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*Navigating Dual Realities: Negotiating Identities of Migration, Gender, and Belonging among Nigerian Women in Cincinnati, United States of America*

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## Abstract

*The United States is a nation of immigrants, yet the narratives of immigrants have been selectively told due to a lopsided focus. This paper examines the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers in Cincinnati, Ohio. It sheds light on how migration reshapes identity, gender roles, and notions of belonging at the intersection of race, class, and motherhood. Drawing on feminist migration theory, intersectionality, and feminist poststructuralism, this study investigates how these women negotiate dual realities, navigating systemic exclusion in the U.S. while maintaining cultural identities rooted in Nigerian norms. Through semi-structured interviews with eight first-generation Nigerian immigrant mothers, the research uncovers recurring themes of emotional labour, shifting gender dynamics, and racialised silencing. Participants confront marginalisation within U.S. institutions, often facing devaluation due to their accents, skin colour, or foreignness. Yet, they respond with strategic adaptations, forming support networks through churches, social groups, and sisterhood alliances. This study challenges dominant migration narratives by centring the voices of African women, often rendered invisible in both scholarly and policy discourse. It argues that Nigerian immigrant mothers are not passive recipients of migration's pressures, but active agents engaged in ongoing processes of identity reconfiguration and cultural negotiation. By amplifying these underrepresented perspectives, this paper contributes to decolonial feminist scholarship and urges a reconceptualisation of migration that honours the complexity, resilience, and agency of Black immigrant women.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, immigrant mothers, gendered migration, identity negotiation, intersectionality, racialization, feminist migration theory

## Introduction

Migration is widely acknowledged as a transformative process that reshapes identities, family dynamics, and sociocultural expectations (Wu, 2024). Yet, it is not a neutral or uniform experience. As migrants navigate new terrains, they confront institutional structures, racial hierarchies, and cultural contradictions that profoundly affect their sense of self and belonging. The United States continues to position itself as a nation of immigrants, but its migration discourse remains uneven and racialised, frequently centring on European or Latin American experiences while overlooking the rapidly growing population of African migrants (Khokhlova, 2022). Within this rising demographic, African women, especially those who are mothers, remain critically understudied. Even though they play important roles in initiating and sustaining life across countries, they are often seen as mere followers or dependents of men who lead migration. This framing thereby reflects a broader intellectual bias in African migration scholarship, which has long privileged economic and labour models that foreground male mobility and minimise the social, emotional, and reproductive labour of women (Setrana & Kleist, 2022; Ette, 2012). The result is what Mlotshwa (2024) describes as a “gendered erasure,” in which African women’s autonomous migration stories and identity negotiations remain hidden beneath reductive narratives. These women face dual invisibility, excluded from dominant academic discourses and rendered peripheral in policy spaces that fail to capture the complex realities of racialised, gendered migration.

This study focuses on Nigerian immigrant mothers in Cincinnati, Ohio, a group navigating the compounded forces of racialization, gendered expectations, cultural loss, and social exclusion. These women’s stories reveal that migration is not simply a relocation, but a radical disruption and an ongoing negotiation between inherited norms and emerging demands. As mothers, professionals, and community members, they must continuously recalibrate their identities while contending with occupational deskilling, isolation from extended kin networks, and the cultural differences between Nigerian community-focused values and American ideas of independence, womanhood, and success.

In examining the lived experiences of eight Nigerian immigrant mothers through semi-structured interviews, this study contributes to a growing feminist and decolonial body of literature that seeks to re-centre African women’s voices in migration studies. As scholars such as Ossome (2023) and Beoku-Betts and Adomako Ampofo (2021) have argued, knowledge production in the Global South must be grounded in the realities of those living at the intersections of race, gender, class, and colonial legacies. This work also echoes recent calls to decolonise migration theory by decentering Eurocentric assumptions and recognising how Black African women navigate transnational life not as passive subjects but as strategic agents of social and cultural negotiation (Zerbe Enns *et al.*, 2021; Bakhshalizadeh, 2025).

By sharing the voices and stories of these women, this research challenges the one-size-fits-all stories often told about immigrants and Africans. It shows that Nigerian immigrant mothers are not just trying to get by; they are actively shaping what it means to be a woman, a mother, a worker, a caregiver, and a Black immigrant in America. Their experiences help us understand how migration can both limit and empower, breaking apart old ideas while creating new ways of belonging, resisting, and becoming.

### Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were designed to elicit in-depth reflections on participants' understanding of their roles as women, mothers, migrants, and workers. Specifically, this study explored:

1. How do Nigerian immigrant mothers reconstruct their gender and professional identities in the U.S.?
2. In what ways do they negotiate belonging in a racialised society?
3. How does migration reshape family dynamics and motherhood?

These questions enabled the researcher to explore how participants balance American ideals of independence and productivity with Nigerian cultural values of collectivism, how they respond to structural barriers such as occupational deskilling and racism, and how they construct a sense of belonging in a society that often marginalises them. The study approaches identity not as a fixed trait, but as relational and continually reshaped through context, power, and lived experience.

### Theoretical Framework

This study draws on feminist migration theory, poststructuralist theory, and intersectionality, which together frame women as active agents navigating transnational structures of opportunity and constraint. Feminist migration theory highlights how systemic forces such as labour markets, immigration laws, and family responsibilities impact women's mobility and adaptation (Izaguirre & Walsham, 2021). It challenges male-centred migration narratives by foregrounding how women's migratory experiences are shaped by caregiving roles, reproductive labour, and emotional work, often overlooked in traditional migration models. It also emphasises the non-linear nature of migratory trajectories for women, where household responsibilities, visa limitations, and structural discrimination intersect to shape possibilities for employment, education, and personal fulfilment. Feminist migration scholarship resists the oversimplified portrayal of women migrants as either victims or heroines, instead emphasising their agency within constraints. For example, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) argued that immigrant women are not merely pulled into migration by familial decisions, but often make strategic decisions regarding when, where, and how to migrate. Their participation in migration is often deeply informed by gendered expectations and aspirations for generational mobility and legacy, which are core to many African family value systems (Ojong, 2020).

Building on this, intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) and extended by scholars such as Amoako et al. (2023), emphasises that immigrant women's identities are not defined by a single axis, such as gender or race, but by the convergence of multiple interlocking systems of power and marginalisation. Intersectionality enables a sharper focus on how Nigerian immigrant mothers experience oppression differently from both white women and African American women, due to their unique positioning as Black, African, immigrant, and female. Nigerian immigrant women may be subject to anti-Black racism, xenophobia, and gendered stereotypes simultaneously, affecting their access to resources, employment, and social belonging (Collins & Bilge, 2020). This study provides scaffolding for interpreting how participants' experiences of motherhood, work, and belonging are mediated by their simultaneous status as racial minorities, cultural outsiders, and women expected to conform to gendered norms both at home and abroad.

To further examine the identity shifts that Nigerian immigrant mothers undergo, this study incorporates feminist poststructuralist theory, which views identity as fluid, discursively constructed, and situated within power relations. Rooted in the works of scholars like Weedon (1987), feminist poststructuralism challenges essentialist understandings of subjectivity and instead emphasises the role of discourse, culture, and institutional norms in shaping how individuals come to understand themselves. Poststructuralist feminism interrogates how dominant societal narratives about womanhood, success, and domesticity regulate which roles are deemed legitimate for women and how individuals adopt, resist, or transform those narratives in daily life. This

perspective is particularly relevant to migration, where women must constantly negotiate who they are in relation to the shifting norms around labour, parenting, and womanhood. Nigerian immigrant mothers may find themselves caught between Nigerian constructions of motherhood, which often emphasise submission, nurturing, and family loyalty (Adisa et al., 2021), and American discourses that prioritise independence, assertiveness, and capitalist productivity. This tension is further complicated by the racialised assumptions in the U.S. that frame Black mothers, particularly immigrants, as either burdens or superwomen, with little space for nuance or vulnerability (Collins, 2000).

### **The Nigerian Immigrant Experience in the United States**

Scholarly interest in African migration to the United States has grown in recent years, but many studies have focused on broad patterns without deeply addressing the gendered and maternal dimensions of that experience. Research by Ibe-Lamberts *et al.* (2025), Bamgbose *et al.* (2022), and Saasa *et al.* (2022) sheds light on the trajectories of African immigrants, and the distinct realities faced by African women, particularly mothers, remain underexplored. Bamgbose *et al.* (2022), for example, provide valuable insights into the motivations and adaptation strategies of African immigrants, but do not fully capture the intersections of gender, care, and identity. Similarly, Nicolle (2022) explores African diaspora identities and transnational networks, emphasising educational aspirations and economic goals as drivers of migration. However, such analyses often overlook how these aspirations are refracted through the lens of gendered labour and motherhood while living abroad.

Nigerian immigrants form a diverse and heterogeneous population across the U.S., with a range of professional, cultural, and generational identities. However, women, and specifically mothers, face a unique set of challenges that are often overlooked in broader migration discourses. Many are responsible not only for sustaining their households economically but also for preserving cultural traditions, managing transnational family obligations, and raising children in racially stratified environments. These women must reconcile traditional Nigerian gender roles with the demands of single or dual parenting in a Western context that often lacks communal or extended-kin support (Onwujuba, 2015).

Youth raised in the United States still maintain strong connections to their African heritage, even as they navigate racial isolation in predominantly White communities (Kiramba *et al.*, 2021). These youths frequently encounter moments of exclusion where their identities as both African and Black intersect in ways that expose them to overt and covert racism (Jack-Vickers, 2024). This dual positioning reflects the broader negotiation faced by Nigerian immigrant mothers, who are tasked not only with surviving the structural inequalities of the U.S. but also with raising children to develop resilience in the face of racialised belonging (Jack-Vickers, 2024). While many Nigerian mothers distinguish their cultural identities from African American norms, they do not reject the political reality of Blackness in America. Instead, they often teach their children to claim both their ethnic and racial identities, embracing a shared Black struggle while maintaining cultural specificity. Their everyday experiences reveal how race, immigration status, motherhood, and nationality intersect to shape belonging in America not as a fixed identity, but as an ongoing process of negotiation and adaptation (Showers, 2015).

### **African Immigrant Mothers' Voices in Migration Studies**

Migration research on Africa has traditionally been shaped by macroeconomic models that foreground male labour migration, portraying men as the primary agents of mobility and women as passive dependents or caregivers (Setrana & Kleist, 2022). This has led to a systematic erasure of African women's autonomous migration experiences and a disregard for the gendered restructuring that occurs during and after migration (Mlotshwa, 2024). Women are often labelled "secondary migrants," despite evidence that many migrate independently or as central actors in household migration strategies (Ette, 2012). Kitonsa (2025) has increasingly challenged these framings, arguing for a reconceptualisation of migration to include domestic labour, caregiving, and the invisible emotional labour women perform in transnational spaces. Moreover, the migration process itself often catalyses a redefinition of women's roles within the household and broader society (Adekoya *et al.*, 2024).

African immigrant mothers often find themselves becoming co-providers or the main earners in their families.

This is a significant change from the norms in many African communities, where women are usually expected to stay at home, care for children, and manage the household, while men are seen as the primary providers (Msangaambe, 2024). In some cases, migration prompts men to take on childcare responsibilities that were formerly designated as “women’s work,” challenging cultural norms (Krieger & Salikutluk, 2023). Yet, for many women, the lack of support systems such as extended family and domestic help, which has an exorbitant price in the U.S., known as childcare, which immigrants might not be able to afford, as was common in Nigeria, can intensify their burden, making the caregiving role more isolating and complex (Okah *et al.*, 2024). These dynamics signal a transition from perceived dependency to visible agency in navigating household resilience and identity reconstruction (Okeke-Ihejirika *et al.*, 2022).

Migration significantly reshapes the experience of motherhood and caregiving, presenting a range of challenges. Immigrant mothers often have to adjust to unfamiliar environments and develop alternative sources of support, whether through forming close networks, relying on childcare services, or navigating the demands of parenting alone. Personal narratives shed light on the specific struggles Nigerian immigrant mothers face in juggling employment, caregiving, and parental duties abroad. For instance, a conversation with a Nigerian graduate student revealed the hardship of managing her toddler’s care on her own while pursuing her degree in the U.S., She shared how emotionally taxing it was to care for her child without the familial support she had back in Nigeria. Her story, among others, illustrates the real-life difficulties Nigerian immigrant mothers face as they balance their roles in the absence of extended family, especially grandmothers. Additionally, many African mothers encounter cultural dissonance as they shift from communal caregiving norms to more individualistic approaches to childcare, as is common in countries such as the United States (Amarapurkar & Hogan, 2009; Coe, 2013).

In host countries like the United States, immigrant mothers often encounter institutionalised obstacles, such as poor childcare laws, workplace inflexibility, and systemic racism (Collins, 2019). According to Manolova (2019), immigrants may have an envisioned way of life in the United States, where preconceived ideals of living abroad collide with the realities of structural and cultural hurdles. For example, immigrants often envision abundant job opportunities, quality education, affordable healthcare, and supportive social environments upon immigration. However, they often face structural hurdles such as labour market scarcity, high childcare costs, restrictive policies, language barriers, and social isolation (Manolova, 2019). The caregiving process becomes more complex due to immigrants’ expectations, as mothers navigate unfamiliar social and institutional environments while maintaining their cultural identities (Okeke-Ihejirika *et al.*, 2022). The above examples describe various effects and challenges of immigration on immigrant mothers residing abroad.

## Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design rooted in feminist inquiry to capture the nuanced lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers as they navigate motherhood, migration, and identity formation in Cincinnati, Ohio. A phenomenological perspective was employed to centre participants’ interpretations of their everyday realities, particularly as they relate to gender roles, racialization, caregiving, and cultural belonging. This approach was most appropriate for exploring how these women make meaning of their migratory journeys and how they negotiate identity across private and public domains in a racially stratified society. Consistent with feminist methodological traditions, this study employed semi-structured interviews to prioritise the perspectives of women, especially those from historically underrepresented and structurally marginalised groups (Harding, 1987; Mohanty, 1988). Feminist methodology foregrounds the importance of listening to women’s stories as valid forms of knowledge production, rather than treating them as secondary data. This aligns with the central focus of the study: to understand how Nigerian immigrant mothers, as both caregivers and migrants, interpret and navigate intersecting systems of gender, race, class, and migration (Collins, 2000).

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary method because they offer rich, flexible, and detailed accounts of lived experience, particularly useful in uncovering the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of caregiving and identity reconstruction (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; DeVault & Gross, 2012). Unlike surveys or strictly quantitative tools, semi-structured interviews allowed participants to describe not only their migration and professional trajectories but also the deeply personal and often invisible labour involved in parenting,

adapting to cultural norms, and responding to systemic exclusions. These interviews were instrumental in allowing the women to speak on their own terms and offer counter-narratives to dominant representations of immigrant motherhood.

### **Sampling Procedure**

Participants in this study consisted of eight Nigerian immigrant mothers currently residing in Cincinnati, Ohio. I assigned code names to all participants to protect their identities in this study. All participants were first-generation migrants, aged between 30 and 58, with diverse educational and professional backgrounds. The sampling strategy for this study was purposive, aiming to select participants who were both Nigerian-born mothers and actively engaged in diaspora life. Given the specificity of the target population, snowball sampling was also employed to expand recruitment. This method, proposed by Woodley and Lockard (2016), is particularly effective for accessing hard-to-reach or marginalised groups, such as immigrant women who may not be part of formal organisations but are connected through churches, WhatsApp groups, and social networks. Snowball sampling involves identifying initial participants who then refer others from their social circles, facilitating trust-based recruitment in communities where formal outreach may not yield results. While the sample size of eight participants is relatively small, it was selected intentionally to allow for in-depth, qualitative exploration of the themes under study. This reflects the phenomenological and feminist orientation of the research, which prioritises depth over breadth and centres the complexity of individual lived experiences over generalizability. Data Collection Methods

Data were collected over an eight-week period from June to July 2024 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes, depending on participant availability and depth of engagement. While two interviews were conducted in person at neutral public locations (such as community centres, centres, and quiet cafés), the remaining six were held virtually via WhatsApp or Zoom due to participants' preferences and scheduling constraints. This flexibility was essential for accommodating participants' family and work responsibilities and circumstances that themselves reflected the daily negotiations explored in the study. Each interview followed a loosely structured guide that explored four central domains: (1) migration experiences and motivations; (2) work and professional identity before and after migration; (3) family dynamics and motherhood in the diaspora; and (4) personal reflections on belonging, race, and gender roles.

### **Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations**

This research was grounded in feminist principles that reject the illusion of objectivity in qualitative inquiry and emphasise the importance of reflexivity, emotional labour, and situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Collins, 1990). Throughout the research process, I engaged in systematic reflexivity to critically examine how my positionality, as a Nigerian-born woman with lived experience of migration, shaped methodological choices, interactions with participants, and interpretation of data. My cultural proximity to the participant community conferred strong insider status, fostering trust, rapport, and open dialogue during interviews. However, I remained aware that this closeness also carried the risk of unspoken assumptions or shared silences that could obscure critical reflection.

Feminist scholarship emphasises that the researcher's body, emotions, and social location are present in the field and cannot be bracketed out of the research encounter. Drawing on Adjepong's (2021) concept of "*invading ethnography*," I embraced my dual positionality: both as an insider shaped by shared cultural norms and an outsider situated in academic knowledge production. To navigate this tension, I practised intentional detachment at different stages of the research process—not to create distance, but to sustain emotional presence without over-identification. This approach allowed for mutual knowledge production while preserving critical analytical distance. I also maintained reflexive journals, documenting moments of discomfort, resonance, and emotional entanglement that emerged during both data collection and analysis.

From an ethical standpoint, the research was conducted in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Participants received full information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Informed consent was obtained both verbally and in writing. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to

ensure anonymity, and all interviews were audio-recorded only with permission and stored securely. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, without consequence.

### **Data Presentation**

This study explored the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers residing in Cincinnati, Ohio. Several recurring themes emerged, illustrating how migration transforms motherhood, identity, family roles, and belonging. These findings reflect the challenges and strategies for adaptation that Nigerian women adopt as they navigate the intersections of race, gender, class, and cultural expectations.

### **Redefining Gender Roles through Migration**

One of the most powerful shifts recounted by participants was the transformation in household gender dynamics. Migration often disrupted traditional roles, particularly encouraging men's involvement in domestic responsibilities. Participant 1 said, "Because of my shift schedule, my husband now prepares the kids for school and sometimes even cooks. Back home, that would have been unheard of". These transformations were frequently linked to structural necessity, such as work shifts and a lack of extended-family support, rather than to ideological change, yet participants acknowledged that these practical adaptations gradually reshaped family expectations.

### **Emotional Labor and Isolation**

Participants emphasised the emotional toll of parenting in the diaspora, compounded by the absence of extended family and the demands of work and study. Participant 2 reflected thus, "I barely have time for myself. I go from work to cooking to homework. No rest. No grandma to help. It's just me". Participant 3 added to this assertion, saying, "In Nigeria, I had my mother and sisters. Here, it's just my husband and me. And he works long hours". These narratives underscore how emotional labour becomes intensified in the absence of cultural support systems.

### **Migration as a Catalyst for Identity Reconfiguration**

Migration acted as a site of identity negotiation. The participants reported both continuity and rupture in their understanding of womanhood, parenting, and cultural expectations. Participant 4 reflected on the dual burden of being a mother and a professional. "In Nigeria, you are respected for just being a good wife and mother. Here, if you are not doing something with your life, work, or education, you are not seen". Others spoke of juggling both Nigerian and American expectations. For example, Participant 2 said, "In Nigeria, I was raised to see motherhood as a sacrifice. But here, people talk about self-care and independence. It's a different world". Participant 5 expanded on this contradiction, "Sometimes I wonder who I am becoming. I am not the woman my mother raised, but I am also not an American; I am in between". These reflections show how migration challenges fixed ideas of motherhood. Participants found themselves constantly adjusting, blending cultural values from home with new expectations in the U.S. to redefine who they are.

### **Dual Identity Awareness**

Several participants demonstrated an emerging awareness of how their identities were being reshaped by their racial categorisation in the U.S. While they identified strongly as Nigerians and maintained their cultural values, they also expressed an understanding that in America, they were perceived primarily as Black, and that this perception came with social burdens and assumptions they had not encountered in Nigeria. Participant 4 reflected on this shift, thus, "In Nigeria, I was just a woman. Here, I am Black, and it comes with a label: aggressive and unqualified. You have to constantly prove otherwise". In a similar manner, Participant 6 explained, "I am a Nigerian, but here I am Black first. That is how they see you. It took me years to understand that".

Participants described how this imposed racial identity influenced how they were treated at work, in school settings, and in public interactions. Some shared that they had tried to explain to their children that being an African and an African-American are not the same, yet they also acknowledged that these distinctions did not

shield them from the broader realities of anti-Black racism. This dual awareness, being Nigerian by origin but Black in the eyes of American society, compelled participants to constantly manage how they presented themselves. For some, this meant downplaying accents or cultural behaviours in public; for others, it meant having difficult conversations with their children about race, belonging, and perception.

### **Discussions of Findings**

The narratives of Nigerian immigrant mothers in Cincinnati reveal the profound and multidimensional ways in which migration transforms identity, gender roles, and belonging. Their experiences reflect both resistance and adaptation within a transnational context shaped by race, class, and gender. Through the lenses of feminist migration theory, intersectionality, and feminist poststructuralism, we can better understand how these women reconfigure their sense of self, motherhood, and purpose amid competing discourses and systemic exclusions.

### **Gender Role Reconfiguration as Feminist Resistance and Necessity**

Migration was described by many participants as a catalyst for the redefinition of gender roles. Men who once held exclusive authority in the home were now sharing or relinquishing domestic responsibilities, not necessarily due to an ideological shift but out of necessity. This shift echoes findings from Msangaambe (2024) that migration destabilises patriarchal norms, particularly in households where women become co-breadwinners or primary earners.

From a feminist poststructuralist perspective, this transformation is not linear or uniform. Participants did not completely abandon traditional Nigerian gender roles. Instead, they balanced old expectations with their new situations, taking on both caregiving and financial responsibilities. This confirms Weedon's (1987) view of subjectivity as discursively constructed, emerging through negotiation with multiple, often conflicting cultural scripts. Participant 1's experience of her husband cooking and helping with the children shows how institutional pressures from work shifts and lack of childcare produce new domestic configurations, challenging hegemonic masculinity in quiet, practical ways. These shifts are often not framed by the participants themselves as resistance, yet they nonetheless reshape the gender order.

### **The Emotional Landscape of Migration and the Invisible Labour of Motherhood**

The emotional toll of immigration featured prominently in participants' accounts, echoing the concept of emotional labour as unpaid, often invisible work central to women's caregiving roles. Participants described feelings of exhaustion, guilt, and isolation, a reality exacerbated by the absence of extended family and communal childcare systems typical in Nigeria. Feminist migration theory demands attention to such reproductive labour, which includes not only caregiving but also the management of children's educational and cultural adaptation. Participants frequently described themselves as the emotional backbone of their families, responsible for transmitting values, preserving language, and buffering their children from both cultural dislocation and racial discrimination.

Drawing on Riach (2023), subjectivity here is not only about how these women see themselves but also about how they are produced by institutions and expectations. They are expected to be emotionally strong, culturally grounded, economically productive, and racially resilient, all at once. The pressure to embody this "ideal immigrant mother" narrative results in chronic emotional overload and the need for discrete acts of self-care, such as shopping, spiritual retreats, and small indulgences, offered as fleeting moments of self-reclamation.

### **Identity as an Ongoing Negotiation**

Ultimately, this study affirms feminist poststructuralism's claim that identity is not fixed; it is an evolving response to power, discourse, and context. Nigerian immigrant mothers in Cincinnati are constantly rearticulating their sense of self in response to multiple demands: from their home culture, American institutions, their children, and themselves.

Whether through redefining gender roles, resisting workplace exclusion, or maintaining cultural pride in hostile environments, these women demonstrate what Weedon (1987) calls "the politics of everyday life." Their

decisions, however small, represent powerful acts of meaning-making in a world that frequently denies them full recognition. This discussion reaffirms that Nigerian immigrant mothers are not merely victims of migration or subjects of loss. They are cultural workers, care strategists, and identity architects whose lives challenge and enrich dominant narratives of migration, motherhood, and belonging.

## Conclusion

This study has illuminated the deeply textured lives of Nigerian immigrant mothers in Cincinnati, revealing the emotional, structural, and cultural labour they perform as they navigate the shifting terrains of migration, gender, and identity. Far from being passive subjects of displacement or economic necessity, these women emerge as active negotiators of complex realities, interrogating patriarchal expectations, resisting racialised hierarchies, and reclaiming space within institutions and narratives that often seek to silence or erase them. By centring their voices, this research reframes migration not simply as a movement across geography, but as a profound reworking of self, kinship, and belonging. Through themes such as renegotiated gender roles, emotional burden, and the cultivation of sisterhood and solitude, participants challenged normative assumptions about immigrant motherhood, femininity, and labour.

Theoretically, this paper contributes to scholarship at the intersection of gendered migration and diasporic identity by showing how Nigerian women, once labelled “secondary migrants,” subvert that marginalisation through everyday practices of resistance, care, and reinvention. These stories compel us to rethink migration discourse itself. What these women seek is not merely integration into the American fabric but the freedom to narrate their lives on their terms. Their experiences demand that migration policies, academic frameworks, and community structures move beyond deficit models that pathologise immigrant mothers and instead honour their complexity, intelligence, and transformative power.

Beyond structural and material realities, this study foregrounds the emotional and epistemic labour Nigerian immigrant mothers perform daily, those quiet acts of meaning-making and care that unfold in kitchens, WhatsApp groups, and school hallways. These women do not merely move across borders; they live across them, juggling time zones, expectations, and obligations that span continents. They bear the emotional weight of transnational kinship and cultural continuity, even as they confront new and often harsh racialised norms in the U.S. Their lives resist simple categorisation. They are at once traditional and modern, vulnerable and powerful, rooted and in flux. In these interstitial spaces between languages, roles, and identities, they forge a dynamic and evolving womanhood that defies dominant frameworks of assimilation, success, or cultural preservation. In remapping the emotional geographies of home, family, and labour, Nigerian immigrant mothers are not merely adapting to life in America. They are remaking what it means to belong. Their journeys are not footnotes in the story of migration. They are the story.

## Ethical Clearance Statement

This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Cincinnati, where the research was conducted (IRB Number: 2024-0347). All procedures involving human participants were carried out in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human subjects. Prior to participation, all participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. To ensure confidentiality and protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used, and identifying details were removed from all transcripts and reports. Data was securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Given the potential sensitivities surrounding immigration status, racial identity, and personal experiences, particular care was taken to create a respectful, safe, and non-coercive interview environment.

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