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Articulating Faith

Christian Beliefs and Practices of Second-Generation Nigerians in London

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Abstract

Religious socialization by parents, which encourages religious participation and affiliation, as well as family upbringing, which instills values like educational success, hard work, resilience, and respect, shape the everyday lives of second-generation Africans. This shaping influence remains central to ongoing scholarly debates, particularly in light of the growth of Pentecostal Christianity within African diaspora communities. Focusing on second-generation Nigerians, this paper explores the role of Christian faith in everyday life within multicultural Britain, thereby contributing to the wider debate on the religion and minority identity. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and diaries written by a sub-sample of participants, this study finds that Christian faith offers guidance and influences participation and settlement among second-generation Nigerians in Britain. Religious lessons provide tools for understanding and drawing intra-racial and inter-racial boundaries, while values like patience, tolerance, and good sociability help individuals manage workplace racism, build broad interracial networks, and progress socioeconomically.

Keywords: second-generation, family upbringing, lived religion, religious socialization, identity

Introduction

Religion functions as a crucial site of belonging and social support for migrants in diaspora. For first-generation Nigerians in Britain, who are mostly Pentecostals, the church remains both a sacred and lived-in space central to social, civic, and extra-religious life (Adenekan-Koevoets 2022, 49). It is a space of belonging where migrants learn practical skills ranging from navigating host-country bureaucracy to learning language and professional skills.

Through their presence, religious organizations also offer basic practical support like childcare services, while church buildings become informal job and business centers (Foner and Alba 2008, 362). Additionally, among migrants who have no family ties in destination countries, religious activities boost their well-being, including mental health, through the ensuing human interactions. In terms of religious obligations, engaging in religious activities like evangelism contributes to migrants' sense of meaning-making and hope of a better life after death for themselves and those they can evangelize. A large body of anthropological and religious scholarship therefore reinforces the point that diaspora churches are not merely places of worship but institutions of social reproduction, moral guidance, and cultural continuity (Olupona and Gemignani 2007; Adogame 2013; Drouhot and Nee 2019).

Historically, African churches were established by migrants in Britain, not only in response to marginalization or a means of coping with social and economic deprivation but also to create a "home away from home" (Kalilombe 1997, 321–322). Therefore, existing research has mostly focused on this founding generation of migrants, emphasizing transnational growth and the transfer of leadership styles and worship practices to the diaspora (Haar 1998). This makes religion a tool of connectivity both in the diaspora and through the promotion of transnational relations. Regarding settlement within destination countries, belonging is negotiable and involves both continuity and rupture. As Hall (1994, 222) reminds us, identity is not fixed but involves a continuous process of [re]-production. It is always positional and influenced by history, culture and power. Therefore, diaspora experiences and the narratives of displacement must be central to any discussion on the identity of ethnic minorities. This presents the need to maintain home attachment while adapting to destination environments where migrants are spatially embedded (Gilmartin 2008, 1844–1845). Consequently, migrants face unique identity struggles and questions of where home is due to the difficulties they sometimes encounter in adjusting to new nations and cultures (Ralph and Staeheli 2011). Their descendants have a different frame of understanding of the concepts of home and destination countries, which shape their sense of identity, integration, and belonging. As noted elsewhere (Adenekan-Koevoets 2021), second-generation Nigerians, now becoming a formidable adult cohort, are contextualizing Pentecostal and cultural traditions based on their exposure to western cultures, without ignoring their Nigerian background. Through this hybrid cultural expressions, they strive to influence the British socio-religious landscape.

Unlike the first-generation, the second-generation have somewhat transcended the harsher experiences of their migrant parents but in Britain's racialized postcolonial society, they must still negotiate recognition, respectability, and belonging as Black people. Religious reproduction is shown through the continuity of Pentecostal practices like worship, testimony, evangelism, and moral discourses. It is a pragmatic way through which Black youth utilize the technology of the self for survival. Martin et al. (1988), describing Foucault's *Technologies of the Self*, state that it involves adopting practices that are characterized by ethics of self-care, critical awareness, and self-stylization.¹ Using these practices and within the power relations in which they are implicated, individuals attain certain levels of happiness, wisdom, and quality of life.

¹ Active creative process of shaping one's identity and behavior to present to others who you want to be as an aesthetic or philosophical practice.

In this way, Pentecostalism functions as a technology of the self. Through religious practices, the second-generation cultivate values of resilience, hard work, and good sociability that help them effectively navigate the education system, workplace/police prejudice, and citizenship regimes in Britain. As well-adjusted individuals, they care for others and actively contribute to the project of community-making.

Studying second-generation Africans is therefore important given the increasing proportion of the population of England that has a migration background. African migrants are Britain's fastest growing Black population; Nigerians have the largest Black ethnic population in Britain and the largest adult second-generation of all sub-Saharan Africans (Office for National Statistics 2021). Their dense concentration in London has translated into vibrant ethnic worlds in which Nigerian migrants and their children are embedded and through which they construct and maintain distinct cultural identities. For example, Peckham in south London, commonly described as Little Lagos, has been a haven, offering affordable housing, a welcoming atmosphere, and is a place where generations of Nigerians have settled and made their own. However, despite several quantitative research investigating mobility among minorities, few have embarked on in-depth qualitative investigations of the intersection of religion and mobility of Africans, and fewer have studied Nigerians. Using a lived religion approach, this article contributes to filling this gap by examining the role of Pentecostalism in the integration of second-generation Nigerians. It presents their contextualized religious views, discussing how religion shapes their everyday lives.

Lived Religion

Lived religion is a bottom-up approach that examines religion as experienced by ordinary people in everyday life. It expands religious scholarships beyond institutional, elite, and textual interpretations to include phenomena, people, and locations marginalized by conventional perspectives (McGuire 2008; Orsi 2010). It emphasizes individual agency, stressing people's active involvement in shaping and negotiating their religious lives despite social and contextual limitations. Lived religion emerged in North American scholarship in the 1990s as a critique of earlier approaches to the study of religion which had produced a problematically one-sided understanding, based on the ideas of religious professionals, doctrines, and institutions rather than ordinary people's religious practices (Hall 1997). It challenged modernization theories, especially the secularization thesis which propounded the theory of an inevitable inverse relationship between religion and modernity (Berger 1967; Bruce 2001). Proponents of lived religion argue that the secularization thesis did not adequately account for the everyday religious practices of individuals that were going on across various societies in the world (Hall 1997; Orsi 2010).

Central to the lived religion approach is the openness to when and where religion occurs. Because the distinction between sacred and secular is often blurred, religion as it is lived, is entangled in politics, family life, social media and leisure pursuits. Scholars therefore argue that it is important to prioritize the practices and beliefs that individuals consider as religious (Klingorová and Gökariksel 2017). This approach concentrates on embodied practices, habits, and materiality, highlighting how people use their bodies, express emotions, or dress during religious participation (Neitz 2011; Kupari 2016). One criticism of the lived religion approach is the excessive attention to individual agencies, which tend to minimize the role of everything

official, labeling organized religion as inauthentic. Therefore, using the lived religion approach effectively demands the inclusion of “official” and “unofficial” religion, as well as what happens in the church and on the streets, to understand religion globally (Ammerman 2021, 7–8).

In his analysis, Pierre Bourdieu (1990) situates lived religion within the intersecting structures of power, gender, race, sexuality, and social class, arguing that practices are embedded within constituted structures of difference and inequality. These structures travel across boundaries, and what individuals learn in one place could spill into other places. People are therefore composites of different identities, which play a major role in religious expressions and understanding (Ammermann 2021, 17). Consequently, this research draws on the theory of practice to understand how participants experience and express Pentecostal practices.

Religiosity and Nigerian Familial Socialization

Research on family socialization provides a framework that helps to better understand the relationship between parenting style, identity, and socioeconomic progress of the second-generation. Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) ecological model for human development provides a useful framework for analyzing the multiple processes of socialization within families. Bronfenbrenner views child development as a product of a series of interconnected environmental systems, ranging from the immediate surroundings (family) to broad societal structures. The family provides a foundation in which children learn how to navigate and fit into society and is the most significant of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems. For migrants’ descendants, who are frequently confronted with more social pressure to conform to Western society standards, family cohesion and well-defined codes of behavior guide their everyday choices. This is because cohesive families tend to be more supportive and responsive to the needs of children, thereby providing a moral compass for navigating prevailing societal norms and peer pressure (Richmond and Stocker 2008).

In his theory of religion and social cohesion, Emile Durkheim describes religion as a tool that reinforces collective consciousness, uniting individuals into a community with shared beliefs and practices (Durkheim [1912] 1968). Among Nigerians, cultural values like collectivism, communalism, and respect for authority are key features of family upbringing. Other competencies like diligence, hard work, respect for authority, and resilience, which are springboards for positive work attitude and social mobility, are also emphasized. This upbringing style, which teaches a combination of religious and family values and competencies, supports children’s socio-emotional and academic development, connecting them with their Nigerian heritage, thus raising individuals that become productive members of society.

Furthermore, through religious rituals, parents instill spiritual beliefs that give children a sense of identity and belonging, which is advantageous in culturally diverse Britain. Nigerian parents accomplish this by modeling faith through practices like praying, fasting, and religious participation, which strengthens familial bonds and builds a sense of community when done collectively. The church offers support by creating social hubs where young people get mentoring, networking, and training opportunities to develop leadership and social skills. Churches also provide platforms for young people to practice these skills before utilizing them in secular spaces. Such deep-rooted understanding and engagement with faith and family

customs, often blend into a set of behavioral codes that influence choices and conduct, helping young people navigate the complexities of modern life successfully (Según et al. 2025, 200–202).

Additionally, as members of diasporic religious communities, the second-generation benefit from the support of a surrogate family.² As children of uprooted people from societies with extended family traditions and communal lifestyles, this large “family” often serves as a node of ethnic reproduction, contributing to maintaining ethnic identities through the propagation and preservation of language, tradition, and religious practices (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Kurien 2017). This sense of belonging to another country and culture—which highly esteems robust work ethics, educational attainment, and exemplary behavior—is often used by Nigerians as a marker for intra-racial distinction from other Black groups in Britain. Greer (2013), reflecting on her experience as an African American student among children of African migrants, suggests that Black people are “not just blacks.” Non-blacks, however, often homogenize entire Black populations despite cultural, historical, and ethnic differences. Similarly, the anthropologist Susan Benson highlights the distinction between African and Caribbean people, suggesting that although both groups appear to be “indistinguishable to many English [White] eyes” and may reside in similar areas, they regard themselves as “very different people” (Benson 1982, 31). Accentuated by global white supremacy, Greer (2013) theorizes the construction of racial hierarchies that distinguish between Black ethnic groups by elevating the work attitude, educational achievement, and integration index of one group above the other. She notes that this has produced a “multi-faceted racial paradigm” and created complex tensions between shared racial identity and cultural ethnic distinction, affecting intra-racial Black relations both in America and Europe (Greer 2013, 2). But unlike America, this has received limited academic attention in Europe. In Britain, the few available studies have focused on the experiences of the older generation (Mwakikagile 2007), while others like Owusu-Kwarteng (2017) investigates intra-ethnic tensions between first- and second-generation Black groups in Britain. Advancing on Mwakikagile’s study, Owusu-Kwarteng finds more prevalent positive relationships between second-generation British-born African and Caribbean groups compared to the first-generation. She attributes this to the formation of “race-based coalitions” and sharing of both groups’ popular culture, although she concludes that intra-ethnic tensions between both Black groups still exist (2017, 12).

Although intra-racial racism is a contradiction, because racism is often perceived mostly as a “White” on “Black” issue, it has existed in Britain between Black African and Caribbean people for decades. This has been quite pronounced in education and politics and highlighted through the media with members of both groups articulating stereotyped ideas about each other (Abbott 2006). The historic stereotyping of Caribbean children as “underachievers,” perpetuated within the media and accepted in the education system, has led some African groups to differentiate themselves, to avoid being similarly labeled (Mwakikagile 2007, 11). This sort of labeling perpetuates intra-group hierarchies and downplays the academic progress

² Among Nigerians, every older person is an auntie, uncle, mum, or dad, while peers refer to each other as sisters and brothers, irrespective of biological connections.

and professional and political achievements of certain groups like the Caribbean people in Britain (Rhamie and Hallam 2002, 5).

Nigerian Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is a belief system that emphasizes the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, prayer, healing, and deliverance. Pentecostal expression is prevalent among Nigerians in Britain, and its practice has its roots in Nigerian culture and tradition (Obinna 2017). Although a widely used term, Pentecostalism embraces a wide variety of churches from the celibacy-practicing Ceylon Pentecostal Mission to the uniform-wearing Zion Christian Church in southern Africa, and Brazil's prosperity-oriented Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Also included are the Assemblies of God, the Catholic, Anglican and Protestant Charismatic movements, and the neo-Charismatic independent prosperity churches, among others. The movement is described with many adjectives like classical, holiness, finished work, oneness, deliverance, word of faith, neo- and others (Anderson 2010, 13–27). The complexity of definition led to the pluralization of the movement as “Pentecostals” (Robeck and Yong 2014). Pentecostalism is a prevalent Christian tradition among Nigerians in Britain, and its practice has its roots in Nigerian culture and tradition (Obinna 2017). In Britain, particularly in London, there are many Nigerian Pentecostal/Charismatic congregations, and I use the term broadly to include both traditions.

In terms of religious development, migrants are known for effectively transmitting their religiosity to subsequent generations (Molteni and van Tubergen 2022; Güveli and Platt 2023). In Britain, second-generation Nigerians tend to adhere to the religious convictions of their parents, although with adaptations. The effectiveness of this transmission has the capacity to influence overall religious commitment, patterns of secularization, and integration among young people. Recent research provides mixed evaluations of the state of Christianity in Britain, with some reporting growth and signs of renewed spiritual interest among young people, while others identify generational decline (Duffy et al. 2023, 3–35; McAleer and Barward-Symmons 2025). More broadly, contemporary British Christianity is characterized by persistent religiosity, dramatic decline and striking resilience. Therefore, focusing on either growth or decline is a distortion because “what you see depends on where and when you look” (Goodhew and Smith 2024, 11). Although this complex situation provides an important context, it is beyond the scope of this paper, which focused on second-generation Nigerians who are already Christians.

Data and Methods

This article draws on interviews conducted with thirty second-generation Nigerians who were drawn from various sources including Nigerian-initiated churches in London, personal contact, and through snowball sampling. Participants included members of Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations whether they were currently active or not. No demographic overview of churches was carried out since churches were recruitment sites rather than research sites, although I attended several worship services during the field work in 2024.

Due to the importance of religious and family socialization to the study, purposive sampling method was used. Criteria included having at least one Nigerian-born-parent to ensure inclusion of elements of Nigerian culture in their upbringing. I adapted the typology of

Kasinitz et al. (2008, 381) for children of migrants. Participants were grouped based on age at arrival: those who arrived before age 7 (1.75G), those who arrived between ages 7 and 16 (1.5G), and those who were older adolescents or young adults on arrival (1.25G). The ability to adapt their accent and behaviors to British societal expectations (see Keating 2021) and the opportunity for seamless integration decreased with increasing age at migration. Age of participants (range: 19–39 years) was also considered to explore religious experiences at different life stages (see Table 1). This is because of periods of uncertainty in identity construction and agency in terms of beliefs that characterize the life stages of young people (Desmond et al. 2010). Most participants were women (n=26), reflecting a commonly observed religious gender pattern (Pew Research Center 2016). Although there are debates around some of the studies, recent reports suggest a reversal of this trend—increased participation among young men than women (McAleer and Barward-Symmons 2025; Pew Research Center 2025). Research ethics around consent, anonymity, and pseudonymity were observed.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics of Participants

	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Age at arrival	Generation	Participant's Religion	Parent's Religion	Occupation	Education ^a	Citizenship
1	Jasmine	F	29	3 months	1.75	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Graduate researcher	Masters	Nigerian British ^b
2	Stella	F	23	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Admin Officer	Bachelors	Nigerian Irish
3	Anna	F	21	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	N/A	Undergrad	Nigerian Irish
4	Adaobi	F	25	15	1.5	Charismatic ^c	Charismatic	Teaching Asst.	Undergrad	Nigerian
5	Ndidi	F	27	15	1.5	Charismatic	Charismatic	Senior Nursing Asst.	Undergrad	Nigerian
6	Blessing	F	19	Baby	1.75	Pentecostal	Charismatic	N/A	Undergrad	British Nigerian
7	Moji	F	29	24	1.25	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Health Carer	Bachelors	Nigerian
8	Georgina	F	30	N/A	2.0	Charismatic	Charismatic	HR Manager	Masters	Nigerian British
9	Tunde	M	31	14	1.5	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Engr. Product Designer	Masters	Nigerian British
10	Adeola	F	32	30	1.25	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Health Carer	Bachelors	Nigerian
11	Rory	F	26	25	1.25	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Health Support	Bachelors	Nigerian
12	Joy	F	30	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Sports Manager	Bachelors	Nigerian British
13	Mary	F	27	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Business Dev. executive	Bachelors	British Ghanaian
14	Judith	F	21	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Entrepreneur	Undergrad	Dutch Nigerian
15	Femi	M	30	28	1.25	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Health Carer	Bachelors	Nigerian
16	Ifeoma	F	21	N/A	2.0	Charismatic	Charismatic	Admin	Bachelors	Nigerian British

17	Obiageli	F	32	25	1.25	Charismatic	Charismatic	Health Carer	Bachelors	Nigerian
18	Ngozi	F	31	23	1.5	Charismatic	Charismatic	Biomedical Scientist	Bachelors	Nigerian
19	Sola	F	21	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Student	Undergrad	British Nigerian
20	Bode	M	30	25	1.25	Pentecostal	Christianity	Lecturer	PhD	Nigerian
21	Sade	F	28	14	1.5	Pentecostal	Christianity	Senior Health Practitioner	Masters	British Nigerian
22	Nkenna	M	23	N/A	2.0	Charismatic	Charismatic	Finance Analyst	Bachelors	Nigerian Italian
23	Sandra	F	23	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Court Usher	Bachelors	Bermudian
24	Olaide	F	22	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	N/A	Undergrade	British Nigerian
25	Fadeke	F	34	7	1.75	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Family Social Worker	Bachelors	British Nigerian
26	Olamide	F	39	14	1.5	Pentecostal	Christianity	Procurement Officer	Bachelors	British Nigerian
27	Lizzy	F	19	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	N/A	Undergrad	British Nigerian
28	Tolani	F	21	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	N/A	Undergrad	Nigerian British
29	Angela	F	26	N/A	2.0	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Psychologist	Bachelors	British Nigerian
30	Ingrid	F	31	29	1.25	Pentecostal	Pentecostal	Mental Health Nurse	Masters	Nigerian

^a Education: Although this was not a selection criterion, all participants had higher educational qualifications (Bachelors, master's or PhD), and about 30% (n=9) were undergraduates.

^b Citizenship: Some self-identified as British Nigerians, expressing kinship with their parents' Nigerian heritage while feeling more attuned to the British culture in which they were raised. Others described themselves as Nigerian British/Irish/Italian. While acknowledging both cultural influences, many in this group were critical of British immigration policies, Brexit and racism, viewing Britain as increasingly anti-immigrant. Stella noted, "I can't be part that [British] history." Similarly, growing up within the community exposed them to Nigerian friends, music and food, enabling an open identification with Nigerian culture. "I feel this [Nigerian] is who I am, this is my culture and my personality stems from me being Nigerian."

^c Religion: Charismatics in all cases refer to Catholic charismatics.

Semi-structured interviews averaging sixty minutes were conducted and research questions centered around how participants' religious experiences were shaped by family upbringing and religious affiliation. My positionality as a Nigerian Pentecostal and therefore an insider, should be advantageous in terms of recruitment and access. This was not my experience because accessing young people required convincing them, despite the leaders' permission. Eventually, they granted interviews but did not permit out-of-church observations due to privacy issues. I also suspect there was some discomfort about my positionality as an older female given power dynamics that are rooted in traditional gender and age norms and the generational differences in interpretations of social attitudes. Nevertheless, I adopted a

feminist approach to interviewing, which allowed engagement with a retrospective narrative of participants' experiences. This was aimed at creating a rapport through mutual sharing, minimal power hierarchies, and a feeling of trust to encourage information sharing. This produced rich data. Nonetheless, I understand that narratives cannot be viewed as transparent accounts through which truth is learned, but as a medium through which people give meaning to their experiences.

Time, space, and other complex factors shape the way participants engage with their stories, but one constant factor is that stories give meaning and thus they shape identity (Sian 2013, 2). Although I am from a migrant background, I am aware of the power of being a researcher and understand that collecting and analyzing people's narration is sometimes colored by the researcher's knowing and interpretation of the world. As Marshall and Rossman (2015, 227) note: "There is no substitute for intimate engagement with your data. Researchers should think of data as something to cuddle up with, embrace, and get to know better."

Having used a feminist approach in my interviews, I familiarized myself with the data by reading the transcripts several times and "knowing" the participants as much as possible through their narratives. All data were coded and thematically analyzed while research ethics around consent, anonymity, and pseudonymity was observed.

The lived religion approach prioritizes adherents' religious observances in non-church spaces, however and whenever they choose to enact those practices. Thus, the initial research design for this project was to observe and record participants' daily religious activities, but as stated above, this was not possible. This necessitated the use of daily diaries. Ammerman (2021, 214) recommends the use of diaries to capture information that may have been missed through interviews, with the possibility of more accuracy since these should be recorded during or immediately after the experiences. Participants were given written prompts to guide them to keep a daily record of their activities for seven days. The responses of the ten women who consented provided an insight into their daily experiences.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, I argue that religion influences every area of the lives of second-generation Nigerians, offering guidance and impacting participation and settlement in Britain. Religious lessons provide tools for understanding and drawing intra-racial and inter-racial boundaries and shape identity construction. Religious ethos like patience, tolerance, and good sociability helps second-generation Nigerians to manage workplace racism, to build broad interracial networks, and to progress socioeconomically. Codes of behavior learned from parents, family members, and the wider Nigerian community provide guidance on the best educational and career trajectories that can enhance positive socioeconomic outcomes. I support my argument by first highlighting how participants articulate their religious beliefs and practices; second, by discussing the role of religious and family culture in their life trajectories; and third, by exploring how religious and family lesson shape participants' responses to racism.

A. Articulating the Beliefs and Practices of the Second-Generation

In a secularized global city like London, one might not expect a high level of religious engagement among young British people, but the second-generation that I studied were different. They narrated how they enact their faith in different social contexts. Fadeke spoke

to this: “To know me is to know that I’m a Christian. I’ve got Tuesday Bible study, Sundays I’m in church, so everybody knows . . . because it’s part of my lifestyle.” In addition to discussing his Christian beliefs with colleagues, Tunde noted, “I even talk about it to my boss.” This is remarkable in a society where more than 70% of young people (ages 16–29) identify as non-religious and where there has been a 13%-point decrease in the Christian population over a twenty-year period (Office for National Statistics 2021).³ Participants reiterated their belief in God as a supernatural being who created and governs all reality, intervenes in human affairs, and supports human morality (Botero et al. 2014). Participants explained that belief in God as the “higher power,” is central to their faith, and avowed that success is predicated on surrendering to God’s sovereignty and guidance of the supernatural. According to Ndidi, “you don’t have to always feel that you need to have it all together because he always has a plan and his plans are perfect.” McAleer and Barward-Symmons (2025) found that in searching for meaning, order, and belonging, an increasing number of young British people have been intentionally turning to Christianity. This contrasts with the findings of Duffy (2023), who reported that internationally the UK public are among the least likely to state that God is important in their life; this assertion was highest among Gen Z (62%) in 2022.

Participants also professed faith in the Holy Spirit as a guide and a friend with whom they have personal and daily interactions. Mary said, “I think he’s great. I speak to him daily. I ask him things like what shall I wear or what should we eat? I treat him as if he’s a friend and I do go to him for advice.” The transformative and empowering power of the Spirit instructs and enables the attainment of Christlike character. This empowerment happens through cultivating embodied dispositions like praying, meditating on the Bible, and fasting, leading to an in-filling of the Spirit. Participants admitted that rather than a life primarily focused on own desires and ambitions, embodying the Spirit demands “living God’s way” and shapes identity, making godly living, which is often counter-cultural, their aim. The ability to negotiate life at the intersection of the spiritual and secular is therefore crucial because this helps to connect religious practice with the many facets of social life and to engage with relationships which extend beyond church. Second-generation Nigerian Pentecostals self-describe having a distinct religious identity that fuels a sense of responsibility toward transforming the spaces they inhabit and the people they encounter.

In this way, Christianity, in terms of changed behavioral patterns, charting meaningful and purposeful lives, and adopting moral values rooted in biblical teachings, can become a marker of difference from non-Christians, both white and black. Sola stressed the role of godly disposition as an attraction to non-believers: “It leads to conversations . . . and they want to know more, just little steps.”

Christianity is not merely a belief system, but a core aspect of participants’ identity, which plays a more defining role in their sense of self than nationality or ethnicity. Joy said:

My identity is based in Christ because I know who he is, what he’s done, and I believe in what he’s going to do in my life. It’s like following a tour guide.

³ Only 94% of the British population responded to the question on religion (Office for National Statistics 2021).

You believe in what they're saying, and where they're taking you, so you follow them. So that's why I see my identity as rooted in Christ.

Fearon (2024, 28) argues that young African Pentecostals refuse worldly categories of identification, choosing to be defined primarily by their Christian faith, describing themselves as being “in the world but not of the world.” Thus, their embodied, ethical, and subjective relationships with the divine enable expressions of identity that were informed by their experiences and declarations of faith.

Participants also stated their belief in adherence to moral biblical principles, which shapes behavior and provides a moral compass especially when they are tempted to deviate from expected norms and indulge in delinquent behaviors. This was a more prevalent view among female participants who contended that obeying religious instructions like abstinence was not merely a matter of religious obligation but a choice that could lead to a more fulfilling and meaningful life. Fadeke explained it this way: “I believe that some things that God has asked us to do, for instance, no sex before marriage, are all for our benefits, so why won't I?” She has a Christian friend who is gay and continues to pray that her friend would find “the flesh of her flesh in a male, in a man, because that's how God intended it.” Scholars find that Pentecostal beliefs influence the sexual health behaviors of members because it portrays sexual intercourse as a faith-regulated activity meant for those in marital relationships while those who contravene this law are viewed as committing “sin,” which can sometimes attract social sanctions (Coakley 2013; Mpofu 2019).

Practices like praying and studying the Bible were stressed as core activities through which participants actively engaged with their faith and developed trusting spiritual relationships. Analysis of the daily diaries indicated that both male and female participants prayed at least once daily, accompanied by daily scripture meditation while seven of the ten recorded in their diaries that they prayed and read the Bible twice daily. Lizzy's Monday entry:

Today was the first day of me implementing the pact I made with myself and God to start each day with God. Usually when I wake up, I reach for my phone to check the time and then wander off to different apps on my phone, but today I made the decision to go to the Bible app first.

Like others, Lizzy found that beginning the day with a “quiet time” motivated her to “get on with her daily activities.” Others explained that this spiritual practice of “talking to God” helped to build “spiritual muscle,” guided their activities and provided strength to face daily challenges. Sade's diary read: “Today, I read the first chapter of Isaiah, and verses 11–13 really struck me. . . . these words set the tone for my day.” For Ingrid, her advice was that:

Christian life is not a life that is free from trials . . . when you read your Bible verse and you are connected to God, it will always speak to you. If you are in pain, sometimes if you are sick and you read a Bible verse, it will minister to your soul . . . it's like, daily food, that is why it is called daily bread.⁴

⁴ Our Daily Bread is a Christian devotional calendar-style booklet published by Our Daily Bread Ministries in over 55 languages (<https://www.odbm.org/>).

Working as a mental health nurse is very challenging, particularly working with young people who have personality disorders. She noted that it is her faith that has equipped her to verbally support them with positive words of encouragement drawn from her own daily private prayer time.

It has long been argued that there is a “universal” gender difference in religious commitment—women are rated as more religious than men on all standard measures of religious commitment (Stark 2002; Pew Research Center 2016).⁵ The reason for the gender gap in religiousness is very complex. While some attribute it to physical or physiological causes such as hormones, genes, or biological predisposition (Miller and Stark 2002), others point to socialization processes which emphasize traditional gender roles, lower rates of female workforce participation, and national economic structures. A case has been made that with increased economic power, women’s religious values should converge with those of men in terms of secularity and rationality (Woodhead 2008; Voas et al. 2013). However, despite recent gender advancement in economic and social power, the gap in religiosity persists in many societies, leading scholars to conclude that the gender gap most likely arises from a complicated mix of nature and nurture (Sullins 2006).

Participants pointed to regular church attendance as an important part of their religious obligation which they saw as vital for developing a sense of belonging because of the chance to join various social and religious activities and groups. Age was also a significant factor with younger participants recording lower attendance compared to older participants. Bode noted the significance of community and fellowship in Christian living, emphasizing the positive impact of regular interaction and the supportive environment that churches provide for members. Through attendance and active involvement young people learned competencies like community, leadership and coping skills, which are beneficial for integration. There were, however, others who acknowledged the practical limitations of daily life like workload which sometimes hindered regular attendance. Studies show that contextual or personal factors like life stage, forming families, marriage and childbearing, or career development influence religious commitment (Uecker et al. 2007; Ossai 2023, 14–15).

Another practice is evangelism—acts of sharing the Christian gospel with the intention of persuading others to become Christians (Währisch-Oblau 2012). Evangelism provides the opportunity to integrate talk and action about the Christian faith into daily life. Young people drew on their extensive network to make Christian outreach successful. They argued that when addressing strangers, it is vital to minimize overt preaching and be thoughtful and welcoming in order to achieve genuine connections. Their goal was always to attain the delicate balance between personal conviction and respecting the religious inclinations of the “Other.” As I wrote in another paper (Adenekan-Koevoets 2021), building relationships and approaching people respectfully were important elements of evangelism for second-generation Nigerians. About a fifth of participants had positive interfaith experiences due to being open, respectful and understanding of friends and colleagues of other faiths and none.

⁵ Five basic measures of religiousness include (1) the importance of religion in the person’s life, (2) affiliation with a religious group, (3) frequency of attending a religious service, (4) the importance of belief in God/supernatural, and (5) belief in an afterlife.

B. The Role of Religious Norms and Family Values in Everyday Life

For second-generation Nigerians, religion is pivotal for their daily lives for different reasons. First, Christian faith serves as a framework for understanding and navigating life's challenges and uncertainties, finding hope in uncertain times, and ultimately finding meaning and purpose in life. As Georgina noted: "Even when things just don't make sense, I'm literally like, I don't understand what's happening. I have faith that things are going to get better and there is a higher power that can see more than me and they're guiding my steps."

Second, faith offers comfort and support in challenging situations, most especially in work situations, and shapes their identity constructs in Britain, particularly when confronted with racist and anti-Black rhetoric. In combination with Nigerian family socialization, religious lessons from churches provide tools for understanding and drawing intra-racial boundaries with other Black ethnicities and for responding to what they described as anti-Black systemic injustices. The case of Tunde drawing from his religious and familial repertoire to deal with issues of systemic police injustice is an example: "I've been searched [by the police] ... I didn't really react in any way, shape, or form, that's also influenced by my religious [and family] background." Studies in Europe and America show that religion provides tools to navigate anti-Black racism and discrimination by promoting greater investment in religious observances as a resource for navigating between the worldly and the divine (Hayward and Krause 2015; Sall 2022).

Third, migrant churches often provide moral compasses and serve as alternative homes where children receive instructions from older members who fulfill the role of the extended family in diaspora (Ambrosini et al. 2021). For example, 30-year-old Joy remembered being in church so often that it not only became a spiritual space but also a sort of foster family with "aunties" and "uncles" and the opportunity for moral education and friendship with age mates. Internalizing the strict moral codes of behavior protects young people from straying into destructive relationships and attitudes and instead focusing on hard work, which contributes to improving socioeconomic outcomes (Kogan et al. 2019). 23-year-old Ikenna is a financial analyst whose charismatic religious upbringing guided him away from "friends" who overindulged while at university and helped him focus on his studies. In a way comparable to how young Africans were found to use religious norms and family values as tools to maintain intra-racial distinction from African Americans (Greer 2013), people like Ikenna make choices based on family and religious codes to achieve their academic goals and advance socioeconomic mobility through positive social networks.

Fourth, Nigerian-initiated mega churches like the Redeemed Christian Church of God with their layered structure of administration—local, regional, national and global—provide frameworks through which diaspora members construct their identities at different levels of church involvement. During our discussion, Tunde described how his religious membership and growing up in Nigeria gave him a sense of originating from a "home" and belonging to a global Christian community. This later served as reference points for confronting racism and shaping his identity when he relocated to Britain. Scholars suggest that identifying with a large denomination connects individuals to a growing transnational movement along with the spiritual esteem associated with its leadership and its projection of spiritual power. Associating with such an organization, sometimes compared to movements linked to historical figures like

Martin Luther King, contributes to a sense of proximity and connection to something larger than one's local context (Eriksen et al. 2019, 231).

Finally, religiosity shapes individual choices, influences overall well-being, and inculcates a productive work ethic, driven by a sense of responsibility to family and community. Starting from adolescence to emerging adulthood, young people begin developing their religious identity which eventually contributes to positive socioeconomic achievements. This is through improved moral order based on church religious teachings, as well as the psychological support of role models and through learned competencies like community and leadership skills, coping skills, and cultural capital (Smith 2003; Yonker et al. 2012). Smith (2003) further theorizes that being religious helps develop social and organizational ties, such as social capital and extra-community skills. Some participants however argued that the impact of church lessons through Sunday school, church sermons, and leaders' influence evolve with age and are not static. One 19-year-old explained that while Sunday school provided foundational knowledge and exposure to religious concepts, its effectiveness in shaping long-term faith depends on various factors, including the individual's age, level of engagement, and personal understanding of the teachings. It is a complex and dynamic relationship characterized by periods of active involvement, subsequent questioning and doubt, and a search for a personal expression of spirituality that fits current circumstances and beliefs. This highlights the fluidity of faith journeys and the challenges of navigating religious practice in the changing life of young people.

In this light, the second-generation stressed the importance of agency in defining their religiosity, which they argued provided fertile ground for the development of a religious identity that supports integration. Such an identity enables religious practice without hindering the development of a sense of belonging or access to the resources needed for social and economic development. Tunde was unequivocal about the importance of discontinuity and adaptations of practices which align the Nigerian spirituality and culture of the first-generation with the cognitive philosophy implicit in modern secular societies like Britain. The inability or unwillingness to make this delineation has contributed to young Africans exiting their parents' ethnically homogenous churches to join more inclusive congregations (Nyanni 2021). Tunde highlighted the need for cognitive ability in textual interpretation, which is beneficial for a holistic understanding while not undermining the importance of spirituality. Psychologists have theorized that cognitive factors influence belief in God, but people with an analytical thinking style are less likely to believe in God (Pennycook et al. 2016). This is controversial because while some scholars find a negative but insignificant relation between intelligence and religiosity (Shenhav et al. 2012), others (Pennycook et al. 2012) find significant correlations between some measures of intelligence and religious beliefs.

C. Confronting Racism – Participants' Strategies

I return to the issue of racism because of the attention it generated during the interviews. Participants reported being regularly confronted with racism, which they argued sometimes resulted in acquiescing to circumstances that were counter intuitive. At the university where he is a lecturer, Bode admitted that he often accepted extra work requests from his boss because of his precarious work situation as a Black man, adding: "I see my other colleagues that are white that do not kind of work as hard as I work moving up the ladder," a situation

he attributed to white privilege. He stated that his ability to accept the status quo is influenced by his Nigerian cultural ethics of hard work and resilience, which his parents taught him were prerequisites for economic success.

Scholars suggest that in addition to self-validation based on faith, the second-generation develop strategies of “social adaptability and conciliation” to manage racism and garner socioeconomic rewards (Imoagene 2017, 14). Social adaptation and conciliation connote the ability of an individual to relate to members of other social and ethnic groups, especially where there is a dominant group, in such a way that there is trouble-free interaction to achieve one’s objectives (Imoagene 2017). Conciliation is primarily concerned with ensuring that one succeeds in the workplace and involves ignoring and/or excusing discrimination from white colleagues or bosses (Bonnett 2006, 1099). Fadeke has been a social worker in a predominantly white neighborhood for the past ten years. Her strategy has always been to overlook racist incidences but be diligent, which is a pragmatic approach to negotiating the interstices of race, mobility and integration. “I’m gonna work with you well, I’m gonna do my job well, and I’m gonna be the best Black person or whatever person you’ve ever worked with, period.” Bode and Fadeke’s responses align with the attitude of increased efforts to overcome racial stereotypes according to the typology of Kasinitz et al. (2008).

In its broadest cultural interpretation, Nigerian upbringing compresses religious and traditional norms into one set of behavioral codes. Lessons from home and church help second-generation Nigerians maintain ethnic identity by preserving behavioral codes like respect, a positive work attitude, resilience, and tolerance. In this way, they establish boundaries with other minorities and maintain the position of being a highly successful and well-integrated Black group in Britain. Sall (2022) finds that Muslim rather than Christian youths used religious norms to maintain intra-racial boundaries and adopt distinct responses to discrimination in America. In contrast, I find that decisions on moral issues around sex before marriage, procreating out-of-wedlock, and homosexuality were guided by religious norms and family behavioral codes and functioned as important boundary markers.

Among Ikenna’s rich white peers, there was more than racial difference. There was distinction based on social class, and he needed to do boundary work toward both fellow ethnic minorities and white peers. Despite the need to maintain a cultural distance in terms of behavioral codes, Ikenna understood the importance of building social networks with those in higher social class (mostly white men), so while it was crucial to be distinct, it was pragmatic to find common grounds. This entailed adaptation of aspects of his belief and resonates with what Treitler (2013, 4) describes as an “ethnic project,” the process through which a group highlights its ethnic variations to give a perception of themselves as different from the bottom but like the top of the racial hierarchy. The strategy of social adaptability follows Moss and Tilly’s (1996, 256–7) concept of soft or social skills which are skills, abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior. Imoagene (2017, 18) explains that this requires that an individual accepts common standards of behaviors and avoids confrontational stances against the system, thereby becoming more likable.

Although Ikenna’s friends behaved differently because they had no religious background and were “doing life as they wanted to do life,” he maintained his belief guided him toward being friendly, communicative, and flexible, saying: “I’m probably more like an agreeable

person so then you end up being liked at work; the more that your colleagues like you, then obviously the higher chance you get promotion.” Developing relational (friendliness, teamwork, ability to fit in) and motivational skills (enthusiasm, positive work attitude, commitment) are necessary for participation and social integration. This may include learning the right behaviors, having the right accent and learning and engaging in activities that match with those of the white majority, whether in workplaces or other spheres of interaction. In combination with adaptability, economically successful second-generation Africans sometimes adopt a passive attitude and can “turn a blind eye” to racial slights by attributing it to “white” ignorance. They argued that this strategy increases white society’s comfort with them and supports career progression, provided one has the necessary soft skills. Moss and Tilly (1996) affirm that being socially adaptable is important for economic mobility while lack of the needed skills negatively impacts the economic advancement of ethnic minorities.

Participants discussed intra-racial differences, particularly tensions with people from the Caribbean community. Tunde compared his response to police harassment with that of young Black Caribbean men who tend to be more confrontational. He reasoned that despite being Black, the Caribbean context of “home” has been Western and heavily influenced by Western ideologies.⁶ Tunde suggested that the historical trauma of slavery and colonialism may explain why Caribbean men adopt a confrontational attitude to injustice. He argued that because “they’ve not actually experienced what home feels like,” they lack the cultural repertoire that could equip them with distinct behavioral codes. Georgina contrasted her family’s emphasis on hard work and resilience with what she perceived as dependency among other Black groups. This sometimes encourages a sense of an elevated minority status, failing to recognize the achievements of other Black groups.

Georgina recalled that a lot of Caribbean people did not use to like Africans, especially Nigerians which was difficult because she grew up in a Black neighborhood. Jasmine recalled that Caribbean people were “worse than white people when it came to African people, Nigerian people in particular” because they thought all Africans were undocumented, uneducated and too dark. Being light-skinned, an/ was highly valued because, “the lighter you were, the more respect they would have for you.” Imoagene (2017, 57) finds similar stereotypes expressed by African Americans and Caribbean people toward second-generation Nigerians in America and Britain during childhood and the effects have endured into adulthood. However, a few participants observed that relationships were improving. In addition to embracing differences and commonalities in terms of histories and cultures, they used shared religious affiliations and beliefs to foster positive interactions. This, noted participants, was by creating awareness about the different cultures, backgrounds, and thinking styles within the church and adapting attitudes and practices to accommodate different Black

⁶ Greer (2013, 2) describes a similar experience, comparing the single American ancestry of African Americans to African dual ancestry. She suggests that, although color unites Black people, they are often divided by cultural, historical, and ethnic differences. This tension between shared racial identity and cultural ethnic distinction leads to a hierarchy among Black people, shaped by [white] social systems. This system positions Black Africans above African Americans within this hierarchy because they were perceived as having better work ethics and educational outcomes and therefore closer to the dominant white group.

groups. When confronted with intra-racial racism, participants some of the tools to navigate discrimination and promote reconciliation as with white on black racism.

D. Effect of Age at Migration on Language Proficiency and Cultural Adaptation Among 1.75-, 1.5-, and 1.25-Generation Nigerians in Britain

Among young Nigerians, I found differences in identity and cultural adaptations, depending on the length of exposure to Nigerian and British cultures. Using Rumbaut's (2004) typology, my data indicates the different ways that the 1.75G, 1.5G, and 1.25G (see Table 1) engage with British society in terms of language proficiency, cultural adaptation, and identity construction. Those who migrated as young children (1.75G) were closer to the second-generation in that they tend to be more adapted to British norms, institutions, and communication style, particularly intonation, while connections to Nigeria were tenuous, mostly through their parents. They were more likely to be critical of Nigerian religious practices particularly around hierarchic leadership and gender issues, yet they upheld elements of their parents' conservative Christian views especially concerning sexuality and morality. By contrast, those who migrated as teenagers (1.5G) had more difficult experiences. Some, like Tunde, mentioned consciously training to acquire British accent to fit in. This is a form of strategic code switching which enables trouble-free interactions with other social and racial groups and allows the individual to achieve their objectives (Imoagene 2017, 161). Nevertheless, this often raised the issue of authenticity and the fear of assimilation into Britishness. They had also been socialized within Nigerian educational and religious institutions and were more conversant with Nigerian culture. Having been partly educated in Britain and being familiar with British norms gave them the feeling of being caught between two worlds. This hybridity, which placed them between the Nigerian communal and British individualistic values, was both challenging and beneficial because it gave them a cross-cultural perspective, making them more resilient and adaptable.

Language and accent were key generational markers of belonging and difference. Those who arrived as older adolescents or young adults (1.25G) faced more challenges because they often retained a Nigerian accent although they were proficient English speakers. Several participants related that this influenced how they were treated in professional and social contexts. A participant observed that "because we speak differently, it sets you out differently and that kind of affects your confidence." This led some of them to withdraw from group activities and social interactions to avoid having to repeat themselves severally. Inversely, the 1.75G and 2.0G spoke flawless English, which made integration and acceptance easier.

Finally, across generations, participants were keen to retain their Nigerian identity by maintaining traditional practices. These include speaking native languages, listening to Nigerian songs like fuji music, eating Nigerian foods, and attending Nigerian churches. Through physical apparels like native clothes and hairstyles like the afro, others brought Nigerian culture into conversations at local and national social events. These physical elements were more important for the 1.25G because of the sense of familiarity and continuity with "home." They were more symbolic for the 1.75G and 2.0G who occasionally engaged with Nigerian tradition and culture. However, as one participant remarked, "I don't want to completely lose my identity." This declaration reflects a broader sense of hybridity

consequently producing identity constructs by second-generation Nigerians that are both local and transnational (Hall 1994).

Conclusion

Scholars of migration and religion have long established that faith is a beneficial resource for migrants in destination countries, providing both spiritual and material resources which are useful for adaptation and re-constructing ethno-religious identity (Diehl and Koenig 2013; Kurien 2017). This article expands the discussion by focusing on second-generation Nigerian Christians.

First, the study reveals the growth of Pentecostal Christianity among Black British citizens of Nigerian heritage in terms of affiliation, participation, and belief. Although contextualized because of their exposure to British socialization, second-generation Nigerians share similar beliefs, practices, and religious affiliations with their migrant parents. Faith remains central to their everyday lives and is often placed above ethnic and national identities. Through fervent evangelism and engagement with peers, they spread the Christian message, thereby influencing the British religious landscape and contributing to the growth of Christianity.

Next, second-generation Nigerians are ethnic hybrids (Imoagene 2022, 696) who draw on the Nigerian communal culture and British norms of individualism in forming their identities. Religious ideals like patience, tolerance, and forgiveness combine with Nigerian behavioral codes like hard work, resilience, and respect for authority to serve as moral compasses for living in multicultural Britain—particularly in London—and have contributed to their positive social and economic achievements. Faith serves as a resource for inclusion but also a marker of distinction from other groups including other Black groups. Their ability to deploy both home and church values to maintain identity, combat racism, and improve socioeconomic mobility is a testament to the importance and embeddedness of faith in their lived experiences. However, age at migration is a critical determinant. Those who were born in Britain or who arrived as children (2.0G and 1.75G), were more bi-culturally competent, which allowed for easier integration and higher socioeconomic mobility than those who migrated as adolescents (1.25G).

Third, both faith and family culture are critical for successful integration. Religious and familial norms and values shape identity, mold behavior, and influence life choices. Adherence to biblical principle was an important marker of identity while belief in a God who guides and controls all aspects of life bedrocks their lives without neglecting personal contributions.

Although these findings should not be over-generalized as the study focused on Nigerian Pentecostals in one location (London), they highlight the role of faith in the identity formation, belonging, and integration of the second-generation. Further qualitative investigation across diverse African groups and religion would provide in-depth information about the role of Christianity among Britain's young ethnic minorities.

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