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Nigerians don't hate their country: Exploring Nostalgia, Belonging and Diasporic Agency among Nigerians in the Diaspora

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Abstract

This paper explores the complex relationship between Nigerians in the diaspora and their perceptions of national identity and patriotism. Despite persistent socio-political challenges in Nigeria, many Nigerians abroad maintain strong emotional and cultural ties to their homeland. Using transnationalism as a theoretical framework, the study examines how diasporic Nigerians reconcile their love for their country with frustrations about governance and infrastructure deficits. This study, based on qualitative interviews with returnee migrants, examines expressions of national pride and identity preservation, as well as the influence of distance on identity. Findings reveal a layered form of patriotism; diasporic Nigerians often express deep affection for Nigeria through nostalgia, remittances, and advocacy, even while remaining critically aware of the nation's systemic failures. This duality challenges simplistic notions of patriotism as either loyalty or disloyalty, showing instead that critique and commitment can coexist. The study further highlights the agency of diaspora Nigerians as cultural ambassadors, political critics, and development actors. Their lived experiences and contributions reflect a dynamic engagement with the homeland that extends beyond economic support. As such, the paper argues for a reimagining of Nigeria's approach to diaspora relations. Rather than treating the diaspora merely as remittance senders, the Nigerian government should recognise them as essential partners in national development and global representation. Through this effort, Nigeria can harness the diaspora's transformative potential to rebuild trust, support reforms, and shape a more inclusive national narrative.

Keywords: Trans-border Migration, Diaspora, National identity, Patriotism, Homeland, Transnationalism

Introduction

This paper explores the paradoxical relationship between Nigerian migrants and their perceptions of national identity and patriotism. While the decision to migrate is often motivated by push and pull factors such as the pursuit of education, safety, and economic opportunity (Castelli, 2018; Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022; Zaman et al., 2023), these migrants do not always sever their bonds with Nigeria (Oluwasanmi, 2026). Instead, they inhabit a transnational space in which both national pride and identity crisis coexist. Through this dual engagement, diasporic Nigerians act not only as cultural ambassadors but also as political agents of critique, using their

trans-border experiences to reflect on the conditions within their home country (Hamidu-Yakubu, 2021; Ojo, 2022).

The Nigerian diaspora represents a dynamic and influential transnational community whose ties to the homeland are marked by deep emotional, cultural, and political connections (Oluwasanmi & Fagbadebo, 2025). Nigerians in the diaspora represent one of the largest diasporan populations worldwide, with about 17 million people as of 2024 (Ekanem, 2024, August 25; Osuyi, 2024, August 13). The figure represents 7.46% of Nigerians in that year. This puts Nigeria fourth among African populations in the diaspora, with the highest estimated remittances of \$23 billion in 2023. In the face of persistent governance challenges, systemic corruption, insecurity, and socio-economic instability, Nigeria continues to experience significant levels of emigration (Adegbami & Osungboye, 2024; Ikonne, 2024). Yet, as this study reflects, many Nigerians abroad sustain a keen connection to their country, navigating their identity through complex intersections of loyalty, critique, and cultural preservation. Existing studies premised migrants' attachment on either the adaptation strategies to the host country, or feeling of alienation, in exile, as a panacea to homeland nationalism, quest for socio-economic and political development, as well as infrastructural development, to the home country (Akinrinade & Ogen, 2011; Asekun et al., 2020; Bolaji, 2022; Olaoluwa, 2017). For Nigerians in the diaspora, they straddle transnational space despite the socio-economic dynamics at home.

With regard to the above, Nigeria stands a chance to harness the diaspora potential, especially in an era where Nigeria's foreign policy increasingly recognises the importance of the diaspora community, particularly under its "4-D" strategy (Democracy, Development, Diaspora, and Demography). Given this, the role of Nigerians abroad becomes central to national discourse. Their remittances support families and local economies (Didia & Tahir, 2022; Osili, 2019), their activism influences global perceptions (Lu, 2022; Oloyede, 2024), and their lived experiences generate critical narratives that challenge simplistic notions of patriotism (Apata, 2024; Kperogi, 2020). Using transnationalism as a theoretical framework, this study interrogates the affective and political dimensions of diasporic belonging. It draws on qualitative data from returned migrants to examine how feelings of nostalgia, symbolic identity, and diasporic agency are negotiated amidst a backdrop of governance failures.

While some existing literature has agreed on the possibility of severing identity connections among migrants, given the socio-economic dynamics at home (Buijs, 2024; Dawson & Rapport, 2021; Hack-Polay et al., 2021), others have identified evidence of diaspora attachment to their homeland, as noted above. However, there is a dearth of literature on how the Nigerian diaspora embraces cultural pride while remaining alert to structural inadequacies at home. This study, therefore, contributes to the broader discourse on diasporic identity, nationalism and

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migration by highlighting the multifaceted ways Nigerians in the diaspora continue to shape, challenge and affirm their connection to the nation-state. Hence, this study examines the paradoxical relationship between Nigeria and its diasporan population.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between the Nigerian diaspora and their perceptions of national identity
2. To explore how diasporic agency is negotiated amidst governance deficit in Nigeria
3. To interrogate expressions of nostalgia and identity preservation among Nigerians in the diaspora

Transnationalism and Diasporic Identity and Agency

This study adopts transnationalism as its theoretical underpinning to explore the complex interplay between Nigerian diasporic identities, nostalgia, and diasporic agency. Transnationalism refers to the multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states (Pries, 2022; Tedeschi et al., 2022). In the context of migration studies, it captures how migrants sustain strong social, cultural, political, and economic connections to their countries of origin while simultaneously integrating into host societies (Caglar, 2022; Tedeschi et al., 2022). Transnationalism is particularly useful for understanding the dual positionality of Nigerians in the diaspora, individuals who, despite physical distance and critical awareness of systemic failures at home, maintain emotional and symbolic attachments to Nigeria (Adebayo & Njoku, 2023; Ogbuagu, 2025). This framework helps explain how diasporic Nigerians negotiate identity, belonging, and patriotic sentiment through trans-border activities such as remittances, cultural reproduction, political critique, and diasporic solidarity.

The narratives explored in this study show that while Nigeria's governance deficits, such as insecurity, corruption, and institutional failure, often erode trust and patriotic attachment, many Nigerians abroad continue to express a profound connection to their homeland. These expressions manifest in language use, cultural practices, community building, and even political participation. Through transnational practices, such as supporting Nigerian communities abroad, participating in national discourse, and preserving Nigerian cultural values in foreign settings, diaspora Nigerians act as both advocates and critics of the Nigerian state. Furthermore, transnationalism allows for the analysis of diasporic agency, the ability of migrants to exert influence on both home and host societies (Lacroix, 2022; Toivanen & Baser, 2020). This is evident in how respondents navigate their

identities by compartmentalising cultural values, building support networks and asserting pride in their Nigerian heritage despite external stigmatisation and internal disillusionment. This study, by adopting a transnational lens, interrogates the assumption that national loyalty must be geographically fixed or politically uncritical. Instead, it illustrates that diasporic patriotism can be dynamic, conditional and rooted in both affective ties and rational evaluation of national conditions. In doing so, it contributes to the broader scholarship that reconceptualises nationalism and citizenship in the age of global migration and transborder engagement.

Conceptualising Diaspora Identity and Agency

The concepts of diaspora identity and agency speak to the lived experiences of individuals and communities who, despite being far away from their ancestral homelands, remain deeply connected to them (Bhandari, 2021; Clifford, 2020). These emotional, cultural, political and economic ties shape how diasporic people understand themselves and interact with the world around them (Bhandari, 2021; Bhat & Rajeshwari, 2022). Diaspora identity is shaped by memories, traditions, and new environments. It is complex and fluid (Jacob, 2024; McLeod, 2020). For instance, migrants may carry memories of home, adopt norms of the host society and forge something entirely new in between. Identity is formed through the tension between belonging and exclusion, memory and reinvention, loss and resilience (Baker, 2012). For many, it involves constantly balancing cultural preservation with adaptation and navigating between the pressures of assimilation and the desire for authenticity (Faiz, 2024; Mazurkevych et al., 2024; Mohyeddin, 2024). However, identity alone does not define the diasporic experience. Equally, agency is vital in this narrative. Agency, in this context, means the capacity to make choices, act and influence one's environment despite external constraints (Donald et al., 2020; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Diaspora agency appears in many forms: culturally, in the preservation of languages, rituals and faiths; politically, in activism and transnational advocacy; economically, in entrepreneurship, remittances, and the flow of skills and capital (Cohen, 2022; Cohen & Fischer, 2018; Ferdous & Das, 2025). It also thrives in creative expressions, such as storytelling, literature, film, and music, that challenge stereotypes and reclaim narratives (Ladzekpo et al., 2024).

The relationship between identity and agency is not always harmonious. Diasporic individuals may face fragmentation or discrimination that limits their ability to fully participate in public life (Arkilic, 2022; Georgiou, 2010). Identity can also become contested over who belongs, whose voices are heard, and how much of the homeland one can retain without being seen as an outsider (Combs & Johnston-Guerrero, 2022; Dabbs, 2024; Kaiser, 2003). Yet these challenges do not diminish diasporic power. In fact, agency often emerges from such struggles and negotiations. Conceptualising diaspora identity and agency means recognising that diasporic people are not merely victims of displacement. They are culture-makers,

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change-agents, and bridge builders. They shape both their host societies and the homelands they remain connected to, crafting meaningful lives across borders.

Contested Patriotism, Nostalgia and Nigeria Governance Crisis

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and one of its most resource-rich nations, has long struggled with issues of governance, institutional failure and political legitimacy (Fagbadebo, 2025; Fagbadebo & Dorasamy, 2022). In this context, public expressions of love for the nation, what is broadly referred to as patriotism, have become increasingly complex and contested (Erez & Laborde, 2020). Far from being a universally shared sentiment, patriotism in Nigeria is fractured, challenged by persistent breach of trust in leadership, and often refracted through the lens of nostalgia and national memory (Dasylva, 2023). Patriotism, often defined as loyalty or devotion to one's country, is typically seen as a unifying force. However, in Nigeria, it has taken on a more fragmented and ambiguous character. Scholars such as Ekeh (1975) and Osaghae (1998) have argued that Nigeria's post-colonial state has struggled to command genuine allegiance from its citizens, due largely to the weak performance of its institutions and the enduring salience of ethnic, religious, and regional identities. As a result, patriotism is often conditional and selective, expressed during international success (e.g., in sports or cultural exports) but muted or even inverted during political crises.

What emerges, then, is a form of contested patriotism *in which* citizens oscillate between symbolic loyalty and practical disengagement from the state. This tension is especially pronounced among young Nigerians, many of whom express frustration through protests, satire, music, and the viral use of the term “*japa*” (to flee the country in search of a better life). These actions reflect not a lack of love for country, but rather deep dissatisfaction with how the country is run (Negedu & Atabor, 2015; Urien, 2024). In the face of ongoing hardship, many Nigerians in the diaspora retreat into nostalgia, a longing for a perceived stable, prosperous or hopeful homeland. This is rooted in memories of their family ties, food, cultural identity and language (Barcus & Shugatai, 2023). However, scholars warn that nostalgia can be a double-edged sword. While it can inspire hope and a sense of identity, it can also distort historical realities, discourage present engagement, or foster cynicism about the future (Bradbury, 2012; Youvan, 2024).

At the heart of both contested patriotism and national nostalgia lies Nigeria's enduring governance crisis. This crisis is characterised by widespread corruption, weak institutions, insecurity, unemployment and a widening trust deficit between the government and its people (Fagbadebo, 2007, 2019). While various administrations have promised reform, the failure to deliver tangible results has eroded the state's legitimacy in the eyes of many citizens (Akuche & Akindoyin,

2024). This erosion of trust affects not only how people engage with the state but also how they understand their own national identity. As Agbiboa (2022) notes, when governance becomes a site of frustration rather than empowerment, patriotism becomes performative, and citizenship is stripped of its civic power, reduced to mere survival or strategic withdrawal.

In a nutshell, contested patriotism and nostalgia are not signs of apathy or betrayal; rather, they are symptoms of a deeper structural malaise in Nigeria's governance landscape. For patriotism to be reclaimed as a genuine civic virtue, the Nigerian state must demonstrate accountability, deliver public goods, and actively rebuild trust. Until then, patriotic feeling will remain fragmented, nostalgia will continue to fill the void left by disappointment, and youth may increasingly choose to exit, physically, emotionally, or ideologically.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the perspectives of Nigerians in the diaspora regarding national identity, nostalgia, and political agency. The research was guided by the transnationalism theoretical framework, which provides a lens for understanding how migrants maintain simultaneous connections with both their country of origin and their host countries. The study involved nine Nigerian returnee migrants who had previously lived abroad for extended periods and later returned to Nigeria. These individuals were purposively selected using convenience and snowball sampling, based on their diasporic experiences and willingness to engage in in-depth interviews. The diversity of participants' geographic locations abroad, as well as their varied disciplinary fields and occupational backgrounds, yielded rich, layered insights into the diasporic experience.

Table 1: List of Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Academic Qualification	Country Visited	Years Spent in the Diaspora	Mode of Interview
P1	Male	57	PhD	South Africa	3	Zoom
P2	Male	47	PhD	South Africa	9	Face-to-Face
P3	Female	45	PhD	South Africa	8	Phone Call
P4	Male	38	PhD	United Kingdom	1	Zoom
P5	Male	43	PhD	Cote D'Ivoire and South Africa	20	Zoom
P6	Male	53	PhD	South Africa	5	Face-to-Face
P7	Male	44	PhD	South Africa	10	Face-to-Face
P8	Male	49	PhD	Uganda, Sierra Leone and Canada	9	Zoom
P9	Male	37	PhD	United Kingdom	4	Zoom

Source: Authors' Compilation, 2025

Data was generated through an in-depth interview conducted between December 2024 and February 2025. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was guided by an interview schedule designed to elicit narratives about migration motivations, feelings of nostalgia, expressions of patriotism, identity preservation, and perceptions of Nigeria's governance structures. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and pseudonyms (e.g., P1, P2...) were used to identify their responses. Interviews were conducted either in person or virtually, depending on the participant's availability and location. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Content analysis was employed to analyse the transcribed interviews. This involved coding the data inductively to identify emerging patterns and themes related to diasporic identity, identity preservation, patriotism, and political critique. The analysis paid particular attention to both the affective dimensions, which involve nostalgia, pride, and alienation and the political and structural contexts, such as governance failure and institutional neglect, that shape diasporic experiences and expressions of patriotism. Ethical standards were maintained throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. All data were stored securely, and identifying information was removed from all transcripts and reports to protect participants' identities. The interviews were conducted under the ethical approval obtained from the Durban University of Technology Institutional Research Ethics Committee, with approval number IREC 040/24

Findings

The Nigerian diaspora and their perceptions of national identity

The perceptions of Nigerians in the diaspora are vividly explored in their responses to interview questions, revealing complex and often mixed feelings toward their homeland. From the data analysed, it is evident that members of the Nigerian diaspora grapple with a sense of national belonging shaped by both affection and disillusionment. Educational aspiration emerged as a key motivation for migration. As P1 noted, the "*need to have further education*" (P1, 20-12-2024) was central to his decision to leave, while P2 echoed this sentiment, lamenting that "*there were no facilities to do a complex study in engineering*" (P2, 25-12-2024). These academic limitations were compounded by concerns over national security. P1 observed that "*the level of insecurity in the country... affects the rate of migration*," while P2 added that "*the roads to travel on... were unsafe for fear of being kidnapped*" (P2, 25-12-2024).

Economic difficulties further drove migration choices. P8 explained, "*if you work and get paid [in Nigeria], the money can't sustain yourself... no electricity, no value for your work*" (P8, 17-01-2025). Similarly, P9 described his return home as disheartening, stating that his salary could not adequately support his dependents. "*I just couldn't cope... because it's been five years since I last taught in a Nigerian classroom*," he explained, concluding, "*the sense of attachment has drastically reduced. I see myself more now, primarily as a UK resident than Nigerian*" (P9, 23-2-2025). His disillusionment reflects a broader trend of emotional detachment among returnees who initially harboured intentions of making national contributions but later became disenchanted.

Corruption and the lack of meritocracy also discouraged diaspora engagement. Participant 2 noted that while scholarships and funding for postgraduate studies exist, they are far more accessible abroad than in Nigeria (Ogunode & Musa, 2020;

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Oladipo, 2024; Omeje & Abugu, 2015). Participant 7 highlighted the challenge in Nigeria: “*You need to know someone who will help you,*” suggesting that systemic corruption limits meritocracy (P7, 25-12-2024). He believed the scholarship he received in South Africa “*might not have been possible*” in Nigeria. Furthermore, he criticised the weak legal framework, asserting, “*In Nigeria, we do not have high regard for the rule of law.*” These deficiencies have contributed to a decline in patriotic sentiment among migrants. Despite lingering feelings of loyalty, many respondents reported a steady decline in patriotic attachment. Participant 3 observed that while some Nigerians in the diaspora are “*always patriotic,*” this sentiment is “*gradually going down*” (P3, 21-12-2024). Participant 9 admitted, “*When things happen in Nigeria... you just want to de-link, detach yourself from the reality of the country,*” and confessed, “*the only reason why I'm here is official. Nothing else. My mind is not here*” (P9, 23-2-2025). This emotional withdrawal reflects a sense of unreciprocated national loyalty. As P3 poignantly stated, “*I love my country... but my nation never offered me such opportunities,*” which has led her to consider alternative citizenship, admitting that she “*sometimes... thinks... should just take [her] family and put them on [her] PR...*” (P3, 21-12-2024).

For some returned migrants, a strong sense of national identity initially aligned with the Nigerian state. As P9 recounted, “*When I initially travelled, everything in the head was, okay, finishing this program, then going back home to massively impact the system... Right now, even the system is struggling to keep me.*” His patriotic intentions shifted over time, reflecting a broader disillusionment: “*We must fix this country. That was 2011–2012. Now, the person who used to be the big champion... migrated to Canada*” (P9, 23-2-2025). Even within Nigeria, the sense of attachment seems to have eroded. According to P9, “*Everybody who comes across you, colleagues you have always known, would ask you, what are you here to do? What is the problem?*” Including those abroad who always ask, “*What are you going there to do?*” This symbolic devaluation of identity is echoed by others. P3 reflected on her gratitude to the South African state, saying, “*Sometimes [I] want to insult South Africans... but what their government did for [me]...*” She added, “*Right from the plane... you see the type of food they offer you*” (P3, 21-12-2024), implying that national pride begins to fade when compared with other countries’ hospitality and institutional care. Similarly, P4 noted that “*institutional culture wouldn't allow you to showcase yourself as Nigerian,*” admitting that his “*sense of identity... was affected by entrenched Western practices*” (P4, 13-12-2024).

Despite these challenges, not all respondents expressed negative views about Nigerian identity. Participant 6 maintained a strong sense of pride, describing himself as “*pro-Nigeria*” and highlighting the country’s international recognition: “*Nigeria is recognisable beyond what we think... even in the international community.*” He concluded with a strong affirmation of national belonging: “*There's no country like one's own*” (P6, 20-12-2024). This sentiment was shared by P7, who asserted, “*I have always considered myself a full-fledged Nigerian*” (P7, 25-12-2024). His dedication to

Nigerian identity led him to found the Nigerian Students Association in the diaspora to address challenges faced by Nigerians abroad. P7 and P8 proudly display the Nigerian flag wherever they go. Remarkably, P7 even noted, "*I had the opportunity to marry a South African woman... but I married from Nigeria,*" underscoring his commitment to Nigerian identity.

P6 rooted his positive perception of Nigeria in the belief that other countries had also faced difficult times but found ways to resolve them: "*Those countries that we so much want to travel to... had some problems... they rallied around and solved the problems.*" He advised that wherever Nigerians find themselves, "*they should not forget their country and contribute whatever quota they have...*" (P6, 20-12-2024). P7 similarly noted that he guarded his national identity by "*compartmentalising values,*" a coping strategy that allowed him to function abroad without losing his cultural grounding.

Interestingly, host country perceptions often mirrored those of Nigerians in the diaspora. Participant 7 explained that foreigners tend to see Nigerians as "*very loud... clever... educated*" (P7, 25-12-2024) but also face negative stereotyping. Some, for instance, wrongly assumed he was involved in drug trafficking. However, as studies later confirmed, only "*an insignificant number [of Nigerians were] involved in the illegal economy.*" P9 captured the emotional weight of these biases, stating, "*Discrimination is better sensed than experienced.*" Such encounters contributed to a sense of being institutionally "*othered,*" where Nigerians were often treated as "*some sort of secondary*" or simply "*different.*"

Nevertheless, national pride endured for some. Participant 8 declared, "*Even when people don't see anything good in Nigeria, I still associate,*" revealing persistent loyalty despite external stigma. P6 also noted a paradox: while Nigerians are "*well-endowed,*" some people perceive them as dangerous *because of the intelligence they carry.*" He lamented that "*it's only Nigerians that don't really value what we have.*" In fact, travel itself was an eye-opener for P8, who concluded that "*travelling made [me] realise Nigeria is blessed*" (P8, 17-01-2025).

Diaspora Agency and Nigeria's Governance Deficit

The persistent crisis of governance constitutes a significant albatross around Nigerians in the diaspora's sustained patriotic disposition (Wapmuk et al., 2014). Many diasporans attribute their waning national allegiance to systemic leadership failures at home. For instance, P6 emphatically remarked, "*It is leadership that is our problem. So, we are supposed to have been bigger than this*" (P6, 20-12-2024). This perception of underachievement due to poor governance is widespread and fuels growing disconnection among Nigerians abroad.

This disenchantment has had a direct impact on patriotic attachment. Participant 3 reflected that while she was "*always patriotic... gradually that patriotism is going down*" (P3,

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21-12-2024). The erosion of this sentiment is often driven by comparisons between opportunities abroad and those lacking in Nigeria. Participant 3 illustrated this contrast by stating, *"The opportunity South Africa offered me, Nigeria never offered me such..."* She further critiqued the Nigerian system for its exclusionary tendencies: *"All those bursaries... they will never allow it to get to the ends of the commoners,"* adding that she had *"never received any of such things from [her] government before."* The lack of institutional support was also evident in her academic journey: *"When it comes to your academic work... nothing is being provided"* (P3, 21-12-2024).

Similarly, P4 expressed diminishing confidence in Nigeria due to the nation's chronic leadership challenges. Although he asserted, *"I strongly believe in the Nigeria project,"* he simultaneously acknowledged that *"the leadership crisis"* remains a deterrent to progress. Migration, for him, became *"an opportunity to escape economic hardship"* (P4, 13-12-2024). His experiences abroad fostered a sense of stability that contrasted sharply with his life in Nigeria. This transformation was succinctly captured in his remark: *"My prayer points changed... because normal things there are miracles here."* Despite his emotional attachment to Nigeria, he concluded, *"Even though I love my country... foreign systems work better"* (P4, 13-12-2024).

Amid the failure of formal institutions to support their citizens abroad, Nigerians in the diaspora have turned to informal networks for community and resilience. P5 illustrated this point when he observed, *"There is no community support... but we found strength among Nigerians"* (P5, 22-12-2024). These informal structures serve as alternative sources of belonging and support, helping Nigerians in the diaspora to navigate their disconnection from the homeland. P8 underscored this point, noting that *"[ethnic] segregation fades in diaspora,"* suggesting that diasporic identity can transcend domestic divisions when individuals are united by shared national experiences and challenges abroad.

Nostalgia and Identity Preservation among Nigerians in the Diaspora

Despite the structural and emotional challenges faced abroad, many Nigerians in the diaspora maintain strong emotional and cultural ties to their homeland. This resilience is reflected in their efforts to preserve their Nigerian identity, even in the face of external pressures. P2 articulates a deliberate commitment to resisting cultural assimilation, stating, *"...what one allows his mind to process... [he] didn't allow any external influence,"* and affirming that he *"...never had any identity crisis in Nigeria"* (P2, 25-12-2024). Although he often experiences disconnection due to racial discrimination, language barriers, and xenophobic harassment, he chooses to preserve his cultural practices. For instance, he proudly notes that he *"never compromised [his] food culture... bought from African shops"* (P2, 25-12-2024). Similarly, P5

described a balance between adaptation and cultural retention: “*I was eating their food... but visited Nigerian joints,*” illustrating a conscious effort to remain connected to Nigerian culture despite living in a different environment. P8 further demonstrated cultural continuity through family practices, stating that he and his family “*wear our Nigerian clothes... speak Yoruba to our children...*” (P8, 17-01-2025). These day-to-day choices reflect intentional preservation of national identity within the domestic space.

Cultural preservation also extends to relationships and community engagement. P7 noted that despite having “*the opportunity to marry a South African woman... [he] married from Nigeria*” because he “*was deliberate in upholding [his] values...*” (P7, 25-12-2024). This decision, alongside “*wearing [Nigerian] clothes... [and engaging in Nigerian] cultural displays,*” reflects how marriage and lifestyle choices serve as mechanisms for sustaining identity abroad. Participant 9 also illustrated this cultural fidelity in the context of family and community: “*In our home, in the UK, 24-7, we eat Nigerian food... we made attempts to speak Yoruba to our children.*” One particularly symbolic form of cultural preservation is the continuation of Nigerian celebrations, particularly the iconic *owambe* parties. According to P9, “*there is a growing sense of Nigerian party (owambe) in the UK... When you enter the venue... you would barely remember that you were outside Nigeria.*” These vibrant gatherings serve not only as social outlets but as recreations of Nigerian cultural space within the diaspora.

Even in the face of psychological and systemic pressures, Nigerians in the diaspora continue to anchor their identity in their cultural roots. P4 reflected on how a “*constructed inferiority complex... in physical appearance*” might erode one’s cultural confidence. Yet, he reaffirmed the value of Nigerian identity, noting that “*Nigeria gave [him] a strong sense of identity*” and declaring, “*there is no superior culture... every culture has its own uniqueness*” (P4, 13-12-2024). Such reflections highlight how nostalgic connections and intentional cultural practices are central to the preservation of identity among Nigerians in the diaspora. P3 affirms an enduring emotional connection to her homeland, stating that “*no matter how... your family [at home] will still recognise you*” (P3, 21-12-2024). This sentiment is deeply rooted in nostalgia and familial bonds. For many in the diaspora, cultural preservation is intentional and embedded in daily practices. P3 shares that she “*often speak[s] Yoruba to [her] children,*” engages with Nigerian films via social media, and frequently buys and enjoys Nigerian cuisine. These actions reflect active efforts to retain cultural identity and reinforce a sense of belonging to the homeland through language, media, and food.

P4 similarly takes pride in preserving his national identity. He asserts, “*I never tried to sound like oyinbo/English]... I feel proud about that,*” adding that he “*proudly says [he is] from Nigeria*” and has never abandoned his “*dialect or culture*” despite living abroad. This deliberate maintenance of cultural roots signals a resistance to cultural assimilation and a strong attachment to one’s heritage. Identity preservation is particularly pronounced among second-generation Nigerians born outside the

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country. P5 notes, *"We were born there... but always saw ourselves as Nigerians"* (P5, 22-12-2024). This enduring identification with Nigeria is often instilled through parental influence, as he explains: *"Our parents made [us] to know... this is not your country."* Here, national identity is not merely experiential but inherited through socialisation within the family. P5 further recalls that they were *"always happy to hear anything about Nigeria,"* and during international sports events, *"even when Nigeria played their country, we supported Nigeria."* These expressions of loyalty, especially through support for Nigerian football, illustrate the emotional dimensions of diasporic nationalism and the power of cultural transmission across generations.

Beyond the family unit, communal structures such as diaspora networks and religious organisations play a vital role in nurturing patriotic and nostalgic sentiments. Nigerian churches, in particular, are a cornerstone of community life abroad. As P8 recounts, *"My church everywhere I go is like home,"* underscoring the role of religious spaces in sustaining emotional and cultural continuity. Similarly, P2 highlights the effectiveness of the Nigerian community in South Africa, noting its active role in providing support during personal milestones, such as when *"the church sent Nigerian doctors to assist... when giving birth"* (P2, 25-12-2024). These communal engagements promote a sense of solidarity and collective identity. P5 articulates this shared experience, stating, *"We all become brother and sister... once you are Nigerian,"* a powerful expression of emotional unity that transcends geography. He further adds, *"Nigerians support each other abroad... [as] brothers and sisters,"* reflecting the strength of diasporic bonds and the central role of mutual support in maintaining identity and belonging far from home.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide insights into how Nigerians in the diaspora navigate national identity, belonging, and political agency amidst systemic challenges in their home country. Contrary to reductionist portrayals of diasporic disconnection or apathy (Eshalomi, 2022; Nititham, 2020), this research reveals a complex interplay between emotional attachment, critical engagement, and transnational loyalty among the diasporans. Three key themes emerge: contested patriotism, identity preservation, and diasporic agency in response to Nigeria's governance deficit.

A major finding is the persistence of patriotic sentiment among diasporic Nigerians, even amid Nigeria's deep-seated governance crisis. Participants expressed love for their homeland, often rooted in familial ties, cultural pride, and nostalgic memories. This is in line with the assumptions of Barcus and Shugatai (2023), Batcho (2021), and Kevers et al. (2024). However, this attachment is increasingly conditional. For many, patriotism has become contingent on their perception of state performance

and the availability of opportunities. Respondents such as P3 and P9 described a steady erosion of patriotic feelings due to corruption, insecurity, and institutional neglect. Their statements, "*my nation never offered me such opportunities*" and "*the system is struggling to keep me*", highlight how unreciprocated national loyalty can diminish diasporic identification over time.

Despite their geographical distance, many respondents actively preserve their Nigerian identity. This is evidenced in their socio-cultural practices such as language use, cuisine, religious affiliation, clothing, and even marriage choices. For instance, P4 proudly rejected Western assimilation, insisting, "*I never tried to sound like oyinbo [English]*," while P8 and P5 emphasised the deliberate transmission of Nigerian culture to their children. The recreation of "*owambe*" parties and the symbolism of the green-white-green flag in foreign spaces reflect a strong collective effort to maintain cultural continuity. *Owambe* has its origin in the Yoruba language. It simply means that "a party is happening there". It is a vibrant, lavish, and often extravagant social party, typically marked by music, colourful fashion, dancing, and feasting, and is common among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria. These acts of identity preservation function as both personal expressions of belonging and symbolic resistance to the erasure of Nigerian identity in the diaspora.

A further significant finding is the way diasporic Nigerians exercise agency both in critiquing their homeland and fostering alternative forms of nationalism. Participants described how, in the absence of state support, diasporic communities created informal networks of solidarity. As P5 noted, "*we found strength among Nigerians*," and P8 observed that "*[ethnic] segregation fades in diaspora*." These networks serve not only as social safety nets but also as platforms for fostering a sense of shared purpose and national pride outside state institutions. Additionally, the ability to compartmentalise cultural values, as highlighted by P7 as noted above, suggests a form of strategic identity management. This enables migrants to navigate host cultures while remaining anchored in Nigerian heritage. The concept of "*diasporic compartmentalisation*" could be understood as a survival mechanism that blends cultural adaptability with ideological resistance. Moreover, the founding of student associations, churches, and community organisations reflects how diasporic Nigerians proactively shape their environments and assert influence, both locally and transnationally.

These findings support the relevance of transnationalism as a theoretical lens. Nigerian migrants are not suspended between two worlds but rather embedded in a network of trans-border practices that include remittances, advocacy, and identity reproduction. The interviews analysed above illustrate how many migrants remain emotionally and materially invested in Nigeria while simultaneously holding critical views of the state. This dual engagement enables a form of participatory, evaluative, and dynamic nationalism. Respondents such as P6 exemplify this attitude, expressing strong national pride while advocating for reform and diasporic contribution to national development. In all, the findings challenge simplistic

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dichotomies between loyalty and disloyalty, or between assimilation and alienation. Nigerian diasporic identity is revealed as multi-layered, adaptive, and deeply relational. While governance failures undoubtedly influence sentiments of disconnection, they do not erase national belonging. Rather, Nigerians in the diaspora continue to negotiate their identity through cultural assertion, community solidarity, and critical patriotism. Their narratives affirm that diasporic engagement is not about rejecting the homeland but about reimagining it from afar.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study explored the relationship between Nigerians in the diaspora and their perceptions of national identity, nostalgia, and political agency. Contrary to assumptions that migration weakens identity ties to the home country, the findings reveal that many Nigerians abroad maintain strong emotional and identity ties to their homeland, despite systemic failures and personal disappointment with successive governments. Using the framework of transnationalism, the study demonstrates that diasporic patriotism is neither static nor unconditional; rather, it is a dynamic engagement shaped by both affective loyalty and critical evaluation of Nigeria's governance landscape. While some migrants express declining patriotic fervour due to corruption, insecurity, and institutional neglect, others maintain a vibrant connection through cultural practices, community networks, and personal advocacy.

Participants illustrated that cultural identity is actively preserved through language, family traditions, religious affiliations, food, and symbolic acts like celebrating Nigerian events abroad. Moreover, the agency exercised by diasporic Nigerians, through remittances, community building, and critical discourse, constitutes a powerful yet underutilised resource for Nigeria's national development. This paper ultimately challenges simplistic dichotomies of patriotism versus alienation, highlighting that national loyalty can coexist with critique. The diaspora represents not a group that has abandoned Nigeria, but one that continuously renegotiates its identity and involvement from afar, often driven by a strong desire to contribute meaningfully to their homeland. The study hence put forward the following recommendations:

Through policy consultations, development programmes, and diaspora voting rights, especially in foreign policy formulation, as the current administration is embarking on, the Nigerian government could institutionalise and strengthen platforms for diaspora engagement beyond remittance payments. However, this should be beyond political games and symbolism, but actual engagement that will facilitate a robust relationship between the diaspora and home. The government should be intentional about reducing deficits at home. This will facilitate the

sustenance of patriotic commitment. Urgent attention should be given to addressing endemic corruption, insecurity and infrastructural decay. A responsive government will inspire more diaspora members to contribute actively and return home.

Given the diaspora's role as cultural ambassadors, Nigerian embassies and consulates should support diaspora initiatives that promote Nigerian culture and identity abroad, such as language schools, festivals, and media collaborations. There should be a robust reintegration policy at home. Many returnees face disconnection due to the mismatch between expectations and Nigeria's systemic realities. Tailored reintegration support, such as access to funding, academic collaboration, and mentorship, can help harness their skills and experiences. Government and private stakeholders should work with prominent diaspora members to reshape global perceptions of Nigeria and promote positive narratives, countering stereotypes and enhancing the country's image. Academic institutions and policymakers should invest in long-term research on diaspora communities to inform data-driven strategies for inclusion and development. Through the above initiatives, Nigeria can transform diasporic agency into a catalyst for sustainable national transformation by acknowledging its people not only as remittance senders but also as critical stakeholders in nation-building.

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