

**EXPLORING THE MUSICAL AND CULTURAL PRACTICES OF NIGERIAN
MIGRANTS IN LETHBRIDGE, CANADA: A CASE STUDY ON COMMUNITY
BUILDING**

OLUWASEUN OLUWAFEMI SONEYE

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Dr. M. Giroux Thesis Supervisor	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
Dr. M. Frishkopf Thesis Examination Committee Member	Professor	Ph.D.
Dr. J. Youngdahl Thesis Examination Committee Member	Professor	D.M.A.
Dr. D. Oye Chair, Thesis Examination Committee	Associate Professor	DMA

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Glory of God, the Alpha and Omega.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated how Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge, Alberta, use music to navigate questions of place, identity, and community in the diaspora. Given the nature of the study, an ethnographic fieldwork design was adopted. Fieldwork comprised participant observation at community events, including Ndi Igbo Day (Yam Festival), the Tehillah concert, Nigerian Independence Day, church gatherings, and birthday parties, along with interviews with five members of the Nigerian community. The study identified how music serves as a cultural pillar and adaptive mechanism. In response to challenges such as the unavailability of important traditional instruments and professional musicians, the community resorts to creative measures such as engaging and hiring members of the community to fill musical roles, and harnessing technology (e.g. loop pedals and DJ mixes) to aid in replicating the Nigerian soundscape. The study further highlighted how music establishes emotional well-being and intergenerational continuity, especially in religious and social events. Remarkably, events such as the Tehillah concert and Nigerian Independence Day celebrations reduce ethnic boundaries and divisions that exist back home in Nigeria and, therefore, give a common identity as “Nigerians” in Lethbridge. This study contributed to filling a scholarly gap in the study of Nigerian musical practices in the diaspora, addressing ways in which diasporic groups are negotiating culture preservation, cultural change, and integration. This study therefore advanced discussions on music, migration, and belonging by putting the voices of Nigerian immigrants at the centre.

Keywords: Nigerian immigrants, music, diaspora, cultural identity, Lethbridge, technology, community-building.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Work described in this thesis received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Boards, under the Project Name “Exploring the Musical and Cultural Practices of Nigerian Migrants in Lethbridge, Canada: A Case Study of Community Building,” No. Pro00143838, July 18, 2024

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines how music is used to establish a sense of emplaced identity within the Nigerian community in Lethbridge, which is located in southern Alberta. It specifically explores the challenges faced by this community; considers the impact of music and culture on the generational line (which refers to the structured order and progression of family lineages and beliefs passed down through generations) of Nigerian migrants in Lethbridge; and analyzes the role of music in meeting those challenges and building community. Based on ethnographic research conducted in Lethbridge in 2024, including interviews with key informants who have a wealth of experience about the Nigerian community in Lethbridge, I argue that music plays a significant role in preserving Nigerian cultures within the Lethbridge community. Specifically, it is used by Nigerian immigrants to create a sense of home and belonging, preserve cultural identity, and foster emotional well-being. However, I also found that in Lethbridge there is a lack of access to traditional Nigerian instruments, few accomplished Nigerian musicians (and none of them professional musicians), meaning that professional Nigerian musicians are costly to hire because they need to travel from other cities, provinces, or countries. For these reasons, it is difficult to practice Nigerian music in Lethbridge as it would be practiced in Nigeria. I argue that, in response to these gaps, non-professional community members take up music-making to fill the important role of the musician when no professional musicians are available and use technologies to support their practice and bring the sounds of Nigeria to Lethbridge. This technology-supported musical practice is fundamental to creating a strong sense of community and home among Nigerians in Lethbridge, including, at times, blurring ethnic divisions.

1.1 The Nigerian Context

Nigeria is a country with a population of over 237 million people, comprising more than 300 ethnic groups and over 500 native languages (World Remit, 2024). The largest ethnic groups are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, with other minority ethnic groups often subsumed under the umbrella of these majority groups (WorldAtlas 2016; Ukiwo 2005, 1). For instance, the Hausas are located in the northern part of Nigeria. Hence, other minority ethnic groups in this geographical location are often classified as Hausas. The largest percentage of the population of Nigerians is from this group of people, with over 67 million in the region (WorldAtlas 2016). The dominant religion practiced in this geographical zone is Islam. This was a result of the trade route in the eleventh century through merchants from North Africa. These traders brought goods along with their faith. Within the northern Hausa region, the most northerly states are Benue, FCT, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau. Other states in the northern region along the northeast corridor are Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe; while states in the northwest corridor are Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, Jigawa, and Zamfara.

Igbo ethnic groups, also known as Ndi Igbo which means Igbo people, are rooted in the southeast of Nigeria (Osuagwu 2024, 2). The main states that comprise the southeastern region are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. As described in the Northern group, many other minority ethnic groups in the southeastern part of Nigeria are not Ndi Igbo but often are classified as part of the group. Some of these ethnic minority groups are the Warris in Delta state, and the Benins in Edo state, among others. The Ndi Igbo are the smallest of the three major ethnic groups, with about 37.9 million people identifying as Ndi Igbo. The Ndi Igbo mainly practice Christianity; however, they also have traditional religions (Marykristel and Chinyere 2021). As stated earlier, the other

ethnic groups often classified as the Ndi Igbos actual belong to the geo-political zone, what Nigeria calls “south-south,” which is also known as the Niger Delta region. States in this region are Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers.

The Yoruba are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, with a population of about 51 million people (WorldAtlas 2016). The Yoruba people practice various religions, including Christianity, Islam, and traditional religion. The Yoruba ethnic groups are situated primarily in the states of Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Kwara, and Kogi. These states are mainly situated under the geo-political zone referred to as the southwest region.

Broadly speaking, Nigeria is a wealthy country (though one with significant inequity in wealth distribution) with a rich cultural heritage and a thriving music industry. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in out migration, known as “japa” in the Yoruba language (Thomas et al. 2025, 2). The term is used nationally as slang for those who have relocated out of the country. Scholars have attributed this migration to unemployment, high inflation, a bad economy, the problem of wealth distribution, and bad governance since Nigeria gained independence in 1960 (Nwosu et al. 2022, 2). These economic and governance issues continue to worsen. As economists Ibeinmo Cookey and Onyinye Ochuba affirm, “Unemployment in Nigeria has assumed such a dimension that wishful thinking and mere official statements by government functionaries cannot mitigate it” (2024, 224). Out migration is also in part a response to the massacre of youth following an altercation between Nigerian youth and the Nigerian police and government in 2021 (Okunade and Awosusi 2023, 2). This has caused many youths to mistrust the country and its leadership; some youths have lost hope in Nigeria and believe that the only available means for them to better their lives is to relocate and start a new life.

1.2 Discussion of Out Migration

Consequently, Nigerians are seeking solace and better opportunities elsewhere, as is the case for many people in Africa, and around the world. Migrating to international countries is a recent means of survival that some Africans have adopted, with many moving for similar kinds of reasons (Okeke-Ihejirika, Creese, Frishkopf, and Wane 2020, 130). Specifically, political issues and recession in Africa between the late 1970s and 1980s increased the migration movements of African migrants into the Western world (Okeke-Ihejirika 2015). Canada, known for its friendly environment and vast landscapes, has become one of the most popular destinations for Nigerians. As a reporter from *Business Day News* website, Bunmi Bailey, reports, 2023 saw the highest number of Nigerians moving to Canada in a decade (2023). Similarly, Julia Hornstein (2023) notes that the number of Nigerian students in Canada has quadrupled since 2019. Considering just Permanent Residents, the 2023 annual report to Parliament on immigration indicated that, in 2022, among Permanent Residents admitted into Canada, Nigerians (5%) were the fourth among the top ten, with Indians (27%), Chinese (7%), and Afghan (5%) immigrants as the top three. The report therefore showed that Nigeria was the top African country for new immigrants gaining permanent resident status in Canada and the only African country in the top ten list (IRCC 2023). Canada is therefore an important destination for Nigerian immigrants, and Nigerians are increasingly important within Canada.

The province of Alberta is home to over 20,000 Nigerian immigrants (Statistics Canada 2023). In the 2021 census, 260 Lethbridge residents identified as being of Nigerian “ethnic or cultural origin” (Statistics Canada 2023). However, I believe that this number has increased significantly over the past four years, as I have attended gatherings in Lethbridge of hundreds of Nigerians.

1.3 The Lethbridge Context

Lethbridge is the fourth largest city in the province of Alberta, Canada (after Calgary, Edmonton, and Red Deer). The 2023 municipal census indicated that the city is home to a population of over 106,000 people with just over fifteen percent identifying as being from a visible minority, a number that has nearly doubled over the past decade (Government of Alberta 2021). The percentage of those under eighteen is 21.7%, those nineteen to forty-four is 36.0%, those forty-five to sixty-four is 24.6%, and those sixty-five and over is 17.7% (City of Lethbridge Census 2023). The three major employers are in the educational, agricultural and governmental sectors. These opportunities and the diverse culture in the city create opportunities for immigrants to come in through their studies and later gain employment in the city.

Having been born and raised in the southwestern part of Nigeria, precisely Lagos state, I moved to Canada in late August of 2023 for further studies and comparative research in my field. When I arrived, I was struck by the number of fellow Nigerians in Lethbridge. I soon met many of these fellow Nigerians and was introduced to the Association of Nigerians in Lethbridge (ANL), even meeting its President, now past president, as his tenure ended late September 2024. More importantly, I was quickly connected to the Redeem Christian Church Freedom House, a church that makes an effort to bring new immigrants together and host them, helping to make immigrants' transition as smooth as possible. They even host those who are stranded or in need of a place where they can stay for a while before settling. As such, the Church has been the first contact for most Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge, welcoming everyone regardless of their religion or culture.

I have met, and visited with, Nigerian immigrants in various gatherings like churches and parties. In my conversations with Nigerians in Lethbridge, I have observed

that they come from different backgrounds, ethnicities, languages, religions, and classes, and thus bring in the wide range of musics associated with these backgrounds; in our home country, I might not have the privilege to meet or talk to them because these socio-cultural differences and class of people create divisions in Nigeria. Because Nigerians are part of the minority in the host country, I have observed that in Lethbridge they often come together and relate across these differences to create a sense of home (a more generic Nigeria) with each other, a situation that may be found in other small immigrant communities. This, in turn, creates something entirely new.

The Nigerian community has organized numerous events since I arrived in Lethbridge. The attendance of Lethbridge Nigerians at social gatherings is so significant that even a child's first birthday celebration is as elaborate and large as an adult party. These events are eagerly anticipated by Nigerian Canadians and Nigerian immigrants, and my observations so far suggest that they help Nigerians in Lethbridge feel more connected to home. I have also noticed that the types of music played are important at these events. There appears to be a conscious effort to exchange pleasantries in Nigerian languages among those from the same ethnic group, or pidgin English (the main language for communication among people from different cultures aside from English) among those from different ethnic backgrounds. This effort made me feel like I was still in Nigeria. This strong sense of community comes from mutual support among members of different ethnicities and cultures, all from the same country, working together to recreate a Nigerian enclave in Lethbridge over time. These feelings of creating a home away from home led me to focus my research on the experiences of Nigerian immigrants and how music serves as a way of connecting to and with home.

Despite being initially struck by a sense of unity among Nigerians in Lethbridge, in summer 2024 I observed that the Ndi Igbo ethnic group came together as a body

separate from the ANL, hosting a Ndi Igbo Day party. Ndi Igbo Day is a festival practiced among the Ndi Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria celebrating the New Yam Festival. This has raised my curiosity, challenging me to consider more closely my initial impression that the Lethbridge Nigerian community is completely unified.

1.4 Musical Dynamism and Relations with Place: Research Questions

Music and culture carry significant importance in human life, shaping and reflecting individuals' identities, values, emotions, and social and cultural lives. Music is not constant or consistent, but rather diverse and dynamic, influenced by various factors such as migration, globalization, and technology. It is therefore important to study how music and culture expand and adapt in different contexts and situations, and how migration affects identity and culture. There are many articles on the role of music in immigrant communities, including the works of Lidskog (2016), Ripani (2022), and Kasinitz and Martiniello (2019). However, to the best of my knowledge there is no literature on the musical experiences of Nigerians in Alberta. There is, furthermore, no research on how music and culture contribute to Nigerian social life and personal well-being in southern Alberta. This is therefore the first study that addresses the musical lives of Nigerian migrants in the region, filling a lacuna in the academic space.

Through its focus on music, this research addresses broader socio-cultural and political narratives. In this way, it is relevant for other scholarly purposes, as its central points are music's influence on culture, integration, identity, diaspora, connection to home, and community building. The findings from this study will therefore contribute to scholarly discussions on music among immigrants in Canada and beyond.

Specifically, this research focuses on exploring the role and significance of music and culture in the lives of Nigerian migrants currently residing in Lethbridge. The study investigates the use of music in the past and the effect and influence of music in current

community events on the lives of Nigerian migrants. Because it is conceived of as a qualitative study, the goal is not to survey the experiences of all Nigerians in Lethbridge, but rather to highlight some of their stories and experiences. The research study has set out to investigate the following questions:

1. What are the challenges and opportunities that Nigerian migrants encounter in establishing a community in Lethbridge while settling in Alberta during the migration process?
2. What role does music play in the events that gather Nigerian migrants, including but not limited to creating a sense of community or home and connecting with Nigeria and Nigerian identity/ies?
3. Are, or how are, Nigerian immigrants engaging in intra-Nigerian connections in Lethbridge and the province of Alberta through music?

Music is a way of life (i.e., embedded in every aspect of life) in Nigeria and many societies around the world. It is a vital aspect of identity that travels with Nigerian immigrants across the globe. Music, then, is a key element in understanding issues of identity, place, home, and belonging for Nigerians in the diaspora. It is also a valuable space to consider how people from diverse Nigerian identities interact in possibly new or different ways while living in the diaspora. The findings from this study will add to the understanding of the significance of music and culture for Nigerian migrants. It will provide new insights into how music reflects and influences their daily lives, initiating scholarly discourse among music scholars regarding Nigerian migrants in Canada. The study will also help fill a gap in the research field by expanding on existing literature on migration issues and creating opportunities for further research on the relationship between music, culture, and migration.

1.5 Chapter Overview

This thesis consists of five chapters. In Chapter Two, I provide a literature review of research on music, migration, diaspora, belonging and connection to home; on music and emotional well-being; on Nigerian music and its significance; and on the adaptation and evolution of music among immigrants. This provides an overview of what researchers in the field have done so far.

In Chapter Three, I discuss my research methodology. I explicitly provide details about the places and demographics where I conducted my research, as well as information about my interviewees. This chapter furthermore describes my approach to data analysis. Additionally, I provide the ethics approval details given to me by the Alberta Research Information Services (ARISE), University of Alberta.

Chapter Four discusses the interviews and fieldwork conducted for this research, presenting and analyzing my data. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the history of Nigerian migration to Lethbridge, which dates back to the 1970s. It then discusses contemporary gatherings, and how these gatherings support community building. Finally, it addresses the challenges Nigerian immigrants face in maintaining cultural practices, and how technology is used to address these challenges.

Chapter Five serves as the culminating discussion of this thesis, offering a cohesive synthesis of the study's principal findings and their broader implications. Building on the empirical and analytical groundwork established in preceding chapters, this chapter considers the research outcomes in relation to the stated objectives and theoretical framework. Furthermore, it identifies key contributions to the field while addressing limitations encountered during the investigation. Finally, the chapter proposes targeted avenues for future research, aiming to extend scholarly discourse and address unresolved questions emerging from this study.

CHAPTER 2: MIGRATION, DIASPORA, BELONGING, HOME, AND WELL-BEING

I begin this chapter by discussing music, migration, and diaspora, examining the reasons why immigrants migrate to a new host country, the role music plays in facilitating transition, and music and emotional well-being of immigrants. This first section also delves into the issues faced by immigrants in a host country including the ways in which music is transmitted intergenerationally or intercommunity. I then turn to identity, belonging, and home, discussing literature on music as a tool to foster community and continuity among immigrants in a new host country. In the third section, I discuss literature on music and emotional well-being, pointing to the importance of maintaining musical practices among immigrants for well-being. Given the centrality of Nigerian music to this thesis, the fourth section discusses Nigerian music, explaining what it means to Nigerians and providing an overview of the various genres and styles. In the final section, I consider adaptation and evolution of music among immigrant communities. These areas emerged during my research as vital to understanding Nigerian music among immigrants in Lethbridge.

2.1 Music, Migration, and Diaspora

Migration, simply put, refers to the movement of people or peoples from one geographical location to another (Jha and Singh 2022, 1). Migration into a new host country creates a generational tree for the family that migrated, which makes the individual who moved the first generation, and the children born the second generation. Olowere explains these groupings clearly, defining “the first-generation migrant as parents who were originally from another country and second-generation migrant as the children born in the new country” (2019, 11). Though the reality is, of course, sometimes

more complicated (e.g., in the case of children of first- and second-generation parents), this attention to definition of generation points to the importance of generation for many immigrants. Certainly, in my discussions with the community, people often mentioned what generation immigrants they are; migrants trace their roots and generations back to the first generation through the generational tree. This affirms the importance of generations when discussing migration and can help clarify or emphasize the reason for the migration.

A major reason migrants make the decision to migrate is the (perceived) opportunities the new country offers (the pull factors), compared to their own country (the push factors). People often move to another country to start a new life because of the future benefits they believe will be available to them and their families. Another common reason for migration is to reunite with families who have long left each other in the bid to get a good life. This has been the world's common and most constant habit, and is not continent or country-specific, but is a global concept people adhere to in the hope of improving their lives, businesses, families, and well-being; they tend to migrate to places that align with their goals or intentions for migration. As historian Sadan Jha and sociologist Pushpendra Kumar Singh state, "The scholarly discourse on migration predominantly conceives human migration as brought on by exceptional moments in a society's life, caused by one or the other factor. These factors are then further traced to the economic dynamics of societies" (2022, 2). To put it into other words, these scholars suggest that socio-economic problems faced by citizens are a major factor for migration into another country.

Once in their new country, individuals living in the diaspora are confronted with a dual influence from their home community and that of their new surroundings. Zeleza iterates this context, stating that "Diaspora is a state of being and a process of becoming, a

condition and consciousness located in the shifting interstices of ‘here’ and ‘there,’ a voyage of negotiation between multiple spatial and social identities” (2010, 212). This is a reality I have faced daily since I moved to Canada; I remind myself each time I step out of my house that I need to blend with the country I am now living in, as this my new reality. In the process, the individual may struggle with identity. As philosopher and journalist, Dons Eze, explains, “The African is thus torn between the culture of his birth and the domineering influence of Western culture. He loses his personality and is therefore neither wholly African, nor wholly European” (2014, 144). Music plays a vital role in these various negotiations because of its ability to fuse identities, both simultaneously and sequentially.

In this context of negotiation and identity struggle, music can facilitate social integration. It provides something in common for people from different backgrounds to integrate and connect with each other. There are many cases of immigrant artists collaborating or featuring with local artists (see, e.g., Royal College of Music 2023). This idea usually brings both the locals and the immigrants together to integrate and create new musical innovations that reflect the diverse cultures of both.

Music thus allows cultural exchange and innovations through its adaptation and evolution. However, immigrant musicians also face challenges and barriers, such as a limited audience, discrimination, little or no access to resources, language differences, and so on (Cassali 2025, 53–55). Though the negative impacts need to be acknowledged, these challenges can inspire creativity and resilience among immigrants, leading to the growth of powerful and unique musical expressions in their new country.

2.1.1 Challenges and Opportunities

People living in diaspora often face significant challenges including maintaining their cultural identity while adapting to the culture of their new community. Human beings

inevitably change in the process of moving from one place to another. Adapting to new environments, ways of life, and cultures, particularly during migration from one's home country and culture to another, can be a significant challenge. Retaining one's original culture in the diaspora can be similarly challenging, even impossible. As sociologist Viorica Cristina Cormoș affirms, migration comes with a whole lot of sacrifices and challenges; it is a total movement from the person's community to an entirely new community, starting a new life in the new community. As such, "migration affects the whole system of family and group, formal and informal, professional and cultural, ethnic and political relations of mobile people while structuring new patterns of appreciation and behavior, value orientation, and social participation" (Cormos 2022, 2). Because migration is a decision that requires sacrifice and affects the entire lifestyle of a person, adjusting is not a one-way process; it involves negotiation and exchange between the host culture and the migrant culture in the context of asymmetric power relations including economic, political, and demographic disparities. As Cormoș continues, "Any individual who has experienced migration can undergo identity changes. These changes are noticeable with the integration in the country of migration, through adaptation to the new social environment, acceptance of reference models from other environments/social groups, integration and assimilation into another professional group or workgroup, learning another language, new social relations, acceptance and assimilation of other norms, and rules and principles of life" (2022, 4). This process nullifies most of the social and cultural networks that migrants accrue in their country of origin and creates another pathway by going through a new learning process to acquire new skills required for the host country. Migration, then, affects every aspect of life. This change affects most minority immigrants in the host country, as the influence of the host will be dominant,

and the immigrants adjust and acclimatize to the culture of the host country they inhabit (Ayeomoni 2011, 196).

Discussing the roles of music among refugees and asylum seekers, Frishkopf similarly notes that “music and performing arts indeed have the capacity to link refugees not only to one another but also to their host societies and to their homelands, respectively empowering the refugee community, catalyzing social integration with a host community, and maintaining personal identity” (Frishkopf 2024, 330). This mirrors how Nigerian migrants in Lethbridge navigate resource scarcity by forging music-based networks that simultaneously sustain identity and foster integration.

Music and culture play a significant role in communicating and interacting between people with varying cultural backgrounds. Through music, migrants can express themselves, connect with others, and introduce their culture to the host community whether through making music themselves, or more passively through consumption of music. Kasinitz, a sociologist, and Martiniello, a political scientist, conclude that “migrants often know the music of the places to which they migrate before they speak the language, and members of the host society often become familiar with the newcomer’s music before they know much else about them” (2019, 859). Music connects people from different cultures breaking the language barrier. Music is a way in which migrants express their cultural identity in the new host country. My own experiences, specifically my trips to South Africa in 2013 and Ghana in 2018 and 2019, support this assertion. My hosts taught me their traditional music and explained the meaning to me before they taught me the basic words in their language; I found that the music helped me say the words properly. This was a moment that keeps resonating in my mind. As a result, anytime I think of going to a particular place, I try to learn the traditional songs of the people.

Music increasingly knows no boundaries in the global world, such that music from a particular culture or continent may be familiar within a wide array of communities. Meanwhile, in the context of the generation of migrants, two likely scenarios emerge with regards to music. Scholars Abigail Gardner and Kai Arne Hansen explain that “migrants bring their music and cultures with them to new places, thereby diversifying local cultural contexts and exploring new hybrid musical expressions” (2024, 14). Specifically referencing the music-making of a griot currently living in Norway, they further point out that, “Through his music he passes down his knowledge about life in the present day and preserves it for future generations” (2024, 14). First-generation migrants may make deliberate efforts to resist the influence of the new community’s music, which requires intentionality of the person as their musical choices are easily swayed by the prevailing culture of the new community. Sonja Condé explains this in her dissertation by summarizing Kelin and Roberson’s discussion. She states, “Since the second-generation migrants do not have the same experiences as their parents and the same strong connection to their parent’s home country as their parents, music has been seen as one way of passing on a collective memory from the first-generation to the second-generation and thereby shaping second-generation migrants’ identities in a particular way while transferring a historical consciousness” (Condé 2021, 10). The second-generation migrants might embrace a hybrid musical form, blending elements from their home and new communities’ musical traditions, facilitating cultural preservation, adaptation, and learning. However, in my discussion with some scholars, I found out that in rare cases, some first-generation immigrants might also embrace hybrid music as a way of integration while some second or third generation immigrants may resist hybrid music as a way to reconnect to their ancestry. This shows the diversity of humans.

For the original culture to be instilled and passed on to another generation, the first generation needs to make it as important as the new culture; the first generation needs to make a serious and conscious effort for the second generation to maintain the original culture while facing the new culture experienced in their daily lives including through school and socialization. The second generation therefore lives a more intensely hybrid life, where they balance their original culture with the new culture. Obsiye and Cook further explain the hybridity of the second generation noting that, “This context also presents opportunities for the young to negotiate their hybrid cultural identity whereby they take on board some of the values and norms of the host cultural context whilst also retaining certain of the cultural practices of their parents’ generation” (2016, 1068). This leaves them to balance their identity between their original culture and host culture. However, it is very hard to find the second generation maintaining and balancing the two cultures which has resulted in the loss of their original cultures among some of the second generation. Some researchers have affirmed this trend with the results from their long research on this particular loss of cultural identity. For example, Bisin, Verdier, Patacchini, and Zenou argue that the second generation does not feel connected and has a lower attachment to their culture of origin, values, and social norms over time (2008, 454). Another reason for disconnection from the culture of origin is marriages from different backgrounds and cultures, making the connection less significant.

Migration can have both positive and negative effects on the individuals and communities involved (Cormos 2022, 17). On the one hand, migration can provide opportunities for personal and professional growth, improve access to education and healthcare, promote cultural exchange and understanding, provide an escape from hardship and war, reunite families, and so much more. A report titled *World Social Report* by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs reveals that

“International migration is a powerful expression of people’s desire to improve their circumstances in a highly unequal world, whether in terms of wages, opportunities, safety or lifestyles. Millions of people move each year between countries and even continents for a variety of reasons, including to study, seek better job opportunities, marry, reunite with family members, retire or flee conflict or natural disasters” (2020, 129). On the other hand, migration can lead to social and economic marginalization, discrimination, and loss of cultural identity. Immigrants are faced with lots of obstacles daily which include unfamiliar behavioral norms, language barriers, discrimination, underemployment, loss of social and cultural identity, and loss of other support networks (Acemoglu and Robinson 2023; Hendriks and Burger 2020). They also face “deskilling,” that is, a lack of recognition of certifications and experience achieved in their home countries (see Okeke-Ihejirika, Salami, and Karimi 2018, 438). Migrants experience both the positive and negative share of their decision to move into a new country.

2.2 Identity, Belonging, and Connection to Home

Culture is one foundational aspect of identity. Identity can be defined as encompassing the various values, beliefs, distinctive qualities, and traits that make an individual unique. Thus, people who belong to one culture can, and often do, have different languages, religions, musical practices, and more; in other words, cultural communities are never homogenous. According to cultural theorist Stuart Hall, “There are at least two different ways of thinking about ‘cultural identity’. The first position defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (1990, 223). While we have some similarities among people, we also have differences that explicate people’s true identity. Hall further explains that a “second position recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity,

there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’” (1990, 225). Cultural identity is influenced by many factors like history, geographical location, economics, and politics; it shapes people’s interactions, and worldviews. Collier and Thomas’s book chapter titled “Cultural Identity: An Interpretative Perspective” defines cultural identity as “Identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has a shared system of symbols and meaning as well as norms/rules for conduct” (1988, 113). Cultural identification is, of course, also situational and can shift over time, context, and place.

Music serves as a representative of culture. It is also a means to discover personal identity and a bridge connecting individuals to various cultures and traditions. Zeleza explains that music is a means of communication; he writes, “Music has been one of the primary media of communication in the Pan-African world, and elsewhere, through which cultural influences, ideas, images, instruments, institutions, and identities have continuously circulated in the process creating new modes of cultural expression both within Africa itself and in the diaspora” (2010, 212). People can communicate within the same culture through music and express their sense of belonging and identity. Therefore, music is one of the basic elements showing migrant cultural identity.

Music and identity are intertwined, giving voice to individuals when faced with community challenges, as they cannot be easily separated from their cultural context. Ruud expresses this sentiment noting that “Music is linked to our identity construction through the memory of musical experiences, as well as our ongoing identification with musical styles, genres, and communities” (2017, 590). Music preserves and retains the migrant’s connection to their homeland; it can bridge them to their cultural roots.

Recent discussions in various fields and ethnomusicology have turned to issues of belonging, the present space the migrants are in, and their connection to their homes. Therefore, several ethnomusicologists have written on home and belonging (Cui 2013; Abdela 2015; Brar-Josan 2015; Mirikabasaki 2023)

It is common for migrants to use music to create a space of belonging in the new community far from home, especially in a country where they are faced with challenges. As outlined by music scholars Nicola Ugolotti and Chyrsi Kyratsou, music is a tool used in creating a connection with a home in the new country of migration, creating a sense of belonging by challenging the stereotypical representation of migrants (Ugolotti 2022; Kyratsou 2023).

Community building is an important part of the migrant experience. And music usually has a part to play. A new immigrant connecting with the immigrant community is one way to adapt into the new country. More established community members can orientate newcomers on the important things to know about the new country, helping migrants adjust more quickly through their connection to people from their country of origin. The day I landed in Canada was when I was orientated by my friend who came to pick me up at the Calgary airport. Our discussion lasted for hours, and it was mainly guidance on what to expect and how to manage any difficulties during my transitioning process. Similarly, when I got into Lethbridge my first contact was also a Nigerian who introduced me to the community. They hosted all the newcomers that also came in around that time; they counseled us all and gave us a helping hand. After this we ate, played games, danced, and listened to various Nigerian musics from different ethnic groups.

My experience points to music as an important bonding factor in building a community in the diaspora. Many studies have shown how music preserves the culture of migrants in an entirely new country and how it has helped to build a community far away

from home. Ethnomusicologist Fulvia Caruso investigated migrants who have relocated to Italy for a long period. She iterates, “As regards the audio-visual archives of the musical expressions of the cultural diversity of foreign residents, I was interested in understanding if and how people who may have lived in Cremona for decades still engage in a relationship with their heritage and if and how their (cultural) associations play a role in this” (2020, 174). Her inquiry revealed that active music-making is not just a remnant of the past for migrants; it is a vital part of their everyday lives, offering a sense of continuity that endures throughout their lives and the community.

2.2.1 Music and Social Integration

Music can play a significant role in integration into the social structure of a new community. One of the most important ways the community stays together is the social event set in the community for integration. I have first-hand experience with this since coming to Canada. Nigerian music is one of the important things used in all the parties and church services I have attended. This is the way migrants synergize and create a community that makes them feel at home and safe; social events and church gatherings can help support integration in the community. Music plays a significant role in this, as it breaks cultural barriers and creates community bonds from different cultures regardless of the barriers from the cultures and communities. As an interdisciplinary team of music, cultural studies, social psychology, and dance researchers affirm, “The idea that music affords opportunities for intercultural understanding and social cohesion has shaped policy and media discourse” (Crooke, Thompson, Fraser, and Davidson 2024, 19). It is an important activity for social integration.

The ability of music to connect people across cultures is not only emotional but deeply structural. In migrant contexts, music serves to build relationships, facilitate belonging, and help communities navigate new cultural terrains. As Frishkopf observes,

“The social bonds of intersubjectivity are constantly being reformulated, and while each case is unique, music always provides the same generalized functions: to bind the displaced together, to integrate them with their new environments, and to tether them to their individual pasts” (2024, 334).

Music also promotes communication that is beyond language barriers and creates bonds among the migrants and the new community or country of migration. Oehrle expounds on the value of music in cultural integration, arguing that “[music] promotes communication, develops an appreciation and new behaviour patterns about the world’s people, broadens our outlook of the world’s peoples, helps us understand the world’s cultures and their diversities, develops multicultural sensitivity, and is a unifying source with positive social significance. Above all, it is a way of breaking down the barriers and prejudices which isolate people from one another: a way of moving towards a culture of tolerance” (1996, 99). This is to say that it aids communication between migrants and the host country.

2.2.2 Role of Music in Preserving Cultural Identity Among the Immigrants

Music aids immigrants’ connection to their culture. Listening to music brings back many memories and emotions from their cultures (Liu 2024, 2). It is a bridge that links immigrants to their homeland and tradition. Music creates a sense of community among immigrants, bringing people together. When immigrants come together as a community, they usually create events like birthdays, festivals, and gatherings tied around music and their local food. These gatherings help individuals support and encourage each other.

Lyrics in immigrants’ native songs maintain language, but more importantly, preserve the dialectical language of the immigrants. Also, they help pass the language on to other generations of immigrants, most especially those born in the host country.

Cultural identity is expressed through music platforms and the sharing of their heritage in the new country of the immigrants. Scholar Flores Rodriguez explained that community music acts as social unification which makes immigrants sustain their ethnic language and culture while adjusting to new host country (2022).

The host country has its own culture, ways of life, and music. Immigrants are most of the time influenced by the music of the host country, and this gives a different blend of the host country and their traditional music. With this fusion, dual-identity characters may be seen through the music, as this is the host country's culture.

Undoubtedly, music is used for the healing process for most immigrants faced with the challenges of adapting to the host country. It is used as a coping system for stress and new uncertainty that will come their way. As associate professor of music, Alper Sakaler emphasized, music functions as more than just pleasure and fun: it also has a therapeutic function for immigrants finding their ground and stability in the new host country's way of life (2025).

2.3 Music and Emotional Well-Being

Scholars and scientists have shown that music is an important factor for well-being, helping in the functioning of all the learning domains. For instance, Jeremy Yudkin, a professor in the College of Fine Arts at Boston University, highlights the significant impact of music across all learning domains. As he writes, "Music touches on all the domains of learning, including the psychomotor domain (the development of skills), the cognitive domain (the acquisition of knowledge), and in particular and most significant ways, the affective domain including music appreciation and sensitivity" (2008, 4). Music sets moods and emotions in the functioning of all the domains. It is used to relieve people of emotional stress that they go through daily. The use of music for well-being activates the affective domain of the mood anticipated through music played. Behavioral economist

Shahram Heshmat states, “Music has the ability to evoke powerful emotional responses such as chills and thrills in listeners. Positive emotions dominate musical experiences. Pleasurable music may lead to the release of neurotransmitters associated with reward, such as dopamine. Listening to music is an easy way to alter mood or relieve stress” (2019,1). With these facts on the ground, it is safe to say that music engagement is used for creating or setting the mood for specific or general purposes. Scientists Viola, Martorana, Airoidi, Meini, Ceriotti, De Vito, De Ambrosi, and Faggiano attest to this in their research, stating “Indeed, participation in musical events can lead to emotional, cognitive and socio-relational benefits, with a positive effect on crucial biopsychosocial functions (e.g. increased immune response, greater sense of self-efficacy, reduction of social isolation, etc.)” (2023, 738). Participation in music for wellness purposes is very important and helpful.

Music is a significant activity that can function as a therapeutic remedy for the healing process. Public health professional Reynolds iterates that, “Music therapy is an evidence-based therapeutic intervention using music to accomplish health and education goals, such as improving mental wellness, reducing stress, and alleviating pain” (2023, 2). It has been used for healing in the past and continues to be used today. I had the opportunity to be in a musical group in 2017, where we went to the University College Hospital (UCH) in Ibadan, Nigeria. The goal of the group was to use music as part of the healing process of the patients in the wards. We (the musical group) performed patients’ music choices while they sang along with us. The experience took about a week, and the nurses and doctors observed a positive change. The joy the patients experienced during this exercise was obvious and contagious during this period, and it made administration of medication easy for all the nurses in the ward. Since then, the hospital has adopted the initiative as part of the process used for the healing stage of their patients. The founder of

the initiative, along with musicians and medical professionals, has since been going to different hospitals to help people through music. They have found that, when performing music to serenade the patients in the wards, the medical professional administered drugs and injections with ease compared to how hard it was to do that when there was no music.

Music also sustains cultural heritage and in doing so, contributes to maintaining mental health. Music is one of the most important things that naturally comes with the migrants to retain and preserve their cultures while in a new country. It gives the migrants fresh memories of their ways of life even in a new country. As Ruud notes, “Music can also be a powerful tool for expressing and communicating one’s experiences of migration, displacement, and belonging, as well as for challenging stereotypes and prejudices” (2017, 599). These aspects of music are all essential in maintaining mental health. In summary, music is an effective means used for well-being. It has been used for healing processes, and this healing has been confirmed by medical practitioners. Music can define and set the mood for emotional wellness, and in the process, it can stabilize emotions and ease the stress and trauma people experience daily.

In communities across the world, including migrant communities, music is often more than mere entertainment; it becomes a vital tool for navigating stress, uncertainty, and emotional disconnection. It shapes mood, provides comfort, and fosters a sense of stability in unfamiliar environments. As Frishkopf puts it, “Music is also a remarkably powerful social technology like no other...music can also be deployed for social good” (2024, 380). In this context this ‘social good’ creates psychosocial wellbeing and resilience, offering both emotional relief and a means of expressing memory and identity. I have many of my friends living in diaspora who have said to me in our discussions that music has been the only thing keeping them emotionally grounded, especially when they are overwhelmed, and do not have family to talk to because they are far away from home.

I am currently in this situation, and I can boldly say the same thing: as a new immigrant trying to navigate my way through my new life and new context, music has been the key factor my emotional wellbeing.

2.4 Nigerian Music and Its Significance

In order to provide context for my study, it is important to provide some background on Nigerian music, as described by scholars in the field. As noted earlier, Nigeria is a multicultural country blessed with diverse cultures and heritages. Music in Nigerian culture is more than entertainment; it reflects the cultures, identities, ways of life, history, and beliefs of the people. Citing Richard Okafor, Nigerian historian Femi Kush states “African music is the force of a living spirit moving within those who perform it, those who have to use it, those who are its targets and those whose actions and non-actions it dictates, influences or moulds. The music pattern of an African community could thus be a true index to their behaviour, carriage, personality, and identity” (2021, 4).

Nigerians have a variety of music cultures from traditional musics to Afro-pop which means that music preferences differ from individual to individual. People within the same ethnic groups also have different preferences for the style of music they listen to. Using two of my siblings, for example, one loves Yoruba-influenced afro-pop music, music that has very heavy instrumentals, while my other sibling loves Yoruba Christian worship music, with its solemn and soft tones. However, I love to listen to many music genres, such as folk, highlife, and fuji, among others. This points to how people’s personalities shape the type of music they choose to listen to or the music they connect to easily. Also, I have some friends from the Ndi Igbo tribes who love Igbo-influenced Afro-pop music and some friends from the Hausa tribes who love the melismatic style of music influenced by their culture.

Similarly, I have had the opportunity to be in some social gatherings here in Lethbridge since my arrival, and I have observed similarities in music preferences. I have observed two approaches to music presentations at these gatherings so far: music presented by a disc jockey (DJ); and live performing artists. Yet the use of a variety of Nigerian musics has been prominent at all the gatherings I have attended so far. This has made me realize that even though music comes with personal preference, culture, ethnicity, or tribe plays a strong role in individual music preferences. The creation of new genres of music over time in Nigeria is influenced by the artist's ethnicity and culture and these are the important features of the music. Therefore, all music styles in Nigeria are influenced by the culture and traditions of the musicians, even as personality and personal choice shape preferences.

Traditional music builds an important connection to Nigerian people's cultural heritage, creating a sense of community and continuity. For those in diaspora, it provides connection to Nigeria. Nigerian traditional music has a range of different music genres and styles which helps immigrants stay connected to their roots while in the new country. Sunday Nnamani discusses traditional music as a powerful tool for development in a society and, importantly, argues that it fosters cultural heritage and identity. As he states, "Folk or traditional music plays important parts in the cultural development of both the adult and younger generation of the society. The children's potentials are developed from birth while the adolescents and adults are nurtured to full maturity through music and other aspects of culture" (Nnamani 2019, 5).

The practice of traditional music among Nigerian immigrants encourages cross-cultural practices in the global world; it helps promote different cultures and influences each other musics globally. Traditional music in Nigeria serves as a way of preserving culture and continuity of the culture to the next generation by learning the past for the

present to be more understood and better maximize the full advantages (Kush 2021, 2). Contemporary Afro-pop music in Nigeria draws heavily from traditional musical styles while seamlessly incorporating Western influences, creating a unique blend that enriches the understanding of traditional music and enhances its role in shaping modern genres. Both Western and local instruments are integral to most Nigerian music today, cutting across genres. Moreover, Afro-pop's impact extends globally, with its elements increasingly influencing Western pop music. For Nigerian immigrants in the diaspora, Afro-pop serves as a powerful symbol of cultural identity and heritage. Research confirms the influence of Nigerian traditional music on all genres of music in Nigerian, as popular styles draw from the wealth of the repertoires and styles in developing new genres and styles of music in Nigeria (Agu and Nwafor 2022, 34; Agu 2016, 1)

2.4.1 The Influence of Religious Practices on Nigeria Music

In her article titled "Religion and Culture in Nigeria," Esther Adelana explains that religious practices in Nigeria have influenced people's beliefs and values, as well as the cultures, economy, and governing system of the country (2023, 4). Religious influence spread to everything in the country, and as such, it has a dominant presence in Nigeria's music practice, from the colonial era up to the present day. However, the religious practices of Nigerians is a highly sensitive topic. In an article titled "Managing Diversity in Nigeria: Competing Logics of Workplace Diversity," University of Lagos scholars Adeleye et al. state that "Nigeria is a highly religious nation, with an almost equal number of Muslims and Christians, and a small number practicing African traditional religions. The intersection of religious and ethnic identities, and the long history of inter-group tensions makes these very sensitive issues in the social and political arena. Such is the level of sensitivity that then President Olusegun Obasanjo decided in the last census in

2006 to not collect data on religion and ethnicity” (2019, 15). As these scholars note, even the Nigerian government is careful in approaching religion.

Music was a major practice among multicultural ethnic groups in Nigeria before the influence of colonization in the country. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the country is home to diverse religions, such as Islam, Christianity, and various traditional African religious practices. It is believed by Nigerian scholars and Nigerians more broadly that music is one of the means used to connect to the spiritual realms and communicate with the gods. As Nnamani iterates, “The communication code linking the invisible world of deities and the visible world of men is music” (2019, 3). Religious practice in Nigeria is as important as the culture of the country; and religion and culture are intertwined.

Due to the spread of both religions in the country, the Islamic melismatic style influenced the Muslim musicians in the southwest and has birthed different genres of music like fuji, apala, ajiwere, and waka music (Adegbite 2025). All mentioned are from the melismatic style and have been influenced by Western instruments. Meanwhile, Christianity has also influenced music in the country due to the influx of western instruments, four-part harmony, and hymnody that came with it. Religious influence has changed Nigerian music form, context, and content, demonstrating Nigeria’s blend of faith and culture.

One of the key areas of this research is music and religion. This is because of strong religious practice among Nigerians; this religiosity was something that I immediately saw when I arrived in Canada. Religion therefore became a very significant aspect of my research.

2.5 Adaptation and Evolution of Music among Immigrants

When immigrants move to a new country, they bring their culture and music with them. This can create fertile ground for cultural fusion; this can result from activities like social integration, cultural exchange, advancement in technology, and so on. Ethnomusicologist Austin Okigbo sees this as an issue of the creation of a new ethnic group that shares dual identities. In his introduction to a themed issue of *The World Of Music* on new African diasporas, he iterates, “New ways of self-referencing with ethnic inflection, such as Nigerian-American, Guyanese-American, and Ethiopian-American, among the diverse groups of peoples of African descent are engendering new perspectives on transnational identities and diaspora discourse...new African diasporic communities of North America participate in this conversation through construction of new ethnicities and therefore new complex identities that are rooted in both their African pasts and American experiences using the performative spaces of music and rituals” (2015, 7).

Music is a major tool immigrants use to maintain their heritage and cultural identity. It can uphold rites while carrying wisdom and lessons from the lyrics, while styles can evoke a mindset for each individual. Immigrants also adapt their music to reflect on their new home and experiences over time. This action results in the constant growth and evolution of music genres. Adapting to new environments and cultures takes process and time, and so does music. It creates new genres with elements from the immigrants’ home culture and the culture of the new country. Professor of sociology, Rolf Lidskog, emphasizes this point in his article “The Role of Music in Ethnic Identity Formation in Diaspora: A Research Review.” Summarizing the works of scholars on this, he states, “Music not only functions to express and maintain pre-existing identities, it also provides resources for contesting and negotiating identities and constructing new ones” (2016, 25).

The advancement of technology has contributed significantly to the adaptation and evolution of the music of immigrants. Social media and the internet play a vital role, making it easier for people to access and share music globally from different cultures. As a result, audiences around the world are increasingly exposed to diverse musical styles, leading to a broader appreciation of different cultures. This global circulation and exchange of music have contributed to the ongoing evolution of musical forms and practices worldwide. This is a key theme in Okigbo's introduction referenced above. As he states, "This volume seeks to explore new areas of African musical ethnography that border on diaspora-related discourse. It follows the increasing ethnomusicological attention to the phenomena of diasporas amid shifts in the trajectories of the discourse as a result of two important dynamics: (1) increases in globalization and the transnational movements of peoples, ideas and objects, technological advancements, and the emergence of social media, resulting in the shrinking of the global space and erasure of national boundaries; (2) the emergence of diaspora studies as an important and vibrant area of scholarly research and debate" (2015, 7).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the major literature that informs this research study, emphasizing themes and current findings. My study builds on this literature, providing an opportunity to understand these issues in a new context. Furthermore, the insights gained from this literature have validated the significance and relevance of this research in addressing these gaps and contributing new perspectives to the ongoing academic discussion in ethnomusicology. My next chapter provides a detailed overview of my methodology. I provide information on research design, the approach that I used for data collection, and analytical methods.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study utilized an ethnographic design to explore the dynamic interplay between music, culture, and the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge.

Ethnography is a qualitative research method in which the researcher actively engages with individuals in their community, a process often known as participant observation (Kramer and Adams 2024, 1). In this capacity, the researcher documents social interactions through field notes and multimedia, such as images and audio or video recordings, while participating in the setting. Drawing on this approach, I attended numerous Nigerian events in Lethbridge, including the weekly service at the Redeemed Christian Church, Freedom House; the Nigeria Independence Day celebration hosted by the ANL for all Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge; various birthday celebrations organized by individuals; and the Ndi Igbo Day celebration arranged by the Ndi Igbo ethnic community in Lethbridge. The field observations were at events that I was personally invited to, and, at some, I was an active participant playing a role as an artist (violinist), and a music director for Tehillah concert. As an active participant I was able to see beyond what I would have seen as a passive observer. I documented my observations in my field notes and through short audio and audiovisual clips recorded on a handheld audio recorder and my iPhone. I provide complete details of all these events later in this chapter.

In addition to participant observation, I interviewed five first generation Nigerian community members. Four of the five interview participants have lived in Lethbridge for more than five years. I included length of time in the city as criteria to ensure that they have substantial knowledge of, and experience with, the Lethbridge Nigerian community and Lethbridge more broadly. Out of the five interviewees, two were former choir members in the RCCG Freedom House. They lived in Lethbridge for over five years

though both have now moved to other locations. One of them moved to Calgary in the year 2022, while the other moved to Edmonton in the same year. I also interviewed a music DJ who still resides in Lethbridge, and a senior member of the Nigerian community who moved into Canada in 1978 and has since lived in Lethbridge. She provided a rich chronicle of the Nigerian community in Lethbridge and how music has played an important role in fostering the growth of the community. Finally, in addition to the four interviewees with long-term connections to Lethbridge, I interviewed an artist from the United Kingdom who came to perform at the “Tehillah 3.0 Concert” (Tehillah being a Hebrew word meaning praise) organized by RCCG Freedom House in Lethbridge. All these interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded using the Zoom record function.

I initially established contact with the participants I interviewed for this research study through friends I made when I arrived in Lethbridge. I explained the purpose of the interview, and then forwarded them a letter of information, summarizing the interview’s purpose and benefits to the Nigerian community, along with a consent form.

This research was conducted with attention to ethics, respecting the community’s privacy and individual preferences, and ensuring that sensitive information remained confidential. My approach aligns with Henderson and Esposito’s advocacy for an ethic of humility in research (2019). The University has a standard policy for research ethics, and I went through the rigorous ethical approval process for this study. It was approved by the Alberta Research Information Services (ARISE), University of Alberta, with Ethics ID: Pro00143838. Following the University of Lethbridge’s ethics requirements, all interviewees were asked to sign a consent form which was sent to them before the scheduled interview. All the participants consented via the email thread of the consent form that was sent to them. More importantly, during the interview oral consent was

requested again as I used the opportunity to brief them about the interview, and I also briefed them on the documentation process. They all agreed to allow me to use their information for this study and furthermore agreed that their names could be mentioned in any part of the study. This protocol ensured that I respected the informants' autonomy, acknowledging that it is not in my place to determine what is right for the research unilaterally or to assess whether my research is of value to interviewees and the community. As Henderson and Esposito articulate, "An ethic of humility also requires that we recognize that we are not the ones who can or should decide what is best for the communities we work with and that we are not the ones who can or should determine the value of our work" (2019, 885). This helps ensure that the migrant community is not extorted by the academic research being carried out in their community and that the study benefits them.

3.1 Places and Demographics

Upon my arrival in Lethbridge in 2023, I made some valuable friendships that have aided my research. These friendships have helped me navigate my music and research journey in Lethbridge. They have also built my network in the city, making the research possible; in fact, all the people that I interviewed were introduced to me by my new Lethbridge friends (that is, using snowball sampling). The spaces where I have made these friendships are Sanctuaries (churches), the Association of Nigerians in the Lethbridge community, and the University. While the interviews were conducted via Zoom, these spaces and connections made it possible for me to complete my field observations.

3.1.1 Sanctuaries

As a Christian, one of my basic important routines is to go to church and fellowship. I had the opportunity to go to a Nigerian church where my landlord fellowships; this was a

church that I knew about from Nigeria. I attended weekly services at the Redeem Christian Church of God (RCCG), Freedom House Parish, located in South Lethbridge. It is a Pentecostal church under the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) umbrella, a church started in Nigeria that has grown globally.

Over time, I have observed that most of the churchgoers in Lethbridge are seniors. I have been in some congregations where I saw only a few youths or young adults. However, that is not the case in the RCCG Freedom House, which has all generations represented in every service. The church runs two services every Sunday and other weekly programs like bible studies, prayer meetings, and various special programs and revivals. Between one hundred to two hundred people attend for major services; during these services, provisions are made for infants, children, and teens to have their own separate services. The church also serves as a community center in the city, as it offers community services to people in need by providing for their basic needs as much as they can. The church also runs a daycare center, which serves as part of its service to the Lethbridge community.

Nigerian Pentecostal churches are known for singing different genres of gospel music like Nigerian gospel music, Western gospel music, Nigerian gospel folk and traditional music, and so many other gospel genres. This same practice of music selection from Nigeria is practiced in every Pentecostal church founded in Nigeria that has a parish outside the country; these are the same trends of music practiced here in Lethbridge. Furthermore, the Western gospel music sung in most services is played in a more rhythmic and danceable style than in other churches. There are around fifteen to twenty-five choristers and instrumentalists, and the choir usually sings selections from the gospel genres practiced in Nigeria.

The first day I went to the church I met a fellow church member from Nigeria. This contributed to me feeling at home and welcome in the church. In no time, I joined the choir which introduced me to so many musicians around Lethbridge. Since I arrived, the church has organized various events and concerts, many of which I have attended. Although I documented my field observations at several of these events, I focused mainly on one of their biggest concerts which was titled Tehillah 3.0. This is the third annual church concert in which different Nigerian gospel music artists are invited from around North America and the United Kingdom, ministering at the concert. The concert is funded solely by donations from church members, friends and family, and some organizations. The concert that I focused on was held on September 20, 2024, at the Yates Memorial Centre in South Lethbridge. The Yates houses over three hundred people, and, for this concert, this included all ages from infants to seniors. About fourteen gospels artists and groups from different cities and countries were present, and they all ministered. The word “minister” is a more acceptable word in Christian settings to mean “perform.” The former is believed to be richer in context as the artists connect the worshipers to God, while the latter is believed to be merely for entertainment.

Following the event, I interviewed some of the music artists as part of this study. They are an essential part of this work as they have shared their wealth of knowledge and observations about the Nigerian community in Lethbridge.

Though spaces like the RCCG are primarily Nigerian, the growing Nigerian population in the city means that Nigerian immigrants are present at many gatherings in the city. Looking back into colonization in Nigeria, the British missionaries played a significant role in this process. The British missionaries brought Christianity into Nigeria, including Catholic, Baptist, and Anglican practices. These forms of Christianity spread, resulting in a large number of Nigerians who continue to practice these religions. In

Lethbridge, most of the Anglican Christians in the Nigeria community attend St Augustine's Anglican church in Lethbridge's southside. Although St Augustine's is a primarily white community church, they have welcomed Nigerians into their congregation. I learned about this church when one of my friends at the University of Lethbridge introduced me to her husband, Rev Femi, during a Nigerian event that was held in the late fall. When I described this project, he invited me to his church. Little did I know that he was a priest at St. Augustine's Anglican church. Though I was initially surprised to see a Nigerian priest in a white community church, looking at the number of Nigerians who attend the congregation, I understood that Nigerians have a strong connection in the Anglican community here in Lethbridge. This church was another place where I did my field observations. In this case, the church is a space where the Nigerian community connects with the host community through engagement and service in the sanctuary. My surprise about seeing a Nigerian priest in a white community church later became a learning curve as I was made to understand that it is a common practice in many Christian churches in Canada (in particular in rural communities) to have a foreign-born priest.

3.1.2 Association of Nigerians in Lethbridge

ANL is a community that unites all Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge. It began as an informal group in the late 1970s. This organization hosted the new Nigerian student immigrants when I arrived in Canada. The welcome they provided was incredibly warm, and I felt as though I was in Nigeria; there was Nigerian music played by a DJ for our entertainment, we enjoyed a variety of Nigerian foods, and we connected with established Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge who were there to offer guidance and assistance to all the newcomers. This event took place at the home of the former president of the Association, Mr. Osaro. About forty people attended this welcome event, making it a

wonderfully enjoyable first experience with them. The whole event was reminiscent of Nigeria's traditional way of hosting friends and guests back home.

I have met many Nigerians through this organization, and I have conducted field observations at various events that the ANL has organized, such as the Christmas party and Nigerian Independence Day. Additionally, I have actively participated by performing at some of their events. The purpose of the ANL gatherings is to unite new and old immigrants, building a community and fostering unity among them (Association of Nigerians in Lethbridge 2024).

3.1.3 Ndi Igbo

Ndi Igbo refers to one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. "Ndi" simply means a group of people coming together, referring to a group within the Igbo ethnic group. Ndi Igbo in Lethbridge have a group outside of the ANL, where they host cultural events and activities distinct from ANL events. One such event is Ndi Igbo Day, an annual Yam Festival, which is one of the Ndi Igbo festivals traditionally celebrated in Nigeria and globally. The association is a new community organization in Lethbridge, formed in 2022. It was created by Mr. Jude Eziagwu, the current president, along with a group of executives. For this research, I was able to observe the Yam Festival. This event is usually held in places where groups of Ndi Igbo celebrate their culture. At the fall event, there were many Ndi Igbo and friends in attendance. While I cannot specify the exact number, I estimate that about 120 attendees were Ndi Igbo. I make this estimate based on the styles of dress of attendees, as all the Ndi Igbo wore their native costumes, while the guests and friends were dressed casually or in their own native attire, which differed from the Ndi Igbo styles. Ndi Igbo organized the Yam Festival, and 2024 marked their second event in Lethbridge. The venue for the event was the Casa Community Arts Centre in downtown Lethbridge. Although I got lost when they spoke in their native language, as I

am from the Yoruba ethnic group, I sat with someone who graciously explained what they were saying. Moreover, they were considerate of their guests, often using English, as there were a few white friends and members of other tribes present at the festival.

3.2 Interviewees

In addition to field observations, I interviewed five people, Mrs Moji Taiwo, Peter Ntigne (DJ Rav P), Joel Olubunmi (Fretless), Oreoluwa Akanbi, and Victor Olayioye. These interviews were a core part of my research, allowing me to document the formation of a Nigerian community in Lethbridge beginning in the late 1970s and growing in recent years. They also gave me insight into how the musicians I interviewed have all made efforts to convey songs the way they are done in Nigeria, despite the challenges they have faced.

3.2.1 Moji Taiwo

Imagine an era when people had to travel with a vinyl record disc just to be able to access that music from their country of origin, just to feel the sense of home. This is exactly what Mrs Moji Taiwo did when she immigrated in 1978, a month before her twentieth birthday. She retired nine years ago from her work as a civil servant for the Government of Alberta after three decades of service in youth justice. She is currently a speaker, author, YouTube show host, community leader, and activist, married with three adult children, two of whom were born in Lethbridge, and three grandsons. Moji moved to Canada alone, not having any family in the country or knowing what the future had in store for her. Nigeria was known for its affluence as an upcoming country with a lot of riches. People who left Nigeria at that time were often not planning to permanently emigrate; they intended to study abroad and go back home. At that time, the Nigerian future was looking promising and bright. However, Mrs. Moji was born into a family

with many children, which made it difficult for her to further her higher education. The possibility for higher education was to go abroad and study while also working to and support yourself. The expectation was that, upon completion, you would return home with your certificate with a promise of better employment, better opportunities, and better future. Although she is not a musician or artist, she is an average Nigerian who loves music and has lived in Canada for decades. She has a wealth of knowledge on how music has been used to build a Nigerian community here in Lethbridge, drawing on her experience coming to Lethbridge in the fall of 1979 to complete a combined Radio and Journalism degree at Lethbridge Collage (now Lethbridge Polytechnic). She provided me with a great deal of information on how the Nigerian community came together during the early years of Nigerian emigration to Lethbridge.

3.2.2 Peter Ntigne

Peter Ntigne, popularly known as DJ Rav-P, is one of the major Nigerian DJs in Lethbridge. He has been playing music since he completed high school in Canada and has played across Canada, Asia, Europe, and Nigeria. As a young boy, DJ Rav-P left Nigeria with his family and moved to the Benin Republic. The family spent more time in Benin than they did in Nigeria. In 2009, Peter and his family moved to Saskatchewan, Canada, in search of a better life for the children. He moved to Medicine Hat for schooling before settling in Lethbridge where his family had already moved to after living in Saskatchewan. Having lived in French-speaking countries, Peter is bilingual. Peter loves various genres of music and sees every music as good music, which, as a result, led him to become a DJ. He has been the official DJ for most of the events that I have seen within the Nigerian community here in Lethbridge. He plays different genres to satisfy various generations present and different countries represented at events, as his wealth of experience has made him understand his audience and make sure they are satisfied

musically. Growing up, Peter saw his mum as a singer in the church choir. Also, during his high school days, he had two friends who loved to sing, which led him to provide soundtrack or DJ effects while they were singing. From there they started putting one or two things together in the basement till the practice became a profession.

3.2.3 Joel Olubunmi

Joel Olubunmi, fondly called Fretless, is a recording artist, music producer, director, music writer, gospel artist, and entertainer. Olubunmi describes himself as a child of God, someone who does not wait for things to happen; rather, he makes things happen regardless of challenges. As the firstborn from a musical family, he followed his parents every Saturday to the church choir. They attended The Apostolic Church, a Pentecostal church in Lagos. His dad is a songwriter, singer, and guitarist, while he (Fretless) is a strong singer. Fretless started playing the drum before the age of eight, and he stood out for his musical ability among his friends. All this was possible because of the first-hand experience he had in church and the fact that music runs in the family. The very first scholarship he got was as a result of him playing the drum during one of the women's conventions of his church. His first time in Lethbridge was during the December 31 Watchnight service in 2023, a program where Christians gather to pray as they enter a new year. He also came to Lethbridge in 2024 for the Tehillah concert (described later in this thesis) organized by the RCCG Freedom House in September.

3.2.4 Oreoluwa Akanbi

Gospel artist Oreoluwa Akanbi moved to Canada in 2009 with her mother and brother. She has been a singer for longer than she can remember and was in the children's choir back home in Nigeria. She joined the Redeem Christian Church of God Freedom House choir here in Canada in 2010, at the age of thirteen. Since then, she has been singing in a

variety of church and school choirs. Growing up in a Christian home in Nigeria, she has a memory of her mother playing music while doing house chores and cleaning the yard; her mother played music like “Tope Alabi,” “Midnight Crew,” Yinka Ayefele,” among many others in the background while working. Akanbi affirmed that these songs helped her build her relationship with God and her music ministry.

3.2.5 Victor Olayioye

Victor Olayioye is a gospel artist, entrepreneur, and businessman, who moved to Lethbridge at seventeen to study. He majored in accounting and minored in supply chain management. He lived in Lethbridge for seven years before moving to another city.

Victor joined the Redeem Christian Church, Freedom House, contributing as a drummer, during his second year at the University. This was his first time in a church choir and performing as a musician since he moved to Lethbridge. He started drumming back home in Nigeria, when he and his dad went to a friend’s church, and there was no drummer. His dad called him to go play the drum. At first, he was not sure if he wanted to, but with his father’s encouragement, he attempted it and was successful. After that, he often followed his sister to choir rehearsal. Victor was the youngest in most of the choirs he joined in Nigeria. He recently picked up singing after COVID. While at home during the pandemic, he rented a keyboard from Long and McQuade and taught himself how to play the instrument. His music ministry all started from RCCG Freedom House.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis

For data analysis, I used the thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Naeem et al. 2023, 1). Additionally, I observed and analyzed music genres during the field

observations and then analyzed them. This contributed to the research's depth and breadth.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodology used in this work to explore the musical and cultural practices of Nigerian migrants in Lethbridge, Canada. I discussed the research design, which employed an ethnographic approach utilizing participant observation and interviews with five participants from the Lethbridge Nigerian community. I outlined the process through which I gathered all the data for this research, including describing the events that I attended in Lethbridge. Furthermore, I discussed the ethical procedures taken to ensure confidentiality and obtain consent.

In the next chapter, I discuss the findings of this research, analyzing the main themes that emerged through my research. I delve into the challenges faced in the community—and how the community meets these challenges—and the role music plays in fostering a sense of community among Nigerians in Lethbridge.

CHAPTER 4: HOME AWAY FROM HOME: CULTURAL PRACTICE AMONG NIGERIAN IMMIGRANTS

This chapter presents my findings based on over a year of field research in Lethbridge. As outlined earlier in this thesis, there are a growing number of Nigerian immigrants in the city. However, even with this growth, Lethbridge is home to no professional Nigerian musicians and few accomplished Nigerian musicians; experienced musicians are costly to hire because they typically need to travel from other cities, provinces, or countries. Furthermore, there is a lack of access to traditional Nigerian instruments. For these reasons, it is challenging to practice Nigerian music in Lethbridge as it would be practiced in Nigeria. In this chapter, I argue that, in response to these gaps, community members (i.e., non-professionals) take up music-making to fill the important role of the musician when no professional musicians are available. Just as importantly, they use technologies to support their practice and to bring the sounds of Nigeria to Lethbridge. This amateur and technology-supported musical practice is fundamental to creating a strong sense of community and home among Nigerians in Lethbridge; in effect, technology is used to bridge the gaps in access to their roots and cultural music and songs. My findings also highlight the importance of religion and religious spaces to Lethbridge's Nigerian community, focusing on Christianity because most of the Nigerians in the city are Christian. However, I also point to some spaces and contexts where inter-ethnic and religious divisions are blurred.

I begin the chapter by providing an overview of the history of gatherings among Nigerians in Lethbridge dating back to the 1970s. Beginning with the early years then moving to contemporary gatherings of Nigerians in Lethbridge, I engage in a discussion of how these gatherings connect the community to Nigeria, supporting the community to maintain their connections to Nigerian culture even in a new host country. Next, I turn to

the challenges Nigerian immigrants face to maintain cultural practice and, finally, discuss how technology addresses some of these challenges.

4.1 The Early History of Nigerian Community Building in Lethbridge

In the late 1970s, Mrs Moji Taiwo arrived in Lethbridge, becoming one of the first Nigerian immigrants to the city. Her main reason for emigrating was to attend university, which was impossible in Nigeria due to her father's multiple marriages, resulting in numerous siblings. As the youngest child of her mother, she faced significant financial barriers to accessing higher education. With limited resources available, her parents could not afford to support all their children through university, leaving each sibling to secure their path to academic advancement independently. She entered adulthood without the financial safety net that could have eased her transition into post-secondary education. This lack of family support meant that pursuing a degree would require extraordinary personal determination, as she alone would be responsible for tuition costs and living expenses while confronting the reality of academic pressures. Consequently, the only option for her to pursue her educational goals was to travel to Canada, where she studied and worked to pay her school fees and living expenses. Given that Nigeria was newly independent and emerging, many people sought education abroad, and there were few universities in Nigeria at that time.

When I met with Taiwo, she described community building among Nigerian and Black immigrant students in Lethbridge and the emergence of a Nigerian community in the early years after her arrival. During this period, there were very few Nigerian and Black individuals living in the city. Because most arrived to pursue higher education, those who were in Lethbridge were at Lethbridge College (now Lethbridge Polytechnic) and the University of Lethbridge. Taiwo explained that the Nigerian and Black students at Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge came together to foster a sense of

community by hosting parties, cooking traditional meals, and celebrating festivals and holidays (interview with Taiwo, 23 November 2024).

Taiwo explained to me that Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge faced culture shock among many other challenges. One of the challenges that they encountered was gaining admission to universities, due in part to their accents. As Taiwo shared, at that time, some Nigerians were denied admission for this reason (including Taiwo herself, who was seeking admission to the University of Calgary), while white applicants could avoid such scrutiny. Her lack of success gaining admission to the University of Calgary ultimately led Taiwo to Lethbridge, where she was able to gain admission to Lethbridge College, albeit in a different discipline from what she had applied to at the University of Calgary (interview with Taiwo, 23 November 2024).

Nigerians also faced prejudice during this time because many southern Albertans had never seen or met Black people. This placed a lot of attention on the few Black people living in the region at this time. As Taiwo explained to me, some white people would touch them out of eagerness and curiosity, while others would just not get close to them, as they would rather avoid them. She described the situation as follows:

Canadians didn't know much about Black people, so their exposure and their knowledge of Black people were like you are apes, you'd live on trees, because of course they only have access to Black people through TV shows and movies, and in those days Black people are portrayed as ignorant, uncultured, non-human. So, when they see you at that time, they are curious, [it] is either curiosity or fear or ignorance, so you will have people who would come up to you out of curiosity to ask how you learned to speak. (interview with Taiwo, 23 November 2024)

Taiwo's words address one of the challenges faced by immigrants globally, and more specifically the racial prejudice encountered by some of the first Nigerian immigrants in

southern Alberta. This racial prejudice is affirmed in a statement made by the Government of Canada during its Black History Month campaign, which described anti-Black racism and its link to Canadian society: “Anti-Black racism includes prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement. It is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies and practices, such that anti-Black racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger white society.” (Canadian Heritage 2025)

Taiwo continued by sharing two ways in which, in her experience, white people interacted with Black people in southern Alberta:

And then you have people who come to touch you, to feel your skin, or they ask why your skin is not white; those are the kind of curiosity and questions that we faced at that time. The extreme opposite of it is ignorant people; they don’t want to learn because they’ve already believed that they are superior, so they avoid you, they don’t sit with you, they don’t talk with you, they don’t rent to you, on and on and on. (interview with Taiwo, 23 November 2024)

Immigrants, particularly Black people, face systemic prejudices in their host countries, limiting their freedom and safety. These systemic discriminations, born from racial prejudice and cultural misunderstandings, perpetuate socioeconomic inequalities that often force marginalized groups to seek safety within their own tight-knit communities. The only safety Black people had as a minority was in the small communities that they created.

Because many had immigrated for post-secondary studies, the University of Lethbridge became a place of safety where the Nigerian and Black students could host cultural events. The small group of Nigerian students, along with other Black students at

the College and the University, formed the core of the Black student community, using the University as the meet-up and safety venue, as Nigerians outnumbered other Black students at the time. This small group of Nigerian and Black students began having Nigerian parties, cooking, and making a community for themselves. Because there was no place to purchase Nigerian foods, the students improvised with available options, substituting, for example, potatoes for yams, and emphasizing the available staple foods (like rice). Every traditional Nigerian holiday, a small group of Nigerians hosted events; though these were conceived of as for Nigerians, they welcomed all other foreign students. They were able to use the University's Students' Union Hall at no cost to host parties, and the Nigerian student community brought various food and whatever they could share to the events. This was how the small community created a home away from home for Nigerians and other Black students in the community. As Taiwo shared, this was done at the University because Nigerians, and Black people more generally, were not welcome outside of the school. In fact, most students left Lethbridge for Calgary or Edmonton during the holiday season to work; they could not find work in Lethbridge, and the people (in Lethbridge) were not accommodating (interview with Taiwo, 23 November 2024).

4.2 The Present Nigerian Community in Lethbridge

The Nigerian community has grown since the 1970s and, with this growth, gatherings have moved into venues beyond the walls of the University. The 2021 Census shows that Alberta's total population of 4.26 million is made up of about 21,065 people who identify as Nigerian, making up roughly 0.5% of the overall population of the province (Statistics Canada 2024a). Census data from the city of Lethbridge indicates that 260 Nigerians are residents in the city, 135 male, 125 female (Statistics Canada 2024b). Though the population has likely grown now, it remains relatively small; nonetheless, it has become

much more visible, with events taking place at major venues such as CASA, the Multicultural Centre, Yates Memorial Centre, and Henderson Park.

My experience in both Nigeria and Lethbridge has taught me that Nigerians value gathering in celebration and festivity. Many of us are vivacious people who love to celebrate small or big milestones by throwing parties for the important things in our lives, like birthdays, naming ceremonies, promotions, sealing of contract deals, and so much more. With the growth of the community in Lethbridge, these celebrations have become an important way of bringing Nigerian immigrants together. This is especially true during the summertime when most Nigerian events occur because of the favorable weather during the season. Nigerian weather is very similar to summer weather in Lethbridge, and as such, people maximize the season to put together parties and celebrations. Since I arrived in Canada in 2023, I have fully engaged with a vibrant and dynamic community. Here, celebrations transcend simple gatherings; they embody identity, express joy, and connect Nigerians in Lethbridge with their homeland. Events such as birthdays, cultural festivals, music concerts, Independence Day celebrations, and Christmas parties stand as vital touchstones of our heritage and unity. A notable observation I have made is the steadfast dedication of Nigerians in Lethbridge to participate in these events. Despite life's challenges, they prioritize these gatherings, understanding their importance as essential connections to their homeland. Consequently, celebrations here gain profound significance; they serve as reminders of tradition, chances to revive familiar customs, and environments where the Nigerian spirit thrives.

A particularly unforgettable occasion that I attended was a lavish fiftieth Golden Jubilee birthday party for a Nigerian woman. Well ahead of the actual date, excitement resonated throughout the community as news of the celebration circulated. The anticipation was intense, likely heightened by its summer timing, which is ideal for

vibrant outdoor events. Known for their splendor, Nigerian celebrations do not disappoint, and this one was no different. Both the host and guests put in considerable effort to ensure the event was truly remarkable. Luxurious gifts were exchanged, conversations flowed freely, and the atmosphere was filled with happiness. Meanwhile, the guests donned beautiful, thoughtfully chosen outfits that showcased both their styles and the rich cultural heritage of Nigerian fashion. Every aspect of the celebration, from the music and dancing to shared laughter and heartfelt speeches, highlighted the strong sense of community and the joint effort to create a memorable experience. The Golden Jubilee birthday celebration was an invitation-only event for families, with guests spanning multiple generations in attendance. The celebration began with a one-hour birthday service featuring prayers, worship songs, and a brief sermon. This was followed by a lively five-hour reception where the DJ kept guests entertained. Another four hours were used in activities like screening a video documentary, a tribute moment for the celebrants, and other fun moments outside of music and dance. The full program included scheduled activities like heartfelt tributes, interactive games, food service, and other fun activities, making the entire birthday event a memorable ten-hour occasion.

Gatherings such as the one just described (i.e., landmark birthdays, anniversaries, celebrations of life, and more) always feature specially chosen clothing and colors; this is true, as I learned through my field observations, in both Nigeria and Lethbridge. Before the event, the celebrant gives details about the desired aesthetic design, clothes, and colors for their event. The fiftieth birthday I attended featured purple and gold decorations, and the costumes worn by all the guests, as requested on the invitation, were also purple and gold. Nigerians are very obliging when it comes to customs or colors picked by the celebrants for their events (see figure 1). People from all age brackets, from children to adults, attended the event, which meant that all generations were represented

at the party. The style of music performed in this party was the juju music popular and common among the Yorubas. One of the ways in which Nigerians in Lethbridge connect to home is by listening to and participating in genres like apala, fuji, juju, afrobeat, afro juju, Igbo highlife, Nigerian pop, and so many more music genres.



Figure 1: Nigerians at a birthday party in Lethbridge dressed in traditional attire matching the event's colours. Photos by Oluwaseun Soneye.

During the fiftieth birthday event here in Lethbridge, the celebrant's first entry was to highlife and juju music performed by a one-person band. The party officially started at 12:00 noon. After the opening prayer and the welcome address, it was time for the celebrant's first entrance. (This is a practice where a celebrant dances into the event with family and friends cheering for them.) Friends and family joined her entrance, and after that they danced and sang along with her for about three hours; the music was loud, and people could not talk easily while the music was ongoing (see audiovisual example 1). For her second entrance, the celebrant wore a radiant, shiny gold gown, and came out

dancing to a genre of music fondly called “old school” music by Nigerians: artists like Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, James Brown, and other popular American artists of the 1960s and 1970s. Nigerian music was influenced by these artists during these decades, and the generation from this period often has a love of this music in common. A DJ played music from the second entrance until the end of the event, including different genres of music after her entrance; he played for about five hours, with the music ending at 10 pm. This party was similar to one that I experienced in Calgary in 2024, which also featured a grand entry of old-school music. Friends and family similarly joined the celebrant during her second entry, singing and dancing along with her as she danced through the aisle (see audiovisual example 2).

In addition to many smaller gatherings, during my fieldwork in Lethbridge, I had the opportunity to observe several large events including a Ndi Igbo Day event, a Nigerian Independence Day event, and a Tehillah event. The Ndi Igbo Day event, specifically the New Yam Festival, is a historical annual celebration among the Ndi Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria. When I attended the Lethbridge Ndi Igbo Day event in 2024 at CASA, attendees were wearing bright colours (see figure 2); the aesthetics were very colorful and beautiful with a display of different Igbo traditional native wear flying around in the hall. One of the fascinating things about this particular event was that every age range was present at the event; attendees ranging in age from less than one year old to over eighty were well represented at the festival. This could suggest the sense of importance attached to this event and also a way to expose the younger ones to the culture. The typical Igbo highlife music, which is more common among the Ndi Igbos, was played during the festival.



Figure 2: Ndi Igbo day festival in Lethbridge, all Ndi Igbos dressed in radiant traditional attire at the event. Photos by Oluwaseun Soneye.

Another event now celebrated by Nigerians in Lethbridge is the Nigerian Independence Day Thanksgiving service, which, in 2024, was held at St. Augustine's Anglican Church in South Lethbridge, and was led by a Nigerian priest and two white Canadian priests. Independence Day is one of the major celebrations in Nigeria, and it is celebrated globally by Nigerians in the diaspora. As I entered the Sunday service, I noticed a significant number of Nigerians in traditional attire and beautiful headgear for both men and women, although most of the men wore their headgear later after the service, as the church does not permit headgear for men during the service. The fascinating aspect I observed was that some members of the church, including some choir members, wore Nigerian native attire to the service that Sunday. The choir was made up of both Nigerian and white Lethbridgeans, and those choir members who did not have such attire were provided with native garments to drape around their necks over their all-black costumes (see figure 3).



Figure 3: Nigerian Independence Day Thanksgiving Service at St. Augustine's Anglican Church in South Lethbridge. Photo taken from YouTube

(https://www.youtube.com/live/uTLEvIL_vc?si=hMweqeF3nCC5yLMU).

Another gathering of Nigerians is known as the Tehillah event, a musical praise concert hosted by the Redeemed Church of God in South Lethbridge. Like the Thanksgiving event, attendees wore different costumes, only that this time, the costumes were more apparent on the musicians. The audience came dressed in different styles of native attire. Nigerian praise concerts organized by churches usually have a free space to dress in anything comfortable, but the musicians and the guest musicians usually wear uniforms for each of their ministrations. The host choirs and the invited choirs are all in different kinds of uniforms, some in Western-style costumes while others are in native costumes of different colors (see figure 4).



Figure 4: Tehillah praise concert, hosted by the Redeemed Church of God. Photos by Oluwaseun Soneye.

The impressive growth of the Nigerian community in Lethbridge highlights a broader cultural shift towards inclusivity and diversity in the city. The presence of Nigerians is not significant in size, but it is significant for a relatively small population among the minor communities in Lethbridge to come out and make connections through the energy they bring to local events, customs, and social gatherings. As they create spaces for cultural expression beyond the University, their role in shaping Lethbridge's multicultural identity becomes clearer. With their strong communal spirit and rich traditions, Nigerians in Lethbridge cultivate a sense of belonging, showcasing the lasting power of cultural heritage even in new settings. For Nigerians in Lethbridge, these celebrations are more than mere social events; they serve as affirmations of belonging, vibrant expressions of cultural continuity, and invaluable reminders that, despite the geographic distance, the heart of Nigeria beats just as strongly within their gatherings.

4.2 Maintaining practices from Nigeria

Through participation in church events, birthday celebrations, festivals, and community-organized social activities, I have observed the ways in which cultural practices of Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge highlight their strong connections to their roots. This section explores the cultural ties to Nigeria revealed by the various events held by the Nigerian community in Lethbridge.

When the first Nigerian immigrants arrived in southern Alberta, they had to forge a new Nigerian community. As Mrs Moji Taiwo explained, back in the 1970s, music was used among Nigerian immigrants to create and maintain community. One of the things that connected her to home were the vinyl records that she and her friends brought to Canada and used at every gathering. She further explained that they were able to obtain additional recordings from music stores nearby because most popular Nigerian artists are under major labels owned by Western countries, making it easier to acquire their music in

Canada. Sometimes, they would also place orders through postal services. As she told me, Nigerian music was a tool that gave them culture and brought different ethnicities together. She told me that we should never lose sight of our roots, as these roots are our real identity in the new land. As she shared,

In this country, you need your people because, no matter [how] well you are doing, you are still a Black person, [and] you still have an accent. Our children were born here, they don't have an accent, but they're still Black, [and] that's all they see first. So, you need your people—those who are like your friends. You [may not be able to] say much [or] force them to do anything, [but] we just hope and pray that they don't come to a realization or [reach] a junction where they are desperately in need of people, [yet] nobody knows them. (interview with Taiwo, 23 November 2024)

Many Nigerian Canadians in southern Alberta have never traveled outside Canada to visit their parents' home country. Having connected with many Nigerians here, I have noticed a gap in cultural knowledge between the first and second generations, with the second generation often less familiar with or accustomed to Nigerian culture. This highlights challenges in preserving culture among immigrants. However, I have also observed that the rise of social media has provided the second generation with more opportunities to reconnect to their roots through access to Nigerian music, movies, and other cultural media. Additionally, some Nigerian events in Lethbridge feature video clips of Nigerian history, using gatherings as a chance to educate those unfamiliar with their heritage. For example, a video shared during the Nigerian Independence Day celebration was very detailed, and many attendees, including second-generation Nigerian Canadians, listened attentively (see audiovisual example 3). Similarly, at the Ndi Igbo Day event mentioned earlier, organizers showed a documentary about the history of the Ndi Igbo ethnic group.

It was an in-depth presentation aimed at helping non-Igbo attendees understand the cultural background. As a Yoruba person, I learned a lot about the Ndi Igbo that I never knew before. But most importantly, it also served to inform the younger Ndi Igbo generation about the importance of understanding their culture. It was an educational experience for many of us (see figure 5).

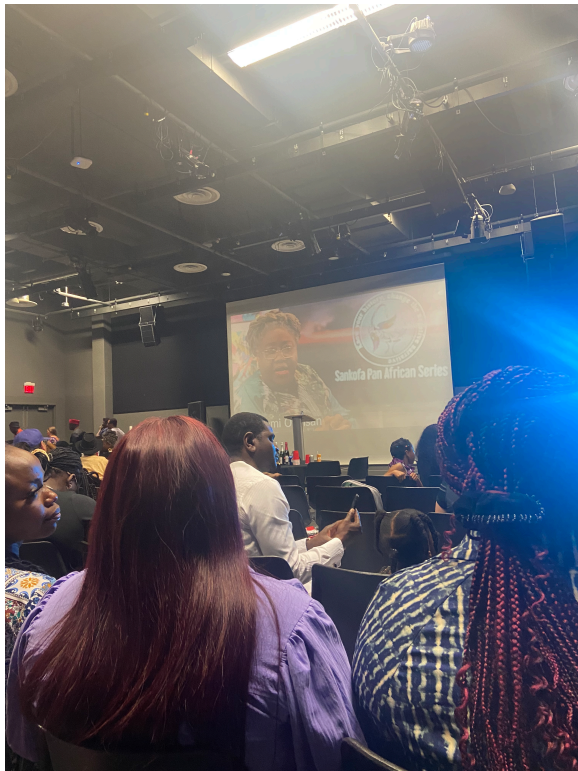


Figure 5: Documentary video about the history of the Igbo ethnic group at the Ndi Igbo Day Festival.

Photo by Oluwaseun Soneye.

Most of my interview participants explained that Nigerians in the diaspora are conscious of not losing their cultural practices. For example, as Taiwo explained to me, “Some of us started having children, so in order to create [and continue cultural practices] here, we have Canadian kids within the Nigerian or Black culture. To create a balance for those kids, some of us [who have children] now [host] birthday parties at home, aside from [major celebrations such as] Thanksgiving, Christmas, and house parties” (interview with Taiwo, 23 November 2024). Similarly, Akande discussed how the community has helped make an impact on her; as she shared, “Anytime I’m going anywhere, as long as I

have a church I'm going to [maintaining cultural practices], and I can be a part of the choir I knew I would find a community" (interview with Taiwo, 8 January 2025). These practices help the community preserve their cultural heritage in the new country and adapt to the host country's culture.

Event celebrations are a major way in which these practices are maintained in Lethbridge. These celebrations have many things in common with those in Nigeria. For social settings in Nigeria, it is expected that each party will have a celebrant or host who plays a central role in the event, as they are the reason for the celebrations. In Nigeria, every party that has a live musician(s) is required to eulogize the celebrant as well as the notable and wealthy people in attendance. As they are eulogized, friends and family throw the celebrant money while the celebrant and attendees are dancing; the celebrant and the people in attendance, in response to the praises, then throw money on the musician(s). Nigerians are very big on spraying money at parties for celebration events. This is also practiced among the Nigerian community in Lethbridge, although, in Lethbridge, they mostly spray American one-dollar bills. (Notably, I have experienced how difficult it is to get American currency from the bank. I went to most of the banks in the city before I could get the denominations I needed. This is the reality many Nigerians faced getting the currency for the purpose of the events they need it for, and for continuity of the practice.) At the birthday party I observed in Lethbridge, this practice was maintained. The celebrant was eulogized on the dance stage, and many people came up to dance with her and throw her money. The artist also praised some notable people dancing with her, and while some were throwing money on the celebrants, others were also throwing money on the musicians. In Nigeria, the celebrants also typically change into different costumes during the party. Although I cannot confirm why this is done, I believe that it is one of the ways to stand out as a celebrant because only the person being

honoured can change their clothing. It is, furthermore, a way of expressing the celebrant's joy. Again, the celebrant in the field observation I did in Lethbridge changed clothing twice during her party, with each costume using the colours she chose for her birthday.

Events in Nigeria typically use a variety of music genres. This variety is to satisfy every audience member present. This is true of a range of celebrations including birthdays, housewarmings, convocation celebrations, and so on. Most of these events include an after-party celebration, essentially a nightclub party, that is strictly for adults aged 18 and older, and those single and searching for a romantic partner (typically younger adults). Many older attendees eventually step away, leaving the parties to continue 'till mama's call' (a local saying meaning that the party lasts all night long). During this afterparty, a DJ pumps music and the event is usually anchored by the "hype man talker" (meaning a master of ceremonies who is in charge of the event order). The different genres and the event followed by after party is to make sure that different generations represented fully enjoy the party. Similarly, I saw something close to that at the birthday party I observed in Lethbridge, although it was not as sensual as it is practiced back home; the married people were still around at this point, and the event planner was packing up as there was a time deadline for everyone to leave the hall. Consequently, the customary "after-party" when the celebrant's closest friends linger once the main festivities have ended to continue dancing and sharing intimate moments was curtailed.

As described earlier in this chapter, the Ndi Igbo Day "New Yam Festival" is a significant tradition in both Nigeria and among the Nigerian diaspora. At the festival, music started almost two hours before the event's official start time. The music played was a mix of Nigerian traditional Igbo music and Nigerian pop music which has elements of cultural influence, like the music of Nigerian artist, Flavor. The atmosphere was

electrifying with great Igbo traditional polyphonic music with a very heavy rhythmic pattern with shifting time feel (what might be notated as 4/4, 6/12, 6/8, and 12/8). Music continued throughout the event and was controlled by the MC.

The New Yam Festival event that I attended in Lethbridge in 2024 started formally with the traditional practice of breaking the kola nut (a fruit from Indigenous West Africa that is used during prayers by the elders of the community) by the eldest person at the event. The kola nut was brought to the oldest man at the event—a man in his nineties. He took it, prayed, and encouraged attendees to keep practicing their culture regardless of where they find themselves. After the prayer and the appeal to preserve culture, the man broke it and ate some; the rest of it was carried and shared among the elders at the event. There were a few white and Blackfoot people present at the event. The kola nut was also shared with them, in recognition and acknowledgment of the host country, honoring the territory in which the event was taking place. After the breaking of the kola nut, the event transitioned into Igbo traditional music and dance, with the MC facilitating the categories of dance like men only dance, women only dance, and men and women dance. This was used as a substitute for the professional dancers who usually participate in festivals in Nigeria. The event brought together representation from all the Ndi Igbo ethnic states, and a first call was made to recognize various states and showcase their unique dance styles, including Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, North Delta, and Rivers. As is typical of Ndi Igbo Day festivals, there were two dancing competitions, one for professional/active dancers, and another for invited participants who are to compete against one another, marking a highlight of the event as the dancers were incredibly entertaining. At the end of this competition, two winners were nominated by the audience. These events, Nigerian Independence Day, Ndi Igbo Day, and the birthday party, brought together every member of the community alongside invited non-Nigerian

friends of the community. This event was done to recreate a sense of home using available means. Also, these events educate the second and third generations who are not aware of how these practices are being done back home, since most of them have not been to their home country and are only exposed to the celebration style of the host country; it helps them see, understand, and participate in the originality of their own culture.

My observations at St. Augustine's church also showed a clear connection to Nigerian practices. In every Nigerian church, there is a tradition during Thanksgiving where friends and family move to the front and dance down the aisle to the altar. This is the tradition the Nigerian community brought to St. Augustine, and all the non-Nigerian members have been eagerly anticipating this moment. During my field observations, Rev. Steven Bateman, one of the priests in the church, expressed that he was honored to officiate the Thanksgiving service; he was one of the most excited people looking forward to this occasion. At this time, the Nigerians in the choir took over this session; they led the congregation into thanksgiving as they sang Nigerian thanksgiving songs (see audiovisual example 4).



Figure 6: Nigerian tradition during Thanksgiving, where friends and family move to the front and dance down the aisle to the altar. Photo taken from YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/live/-uTLEvIL_vc?si=hMweqeF3nCC5yLMU).

The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Freedom House, is one of the parishes of the congregation founded in Nigeria. The church holds regular services every week, and, more importantly, it organizes special events and services that benefit the community of Lethbridge. Among the events hosted by the church is Tehillah, primarily a praise and worship concert and one of the church's largest special events. (The event is based on one of the biggest music shows in the world, specifically "The Experience," hosted by House on the Rock Christian Church International Headquarters in Lagos.) The concert brings together gospel music ministers from around the world to Lagos. This event is hosted by a

group of choirs called David's Trybe of Freedom House, made up of members from both the main church and the youth church choirs. I directed the host choir for the 2024 concert as I was an active participant in this event. In my role, I oversaw the choir's songs, rehearsals, and preparations for the concert. The Tehillah concert depicts how the Nigerian Pentecostal church's praise and worship concert is done. This type of concert brings together all different genres of music like Nigeria Christian songs, western praise and worship songs, and traditional or dialectical praise and worship songs. Lots of music artists were present to minister in the concert (see audiovisual example 5). Most of the guest artists for the Tehillah concert were from outside Lethbridge; in fact, only one artist was from Lethbridge, as were the host choir, the main church choir, the youth choir, and the Redeem New Life choir. The rest were from outside Lethbridge and other countries. Tehillah is the biggest event and the biggest Nigerian concert I have seen in Lethbridge since my arrival here in 2023. The Sunday after the concert was a Thanksgiving service. There were still a few artists present in the city who also sang in the Thanksgiving service. All of this was done to maintain the Nigerian church culture in Lethbridge.

In my interview with Victor Olayioye, he explained how music has created a sense of home for him and has become a vital part of his life, especially as an immigrant. He further explained that music has helped him build a sense of community and provides a break from the pressures of school and work in his new country. He participated in a Nigerian choir rehearsal at his home church in Nigeria, which often did not have a fixed ending time, as people enjoy the togetherness, and they are generally not in a rush to leave the rehearsal. (In Nigeria, the choir rehearsal is often abruptly stopped, primarily due to the logistics of the electricity generator when it is turned off.) Olayioye has built a strong musical community around himself by connecting with fellow Nigerian music enthusiasts in Lethbridge.

Olayioye's continuous practice with individuals of a similar mindset has built his confidence and improved his music delivery skills. During my interview with Olayioye, he described the situation as follows:

Coming into [Lethbridge] Canada as a new immigrant, as someone who didn't have a lot of friends, [I] feel like finding excuses and a like-minded passion for music can come together and really make [Nigerian church] music right, I think for me it was really important to just have that community. So, for me, it was a way of escape, right, I was a student at the university, so really busy, and music for me, it was just kind of an escape, just to try and get involved once a week. We go to [choir] practice, and I still have like a video from my phone of way back of us in the church, the [Redeem] freedom house, jamming to [Nigerian church] music and just playing, it was just very nice to see different people come through. Like I said I lived [in Lethbridge] for seven years, so different people come through and how music evolved. (interview with Olayioye, 9 January 2025)

These events allowed me to observation how music helps Nigerian immigrants maintain connections to Nigeria, while also bringing together every member of the community alongside friends of the community—that is, the larger Lethbridge community. These events recreated a sense of home—engaging with practices from Nigeria—drawing on available means. These events also educate the second and third generations that are not aware of how these practices are being done back home, since most of them have not been to their home country and are only exposed to the celebration style of the host country; it helps second and third generations see and hear the originality of their culture.

4.3 Crossing Boundaries

While the last section emphasized the maintenance of Nigerian cultural practices in Lethbridge, it also began to suggest how music and gathering is used to cross boundaries.

DJ RavP's musical style transcends cultural boundaries. While Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge often use music to uphold their heritage, DJ RavP emphasizes adaptability, selecting tracks that resonate with the audience rather than focusing solely on Nigerian sounds. In our conversation, he pointed out that quality music can be found in every culture, and one's nationality does not necessarily dictate their ability to play their music well. He mentioned that on certain days, he might even perform Latino music better than Latino DJs, showcasing his versatility and attentiveness to the crowd's energy. Instead of merely highlighting his Nigerian roots, he aims to engage the audience by tailoring his song choices to the moment, which makes his performances lively and relatable. His knack for blending cultural representation with musical adaptability enables him to connect with varied communities while still honoring his identity as a DJ. During my interview with RavP, he summarized our discussions as follows:

Every nation has good music not just Nigeria; in general, sometimes when I play for the Canadian community or any other country that is not Nigerian, as they always say you have to be from that country for you to play their music, I feel like it's not like that. Sometimes I might have a best day that I will play better Latino songs than some of the Latino DJs, just like that, it goes around. We, as DJs, sometimes go through all that; sometimes, it always goes to look into the crowd. Let us say if I am playing for a Canadian party, I will throw you one music just to make them know if they will swing in that way or kind of capture music that comes from that area, most of the time, that's what I always try to do. (interview with DJ RavP, 6 December 2024)

This viewpoint fundamentally challenges cultural gatekeeping in music, emphasizing that artistic brilliance crosses boundaries. A talented DJ can energize any audience, drawing from rhythms that communicate beyond cultural divides.

4.3.2 Importance of Church Services

Nigeria's rich diversity has given people the freedom to choose any religion of their choice. Still, my discussion is centered on Nigerian Christianity in Lethbridge, as this religion influences my core research. Christianity holds vital importance in Nigerian culture, and it is one of the dominant religions in Nigeria. Beyond spiritual growth, it serves as a social support and community bonding. The Nigerian church community has built a strong community in Lethbridge, as this is one of the places where Nigerians constantly meet up with people from the same community and build a strong bond with each person in the church, creating a life and connection with one another outside church premises. The church has always served as a place of rescue for new immigrants and those in need and has had a positive impact on the community around them. The Nigerian church in Lethbridge serves as a place where cultural practices are of importance to their doctrine, also bringing into the service the Nigerian traditional ways of praise, worship, and sermons. More importantly, the Nigerian church culture has helped in continuing the cultural practices from home, also teaching cultural heritage to the second and third generations that are not aware of the origin and practices of the culture. The Nigerian church in Lethbridge serves as an embodiment of spiritual, community, and cultural preservation among Nigerian immigrants.

Nigeria has a culture of putting God first in everything they do, be it religion or social and official gatherings. For religion, prayers are conducted according to their faith beliefs; for social and official gatherings, prayers are usually from Christianity and Islam, the two most popular religions in Nigeria. For example, the birthday observation started with a sacred service in the hall. A few hymns were sung during the service, and a clergyman prayed for the celebrant and blessed her new age. Nigerians take religion very seriously, especially in special celebrations like the Golden Jubilee birthday, which is one

of the important landmarks. The Ndi Igbo ethnic group has a very large percentage of Christians, and most of their events start with sacred prayers.

4.3.3 Christian events in the community

The Nigeria Independence Thanksgiving Day was held at St. Augustine Anglican Church because, looking back into the colonization history in Nigeria, the British missionaries played a significant role in this process. The British missionaries brought Christianity into Nigeria, which includes Catholicism, Baptist, Anglican, and the like. This spread of Christianity resulted in a significant number of Christians in Nigeria. Most of the Anglican Christians in the Nigerian community here in Lethbridge attend St Augustine's Anglican church in South Lethbridge, as there are almost a hundred Nigerians in number. St. Augustine's, being a predominantly white community church, gave a warm welcome to Nigerians in the community. At the Nigerian Independence Thanksgiving Day service, Psalms were chanted, prayers were said, bible readings were read, and hymns were sung, following the Anglican order of service. After all this was done, Reverend Steve gave his sermon, and in his final words, he said:

I love the fact that people who were born and raised in Canada are being led by people who were born and raised in Nigeria; we started our journey half a world away from each other, but we are drawn together in this place and at this time by one who is neither Canadian nor Nigerian or maybe he's both. (fieldnotes, 6 October 2024)

The summary of his message was about people coming together regardless of culture and race, as this is the good news of God in Christ, bringing us together as a family.

During the Independence Thanksgiving service, Reverend Steve Bateman announced that he had had this date circled for a long time on his calendar. He was looking forward to the whole service, but more importantly, he was looking forward to

the Thanksgiving portion of the service, as that is something he has never seen done in Canada before, as he noted in his announcement. He was so excited as he announced that people should be ready to dance, and that there would be rhythmic music that would be played. The Thanksgiving portion of service was a peak moment of the service. Although most white Canadians present in the service were not dancing to the rhythm, I observed that they were very happy, seeing this heart of thanksgiving giving glory to God. Most of the white Canadians came out to join the Nigerian community in thanksgiving. The joy in the church was contagious, and people expressed their joy in thanksgiving to God. After everyone got to the altar, the singer stopped the songs, and Reverend Steve led the prayers, lifting Nigerians and the church into God's hands. The song started as people danced back to their seats with joy in their hearts. At this point, Reverend Gillian Breckenridge, who was among the officiating ministers for the Thanksgiving service, was dancing and turning around at the altar. One of the altar servers went to her, and both held each other's hands and danced happily. Reverend Steve said in his comment, "I have received my first request to do this every week" (fieldnotes, 6 October 2024), and the congregation laughed. Though he intended this statement as a joke, he used it to express his joy in this service. At this time, the service was handed back to Reverend Femi for the closing of the service, as he led the order of thanksgiving service. He led the church in "doxology" (that is, the final hymn), he gave the blessings, and a three-fold amen was sung by the choir and the congregation. Reverend Femi thanked the reverends and the church on behalf of the Nigerian community. He informed the church that those who christened this church St. Augustine were ahead of their time, as Augustine is a renowned African church father. The service ended with a recessional hymn and Grace. People exchanged pleasantries while standard Anglican Thanksgiving hymns were played. All the congregation was invited to join the community in the basement for a lunch get-

together after the service, and Nigerian food was served to everyone who joined in the lunch.

At the gathering, the sight was both remarkable and symbolic—many white Canadians in attendance embraced Nigerian cultural expression by donning traditional Nigerian attire. The choir, too, was fully adorned in native garments, creating a vibrant and unified aesthetic. Even those who did not wear full traditional outfits incorporated a touch of Nigerian fashion by draping native capes over their black dresses, demonstrating a thoughtful acknowledgment of the cultural essence of the event. This scene reinforced the strong bond that Nigerians in Lethbridge maintain with their church community. Their deep connection was evident not only in their attire but also in their worship practices and the music that resonated throughout the service. The sense of unity extended beyond the Nigerian community, welcoming individuals from diverse backgrounds.

On September 20, 2024, the “Tehillah” concert took place at the Yates Memorial Centre in South Lethbridge. The event featured over twelve gospel artists and groups who ministered throughout the evening. The concert began at five pm and lasted for about six hours. The songs covered various gospel genres, including African praise, the artists’ compositions, popular global Christian songs, and many other Christian styles. Each artist sang many familiar Nigerian songs, creating an atmosphere that reflected a distinctly Nigerian style of worship (see audiovisual example 5).

Although led by a Nigerian church, the Tehillah concert became a melting pot of cultures, attracting Nigerians along with Ghanaians, Cameroonians, white Canadians, and many others from various communities in Lethbridge. The atmosphere was electric with collective enthusiasm. The concert truly embodied the spirit and energy of Nigerian praise and worship, engaging the audience in a profound and uplifting ministration. Every performance was met with joyful participation, clapping, singing along, and dancing,

turning the event into more than just a showcase of music, but a bridge that connected different communities through a shared celebration. The overwhelming reaction from attendees illustrated how music transcends cultural boundaries, creating a space where people could not only experience Nigerian worship traditions but also actively participate. The excitement, elation, and positive energy radiated through the crowd as they immersed themselves in the dynamic rhythms and passionate expressions of praise. Ultimately, the concert served as a powerful reminder of how music fosters unity, strengthens bonds, and invites people of all backgrounds into a collective experience of celebration.

4.4 Constraints and Limitations of Nigerian Events in Lethbridge

Despite Nigerians coming together to build community through gatherings, various limitations are creating a gap including limited availability of venues, access to musicians accomplished in Nigerian-style music, and the lack of availability of traditional instruments. During my interview with Olayioye, he discussed the availability of venues suitable for concerts or events in Lethbridge. He noted that there are a limited number of halls available in the city, and most of the available venues are not suitable for concerts or musical purposes as they are not good acoustically. As Olayioye shared,

In my opinion, Lethbridge lacks venues that support music, as there are not enough places that are actually conducive to musical performances. By conducive, I mean the acoustics of a location, where minimal modifications are needed to sound good. I feel like Lethbridge falls short in this area. For instance, when organizing a concert like Tehillah last year, it felt almost miraculous that we found the Yates Memorial Centre [for the 2024 event] and were able to use that space. Even then, there were still some challenges, but it was an improvement compared to previous years. It was very encouraging to see that we are making progress and that things will improve. Perhaps something like this, which unites the whole

community, could lead to a music venue where we can perform gospel music, with good acoustics that help people feel connected. (interview with Olayioye, 9 January 2025)

The production was better in terms of space, lighting, and sound, and also better accommodated the number of attendees than the previous year's Tehillah venue, which was Redeemed Christian Church, Freedom House church's auditorium. As noted earlier, Tehillah was an African music praise concert, that featured West African styles of dressing and music and different Nigerian artists from the United Kingdom, United States, and different provinces in Canada. Olayioye outlined some other limitations of the Yates Memorial Centre for traditional African styles of worship specifically noting that African praise concerts usually involve various types of energetic expressions, engaging the audience in movement and participation. In Nigerian praise concerts, there are numerous activities people engage in while singing, such as dancing in the aisles, rolling on the ground, kneeling, carrying chairs, or standing on them. This is a form of expression that Nigerians embrace during worship, particularly in a praise concert. The Yates auditorium restricted this participatory element because the seating style of the hall does not allow free movement.

Oreoluwa Akanbi also reflected on her experience with the venues used for the Tehillah concert. She explained that choosing the Yates Memorial Centre was a great decision, as it supported the event's growth beyond a church concert. However, she admitted that the venue restricted the way African attendees express themselves in a praise and worship setting. Like Olayioye, she emphasized that a larger space, designed to accommodate the dynamic and expressive nature of African worship would be more suitable. During my interview with Akanbi, she described the situation as follows:

In church, people come out in front to be able to like dance around, to be able to engage with the artist more but Yates wasn't like that unless, like people came on stage directly; there wasn't that kind of opportunity to do that, but I like it [the Yates Memorial Centre] because it gave professional vibes to it, and again, it gave more opportunities for people to show up. I think that is one of the things Bro Bayo [the convener of the event] was like just wanting more people because the church is like kind of limited sometimes like the space in church kind of limited the number of people that can show up, but I liked it, I prefer Yates. (interview with Akanbi, 8 January 2025)

Akanbi's words highlight the challenges of finding a venue in Lethbridge that meets all the needs of Nigerian praise music.

In addition to finding a venue, it is also difficult to find musicians who can perform Nigerian musics; and just as significantly, there is a scarcity of traditional musical instruments, such as talking drums, in Lethbridge. Most musicians in the area are students who, after completing their programs, move away to pursue better career opportunities or settle down with their families. Occasionally, there are fully available musicians for a time, but many travel outside the city during the summer to work. These factors create gaps in musicians' availability and mean that those who are available are often still in the learning stage, which limits their ability to handle certain aspects of song ministry.

Akanbi shared some of the challenges she faced while performing in Lethbridge related to availability of musicians. Having travelled from Edmonton to perform at the Tehillah concert, she noticed the lack of dedicated musicians and instrumentalists available for rehearsals. Though there are some Nigerian musicians available in Lethbridge, many are unavailable due to work or school commitments. Most of the time,

the available musicians are still learning, and there is a limit to what they can do in terms of the arrangements. This meant that Akanbi had to choose repertoire suitable for musicians still early in their learning journey, adjusting to their abilities. Furthermore, she described a challenge that happened on the day of the Tehillah concert. The artists were not on the ground before the commencement of the event to do required checks (like the sound check), which helps the sound engineer adjust sound settings before the actual performance. Akanbi described the situation as follows:

I can't remember [the last time I saw] a [committed] instrumentalist; for example, I could tell you numerous examples of where I have come up with a setlist of stuff that I've said this would work, and it would work if we had like a [committed] instrumentalist to play how I imagine it in my head; but then I would come to practice and we just have to scrap it off because it would not work, because we don't have, and again no offense [to] the musicians available were slowly coming up [at the time]. (interview with Akanbi, 8 January 2025)

The absence of committed instrumentalists has posed a significant challenge, often disrupting musical arrangements and limiting creative possibilities. Carefully planned setlists frequently have to be adjusted or discarded due to a lack of skilled musicians available to bring the vision to life. However, Akanbi believes that it will get better as more Nigerians come to Lethbridge.

Akanbi also struggled with expanding the repertoire of the choir she participated in here in Lethbridge. The choir struggled with flexibility in doing unfamiliar songs during the praise and worship session, as the congregation also preferred singing familiar songs. They were more comfortable sticking to well-known selections instead of incorporating new ones into regular services. However, during concerts or special events, the same congregation willingly embraced and learned new songs performed by guest

artists. This inconsistency made the situation frustrating for Akanbi, as she often found herself repeating the same set of songs for every service.

When choir members are not dedicated to learn[ing] [new] songs, I will bring new songs that I have, maybe something that I have been jamming with and...you know we can't be singing the same songs that we sing all of the time but they are not willing to learn, they are not willing to like to take the time to like, you know let's practice this properly, and learn, that was one of the challenges that I had back then in Lethbridge. (interview with Akanbi, 8 January 2025)

Akanbi continued describing the response of church members to new songs during church services:

Church members can be very rigid in what they want. Like they [seem] unwilling to go explore [new ideas] with you; [for example] if I come to a Sunday service now, and I'm leading praise and worship and like maybe I sing a song that they've never heard, not that my service will be a song that they've never heard, I will never do that; but maybe just you know be willing to [try]. People coming to the choir director after service, oh, you people, song [it's not interesting at] this time, [and] that choir director has to relay the message to us. (interview with Akanbi, 8 January 2025)

Church congregants often show a strong preference for familiar songs, making it difficult to introduce new music during worship services; at the same time, the congregation wants a greater variety. There is a noticeable reluctance from the congregants to explore fresh ideas, and when unfamiliar songs are included, feedback tends to reflect dissatisfaction. This rigidity limits musical diversity and innovation, placing pressure on choir directors to balance tradition with efforts to refresh the worship experience.

Olayioye spoke about these same challenges during his performances in Lethbridge. He too felt that one of the major problems in Lethbridge is the availability of musicians. Olayioye describes this shortage as follows:

In terms of challenges, I would say the biggest one is access to enough musicians. I feel there is a shortage of musicians in Lethbridge. As I explained earlier, there were times when we were making music and would have a guitarist and a keyboardist, but then summer would come, and they would go back home for their holiday. During that time, there would be four or five months without having a full group, which led to a lack of consistency. Then, sometimes, two or three would graduate, and new people would come, or we would only have a keyboardist for about six months. Thus, I would say the constant availability of talent is a significant issue. We haven't consistently had people available to create music, and I believe that is one of the biggest challenges we've faced. (interview with Olayioye, 9 January 2025)

As Olayioye's comment indicates, seasonal shifts, such as summer breaks, often result in key players leaving temporarily, creating gaps in musical collaborations for months at a time. Additionally, as musicians graduate (from the University or Polytechnic and move to another city) and new members join, maintaining a stable and cohesive group becomes difficult. The lack of consistent talent has made it challenging to sustain musical projects over time, highlighting the need for a more reliable and enduring artistic community.

As noted earlier, the lack of available musicians is compounded by the scarcity of traditional Nigerian instruments, such as the talking drum. These instruments play a crucial role in creating the authentic sound of Nigerian music. Fretless, a musician who travelled from United Kingdom to perform at the Tehillah concerts in Lethbridge,

expressed that instruments are vital to his musical practice and performances. Having participated, he shared his perspective during our interview:

The experience that I have now in Lethbridge is a very wonderful experience, like I said it's a sweet-sour experience that was just for the first time because the devil makes [is] just [to] squash the whole thing, and he wanted me to feel really bad. Okay, so where's the drummer playing, there was no drummer; I just had to improvise with somebody to be on the drums, then somebody being on the keyboard, then no talking drum, WOW. It was a big one. (interview with Fretless, 11 December 2024)

For Fretless, the journey in Lethbridge proved to be both rewarding and demanding, filled with unforeseen challenges that necessitated swift adaptation. Although there were initial hurdles, like the missing drummer and missing talking drum, improvisation was crucial for sustaining the performance. He had to adjust to the circumstances and make the most of the available resources. This experience highlighted the resilience and creativity essential in live music, transforming challenges into chances for artistic development, a theme that I take up in the next section.

4.5 Use of Technology

Numerous obstacles that immigrants used to encounter have been alleviated by modern technologies. These technologies make it possible to have smooth video calls with loved ones no matter how far away they live. Furthermore, they help immigrants keep up social ties which is essential in creating a feeling of belonging in their host nations.

Livestreaming popular music via social media and other digital means allows people to interact with known cultural sounds and practices from the convenience of their homes, which in turn nurtures a feeling of cultural identity and belonging. The music played during the fiftieth birthday I attended in the summer of 2023 was influenced by

technology. During this event, the musician used a loop and vocal layering techniques to recreate the sound of unavailable instruments, including traditional African drums, shekere, and talking drums. These instruments, often central to Nigerian music, were not physically present but were sonically mimicked through looping and rhythmic vocal patterns. The loop, combined with percussive elements, allowed some of these unavailable instruments to be “sounded” together, maintaining the authentic sound of Nigerian musical expression (see audiovisual examples 1, 4, and 5). DJ Rav-P also programmed different beat sequences for the event and had a pre-recorded talking drum. Similarly, during the Ndi Igbo Day festival, the performers used percussion loops to recreate the sound of traditional Igbo instruments, such as the udu (a clay pot drum), ogene (a hand-held gong), and ekwe (a slit drum), giving the event the sound of Igbo traditional music. During the Thanksgiving session of the Nigerian Independence celebration at St. Augustine Anglican Church, different musicians led the music, using rhythmic loops, created live with loop stations, as the percussion foundation for the praise songs. These loops, made by layering hand percussion, vocal taps, and simple instrumental sounds, were combined with live singing and keyboard accompaniment, blending prerecorded elements with live performance to create a rich and engaging worship atmosphere.

The Tehillah concert was also heavily influenced by loops used by different artists. Fretless spoke explicitly about how he used loops to improvise the style of sound he wanted for his performance, which is one of his strengths in music. The use of loops amplifies his stagecraft, as he explained during our discussion:

There were [certain] elements I expected to facilitate the production. [One of them was the] talking drum, and I had [assumed] that there [would be one available]. [However,] for whatever reason, we couldn’t have a talking drum that night, and I

had not met with the team [beforehand]. I think I only had a few minutes—or thereabouts—to mingle with the [singers]. Of course, I had [brought] a loop, [which] was all we had to lean on. A good drummer wasn't available that night, [nor was] the talking drummer, [who] was supposed to be a key element in [supporting] my ministration or performance. So, we [had] to [rely on] alternative options (interview with Fretless, 11 December 2024)

Fretless's experience at the Tehillah concert highlights the adaptability and ingenuity required in live performance. Despite the absence of key instruments, his ability to lean on loops and improvisation allowed him to bring in the instrument's essential sound elements and demonstrates the resilience and artistry essential in music. This moment not only underscores the significance of creative problem-solving but also reflects the power of innovation in shaping a compelling performance and integrating the required elements of Nigerian music in a context where doing so as it might be done in Nigeria is difficult.

During my interview with Olayioye, he noted that advances in technology have allowed Nigerians in diaspora to hear new music as soon as it is released; this is a significant change from the delay in access in years past. In his discussion, he described the positive effects of technology:

Music evolved as live streaming became accessible, so we will always sing stale songs right, but now social media has minimized the divide. The gap between Nigeria and here is so small; it's pretty much the same in the sense that whatever musical influence is out there, we grab it immediately. Previously, there was a buffer—usually two or three months—before we realized there was a new song or a new style, and by the time we adopted that style, another two or three months would pass before we heard of something else. Now, everything is much more streamlined. Everyone is on the same page. So back home and here, I feel there is

no difference; it's all connected in terms of the impact that music has on the community. I think it's pretty much one. (interview with Olayioye, 9 January 2025)

Olayioye's insights emphasize how technology has revolutionized the accessibility of new music worldwide and how this connects Nigerians in Lethbridge with the Nigerian music scene. With instant access to releases, cultural exchange has become more fluid, enabling audiences to stay connected to musical trends in real time. This advancement not only strengthens the artistic bond between Nigeria and the diaspora but also highlights music's role as uniting communities across vast distances. As technology continues to break down barriers allowing wider accessibility of Nigerian music to all, it reinforces the idea that music is a shared experience, transcending geographical boundaries and fostering a deeper sense of global connection. The impact of technology is exemplified by the fact that Nigerian styles like Afrobeats have become hugely popular with western audiences.

4.5.2 One-person Bands

The growth of technology has also led to the emergence of one-person bands, which address the challenge of finding enough musicians and instruments in Lethbridge. In the contexts that I experienced them, the one-person band uses their talent to connect immigrants to their culture and heritage through music in a host country. In the summer of 2024, I witnessed a talented one-person band perform at multiple events in Lethbridge, including the fiftieth birthday celebration I described earlier. The event was held in a vibrant hall where guests were dressed in vibrant traditional clothing. There was a lively atmosphere, and the children were darting through tables, the elders greeted each other in the Yoruba and Igbo languages, and the aroma of jollof rice and fried plantain permeated the air. In this setting, the one-person band did not just play; rather he invoked both a

sense of home and belonging through music, making the hall an arena of cultural remembrance and celebration. This musician, whose name is Ojewole, combined instrumental sounds, like shekere (a dried gourd with beads) and talking drum (an hourglass-shaped drum that produces a wide range of tones, evoking speech), with vocals in Yoruba and English language, using loop pedals to layer rhythms and create a full dynamic sound. His performances helped preserve and share important African musical genres like juju, highlife, and afrobeat with the local community. At the birthday event, he played a central role as the key musician, leading all the hymns, praises, and worship songs during the service. He also performed during the celebratory portions of the event, providing music for the entrance of guests and the main celebrants into the hall. The audience was so delighted by his renditions of traditional music, which were familiar from their cultural heritage, that they showered him with dollars in appreciation. While I am unsure if Lethbridge has multiple one-person band performers, this particular artist left a strong impression with his ability to engage the crowd and blend cultural traditions into a lively musical experience (see audiovisual example 1). In Nigeria, however, one-person bands are a common and practical choice, especially for those with limited budgets who cannot afford full bands or expensive musicians for their events. Their versatility and affordability make them a popular alternative for creating vibrant entertainment without high costs.

4.5.3 Use of DJs

DJ music among Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge serves as a basic option that connects Nigerians to their roots by playing the traditional music of the community. I have seen DJs at all types of events such as parties, birthdays, cultural festivals, and weddings here in Lethbridge. As described earlier, at the fiftieth birthday event, a DJ was used. Initially, a one-person band performed during the birthday party and as the celebrants made their

first entrance. However, after these opening moments, the DJ took over and became the primary source of music, carrying the energy of the party all the way to the end (see audiovisual example 2). The DJ included different genres of music that suited all generations represented at the party. The DJ filled the major gaps in the music played throughout the event, playing a diverse range of genres from the 1960s to the present, with a particular emphasis on Nigerian pop music. I also observed that the audience was satisfied, as most of them were dancing until the hall they rented was almost closed. At the Ndi Igbo Festival, the significant thing that I noticed as I stepped into the hall was that traditional music was played all through, skillfully mixed by the DJ (see figure 7). This lit up the atmosphere as the organizers stepped to the beat as they were working. All through the event, there was a strong presence of music. While at this party, the DJ serenaded the audience with beautiful music from different Nigerian artists since there was no live musician on set, which is a limitation faced in hosting cultural events in the diaspora (see audiovisual example 6).



Figure 7: DJ skillfully performing during the Ndi Igbo Day Festival. Photo by Oluwaseun Soneye.

These observations and interviews demonstrate how Nigerian immigrants continue their practices even while in Lethbridge. Activities like birthdays, social gatherings, events, and festivals have sustained cultural practices among the community, creating a sense of home among the Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge. This music-making in the community has preserved the Nigerian tradition in the new host country, and, more importantly, strengthened the bonds among the community.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the key themes that emerged from the field observations and interviews I conducted throughout this research study. I focusing on the challenges faced in fostering a connection to Nigerian culture and the importance of various events such as concerts, festivals, birthdays, and other social gatherings, functions that help to preserve Nigerian identity among immigrants in Lethbridge. These findings not only deepen our understanding of Nigerian cultural practices but also illuminate how other available means, such as technology, DJing, and one-person bands, bridge the gap that disconnects Nigerian immigrants from their culture. The events discussed in this chapter create and provide a sense of home and, just as importantly, showcase our beautiful culture to other communities in Lethbridge. Building on my previous chapters and my findings, chapter five will be the concluding section of this research project, suggesting areas for further research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

My study has explored the ways in which Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge, Alberta, employ music as a medium of cultural identity preservation, community building, and a tool to navigate the diasporic life. Based on ethnographic data gathered for this study (including participant observations and interviews), this research has demonstrated that music is both a symbolic and a pragmatic instrument by which immigrants keep ties to their homeland alive and a means to establish connections to a new socio-cultural setting.

This study responds to three major research questions. First, it addressed the challenges and opportunities Nigerian migrants face in the process of forming a community in Lethbridge. Second, it explored the role of music in communal gatherings especially related to building a sense of community, home, and identity. And third, it delved into Nigerian immigrants' engagement in Lethbridge through music.

The findings show that, although there are no professional musicians, traditional instruments, or purpose-built cultural venues, Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge have managed to develop a lively musical life. They use creativity, improvisation, and non-professionals, as well as DJs, one-person bands and digital technologies to mimic the musical textures of Nigeria. These practices are not replacements; these are culturally meaningful forms of perpetuating resilience, adaptation, and identity. At community assemblies like birthdays, festivals, religious gatherings, and Nigerian national holidays, music creates strong feelings of togetherness, memory, and continuity.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates that music to Nigerian immigrants is not just for entertainment. It is a collective performance of identity, a bridge, and a way to negotiate difference and unity from generation to generation. While there may be some generational differences, especially in music tastes or capacity to accept new trends, music still serves as a force of integration that helps to preserve the past while embracing

the present. Findings suggest that elders use communal gatherings as a way of educating and disseminating culture to younger generations, and younger Nigerians connect with Nigerian culture through digital access to Afropop, gospel, highlife, and blends.

I suggest that the advancement of technology has become a major transformational force in these cultural expressions. With the help of platforms like YouTube, social media, and streaming services, diasporic communities become aware of local (Nigerian) music expeditiously, filling the gap introduced by their geographic separation, while also bringing awareness to non-Nigerian residents of Lethbridge. Apart from this, music technologies, such as loop devices, digital percussions, and mixing tools are substitutes for lack of traditional sound production devices. These innovations allow Nigerian immigrants to reproduce familiar sonic environments, and make performances fit in with spatial and logistical limitations of the Canadian environment.

Findings of this study also highlight the importance of religious spaces and cultural affiliations in music expression. In addition to maintaining spiritual functions, churches become cultural centres, where the music that is in churches provides for communal ties but also ethnic distinctiveness.

Likewise, there are festivals such as Ndi Igbo Day and Nigeria's Independence Day that are community based and provide opportunities for inter-ethnic contact and cultural education, while serving as an avenue to connect to Nigerians in Lethbridge. Music at these events is more than nostalgia. It is pedagogical and dialogic at the same time that it is affirming identity but also inviting intercultural understanding.

Despite the vitality of the Nigerian community in Lethbridge, significant challenges persist. The lack of adequate facilities, poor acoustics in the venues, and lack of sufficiently engaging musicians interfere with the musical experience. Compromise is usually needed at gatherings; this may include adjusting programs to suit volunteers' skill

levels or using fixed seating halls that do not allow the energetic movements common to Nigerian festivals. However, the cultural vitality is not significantly affected by these difficulties. Rather, they highlight the resilience of the community as it tackles difficulties particular to their host community.

This study reinforces what Frishkopf describes as the “transcultural potential of music to create community beyond borders,” a concept that aptly captures how Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge use music to navigate hybrid identities, create inclusion, and construct belonging across generational and ethnic lines (2024, 301).

Further research on Nigerian music in Lethbridge and in Canada more generally could compare musical practices within different provinces or consider different ways in which gender shapes people’s involvement in Nigerian music in the diaspora. Such comparative research could consider major urban centres, such as Toronto, where the larger population of Nigerians may shape transmission and sense of shared community, and may be influenced by the much larger presence of other West African and Black communities, as well as 2SLGBTQ+ communities. This thesis does not, furthermore, address sound in connection to Islam in Lethbridge and Alberta more broadly. This omission was because the city’s Nigerian Islamic community is very small, often gathering in homes rather than in more public spaces. However, understanding the role of music in this community would be a great area for further research, especially in the context of the wider province or possibly country, within larger urban centres.

Alternately, future research could examine the manner second generation Nigerians have transformed traditional cultural practices, or the impact of intermarriages on cultural transmissions. In addition, the cultural entrepreneurs who do their part in establishing the traditions in Canada (like DJs, event organizers, and church musicians) deserve a closer look. Finally, staying closer to southern Alberta, additional research might take a closer

look at the space, social, and technological needs of Nigerian migrants in Lethbridge, asking what kinds of spaces would need to be built or adapted to best allow for the flourishing of Nigerian musical practices in the city.

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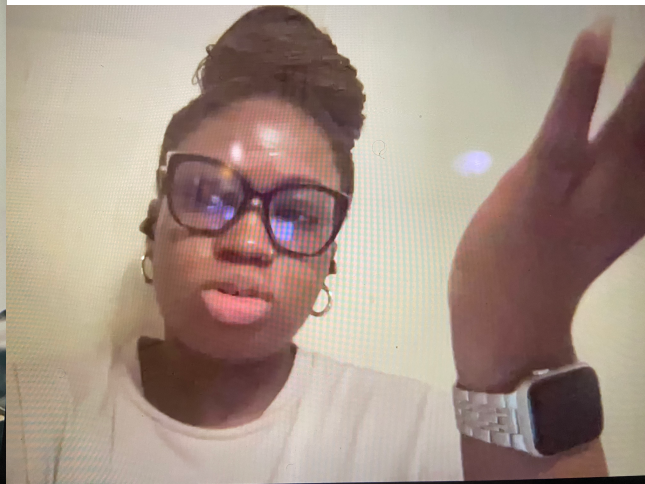
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APPENDIX:
ORAL INTERVIEWS





Event Fliers and Posters





Pictures From Fieldwork





