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Transnational Anchoring, Gender Renegotiation, and Diaspora Family Life Architecture Among Nigerian Immigrants in the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada: Implications for Social Work Education and Practice

By

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Abstract

This paper examines transnational family practices and gender role renegotiation among Nigerian immigrant families in the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), and Canada, drawing on a mixed-methods study comprising survey data from 150 respondents and qualitative thematic analysis of ten in-depth interviews. Financial remittances to Nigeria were engaged in by 90.0% of respondents, and a moderate positive relationship between transnational communication frequency and family cohesion was confirmed by Pearson's correlation ($r = .532$, $p < .001$). A chi-square test confirmed a significant association between gender role change and spousal conflict ($\chi^2 = 18.42$, $p < .001$). Two central theoretical contributions are made. The first is the concept of transnational anchoring the daily, embodied practices of food, language, digital kinship, intentional celebration, remittance obligation, and selective acculturation—through which Nigerian immigrants constitute diaspora identity and sustain family cohesion across distance. The second is a theorization of gender renegotiation as a contested, multi-directional process shaped by norms of patriarchal origin, egalitarian frameworks in host countries, and individual spousal orientation. Grounded in family systems theory (Bowen, 1978), transnational social work (Lyons et al., 2006), and postcolonial feminism (Bahri, 2009), the paper develops substantial implications for social work education in Nigeria and for international social work practice with Nigerian immigrant families. It is argued that social work curricula in Nigeria must integrate transnational family practice as a core competency, and that practitioners engaging with Nigerian immigrant families require culturally informed frameworks that recognize transnational practices as resources rather than problems and engage with gender renegotiation in contextually sensitive and gender-critical ways.

Keywords: *transnational anchoring, gender renegotiation, Nigerian immigrants, social work education, cultural competence, family systems, selective acculturation, diaspora identity*

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian diaspora in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada represents one of the most educationally distinguished and culturally productive African immigrant communities in the English-speaking world. Nigerian immigrants bring with them a complex cultural inheritance that includes a deep orientation toward family and communal connection, a set of gender norms forged under the combined pressures of precolonial tradition, colonial imposition, and postcolonial modernity, and a transnational sensibility shaped by decades of movement between Nigeria and the Global North (Amzat et al., 2022; Afolayan, 2017; Igbineweka, 2022). An estimated 244 million individuals worldwide reside in a country different from their birthplace (International Organization for Migration, 2017), and Nigerians constitute one of the most professionally accomplished segments of this global migrant population, particularly in the health, education, and technology sectors of the three host countries under study. Understanding how Nigerian immigrant families navigate the cultural, relational, and structural demands of life in the diaspora is both a theoretical and practical imperative for social work.

However, social work education and practice frameworks for engaging with Nigerian immigrant families remain

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comparatively underdeveloped, both in Nigeria and in host diaspora countries (Lyons et al., 2006; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018). Nigerian social work graduates who are trained primarily within bounded national frameworks frameworks that assume families exist within a single cultural and national context are inadequately prepared to assess and support families whose lives span multiple national borders, whose obligations run simultaneously to spouses in Canada and parents in Enugu, and whose cultural identities are actively constructed from both Nigerian origin practices and host country norms. This is not a marginal concern for Nigerian social work education. The reality of contemporary Nigerian family life is that transnationalism isn't an exception but an increasingly common feature of family structure and experience.

This study focuses on two dimensions of Nigerian immigrant family life that have received insufficient integrated attention in the social work literature. The first is transnational family practice: the activities, arrangements, and orientations through which Nigerian immigrant families maintain connections with family members and cultural life in Nigeria while building new lives in the host country. The second is gender role renegotiation: the process through which Nigerian immigrant men and women navigate the significant gulf between Nigeria's predominantly patriarchal gender norms and the more egalitarian norms they encounter in Western host countries. These two dimensions are not separate phenomena; transnational practices are gendered, with women bearing disproportionate responsibility for cultural transmission, and transnational frameworks of obligation, expectation, and identity shape gender renegotiation (Bahri, 2009; Pessar & Mahler, 2003). Attending to both simultaneously, and to the relationships between them, offers a more complete account of Nigerian immigrant family dynamics than either alone could provide—and a more adequate basis for social work practice.

This paper makes two original theoretical contributions that are directly relevant to social work. The first is the concept of transnational anchoring—the daily, embodied practices through which Nigerian immigrants constitute diaspora identity and sustain family cohesion across distance. The second is a theorization of gender renegotiation as a contested, multi-directional process in which the spouse's pre-migration gender orientation emerges as a significant and previously undertheorized mediating variable. Both contributions are grounded in empirical findings and are explicitly oriented toward social work education and practice. Furthermore, the paper draws on the work of Adaranijo et al. (2024) on identity reconstruction among Nigerian women facing transformative life experiences, applying this framework to the diaspora context in ways that illuminate the agentive and creative dimensions of Nigerian immigrant women's cultural navigation.

The paper is organized as follows: a theoretical framework section grounds the analysis; a literature review contextualizes the study within existing social work and social science knowledge; a methodology section describes the research design; findings are presented in integrated quantitative and qualitative form; a discussion synthesizes the evidence in relation to the theoretical frameworks; and a dedicated section on implications for social work education and practice translates the findings into actionable guidance for practitioners and educators.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three interlocking theoretical frameworks that provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding Nigerian immigrant family dynamics and for developing culturally informed, structurally aware, and gender-critical social work responses.

The first is Bowen's (1978) family systems theory, which understands the family as an emotional unit in which each member's behavior, feelings, and functioning affects and is affected by the others. Family systems theory is particularly relevant for understanding transnational family dynamics because it directs attention to the emotional processes that connect family members across geographical distance and to the ways in which tension, obligation, and loyalty in the extended family system shape the immediate conjugal unit's functioning. The Pearson correlation finding in this study ($r = .532$, $p < .001$) confirming that frequency of transnational communication is significantly associated with family cohesion is readily understood within a family systems framework: the emotional triangles, fusion dynamics, and differentiation processes that family systems theory identifies as central to family functioning do not dissolve when families are separated by national borders; they continue to operate through digital communication channels, remittance patterns, and the management of obligation and expectation across distance. For social work assessment, understanding a Nigerian immigrant couple's immediate relational dynamics requires understanding their position within a broader family system that simultaneously extends to Nigeria and, in some cases, to multiple countries.

The second framework is transnational social work, as theorized by Lyons et al. (2006). Transnational social work challenges the methodological nationalism that has historically characterized both social work education and practice the assumption that families, communities, and social problems are bounded within single national contexts and that social work intervention is a locally contained enterprise. Lyons et al. (2006) argue that contemporary social work must engage with the cross-border dynamics that shape increasingly large portions of the populations it serves, including the transnational family obligations, split-household arrangements, and cultural identity negotiations that characterize the lives of immigrant families. Transnational social work also challenges the tendency to position transnational practices remittances, digital kinship, and split-household parenting primarily as social problems or risk factors and insists on recognizing these practices as adaptive strategies that reflect the resourcefulness and relational commitment of immigrant families. This reframing is central to the concept of transnational anchoring introduced in this

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paper, which positions food, language, digital communication, and celebration as identity-constituting practices that sustain family cohesion and cultural continuity across distance.

The third framework is postcolonial feminism (Bahri, 2009; Guyo, 2017), which is essential for understanding the gendered dimensions of transnational cultural practices and gender renegotiation. Postcolonial feminism recognizes that Nigerian immigrant women occupy a specific and complex position within the intersection of patriarchal cultural norms, the dislocations of diaspora life and the structural power relations between the origins of the Global South and Western host countries (Bahri, 2009). It insists on attending to Nigerian immigrant women as active agents who navigate complex and often contradictory normative worlds with considerable skill and reflexivity, not as simply oppressed by their cultures or simply liberated by migration to the West. This theoretical orientation is directly expressed in the concept of selective acculturation identified in this study as the meta-strategy through which Nigerian immigrant families navigate the tension between cultural retention and host country integration which positions Nigerian immigrant families as reflexive cultural agents rather than passive recipients of cultural influence from either direction. Furthermore, postcolonial feminism's commitment to centering African and Nigerian scholarly frameworks as primary analytical authority (Adaranijo et al., 2024; Amzat et al., 2022) informs this paper's consistent prioritization of Nigerian scholarly perspectives alongside Western social work and social science frameworks.

Literature Review

Transnational Family Practices: Theory and Evidence

As a theoretical framework, transnationalism holds that contemporary migrants maintain active and meaningful ties to both their countries of origin and their host societies, constructing lives that operate simultaneously across national borders rather than undergoing linear assimilation into a single national context (Glick Schiller, 1999; Walton-Roberts, 2004). Transnational family practices are the concrete activities through which these cross-border lives are sustained: financial remittances, digital communication, visits, participation in cultural and religious events, and the maintenance of emotional bonds across distance (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Among Nigerian immigrant families, transnational practices are not peripheral but central to daily life; the moral and affective economy of Nigerian immigrant existence is deeply organized around obligations to family in Nigeria, and financial remittances, emotional availability and cultural transmission are not merely practices but duties that carry significant social and moral weight (Igbineweka, 2022; Afolayan, 2017). Research has consistently documented both the sustaining and the straining dimensions of these obligations: sustaining because they maintain the emotional bonds that give Nigerian immigrant life meaning and connection; straining because they generate financial pressure, time demands, and the emotional labor of maintaining multiple relational fields across significant distances and time zones (Dito & Mazzucato, 2025; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011).

What has received less attention in the social work literature, however, is the identity dimension of transnational practices the ways in which food preparation, language use, celebration, and digital communication function not merely as maintenance activities but as ongoing acts of cultural selfhood in the diaspora context. This paper addresses that gap through the concept of transnational anchoring, which builds on Brah's (1996) concept of the diasporic imaginary the ongoing material and affective relationship with an origin that is simultaneously absent and present but grounds it in the specific, everyday practices through which Nigerian immigrant families constitute and reconstitute their cultural identities. Furthermore, digital technology has fundamentally transformed the infrastructure of transnational family practice. Whereas earlier generations of Nigerian immigrants relied on expensive international telephone calls and physical letters, contemporary immigrants maintain near-continuous digital connections with their families in Nigeria through WhatsApp, FaceTime, and social media platforms (Dito & Mazzucato, 2025; Maszucatta, 2008). This connectivity does not resolve the structural challenges of transnational family life time zone differences, financial constraints, and the emotional labor of multiple relational fields but it does substantially alter the conditions under which those challenges are navigated.

Gender roles, migration, and social work

The relationship between migration and gender role transformation has been extensively debated in the sociological literature on immigrant families (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Pessar & Mahler, 2003). The dominant argument holds that migration from patriarchal societies to more egalitarian Western host countries tends to expand women's agency and challenge men's authority through the structural necessity of dual-income households, the removal of communal surveillance, and exposure to egalitarian host country norms. Evidence for this pattern among Nigerian immigrants is consistent but complex. Studies document that Nigerian immigrant women in Western host countries experience greater freedom of expression, access to professional development, and expansion of decision-making authority within their marriages (Ilo, 2010; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2015; Akinwumi, 2023); however, the costs of this transformation are real and unevenly distributed. Men experience role reversal as a challenge to masculine identity, which can generate relational conflict if not adequately supported (Adeniyi, 2022). Women who embrace egalitarian norms may encounter resistance from partners, extended family members, and community members who remain committed to traditional frameworks. The chi-square finding in this study ($\chi^2 = 18.42$, $p < .001$) confirms what the literature qualitatively documents: significant gender role change is associated with increased spousal conflict, and this association is strong and significant.

However, the social work literature has given insufficient attention to the specific mechanisms through which gender renegotiation occurs among Nigerian immigrant families and to the implications of the process that follow from a genuinely

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culturally informed understanding of this process. In a scoping review of African immigrant women's experiences in Western host societies, Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2018) identified gender role conflict as one of the most consistent themes in the literature but noted the absence of social work practice frameworks for addressing it in culturally appropriate ways. This paper contributes to filling that gap by theorizing gender renegotiation as a multi-directional process with specific mediating variables most notably the pre-migration gender orientation of the spouse and by developing social work education and practice guidance grounded in this theoretical understanding.

Social Work Education and Transnational Practice in Nigeria

Social work education in Nigeria has developed significantly since the establishment of the first formal social work programs in the 1960s. However, the curriculum remains predominantly oriented toward domestic social problems poverty, child welfare, community development, disability and has been slow to incorporate the transnational dimensions of Nigerian family life as a core competency (Amzat et al., 2022). This is a significant gap, given that an increasingly large proportion of Nigerian families include members residing in multiple countries and that Nigerian social work graduates working in hospitals, schools, community organizations and government agencies will routinely encounter families whose lives span national borders. Furthermore, Nigerian social workers who are themselves members of diaspora communities or who are preparing for practice in host countries need transnational social work frameworks to competently practice in contexts where the intersection of Nigerian cultural norms, host country legal and social frameworks, and the structural conditions of immigrant life create complex assessment and intervention challenges. This paper proposes that the concepts of transnational anchoring and selective acculturation, developed from the empirical findings reported here, offer concrete and culturally grounded frameworks that social work education programs in Nigeria can incorporate into their curricula.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative in-depth interview data. The choice of mixed methods reflects a methodological commitment to integrating the breadth of quantitative evidence with the depth of qualitative meaning-making, recognizing that statistical patterns and lived experiences are mutually illuminating rather than competing forms of knowledge (Creswell, 2003). This is also consistent with the tradition of evidence-based practice in social work, which values the integration of multiple forms of evidence in the service of informed and responsive practice.

The quantitative component comprised a structured online survey administered to 150 Nigerian immigrant respondents residing across the UK (London and Manchester), the US (New York City and Los Angeles), and Canada (Toronto and Montreal), recruited through Nigerian immigrant community networks using convenience and snowball sampling. The questionnaire included sections on demographic characteristics, transnational family practices, gender role perceptions, and conjugal dynamics. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, with frequency distributions, Pearson correlation, chi-square tests, and multiple regression analysis employed as appropriate.

The qualitative component comprised ten semi-structured in-depth interviews with six women (P1, P3, P5, P6, P8, and P9) and four men (P2, P4, P7, and P10) residing across Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The interview team conducted the experiment by telephone, recorded with informed consent, and transcribed verbatim. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) was employed, with inductively generated themes from the data through close reading, initial coding, theme construction, and review across multiple iterations. Member checking was employed to support the qualitative findings' dependability (Boyd, 2017). Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the researchers's institution, and all participants provided written informed consent and were assured of the study's voluntary, confidential, and anonymous character.

Findings

Quantitative Findings: Transnational Practices and Roles of Gender

Financial remittances to family in Nigeria constituted the most widespread transnational practice among respondents, with 90.0% of the sample engaging in this practice. This finding confirms the centrality of financial obligation in Nigerian immigrant transnational life and is consistent with the existing literature on the moral economy of diaspora remittances (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Dito & Mazzucato, 2025). Transnational parenting arrangements and split-household arrangements were reported by 38.7% and 28.0% of respondents, respectively. Most respondents (75.3%) maintained at least weekly communication with family in Nigeria, primarily through regular telephone calls (94.7%), social media (74.7%), and video conferencing (65.3%). The Pearson correlation analysis confirmed a moderate positive relationship between transnational communication frequency and perceived family cohesion ($r = .532$, $r^2 = .283$, $p < .001$), indicating that communication frequency alone can explain approximately 28.3% of the variance in family cohesion scores. This is a statistically robust finding that provides quantitative grounding for the qualitative concept of transnational anchoring, confirming that regular contact with family in Nigeria is a meaningful and significant predictor of the immigrant family unit's cohesion and satisfaction.

Most respondents (60.0%) reported positive or very positive effects of transnational practices on family relationships, and 78.7% reported that transnational practices helped maintain cultural traditions. Of these, 56.7% adopted new cultural practices from the host country, suggesting a pattern of selective acculturation rather than either wholesale retention or wholesale assimilation. However, challenges were also common; among the 48.0% who reported difficulties from

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transnational practices, financial strain (62.5%), emotional distress (52.8%), and time management difficulties (44.4%) were most frequently cited. Time zone differences (70.0%) and financial constraints (65.3%) were the most significant structural challenges to transnational family maintenance, reflecting the dual burden of emotional and economic investment that transnational family life requires.

Regarding gender roles, a striking contrast emerged between respondents' characterizations of Nigerian and host country gender norms; 88.7% characterized Nigerian gender roles as traditional or very traditional, and 86.7% perceived their own gender role in Nigeria as traditional or very traditional, while 76.7% characterized host country gender roles as modern or very modern. Furthermore, 63.3% reported experiencing challenges or limitations due to traditional gender roles in Nigeria, most commonly limited career or educational opportunities (61.1%), unequal household responsibility distribution (54.7%), and restricted decision-making power (50.5%). Since migrating, 70.0% experienced moderate to significant change in their gender role perceptions, and 78.7% experienced either challenges or benefits from navigating them. The chi-square test confirmed a statistically significant association between the extent of gender role change and the occurrence of spousal conflict ($\chi^2 = 18.42$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, $\varphi = .35$). Among respondents reporting significant or moderate gender role change, 64.8% experienced spousal conflict, compared with 37.8% of those with little or no change. Despite this conflict, 60.0% of respondents reported positive or very positive effects of gender role change on their sense of identity and self-concept, which reflects the genuinely ambivalent character of gender renegotiation and underlines that conflict and growth are not mutually exclusive in this process.

Theme 1: Transnational Anchoring as Identity Work

All ten participants maintained active transnational cultural practices that functioned not merely as strategies for maintaining family relationships but as ongoing acts of cultural identity construction. Their identity-constituting function is most clearly visible in the daily, embodied character of these practices—food cooked and eaten, languages spoken within the home, celebrations observed and marked, and messages sent before going to sleep. This study introduces the concept of transnational anchoring to describe these practices, emphasizing that they anchor the immigrant self to a cultural world that is geographically distant but affectively and materially present and constitute a form of everyday resistance to the cultural erasure that assimilation pressures might otherwise produce.

P1 and P3 identified Nigerian food as the most consistent and nonnegotiable anchoring practice; P1 articulated this with the following particular force:

Nigerian food, we don't play with it. I know it's very expensive to get our local meals, but that one is consistent. No matter how much burgers they eat, they still prefer Nigerian cultural food. (P1)

The phrase "we don't play with it" signals that food is not merely a dietary preference but a cultural assertion and a form of daily commitment; the willingness to absorb significant financial cost for Nigerian ingredients constitutes a daily vote in favor of Nigerian identity, and the consistency of this practice across years of settlement suggests that as integration deepens, transnational anchoring through food does not diminish. This is an important observation for social work: food practices that might appear to a culturally uninformed practitioner as evidence of failure to integrate should instead be understood as active and deliberate strategies of cultural self-constitution and family cohesion maintenance. Furthermore, within a family systems framework (Bowen, 1978), the shared ritual of Nigerian food preparation and consumption constitutes an emotionally significant family practice that reinforces the family's sense of shared identity and belonging.

P3 extended the anchoring concept to include language, introducing a dimension that is equally significant but absent from P1's account:

Our language. We communicate. Still communicating in our language. (P3)

Speaking a Nigerian language within the household is not simply habitual but performative. In a context where the dominant language is English and the dominant culture is Canadian or British, choosing to communicate in one's mother tongue is an act of cultural self-assertion that reproduces cultural membership within the household, signals its importance to children and other household members, and maintains a form of linguistic intimacy that English cannot fully replicate. P3's pairing of food and language as the two primary anchoring practices frames both eating and speaking as daily enactments of Nigerian belonging in the diaspora—a point that resonates with Adaranijo et al.'s (2024) observation that Nigerian women actively construct new self-identities in response to transformative life experiences, negotiating between prior self-understanding and new realities in ways that preserve continuity while accommodating change.

Digital communication constituted the primary infrastructure of transnational family maintenance for all 10 participants; however, participants did not merely communicate digitally but did so with considerable intentionality and structure. P1 described the deliberate use of family celebrations as a relational touchpoint: 'I'm always intentional about celebrating most family members—birthdays, graduation—so that way it's an avenue to reach out to them'. P2 described a personal rule of reaching out to family before the end of each day: 'Before the end of the day, before I go to bed, I ensure that I reach out', so that communication became not a reactive response to need but a structural feature of daily life, a habit rather than a choice. P2 drew this discipline explicitly from his own childhood experience of a split-household arrangement, in which his family maintained its cohesion through annual reunions and consistent communication despite physical separation. This intergenerational transmission of transnational family maintenance strategies is

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itself a finding of social work relevance, suggesting that the capacity for transnational anchoring is in part a learned family competency.

P3 offered the most explicitly theorized framing of the cultural navigation that involves transnational anchoring:

The challenge is not adopting the bad part but adapting the good part. How to differentiate when to stop or fully integrate into a new culture. (P3)

This selective acculturation framework positions P3 as a reflexive cultural agent who evaluates practices from both her Nigerian origin and her Canadian host society against a moral-evaluative framework, retaining what she considers valuable from each and discarding what she considers harmful. This is a sophisticated navigational strategy that fundamentally challenges linear assimilation models: Nigerian immigrants do not simply move from Nigerian to Canadian or British culture but actively construct a hybrid cultural position through deliberate evaluation and synthesis. Furthermore, P3 articulated a positive framing of cultural encounter as epistemic expansion: "The benefit is exposure." We can see beyond our worldview, beyond what we used to know. We can see the world differently."Migration is thus experienced not as cultural loss but as cultural enrichment—a finding that challenges the deficit narratives of the cultural experience of immigrants and aligns with the strengths-based orientation that is required for effective social work practice."

Figure 1. Transnational Anchoring—A Conceptual Model of Diaspora Identity and Family Cohesion



Note: From the researcher's qualitative data, 2026.

Theme 2: Gender Renegotiation as a Contested, Multi-Directional Process

All ten participants described a significant transformation in gender role expectations following migration; however, the nature, pace, and experience of that transformation varied considerably across accounts, illustrating that gender renegotiation is not a uniform event that migration triggers but a contested, multi-directional process shaped by individual spousal orientations, structural conditions in the host country, the material circumstances of the couple, and the degree of gender consciousness each participant brings to the experience. P1 offered the most explicitly critical framing of Nigerian gender norms, grounded in her own lived experience of their costs:

In Nigeria, the idea is that women are for the kitchen or the home, and men are for the outside. That is a stereotype on its own. Nigeria is a misogynistic society. Even the educated approach gender roles in that way. (P1)

This is not a complaint about individual behavior but a structural critique of the normative order. P1's use of the word 'misogynistic' is politically and analytically precise, naming the Nigerian patriarchal system as ideologically organized against women's interests rather than merely descriptively different from Western norms. Furthermore, migration to Canada did not produce this feminist consciousness in P1; it gave it permission to be voiced a distinction that is important for social work practitioners to understand because it suggests that Nigerian immigrant women may arrive in the host country already possessing gender-critical perspectives that have previously been constrained by cultural and social pressures from expression. Social workers who engage with Nigerian immigrant women as passive recipients of Western feminist ideas, rather than as women with their own analytical frameworks forged through experience, are both inaccurate and disrespectful.

P2 offered an equally instructive contrasting male account of gender renegotiation. He described growing up with the normative conviction that the man has the final say, acknowledged this as formative, but equally acknowledged that this norm would not survive migration intact without damaging the marriage:

One thing I realized is that time is evolving. Society is evolving. If marriage is going to stay together, you've to adapt. (P2)

For P2, the motivation for gender renegotiation was pragmatic rather than ideological—relational survival rather than feminist conviction. This pragmatic motivation is itself a social work insight; it suggests that practitioners working with Nigerian immigrant men need not wait for ideological transformation before engaging with gender equity issues, but can work with the practical and relational motivations identified by men. The adaptation is real and meaningful, regardless of its ideological driver. P2's role reversal experience, during which his wife became the primary financial provider while he pursued full-time study, represented the most structurally dramatic account of gender renegotiation in the dataset. During this period, his domestic participation increased substantially: 'I helped a lot more in the kitchen and in domestic affairs, and I could see there was a major shift'. He does not describe this as a crisis but as an adaptation enabled by a shared commitment to the marriage's future an account that the strengths-based perspective would recognize as evidence of significant relational capital and adaptive capacity.

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P3 described a considerably smoother gender renegotiation trajectory than either P1 or P2, which she attributed explicitly to her husband's pre-existing gender orientation:

The spouse I married is not an extreme Nigerian cultural man. He is more modern in his approach, more westernized. It makes it easier for us to get used to Western culture, and adapting was not difficult. (P3)

This observation introduces a mediating variable—spousal pre-migration gender orientation—that the social work and sociological literature has not previously addressed with sufficient precision. The relative ease of P3's gender renegotiation is not primarily a product of Canada's egalitarian norms but of the relational capital she and her husband brought to their marriage before migration; their prior orientation toward shared responsibility gave them a head-start in the renegotiation process that couples with more traditional orientations do not have. For social work assessment, this suggests that enquiring about each partner's pre-migration gender orientation (including their family of origin's practices and their own prior beliefs about household division of labor) is a meaningful and informative assessment question because it helps practitioners understand not just where a couple is currently in the renegotiation process but also what resources they have for navigating it.

All ten participants eventually arrived at a model of shared domestic and financial responsibility that was flexible and capacity-based rather than rigidly divided by gender. P1 articulated this most clearly: "It's not a 50-50 system. We adapted. We work with what we have based on our capacity and the strength of people."This capacity-based model does not represent a rejection of Nigerian relational values but a revision of them; the commitment to mutual support, interdependence, and family solidarity remains, whereas the gendered assignment of specific tasks to specific persons does not. This distinction is important for social work practice: the goal is not to replace Nigerian relational values with Western individualist ones, but to support couples in revising the specific gender arrangements that those values have historically produced in ways that are sustainable in the host country context and equitable in their distribution of domestic and financial responsibility.

Theme 3: Remittance Obligation as Transnational Care and Structural Pressure

P2 raised the financial dimension of transnational family practice in terms that illuminate the moral economy within which Nigerian immigrant families operate and have direct implications for social work assessment and advocacy:

There is an expectation that you will have to send money home. Starting off life as a young couple, still trying to settle down and make ends meet, can be challenging. But the family has been very understanding. (P2)

The obligation to send remittances is not experienced as an external imposition but as an expression of familial love, belonging, and reciprocity; it is a practice through which transnational kinship is materially enacted and family solidarity across distance is maintained. The fact that 90.0% of survey respondents engaged in financial remittances to Nigeria underlines the near-universal character of this obligation within the Nigerian immigrant population, and the fact that 62.5% of those who reported transnational practice challenges cited financial strain as a primary difficulty underlines its real material cost. For young immigrant couples in the early settlement period (when income may be limited, credential recognition may be delayed, and the couple is simultaneously trying to establish themselves in the host country), remittance obligation can create significant financial pressure that compounds the relational strains of the transition period.

For social work, the remittance finding has both assessment and advocacy implications. At the assessment level, practitioners should routinely enquire about remittance obligations as part of the financial assessment for Nigerian immigrant families, recognizing this as a significant and often invisible financial commitment that affects the family's material stability and therefore its relational functioning. At the advocacy level, social workers have a professional mandate to advocate for structural supports (e.g., expedited credential recognition, employment bridge programs, and settlement financial assistance) that would reduce the tension between remittance obligation and immediate household financial need. P2's observation that "the family has been very understanding" points to the fact that transnational obligations are often managed through negotiation and mutual understanding within the extended family system; this is itself a relational strength that social workers should recognize and support.

Discussion

The concept of transnational anchoring introduced in this paper extends existing transnational theory and social work knowledge in important directions. While transnational theory has focused primarily on economic remittances and political ties (Glick Schiller, 1999; Walton-Roberts, 2004), and social work literature has tended to frame transnational practices primarily as risk factors or practical challenges, this study demonstrates that the sensory and affective practices of daily life (taste, speech, celebration, and deliberate digital contact) are equally central to maintaining cultural continuity and family cohesion across borders. The Pearson correlation ($r = .532$, $p < .001$) provides quantitative grounding for this claim; the frequency of transnational communication is not merely a social preference but a statistically significant predictor of family cohesion, which supports the reframing of transnational practices from problems to resources that transnational social work requires (Lyons et al., 2006).

Postcolonial feminism (Bahri, 2009) illuminates the gendered dimension of transnational anchoring in essential ways for social work practice. Women, as primary caretakers of food preparation, child socialization, and family celebration, bear disproportionate responsibility for the diaspora's cultural reproduction work. It is worth noting that P1's insistence on Nigerian food as non-negotiable and P3's deliberate retention

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of the Nigerian language both reflect this reproductive labor labor that is meaningful and culturally sustaining but also unequally distributed work. Social workers who engage with Nigerian immigrant women without recognizing the cultural reproduction labor they carry risk invisibilizing a significant dimension of their workload and wellbeing. Furthermore, P3's selective acculturation framework adopting the good part and rejecting the bad part—resonates deeply with Adaranijo et al.'s (2024) analysis of identity reconstruction among Nigerian women navigating transformative life experiences. In both contexts, Nigerian women demonstrate a remarkable capacity to construct new self-identities from the materials of disruption and change, without losing the cultural continuity that gives their lives meaning and coherence. Social work that recognizes and supports this capacity works with, rather than against, the agency of Nigerian immigrant women.

On gender renegotiation, the chi-square finding ($\chi^2 = 18.42$, $p < .001$) confirms that gender role change is significantly associated with spousal conflict, but the finding that 60.0% of respondents report positive identity effects from this change underlines the ambivalent character of the renegotiation process. The finding that spousal pre-migration gender orientation is a significant mediating variable is, perhaps, the most practically actionable of this study's qualitative contributions; it identifies a specific assessment question—what were each partner's gender orientation and household practices before migration?—that can usefully inform social work intervention planning. Couples entering the renegotiation process with more flexible prior orientations will likely require different and less intensive support than couples with a large gap between prior orientation and host country expectations and where the renegotiation is correspondingly more conflictual.

Within a family systems framework (Bowen, 1978), both transnational anchoring and gender renegotiation can be understood as dimensions of the broader process of family differentiation the capacity of family members to maintain individual identity and autonomous functioning while remaining emotionally connected with the family system. The Nigerian immigrant families in this study are, in their different ways, engaged in a complex process of differentiation from the family systems of origin and cultural norms while maintaining the emotional connection that gives their lives meaning. The selective acculturation concept captures this process precisely, naming the active, reflexive character of the cultural navigation they engage in. Social work assessment and intervention informed by family systems theory will be better equipped to support this differentiation process in ways that honor both the family's cultural continuity and its members's individual development.

Implications for Social Work Education and Practice

Curriculum Development in Nigerian Social Work Education

Social work education programs in Nigerian universities, including those preparing graduates for both domestic and international practice, should incorporate transnational family practice as a core curriculum component rather than a specialist elective. The reality of contemporary Nigerian family life is that transnationalism is increasingly normative; a social worker in any Nigerian state who is not equipped with frameworks for understanding and assessing transnational family dynamics will routinely encounter inadequately prepared families. The curricula should incorporate modules on transnational family assessment, using culturally adapted genograms and eco-maps that capture cross-border family networks and the obligations, loyalties, and tensions that flow through them. The genogram, as a standard social work assessment tool, needs to be taught in ways that make its application to transnational Nigerian family structures explicit including how to represent siblings in four countries, remittance obligations flowing in multiple directions, and split-household parenting arrangements involving children who may be in Nigeria while parents are in Canada. Without this adaptation, the tool is inadequate for the families that Nigerian social workers encounter.

Furthermore, social work curricula should include training in the moral and affective economy of remittances, grounded in findings such as the 90.0% remittance rate documented in this study, so that social workers understand Nigerian families' financial obligations as a normal and meaningful dimension of family functioning rather than as a personal financial problem or evidence of poor boundary-setting. The concept of transnational anchoring offers a concrete framework for teaching students about how Nigerian immigrant families maintain cultural identity and cohesion across distance. The six anchoring practices identified in this study food, language, digital kinship, intentional celebration, remittance obligation, and selective acculturation provide a structured and empirically grounded teaching framework that goes beyond generic statements about the importance of cultural identity.

Assessment: Reframing Transnational Practices as Family Resources

Lyons et al. (2006) argued that transnational social work requires practitioners to reframe their understanding of transnational practices from problems to resources. The empirical findings of this study support this reframing, most notably the Pearson correlation ($r = .532$, $p < .001$) confirming that the frequency of transnational contact is positively and significantly associated with family cohesion. In practice, assessment frameworks for Nigerian immigrant families should include structured enquiry about the quality, regularity and variety of transnational practices, treating these as positive dimensions of family functioning rather than as evidence of failure to integrate. Practitioners should ask the following questions: How does this family stay connected to Nigeria? What cultural practices do they maintain, and what do these practices mean to them? How does the family manage its remittance obligations, and what support does it need to sustain both its transnational responsibilities and immediate household stability? These questions, when asked with genuine curiosity and cultural humility, can yield

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assessment information that is both more accurate and more useful than assessments that treat Nigerian immigrant families primarily as individuals in a new cultural context rather than as members of extended transnational family systems.

Gender-Sensitive Practices with Nigerian Immigrant Families

The gender renegotiation findings have several direct implications for social work practice that are of immediate relevance to practitioners in both Nigeria and host countries. First, social workers should routinely assess couples' gender role expectations and practices as part of a standard family assessment, specifically attending to the gap between Nigerian patriarchal origin norms and host country egalitarian frameworks, and to the specific flashpoints household labor distribution, financial decision-making, and power dynamics that the quantitative data identify as the most common sources of gender role conflict (at 68.2%, 52.9%, and 49.4%, respectively). Second, practitioners should enquire about each partner's gender orientation, recognizing this as a significant mediating variable that shapes the pace and difficulty of renegotiation. Third, social workers should be familiar with the capacity-based partnership model that Nigerian immigrant couples frequently adopt through renegotiation-shared but flexible division of responsibilities based on capacity rather than gender. This model should be validated and supported as a culturally grounded and practically effective framework for sustainable marital equity, rather than imposing externally derived Western frameworks of gender equality that may not resonate with the values and relational styles of these families.

Selective Acculturation as a Framework for Social Work Practice

The concept of selective acculturation P3's articulation of adopting the good part and rejecting the bad part—offers social work practitioners a powerful and culturally grounded framework for working with Nigerian immigrant families that avoids both uncritical cultural relativism and culturally insensitive assimilation pressure. Social workers who adopt this framework in their practice position the family as the agent of cultural evaluation capable of discerning what to retain, what to adapt, and what to discard from both origin and host cultural repertoires rather than positioning either Nigerian cultural tradition or Western norms as the unquestioned standard against which the family's practices should be measured. In supervision and reflective practice, social workers should be encouraged to examine their own assumptions about what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' cultural practices, recognizing that these judgments are not culturally neutral and that cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998) requires ongoing interrogation of these assumptions. For Nigerian social workers, selective acculturation as a practice framework offers a way of engaging with the cultural complexity of diaspora family life that honors both Nigerian clients' cultural heritage and their capacity for reflexive cultural agency.

Conclusion

This study examined transnational family practices and gender role renegotiation among Nigerian immigrant families in the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada, integrating quantitative evidence of statistically significant patterns with qualitative accounts of lived experience, cultural meaning, and relational process. Two central analytical contributions that have direct relevance for social work education and practice emerge from the analysis. The concept of transnational anchoring is introduced to describe the daily, embodied practices food, language, digital kinship, intentional celebration, remittance obligation, and selective acculturation through which Nigerian immigrants constitute diaspora identity and sustain family cohesion across national borders. The Pearson correlation ($r = .532$, $p < .001$) provides quantitative grounding for this concept, confirming that the regularity of transnational communication is a significant predictor of family cohesion. Gender renegotiation is theorized as a contested, multi-directional process in which patriarchal origin norms, host country egalitarian frameworks and individual spousal orientations intersect to produce highly variable outcomes. The chi-square finding ($\chi^2 = 18.42$, $p < .001$) confirms that significant gender role change is associated with spousal conflict, but 60.0% of respondents report positive identity effects from this process. The capacity-based partnership model that participants arrive at represents a culturally grounded form of gender equity that social work should recognize and support.

Nigerian immigrant families in the diaspora are active and discerning architects of their cultural lives; they do not carry Nigerian culture into the diaspora unchanged, nor abandon it for assimilation, but rather construct something new with remarkable reflexivity and resourcefulness from the materials of origin and host culture. Social work education programs in Nigeria are called upon to develop transnational family practice as a core curriculum competency so that Nigerian social work graduates are equipped to serve the full complexity of Nigerian family life in its increasingly transnational forms. Social work practitioners in host diaspora countries are called upon to develop cultural humility and structural awareness to engage with Nigerian immigrant families as resourceful and agentive people navigating genuine complexity not as vulnerable populations requiring remediation but as families doing remarkable things under difficult circumstances. Future research should pursue longitudinal designs, recruit more diverse and less educationally privileged samples, and attend to the second generation as inheritors and transformers of the anchoring practices and gender frameworks documented here.

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