

**Exploring My Lived Experiences as a Nigerian Black Woman in
the Education Doctorate (EdD) Programme in the UK**

By

Buki Akilapa

Canterbury Christ Church University

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Abstract

The thesis explores into the lived experiences of a Nigerian Black woman in the Education Doctorate (EdD) Programme at a Western university, with a particular focus on the issue of a sense of belonging. It navigates the process of identity reconstruction through liminality and its connection to coping strategies in various situations. The thesis also examines into the self-recognition process, reconciling the past with the present to identify the transformative aspects of the learning journey within the doctoral programme (Formenti and West, 2018). By employing autoethnography as the research methodology, the researcher becomes both the subject and the narrator, sharing a story of resilience and determination in the face of challenges rooted in racial, political, and socio-economic intersectionality.

Writing the thesis facilitates moments of awakening and soul work, as it prompts the researcher to examine their position as an autoethnographic researcher critically. This process leads to developing an academic voice that reflects their positionality, originality, and creativity (Durrant, 2022). The findings highlight the influence of both colonial and postcolonial contexts on the sense of belonging within academia. This underscores the importance of decolonising the curriculum and educational practices to dismantle asymmetrical power dynamics in academic spaces while promoting student engagement and retention. The research concludes that educators, scholars, academics, and decision-makers should move beyond superficial reforms and demonstrate a sense of urgency and political will to create meaningful institutional change. This shift is necessary to recognise

and incorporate diverse perspectives, avoiding the risk of a superficial compliance approach (Adébisí, 2023). Achieving a decolonised curriculum and fostering pedagogically inclusive learning environments require educators to demonstrate strong determination in reshaping knowledge production at all levels, regardless of their cultural background.

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A Message of Unravelling Identity and Belonging: A Journey to Self-Discovery

From age 6, I grew up knowing that the West is Best! At the time, in Nigeria, I believed that I was privileged to attend a primary school with a White head teacher. I had access to Western books such as Goldilocks and the Three Bears and Little Red Riding Hood. Several years later, I would consider myself even more privileged as I studied at a Western university to obtain a master's degree and a doctorate. This is because it is usually the dream of every young Nigerian to study at a Western university. Closer to the end of my thesis stage, I realised that Western perspectives and authors mostly dominated my reading lists. I would say that I experienced an awakening in that moment of realisation. I began questioning everything because I saw history repeat in a pattern from childhood. I felt angry but learned to turn inwards using my intuition for guidance. I trusted the process and allowed myself to go through the transformation journey with courage and confidence.

Through this autoethnographic research, I have realised that I could be going through the liminal process more often than I envisaged, with recurring before and after identities while experiencing moments of feeling out of place because I am neither here nor there. Nonetheless, I am now aware that the feeling of being out of place, which also impacted my sense of belonging and confidence, stems from trying to be like others.

Hence, through this research process, I now have the following understanding.

- *It is okay to follow my path and not fit into other people's expectations.*

- *My positionality as an educator is essential in promoting inclusive literature that celebrates diversity as a resource for learning.*
- *My sense of worth does not depend on people's approval of me.*
- *I am good enough to be my authentic self and do not need to fit in or belong to any groups.*
- *I have enjoyed and benefitted from the empathetic support of educators in Western higher education, and it is my turn to pay this forward.*

Buki xxx

General Introduction

The focus of this thesis is to explore the concept of belonging from a Nigerian cultural perspective, specifically examining how this sense of belonging influences pedagogically inclusive teaching and learning practices within educational institutions. To address this focus, the research uses autoethnography as the primary methodological approach, which is presented through a first-person narrative. This approach facilitates a deep, personal, and cultural exploration of the challenges faced by a Nigerian woman within the Education Doctorate programme at a Western institution. The justification for this thesis is grounded in addressing the following research questions.

i. To what extent might some methodologies 'other' ethnic minority students unintentionally in academic research? This question examines how certain research methodologies might marginalise or misrepresent ethnic minority students, inadvertently perpetuating a sense of 'otherness' within academic settings. By exploring this through the autoethnographic lens, the thesis will reflect on personal experiences to highlight how methodological choices can impact the inclusion and representation of diverse cultural perspectives.

ii. To what extent have my experiences as a Nigerian Black woman motivated me to study for a doctorate in the UK? This question investigates the personal motivations behind

pursuing a doctoral degree from a Nigerian cultural perspective. The autoethnographic approach will provide insight into how my unique experiences and cultural background have influenced my decision to engage in advanced academic study, revealing the personal and cultural factors that drive this academic pursuit.

iii. To what extent has my cultural perspective influenced transformative learning to a doctoral level? This question explores how my Nigerian cultural perspective has shaped and enriched my transformative learning experiences during the doctoral programme. The thesis will use personal narratives to illustrate how cultural context impacts educational growth and the development of pedagogically inclusive practices.

In addressing these research questions, it is essential to contextualise my personal and cultural background, as this will provide a foundation for understanding the motivations and experiences underpinning this study. To offer a more comprehensive view of how my Nigerian cultural perspective influences my research, the following section presents a brief autobiography. This personal narrative will lay the groundwork for a deeper exploration of how my background has shaped my educational journey and methodological choices.

A Brief Autobiography

As the fifth daughter in a Yoruba Nigerian family, my upbringing was deeply influenced by cultural norms that emphasised respect and traditional gender roles, rooted in a patriarchal society. My education in Nigeria was strongly supported by my father's belief in the importance of female independence, yet the patriarchal structures in which I was raised left a lasting impact on my identity and role within the family.

In 2008, my husband and I relocated to England on a Highly Skilled Migrant visa, with me entering the country on a dependent visa. This migration, underpinned by patriarchal systems, systematically affected my role as a wife and mother in the UK. Having sold our assets in Nigeria, we quickly realised that our savings diminished rapidly after converting them from Nigerian naira to pounds. Despite his qualifications as a mechanical engineer with the American Embassy in Nigeria, my husband struggled to find employment and initially worked in low-paid jobs for several years. Our son was born two months after our arrival in the UK, and with him only five months old, I began working in factory and care jobs to support our family. The stark contrast between my previous role as a luxury car hire manager in Nigeria and the reality of low-paid work in the UK highlighted the significant challenges we faced.

Determined to improve our circumstances, I pursued a master's degree in 2015, which marked the beginning of my journey to regain professional and personal agency. Building on this progress, I embarked on the Education Doctorate programme in 2017 to secure a better future for myself and my family. It was also in 2015 that I transitioned from low-paid jobs to a role as an apprenticeship assessor. The balance between low-paid work and academic advancement from 2008 to 2015 reflects how I navigated the complexities of employment and identity in a new cultural context. These experiences, shaped by the intersectional factors of migration, education, cultural identity, and the influence of patriarchal systems, are central to my autoethnography and are essential for understanding my perspective within the Education Doctorate programme in the UK.

The Nature of the Education Doctorate Programme

The Education Doctorate (EdD) programme at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) in Kent includes eight taught modules, from Module One through Module Eight, with Module Eight serving as the final module. These modules are scheduled over study weekends, running from Friday evening to Sunday lunchtime, with each module completed within a university term. Assignments are submitted and graded at Level 7 after each module, though students are expected to be working at Level 8, with the final module being assessed at Level 8. These modules guide the cohort through their doctoral journey, culminating in the thesis proposal during the last module, which then transitions into the thesis stage. Throughout this process, supervisors closely monitor students' progress and provide

continuous support. Over the five-year programme, cohort members can attend seminars, workshops, lectures, and tutorials, engaging with other researchers under the guidance of a module leader. The programme handbook outlines the methodologies, paradigms, module structures, credit ratings, and other details of the programme (CCCU, 2020). This structured approach fosters a learning environment where students can develop their academic and professional identities.

Understanding the structure and demands of the EdD programme at Canterbury Christ Church University provides essential context for appreciating how specific elements within the programme have shaped my research focus. In particular, the Module 4 learning activity played a pivotal role in influencing the direction of my study. This assignment, which highlighted the impact of my cultural background on learning experiences, sparked my interest in exploring how my Nigerian heritage intersects with pedagogical practices. The subsequent section delves into the background story of this influential Module 4 assignment, detailing how it inspired and shaped the research topic of this thesis.

The Background Story of Module 4 Learning Activity that Inspired this Research Study

The Module 4 EdD assignment that I completed in 2018 inspired me to choose this research topic. The focus of the Module 4 assignment was on how my Nigerian culture has influenced my learning journey in the EdD programme. The weekend's first activity was to pick a

picture that best reflects our feelings at that stage. I chose a picture with an African print design because it represented part of my ethnicity. I was happy to see that the learning activity promoted diversity. This was because the Module leader included that picture in the learning activity. It took away the pressure of trying to find what to say about the other images that I could not relate to because, at that moment, representation mattered (Durrant, 2022). Initially, I was anxious about the learning activity and did not know what to say when it was my turn to speak. I told the group that the patterns on the picture represent my culture, and the various colours can be likened to my multiple identities. I explained that having multiple identities sometimes affects my confidence and self-esteem, making it difficult to express myself in public, especially when the thoughts coming from a different cultural background become overwhelming. Strangely, after the activity, I felt relief that my multiple identities had given me some form of uniqueness with outcomes of a positive experience within a transitional space.

This experience raised significant questions about how my cultural perspective shapes my academic journey and interactions within the EdD programme. It led me to explore how autoethnography could offer deeper insights into these lived experiences, thus becoming a central component of this thesis.

The Rationale for Using Autoethnography as the Research Methodology

Autoethnography is often credited to anthropologist Martin Heidegger (Buzard, 2003). Heidegger, one of the most influential German philosophers of the 20th century, is well-known for his contributions to phenomenology, existentialism, and hermeneutics (Clark, 2011). In Clark's (2011) exploration of qualitative methodologies, he cites the work of Martin Heidegger, who introduced key concepts such as phenomenology, existentialism, and hermeneutics. Phenomenology is described as a philosophical approach that seeks to understand human experiences from the first-person perspective, focusing on describing phenomena as they are perceived by individuals. This method prioritises the subjective, lived experience and aims to uncover the essence of experiences by setting aside preconceived notions. Existentialism, on the other hand, concerns itself with individual freedom, choice, and the human condition, exploring how individuals find meaning in life and navigate experiences of anxiety and personal responsibility. Hermeneutics, as Clark (2011) explains, is the study of interpretation, particularly of texts and symbolic expressions, emphasising the role of context, history, and culture in understanding meaning. It requires researchers to engage in a process of dialogue with the subject matter to reveal deeper meanings behind actions, events, or texts.

Heidegger distinguished autoethnography as a method in which the researcher explores their own experiences, in contrast to traditional ethnography, where researchers study

other cultures (Buzard, 2003). Defining autoethnography can pose a challenge as it cannot be reduced to a single method, practice, or style (Anderson, 2006). The term autoethnography can be examined by its component parts: 'auto' meaning self, 'ethno' meaning culture, and 'graphy' meaning interpretation, representation, or description of a lived experience of individuals from a cultural context (Adams & Herrmann, 2020). To make my cultural values known while establishing my place of belonging methodologically, I have employed autoethnography because it is an interpretivist approach which aligns with postmodernism principles (Kroeze, 2012).

Autoethnography highlights how some marginalised people may experience marginalisation or social injustice to improve their cultural conditions and give them a voice as authors (Beattie, 2022). Hence, autoethnography allows my research to benefit from stories of my lived experience within a cultural context while analysing these experiences through theoretical and methodological tools.

Autoethnography can use aspects of the following three writing genres (Reed-Danahay, 1997): native anthropology, where people, once the research subjects, become the author studying their cultural group; ethnic autobiography, personal narratives written by authors of minority groups; and autobiographical ethnography, in which anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 2). This research will allow me to narrate my lived experiences, taking my cultural background into account while

being the author. My experiences will be interpreted using theories to develop new knowledge (Ronai, 1995). A non-critical, post-positivist sociology has for too long produced research which is led by researcher-generated questions in interviews and questionnaires and has not made room for people who are being researched to express their agendas (Holliday, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, some methodologies should be decentred to allow subjects to narrate their own life stories to express their thoughts and feelings in matters that affect their lives, such as this autoethnography research which is inclined to the ethnic autobiography writing genre.

Consequently, this provides me the opportunity to highlight my struggles within a non-dominant ethnic group. This shift towards autoethnography, particularly within the ethnic autobiography genre, empowers me to move beyond traditional, researcher-imposed frameworks and instead centre my own voice and lived experiences. By giving priority to the personal narratives of those from minority groups, this method challenges conventional research approaches that often overlook the perspectives of the researched. In doing so, my role as both researcher and participant enables a more authentic and reflective analysis of my experiences, which are explored at a pace that allows for deeper cultural insights. This extended engagement underscores the strength of autoethnography in offering a richer, more nuanced understanding of one's own cultural and social context.

In addition, being the author of this autoethnographic research allows me to deeply reflect on my personal thoughts and emotions throughout the study, engaging in reflexive writing as intended. By examining my lived experiences through a cultural lens, I can uncover how historical influences shape my current academic experiences and define cultural norms and expectations. This self-exploration reveals how my experiences have influenced my sense of belonging within academia and how these experiences intersect with theories of self-recognition, particularly through the framework of 'good enough' relationships (Formenti & West, 2018). In adult education, the quality of teacher-student relationships plays a crucial role in fostering these 'good enough' interactions, which in turn enhances positive educational outcomes and supports student retention (Field, Merrill & West, 2012). Understanding these dynamics underscores the significance of autoethnography as a methodological approach.

Autoethnography allows for an intimate exploration of personal experiences and cultural contexts, offering insights into how individual narratives can reflect broader systemic issues. This method is particularly valuable in addressing the gaps between personal and institutional experiences, providing a nuanced perspective that can inform efforts to create more inclusive and supportive educational environments.

Autoethnography is a valuable tool for researchers and practitioners working in multicultural settings, including educators, medical practitioners, clergy, and counsellors. It enhances cultural understanding of both self and others, encouraging cross-cultural

recognition (Chang, 2016). In autoethnographic research, the researcher engages with primary data from the outset, as the data source is the researcher themselves. This approach involves 'turning the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto) while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context where self-experiences occur' (Denzin, 1997, p. 227). The primary data for autoethnographic research are past and present experiences, collected through personal memory and reflexive writing (Mertens, 2023). A key distinction between autoethnography and ethnography is that autoethnography relies on the researcher's personal memories, whereas ethnography depends on the memories of others (informants or participants) during data collection.

However, memory can be unreliable and unpredictable, often revealing only partial truths as it selectively shapes and distorts the past (Chang, 2016). We may vividly recall distant events due to their impact or the emotions they evoked, while more recent events may fade from memory depending on their relevance. During my research, I found that I had to rely on the memories of loved ones to gather data from a cultural perspective, which highlighted limitations beyond my control, as some crucial information from my early life was inaccessible for analysis. In addressing ethical concerns related to incomplete memories in autoethnographic research, it is essential to draw on literature that discusses how researchers manage such challenges.

According to Bochner, autoethnographers often face the challenge of incomplete or fragmented memories, which can impact the richness and accuracy of their narratives (2016). Bochner highlights that autoethnographers address these gaps by integrating supplementary sources or perspectives. Researchers may turn to recollections of loved ones, historical documents, or other external sources to provide additional context and fill in the missing details. This approach not only helps in constructing a more comprehensive narrative but also maintains ethical integrity by acknowledging the limitations of personal memory and actively seeking to address them. In my own research, I encountered similar limitations due to reliance on family members' memories to gather data from my early life.

This reliance was necessary because some aspects of my early experiences, such as details from my birth, were not fully accessible to me. Bochner's discussion supports this practice by emphasising that such reliance is a common and accepted strategy within autoethnographic research. It is crucial, however, to approach these supplementary sources with transparency and critical reflection, ensuring that their inclusion is ethically justified and contributes meaningfully to the analysis.

Bochner emphasises the importance of ethical considerations when using others' memories in autoethnography (2016). Researchers must manage these contributions with respect and ensure they are properly acknowledged, helping to address ethical concerns and maintain the credibility of the narrative. Supplementing incomplete personal memories with external

sources is a recognised method in autoethnography. Although it presents challenges, this approach aligns with ethical research standards when applied transparently and thoughtfully—principles reflected throughout my thesis. By addressing memory limitations with supplementary sources, researchers can enrich the narrative, making it more accurate and respectful. It is essential to explore how these methodological concerns intersect with broader themes of belonging in educational settings. The next section, ‘The Questions of Belonging,’ delves into how adult students, particularly those from minority backgrounds, navigate their educational journeys and the challenges they face in establishing a sense of belonging. This exploration will highlight the significance of supportive relationships and institutional responses in shaping the educational experiences of these students.

The Questions of Belonging

Adult students may rely on significant others to help cultivate a supportive environment through meaningful relationships that enhance our sense of belonging (Winnicott, 1991). However, higher education can be challenging for adult learners, who often face learning anxieties linked to their specific needs. These needs are shaped by the values, ethos, and behaviours of adult students from minority backgrounds, who may struggle to feel a sense of belonging in institutions that do not fully address their needs (Burke, 2020). This struggle underscores the experience of otherness that minority students face in higher education, which is connected to their familial and community backgrounds (Saunders & Trotman, 2022). In this research study on my experiences as an ethnic minority student in the Education Doctorate programme in the UK, the concept of othering is key to understanding

the marginalisation and challenges I have faced. Othering, a concept deeply embedded in postcolonial theory and elaborated upon by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, describes how dominant groups construct and perceive subordinate groups as fundamentally different and inferior (Spivak, 2023). This process is often enacted through discursive practices that reinforce power structures and influence the identity formation of those in less powerful positions (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011). In professional settings, othering manifests through various forms of stereotyping and racialisation, where entrenched narratives and micro-aggressions perpetuate existing inequalities.

These processes are often manifested through discursive practices that reinforce existing power structures and influence the identity formation of those in less powerful positions. The concept of belonging, influenced by both individual and institutional habitus, highlights the need for educational institutions to understand and address these diverse needs to create an inclusive environment where all students can succeed (Reay, 2018). By acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by minority students, institutions can foster an environment that not only recognises but actively supports the diverse experiences and identities of all learners.

Habitus, a concept introduced by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the ingrained skills, habits, and dispositions individuals develop through their cultural and social experiences (Bourdieu, 1986). These ingrained skills, which become second nature through extensive practice, are crucial in understanding how students navigate the educational

environment. Understanding habitus is essential for exploring how adult learners, particularly those from minority backgrounds, perceive their place within the academic setting and how this perception influences their sense of belonging.

To relate the concept of habitus to my lived experiences as a Nigerian woman pursuing an Education Doctorate in the UK, I consider several factors. My heritage and the values, traditions, and social norms I was raised with and how they form a significant part of my habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). These cultural elements shape how I perceive education, success, and interactions within the academic environment. Navigating a new cultural and academic landscape in the UK involves interpreting my experiences through the lens of my Nigerian background, which affects how I engage with peers, the faculty, and the curriculum.

The social capital I bring from Nigeria, including relationships and networks, can significantly influence my ability to adapt and succeed in the UK. This adaptation process involves navigating through different forms of capital valued in the UK academic context, which may require adjustments in my behaviour and mindset. My self-perception as a Nigerian woman, alongside how I believe others perceive me, impacts my confidence, participation, and overall academic experience. The potential biases or stereotypes I encounter might also affect my behaviour and strategies for navigating the academic environment.

My acquired habitus—shaped by my past experiences and socialisation in Nigeria—guides how I interpret challenges and develop coping mechanisms in my current academic journey (Bourdieu, 1986). The resilience and strategies I employ to navigate a foreign educational system are rooted in these ingrained dispositions. As I interact with the new academic environment in the UK, the interplay between my Nigerian habitus and this unfamiliar context fosters the development of a 'hybrid habitus,' blending elements from both cultural environments (Bourdieu, 1984). This evolving hybrid habitus not only shapes how I build networks and seek support within the academic community but also deepens my approach to research, methodology, and data interpretation. Understanding the influence of my acquired habitus on my educational outcomes offers valuable insights for contributing to academic discourse, fostering more inclusive and culturally sensitive practices within the academic community.

This reflects my role as an educational practitioner seeking to enhance inclusivity through personal and academic growth. It calls for a re-examination of the knowledge systems, perspectives, and voices represented in educational curricula, integrating diverse cultural, historical, and epistemological frameworks. This links directly to the idea that student retention is strongly connected to their sense of belonging in higher education (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021). Acknowledging this connection reveals the importance of going beyond merely enrolling students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds; instead, institutions must actively promote their progression by cultivating a sense of belonging through inclusive interventions. These interventions may involve incorporating diverse cultural

perspectives in the curriculum, establishing support networks for minority students, and ensuring that teaching practices are culturally responsive. In doing so, higher education institutions not only improve retention rates but also enrich the overall educational experience, fostering a learning environment where all students feel valued and understood.

Belonging, a fundamental psychological need, is theoretically grounded in Maslow's Hierarchical Needs (Maslow, 2013). This need emerges after basic physiological and safety needs are met, serving as a precursor to self-esteem and self-actualisation, which are achieved through positive interactions and social connections (Pedler et al., 2022). Research underscores that meaningful social interactions with staff and peers significantly contribute to a sense of belonging in educational contexts (Watson et al., 2010). This sense of belonging helps students build self-esteem and confidence, which in turn enhances their engagement and enjoyment of learning tasks (Ulmanen et al., 2016). It is evident that students in higher education who struggle with a sense of belonging are often at greater risk of dropping out, as their motivation is closely tied to this feeling. The relationship between student retention, motivation, and belonging is crucial for understanding how academic institutions can better support their students. In the later chapters of this thesis, I will demonstrate how my own sense of belonging in the EdD programme gradually increased, providing me with the motivation to persist and complete my doctorate. This journey underscores the importance of challenging racial inequalities in higher education to create

space for the contributions and participation of ethnic minorities, paving the way for developing emancipatory and inclusive pedagogies.

Building upon these critical insights, the research questions driving this study have been formulated to explore the nuanced ways in which personal and cultural perspectives impact academic experiences. These questions not only reflect the challenges and opportunities identified but also guide the exploration of how these issues manifest in my own academic journey. The following section outlines these research questions, which form the foundation of the inquiry into my personal experiences and their broader implications for pedagogical inclusivity and belonging within higher education.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent might some methodologies 'other' ethnic minority students unintentionally in academic research?
- ii. To what extent have my experiences as a Nigerian Black woman motivated me to study for a doctorate in the UK?
- iii. To what extent has my cultural perspective influenced transformative learning to a doctoral level?

The Module 4 learning experience prompted me to question how my cultural perspective shapes my academic journey and interactions within the EdD programme. The research questions guiding this study are intricately connected to these reflections. In the subsequent chapters, I will detail how these questions were developed and the insights that emerged. Throughout my autoethnographic study, I encountered significant revelations about my own positioning and sense of belonging. These insights have allowed me to reposition myself more powerfully within education and academia, a journey that will be fully explored during this thesis.

In conclusion, this General Introduction has laid the groundwork for understanding the intricate dynamics of this research study. The personal narrative of my journey as the fifth daughter in a Yoruba Nigerian family provides a foundation for exploring how cultural influences have shaped my educational experiences. The structure and demands of the Education Doctorate (EdD) programme at Canterbury Christ Church University, with its rigorous modules and support systems, set the stage for a deep dive into the academic journey. The inspiration drawn from Module 4's learning activity, which emphasised the significance of cultural representation, highlighted the need for an approach that truly reflects personal and cultural experiences. Autoethnography emerges as the ideal methodology for this research, offering a lens through which personal and cultural insights can be deeply examined and shared. This methodology is crucial for exploring the concept of belonging, a theme central to understanding how cultural perspectives influence pedagogical practices. The research questions that guide this study are designed to probe

these dimensions of belonging and identity, providing a framework for analysing how methodologies, personal motivations, and cultural perspectives intersect in shaping academic experiences. This comprehensive approach aims to enrich the dialogue on inclusive pedagogies and contribute to a deeper understanding of belonging in higher education.

The Structure of the Thesis

Following this introduction, the thesis is organised into seven chapters, each addressing different facets of the research. Chapter One offers an overview of my Nigerian heritage, including its historical and cultural context. It sets the foundation for discussing the importance of decolonising the curriculum and academic practices, and advocates for the creation of inclusive pedagogies. Chapter Two critically examines my navigation through Nigerian and Western cultures using the theoretical frameworks of Honneth (1996), Bourdieu (1986), and Winnicott (1991). Again, Chapter Two explores how my past experiences have shaped my learning journey and engages with postcolonialism to understand the complexities of my cultural identity. This chapter also argues for the significance of educational transitional spaces in fostering inclusive practices and serves as the literature review, laying the theoretical groundwork for the thesis. Chapter Three explores the methodology used in the study, critically examines the autoethnographic approach and the concept of culture, and discusses data collection methods, ethical considerations, and research limitations.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six present and analyse my lived experiences from childhood to the present through reflexive writing, a key element of autoethnography. In line with autoethnographic principles, these chapters use a layered approach to data presentation, where different fonts are employed to distinguish between narratives, thoughts, and feelings. The use of *Segoe Print*, which reflects the handwritten nature of my original journal entries, aligns with the reflexive and personal nature of autoethnographic writing (Ronai, 1995). This approach supports the introspective style central to autoethnography, highlighting the subjective and reflective dimensions of the research. Chapter Four examines my sense of belonging as a girl and woman navigating a patriarchal society. Chapter Five explores the motivations behind my decision to pursue higher education outside of Nigeria. Chapter Six discusses the process of self-recognition within academic transitional spaces and the impact of my Nigerian cultural background on this process.

Chapter Seven synthesises the key findings of the thesis, demonstrating how reflexive writing has enabled a reconciliation of my past with my present. This concluding chapter also outlines the original contributions of the thesis to the field of knowledge and emphasises the importance of autoethnography as a research method. This thesis provides a comprehensive narrative on how belonging, influenced by cultural and psychological factors, affects educational experiences and practices. It offers valuable insights into the intersection of personal identity and academic environments.

To unveil the thesis, I progress into Chapter One, which delves into the core of my Nigerian cultural heritage. This chapter provides essential context for understanding how historical and cultural influences have shaped my educational journey. It also establishes a foundation for discussing the broader implications of decolonising curricula and promoting inclusive pedagogical practices. By exploring the historical and cultural aspects of my Nigerian background, Chapter One lays the groundwork for a deeper analysis of how these factors intersect with academic environments and contribute to the discourse on educational inclusion and representation.

Chapter One: Unveiling My Nigerian Heritage and Its Impact on Academic Experiences

Introduction

This chapter delves into the intricate dynamics of navigating cultural identity and belonging, starting with an exploration of my socio-economic background, which provides a foundation for understanding the interplay between culture, class, and identity. The discussion moves on to the embourgeoisement Thesis and social class dynamics, examining how shifts in social class structures impact individuals and communities. This theoretical framework offers insight into the evolving nature of social class and its implications for personal and collective experiences.

Attention then turns to Cultural Capital and Habitus, shedding light on how these concepts have informed my understanding of social mobility and identity. While these theories provide valuable perspectives on the resources and dispositions influencing our interactions with the world, their limitations and critiques are also considered. Personal reflections reveal how cultural capital intersects with systemic barriers, highlighting the challenges and opportunities encountered in navigating these intersections. This examination offers insight into how personal resources interact with broader structural constraints. The role of Nigerian cultural capital in my academic journey is explored, emphasising how elements of my cultural heritage have supported and influenced my educational pursuits. As a minority

in the EdD programme, my past reflects the cultural capital that I bring with me to the university, which is different from the cultural expectations of the dominant groups at Western universities. Hence, the interplay of the dispositions highlights the moments when I feel like an outsider. Cultural capital is a concept introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986). It refers to the collection of knowledge, habits, and cultural assets that individuals acquire through their upbringing and socialisation within a cultural context (ibid). Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital operates as a form of currency, thereby offering advantages to individuals who possess it. Hence, contributing to their successes and social mobility without them realising it. Understanding these specific socio-cultural factors is crucial for appreciating their impact on my academic experiences.

The intersection of race and social class is addressed, exploring how these dimensions interact to shape experiences of identity and opportunity. This discussion is enriched by examining social class and intersectionality, which reveal the complex interplay between various forms of identity and capital. The broader context of Nigeria is provided, including a look at historical background and contemporary social issues. Early awareness of racial discrimination is recounted through cinematic contrasts and regional disparities between Nigeria's North and South are discussed. Additionally, hidden forms of colonialism and the lingering effects of colonial mentality on Nigerian society are examined.

Finally, reflections on Nigerian cultural identity consider how it has influenced and shaped both personal and academic narratives. This exploration aims to offer a comprehensive

understanding of how cultural identity and belonging navigate the complex terrain of socioeconomic and racial dynamics.

Navigating Cultural Identity and Belonging

Culture plays a vital role in shaping our ideas, practices, and communication with others (Bourdieu, 1986). Our cultural differences set the expectations of how people think and feel in different situations. Hence, people will unconsciously feel confident or not confident when they measure their capabilities and physical attributes with others (Formenti & West, 2018). These bring to focus the rites of passage and ways of managing anxieties depending on how one is valued, supported, and included through educational practices and policies. Stone acknowledges the importance of having a classroom founded on love and trusting relationships where students can feel safe to engage and interrogate different ideologies (Stone, 2018). From a Nigerian cultural viewpoint, it is difficult to overlook the interplay of dispositions which come with the new habitus of belonging in an academic space where I consider myself an outsider.

My lack of sense of belonging further establishes the feelings of being out of place. This is intensified through the cultural and social capital I bring to the university, considering my humble beginnings as a care worker/factory worker when I relocated to England with my husband from Nigeria in 2008. So, having a safe place with empathetic lecturers who

embrace diversity encourages a sense of belonging, which helps to reduce learning anxieties. Therefore, the richness of this research stems from employing autoethnography to illuminate the collectivities and shared experiences of people like me, which cuts across gender, class, and race. This will be explained fully in Chapter Three.

When I began my master's degree at a Western university in 2015, I was still working in low-paid jobs, which highlighted moments when I felt out of place. This can be associated with a 'fish out of water' experience because my values, skills and attitude are from a diverse cultural and socio-economic background (RANLHE, 2009). The 'fish out of water experience' responds to the 'fish in water' that relates to the institutional habitus ethnic minority students find themselves in, affecting the students' lives without questioning it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). My Nigerian accent and mannerisms often make me feel like 'the other' during lectures, in libraries, or at seminars in Western universities. This sense of anxiety or discomfort in these settings can be compared to a fish-out-of-water experience, which may affect my confidence in learning. These feelings of inferiority, compounded by my identity as a woman of African descent in the EdD program, have further affected my sense of belonging and heightened my sense of being out of place.

The feelings of inferiority began to creep in on my way to the top floor of Augustine House at Canterbury Christ Church University with other cohort members who were lecturers, heads of departments and head teachers. When developing and maintaining relationships

with cohort members, I had to negotiate my place of belonging consciously and unconsciously. The feelings of being out of place were intensified at these moments because the social status of the cohort members was different from the people I encountered in my everyday life (Said, 2012a). At that time, I was a Tutor/Assessor delivering Health and Social Care Apprenticeship qualifications with a private training provider and my care worker background made me struggle to 'fit in' to the academic learning environment.

The feelings of being an insider can be experienced when individuals are among people with similar identities or characteristics (Said, 2013). As a mature Black woman, I feel like an outsider where culture defines who I am, and my lived experiences in England accentuate how my social class can be a by-product of my culture. More often, I do not feel out of place when I am among people from the Nigerian culture and African communities because our culture defines who we are and what we have in common. The diversification of people means that no one can be a complete insider with a group of people at any given time (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Diversification would mean that my identity/identities are neither here nor there, as I can sometimes be an insider or outsider in different contexts and situations.

Additionally, this suggests no apparent dichotomy between being an outsider and an insider because the lines are a blur with a fluid passage between both positions (Ogbemudia, 2022).

The situations we find ourselves in may sometimes lead to positive or negative experiences. Positive experiences can enhance development, while negative experiences shape the individual's worthiness perspective (Tight, 1998). As a Nigerian student at a Western institution, at the beginning of my learning journey, I noticed the cultural differences, which might be called a culture shock or clash. Culture shock can be seen as something serious, and a culture clash indicates a state of conflict or disagreement (Furnham & Bochner 1986). Ogbemudia argues that 'culture shock' is a strong word to explain unfamiliar experiences because individual experiences are shaped by the extent of their acquired personal and social skills (Ogbemudia, 2022). For me, I see these as cultural differences that I have learned to navigate using personal and social skills.

In this section, I have highlighted the essential role of culture in shaping my lived experiences. In the next section, I will explore my socio-economic background through the lens of social class.

My Socio-Economic Background

In this section, I will examine the theoretical foundations of social class in the UK, while reflecting on my changing class roles as I engage with others. I am an adult student from an underrepresented group and a working-class background, returning to higher education in a bid to secure a better future (Merrill, 2015). Education has provided me the career

opportunities that I would not have accessed otherwise, and this has contributed to me climbing up the social mobility ladder. Education is a pivotal instrument in mediating social mobility and mitigating inequalities associated with social class. However, access to quality education remains disparate, particularly for marginalised communities (Ball, 2006). Despite encountering barriers such as discrimination and financial constraints, individuals from Nigerian backgrounds have exhibited resilience and agency in pursuing education as a pathway to upward mobility (Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). My social mobility journey as a Nigerian immigrant in England exemplifies how intersectionality has influenced my socioeconomic mobility and social class while overcoming the challenges I encountered. Exploring how my cultural identity and gender present challenges in social spaces may reveal the multiple dimensions of intersectionality and it also informs how privileged groups are understood.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality can be referred to as the interdependent phenomena of oppression which may be in relation to race, gender, class, disability and so on (Collins, 2022).

Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Crenshaw (1989), acknowledges that Black women may encounter both shared and distinct forms of discrimination compared to White women, Black men, and individuals from other intersecting identities. Social class, on the other hand, serves as a fundamental aspect of social stratification, providing insight into

individuals' standings within societal hierarchies based on several factors such as wealth, income, education, and occupation.

Social stratification in the UK is intricately influenced by historical and structural elements encompassing industrialisation, economic policies, educational frameworks, and cultural norms (McManus, 2023). Historically, determinants such as inheritance, land ownership, and aristocratic titles wielded substantial influence in ascribing social status. However, with the ascendance of industrial capitalism and the burgeoning middle class, factors such as occupational prestige and educational attainment assumed paramount importance in shaping social standing. Contemporary UK society continues to grapple with the dynamics of social mobility, a quintessential aspect of social stratification (Bukodi et al., 2017). While specific individuals can ascend or descend the social hierarchy through avenues such as educational attainment, employment prospects, and wealth accumulation, persistent obstacles to mobility endure, including systemic inequities, discriminatory practices, and constrained resource access.

Social stratification within the UK delineates the hierarchical organisation of individuals and groups within society based on diverse socioeconomic determinants such as wealth, income, education, occupation, and social status (Fisher, 2017). This hierarchical structuring categorises individuals into distinct social classes or strata, each characterised by varying power levels, prestige, and resource access. Traditionally, social stratification in the UK has

been predicated on class distinctions, with the working class, middle class, and upper class serving as primary delineations (Savage et al., 2015). These classifications are often delineated by individuals' occupational roles, income levels, and possession of wealth and authority.

In the context of the United Kingdom, the significance of social class transcends mere categorisation; it is deeply ingrained in shaping individuals' life prospects, resource accessibility, and socioeconomic mobility. The elucidation of social class dynamics often finds its footing in social stratification theory, which underscores the hierarchical arrangement of society into discrete strata delineated by individuals' socioeconomic attributes (Grusky & Weeden, 2018). Traditionally, social class in the UK has been divided into three main categories: working class (£15,000 - £25,000), middle class (£25,000 - £70,000), and upper class (above £70,000), distinguished by occupation, income, and wealth (Savage et al., 2015). While working in the care sector, I was considered part of the working class. Now, as an academic, I am classified as middle class. I will explore my social class further in Chapter Five of my thesis.

Max Weber's conceptualisation of social stratification offers a multifaceted approach, highlighting the interplay of economic, social, and cultural factors in shaping individuals' societal standings (Weber, 2013). Within the UK context, Weberian theory accentuates the significance of status and prestige alongside economic metrics in delineating social class

positions. For instance, professions such as doctors and lawyers may ascend to elevated social strata not solely by financial prosperity but also owing to societal esteem and cultural capital. In contrast, Marxist theory posits social class as primarily contingent upon individuals' relations to means of production, with capitalist societies marked by exploiting the working class by the capitalist elite (Marx & Engels, 1848). Within the UK, Marxist analysis underscores economic disparity and class conflict as pivotal forces moulding social class dynamics. For instance, consolidating wealth and influence among a select capitalist echelon perpetuates class disparities and exploits the working class.

In examining my Nigerian heritage and its impact on my academic journey, it is essential to contextualise this within broader socio-economic frameworks. Understanding my experiences requires an exploration of theoretical perspectives on social class and cultural capital. The next section, 'The Embourgeoisement Thesis and Social Class Dynamics,' delves into these frameworks, highlighting how social class and economic dynamics shape individual experiences and societal positions. By integrating Max Weber's and Karl Marx's theories with the embourgeoisement thesis, we gain insight into the fluid and often contested nature of social class, particularly in the context of my academic experiences in the UK.

The Embourgeoisement Thesis and Social Class Dynamics

The embourgeoisement thesis, proposed by sociologist John Goldthorpe (1969), offers a fascinating lens through which to view the fluid and intricate nature of social class boundaries in contemporary societies (Goldthorpe et al., 1969). While it has faced scrutiny within the UK for oversimplifying class dynamics and neglecting enduring inequalities (Marshall, 1997), this theory presents a complex and dynamic understanding of social class. Real-world examples from the UK context underscore the practical application of theoretical constructs in understanding social class dynamics. For instance, the decline of traditional manufacturing sectors in regions such as Northern England has uprooted working-class communities and eroded social cohesion (Savage et al., 2015). Conversely, London's burgeoning financial services sector has consolidated wealth and power among the upper class, exacerbating socioeconomic inequalities (Piketty, 2014). These examples demonstrate how social class is a complex aspect of British society, profoundly influencing individuals' access to resources, opportunities, and life chances.

Cultural Capital and Habitus: Insights and Critiques

It is imperative to recognise the multifaceted nature of social class in the UK context, where intersecting identities such as ethnicity and migration experiences intersect to shape individuals' experiences of social stratification (Savage et al., 2015). While traditional

classifications delineate social class along hierarchical lines, recent scholarship underscores its multidimensional nature, encompassing economic, cultural, and social dimensions (Grusky & Weeden, 2018). Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital offer valuable insights into how cultural resources, such as education and qualifications, perpetuate social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital includes various non-financial social assets acquired through an individual's cultural background, upbringing, and socialisation. These resources—such as educational qualifications, language proficiency, cultural knowledge, social networks, and aesthetic preferences—significantly shape individuals' life chances and social mobility, thereby reinforcing social stratification.

Privileged individuals with access to high-quality education and influential social networks possess greater cultural capital, enabling them to navigate social institutions more effectively and gain advantages over others. However, Bourdieu also highlights the unequal distribution of cultural capital, noting that individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds often face barriers to accessing quality education and influential networks, thus limiting their opportunities for social mobility (1986). Additionally, cultural capital operates symbolically, with specific cultural practices and preferences being valorised within society, which reinforces the dominance of certain cultural norms associated with privileged groups. For instance, qualifications from prestigious institutions are often given greater value, contributing to the perpetuation of social stratification based on class, race, and ethnicity (Gordon et al., 2019). This understanding sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how these dynamics influence both social mobility and self-perception in the subsequent section.

Personal Reflections: The Interplay of Cultural Capital and Systemic Barriers

In my thesis, the concept of habitus and the critiques of Bourdieu's cultural capital ideas are deeply relevant. Bourdieu's idea of habitus (1986), which includes the ingrained skills, habits, and dispositions shaped by cultural and social experiences, helps me articulate how my background and identity as an African woman influence my journey through the EdD programme in the UK. My habitus, shaped by my unique cultural heritage and social experiences, plays a significant role in how I perceive, interpret, and respond to the challenges and opportunities within the academic environment.

However, the critiques of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory are particularly pertinent to my study. Critics argue that Bourdieu's focus on cultural resources, such as education and linguistic skills, overlooks the structural barriers and institutional discrimination that marginalised groups, including women of African descent, face in educational settings (Fraser, 2000). This is especially relevant in the context of my experiences in the UK, where systemic inequalities and racism may pose significant challenges to my academic journey. By engaging with these critiques, I can explore how institutional discrimination, and systemic barriers have influenced my access to educational resources and opportunities. While Bourdieu's concept of habitus helps explain how I navigate the social world of academia, it may not fully capture the broader socio-political contexts that constrain my experiences as an African woman. Therefore, in my thesis, I aim to examine the interplay between cultural

capital and these broader structural factors, providing a more nuanced understanding of my lived experiences within the EdD programme. The relationship between Bourdieu's habitus and cultural capital theories, alongside the critiques of these theories, allows me to explore how my personal and cultural background intersects with systemic barriers in the UK educational system, shaping my academic journey and broader social experiences.

Additionally, critics contend that Bourdieu's idea tends to essentialise culture, overlooking the agency of individuals in challenging and transforming cultural norms and practices (Du Gay, 1995). While Bourdieu's cultural capital idea provides valuable insights into the role of education and qualifications in perpetuating social inequalities, it is essential to examine its limitations critically. By acknowledging the interplay between cultural resources and structural factors, as well as the agency of individuals, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of how social inequalities are produced and reproduced within society. It is important to note that while cultural capital is a significant factor in perpetuating social inequalities, it is not the only factor, and a comprehensive understanding of social stratification requires consideration of other structural and systemic factors.

The Role of Nigerian Cultural Capital in My Academic Journey

The cultural capital I developed within the Nigerian context equipped me with essential tools that have been invaluable throughout my academic journey in the UK. My background instilled in me a strong work ethic, resilience, and a deep respect for education, all of which

have enabled me to navigate the demanding academic environment in the UK. These qualities have helped me persevere through challenges, adapt to new academic expectations, and approach my studies with dedication and determination.

However, while these attributes have been crucial in helping me succeed, they have not fully shielded me from the difficulties related to self-confidence and self-esteem. The skills and values I brought with me from Nigeria have provided a foundation upon which to build, but the transition to a different academic culture, coupled with the lack of representation of Black women in academia, has presented unique challenges. These experiences underscore how my Nigerian cultural capital has been both a source of strength and a framework through which I have had to negotiate the complexities of my academic life in the UK.

My thesis aims to delve into the interplay between cultural capital, self-confidence, and self-esteem, offering insights into how my background shapes my experiences and viewpoints within the Education Doctorate programme. Acknowledging the impact of systemic issues like underrepresentation and cultural marginalisation, my research seeks to illuminate the complex dynamics influencing my sense of belonging within academia. This interplay is crucial to understanding how social inequalities are produced and reproduced within society, and it is the primary focus of my research. To further explore these complexities, it is essential to consider how social class intersects with other aspects of identity, such as race and gender, in shaping individual experiences. The next section will examine the

relationship between social class and intersectionality, providing a broader framework for understanding these overlapping influences.

Social Class and Intersectionality

Intersectionality theory, pioneered by Crenshaw (1989), offers a robust analytical framework for comprehending the intricate interplay of social identities and power structures. It provides a critical lens to explore how social class intersects with other axes of identity, such as race, ethnicity, and gender, to shape individuals' experiences of privilege and oppression. As a person of colour at a predominantly white institution, my race determines how I navigate within these spaces. In this thesis, I will refer to race quite often and need to establish what race means.

Race is a multifaceted and socially constructed concept, with scholars offering various perspectives on its definition. According to Omi and Winant (2014), race is characterised as a concept that signifies and symbolises social conflicts and interests by referring to several types of human bodies. This definition underscores the idea that race is not solely based on biological attributes but is intricately linked to societal power dynamics and hierarchies. Similarly, Bonilla-Silva defines race as a social construction that denotes group categories based on selected physical traits thought to reflect innate differences (2021). This highlights the arbitrary nature of racial classifications and emphasises the role of social mechanisms in constructing and perpetuating racial boundaries. These definitions collectively illustrate that

race is a product of social construction rather than biological determinism, demonstrating its profound impact on shaping social interactions and power structures.

The theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, as pioneered by Crenshaw (1989), and the concepts of race as defined by Omi and Winant (2014) and Bonilla-Silva (2021), are highly relevant to addressing my three research questions. These frameworks provide a robust analytical lens through which I can examine the complexities of identity, power structures, and social dynamics, all of which are central to my inquiry.

When exploring the extent to which some methodologies might unintentionally 'other' ethnic minority students in academic research, intersectionality theory is crucial in understanding how race, ethnicity, gender, and social class intersect. This theory helps reveal the biases and assumptions that may be embedded in research practices, which can marginalise or misrepresent the experiences of ethnic minority students, thereby reinforcing systemic inequalities. Understanding the multifaceted nature of race as a social construct, as discussed by Omi and Winant (2014) and Bonilla-Silva (2021), allows me to critically evaluate how some methodologies might perpetuate stereotypes or fail to capture the lived realities of these students. This insight directly informs my investigation into the extent to which academic research might 'other' ethnic minority students, highlighting the need for more inclusive and reflective research approaches.

Reflecting on my experiences as an African woman, intersectionality theory offers a valuable framework to examine how the intersection of race, gender, and cultural background has influenced my motivation to pursue a doctorate in the UK. The cultural capital I developed in both Nigeria and the UK has been pivotal in helping me navigate the challenges of higher education. This capital, consisting of the knowledge, skills, and experiences I have accumulated across two diverse cultural contexts, has empowered me to manage academic demands and social expectations. However, the intersection of race and gender within predominantly white institutions has significantly impacted my sense of belonging and self-confidence (Maslow, 1970).

As a Black African woman in these settings, I have experienced moments of exclusion or self-doubt, which in turn have influenced my academic aspirations. This tension between feeling marginalised and striving for success is a critical part of my educational journey, shaped by the intersecting identities that I carry with me. By applying an intersectional lens, I can better understand how these complex social dynamics have driven my educational pursuits. The interplay of race, gender, and culture reveals the multi-layered factors that have shaped my decision to undertake doctoral studies, providing a deeper analysis of my motivations. Intersectionality allows for a nuanced view of how societal structures and individual experiences intersect, making it clear that my journey is influenced not solely by academic ambition, but also by the broader context of social inequalities and personal resilience.

In summary, intersectionality theory provides a critical framework to explore the layered influences of race, gender, and cultural background on my academic journey. Through this lens, I can better appreciate how these interconnected identities have shaped both the challenges and motivations I have faced in pursuing a doctorate in the UK. This approach enriches the analysis of my personal and educational experiences, revealing the profound impact of social dynamics on my sense of self and academic aspirations.

In considering how my cultural perspective has influenced my transformative learning to a doctoral level, I see that my experiences as an African woman in both Nigeria and the UK have played a significant role. Intersectionality allows me to explore how my cultural identity, alongside other social factors such as race and gender, has influenced my learning experiences and intellectual growth. The social construction of race, as discussed by Omi and Winant (2014) and Bonilla-Silva (2021), further illustrates how my racial identity has shaped my interactions within academic spaces and how these experiences have contributed to my transformative learning. Understanding how my cultural perspective intersects with broader social identities and power structures allows me to provide a nuanced analysis of how these factors have influenced my academic development and learning outcomes.

Intersectionality theory and the social construction of race provide essential frameworks for addressing my research questions. These concepts help illuminate how methodological

practices might marginalise ethnic minority students, how my intersecting identities have motivated my pursuit of a doctorate, and how my cultural perspective has shaped my transformative learning journey. Applying these frameworks enables me to develop a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of social stratification, inequality, and identity within the context of my doctoral studies.

The Intersection of Race and Social Class

The categorisation of race creates hierarchies that position certain racial groups as superior and others as inferior. The hierarchical disposition is what justifies the unequal distribution of power, opportunities, and resources, which leads to racism. Racism involves the exclusion and mistreatment of people of colour in white spaces, placing them in a lower position and mistreating them due to baseless beliefs of inherent inferiority (Braveman et al., 2022). This encompasses both intentional acts of injustice and subconscious prejudices that lead to the subjugation of individuals belonging to racial minority groups. Racism can manifest in ways that are not necessarily obvious or deliberate; frequently, it functions within the framework and organisation of a system or structure. Systemic and structural racism are forms of racism that are not as obvious as hate crimes, but they can often be visible to the victims. These may include discrimination, denial of opportunities, biased treatment, etc. Systemic and structural racism encompasses widespread and deeply rooted types of prejudice that exist within various systems, laws, policies, practices, and societal attitudes (ibid).

Institutions and structures can sustain the pervasive and unjust treatment of individuals belonging to racial minorities, either through explicit policies or unconscious biases.

Braveman et al., posit that systemic racism constitutes the underlying mechanism that pervades entire societal systems, encompassing domains such as political governance, legal frameworks, economic structures, healthcare systems, educational institutions, and criminal justice along with the underlying frameworks that sustain these systems (2022). Structural racism delineates the specific role played by these systems, including legislative frameworks, regulatory mechanisms, institutional protocols, and deeply entrenched social norms, in establishing the fundamental framework for systemic racism. Systemic racism inherently encompasses structural racism, hence the interchangeable usage of the term 'systemic racism' to summarise both concepts. Alternatively, the term institutional racism is often used synonymously with systemic or structural racism, elucidating the way institutional systems and structures contribute to the perpetuation of racial discrimination and oppression, whether within specific institutional contexts or across broader societal realms.

Intersectionality theory highlights how racialised identities intersect with social class to shape individuals' access to resources, opportunities, and social networks, influencing their socioeconomic mobility and integration into British society (Okome, 2010). For individuals from Nigerian cultural backgrounds like me, our racial experiences intersect with social class

dynamics, influencing our socioeconomic trajectories. Ade-Ojo and Duckworth (2015) underscore the diverse narratives within migrant communities, illustrating how language proficiency and cultural adaptation impact individuals' access to opportunities. Within the context of Nigerian immigrants in the UK, intersectionality offers a nuanced perspective through which to examine how race, ethnicity, gender, and migration status intersect with social class dynamics, shaping individuals' experiences of privilege and marginalisation.

Intersectionality theory posits that individuals occupy multiple social positions simultaneously, and these intersecting identities shape their experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). Nigerian immigrants in the UK navigate intersecting axes of identity, including race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and migration status, all of which combine with social class to create distinct experiences of social stratification (Crenshaw, 1989). Understanding these intersections requires a comprehensive approach that accounts for the interconnected nature of various dimensions of identity and power. For these immigrants, social class intertwines with other identity factors, significantly influencing their socioeconomic pathways and available opportunities (Castles & Miller, 1998). Hence, research indicates that Nigerian immigrants often encounter structural barriers in accessing employment, education, and housing, compounded by factors such as racial discrimination and cultural stereotyping (Vertovec, 2007).

Intersectionality theory helps elucidate how these intersecting forms of oppression intersect with social class to produce differential outcomes for Nigerian immigrants (Vertovec, 2007). Race and ethnicity intersect with social class to deliver unique experiences of marginalisation and exclusion among Nigerian immigrants. Studies have demonstrated that racialised minorities, including Nigerians, face disproportionate levels of poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion in the UK (Gordon et al., 2019). Moreover, gender also intersects with social class among Nigerian immigrants, shaping their experiences of socioeconomic inequality and discrimination. Research indicates that Nigerian women encounter intersecting forms of oppression based on their gender and ethnicity, which intersect with social class to produce unique challenges and opportunities (Ogbemudia, 2022). Intersectionality theory underscores the significance of considering the intersecting dimensions of gender and social class in understanding the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in the UK. Migration status intersects with social class among Nigerian immigrants, particularly concerning legal status, access to services, and employment opportunities. Undocumented migrants and asylum seekers often contend with precarious living conditions and limited access to social welfare provisions, which intersect with social class to exacerbate vulnerability and marginalisation (Bloch et al., 2011).

Intersectionality theory illuminates how migration status intersects with social class to shape individuals' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in British society. It offers a critical lens through which to understand social class among Nigerian immigrants in the UK. By examining the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and migration status with social class,

intersectionality theory furnishes a comprehensive framework for analysing the complex dynamics of socioeconomic inequality and structural oppression. The emphasis is placed on the importance of intersectionality in shaping policies and interventions aimed at redressing inequalities and fostering social justice for Nigerian immigrants in the UK.

An in-depth exploration is conducted into how intersectionality intersects with social class dynamics in higher education (Bhopal, 2017). Bhopal examines the complex interplay between race, ethnicity, and social class, emphasising their combined influence on disparities observed within higher education systems (ibid). A critical aspect underscored is the acknowledgement that individuals' experiences in higher education are not solely shaped by their racial or ethnic backgrounds but also by their social class. It is noted that individuals belonging to marginalised racial or ethnic groups may encounter additional hurdles if they also find themselves positioned within lower social classes. This intersectionality complicates the experiences of both students and faculty members, affecting their access to resources, opportunities, and support networks within higher education institutions. For example, the exclusion of non-white voices and the Eurocentric focus within the curriculum has been shown to affect student belonging and engagement, particularly among Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, who may struggle to see their identities and histories represented within educational spaces (Arday et al., 2021).

Additionally, these exclusions not only impact BAME students but also create barriers for faculty members who must navigate predominantly white institutional structures

(Moncrieffe et al., 2020). The persistence of inequitable structures is highlighted by decolonisation efforts in education (Maylor et al., 2021), further reinforcing the difficulty for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to navigate these academic environments (Chetty, 2020).

Again, social class intersects with race and ethnicity to perpetuate inequalities across various dimensions, such as academic achievement, access to higher education, and the attainment of academic positions (Bhopal, 2017). Those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds often encounter structural barriers like financial constraints, limited access to quality education during earlier stages, and a lack of cultural capital. These barriers intersect with racial inequalities, resulting in cumulative disadvantages in higher education.

Therefore, exploring the intersectionality of social class within higher education is crucial as it sheds light on the multifaceted nature of inequalities inherent within academic institutions. This understanding highlights the importance of adopting comprehensive strategies to promote equity and inclusion within educational settings. These also help address the diverse needs of individuals from various social backgrounds while maintaining student retention and completion.

My pursuit of a doctorate originates from a desire to break free from low-paying jobs. After moving to England in 2008 with my husband, I spent several years working as a carer and in factories. Realising the need to advance my career, I viewed education as the key to achieving greater professional and personal progress. This commitment to academic success

as a means of social mobility aligns with the concept that Bourdieu (2007) referred to as the ‘oblat miraculé’—the idea of an individual who dedicates themselves to education as a form of sacrifice, hoping that academic achievement will lead to a miraculous transformation in their social status and opportunities. However, studies indicate that the determination of adult students to complete their degrees and the factors influencing their decisions to leave higher education are intertwined with challenges related to finances, academic demands, institutional culture, and personal circumstances (RANLHE, 2009). At various points, financial constraints almost led me to consider abandoning my higher education journey. Initially, I worked two low-paid jobs to fund my education, which took a toll on my family life, studies, and overall well-being. Balancing family commitments while saving for tuition fees proved challenging, forcing me to resort to personal loans. I opted to supplement my income with loans when my applications for student loans were unsuccessful.

Research by RANLHE reveals that students who do not complete their degrees, as well as those who do, undergo significant personal transformation (Merrill, 2015). Merrill contends that non-completion does not necessarily carry negative connotations, as students often discuss the benefits they derive from the learning experience, identity development, and personal growth at the university. Nonetheless, during a particularly challenging period, when financial difficulties arose from relocating within the UK, I contemplated dropping out of the program. I later chose to take a temporary break instead. Like Bourdieu, I embody the exception within the working class, succeeding against formidable odds as ‘une miraculée’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Despite grappling with feelings of inadequacy, my

determination to secure a better future for myself and uphold the hopes of my extended family in Nigeria outweighed the uncertainty. The prospect of remaining trapped in low-paying jobs as a non-completion student was intolerable, fuelling my resolve to persevere. I will explore my lived experiences that relate to these in Chapter Five.

Following the exploration of social class and intersectionality, it is crucial to delve into the historical and cultural context of Nigeria to fully understand the social issues embedded within both colonial and postcolonial frameworks. Nigeria's rich history and diverse cultural heritage have significantly shaped its societal structures and ongoing challenges. The legacy of colonialism has left enduring imprints on Nigerian social, economic, and political landscapes, influencing contemporary issues of inequality and identity. By examining Nigeria's historical trajectory and cultural dynamics, we can better appreciate how colonial legacies continue to impact social stratification and contribute to systemic barriers faced by individuals from Nigerian backgrounds. The next section will establish the foundational social issues that arise from Nigeria's colonial past and its postcolonial realities, setting the stage for a deeper analysis of their implications within the broader context of global academic practices and the lived experiences of Nigerian individuals in the UK.

Nigeria

Historical Background

Nigeria is an English-speaking country in West Africa that was colonised by the British Empire in the 19th century until it gained independence in 1960. It is common for Nigerians to speak multiple languages, including English or the widely spoken Nigerian Pidgin English. The country is home to more than 250 ethnic groups, with over five hundred distinct languages and diverse cultures (Mustapha & Ehrhardt, 2018). Most Nigerians identify as either Christians or Muslims, but there are also followers of traditional religions and idol worshippers (ibid). In Nigeria, religious, political, social, and economic conditions are deeply intertwined (Dowd, 2015). As the decolonisation process advanced in 1948, Dr Azikiwe, one of Nigeria's political leaders and the first president from 1963 to 1966 encouraged Nigerians to put aside their differences and embrace the concept of 'One Nigeria' (Mustapha & Ehrhardt, 2018). Dr Azikiwe, born to Christian Igbo parents from Anambra State in Southeastern Nigeria, lived in Zungeru, now known as Niger State in the Middle Belt region, where he learned to speak Hausa. He later moved to Onitsha, east of the Niger River, where he became fluent in Igbo, and he also spent time in Lagos, where he learned Yoruba. It could be argued that Dr Azikiwe's diverse lived experiences as the 'other' in various parts of Nigeria influenced his advocacy for a 'One Nigeria' perspective.

In contrast, Sir Balewa, who opposed the 'One Nigeria' motion, served as Nigeria's first and only Prime Minister. A devout Muslim from Bauchi, Northern Nigeria, Balewa completed

most of his education locally before studying at the present-day University College London in 1944. It can be argued that Balewa had less exposure to being an 'outsider' in Nigeria compared to Azikiwe. In one of his statements, Balewa cautioned Nigerians against being misled by the 'One Nigeria' motion, claiming that Southerners were 'pouring into the North' without integrating with the local population, causing Northerners to perceive them as 'invaders' (Coleman, 2022). Likewise, other prominent Northern leaders regarded Southerners as akin to the new Europeans in the region, wielding control over key government financial resources such as railways, post offices, and hospitals. This reminds me of visiting my mother at the bank where she worked when I was in primary school; it was evident that the senior management team was predominantly composed of Southerners from Yoruba and Igbo backgrounds.

Nigeria's Social Issues

The Northern people's apprehensiveness developed religion and identity politics through the Northernisation programme (Mustapha & Ehrhardt, 2018). The Northernisation programme was set up in defence of the threat perceived by the Northerners that the Southern people were replacing the Europeans in the North, which also meant Christian domination (ibid). This inevitably reveals how political roles have contributed to the ongoing conflicts between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria.

The social conflict in Nigeria has been reproduced since the early colonial period, with Northern Nigeria considered disadvantaged compared to Southern Nigeria (Mustapha & Ehrhardt, 2018). More political turbulence arose when some Northern States adopted Sharia law in Nigeria (ibid). Nigeria sparked international criticism when two women from Northern Nigeria, Amina Lawal and Safiya Hussein, were sentenced to death for giving birth outside wedlock in 2002 under Sharia customs, despite one of the victim's claims that the pregnancy resulted from repeatedly being raped by a man (Adesina, 2016). The Sharia law found the accused men not guilty due to lack of evidence. After a retrial in 2002, fortunately, both women were acquitted (ibid). There has been a widespread debate about how Islamic practices have continued to disadvantage Muslim women in Nigeria, especially Northern Muslim women (Adesina, 2010). The Southern Nigerian Muslim women refer to such Islamic practices as unfair, unjust and a violation of human rights (ibid). The data from the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey highlight significant disparities in girl-child marriage rates across different regions and ethnic groups in Nigeria. In the Northern region, where cultural and religious practices often play a prominent role, a substantial proportion of girls aged 15-19 participated in girl-child marriages, with an overall rate of 54.8%. Among ethnic minorities in the Northern region, this rate was notably lower but still significant at 25.7%.

In contrast, the Southern region exhibited much lower prevalence rates of girl-child marriages. The two major Southern ethnic groups recorded rates ranging from 3.0% to 3.6%, indicating a stark contrast with the Northern region. Southern minorities, while higher

than the major ethnic groups, also had comparatively lower rates at 5.9%. These disparities underscore the complex interplay of cultural, religious, and regional factors influencing the prevalence of girl-child marriages in Nigeria. The higher rates in the Northern region suggest a stronger adherence to traditional norms and religious beliefs that support early marriages for girls. In contrast, the lower rates in the Southern region may reflect diverse cultural practices and perhaps greater access to education and awareness about the harms of early marriages.

Addressing these disparities requires interventions that consider the specific cultural and social contexts within each region and ethnic group. Efforts to combat girl-child marriages should focus on empowering communities with education, promoting gender equality, and challenging harmful cultural practices and beliefs that perpetuate early marriages.

Social injustices have been observed against women and the girl-child, reflecting pervasive gender inequalities in Nigeria (Makama, 2013). Therefore, there has been a broader interest in exploring the narratives of the social realities of gender identities in Nigeria and across Africa (ibid). Ethnicity and religion are identified as major factors influencing the lived experiences of the girl-child and women in Nigeria.

Christianity was introduced to Southern Nigerians in the 15th Century by missionaries from Spain, Ireland, and Portugal, who built schools and hospitals while evangelising (Alubo,

2011). Christianity arrived in the North during the mid-19th Century (ibid). While Christianity spread across Nigeria, it also introduced ideological divisions, shaping identities as 'us' versus 'them' (Alubo, 2008). Since the late colonial period, towns like Jos and Kaduna have experienced religious and political tensions that significantly impact social and economic conditions (Mustapha & Ehrhardt, 2018). Understanding these historical and cultural contexts is crucial for addressing gender inequalities and social injustices affecting women and girls in Nigeria. Efforts to promote gender equality and protect the rights of women and girls must consider the intersections of ethnicity, religion, and socio-political dynamics to effectively promote positive social change and empowerment.

Early Awareness of Racial Discrimination Through Cinematic Contrasts

I was about seven or eight years old when I first became aware of social injustice and discrimination through watching 'Things Fall Apart,' a Nigerian movie (Achebe, 1958). The novel was published in 1958 and later turned into a movie. Adapted from Chinua Achebe's novel, the film portrayed cultural conflicts and the impact of colonialism (ibid). Before that, my father discouraged us from watching Nigerian movies because he did not consider them educational. The first non-Nigerian movie I recall watching was 'The Sound of Music' (1965), which portrayed White people as kind-hearted and deeply valuing music and family. This contrast in cinematic experiences sparked my early awareness of racial and cultural differences.

The Things Fall Apart story is about pre-colonial life in the southeastern part of Nigeria and the arrival of Europeans in the 19th Century. The storyline depicts how Christianity was introduced to Nigerians and the difficulties the people experienced during colonialism, which was the control of Nigerian people by the Europeans at the time for economic gains. I was always looking forward to watching the episodes shown on national TV with my family as a child. This was not because I took lightly the suffering of Nigerians at that time of colonialism, considering that the stories were loosely based on true events. The movie made me aware of the different perspectives I had about Britishness. My initial thoughts were that all White people were as lovely as my school head teacher, and I was deeply saddened to see the harsh treatment of the Nigerian people by the Whites. The Nigerian 'Things Fall Apart' television episodes brought to my awareness racial discrimination from an early age.

The Nigerian North versus South Disparities

The Northerners assumed that Christianity was from the power of expansion of colonisation through their unguarded geographical spaces. As a result, the Southerners were taking control of the financial resources in their geographical area, reproducing colonisation. Said quoted Leroy-Beaulieu as follows.

'Colonisation is the expansive force of a people; it is its power of reproduction; it is its enlargement and its multiplication through space; it is the subjection of the universe or a

vast part of it to that people's language, customs, ideas and laws.' (Leroy-Beaulieu cited in Said, 2003, p. 219).

It could be argued that Southerners were seen as a threat in the North with the knowledge of how Europe or the West colonised Africa in the 19th Century. The French and British empires became allies and partners when they compromised to share their common interest of taking over Africa and Asia to avoid war (Said, 2013). Again, Said quotes Lord Salisbury (1881), 'When you have got a ... faithful ally who is bent on meddling in a country in which you are deeply interested - you have three courses open to you. You may renounce, monopolise, or share..... So, we resolved to share' (Said, 2013, p. 41). It became clear that intellectual power was also part of what was shared alongside land, profit, and rule, which Said called 'Orientalism' (ibid).

The Northerners were careful not to allow history to repeat itself, and the 'One Nigeria' motion was not considered to be in their best interest. Some evidence suggests that the geographical segregation of the ethnic groups in Nigeria by the British Empire developed the identities of 'us' versus 'them' in communities once closely affiliated (Said, 2013). These have embedded some historical grievances among communities as ethnic groups in the sixteenth century raided ethnic minorities for domestic work in the ruler's households and for sale to make additional income, which aided the exportation of slaves (Fisher and Fisher, 1970). Nigeria has had a troubled past, and the social conflicts have continued to this

present day. It is believed that the divide-and-rule strategy that the British Empire used to control countries during the colonisation era contributed to the crisis of the identity structure in colonised countries (Said, 2013). The British Empire created two British protectorates in Nigeria called the Northern and Southern Protectorates under the British colonial administrator Sir Luggard (ibid).

In addition, during the pre-colonial era, several indigenous chiefdoms were established to help with the British indirect rule system (ibid). These led to several ethnic groups with designated traditional rulers assigned to oversee affairs across Nigeria. Sir Balewa recognised the disparities of the Northern States as underdeveloped and poorer than the Southern States (Mustapha & Ehrhardt, 2018). According to the records, in 2013, the Northern States were four times poorer than the Southern States, and 73 per cent lived in poverty compared to 24 per cent of the Southern States (ibid). Again, the same pattern could be observed as most Muslim States were four times poorer than States with Christians.

These historical disparities were heavily influenced by religion, which has played a contentious role in Nigerian politics (Dowd, 2015). Post-independence saw an increased interest in attaining higher education in Nigeria as modern universities emerged. Initially, most Southerners were the first to pursue higher education both nationally and internationally (Ibid). Consequently, Nigerians recognised globally for their distinguished

accomplishments in literature, arts, culture, and science have predominantly been from the South.

However, despite Southern Christians in the North being more educated than their Muslim counterparts, they experience political marginalisation (Higazi, 2016). Nigeria, as a multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic country (ibid), recognises traditional rulers and cultural practices through the Nigerian federal government's constitution, which evolved from the colonial period (Ibid). These traditional institutions, known as 'royal fathers,' primarily mobilise people for or against the government (ibid, p. 303) and often shield government officials accused of financial crimes or misconduct. This complex interplay of education, religion, and traditional governance underscores enduring challenges and dynamics within Nigerian society, shaping political and social landscapes in multifaceted ways.

For instance, Mohammed Abacha, son of the late head of State Sani Abacha, embezzled billions of dollars (Ibid). Although initially protected by the Northern Kano Emirate, his eventual arrest triggered political protests in Kano. This incident underscores the broader issues within Nigerian society, such as corruption in political circles and the complex power dynamics between traditional rulers, government authorities, and the public. The protests also highlighted the deep-seated religious and ethnic tensions that have historically shaped political rivalries and societal unrest in Nigeria (Ibid). Such events continue to reflect

ongoing challenges in governance and accountability, contributing to the country's volatile socio-political landscape.

My parents, originally from the southern part of Nigeria but settled in the northern region, were Christians. Attending church on Sundays was non-negotiable for us as children. They aimed to instill strong Christian values through Bible teachings. I vividly recall memorising weekly Bible verses to avoid reprimand from the Sunday school teacher, who often picked students at random to recite them. Many children would sneak to the restrooms if unprepared, knowing the teachers could reprimand any child. Physical punishment for misbehaviour was common. Despite my reluctance, attending Sunday school became ingrained in my upbringing as a lesson in obedience.

I also attended a Catholic primary school, where my head teacher was British. This was my first encounter with Britishness. The school's library was filled with Western books featuring pictures of white children with blonde hair and blue eyes. During my early years in primary school, there were hardly any books written by Nigerian authors. I saw how white children played in the snow and ate apples, which was quite different from the sand we played with in Nigeria and the mangoes I ate as a child. My favourite storybooks were 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears.' I was fascinated by the wolves and bears in both stories, as those types of animals are not found in Nigeria. The storybooks I read broadened

my imagination and knowledge of Britishness, but at the time, I lacked the opportunity to engage with indigenous learning resources.

The Hidden Forms of Colonialism and Colonial Mentality

Despite political independence, postcolonialism studies have continued to expose the hidden forms of colonialism (Bhabha, 1994). As a Nigerian woman living in the UK, I can explore how colonial mentality has constructed my identity and perceptions over time. At some point in my life, I believed that anything Western was more prestigious and more valid than anything non-Western.

As Fela, a renowned Nigerian musician, observed, the colonial mentality continues to attract previously colonised nations, leading to the abandonment of their cultural identity in favour of Western ideologies (Caroll, 2013). Countries like Nigeria and India, despite having formally gained independence, are still grappling with neo-colonialism, a form of psychological colonisation where Western influence remains dominant (Said, 2013). Additionally, the British have adopted more covert forms of control over Commonwealth countries, perpetuating hidden forms of colonialism (Nahaboo, 2023). Although the Commonwealth initially comprised nations that were once British colonies, it has since opened membership to other countries that wish to join voluntarily. As Chigudu explains, colonialism's impact lingers well beyond formal independence, with its legacy influencing contemporary politics,

identity, and societal structures (2021). This ongoing influence highlights the persistent nature of colonial power, even in post-colonial contexts.

Drawing people and resources worldwide to promote democracy and peace alongside other worthy causes helps to unite these countries. For example, some of the African nations of the Commonwealth are against same-sex marriage, but due to the benefits they derive from being part of the Commonwealth, they may reconsider their views. It could be observed that some of those countries that deny the human rights of LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual and more) participated in the 2022 Commonwealth Games without any form of opposition despite the increased awareness of LGBTQIA+ at the events.

Britain continues to exercise superiority and control over the Commonwealth countries in subtle ways, introducing Western ideologies without the forceful coercion of the colonisation period (Nahaboo, 2023). In addition, others might argue that through the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, countries are connected to protect natural resources and boost economic trade to benefit the investment of Western countries.

So far in my introduction, I have highlighted the history of Nigeria and the impact of colonialism in shaping our collective identities. It is now important for me to explain how

this contributes to shaping my Nigerian cultural identity in relation to how I view myself in the eyes of others.

My Nigerian Cultural Identity

My Nigerian cultural background has significantly shaped how I speak, dress, and behave, forming part of the characteristics that establish the distinction of being perceived as 'the other'. As Holliday (2005) suggests, our cultures define who we are, and these cultural markers often set us apart in different social contexts. For instance, when I introduce myself as 'Buki', a name common in Nigeria, I frequently encounter Western people asking, 'How do I pronounce your name?' I typically respond by suggesting they replace the 'C' in 'cookie' with a 'B', creating 'Bookie', which helps them remember. While I appreciate their efforts to pronounce my name correctly, I often feel a sense of relief that I do not have to explain the pronunciation of my full name, 'Olubukola'. This experience highlights how my name, like my cultural identity, marks me as 'the other' within a Western institution, whether I am physically present or not, such as in administrative processes.

This personal experience resonates with the 'I am not a typo' campaign, initiated in 2022, which urges tech giants to correct their autocorrect systems in the name of inclusivity. The campaign, marked by an open letter to the tech companies on 8th March 2022, emphasises how names, particularly those from non-Western cultures, are often flagged as mistakes by autocorrect systems, reinforcing a sense of otherness. Just as my name marks me as

different in face-to-face interactions, the frequent misrecognition of culturally distinct names in digital spaces perpetuates the feeling of being 'the other'. This underscores the broader issue of inclusivity, not just in social interactions but also in the technological systems that are increasingly integral to our lives. The campaign's call for change reflects the need for these systems to acknowledge and respect the cultural identities embedded in names, much like the respect I seek when others attempt to pronounce my name correctly.

The Dynamics of 'The Other' and Whiteness in Postcolonial and Critical Theories

This experience ties into Said's postcolonial theory, where the concept of 'the other' is central. Said's work emphasises how Western cultures have historically constructed non-Western cultures as exotic, different, and often inferior, thereby reinforcing a sense of otherness (Said, 1978). My face, skin colour, and name all contribute to this perception, immediately identifying me as someone from a foreign country and setting me apart from those perceived as Western, as discussed earlier (Holliday, 2005). This dynamic underscores the 'Whiteness' associated with native English speakers of Western origins, positioning me as 'the other' due to my non-White appearance (ibid).

Scholars like Ahmed (2012) and Gillborn (2006) further explore the concept of whiteness, which extends beyond racial categorisation to encompass a complex hierarchy of privilege, power, and dominance within societal structures. Ahmed argues that whiteness operates as

a normative standard, shaping institutional systems and behaviours to favour those perceived as white. Similarly, Gillborn highlights how whiteness confers social and cultural advantages, positioning white individuals at the top of societal hierarchies (2006). This intersection of race and identity, as explored through the lens of postcolonialism, illuminates the ongoing challenges of navigating cultural perceptions and societal norms that are often based on physical appearance. My experience as 'the other' in a Western institution is a reflection of these broader postcolonial dynamics, where identity and cultural differences continue to play a significant role in shaping social interactions and institutional processes.

These constructs of whiteness intersect with various theoretical frameworks, each offering unique insights into its mechanisms and implications. Critical Race Theory (CRT), for example, scrutinises how whiteness is deeply embedded in legal, social, and institutional structures, perpetuating racial hierarchies and systemic racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Postcolonial Theory examines whiteness as a representation of colonial power and authority, contributing to the establishment of hierarchies of superiority and inferiority (Chakrabarty, 2009). Intersectionality further complicates the understanding of whiteness by acknowledging its interaction with other social categories such as gender, class, and sexuality, producing nuanced forms of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 2013).

Meanwhile, Critical Whiteness Studies deconstruct whiteness as a social construct, revealing its role in maintaining systems of privilege and domination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). In

Western institutions, whiteness operates as an implicit standard, privileging white individuals and marginalising those perceived as the other (Said, 1978). Understanding whiteness requires a comprehensive examination of its historical, social, and institutional dimensions, recognising its pervasive influence on societal frameworks and relationships (Arday, 2018). By critically engaging with the concept of whiteness, scholars aim to challenge its invisibility and normalcy, fostering a deeper understanding of its effects and influences on individual experiences and societal structures.

The Impact of Being 'The Other' on Identity and Perception

The impact of being perceived as 'the other' can profoundly affect one's identity and self-perception, especially for marginalised adult students in higher education. This sense of 'otherness' is often reinforced through daily microaggressions, as highlighted by Pearce (2019). These subtle, yet harmful, behaviours – such as mispronouncing a name or questioning someone's cultural background – may seem insignificant but have a cumulative effect on individuals' well-being. For those who have experienced racism, these acts are often too subtle to name, yet they persist and deepen feelings of exclusion.

For adult students, particularly those from minority backgrounds, these microaggressions can exacerbate feelings of marginalisation in both academic and professional environments, including work placements. In such settings, these individuals may feel isolated or misunderstood, especially if their identity does not align with the dominant cultural norms.

Pearce points out that without the necessary tools to identify and challenge these subtle acts of racism, the structures that marginalise these students remain unchallenged, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion (2019). In my experience navigating predominantly white spaces, these subtle forms of exclusion mirror Pearce's findings. The consistent need to explain or justify cultural differences can reinforce the perception of being 'the other,' making it harder to navigate environments that are not designed to accommodate diverse identities. Addressing these microaggressions through educational frameworks that validate the experiences of minoritised students, as suggested by Pearce, would not only create more inclusive spaces but also empower individuals to challenge the structures that marginalise them.

Being characterised as the 'other' through lived experiences illuminates the development of systems of oppression within postcolonial contexts (Said, 1994b). As an ethnic minority student from Nigeria attending a Western university, it is crucial to recognise how my lived experiences are intricately entangled within both colonial and postcolonial frameworks. These frameworks are constructed through power dynamics that manifest in direct or indirect discrimination based on the identity of being the 'other' (Holliday, 2005). Consequently, we internalise this perspective, which becomes integral to our self-understanding (ibid). This internalisation can often lead to feelings of inferiority, diminishing self-esteem and confidence. Our interactions with others may reveal hidden perspectives shaped by our own identities as we view ourselves through the eyes of others. Our perceived differences may be unconsciously projected into focus through our awareness of

being the 'other' (Goffman, 1997). For example, I have tribal marks on my face that make me feel insecure when I am around people who are not from the same culture as myself.

In Nigeria, tribal marks signify ethnic heritage and are believed to ward off evil spirits, with parents often seeking the expertise of traditionalists to apply them to babies or people of any age (Obiechina & Olutayo, 2000). If my parents were alive, I would have asked them why they chose to give me these marks, as some of my sisters do not have them. It was assumed that I slept a lot as a baby, and they sometimes thought I had fainted, leading them to believe that the tribal marks were necessary to drive away evil spirits and save my life. This belief is associated with Nigeria's superstitious traditions (ibid). However, people with tribal marks in Nigeria often face discrimination and dehumanising stigma (ibid). While tribal marks are less common today, some argue that they are a dying tradition that should be revived for their aesthetic and cultural significance (Enaikele & Adeleke, 2017). Others believe that Western civilisation has contributed to the erosion of Yoruba ethnic identity and heritage.

Further exploration of this issue revealed that some people with tribal marks wish they could remove them, while others have resigned themselves to their fate, believing that nothing can be done to erase them (Obiechina & Olutayo, 2000). As I have grown older, I have become less concerned about my tribal marks; I can now walk my dog without wearing makeup. It became less of an issue for me when I realised that no one had asked me about

the marks until I mentioned them. My tribal marks are not as noticeable as I once thought. Nonetheless, I was thrilled when I discovered brown powder during my first degree at a Nigerian university, as it covered the marks better than white powder. When I moved to England and began using brown foundation, it felt like it concealed a multitude of flaws. I became more confident and felt more beautiful when my tribal marks were less visible, especially when I went out. Part of me does not want people to mistake these marks for signs of violence or street fights, as they might not understand that they are part of my cultural heritage and could wrongly label or stigmatise me.

My tribal marks are a part of me that I find unattractive and problematic, leading me to constantly seek ways to conceal them to avoid the associated stigmatisation. This sense of stigmatisation often arises when one is uncertain about what others are thinking in their presence, especially when one has a visible feature that may attract attention (Goffman, 1997). Being in a Western country where tribal marks are unusual may negatively affect the signifier's moral status, marking them as different from others (ibid). The marks are on my cheeks, making it difficult not to feel self-conscious, particularly during conversations. Covering them with brown foundation provides a sense of relief, as the marks become less noticeable.

In addition to facial features, speaking a language fluently is one of the significant characteristics of identifying people who are part of a culture, thereby establishing those

forms of recognition embedded in inequalities (Holliday, 2009). This suggests that one must be born or brought up early before puberty to adopt a particular country's cultural values. Similarly, this contextualises the differences between the lived experiences of a Nigerian Black woman and that of a Black British woman of African or Caribbean descent in the UK. The way I speak, and my mannerisms would distinguish me from other Black women who are not from Nigeria, influencing how I am perceived as an insider or outsider in social groups in the UK. These distinctions extend beyond mere cultural markers, shaping how I navigate social spaces and interact with others. Nevertheless, my children, who were born in this country, face challenges in being fully accepted as British due to their skin colour and the influence of 'Whiteness' (Davies, 2006). This disparity highlights how my physical attributes and cultural background play a critical role in defining my identity and navigating cultural perceptions, while also revealing the complexities of racial and cultural acceptance for the next generation.

Conclusion

In reflecting on the intricate relationship between cultural identity and belonging, this chapter has examined several key areas. It began with an exploration of how my socio-economic background influences both my academic and personal life. This foundational context sets the stage for understanding the broader implications of my experiences.

The analysis of the Embourgeoisement Thesis provided insights into the shifting nature of social class structures and their intersections with my own experiences. This framework has helped to illuminate the evolving dynamics of social class and its impact on my life.

The chapter then delved into the concepts of Cultural Capital and Habitus, offering a framework to understand the resources and dispositions that shape my identity and opportunities. This examination also prompted a critical reflection on the limitations of these concepts and the persistent systemic barriers that I face, despite the cultural capital I possess. Personal reflections highlighted the complex ways in which cultural capital interacts with systemic challenges. This interaction has been particularly evident in my academic journey, where Nigerian cultural capital has played a significant role in shaping my trajectory. Recognising the role of my heritage has been crucial for navigating the academic environment and establishing my place within it.

The discussion on social class and intersectionality underscored the intricate relationships between race, class, and identity. This intersectional perspective has revealed the multifaceted nature of my experiences and how the interplay of race and social class affects my opportunities and challenges. By examining Nigeria's historical background and social issues, I have contextualised my personal narrative within a broader socio-political framework. Early experiences with racial discrimination, contrasted through cinematic portrayals, have highlighted the influence of cultural narratives on my understanding of

identity and belonging. The chapter addressed regional disparities within Nigeria and the enduring impacts of colonialism and colonial mentality. These factors have provided important context for exploring my Nigerian cultural identity and have profoundly shaped my perspective and sense of self.

As I conclude this chapter, it is evident that my cultural identity is deeply intertwined with my socio-economic background, academic experiences, and the socio-cultural context of Nigeria. The interplay of cultural capital, systemic barriers, and intersectional factors has profoundly shaped my journey. This understanding not only informs my academic research but also enriches my personal narrative, offering a comprehensive view of the forces that have shaped my experiences and identity.

Looking ahead to the next chapter, I will delve into the theoretical framework of my thesis, examining key concepts such as Habitus, Identity, Post-Colonial Boundaries, and Educational Transition Spaces, and exploring their impact on my educational experience. This exploration will provide further insights into the theoretical underpinnings of my research and its broader implications.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Foundations: Habitus, Identity, Post-Colonial Boundaries, and Educational Transition Spaces

'I bring my social and cultural capital to the university and having a safe place to re-imagine myself in new ways requires a learning environment that encourages belonging and embraces diversity to reduce learning barriers.' (Learning Journal, 2022).

Introduction

This chapter serves as the literature review, providing the conceptual framework and theoretical foundation for the thesis. The first section of this chapter will focus on theories that explore how I navigate through Nigerian and Western cultures using the work of Bourdieu (1986). I will connect this with the liminality process to establish identity reconstruction and how this may be related to coping strategies in different situations. The second section concerns Honneth's recognition theories while highlighting how my past experiences have informed my learning journey. The third section of this chapter will engage with postcolonialism and its impact on my lived experiences. Finally, the last section will bring together the transformation that occurs in transitional spaces to examine how this is influenced by the people we encounter, which develops new knowledge from what is known through the lens of Winnicott (1991). Transitional spaces within the realm of education encompass environments or settings that aid individuals in moving between various phases or facets of learning, growth, or social interaction (ibid). These spaces

function as connectors between the known and unknown, offering chances for individuals to navigate novel obstacles, develop fresh skills, and amalgamate insights from a variety of sources. Transitional space in the context of my thesis involving my Nigerian heritage and study at a predominantly white institution represents the environments or contexts that facilitate my transition between diverse cultural, educational, and social spheres. These spaces serve as bridges between the familiar and the unfamiliar, providing opportunities for me to navigate the challenges of adjusting to a new academic and cultural environment while retaining aspects of my Nigerian identity.

For instance, as I navigate the educational landscape of a predominantly white institution, I encounter transitional spaces where I must reconcile my Nigerian heritage with the dominant cultural norms and practices within the academic setting. These spaces offer opportunities for me to integrate insights from both cultures, develop new skills, and navigate cultural disparities that may impact my academic and social assimilation. Research in areas such as Cross-Cultural Transitions sheds light on the experiences of students transitioning across diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, offering valuable insights into the challenges they face and strategies to support their adaptation and acclimatisation (Ahmed, 2012). By understanding the dynamics of transitional spaces, educators and institutions can better support students like me in navigating the complexities of cultural and educational transition, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

One might ask why I am engaging with Honneth (2008), Bourdieu (1986), and Winnicott (1991) as theoretical friends considering that they are dominant White male figures with Western ideologies when my autoethnographic research from a Nigerian perspective is supposed to be more focused on critical race theories. Before delving into the justification, it is essential to clarify the significance of race in this research. The reality is that as an individual of African descent in a predominantly white institution, I often find myself contending with the pervasive myth of inferiority (Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003). This struggle manifests in various social contexts, where I am consistently forced to navigate biases and prejudices stemming from my race or gender, pondering over the appropriate responses.

My racial identity profoundly influences how I perceive, interpret, and react to the world around me, shaped by my personal history and familial experiences (Warikoo, 2016). Statistics from the Equality Challenge Unit's Student Statistical Report reveal that 30.2% of Black, Asian, and Ethnic Minority Groups (BAME) in the UK are comprised of Black Africans (ECU, 2022). This demographic representation underscores the importance of addressing the challenges faced by individuals from Black backgrounds in educational settings.

Unfortunately, Black women remain significantly underrepresented across all levels of education, a phenomenon that contributes to the marginalisation of research examining the specific hurdles they encounter (Bush et al., 2023). Acknowledging this

underrepresentation, my research aims to elucidate the challenges I have faced in higher education while shedding light on Bourdieu's concept of intersubjective interactions (1986). Intersubjective interactions denote the dynamic exchanges among individuals, involving mutual understanding and recognition of each other's subjective experiences, which profoundly influence human relationships and social dynamics. This research aligns with social psychology, which underscores the significance of empathy and perspective-taking in facilitating mutual understanding and emotional connection among individuals (Honneth, 2008). Empirical studies also demonstrate that empathic responses enable individuals to share and resonate with others' emotions, fostering interpersonal closeness and cooperation. Hence, by exploring these intersubjective interactions, my research seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of the systemic barriers Black women face in academia and the importance of empathy in overcoming these challenges.

Exploring my lived experiences as I navigate diverse cultures contributes to cross-cultural research, which examines how cultural norms and values shape the expression and interpretation of intersubjective interactions within different transitional spaces (Winnicott, 1991). Cultural disparities in social cognition and self-other relationships underscore the dynamic interplay between individual agency and cultural context. Understanding these cultural distinctions is crucial for promoting cultural competence and effective communication in heterogeneous social environments. Intersubjective interactions are fundamental to human sociality, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and others in social milieus.

Therefore, engaging with Honneth (2008), Bourdieu (1986), and Winnicott (1991) as theoretical friends in this research underscores the dynamic and reciprocal nature of intersubjective exchanges, emphasising the roles of empathy, embodiment, and cultural context in shaping social interactions in transitional spaces. My lived experiences would illuminate the process of self-recognition concerning my thoughts and feelings, thereby enabling me to articulate marginalised knowledge and foster the generation of new insights to empower others.

Knowing is always mediated through the discourses available to us to interpret and understand our lived experiences (Skeggs, 1997, p. 29). A range of theoretical concepts have enabled me to analyse my joys and achievements alongside my sadness, hopelessness, and hidden injuries. I decided to engage with theoretical friends to allow me to explore my lived experiences in the EdD programme. My narratives would enable me to sensitise the concepts of Bourdieu's habitus (1986), Honneth's recognition theory (1996), and Winnicott's transitional space (1991). This approach would also enable me to examine the interplay of structure, agency, and the self-recognition process in transitional spaces.

Bourdieu's habitus helps explain how our ingrained dispositions shape our perceptions and actions within social contexts (1986). Honneth's recognition theory emphasises the importance of mutual respect and recognition in developing a positive self-identity (1996).

Winnicott's transitional space provides a framework for understanding the emotional and psychological space necessary for personal growth and adaptation. By integrating these theories, I can comprehensively explore how educational structures and personal agency interact, and how self-recognition processes occur within the transitional spaces of an academic environment. This theoretical synthesis allows for a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in navigating higher education as a Black woman and sheds light on broader systemic issues that affect underrepresented groups.

To investigate how much of my social and cultural capital I bring into different transitional spaces, I must engage with Bourdieu's concept of habitus in the next section. The Education Doctorate programme is one of the transitional spaces which will be referred to several times within this thesis.

Habitus

The concept of habitus developed by Bourdieu relates to the dialectics of agency and structure where the past and present experiences of school, home, and work integrate (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). I was drawn to Bourdieu's idea for two reasons: the emphasis on the intersubjective interactions between individuals and the concept of habitus, which suggests that society consists of isolated and determined individuals (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Like Bourdieu's perspective of 'une miraculée,' I belong to the working class and have managed to succeed despite facing significant challenges (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Furthermore, I am dedicated to achieving academic success to attain remarkable social mobility, a concept Bourdieu referred to as 'oblat miraculé' (Bourdieu, 2007). This research is focused on the impact of the interactions I have encountered during my childhood, which have also been influenced by my Nigerian culture, on the EdD programme. Bourdieu's idea provides a framework for understanding how these past experiences shape my current educational journey and social mobility aspirations. The integration of habitus into my research highlights the influence of deeply ingrained dispositions and social structures on personal agency and success. Additionally, examining my experiences through the lens of habitus allows for a nuanced exploration of how cultural background and social interactions impact educational outcomes and personal development within the academic setting.

Engaging with habitus allows me to capture the in-depth dialectics of agency and structure of my learning experiences as I engage with how my past experiences at school, family and work life continue to construct my present identity as a mature student in a Western educational setting. The thought of embarking on lifelong learning or education can sometimes be daunting. It feels exciting to study at a doctorate level but occasionally, things can become overwhelming. The tone of my arguments sometimes shifts as I reflect on and reinterpret my lived experiences, creating a sense of ambiguity. Writing this thesis accorded me the privilege of developing fresh perspectives as I reconcile my past with my present. I have been able to debunk how I have overcome the challenges associated with my habitus while developing coping mechanisms using resilience, agency, and determination in a bid to secure a better future for my family.

Autoethnography as a methodology has enabled me to use academic language to explore my cultural perspective (Chang, 2016). This approach provides valuable insight into how my identity/identities have been shaped, altered, and developed through cultural transitions, helping me make sense of my lived experiences. It is crucial to acknowledge that these identities can be complex and sometimes conflict with one another. For instance, Chant's (2017) exploration of the stories of three women with complex and conflicting identities, drawing on the works of Edward Said (1978), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Audre Lorde (2007), underscores the intricate nature of identity. Similarly, my own experience as a Black woman navigating social spaces in a Western country often reveals these complexities. When communicating with family and friends in Nigeria, I notice how my thoughts and feelings have become more Westernised, a contrast that becomes less noticeable while I am in the UK, where my Nigerian cultural influences are more prominent. My identity is shaped by my interactions with others and is collaboratively constructed (Plummer, 2001). This thesis provides an opportunity to explore my multiple identities as a woman of African descent within the context of an EdD programme at a Western institution. Rather than viewing cultural differences as barriers, I see them as opportunities to build connections and deepen my understanding of myself in relation to others.

The personal stories examined in this research are intricately connected to my emotions and reflections during the events, and these narratives are further shaped by the feelings I experienced while writing them (Ellis et al., 2011). Depending on the context, I may tell the

same story differently, focusing on different social issues relevant to the moment. This variability underscores how memory is continuously constructed and reconstructed, with present perspectives influencing our understanding of past experiences (Chang, 2016). As part of this autoethnographic research, I will analyse my thoughts and feelings before, during, and after the experiences described. This approach will shed light on the psychosocial dynamics and emotions linked to these stories. In Chapter Three, I will delve into the framework of autoethnographic research, exploring how methodologies can sometimes unintentionally 'other' individuals in academic contexts.

The next section, 'Exploring Habitus in Understanding Social and Cultural Reproduction,' will build on this discussion by examining how the concept of habitus contributes to our understanding of social and cultural reproduction, further illuminating the interplay between personal identities and broader cultural dynamics.

Exploring Habitus in Understanding Social and Cultural Reproduction

Bourdieu's idea of habitus is particularly relevant to my thesis, which explores my lived experiences as a candidate in the EdD programme in the UK. The concept of habitus helps to identify the social environment where my everyday interactions and experiences are shaped by the cultural capital I bring from my background (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This cultural capital, comprising the knowledge, values, and behaviours I have internalised

through my upbringing, often contrasts with the dominant norms and expectations within the Western academic setting.

In the context of my thesis, the interplay between position, disposition, and learning becomes crucial. My position as someone from a diverse cultural background in a predominantly Western academic space creates a social locus where learning is not only academic but also deeply cultural. Here, the unintentional learning that occurs through my interactions within this space is influenced by the cultural capital I possess. At the same time, my dispositions—the values and behaviours shaped by my heritage—often clash with the prevailing cultural norms of the UK academic environment, highlighting moments when I feel like an outsider.

This tension between my ingrained cultural capital and the expectations of the dominant group within the EdD programme highlights the challenges I face in navigating this academic environment. By examining these dynamics through the lens of habitus, my thesis explores how my cultural background shapes my educational journey, sense of belonging, and my success in the EdD programme.

Bourdieu identifies three main forms of cultural capital: embodied cultural capital, objectified cultural capital, and institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Embodied cultural capital involves the knowledge, tastes, and habits that individuals internalise through their upbringing and socialisation within a cultural context. For instance, familiarity

with certain music genres, fine art, or literature represents forms of embodied cultural capital. During group discussions in the EdD programme, I realised that I needed to expand my knowledge of certain literature that was frequently discussed because I was encountering them for the first time. This might be due to my previous academic experiences in Nigeria, where similar literature was not a focus during my first degree.

Another form of cultural capital identified by Bourdieu is objectified cultural capital, which refers to material objects and possessions that hold cultural value and prestige, such as artwork, luxury goods, or musical instruments, which signify one's status in society (1986). Institutionalised cultural capital refers to the formal qualifications, educational achievements, and credentials acquired through educational institutions or professional endeavours. These forms of capital serve as markers of cultural competence, giving social advantage to opportunities and resources. That is why, overall, cultural capital plays a key role in shaping individuals' life chances and access to opportunities as they navigate social hierarchies through their network to achieve success (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is highly relevant to my experiences as a Nigerian who relocated to England in 2008, pursued higher education, and currently works as a lecturer while undertaking doctoral studies. The three forms of cultural capital identified by Bourdieu can be applied to various aspects of my personal and professional development.

Embodied cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that I have acquired over time. This encompasses the cultural and social understandings I have developed through the process of adapting to a new cultural context in England, as well as the ability to navigate diverse social environments. My academic experiences and work-based learning in the United Kingdom have significantly shaped my professional identity, teaching methodology, and overall approach to education. These experiences have enhanced my capacity to engage with and effectively support a diverse student population.

Objectified cultural capital involves material objects and possessions that hold cultural significance, such as books, technological tools, or artistic works. In my case, this extends to the academic resources and materials that I have accumulated over the course of my studies and career, including textbooks, research tools, and educational technologies that serve to enhance the quality of my teaching and facilitate my learning.

Institutionalised cultural capital pertains to the formal qualifications and credentials that I have obtained, which signify cultural competence and academic achievement. My master's degree from a Western university, alongside various work-based qualifications, exemplifies this form of capital. These credentials not only serve to validate my expertise but also contribute to my professional standing as a lecturer and doctoral candidate. Moreover, they offer recognition within the academic field and present opportunities for further advancement in the realm of education.

The accumulation and application of cultural capital throughout my journey have enabled me to adapt to, succeed in, and contribute to a different cultural and educational context, thereby enriching my professional and academic pursuits. Bourdieu's idea shows how society works in ways that make some people more powerful than others, which may lead to unfair treatment to keep inequality going (Bourdieu, 1984). The way society is set up determines who has power and how this power can be transferred to others.

These ideas can be used to better understand how discriminatory practices in education can occur through symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2007). Bourdieu's symbolic violence refers to how the dominant group uses symbols, cultural norms, and language to maintain their power while controlling less powerful groups (Ibid). The violence referred to here does not involve physical harm but operates through norms, values, and belief systems developed by the dominant group. Through stereotypes, prejudice, and discriminatory practices, unequal power is reinforced between social groups.

These may further lead to the marginalisation of individuals or groups. For example, in higher education, it may be argued that symbolic violence can be observed through cultural capital. Bourdieu argues that individuals from privileged backgrounds possess cultural capital of knowledge, cultural resources, and skills that are more valued than others within educational institutions (1986). These make the valued sets more legitimate, which leads to the further marginalisation of less dominant groups (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Once again, symbolic violence can be observed in the realm of access and participation in higher

education, stemming from structural inequalities within society such as socioeconomic status and race (Guise, 2024). These inequalities restrict access to educational opportunities, as students from disadvantaged backgrounds often encounter various barriers. For instance, insufficient financial resources and inadequate support systems frequently result in student dropout or non-completion of studies. In my personal experience, the lack of financial resources during my EdD programme was evident, leading me to resort to personal loans to cover tuition fees. Despite working two jobs to meet my financial obligations, I remained at risk of dropping out due to financial constraints, a topic that will be further explored in Chapter Five.

The combination of the different forms of cultural capital that I brought with me to the university contributed to how I see myself in the eyes of others. These impacted my self-esteem and self-confidence in the EdD programme. Notwithstanding, over time in the university, it can be argued that I began to develop 'good enough' relationships that allowed me to flourish (Winnicott, 1991). My habitus evolved through changing experiences and situations when I began to develop good enough relationships with the cohort members during lectures. In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I will be engaging with those moments of feeling like an outsider while drawing attention to those changing experiences that illuminate my position and dispositions within the social space in consideration of cultural capital.

To draw together the themes of habitus through identity reconstruction in this chapter, I have considered engaging with the notions of the liminality process to establish where my past meets my present to merge into something new through a self-negotiation process in transitional places.

Liminality: The Ritual Passage of the Identity Reconstruction

According to Bigger (2009), the term 'liminality' was first introduced by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1909 as part of his work on rites of passage. It was later developed and expanded by Victor Turner, who applied the concept to a broader range of social and cultural phenomena, exploring how individuals experience transitional stages and the social structures that accompany them. Liminality can be described as a transitional phase in the rites of passage, during which individuals are no longer in their previous familiar social roles but have not yet assumed their new roles (Turner et al., 2017). He established that liminality is characterised by ambiguity, with the potential for transformation (ibid). Liminality helps us to understand the interplay between an individual and their social structures during identity reconstruction or change (Beech, 2011).

Liminality can be seen as a rite of passage that reflects how an individual transitions their identity from one to another (Van Gennep, 1960). Van Gennep illustrated the liminal process through examples like marriage or age-related rituals, such as the teenage years,

where one is neither a child nor an adult. He pointed out that liminality can be characterised by a three-part structure: separation, the liminal process, and reassimilation. Separation involves detachment from the former identity, often triggered by a significant event. The liminal process is the 'passing through,' where an individual holds no attributes of the before or after identity (Beech, 2008). Finally, the process of aggregation and consummation occurs in the reassimilation phase, where the new identity adopts certain norms (ibid). In my own case, the separation phase could be likened to my relocation from Nigeria to England, which made me experience a detachment from my previous identity. This process involved self-negotiation due to cultural differences, eventually leading to the reassimilation of new identities and the adoption of certain norms.

The liminal processes occurred when I struggled to fit in, with no clear attributes of either my old or new identity. An extended liminal process can lead to low self-esteem, potentially impacting an individual's commitment in various settings or groups (Garsten, 1999). There is a tendency for some individuals to never fully emerge from the liminal phase into the reassimilation or aggregation phase, which may lead to detachment and impact their identity reconstruction (Beech, 2008). In my narrative, liminality denotes a transitional stage where an individual is partially disengaged from their former identity without fully integrating into a new one. This state resembles a limbo, where distinctions between past and present selves blur, leading to feelings of disorientation and uncertainty (Turner, 1969). Turner defines the liminal phase as characterised by structural ambiguity, where individuals find themselves in an intermediary state, existing 'betwixt and between' (ibid). In my own

experience, this liminal period disrupted my internal sense of self and challenged established social roles.

This experience also provided an opportunity for personal growth and transformation as I navigated this uncertain space, reconstructing my identity to adapt to the evolving dynamics of my surroundings (Beech, 2008). For instance, transitioning from a low-paying job to a more financially stable position placed me in a liminal space, where I shed my former identity rooted in financial hardship and embraced a new one centered around stability and career advancement. Personal narratives and self-reflection during transitional periods can be powerful tools for self-exploration and career development, leading to a more empowered and confident sense of self (Ibarra, 2004).

The shift brought new responsibilities and social privileges that had previously been out of reach, but it also revealed an internal struggle, as I felt like an outsider in environments where my past low-paying job status still lingered. The doctoral program was instrumental in this transformation, enhancing my self-esteem and confidence while providing me with new skills that improved my job interview success. As a result, my career advanced, and I gradually assumed the responsibilities and power of my new identity, eventually emerging from the liminal phase within the social system. This relates to my new identity as I move up the social mobility ladder, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Turner's concept of liminality has faced criticism for its potential romanticisation of *communitas*, with scholars suggesting that it may overlook hierarchical dynamics (Higgins & Hamilton, 2020). *Communitas*, as defined by Turner (1969), refers to a temporary social anti-structure that emerges during transitional phases, characterised by a suspension of conventional norms and rules. However, research on ethnic minority students in higher education has uncovered a 'superficial commonality' amidst hierarchical differentiation among students, challenging the notion of pure *communitas*.

For instance, while university initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity and belonging may create an impression of shared experiences among students from diverse backgrounds, deeper social and cultural divisions often persist beneath the surface. Factors such as socioeconomic status, language barriers, or racial discrimination can influence interactions among students, meaning that the experience is not as egalitarian as the concept of *communitas* suggests. This insight complicates the idealised notion that inclusive practices in higher education automatically foster true communal equality and instead highlights the persistence of power dynamics even within contexts that aim for equity and inclusion.

It could be argued that Turner's framework may not adequately address the power dynamics within liminal spaces. For ethnic minority students like me, feelings of being out of place may align with the concept of psychological liminality (Said, 2007). This state can be likened to a feeling of being 'neither here nor there,' caught between two points. During EdD sessions, I often experience confusion and uncertainty, grappling with the process of redefining my identity in this liminal space (Beech, 2008). Liminal spaces are characterised

by a conflict between self-perception and external projections, leading to feelings of inferiority and 'imposter syndrome' (Clance and Imes, 1978). Imposter syndrome is a psychological phenomenon experienced by individuals from diverse backgrounds, characterised by a persistent self-doubt and fear of being exposed as a fraud, despite evident competence and achievements. This syndrome often involves constant comparison with peers in various contexts, such as educational, social, and cultural environments, which I will explore further in Chapter Three.

Individuals grappling with imposter syndrome frequently attribute their successes to chance or external circumstances rather than acknowledging their capabilities, leading to a sense of inadequacy, self-questioning, and apprehension regarding their perceived authenticity. This phenomenon exerts its influence across diverse spheres, including academia, professional milieus, and interpersonal interactions, which will be further examined in Chapter Four.

Identity Construction and the Liminality Process

The process of identity reconstruction in transitional spaces, particularly within the realm of higher education, examines the concept of liminality (Beech, 2011). Liminality elucidates how individuals navigate their social environment during periods of identity transformation (ibid). Central to this process is the transitional phase where individuals negotiate between two distinct identity constructions. Identity reconstruction occurs within the interplay between an individual's self-perception, shaped by internal factors, and external influences such as societal discourses, institutional frameworks, and cultural norms (Watson, 2008). As

an ethnic minority in the EdD programme, my racial and gender identities emerge from birth, while other facets of my identity shape themselves in response to social or educational contexts, such as my role as a student within an institution or as an employee within an organisation.

At university seminars, I frequently oscillate between feeling included and excluded, which directly impacts my sense of belonging and engagement. These experiences underscore the contextual nature of identities, illustrating the inherent fluidity of life, as theorised by Bauman's concept of liquid modernity (2005). Bauman's liquid modernity theory posits that contemporary society characterises itself by fluidity and instability, with traditional structures and institutions giving way to transience and impermanence (ibid). In this liquid modernity, individuals grapple with constant change and uncertainty, leading to feelings of insecurity and instability across various domains of life. This fluidity disrupts established norms, emphasising the need for individuals to adapt and manage the uncertainties that come with changing social structures.

The identity reconstruction of individuals in transitional spaces flows fluidly (Beech, 2011); consequently, it illuminates the identity construction related to the changing self and an aspiring identity (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009), disassociating oneself from a particular identity to maintain authenticity (Costas and Fleming, 2009), or the before and after identities (Fiol, 2002). Regarding aspiring identity, my quest to leave low-paid jobs propels me to seek a doctoral course. However, my dissociation from a particular identity to maintain authenticity exposes itself when I struggle to fit into groups because I want to

maintain my Nigerian identity. Liminality describes the transformative phase where an individual navigates between forming two identities, encompassing emotional, social, and mental shifts (Beech, 2011). The 'before and after' identities often arise when I find myself caught between two identities, feeling neither fully here nor there, which can sometimes lead to conflicting emotions. This notion of betwixt and between, developed in social anthropology (Turner, 1969), extends itself to interpret the dialogue between the inner-outer psychosocial dynamics associated with liminal spaces.

A prolonged liminal state presents a pure danger because it may become a permanent state where people might feel stuck (Thomassen, 2012). Students who struggle to fit into higher education might have a higher risk of dropping out of the programme if they remain stuck in a liminal state. Some individuals who strive or excel in liminality may be accustomed to constant changes that help them cope with difficult circumstances (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003). This can be said of the ethnic minority students who excel against all odds in higher education, referred to as 'une miraculée' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 175). Additionally, the support that students from minority backgrounds receive from peers, tutors, mentors, and family members might provide them with the motivation they need to evolve from the liminal state. It further highlights the importance of shifting content to context to encounter those hidden perspectives which connect the educator/teacher to the student, enabling client-centred learning (Formenti & West, 2018). Inclusive teaching and learning practices consider meeting diverse learning needs while breaking educational barriers that disadvantage ethnic minorities entangled in gender and racial inequalities.

From a gender perspective, I have navigated patriarchal systems both at home and abroad. Research points out that men receive more privileges to attend universities in Nigeria than women (Ogbemudia, 2022). In Ogbemudia's study, she confirms that a high percentage of girls and women in Nigeria either do not have access to education or drop out of school or university for several reasons, including financial constraints or family commitments (ibid). The patriarchal attitude of families not wanting to invest in a girl child's education because they believe she will end up in her husband's kitchen one day remains widespread (Ogbemudia, 2022). Therefore, class and gender further determine the extent to which one can fit into higher education. This also presents the danger of feeling stuck in a prolonged liminal phase and dropping out of the Western university if one lacks the resilience and determination to succeed against all odds.

Fortunately, the financial support and encouragement that I continue to receive from my husband and loved ones keep me going against all odds in higher education, which I will explore further in Chapter Five. The process of 'fitting in' to different spaces requires the loss of an old self, which I will discuss in the next section.

The Grief of Losing the Old Self While Trying to Fit In

Sometimes, it takes conscious effort to belong to a group or try to 'fit in' to avoid attracting negative attention or disrupting the group's status quo. This effort also represents a bid to find a new self while feeling the loss of an old self. If the internalised process of 'fitting in' becomes submissive, the unsettling feelings associated with losing the old self resemble

grief. This type of grief relates to feelings of emptiness and sadness. Although this grief is not physical, for me, it was treated like a physical injury that required time to heal.

Occasionally, the grieving process provides the courage to keep carrying on against all odds.

On the other hand, if the process of 'fitting in' faces resistance, it can bring anger, hate, envy, and resentment (Thomassen, 2012). These emotions also manifest as social identities imposed through external discourses, where individuals internalise the view of the self in relation to a particular narrative (Watson, 2008). This process of agency-structure dialectic in action, where individuals both shape and are shaped by their social environments, intricately links to transformative learning, which underscores the dynamic interaction between personal experiences and broader societal structures (Williams, 2018). Liminal processes are psychologically negotiated through reflection and recognition concerning self and others' identities. In my thesis, I will highlight moments when I lost my old self while trying to fit in. However, toward the end, I realised that I do not need to conform to others' expectations; instead, I should follow my path and stay true to myself. One could argue that I experienced transformation.

This transformation indicates the profound shifts that occur during the process of navigating and negotiating one's identity in relation to societal norms and expectations. The recognition of the need to stay true to oneself, despite external pressures, reflects a deeper understanding and acceptance of one's authentic identity. This personal growth aligns with the principles of transformative learning, which involves critically examining and reshaping one's beliefs, values, and assumptions to foster a more inclusive and self-aware perspective.

In the next section, I will discuss transformative learning and how transitional spaces in education empower students to critically reflect on their experiences for transformation to take place.

Transformative Learning

In the dynamic landscape of education, a transformative realm exists where learning transcends the mere acquisition of knowledge to become a catalyst for profound personal growth and societal change. This transformative journey often unfolds within transitional spaces, where learners encounter new perspectives, challenge established paradigms and embark on a journey of self-discovery. In this section, I delve into the concept of transformative learning and explore the pivotal role of transitional spaces in fostering intellectual development, critical reflection, and transformative experiences within educational settings. Through examining theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and practical applications, I aim to illuminate the transformative potential inherent in transitional spaces and their significance in shaping the educational landscape of the future.

As defined by scholars like Mezirow, Cranton, and Illeris, transformative learning profoundly impacts individuals' perspectives and ingrained thought patterns, leading to a significant transformation. According to Mezirow, transformative learning involves questioning and changing assumptions and expectations that are deeply influenced by culture and reassessing moral and convictions (1978b). Cranton elaborates on this concept by defining transformative learning as a notable change in the underlying principles that guide an

individual's thinking, emotions, and behaviours (2006). According to Illeris, transformative learning refers to any learning experience that leads to a substantial change in the learner, highlighting the transformative aspect of the process (2014). Additionally, transformative learning involves altering one's frame of reference (Mezirow, 2018). Adults typically possess comprehensive experiences, including associations, concepts, values, and emotions. These frames of reference serve as the underlying structures of assumptions through which individuals interpret their experiences, selectively influencing their expectations, perceptions, cognition, and emotions.

The theory of transformative learning has garnered recognition for its potential to engender substantial personal and societal transformation. However, critics have articulated significant apprehensions concerning its theoretical underpinnings, empirical substantiation, cultural applicability, and practical implementation challenges. Primarily, critiques underscore the absence of empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of transformative learning methods. Newman (2012) and Cranton (1996) emphasise the lack of research demonstrating the enduring impact of transformative learning on behaviour, attitudes, and societal change. Critics contend that this absence of robust empirical evidence poses challenges in accurately assessing the effectiveness of transformative learning theory.

Furthermore, critics argue that transformative learning theory often espouses an excessively individualistic perspective, disregarding broader social and structural influences that shape the learning and transformation process. According to Cranton, critics posit that transformative learning frameworks may fail to account for the impact of systemic

inequities, power dynamics, and social environments on individuals' capacity for transformation (1996). This critique suggests that transformative learning may not effectively address the underlying factors contributing to societal disparities and injustices. Another significant criticism revolves around the cultural bias inherent in transformative learning theories. Critics contend that these theories frequently reflect Western, individualistic viewpoints on learning and development, thereby limiting their relevance in multicultural or non-Western contexts (Newman, 2012). Concerns arise that transformative learning may not encompass diverse cultural norms, beliefs, and epistemologies, potentially excluding marginalised voices and experiences from the discourse.

Moreover, opponents highlight the practical challenges of implementing transformative learning interventions in educational settings. They argue that enabling transformative learning experiences requires skilled facilitators, conducive learning environments, and time-intensive processes, which may pose challenges within traditional educational frameworks and resource constraints (Cranton, 1996). This critique suggests widespread adoption and implementation of transformative learning may encounter obstacles.

Criticisms that caution against excessive emphasis on disruption and conflict as essential catalysts for transformative learning. While transformative learning theories often underscore the significance of unsettling issues and critical reflection, critics argue that this emphasis may overlook the role of positive, affirming experiences in promoting personal development and transformation (Newman, 2012). This critique suggests that transformative learning could benefit from adopting a more balanced approach that recognises the potential for growth and change through constructive and encouraging

encounters. Transformative learning holds promise for individual and societal development, yet it faces opposition from sceptics. Scholars like Newman (2012) and Cranton (1996) have articulated concerns regarding its theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, cultural relevance, and practical implications. These critiques contribute to ongoing discussions within adult education and learning theory, urging scholars and practitioners to evaluate and refine transformative learning methods critically.

Despite the critiques raised against transformative learning theory, I argue that it remains relevant and valuable for exploring my lived experiences in the EdD program. While critics have highlighted concerns about its theoretical underpinnings, empirical support, cultural relevance, and practical implementation challenges, transformative learning theory offers unique insights and benefits that are particularly pertinent to my research topic. Firstly, transformative learning theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals like myself can navigate and make sense of the complexities of their experiences within educational settings (Mezirow, 1991). Despite the lack of robust empirical evidence, transformative learning theory offers a lens through which to critically reflect on and analyse my experiences' impact on my behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions of societal change.

Moreover, critics have pointed out that the individualistic perspective of transformative learning theory can still offer valuable insights into the broader social and structural factors that shape learning and change (Cranton, 1996). By acknowledging the influence of systemic inequalities, power dynamics, and social context on transformative learning processes, I can

contextualise my experiences within larger societal frameworks and better understand the interplay between personal and structural factors. Furthermore, while transformative learning theory may exhibit cultural biases, it can still provide a framework for exploring diverse cultural norms, values, and ways of knowing (Mezirow, 2000). By critically engaging with transformative learning theory from a culturally situated perspective, I can ensure that my research remains inclusive and responsive to the diverse experiences of individuals from multicultural backgrounds.

Additionally, while practical implementation challenges exist, transformative learning theory offers practical strategies for fostering transformative learning experiences within educational settings (Cranton, 2016). Educators play a crucial role in fostering transformative learning experiences by cultivating supportive learning environments, promoting critical reflection, and facilitating open dialogue and collaboration. These efforts empower individuals to engage in meaningful self-examination and drive positive change within themselves and their communities. Even though critics caution against overemphasising disruption and conflict, transformative learning theory can still acknowledge the role of positive, affirming experiences in fostering growth and change (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Adopting a balanced approach that recognises the potential for growth and transformation through challenging and supportive experiences ensures that transformative learning theory remains relevant for exploring the complexities of lived experiences in educational contexts. Despite the critiques against transformative learning theory, it continues to serve as a valuable framework for exploring my lived experiences. Critically engaging with transformative learning theory and addressing its limitations allows

me to leverage its insights and benefits to enrich my research and contribute to ongoing debates within adult education and learning theory.

In the journey of personal and societal transformation, transformative learning emerges as a guiding framework, offering profound insights into the complexities of individual growth and societal change. This introspective exploration delves into my lived experiences as an immigrant navigating the EdD program in the UK through the lens of Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning process. Within this transformative journey, ten distinct phases unfold, each representing a pivotal moment of introspection, critical assessment, and action-oriented empowerment as follows.

1. **Disorientating Dilemmas:** I experience disorientation as I confront societal injustices and inequalities within educational settings, prompting me to reflect on my experiences of marginalisation and empowerment critically. Disorienting dilemmas were more evident as I understood the term decolonisation and its impact on my learning journey.
2. **Self-examination of Guilt and Shame:** I engage in self-examination, grappling with feelings of guilt and shame associated with my experiences of marginalisation and navigating the challenges of academia as a minority student.
3. **Critical Assessment of Epistemic or Socio-cultural Assumptions:** Through transformative learning, I critically assess societal assumptions and beliefs regarding race, gender, and power dynamics within educational institutions, challenging existing paradigms and seeking new perspectives.

4. Recognising Shared Experiences with Others: The exploration of transformative learning's role in fostering a sense of belonging and community among students resonates with my acknowledgement of shared experiences with fellow minority students, which promotes solidarity and collective empowerment. My research has revealed that I am not alone in my journey, prompting me to delve deeper into how my work aligns with ongoing discussions surrounding the decolonisation of educational practices.

5. Exploration of Options for New Roles, Relationships, and Actions: I ventured into new roles and relationships within the academic community, actively seeking opportunities for advocacy and empowerment to address systemic inequalities. For example, presenting workshops and participating in collaborative research to develop strategies to improve the cultural competence of educators in our institution.

6. Planning of a Course of Action: Drawing from transformative learning experiences, I devise a plan of action to advocate for change within educational settings, aiming to address societal injustices and promote inclusivity and equity.

7. Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills: I acquire the knowledge and skills required for my advocacy endeavours, participating in research, discussions, and partnerships to drive impactful change. Additionally, I sought guidance from mentors to expand my knowledge while conducting further research.

8. Provisional Trying of New Roles: I tentatively try out new roles and approaches, navigating the complexities of advocacy and empowerment within the academic context.

9. Building of Competence and Self-confidence: Through transformative learning, I build competence and self-confidence in my advocacy efforts, gaining resilience and determination to effect positive change.

10. Reintegration into My Life: I undergo a process of reintegration into my life based on a transformed perspective that prioritises social justice, equity, and empowerment within educational settings.

Applying Mezirow's transformative learning process to my exploration of my lived experiences highlights the profound impact of critical reflection, self-awareness, and collective action in fostering personal and societal transformation within the academic context. This process is deeply interconnected with the concept of transitional spaces in education, where students navigate and negotiate their identities, beliefs, and values.

Transitional spaces in education, much like the concept of liminality, serve as dynamic environments where individuals find themselves between old and new identities. In these spaces, students are challenged to confront and reflect on their pre-existing notions, leading to a greater sense of self-awareness. This process mirrors the liminal phase, where individuals are neither fully anchored in their past identities nor fully integrated into their new ones, existing in a state of ambiguity and potential transformation.

Within these educational liminal spaces, critical reflection becomes an essential tool for students to examine and question their assumptions, fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and the broader social structures and cultural narratives that shape their educational journey. This heightened self-awareness, akin to the transformative potential inherent in liminality, allows individuals to recognise the influence of these structures and narratives on their identity and academic experiences.

Moreover, transitional spaces in education offer opportunities for collective action, enabling students to engage with peers and educators in meaningful dialogues and collaborative efforts. These interactions can be seen as part of the reassimilation phase in the liminal process, where students begin to integrate new aspects of their identity within a community. This sense of community and belonging is crucial for personal growth and societal transformation, as it supports the development of a more inclusive and empathetic understanding of both oneself and others.

Navigating these transitional, liminal spaces, students can emerge with a more inclusive and equitable perspective, contributing to a transformative educational experience. This journey through liminality in education highlights the importance of these transitional phases in shaping a student's identity and understanding of the world, leading to personal and collective growth.

The Transitional Spaces of Education

Education endeavours to empower individuals by enhancing their capabilities and granting them the freedom to pursue meaningful activities, thus enabling their personal growth and fulfilment (Nussbaum, 2011). However, Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor argue that education has multiple characterisations with threads of colonisation, which educators and students are not always aware of (2015). This autoethnographic study provides an opportunity to

examine the extent to which methodological approaches 'other' ethnic minority students in academic research. Drawing from my Nigerian background, I bring with me a history of colonisation to the doctoral course, where educational interactions take place within transitional spaces, often positioning me as an outsider. Building on the theories of Bhabha (1994) and Soja (1998), the concept of the Third Space Theory sheds light on the intermediary space between home and work, where knowledge is acquired. These spaces, distinct yet interconnected, are evident in our social interactions, behaviours, and conflicts (ibid). Nevertheless, the amalgamation of the first and second spaces gives rise to the third space through cultural translation, enabling students to integrate work experience and academic knowledge to foster a deeper understanding (Bhabha, 1994). The EdD programme serves as my third space, offering a safe environment to navigate various challenges and redefine myself. Cohort meetings, interactions with tutors and peers, conferences, and discussions have all contributed to the development of my academic identity through learning, support, and feedback.

During one of the first cohort days of my Education Doctorate sessions, the cohort leader invited a former doctoral student to talk about his autobiographical thesis. At that moment, I pondered how convenient it was for him to write about himself, and I perceived him as a proud man. Based on this premise, I questioned the validity and reliability of his research. However, I now understand the significance of the narratives people share and how they contribute to autoethnographic research. Recognising moments of doubt and bewilderment in creative spaces is crucial because such discomfort often leads to a new understanding

(Gibson et al., 2017). As my EdD journey progressed, I gained clarity on the focus and nature of my thesis through the exploration of my own story. It became evident that I aimed to examine how my past experiences inform my present reality, shedding light on social issues often overlooked from a cultural perspective. My aspirations to attain a doctorate and transcend low-paying jobs as a wife and mother are driven by a desire to uphold the hopes of my immediate and extended family. Despite encountering numerous challenges along the way, their unwavering support has fuelled my perseverance, a theme explored further in Chapter Five of this research.

The EdD Programme as a Transitional Space for Self-Negotiation

The EdD programme has become a transitional space where my past meets my present to develop something new that informs my future. This space allows me to reimagine myself and engage in the self-negotiation process, where I play with new ideas and reconstruct my identity in intersubjective moments through the recognition of the self and others (West, 2014). Psychoanalyst Winnicott's work provides valuable insight into how transitional spaces facilitate changes in self-experience and help individuals navigate difficult moments (Winnicott, 1991). He described these spaces as instances where we make sense of the world through the interplay of subjective experiences and objective possibilities. Winnicott's concept of transitional spaces originated from the gradual separation of a child from the caregiver, where the 'good enough' relationship allows the child to let go of anxiety in moments of play and creativity.

In the context of higher education, transitional spaces provide an environment where we feel understood and legitimate in the eyes of significant others, such as tutors and peers (Formenti & West, 2018). The empathetic support from tutors and the friendliness of cohort members foster a sense of belonging and create new possibilities for transformative learning. During study days, when I struggled to understand certain topics, the willingness of Module Leaders to engage in additional discussions during breaks helped me grasp complex ideas and reinforced my knowledge through tailored examples. Such 'good enough' relationships help process learning anxieties and negative emotions in constructive ways, allowing for autonomy and growth.

The EdD programme, therefore, serves as a safe space where I can explore who I was and envision who I want to become—a better version of myself. This self-negotiation involves bridging past and present experiences while understanding the dynamics of relationships and solidarity, which are fundamental to human flourishing. The attentiveness of tutors, aligned with Winnicott's object relations theory, supports students by recognising moments of anxiety and addressing their learning needs in ways that promote both personal development and transformative education (Winnicott, 1991).

Challenging Nigerian Patriarchal Culture in the EdD Programme

The EdD programme became a safe place for me to challenge my Nigerian patriarchal culture while redefining my before and after identities. This was brought to my awareness through feminist study. Feminist theories explore ways dominant knowledge and practices disadvantage women by making them invisible with no voice (Brubaker, 2021). The Nigerian culture does not align with being a feminist, as boys are given more preferential treatment than girls by their parents (Bulus, 2012). This encourages boys to copy their father's behaviour as they grow older, and women become treated less favourably. The girls also copy their mothers by not questioning the authority of men, thereby complying with the cultural norms without expressing any form of resistance as adults (Adichie, 2013).

Debunking the patriarchal culture allowed me to reimagine myself in new emancipative ways. This journey of self-redefinition is intricately linked to the concept of transitional spaces in education, where individuals are allowed to critically reflect on and transform their identities. In the EdD programme, I found a transformative educational space that not only encouraged critical examination of societal norms but also supported the development of new, empowered self-conceptions. By engaging with feminist theories and participating in a community of scholars who value equity and inclusion, I was able to challenge internalised patriarchal values and envision a future where my identity is not constrained by traditional gender roles. This transformative experience underscores the importance of educational environments that provide safe spaces for questioning and reimagining

personal and cultural narratives. Therefore, to explore these further, it is crucial to examine the vehicles of self-recognition about identity formation and how it transpires in unconscious ways.

Self-Recognition

Over the years since migrating to England in 2008, I have realised that my low self-esteem and self-confidence, which developed from my childhood, have significantly impacted my personal and professional life. My doctorate journey has allowed me to reflect on how I have let go of some of my old identities entangled in low self-esteem and self-confidence to adopt something new. When I began this research, I quickly realised that Bourdieu's role of intersubjectivity was sensitised by the concept of recognition from the work of Honneth (2008). The idea of recognition is deduced from critical theory ideology, which focuses on culture and society while uncovering and challenging power structures (Brookfield, 2000). Regularly, members of marginalised and subaltern groups have been systematically denied recognition for the worth of their culture or way of life, the dignity of their status as persons, and the inviolability of their physical integrity (Honneth, 2008). Individuals struggle for recognition through the relationships they encounter, which develops self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect as intersubjectivity helps to shape the person's identity.

To understand ourselves better, we must come to terms with the inner complexity and learn how to have a dialogue with our multiple parts (Formenti & West, 2018). This highlights the

correlation between a productive relationship with the self and the intersubjective recognition of achievements. Revealing negative experiences where individuals' moral expectations have been violated, lays out the forms of disrespect. We might become defensive of our past for fear of losing our identity or in response to the judgement of others. Sometimes, this may put one in a vulnerable position with the fear of being exposed to powerful others from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Reconciliation Can be Established Through the Forms of Recognition

The three forms of recognition, self-respect, self-confidence, and self-esteem are all founded on love and friendship, which is not just courtesy but a human need (Honneth, 2008). My melancholy past, which will be highlighted in Chapter Four, points out the abusive interactions with significant others whilst drawing upon the psychoanalytic object relations theory (Winnicott, 1991). However, conscious effort in engaging with our past through psychoanalysis can bring healing and reconciliation that reveals the positives from difficult experiences. Higher education has provided a transitional space for those forms of disrespect from the past to transform into a self that feels more understood and legitimate (ibid). This autoethnographic research has made me engage with my past, exposing moments of vulnerability, anger, and resentment while seeking the opportunity for healing and reconciliation to view myself as a different person. These highlight the transformation process, indicating those forms that transform within the self-recognition process (Kegan, 2018). The complexity of transformation is established through cultural norms embedded in

family values and belief systems, as I will uncover in Chapter Four while engaging with my Nigerian patriarchal culture.

Managing Learning Anxieties in Higher Education as an Adult Student

In education, the self can be continuously threatened and caught between the new and old, known, and unknown, and comfort and discomfort (Said, 2007). Biographical research and supervision can help educators/students engage with those difficult words, meanings, and defensive feelings they experience when overwhelmed (Bainbridge & West, 2012). When I enrolled on the EdD programme, I was overwhelmed with the feeling of being out of place about the self/other recognition. I felt exposed to the unknown and not sure what to expect. I became used to putting on a persona to 'fit in' as I was under pressure to adopt the Western culture by consciously abandoning some of my African attributes or not being comfortable with them. These may be related to the power structures and grand narratives which are reproduced (Holliday, 2022), thereby, developing unconscious bias that stereotypes people through visual appearance (Goffman, 1997) as I explained in Chapter One.

The educational system can sometimes endorse 'coldness', which is the lack of empathy students encounter from being in a competitive learning environment (Bainbridge & West, 2012). Learning institutions also play a crucial role in developing teaching practices, activities, systems, and processes to reverse the unemotional learning environment

(Durrant, 2022). These social conditions can give more warmth and love to students where possible to reduce the hardness and coldness by creating more opportunities to build trusting relationships that foster love through human interaction. These further highlight the impact of hardness and coldness on students using the psychoanalytic understanding of learning anxieties (Bainbridge & West, 2012). Here, psychoanalysis does not perceive anxiety negatively; instead, anxiety is seen as a genuine response to internal and external conflicting conditions. Anxiety can develop through feelings of abandonment because we depend on other humans for survival through 'good enough' relationships (Winnicott, 1991). Learning anxieties can indicate students' dissatisfaction with specific individual and social conditions, rendering them unable to have a positive learning experience (Bainbridge & West, 2012). Some of the anxieties I encountered stemmed from not knowing how to write academic essays and not fully understanding learning outcomes, despite guidance from Module Leaders.

Interestingly, the struggle with academic essay writing was a shared experience among others in the cohort. It was not until the later stages of my doctorate program that I grasped the essence of achieving learning outcomes. These moments of anxiety reveal a vulnerability in transitional spaces, where we may feel like infants in need of love and validation through student-centred support. In learning institutions, there is a crucial need for significant others to promote inclusion, particularly for students who may feel different due to their protected characteristics like age, race, or gender. This fosters a sense of value, respect, and acceptance among students while developing strategies to recruit, retain, and

engage minority students (Merrill, 2015). Evidence suggests that ethnic minority students, like me at a Western university, require various forms of support through policies and practices across the UK and Europe (Finnegan et al., 2014). This support could come in the form of lecturer encouragement, comprehensive feedback to boost students' learning confidence, and addressing their specific needs such as financial, childcare, and technological support (Field and Kurantowicz, 2014). To mitigate the challenges students face, academic institutions should identify their specific needs early on, ideally during pre-enrolment and induction, to provide tailored support and reduce dropout rates.

Moreover, institutions should abandon the view of non-completion students as mere statistics and instead understand the underlying reasons for their withdrawal from higher education. Active listening and giving these students a voice is essential in preventing the recurring disappointment of shattered hopes. My challenges in higher education are influenced by my background as a migrant from a previously colonised country. As discussed earlier, my cultural and social capital shape my identity as a doctoral student, driving my pursuit of self-improvement. Exploring how my past has dynamically influenced me through postcolonialism will be the focus of the next section.

Postcolonial Theoretical Frameworks

Edward Said's concept of postcolonialism, as outlined in his book 'Orientalism' (1978), provides a lens through which to analyse the challenges encountered by Nigerian women

pursuing education at Western universities. Said, a Palestinian American philosopher, examines the enduring impacts of colonial interactions and European dominance on non-European nations' cultures, economies, and societies (Said, 1978). Said elucidates Western civilisation's deliberate construction of the Orient as an alluring yet subordinate entity, with the explicit purpose of rationalising European colonialism and the exploitation of Eastern nations (ibid). The creation of the Oriental 'Other' perpetuated stereotypes, power imbalances, and cultural hegemony, influencing the narratives and viewpoints of both the colonisers and the colonised.

Nigerian women, being from a nation that was previously subjected to colonisation, encounter the difficulty of navigating academic settings that have been influenced by colonialism. This implies that they must address the dominant impact of Western viewpoints, which often dismiss non-Western perspectives and knowledge systems (Said, 1978). The portrayal of the Orient as both exotic and inferior in Western history has marginalised other perspectives, hence impacting the academic experiences of people from non-Western backgrounds (ibid). Consequently, individuals may have challenges demonstrating their intellectual autonomy in Western educational settings, which are primarily shaped by Eurocentric viewpoints.

Said's postcolonial theory highlights the pervasive power imbalances and inequalities within academic institutions, which mirror broader colonial systems of oppression (Said, 1978).

People of colour who opt to pursue advanced education in Western universities may confront the classification of being designated as 'Others' and may encounter preexisting prejudices that stem from colonial narratives (ibid). Power disparities may impede their capacity to acquire resources, engage in intellectual pursuits, and establish a reputation within academic spheres.

Furthermore, Said underscores the importance of meticulously examining and deconstructing colonial myths and portrayals (Said, 1978). Non-white students attending Western educational institutions can employ Said's perspectives to challenge and mitigate Orientalist biases, thus impacting the formation of their scholarly narratives (ibid). Individuals can actively undo colonial influences within academia and advocate for more inclusive scholarly environments by critically analysing Western epistemologies and acknowledging the significance of non-Western perspectives. Said's postcolonial theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the challenges faced by non-white women pursuing higher education at Western universities.

The Influence of Fanon and Bhabha

Fanon's influential writings, particularly 'The Wretched of the Earth' and 'Black Skin, White Masks,' provide insight into the psychological and socio-political effects of colonialism on the mindset of the colonised individual. Fanon's thesis strongly resonates with ethnic minorities negotiating academic environments in the Western hemisphere. It explores the

complexities of internalised racism and the continuous fight for decolonisation (Fanon, 1963; Fanon, 2023). In academia, the long-lasting impact of colonialism is evident in several ways, such as the continuation of Eurocentric knowledge frameworks that frequently exclude alternate ways of knowing and different perspectives. Fanon's focus on the necessity of regaining control and individuality in response to colonial subjugation influences the scholarly endeavours of people of colour who want to assert their intellectual independence inside Western educational environments.

Bhabha's conceptual framework of hybridity provides an additional perspective for understanding the experiences of non-white students as they navigate the landscape of Western academia. Bhabha argues that colonial encounters create hybrid identities and cultural manifestations that challenge existing power systems (Bhabha, 1994). Within doctoral studies, students from non-Western backgrounds skillfully navigate their hybrid identities, blending elements of their history with the established practices of Western academic traditions. This negotiation involves negotiating many cultural and intellectual frameworks developing novel, blended forms of knowledge generation and scholarly involvement. Bhabha's conceptualisation of the 'third space' as a location for cultural transformation highlights the capacity of ethnic minorities to establish intellectual realms that surpass traditional colonial divisions and hierarchies.

Fanon's analysis of colonial alienation and Bhabha's scrutiny of cultural ambivalence provide insight into the emotional and psychological aspects inherent in the academic experience of people of colour studying in Western universities. These theorists emphasise the importance of recognising and confronting the lasting impact of colonialism in educational environments while embracing the innovative possibilities of cultural blending and opposition (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 2023). Fanon and Bhabha's theoretical frameworks provide helpful insights into the colonial and post-colonial dynamics that shape the lives of ethnic minorities pursuing doctoral degrees at Western universities. Through a rigorous examination of these theories, researchers can analyse the connections between power, identity, and the creation of knowledge. This contributes to more significant efforts to challenge colonial academic influences and promote inclusive scholarly settings.

Contributions of Chakrabarty, Loomba, Memmi, and Bhabra

Chakrabarty's influential work, mainly 'Provincialising Europe,' strongly criticises Eurocentric narratives that have traditionally held sway in academic discussions (Chakrabarty, 2009). He contends that the all-encompassing assertions of European philosophy have marginalised non-Western perspectives, consigning them to the outskirts of mainstream academic discourse. When starting a doctorate programme at a Western university, Chakrabarty's approach emphasises the importance of shifting away from Western thinking and prioritising non-Western viewpoints in academic research. Through the process of provincialising Europe, scholars can engage in a critical analysis of the colonial origins of

knowledge creation, therefore promoting a more inclusive and diverse academic atmosphere. Chakrabarty's notion of 'historical difference' provides a productive framework for examining academic paths' colonial and post-colonial aspects (Chakrabarty, 2009). By recognising the particularity of historical experiences, researchers can challenge linear narratives of advancement and acknowledge the nuanced complexity of colonial and post-colonial interactions.

In addition, Loomba's study on colonialism and post-colonialism provides more insight into the lasting effects of colonialism and how they influence different areas of the academic journey (Loomba, 2002). Her work highlights the impact of colonial history on educational systems and hierarchies, which in turn influence the development of identity, the creation of knowledge, and the dynamics of power. By examining the points where gender, racism, and colonialism overlap, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the intricate obstacles and possibilities faced by individuals in Western educational environments. Loomba's examination of resistance and agency in colonial settings enhances this concept, emphasising individuals' proactive involvement in navigating and questioning power dynamics.

The theoretical viewpoints of Chakrabarty (2009) and Loomba (2002) offer essential frameworks for understanding the colonial and post-colonial dynamics that influence the experiences of those obtaining doctorate degrees at Western universities. Through a

rigorous examination of these theories, scholars can uncover the complex connections between power, identity, and the creation of knowledge. This contributes to more extensive efforts to remove colonial influences from academia and promote inclusive scholarly settings.

Similarly, Albert Memmi, a distinguished Tunisian French writer and sociologist, offers significant theoretical perspectives on the lasting consequences of colonialism and its effects on the civilisations that were colonised. In his influential book, 'The Coloniser and the Colonised' (2013), he thoroughly examines the intricate power dynamics inherent in colonial relationships. He uncovers how colonialism creates and sustains systems of control, where the coloniser exerts authority over various aspects of the lives of the colonised individuals, such as their identities, cultures, and opportunities.

Memmi's work sheds light on the lasting impacts of colonialism that still influence the academic paths of ethnic minorities studying in Western institutions (2013). More precisely, his analysis of the psychological effects of colonisation strongly connects with the experiences of marginalised students as they grapple with emotions of inferiority, reliance, and isolation in academic settings shaped by colonial pasts. Moreover, Memmi emphasises the deeply ingrained structural disparities perpetuated by colonial institutions, which prioritise the coloniser's interests while marginalising and exploiting the colonised people. This viewpoint highlights the structural obstacles and unfair treatment faced by Black

women when pursuing doctorate studies in Western academia. These challenges are profoundly ingrained in the historical processes of colonisation and oppression.

Utilising Memmi's theoretical framework allows scholars to explore the complex intricacies related to power dynamics, the development of identity, and the creation of knowledge in the context of higher education. Furthermore, this involvement adds to continuous efforts to dismantle colonial influences in academia and foster more inclusive academic settings (Memmi, 2013). Memmi's theoretical ideas provide valuable insights into colonialism and post-colonialism's effects on Nigerian women pursuing higher education at Western institutions. Critically analysing Memmi's work enables researchers to gain insight into the difficulties and possibilities of navigating academic environments influenced by colonial histories. This understanding can inform attempts to promote decolonisation and inclusivity in higher education.

Moreover, Gurinder Bhambra, a renowned sociologist, provides insightful theoretical frameworks for comprehending colonialism and its consequences. Bhambra's research rigorously analyses the enduring effects of colonialism on present-day society, particularly in terms of race, ethnicity, and post-colonial identity (Bhambra, 2007). She underscores the significance of contextualising colonialism within wider global and transnational frameworks, questioning the Eurocentric narratives that prevail in academic discussions.

Bhabra's study prominently centres on the interrelation between colonial histories, globalisation, and migration (2007). She emphasises the impact of colonialism on migration and diaspora, which has influenced the experiences of individuals and communities in both the colonising and colonised cultures. Bhabra's analysis provides valuable insights into the intricate interconnections of race, migration, and identity for Nigerian women studying at Western universities. It highlights how the lasting effects of colonialism still influence their academic paths. Additionally, Bhabra's research emphasises the significance of acknowledging the ability and opposition of colonised individuals to confront colonial power structures and create novel expressions of identity and affiliation.

These analyses show how social movements and grassroots initiatives have organised themselves to oppose colonial injustices and promote decolonisation and social justice. Bhabra's views inspire and empower ethnic minorities in Western higher education. Her work underscores the potential for collective action and solidarity in addressing the colonial influences in academic environments (2007). Bhabra's theoretical ideas offer a thorough framework for comprehending the effects of colonialism and post-colonialism on Nigerian women pursuing higher education at Western universities. By actively studying Bhabra's research, scholars can understand the historical origins of present-day disparities and injustices. This knowledge can then be used to advance the process of decolonising academia and promoting educational environments that are more inclusive and fairer.

In summary, Memmi's ideas centre on the power dynamics and psychological effects of colonialism (2013). In contrast, Bhabra's thoughts explore the broader consequences of colonial legacies on present-day society, such as migration, identity, and resistance (2007). These different perspectives contribute to thoroughly comprehending colonialism and post-colonialism's effects on Nigerian women studying at Western universities. They provide significant frameworks for advancing the process of decolonisation and creating inclusive educational environments.

Situating Autoethnography Within Postcolonial Discourse

As a research methodology, autoethnography aligns effectively with postcolonialism literature and provides a nuanced perspective for understanding the intricate aspects of identity, power, and representation within colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Autoethnography prioritises personal narratives and subjective experiences, aligning with the postcolonial critique of dominant Western narratives and the significance of amplifying marginalised voices. Being a woman of colour allows this research to hold a position that is influenced by both the historical and current impacts of colonialism and imperialism (Said, 2012b). Autoethnography empowers me to regain control over my personal story, questioning dominant ideologies and presenting a different viewpoint based on my lived experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). Furthermore, the emphasis on self-awareness and critical consciousness in postcolonialism aligns with autoethnography's concentration on reflexivity.

Through reflective analysis of my subjectivity and positionality, I can examine how colonial histories, power structures, and societal norms influence my experiences within the EdD programme. This self-reflective position recognises the overlapping impacts of race, gender, and nationality, which helps to develop a more detailed comprehension of my position within more comprehensive socio-cultural environments (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Moreover, the dedication of autoethnography to creating meaning and forming understanding aligns with postcolonialism's objective of dismantling the creation of knowledge influenced by colonialism. By contextualising subjective experiences within broader socio-cultural and theoretical frameworks, this research actively contributes to creating knowledge that questions prevailing narratives and prioritises the viewpoints of marginalised communities.

This process of making meaning not only enhances the comprehension of the EdD programme experience for marginalised groups but also contributes to broader efforts aimed at decolonising academic practices and promoting more inclusive ways of knowing (Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnography serves as a potent research tool that allows for the examination of subjective experiences of a Nigerian Black woman in the EdD degree in the UK, particularly within a postcolonial context. It enriches the understanding of identity, power, and representation in colonial and postcolonial settings by amplifying the voices of marginalised individuals, encouraging introspection, and facilitating the creation of meaning.

To better understand the roots and evolution of these methods, it is essential to explore how autoethnography and biography have their origins in 'Western' symbolic interactionism.

Autoethnography and Biography Have Their Origins in 'Western' Symbolic Interactionism

Autoethnography and biography are social research methodologies from the 'Western' school of symbolic interactionism, a prominent theoretical framework within sociology. Symbolic interactionism, a sociological perspective, was formulated in the early 20th century by notable scholars such as George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. This theoretical framework focuses on understanding human behaviour by examining how individuals interpret symbols and interact with each other based on these interpretations (Blumer, 1969). Autoethnography is a research methodology that integrates personal autobiography and ethnographic inquiry. Autoethnography involves scholars analysing their own experiences to gain an understanding of broader social and cultural phenomena (Ellis et al., 2011). As a method of inquiry, biography involves studying an individual's life to explore wider social and historical phenomena (Chamberlayne et al., 2000). Both strategies emphasise the importance of subjective experiences and interpretations in understanding social reality, aligning closely with the core concepts of symbolic interactionism.

The notion of the 'self' carries considerable significance within the framework of symbolic interactionism. Mead posits that the formation of the self-results from social interaction and is shaped by an individual's perception of how others perceive them (1934).

Autoethnography and biography provide vital insights into how individuals construct their identities within social contexts by exploring their personal experiences and narratives. They focus on highlighting how social interactions shape human identities and how they evolve.

Symbolic interactionism emphasises qualitative research approaches that provide a thorough analysis of subjective experiences and perceptions. According to Blumer (1969), autoethnography and biography align well with this need for contextual understanding due to their focus on narrative inquiry and qualitative analysis. These methods offer nuanced insights into human behaviour and social dynamics, revealing the symbolic meanings individuals attach to their experiences.

However, the origins of autoethnography and biography within the 'Western' context of symbolic interactionism raise concerns about cultural specificity and universality. Critics argue that these methods may reflect Western cultural norms, potentially limiting their applicability in non-Western contexts (Chang, 2016). Additionally, the emphasis on individual experiences in autoethnography and biography might overlook broader systemic factors influencing social phenomena.

Autoethnography and biography are intricately linked to 'Western' symbolic interactionism. Both place a high importance on personal experiences, communication, and in-depth analysis, consistent with the core principles of symbolic interactionism. However, the fact that these theories stem from a Western theoretical framework raises substantial questions about cultural bias and the degree to which they may be widely applied.

Clandinin highlights that engaging in narrative inquiry through autoethnography offers significant insights into how personal experiences shape academic and transformative learning processes (2022). This approach is particularly advantageous for addressing research questions about the impact of methodologies on ethnic minority students, personal motivations for pursuing advanced studies, and the influence of cultural perspectives on learning.

Autoethnography is a research method where the author uses their own experiences as primary data, integrating autobiography with ethnographic research. It involves a high degree of reflexivity, where the researcher critically examines their thoughts, feelings, and experiences within a cultural context. Autoethnography, as a research methodology, offers unique advantages for addressing the following research questions: to what extent might some methodologies 'other' ethnic minority students unintentionally in academic research?; to what extent have my experiences as a Nigerian Black woman motivated me to study for a

doctorate in the UK?; and to what extent has my cultural perspective influenced transformative learning to a doctoral level?

Autoethnography and biography are both grounded in symbolic interactionism, a Western theoretical framework that examines how individuals create meaning through their interactions with others. Biography involves documenting a person's life, usually written by a biographer, who can sometimes be someone other than the subject. While biography can capture the life and experiences of the subject, it can be influenced by the external perspective of the biographer and is open to varying interpretations.

Autoethnography offers a 'deeper personal connection and reflexivity' than biography. This means that autoethnography allows for a more intimate, personal, and self-reflective exploration of the subject's experiences, as it is written by the person who lived those experiences. Therefore, autoethnography is seen as providing a richer and more nuanced understanding of the individual's experiences, particularly in how they relate to broader cultural and social contexts. By integrating personal autobiography with ethnographic inquiry, autoethnography enables me to critically engage with my own experiences, emotions, and reflections within the academic context. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of how my identity interacts with the educational environment and broader cultural dynamics, addressing how methodologies might unintentionally 'other' ethnic minority students. Through this self-reflective process, I can offer a rich, nuanced

understanding of my experiences that goes beyond what an external biographer might capture (Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnography prioritises the insider perspective, giving voice to those who are often marginalised or underrepresented in academic discourse (Blumer, 1969). This perspective is crucial for understanding the intersectionality of race, gender, and education, particularly in exploring the motivations behind my pursuit of a doctorate in the UK. As I navigate the complexities of a Western-dominated educational system, my insights and interpretations are crucial for understanding the intersectionality of race, gender, and education. Autoethnography empowers me to articulate my unique standpoint, providing a first-person account that highlights the challenges and triumphs of my journey, which is essential for shedding light on the specific cultural and systemic factors shaping my educational experience.

Furthermore, autoethnography offers greater flexibility and adaptability in methodological approach, which is particularly important in capturing the complexities and contradictions inherent in my experience in a predominantly Western academic setting (Chang, 2016). This flexibility allows for a more fluid exploration of my cultural perspective's influence on transformative learning at the doctoral level, aligning closely with symbolic interactionism's emphasis on subjective experiences. Autoethnography aligns closely with this emphasis by foregrounding my subjective experiences and the symbolic significance of my journey through the doctoral programme. By focusing on my narrative, autoethnography allows for an in-depth exploration of how I interpret and navigate the educational landscape, offering insights into broader social and cultural phenomena.

While both autoethnography and biography are rooted in Western symbolic interactionism, autoethnography provides a more suitable framework for addressing issues of cultural specificity (Chang, 2016). By centring my voice and perspective, autoethnography enables me to challenge and critique the cultural assumptions embedded in Western academic practices. This method allows me to bring my Nigerian cultural context to the forefront, offering a counter-narrative that highlights the diversity and richness of non-Western experiences in education.

In conclusion, I have chosen autoethnography as the theoretical framework to explore my lived experiences in the Education Doctorate programme because it offers a more personalised, reflective, and flexible approach. Autoethnography empowers me to critically engage with my subjective experiences, challenge cultural assumptions, and provide a nuanced understanding of my educational journey. This methodology aligns with the core principles of symbolic interactionism while providing the necessary tools to navigate and elucidate the complexities of my educational journey.

In addition to my chosen research methodology, I have selected key theoretical friends such as Honneth (2008), Bourdieu (1986), and Winnicott (1991) to enrich my research framework. These friends offer deeper insights into power dynamics, recognition, and psychological development within cultural contexts, which I will justify in the next section.

The Justification for Choosing Key Theoretical Friends (Honneth, Bourdieu, and Winnicott) and Their Role in Postcolonial Discourse

The choice of key theoretical friends for this thesis is motivated by the desire to thoroughly comprehend the complex interplay between identity development, social status, and educational encounters within the framework of postcolonialism. The selected theorists, specifically Honneth (2008), Bourdieu (1986), and Winnicott (1991), provide different viewpoints relevant to examining an ethnic minority's experiences in higher education while considering their position within postcolonial discourse.

Honneth's theory of recognition offers a fundamental framework for understanding how individuals develop their identities through social interactions and connections (1996). Honneth's viewpoint can shed light on the intricacies of recognition and misrecognition that non-white students encounter in White institutions. Honneth's theory (2008) recognises the historical effects of colonisation, which have marginalised and made certain groups invisible. This theory allows for an examination of how these students navigate academic environments and strive for recognition of their intellectual contributions and cultural identities.

Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital and habitus provides valuable insights into how social and cultural capital influence educational experiences and outcomes (1986). Bourdieu's approach can provide insight into how ethnic minorities' cultural origins, social networks, and embodied dispositions in the EdD programme impact their relationships with peers, lecturers, and institutional structures. Bourdieu's idea can provide insights into the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion experienced by marginalised students by analysing the distribution of cultural capital in academia. However, biographical illusion, within the framework of Bourdieu's idea, refers to the tendency for individuals to perceive their life trajectories because of their agency and choices, while overlooking the influence of social structures and conditions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This concept suggests that people often construct narratives of their lives that emphasise personal agency and merit, neglecting the role of social forces such as class, culture, and institutionalised inequalities in shaping their life outcomes.

Winnicott's idea of transitional objects and spaces offers a developmental viewpoint on identity creation and establishing boundaries between the individual and the outside world (Winnicott, 1953). Within higher education, Winnicott's concepts can shed light on how students navigate the shift from their native cultures to the academic setting. Winnicott's theory recognises the importance of transitional spaces in developing one's identity. This theory provides valuable insights into students' difficulties and possibilities when reconciling their cultural identities. These thinkers align with postcolonial thought by providing

frameworks that recognise colonialism's past and continuous effects on identity, power, and knowledge creation.

Honneth's theory of recognition examines the enduring effects of colonialism by emphasising the significance of recognising and confronting the patterns of misrecognition and control sustained by colonial structures (Honneth, 1996). Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital corresponds with postcolonial criticisms of Western-centric educational systems, which frequently prioritise specific types of knowledge and cultural capital above others (Bourdieu, 1986). Winnicott's focus on transitional zones aligns with postcolonial viewpoints that acknowledge the dynamic and mixed character of identity development within colonial interactions (Winnicott, 1953). The choice of Honneth (2008), Bourdieu (1986), and Winnicott (1991) as theoretical allies in researching the experiences of a Nigerian Black woman in the EdD programme in the UK is justified by their ability to offer detailed and sophisticated perspectives on identity, recognition, cultural capital, and transitional experiences within the framework of postcolonialism. By using these theoretical frameworks, the research thoroughly comprehends the intricate processes in action and contributes to endeavours focused on fostering diversity and fairness in higher education.

Through integrating these theoretical perspectives, the research delves into the complex dynamics at play, thereby contributing to efforts aimed at promoting diversity and equity in

higher education. This comprehensive approach also allows for an exploration of postcolonial themes as expressed through music from a Nigerian context.

Postcolonialism Expressed Through Music From a Nigerian Context

Postcolonial narratives have been expressed through music in Nigeria to reflect our culture, traditions, and ideologies (Kuti, 1977). One Nigerian who was not afraid of expressing his ideologies through music was Fela Ransome-Kuti until he died in 1997 at 58 years old. He changed his name to Anikulapo-Kuti because he described 'Ransome' as a name from British colonialism that had no meaning in the Yoruba language (Caroll, 2013). Fela studied at the London School of Music in 1957 and then adopted Jazz (Kuti, 1977). Fela later abandoned Jazz for Afrobeat music to embrace African rhythms (ibid). Fela's song lyrics reflected his political activism to highlight postcolonialism, corruption, and discrimination (Caroll, 2013). He also used his songs to criticise the Nigerian soldiers.

One of his famous songs, called 'Zombie,' condemns the Nigerian Military government's methods, which resulted in one thousand soldiers attacking his home Kalakuta Republic (ibid). Fela's home was burnt down, and he was severely beaten (ibid). His mother, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, a women's rights activist, was at Fela's home during the attack, and she was pushed through the second-floor window (ibid). It was believed that she later died from her injuries (Johnson-Odim et al., 1997). Fela criticised the Nigerian government for employing the European style of government, even though it was harmful to the

members of the Nigerian public. (Falola et al., 2012). He also used his songs to denounce authoritarian regimes (Onyebadi, 2018). Fela's song 'Gentleman' was directed toward postcolonial Africans adopting European clothing, which he perceived as an inferiority complex. He criticised Africans for copying the European suit and tie to look like gentlemen. His chorus included '...I no be gentleman at all – o, I be African man, original.' Another of Fela's songs that highlight the issues of cultural identity is 'Yellow Fever.' In this song, he addresses skin whitening by African women, which he sees as a cultural inferiority complex, and the impact of colonialism as Black women wanted to have white-coloured skin. Fela urged African women to take pride in their culture and be proud to be Black women.

When I was at the Nigerian university doing my first degree, I was also using skin whitening cream to make my skin look lighter because it made me feel more attractive. At the time, there was a general belief that Nigerian men saw women who had lighter complexions as more desirable. Again, White people and Whiteness are more favourable because the colour white is seen as pure and beautiful, unlike Black skin and black colour, which is seen as evil or sinful (Moncrieffe et al., 2020). Such dichotomies validate White people and their culture to be more valuable and regarded with higher prestige than Black people and their culture.

Honneth's recognition theory (1996) is relevant to Fela's critique of postcolonial African identity. According to Honneth, recognition is fundamental to human development and social integration, involving the acknowledgement and validation of individuals and groups

in their distinct identities. Fela's music, particularly in songs like 'Gentleman' and 'Yellow Fever,' calls for the recognition of African cultural identity and the rejection of colonial and European influences that undermine this identity. His criticism of adopting European clothing and skin whitening practices reflects a demand for genuine recognition and respect for African cultural heritage. By highlighting these issues, Fela's work aligns with Honneth's theory, advocating for a society where individuals are affirmed in their authentic cultural expressions, free from the impositions of colonial legacies.

Fela also released his song 'Colonial Mentality' in 1977, 17 years after Nigeria gained independence in 1960 from the British. In this song, Fela emphasised that Africans have continued to embrace the colonial mentality; in other words, Western ideologies, despite gaining independence from colonialism (Falola et al., 2012). He suggests that Africans did not place value on anything Indigenous and were content with foreign influences (ibid). Fela Kuti expressed his views and told stories through his music, using Nigerian Pidgin English instead of standard English. This choice was a deliberate effort to preserve and emphasise his African identity, rejecting foreign linguistic and cultural dominance.

Through his use of Pidgin English, Fela connected with a wider Nigerian audience while affirming his cultural roots. This further brings to light how Nigerian elite parents hold British teachers and schools in high regard both in Nigeria and abroad (Ayling, 2019). This reiterates that the 'Oyinbo' or colonialist curriculum is more desirable at premium prices with exorbitant school fees in Nigeria because of their affiliation with British or Western

standards (ibid). This also indicates that the presence of White people at a Nigerian school automatically gives them the reputation of being intelligent and/or an education expert. It could be observed that this has contributed to the reasons why I relocated to England with my husband in 2008 from Nigeria because we grew up with the knowledge that the West is Best! Again, the high cost of Western higher education has not deterred me from pursuing an Education Doctorate and I have relied on personal loans to help pay my tuition fees which I will narrate in Chapter Five.

Bourdieu's idea, particularly his concepts of cultural capital and habitus, provides a valuable lens through which to understand these phenomena (1986). Cultural capital refers to the non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means, such as education, intellect, style of speech, and appearance. In this context, the preference for lighter skin, British education, and Western standards can be seen as forms of cultural capital that confer higher social status and prestige in Nigerian society.

Fela's encouragement for African women to take pride in their Blackness challenges the dominant cultural capital that values whiteness and Western standards. His advocacy can be interpreted as an attempt to redefine what is considered valuable cultural capital within the Nigerian context. By promoting pride in Black identity, Fela aims to shift the habitus, the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals acquire through their life experiences, of African individuals towards valuing their own culture and identity.

My personal experience with skin whitening and the perception that lighter skin is more attractive reflects the influence of Western cultural capital on Nigerian society. This extends to the high regard for British teachers and schools, which are seen as prestigious due to their association with Western standards. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence (1991), which refers to the imposition of the dominant culture's values on a marginalised group, can be applied here, as these preferences perpetuate the idea that Western culture is superior.

Moreover, my decision to pursue higher education in England, despite the high costs, underscores the perceived value of Western cultural capital. The willingness to incur significant debt for Western education illustrates the extent to which Western standards are internalised as markers of success and intelligence. Bourdieu's idea helps to explain how cultural capital and habitus shape the preferences and behaviours of individuals in Nigerian society, including the preference for lighter skin, Western education, and the relocation to the West for higher education. Fela's critique and my narrative both highlight the ongoing struggle to redefine cultural capital in a way that values African identity and experiences. Hence, the attribution of superlative standards to Western culture appropriates the hidden forms of colonialism.

This internalisation of Western values is not limited to education but extends into professional environments, where postcolonial dynamics continue to influence workplace interactions and power structures. The next section will explore how these postcolonial

influences manifest in the workplace, particularly in how marginalised groups navigate professional settings shaped by these enduring legacies.

Postcolonialism in the Workplace

Holliday uses creative non-fiction to illustrate how cultural differences and stereotyping can lead to racism, employing Bourdieu's concept to demonstrate how micro-aggressions by dominant groups marginalise individuals (2022). In his narrative, Holliday uses four characters—Stefan, Alicia, Roxana, and Jane—in a workplace setting to highlight how micro-aggressions occur. Roxana, a new colleague, is described by others as flashy, extravagant, and materialistic, marking her as someone from a foreign country. This non-fictional account shows how unconscious biases become active in othering individuals through statements that might seem flattering but are embedded in the social structures of 'us versus them.'

The struggle to confront these micro-aggressions within higher education, particularly in the UK, echoes the broader challenges faced by minority groups who seek safe spaces to question and dismantle deficit thinking and the gatekeeping of knowledge, often centred around whiteness. Wilson et al. (2023) explore this concept of othering in their examination of Black women doctoral students at predominantly White institutions, drawing on Said's (1978) seminal work 'Orientalism', which exposes the deep-rooted power disparities in Western discourse. These concepts are not only applicable within academic environments but also resonate with the dynamics of postcolonialism in the workplace (Said, 2014). In the

workplace, just as in academic spaces, the lingering effects of colonialism manifest through structural inequalities, where dominant groups maintain their positions of power by marginalising and devaluing those from minority backgrounds. This marginalisation often occurs through micro-aggressions and other subtle forms of discrimination that perpetuate systems of dominance and subordination.

The Impact of Power Dynamics in the Workplace

Postcolonialism in the workplace reflects power dynamics where individuals from marginalised groups are often positioned as 'the other,' subjected to stereotypes and pressured to conform to the norms of the dominant group. This can result in a sense of alienation and disorientation as these individuals struggle to find their place in environments not designed for them. The internal challenge of navigating such spaces—whether in academia or the workplace—can be overwhelming, often leading to non-participation as a form of self-preservation. This aligns with Arday's (2021) argument that non-participation can be viewed as a form of resistance, a refusal to perpetuate the white supremacy embedded within these systems, and a means of safeguarding one's mental health and well-being. Lorde's assertion that self-care is not self-indulgence, but a form of political resistance, underscores the importance of prioritising one's well-being (1988). The option for ethnic minorities to leave higher education or the workplace is often understated because survival within these spaces is seen as their only option.

Victims of micro-aggressions frequently leave their employers to escape the politics of 'us versus them' (Holliday, 2022). This situation can indirectly pressure ethnic minorities to conform to 'fit in' or 'belong,' so as not to be perceived as a threat to the system and to avoid disrupting the status quo. This tendency is supported by evidence in Megan Reitz and John Higgins' (2019) book 'Speak Up', and its second edition (2024) 'Speak Out', which highlights how individuals from marginalised groups often feel compelled to remain silent or conform to dominant norms to avoid conflict and protect their position within organisations. Reitz and Higgins discuss how the dynamics of power and privilege in the workplace can stifle voices from minority backgrounds, as in backgrounds that are seen through the lens of low-status titles/labels in the eyes of those with high-status titles/labels. These dynamics lead and sustain an environment where speaking up is perceived as risky for those who would speak up and identify (minority/minoritised) voices of difference as not worth listening to by those who have the power to choose who to hear and discount. These established patterns of voicing and silencing then reinforce historical patterns of organisational power, further entrenching existing inequalities.

This may explain why individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds often change employers, seeking to find a workplace where they can fit in with less conflict (in terms of patterns of conversational power that need to be challenged) and where they can speak up with less risk and effort. In a conversation with a friend in 2022, I discussed how some of the Black women I know change jobs every 1-2 years due to micro-aggressions in Western workplaces, often invisible to those who occupy positions of both formal and informal

power. Reitz and Higgins (2019, 2024) emphasise that when people from marginalised groups do speak up, they often face significant pushback and must work much harder to be heard, making it even more challenging to address systemic issues which are an expression of the power status quo. This constant job change, in search of less taxing/toxic environments, makes it difficult for Black women to advance up the career ladder, as they are unable to build up the social and relational capital required to progress, often trying to escape toxic work environments. These challenges frequently impact their social mobility, which may explain the scarcity of Black women in leadership roles and a general lack of social mobility.

The Concept of 'Voice' and Psychological Safety

The concept of 'voice' explored by Reitz and Higgins (2019, 2024) in 'Speak Up' and 'Speak Out' suggests that the lack of psychologically safe spaces, as seen from the perspective of the relatively powerless, to express concerns and ambitions in ways that are heard and acted on by the relatively powerful, contributes to the ongoing marginalisation of these individuals.

It has been observed that Black women often belong to more than one marginalised group, such as being both 'Black and female,' which exposes them to even greater discriminatory practices (Morgan, 2020). Reitz and Higgins' work supports this, indicating that the intersection of multiple marginalised identities (in their language and titles) exacerbates the

difficulties faced in speaking up and being heard within organisational settings. In Chapter Five of this thesis, I will explore the impact of gender and race on my career development while also highlighting how patriarchal systems continue to disadvantage people like me.

My experiences in the EdD programme in the UK highlight the complex interactions between liminality, micro-aggressions, and the broader challenges of navigating a postcolonial academic environment. Understanding these dynamics and relating them to postcolonialism in the workplace, it becomes clear that creating inclusive and transformative spaces requires a conscious effort to recognise and address the lingering effects of colonialism. Diverse perspectives must be not only welcomed but also actively implemented, allowing individuals from minority backgrounds to truly thrive rather than merely survive within these transitional spaces. The work of scholars like Ahmed (2012) and the narratives provided by Holliday (2022) and Wilson et al. (2023) underscore the importance of addressing these issues within both academic and professional contexts, ensuring that marginalised voices are heard and valued in the ongoing effort to decolonise these spaces.

The racism that persists both 'out there' and 'in here,' as highlighted by Arday (2021), often remains subtle and challenging to address. The effort required to transform these environments—whether in academia or the workplace—can be so daunting that some individuals might choose to withdraw from the system altogether. This act of opting out can

itself be seen as a form of soul work—a recognition of the need to prioritise one's well-being while resisting the oppressive structures prevalent in these environments.

Soul work, as theorised by Dirkx (2000), involves a deep, reflective process of exploring one's unconscious and emotional responses shaped by lived experiences. In both academic and professional settings, it allows individuals to critically examine their roles within systems of power and oppression, helping them navigate environments that may be unwelcoming or discriminatory. By addressing the emotional impact of micro-aggressions and other harmful practices, soul work fosters deeper self-reflection, enabling personal growth and reconciliation of past experiences with present challenges. It aids individuals in understanding their identity within complex social structures.

In line with this, Arday and Mirza argue that legitimate knowledge and contributions need not be confined to traditional institutions (2018). Instead, they can be expressed through alternative platforms such as radio, television, and other settings where individuals from minority groups feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. These spaces provide a refuge from the burden of representation and the constant need to justify one's place within systems that were not designed with them in mind. By seeking out and creating such safe spaces, individuals can engage in soul work that fosters growth, resilience, and the ability to flourish both within and beyond traditional environments. Through this process, they can challenge oppressive systems while nurturing their well-being and development.

As I navigate these liminal spaces within academia, I encounter micro-aggressions that reinforce power imbalances deeply rooted in colonial histories. These aggressions manifest through stereotypes and marginalisation, maintaining systems of dominance and subordination, and positioning me as 'the other' within an academic environment not originally designed for individuals like myself. For instance, there may be times when I am invited to participate in diversity panels or initiatives, not necessarily because of my expertise, but rather to fulfil a perceived need for ethnic representation.

Similarly, I receive more invitations to speak during Black History Month, as if I stopped being Black during the other eleven months of the year. This tokenistic approach implies that my experiences and perspectives are only relevant within the narrow confines of a designated month, rather than being recognised as integral to the academic community all year round. It is important to note that the lived experiences of Black people are 365 days a year and not just every October in the UK. These situations highlight how colonial power dynamics still shape the way diversity is approached in academia, often valuing my background more than my academic contributions.

The influence of postcolonialism extends beyond academia and the workplace, permeating various forms of cultural expression, including literature. Nigerian literature offers rich insights into the postcolonial experience, providing a powerful platform for exploring themes of identity, resistance, and the lingering impact of colonialism. The next section will

delve into how postcolonialism is reflected and challenged in Nigerian literature, further illustrating the broader cultural and societal implications of colonial legacies.

Postcolonialism in Nigerian Literature

In Achebe's 'The African Trilogy' (2010), Adichie, a famous Nigerian author who considers herself a feminist, wrote about how Achebe read some 'colonialism classics' in secondary school in the 1940s. At the time, Achebe believed that White men were good and intelligent while Black men were savages, sinister and cunning (Achebe, 2010). Achebe later discovered the power of narratives and how this knowledge was reproduced by those telling the stories and how the stories were told (ibid). However, the voices of Africans were missing from these Eurocentric stories because they did not reflect who Africans were, their lived experiences, the languages they spoke, or the perspectives they represented (ibid).

Adichie acknowledged that Achebe's novels became strangely personal (Achebe, 2010). 'Things Fall Apart' (1958) became the life my great-grandfather might have lived. 'Arrow of God' became the story of my ancestral hometown during my grandfather's time, and 'No Longer at Ease' became the story of my father's generation (Achebe, 2010, p. ix). Achebe, the author of the novels, brought to life the lived experiences of many Nigerians. Through storytelling, whether fiction or nonfiction, people worldwide can learn and develop codes of behaviour while making meaning of their lives (Adichie, 2013). It can be observed that history and lived experience matter in these perspectives. Adichie suggests that seeing

oneself distorted in literature was strange, and not seeing oneself at all in some literature was part of her childhood as she read British books (ibid). However, she also noted that her writings mimicked the British books with White characters of stories set in England before discovering her cultural identity (ibid). In my personal experience as a child, I also read British books. I encountered Englishness in the Nigerian private primary school I attended from an early age as my headteacher was a lovely British lady. As I grew older, I watched the Nigerian 'Things Fall Apart' (1971) movie televised in episodes on the National Television Authority (NTA), Nigeria's largest television network. It can be said that 'Things Fall Apart' is a fictional movie but is also based loosely on actual events. However, the film made me discover the painful past of Africans during the pre-colonial period, and this was knowledge mostly denied to me through education in my early years.

Narratives illuminate invisible paths to build sense and meaning that shape us (Formenti & West, 2018). After watching 'Things Fall Apart,' I began to see Englishness from another perspective. The movie brought to my imagination the pain and hardship my ancestors would have experienced at the hands of their colonial masters. Achebe's version of the narrative made me encounter how Christianity was used to penetrate the Igbo community. One of the Igbo characters in the story proclaimed that the community's naivety was consequential as the Englishman took advantage of the vulnerabilities within the cracks of internal complexities that already existed (Achebe, 2010). This also reflects the worries of the Northern people of Nigeria about the Southerners being invaders like the Europeans who colonised them in the past (Coleman, 2022), as discussed in Chapter One. The Western

missionaries demonstrated love by dedicating long hours to charity work in the poor African villages of that time. Their commitment and service to the local communities helped build trust and foster mutual recognition between themselves and the villagers. These loving relationships encouraged the development of respect in more empathetic ways, which in turn led to the African communities gradually adopting the Christian religion while moving away from their traditional cultural beliefs. It could be argued that the acceptance of Christianity was, in a way, a gesture of gratitude from the Africans in response to the missionaries' perceived kindness, with the assumption that the love shown would not cause them harm.

Achebe's novel 'Things Fall Apart' consists of narratives of the criticism of the impact of colonialism (Achebe, 2010). Achebe's writing also made readers aware of how political and economic power was established through Christianity and colonialism with tragic characters who were gravely wronged (ibid). In addition, Achebe's writings portray the rich culture and direct translations from the Igbo language with proverbs and manners of speaking that depict cultural connotations. In the 1950s, when Achebe was in university, he read *Mister Johnson*, written by Joyce Cary, the best book by Time Magazine in those days. Achebe disagreed with the descriptions of Nigerians in the book, and it is believed that he wrote his book 'Things Fall Apart' in response to *Mister Johnson* (ibid). I would say that these fictional stories made me aware that narratives are shaped by the perceptions and experiences of individuals. It was not until the later stages of writing my thesis that I began to critically examine my long-held belief that 'the West is best.' This belief might explain why, earlier in

my research journey, I primarily engaged with theoretical perspectives from predominantly White male scholars.

Positionality is the Core of Decolonisation Practices

Undertaking this research study has been a transformative journey. One that has led me to confront the complexities of decolonisation within academic spaces. Throughout this reflective research, I delve into the liminal process of decolonisation, examining the phases of separation, liminal process, and reassimilation, as outlined by Van Gennep (1960), and considering the role of positionality in this critical discourse.

The cultural shift towards championing decolonisation presents a challenge that many may find difficult to navigate, and resistance or obliviousness to this shift may arise. This period can be referred to as the separation phase (ibid). Following that is the liminal phase where the feelings of discomfort and resistance occur. Here, educators grapple with their thoughts within the decolonisation discourse as I experienced (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021).

Positionality emerges as a crucial concept in this learning journey, enabling me to problematise existing knowledge and power structures while interrogating how these structures perpetuate advantage and disadvantage others. This refers to the continuation or maintenance of existing privileges and benefits for certain groups while simultaneously causing harm or putting other groups at a disadvantage. It suggests that the actions, policies, or systems in place contribute to the ongoing inequality and inequity experienced

by marginalised or oppressed groups, often by reinforcing existing power dynamics and social hierarchies.

Educators may find themselves in a liminal process concerning positionality, as it demands a level of responsibility and commitment that extends beyond their comfort zone. The reluctance to compromise one's position may prolong this liminal state, hindering progress towards meaningful decolonisation practices. In this phase, educators may perceive decolonisation as unnecessary pressure, leading to a stagnant state where the status quo is maintained under the guise of complacency.

Once the liminal process is achieved the reassimilation phase unfolds where educators are prompted to critically reflect on their positionality within historical, social, and political contexts (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). This critical reflection prompts a series of questions that guide the decolonisation process as follows:

1. Which knowledge are we reproducing or representing?
2. Who is our academic work serving?
3. Is the knowledge produced from the position of with and from rather than about?

(Schultz et al., 2018)

Positionality helps us to challenge the systemic practices that continue the processes of marginalising individuals, which aids objectification and normalisation. Positionality further

supports moving away from the 'Everything is Awesome' space to progress towards 'beyond reforms' where there is the political will in the hearts and minds of decision-makers at all levels to change the colonised structure and to question how knowledge is produced (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). My doctoral journey has illuminated the significance of positionality in navigating the complexities of decolonisation within academic spaces. By embracing critical reflection and interrogating power dynamics, educators can move beyond the liminal state and actively contribute to transformative decolonisation practices. By persistently interrogating positionality, we can confront deeply rooted systems of oppression and work towards fostering a more just and inclusive educational environment.

Positionality not only enables us to challenge marginalising systemic practices but also serves as a foundation for engaging in meaningful reform that goes beyond surface-level solutions. As we continue to critically examine power dynamics and the structures of knowledge production, it becomes evident that achieving transformative change requires concerted efforts at all institutional levels.

As an educator, it is important to explore how educational practices in Western countries continue to perpetuate colonialism through the marginalisation of students in distinct and subtle ways. Therefore, it becomes essential to examine the imbalance of power within knowledge production and the need for decolonising the curriculum to foster more inclusive practices. My initial engagement with academic research involved reproducing Western

knowledge and ideologies without question. This uncritical approach underscores the broader issue of social injustice perpetuated through the knowledge that is reproduced.

Social Injustice Through the Knowledge Reproduced

Tensions have existed in contending with guilt and politics (Fataar, 2018) and the ideas of White fragility (DiAngelo, 2018). Some scholars argue that there is a social justice element in challenging epistemic violence related to colonialism or coloniality, suggesting that it is better to move on or continue without disrupting knowledge production in disobliging, uncooperative, and obstinate ways (Le Grange, 2016). This notion is advocated by scholars from both former colonies and colonisers (Santos, 2017). It is not surprising that some argue that the colonised should be grateful for the benefits of colonisation, yet they overlook how systemic educational practices violate the rights of individuals (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). This raises questions about how arguments of colonialism are legitimised in academia and whether they are given publication worthiness without sufficient scrutiny or critical self-examination (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021).

Colonisation cannot be written out from academic discourse if we do not acknowledge how it was written in and maintained as a major force in the narrative of abused lives (Adébí sí, 2023). Chinua Achebe's warning—'...when we are comfortable and inattentive, we run the risk of committing grave injustice absent-mindedly' (Achebe, 2009, p. 93)—underscores the need for voluntary practical changes by decision-makers to ensure unbiased knowledge reproduction at all levels. In educational practices, evidence suggests that supervisors often

discourage the use of non-English language resources or references, arguing that they do not meet UK academic standards and might weaken the quality of research (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). Students or scholars from minority backgrounds may acquiesce due to the power dynamics and hierarchy between them and their supervisors (ibid). This practice undermines the value of non-Western perspectives and allows the attitudes of such academic gatekeepers to perpetuate systemic violence through microaggressions, which can also affect ethnic minority staff (Vickers, 2020). Recognising and incorporating non-Western perspectives are crucial for addressing historical injustices regarding knowledge and power established through colonial practices (Adébísí, 2023). By doing so, we can work towards a more inclusive and diverse curriculum and reading lists for students.

The impact of continuous exclusions, distortions, and lack of representation of non-Western perspectives in higher education is reflected in the sense of belonging, engagement, learning, and attainment of marginalised students (Schucan Bird & Pitman, 2019). The stark disparity between gender, theory, and practice in higher education reveals power imbalances, where wages and academic contracts marginalise Black women. According to Advance HE (2020), statistics indicate that only 0.6 per cent of 110 Black professors out of 18,425 professors in the UK are Black female professors. This underscores how studying for a doctorate in the UK is influenced by 'imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (hooks, 2014, p. 4). Highlighting the importance of positionality, this situation demonstrates that knowledge is politically and historically contingent (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). Addressing these issues involves confronting intricate challenges in decolonising educational

practices, emphasising the need for critical self-reflection and tangible reforms to combat systemic injustices.

My thesis advocates for unbiased knowledge reproduction and the inclusion of non-Western perspectives to address systemic violence and enhance the sense of belonging and academic success of marginalised students, particularly Black women, who face intersecting oppressions. When conducting this research, the urgent need for decolonisation arose to foster inclusivity, diversity, and equity in higher education and to create supportive learning environments for all students (Grant & Young, 2022). This discussion underscores the necessity of recognising and addressing systemic biases within academic practices. It illustrates how historical and contemporary injustices shape knowledge production and influence the academic experiences of marginalised groups. By acknowledging these complexities and advocating for inclusive reforms, we can work towards a more equitable educational landscape that values diverse perspectives and promotes genuine representation and academic success for all students.

Building upon the imperative to foster inclusivity and diversity in higher education, the next section delves into the contrast between traditional and non-traditional research methodologies. It explores how the decolonisation of the curriculum can help address the 'othering' of ethnic minority students. This analysis underscores the importance of challenging Eurocentric academic frameworks that marginalise non-Western perspectives and advocate for research practices that more accurately reflect the diverse experiences of

ethnic minority students. Through this, we can work toward creating academic environments that prioritise equity, inclusion, and diverse ways of knowing.

Traditional Versus Non-Traditional Research: Decolonising the Curriculum and Addressing 'Othering' of Ethnic Minority Students

Both traditional and non-traditional research methodologies offer valuable insights into understanding the complexities of academic research, but they differ significantly in approach, focus, and outcomes, particularly in the context of decolonising the curriculum and addressing how ethnic minority students are unintentionally 'othered.' Traditional methods, such as quantitative research, prioritise objectivity, generalisability, and the use of tools like surveys, statistical models, and experiments to derive data from large samples (Willan, 2016). These methods, while offering structured and replicable results, can inadvertently generalise experiences, failing to address the socio-cultural factors that shape the lives of ethnic minority students.

For instance, surveys often fail to capture the diverse barriers that Black women face in higher education, reinforcing stereotypes and ignoring structural inequalities (Maylor et al., 2021). Moreover, these methods assume neutrality, which can obscure inherent biases, especially when conducted by researchers from majority ethnic backgrounds (Sang, 2018). This emphasis on standardisation can inadvertently marginalise students by positioning

them as outliers or anomalies within the data, thereby perpetuating their exclusion in research settings (Arday, 2018).

In contrast, non-traditional methods such as participatory action research (PAR) and autoethnography provide more inclusive, context-sensitive approaches that centre on the lived experiences of marginalised communities. PAR, for instance, involves collaboration with minority students throughout the research process, enabling them to co-create knowledge and actively participate in shaping the research agenda (Arday, 2018). This method challenges the hierarchies inherent in traditional research by addressing the power imbalances that often marginalise minority voices.

Similarly, autoethnography allows researchers to reflect on their personal narratives and lived experiences, offering insights into the unique challenges faced by ethnic minority students, especially in relation to intersectional identities (Willan, 2016). These non-traditional methods align with Critical Race Theory (CRT), which seeks to challenge the objectivity that traditional methods often prioritise by recognising that race and power are embedded within educational structures. CRT-informed methodologies, such as narrative inquiry and discourse analysis, provide platforms for marginalised voices, facilitating counter-narratives that disrupt dominant discourses and address systemic inequalities in educational research (Arday, Belluigi & Thomas, 2021).

Furthermore, the incorporation of intersectionality into non-traditional research frameworks allows for a more nuanced understanding of how overlapping social identities—such as race, gender, and class—interact to create compounded forms of marginalisation for ethnic minority students, particularly Black women (Sang, 2018). Traditional methods that fail to account for these intersecting identities risk oversimplifying the diverse experiences of ethnic minority students, perpetuating a one-dimensional view of their challenges (Maylor et al., 2021). In this regard, non-traditional methodologies provide a more suitable framework for addressing the multifaceted realities of these students' lives.

Participatory action research (PAR), for example, offers a collaborative approach that directly involves minority students as co-researchers rather than subjects. This engagement fosters a more inclusive research environment where the voices of ethnic minority students are central to the knowledge production process. This method aligns with principles of social justice, aiming to mitigate the 'othering' of these students by addressing the power imbalances that are often inherent in traditional research settings (Willan, 2016). PAR thus becomes a vital tool in the decolonisation of the curriculum by allowing minority students to actively participate in shaping educational narratives and research outcomes (Arday et al., 2021).

While traditional research methodologies can provide valuable insights, they often fall short when it comes to engaging with the complex, lived experiences of ethnic minority students. The emphasis on objectivity and generalisability can inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce inequalities by failing to address the socio-cultural factors that influence these students' educational experiences. Non-traditional, qualitative, and participatory methods, especially those informed by Critical Race Theory and intersectionality, offer more inclusive and effective approaches for representing the diverse realities of ethnic minority students. These methods are particularly important in the context of decolonising the curriculum, as they promote a more equitable academic environment that challenges systemic inequalities and values the diverse contributions of all students.

Both traditional and non-traditional approaches have their value, and in some cases, researchers may use a combination of traditional and non-traditional methods to provide a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the research question. By integrating quantitative methods like surveys or experiments with non-traditional approaches such as narrative inquiry or participatory action research, researchers can address both the general patterns and the specific, lived experiences of minority students, offering a more holistic understanding of the educational challenges they face.

The lack of representation of Black women at all levels of higher education presents some racialised experiences in the academy (Robinson, 2013). Evidence suggests that even when

ethnic minorities are represented in the academy, their appearances often serve as tokenism (ibid). Tokenism refers to the practice of including a small number of members of a marginalised group to give the appearance of diversity or inclusivity, without genuinely addressing systemic inequalities or power imbalances (Weekes et al., 2024). It often involves superficial gestures or symbolic acts that do not lead to meaningful change or representation for the marginalised group (Berrey, 2005). Education can sometimes present obstacles where the power relationships are still working against Black women, the curriculum and pedagogy because they are not yet decolonised. Formal education is influenced by organised, deliberate actions intertwined in political, cultural, and social enactments.

The power imbalance of knowledge production gave rise to the widespread interest in decolonising the curriculum in higher education in the UK (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021), with evidence suggesting that education is still serving the agenda of the White/Europeans through imperial control (ibid). Decolonisation is the effort to resist the distinct and intertwined processes of colonisation and racialisation to support transformation (Adébí sí, 2023). There is the risk that decolonisation has become a buzz term tied to a trend allowing superficial representations because of the failure to address racial, political, and socio-economic intersectionality (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). Some argue that decolonisation has been used to recolonise the intellectual space where the colonised are still the victims of the colonisers (ibid). This will be critiqued further in Chapter Seven.

There has been student and staff solidarity in the UK to decolonise the curriculum linked to a broader civil rights movement (Adébísí, 2023). Decolonisation of the curriculum has a long-standing chronicle regarding learning influenced by conceptual frameworks deeply rooted in history, which have set barriers (Morreira et al., 2020). The work of knowledge considers what counts as education or miseducation because one can teach someone where not to look (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). Consequently, decolonisation has been explored through the position of initiatives that highlight 'soft,' 'radical' and 'beyond' reform(s) (ibid). These reforms highlight the concerns that the UK's curriculum and reading lists are still influenced by colonial roots (Adébísí, 2023).

Evidence suggests that reading lists provided to students in the UK are often shaped by patriarchal white males, who impose a specific way of understanding and interpreting the world (Morreira et al., 2020). Throughout my higher education journey in the UK, the majority of my academic supervision has come from white male lecturers. However, I was exposed to non-Western literature on study days before reaching the thesis stage, which helped reduce the risk of following a colonised academic path. Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021) highlight that reading lists dominated by white perspectives increase the risk of reinforcing a colonised approach, which leads to 'soft reform.' While some educators may not intend to perpetuate colonial dominance, they are often products of that very system, making it difficult to change from within. Therefore, it is crucial that educators learn, raise awareness, and acknowledge that this issue exists, a point I will further explore in Chapter Seven.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used frameworks such as habitus, self-recognition, and transitional spaces to explore my experiences within the doctorate programme. These theories have offered insights into the role of social and cultural capital in fostering a supportive, inclusive academic environment. The need to decolonise the curriculum has been emphasised, advocating for the inclusion of non-Western perspectives in knowledge production. Building on the discussion of traditional versus non-traditional research methodologies and their role in decolonising the curriculum, I have shown how traditional methodologies often marginalise ethnic minority students, while non-traditional methods like PAR and autoethnography provide more inclusive alternatives. This further highlights the importance of dismantling power imbalances in higher education, calling for deeper, more meaningful decolonisation efforts rather than superficial diversity initiatives.

This chapter advocates for creating equitable academic spaces that foster belonging, urging educators to provide tailored support to all students. These reflections contribute to the wider academic conversation on diversity, inclusion, and equity within higher education. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methods and methodology of this research, justifying the use of autoethnography to explore my lived experiences within the EdD programme. This will include a detailed examination of data collection and ethical considerations, as well as how I perceive myself through the lens of others from a cultural standpoint. This exploration

will deepen the discussion of my place of belonging, recognising both the self and others,
and the connection between identity and narratives in academic research.

Chapter Three: Autoethnography as a Method: Using Reflexive Writing, the inspiration for the thesis

Introduction

During one of my first cohort sessions in the EdD programme in 2017, someone delivered a presentation about his autobiographical research. I was not only surprised that he wrote about his personal stories for doctorate research but also wondered how personal stories and academic research could be mixed. However, my position about writing personal stories in educational research has shifted because I now understand more through exploring these ideas in literature. Through reflection and careful consideration of some of the reasons for my original perspectives on what research is, I decided to employ autoethnography in addressing the following research questions.

1. To what extent might some methodologies 'other' us unintentionally in academic research?
2. To what extent have my experiences as a Nigerian Black woman motivated me to study for a doctorate in the UK?
3. To what extent has my Nigerian cultural perspective influenced transformative learning to a doctoral level?

To investigate my research questions, the structure of this chapter is as follows. The first section of this chapter engages with autoethnography as a methodology. The second section will engage autoethnography while bringing into focus the cultural inferences of how my upbringing has influenced me as an adult student in the EdD programme. I will also explore this study's data collection and ethical considerations in the second section. The third section will examine how I view myself through the eyes of others from a cultural perspective. These will enable me to investigate my place of belonging in recognition of the self and others whilst considering the connection between identity and narratives in academic research.

Autoethnography as a Research Methodology

In this thesis General Introduction, I defined autoethnography while establishing the rationale for using autoethnography as the research methodology. In this autoethnographic research, I am both the researcher and the participant, reflecting on how my Nigerian culture has influenced my experiences and motivation in the doctorate programme.

Autoethnography allows me to analyse my lived experience while exploring the socially just and socially conscious acts embedded in inequality. It could be argued that as a mature woman of African descent studying in a Western academic institution, my lived experiences are intertwined with factors such as age, race, class, and gender. My cultural background plays a key role in how I navigate relationships, revealing both challenges and successes throughout my educational journey.

When my research proposal was approved before writing my thesis, I began to explore different methodologies that would allow me to untangle how my past has influenced my lived experiences as a Black woman in the EdD programme from a cultural perspective. After doing some research, I chose autoethnography. When completing one of my assignments that related to methods and methodology in the EdD programme, I knew that my research focus would be qualitative because I would be exploring my lived experiences from my cultural perspective. Even so, it was unclear what methodology I would employ in this research. In 2020, when I was working on my EdD Research Proposal, autoethnography as a research method caught my attention. At the time, I did not know the difference between autoethnography, autobiography, ethnography, and auto/biography. When writing my draft for the research proposal, I found myself choosing the four interchangeably without careful consideration of what they meant in context. In 2021, when writing the thesis, it became increasingly clear that my research leaned towards autoethnography, not autobiography.

To clarify these terms, an autobiographer writes about past experiences, which may include the stories of others in the document as they engage with other participants (Ellis et al., 2011). An autobiographer often writes about epiphanies or remembered moments, events, or crises that have significantly impacted the person's life (Bochner & Ellis, 1992). Here, epiphanies can be self-acclaimed, where an individual may consider an experience transformative while another may not (Ellis et al., 2011). These may contribute to intense

situations that impact memory and are associated with self-recognition, which depends on lived experiences.

However, when researchers do ethnographic research, they study a culture's values, beliefs, and shared experiences to help insiders and inform outsiders of the way of life of the insiders (Maso, 2001). Ethnographers explore cultures by being participant observers and engaging in the culture while taking notes of the events (Goodall, 2001). They may interview the cultural members as part of the research (Berry, 2005) or analyse how they eat, speak, dress, celebrate, or engage with their natural environment (Macht et al., 2005). On the other hand, autoethnographic researchers retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that develop through being part of a culture or possessing a particular cultural identity (Ellis et al., 2011).

Autoethnography is a research method that uses the researcher's autobiographical data to analyse and interpret cultural assumptions (Chang, 2016, p.9). Likewise, critical autoethnography concerns culture and power that untangles cultural identities, intersectionality, and social inequalities (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). Autoethnography considers personal experiences as the primary source of knowledge in relation to cultural inferences to establish positions of privilege whilst revealing vulnerability (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). The epistemology of this research is developed through self-reflexivity from a personal narrative of lived experiences, bringing into focus how cultures are created and compromised through

relational encounters within power structures (Beattie, 2022). Hence, the complexity of this research can be explored through the lens of critical autoethnography as it delves into my lived experiences, highlighting areas where I have been othered.

The Critical Review of Autoethnography as a Methodology

Autoethnography as a research technique illuminates its appropriateness for substantiating the study objective of investigating my lived experiences as a Nigerian Black woman in the Education Doctorate programme in the UK. Autoethnography has garnered significant interest and examination in academic circles because of its unique attributes and ramifications.

Critics contend that autoethnography strongly depends on the researcher's subjective experiences, which may introduce bias into the research findings (Ellis et al., 2011). The presence of subjectivity in studying lived experiences as an ethnic minority in the UK's EdD programme has advantages and disadvantages. Although it facilitates a thorough examination of individual experiences, it also raises issues over the applicability and impartiality of the results.

The validity and credibility of autoethnography have raised concerns about accuracy and trustworthiness. Critics argue that engaging in self-reflection and introspection might result

in introspective bias, wherein the researcher interprets their experiences to support their preexisting beliefs or desired results (Chang, 2016). Nevertheless, the importance of reflexivity and transparency in this study has been highlighted, allowing readers to assess interpretations critically to improve the study's validity.

Ethical considerations are crucial in autoethnographic research, particularly when examining sensitive subjects such as race and identity (Ellis et al., 2011). Throughout the research process, I have addressed the possible hazards associated with self-disclosure and the guarantee of confidentiality and privacy of participants. I have shared the work in progress with my family members to gain their consent and they gave me their support. My sisters were surprised at some of the details but they the endorsed inclusion of the narrative.

Reed-Danahay noted that autoethnography magnifies the voices of marginalised individuals and challenges prevailing narratives (1997). By prioritising my own experiences, this approach allows for examining views frequently disregarded in conventional research frameworks. This research demonstrates how autoethnography empowers marginalised communities to regain control over my own story and make a valuable contribution to a broader and more diverse academic discourse. The methodological rigour of autoethnographic research has been criticised because of concerns about the lack of standardised processes (Ellis et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it is argued that autoethnography provides adaptability, enabling researchers to customise their methodology to align with the subject's distinctive attributes. Employing autoethnography as a research methodology for

this research focuses on personal narratives and subjective reflections to gain a comprehensive grasp of intersectional dynamics.

Autoethnography, like every other research methodology, raises questions regarding subjectivity, validity, and ethical considerations. Autoethnography provides an excellent method for investigating intricate phenomena. Employing autoethnography in this research produces valuable insights into my lived experiences, contributing to broader discussions on identity, power, and representation in academia. Thereby adopting reflexivity, transparency, and ethical practices to improve its validity. In the next section, I will be engaging with the critics of autoethnography.

Critics of Autoethnography

One of the main criticisms of autoethnography in recent years has been ethical challenges. Newcomers into autoethnography may think that autoethnography is an ethics-free zone until they find out that it is an ethically contested terrain (Sparkes, 2024). Similarly, Morse (2002), in her editorial notes of the journal *Qualitative Health Research*, affirmed that she usually discourages students from writing their own experiences for the following reasons: *'First, the narrative is rarely entirely one's own. It includes information about others who are, by association, recognisable, even if their names have been changed. As such, writing about others violates anonymity. If these, 'others' do not know about the article, it still violates their rights, for they have not given their permission, and they do not have the right of*

withdrawal or refusal that the informed consent provides' (p. 1159). Morse's (2002) concerns about autoethnography bring to focus (Ellis, 2007) relational ethics that acknowledge the interpersonal bonds to others in ways that value mutual respect, integrity and dignity between the researcher and the community in which they live and work. In response to ethical challenges, some researchers have developed guidelines and various lists for autoethnographers to apply to address these concerns.

For example, Tolich (2010) presented ten foundational guidelines around the key themes of consent, vulnerability, and consultation. Likewise, Tullis (2021) developed seven ethical guidelines which include not harming self and others, consulting your university's ethics committee, not underestimating the afterlife of a published narrative etc. Without guidelines or lists suggested, the ethics of autoethnography can pose as a dangerous minefield muddled unaided (Gibbs, 2018). As I delve into the process of recounting my experiences, I encounter ethical dilemmas regarding the ownership of these stories. While I am the author, my narratives invariably involve others who have played a role in my journey. Therefore, I feel compelled to contemplate how to safeguard their privacy and ensure that my narratives do not inflict harm or discomfort on myself or others.

As Cavarero suggests, storytelling is inherently relational, meaning that the stories we tell about ourselves inevitably involve others, and thus require a heightened sense of responsibility to ensure their dignity and agency are preserved (2000). This introspection

encourages me to adopt strategies aimed at minimising potential harm in my research. It calls for a sensitive and respectful approach to storytelling, emphasising the importance of protecting the privacy and dignity of those involved. Measures such as anonymising individuals, obtaining consent where possible, or withholding sensitive information that might compromise their well-being may be necessary. Although I am the central figure in my narrative, I am accountable for the impact my storytelling has on others, highlighting the need for careful and ethical consideration throughout the research process.

In the context of my autoethnography research, my stories may be solely personal, but it is crucial to recognise that these narratives are intertwined with relationships and societal contexts. Every aspect of the self is interconnected with others, whether they are family, friends, colleagues, or community members. Hereafter, I followed the six thinking points of Sparkes (2024) to address the ethical considerations inherent in using autoethnography as a research methodology:

1. **Authorship and Ownership:** I grapple with the ethical complexities surrounding authorship and ownership, acknowledging that my narratives are shaped as I engage with others. This prompts me to reflect on the ownership of these stories and navigate the ethical implications of sharing them.
2. **Anonymity and Confidentiality:** I recognise the importance of respecting the privacy and dignity of individuals, which is why I have abstained from using specific names in my narratives. To mitigate the risk of causing harm, I have been cautious not to reveal sensitive

information that could lead to the identification or negative portrayal of others.

Furthermore, no connection has been made between the abuse and exploitation that I experienced with my family or connected individuals. Additionally, I have chosen to omit certain details to uphold confidentiality and ensure that no harm is inflicted.

3. Informed Consent: Although traditional research participants are not involved in my study, I have obtained informed consent from my family members, as they are readily identifiable within my research context. They participated in a seminar where I presented my ongoing thesis work and expressed sincere support for it. Subsequently, I engaged in a lengthy conversation with one of my sisters, during which she expressed surprise at being unaware of certain aspects of my experiences. Our conversation also led us to reflect on our shared childhood, revealing nuanced differences in our relationships with our parents despite similar upbringing. This reflective dialogue evoked feelings of nostalgia and comfort. Upon completing my thesis, I shared it with them for their review, ensuring they comprehended how they were portrayed and the potential implications thereof. They wholeheartedly endorsed my research endeavours and extended their well-wishes. Another sister conveyed immense pride in my thesis progress and frequently discusses with acquaintances how my cultural identity has shaped my academic journey at a white institution.

4. Member Checking: This involves seeking feedback from individuals that are in one way or the other implicated by my research to verify the accuracy of their portrayal and make any necessary revisions. Member checking ensures that participants have an ongoing opportunity to review and confirm how they are represented in the research. For example,

in my study involving family members, I engaged in member checking by sharing the completed thesis with them for review as I mentioned earlier. Their feedback and validation further ensure ethical practice and accuracy to do no harm.

5. Do No Harm to Self: I reflected on the potential impact of revisiting past experiences on my own well-being, taking measures to protect my mental and emotional health throughout the research process as I had regular supervisions with my supervisor and chair. I also had several conversations with my husband regarding my research and how to address any concerns that unfolds in the future for my health and well-being.

6. Do No Harm to Others: I am mindful of the potential harm that sharing certain narratives may inflict on others who have not been named but can be identified. Therefore, I strive to ensure that my storytelling is conducted with sensitivity and respect, refraining from disclosing information that could cause discomfort or harm.

When employing autoethnography as a research methodology, it is essential to consider the ethical complexities it entails. Sparkes (2024) outlines six key thinking points to navigate these considerations. By carefully engaging with these points, researchers can approach autoethnography with a heightened sense of responsibility and ensure that their work upholds ethical standards while exploring personal and collective experiences. Addressing these ethical considerations is not only crucial for maintaining the integrity of the research but also for fostering a deeper understanding of personal and collective identities. With the ethical foundation established, I can now delve into the exploration of identity from various

perspectives. This section will examine how cultural, social, and personal forces shape our sense of self and our relationships with others, offering insights into the complexities of navigating multiple identities in diverse contexts.

Exploring Identity From Different Perspectives

Autoethnography allows researchers to understand the self and others because self-reflection and self-examination are crucial to self-understanding (Chang, 2016). Writing from a cultural perspective enables me to reflect on the forces that have shaped my views and character, which have informed my sense of self. These forces are entangled in gender, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic class, education, religion, location, and sexual orientation. The forces influence our preconceptions of who we are in relation to others, thereby establishing thoughts and feelings of similarities and differences embedded in 'I' or 'we' versus 'them'. Being a Black woman who migrated from Nigeria to England in 2008 highlights my place of belonging within these forces. This comes with the psychological struggles of trying to fit in.

I have expressed a strong need to fit in as a Black woman and was quite surprised to hear someone from Central Europe reveal how she wished she were a Black woman. During the conversation, she said, 'I am white as snow, but in my head, I think I am a Black woman because I want to be one.' Again, a friend of mine, a White British woman, always tells me

that she wishes she could have some of my skin colour to give her some tan, and we always laughed about it. However, I understand this might not sound right to some people of colour because it takes the lived experiences of people of colour for granted. Others may think these women are naïve because if they had the lived experiences of some people of colour, such as racism, they would not wish to be Black based on only physical appearance. Sometimes, I think that if I were a White African, my experience in a White-dominated neighbourhood or cohort might be different from that of a Black African. This is because, at face value, people cannot quickly tell if you are African or not when you are seen as White. Nonetheless, I am proud of being a Black woman and because of my identity, I am the person I am today with pride.

The Facets of Identity

The exploration of various facets of identities simultaneously within its encounter with others in the study of culture has been of interest in the past two decades because of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2013). For this research, I am employing narrative autoethnography because it allows me to engage with how my Nigerian culture has influenced my multiple identities in social spaces. This type of research refers to texts presented in stories grounded on personal experience, producing meaningful analysis of self in relation to others (Bochner, 2016). Identities and experiences are multiple when they cut across race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, complicating one another because they do not overlap neatly or entirely (Smith & Watson, 1992). Identity integration is cross-cultural and psychosocial development that reflects an understanding of the self in multiple facets (ibid).

Although numerous identities can be in a symbiotic relationship, cultural or social identities are identifiable and salient in areas of the individual's life (Myers et al., 1991). Moreover, narrative autoethnography provides a unique lens through which to examine the nuanced ways in which these intersecting identities influence personal and professional interactions. By employing this methodology, I can critically explore how my cultural heritage both challenges and enriches my identity within the broader context of a Western academic environment, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in identity formation and negotiation.

Said argues that no one is purely one thing because labels like woman, Indian, American, or Muslim are only starting points (Said, 1994a). Every individual has more than one identity, and their lived experiences reflect the connections between their multiple identities.

Exploring my multiple identities as a Black woman studying an Education Doctorate allows my stories to become self-consciously value-centred rather than value-free. I turned to autoethnography because it helped me concentrate on ways that evoke meaning from lived experiences shrouded in silence while drawing attention to the 'us versus them' structures within the educational system, notably higher education.

Cultural Analysis and Interpretation

Autoethnography acknowledges there could be different versions of stories for the same event based on how people feel or think about what they saw or experienced. Memories

are constructed in retrospect, from now, looking back. So, it is the meaning felt today that contributes to the construction of the memory. For example, the story of an eventful wedding may be narrated as the happiest day for the bride. In contrast, the bride's mother might describe the event as a day of mixed feelings of joy and sadness because she will miss her daughter, who is starting her new home.

Similarly, the family of a first-generation student from an underrepresented community attending an international institution will narrate the story of their child going to university with pride and joy because a family member has achieved that milestone. Again, the first-generation student of this family going to university may have unsettling feelings. These feelings could be related to the thoughts that he/she/they will miss home and not be sure of what to expect in the unfamiliar environment. The uncertainty may be associated with the fear of people discriminating against them or the struggle to fit into the learning environment. Being the only or one of a few Black students can induce psychological distress and compel individuals within this minority to feel pressured to counteract negative stereotypes and serve as representatives for the entire Black community (Harper et al., 2009). I am one of the ethnic minority students in my cohort on the EdD programme when I started in 2017. I sometimes had unsettling feelings, which include feelings of inferiority and not fitting in or not belonging to certain groups.

In this research, validity is claimed through the derived meanings and the interpretation of how I tell the stories about myself because this is of interest to the reader (Chant, 2017). Autoethnographers are interested in those who read their work and are affected by it to keep the conversation going to change us and change the world we live in to be a better place. I recently joined an autoethnography group with members across the world, and we share our work and seek peer support through written feedback which is of excellent quality. Sharing personal stories as data in research brings private life into the public domain. Sometimes there are emotive stories that only the author can share themselves because the information can be quite intimate. There are privacy concerns when interviewing participants for research purposes. Nevertheless, autoethnography allows the researcher to share sensitive information about their private life to provide meaningful understanding while engaging the readers.

Chang emphasises that autoethnography research should commit to cultural analysis and interpretation to avoid being descriptive as a memoir (Chang, 2016). She also confirms that autoethnography is an instructional tool which helps social scientists and educational practitioners understand the relationship between self and others while engaging with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Here, the term 'others' refers to individuals from diverse cultural groups who possess different behaviours, beliefs, and customs from the dominant group. These differences 'often shift with time, distance and perspective' (Canales, 2000, p.16). My Nigerian cultural background shapes my frames of reference. As a Black woman in the EdD programme and community, understanding the self and its

interrelatedness with others provides the data for this research's cultural analysis and interpretation. Within this research, I have referred to myself as the 'other' from the Western perspective. I am an educational practitioner, and employing autoethnography as a research instructional tool allows me to explore my lived experience as a Black woman in the EdD programme. In this section, I explored how autoethnography can be used as a tool for cultural analysis and personal reflection. The next section will focus on the data collection method employed in this research.

Data Collection Method

The data generated for this research stemmed from ethnicity, gender, race, religion, and citizenship from living in Nigeria and when I relocated to England in 2008 with my husband. Examining these aspects of my life helps provide a better understanding of being the other from an early age because I am Yoruba born and brought up in the Hausa-speaking part of Nigeria. The Yoruba and Hausa cultures are distinguished by societal norms embedded in colonialism's political and religious issues, which I explained in Chapter One. These allow me to engage with the self/other perspectives within my cultural background. Again, exploring my experiences as a girl child in Nigeria, where boys have more privilege, helps to understand how gender contributes to rights and entitlements in subtle ways in psychosocial spaces explored in Chapter Four. Therefore, examining how these transcend into my lived experience as a Black woman in a White male-dominated cohort on the EdD programme provides rich data which will be value-centred.

Writing autoethnographic research requires some evocative narratives of personal and interpersonal experience, which is established by discerning the patterns of culture through showing and telling (Ellis et al., 2011). This makes the individual experience more meaningful and the cultural experience more engaging. The text becomes accessible to insiders and outsiders of culture while giving me a voice (ibid). Personal stories are the primary data source which can be considered familiar data, providing an added advantage to data collection, analysis, and interpretation of autoethnographic research (Chang, 2016). Writing in qualitative research is within the interpretative paradigm and the meaningful reading of the produced text (Baker & Edwards, 2012). This means that meaning can be established by reading the entire text and not scanning through it.

Autoethnography is an interpretivist approach that draws from qualitative data and gives an understanding of the meanings of lived experiences of individuals or groups. The research evolves from emerging questions, and the data analysis develops general themes as the form of inquiry follows an inductive style (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). This contrasts with quantitative research, where the final report follows a specific structure that includes an introduction, literature, methods, results, and discussion. This is because theories are evaluated deductively (ibid). In my autoethnographic research, I use personal stories to understand how my past has informed my present while exploring how these experiences have influenced my sense of belonging in the master's and doctorate programmes.

Over time, the relationships I have encountered in a transitional space can be examined through the self-recognition process (Formenti & West, 2018), forming part of the valid data that will be analysed in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. Chronicling my past through self-narrative helps me to capture my complex, multi-faceted life from the beginning while gathering information from memory which can easily be missed (Chang, 2016). The reflexive writing data for this research is collected over the whole span of life. Each chapter of this autoethnographic research explores the various stages of my life over a certain period. It will be observed that my past informs my present and pre-determines my future through those forms that transform within the self-recognition process from a cultural perspective.

It is important to note that the data gathered is through a selective approach to the research focus as I cannot engage with every single detail of my personal life in this research due to time limitations (ibid). I collected data throughout the self-study as I engaged with literature, reflected on my past, and during reflexive writing. At the beginning of this research, I wrote notes down through reflexive writing under different sub-headings while engaging with theories. In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I have used *Segoe Print* to indicate the feeling of reading a reflexive journal from my extracts. The cultural analysis has remained in this Calibri (Body) font.

At the later stage of my research, I began to write on my laptop and abandoned the notebook because I now had developed chapters. I noticed that data was collected in the late-night hours, around 9 pm to 2 am, or incredibly early hours of the morning. I often wrote in the middle of the night, sometimes from 2 am to 6 am on weekdays and at any convenient time over the weekend to progress further. I usually go back to sleep from 6 am to 8 am before my day's work on weekdays to catch some sleep. Most nights, I have four to five hours of sleep altogether because I have a lot of commitments as a mature student and a full-time working mum. Working from home at the time has made it convenient for me to adopt this routine because there is no travel time to work. I got ready for work within the shortest possible time without any negative impact. My brain could engage more with my past experiences during these periods. Some events during the day also brought back memories relevant to my research, so I often recorded these in emails and sent them to myself with the subject 'Thesis.' This allowed me to filter through my email when writing to develop my research further.

It is important to note that I worked night shifts for a few years as a care worker, and my body clock prefers working at night. Also, some supervisors, mentors, and managers I have worked with in higher education have confirmed my strong work ethic. This could be a result of my strict upbringing by my dad, particularly, and how I developed my interest in studying, which developed from childhood, which will be analysed in Chapter Four. Additionally, one could say that working in low-paid jobs has developed my sense of purpose to work around others' needs in various aspects of my life. Again, my

determination and commitment to achieving this milestone has kept me going despite the challenges.

Apart from chronicling my past through reflexive writing, I also observed that my recent or present lived experiences help capture my emotions, thoughts, behaviours, and ongoing interactions as I have become more self-conscious of my research focus (Chang, 2016).

Working from home during my final year in the EdD programme has significantly benefited my ability to regularly access and update my reflective journal. For instance, it allowed me to engage with Goffman (1997) in analysing how my facial marks have influenced my self-esteem and confidence, particularly as I reflected on my feelings after a work activity.

Whenever something relevant to my research comes to mind, I make it a priority to write it down as soon as possible, while it is still fresh in my memory, to ensure I capture valuable insights (ibid). Much of my reflexive writing occurred while I was completing the literature review in Chapter Two of this research.

The literature review forms the theoretical perspectives that frame my research study (Merrill & West, 2009). As I engaged with literature, it helped to contextualise my lived experiences within a sociocultural context (ibid). It is noteworthy that the immeasurable support from my supervisor and my previous and current Chairs has also helped me collect valuable data from memory as we discuss the progress of my research monthly. Feedback on written work sent by email has also helped me to develop critical analytic skills to benefit

my research. The rich, diverse knowledge and experience have helped me throughout this research as I engage with my lived experiences in remarkable ways. They have also made recommendations for further reading to make those relevant connections while improving the standard of my work. Our discussions during our monthly supervision and regular email communications/feedback on the thesis have formed part of the reflective journal for this research. I have also referred to my Module Leaders' feedback from all my assignments in the EdD programme. This has informed my development when writing this research, given that EdD is the focus of this thesis.

Data collected from the present becomes raw data derived from self-awareness, bringing fresh perspectives into focus (Chang, 2016). These further highlight vivid details from naturally occurring environments while engaging in my daily activities. Data from present occurrences can be referred to as self-observational data, which is different from self-reflective data because it is data collected from the researcher's own life at the time of the research (Chang, 2016). Self-observational data allows me to explore what I think, how I feel, and what I say in the company of others. These also help untangle how people make me feel, transcending or transforming into self-love, self-respect, and self-confidence. These associated feelings further illuminate where I experience disrespect which informs my decision to exclude people in the quest to avoid circumstances that might allow unpleasant situations to reoccur.

Besides, bringing together my past and present data informs the changes of those forms that have transformed from a cultural perspective over time. The data pulls through from growing up in Nigeria, completing undergraduate studies, then relocating to England as a newly wedded couple, becoming a mum to two children, and progressing to a doctorate level. This indicates how my social roles and socio-cultural expectations have changed over time within the relationships I have encountered in recognition of the self and others (Formenti & West, 2018). These are relevant data and useful for the analysis of this research. Self-awareness or self-consciousness about using daily occurrences as research data will encourage intentional responses to people or situations. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the way people make you feel is often out of your control.

My feelings are valid and value-centred in this research because the feelings inform my thoughts and behaviours. As I collected data, I began to evaluate and organise my data into chapters. This was like a cut-and-paste activity; sometimes, I was putting a textual data puzzle together and imagining what goes where with the images in my head. Some data were not used in the end because they were not part of the research focus, but they helped draw data from memory to meet the research needs (Chang, 2016). The data that has not been used in this thesis will be used for future research as I intend to pursue my interest in autoethnographic research. This brings us to the next section: the use of proverbs as part of autoethnography from a Nigerian cultural perspective.

The Use of Proverbs as Part of Autoethnography Research From a Nigerian Cultural Perspective

My primary data consist of stories from my experiences, along with songs, religion, proverbs, and superstitious beliefs. These elements have all shaped my values and morals, helping me to distinguish between desirable and undesirable behaviours from a cultural perspective. As I grew up, I noticed that adults frequently used proverbs to convey wisdom and values in their conversations (Akinmade, 2009). Proverbs can be interpreted in several ways depending on one's perspective, making them a valuable tool for understanding the social ethos of a particular culture (Arewa & Dundes, 1964). For example, the first proverb I remember being told as a child was 'what an elder can see sitting down; a child cannot see from the top of an iroko tree.' The proverb emphasises the wisdom and experience that come with age. It suggests that elders, due to their life experience and accumulated knowledge, have insights and understanding that younger people, despite their energy or vantage points, may not possess.

The iroko tree, being one of the tallest and most revered trees in many African cultures, symbolises a high vantage point, but even from such a height, the proverb implies that a child (or someone younger) still lacks the depth of perception that comes from the elder's years of experience. The proverb underscores the value of respecting and heeding the wisdom of older generations. This proverb has undoubtedly developed my morals and values such that I often respect the opinions of those I consider having varied experience.

This has helped me develop positive relationships with people I encounter at work, in education, or in my personal life.

Another Nigerian proverb says, 'a woman is like a horse; he who can ride her is her master' (Akinmade, 2009, p. 124). This proverb reflects traditional and patriarchal views on gender roles, where women are compared to horses, and the idea of 'riding' suggests control or mastery. In this context, it implies that a woman is seen as an animal to be controlled or dominated, and the person who can do so effectively becomes her 'master.' However, it is important to note that this proverb embodies a perspective that is rooted in a patriarchal and often problematic view of relationships and gender dynamics. It reflects traditional attitudes where power and control over women were considered acceptable or even desirable.

In contemporary discussions, such views are often critiqued for perpetuating gender inequality and for devaluing women's autonomy and agency. Understanding this proverb requires sensitivity to its cultural and historical context, while also recognising the shift towards more equitable and respectful views of gender relationships in modern times. Again, this proverb reflects the simile figure of speech comparing two things, such as the woman like the horse (Baldick, 1994). The metaphor of 'riding' a horse implies control, domination, and mastery, which can be extended to the sexual domain, where similar ideas of dominance and submission may be at play. In this context, the proverb suggests that a

man who can 'master' a woman in a sexual relationship gains control over her, reflecting a view that equates sexual dominance with overall power in the relationship. Blinne highlights how women, particularly within traditional and patriarchal societal structures, often face challenges in asserting their sexual autonomy (2012). These systems tend to impose restrictive roles and expectations on women, making it difficult for them to openly express self-love or embrace their personal sexuality. In such contexts, women may feel pressure to conform to societal norms rather than pursue their own sexual desires or identity.

Nonetheless, this interpretation is rooted in problematic and outdated notions that view women as objects to be controlled rather than as autonomous individuals with equal rights and agency. Such perspectives reinforce gender inequality and perpetuate harmful stereotypes about power dynamics in sexual and romantic relationships. Understanding this proverb within its cultural and historical context is crucial, but it is equally important to critique and reject these views in favour of more respectful and equitable approaches to relationships that recognise the autonomy and dignity of all individuals involved.

Similarly, another African proverb, 'a fat woman warms the coldest night,' suggests that a woman, particularly one who is plus-sized, is seen as capable of providing warmth and comfort, both literally and metaphorically. It reflects a preference or appreciation for plus-sized women in African communities, implying that they are well-suited to meeting a man's needs, especially in terms of physical comfort or emotional warmth.

That said, it is important to note that the proverb can also be interpreted as reducing a woman to her physical attributes and her ability to fulfill a man's needs, rather than recognising her as a whole person with her own autonomy and worth. Like many proverbs, it carries cultural values and attitudes, which can be seen as positive in some contexts but problematic in others, particularly if it reinforces stereotypes or objectifies women. There is much to consider about gender roles within Nigerian patriarchal culture, as these proverbs reveal how women are compared to animals or used to accomplish men's desires.

Nevertheless, when engaging with some proverbs, I recognise that translating from Nigerian Pidgin or other dialects into English can often result in the loss of cultural nuances and emotional depth. Likewise, Grammarly often flags Nigerian Pidgin English as incorrect since it does not align with standard English grammar, reflecting the broader issue of linguistic dominance. This disregards other forms of spoken English in non-Western countries, establishing forms of dominance ideology. Considering the above, proverbs have helped me through my reflective writing as I engaged with how my lived experiences relate to my Nigerian culture, which was valuable in retrieving data from memory in this autoethnographic research.

In addition to proverbs, other forms of cultural artifacts, such as photographs, play a crucial role in retrieving memory data which will be discussed in the next section.

Photographs as a Source of Retrieving Memory Data

Photographs are considered a valuable source for retrieving memory data in autoethnographic research (Chang, 2016). The data I would have liked to include would have been photographs from my childhood, reflecting various stages of my life. During that period, my family did not own a camera, and we relied on camera operators to take photographs on special occasions. Unfortunately, due to the absence of mobile phones in the 1980s, I have very few childhood photographs and no videos, which means a sizeable portion of my childhood has been lost to memory without visual cues to recreate past imaginations and cultural data. Although one could argue that photos play a key role in shaping memories, it is important to note that Nigeria also has a strong oral tradition, where memory transmission relies heavily on those around us. In my case, my parents, who passed away over 20 years ago, and my much older sisters, who were often away at boarding schools or universities during my early years, had limited information to share about my childhood.

From another perspective, women of my mother's generation were often socialised to remain silent about many aspects of their lives (Kuhn, 1995). This silence covered personal hardships, including emotional and physical abuse, which many women endured quietly to avoid bringing shame upon their families. Consequently, my mother may not have shared

much about her own experiences or even aspects of our family life, leaving certain memories unrecoverable. In addition, many of my childhood photographs were lost due to frequent moves with my family or damaged by water. When I relocated from Nigeria to England in 2008, I left many belongings, including family photographs, with relatives. However, over time, as those relatives also moved homes, more photographs were lost. The few I have retained from my secondary school years, university days in Nigeria, family celebrations, and funerals have helped engage my memory for data analysis. My wedding photographs, along with some shared by my sisters through WhatsApp, have similarly helped in recollecting past experiences. However, for personal reasons, I have chosen not to include these pictures in my research. These images evoke both happy and sad memories, especially of my parents, who passed away in 2003 and 2005, respectively.

Reflecting on these photos brings a sense of longing for how different our relationship might have been had they lived to see me in my forties. My parents, especially my strict father, would have been invaluable in recalling my childhood experiences, helping me understand how I have transformed over the years, which is crucial in identifying how my past informs my present (Formenti & West, 2018).

While photographs can be an excellent means of retrieving data for autoethnographic research (Chang, 2016), I am not someone who frequently takes pictures. Instead, I rely on memory to recall noteworthy events and personal encounters. For instance, I chronicled my

postgraduate studies through the modules and cohort sessions in the EdD programme, although I have no photographs to document these moments. I would have liked to include pictures from my first day at university or learning activities during my study days, but, unfortunately, I have none. Instead, I have visualised those moments in my mind, engaging with the associated feelings and thoughts, which have served as valuable data for this research. While photographs provide a tangible connection to the past, relying on memory has offered a more introspective and emotionally rich approach to data collection. This introspective method brings into focus the ethical considerations inherent in autoethnographic research, particularly when personal narratives intersect with the lives of others.

In summary, both photographs and memory are valuable sources of data in autoethnography, each with its own strengths and limitations. Photographs provide a visual record of the past, while memory involves a more personal and emotional process of recollection. However, memory can raise ethical concerns regarding the representation of others. The next section will explore these issues further.

Ethical Considerations

In the context of storytelling, both individuals and others can find themselves implicated (Adams, 2006). Even in the absence of explicit names, personal and academic narratives may inadvertently reveal the identities of family members and university Module Leaders.

Recognising the relational implications inherent in autoethnographic research is of paramount importance (Ellis, 2007). The British Educational Research Association underscores the necessity of conducting educational research with the utmost respect for researchers' privacy rights, integrity, and reputation (BERA, 2011). Autoethnographies should afford implicated individuals the opportunity to respond to their portrayal prior to publication (Jones et al., 2016). Obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy, and protecting participants from emotional harm are essential aspects of ethical research conduct (Jones et al., 2016). While storytellers may not possess exclusive ownership of the narrative, they bear the responsibility of safeguarding others' privacy, particularly that of close acquaintances (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Preserving others' privacy poses a significant challenge in autoethnographic research, where the identities of close acquaintances can inadvertently be disclosed. Thoughtful considerations have been made to afford them the necessary privacy.

Changing the names of individuals and places can serve to shield their identities (Fine, 1993). Notably, no names have been included in this research, opting instead for clearly defined relationships. The importance of upholding privacy and dignity is acknowledged, with a deliberate avoidance of names and sensitive information to pre-empt harm or negative portrayals. As a result, any subjective experiences that could carry negative connotations are purposefully dissociated from references to family members (Sparkes, 2024). Informed consent was secured from family members, who attended a seminar and expressed genuine support for the ongoing thesis work. Subsequent discussions unveiled

their previous lack of awareness regarding certain personal experiences. I have tried to maintain the details of the actual events of my narratives to preserve the validity of the research because if changes are made, the study will lose its true meaning or even risk moving away from the focus of the study (Davis, 1991). Absolute protection of privacy is not always possible, so I will be honest and make a conscious effort to comply with the ethical code of analysis of Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent.

At the beginning of the thesis stage, I completed the Ethics Application for approval that my research study will not be causing harm to myself or others. I have shared my writings with my family at various stages of the thesis. I invited them to one of the CLIER seminar series hosted online by Canterbury Christ Church University. I presented my thesis during the seminar and highlighted areas of family and personal life, and they shared their passion and support through their active contributions during the discussions.

Autoethnography allows the researcher and the reader to self-examine (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Writing is a way of knowing, and it can become therapeutic as we write to make sense of ourselves while purging our burdens (Atkinson, 2007). We use writing to raise awareness, promote cultural change and reduce prejudice (Ellis, 2004). Personal narratives help understand the connections between stories and events by exploring self and academics from a cultural perspective (ibid). This autoethnographic research provided me with the opportunity to tell and re-tell my stories during a time in my life that I felt safe to

do so. It is important to note that the time and pacing of telling stories should be right to avoid the risk of being re-traumatised (Etherington, 2005). It is also right to say that I have decided to tell my stories when I understood how my past has had an impact on my present life. These meant that I had to try to connect some disconnected parts of my lived experiences and acknowledge the emotions and feelings that come with the process. Hence, some of my stories have been difficult to read because of the sensitivity of the writing. My Supervisor and Chair have made it their duty of care to check how I was feeling, and they offered support where needed as they read my reflective journals. They also encouraged self-care and checked on my well-being.

The EdD programme and the supervision I had during the thesis stage provided me with a safe place when writing the thesis. I now have more control of my life through the positive relationships of my loved ones (friends and family) and reflecting on my past has been done at a time when I am mentally and emotionally stable. Again, writing the thesis created a safe place for me to heal from some aspects of my past because as I wrote, the pages were silent and trusted with the secrets until I became the first reader and felt comfortable sharing. I believe that reconciling my past with my present has restored my sense of self because through these self-reflections, I have learned to accept the things that I cannot change whilst accepting my imperfections to renew a positive sense of self. These lead to identifying and reconnecting to my personal values to establish healthy boundaries of relationships and situations as I embrace the opportunities for personal growth.

A researcher may be interested in who, what, where and how to research while considering institutional review boards, funding, or personal circumstance (Ellis et al., 2011). This autoethnographic research allows me to explore aspects that matter to me as a higher-education Black woman. Again, autoethnography will be employed to analyse my place of belonging in a divided patriarchal land, which cuts across self-recognition in colonial and postcolonial worlds, which will be delved into in Chapters Four and Five of this research. As a Nigerian, my cultural perspective is at the core of this research through my lived experiences intertwined with history in consideration of my colonial past. This requires me to explore the concept of culture in recognition of the self and others, which I will explore in the next section.

The Concept of Culture

The concept of culture can mean different things to different people at various times (Holliday, 2018). This suggests that culture does not have a specific definition because the new thinking about culture is that the national boundaries of the world are increasingly blurred and negotiable (ibid). An entirely critical cosmopolitanism requires restraint from defining and categorising culture so that the margins can find space to claim the world on their terms (Bhabha, 1994). It is easy to describe culture using the behavioural traits that confine people as occupants instead of referring to their cultural realities, which are ideas that occupy people rather than colonising them (Holliday, 2018). These reduce the risk of

stereotyping people with a particular cultural trait by investigating the social forces influencing them (ibid).

In a postcolonial world, a person of colour is often asked, 'Where are you from?' or 'How come you speak good English?' Sometimes, these questions are posed by people who are showing interest to know more about people from ethnic minorities. However, to those colonised, these questions could sound like they do not belong to the race that speaks good English, or they are from another planet. So, the question will mean different things to the speaker and the listener depending on their lived experiences. Someone like me who migrated to England as an adult may answer back to say, 'I am a Nigerian'.

Notwithstanding, my children born and brought up in England respond to the question, 'Where are you from?' with 'What do you mean?' Their response in that manner is because they want you to clarify what information you are after. Their initial thought would likely be that you are asking which part of England they are from, despite only having visited Nigeria once for two weeks since birth. They consider themselves British, viewing England as their home, even though they are aware that their father and I migrated from Nigeria. While they recognise their parents as Nigerians, they identify as British. For instance, our Nigerian culture influences them at home through language, food, and mannerisms. However, as they grow older, they are increasingly shaped by Western culture through education and

social interactions. My research focuses on exploring the complexity of multiple identities from a cultural perspective, so I must examine the concept of culture within this context.

My cultural perspective has influenced this research, so it is by no means neutral, and this has shaped my research questions, method, methodology, analysis, and conclusion.

Anthropologists have repeatedly asked, 'Where is culture located?' In response to this question, De Munck explained that culture is in the public sphere and the self (De Munck, 2000). Chang (2016) analysed culture from two perspectives; A) Culture is shared with a group of people defined by boundaries such as language, nationality, ethnicity, and geography. For example, Nigerian culture or Western culture. B) Individual culture is a combination of values, beliefs, and behaviours that differentiates us from others, thereby giving us the autonomy to alter, interpret, and develop our version of culture within social expectations (Chang, 2016).

Chang argues that the concept of culture is group-oriented because it depends on human interactions and the recognition of self in relation to others (ibid). She puts forward that the notion of individual culture is the version of group cultures that are formed, shared, maintained, and transformed through human interactions. These interactions take place at home, work, school, local community, and even online as we interact with people globally. Gajjala established through her cyber-ethnographic study how cyber-cultural groups could be formed and transformed into similar local cultural communities through human

interactions (Gajjala, 2004). This was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when work and learning activities were moved online, and people found communities of interest virtually. Therefore, culture is not limited to groups of people in a physical space because it also includes what people have in common in virtual spaces. My EdD programme has allowed me to participate in person and virtually, thus bringing to focus the issues of a sense of belonging. However, I felt more comfortable attending the cohort sessions online than face-to-face. I could leave my camera on or off in small or large group sessions. I did not have the problem of trying to fit in on Teams or Zoom because my face was not seen when my camera was turned off.

The Struggles of Fitting in as a Nigerian Woman

Imposter syndrome is the thought of not being good enough for the academic challenge or not feeling worthy of being part of a particular group because of doubt in knowledge (Saunders & Trotman, 2022). Those who suffer from low self-esteem might be minorities in relation to the protected characteristics of age, race, gender, and sexual orientation. These feelings highlighted are in recognition of the self and others, which shows that culture and human interactions are inseparable. It can be noted that other cohort members also have feelings of self-doubt and anxiety associated with high expectations because of their job roles or academic experiences (Durrant, 2022). De Munck similarly argues that the concept of 'self' cannot exist independently of culture, just as culture cannot exist without the individuals who embody it. Culture would cease to exist without the people who create it and give it meaning (De Munck, 2000). This helps establish that culture could be a group's

societal norms and beliefs. Also, culture is a thing of the mind that has been adopted, maintained, or shed from an individual perspective. Since relocating to England in 2008, my Nigerian culture, which developed from childhood, has been altered.

Some might argue that the story of my Module 4 learning activity, narrated in General Introduction, exemplifies transformative learning—a process that changes our frame of reference. According to Mezirow (1991), our frames of reference are shaped by our feelings, concepts, associations, and conditioned responses, which help us interpret our experiences. This explains why we might reject ideas that do not align with our preconceptions. For instance, at the start of my EdD journey, I avoided joining a group discussing feminism, as I believed it contradicted the patriarchal views I had developed in Nigeria, a story I will narrate in Chapter Six. Over time, I have learned to demonstrate reflexive and critical awareness of my preconceptions in my research. By critically reflecting on my misconceptions, I have sometimes changed my point of view.

For Mezirow, the frame of reference is composed of two dimensions: the habit of the mind and a point of view (Mezirow, 1991). He pointed out that habits of the mind are broad habitual ways of thinking and feeling that constitute a set of codes which may be psychological, cultural, political, educational, and economical. Mezirow affirms that the habits of the mind are articulated through our points of view which could be linked to beliefs, judgement, and attitudes toward others, such as homosexuals or people of a

different race (Mezirow, 1991). He noted that our points of view are subject to continuous change by negotiating psychological boundaries depending on how we try another person's point of view and appropriate it (ibid). For that reason, our points of view can sometimes change in recognition of the self and others.

For example, when my husband and I told some of our African friends in Kent that we were relocating to a small town in Shropshire in 2018, their first thought was that we would be going to a place where we could experience 'more racism' due to being minorities in the area. I put in the quote 'more racism' because they felt that Kent is becoming multicultural and Black people still experience racism, but moving away to a less diverse place would increase the possibilities of discrimination. At the time, only eight coloured families were living in the Shropshire town we were relocating to from the last Census statistics, but we were not particularly bothered by the numbers. We were looking forward to living in a more spacious house with access to woods for walks and the seaside in North Wales and surrounding areas for family days. Our lifestyle changed when we relocated to Shropshire because we prioritised more family days than we did in Kent.

Initially, when we went for walks, some people were avoiding eye contact with us, but after a while, we noticed that most were very friendly. Some locals did not know how to initiate the first conversation, but they smiled, showing some form of acknowledgement. It can be noted that when people want to talk to strangers in England, they talk about the weather,

whether warm or cold, which happened on several occasions, so after a while, we did not feel like strangers anymore. Through conversations on walks, we discovered that some locals participated in charity work affiliated with Africa. Some of them have also travelled to or lived in Africa. A neighbour a few doors away spent most of her childhood in Africa when her British parents relocated there many years ago. I was happy to hear that her brother lived in the town where I was born and married a Nigerian woman.

When people talk about things they have in common, there is less concern about trying to fit in or belong because the focus is not on what makes them different. Consequently, it developed my point of view such that my judgement and attitude towards others in the community are more open-minded (Mezirow, 1991). Therefore, our cultural background influences our points of view, which are often a reflection of our lived experiences that develop our perspectives of the self and others. To explore my cultural perspective in this research whilst articulating my point of view, autoethnography provides me with the right tools to engage with my lived experiences that shape my frames of reference.

Perception is more than seeing because it is the union of our inner self and outer body, and our knowledge is guided by not only what we see but what we hear and feel (Formenti & West, 2018). Our cultural perspectives develop through our differences, making us see things differently, which is unique to us. Hence, it reveals our views and opinions original to us. My views have been developed by what I see and my subjective experiences. We

imagine the words we hear through the visual representations that exist in our perceptions. This means that we are not neutral, and our thoughts and perceptions are shaped by power and established through previous knowledge.

How the English Language 'Other' us Unintentionally in Academic Research

To explore my multiple identities as an ethnic minority studying in the EdD programme at Canterbury Christ Church University, I examine my history and culture through autoethnography. This approach allows me to investigate the interaction between my identities while challenging dominant Western ideologies. My position as a woman of colour studying at an international institution enables me to engage with various binaries that may intersect, such as mind and body, social and psychological, and self and others. Connecting life and learning through lived experiences can be complex, as it involves relationships that bridge past, present, and future within family and communities (Formenti & West, 2018). These experiences encompass love, pain, joy, distress, rejection, disorientation, and struggles and achievements (ibid). They help to unravel issues of class, gender, and race between self and others, using diverse ways of knowing. Some feelings may reveal how our colonised past influences our present, highlighting early life insecurities.

My skin colour, colonised history, class, gender, race, and Nigerian languages focus on these social issues. English, though widely spoken in Nigeria due to colonisation, is not my first

language, so I must enhance my English vocabulary to navigate this autoethnographic research. I needed to develop language skills to negotiate emotional boundaries as I engaged with personal stories, seeking meaning through theoretical and methodological approaches. I found the Power Thesaurus helpful in expressing myself during reflexive writing. Nonetheless, being born and raised in a former British colony, my ability to read and write in English grants me a certain degree of power and privilege compared to someone from a non-English-speaking country. My writing is clearer and more concise than my speaking, partly because I have more time to process the information when writing.

English Language as a Mark of Privilege

When studying for this research, I decided to engage with a published thesis relating to identities at Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent. I realised it would take much arduous work to write to that level because language became a mark of privilege as an English non-native speaker (Stanley & Vass, 2018). The way we are positioned through 'otherness' to be less proficient than those within the dominant culture reinforces those deeply rooted cultural affiliations which can be out of our control (ibid). Navigating these 'other' and 'otherness' emotional boundaries can sometimes be exhausting as I engage with English native speakers within my community, workplace, and the EdD programme. This puts me under pressure to put on a brave face so that people can take me seriously or treat me with respect, which I often sense from how they speak or respond to me in different situations.

My face as a Black woman is my identity, and my accent makes me the 'other' by default (ibid). I often wonder if my colleagues at work or on the EdD programme who are native English speakers feel the same as I do because my cultural identity makes me feel more likely to be discriminated against (Holliday, 2005; Holliday, 2009). When I speak English in front of people who speak English as their first language, I start experiencing anxiety and feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. These are associated with the feelings of being positioned as the other (Stanley & Vass, 2018), where I am an illegitimate user of a language possessed by a native English speaker (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). When these feelings overwhelm me, I stammer and stumble on words whilst having trouble in expressing myself.

These factors affect my confidence and self-esteem, leading to the correlative thought that I might not be good enough for the Education Doctorate. This is influenced by the perception that some people equate fluent English speaking with intelligence, which can disadvantage individuals like me who have accents from speaking other languages and expose us to potential discrimination (Holliday, 2009). Various standards of English, including Nigerian and Indian English, have been recognised (Holliday, 2009). However, despite these variations, English is now a global language belonging to everyone who uses it (Holliday, 2009). This highlights that English is often seen as a language of power and prestige (Stanley & Vass, 2018).

The pervasive belief that fluency in English equates to higher intelligence and capability can create a challenging environment for non-native speakers and those with accents. This belief can impact self-perception and lead to feelings of inadequacy, particularly in academic and professional settings where English proficiency is often unjustly prioritised (Oliver et al., 2011). The recognition that English encompasses various standards reinforces the idea that its global status does not inherently denote superiority or prestige. Therefore, understanding English as a diverse and inclusive language can help mitigate the negative effects of these perceptions and promote a more equitable evaluation of individuals' abilities and contributions, regardless of their accent or linguistic background.

Ahn narrates her frustration with the extensive dedication, determination, and sacrifice she invested in learning English in Korea, only to discover that the language is not exclusively for the wealthy and powerful when she encountered a homeless man in Sydney, Australia (Ahn, 2018). Ahn felt deceived because the textbooks she studied in Korea portrayed English-speaking societies as affluent and influential, contrasting sharply with her experience of hearing English spoken by a homeless individual in Australia, who had been born in the 'right' country (Ahn, 2018). English textbooks often promote distorted views, suggesting that proficiency in English and association with English-speaking societies are symbols of socioeconomic advancement, thereby influencing perceptions of lifestyle and success (McKay, 2002). Similarly, growing up in Nigeria, watching English movies on local television led me to believe that Western countries were idealised destinations where people

appeared glamorous and wealthy. This perception reinforced the notion that speaking fluent English and living in a Western country were pathways to success and prosperity.

It is not surprising that people from developing countries are desperate to relocate to Western countries at any risk. If people knew that not everyone in the Western world is rich, they would not have embarked on their life-changing journey to a Western country. The expectations society sets to speak and look a certain way are pre-determined by Western ideology through symbolic value, as English is a language of power (Holliday, 2009). The English language can become a mark of privilege for those born in the West because the language becomes a determinant of being an insider. I was born in Nigeria, making me an outsider by default. To progress the chapter further, it is essential to consider how my interest in using storytelling in academic research developed from my childhood within the Nigerian cultural context, thereby informing my choice of employing autoethnography as a methodology in this study.

The Historical Perspective of Storytelling From the Nigerian Cultural Context

In Nigeria, storytelling was the first method of oral tradition, which provided knowledge that preserves people's history from generation to generation (Edosomwan & Peterson, 2016). The oral tradition of storytelling in Nigeria can be said to contribute to the knowledge that the child develops into adulthood, influencing their behaviour through reflective thinking

associated with the lived experiences incorporated in the stories as they make sense of the world they live in (Adichie, 2013). Tokin defines oral narratives as 'social actions situated in particular times and places and directed by the individual tellers to specific audiences' (Tokin, 1992, p. 97). The storyteller's memory is key in the dialectical process between structure and agency (Merrill & West, 2009). As the storyteller makes sense of the stories, the audience derives meaning from them through interpreting events or experiences. The belief given to the story people tell is based on the lived experience of individuals who share the same values and belief systems.

As a child, storytelling brought to my awareness the significance of truth being established in the narratives, bringing to my consciousness the cultural values of people like me. My choice of methodology was born out of my historical background in storytelling. My thesis has elements of history and culture and how my knowledge and lived experiences have been shaped over time. My reflexive writing will include these aspects that have developed my moral principles from a cultural perspective to establish the truth. This autoethnographic research will bring to focus my cultural roots and the 'good enough' relationships in transitional spaces and how these have helped me overcome my fears and anxieties (Formenti & West, 2018). Lastly, I aim to draw together the lessons learned from my lived experiences. Relationships are important to me from a cultural perspective, bringing to focus the people I encounter within my lived experiences while unpacking those forms that have transformed through the self-recognition process.

In Nigeria, the art of storytelling originated from family units where parents sought to inform and educate their children after daily chores and dinner (Edosomwan & Peterson, 2016). At night, children who lived in the same family compound sat around the storyteller under lamps, and women were usually the storytellers (Oriloye, 1977). Interestingly, some communities in Nigeria established sanctions for telling stories in the daytime, and the art of storytelling was also known as folktales (Afolabi-Ojo, 1966). The stories were about people, animals, heritage/cultural traditions, and superstitious beliefs and were fictional and non-fictional (Edosomwan & Peterson, 2016). A storyteller told stories about cultural roots, good and evil characters, and moral values, and lessons learnt from the stories were highlighted at the end of each story, and these could be the social issues of the time.

Usually, the lessons learnt included respect for elders, love for one another, and issues related to discipline. The stories had songs, proverbs, and Indigenous names and characters that made the stories entertaining and natural because the audience could relate to the aspects of the stories through cultural influences. Most of the stories I heard as a child were fictional, on television or from friends rather than from family. My parents were not used to sitting down with us and telling us stories. My father and mother had a similar past; they were the only children of their mothers. Their mothers died during childbirth, and they both grew up with stepmothers and did not talk much about their childhood. I grew up knowing that they had a traumatic past and preferred not to have conversations that would bring back unpleasant memories from their past. Nonetheless, my interest in storytelling developed from fictional stories.

Storytelling was formally introduced to the Nigerian Television Authority station in the 1980s through a television programme called 'Tales by Moonlight' (Oha & Andah, 2002). This programme quickly became a favourite among Nigerian viewers, particularly children, who eagerly anticipated the weekly 30-minute show, which aired on Sundays at 7 pm. I was under ten years old at the time and remember looking forward to each episode. The programme aimed to revive the ancient oral traditions of Nigerian ancestors, which were used to impart morals and principles to the younger generation. However, as technology advanced in Nigerian households, interest in 'Tales by Moonlight' began to decline. The rise of satellite television, such as DSTV, and increased engagement with social media platforms like YouTube led to a shift in viewing habits. The gradual introduction of foreign television disrupted Nigeria's cultural relations, showcasing a broader trend where local media was increasingly overshadowed by global influences.

The introduction of Western culture into Nigeria through various media channels inadvertently undermined Nigerian cultural foundations (Nandy, 1988). Television became a tool for advancing colonial objectives, as European powers utilised information and technology to extend their influence. This strategy aimed not just at geographical domination but at a more subtle form of control over cultural and psychological spaces. My own understanding of the superiority of the 'West' may have been shaped during this period, reflecting the broader colonial narrative that positioned Western culture as a benchmark for progress.

During this era, wealthy Nigerian families were particularly drawn to Western media, such as CNN, BBC, and music channels broadcasted via satellite dishes. This preference underscored a class divide, where access to foreign media and Western technologies became markers of privilege. Nandy (1988) argues that colonisation extends beyond physical conquest to the realms of culture and identity, subtly realigning the priorities of the colonised with those of the coloniser. This phenomenon is further explored by Hall (1992) and Hall (1996a, 1996b), who suggest that such cultural shifts are a form of psychological colonisation, wherein the colonised are encouraged to embrace the Western model of modernity, often at the expense of their own cultural identities (Said, 2003). In Nigeria, this is evident in the preference for British and American schools, which are highly sought after despite their high fees. These educational choices reflect a broader desire to align with Western ideals and significantly shape how Nigerians, including myself, perceive and engage with the world.

Dislocating Dominant Frames of Reference Using Narratives

Writing research from a cultural viewpoint helps to critically explore the perspective of underrepresented groups, which also means that the research will be qualitative and subjective (Ghaffar-Kusher, 2015). Research can be politically charged, influencing the telling, and reading of the study and thus, related to the postmodern culture (ibid). Hence, it

provides the opportunity to engage with ethnic minorities' history (Thompson, 2002).

Autoethnographic research allows marginalised people, like ethnic minorities, to tell their own stories from their perspective and challenge the stories told by powerful others.

Autoethnography acknowledges the positioning of lived experiences in consideration of postcolonial conception, bringing to focus cultural standpoints while resisting dominant perspectives. This autoethnographic research not only focuses on my identity as a Black woman studying in the EdD programme but also considers how my identities stem from colonial and postcolonial worlds.

Denzin asserts that the poetic or narrative text is reflexive, not only in its use of language but also in how it positions the writer in the text and uses the writer's experiences as both the topic of inquiry and a resource for uncovering problematic experiences (Denzin, 2001).

As presented in my reflections, my lived experience cuts across class, race, gender, and other developed identities, and those yet to develop. Researchers who study themselves or their cultural background may be biased and not objective (ibid). Objectivity and bias-free research may be the ambition of the positivist orientation, but qualitative research allows multiple ways of knowing through a postmodern turn, considering subjectivities (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). This research will highlight my positionality and authenticity through reflexivity whilst drawing on my lived experience, including personal struggles. In other words, this research is highly subjective. Its strength, authenticity, and richness lie in the subjectivity and peculiarities of my lived experiences.

My Nigerian cultural perspective influences how I interpret my lived experiences, making it challenging to maintain complete objectivity. This leads to challenges with generalisations and biases. Consequently, one could argue that I have inadvertently 'othered' people based on race and ethnicity in this research. Dividing people into natural groups of 'us' and 'others' who do not belong to the West is a colonial mindset (Thomas-Olalade & Velho, 2011).

Othering typically involves the marginalisation of individuals by a dominant group, leading to social exclusion and discrimination (ibid). In response to my own experiences of marginalisation, I have depicted dominant groups as different. My intention is not to stereotype these dominant groups but to analyse discursive practices from my cultural perspective.

It is important to note that the power dynamics across the historical, social, and cultural contexts are complex. Othering is often used when referring to systemic injustice experienced by marginalised groups which has been ingrained into the fabric of economic, social, and political systems through laws, policies, and cultural norms (Spivak, 2023). There is limited research on 'reverse othering' because such situations do not carry the same systemic weight as the discrimination faced by marginalised groups as the power structures or hierarchies are different.

Interrogating My Views on 'Othering'

When contemplating the potential consequences of highlighting the differences between myself as a Nigerian Black woman and the 'other' Education Doctorate students who are labelled as 'native English speakers,' there is a risk of engaging in 'othering,' which perpetuates power dynamics and hierarchies (hooks, 2013). The narrative of 'us versus them' can inadvertently result in the assimilation of both groups and reinforce biases and presumptions (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). It is crucial to recognise that the term 'native English speakers' encompasses a wide range of individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities (Holliday, 2005). In treating this group as homogenous, I risk overlooking the complexity of their identities, potentially reinforcing stereotypes and excluding diverse viewpoints (Ahmed, 2012). In my thesis, I was referring to oneself as the 'other' with respect to 'native English speakers' runs the risk of oversimplifying and making broad generalisations about identities (Hall, 1990). Essentialism reduces persons by emphasising a limited set of defining characteristics, leading to oversimplified and inaccurate representations (Alcoff, 2005). Again, essentialisation can marginalise groups and reinforce stereotypes (Bilge, 2013). To fully understand identity, it is vital to comprehend the interdependence of language and cultural background, as Crenshaw (2013) emphasised.

Intersectionality recognises the interdependence of several social factors, such as race, gender, and nationality, in shaping individuals' experiences (Collins, 2022). Limiting consideration to language or ethnicity fails to recognise the multiple dimensions of an individual's identity. It can further marginalise those not neatly fit into preset categories

(Anthias, 2002). Overemphasising impostor syndrome and associating it with one's identity may result in a simplistic comprehension of others' emotions (Perdomo, 2012). Attributing it solely to one's identity promotes preconceived notions about competence and inclusion (Sue et al., 2008). Therefore, it is crucial to embrace an intersectional perspective to minimise the likelihood of categorising and homogenising everything (Collins, 2022). This involves recognising the complexities and diversity within one's own identity and the identities of those categorised as 'native English speakers' (Cho et al., 2013). Promoting transparent dialogue and shared understanding across diverse groups can challenge preconceived ideas and encourage inclusivity within the EdD programme (Mills, 2007). Hence, through this research, I have learned that sometimes things do not often seem as they look, and it is crucial to continue to challenge one's assumptions and biases.

For example, I initially believed that fellow cohort members in the EdD program exhibited greater confidence, and a stronger sense of belonging compared to me, despite their similar experiences. However, I soon realised that some of them also grappled with feelings of being outsiders, albeit for varied reasons, as noted by Durrant (2022). Acquiring the realisation that appearances may usually obscure underlying realities provides numerous advantages. It prompts continual introspection, prompting me to challenge entrenched assumptions and biases, enhancing my critical thinking abilities and fostering open-mindedness (Cearley, 2023). This cultivated mindset facilitates the exploration of diverse viewpoints and interpretations, enriching my cognitive repertoire and broadening my intellectual horizons. Moreover, by acknowledging the potential fallibility of surface impressions, I cultivate a sense of circumspection in concluding and a heightened receptivity

to novel information. This cognitive flexibility catalyses my intellectual maturation and capacity for empathetic engagement. It engenders a more profound comprehension of the intricate nuances inherent in the human experience and the complexities of the world at large. This newly cultivated mindset equips me with the insight to navigate situations characterised by ambiguity or uncertainty with discernment and adaptability.

By fostering clarity of thought and informed decision-making, it fosters enriching interpersonal relationships grounded in mutual understanding and respect. Ultimately, embracing the notion that superficial appearances may belie underlying realities engenders a disposition characterised by curiosity, humility, and an enduring commitment to lifelong learning (Barth, 2023). In consideration of these, I have been mindful not to make assumptions on the part of my learners. This has improved understanding of individual needs, enhanced communication, increased learner engagement, cultivation of trust, promotion of inclusivity, and prevention of bias. As a result, I have been able to meet and exceed the set targets for my Key Performance Index (KPI) while supporting students to achieve their learning goals. Every learning experience matters, and my values are reflected in all of these through the empathetic support that I provide.

My research study has developed my cultural sensitivity and competencies as I continue to promote inclusivity in my educational practice. I now understand more than ever that every student brings their social and cultural capital to the university and having a safe place to re-

imagine themselves in new ways requires a learning environment that encourages belonging and embraces diversity to reduce their learning barriers.

Reflecting on these experiences reveals the complexities and responsibilities inherent in my dual role, underscoring the importance of employing autoethnography in my research. This method allows me to critically examine my positionality and its impact on my interactions and perceptions. The next section will explore the burden of representation.

The Burden of Representation – Being an Insider and an Outsider

Autoethnographic research can increase the 'burden of representation' from being an insider of the community under study alongside the expectations of the academic audience (Ghaffar-Kusher, 2015). Autoethnographic research is central to being an insider of the group studied. My autoethnographic research will focus on my positionality in relation to self/others, which can shift between the views of an insider and outsider depending on the context (ibid). Membership or insider status of any social group is context-dependent, ever-changing, and shifting, which questions authenticity (Verduyn, 2008). Sometimes, insider status does not necessarily mean one holds the same views as the 'natives' (Strathern, 1987). This challenges the criteria used to determine authenticity or 'original native' in consideration of obligations, rights, and length of time of being a member and who decides on these criteria (Motzafi-Haller, 2021). It is important to note that the research process of

conceptualisation, data collection, analysis, and presentation can differ depending on its purpose due to the dominant knowledge reproduced or challenged at the time.

Writing about how my Nigerian culture has influenced my learning in the doctorate programme involves exploring how I navigate discourses from different traditions. This exploration considers my lived experiences while challenging some dominant frames of reference through reflexive writing. Identifying oneself as part of a group or culture does not mean 'speaking for' or representing everyone in that group, as other salient intersections of identity, such as age, gender, and ethnicity, may differ from one's own (Verduyn, 2008). This brings into focus the questions of validity. I argue that the validity of this research enhances and strengthens my narratives. My thesis presents stories that can be viewed from different angles with multiple layers, thereby casting light in multiple directions.

As a non-white, I am distinguished by the intersections of skin colour, race, nationality, bloodline, beauty, hair type, and desire, which are dependent variables of our identities (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). These variables fluctuate as we negotiate various aspects of our multiple identities. Hence, the limitation of this research highlights that my account does not represent the experience of all Nigerian Black women in higher education in the UK. Nonetheless, I am part of the non-dominant group, and a first-hand account of my lived experience provides deeply personal and evocative stories that cannot be replicated.

My race, accent, skin colour, and hair type, among others, distinguished me as the other and an outsider of the dominant group. Therefore, employing narrative autoethnography seeks to unsettle the discourses of history and culture, thereby disrupting the process of 'othering' by focusing on how it manifests through more extensive processes produced in actions and words to derive meanings (Ghaffar-Kusher, 2015). This research methodology allows me to engage with my multiple identities while exposing those tensions established from my lived experiences from a cultural perspective in the EdD programme and community. Hence, the actions and words of those I encounter within my lived experiences are brought to light to derive meanings through the interpretation of my narratives.

In delving into the intricacies of our history and cultural influences, it becomes apparent that culture serves as a significant force shaping human life and cognition, imparting meaning to our actions through interpretive frameworks (Bruner, 1990). As we traverse through time, it becomes evident that our past not only informs our present but also extends its influence into our future, manifesting in various forms such as self-esteem and self-respect (Formenti & West, 2018). Hence, narratives play a pivotal role in elucidating these cultural intricacies, serving as vehicles for making meaning and interpreting lived experiences, which I will explore in the next section.

Making Meanings of Narratives

To engage with our history, we need to recognise that culture shapes human life and the human mind, giving meaning to specific actions through an interpretive system (Bruner, 1990). Our past helps us to interpret the present, and it is essential to note that our past is not concluded because it continues into our future in different forms, such as self-esteem and self-respect, which I will be engaging with in Chapter Six (Formenti & West, 2018). The interpretation of narratives helps to identify or recognise patterns that align with cultural systems. Bruner asserts that narratives are established through mental judgement and meaning-making processes of lived experiences (1990, p. 36). Understanding human minds requires connecting descriptors of similarities and differences of human actions situated in what has been learnt from an early age embedded in culture and language. This further develops habits and traditions that have been of interest to psychologists like Bourdieu (habitus), concerned with how individuals acquire these systems expressed through culture (1986). To understand how our experiences shape us and influence the motivation that guides certain achievements in our lives, we need to construct narratives to make sense of the experiences.

Narratives and stories provide social understanding and meaning to our lived experiences (Fiske, 1993). Interestingly, narratives in research explore how people think about themselves, about other people, and how people might think about them in consideration of their identities or cultures. Culture can be attributed to a group negotiating shared

meanings through a way of life. Sometimes intended meanings of specific actions may be unclear through human actions, and individuals can make excuses for their actions as they navigate the public domain. Excuse-making can be legitimised through the influence of binaries such as us and them to benefit its members. Since culture shapes human minds, it is right to say that it forms the values and belief systems of structured institutions like education and families, which consequently influence the experiences of the self/others. Hence, it is important to ensure that narrating events or stories are close to reliving the experience (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). That is why I have included my thoughts, feelings, and reflections in a different font to differentiate the events from the analysis or interpretation to relive the experiences.

Our personality, history, and conceptual frame determine how we tell our stories and construct our research questions. The researcher establishes the interest and motivation to make sense of their stories (Merrill & West, 2009). Narratives in research can include reasons, beliefs, goals, and intentions captured in our thoughts (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). As I mentioned earlier, narratives can sometimes provide conflicting and contradictory information. However, Bruner argues that narratives strive for contradiction because they explain human behaviour, accounting for those discrepancies (Bruner, 1990). The propositional thought provides more information about why people behave in specific ways and how their narratives are structured, revealing more details underlying their stories. Different research studies have examined the intrinsic relationship between autobiographical stories, motives, goals, and intentions (Formenti & West, 2018). My research questions stem from cultural inferences through my lived experiences that focus

on the entanglement of race, class, and gender and how these have informed my learning/motivation for the EdD programme, which also justifies the need to employ autoethnography. Therefore, interpreting my lived experiences through a theoretical lens helps to derive meanings for analysis.

The Interpretation of My Stories Using Theories

The interpretation of my stories using theories helps establish how I think about my social world while focusing on the motivating factors connected to goals, wants, and needs.

Stories can have interpretive and interpersonal motives (Baumeister & Newman, 1994).

Although Baumeister and Newman recognise that most people engage with narratives to understand their interpretive experiences, they highlighted reasons why narratives may be interpersonal (ibid). The first motive they identified is based on the desire for reward, and thus, the stories are manipulative to induce emotions and influence other people's perceptions for personal gain. The second interpersonal motive is when people desire others to validate their identity, like narrating stories to suggest that one is a good mother, a busy, successful headteacher, or a thriving academic. The third interpersonal motive is to pass information to store and transmit it over time, such as people who post stories on social media to be reminded of the anniversary of their post.

The fourth interpersonal motive can be associated with the desire to attract other people through entertainment. The entertaining stories are constructed in an amusing way to engage the reader and help draw attention to the narrator (Baumeister & Newman, 1994).

Interpersonal motives usually show the patterns that shape the way people tell their stories. The stories undoubtedly become a tool shaped by people's needs and guided to make sense of experiences in a particular context. Stories can either be constructed with an audience in mind or not in mind. My stories are written with the intended purpose of bringing my voice to the public domain with interpersonal motives. Therefore, they are constructed for an academic and general audience, so I need to analyse and interpret them to make meaning of the stories while using autoethnography as a research tool.

Constructing Narratives to Make Meaning

Baumeister (1991) provides a framework that helps to establish how people construct narratives with the need for meaning linked to their lived experiences. The framework describes four needs (Baumeister, 1991); the first need for meaning is purposiveness, which is the motivation to interpret events that link past and future events. Future purposes can be viewed as goals and fulfilments where dreams meet objective conditions and satisfy desirable subjective attributes. When the story formation takes an ordering system of activities or events, it aims to develop a goal established through a narrative structure with little effort to interpret the events. Personal stories may reveal unanticipated outcomes that were not part of the intended goal. However, this does not satisfy the need for a meaning of purposiveness because a plan was not intentionally pursued but can be said to establish causal relationships. The intent behind a plan can influence and modify narratives to suit the desired result, sometimes leading to unintended biases. For example, my experience of the

Module 4 learning activity did not have an intended purpose, but I could establish the causal relationships linked to self-recognition, revealing unanticipated outcomes. The feeling of uniqueness after the activity increased my self-esteem and self-confidence, making me feel like a valued cohort member from my perspective.

The need for meaningful fulfilment of narratives is goal-oriented and communicates the experiences or processes of fulfilment to engage the reader. Baumeister suggests that fulfilment is achieved when narrating the entire sequence of events in a story to authenticate fulfilment instead of describing the fulfilment alone (Baumeister, 1989). He used an example of masochistic narratives of being tied and whipped to be more of interest to a masochist than describing only the orgasm itself. Similarly, As an African woman pursuing an Education Doctorate, my sense of fulfilment is best conveyed by detailing the entire journey of my academic experience rather than just celebrating the final achievement. For example, I enrich my story by recounting the initial challenges I faced, such as adapting to a new educational system and overcoming cultural barriers. By highlighting the process of developing my research, the personal growth I experienced, and the impact of my research on my teaching practice, I provide a fuller, more authentic portrayal of fulfilment. This approach aligns with Baumeister's idea that the true meaning of an accomplishment lies in the comprehensive journey rather than just the result.

Baumeister's second need for meaning highlights the importance of justification and value. This need involves aligning one's actions with specific values and principles and ensuring they are perceived as correct. Justifying one's actions requires providing reasons and

motives while rejecting any wrongdoing. This process of self-justification is particularly relevant when individuals cause anger in others and then experience their feelings of anger (Baumeister, Stillwell & Wotman, 1990). On both accounts, they discovered that the transgressors and the victims downplayed the dire consequences of their actions for self-justification while denying any wrongdoing (ibid). While transgressors provided reasons to justify their actions in contrast to the victim's account, the victims insist that the transgressors do not have valid reasons to explain their actions. Some transgressors claimed they had the right to act the way they did and disapproved of the victim's anger towards their actions (Baumeister, Stillwell & Wotman, 1990). Although some transgressors tried to make amends by apologising, the victim's account did not include these apologies. Again, while the transgressor's account is in the past, the victim's account portrayed incidents as a pattern in the present and unresolved, with the tendency of similar incidences happening in the future (ibid).

Likewise, studying in the EdD programme has, in a way, made me lose some friends because some of them cannot understand why I am unable to socialise. Staying up long hours studying tends to make me feel so tired during the daytime. Occasionally, I prioritise rest and cancel pre-arrangements because I do not think I will be good company when I am in that state of tiredness, which does not go down well with some friends. Although I apologise for not attending, this does not stop them from making their judgements about me because they think I am downplaying my actions with very unconvincing reasons of being tired from studying. In this case, my friends see themselves as the victims, thereby viewing this as a recurring pattern of my behaviour, even though I justify my actions as right and aligned with

specific values and principles to prioritise what is important to me at the time whilst denying wrongdoing. Prudent judgment considers what would be morally right in each situation (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 37). My upbringing has made me feel that I need to make practical use of my time to study instead of socialising; this will be explored in Chapter Four. However, I need to consciously try to have a work-life balance and promote my well-being as I develop new self-respect and self-esteem.

As explained by Baumeister, the third need for meaning is the need for efficacy and control (Baumeister, 1990). The sense of efficacy can be linked to making a difference or a desired outcome with valuable information about achieving such goals. Sometimes individuals may exaggerate their experiences to shape their stories to maximise their sense of efficacy. For example, people often deny their responsibilities in relationships but tend to exaggerate their part in controlling and initiating the breakup (Gray & Silver, 1990). The stories of failure might not necessarily benefit the sense of efficacy, but narrating the events will bring to one's awareness the actions that led to the failure to prevent it in the future. This process can be called interpretive control because it gives the individual a certain level of control to avoid similar circumstances even if they cannot alter the past (Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982). In Chapter Six of this study, I will have the opportunity to engage with my sense of efficacy. I will highlight lessons learnt after I failed all my module assignments in the master's programme and passed them on resubmission. Even though I cannot alter the past, it has informed my present to develop myself further.

Baumeister's fourth need for meaning is self-worth, and he explained that people might narrate their stories to boost their self-worth (Baumeister, 1991). Baumeister argues that justification concerns specific actions, while self-worth affects the whole person. Self-worth can be linked to reasons why people belong to groups or even wholly detach themselves from other groups. The construction of the narratives can sometimes depict the 'us' versus 'them' tone to satisfy the sense of self-worth (ibid). Stories that relate to how people identify themselves, such as race, class, or gender, can provide meaning related to superiority and inferiority, which may also have links to colonialism or sexism.

People with low self-esteem might be vulnerable in certain situations, threatening their self-worth. Self-worth can also be affected by stories of successes and personal failures such that people with low self-esteem can feel that their self-worth has diminished or is reduced because of their accounts of failure (Steele, 1988). Self-worth often benefits one who feels superior in groups or relationships. The stories can create a sense of belonging to a group, thereby establishing identities of the other and otherness in the process. This narrative autoethnographic research will explore how I navigate my multiple identities while narrating my success stories and vulnerabilities with the shifting positions of self-worth depending on the context in Chapter Five.

Identity and Narratives in Research

Identity and narrative have been of interest to academics of different disciplines from a theoretical point of view (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). They believe that the integration of psychological issues of memory and identity can be concerned with areas of discourse, language, and narration (ibid). The concept of narrative can be constructed from visual and performing arts, communication, artefacts, and other forms of culture in general. The exploration of narratives is not limited to written text because meanings can be organised through dance, music, museum displays, artefacts, rituals, fashion, ceremonies, and so on.

This points to autoethnographic studies of narratives that give a 'voice' while embedded in cultural meanings (Hymes, 2003). As a result, narratives can be inconclusive as they unfold into more meanings that unveil more identities whilst producing more interpretations from the stories told (Bakhtin, 2010). Stories provide the correlation between people's identities, places, and spaces (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). Personal stories can sometimes highlight the links between the stories and the storyteller's places because identities are constructed in certain places (Creswell, 2004). Bruner states that when engaging with personal stories, we set forth a view of what we call ourselves and our doings, reflections, thoughts, and place in the world (Bruner, 1990). Bruner also postulated that narrative accounts should have at least two characteristics, focusing on people and their intentional states like desires and beliefs (ibid).

In addition, narrative accounts should focus on how these intentional states led to certain kinds of activities; thereby, the narrative account unravels the connection between identities, the past and present, while revealing future considerations where applicable (ibid). Our cultures shape how we think, behave, and communicate with one another as we engage in certain activities (Hofstede et al., 2014). We incorporate ideas of what is expected or required in academic writing, presentations, or professional activities, and these ideas can reveal our identities connected to age, race, class, and gender (Formenti & West, 2018). These expectations can sometimes be unconsciously internalised through our lived experiences and the knowledge of the other and otherness with conflicting feelings that may uncover insecurities (Formenti & West, 2018). I will explore these further in Chapters Four, Five, and Six of this autoethnographic research as I engage with my place of belonging in diverse groups through the self-recognition process in consideration of the colonial and postcolonial world.

In exploring the intersection of identity and narratives in research, we delve into how personal and cultural narratives shape and enrich our understanding of truth in research. By examining how identities influence the stories researchers tell, we uncover the ways these narratives contribute to establishing a more nuanced and authentic representation of truth within academic inquiry.

Establishing Truth in Research

As Hannah Arendt described, storytelling can provide a critical understanding of our lived experiences, often bridging our past and future (Arendt, 1977). Arendt believed that facts alone cannot determine a historical narrative because they differ from opinions and interpretations, making the search for objectivity one of the troubles of storytelling (ibid). Storytelling in research discloses the unsaid, masked, and contradictory viewpoints that make scholars vulnerable and exposed to challenges. The art of storytelling as a method or methodology in education seeks to challenge the colonising forces to eliminate forms of oppression between the self and others. Narrating life stories can lead to oversharing, which is the courage to be more open (Saunders & Trotman, 2022). People's stories can also encourage others to share their struggles. However, the uncritical use of storytelling clamours for more detailed and robust stories that situate the stories in powerful contexts (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Employing autoethnography to engage with my personal and academic narratives allows me to establish a rigorous intellectual inquiry to theorise my lived experiences within my multiple identities with philosophical underpinnings from a cultural perspective.

Societies have shared histories through their oral traditions, and one can challenge the validity and reliability of the stories people tell. Stories passed from generation to generation might have lost their authenticity due to the inability of the memory to recollect all the facts of the original story or the storyteller's ability to narrate the story to fit a

particular context. This research's validity is based on a convincing account of the past and present from a realist perspective and personal viewpoint. From a critical realist position, it could be argued that the past is a construct mediated through the gift, including the work of language and relationships (Merrill & West, 2009). Life stories are not neutral because they are constructed from language shaped in discourses, knowledge, and power through the intentional and unintentional representation of reality which questions truth in research. I have decided to write in the first person to reflect my voice, which feels more authentic to me.

As Cilliers notes, postmodernism's complexity lies in its ability to embrace contradictions and ambiguity, allowing me to engage with difficult experiences while acknowledging that they contribute to my broader understanding of self and society (1998). I recognise that some of my experiences are intensely personal, and writing this reflective account enables me to carefully examine my inner world and question my belief systems. At times, I considered leaving out painful aspects of my life from my narratives for fear of being judged. However, my autoethnographic research seeks to bridge the past and present, uncovering power structures rooted in inequality and the denial of rights. This aligns with postmodernism's commitment to fostering social change for humanistic purposes (Cilliers, 1998). Engaging with my past means revisiting painful moments I would rather forget, but I have chosen to be open and transparent about my financial struggles, emotional difficulties, and experiences of hurt, abuse, and suffering, alongside my successes and achievements.

There is a Yoruba proverb that I grew up with which says, 'Afefe ti fe a ti ri idi adiyé.' This proverb is translated in English as 'When the wind blows, the buttocks of the fowl will be exposed.' This means that secrets cannot remain hidden forever because some circumstances, as strong as the wind, will eventually reveal the secrets. The value of truth has been important in this research from a cultural perspective because my morals and beliefs have been embedded since my childhood. This research reflects who I was, who I am, and who I want to be, which is vital in establishing both ontological and epistemological truth through my evolving understanding (Formenti & West, 2018). The writing process of this thesis went beyond telling a story; it became a work of discovery, and subjectivity took priority over objectivity (ibid). The aim of employing autoethnography as a methodology in this research would be defeated without truth because it considers positions of privilege while revealing vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I shed light on the background story behind the research study and methodology, highlighting how feelings of inferiority have accompanied the thoughts of being non-white in the EdD programme. These feelings of inferiority stem from my colonial past, transcending my postcolonial lived experiences of my multiple identities and interactions of race, age, and gender, among others. I explored the ontological issues affecting my sense of belonging, where feelings of being out of place led to emotional struggles linked to self and other recognition. The research methodology is ontologically

clear to conform with qualitative data of the personal narratives, to help analyse my place of belonging while considering the interplay of structure, agency, and space.

The justification of the research methodology, methods, and research tools needed to be explored through cultural inferences to understand how my past has informed my lived experiences. Writing this autoethnographic research is valuable in understanding the self in relation to others from a cultural perspective. It is also concerned with culture and power and how identities are constructed through lived experiences whilst dislocating dominant frames of reference and exposing discriminatory practices. Autoethnography identifies situations that privilege some people while disadvantaging others and exposing their vulnerabilities to develop new knowledge that stimulates new supportive practices.

I employed autoethnography, a qualitative research method that brings to focus the stories of marginalised members of groups where the author writes about personal lived experiences with their relationship to culture (Ellis, Adam & Bochner, 2011).

Autoethnography allows me to reveal unique cultural realities and the complex ways they are best understood through narratives that uncover racial stereotypes complicated through lived experiences. This helps bring to focus the voice of marginalised people while outsiders access inside perspectives to move towards social change because representation matters (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). The direct access to memory data through reflexive writing provided me with the possibility of in-depth cultural analysis throughout this self-study, and

I have explained my data collection process. These data include my thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and experiences. I will carefully narrate my lived experience in consideration of how much I want to talk about myself and the implications of the truth. My values and morals have occasionally taken precedence, which may lead the reader to notice gaps in the data or feel that certain aspects are unclear and leave them with unanswered questions.

In qualitative research, there are no guidelines to determine the amount of data required for conclusion or analysis, and there can be multiple interpretations (Collins, 2022). My data collection has been based on expanding emerging themes and filling the gaps as required to fulfil the research aims. My research provides the reader with a deep understanding of the lived experiences of marginalised groups and the oppressive practices that put them at a disadvantage. The interpretation and analysis of this research cannot be replicated because of my unique life experiences, which are similar but not the complete representation of people who share groups with me. I have followed ethical standards, acknowledging that in autoethnographic research, these are often challenging and easily overlooked.

As I mentioned earlier, just because we tell some stories does not mean we own the stories. This helps to address the concerns of how autoethnographers protect individuals' identity and privacy in the stories they tell while following ethical standards. When trying to retain the integrity of my cultural perspective, it can be easy to disregard the rights of others. In consideration of this, there might be conflicting decisions about telling the truth and

protecting individuals' identities in some of the stories I tell. Using my personal stories to analyse cultural experiences will give me a voice. However, I recognise that this research will trigger memories deep-rooted in pain, anger, uncertainty, and confusion. It will also bring my private life to the public domain for criticism, thereby exposing me further to the critics of significant others.

This research study offers insight into the complexity of the multiple identities of marginalised people, particularly ethnic-minority students. I am not just a number or part of a statistic of quantitative research because my subjective experiences are authentic and valid. These should be considered when developing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies in academic institutions.

So far, Chapters Two and Three have covered the theoretical aspects of this research and I will take these further by analysing my lived experiences in Chapters Four, Five, and Six to derive meanings. Hence, Chapter Four will focus on my lived experiences in a divided, patriarchal land.

Chapter Four: Belonging in a Divided, Patriarchal Land: Being a Girl and Becoming a Woman

Introduction

This chapter concerns the extent to which my childhood has influenced my lived experiences as a mature Nigerian Black woman. I will highlight the importance of motivating and retaining marginalised students in higher education. To take this further, I will be engaging with my feelings of being out of place in the EdD programme until my Module 4 learning activity provides me with a transitional space, which became a catalyst in developing my self-esteem and confidence in that space (Durrant, 2022). For me, the Module 4 learning activity increased my sense of belonging because it promoted diversity, which helped to reduce the anxiety experienced from being one of the Black minorities in the cohort. The chapter will explore how my childhood identity developed from family and societal expectations through the cultural context whilst engaging with the ideas of Mead (1934) and Honneth (2008). Next, I will go further to untangle those forms that transformed as I became a mature woman through the self-recognition process (Formenti & West, 2018). Finally, I will discuss how forms of disrespect cause 'pain and psychological injury' when rights are denied (Honneth, 2007). Social struggles are best understood using the self-recognition process through interaction with others, which may illuminate inclusion and exclusion practices.

The negative experiences from the 'key forms of exclusion, insult and degradation can be seen as violating self-confidence, self-respect or self-esteem', and these can be established through cultural conditions (Honneth, 2007, p. xix). My Nigerian background influences my views and perspectives, which stem from my historical and cultural experiences associated with the self-recognition process. My positive lived experiences have accentuated moments that facilitated self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect. At the same time, the negative experiences bring into focus those situations where the forms of disrespect have caused pain. This chapter will analyse the forms of recognition that shaped the impetus of my identity from my childhood experiences, which developed those forms that transformed later in my adult life.

Cultural Identity Through the Eyes of Others

As a Black middle-aged woman studying a doctorate, my social struggles in the EdD programme go beyond having the opportunity to access and explore aspects of research, policy, and professional practice, which I will engage with in Chapter Five. There is a need to employ strategies that help motivate and retain marginalised students in higher education (Field, Merrill & West, 2012). Marginalised students can often find themselves in situations or institutions that systematically deny them the recognition they deserve (West, 2009). Recognition is a vital human need that should be part of human rights (Honneth, 2008). This research highlights the importance of recognising my culture to promote my dignity and integrity in higher education. Marginalised students who do not feel recognised often lose

their sense of worth, affecting their motivation. This increases the risk of them not achieving their qualifications or degree as expected (Field, Merrill & West, 2012). An extract from my narrative reflects this.

Module 4's 1st learning activity in the EdD programme provided me with a safe place where I felt valued, which motivated me to stay on the programme because, at the time, I felt lost. Before then, I thought I did not belong to the EdD programme. However, through the inclusivity of the learning activity, my self-esteem and confidence increased despite contemplating dropping out of the programme due to some challenges and the emotional struggles of feeling out of place. The Module 4 learning activity became the pivotal point of my learning journey in the EdD programme. These positive feelings then established my place of belonging within the cohort. My Nigerian cultural identity has defined my place of belonging in social spaces as I encounter others. This further reveal how I see myself, reflecting the impact on my self-esteem and confidence.

Here, the transformation occurred in a transitional space, which was established through the self-recognition process because the experience brought about feelings of self-esteem and confidence (Formenti & West, 2018). Field postulates that students' identities are best understood through social and cultural processes, which are formed and re-formed in

dynamic relationships with others (Field, Merrill & West, 2012). My self-esteem and confidence increased within that social process of the learning activity, as seen above, which promoted my sense of belonging as I was able to engage with my cultural identity. The Module 4 learning activity had an African print through which I chose to explain my experiences, interests, and concerns in the EdD programme. Life history and biographical methods have increasingly shown the importance of studying identity and agency while exploring different perspectives (Formenti & West, 2018). Academic institutions have been discussing the increase in equity and inclusion through access or entry into higher education, focusing less on student motivation and retention (Field, Merrill & West, 2012). Therefore, understanding the lived experiences of ethnic-minority students by examining the relationships between identity, structure, and agency brings into focus those factors that help promote retention.

Professional Identity

As a middle-aged Black woman delivering Level 2, 3, 4, and 5 Apprenticeships in work-based learning, my physical appearance played a crucial role in my previous job. How I dressed and presented myself significantly impacted my confidence level (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). The following extract from my journal illustrates this.

I constantly think about how I present myself so that people do not take me for granted and this comes with undue pressure. I consciously and unconsciously negotiate other people's thoughts and their approval of me.

Someone might have asked why I was so concerned about my appearance despite being qualified and experienced enough to deliver these qualifications. I felt this way because I was one of the few Black women in further education, a position often associated with feelings of inferiority (Bhattacharyya et al., 2003). Writing from my perspective, I can only speak to my feelings and not those of others. Historically, some people have viewed Africa as a poverty-stricken continent filled with barbarians and savages, a perception reinforced by literature and social media (Adichie, 2013). Charity organisations' appeals for aid often depict Africa in a way that suggests most of the continent resembles these negative images. As a result, some Westerners may hold a singular, stereotyped view of Africa that influences their perception of me before even meeting me (ibid). This predisposition can lead some students to doubt the knowledge I can impart, given my Nigerian cultural background.

Professional identity can sometimes be constructed from assumptions which suggest othering (Saunders & Trotman, 2022). My African accent might be used to assess my level of intelligence (Holliday, 2005). Some people may doubt my ability to support them in achieving their qualifications due to the indirect association with the barbaric African

continent they have in their imagination (Adichie, 2013). Over time, through the support they get from me to progress and achieve their qualifications, they show some gratitude and are pleased to have me as their tutor.

From some of our conversations and how some of them gradually warmed up to me, I realised that their perception of me as the 'other' gradually shifts to someone they trust, as shown below in one of my narratives from my journal.

When I worked in Wales, one of the Welsh students who was transferred to me had referred to her previous Tutor as an 'English woman' when she tried to explain what coursework she had submitted. As a Black woman, it then occurred to me that I am not the only one seen as the 'other' in a White-dominated environment. Here, a Welsh woman refers to an English woman as the 'other', which is fascinating considering that they are both White women. I noticed her body language and tone of voice were like she found common ground with me.

I suppose she referred to the English woman as the other because of the unfriendly historical past between Wales and England. Previously, I thought only people of colour were

always considered to be the 'other' in a Western country, but I was surprised to hear that. As Fanon puts forward, the ontology of a Black man is made impossible in a colonised society because the Black man will always be the other to the White man (Fanon, 2023). My thoughts and feelings before this moment only further highlight the issues of colonisation founded on power relations (Formenti & West, 2018). I sometimes worry about how students, colleagues, or peers in the EdD programme view or perceive me as a Black woman. These feelings may lead to the urge to try and liberate myself from Western perspectives (Holliday, 2005). My thoughts below reflect this.

Sometimes, I feel people have their opinions of me as a Black woman before they know who I am. I sometimes think that some people judge my abilities based on my skin colour. However, I am aware that this reflects some of my fears and feelings of being the other, which could also reflect my own biases.

My existence as a Black woman is often seen as the 'other' from a Western perspective, embedded in my consciousness through colonialism (Holliday, 2005). This further accentuates my feelings of inferiority with thoughts of being out of place. The feelings of an inferiority complex can be explored through otherness (Adler, 1927). At times, imposter syndrome takes over, making me feel like a fraud who will soon be exposed, as I do not feel deserving of my place in the EdD programme. This also reflects some of the feelings of other

EdD students (Saunders & Trotman, 2022). My thoughts about the feelings of imposter syndrome at work have been captured below.

I sometimes think I am not as good as people think. I tend to put myself under pressure to achieve every relevant qualification for my sector to prove that I am knowledgeable and competent to conduct my job. Although I do not have this conversation about my qualifications with students or colleagues, it is reassuring to have these qualifications on my CV as proof of being educated.

I have never felt like an expert; I need to learn more, even when my colleagues see me as a high achiever. I often prefer to do measurable jobs through the Key Performance Index (KPI) because I can do less talking about being a hard worker, and the numbers reflect this. I enjoyed meeting all my monthly KPIs as it helped dispel any doubts about my competence. I often avoided discussing or boasting about my qualifications and academic achievements, fearing that I might be deemed overqualified for my role as an Apprenticeship Tutor at the time, which did not require a postgraduate degree. Climbing the career ladder was a challenging journey. When I first arrived in the UK, I struggled to find jobs due to my lack of UK experience, relying on care work and factory jobs for income. Although I earned a first degree in Urban and Regional Planning in Nigeria before relocating in 2008 and completed a

master's degree in Youth Work and Community Learning Development in the UK in 2015, I still felt underqualified and lacked the relevant UK work experience needed for higher-paid positions. This catch-22 situation is a common experience among Nigerian women who have migrated to England (Ogbemudia, 2022). I will discuss these issues further in Chapter Five.

Identifying the Moments of Ethnic Otherness

This autoethnographic research allows me to identify the moments of ethnic otherness because of its ability to witness dominant forms that exclude or marginalise individuals through self-reflection (Ellis et al., 2011). Consequently, this provides the opportunity for other ways of knowing, allowing us to reflect on what could be different because of existing knowledge and contributing to the deep analysis and understanding of the social world (Wall, 2006). This research questions the dominant scientific paradigm or traditional science as I engage with evocative stories of lived experiences that embrace subjectivity and reflexivity (Beattie, 2022): to speak rather than be spoken for and to identify those moments of oppression and explore the systematic forces such as racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism whilst engaging with difficult conversations from a cultural perspective. My narrative from the extract below painfully sheds more light on this.

Recently, I invited one of my White friends, who is in her late seventies, for lunch at a pub restaurant I regularly visit with my husband and two children. My

family did not go with me on this occasion, but I was getting them a takeaway from the pub restaurant instead. After sitting at the table, I had reserved before our arrival, I asked my friend what she wanted to eat and drink. Then I went to the bar to place our order and paid for the takeaway simultaneously. The bartender called the attention of the pub manager to double-check that they could do a takeaway for me, and she said yes.

The pub manager came a few minutes later to clarify the order, as they usually do before they bring the food out. As she approached our table, she focused all her attention on my White British friend, sitting at the opposite side of the table, without looking in my direction for a second. The pub manager told my friend that she wanted to confirm the order before they prepared the food. She started calling the items on the order before my friend interrupted her and pointed toward me on the opposite side of the table.

My friend said to her, 'Buki placed the order, not me'. Immediately, the manager looked embarrassed and turned toward me to confirm the order. One might argue that her attitude of ignoring my existence at that moment was initially associated with my Black skin colour. Her cold shoulder or silent treatment could be a form of passive aggression.

When I reflected on the incident, I wondered why she would have acted that way because she had served my family several times at the pub, so I was not an unfamiliar face to her. Again, I could not help but think that her passive aggression towards me might be associated with the age difference between my friend and me. Having worked in the care industry myself, and with experience taking clients on community day outings, she may have assumed I was a care worker and my friend was a client. Her behaviour reflects the possibility of discrimination rooted in socio-economic class, reinforced by racial bias and an assumed entitlement to dominance.

Lorde puts forward that her response to racism is anger, and she confirmed that she lived with that anger most of her life, feeding upon it and ignoring it (Lorde, 2007). She expressed that responding to racism can be in silence because of its weight, and associated with exclusion, stereotyping, unquestioned privilege, defensiveness, and co-optation (ibid). My thoughts and feelings about the pub incident were mixed because I could not point out the reason behind the manager's attitude. Not all White people are racist, but I could not help thinking that her attitude of ignoring me was not because of my skin colour. The fact that she knew I paid for the order at the bar was even more disturbing, and it was more likely that she was the one I spoke with when I called the pub earlier to reserve a table.

However, my way of responding to that action by ignoring the behaviour in silence was because of the fear of being stereotyped as the 'angry Black woman.' An angry Black woman is furious and dangerously ready to act out her anger on innocent White people (Parks, 2001). Due to stereotypical beliefs, I feared reacting in anger to her discriminatory behaviour so as not to draw negative attention to myself at the pub, considering that I was the only Black person at the time. Over time, I have learned to live by the Nigerian proverb, which says that no matter how hot your anger is, it cannot cook yams. Nonetheless, a Black woman's anger is often in response to racial microaggressions linked to stereotyping, leaving them feeling vulnerable, disempowered, and voiceless (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). Even if I had used non-verbal communication methods to react, my reaction would have taken over the incident, and she could play the victim. It was a painful experience, but I learned how to ignore it, and I responded to her like I was not offended by her actions. I will regret not reacting to that incident for the rest of my life because experiences like these reflect those forms of disrespect.

This incident shows a lack of respect for a person of colour, highlighting those attributes of otherness that accentuate feelings of superiority and inferiority. Embarking on this autoethnographic research has allowed me to engage with my thoughts, feelings, and reflections from a cultural perspective. To investigate these further, it is essential to explore how my childhood experiences within the Nigerian cultural context have shaped my identity through the self-recognition process, which has also influenced me in adult life, bringing to focus the forms of disrespect.

Being a Girl Child in a Patriarchal Land

The failure to give someone due recognition is a form of disrespect, and giving recognition in consideration of love and respect and boosting self-esteem accords them with a positive status (Honneth, 2008). Disrespect can be expressed by degradation and physical abuse (Honneth, 2007). How I recognise forms of disrespect are established through my morals that question what is right or wrong, developed through customs from my childhood. The norms and values that inform my way of life have been influenced by the Nigerian community within which I grew up.

However, relocating to England has decreased the inherited templates whilst re-imagining myself in new ways (Giddens, 2003). As a girl child in Nigeria, I did not have the freedom and choice to express myself in social life because of the pressures of culture and religion. Social injustices have been seen in Nigeria against women and the girl child, reflecting gender inequalities (Makama, 2013). There can be problematic issues associated with life histories which may cause anxiety in those who are vulnerable when they are interacting with those in authority (West, 2009). I am from the Yoruba tribe, and children are obliged to respect adults through words and actions from a cultural perspective, while women also respect their husbands. I never call my elder sisters by their first name alone because I must call them Aunty B or Aunty F, even though they are not my aunties. It is a sign of respect. My mum never called my dad by his first name; she referred to him as Daddy even though he

was her husband. This is typical of most Yoruba families, which puts women in the position of allowing their husbands to make decisions for them rather than with them as a father would to his daughter, thereby taking their voice from them in the patriarchal land.

The Place of Role-Playing in Identity Formation

Reflecting on one's childhood can often provide profound insights into how early experiences shape one's identity and worldview. This personal account not only sheds light on my own experiences but also prompts a broader exploration of how such narratives fit into the larger tapestry of cultural and familial stories.

I am the fifth daughter of six girls, with no male child in the family. I can only imagine how my mum felt when she discovered she had a fifth female child. I knew my mum kept trying to have a male child from an early age until she gave up trying after having my younger sister. I grew up in a society that disrespected women and fathers beating their wives was a norm. As I grew older, it became clear that my dad did not want his daughters to get pregnant out of wedlock. He forbade us to talk to a boy by the fence of our house, and he would tell the boy to leave immediately. It was unheard of for a boy in the neighbourhood to

come inside the house. My dad was a disciplinarian with a keen interest in ensuring that we all grew up to be responsible women. His rule was only bringing the man home when I was ready to marry him, which makes me wonder how I would have started a relationship before getting married. I pretended not to have a boyfriend until my middle twenties, which was after my first degree, because my dad made me feel that having boyfriends would distract me from good grades while in education. Unfortunately, my dad never had the chance to meet my husband. My husband had been my boyfriend for over three years before my dad passed away.

To analyse this narrative, I need to explore my birth story, which forms part of a larger network of interconnected stories (Formenti, 2014). Birth stories are often recounted by close ones, such as family members or those present at the time of birth (ibid). Given that Nigerian culture was quite strict at the time of my birth, children were not included in adult conversations. Since my parents are no longer with us, I had to rely on my elder sisters to share what they knew about my birth story. This is because the stories we tell about our past are frequently shaped by significant others (McAdams, 1993). Unsurprisingly, they do not recall the details because they were young, and one of my elder sisters said all conversations were kept between my dad and mum. I then explored the condition of my parents at the time of my birth through the meaning of my full name, as Buki is the short

version of Olubukola. Names given at birth can sometimes reflect culture, religion, gender, family history and language (Peterson et al., 2015). There are links between a person's name and cultural identity, which may provide the motive behind choosing a particular name (ibid). This confirms that the stories we hear about ourselves, or the past are internalised as we reflect on them, thereby shaping our identity. Sometimes, these stories might leave a positive or negative impact depending on who told the stories and how the stories are told.

The meaning of my full name, 'Olubukola,' translated from the Nigerian Yoruba language, is that God has added to our wealth. My parents gave me the name because they think they have been blessed with more wealth in literal terms and blessed with another daughter in addition to the four daughters they already had. This may mean they have more daughters than they could ever ask for. The choice of name may also correspond with the fact that when daughters grow old enough to get married, parents get the bride price from the groom's family. Parents can sometimes give their children names that reflect their hopes for their future (Botelho, 2009). So having five daughters would bring more wealth from the bride price, which may imply that they were trying to see some positives out of their situation—considering that they lived in times when they would have loved to have a male child.

In addition, my dad lived in the Northern part of Nigeria for many years, and culture and religion have influenced him. While I was growing up, it was evident that the boy child was

more desirable within Nigerian society (Baloyi & Manala, 2019). The male children are preferred to protect the family lineage, which also is a symbolic strength for the father and to make the marriage legitimate for the mother in the eyes of society (Nwokocha, 2007). This brought about societal pressure to have at least one male child to pass on the family name to future generations (ibid). Mothers and fathers are proud of having a son; the girl child is less favourable as the desire for a male child transcends gender boundaries (Ogbemudia, 2022). It was not surprising to see parents prioritising the education of the male child over the female because they felt the women would be married off, but male children would continue with the family name (Bulus, 2012). My dad was enthusiastic about educating his daughters because he wanted us to be independent and not rely on men as we grew older. My dad oversaw that all his daughters were well-behaved and believed we would succeed through good education. He wanted us to do well so that he could be proud of us in a society that values men more than women.

My dad was a businessperson and more present at home because he had more flexible working hours. My mum was a busy banker when there were few computers and had to work long hours, so my dad looked after us most of the time, which was not the norm in Nigerian society. However, we had house help who did the domestic chores most of the year except when they travelled to see their families during festive seasons. The narrative below captures my memory of the time.

From the early age of six, I would hear my dad telling my elder sisters off when they did something wrong, and that instilled fear in me, I preferred to stay out of trouble to be in his good books. I always ran through the back door into the house to pick up my book and pretended that I was reading when I heard his car approaching the house. This happened especially when I was playing outside with other children. My dad was strict with us and ensured that we read our books after school rather than walking about on the streets playing with friends. He did this because he wanted us to do well at school, make a living for ourselves as adults, and not be financially reliant on our future husbands.

On reflection, my parents were feminists and opined that a girl could achieve as much as a boy, and they trained us in ways they thought would make us independent, like my mother, who was our role model. At that time in Nigeria, most parents wanted their children to be medical doctors, engineers, or lawyers, and my dad believed that we had to study hard to achieve that milestone. It would have made my dad prouder for his daughters to pursue one of these prestigious professions in a patriarchal land. So, to fulfil this, we needed to study, and my right to play as a child was denied. Sometimes, I felt like playing was wrong because my dad would ask why I was not reading my books instead. Staying in the room and reading my schoolbooks felt like a safe place because my dad was happy to see me there reading.

Hence, my way of playing was pretending to read my books, which took the form of role-playing (Mead, 1934). At times, I was in the room playing but pretending to be reading. I usually picked up a book very quickly when someone approached the door, and I would stare at a page as if I were reading. During that time, my identity formation was developed from pleasing my dad and being a daddy's girl. We were born into vulnerability while depending on others for survival from childhood (Formenti & West, 2018). I depended on my dad's affection, which meant I was happy to earn it for as long as possible by doing as I was told, which developed into long-term habits. It is difficult to separate the way of seeing from who we have been. The extract below reflects how my childhood experiences have influenced me in adult life.

It is not surprising to see that to this present day, my bedroom is still my favourite room in the house. I have a designated table and chair in my bedroom for work purposes, and I can stay in the room most of the day. The room still feels like a safe place, and I consciously must try to leave the room over the weekends to stay downstairs. At times, I feel guilty about going out, as it seems like I am doing something wrong. I still struggle to socialise regularly with friends, as I often feel I should be studying, similar to how I used to spend time reading alone in my room as a child.

A friend told me recently that I always invite her to my house, but she noticed that I find it difficult to visit her. She said I always gave her an excuse. I apologised that I did not mean to be rude and that it was not intentional. This was the first time someone brought this to my awareness, and I have continued to make positive changes.

As individuals, our knowledge is shaped by our experiences as we encounter others, making our history come into play unconsciously (Formenti & West, 2018). The transference of history is constructed through cultural frames of reference, which may present defences, dependencies, and interference (Britzman, 2003). Since 2015, when I started my master's degree in England, I have been doing several online work-based learning courses and Level 2 to 5 qualifications simultaneously for my personal development. I started my doctorate the same year after completing my master's degree in 2017. So, I have used studying as a genuine reason not to socialise as often as I should. Embarking on lifelong learning and studying to a doctorate level can be said to be part of trying to fulfil my father's dreams. As a young child, my behaviour at home and school was influenced by my dad's expectations. Being well-behaved at school was to please my dad, which was captured in my journal below.

I must say that I was one of the best-behaved children in primary and secondary school. I got the 'Best behaved student Award' in secondary in my third year at

the Speech and Prize Giving Day. I became the Head Girl in my sixth year at secondary. Being well-behaved at school was not a personal choice, but it was from the fear of being reported to my dad for any wrongdoing. My dad got his proud moments at every Speech and Prize Giving Day at my school because I always got an Award. Often, he was very protective of me and partial in his judgements, which made me have a close bond with him. I remember that my dad made it evident that I was close to his heart from when I was seven years old till about sixteen years of age. He would not let my sisters allocate me some housework, and reading books became an escape from doing chores.

The parent-child relationship between my dad and myself was satisfied through the recognition of love and approval (Honneth, 2008). Honneth describes the recognition relationship as tied to the physical existence of significant others who express feelings of esteem and being oneself in another. This affectional relationship depends on the balance of interdependence and attachment, which is determined by a psychoanalytic object-relations theory that considers the forms that transform through the interplay of inner and outer dynamics (West, 2014). The portrayal of love as a form of recognition highlights the symbiosis of the relationship between my dad and myself. This extends from Winnicott's perspective of psychoanalytic conditions of 'good enough' relationships between mother and child (Winnicott, 1991). A 'good enough' relationship implies that maternal care is under control when a child cannot take responsibility for the good and bad things in the

environment (ibid). Although Winnicott's theory depicts the relationship between a mother and child, I have made connections by explaining the relationship between my dad and myself. I depended on his affection and my willingness to be obedient, because he met my dependency, needs as a mother figure.

The relationship was established by accepting and loving each other as independent entities until my teenage years when there was a gradual separation of the subject and object, which was my dad and me. Winnicott explains that these types of separation develop from my evolving personality and character, and my dad adapted as I grew older, enabling a measure of reliability (Winnicott, 1991). My teenage years ended the symbiotic unity in which Honneth affirms that I acquired a newfound interdependence as I went into a secondary boarding school (Honneth, 2008). I experimented with my new selfhood through a self-negotiation process, and the capacity to let go was also established through this process (Formenti & West, 2018). Hence, going into secondary school provided me with the potential space to enjoy creative playing while my dad trusted me to abide by the cultural values of my formative years.

Copy and Compliance

For Mead, identity formation is distinguished between 'I' and 'me', where 'me' is used when one sees oneself from the second-person perspective and through the eyes of others (Mead, 1934). This brings into focus the moral norms as predictive and expected behaviours

bounce off each other as I learnt the forms of moral judgement. In secondary boarding school, I gained some independence and had the opportunity to make good or bad decisions while considering how my dad would feel if he heard that I had done something wrong at school. These form the starting point of identity formation as I apply my dad's moral values to practical situations (Numminen et al., 2017). At boarding school, I had my first boyfriend at fourteen, and I knew it was forbidden from my dad's point of view, but it was a risk I was willing to take because I was away from home. Mead sees this development in two phases, 'play' and 'game' (Mead, 1934). Before I went into boarding school, I was role-playing, and my behaviours were in response to meeting my dad's expectations to please him. While at secondary, the second phase was distinguished through the patterns of the 'game' established through action expectations of teenagers like me within my social circle while gaining satisfaction from the game. These show how my development transitioned from play to game through the perspectives of others, mirroring the self-recognition process.

The Guilt of Being a Girl Child

Self-understanding brings the awareness of rights accorded by the members of society (Mead, 1934). The upbringing and rights of a girl child in Nigeria differ from those of a boy child. Boys have more rights than girls regarding education, inheritance, and everyday privileges. A girl child like me is often made to feel guilty for being a girl (Adichie, 2013). She needs to be disciplined more to comply with the norms and values to get a husband to marry her when she grows up (Bulus, 2012). It was not surprising to hear adults in Nigeria

say girls should not say certain things and behave in specific ways because certain morals guide or define them as girls or women (Ibid). They often say that as a girl, you must ensure you become marriage 'material' (Adichie, 2013). The word 'material' here suggests a 'thing' that can be used without a mind or a spirit. This contributes to girls being silenced and not vocalising their opinions or desires as they grow older, thereby pretending that everything is okay when it is not okay.

From a cultural perspective, it would be right to say that the female gender defines how a woman should be from an early age (Adichie, 2013). The girl child copies how her mother behaves in society and when she becomes older, she complies with the norms without any form of resistance because that is all she has known. This also applies to boys copying the behaviours of their dads and how they treat women as they take more dominant roles in their families and society at large. My parents brought us up with the belief that women should be respected like men.

The Forms of Disrespect Conferred on a Girl Child

The forms of disrespect experienced by the girl child or woman in Nigeria take away their rights and dignity as recognised members of society. Mead asserts that recognition corresponds to the social value of one's identity, which highlights the positive attitude toward oneself through self-respect (Mead, 1934). At the individual level, the experience of being recognised as a legal person by the members of one's community ensures that one

can develop a positive attitude toward oneself (Honneth, 2008). The extract below reflects how I complied with cultural norms in my early years.

As a child, I felt the need to hide my true self whilst being a daddy's girl and complying with the norms of the girl child in Nigerian society.

This extract echoes the story of 'Walking Out of a Doll's House?' a second metalogue by Laura and Linden (Formenti & West, 2018). Laura suggests that the story can be interpreted through a feminist lens, offering insight into the dynamics of power in societies and families where women have no right to decide the course of their lives (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 97). As a child, I was denied the right to play, and such denial can be a form of disrespect (Honneth, 2008). However, there was also a counterpoint of respect in that I was encouraged to study, which reflected a form of valuing and recognition of my equal worth. Initially, my true self was hidden, as I had no right to express my thoughts and feelings, leading me to develop a false, more acceptable self to please my father and conform to social norms.

We can become overly preoccupied with others and develop a fear of not being 'good enough,' leading to an unconscious need to put on a show to gain attention (RANLHE, 2009). Growing up, I must have felt that my true self was not good enough, leading me to develop a false identity through my relationship with my father, who was my significant other (Hunt & West, 2009). However, the dynamics changed when I became a woman, with a newfound

identity and freedom to express my feelings in relationships with men and society. I felt I had more power to make decisions, engaging in the associated risks of 'play' and 'game' in a different form. If I had not been encouraged to study or attend school as a girl, I might have ended up getting married without an education, becoming a wife and mother within the Nigerian patriarchal system. My family's values of educating a girl child provided me with the opportunity to experience a sense of freedom as I grew into adulthood.

Grief and Grieving

Separation from a significant other can lead to anxiety related to one's former identity (Bainbridge & West, 2012). My identity as a child was shaped by my role in pleasing my dad. As an adult, I came to realise the importance of living life on my terms, which brought unforeseen responsibilities. These developmental stages can be viewed as transformative learning, where one evolves from the old self to a new self, with this process being renegotiated over time (Mezirow, 1991). Family crises can also result in academic failures (West, 2014), as illustrated in the extract below.

Fast forward a few years later, when my dad suddenly passed away in my second year at the university in Nigeria. I felt lost, and it was like I had lost my hero. Everything I did in the past was to please my dad. I lost my motivation to succeed in life when he died. While still grieving the loss of my dad, sadly, about

a year and a half later, my mum passed away too, and it was like my world turned upside down. I struggled to concentrate at the university and had low grades, which affected my overall Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA).

Here, anxiety arises from the fear of losing the old self, and depression from recognising that the old self has already been lost, and these often follow a grieving process (ibid). I was highly disappointed in myself, and I lost confidence in my intellectual abilities. However, my sense of freedom increased, which led to some form of transformational change.

Transformational changes are like a caterpillar metamorphosing into a butterfly with significant changes in structure (Bainbridge & West, 2012). This illuminates that my identity changed with the awareness of not pleasing anyone, and I could live my life in freedom without role-playing the way I did as a child.

Newly Found Independence Came at a Price and Established Forms of Disrespect

My newly found independence made the negotiation of boundaries conflict with the moral standards I learned as a child (Honneth, 2008). The moral standards of what was right or wrong were then relative to meeting my needs and solving the problems I had. I soon realised that I could not blame anyone for my actions, and learning from my experiences became a regular occurrence. An extract from my journal captures my reflection on these.

A couple of years after I lost my parents, I struggled to maintain my newfound status of not having my parents to fall back on. However, one part indulged in freedom because I was now in control of my life. There was no one to tell me off when I was wrong, and I could be my true self without pretending to anyone and I felt at ease being an adult. I had little or no supervision from my sisters. My elder sisters were incredibly supportive if I needed them, but they had their lives and personal struggles. They were happy to support me financially when they could or offer advice as required and did not intervene in my life. I lived outside the university campus at a Nigerian university from my second year to my fifth year. It was a five-year programme.

My rigid disciplinary and educational upbringing slipped into new forms of independence detached from rules and established patterns of lack of parental control or guidance. I was relieved from the pressure of seeking one approval or the other before I could do something, but that came with unanticipated responsibility. The family friends we had and people that I thought were good friends to my parents became interested in me sexually and offered to provide me with financial assistance.

Previously, I thought I was imprisoned through parental control when my dad was alive, but I then realised that I began to look for father figures amongst my dad's friends and was craving to fill the gap. Some of them wanted to take advantage of my vulnerability and susceptibilities as I tried to fill the parental gap that was void. I later realised that the freedom and the independence I had when my parents passed away came at a price. When I needed money to pay my bills at the university, people would not help me without the exchange of having the pleasure of my body. There were conflicting feelings and actions while repressing some thoughts for justification (Honneth, 2008). Soon after, those feelings led to defence mechanisms to defend the unacceptable feelings.

This new selfhood of becoming an independent woman established through trauma and transformative learning comes with the awareness of its precarious freedom (Bainbridge & West, 2012). Becoming a woman was a transformative process of meaningful change, such as metamorphosing from a caterpillar to a butterfly (ibid). Nevertheless, I had a few bad experiences that did not make me feel like a beautiful butterfly because they were traumatic. Some of the relationships I had with men when I became a woman and as I discovered my new sense of freedom took dominant roles of humiliation in my life. The men's behaviours were disrespectful (Honneth, 2008), and I was wrongly treated by those I thought were my dad's close friends. My human integrity was shaken, leading to physical and psychological injury (ibid). Honneth puts forward that the forms of practical maltreatment in which a person is forcibly deprived of any opportunity to control his or her own body represent the most fundamental sort of personal degradation (ibid, p. 132). The

humiliation and abuse represent forms of disrespect that damaged my self-esteem and confidence because sometimes, the control over my body was against my will.

At this time of my life, Mead's 'play' took a different dangerous dimension because I was no longer role-playing like when I was a child (Mead, 1934). It was my reality, and this time, there was no satisfaction from the 'game' because the experiences of denigration affected my self-respect (Mead, 1934). As a child, I derived joy and pride from the affection I got from my dad. On becoming a woman, 'role-playing' to meet my needs was accompanied by pain and loss of self-worth with feelings of inferiority. In both cases, I was pleasing someone. As a child, I was pleasing out of love and duty, while the latter was due to abuse. These forms of disrespect resulting from being excluded from certain rights bring social shame and a lack of self-love (Honneth, 2008). The denial of rights in society lies in the forcible restriction of personal autonomy, and not enjoying the status of a fully-fledged partner in the interaction threatens moral rights (Honneth, 2008). These further highlight the loss of self-respect because I am not an equal partner with the people I encountered.

The social devaluation leads to a loss of self-esteem, reflecting how denial of rights follows a process of historical change (ibid). Therefore, it is important to note that now that I am in a more comfortable place, I have made friends with people in their 70s and 80s in my local community. If my parents were still alive, they would have been in that age group, and I derive the pleasure of inviting them to my house for meals and checking on their welfare by text now and again. These are the things I would have done for my parents, and the

friendship I have developed with them over time has helped me to re-establish my lost self-love in diverse ways.

Again, it might be said that I am trying to fill the parental gap, but this time, the need, or the justification for this is not out of necessity. The relationship is defined by 'good enough' love through authentic and enhanced selfhood while working towards healing and challenging the abuse done in the past (Formenti & West, 2018). This could be said to be the forms that has transformed (Kegan, 2018). The 'good enough' love from my lived experiences above transforms into self-esteem and confidence through self-recognition dynamics at various levels (Honneth, 2008). Over time, the more I keep reconciling my past to my present, the more I keep noticing the transformation that occurs.

My Past Informs My Present Through the Self-Recognition Process

The forms of disrespect trigger emotional responses that can become the motivational impetus for the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1996). Similarly, denial of rights and denigration in the social world holds out injustices of disrespect which come with psychological hurt and shame (ibid). We respond to how society works and the cultures where we live through the relationships we encounter. How people behave is influenced by cultural forces associated with class, ethnicity, and gender factors that shape how people think, feel, or talk about themselves (West, 2014). Understanding the motivation for adult learning in higher education is not straightforward because of the entanglement of our past

in the present from a cultural perspective. This can also be determined by examining our relationships with significant others (Formenti & West, 2018). Our lived experiences make us who we are, and when people encounter us, we make them have experiences that make them who they are.

Bhabha, a post-colonial writer, states that education gives access to the third space where the past meets the present; the inside connects to the outside, and inclusion and exclusion intermingle to create something new (Bhabha, 1994). The academy has been a transitional space where my past has informed my present, where I have experienced being both an insider and outsider, and where my cultural perspective has sometimes been excluded through educational practices (West, 2014). For example, before my Module 4 learning activity, I felt like an outsider invading the space of those I consider significant others in the EdD programme. However, through this research, I had the opportunity to engage with how the Module 4 activity developed my self-esteem and self-confidence. I have been able to reflect on how I felt valued after the activity, which is associated with being an insider through established inclusivity.

The Role of Soul Work in Scholarly Research

This autoethnographic research has provided me with the opportunity to gain valuable experience through scholarly work, which has evolved into what can be considered 'soul

work.' According to Dirkx, the soul is the mythic and unconscious aspect of our psyche, intimately connected to our emotional state, with emotions acting as symbolic indicators of deeper soul-level processes (Dirkx, 2000). His theory of soul work offers insight into a way of knowing that distinguishes the soul from the mind and matter, creating a framework for understanding the deeper, often hidden, dimensions of human experience.

Engaging in soul work is essential for a deeper understanding of oneself, involving the exploration of binaries such as mind and body, social and psychological, and emotion and cognition (Formenti & West, 2018). This approach aims at transformative learning, where individuals make meaning of their experiences through interactions with others and their environment, facilitating a process where the unconscious is brought to the conscious through emotional engagement (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006). Emotional upheavals, as suggested by Dirkx, can function as catalysts for transformative learning, serving as signals that prompt deeper reflection and growth (2000). Educators engage in soul work by addressing the emotional responses of their students and incorporating teaching resources that encourage introspection (Dirkx, 2006). This process involves the dynamic interaction between the conscious and unconscious selves, often expressed through various forms such as images, stories, and essays.

For educators who find the concept of soul work challenging, Herr (2016) offers a reframed perspective, viewing it as a method to listen to the unconscious for greater self-awareness

and self-knowledge. Soul work is not just a path to personal transformation but also a vital component in the educational process, helping both educators and students to navigate the complexities of their emotional and intellectual lives, thereby fostering a richer, more meaningful learning experience.

The Impact of Cultural Dissonance on Academic Experiences

In my journey as a researcher, soul work began when I critically examined my role and position in generating knowledge within academia. Engaging with Dirkx's theory of soul work provided a framework for understanding this introspective process, highlighting the role of emotions as indicators of the soul, and differentiating between the soul, mind, and matter (2000). Navigating the complexities of my heritage in a predominantly white academic environment underscored the need for soul work to reconcile my past experiences, cultural identity, and current challenges. Emotional responses, such as feelings of alienation or disorientation, served as catalysts for deeper reflection and growth, prompting me to explore the underlying soul-level processes shaping my academic journey.

As a researcher and now a lecturer in higher education, I recognise the importance of engaging in soul work for both personal development and for fostering meaningful connections within academia. By attending to the emotional responses of peers and using teaching resources that promote introspection, I contribute to the collective process of soul

work. While the concept of soul work may not resonate with everyone, I appreciate Herr's (2016) suggestion to reframe Dirkx's theory as a means of listening to the unconscious to achieve greater self-awareness. This perspective underscores the importance of introspection and understanding one's inner experiences, regardless of the terminology used.

Addressing Marginalisation in Higher Education

As I advance in my academic journey, soul work remains crucial to my growth and development. Chapter Seven of my thesis will further examine the transformative learning that has emerged from this process, exploring how soul work has deepened my understanding of both myself and the world around me, and contributed to my personal and academic development. Through soul work, I aim to continue deriving meaning, fostering growth, and reconciling my past and present identities, thereby enriching both my research, and lived experiences.

My feelings of being out of place within the EdD programme can be analysed through the lens of how I internalise various emotions within my learning environment. Bowl (2001) suggest that mature students in higher education often experience disorientation due to a lack of sense of belonging. This sense of displacement can be more pronounced for

marginalised students, as noted by Field (2012). Bourdieu's concept of habitus explains how individuals internalise cognitive and motivational structures, which influence their thoughts, actions, and emotions (Bourdieu, 1984). As a person of colour in a predominantly white institution, I experienced cultural dissonance. Cultural dissonance refers to the discomfort or psychological tension that arises when individuals face conflicting cultural norms, values, or expectations. It occurs when there is a mismatch between an individual's cultural background and the cultural context in which they find themselves. This discrepancy can lead to feelings of confusion, anxiety, or unease as individuals navigate between diverse cultural expectations or attempt to reconcile conflicting cultural identities. Cultural dissonance is often observed in multicultural or cross-cultural environments where individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds interact, and it can manifest in various aspects of life, including language, customs, social norms, and communication styles. For me, while some aspects of integration were intellectually stimulating, others caused anxiety as they challenged my cultural values. Consequently, I found it necessary to consciously dismantle certain defence mechanisms.

The experience of navigating cultural differences can be particularly challenging for ethnic minority students, as they may perceive it as a compromise of their cultural identity in favour of Western norms. This phenomenon is often referred to as 'culture shock,' denoting the anxiety stemming from the loss of familiarity in new environments (Oberg, 1960). However, Ogbemudia (2022) argues against the characterisation of these experiences as 'culture shock', suggesting that individual responses are influenced by their acquired

personal and social skills, rather than a predetermined reaction. Additionally, the term 'shock' may be deemed inappropriate, as it implies a severe reaction akin to tonic immobility (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). As a person of colour within a predominantly white institution, I have employed various strategies to navigate the nuances between my Nigerian culture and Western norms, drawing upon both personal and social skills. This process underscores the complexity of cultural adaptation and highlights the importance of recognising and reconciling diverse cultural identities within academic settings.

The cultural disparities present in Western countries often exacerbate feelings of insecurity among ethnic minority students, causing them to feel alienated and disconnected from their academic environment. This sense of displacement can significantly impact their sense of belonging. Therefore, it is imperative to foster mutual understanding and collaboration rather than erecting barriers between diverse cultural groups. Research indicates that cultivating empathetic support and nurturing positive relationships within educational settings can provide adult students with a supportive transitional space (Formenti & West, 2018). Conversely, the absence of such support structures often hinders students from disadvantaged backgrounds in achieving academic qualifications (Field, Merrill & West, 2012). Addressing systemic ideologies that undermine the capabilities of students from marginalised backgrounds due to their cultural heritage is crucial (ibid). Empathetic guidance from educators plays a pivotal role in helping students overcome academic barriers (Formenti & West, 2018). Personally, the unwavering support I have received from

some Module Leaders has not only bolstered my academic journey but has also restored my self-esteem and self-respect—a deeply personal transformation.

Additionally, higher education institutions must continually evaluate their Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies to ensure that learning environments are conducive to inclusivity and well-being (Stone, 2018). Representation matters, especially for individuals of colour, as people tend to connect more easily with those who share similar experiences (ibid). Supportive academics who empathise with the life stories and struggles of ethnic minority students can bridge gaps and foster supportive relationships (Bainbridge & West, 2012). In such an environment, education transcends mere academia, it becomes a sanctuary where all students, regardless of background, can strive towards their academic aspirations. Conversely, when disadvantaged students feel compelled to drop out of university, their experiences resonate with feelings of rejection, failure, and shame, an unfortunate form of disrespect (Field, Merrill & West, 2012). In contrast, those who encountered good enough relationships that increased their self-esteem, and confidence had more success stories through supportive teachers and academics (Formenti & West, 2018). The success stories were born from the feelings of being legitimate members of their study groups where they felt understood.

Navigating the Challenges of Recognition and Belonging in Academic Spaces

Sometimes, the struggle for recognition associated with disrespect comes with rejection, failure, and shame because the actions are demeaning or degrading (Honneth, 2008). These actions make me start overthinking things, and I sometimes begin doubting my compos mentis, wondering if I am insane because of what I think or feel. An extract from my journal illustrates this below.

During one of my study days in the EdD programme, I sat in this lecture room, and I could not help but notice that the lecturer focused more on the conversation that transpired with the dominant group. It seemed like only that side of the room had visible humans because I felt unseen where I was sitting. I was dying for eye contact from the lecturer to acknowledge my presence in the room. I did not feel like I existed in that space. It looked like there was a big wall between us, and I was hoping for the session to end so that I could escape the awkward situation.

This experience highlighted the profound impact of my sense of belonging, particularly as a member of a non-dominant group within the cohort. Such instances underscore

marginalised individuals' challenges in asserting their presence and participating fully in academic settings. My reluctance to contribute during the lecture stemmed from the perception that my input would be viewed as an intrusion into the established dynamics of the conversation, further reinforcing feelings of exclusion.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognise that the lecturer's actions may not have been intentional, as I later discovered during discussions with other lecturers. Through these conversations, I learned that some of the negative experiences I perceived might have stemmed from unintentional oversights or systemic issues rather than deliberate actions. This understanding helped me to see that addressing such issues might require a more nuanced approach, including improving communication and support systems, rather than attributing blame solely to individuals. Recognising this distinction is important for fostering a more inclusive and empathetic academic environment.

These conversations shed light on the complexities of academic interactions and the potential for unintended consequences stemming from feelings of insecurity or discomfort among both students and lecturers. For instance, the act of making direct eye contact during lectures, which I perceived as a lack of acknowledgement, may be interpreted differently by others as discriminatory or preferential treatment. This highlights the nuanced nature of interpersonal dynamics within educational settings and the need for greater awareness and sensitivity to diverse experiences.

Nevertheless, some dynamics illuminate the subtle yet pervasive forms of disrespect prevalent within institutional settings, which often go unnoticed or unaddressed. Pearce points out that without the necessary tools to identify and challenge these subtle acts of racism, the structures that marginalise these students remain unchallenged, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion (ibid). As one of the few minorities in the cohort, experiences like these contribute to a sense of invisibility and marginalisation, eroding self-esteem, and confidence in similar situations (Pearce, 2019). Pearce research highlighted underlying power structures rooted in colonial and postcolonial relations, perpetuating injustices that are challenging to confront (ibid). Honneth puts forward that respect for persons may simply mean respect for their rights (Honneth, 2008). Negative experiences resulting from feelings of bitterness or alienation towards individuals can significantly contribute to student attrition rates, further exacerbating the cycle of marginalisation within academic environments (Pearce, 2019). When students feel isolated or unfairly treated, their engagement and commitment to their studies may wane, leading them to withdraw from their programmes. This withdrawal not only impacts their personal academic and professional trajectories but also reinforces existing patterns of exclusion, making it harder for diverse students to find a supportive academic community.

Being perceived as 'the other' can significantly impact one's identity and self-perception, particularly for marginalised adult students in higher education. This sense of 'otherness' is often reinforced by daily microaggressions, as noted by Pearce (2019). In her research, Pearce identified subtle but harmful behaviours—such as mispronouncing a name or questioning someone is cultural—that may seem minor but cumulatively affect an

individual's well-being. For those who have experienced racism, these acts are often too subtle to explicitly label, yet they persist and intensify feelings of exclusion.

For adult students, particularly those from minority backgrounds, these microaggressions can exacerbate feelings of marginalisation in both academic and professional environments, including work placements. In such settings, these individuals may feel isolated or misunderstood, especially if their identity does not align with the dominant cultural norms.

In the next section, I will highlight the importance of promoting inclusivity in higher education by drawing attention to issues that further marginalise students from disadvantaged groups.

'Why Is My Reading List White?'

Educators need to use international resources or case studies that are not limited to the UK or high-income countries (Moncrieffe et al., 2020). Institutions must ensure that images used for teaching and learning are diverse and that students from each continent can relate to them. It is also essential that educators not only try to pronounce their students' names correctly but also find out a bit about each student's background, experiences, and interests. This information would become relevant when developing or creating an inclusive curriculum not solely focused on the coloniser's agenda, which is determined to recycle White/European knowledge (Morreira et al., 2020). Therefore, decolonising the curriculum helps reduce the risk of continuous exclusions and distorted representations of marginalised

history, perspectives, and interests, which impacts the sense of belonging, learning, and engagement in educational spaces (Schucan Bird & Pitman, 2019).

As I was coming to the end of my thesis, I began to question, 'Why Is My Reading List White?' (Adébisí, 2023). My reading list has been predominantly White male perspectives, authors, and theories (Reflective Journal, 2023). The systemic and structural inequalities in higher education continue to affect Black and minority women disproportionately (Begum & Saini, 2019). The wage relations and contracted working conditions disadvantage Black minority academics, which often makes them complicit to the colonial structures (Jivraj, 2020). These feelings of anger align with the Campaigns of 'Why Isn't My Professor Black?' and 'Why Is My Curriculum White?' (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). My Nigerian patriarchal background has also made me seek father figures in my academic journey and research. I have been unconsciously drawn to Western male-dominated theories, authors, and perspectives without challenging these until now. These have made me reflect on my narratives of growing up as a girl child and becoming a woman in Nigeria in a patriarchal land.

There is the repetition of my childhood experiences within my learning journey in higher education as my rights to an impartial education system are being violated. As a child in Nigeria, I grew up reading English books with limited access to books written by Nigerian authors because my head teacher in primary school was an English woman. In England, my

reading lists are mostly Western male authors because most of my Module Leaders and supervisors have been predominantly White men. I also grew up with the fear of not challenging those in authority, and unconsciously, I have become a recipient of recycled Western male knowledge. Nonetheless, this does not mean that White men have not been involved in championing the decolonisation of the curriculum.

It is important to note that I was not an academic before pursuing a doctorate, and I relied on my reading list for guidance. Decolonising higher education needs to move 'beyond reform' to allow the deconstruction of the asymmetrical powers intertwined in race, class, and gender (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). This will give way for meaningful recognition of alternative perspectives and decolonisation in practice. It requires the political will to change the structures in the hearts and minds of those in decision-making positions to shift practices of knowledge production at all levels.

Conclusion

This chapter has made me think deeply about how my childhood identity was formed through the self-recognition process in a divided and patriarchal land. Writing this chapter has been therapeutic in making sense of how my past has influenced my lived experiences from a cultural perspective whilst purging my burden (Atkinson, 2007). I analysed my lived experiences through the narratives from my memories and reflections to establish those

forms that transformed as I became a woman while exploring how these transcend to developing self-esteem and confidence. I have analysed the relationships I have encountered over time and how these have been deeply intertwined with my inner-outer psychosocial dynamics (West, 2014). While some of the relationships were founded on the self-recognition process that increased my self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect, other relationships have highlighted the forms of disrespect accentuated by the denial of rights (Honneth, 2008). The good enough relationships I have encountered on my learning journey have continued to help me develop myself while achieving my academic goals (Winnicott, 1991). Academic institutions are responsible for monitoring that ethnic-minority students' rights are not denied, as these contribute to motivation and retention. Taking my cultural background into account in the EdD programme has helped illuminate how past experiences can bring back memories in both positive and negative ways as I encounter others. Therefore, there is a need to listen to students' stories to understand their past and how to offer empathetic support to help them achieve their learning goals through inclusive practices because everyone has their struggles.

This autoethnographic research has illuminated the effects of inhabiting liminal spaces in a societal and educational context where the power relationships still work against me because the curriculum and pedagogy are not yet decolonised (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). In the preceding chapters, I have explored how the interplay of historical and cultural contexts has shaped my experiences and perceptions within higher education.

Having examined how my past experiences have impacted my present and how I have been othered in terms of gender and race, I will now turn to the motivation behind my decision to pursue a doctorate. Chapter Five will delve into the personal and aspirational drivers that guided my choice to embark on a doctoral journey, exploring how these motivations are deeply rooted in self-recognition and influenced by my historical and cultural background.

Chapter Five: Motivation to Pursue Higher Education in a Western University as a Nigerian Woman Living in the UK

Introduction

This autoethnographic research has provided me with the immense opportunity to explore my lived experiences considering my Nigerian heritage and my motivation to pursue the Education Doctorate. Understanding history better, comprehending the forces it has unleashed, and seeing oneself as part of a longer story is how we can keep striving to move forward (Olusoga, 2016). As I embarked on this thesis, it became increasingly clear that it was difficult to engage with my present without exploring how cultural and socio-economic factors have contributed to motivating me in the EdD programme. Hence, in the first section of this chapter, I will explore how, through colonialism, Nigerian women's subordination was perpetuated through gender oppression and exploitation (Oni, 2014). These forms of subordination are further entrenched through customs, politics, language, and religion, as men are perceived as superior to women, rendering women more voiceless in the public sphere (Ogbemudia, 2022). It can be seen how my past is deeply rooted in colonial and post-colonial worlds as a Nigerian who migrated to the UK.

Additionally, this chapter will examine the processes of recognition deeply embedded in historical and cultural contexts, establishing how we view ourselves in the eyes of others (Formenti & West, 2018). Afterwards, I will analyse how my lived experiences influenced my motivation in the Education Doctorate programme to transition from low-paid jobs. Finally, I

will highlight the importance of having support from loved ones to help overcome challenges or difficulties when studying for a doctorate.

Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds

As a Nigerian woman, I grew up with the consciousness that my role in society was to be a child bearer, look after the home, and be a second-class citizen to my husband while doing as I was told. While growing up, this stereotype did not seem to hold true in my family because my mother was a role model who worked for 36 years in the bank, and my father was very enthusiastic about educating his daughters. Nigerian cultural beliefs are entangled in religion and politics.

Nigerian Christians widely believe that the man is the head of the family, and this is established through biblical scriptures such as, 'I will multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you' (Gen. 3:16). Likewise, the Bible verse, which puts forward that man is the head of the woman (1 Cor. 11:3). However, these scriptural verses are subject to different interpretations, meaning that religious teachings will never be neutral, and religious teachings can be a resource or a roadblock for violence against women (Fortune & Enger, 2005). During the colonial era in Nigeria, women were denied Western education in the 19th century when it was introduced through missionary work (Bamidele, 2014). This

further established the Nigerian patriarchal system of not educating the girl child, which magnifies the challenges of getting employed as a woman or settling for menial jobs if there are limited options (Jacob & George, 2014). This illuminates how Nigeria's religion, politics, and cultural systems are interwoven.

In post-colonial times, Nigerian men are mostly seen as the 'breadwinner' of the family as men assume dominant roles in the labour market reinforced by the Nigerian constitution, which is highly patriarchal (Ogbemudia, 2022). These issues are amplified further as most Nigerian men are in a better position to apply for immigration visas than their wives, who are the dependents through point-based systems like the Highly Skilled Migrant Visas (HSMP). This provides single or unmarried women limited options to apply for work or settlement visas in the UK on their own (ibid). Nigerian women's rights have been persistently denied from colonial to post-colonial eras, enmeshed in societies favouring men over women through gender pay gaps and power imbalance in the social sphere.

Most Nigerian women who relocated to the UK found themselves doing low-paid work, which they refer to as BBC jobs, the acronym British Bottom Cleaners (Ogbemudia, 2022). Ogbemudia conducted research where she interviewed 32 Nigerian women who had professional qualifications and jobs in Nigeria, but on relocation to the UK, only nine of these women had professional jobs, while seventeen were doing menial jobs (ibid). The Nigerian women in her research narrated how they thought the UK was a promised land

with milk and honey, but to succeed, they had to create new pathways and readjust their dreams. It is not surprising that Nigerian women faced gender issues on arrival in the UK because this was already the lived experience of working-class women (Merrill, 1999). Merrill explored the lived experiences of some women in the UK who went into unskilled work, got married, had children, and were desperate to get out of domestic life (ibid). It could be argued that in a bid for women to break away from cultural and structural constraints, they seek self-development through higher education; therefore, providing them with opportunities to pursue a career.

Similarly, I have continued to acquire academic qualifications to liberate myself from this generational malediction of the patriarchal system. This is because I believe that the qualifications will help pave the way for me to come off low-paid jobs. The qualifications include two Level 2 courses, three Level 3 diplomas, one Level 4 diploma, and two Level 5 diplomas in addition to my first degree in Nigeria (B. Tech in Urban and Regional Planning), master's degree, and doctorate in the UK. The quest to acquire multiple professional qualifications is described as 'credentialism' and 'diploma disease' to maximise job opportunities and be recognised in failing systems (Khalanyane, 2012). The mindset to accumulate these qualifications for me is to get the required qualifications for my career pathway, which I thought would allow me to apply for specific jobs without work experience. However, this put me at risk of being overqualified for entry-level employment, reflecting the predicament of most Nigerian women in the UK (Ogbemudia, 2022). This can be seen in the extract from my journal below.

As an assessor delivering apprenticeship qualifications in health and social care settings, I encountered migrant women in care jobs who decided to undertake apprenticeship courses to move away from low-paid jobs. They confirmed that they hoped to use their diploma qualification as an access course to develop their careers as nurses or social workers in Western universities. They believed they would be stuck in care jobs forever if they did not acquire these qualifications or take steps to change their situation.

When I first undertook my Level 3 Apprenticeship course in Health and Social Care, I was apprehensive. I initially believed that my first degree from a Nigerian university held more recognition than the Level 3 diploma course in the UK. Over time, I set aside my pride and enrolled in the Level 3 course, which eventually enabled me to transition from low-paid jobs a few years later. This experience is not unique to me; many immigrants use care work and factory jobs as a means to support their families and as a stepping stone for career advancement (Anderson, 2010). Reflecting on this, I recognise that my care work experience has been invaluable in my current role as a Healthcare Management Lecturer. It has allowed me to draw on real-world examples to enhance students' understanding of theoretical concepts in various contexts.

How I Developed My Sense of Identity from Our Nigerian Community in the UK

In Western countries, as the Indigenous population progresses through the workforce in the labour market, there will be a shortage of labour created at the bottom for the proletariat, which is easily accessible to immigrants (Knight, 2015). The aforementioned 'BBC' jobs may be a literal symbol of a care worker's job, but it could also represent a ranking of care work in the labour market (Ogbemudia, 2022). This is most likely because there is a widespread impression that care work and factory jobs are low paid, disregarding the field and the lived experiences of the people doing these jobs.

Ethnic minorities who have been previously colonised might experience exclusion and otherness, which may illuminate conflicts in identity (Bhabha, 1994). The tacit acceptance of otherness in the minds of marginalised people disseminates intrinsic inequalities in society (hooks, 2013). This further implies that identity construction could be linked to stereotypical connotations of how we view others and how others view us (Fanon, 2023). It is important to note that some migrants doing low-paid jobs have high educational attainment with a significant level of expertise that is being wasted (Ogbemudia, 2022). The immigration system is used to benefit from cheap labour to boost capitalist-driven economies through the exploitation of marginalised communities (ibid). It could be argued that most Nigerian Black women are faced with few job opportunities on their arrival in the UK and they are forced to accept care jobs for survival.

Immigrants on the HSMP scheme were given higher-skilled visas, and they struggled to secure higher-paid jobs in the UK due to having no UK work experience on arrival and facing the harsh realities of making ends meet (Ogbemudia, 2022). Again, the HSMP point-based system requires only the main applicant to earn a certain amount within a particular time (ibid). Evidence shows that there has been no support system for highly skilled Nigerian migrants to get higher-paid jobs in the UK (ibid). This aligns with my experiences, as narrated below.

When my husband and I arrived in Woolwich, South-East England, in 2008, the people we encountered helped us secure care and factory jobs. One might say that we chose to live in Woolwich initially to be among the Nigerian community, who would assist us in settling down in the UK. Most of the people we spoke to were engaged in care work and factory jobs, so they referred us to the companies they worked for. They shared their own stories of how they ended up taking these low-paid jobs for survival.

Our initial hopes and dreams of a better life were shattered. We resided in the smallest room of a shared three-bedroom house with multiple occupants. We lived from 'hand-to-mouth' when my husband's wages were paid. This meant

that there was no money left after paying bills and buying foodstuff. My husband had the HSMP visa, and I was his dependent. Initially, we thought we would quickly secure well-paid jobs upon our arrival in the UK. We also assumed that having a first degree would open more opportunities for higher-paid jobs. This was because of the name of the visa, 'Highly Skilled Migrant Visa,' and we relied heavily on the information we received from the visa agent who processed the visa for us in Nigeria. Unfortunately, we did not have any family or friends in the UK who had travelled on HSMP visas, so we could not ask them questions about their experiences. The impression we got from Nigerian and Western movies led us to believe that people easily make a lot of money in the UK because they portray luxurious lifestyles. However, our reality changed after several unsuccessful job applications and interviews upon our arrival in the UK.

Additionally, my husband did not have enough points for a master's degree and had to make up the points through a higher income threshold. This required him to work up to three jobs to earn that amount, leaving him under immense pressure and despair. Sometimes, I would not see him for over a week or more because he worked one job during the day and another at night. My career was put on hold to look after the children, and I worked in domiciliary care and

factory jobs while the children were at school. This also made me financially dependent on my husband as I could barely earn up to £400 a month due to being on minimum wage. As a domiciliary carer with no car, I spent extended time on buses travelling to client homes and could only do three to four hours of paid work between school drop-offs and pick-ups.

The narrative provides a poignant personal account of the struggles and realities faced by my family and me as migrants in the UK. Analysing this narrative through the lens of social stratification theory reveals several key insights and themes about class, identity, and the socio-economic challenges immigrants often face. My narrative begins with our initial expectations upon arriving in the UK, shaped by the 'Highly Skilled Migrant Visa' (HSMP) and perceptions from the media and the visa agent. We expected a quick and easy transition to a better life with well-paid jobs, a common narrative among immigrants influenced by the allure of Western prosperity depicted in films and anecdotal accounts.

However, the reality proved drastically different, highlighting the gap between perception and reality. Upon arrival, my husband and I encountered significant barriers to employment. Despite our educational qualifications, we faced the stark reality of being forced into low-paid care and factory jobs due to the lack of 'relevant UK experience.' This situation reflects some of the challenges immigrants face, where their qualifications and skills are undervalued or unrecognised, resulting in downward social mobility. My narrative illustrates

how systemic barriers prevent skilled migrants from accessing opportunities that match their qualifications, reinforcing our position in lower social strata.

The economic struggles we faced were severe. Living in a small, shared room and surviving hand to mouth on minimal wages underscored the precarious financial situation many immigrants endure. The pressure on my husband to meet a higher income threshold to secure visa points further exacerbated our situation, leading him to work multiple jobs. He worked one job during the day and, after finishing, went to another job at night. Sometimes, he was absent from family life for up to two weeks. This situation highlights the intersection of immigration policy and economic strain, where visa requirements indirectly contribute to the exploitation of immigrant labour.

My narrative poignantly describes the emotional toll of these experiences, noting the feelings of not being 'good enough' for higher-paid jobs. This internalised sense of inadequacy and the constant struggle against societal barriers reflect the broader issue of social misrecognition. The concept of misrecognition, as discussed by Stone (2018), resonates deeply here, where the systemic undervaluation of our capabilities shapes our identity and self-worth.

Despite the hardships, my lived experiences have fostered a deep empathy and solidarity with others facing similar struggles. This mirrors Stone's research on class and identity, emphasising how personal struggles with social mobility and misrecognition can lead to a profound understanding of and empathy for marginalised groups. My ability to identify with

disadvantaged students highlights the potential for shared experiences to drive advocacy and support for social justice. Again, my narrative vividly exemplifies the principles of social stratification within the UK. The hierarchical organisation of society based on socio-economic determinants such as occupation, income, and education are evident in my story. The traditional class distinctions (working class, middle class, upper class) are implicitly present in the barriers I face in my quest for upward mobility. My experiences align with the historical and structural influences on social stratification described by McManus (2023) and Savage et al. (2015), where systemic inequities and discriminatory practices hinder social mobility. My narrative offers a compelling illustration of the complexities of social stratification and the immigrant experience in the UK. Through the lens of social stratification theory, it highlights the persistent barriers to upward mobility and the profound impact of these barriers on identity and self-perception. My story not only sheds light on personal and systemic challenges but also underscores the importance of empathy and solidarity in addressing social inequalities.

Our Lived Experiences are Historically Located

The lived experiences of individuals are historically located, and these can often reflect their increased instabilities and frightening insecurities (West, 2014). The conditions we find ourselves in are often deeply rooted in economic, social, and cultural flux, which can be ongoing for most of our lives (Bird & Schnittger, 1990). Education has given me an escape from low-paid jobs as I climb the social mobility ladder. Some of the people I have encountered in my daily life when working in low-paid jobs were not in respectable

positions like the cohort members in the EdD programme. In the initial stages of my EdD programme, interacting with cohort members was a bit challenging for me because of my low self-esteem and confidence during cohort days. Below is another extract that reflects some of my struggles.

My husband worked as a Maintenance Engineer for the American Embassy in Nigeria before we migrated to England. He had a first-degree qualification in Mechanical Engineering in Nigeria but struggled to get a decent job in the UK for over two years because he did not have UK work experience. I was in my third trimester of pregnancy when we relocated to England in 2008. I had to wait to deliver our first child before looking for a job without recourse to public funds. My husband went to several job centres before we could sort out our mobile and internet access to do job searches from home, with no success securing the first job for weeks.

The first paid job he got was carrying rugs by hand from one part of the warehouse to another in an 8-hour shift. When the supervisor called him the next day to do the same job, my husband said he could not work that day because his body ached, and they did not want him back there again.

Before we left Nigeria, we knew we were leaving the country for good, so we sold everything and converted the money to pounds. It was a lot of money in Nigerian currency called Naira, but when we converted the money to pounds, it was not enough to meet our needs and pay our bills for six months in England. We had a lovely two-bedroom rented apartment in Abuja, Nigeria, which was newly furnished because we were only married for just over a year before we decided to relocate to England. At that time, I was a manager at a luxury car hire company, and it was my first job after graduating from university. We were comfortable and doing well amongst our peers in Nigeria, so coming to England and struggling to get our first decent job presented the most frightening insecurities we could ever imagine.

My husband always had a passion for living abroad, and I did not want to leave Nigeria. To discourage him, I told him that a lizard in Nigeria would not be an alligator in England, so there was no point in relocating. However, he argued that our relocation to England would give our children more opportunities (Reflective Journal April 2022).

Intersectionality theory, pioneered by Crenshaw (1989), provides a robust analytical framework for understanding the intricate interplay of social identities and power structures. My experiences as a Nigerian immigrant intersect with social class dynamics, influencing my socioeconomic trajectory. My husband's and my struggles to secure employment, compounded by a lack of UK work experience, reflect how race, ethnicity, and migration status intersect with social class to shape our experiences of privilege and marginalisation.

Again, our story vividly exemplifies the principles of social stratification within the UK. The hierarchical organisation of society based on socio-economic determinants such as occupation, income, and education are evident in my narrative. The traditional class distinctions (working class, middle class, upper class) are implicitly present in the barriers we face in our quest for upward mobility. Our experiences align with the historical and structural influences on social stratification described by McManus (2023) and Savage et al. (2015), where systemic inequities and discriminatory practices hinder social mobility.

Race and ethnicity intersect with social class to deliver unique experiences of marginalisation and exclusion among Nigerian immigrants. Studies have shown that racialised minorities, including Nigerians, face disproportionate levels of poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion in the UK (Gordon et al., 2019). Gender also intersects with social class, shaping experiences of socioeconomic inequality and discrimination, particularly for Nigerian women (Ogbemudia, 2022). Intersectionality theory highlights how

these intersecting forms of oppression impact our access to resources, opportunities, and social networks, influencing our socioeconomic mobility and integration into British society.

Migration status intersects with social class, particularly regarding legal status, access to services, and employment opportunities. Undocumented migrants and asylum seekers often contend with precarious living conditions and limited access to social welfare provisions, exacerbating vulnerability and marginalisation (Bloch et al., 2011). Intersectionality theory illuminates how migration status intersects with social class to shape individuals' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in British society. Education is a pivotal instrument in mediating social mobility and mitigating inequalities associated with social class. Despite encountering barriers such as discrimination and financial constraints, individuals from Nigerian backgrounds have exhibited resilience and agency in pursuing education as a pathway to upward mobility (Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). Our experiences reflect the stories of work, family life, and adaptation shared by professional women who migrated from Nigeria to the UK, as explored in Ogbemudia's study (2022).

According to Ogbemudia's research, most families who relocated or are considering relocating to Western countries from Nigeria are doing it for their children (2022). They expressed that they want their children to have access to good education and welfare systems. Our struggles at the time felt like a badge of honour that kept our hope alive to give our children a brighter future. A Nigerian proverb says, 'if your face is swollen from the severe beatings of life, smile and pretend to be a fat man.' I suppose this helps to develop

resilience in us as Nigerians. My husband and I were motivated to not give up through the constant reminder that we want to leave a legacy for our children despite our challenges. We have continued to hope and pray that our children will not go through all the difficulties we have encountered as marginalised people.

My narrative offers a compelling illustration of the complexities of social stratification and the immigrant experience in the UK. Through the lens of intersectionality theory, it highlights the persistent barriers to upward mobility and the profound impact of these barriers on identity and self-perception. Our struggles are motivated by a desire to provide a brighter future for our children despite the adversities we have faced.

Motivation to Pursue My Dreams

Becoming somebody is a term for recognition which also comes with some form of economic independence that develops sociocultural identity (Smyth et al., 2004). Becoming a reputable person in society when one is from a marginalised group comes with many hurdles. Ogbemudia, whose research focuses on the migration of professional women from Nigeria to the UK, provided insight into how people's hopes were crushed through the downward mobility of the labour market (Ogbemudia, 2022). The participants narrated their personal stories of pain and regret about relocating to the UK from Nigeria with shattered dreams (ibid). She was disappointed when a lecturer interested in her research responded, 'Well, yeah, their certificates are not recognised; what else is there to research about

them?’ (ibid, p. 141). She wished that the lecturer had listened to Ruth’s story. Ruth was a graduate of Economics and an Insurance Officer in Nigeria. Ruth experienced deskilling and downward mobility of shattered dreams and crushed hopes as she relocated to England (ibid). Please note Ruth’s narrative is in Nigerian Pidgin English.

...it’s not what I am doing now. That’s my greatest pain; it’s where I’m coming from. The struggles, the sacrifice, the pain, and the hustling to become somebody. See, it’s not easy to explain, but I know what I am talking about. In the eyes of my people, coming abroad has already made me somebody. Do you know what I do? Whenever they’re visiting (relatives and friends from Nigeria), I dress up like an office worker, just like they used to know me. I put my factory uniform and boots in my car to change when I get to work. See ... I’m not pretending is just that which mouth will I use to tell them that I am a labourer in the UK? It used to be a thing of joy to be corporately dressed to go to work in Nigeria .. ha-ha; I say most of my clothes and accessories were ordered from UK ...[...] but, well, coming here, they took my heels off me; I wear boots now (laughs silently). Ehn ... especially my mother will cry for me [...]. I suffered; I suffered, it wasn’t easy; I mean, I already told you the condition under which we went to school those days. But I went through that stage of my life with hope for the future. Yes, I was hopeful of coming here but is this it? I mean, my hope’s been crushed; this isn’t it at all [...]. (Ogbemudia, 2022, p. 141 - 142).

Ogbemudia later established that Ruth abandoned her ambition of looking for corporate jobs in the UK after several attempts to complete different courses to secure a well-paid job. Ruth also converted her Nigerian certificates through the National Academic Recognition

and Information Centre (NARIC), and she felt she kept going from pillar to post with shattered dreams (ibid). Ruth later became resigned to her fate and started doing care jobs before going to factory jobs.

The perseverance to 'keep keeping on' (Frosh, 1991, p. 21) is reawakened now and again with the desire to become somebody (Ogbemudia, 2022). Becoming somebody for Ruth and other immigrants is a form of recognition that allows individuals to gain respect which increases their self-esteem along a corporative (Honneth, 2008). This aligns with the collective traits of a status group in which individuals may have a sense of group pride or collective honour and a sense of worth is recognised by members of the society (ibid). Ruth's story is also a replica of my story up to a certain point, but later transcended it, as shown below. The story reflects how the ambition to become somebody and a respectable position in society was developed from giving hope to our families back home in Nigeria.

After a few months of struggling to get a regular income on minimum-paid jobs in 2008, we ran out of money. On a phone call, my husband told his mother in Nigeria that we wanted to go back to live in Nigeria because our suffering was too much, and all hope for a better life was lost in the UK. My mother-in-law told my husband, 'Please, just stay there; I am happy to tell people that my son is living abroad and your suffering in London is still better than coming back and living in Nigeria.' (Reflective Journal, April 2022).

Here, it shows that there is pressure on the family for recognition as status and pride moving to the colonial powers is based on the widespread belief that the 'West is Best.' Hearing these types of statements from not only my mother-in-law but from other family members and friends develops some form of resilience in us to keep not only our hopes but their hopes alive. Returning to Nigeria will also be the shattered dreams of our families, who look up to us for varied reasons. It looked like we had the opportunity everyone back home wanted, which cannot be abandoned, no matter our challenges. As a result, we have developed the courage to 'keep keeping on' (Frosh, 1991).

Navigating the Complexities of Social Mobility and Academic Success

When I reflect on my journey, considering the struggles, pain, and sacrifices along the way, I hugely appreciate reaching this milestone. Advancing to a doctorate has been an achievement against all odds, significantly altering my status. The cultural capital I have developed in the UK, combined with the cultural capital I brought from Nigeria, has transformed into economic capital as I invest in new forms of identity (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu argues that one's position in social space is determined by social, economic, and cultural status, while habitus is a set of dispositions, including values and behaviours (ibid). However, Bourdieu did not account for how students like me, who enter Western universities with limited social capital, manage to survive and succeed (Hoult, 2012). Although stories like mine often have successful outcomes, some students from ethnic

minorities experience the pain and losses associated with dropping out of higher education, even as they try to find positives in their situations (RANLHE, 2009). Examining people's positions and dispositions within social space can provide deeper insights into the effects of action and agency (Field, Merrill & West, 2012). It could be said that my motivation to pursue a doctorate lies in the interplay between position, disposition, and learning.

This dynamic also reflects Stone's exploration of the inter-relationship between class transition and education as she moved across class boundaries (Stone, 2018). The thoughts of hope for a better life and dreams of a successful career kept tormenting me, so I could not drop out of the programme. Even when I struggled with my finances at some point, I took a break instead and later returned to the programme. My motivation to stay in higher education and complete the doctorate is complicated and interwoven within a historical, social, and cultural context (Ogbemudia, 2022). Studying at a doctorate level has allowed me to access personal and professional connections alongside resources that form my newly acquired social capital. These opportunities were not within my reach as a care worker in low-paid jobs when I lived in the Nigerian community in Woolwich, London.

Having these prospects associated with my new social capital has fostered a fervent desire to continue pursuing my academic goals and ambitions. The people I encountered daily when I was working in low-paid jobs were surviving each day with no hope for the future, which was my life at the time. I now have more freedom to apply for higher-paid jobs, which has benefitted my social status. This transformation highlights the significance of

recognising and leveraging the interplay of cultural, social, and economic capital in navigating and succeeding within academic and professional realms, as discussed by Gonzales (2014).

The following section, *The Dualities of Social Mobility and Self-Perception*, will examine the complex dynamics of advancing through social strata and the accompanying shifts in self-identity. This exploration will provide insight into how the pursuit of higher education and professional growth can create both opportunities and challenges, affecting one's sense of self and social positioning.

The Dualities of Social Mobility and Self-Perception

Studying in the EdD programme has allowed me to embark on this autoethnographic research that has made my voice heard. I can share my experiences from my cultural perspective, which gives this autoethnographic research the richness it deserves while highlighting the importance of diversity and inclusion within policies and processes. However, social mobility has also come with other unanticipated challenges. As an ethnic minority in the EdD programme, I will be seen as the other because of both internal and external justifications of the powerful others (Sayer, 2005). When I am in the midst of 'significant others' whom I consider to be 'powerful others', I will experience the feeling of not being good enough because it will feel like I am invading their social space; although it is important to note that I am undergoing a slow process of healing from the damage to self-

worth and lack of confidence from abusive relationships from gendered issues highlighted in Chapter Four. However, higher education has become a transitional space where I continue to embrace the pleasures and the pain that comes with it. The pleasures relate to the benefit of working in higher-paid jobs, while the pain relates to the anxieties of being an illegitimate member of my new social class, which I perceived myself to be.

The opportunities to apply for higher-paid jobs increased when I began my master's degree in the UK. I was able to apply for a master's degree when we acquired our British citizenship through naturalisation. I was able to pay the home fees, which were significantly cheaper than paying the fees as a foreign student. The expense of renewing our visas under the HSMP scheme before naturalisation had a notable impact on our financial stability, especially given our low-income jobs. We believed that naturalisation was the best course of action to avoid the ongoing financial burden of frequent payments to the UK Home Office for visa renewals. When we got our British passports, it seemed like a new world of opportunities had opened. We had more confidence to apply for jobs we could not when we were on the HSMP visa. We became more financially stable and looked for ways to develop ourselves to progress further.

In 2014, I sought admission to an undergraduate course in Adult Nursing, which would have been my second undergraduate degree. My narrative below illustrates the importance of having a support system within personal relationships to help overcome challenges encountered along the way as I pursue my academic goals.

My decision to pursue a nursing degree stemmed from observing how many African women transitioned from low-paid jobs through this path. Regrettably, my application was unsuccessful on two occasions. Feeling disheartened and hopeless, my husband suggested exploring postgraduate options, considering my existing degree from a Nigerian university. Initially doubtful, I believed my previous rejections would hinder my chances. However, I overlooked the possibility that rejection could lead to a new direction. Encouraged by my husband, I searched online and in university brochures, eventually discovering the Youth Work and Community Learning Development programme at YMCA George Williams College in London. With the requisite work experience, I applied. To my astonishment, my application was accepted, igniting excitement as I looked forward to further personal development and the prospect of new opportunities.

My excerpt above illustrates how women may sometimes rely on their spouses, who serve as their significant others, to shape their potential selves (Dunkel & Kerpelman, 2006). Upon securing admission to pursue my master's degree, my aspiration to establish myself as a notable figure within the Nigerian cultural milieu began to materialise. I envisaged that Western education would afford me access to lucrative employment opportunities.

Assimilating through Western education could mitigate the sense of 'otherness' often associated with specific cultures and individuals from diverse backgrounds, positioning them as less competent and productive than their Western counterparts (Said, 1978). Under these revised circumstances, the experience of social esteem is accompanied by a palpable confidence in the recognition of one's accomplishments or abilities as 'valuable' by fellow members of society (Honneth, 2008). I yearned for a level of respect that aligned with societal norms, fostering the confidence to pursue employment deemed prestigious by societal standards.

I sought employment that I could proudly proclaim to my Nigerian family while residing abroad. Our sense of esteem is often derived from attributes perceived as significant, nurtured through a sense of solidarity that serves as inspiration to others (Honneth, 2008). It also underscores how self-esteem and self-respect are shaped by diverse cultural experiences (Formenti & West, 2018), intertwined with the desire for recognition within the socio-cultural sphere (West, 2014). Education is believed to engender heightened self-respect, empowering individuals to assert their voices while studying at Western universities (Merrill & West, 2009). This elucidates the interconnectedness between self-worth and self-esteem, which correlates with self-confidence and self-respect, all pivotal in my endeavour to transition away from low-paid employment.

The Support from My Husband

When I commenced my doctorate, my husband was employed in a low-paid position with an agency, where the hours were not guaranteed on weekdays, necessitating weekend work as per the demands of the job. He opted to work with agencies due to the flexibility they offered in scheduling hours to accommodate family commitments. Over time, my husband underwent a transformation, relinquishing Nigerian patriarchal ideologies to embrace feminism, a shift that potentially offered him liberation or emancipation (Silverstein, 1996). We shared childcare responsibilities, a departure from the traditional Nigerian perspective where such duties were exclusively viewed as women's domain. My husband departed from the Nigerian tradition dictating that women were solely responsible for childcare and household chores, recognising the necessity for partnership in overcoming our challenges. An excerpt from my reflective journal captures this transformation.

A few times, my husband and the children accompanied me to Canterbury for the Sunday cohort days because, at the time, we were still living in Kent. They spent time around the town centre until I joined them later. It felt like a day out for us, considering that our lives revolved around work, childcare, and study, leaving fewer days for social outings. I did not feel like I was on the EdD programme alone because my immediate and extended family provided me with moral support. Following the Sunday cohort sessions, when I reunited with my

husband and children at Canterbury town centre, we would discuss the new knowledge and learning experiences I had over the weekend. This also indicates the gradual development of my sense of belonging, as I felt I was integrating slowly into the system at the time and feeling less out of place. On reflection, I believe our discussions made higher education in the UK appealing to my husband, as he later applied for a postgraduate course in Public Health at the same university while we were living in Kent. Now that we live in Shropshire, he has recently completed another undergraduate degree and is now a qualified Mental Health Nurse.

Nigerian women in higher education, particularly those with supportive partners and parents, are often encouraged and motivated to achieve their learning goals (Bulus, 2012). I am always grateful for the support I have received from loved ones, especially my husband while pursuing higher education. Relationships are crucial due to the financial and emotional support required. Both my master's degree and doctorate have been self-funded, resulting in financial constraints, sometimes necessitating reliance on my husband for support. These circumstances underscore the challenges of accessing funding for postgraduate students and highlight the need for increased accessibility for individuals from ethnic minorities and disadvantaged backgrounds. I have maintained transparency about my financial situation and engaged in open conversations with my husband to ensure that I do not appear to be taking advantage of his kindness and financial support.

Moreover, being a mother of two children entails balancing a full-time job with family commitments and studying in the EdD programme (Gibson et al., 2017). Nevertheless, higher education, while perceived to offer liberation from domestic life, introduces additional roles and responsibilities, as I have come to realise. Time management becomes paramount as I strive to fulfil my roles as a mother and wife, often sacrificing personal leisure time. To cope, I have honed my organisational skills by diligently recording appointments and plans, relying less on memory. At times, assistance is needed with tasks such as meal preparation, shopping, and school drop-offs or pickups, especially while managing a full-time job and EdD studies, and my husband has readily offered his help without complaint.

My husband takes immense pride in informing others about my pursuit of a doctorate, and his unwavering support has been invaluable in ensuring I remain committed to the programme. He seizes every opportunity to share news of my doctoral studies, perhaps because among his peers, their wives do not hold doctorates. This additional attention adds pressure on me to successfully complete the programme, as many inquire about my progress. My husband often checks if I am studying when he has not seen me doing so for a few days, resembling the role of an encouraging parent. To pre-empt such queries, I inform him in advance if I plan to take a brief hiatus from studying for some much-needed rest. Daily walks lasting at least an hour have proven beneficial in managing time constraints,

providing us with uninterrupted time to converse and strengthen our relationship amidst our busy schedules.

For women in higher education lacking supportive partners or families, navigating these challenges may prove even more daunting. They may find themselves torn between educational pursuits and family commitments (Merrill, 1999). Indeed, some women from minority backgrounds opt to discontinue their university studies, while others take breaks before returning to complete their education (Merrill, 2015). Without the support of a husband who shares my aspirations of moving beyond unskilled or low-paid jobs, I may have similarly considered dropping out and not returning.

Conclusion

The reason for detailing my lived experiences here is not to present my struggles as a badge of honour or seek a sympathetic response. Instead, it highlights the tangled complexities of the pressures of pursuing my dreams of achieving a doctorate against all odds. I have experienced being the other in the labour market through the immigration system while being disadvantaged through cultural and economic capital. Also, against the backdrop of loss and abuse, it could be argued that there were social and personal dimensions to the struggles I encountered. These have contributed to how I see myself through the eyes of others, which establishes my place of belonging in different psychosocial spaces. Writing

this chapter made me realise that I was caught between meeting the expectations of others and transforming myself in more critical ways.

My struggles are historically located, and my lived experiences transcend myself and my family in consideration of our cultural identity (Ogbemudia, 2022). The labour market and immigration policies are strategised to dominate and exclude the lived experiences of Nigerian Black women like me (ibid). So, most people in an analogous situation are usually in survival mode for most of their active years in the UK in low-paid jobs, accounting for only a few Nigerian women studying up to a doctorate level in Western universities (ibid). For me, studying at a doctorate helped me develop some forms of recognition such as self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence through the value attributed to achievements by significant others (Honneth, 2008). It could be argued that it would have been impossible to achieve all that I have accomplished so far without the support of my husband.

The financial burden, childcare responsibilities, and other commitments would have been enormous for me to bear alone, considering that I do not have members of my extended family abroad for help. Furthermore, the tremendous support from empathetic Module Leaders, mentors, supervisors, and chairs in my postgraduate studies in Western universities has continued to propel me to greater heights as I got closer to the finish line of submitting my thesis.

In this chapter, I have stressed the importance of having a supportive system in my home and school life as I pursue my goals. In the next chapter, I will be focusing on my sense of belonging and self-recognition process in the transitional spaces of the academy.

Chapter Six: Belonging to the Academy and Self-Recognition: the Transitional Spaces of the Academy

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore how the sense of belonging promotes positive relationships. I will take this further by engaging with those moments when I felt out of place in the academy. Next, I will analyse my experiences within the transitional spaces of the academy in consideration of the self-recognition process and highlight how cultural capital can be situated within certain frames of reference. Finally, I will conclude that embarking on this autoethnographic research has allowed me to look inward and outward to explore those fundamental changes that have been transformed at the doctorate level.

The Sense of Belonging Promotes Positive Relationships

When I began the EdD programme in 2017, classes were held at St. Augustine House in Canterbury, UK. The seminar room was located on the top floor, which opened to a roof terrace. Ascending the stairs or using the lift to reach the seminar room, alongside colleagues who were head teachers, department heads, and lecturers, often felt intimidating. I felt out of place because my career in the UK had started in care work. During the initial stages of the programme, my low self-esteem and lack of confidence affected my

interactions with the cohort. I would leave for my car during coffee breaks to call my husband, returning just before sessions began to avoid awkward social interactions. This discomfort was partly due to my status as one of the ethnic minorities in the cohort and my socio-economic background, which hindered my confidence and participation.

However, my sense of belonging began to develop after the Module 4 learning activity, as described in the General Introduction. The stunning views from the seminar room terrace, overlooking rooftops and city streets, instilled a sense of pride and positive feelings (Ali & Aksamija, 2008). Coffee breaks became opportunities for reflection and interaction, helping to build relationships and enhance self-worth (Durrant, 2022). I often found myself pinching myself in disbelief at my good fortune, feeling increasingly valued and forming meaningful friendships with cohort members (Winnicott, 1991). The enjoyable environment made me look forward to study days. My self-esteem improved as I engaged more with the group, particularly during breaks on the terrace, which contributed to a feeling of elation and acceptance.

Feeling a sense of belonging was crucial in managing my learning anxieties as an ethnic minority student. My anxieties stemmed from my perception of cultural differences. Our ability to face and cope with challenges is shaped by the relationships we form, which are influenced by past experiences of love and acceptance (Winnicott, 1991). We often compare current relationships with past ones, drawing parallels between teachers and family

members, which impacts self and other recognition processes. Below is an extract from my journal which highlights my sense of belonging in the EdD programme.

Some of the cohort members travelled from various parts of the UK with an overnight stay at Canterbury for the first two nights of the study days. It became usual for the cohort members to meet up after the end of the first two study days for a meal. This helped to develop friendships and positive relationships among the cohort members. I attended only one of the meals at the time and enjoyed the company of the cohort members. I could not attend subsequent meals because my husband worked night shifts, so I had to go back home quickly after the study days for him to go to work. We always looked after our children between us because we had no families in the UK to help with childcare, and the cost of childcare was not affordable on our income. Not being able to attend the evening meals with the EdD cohort members felt like I was missing developing closer friendships with the cohort members.

The opportunity to have conversations with cohort members is essential because it opens the different perspectives and experiences of others in the EdD programme (Saunders and Trotman, 2022). It is important to note that the feelings of being out of place can be

influenced by socioeconomic status, which cannot be overlooked. In my extract above, it was evident that my socioeconomic status reduced my engagement with the cohort members by not going out for regular meals after study days. I later made the most of the opportunity to discuss with cohort members during coffee and lunch breaks at the café and the seminar room. This helped me develop close friendships that increased my sense of belonging within the cohort.

The sense of belonging can be said to be fostered by soul work, solidarity, mutual recognition, and a spirit of fraternity or sorority (Formenti and West, 2018). The opportunity to have regular communication with others can help foster a sense of belonging. We had a WhatsApp group and ongoing communication during and outside study days, so I was not feeling isolated at the time. The collective traits of the cohort members and being part of the group brought a sense of group pride or collective honour (Honneth, 2008). After a while, it felt good to be part of a group of people I did not encounter in my everyday life who were highly respected in their professions. This promoted my self-esteem and confidence in other aspects of my life. However, after the seven taught stages during the Covid pandemic, it felt like the friendship was lost because the communication within the cohort's WhatsApp group gradually stopped as everyone was working at their own pace with the support of their supervisors.

The Feelings of Being Out of Place

I completed my undergraduate at a Nigerian university, and it is worth noting that lecturers and head teachers are highly respected in Nigeria. These invisible, unconscious barriers made me struggle to see cohort members as peers because of their respectable jobs and professions, thus intensifying the feelings of being out of place from a cultural perspective. This was echoed in my reflection below.

It felt great to go for a meal with people who held prestigious jobs as head teachers, heads of departments, and lecturers. The closest I had been to head teachers was at school assemblies when I was a child, and yet, during one of the cohort study days, I was sitting and dining with them, experiencing a lot of pinch-me moments! It felt so surreal. However, seeing the menu at the restaurant was a bit daunting. I struggled to recognise the types of food on the menu and did not want to make a fool of myself by asking too many questions. At the time, my family could afford McDonald's and Burger King occasionally. The English foods that were familiar to me were burgers and chips. I decided to order the same meal as one of the cohort members, and fortunately, I enjoyed the meal.

It is essential to note that there is a strong connection between our cultural background and social class (Bourdieu, 1986). I brought with me to the White institution my social class, which stems from being a migrant and a care worker in low-paid jobs, as I highlighted in Chapter Five. Being a Black woman in the EdD programme and one of the ethnic minorities in the EdD cohort meant the interplay of not only class and culture but also of hierarchies within the intimacies of the struggles (RANLHE, 2009). Coming from a working-class background meant I had limited experience going to restaurants for meals because I could only afford to buy fast food at the time. As I negotiated the psychosocial space, I began to appease and please while forging through the interactions with significant others (Hunt & West, 2009). I later started making the effort to chat with cohort members during coffee and lunch breaks to promote my sense of belonging while establishing my new forms of identity.

Cultural dilemmas

Culture is there when reifying the power of observation and scientific precision, alongside celebrating tidiness and perceptions of ordered beauty (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 67). Cognition is culturally situated, and our habits are structured by class, race, and gender in complex ways (ibid). Therefore, cultures and societies influence our choices and ways of thinking. For example, I grew up in a Nigerian culture where a tablespoon is the only cutlery you see at mealtimes, and sometimes we eat our food with our hands instead of using any cutlery. When I went for Christmas meals with my co-workers, I noticed that some ate their

burgers and pizzas with forks and knives. Consequently, eating my food without cutlery amongst them would make me feel awkward. It is worth noting that eating my chicken from the bone tastes better with my hands because I had developed the natural ability to suck the broth from the chicken bone as a Nigerian. Sometimes, little actions like these are like the little pleasures of life that must be done from my cultural perspective. So, eating and dining presented some cultural dilemmas in my narrative below.

The first time I tried eating with a fork and knife was at a work's Christmas party in 2015. That night, using the table knife and fork became a concern to me very quickly. I did not know how to hold the knife and fork. I watched my other colleagues to see which hands they used to hold the fork and knife. I tried to copy them while switching the cutleries in both hands to find a better grip. In Nigeria, from a cultural viewpoint, you are never allowed to use your left-hand during mealtimes, so I struggled to use my left hand to hold the table knife to cut the food. I would wait until they were having a serious conversation before attempting to chop the food with a table knife so that I did not attract attention to myself. I can remember the noises I made with the fork and knife as I attempted to cut through the food I was eating.

At some point, I mistakenly dropped my table knife on the floor because it slipped out of my hand. I apologised while feeling embarrassed. However, I knew I was clearly an unknown risk at the table with the knife flying out of my hands. I decided to continue eating my food with only the fork, and eventually, I was okay with that.

My narrative shows that culture is a 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct 'strategies of action' (Swidler, 1986). This means that the location of an individual's upbringing contributes to how the individual perceives and relates to the world. This brings into focus the cultural capital situated within certain frames of reference rather than from the position of class (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). This can also be likened to the 'fish out of water' because I did not have the family experience to draw on things other people might consider basic skills (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It can be observed that some of the places I felt out of place were during socialisation with cohort members from the EdD programme and work colleagues. However, I found diverse ways to blend into those spaces where culture and class defined me as the other, thereby constructing new identities.

Furthermore, cognitive skills can be evidenced through verbal, writing, reading, behavioural, and analytical skills (Farkas, 2003). One could argue that these cultural toolkits are transmitted intergenerationally and are not evenly distributed across the socioeconomic

spectrum, causing disparities (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). In White institutions, there is the risk of native English speakers' students from ethnic minority backgrounds if they do not fit within a certain frame of reference, which brings some power structures into play (Holliday, 2018). Therefore, institutions should be mindful of not exercising power and control on doctorate assessment processes so as not to disrupt individual agencies (Enow, 2022). The EdD programme can promote the ethic of care through professional humility by putting the students first in the context of teaching and learning (ibid). This helps to encourage individuals to develop their professional competence by finding their voice through reflexivity and positionality (Durrant, 2022). This is also in consideration of identifying their learning needs to promote inclusive teaching and learning practices that help minority students to overcome their learning barriers.

So far, I have explored how feelings of being out of place have influenced my sense of belonging in the doctorate programme. Below, I will highlight how my thought process has changed over time, particularly regarding my identification as a Black woman in my thesis.

I Do Not See Colour

Race matters in this autoethnographic research because I am a Nigerian Black woman at a White institution. My EdD programme started in 2017. However, when I started working on my thesis in the year 2020, I was referring to myself in my writing journals as an ethnic minority student and not a Black woman. Back then, I was uncomfortable referring to myself

as a Black woman. It is important to note that I am immensely proud that I am a Black woman, and my identity represents my culture and heritage. Nonetheless, for reasons that seem unclear, I did not want to add another layer of the 'us versus them' structure by identifying as a Black woman in my thesis. Over time, I decided to change my narrative and now refer to myself as a Black woman as my confidence grew as I progressed further in this research. Given this, my autoethnographic research focuses on building bridges to connect rather than walls that create division. The extract from my journal reflects this.

At the beginning of my EdD programme, I believed I do not see colour, which was in view of colour blindness. At the time, being colour-blind meant that I treated everyone equally, irrespective of colour. While my intentions may be well-meaning, I did not realise that it was not my place as a Black woman to say that I was colour-blind.

The concept of colour blindness embodies systemic racism, suggesting that skin colour or race is irrelevant (Bartoli et al., 2016). In the realm of race and racism, the concept of 'colour blindness' is often touted as a solution, positing that ignoring racial differences and treating everyone equally will pave the way for a more harmonious society (ibid). Proponents argue that by disregarding race, societal divisions and discriminatory practices will dissipate, fostering unity and equality among all individuals. However, this purported colour-blind

approach to combating racism faces significant criticism. Critics contend that it overlooks the entrenched systemic inequalities and racial disparities that persist in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). By failing to acknowledge race, this approach neglects the unique challenges and experiences of marginalised racial and ethnic groups, effectively rendering them invisible in discussions of social justice.

Moreover, the colour-blind perspective can impede genuine efforts to address racism by obscuring the pervasive nature of racial biases, discrimination, and disparities (Bartoli et al., 2016). By refusing to confront race-based injustices, individuals and institutions may inadvertently perpetuate existing power structures and privilege, thereby perpetuating the status quo. Furthermore, the colour-blind ideology undermines initiatives aimed at fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion by dismissing the importance of recognising and valuing racial and cultural differences (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). By promoting a one-size-fits-all approach to equality, it fails to address the unique needs and experiences of diverse communities, hindering progress towards a more equitable society.

While the concept of colour blindness may initially appear well-intentioned in its pursuit of equality, it falls short in addressing the complex and persistent realities of racism and racial inequality (Bartoli et al., 2016). Instead, there is a growing call for approaches that actively acknowledge and challenge racial biases and disparities, prioritise inclusivity and diversity, and work towards dismantling systemic racism in all its forms. A colour-blind perspective

overlooks the role of race in perpetuating social inequalities, despite evidence indicating its significance across different spheres (Bhopal, 2017). In contrast, a diversity-focused perspective acknowledges race as a cultural identity that positively shapes an individual's worldview and cultural practices. Systemic racism contributes to disparities in education, housing, employment, and other areas in White institutions (Bartoli et al., 2016). When I claim to be colour-blind as a Black woman, it undermines my identity, as I attempt to avoid confronting my feelings of discomfort. A power analysis assesses the role of race in society by examining unequal power dynamics among various groups, highlighting how power manifests through racial disparities. Interactions with individuals of different races may evoke emotions tied to past or ongoing challenges, impacting us positively or negatively.

This autoethnographic research has further questioned my past belief of 'I do not see colour' because if that is the case, why do I think I do not fit in or belong to a cohort of few ethnic minorities? It could be said that this belief developed in unconscious ways, but the EdD programme became a safe place for me to challenge this idea and re-imagine myself in new positive ways. In the next section, I will explore the transitional spaces within the academy to examine the various forms that transformed during the process of self-recognition.

The Transitional Spaces of the Academy

In education, transformation occurs when people negotiate transitional space exploring what is known and what can be discovered (Winnicott, 1991). Transitional space is a research process that allows an individual to think and have respectful and open forms of dialogue (Bainbridge & West, 2018). Transitional spaces in universities might be full of possibilities for self-negotiation but also be a place where doubt and defensiveness exist (Formenti and West, 2018). Some spaces allow individuals to feel legitimate through being understood and respected amongst peers, while others might be riddled with anxieties from misrecognition (ibid). These often highlight the beauty of the struggles in the accomplishment despite the associated pain, loss, and failure (West, 2014). The academy is a psychosocial space where there is constant negotiation and struggles to let go of past ideas for an emerging new self to flourish (RANLHE, 2009). This means there is the possibility of reworking one's identity through learning, and the university becomes a place where space and time are significant (ibid). The transitional spaces of the academy that I am referring to in this chapter are those of my doctorate study.

It is important to note that I did my first degree in Nigeria and progressed to my master's and a doctorate in England. During my doctoral study, I began to experience identity construction that highlighted my before and after identities (Fiol, 2002). My level of membership determines my affinity and identity as I navigate through the diverse groups of the academy (Chang, 2016). This brings to focus the liminality process as identity/identities

become fluid, which is when I feel that I am neither here nor there (Beech, 2011). Liminality represents the transition when an individual stands between constructing two identities, which signifies a before and after identity (ibid). One may argue that I feel out of place when I am neither here nor there, which corresponds to the notion of between and betwixt (Turner, 1969). This also highlights those moments where learning anxieties may be experienced as I challenge my cultural belief systems related to class, race, and gender. The extract from my journal below highlights the moment I felt like I was going to be a fraud joining a group that was going to discuss feminism, which did not align with my Nigerian cultural and religious beliefs.

In Nigeria, there is the dominant belief that men hold power and are in charge.

At the beginning of my EdD programme, I refused to join a group that agreed to discuss feminism during a collaborative group session. This was because of my upbringing in the Nigerian patriarchal system, where girls and women are seen as second-class citizens to men, which made me feel uncomfortable discussing these issues with those outside my culture. Then, I experienced the fear of losing my Nigerian identity because the feminist ideologies would change my orientation from my cultural beliefs.

At that moment, my past transitioned into my present through memory in unconscious and dynamic ways (Klein, 1997). However, if this had happened towards the end of my EdD

programme, like the thesis stage, I would have felt more comfortable discussing such matters, considering that I have developed good enough relationships with tutors and cohort members over time. This would have helped me to express my feelings in a safe place, thereby managing the anxiety to provide me with a transformative experience sooner rather than later in my learning journey.

The Academy and Self-Recognition

My motivation for knowledge acquisition has been in constant battle because one part of me seeks knowledge for personal development to improve my confidence and self-esteem, linked to intrinsic value, while the other part of me seeks knowledge to be relevant and recognised, linked to extrinsic values. The extrinsic values develop the motivation associated with economic, social, and cultural changes (Ogbemudia, 2022). As a middle-aged Black woman educated to a doctorate, it could be argued that I will have access to more opportunities. Some of these opportunities might not be readily available to me without the knowledge, skills, and experience I have, which I engaged with in Chapter Five.

Studying in the EdD programme allows me to experience Western culture academically. This learning process has significantly changed my class and culture by having more access to travel, courses, information, languages, and so on. I must say that having the opportunity to study to the level of a doctorate has given me more flexibility in choosing my level of engagement in society than when I came into the country as a migrant a few years ago.

Over time, I have noticed that the more Western culture I adopt, the more accepted I become by people outside my cultural group. This also implies that my cultural values are shifting away from my Nigerian identity. These transcend consciously and unconsciously within my self-formation, as my reflection captures below.

When I relocated to England from Nigeria, it was not surprising to hear people tell me to repeat what I had just said so they could understand what I meant in conversation. This could be because I grew up in a Nigerian culture where we assume the person you are talking to understands where the conversation is going. In Nigeria, at the end of sentences, I often say, 'you get de jist ba, or you understand wetin I mean ba?' This is in Nigerian pidgin, translated as 'do you understand what I mean?'. This implies that I do not need to explain further, and there is a universal understanding of what is being discussed. Bringing that mindset with me to England made communication a bit difficult until I made the conscious effort to choose my words carefully by saying precisely what I meant in a conversation.

However, it was a different case a few years later when I spoke to my Nigerian friends and family back home. They sometimes say that it seems like I have lost touch with reality regarding my views and perspectives on social issues.

Sometimes they say, 'you are now thinking and behaving like the White people.'

This sometimes makes me feel like I have become an outsider to a culture I was born into, as our perspectives on certain issues have drifted apart. These occasionally bring thoughts and feelings of being neither here nor there, which signifies the feeling of being out of place from another perspective.

My reflection above is a typical example of having before and after identities from different points of view (Fiol, 2002). Again, this suggests that identity construction is fluid and can sometimes change in relation to context (Beech, 2011). Similarly, there are moments where my sense of belonging is neither here nor there (Turner, 1969). Hence, it brings to focus the dialogue between my inner-outer psychosocial dynamics associated with liminal spaces (Beech, 2011). Liminal processes highlight when the self perceives their identity to be different from others, and the received projections from others may be conflicting (Beech, 2008). The feeling of being an outsider to the culture I have known from birth illuminates the grieving process of my old self and the authenticity of my Nigerian identity. As a woman of colour in the EdD program at a White institution, I experienced conflicting identities as I engaged with different people from diverse cultures.

My self-formation is shaped by the relationships I encounter as my past collides with my present (Formenti and West, 2018). The EdD program has sometimes provided me with a safe place to explore conflicting feelings during supervision, group discussions, seminars and

so on, through the attentiveness of a caring and loving group of academics, professionals, and adult students. For these reasons, it is important to shine more light on those forms that have transformed within my multiple identities in the next section.

The Fundamental Attributes of the Self-recognition Process

Formation requires support or intervention from our relationships within our multiple identities, including family, school, work, and education. Education builds on our inherited forms of knowledge, which can be assessed over time. My childhood experiences have led me to hold firm belief systems as I progress to adulthood, driven by a fear of separation (Winnicott, 1991). I sometimes struggle to change my ideas or way of life for fear of separating from my past. Some of the principles with which I was raised may be unconsciously transferred to my children. I often need to reconsider the cultural differences to make necessary adjustments. My children are more imbued with Western culture as they were born in England, and some of my Nigerian cultural beliefs are incompatible with theirs. The narrative below from my extract reflects this.

Growing up in Nigeria, I was told to do chores without getting paid or rewarded by my parents or elder siblings. However, in England, I often find myself negotiating the fee of £5 with my children to do housework. As a child, I did not have the right to ask for a reward for the chores because of respect attributed to

people older than you in the Nigerian culture. My children, influenced by Western culture, can request, and negotiate certain terms and conditions before completing chores.

My belief system regarding treating children as equals or respecting their rights has changed from my Nigerian cultural perspective. While some of these changes can be beneficial, others can threaten my self-identity due to the fear of losing my old 'self' consciously and unconsciously (Fiol, 2002). Adopting Western culture in child upbringing can lead to conflicting identities when trying to appear legitimate to family or friends from Nigeria. There is criticism that my children, who are of Nigerian heritage, have become too Westernised. Some within my Nigerian cultural group view this as a form of poor upbringing.

The Self-Recognition Process

The transformation of my cultural values could have been fostered through new empathetic understanding and patience to accommodate different belief systems and cultural values (Formenti & West, 2018). Additionally, the various training on equality and diversity I have completed in my work practice has helped change my behaviour to respect cultural differences. This aligns with promoting diversity in recognition of the protected characteristics of individuals, such as age, race, disability, or gender, to comply with legislation (Equality Act, 2010). Growing up in Nigerian culture has shaped my perceptions

of right and wrong, established by societal values and principles. For example, as a child, respect was not shared with children because only adults deserved respect. It could be seen as disrespectful if a child spoke when a grown-up was talking. It indicated a lack of good upbringing, and children's opinions or views were not usually considered valid.

This form of discipline habitually instilled fear in children and young people, leaving some with low self-esteem and confidence. The upbringing of children in Nigeria while I was growing up contrasts with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC agreement highlights that children should be allowed to express their opinions and should be listened to (UNCRC, 1990). Relocating to England from Nigeria as an adult has made me realise the strong links between self-respect and self-confidence and how these have impacted my communication skills. I often struggle to communicate effectively in public. Sometimes, I am reluctant to contribute even with exceptionally good knowledge of the discussed topic. This is due to the fear of saying something wrong or being misunderstood and judged, which brings back childhood memories of being told off when speaking in front of adults.

I followed the advice given in Module One feedback to improve my writing skills by getting support from the Learner's Support Team (LST). I had regular appointments with the team, and I took my written work to someone each time to provide advice and guidance on my written work. I made the most out of this and ensured that I completed assignments ahead of time, allowing me to make

further corrections after my meetings with the LST before submission deadlines. The learning support went on for over a year, and gradually my written work reflected clearer ideas that were understandable to the reader. I was pleased to see my results for Module Two's assignment when I passed on the first submission. The feedback I received for the Module Two assignment gave me hope to continue to pursue the Education Doctorate. After passing the Module Two assignment, my self-confidence increased, and it felt like a new beginning. My fears and anxieties about dropping off the course at that stage were overtaken by positivity.

The support received from the LST played a pivotal role in enhancing my self-esteem and confidence. As noted by Honneth (2007), feeling valued and acknowledged contributes to the development of self-esteem. The positive experiences with the LST instilled a sense of self-recognition and empowerment, aligning with West's (2014) notion that self-recognition involves deeply embodied processes with significant others. Over the course of a year, these interactions fostered a transformative journey, reinforcing Kegan's (2018) concept of embodied changes that shape personal growth and the achievement of learning goals.

Through the support of the LST and Module Leaders, I have successfully overcome significant learning barriers in my academic journey. This support resonates with the

theoretical viewpoints of Chakrabarty (2009) and Loomba (2002), who offer essential frameworks for understanding the colonial and post-colonial dynamics that influence the experiences of those obtaining doctorate degrees at Western universities. Initially, I struggled with the power differences between me and the Module Leaders, stemming from my identity rooted in a colonised past as a Nigerian. Over time, my one-to-one meetings with the LST helped break down barriers, revealing the complex relationship between power and identity. These interactions also underscored the importance of removing colonial influences from academia to create more inclusive scholarly environments.

The empathetic guidance provided by the LST and Module Leaders has been crucial in helping me navigate the complexities of my academic environment. This support aligns with Memmi's analysis of the psychological effects of colonisation, as detailed in his influential book, 'The Coloniser and the Colonised' (2013). Memmi's work highlights how colonialism creates systems of control that affect the identities, cultures, and opportunities of colonised individuals.

As I study in a Western institution, I have grappled with feelings of inferiority and isolation in academic settings shaped by colonial pasts. The support from the LST and Module Leaders has been instrumental in overcoming these feelings, fostering a sense of empowerment and intellectual independence. Analysing my narrative through the lens of Memmi's theoretical framework reflects the complex intricacies related to power dynamics, identity

development, and knowledge creation in higher education. This engagement contributes to ongoing efforts to dismantle colonial influences in academia and foster more inclusive academic settings. The support from the LST and Module Leaders has been pivotal, providing me with the tools and confidence needed to navigate and challenge the Eurocentric frameworks that dominate Western academic institutions.

When I passed my Module Two assignment, I felt so pleased; I grew more confident and believed I could progress further in the EdD programme. This also provided evidence that the support I received from the LST was beneficial. Initially, I struggled to interact with those in authority as my past and present experiences merged (West, 2014). Then, I saw Module Leaders as those in authority, but the LST helped me break the unconscious barrier to develop academic writing skills.

The Forms that Transformed from a Cultural Perspective

In exploring my journey through the lens of Nigerian cultural heritage, I reflect on how my upbringing in Nigeria has shaped my educational experiences and personal development. Nigerian culture, with its strong emphasis on respect for parents and elders, significantly shapes community attitudes and behaviours (Omobowale et al., 2019). During my upbringing, both educational and cultural practices stressed the importance of adult

authority in enforcing discipline. This authority often extended beyond immediate family to uphold communal values. As a result, children were expected to respect adults but were often discouraged from voicing their opinions freely, which influenced their self-confidence and hindered aspects of personal development.

As I transitioned to England, these ingrained cultural practices influenced my interactions and self-esteem in academic and professional settings. The supportive environment provided by educators and peers played a crucial role in overcoming the challenges rooted in my cultural background. This section delves into how my cultural heritage has affected my self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-rectitude, examining the transformation from a background marked by strict cultural norms to a more self-aware and confident individual. Through this exploration, I aim to understand how my past experiences and cultural identity have shaped my current self-perception and academic journey.

Self-Respect

I grew up in a culture that respects parents and elders in Nigeria (Omobowale et al., 2019). Culture can be seen as the knowledge, morals, law, customs, traditions, behaviours, and language of a group of people that informs the attitudes and habits of a group of people (ibid). The extract from my reflective journal reflects this.

When I was growing up, Nigeria's educational system and cultural upbringing encouraged adults to enforce disciplinary actions on children and young people, whether biologically related or not. The adults will even report you to your parents for further sanctions. They practice a cultural principle that it is the responsibility of a community to reprimand bad behaviour. These forms of discipline contribute to how some children and young people respect adults and cannot express themselves confidently for fear of doing or saying something wrong. On the other hand, some other children within the same cultural environment may become overly confident because they are used to disciplinary actions and do not care about the consequences of expressing themselves. However, these confident children can be labelled as disrespectful.

Self-respect can be intricately linked to communal rights that individuals feel they are entitled to within a society (Honneth, 2008). This concept extends to respecting others by recognising and honouring their rights. Within the Yoruba culture in Nigeria, for instance, anyone older than you is automatically entitled to respect from a cultural standpoint (Omobowale et al., 2019). Elders often feel obligated to correct or advise, regardless of whether they are biologically related, as they exert their perceived rights to gain respect (Mikucka & Rizzi, 2016). This dynamic reinforces the idea that without rights, there can be no respect (West, 2014). As I matured, I found it challenging to detach from behaviours that

either command or give respect unconsciously. Navigating this tension, particularly in hierarchical relationships such as parent-child, employer-employee, and teacher-student, requires a conscious effort. These hierarchies can either enhance or strain relationships, depending on how respect and rights are negotiated.

Furthermore, Milazzo and Soulard suggest that understanding respect and rights within a broader context of transformation can reveal how these dynamics shape our interactions and relationships (2024). For example, while self-respect may allow one to respect others without an explicit focus on rights, the insistence on respect as an inherent right can, at times, contradict moral values. The idea of respect as a form of exchange further complicates this relationship. As the saying goes, 'You cannot give what you do not have,' meaning self-respect is crucial before one can genuinely respect others. Milazzo and Soulard also highlight that transformation in relationships often happens when individuals re-evaluate their perceptions of respect and rights, particularly in liminal spaces where social norms are redefined (2024). This perspective is especially relevant when considering how respect operates within various cultural and professional hierarchies. As these hierarchies influence not only the distribution of respect but also personal self-worth, it becomes evident that self-confidence plays a vital role. With greater self-confidence, individuals may navigate these dynamics more effectively, maintaining both self-respect and the ability to respect others in challenging environments.

Self-Confidence

When I was young, I could not speak when amongst adults, and this form of discipline affected my self-confidence when I became an adult. This type of discipline can be considered a form of disrespect that violates the meaning of one's existence (Honneth, 2007). This also implies that young people or children are not good enough to voice their opinions. These ideas of discipline instil fear in young people, which develops a culture of having no voice. The extract from my reflective journal below illustrates this.

When I relocated to England, I struggled to communicate with significant others at work and in learning environments because of my lack of confidence. This also impacted my ability to seek help with academic writing at the university. The empathetic support from the LST, Module Leaders and Supervisor allowed me to overcome my learning anxieties. As my confidence grew, I sought support to develop my knowledge and academic writing skills without hesitation.

The role of the mother is not limited to the biological mother, which means that good enough care and support from Module Leaders and supervisors foster a good learning environment where learning needs can be met (Honneth, 2008). When my self-confidence

developed after successfully passing my Module Two assignment, I began to trust the process, which can be likened to trusting oneself (Honneth, 1996); as a result, increasing the ability to express one's needs in terms of academic support without feeling judged.

Regarding self-formation, the person I was and who I am, are the fragments of who I want to become while navigating through my past and present to establish my truer self (West, 2014). Occasionally, I have struggled to change my ideas or way of life because of repressive feelings. Sometimes our past colonises the present as we develop insecurities that threaten our new relationships or ideas through unsettling thoughts (Formenti and West, 2018). In the quest to become my best self, I discovered my vulnerabilities and imperfections through the cracks of my self-formation, considering the interplay of my inner and outer worlds.

Self-Esteem

The feelings associated with belonging to the EdD programme, which developed through the self-recognition process, can be explored through self-esteem. The sense of shared rights acknowledged from self-respect is when a person belongs to a community where they feel valued and accepted (West, 2014). The extract from my narrative journal reflects this.

I noticed the difference in my increased self-esteem during my Module Six study days. The support I received from Module Four, Five and Six Leaders promoted

my self-esteem and developed my self-confidence. During the COVID pandemic, the study days moved online. It is important to note that this was when I returned from the break I took from the Education Doctorate course. I was now part of a different cohort with candidates from diverse cultural backgrounds. I developed a newfound confidence, which allowed me to participate more. This also increased my sense of belonging, positively impacting my motivation for the EdD programme. I felt as though I gradually transitioned from being an outsider to becoming an insider through active participation and contributions to discussions.

Where self-respect relates to the feelings associated with entitlement or status attributed to others, self-esteem refers to feelings of being unique or special which must be valuable (Honneth, 1996). These can be likened to the feelings I now experience when I contribute to academic sessions while referring to examples of my cultural background. Unlike before, my fears and anxieties highlighted my Nigerian cultural identity as a problem. However, I now view these differences as valuable and unique attributes. My sense of uniqueness is linked to my Nigerian culture, which has increased my confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. These can also be seen as the forms that transformed on my doctorate journey.

Self-Rectitude

In addition to Honneth's set of recognition, I am adding self-rectitude, which in other words can be said to be self-righteousness. Self-rectitude can be said to be the attitude when individuals think they are always right; they do not need to change because they are better informed for certain reasons (Falbo & Shepperd, 1986). Evidence suggests that someone with high self-esteem will express low self-righteousness, while someone with high self-righteousness will show low self-esteem (ibid). Self-rectitude implies a strong connection between power, religious and cultural beliefs because people with high self-rectitude will be concerned about others dominating them.

As a Nigerian, I grew up with cultural beliefs that are founded on custom and religious principles passed on from generation to generation through our oral tradition. These has developed my biases and assumptions over time, and I have had the opportunity to interrogate my biases throughout this research. My thoughts and feelings about this have been captured below.

Through feedback on module assignments and supervisions during my EdD programme, I have become more aware of my biases and assumptions. Questions like, 'How do you come to know about this?' and 'Is there any evidence to back this up?' have made me examine my thoughts and feelings in different situations. At times, I can get fixated on the mindset that something has happened to me

because I am an ethnic minority. I do not undermine my lived experiences because sometimes, if you can feel it, it is happening, especially when it comes to racial discrimination. However, interrogating my thoughts and feelings now and again has made me give the benefit of the doubt to people, actions, and situations. By doing so, I feel that I am less judgmental and seek ways to have internal peace, as I believe that I cannot always put the wrongs of others to right.

Sometimes there is a strong urge to prove that one is right while trying to justify that others are wrong. Relocating to England and embarking on lifelong learning has helped me make a conscious effort to work on my self-rectitude. My judgements are not neutral because my cultural perspective is founded on power structures. I did not realise while growing up that we all see things from different perspectives because our past has influenced us in diverse ways. Transitional spaces helped me manage the anxieties over losing some protective traits developed through our guardian or parental relationships (Winnicott, 1991). The narratives we believe and tell others are founded on our truth because there are different versions of the truth. The EdD programme has encouraged me to seek the truth as I explore my lived experiences through soul work. Although it has been uncomfortable to engage with some of my weaknesses and vulnerabilities, which were established through the cracks of my fragmented past, this autoethnographic research has provided me with moments of emancipation as I engage with those forms that have transformed. Through personal and

cultural reflexivity, I have immersed my heart, body, and soul in this research to interrogate my belief systems whilst making some compromises.

Conclusion

This chapter has allowed me to explore how my cultural background has influenced my attributes and belief systems. I was able to establish the importance of promoting students' sense of belonging in academic institutions to enhance their motivation and retention. The self-recognition process highlighted the forms that have transformed me as I engaged with self-respect, self-esteem, and self-confidence. Nonetheless, self-rectitude illuminated how I interrogated some of my belief systems to reconcile my past with the present, offering some form of healing as I forge new identities. The relationships I have encountered and the empathetic support I have received to complete this doctorate are all embedded through valued recognition, which is essential for human flourishing. Studying in the EdD programme has not been the easiest learning journey of my life. However, embarking on this autoethnographic research has allowed me to look inward and outward to explore those fundamental changes that have kept me going against all odds.

In this chapter, I have explored the self-recognition process to identify the forms that have transformed in transitional spaces. The next chapter is the conclusion of the thesis, and it will draw together all the themes from my previous chapters. This will allow me to highlight

the importance of promoting a sense of belonging for marginalised students in White institutions through decolonisation processes.

Chapter Seven: Synthesis and Contribution: Reconciliation through Reflexive Writing and the Role of Autoethnography

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I will begin by establishing the research background that led to choosing the topic of this thesis. Following this, I will outline my research questions and how these have been addressed throughout the thesis. I will also reflect on my learning journey before and during the thesis stage. This chapter will then highlight the original contribution to knowledge and autoethnographic research while establishing validity, which would be helpful for others. Finally, I will conclude by acknowledging that my learning and meaning making of lived experiences are still on a lifetime journey, even after completing this thesis.

In the General Introduction, I provided the research background for choosing this topic due to my Module 4 learning activity. The research was born from my thoughts and feelings about the learning experience from that activity. For the first time in the EdD programme, I had a personal connection to a learning activity that made me feel seen and valued. During the learning activity, the initial feelings of being out of place were quickly replaced by high self-esteem, which later increased my self-confidence. These experiences also increased my sense of belonging over time in the EdD programme. These profound experiences led me to develop the following research questions.

My Main Research Questions and Key Findings

- I. To what extent might some methodologies 'other' ethnic minority students unintentionally in academic research?
- II. To what extent have my experiences as a Nigerian Black woman motivated me to study for a doctorate in the UK?
- III. To what extent has my cultural perspective influenced transformative learning to a doctoral level?

Below are the key findings for each of the research questions.

1. To what extent might some methodologies 'other' ethnic minority students unintentionally in academic research?

To address the research question, 'To what extent might some methodologies unintentionally 'other' ethnic minority students in academic research?', it is essential to first define the concept of 'othering,' particularly within academic contexts. As articulated by Uda (2018), othering involves dominant groups defining subordinate groups into existence by reducing them to inferior or problematic characteristics. In academic research, this manifests when ethnic minority students are positioned as outsiders, often framed as deviations or outliers compared to the dominant white, Western norms that shape knowledge production.

This experience of othering is embedded in postcolonial theory, with scholars like Said (1978) exploring how Western cultures have historically constructed non-Western cultures as exotic, different, and inferior. Said's concept of 'Orientalism' highlights how these constructions reinforce power imbalances, privileging Western perspectives while marginalising non-Western voices. My own lived experiences as a Nigerian Black woman in the UK's EdD programme reflect this dynamic. My identity—my face, skin colour, and name—marked me as 'the other' from the outset. In this context, whiteness operates not only as a racial category but as a normative standard, shaping both institutional practices and social interactions. Ahmed (2012) and Gillborn (2006) point out how whiteness confers social and cultural advantages, positioning white individuals at the top of institutional hierarchies, while ethnic minorities are often relegated to positions of marginalisation.

In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I explore how being perceived as 'the other' in a predominantly white academic institution has affected my identity and self-perception. This ongoing process of othering is reinforced by institutional barriers. Pearce (2019) notes that some microaggressions, though subtle, serve to remind ethnic minority students that they do not fully belong in academic spaces dominated by Eurocentric perspectives. The lack of representation of Black supervisors in predominantly white institutions further contributes to the marginalisation of ethnic minority students, as the absence of relatable role models can exacerbate feelings of alienation and exclusion.

In Chapter Two, I examine how traditional research methodologies often reinforce the process of othering by prioritising dominant white, Eurocentric perspectives. In this chapter and Chapter Three, I explore how methodologies that rely heavily on quantitative data, statistical analysis, and claims of objectivity fail to adequately capture the socio-cultural complexities of ethnic minority students' lived experiences. I illustrate these complexities through the examples highlighted in Chapters Four, Five, and Six of this thesis.

Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021) define 'unintentional othering' in academic research as the marginalisation of ethnic minority students through seemingly neutral research practices that, while not deliberately exclusionary, inadvertently perpetuate inequities. Unlike overt or deliberate exclusion, which is characterised by explicit bias or discrimination, unintentional othering occurs subtly within the structures and methodologies of academic research that claim objectivity and universality. For example, traditional research approaches, particularly those that rely on quantitative methods, emphasise objectivity, generalisability, and large sample sizes, often using tools like surveys, statistical models, and experiments (Willan, 2016). While these methods provide structured and replicable results, they tend to homogenise diverse experiences, overlooking the nuanced socio-cultural factors that shape the academic realities of ethnic minority students. This emphasis on neutrality and large-scale data collection may neglect the unique challenges faced by these students, effectively contributing to their othering within academic research. By failing to

account for the complexities of lived experiences, such practices reinforce the dominant Eurocentric frameworks and reduce ethnic minority voices to simplistic statistics. In contrast, non-traditional methodologies, such as autoethnography and participatory action research, offer more inclusive frameworks that recognise and address these socio-cultural complexities, particularly within the broader context of decolonising the curriculum.

Another way that ethnic minority students can be unintentionally othered in academic research is exemplified by Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021), who describe a situation in which a student was advised to limit the use of non-English references in her dissertation. This reflects how traditional research methodologies privilege Western knowledge systems while marginalising non-Western perspectives, reinforcing the idea that Western academic knowledge is superior and that anything outside of it is secondary or irrelevant. The example provided by Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021) illustrates how traditional methodologies privilege Western knowledge systems while sidelining non-Western perspectives. These practices reinforce colonial hierarchies, positioning Western knowledge as the default while marginalising voices from the Global South.

Furthermore, this also demonstrates how ethnic minority students can experience a 'fish out of water' feeling when they are expected to conform to Western academic norms. These norms often prioritise English sources over non-English ones, creating a significant disconnect for students from non-Western backgrounds. As a result, they may struggle to

reconcile their own cultural knowledge systems with the expectations and demands of a Eurocentric academic environment, leading to feelings of alienation and marginalisation within their academic journey.

The 'fish out of water' experience directly relates to Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) concept of institutional habitus, where individuals from non-dominant groups are confronted with unspoken norms and expectations that others, particularly those from dominant groups, navigate effortlessly. Ethnic minority students, like the one mentioned by Abu Moghli and Kadiwal, find themselves in academic spaces where the value of their knowledge and experiences is undermined or overlooked (2021). This leads to a lack of a sense of belonging, as their cultural perspectives are viewed as less valuable or inappropriate in academic discourse.

As I reflect on my academic journey, particularly during some of the study days of the EdD programme, I recognise the significant role that my predominantly white male supervisors played in shaping my research. They referred me to key postcolonial theorists such as Said (1978) and Spivak (2023), as well as essential articles on decolonisation. This guidance was instrumental in helping me avoid the risk of following a colonised path in my research. It allowed me to engage with frameworks that critically acknowledge and challenge the very power structures responsible for perpetuating othering. By incorporating these readings, I was able to frame my research in a way that centres the lived experiences of ethnic minority

students, resisting the dominant Eurocentric methodologies that have historically marginalised voices like mine.

However, it is essential to critically examine the broader context of academic supervision and the construction of knowledge within the UK education system in relation to the systemic roots of unintentional othering. Academia has historically developed research standards and methodologies through a predominantly Eurocentric, white male lens, which traces back to colonial and patriarchal histories that continue to shape present-day practices. These histories embedded certain ways of knowing and understanding the world into academic structures, privileging Western knowledge while marginalising non-Western perspectives.

Evidence suggests that reading lists provided to students are often shaped by these patriarchal, Eurocentric frameworks, as white males have traditionally dominated the field, imposing a specific worldview on students (Morreira et al., 2020). Throughout my higher education experience in the UK, the majority of my lecturers have been white male lecturers, reinforcing this dynamic. Nevertheless, the limited presence of such diverse literature points to the ongoing influence of historical power imbalances, illustrating how the systemic roots of othering continue to permeate contemporary academic supervision and knowledge production.

Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021) highlight the dangers of reading lists dominated by white perspectives, which increase the risk of reinforcing a colonised approach, even through seemingly minor 'soft reforms.' Abu Moghli and Kadiwal discuss the concept of 'soft reform,' which refers to minimal or surface-level changes that fail to address deeper structural inequalities within academic research methodologies (ibid). While these reforms may create an appearance of inclusivity, they often leave the underlying Eurocentric and exclusionary assumptions intact.

For instance, the inclusion of a few non-Western sources or token ethnic minority perspectives in reading lists or research designs can give the impression of diversity, yet these changes do little to challenge the dominant frameworks that shape knowledge production. Such superficial modifications overlook the deeper need to decolonise methodologies, which involves critically rethinking how research questions are framed, how data is collected and interpreted, and whose knowledge is considered valid. As a result, soft reforms may unintentionally reinforce the very structures they aim to disrupt, offering only a temporary or cosmetic solution to the systemic marginalisation of ethnic minority voices in academia. True inclusivity requires a deeper interrogation of the power dynamics embedded within research practices and a commitment to dismantling the Eurocentric norms that continue to dominate academic spaces.

While it is true that many educators may not intentionally seek to perpetuate colonial dominance, they are often products of the very system they inhabit, making it challenging to enact meaningful change from within. This highlights the importance of educators actively learning, raising awareness, and acknowledging that these systemic issues exist. Such recognition is crucial if we are to move toward more inclusive and decolonised approaches in academia. This reflection underscores the complexities of navigating a predominantly white academic system while resisting colonised ways of thinking. It also highlights the importance of continual critical engagement with both the structures and individuals that shape academic knowledge.

Employing autoethnography as a research methodology not only illuminates how academic structures privilege certain groups over others, but also highlights the vulnerabilities of those marginalised within these systems. The narratives I present in my research highlight situations where, as a Nigerian Black woman, I felt disadvantaged and excluded. However, it also provides insights into how these experiences can be transformed into new knowledge that challenges the status quo. By exposing these vulnerabilities, autoethnography creates space for generating supportive practices that better accommodate the diverse identities of students in higher education. Moreover, the strength of autoethnography lies in its ability to foreground the personal experiences of marginalised individuals while situating these experiences within broader cultural and institutional contexts.

Traditional research methodologies, on the other hand, perpetuate this dynamic by centring Eurocentric norms and relying heavily on quantitative data, which reduces the lived experiences of ethnic minority students to mere statistics. These methodologies often fail to capture the complexity of these students' socio-cultural realities, oversimplifying their challenges and experiences into numerical data that overlooks the deeper, intersectional factors shaping their academic journeys.

As Maylor et al. (2021) argue, these methodologies often obscure structural barriers like institutional racism, financial struggles, and feelings of alienation that ethnic minority students commonly face. As I explain in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, my financial struggles and Nigerian cultural background played a crucial role in shaping my academic journey. However, these influences would have remained unnoticed if I had relied solely on traditional research paradigms. My research critiques the ways in which traditional academic structures perpetuate exclusion and offers a pathway toward more inclusive and equitable educational practices. By using autoethnography as a research methodology, I reclaim the narrative of my identity and my place within the academic world, highlighting the importance of personal lived experiences in challenging the institutional frameworks that continue to marginalise ethnic minority students.

By examining my own experiences through an autoethnographic lens, I explored the deep cultural and systemic forces that shaped my sense of belonging (or lack thereof) within

academic spaces. Writing this autoethnographic research allowed me to understand the self in relation to others, particularly how culture and power dynamics operate to construct and reinforce identities. This process of reflection and self-analysis disrupts dominant frames of reference, exposing discriminatory practices within academic environments that often go unchallenged.

The methodology, methods, and research tools used in my research were informed by my lived experiences. Writing this autoethnographic research has been valuable for understanding the self in relation to others from a cultural perspective. It also examines how identities are constructed through lived experiences while disrupting dominant frames of reference and exposing discriminatory practices. Autoethnography reveals situations where privilege benefits some people while disadvantaging others, offering insights into how new knowledge can stimulate supportive practices.

By employing autoethnography, I was able to write about personal experiences in relation to culture (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). This qualitative method helps reveal unique cultural realities and the ways in which they can be best understood through narratives that complicate racial stereotypes. Autoethnography brings the voices of marginalised people to the forefront, allowing outsiders to access inside perspectives and move toward social change because representation matters (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020).

My lived experience highlights the need for more inclusive research methodologies that account for the intersectionality of social identities. As Sang (2018) argues, traditional methodologies that fail to consider the overlapping identities of race, gender, and class risk oversimplifying the struggles of ethnic minority students and presenting a one-dimensional view of their challenges. In contrast, non-traditional frameworks like autoethnography offer a more nuanced understanding of these intersectional dynamics. Autoethnography centres the voices of ethnic minority students, allowing them to reflect on their own experiences and providing richer explorations of the socio-cultural and systemic barriers they face in academic settings.

Autoethnography, as demonstrated in Chapter Three of my research, played a pivotal role in engaging with my identity as a Nigerian Black woman navigating the UK's academic system. This methodology enabled me to explore how my cultural background, race, and gender intersected to create unique challenges, such as reconciling my Nigerian heritage with Western academic norms and confronting racialised microaggressions. These deeply personal experiences, often overlooked by traditional research methodologies, formed the foundation for my autoethnographic analysis, allowing me to resist the othering effects of conventional approaches and fully acknowledge my lived experiences.

By positioning ethnic minority students as both researchers and participants in the creation of knowledge, autoethnography directly addresses the issue of othering by centring their voices in the research process (Willan, 2016). It empowers marginalised students to control how their narratives are constructed and how their experiences are represented in academic discourse. This focus on lived experiences provides a more nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural and systemic barriers faced by ethnic minority students in academic settings. As shown through my narratives in Chapters Four, Five and Six, autoethnography allowed me to critically engage with my identity and explore the intersectional challenges I faced, such as confronting racialised microaggressions and navigating Western academic norms. These complex, personal experiences highlight the limitations of traditional research paradigms in capturing the full realities of ethnic minority students' academic journeys.

The adoption of non-traditional methodologies such as autoethnography challenges the Eurocentric frameworks that shape academic spaces and knowledge production. By centring the voices of ethnic minority students, these methodologies promote a more inclusive and socially just approach to research. As Arday et al. (2021) argue, decolonising academic spaces requires a critical re-evaluation of the methodologies used in research to ensure they do not perpetuate systemic inequalities or marginalise diverse perspectives.

However, as Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021) caution, the concept of decolonisation must not become a superficial buzzword. Meaningful structural change requires moving beyond tokenistic inclusion and adopting non-traditional research methodologies that resist the reproduction of colonial hierarchies. These methodologies must actively dismantle the power imbalances that have long defined academic spaces, ensuring that ethnic minority students' voices are centred in academic discourse.

My research demonstrates that traditional methodologies in academic research may unintentionally other ethnic minority students by failing to account for the cultural, racial, and personal factors that shape their academic journeys. By adopting non-traditional methodologies such as autoethnography, participatory action research (PAR), narrative inquiry, ethnography, and grounded theory, a more inclusive and nuanced framework for understanding the unique challenges faced by ethnic minority students can be established (Maylor et al., 2021). These methodologies prioritise the voices and lived experiences of marginalised groups, enabling researchers to explore the socio-cultural complexities that traditional methods often overlook. These non-traditional methodologies provide more inclusive frameworks for research, valuing the diverse and complex experiences of ethnic minority students.

By prioritising lived experiences, personal narratives, and active participant engagement, they challenge the dominant Eurocentric frameworks and the perceived objectivity of

traditional methodologies (Maylor et al., 2021). This shift allows for a deeper understanding of the unique socio-cultural realities faced by ethnic minority students, fostering a more holistic approach to research that recognises their full range of experiences.

As a Nigerian Black woman in the UK's higher education system, I encountered various forms of othering that traditional research methods could not fully capture. My personal narrative, as explored throughout this thesis, demonstrates how quantitative methodologies often reduce the complexity of ethnic minorities' lived experiences to simplistic statistics, failing to account for the intersectional challenges they face in higher education. For example, my financial struggles and lack of a sense of belonging, as narrated in Chapters Five and Six, which nearly led me to drop out of the EdD programme, would have remained invisible in a survey-based study focused solely on success rates or satisfaction levels. These deeply personal experiences, shaped by the intersections of race, gender, and class, are complex and not easily captured or quantified through traditional research methods.

In contrast to traditional methodologies, non-traditional approaches such as autoethnography, participatory action research (PAR), narrative inquiry, ethnography, and grounded theory provide more inclusive frameworks for academic research because they rely on qualitative data. Qualitative data are crucial in exploring the lived experiences of individuals, particularly ethnic minority students, as they allow for a deeper understanding

of personal, emotional, and socio-cultural dynamics. These methods capture the complexity of human experiences and offer rich, detailed insights into the intersectional factors—such as race, class, and gender—that shape individuals' identities and academic journeys, which quantitative data often overlook (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

For instance, ethnography allows researchers to immerse themselves in the cultural contexts of participants, offering a detailed examination of the socio-cultural factors influencing ethnic minority students (Denzin et al., 2023). Similarly, grounded theory facilitates the development of theories grounded in the actual experiences of participants, making it particularly suitable for capturing the realities faced by marginalised students in academia (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These methodologies enable researchers to gather nuanced data that reflect the lived experiences of ethnic minority students, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the systemic challenges they face (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Focusing on qualitative data, these non-traditional methods are more effective in addressing the unique challenges ethnic minority students encounter, ensuring that their voices are adequately represented in academic research (Silverman, 2021).

This research calls for a critical re-evaluation of traditional methodologies and a commitment to socially just and inclusive research practices that recognise and value the diverse experiences of all students. By embracing these non-traditional approaches, academic research can move towards a more equitable and reflective understanding of the

challenges faced by ethnic minority students, ultimately contributing to the decolonisation of academic spaces.

The second research question delves into the personal motivations behind my pursuit of a doctorate in the UK as a Nigerian Black woman. This section will reflect on how my lived experiences—shaped by my cultural background, educational journey, and the intersectional challenges I have faced—have not only influenced my academic trajectory but also fuelled my desire to challenge existing academic paradigms. By exploring these factors, I aim to demonstrate how my identity and experiences have motivated me to contribute to a more inclusive and representative academic landscape, addressing the gaps I have encountered as both a student and a researcher.

2. To What Extent Have My Experiences as a Nigerian Black Woman Motivated Me to Study for a Doctorate in the UK

To effectively respond to the research question, 'To what extent have my experiences as a Nigerian Black woman motivated me to study for a doctorate in the UK?', it is essential to explore the intersections of my cultural, racial, and gendered identities and how they have influenced my educational journey. Drawing from Chapter Five, which reflects on critical experiences from my background, this response uses intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) to examine how the intersections of race, class, and gender have shaped my motivation. As discussed in Chapter One, intersectionality provides a necessary framework for understanding how multiple identities interact simultaneously to create unique experiences of privilege and oppression. The role of support systems, including family and academic mentors, is also key in encouraging me to pursue my academic goals. Furthermore, this response explores the transformative impact that undertaking a doctorate has had on my personal and professional growth.

Reflecting on the extent to which my experiences motivated me to pursue a doctorate, it is evident that the intersecting factors of race, gender, class, and migration status played a significant role. My identity as a Nigerian Black woman has been central to my motivation to pursue higher education. Navigating both patriarchal Nigerian structures and socio-economic challenges as a migrant in the UK has shaped my pursuit of higher education as a path to empowerment. In Chapter Five, under the section titled 'Our lived experiences are

historically located,' I discussed how my upbringing in a patriarchal Nigerian society, combined with cultural expectations placed on women, deeply influenced my early experiences. Coming from a society where gender roles are strictly defined, I was expected to conform. However, the loss of my father, a key figure in my life, marked a significant turning point in my identity formation, reinforcing the importance of education as a means of gaining autonomy and agency as I transitioned into womanhood.

Intersectionality theory, introduced in Chapter One and elaborated upon in Chapter Five, provides an in-depth exploration of how my overlapping identities—as a Black woman, a migrant, and an individual navigating social class dynamics—have shaped my sense of belonging and motivation to pursue a doctorate. My cultural capital, developed in both Nigerian and British contexts, has empowered me to navigate the complexities of higher education. However, these intersecting identities have also highlighted the challenges of exclusion and self-doubt that I faced in predominantly white academic spaces. These struggles were deeply rooted in systemic structures that, as Crenshaw (1989) highlights, often fail to account for the complexity of individual identities.

My narratives in Chapter Five, particularly my husband's and my struggle to secure decent jobs in the UK, further highlight the intersectionality of race, migration status, and class. Despite our strong educational backgrounds from a Nigerian university, our qualifications were not recognised, and the barriers we faced as migrants compounded our economic and

social struggles. These experiences vividly illustrate the core premise of intersectionality theory—multiple identities, such as being Black, Nigerian, and migrants, converge to produce distinct forms of marginalisation. As we navigated low-wage jobs and economic instability, it became increasingly clear that education was the primary means to escape these barriers and secure a better future, not only for myself but also for my family.

The societal pressure from my extended family, who viewed our migration to the UK as a symbol of success, further fuelled my motivation. In one of my narratives in Chapter Five, I recounted how my mother-in-law's insistence that we remain in the UK, despite our struggles, reflected the broader cultural expectations of success attached to living in the West. This pressure for recognition, rooted in the belief that 'the West is Best,' served as a powerful motivator. My work as a domiciliary carer on minimum wage and my financial dependence on my husband at the time highlighted the stark contrast between my expectations of migration and the realities I faced. This experience made the pursuit of a doctorate even more critical, as education became a crucial tool for overcoming systemic inequalities and achieving social mobility. My narratives in Chapters Five and Six offer a poignant reflection on the socio-economic challenges my family and I faced as migrants in the UK, revealing the complexities of class and identity. Analysing these experiences through the lens of social stratification theory sheds light on how our initial expectations of success, shaped by the 'Highly Skilled Migrant Visa' and media portrayals of the West, were met with harsh realities.

Despite our qualifications, we were forced into low-paying jobs due to the lack of 'relevant UK experience,' reflecting the systemic barriers that prevent skilled migrants from accessing opportunities that match their qualifications. This downward social mobility reinforced our position in lower social strata, illustrating how intersectional identities intersect with systemic inequalities to create significant challenges for immigrants. The intersection of my racial, gendered, cultural, and socio-economic identities has profoundly influenced my motivation to pursue a doctorate in the UK. These experiences of marginalisation and exclusion, paired with my resilience and determination to succeed, have shaped my academic journey. Education has emerged as a central tool for upward mobility and empowerment, enabling me to navigate these challenges and establish a sense of belonging and recognition within both academic and cultural communities.

Additionally, in Chapter Five, 'Navigating the Complexities of Social Mobility and Academic Success,' I delve into the barriers I encountered, which were shaped by the intersection of race, gender, and social class. The patriarchal structures that governed my early experiences in Nigeria were compounded by the racial and ethnic challenges I encountered in the UK. As a Nigerian Black woman in a predominantly white academic environment, I often felt marginalised and struggled with feelings of being out of place, which were further exacerbated by societal structures that privilege whiteness. These tensions frequently affected my self-confidence and my ability to assert myself in academic spaces, as explored in Chapter Six. I often questioned whether I truly belonged, a feeling intensified by the exclusionary academic norms that catered primarily to white students. These challenges

were further complicated by economic barriers, as detailed in Chapter Five 'The Dualities of Social Mobility and Self-Perception,' where I explain how my qualifications were not recognised in the UK, and my status as a migrant made it even more difficult to find opportunities that reflected my skills and educational background.

Despite these challenges, several motivational factors have driven me to pursue my doctorate, as I explored in Chapter Five, 'Motivation To Pursue My Dreams.' My personal aspirations for upward social mobility, self-recognition, and validation within my Nigerian community were significant in motivating me to continue my educational journey. In Nigerian society, academic achievement—especially at the doctoral level—is highly respected and confers status and recognition within the community. Having a Western doctorate degree is even more esteemed, particularly if it is from a Western university, because back home in Nigeria, there is a widespread belief that 'the West is best.' This belief elevates the perceived value of degrees obtained abroad, and my family is eagerly looking forward to having a family member achieve this prestigious milestone. This societal value placed on education shaped my aspirations to succeed, as I not only sought to better my own life but also to fulfill the cultural and familial expectations placed on me as a Nigerian woman.

The desire for self-recognition is deeply intertwined with Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition, which underscores the importance of being acknowledged by others in shaping

one's identity and sense of worth. My pursuit of a doctorate was as much about achieving personal goals as it was about gaining validation within my community. In Nigerian culture, the success of one individual often reflects on the family as a whole, which added another layer of motivation to my academic journey. Winnicott's theory (1953), particularly his concept of the transitional object, further illuminates the role of early parental guidance and how my upbringing influenced my aspirations and motivations. My parents, particularly my father, served as role models who instilled in me the values of hard work and education. My pursuit of a doctorate can be viewed as a continuation of fulfilling my parents' expectations and aspirations while also serving as a pathway to greater independence and equality. The support I received from my family has been central to my academic journey, as explored throughout Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

Furthermore, my desire for representation in academia played a pivotal role in motivating me. The lack of Black women in academic leadership positions, combined with the systemic challenges faced by ethnic minority students, reinforced my drive to serve as a role model for others who might follow a similar path. As I discussed in Chapter Five, the desire to challenge the status quo and contribute to greater representation in academia gave me a sense of purpose and determination to succeed, even in the face of significant obstacles. This aligns with my understanding of intersectionality, as discussed in Chapter One, which demonstrates how social structures marginalise individuals based on their multiple, intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1989).

The support I received from my family, especially from my husband, was critical in enabling me to balance academic pursuits with personal responsibilities. In Chapter Five, in the section 'The Support From My Husband,' I described how his emotional and financial support allowed me to focus on my doctoral studies. Without his help, managing the competing demands of studying, working, and caring for my family would have been almost impossible. His encouragement and belief in my abilities motivated me to persist, even when I felt overwhelmed by the pressures of the doctorate. The concept of relational recognition, discussed by Honneth (1996), is evident here, as my husband's acknowledgment of my potential and his support of my goals contributed to my sense of self-worth and determination to succeed.

As I presented my thesis at the university's seminar series for Culture, Language, and International Education Research (CLIER) in March 2023, I was reminded of the importance of community. My extended family and friends in Nigeria participated online, offering their support and encouragement. Their involvement further strengthened my resolve to complete this milestone, knowing that my success would resonate with others in my community and inspire them to pursue their own academic aspirations.

In addition to family support, the academic support I received from Module Leaders, supervisors, and mentors was equally important. As I discussed in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, their empathetic guidance, encouragement, and willingness to help me navigate the challenges I faced were invaluable. They provided a sense of belonging within the academic

environment, which was often lacking due to my feelings of marginalisation. This support helped me overcome feelings of isolation and anxiety, which were compounded by the racial and ethnic challenges I faced. Their belief in my abilities and their encouragement to keep pushing forward gave me the confidence to continue, even when the journey seemed particularly difficult.

The concept of belonging is explored in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (2013), where it emerges as a fundamental psychological need that must be met before higher levels of self-actualisation can occur. The EdD programme provided a safe and nurturing environment where I could confront the challenges of my past and present, allowing new forms of identity to flourish through increased self-esteem and confidence. This growing sense of self-esteem allowed me to actively participate in cohort days and seek additional support when needed, significantly reducing my risk of dropping out of the programme, as I reflect on in Chapters Four and Six.

My motivation to achieve a doctorate was deeply connected to my sense of belonging within the EdD programme, as well as the support I received from my family (Lawson & Lawson, 2013). There is a strong relationship between students' retention, motivation, and sense of belonging within academic institutions, as highlighted by Pedler et al. (2022). Pursuing a doctorate is often portrayed as a transformative experience that fosters self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence through the validation of significant others (Honneth, 2008). Throughout my journey, I experienced the transformative power of

supportive environments and relationships, which played a critical role in shaping my academic success.

The doctoral journey itself has been deeply transformative, both personally and professionally. In Chapter Six, the sections on 'Self-respect, Self-confidence, and Self-esteem,' I reflected on how my confidence and self-esteem have grown throughout the programme. Initially, I struggled with self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, due to the challenges I faced as a Nigerian Black woman in a predominantly white academic environment. However, as I progressed through my studies and gained more experience, my confidence grew. This transformation was not only academic but also deeply personal, reshaping my sense of self and allowing me to take pride in my achievements. The ability to reconcile my Nigerian heritage with the expectations of the UK academic system gave me a sense of agency and empowerment, further motivating me to complete my studies. My experiences as a Nigerian Black woman have profoundly shaped my motivation to pursue a doctorate in the UK. The intersection of race, gender, culture, and socioeconomic status has presented both challenges and opportunities throughout my academic journey.

My motivation to pursue a doctorate in the UK as a Nigerian Black woman is deeply intertwined with various intersecting dimensions, including gender, cultural aspects, socioeconomic status, and migration status. Gender intersects with social class among Nigerian immigrants, shaping their experiences of socioeconomic inequality and discrimination (Ogbemudia, 2022). Research indicates that Nigerian women face

intersecting forms of oppression based on their gender and ethnicity, which intersect with social class to produce unique challenges and opportunities (ibid).

Intersectionality theory illuminates how migration status intersects with social class to shape individuals' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in British society, emphasising the importance of considering multiple dimensions of identity in understanding inequalities and fostering social justice (Bloch et al., 2011). My personal journey reflects the complexities inherent in navigating higher education as a Nigerian Black woman in a Western country. Coming from a patriarchal society in Nigeria, the transition to womanhood brought significant changes, as described in Chapter Four. This transition underscores the intricate relationship between gender dynamics, cultural expectations, and personal agency. As I ventured into higher education in the UK, I was forced to navigate the dual challenges of cultural displacement and a patriarchal systems within academic spaces.

In conclusion, my experiences as a Nigerian Black woman have profoundly shaped my motivation to pursue a doctorate in the UK. The intersection of race, gender, culture, and socioeconomic status has presented both challenges and opportunities throughout my academic journey. As discussed in Chapter Five, these experiences have not only fuelled my academic ambitions but have also motivated me to contribute to the broader movement for greater representation and inclusion of minority voices in higher education. Through the support of my family, particularly my husband, and my academic mentors, I have been able

to overcome barriers and achieve personal and professional transformation. By reflecting on my journey, I can now see how the complex dynamics of race, gender, and class have shaped my motivations and aspirations, driving me to pursue a doctorate and contribute to the broader efforts of fostering inclusion and diversity within academic spaces.

In moving forward, it is essential to explore how my cultural perspective has further influenced my transformative learning journey to a doctoral level for my third research question. This next section will examine the ways in which my Nigerian heritage and cultural identity have shaped my academic development and personal growth, providing a deeper understanding of how culture intersects with education at a doctoral level.

3. To What Extent Has My Cultural Perspective Influenced Transformative Learning to a Doctoral Level?

My third research question, 'To what extent has my cultural perspective influenced transformative learning to a doctoral level?' directly relates to the concept of liminality as discussed in Chapter Two, particularly in the context of identity reconstruction and transformative learning. Throughout my doctoral journey in the UK, I encountered disorienting dilemmas, questioned deeply ingrained assumptions, and experienced a process of identity transformation shaped by my Nigerian cultural background. This aligns with the idea of liminality, which encompasses a transitional phase where I was no longer in my previous social role but had not yet fully assumed a new one (Bigger, 2009; Turner et al., 2017).

In Chapter Two, I described liminality as a three-part structure: separation, the liminal process, and reassimilation. My separation phase began when I relocated from Nigeria to England, resulting in a detachment from my previous cultural identity. This transition was not only geographic but also cultural, as I encountered new social norms and academic expectations that challenged my established frames of reference. This mirrors Van Gennep's (1960) notion of separation as a detachment from former identities, initiating a process of significant change.

The liminal phase manifested as I struggled to navigate the cultural and academic landscape of the UK. Characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty, this phase saw me grappling with a lack of clear attributes associated with either my old or new identity. It was a period of self-negotiation and critical reflection, as I examined how my Nigerian cultural perspective intersected with the dominant academic structures I encountered. The ambiguity and structural fluidity described by Turner were evident in my experience of being 'betwixt and between,' as I sought to reconcile the tensions between my cultural background and the predominantly Western academic framework. At times, I felt as though I was in a state of limbo, where the distinctions between my past and present self blurred, making the process of transformative learning deeply personal and challenging (Turner et al., 2017).

This ongoing liminality became especially significant when engaging with alternative epistemologies and decolonising educational practices. The resistance I faced within the academic environment often prolonged the liminal phase, as I continually had to navigate and challenge entrenched power structures that did not readily recognise the cultural capital I brought with me. This resonates with Beech's (2008, 2011) argument that an extended liminal process can impact one's commitment, potentially leading to feelings of detachment or low self-esteem. Confronting microaggressions and deficit thinking in academic spaces became a recurring aspect of this prolonged liminality, requiring continuous negotiation and reflection (Garsten, 1999).

The reassimilation phase, as described in Chapter Two, involved adopting new identities and norms. For me, this phase was not just about reintegrating into the academic environment but also about embodying a reconstructed identity that acknowledged the strengths of my Nigerian cultural perspective. Through critical reflection, I began to challenge existing assumptions about knowledge, authority, and education, which were shaped by colonial legacies within the academic system. This reassimilation was not a return to a pre-existing identity but rather the emergence of a transformed self, integrating elements of both my cultural background and new academic insights.

Liminality thus offers a framework for understanding my transformative learning journey, where the liminal space became a place of critical reflection and self-negotiation, leading to profound changes in how I viewed myself and my role within the academic community. This state of liminality facilitated a transformative process that went beyond acquiring new knowledge, fundamentally reshaping my identity and worldview, embodying the essence of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning.

Transformative learning, as Mezirow (1991) defines it, is a process where individuals critically assess their assumptions, leading to deep learning that shifts their worldview. This idea has been crucial to my development in the EdD programme. My Nigerian cultural background, as highlighted in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, has profoundly influenced my learning approach. This background, shaped by values around education, family, and

gender, has played a pivotal role in guiding my academic experiences. It has not only framed my approach to learning but also fuelled my determination to succeed within a Western academic context, despite the challenges I have faced. These cultural influences have guided my academic experiences and motivated me to succeed in a Western academic setting, despite the challenges detailed in my response to the second research question above.

To build on this, the process of transformative learning inherently involves critical reflection, which is essential for deep shifts in worldview. In my experience, this reflection has been pivotal in deconstructing my pre-existing assumptions about knowledge, authority, and education. This critical engagement, shaped by my Nigerian cultural perspective, was particularly significant when navigating the challenges of decolonising academic spaces, as explored in Chapter Six. Critical reflection is a key component of transformative learning, as Mezirow (1991) describes. In my case, I had to deeply question my established assumptions about knowledge, authority, and education. These reflections were particularly prominent in the context of decolonising academic spaces, as discussed in 'Cultural Dilemmas' and 'I Do Not See Colour' from Chapter Six. The systemic nature of these dilemmas, which involved confronting microaggressions and deeply embedded deficit thinking, became an ongoing source of tension that required constant navigation.

As I engaged in this critical reflection, I realised that my Nigerian cultural perspective was often at odds with the academic structures I was operating within. These structures, rooted

in colonial legacies, often resisted alternative epistemologies and ways of knowing, which made it difficult for me to assert my cultural perspective. Yet, this resistance also became a catalyst for my transformative learning. By recognising the limitations of these systems, I began to challenge them, pushing for more inclusive and equitable academic environments that honoured diverse perspectives.

The self-recognition process, which I explored in 'The Transitional Spaces of the Academy' and 'The Academy and Self-recognition' in Chapter Six, was a pivotal aspect of my transformative learning. As Cranton (2006) highlights, transformative learning often leads to profound changes in how individuals view themselves and their place in the world. Through this process, I not only began to critically engage with my cultural identity but also learned to embrace it as a source of strength in my academic journey.

Throughout my doctoral studies in the UK, I encountered a series of disorienting dilemmas that prompted me to critically reflect on my assumptions. These dilemmas are central to Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, which posits that individuals are often challenged by experiences that contradict their prior beliefs and expectations. One such dilemma emerged when I was confronted with discrepancies between dominant Western narratives and alternative epistemologies rooted in non-Western cultural perspectives. The Western academic system often privileges Eurocentric ways of knowing, which created friction with the values and knowledge systems of my Nigerian background. This experience

forced me to reconsider how knowledge is produced, validated, and taught in academic institutions, leading to a deep shift in my thinking and learning approach.

Mezirow's theory asserts that transformative learning begins with a disorienting dilemma, followed by a process of critical reflection. For me, these dilemmas were not only intellectual but deeply personal. The feeling of being out of place in predominantly white, Eurocentric academic spaces triggered profound reflection on my cultural identity and academic journey. As I explored in Chapter Six, this sense of marginalisation shaped my frames of reference and affected how I navigated and engaged with the academic environment.

The integration of transformative learning theories with the data from my firsthand experiences, as outlined in Chapter Six, underscores the importance of shifting frames of reference in creating more inclusive and equitable academic environments. Mezirow (1978) defines transformative learning as a process that requires re-evaluating deeply ingrained assumptions, many of which are shaped by culture. Cranton (2006) and Illeris (2014) extend this view by recognising transformative learning as a catalyst for profound personal change. These perspectives align closely with my own experiences, as my Nigerian cultural background played a significant role in shaping the depth and direction of my intellectual and personal growth throughout the EdD programme.

Frames of reference, as described by Mezirow (1991), guide individuals' interpretations of their experiences. The resistance to change these frames is often a significant obstacle to decolonising educational practices (Dennis, 2018). This resistance, which I encountered in the UK academic context, challenged me to engage more deeply with transformative learning. Through self-reflection and engagement with alternative perspectives, I was able to disrupt these entrenched beliefs and foster openness to new ways of thinking (Cranton, 1996). This process is vital in interrogating the colonial legacies within educational systems (Tisdell, 1993), ultimately leading to more inclusive spaces that honour plurality, equity, and social justice.

To take this further, I find it essential to critically examine Mezirow's (1997) ten phases of transformative learning within the context of decolonising educational practices. These ten phases, which guide an individual from a disorienting dilemma through critical reflection and new perspectives, provide a valuable framework for reflecting on my transformative learning journey. By analysing these phases, I can explore how my cultural identity intersects with this process of decolonisation and how each phase has influenced my academic and personal growth within a postcolonial academic environment.

Mezirow's first learning phase is as follows. During my doctoral journey, I encountered disorienting dilemmas when confronted with the discrepancies between dominant Western narratives and alternative epistemologies rooted in diverse cultural perspectives discussed

in Chapter Two. These dilemmas prompted me to critically reflect on the colonial legacies entrenched within educational systems and to question my assumptions about knowledge and authority. As a female academic navigating predominantly white, male-dominated institutions, I have encountered challenges that disrupted my established beliefs and assumptions, prompting critical reflection and potential transformation (Mezirow, 1991). Begum and Saini (2019) vividly depict the disorientating dilemma faced by female academics, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, who are tasked with advocating for underrepresented groups within academia. This expectation places a considerable burden on us, extending beyond our academic responsibilities to encompass emotional labour.

Similarly, Evans et al., (2015) shed light on the emotional toll of navigating spaces where institutional norms perpetuate systems of oppression, particularly for women of colour. This analysis underscores how the disorientating dilemma manifests in the lived experiences of female academics like me. This prompts us to confront the contradictions between our roles as advocates for marginalised voices and the emotional toll of navigating oppressive institutional norms (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). Reflecting on my own experiences, I recognise the temptation to avoid confronting Western perspectives and the associated burdens. At the beginning of my thesis stage, I was trying to avoid the burden of representation which lies on female ethnic minorities in academia. In the process, I went through Mezirow's transformative learning journey beginning with disorientating dilemmas.

There is a natural inclination to prioritise self-preservation when faced with entrenched power structures within academic institutions. However, I acknowledge that evading these challenges only serves to perpetuate the status quo and reinforce existing inequalities. By critically engaging with these dilemmas, I believe we have the potential to undergo transformative learning, challenging our existing beliefs and assumptions and fostering personal and societal change (Mezirow, 1991). As I advance through Mezirow's second phase of transformative learning, I am acutely aware of my history rooted in a colonised past as an ethnic minority. This historical context underscores the urgency of engaging in decolonising educational practices (Arday and Mirza, 2018). Within this phase, I undergo a process of deep introspection, confronting feelings of guilt and shame arising from my complicity in oppressive structures and my lack of privilege inherited from colonial legacies. This introspective journey prompts me to delve further into my cultural identity and my role within the broader decolonial struggle.

Central to my transformative learning process was the critical assessment of epistemic and socio-cultural assumptions underpinning mainstream educational frameworks. This third phase involved challenging Eurocentric perspectives and acknowledging the validity of diverse knowledge systems rooted in non-Western cultures. As I embarked on the journey of decolonisation reflected in Chapters Two, Four and Six, recognising shared experiences with others became essential for fostering solidarity and collective action, thus, becoming the fourth phase. This phase enabled me to empathise with the struggles of marginalised

communities impacted by colonialism and to collaborate in dismantling colonial structures within education.

Furthermore, the fifth phase involved decolonising educational practices which required me to explore alternative roles, relationships, and actions aimed at challenging the status quo and advancing decolonial agendas. This phase involved seeking out decolonial mentors, forming alliances with grassroots movements, and advocating for inclusive curriculum and pedagogical practices. The next phase I went through was strategising and mobilising resources to effect meaningful change within educational institutions as this became a crucial aspect of my transformative learning journey. This sixth phase entailed developing decolonial initiatives, presenting at workshops, writing blogs, and engaging in advocacy efforts aimed at institutionalising decolonising practices and policies. The seventh phase involved acquiring knowledge and skills relevant to decolonising educational practices which was essential for enacting transformative change. This phase involved engaging in critical pedagogy, participatory action research, and community organising to develop practical strategies for challenging colonial hegemony in education.

I am pleased to be recently involved in a research project centered on collaborative autoethnography, which aligns seamlessly with my academic interests in participatory action research (PAR). This methodology underscores the significance of collaboration between researchers and participants, with a strong emphasis on engaging community

members or stakeholders to address pertinent issues within their respective contexts (Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez, 2013). What sets this research project apart is the active involvement of participants in shaping the research process. Rather than being passive subjects, we are integral contributors who will collectively determine research questions, methodologies, and outcomes. This collaborative approach resonates with me, as it empowers us to assume ownership of the research process and work as equal partners. PAR entails iterative cycles of reflection, planning, action, and evaluation, all aimed at developing strategies for social change. I am excited to be part of a research framework that prioritises democratisation, participant empowerment, and the creation of tangible outcomes to drive meaningful impact. The core tenets of PAR – collaboration, empowerment, action orientation, reflexivity, and contextualisation – underscore the importance of acknowledging the unique social, cultural, and political contexts within the educational setting or groups under study. I am enthusiastic about immersing myself in this research project and contributing to the generation of knowledge that is pertinent, meaningful, and actionable within our educational community.

The eighth phase of stepping outside of traditional roles and assumptions to experiment with alternative ways of being and knowing was a challenging yet transformative phase of my journey. Embracing the discomfort and taking risks in advocating for decolonising initiatives within educational contexts allowed me to explore new possibilities for transformative action. It took a while for me to build competence and self-confidence in decolonising educational practices and this was crucial for sustaining long-term engagement

amidst resistance in the ninth phase. This phase involved honing skills in critical analysis, community organising, and cultural responsiveness, empowering me to navigate complex power dynamics and effect meaningful change. Finally, the tenth phase involves the reintegration into my life which required embodying decolonial values and principles in everyday practice. Aligning my personal and professional endeavours with my decolonial commitments fostered authenticity, integrity, and accountability in my interactions and contributions to the broader decolonial movement.

Analysing Mezirow's ten learning phases within the context of decolonising educational practices has provided valuable insights into the relationship between transformative learning and cultural perspectives. This process has allowed me to confront power structures and contribute to creating more inclusive educational environments that embrace diverse cultural experiences. Moreover, this exploration has highlighted how my cultural perspective has shaped my transformative learning journey at the doctoral level.

In summary, my Nigerian cultural perspective significantly shaped my transformative learning journey throughout the EdD programme. The experience involved navigating the stages of liminality—separation, liminal process, and reassimilation—during which I confronted disorienting dilemmas and critically reflected on my cultural identity. The prolonged liminal phase, marked by ambiguity and the challenge of reconciling my background with a Western academic context, ultimately served as a catalyst for growth. Through this process, I integrated new identities and insights, using my cultural heritage as a

source of strength. This journey highlighted the importance of creating educational environments that honour diverse perspectives and support transformative learning.

Following the detailed exploration of how my cultural perspective has shaped my transformative learning journey, it is important to highlight the original contributions this research makes to the academic field. By examining my experiences as a Nigerian Black woman within the UK Education Doctorate (EdD) programme, this thesis contributes fresh insights into an underexplored area of research.

The Original Contribution To Knowledge

This thesis makes significant original contributions to the existing body of knowledge, especially concerning the lived experiences of a Nigerian Black woman in the UK Education Doctorate (EdD) programme. By exploring research methodologies, personal motivations, and cultural influences on transformative learning, my research fills substantial gaps in the literature on ethnic minority students and doctoral education. It provides new perspectives on how these lived experiences shape educational journeys and inform more inclusive academic practices. This contribution is framed around three key themes: addressing 'othering' in research methodologies, uncovering the motivations for doctoral study, and applying transformative learning through a cultural lens.

Original Contribution in Addressing 'Othering' in Research Methodologies

One of the most critical contributions of my thesis is expanding the understanding of how traditional research methodologies can unintentionally 'other' ethnic minority students. Traditional Eurocentric methodologies often fail to account for the diverse and complex lived experiences of minority students, perpetuating exclusion, and marginalisation. As articulated by Udah (2018), 'othering' occurs when dominant groups define subordinate groups by reducing them to inferior or problematic characteristics. In research, this can

manifest when ethnic minority students like myself are framed as exceptions to dominant white, Western norms that underpin knowledge production.

My research responds to this issue by employing autoethnography, which positions me as both researcher and participant, allowing my lived experiences to be fully represented.

Traditional methodologies, particularly quantitative analysis, often reduce complex identities into generalised categories, overlooking the socio-cultural nuances that define the experiences of ethnic minorities, especially when considering intersectional factors such as race, gender, and class (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Autoethnography, as I used it, counters this tendency by integrating personal narrative and scholarly investigation, positioning my voice at the centre of the research.

As discussed in Chapter Three, autoethnography is a vital tool for decolonising research. It challenges dominant Eurocentric frameworks by amplifying marginalised voices and critiquing traditional modes of knowledge production (Ellis et al., 2011). This research approach aligns with postcolonial theories, as it disrupts exclusionary practices within academia by centring the experiences of ethnic minorities (Ashcroft et al., 2013; Bhabha, 1994). Through critical self-reflection, my research contributes to advancing knowledge informed by diverse perspectives, reclaiming representational spaces that have historically been dominated by privileged groups (Tierney, 1998). This methodology demonstrates a commitment to ethical research practices, particularly when dealing with the representation

of marginalised experiences, as emphasised by Said (1978). The research does not simply critique dominant academic structures but offers a constructive pathway for more inclusive research methodologies that honour the complexity and diversity of human experience. Through autoethnography, I challenge the inherent bias in traditional research methods, thus contributing a unique, culturally grounded approach to decolonising academic discourse.

Original Contribution Regarding Motivation for Doctoral Study

The second significant contribution of my research lies in exploring the unique motivations that shaped my pursuit of a doctorate in the UK as a Nigerian Black woman. My research highlights the intersectionality of race, gender, culture, and socio-economic factors that influenced my academic journey. Unlike existing literature, which tends to focus on institutional support or personal ambition, my narrative reveals underrepresented motivations such as cultural identity, resilience, and socio-cultural pressures, using intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) as a framework.

In Nigerian society, academic achievement—particularly at the doctoral level—is highly respected and confers both status and recognition within the community. For me, this societal value placed on education played a significant role in motivating me to pursue higher education. Beyond personal ambition, my educational pursuits were deeply

intertwined with cultural and familial expectations. As discussed in Chapter Five, education is not just a personal achievement; it reflects positively on one's family and community. The respect and recognition conferred by holding a doctorate, especially from a Western institution, underscored the importance of my educational journey.

In addition, the patriarchal structures of my upbringing in Nigeria and the loss of my father during a critical period of my life reinforced the role of education as a means of empowerment. Education became a tool for gaining autonomy, particularly as I navigated the transition into womanhood in a new cultural context. This narrative expands our understanding of why ethnic minority students, particularly from non-Western backgrounds, seek higher education—motivations that often remain invisible in the literature. My thesis addresses this gap by detailing the socio-cultural pressures, such as fulfilling familial expectations and challenging systemic inequalities, which drive ethnic minority students to pursue doctoral degrees.

Furthermore, my research touches upon the importance of relational recognition (Honneth, 1996), particularly the emotional and financial support provided by my husband, which enabled me to navigate the demanding landscape of doctoral education. This personal narrative broadens the understanding of ethnic minority students' motivations and challenges simplistic narratives about their academic aspirations. By incorporating the

complexities of family dynamics, cultural expectations, and individual ambition, my research offers a more nuanced understanding of academic motivation among minority students.

Original Contribution to Transformative Learning Through a Cultural Lens

The original contribution of my research lies in how it extends and enriches existing theories of transformative learning by incorporating the concept of liminality through the lens of my Nigerian cultural perspective. While Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory has traditionally been applied within Western frameworks, my research introduces a non-Western context, demonstrating how cultural values and lived experiences significantly shape the process of transformation. By navigating the stages of liminality—separation, the liminal process, and reassimilation—I provide a nuanced understanding of how identity reconstruction occurs within the context of a cultural shift from Nigeria to the UK.

This research adds to original knowledge by highlighting the role of cultural identity as a source of strength in navigating disorienting dilemmas, thus challenging dominant Western-centric perspectives on transformative learning. The incorporation of liminality offers a framework to understand the transitional phases that individuals experience during cultural adaptation and identity reconstruction. It also brings to light the prolonged state of liminality as a catalyst for critical reflection and transformation, an aspect that has not been extensively explored in the literature.

Furthermore, by engaging with my experiences of cultural dissonance and decolonising educational practices, the research challenges entrenched academic structures and advocates for more inclusive frameworks that recognise diverse epistemologies. This adds a novel dimension to transformative learning theories by demonstrating how alternative cultural perspectives can reshape traditional views of learning and knowledge production, offering a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of how academic development can be achieved in multicultural and postcolonial contexts.

Another major contribution of my research is its application of transformative learning theories (Mezirow, 1991) through the lens of my Nigerian cultural background. My experience highlights how transformative learning is shaped by the cultural values and epistemologies that individuals bring to the academic environment. This cultural lens disrupts the Western-centric models of transformative learning by integrating alternative perspectives and challenging existing academic structures.

As explored throughout my thesis, particularly in Chapters Two, Four and Six, I encountered numerous disorienting dilemmas, often prompted by the clash between dominant Western narratives and the non-Western cultural perspectives I brought with me. These dilemmas forced me to critically reflect on the colonial legacies entrenched within academic systems, prompting significant personal and intellectual growth. In line with Mezirow's (1997) ten

phases of transformative learning, my research journey guided me through critical reflection, self-examination, and the eventual development of new perspectives and actions that challenge traditional structures of knowledge production.

By engaging with these dilemmas, I was able to contribute to the decolonisation of educational practices, pushing back against entrenched power structures and advocating for more inclusive academic spaces. My research shows how transformative learning does not simply involve individual reflection but can be a collective, culturally situated process that reshapes how academic institutions function. This lens offers a novel contribution to transformative learning theories by demonstrating the importance of culture, identity, and self-recognition in academic development (Cranton, 2006; Illeris, 2014).

My research also contributes to the literature on decolonisation by highlighting how transformative learning theories, often grounded in Western frameworks, can be applied to non-Western contexts. This expansion of transformative learning theory, informed by postcolonial scholarship, highlights the importance of shifting frames of reference to foster more inclusive and socially just academic environments (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). By situating my transformative learning within a Nigerian cultural context, my research challenges dominant academic paradigms and provides a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of learning.

Implications for Educational Practice and Policy

The practical implications of my research extend to how educational institutions can better support ethnic minority students. By illuminating the barriers, I faced—including microaggressions, isolation, and lack of representation—my research advocates for institutional reforms that foster inclusivity and equity in academic environments. This aligns with calls from Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021) for more meaningful efforts to decolonise the curriculum, which include diversifying faculty, rethinking reading lists, and transforming pedagogical practices beyond superficial reforms.

My findings also emphasise the need for culturally sensitive support systems, including mentorship programmes and peer networks that address the specific challenges faced by minority students. By considering the insights from my research, institutions can implement targeted interventions that prioritise equity and inclusivity, enabling students from diverse backgrounds to succeed academically and personally. Additionally, my research suggests that higher education institutions must critically reflect on how systemic inequalities are reproduced within academic spaces and take bold steps toward rectifying these imbalances (Ahmed, 2012).

Conclusion: A Unique Contribution to Knowledge

In conclusion, my research makes a unique and substantial contribution to knowledge by exploring the intersection of culture, identity, and education through my lived experiences as a Nigerian Black woman in the UK EdD programme. The original contribution lies in how it extends and enriches existing theories of transformative learning by incorporating the concept of liminality through the lens of my Nigerian cultural perspective. While Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory has traditionally been applied within Western frameworks, my research introduces a non-Western context, demonstrating how cultural values and lived experiences significantly shape the transformation process. By navigating the stages of liminality—separation, the liminal process, and reassimilation—I provide a nuanced of how identity reconstruction occurs within the context of a cultural shift from Nigeria to the UK. This adds a novel dimension to transformative learning theories, offering a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of academic development in multicultural and postcolonial contexts.

Through autoethnography, I challenge traditional research methodologies that often 'other' ethnic minority students and provide a model for inclusive and reflexive research. My thesis also expands the understanding of ethnic minority students' motivations for pursuing higher education, highlighting the critical role of culture, identity, and family expectations in shaping these aspirations.

Additionally, by engaging with my experiences of cultural dissonance and decolonising educational practices, the research challenges entrenched academic structures and advocates for more inclusive frameworks that recognise diverse epistemologies. The incorporation of liminality provides a framework to understand the transitional phases individuals experience during cultural adaptation and identity reconstruction, bringing to light the prolonged state of liminality as a catalyst for critical reflection and transformation—an aspect that has not been extensively explored in literature.

This research not only challenges dominant Western models of learning but also contributes to the decolonisation of academic spaces. It serves as a call to action for institutions to foster more inclusive and equitable environments, supporting diverse student populations and promoting transformative learning that honours the complexity of the human experience.

My thesis stands as a contribution to efforts toward decolonising education, advancing equity and inclusivity in higher education, and promoting a deeper understanding of the transformative potential inherent in diverse cultural perspectives.

Critical Reflection on the Validity of Autoethnography in Addressing Research Questions

In critically reflecting on the validity of my research, the use of autoethnography has proven to be a particularly appropriate methodology to address the three research questions presented in earlier on in this chapter. By engaging with autoethnography, I have embraced a methodological approach that positions my personal narrative at the centre of the inquiry, allowing me to explore the intricate experiences of being a Nigerian Black woman navigating the Education Doctorate (EdD) programme in the UK. This methodology provides a lens through which my lived experiences, cultural background, and intersectional identity are not only examined but also validated as legitimate forms of knowledge production.

Autoethnography has garnered both support and criticism, with critics often highlighting its reliance on subjectivity and the risk of bias (Ellis et al., 2011). However, as I reflect on my journey, I have recognised that the subjectivity inherent in this approach is not a limitation, but a strength that has allowed me to delve deeply into my personal and cultural experiences. While subjectivity introduces challenges regarding the impartiality of results, it has provided me with the means to present an authentic narrative that captures the complexities of identity, race, and cultural belonging. In this sense, the method aligns seamlessly with my research objectives, particularly in addressing my first research question: 'To what extent might some methodologies 'other' ethnic minority students unintentionally in academic research?' Autoethnography has enabled me to critique how

traditional research frameworks may perpetuate 'othering' by failing to account for the nuances of ethnic minority experiences (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

In response to concerns regarding the validity and credibility of autoethnographic research, I have incorporated strategies of reflexivity and transparency, as highlighted in Chapter Three (Chang, 2016). Throughout my thesis, I have engaged in a process of continuous self-reflection, openly discussing the challenges I faced and the biases that might have influenced my interpretation of events. By doing so, I have created space for readers to engage critically with my narrative, assessing the conclusions drawn through their own interpretive lenses. This reflexivity not only enhances the validity of my research but also supports my claim that autoethnography can offer valuable insights into the lived experiences of those often marginalised in academia.

While autoethnography offers a powerful tool for exploring lived experiences, it is not without its limitations, which I acknowledge throughout this thesis. Critics have argued that the subjective nature of autoethnography can lead to challenges in maintaining objectivity and generalisability, raising concerns about its validity in comparison to other methodologies such as narrative inquiry or phenomenology (Ellis et al., 2011; Reed-Danahay, 1997). However, as I explored in Chapter Three, these limitations are mitigated by the reflexive nature of autoethnography, which encourages transparency and critical self-awareness. By continuously reflecting on my own biases and explicitly acknowledging the

ways in which my personal narrative shapes the research, I address concerns related to subjectivity and potential bias (Chang, 2016). Additionally, the choice of autoethnography over other methodologies was deliberate, as it aligns with the goal of centring marginalised voices and experiences—an objective that traditional methodologies often fail to achieve (Ellis et al., 2011). While methods such as phenomenology might offer a more structured approach to exploring lived experiences, autoethnography allows for a more nuanced and culturally specific investigation, making it particularly suited to addressing the intersectional complexities of identity, race, and culture central to this research (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Therefore, while autoethnography has inherent limitations, its ability to capture the depth of lived experience and challenge dominant academic paradigms justifies its selection for this study.

My second research question, ‘To what extent have my experiences as a Nigerian Black woman motivated me to study for a doctorate in the UK?’ has been addressed through the narrative exploration of my motivations and personal development. Autoethnography has allowed me to articulate the impact of my Nigerian heritage and the socio-cultural expectations that have shaped my academic journey. By narrating these experiences, I have been able to show how my pursuit of academic success was driven by complex factors, including personal ambition, the need for social mobility, and the desire to challenge and transcend the constraints imposed by both Nigerian patriarchal structures and the UK’s academic systems (Ellis et al., 2011). This narrative, rooted in cultural and intersectional

analysis, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind my doctoral journey.

The ethical concerns associated with autoethnography, particularly those related to self-disclosure and relational ethics, were addressed with sensitivity throughout the research process (Ellis, 2007). As discussed, I have taken steps to anonymise individuals where necessary and obtained informed consent from family members involved in my narrative. Member checking also played a crucial role in ensuring that my portrayal of others was accurate and ethically sound. This approach demonstrates my commitment to ethical research practices, ensuring that my work adheres to the principles of integrity and respect for all individuals involved.

Finally, my third research question, 'To what extent has my cultural perspective influenced transformative learning to a doctoral level?' has been comprehensively addressed through the application of autoethnography. This methodology has provided a platform for exploring how my Nigerian cultural background has shaped my transformative learning experiences, enabling me to reflect on the challenges and breakthroughs encountered in the EdD programme. The process of soul work, highlighted throughout my thesis, underscores the transformative nature of this learning journey, where moments of self-recognition and identity reconstruction have facilitated both personal and academic growth (Dirkx, 2000). Autoethnography has proven to be an effective tool for documenting these transformations,

offering a rich, layered narrative that illustrates the interplay between culture, identity, and learning.

In conclusion, the use of autoethnography in this research has allowed me to create a narrative that is not only personally meaningful but also academically significant. By prioritising reflexivity, transparency, and ethical responsibility, I have addressed the criticisms typically levelled at this methodology and demonstrated its value in exploring complex, intersectional identities. Through autoethnography, I have been able to address my research questions effectively, contributing new insights into how ethnic minority students experience and navigate higher education in the UK.

Critical Reflection on My Learning Journey When Completing My Thesis

This autoethnographic research illuminated the importance of my Nigerian cultural perspective in my learning journey at a doctorate level. Having an equal proportion of male and female Module Leaders with various cultural backgrounds was necessary. A diverse support system in higher education and a decolonised curriculum reduces the risk of colonised recycled knowledge at all levels. Educators must use international resources or case studies not limited to the UK or high-income countries (Moncrieffe et al., 2020). Institutions must ensure that images used for learning activities are diverse and students from each continent can relate to them. Educators must know a bit about each student's

background, experiences, and interests, which can be considered when developing the curriculum. Only towards the end of my thesis did I begin to question, 'Why Is My Reading List White?' (Begum & Saini, 2019). This is because my reading list has been predominantly White male perspectives, authors and theories which presented a colonised path. I suppose it was difficult for me to see from the inside because of being a product of the system. However, through my awakening experience, I was able to challenge and question my position on knowledge reproduction.

As a child, I grew up reading English books because my head teacher at the Nigerian primary school I attended was an English woman. This early exposure shaped my educational journey, and again, in higher education in England, my reading lists featured Western male authors. I did not initially recognise the implications of this until I encountered a moment of reawakening (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). Before starting my Education Doctorate programme, I believed 'decolonisation' referred solely to the process that colonised countries underwent to gain independence from their colonisers. However, I later realised that this understanding was incomplete (ibid). Towards the end of my thesis, I became increasingly aware of colonised educational practices, which highlight the need for decolonisation—not as a mere option but as an obligation to promote inclusivity.

To dismantle the asymmetrical powers embedded in race, class, and gender within higher education, decolonisation must move beyond 'soft reform' to more radical, structural changes (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). As scholars suggest, we need to disrupt the

comfortable status quo and approach this with a sense of urgency to promote meaningful recognition of diverse perspectives (Adébísi, 2023). The process of decolonisation should not merely be a performative act or a tick-box exercise but should occur in practice to genuinely transform educational spaces.

This transformation requires the strong determination of educators, regardless of their cultural background, to initiate changes in knowledge production at all levels (Ortega, 2006). Furthermore, formal accountability must be embedded in institutional frameworks, ensuring that decolonisation is not the sole burden of ethnic minorities but a shared institutional goal with legal obligations (ibid). When educators take collective responsibility, it alleviates the pressure on marginalised groups and creates a more equitable space for decoloniality. Therefore, decolonisation is essential for promoting inclusivity in education. It requires a collective and determined effort from educators and institutions to move beyond superficial reforms, ensuring that diverse perspectives are truly recognised and valued. Only through shared accountability and transformative practice can we dismantle colonised educational systems and create a more equitable academic environment.

Fundamentally, students should engage with a curriculum that reflects their history and lived experiences (Arday, 2021). Access to a diverse reading list is vital in developing a pedagogically inclusive learning space that promotes students' sense of belonging and engagement (Pedler et al., 2022). As part of decolonising academic institutions, there is a

need to break stereotypical practices against ethnic minorities that legitimise knowledge gatekeeping by colonial oppressors (ibid). I am not of the notion of removing Western perspectives, but it is crucial to disrupt the status quo of racial inequalities in higher education through inclusive practices. This would help embrace the contributions and participation of ethnic minorities to pave the way for developing emancipatory inclusive pedagogies in academic institutions.

At the beginning of this research, I highlighted that the focus of this study is not to see cultural differences as contempt or a disposition to build walls against. Overall, the thesis has helped me to build bridges to make connections that foster the understanding of self in relation to others. This thesis has demonstrated the affective, cultural, and emotional aspects of learning and identity/identities that must be considered. The interplay is different for each person, and getting to know one's student is essential. Again, one person's story does not give the generalisation that everyone shares the same lived experience. However, this helps to understand the peculiarities of one person's story which gives insight into a lived experience to establish validity.

As a doctorate candidate, I dwelled so much on comparing my skills and abilities with others which impacted my self-esteem and confidence. My narrative changed when I realised that my Nigerian cultural identity is an asset, not a form of incompetence to be covered up or resisted. Educators at all levels have a massive obligation and responsibility for other students and researchers to experience the transformative experiences I have been

through. They need to seek ways to join the 'beyond reform' movement and design curriculum and pedagogy accordingly through decolonisation practices (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). This will help enable others' learning journeys, identity work or cultural transitions to take place.

Strategies for Dismantling Systemic Racism in Institutions

During my educational journey in the EdD program, I have come to understand the significance of offering personalised assistance to students from ethnic minorities. Providing Tailored support aimed at assisting students from ethnic minorities in overcoming challenges encompasses a variety of initiatives. Mentorship programs, as advocated by Arday (2019), pair students with faculty members or older peers who offer personalised guidance and support tailored to their unique needs. Additionally, cultural sensitivity training for faculty and staff, as recommended by Bhopal (2017), fosters awareness of cultural differences and promotes inclusivity within the academic environment.

Moreover, academic support services, including tutoring, study groups, and specialised workshops, address the specific academic needs and challenges faced by students from ethnic minorities (Neely & Montañez, 2022). Decolonising the curriculum aims to enhance academic performance and facilitate success in higher education (Abu Moghli and Kadiwal, 2021). Counselling and mental health services that are culturally competent and sensitive to

the experiences of ethnic minority students are essential for addressing their unique stressors and mental health needs (Evans & Moore, 2015). Financial assistance programs, such as scholarships and grants targeted at ethnic minority students, help alleviate financial barriers to education and promote access to higher education (Bhopal, 2017). Additionally, creating peer support networks and affinity groups enables students from ethnic minorities to connect with peers who share similar experiences, fostering mutual support and a sense of belonging (Arday, 2019). Yosso (2004) emphasise the importance of community cultural wealth in supporting the success of students from ethnic minorities. Hence, equitable access to resources, including textbooks, technology, and research materials, is crucial for supporting academic success among students from ethnic minorities.

Community engagement initiatives that involve collaboration with local communities and cultural organisations provide opportunities for cultural enrichment and community involvement, contributing to a sense of belonging and inclusion (Bhopal, 2017). Offering flexible learning options, such as online courses or evening classes, accommodates the diverse needs and schedules of students from ethnic minorities. Finally, empowering students from ethnic minorities to advocate for their needs and interests within the academic institution through student organisations, diversity committees, and representation in decision-making processes promotes equity and inclusivity in higher education.

Reflection on the Insights Gained from Conducting the Research

My journey as a non-white individual pursuing a doctorate at a predominantly white institution profoundly influences my sense of belonging and self-worth in academic spaces. Being constantly aware of my non-whiteness, a concept elucidated by Ahmed (2012), exacerbates feelings of being out of place and inadequacy amidst a predominantly white peer and faculty cohort.

Upon reflection, I have come to realise that these feelings of inferiority stem from a complex interplay of historical and contemporary factors, including colonial legacies, postcolonial dynamics, and intersections of race, age, and gender. Additionally, my subjective experiences as a woman of colour migrating to the UK in 2008, which I detail in Chapter Five, underscore the various forms of marginalisation I encountered. Specifically, being the dependent visa holder under the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP) limited my access to privileges, leading me to take on low-paying jobs for flexibility in balancing work and childcare responsibilities while my husband served as the primary income earner (Home Office, 2006). Consequently, I found myself financially dependent on him, unable to make major financial decisions, despite his supportive role. Over time, however, pursuing education provided me with avenues for financial independence and social mobility, opening new opportunities for personal and professional growth.

To confront these existential challenges, I have chosen a research approach that delves into personal narratives to explore notions of belonging and the intricate interplay of social structures, individual agency, and spatial dynamics. Through the lens of autoethnography, I embark on a journey to uncover the nuances of my cultural identity and its impact on my interactions with the world around me. Employing autoethnography as a research method enables me to uncover the unique nuances of my cultural background and challenge prevalent racial stereotypes through the sharing of personal narratives. By providing an insider's perspective into my lived experiences, my goal is to contribute to broader societal discourse. However, as I navigate the ethical intricacies of autoethnography, I must conscientiously balance the imperative of truth-telling with the responsibility of safeguarding individuals' privacy and dignity.

The importance of decolonising educational practices becomes apparent as I explore the complex interplay of personal identity formation, cultural encounters, and power dynamics within academic settings in my research. Through my autoethnographic inquiry, particularly in Chapter Four, I reflect on the shaping of my childhood identity within an environment characterised by division and patriarchy. This process also highlights the therapeutic role of writing in comprehending the impact of past experiences on my present circumstances (Atkinson, 2007). By analysing my lived experiences and relationships, I discern how past encounters have shaped my self-esteem, confidence, and overall sense of self-respect in Chapter Six. Crucially, I acknowledge the pivotal role of my cultural background in shaping my experiences and memories, particularly as I navigate interactions within academic

spaces. I also emphasised the profound impact of respectful versus disrespectful relationships on my personal growth and academic journey in Chapter Four (Honneth, 1996; Winnicott, 1991). This study's Chapters Four, Five and Six underscore the responsibilities of academic institutions to acknowledge and respect the cultural backgrounds and experiences of ethnic-minority students. This would enable them to recognise their significant influence on their motivation, retention, and completion of studies. By actively listening to students' stories and providing empathetic support, institutions can foster inclusive practices that enhance student success.

Additionally, my autoethnographic research sheds light on the complexities of navigating liminal spaces within societal and educational contexts, where existing power dynamics may perpetuate marginalisation, especially in the absence of decolonised curricula and pedagogy (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). Fundamentally, this research study highlights the imperative of decolonising educational practices to cultivate inclusive learning environments that honour and celebrate diverse cultural experiences and identities. Through this transformation, institutions can better support the academic achievement and well-being of all students, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds who contend with historical and systemic inequalities.

Empowering Ethnic Minority Students in Higher Education

As I reflect on my doctoral studies, I am compelled to underscore the importance of addressing the challenges faced by ethnic minority students in higher education. Through my journey and the insights gained from my lived experiences, I have identified several strategies that institutions can implement to promote motivation, retention, and successful completion of non-white students in higher education.

Firstly, it is imperative to acknowledge the systemic challenges that ethnic minority students encounter, including discrimination in the labour market and inequities within immigration policies. By recognising these barriers, institutions can develop targeted interventions to support students navigating these complex systems. Financial support is another critical aspect of fostering student success. Offering scholarships and financial assistance can alleviate the economic burden faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds, allowing them to focus more on their studies with less financial constraints.

Creating supportive networks within the institution is also vital. Mentorship programs and support networks can provide guidance, encouragement, and advice to students throughout their academic journey. Mentors, Module Leaders, supervisors, and chairs play pivotal roles in offering valuable support and guidance to students, helping them navigate challenges and stay motivated. In addition to mentorship, fostering inclusive environments is essential. Institutions must actively promote diversity and cultural sensitivity, combatting

discrimination and bias in all aspects of university life. By creating inclusive and welcoming environments, students feel valued, respected, and supported, enhancing their overall experience and sense of belonging.

Flexible support services are also crucial in accommodating the diverse needs of students. Providing childcare assistance, counselling services, and academic support acknowledges the multiple roles and responsibilities that students may require. Therefore, it is important to offer resources to help them balance these commitments effectively. Promoting self-esteem and confidence among ethnic minority students is equally important. Recognising and celebrating their achievements fosters a sense of pride and reinforces the message that success is attainable for all students, regardless of background.

Lastly, encouraging family and community involvement can significantly impact student success. Engaging family members and communities in supporting students' educational endeavours acknowledges the importance of familial and cultural support systems, fostering a comprehensive approach to student support. By implementing these strategies informed by lived experiences, institutions can create a more supportive and inclusive environment for ethnic minority students, promoting their motivation, retention, and successful completion of higher education programs. As I conclude my doctoral studies, I am committed to advocating for these initiatives and contributing to positive change within the higher education landscape.

In concluding this thesis, I am struck by the profound implications it holds for transformative learning and the ongoing discourse surrounding the decolonisation of educational practices, particularly in higher education. Through the lens of my cultural background and the intricate interplay of my experiences, I have underscored the critical importance of fostering a sense of belonging among marginalised students within academic institutions.

Central to this discussion is the recognition that promoting students' sense of belonging aligns closely with the principles of transformative learning. By engaging in critical reflection on our experiences and beliefs, we open ourselves up to personal and societal change. Through my journey of self-recognition, I have witnessed transformative shifts in my self-respect, self-esteem, and self-confidence, highlighting the profound potential for growth and development within the academic sphere.

Moreover, I have come to understand how my process of self-rectitude and interrogation of entrenched belief systems explained in Chapter Six has contributed not only to personal healing but also to the forging of new identities. This introspective journey has served as a catalyst for challenging existing paradigms and fostering resilience in the face of adversity. Additionally, the invaluable relationships and empathetic support I have encountered throughout my doctoral journey serve as a testament to the significance of valued

recognition in promoting human flourishing. Grounded in empathy and understanding, these relationships have played a pivotal role in fostering my sense of belonging.

Chapter Six also offers profound insights into the transformative potential of decolonising educational practices. By prioritising the promotion of students' sense of belonging and cultivating empathetic support networks, academic institutions can create inclusive environments where all students, regardless of background, can thrive academically and personally. As I reflect on the journey that has led me to this point, I am hopeful that these insights will continue to inform and shape discussions surrounding transformative learning and decolonisation in education.

Advancing Research to Support Non-White Students Belonging

Following the completion of my doctorate thesis, there are more opportunities to conduct further research that holds immense potential in informing strategies to enhance the sense of belonging of non-white students in higher education. Here is why each suggested area of investigation is critical:

Exploring Intersectionality of Non-White Students: Delving into how intersecting identities shape the experiences of non-white students is crucial. By understanding the complex

interplay of race, gender, class, and nationality, we can tailor interventions to address the specific needs of students navigating multiple marginalised identities.

Comparative Studies: Conducting comparative studies across different institutions enables us to identify effective practices for promoting belonging among non-white students. By analysing institutional policies, support services, and campus climates, we can pinpoint strategies that can be adapted or replicated to create inclusive environments elsewhere.

Longitudinal Studies: Tracking the experiences of non-white students over time provides valuable insights into the factors contributing to their persistence and success.

Understanding the challenges they face at distinct stages of their academic journey allows us to develop targeted interventions to support their ongoing success.

Qualitative Inquiry: Centering the voices of non-white students through qualitative research methods allows us to capture the nuanced nature of their experiences. Listening to their perspectives deepens our understanding of the factors influencing their sense of belonging and academic engagement, informing more effective support strategies.

Faculty and Staff Perspectives: Understanding the views and practices of faculty and staff is crucial for creating supportive environments for non-white students. Exploring their

perspectives on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives helps identify areas for collaboration and professional development to better support students from diverse backgrounds.

Community Engagement: Investigating the role of community engagement in promoting belonging among non-white students sheds light on the importance of connecting students with external communities. Assessing the impact of community initiatives helps enhance students' academic success and sense of belonging.

Policy Analysis: Analysing institutional policies through a critical race theory lens uncovers hidden biases and structural barriers hindering the sense of belonging of non-white students. Advocating for policy changes and institutional reforms contributes to creating more equitable and inclusive higher education environments. Through these further research studies, we can advance knowledge and develop evidence-based strategies to promote the sense of belonging and academic success of non-white students in higher education, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive learning environment for all.

After all these have been said, I reflected on my academic journey as an adult student in the UK and I can only say that I am filled with gratitude which I will express in the following section.

Gratitude

Gratitude has featured heavily as a theme running through this thesis and it is a fundamental aspect of my Yoruba culture. I cannot express enough gratitude to those who have been part of my learning journey as an adult student in the UK. There is a quote from Dr. Robert Holden which says, *'The miracle of gratitude is that it shifts your perception to such an extent that it changes the world you see.'* This quote resonates with the Yoruba cultural perspective on gratitude and its transformative power. In Yoruba culture, expressing gratitude is not just about reciprocating kindness or acknowledging support; it is a profound act that shapes my worldview and experiences. It reflects an understanding that recognising and appreciating the contributions of others can fundamentally alter how I navigate life's challenges and interact with the world.

In relation to my journey as an adult student in the UK, this quote speaks to how the practice of gratitude has allowed me to reframe my experiences, even in the face of systemic social injustices. While these injustices could have led to anger and despair, the act of giving gratitude has shifted my perception, enabling me to view these challenges as opportunities for growth, learning, and advocacy. This shift has empowered me to channel my experiences into meaningful research aimed at decolonising the curriculum and pedagogy to foster inclusivity.

By focusing on gratitude, I have transformed my perception of the injustices encountered. Instead of solely viewing them as barriers, I see them as catalysts for change—prompting actions that can benefit not only myself but also other marginalised students. This approach aligns with the Yoruba belief in using gratitude as a tool for resilience and social change, shaping a new reality where barriers are broken down and a more inclusive world is possible. Hence, gratitude does not merely acknowledge the past; it actively influences the present and future by altering how I engage with the world around me.

I am so grateful that I chose autoethnography as the research methodology for this study because representation matters. This methodology has provided me with the opportunity to write from my Nigerian cultural perspective without being apologetic. People like me will read my stories, and it will also give insight to those who are not like me so that we can all work towards social change. The social change where the burden does not lie on being an insider or an outsider, where goals are shared, and successes are celebrated together (Beattie, 2022). These changes imply that things should be done differently, bringing a famous quote to mind.

'There comes a point where we need to stop pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they are falling in'. – Desmond Tutu

One could argue that in education, we keep waiting to pull people out of the river because, by so doing, we are seen as saviours. For social change to begin, we need to investigate why people are falling into the river in the first place while using our political will to ignite

'beyond reforms'. Decolonising the curriculum and the education system begins with representing people from various groups in educational settings because there is a need to promote inclusion at all levels of higher education. This further implies that the burden to champion social change will not be left to minority groups alone.

Concluding Thoughts: A Journey of Self-Discovery and Advocacy

The lack of representation of Nigerian women academics at the academy has contributed to my feelings of being out of place. My experiences would have been different if there had been a balance of people from various cultural backgrounds as Module Leaders and Supervisors. It is crucial to have a wide range of people who are representatives of distinct groups to dismantle the colonial mentality of the West is best as well as challenge patriarchal systems (Adébí sí, 2023). As educators, we need to stop talking sometimes and listen more to promote an inclusive learning environment (Durrant, 2022). This will allow us to hear other people's stories and value their perspectives which will contribute positively to their learning journey. Such perspectives should be recognised and given a valuable space in education without discrimination.

I now view myself as an autoethnographer, and it is essential to recognise the space I occupy and how I derive meaning from my lived experiences. This further develops my academic voice, which reflects my positionality, originality, and creativity. I urge Nigerian Black women, people from minority groups, scholars, and higher education tutors to

embrace autoethnography as a research methodology to challenge and inspire others with their stories. To provide alternative ways of knowing that recognise and appreciate the interpretation of new knowledge, not just an absolutist transactional way. Using autoethnography as my research methodology has allowed me to engage with my inner and outer self, my successes, and failures as I continue to strive to be a better version of myself through transformative learning.

Finally, this research has been soul work, and the writing process has been therapeutic. This thesis made me conclude that I am still a work in progress. Even though the study has reached its final word, my learning and meaning making of my lived experiences are on a lifetime journey.

At the Crossroads: A Journey of Self-Discovery and Advocacy in the Academy

As I conclude this thesis, I reflect on a journey that has been both one of self-discovery and advocacy. Navigating the complexities of identity, belonging, and representation in the academy, this experience has highlighted the critical need for diverse voices in higher education. Embracing autoethnography has allowed me to challenge established norms while encouraging others to share their stories. While this thesis marks the end of one chapter, it also signals the beginning of a lifelong journey of learning, growth, and self-

pursuit. I leave you with a poem that encapsulates this journey of finding my place, voice, and strength as a Nigerian Black woman in a Western academic space.

*In a land where roots and dreams entwine,
A Nigerian soul in a Western climb,
Navigates the tides of identity's quest,
In liminal spaces, seeking the self's best.*

*From childhood whispers of the 'West is Best,'
To doctoral halls, where belonging is a test,
She weaves her tale with courage anew,
Finding worth, in paths true, not few.*

*Her journey—a reflection, a voice now strong,
In the academy's echo, she belongs.*

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