African Child Rearing in the Diaspora:
A Mother's Perspective

by

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Abstract

This article discusses the challenges many African immigrants face as they raise their children in the United States. Their struggles, I argue is further complicated by issues related to racial and ethnic identities, in addition to their children's reality as first generation American born.

Child Rearing Challenges in the Diaspora

There is no doubt that immigration is and will continue to dominate political debates during these first decades of the twenty-first century. The issues are complicated and the decisions will clearly have ramifications for everyone living in the United States including our children. While politicians seek ways to address the broken border crisis, many Americans seem to be oblivious to the socio-cultural problems legal immigrants face constantly in the new world, or how they deal with such challenges.

This may be because many expect these new immigrants that enter the United States legally to assimilate quickly. This way they are able to participate fully in the socio-political life of their new country. Some immigrants like those coming from Africa, for the most part, choose to negotiate their relationship with the new culture differently, for they perceive themselves as "Africans first and members of a national group second" (In Motion, p. 8). This means they "have a continent . . . belong to a specific country, . . . [and are] heir to a deep-rooted history" (In Motion, p. 8). Thus it is important that while they survive materially and serve their local and national communities in different professional capacities, they maintain their cultural identity as Africans.

One reason for this stance is because Africans "prefer to distance themselves from a [American] culture they often perceive as promoting individualism, materialism, racial polarization, and violence" (p. 9). Distancing themselves from the mainstream culture, however, does not mean they can escape from its impact, especially those with children. They remain Black immigrants and must contend with all that comes with belonging to these two racial and/or political categories. [1]

The question then becomes can African immigrants raise their "American" children to adjust properly and succeed in their new home without necessarily sacrificing their African cultural heritage? John Arthur (2008) points out in his study of Ghanaian immigrants in the United States and Europe that a lot depends on the particular family and on a number of variables. This article discusses some of the challenges Africans face as they rear children in the Diaspora, while briefly commenting on the role that childhood culture in general plays in complicating the process. One reason for framing this article within the umbrella of childhood studies is because children born to African immigrants are children first and Africans second. Therefore, for their own personal survival these children in the new world find themselves participating in what Joe L. Kincheloe (1998) refers to as a "kinderculture" -- a culture he believes "takes shape in shadows far away from the adult gaze" (p. 163). It is a culture that many parents are acutely aware of, even though they cannot access; although some African parents may not even want to acknowledge its existence.

To proceed with the discussion, it is necessary to identify some major sites that continue to define childhood culture, and to demonstrate how these sites that reinforce cultural values for all American children can create tension between "African" American children and their African families. In addition, the concluding section of this chapter will focus on the different ways some African immigrants, especially mothers are dealing with these issues while wrestling with the omnipresent challenges of negotiating cultural identities that reflect African ethnic and American realities.

African Children and American Childhood Culture

Childhood for many is that special period when children are sheltered from the harsh reality of life. It is a time they should be free from worry. For others, childhood is more than this. As Henry Jenkins (1998) notes in the introductory chapter of *The Children's Culture Reader*, childhood "is subject to the same historical shifts and institutional factors that shape all human experience" (p. 4), and is not simply a "utopian space, separate from adult cares and worries" (p. 3). This definition may be difficult for many adults to accept, especially since we want to believe that childhood is indeed a period of innocence regardless of how our own childhood experiences really were.

Childhood also varies from culture to culture; and even within a particular culture, it varies from child to child. Simply put, it has become "particularly problematic in our time" (Peter B. Pufall and Richard Unsworth (2004, p. 3). While Pufall and Unsworth (2004), authors of *Rethinking Childhood* refrain from providing a specific definition of childhood, like Jenkins (1998), they recognize children's social and political agency, hence, from their stance children "are much more self determining actors than we generally think" (p. 9). This means they are not passively acted upon as many adults may be tempted to believe. Rather, they "are active participants in that process of defining their identities, though they join those interactions from positions of unequal power" (Jenkins, 1998, p. 4). Children therefore, have some control in deciding what identities they want to assume, but like the adults in their community they also encounter obstacles in this process. Moreover, their methods of dealing with these obstacles do vary. Some ways they handle obstacles involve watching how other children behave, understanding what adults expect of them, understanding the laws that govern human behavior within their community, and balancing between their own needs and those of the dominant culture. They may have to compromise because as Pufall and Unsworth (2004) rightly observe, "Neither their social reality nor their identity are elements in isolation from the social world" (p. 9).

In addition, children must contend with their postmodern cultural reality that predisposes them to survive by figuring out answers to their questions alone partly because their parents are either too busy making a living or are no longer together as a couple (Kincheloe, 1998). They must quickly understand the academic and social expectations of their schools, negotiate relationships with friends on the playground, and decipher the messages behind the images of our global cultures the media bombards to them regularly. These demands on children living in the latter half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century continue to make life difficult, especially for children whose parents hail from a continent and a culture the media repeatedly depicts negatively. [2]

Although there are several variables that contribute in shaping childhood culture in different settings, some scholars have identified three specific sites of construction: the home, the school, and the media (Jenkins, 1998). Thus children are impacted by what they see and do at home and their neighborhood, what they learn at school, and what they read about their African and American cultures from the media. For the African immigrant these sites are fraught with tension, partly because the sites most often manifest values that do not only undermine African culture, but demean them, complicating the child rearing process in the Diaspora. The challenge becomes how to provide children of African parentage with strategies that would enable them to effectively balance expectations within their private space that celebrates their Africanness and the public space that emphasizes their Americanness. Therefore, Karen Calvert's (1998) claim that parents indeed have the social privilege to define their children (p. 67) may be problematic. This is partly because the children of African immigrants, like most immigrants have home cultures that may not necessarily reflect the mainstream values; and moving back and forth from the home space to the public sphere can leave the child confused, ashamed, or/and frustrated unless parents are able to handle the transition with skill and tact. I address some of these issues in a study I did with my daughter in the nineties. [3]

Although one may be tempted to believe that this is a recent phenomenon, there is ample evidence that childrearing in the new world has always been a challenge, especially for Black families. James Comer and Alvin Pouissant (1992) discuss the struggle of raising Black children first under slavery, and later after emancipation. They observe that Black children were saddled with the responsibility of raising themselves, their siblings and other children, and eventually were neglected by society because of racism. Furthermore, that it did not take long for these children to understand that there are two cultures in the new world: minority and majority cultures. To cope with this reality some find themselves expressing their frustration in different ways within their community. This seems to be the case as well with children of African immigrants. As they move back and forth their home and public spaces they encounter conflicting messages about their race and culture, which inadvertently elicit mixed emotions about their place in the new society and may frustrate some.

Richard Davis (1993) takes the argument a step further explaining that, "The Black family is influenced by both ethnic and mainstream culture, which means that assimilation is still taking place. There are a number of factors that seem to complicate the process. For one thing, even though affluent Blacks have greater flexibility in the assimilation process, both affluent and non affluent Blacks continue to identify with ethnic culture – some through nativism, others through survivalism, but all seem to identify with mainstream culture to some extent" (p. 57). This may be so because of the powerful influence that mainstream culture has on everyone residing in the United States. [4]

Although I focus on African and Black experiences, there are creative works and studies that have addressed a variety of ways recent immigrants from across racial groups are handling intergenerational conflicts within their families. For example, Amy Tan captures this in her popular essay, "Mother Tongue," where she describes the humiliation her mother with limited English proficiency had to endure as she interacted with mainstream culture, and her role in easing this pain simply because she could speak English with a mainstream American accent. Her bestselling novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1987/2006) that was eventually made into a movie captures a similar struggle, exploring intergenerational conflicts between Asian parents and their American born daughters. In 2006, Mira Nair, an Indian film producer also explored this theme in her made for cable drama, *The Namesake* starring Kal Penn as the American born Indian caught in a cultural mesh.

Some studies that have examined immigrant parents and their childrearing experiences away from their countries of origin includes Maja Dekovic, Trees Pels, and Suzanne Model's (2006) *Childrearing in Six Ethnic Families: The Multi-cultural Dutch Experience*, and John Arthur's (2008) *The African Diaspora in the United States: The Ghanaian Experience*. Although Dekovic et al (2006) conduct their study but in The Netherlands with participants from a cross section of indigenous groups, their conclusions on immigrant families' experiences raising children in a new society whose culture they may not be too familiar with, point to similar challenges faced by African immigrants in the United States. Arthur's (2008) study does not only acknowledge the intergenerational conflicts that exist among Ghanaian families in the African Diaspora, but examines how the children themselves are coping with the expectations from the different cultures they encounter daily. In the study, he concludes that African immigrant parents are raising their children not only in the presence of two dominant cultural values as Comer and Pouissant (1992) posit, but among several conflicting cultural values consisting of white mainstream, Black American minority, and competing African cultures. I would add a fourth category, competing minority cultures.

Cultural Challenges and Identity Formation

The most challenging aspect of the immigrant experience for me as a parent has to do with food. Some may wonder why I have chosen to begin with such an obvious cultural artifact. I have done so because not only does food nurture the body, it also predisposes us to certain illnesses and lifestyles. In fact, it is a major part of a cultural heritage as it communicates who we are in the broadest sense of the word. In addition, food is culturally entrenched in our socio-historical reality. In my discipline of Children's Literature, it is also clear that food is a recurrent theme, especially in the classics and particularly in fairy and folk tales – stories used to socialize children very early on how to behave in society or/and interact with others in their environment. Most often in these tales, food becomes a sort of bait or weapon witches or stepmothers use consistently to either endear themselves to gullible children in order to entrap, punish or even kill them.

Food, therefore, becomes a powerful symbol of cultural assimilation, cultural resistance, and/or cultural liberation, for it not only serves a functional purpose of nurturing healthy children but defines their taste forever empowering and/or disempowering them in ways that their African parents are unable to fathom. While some children of African immigrants may use food to assert or reject their Africanness as they negotiate an identity with which they are comfortable, or an identity that pleases or provokes their parents, there are others still, who use food as an outlet to liberate themselves from the cultural hegemony that prevails both at home and in the world away from home. To this group of African children food then provides an ample opportunity to make survival decisions as needed, freeing them from an either or solution to their plight. Thus, if they are hungry, they reserve the right to eat whatever is available in their immediate environment, and are also ready to embrace the consequences that come with this action. This is the case in some fairy tales.

For example, in the classic folk tale, *Hansel and Gretel*, Hansel gets into trouble with a wicked witch because he and his sister crave the delicious gingerbread house. Once they take a bite off it, there is no turning back, for they become entrapped in a violent survival plan. It does not matter that they had gone without food all day long and are famished. What matters is that they eat a food item that belongs to someone else. The food item is delicious but also has the propensity to be deadly and the act of eating makes Hansel a prisoner and Gretel a calculating murderer. However, this act also enables Gretel who has spent most of her young life in her brother's shadow to step up and become a leader who is able to think quickly on her feet of ways to save her brother. In a sense then it liberates both of them from stereotypical gender roles.

In *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, Goldilocks almost gets captured by Papa Bear because she eats Baby Bear's porridge among other things. Although she is able to flee from the scene, one can only speculate what would have happened to her if Papa Bear had actually caught her. In Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, Peter loses his coat and freedom to wander around like his siblings because he steals carrots from Mr. McGregor's garden. In addition, he must drink chamomile tea to soothe his upset stomach. And in a popular Cameroonian folk tale, "If Na Me Chop Dis Rice," a girl drowns because she lies about eating the rice dish meant for all the members of the family. Each of these tales cautions children about craving food that does not belong to them per se. If they do, there are consequences. They may become something they did not anticipate as readers notice about Gretel; may lose their freedom as the rabbit, may escape without a scathe like Goldilocks, but also may die as in the girl in the Cameroonian folk tale. Ignoring the role that food plays in the acculturation process may therefore seem naïve to many cultural critics. This becomes a reality African immigrants may have to reckon with because once children leave the home for school or the play ground we have no control over what they eat and how this would affect their sense of selves. [5]

Admittedly, food is a major source of intergenerational conflicts among African immigrants because meals served within most African homes are completely different from those served in the school cafeteria and in fast food restaurants. Thus children may have to adjust their taste buds to the variety of meals with which they encounter away from home. This may also mean adapting to the culture of that particular space. Most often when this happens for some reason the home culture is relegated to the background, although this does not necessary have to be so. As Joy Ekema-Agbaw (2000) points out in "Mommy, I Just Want to Fit In", in as much as she loves the food served in both settings, she does not feel comfortable telling her peers that her favorite meals are really dodo and eru because they would not understand (p. 43). [6] So it becomes easier to stay quiet or claim like her American friends to like but Chicken Alfredo or a traditional white mainstream dish they could easily relate to. While she was struggling with this matter of personal taste trying to assert her identity as an eleven-year-old African girl living in the United States, and as an American girl growing up in an African home in rural Pennsylvania, her brothers simply dismissed all African food as too exotic claiming their identities as mainstream Americans that have no connections with Africa.

This stance may help them to navigate mainstream culture whenever they are with their peers, but one wonders how it serves them as individuals from a home that privileges an alternative culture. This rejection has the potential to further marginalize these children's African families as an 'other' vis a` vis mainstream American families, a phenomenon Molefi Kete Asante (1998) finds problematic, arguing in his seminal work, *The Afrocentric Idea* that "Otherness" is a Eurocentric construct (p. 177). Or perhaps it could also be looked upon as an act of subversion to liberate them from the hegemony of the African ethnic culture that dominates their home spaces. These are questions one needs to ponder further.

Focus group discussions with some African mothers in Maryland, Ohio, Virginia, and Washington, DC areas reveal that their children's polite or quiet rejection of traditional African meals can be insulting. One reason these women give repeatedly is that they take great pride in cooking, and feeding their families. Consequently, when a child rejects the food they have so painstakingly taken the time to prepare for the family, it makes them feel inadequate and affects their maternal egos. Further, they ponder the possible reasons for why this may be happening given that they were socialized in their African countries of origin that a child never denies to eat his/her mother's food. They perceive such an act as synonymous to rejecting one's culture. This is because cooking, especially for Cameroonian mothers indicates how nurturing and caring a mother can be. [7] The inability to cook for one's child or to feed one's child properly means a mother has failed her children woefully.

As I explained to one of my sons, making me fix hamburgers or sandwiches for them constantly instead of fixing them a Ndolé dish as labor intensive as preparing the meal is, was an insult to my cooking intelligence. However, like some of the women I interviewed I have compromised somewhat by learning new recipes from the mainstream culture. It is our desperate attempts to keep our children from overly depending on hot dogs, hamburgers, and pizzas.

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This experience of relearning how to cook can be tough as well, as these mothers become what Joe Kincheloe refers to as "childified," with their children seeming to know a lot more about the mainstream American culinary culture than them (Kincheloe 1998, p. 170). [8] As several use ingredients or spices unfamiliar to them to prepare traditional American dishes they begin to depend heavily on their children's better knowledge of the Diasporic – Black and white mass and mainstream cultures or on their American neighbors and friends. They learn to measure their spices in teaspoons and/or measuring cups, follow recipes from youtubes, and/or cook books, and use timers to remind them when the meals are ready. This becomes a new phase in our childrearing process, for most of us grew up not depending on these gadgets as we prepared meals for loved ones and strangers.

One of the women from the focus group discussions confided later that losing the battle in the kitchen to her son was the last straw. From her perspective it is humiliating to admit to one's hungry "Americanized" child that one does not know how to fix the mainstream American food the child cherishes. Thus rather than admit this perceived shortcoming, she found herself condoning the child's voracious appetite for junk food. This does not have to be the case though. Although as African mothers some of us were initially resistant to our American children teaching us how to fix their "favorite" American dishes, more and more it provides one with the opportunity to bond with one's child. Moreover, it brings the family together and gives us an opportunity to accommodate our favorite meals on one table, reflecting our multiple cultural experiences in the Diaspora without necessarily sacrificing food from the old world. Better yet, there is no need to police our children on the one hand and no need for them to be unnecessarily hostile or tensed for not declaring their love of African ethnic food to their parents.

Another source of stress has to do with the children's experiences at school. This is because although most Africans use English as their primary medium of communication with colleagues and Americans formally and informally at work and social events, at home they tend to communicate either in their mother tongue or in a lingua franca they had grown up with in their countries of origin under different colonial realities. Therefore, while raising children in the Diaspora, some insist that their children speak only the home language at home and save English for school and other public domains. Home language for such parents remains a symbol of cultural survival, while school language is perceived as a means to an end – material survival. However, the transition between the home and school languages can be tenuous as well, as gradually some African children begin to regard the language spoken at home as inferior simply because many of their mainstream peers are unfamiliar with it.

Some African parents deal with this issue informally by explaining to their children the role that language plays in the survival of a people. Others address this formally during annual cultural or ethnic conventions where they deliberately schedule sessions on how to encourage children to value their indigenous languages. [9]

Still, there are others who take matters in their hands by organizing language classes in their local communities for their children, bringing them all together to see that speaking an African ethnic language does not mean that one is ignorant, especially since African immigrants have been identified as "the most highly educated communities in the nation," and African women for having "the second highest levels of education of any female group in the United States" (In Motion 2006, pp. 4 & 5; Schomburg April 2006 Exhibit). Thus use of an ethnic language at home is simply a way of preserving one's cultural heritage.

Resolving the home language issue is only part of the challenge, for these children like their peers from other ethnic minority cultures must actively participate in every aspect of the American school culture, if they want to be well rounded as they hone their academic skills that would guarantee material survival. This is usually not a problem initially or so many of the African parents I interviewed assume, coming from a continent where education is cherished greatly and teachers are highly revered. African immigrants expect no less in their new environment. This means they do not necessarily have to worry about their children getting into trouble because it is understood that these children will be disciplined at school and would have to perform better than average in academics. Besides, what some African parents fail to understand is that the schooling experience in the United States is extremely complex. There is the guaranteed academic component, an extracurricular component, and a social component! Since many come from home cultures that used to place little or no value on children's extracurricular activities such as sporting events and social life, many do not know how to respond to challenges that stem out of these venues. Thus some choose not to attend their children's games, plays, or to participate in fieldtrips as other American parents do. However, what they overlook is the cultural implication of this absence, which may translate into "neglect" or lack of interest in one's child's education and well-being. Unfortunately, as the participants in the focus group discussions admit this cultural misunderstanding inadvertently creates tension between African parents and their children at home especially if the child in question has to rely on parents of other teammates for transportation and moral support.

The African parents who understand the cultural implications of not participating do not necessarily find it easy to cope as well. For one thing, they must also take turns in bringing snacks, manning the boosters and supporting their child's team in any way possible. Failure to do so can also be construed as an irresponsible behavior, which may also embarrass the child. These issues as trivial as they may seem to the average American continue to complicate the childrearing process as they further define otherwise well-intentioned African parents as incapable and/or uncaring.

As African parents (especially fathers) struggle to raise children in the Diaspora, and work hard to maintain their authority in the home, and respectability as professionals at work, they must also contend with the omnipresence of the media that in a way also undermines their authority (Arthur 2008).

The consumer culture celebrated by the media and the ideal images of personhood disseminated further disempower them and continue to "childify" them, for although they may have control at home over the amount of television and quality of shows watched, they have no control over what their children watch elsewhere and how it affects their sense of selves or shapes their values. Some, however, counterbalance these with homemade movies of their old culture, and self-published books on particular aspects of their culture. As Kincheloe (1998) points out about postmodern children in the United States, nothing is secret to them anymore. They seem to know a lot more than their parents, and depending on the child, they may use this information for good or for bad. Overwhelmed with these cultural problems, some Africans who can afford it opt to send their children to their countries of origin to be raised by relatives or grandparents. This way they believe they can somehow guarantee that the children are well grounded in the home culture by the time they return to the United States as young adults to continue their education (In Motion). Parents who find this approach too drastic or who do not have the financial means instead arrange to bring a grandparent over to assist with the "Africanization" process. The children also benefit from having an important relative around to connect them with their ancestral heritage. However, as some of the women I interviewed attest, there are moments when this arrangement can backfire, especially if the cherished grandparent insists on raising the child the African way, enforcing strict, rigid rules or forcing the child to act just like a cousin in the old country. When this happens some of the children play the American card, calling the Cops on their grandparents and citing child abuse. Such an action embarrasses the African parent as it demeans the grandparent. Sometimes, it actually breaks up a family, for siblings of the African parent accuse him/her of encouraging such disrespect of their dad or mom [the grandparent in question] (Arthur 2008).

American Children in an African Diaspora Home

African immigrants may have to rethink how they want to negotiate their relationship with the new world that currently serves as their home in order to stay emotionally and physically healthy. Once they are able to accomplish this, perhaps they would be able to make room in their consciousness to understand the dominant culture beyond their immediate profession and stop living "insular lives surrounded by compatriot, socializing primarily with other Africans" (In Motion, p. 9). Although this is hard, it may help them to better understand American culture as they guide their children to navigate the system as Americans but holding on to their African roots for emotional and psychological stability. This way perhaps *our* children would no longer perceive us as "ignorant" or "rigid country folks" who are socially inept. As we seek to understand and become part of the mainstream it becomes necessary to develop a strong subculture as well – a culture that would make our children proud of being African and American as some African immigrants in Arthur's (2008) study are already doing. This may mean that we do not only attend occasions meant for our fellow countrymen but make an effort every now and then whenever possible to participate in other mainstream social forums that would help us connect with others across ethnic cultures and at the human level. [10]

As immigrants in a new culture, if we find a way to educate ourselves on the laws of our new country and make sure that cultural practices from our countries of origin do not violate any aspect of these laws, raising children in the Diaspora may not be a legal issue as is the case with some families. Our children would then be able to see some kind of consistency between the rules implemented at home and those enforced at school or in the larger society. If we insist on doing otherwise, there are or may always be consequences. For example, instead of using corporal punishment as a disciplinary method as is practiced back home by some families, one needs to seek an alternative approach that is encouraged in the Diaspora. A couple of months ago as a follow-up to our discussions on the immigrant experience in the United States with some mothers in Maryland, I listened to one woman refer to her children as pirates, good for nothing idiots, and terrorists terms condoned in Cameroon, my country of origin, and even regarded as a display of maternal affection or endearment depending on the context of usage. I wondered what would have happened to this young mother and her family, if the four, six, and eight-year-old children had picked up the phone and called a social worker, or an American neighbor. Language like this is common usage in Cameroon, no doubt; however, in the Diaspora such language is not condoned and may be interpreted as a form of abuse. Such communication patterns have jeopardized the lives and/or welfare of several African immigrants in the Maryland and Washington D.C. areas as the participants I interviewed convey. Although they seemed frustrated about this, they have somewhat accepted this as a new reality within their community.

Many African immigrants may not understand what is considered child abuse in the United States. According to Banton (2004) "child abuse [falls] under four headings: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect" (p. 123, [as cited 1999:14]). Child abuse in Africa may mean something vastly or slightly different from how it is interpreted in the United States, just like parenting styles vary among ethnic groups and among parents within the different ethnic groups in Africa. This notwithstanding, there may be culturally specific forms of discipline that may be construed in the new world as abuse. [10] There seems to be an acute need therefore for a major shift in paradigm as African parents raise their first generation American born children in the United States. This shift however, may not necessitate that an immigrant sever ties with his/her culture of origin. Rather, it should enable one to make culturally informed decisions on how to raise one's children in a society that constantly sends conflicting messages about mainstream and other cultures.

As this recent group of African immigrants search for peace and/or material and intellectual fulfillment in the Diaspora we would have to consistently juggle the cultural practices of our old cultures and those that govern the new world our children are being socialized to live by. Expecting American children born of African parents to develop a strong African consciousness and attachment to the continent just like their African parents who grew up in the continent is wonderful; but it is important to not underestimate the hegemony of the mainstream culture that is deeply entrenched within the Anglo Saxon tradition.

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Not raising them to be aware of their identity and to understand their cultural history regardless of how they feel about it may have consequences beyond the scope of this article. As challenging as the task of helping American children of African descent negotiate cultural and individual identities may be, in the long run their sense of selves may depend on how much effort the adults within their Diasporic communities put in nurturing these American children within their African homes. It is this new "self" that can enable them to find a balance between what they value in the culture of their parents' old world and the culture of the new world of which they are a part.

End Notes

[1]: During my April visit to the Schomburg Research Center for African-American Culture I read that Africans make 6% of the immigrant population in the United States. This statistics also appears on the "African Immigration" website.

[2]: Vivian Yenika-Agbaw has discussed this aspect of image-making in her book *Representing Africa in Children's Literature*.

[3]: In the study my daughter then in middle school shares candidly her views on identity formation as an African girl who is aware that her survival within her local community and within the school system depends on how quickly she can become American. The article that came out of this study is entitled: "Mommy, I Just Want to Fit In."

[4]: According to John Arthur (2008), "Assimilation theories stress that minority groups conform to the norms and values of the dominant groups, exhibiting unqualified acceptance of their ways of life" (p. 66).

[5]: To get a deeper understanding of what food signifies in children's literature, read Keeling, Kara K. & Scott T. Pollard [Eds.] *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature*. Routledge: New York, New York, 2008.

[6]: Dodo is fried ripe plantains and Ndole is a vegetable dish made from bitterleaves. These are popular meals in Cameroon.

[7]: Cameroon is my country of origin. Food is quite important in this culture and people expect mothers to be able to cook and feed their children properly.

[8]: Childified is a term Kincheloe (1998) uses to describe contemporary parents and their struggle to cope with their limited knowledge of technology in the latter half of the twentieth century. This lack of familiarity with new media forces them to rely heavily on their children for guidance, hence making the children teaches.

[9]:   During the summer vacation most African ethnic groups hold annual conventions to reinforce their group identity of a particular ethnicity and/or nationality. For example, members of my ethnic group have formed a Bui Family Union that convenes at the end of July annually. On such occasions they introduce American born children to popular ethnic dances such as Kikum, Njang, and Toh dances socializing them to gender expectations and basic social etiquette.   Most of the children are usually fascinated by the spectacles of the traditional dances, but seem lost as the adults speak Lamnso over their heads and excitedly perform rites alien to them.

[10]:   There are many social forums out there for the African immigrant who chooses to diversify his/her social experiences in the United States. Some, however, can further reinforce our social alienation from the main culture. This notwithstanding, when one chooses well, paying attention to the members of such a forum or the activities, one can avoid unpleasant experiences at mainstream social gatherings. Thus the bottom line is for one who to use good judgment.

[11]:   The popular Nigerian movies demonstrate this constantly as perhaps the producers attempt to sensitize viewers about child abuse issues in Nigeria and Africa in general.

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