to the USA. Chukwu has now been in the USA for seven years, but still maintains contact with his friends in Nigeria, periodically sending gifts and keeping in touch with frequent emails and occasional telephone calls.

He described his initial move to Nigeria as an extremely painful and difficult adjustment period. His peers ridiculed him for his accent and he lamented his inability to communicate effectively. He endured a phase of 'culture shock' because he was familiar with the USA and felt unfamiliar with Nigeria. At the age of 16, he moved back to the USA to live with his mother and had to deal with a similar situation but now in the reverse. Now his classmates mocked him for his Nigerian accent and unfamiliarity with American slang terms. He once again felt like an outsider. Chukwu feels conflicted about his identity. Utilizing a sports analogy to buttress this point, he pronounces that if Japan and the USA were playing each other in a match, he would probably not root for the USA, because he does not share the same level of patriotism that unites other Americans. I then posed the question of who he would support if Nigeria and the USA were playing each other. To which he responded that he would probably 'root more for Nigeria than United States.' Here, Chukwu's emphasized that he would 'root more for Nigeria' but *not* that he would solely support Nigeria. This is important because in the same breath he said that if his American-born brother, a competitive track and field athlete, were to be a member of the USA team he would have to support America because of his brother.

Chukwu considers both Nigeria and the USA to be his home, although he is careful to stress that it is particular localities in these two places that feel the most comfortable to him. That is, he is weary of expressing an allegiance to Nigeria or the USA in their totality, preferring instead to situate his experiences and identity within specific cosmopolitan cities in these two countries. He describes his friends

as being very diverse, residing all over the globe. However, he also mentioned that he purposefully tries to distance himself from being attached to a Nigerian community in the USA because he feels that such associations would be exclusionary and a form of self-segregation. Instead, he prefers to keep friends from a variety of backgrounds. He declared:

> One of things that tends to tick me off is when people only hang out with their own. I really don't like it. That's one of the reasons I never had too many Nigerian friends. I do have a few that I am close to but I don't have a lot. Most people as they come here they tend to stick to their own too much. That's something I don't like.

Chukwu's need to create and sustain multiple and varied social networks may stem in part from the back-and-forth circumstances of his experience between the USA and Nigeria.

The circumstances surrounding Chukwu's life have him caught within a liminal space between Nigeria and the USA in which he largely experiences these spheres as separate, although he can easily move between the two. As a result, Chukwu does not identify as completely American or completely Nigerian, as he feels that he is neither. Instead he self-identifies as a hybrid of both. This is due to his life as a youth which spanned the borders of both Nigeria and America and in which engagement with Nigeria as well as his life in the USA influence his identity formation.

Ebi's experiences of assimilation in the USA and *emergent* transnational engagement with Nigeria also combine to shape her identity. She compares and contrasts her two 'worlds' in trying to elucidate and reconcile the contradictions within her sense of self. Ebi vividly narrates her experience during her most recent trip to Nigeria as a teenager. She recalls that while her identity as a Nigerian is not questioned within the USA, she realizes that she is not entirely regarded as Nigerian once she is in Nigeria:

> I noticed that we were not seen as Nigerians in Nigeria. Like here in America, we are seen as Nigerians. People know me on campus as [Ebi] the Nigerian, not [Ebi] the black girl. But, in Nigeria, we were not seen as Nigerians, we weren't even seen as black people. We were seen as white people. Me and my siblings we were raised speaking Igbo and English. We speak Igbo in our parent's house, rarely do we speak English, especially as a child we always spoke Igbo . . . When I went to Nigeria, a lot of people didn't know that we knew Igbo . . . When we went to go visit my dad's brother and there were probably like about 20 or 30 people. We have a land cruiser there. So when they see a flashy car, everyone gathers around. And they all gathered around and we got out of the car and all I heard were a bunch of people, I mean little kids 4, 5, 6 years old screaming 'Indocha. Indocha' and that means white people. And we were really pissed.

What mark Ebi and her family as 'white' in the context of Nigeria are not phenotypic distinctions, but rather the 'flashy car' that seems out of place in her parents'

small village. Ebi mentions here that her ability to speak Igbo should give her entry into a Nigerian identity regardless of other factors, yet the ways in which she is 'imagined' by Nigerians in Nigeria disrupts this sense of self. This shows the ways in which self-crafted ethnic identities can be complicated by transnational ties and creates an intriguing interaction effect between incorporation and transnational processes. That is, Ebi's ethnic identity remains largely affirmed within the context of the USA, as a result of her integration within a relatively large ethnic community. However, her experience in Nigeria challenges this identity, playing a part in the identity construction process.

Ebi's trip back to Nigeria speaks to a broader issue of how clashes over internal expectations and external perceptions manifest through negotiations over identity transnationally. Second-generation Africans are often confronted with being primarily identified as an 'American' in Africa (Clark, 2009) and when Nigerian-Americans return home and are labeled 'white' due to westernization and wealth, it can be shocking since they have grown up in a racialized American society with a sharp (yet seemingly flexible) color-line shaped by the legacy of slavery, segregation and its aftermath (DuBois, 2007; Lee and Bean, 2004; Omi and Winant, 1994).[7]

Various levels of integration within youth community contexts, particularly in relationship to ethnic social networks, influence identity formation in distinct ways. Moreover, the strength of transnational ties, starting from youth also impact identity construction. Zhou and Bankston's work (1998) examines the ways in which Vietnamese youth establish and use ethnic social institutions as a means of adaptation. They argue that ties to ethnic communities help to facilitate integration and mobility rather than hinder it. My findings also show that ties to an ethnic community as youths support a more affirmative ethnic identity because respondents feel a close affinity with co-ethnics. However, I also point out that varied levels of ethnic group associations influence identity differentially. Those who have access to a relatively large ethnic community throughout a variety of youth contexts express less conflict over their identities, whereas those who feel that their ethnic social connections are not uniformly present within the context of their neighborhoods, schools and self-crafted friendship networks express a great deal of conflict over their identities. Meanwhile, those with relatively little access to an ethnic community tend to focus on a fundamental mismatch between their identities as Americans or blacks as opposed to a Nigerian ethnic identity. These findings show how differences in the level of interaction with ethnic communities can shape identity formation.

Moreover, transnational ties to Nigeria further complicate ethnic identities and identity formation more generally. Vickerman (2002) argues that access to ethnic communities often serves as a substitute for transnational consciousness and behavior. Conceptually, ethnicity and transnationalism may be harder to separate when ethnic communities are less readily available or identifiable. Reversing the logic of Vickerman's theory, I examine a group whose ethnic communities are much more dispersed than the West Indian second-generation immigrants

he studied. As such, while varying access to ethnic communities impact the identity formation process, it may be further mediated by the strength of transnational connections that can also influence identity in myriad directions. In some instances, *indirect* transnational ties to Nigeria serve as a symbolic affirmation of ethnic identity in the USA. In other cases, more *sustained* transnational connections create a more liminal identity formation process that challenges delimited ethnic or national identity categorizations, leading to a more hybrid identity. Still in other cases, transnational engagement can pose a challenge to one's ethnic identity in the USA. This highlights how both transnational ties and incorporation processes combine to form the identities of the second-generation and are not entirely distinct trajectories.

College integrative experience

The college integrative context includes friendship networks, membership in organizations, and the racial demographics of the college. The vast majority (85 percent) of respondents attended Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), while the rest (15 percent) attended Historically Black Institutions (HBIs). All participants attended PWIs in the Bay Area, with the exception of one participant who grew up in and was now a current resident of the Bay Area but attended college in Southern California. Most HBIs were in the South, with a few attending HBIs on the East Coast, specifically Washington DC. The majority of respondents developed close friendships with other blacks in college and participated to some degree in race or ethnic-based organizations. Very few developed mostly white friendships during their college years.

The college experience was another point in the life course that influenced identity. Ada discussed the ways in which her college experience was a critical time for her identity formation:

> About being a Nigerian I don't think it really clicked until I got to college … Upon coming to college I think that's when I got more involved in things like the [African Students Organization] and it made me do a lot more research and I learned a lot from just being in the organization and trying to seek out my history and I've learned a lot about the system in Nigeria … Now I understand some of the things that my dad says.

Participants often cited organizations such as African Students Organizations (ASO) or more ethnic-specific Nigerian Student Organizations as the impetus to investigate more about Nigeria. They planned cultural events, organized charity drives and sponsored courses that directly engaged with Nigeria and the African Diaspora. As Ada notes, her involvement in ASO sparked her interest in learning about Nigeria's system, which served as a connection to her father's recollections and thoughts about past and current events in Nigeria.

College was a time during the life course when participants became interested in thinking about their personal identities and tracing their heritage. During the

college experience, context matters. Participants who attended PWIs tended to stress their racial identities as black, largely to express solidarity with other blacks, and highlight their linked minority status. In contrast, those who attended HBIs emphasized their ethnic identities as Nigerians as a way of recognizing and affirming the diversity within black identity. Overall, the college years allowed many of the participants to realize that identifying racially as black and ethnically as Nigerian were not incompatible.

Predominately white institutions

Within PWIs, most respondents emphasized that asserting a black racial identity did not have to become associated with negative attributes. That is, within a college environment, surrounded by other upwardly mobile blacks, disassociating from blacks as a way to distance themselves from perceived oppositional characteristics proved unnecessary. Many respondents believed that they could embrace a black identity that could be associated with positive attributes such as being well-educated. Moreover, a shared minority status within PWIs aligned many of the respondents with other black students on campus. For example, Nike, a 19-year-old college student, chose to live on an African-American themed residential hall because of her increasing awareness of a shared context of racial discrimination:

> We share similar experiences because of our color. I mean, unless I tell people that I'm Nigerian, they will perceive me [as being] African-American … Being here really alerted me to the problems we face as minorities. Being part of the black community has really opened my eyes.

This acknowledgment of a common experience shaped her increasing sense of racial identity at college.

Similarly, Bunmi an active member of the ASO while in college, recounted an encounter with a reporter from her college newspaper who wanted to interview her for a story about the divisions within the African-American and African immigrant communities. Bunmi remained adamant that an article in this vein would detract from the racial solidarity within the minority black community on campus and insisted that the reporter rescind the article:

> [The college reporter] is [not] black . . . so I don't think she can understand the dynamics between the two [groups]. This is like coming into a family, finding out their issues and then going out to publish it for the whole community to see . . . I was just like this is not going to work . . . This doesn't seem like it's going to go in the direction where it can help the black community . . . Why can't we focus on the fact that we work together?

Bunmi did point out during the course of our interview that there are differences within the black community on campus, but that the community had made an effort to come together and support each other in order to maintain solidarity. Despite an

increased sense of racial solidarity in college, both Bunmi and Nike recounted that before college they did not forcefully assert a racial identity and many of their friendship networks included Asians, whites and Latinos. Bunmi recalls:

> I went to high school being scared of black people and I came here [to college] making a conscious decision to hang around black people just because this is ridiculous that I feel so uncomfortable in the midst of black folks.

Bunmi traces this 'fear' of black people to a lack of contact with other blacks during her youth and remembers making an intentional choice to have more contact with other black students once she was in college because she wanted to feel more 'comfortable.' Within the context of a predominately white college environment where blacks remain in the numerical minority and their social networks include the presence of upwardly mobile blacks, they felt increasingly comfortable in emphasizing a racial identity and associating with black American students.

The segmented-assimilation approach, however, racializes mobility in such a way that is not consistent with these experiences. The presumption under this model is that integration into a black mainstream is associated with downward mobility. However, most of Nike's and Bunmi's friends are African-American and also include other second-generation Nigerian-Americans whom they met in college. Although a segmented assimilation approach proposes multiple mainstreams, it does not account for integration into an upwardly mobile black population (Neckerman et al., 1999). As such, these cases demonstrate that integration into a black mainstream and upward mobility can coincide, pre-empting the necessity to actively disengage from black-Americans as a way to reaffirm positive attributes and reject negative ones.

Historically black institutions

Respondents in HBIs, in contrast, stressed their Nigerian identities. Asabe, a 19-year-old college student decided to attend a HBI because she wanted to be in an environment where 'people of your color are going to college.' According to her, attending a HBI directly combated the pervasive depictions of African-Americans as uneducated. She noted that during middle school, she largely identified as African-American because all her close friends were African-American and she wanted to fit in, but as she got older she began to identify as Nigerian as well. She wondered aloud, 'You know when you fill out those forms where they say check a box? I think should I check African-American or write Nigerian over it?' This increasing sense of wanting to assume a Nigerian ethnic identity was in part a result of conversations and activities among members of her family, but also was an outcome of encouraging cues that she received from members of her black peer group at her HBI. While as a child she often felt ridiculed and embarrassed by the national origins of her parents, as a young adult several of her friends now speak to Asabe about her Nigerian background as a topic of interest, an aspect of her

identity that makes her unique. For example, she revealed that she and her best friend (an African-American), who considers herself an 'honorary Nigerian,' had been making plans to travel to Nigeria together as soon as they had the opportunity.

Segun, a 23-year-old teacher of Puerto Rican and Nigerian heritage, recalled her HBI experience as incredibly diverse. Within this context Segun became aware of the diversity within the black community and she began to embrace an ethnic Nigerian identity:

> [HBI] was very diverse. Coming from the Bay Area, mostly when you think of black people it's mostly in terms of African-Americans or a few from Africa. But at [HBI] there are black people from all over.

Before attending college both Segun's and Asabe's friendship networks mostly included African-Americans. Although both Segun and Asabe primarily choose to go to a HBI because they were interested in being in an environment where people 'like them' were attending college, they soon realized that there was a sizeable range of experiences and identities within the black community. They learned to embrace their ethnic identities in part because of this realization. Moreover, through juggling their ethnic and racial identities, they also became aware that these identities were not necessarily in conflict.

Smith and Moore (2000) argue that within the context of a predominately white university, there remains overwhelming pressure to identify racially as black. They show that because of racial/ethnic identification, socioeconomic status, and pre-adult integrative experience, some black students on campus did not express high feelings of closeness to other blacks. Within my own study, participants who attended PWIs expressed an allegiance to racial solidarity, choosing to focus on unity rather than division in order to maintain and preserve a black student community. While Smith and Moore suggest that within PWIs the pressure to identity as black mostly takes on an externalized form from black students who readily identify as black, my findings show that second-generation black immigrants may also be invested in attaching themselves to a wider black community because of a shared racial minority status. My findings also highlight that within another racial context of a HBI, participants tended to emphasize their ethnic identities as a means of affirming the diversity within the black community. This highlights the importance of racial and ethnic salience within a particular context. However, the central unifying finding was that a black racial identity and a Nigerian ethnic identity did not necessarily have to be in conflict. Most participants negotiated between both identities.

Post-college adulthood experience: 'On my own terms'

Recall Ayo, who earlier asserted that during her youth, she actively distanced herself from a Nigerian identity, in part as a means of dissociating herself from

her mother. Now married with a child, Ayo expresses that as an adult she has been able to establish her own sense of self on her own terms, which includes an increasing awareness of a Nigerian ethnic identity. This is in part tied to her independently crafted, *emergent* transnational engagements with Nigeria. She expressed:

> There are situations where I identify as more Nigerian. In the last 10 or 12 years like I was just in Nigeria this past summer although only for a short period of time and I went to Nigeria in 1994 for a few weeks. I think as I've gotten older, I feel more Nigerian in some ways partly because it's less dependent on my mother and her own definition of what it means to be a Nigerian and partially because when I went to Nigeria in 1994 suddenly this whole new world that I belonged to opened up to me. So I would be driving down the street and see 'Ayo's pharmacy.' You're never going to see that in the States, It makes you realize what it means to have connections and roots in a place that is so much deeper or longstanding than what I have here ... The Big Conflict has always been that I don't speak Yoruba, and people say how can you be Nigerian and not speak the language? But I do feel increasingly more Nigerian.

Her changing identity as an adult highlights the importance of life course in shifting the formation of identity. Ayo ties her gradual adopting of an ethnic Nigerian identity later in life to her increased connection to Nigeria, most concretely represented through her recent visits to Nigeria as an adult, which allowed her to create and sustain social connections to people in Nigeria. Many participants highlighted the importance of direct in-person contacts, most notably in the form of travel to Nigeria in adulthood, as figuring prominently in their identities. At the age of 27, Ayo bought a plane ticket to Nigeria in order to visit her aging grandmother. During her most recent visit a year ago, Ayo feels that she is forging viable relationships with family members in Nigeria, reporting that her uncle had recently visited her in the USA, which served as an incentive to return to Nigeria in order to sustain these relationships. Social relations across borders are also a key form of maintaining transnational engagements with reverberations at the material and symbolic levels.

Ayo's initial reluctance in embracing an ethnic identity in her youth stemmed from feeling disconnected from an ethnic community. However in establishing voluntary transnational connections to her parents' country of origin as an adult, Ayo has been able to cultivate an ethnic identity. In her latest trip to Nigeria, her siblings accompanied her and she feels that this visit brought them together and allowed for them to create 'their own little Nigerian community' in the USA. She wants her own two-year-old son to feel a part of this community and even spoke of wanting to take him to Nigeria. However, she also emphasized that she wanted him to come to terms on his own with what a 'Nigerian' identity would mean for him. Ayo intends to purposefully include her own son within the 'little Nigerian community' that she is building in the USA as well as introduce him to the possibilities of building and sustaining transnational connections to Nigeria through trips.

Conclusion: Rethinking identity formation and categorization

I argue that the variation in identity formation can not be solely explained by economic mobility. Other contextual factors shape second-generation identity across the life course. In particular, differing levels of and varying access to co-ethnics during youth informs identity formation, but can also mediated by the strength of transnational social connections. The college experience demonstrates that association with black Americans does not necessarily connote downward mobility. Within the context of a college environment, disassociation from black Americans as a means of affirming and securing upward mobility proves largely unnecessary. As a result, maintaining an ethnic and racial identity is not viewed as overwhelmingly inconsistent. However, the context wherein these identities are affirmed also matter. Within predominately white institutions, participants tended to place greater emphasis on their racial identities as a means of securing solidarity with other minority blacks on campus. Students who attended historically black institutions signaled their ethnic identities to showcase the diversity within the black community. The college experience was also a central time for heritage investigation and sparked interest in learning more about Nigeria and the African Diaspora. Changes in the identity formation process continue throughout the life cycle, and can fluctuate partly due to increased transnational connections in adulthood.

This article contributes to the literature on segmented-assimilation and traditional assimilation frameworks by showing the complex relationship between structural, economic and sociocultural (i.e. identificational) incorporation. The segmented-assimilation model proposes congruence between economic, structural and identificational forms of incorporation in which identity is formed in part through the second-generation's mobility prospects. By focusing on middle-class second-generation Nigerian immigrants, this article identifies other factors beyond economic mobility that inform identity, which are often de-emphasized in the segmented-assimilation literature. Those that are economically and structurally incorporated into the USA might still resist identifying solely as American, contradicting the straight-line assimilation model. Despite their economic mobility, middle-class minorities continue to face discrimination (Anderson, 1999; Feagin and Sikes, 1994; Waters, 1999b) highlighting a critical roadblock to full assimilation and the continued salience of race.

The study also highlights the tension between ethnic and racial identities for black immigrants and their children. My findings show how second-generation Nigerians negotiate between and embrace both their ethnic and racial identities, which are shaped by institutional context, social networks and transnational connections across the life course. While the black immigration literature tends to focus on the ways in which middle-class black immigrants embrace their ethnic identities as a means of distancing from African-Americans, this study shows how the perception of shared experiences allows black second-generation immigrants to

embrace a black racial identity, in addition to an ethnic one. This highlights the continuing power of race, particularly blackness, on identity options, which at times can override internal differences based on class, nativity and ethnicity (Butterfield, 2004; Lee and Bean, 2007). This finding has implications for the US color line. Some researchers theorize that the US color line continues to separate blacks from other groups including non-white immigrants to create a black/non-black racial divide (Gans, 1999; Lee and Bean, 2007). Yet the Black racial category might be reconstituted through the presence of black immigrants and their children.

This article also contributes to the literature on the fluidity and situational nature of identity formation, which can shift over time (Ali, 2008; Feliciano, 2009; Levitt, 2002) and vary within members of the same national-origin group who share similar class backgrounds. Focusing on self-understandings of ethnic, racial and national belonging (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) is key to explaining the socioeconomic positions, intergenerational mobility, and incorporation prospects of the children of immigrants – the second-generation (Zhou, 1997; Zhou and Lee, 2007). Rethinking the process through which identities are formed expands our understanding of collective meaning, boundary making and the shifting ideas of race, ethnicity and immigration within the second-generation (Jimenez, 2004; Lee and Bean, 2007; Marrow, 2003; Nagel, 1994; Waters, 1990). Identities are not static and depend in part on shifts over the life course, and the racial and ethnic composition of social networks and institutional contexts through which these identities are maintained.

Future research should examine the transnational linkages between the contexts of reception and exit (Basch et al., 1993; Grosfoguel, 2004; Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004; Portes and Rumbaut, 2006) to examine how factors such as immigrant policy, societal discrimination, ethnic community strength and reasons for migration impact the ways in which identity unfolds in specific locations. For example, research could compare the experiences of second-generation immigrants from ethnically dense metropolitan areas to those from cities with a low number of co-ethnics. Similarly, one could examine African migrant groups with different migration patterns, such as refugees and high-status economic-migrants. Such research will continue to bring to the forefront other additional factors beyond mobility that might influence identity formation among the second generation.

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Notes

1. According to the 2000 Census, of the Nigerian foreign-born, 93.9 percent have a high school diploma or higher; 58.6 percent have a bachelors degree or higher. The 1999 median household income was $45,072 and 9.8 percent live below the poverty line. For comparison, among all those residing in the USA (US and foreign-born), 80.4 percent have a high school diploma or higher; 24.4 percent have a bachelors degree or higher. The median household income was $41,994 and 12.4 percent live below the poverty line (USA Census Bureau, 2002).
2. Examples of interview questions include: When a form asks for you to check off your race, what do you put down and why? If you could invent your own box what would it say and why? How has your identity changed over the years? A full interview protocol is available upon request.
3. The majority of my participants, 55%, were recruited through personal contacts and snowball sampling that relied initially on those contacts. I recruited 15% through organizations and 30% through directories. In a few cases, recruitment through organizations and directories put me in contact with first-generation Nigerian immigrants, in which case I asked them to put me in touch with their children if they fit the parameters of the study, or refer me to someone else.
4. I contacted three types of organization: African, which included members from a variety of African countries, from which I requested to be put in contact with Nigerians; Nigerian, which included people from throughout Nigeria; ethnic-Nigerian, which included members from a specific ethnic group in Nigeria (e.g. Yoruba).
5. I recognize that the concept of a Nigerian ethnic identity might be problematic, because Nigeria is not a monolithic nation due to ethnic, linguistic, regional and religious diversity. However, 'Nigerian' as an ethnic label was meaningful to the vast majority of my respondents. The recognition of ethnic differences among Nigerians often came up through the emphasis on culture or language, and was most meaningful to those who strongly stressed their ethnic identities (i.e. self-selected group). Because the number of co-ethnic Nigerians was relatively low, participants tended to express affinity with other Nigerians, regardless of intra-ethnic differences. Also, as the children of immigrants, there were differing levels of awareness of the ethnic differences among Nigerians from their parents' homeland. As ethnicity is made meaningful within a specific context, within the USA, a Yoruba or Ibo identity did not make sense to the majority of people outside of the Nigerian community and as such a Nigerian ethnic identity often trumped subethnic Nigerian identities (e.g. Ibo or Yoruba), making subethnic identification a less salient marker of identity (Halter, 2007).
6. The marginal group includes participants who might have had access to co-ethnics, but self-selected friendship networks outside of their ethnic community.
7. This designation is also given to Nigerians (and other Africans) who have never left their country of origin, but are thought to have acquired the manners and status of their former colonial masters (Falola, 2001; Smythe and Smythe, 1960). This process can also work in another direction, with Americans disappointed by the westernized aspects of Nigerian culture, especially if they nurtured romantic images of a 'traditional' African homeland. Clarke's work (2004) focuses on the religious dimensions of this clash, examining how African-American members of the Yoruba religion identify as authentically Yoruba in comparison to those in Nigeria.

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Appendix: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Generation	Occupation
Deola	18	F	1.5	College student
Laide	18	F	2. 0	College student
Idris	19	M	2. 0	College student
Nike	19	F	2. 0	College student
Nneka	19	F	2. 0	College student
Asabe	20	F	2. 0	College student
Chidi	20	F	2. 0	College student
Eniola	20	F	2. 0	College student
Andrea	21	F	2. 0	College student
Ebi	21	F	2. 0	College student
Ada	22	F	2. 0	College student
Bunmi	22	F	2. 0	Engineer
Khadija	22	F	2. 0	College student
Chukwu	23	M	1.5	Graduate student
Fola	23	M	2. 0	Retail
Kayode	23	M	2. 0	Marketing
Segun	23	F	2.5	Teacher
Dele	24	M	2. 0	Social worker
Lara	24	F	2. 0	Advertising
Chinedu	26	M	2. 0	Medical student
Shola	26	M	2. 0	Lawyer
Toyin	27	F	1.5	Graduate student
Femi	32	M	1.5	Small business owner
Uchenna	37	M	2.5	Service worker
Ayo	39	F	2. 0	Researcher