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Culture on the Move: Transnational Nigerian Masculinities and Identity Negotiation in the United States

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Research Article

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Abstract

In recent decades, gendered scholarship on transnational migration has expanded substantially but studies on transnational Nigerian masculinities remain limited, despite the hypervisibility of Nigerians as Black and African bodies in the diaspora. This article examines how Nigerian men in the United States negotiate and reconfigure masculinity within transnational contexts. Drawing on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seventeen participants and analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis, also leaning on the framework of transnational masculinities, the findings reveal five major domains in which participants confront challenges to masculine identity: dating, family roles and dynamics, workplace interactions, sociocultural norms and values, and gender relations. Across these contexts, participants employ four core strategies—resistance, learning and adaptation, cultural sensitivity and communication, and silence and caution—to navigate cultural dissonance and preserve self-definition, thereby evidencing agency in the ongoing reconstitution of identity. The study advances the theorization of transnational African masculinities by demonstrating that the rearticulation of African diasporic manhood is significantly shaped by contextual racialization and institutional gendering producing fluid, situational performances that hinge on cultural capital and entail significant affective labor. It concludes with implications for culturally responsive integration initiatives and calls for broader comparative and longitudinal research on African migrant masculinities.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, discourse on transnational migration has expanded significantly, drawing scholarly attention to how migrants' encounters with new cultural settings stimulate processes of self-reflection and identity reconstruction (Bell and Pustułka, 2017). These transformations are gendered as well, given that while migration reconfigures individuals' cultural and social orientations, it also reshapes their understanding and performance of gender, which remains central to identity formation (Farahani 2012; Gardner 2009). Although the experiences and vulnerabilities of female migrants have long been a central focus of migration scholarship (Hanson 2010; Elias et al. 2008; Blumen and Kellerman 1990), the twenty-first century has seen a notable shift toward including the perspectives and challenges of male migrants within this discourse (Wojnicka and Pustułka 2019). This is, in fact, vital, owing that the intersection of masculinity and migration has received inadequate attention for many years. Wojnicka and Pustułka (2019) contend that migration's gendered dimensions produce distinct outcomes for individuals and societies, influenced by the sex of migrants, which in turn shapes public perceptions of migration (91).

In today's politically unstable climate, migration has taken center stage as a critical global phenomenon. Consequently, the field of migration studies has expanded to consider the intersections of masculinity, identity, and mobility. The growing research on male migrants adopt an interdisciplinary approach, analyzing their intersections with family structures, labor markets, and social issues such as culturally-bound offenses, youth criminality, and violence against women (Kanaiaupuni 2000; Manuh 2005; Griffiths 2015; Vlase 2018). The notion of masculinity is subject to various interpretations and constructions. The

consensus among gender scholars is that masculinity is constructed through entangled complexities of history, culture, and social discourse that transcends biological determinism (Berger et al., 1995). While migration does raise critical questions about identity and belonging, Nigerian migrants frequently experience what scholars like Stuart Hall (1996) describe as cultural hybridity, where individuals must blend elements of their native and adopted cultures to survive. This cultural dilemma, impelled by mobility, often leads to a complex negotiation of masculine identity as migrants strive to maintain connections with their roots while adapting to their host culture.

While very few studies have explored how African men negotiate identity in the diaspora (Pasura and Christou 2018; Maziva 2020), specific attention to Nigerian masculinities within new contexts has been very limited (Jemiluyi 2025a; 2025b). Given Nigeria's unique social and cultural constructs around masculinity, the ways Nigerian men redefine their masculinity in response to American social norms deserve further examination. These men face unique pressures to adapt while grappling with pre-existing cultural expectations, creating an experience marked by both cultural continuity and change. Hence, the objective of this study is to explore specific areas in which Nigerian men in the United States perceive the need to negotiate their masculine identities, and to identify the strategies they employ to manage these cultural tensions and adapt effectively to their new environment. To lay a foundation for this analysis, the following section provides a review of how masculinities are performed and understood within Nigerian societies, offering important contextual grounding on the cultural values these men are largely socialized into. Subsequently, the study presents the framework of transnational masculinities, which serves as a lens into the experience of Nigerian men navigating their masculinities in the diaspora.

Local Contexts: Nigerian Masculinities

Scholarship on Nigerian masculinities, spanning multiple periods (Sara 1985; Andrea 2002, 2003; Lisa and Miescher 2003), consistently highlights the centrality of the provider role in shaping male masculine identities and behaviors. Hunter Mark (2010) and others (Andrea 2002, 2003; Simpson, 2009) highlight that, for men in southern Africa and beyond, the enduring significance of their provider role—extending to wives, children, and broader kin networks—generates pressures as they navigate interconnected domains of economic production and social reproduction. Andrea Cornwall's (2003) study highlighted that, for men in southwestern Nigeria, the fear of being deemed "useless" – unable to provide financially or emotionally – triggered significant anxiety. Despite societal shifts and emerging ideals of intimacy emphasizing gender equality, the notion that masculinity is contingent upon successfully fulfilling the "provider" role remains steadfast, a role Mark (2010) termed "provider love" (35). Likewise, Jemiluyi's (2026) recent study points to the growing configuration of the "Odogwu" archetype as an idealized masculine figure defined by "economic power, social recognition, cultural legitimacy, and performative visibility" (1).

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the role of colonialism in shaping masculinity in Africa, given that Africa's identity and reality have been shaped by the colonial and postcolonial forces, which

have constructed and invented aspects of the continent's culture, history, and society (Mudimbe 1988). Egodi Uchendu (2008) explored the evolution of masculine identities in Africa, tracing developments from precolonial to colonial periods. Consequently, colonialism and globalization have led to a transformation of social dynamics (Ouzgane and Morrell, 2005), including social reproduction, with the colonial-era concept of a male breadwinner emerging from migrant labor systems and cash crop production that primarily engaged men (Pasura and Christou 2018; Barnes 1992). Nigeria boasts a remarkable cultural diversity, comprising about 389 distinct ethnic groups (Otite 2000). This amazing mix of traditions, languages, and social norms shapes varied expectations and expressions of masculinity across different communities, contributing to the multiple masculinities that coexist within Nigerian society. For instance, in certain parts of the Northern region in Nigeria, young men between 18 and 20 years old are often expected to marry, with marriage serving as a significant marker of adulthood and masculine identity. Remaining unmarried at this "marriageable age" can carry a social stigma, as marriage symbolizes readiness for adult responsibilities. Similarly, rites of passage such as circumcision for boys between the ages of 5 and 7 signify their initiation into societal expectations of masculinity (Olawoye et al. 2004).

In some rural areas of eastern Nigeria, men often derive a sense of pride from fulfilling economic roles, which include not only working in agriculture but also migrating to the urban area to seek wage labor to support their families. Scholars like Sunday J. Ayodabo (2021) have also argued that Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) provides a window into traditional Igbo masculine culture. In the southwestern region, primarily inhabited by the Yoruba people, marriage is also considered essential for masculine maturity. However, here, readiness for marriage is contingent upon a man's ability to financially support a wife, which reinforces the association between economic stability and masculinity (Olawoye et al. 2004). Additionally, in several parts of the country, men have a significant responsibility to model positive behaviors in their role as community leaders and family figures. Uchendu (2007) found that as Nigerian youths mature, they actively seek to embody an idealized form of masculinity, showcasing distinct expressions of masculinity that evolve with age.

When examining Nigerian masculinities, it is crucial to also consider how space and environment shape masculine identities and expressions. For instance, in the oil-producing Niger Delta, a region marked by environmental and economic instability, masculinity often becomes closely associated with aggression and resistance, reflecting the area's socio-political tensions (Ashamole 2019). This intersection of place and masculinity illustrates how local contexts can shape unique expressions of manhood. Additionally, scholars like Dominic Pasura and Anastasia Christou (2018) emphasize that African masculinities cannot be fully understood without examining transnational migration, which brings new spaces and influences into the complex configurations of masculine identity.

Theoretical Framework

Transnational masculinities provide a vital theoretical lens to explore how migration experiences influence male identity negotiation and adaptation within transnational contexts. While migration

research has extensively documented women's experiences, scholarly attention on male migrants remains relatively sparse (Kofman et al. 2020). Traditionally, migration literature often positions men as normative or universal subjects, inadvertently homogenizing their diverse experiences and obscuring how migration distinctly reshapes their identities, behaviors, and perceptions of masculinity (Pasura and Christou 2018; Wojnicka and Nowicka 2022; Wojnicka and Pustułka 2019). Recently, however, scholars have increasingly turned attention towards explicitly analyzing male migrants, uncovering how migration complicates conventional understandings of masculinity, race, class, and gender.

While masculine identities are generally understood as socially constructed, relational, and continuously redefined across cultural and geographic contexts rather than as fixed or biologically determined traits (Reeser 2010), transnational masculinities are shaped with the framework of “transnational migration” that often “challenges migrant men’s attitudes towards and experiences of masculinities,” and consequently becomes crucial to understanding the formation of new masculine identities and the reconfiguration of existing ones (Sowad and Lafrance 2024, 133). In this context, structural and cultural disparities between homeland and host society, compounded by subtle yet pervasive forms of racism, sexism, and classism, also contribute to shape and constrain the gendered experiences of migrant men (Johnson et al. 2019; Wong and Poon 2019). In their study, Pasura and Christou (2018) conceptualize transnational African masculinities within the London context as being defined by “a constant tension between accommodation and resistance” (541). They argue that transnational migration compels African men to construct hybrid forms of masculinity through which they continuously negotiate their identities as “socially constructed, unstable, and always changing” (541).

While transnational masculinities provide a useful framework for examining the experiences of Nigerian men in the United States, a group whose realities remain understudied despite their significant presence as hypervisible Black and African immigrants and often subjected to racialization and stereotypical representation in public discourse (Jemiluyi 2025a; Acheme 2021), this area of inquiry warrants deeper scholarly engagement. Upon relocating to a culturally distinct environment such as the United States, Nigerian men encounter contrasting social norms and gender expectations and constructions that compel them to critically negotiate how masculinity is understood and performed in their new diasporic contexts. Understanding how these tensions manifest and are managed in everyday life is therefore crucial, leading to the following research question:

RQ1

In what ways has migration to the United States necessitated Nigerian men to adapt or renegotiate their masculine identity, and what strategies do they employ to navigate and address these challenges?

Method and Procedure

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how migration to the United States influences the negotiation and adaptation of masculine identities among Nigerian men. A qualitative approach was selected due to its suitability for capturing the nuanced personal experiences of individuals (Lim 2024),

providing a rich and contextual understanding of the intersections between masculinity, culture, and migration. The context for this study is significant given the Nigerian diaspora's prominence in the United States. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2016), which is the last comprehensive data available, Nigerians represent the largest group of African immigrants in the U.S. The Nigerian diaspora is distinguished not only by its size but also by notable educational achievements and professional diversity, making it a relevant and insightful group for exploring diasporic identity negotiations (Jemiluyi 2025a, 1).

The study involves 17 Nigerian men currently residing in the United States, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Tracy 2019). Participants met specific criteria: being of Nigerian origin, identifying as male, having lived in the U.S. for at least one year, and being aged 21 years or older. This combination ensured a comprehensive representation of adult male experiences in the diaspora. It is also important to acknowledge that the participant pool was predominantly composed of graduate students from various U.S. universities, presenting a limitation as perspectives from other professional or socioeconomic backgrounds were less represented. Nonetheless, the data was rich and data saturation was reached by the 14th interview, and an additional three interviews were conducted to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Data collection occurred through semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting approximately 30–55 minutes each, conducted virtually via Zoom. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies in negotiating their masculine identities post-migration. Sample questions included: In what ways has migration to the United States created the need to adapt or negotiate your masculine identity? What strategies have you employed to navigate these challenges?

Interviews were recorded with participants' informed consent, ensuring accurate transcription and analysis. Following each session, transcripts were produced using transcription software, after which I meticulously reviewed each transcript against the audio recordings for accuracy. To maintain confidentiality and protect identities, pseudonyms were assigned to participants. The transcription process resulted in 73,430 words across 188 pages of text, formatted at 1.5 line spacing. Several weeks were dedicated to thoroughly reviewing and immersing myself in these narratives to ensure a deep and reflective engagement with the data.

The analytical approach employed thematic analysis, following the method outlined by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). This included iterative phases: familiarizing myself with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, generating initial codes from recurring patterns and significant narrative points, and organizing these codes into broader themes that encapsulated participants' experiences. The analytical process was primarily inductive, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data, while also integrating deductive elements guided by the theoretical framework of transnational masculinities to provide interpretive clarity. Categories identified included specific areas of negotiation

(e.g., dating, family roles), strategies employed by participants (e.g., resistance, adaptation), forming a robust analytical framework aligned with the study's objectives.

Given the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, it is essential to disclose my positionality as a researcher. As a Nigerian male researcher exploring the experiences of Nigerian men in the United States, I acknowledge that my cultural background and identity provided both advantages and challenges in conducting this study. My shared cultural identity likely fostered an atmosphere of trust, enabling participants to comfortably and candidly discuss their personal experiences with someone who understands their cultural nuances. Nevertheless, I was mindful of the potential for bias and actively sought to minimize assumptions by engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process, and ensuring that the emergent themes authentically and reflected participants' narratives rather than my own preconceived notions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval

for the study was obtained from the author's university with the IRB Number #2122849. Participants were provided informed consent prior to the interviews, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all participant data and securely storing recordings and transcripts.

Findings and Discussion

Areas of Negotiation

1) Dating

Dating emerged as a significant area where Nigerian men encountered cultural differences that challenged traditional notions of masculinity and required substantial adaptation. Participants' experiences highlight shifts in romantic expectations, power dynamics, and financial norms. Babatunde described the cultural adjustment in romantic gestures, such as buying flowers, a practice that is only common among a few in Nigeria

Girls over here like flowers and stuff. So, you need to buy flowers. But back in Nigeria, it's not really a thing. If you buy flowers for a girl in Nigeria, it will be like, ahn ahn, come on, you can use that money for something else.

This quote reflects not only a practical difference but also the cultural value system underpinning relationships. In Nigeria, romance is often expressed through actions tied to provision and pragmatism, such as financial support or gifts that serve a functional purpose (Andrea 2002; Olawoye et al. 2004). This emphasis on flowers in the U.S., a very thoughtful, though fleeting gesture in that bouquets die

quickly, challenges this practicality, creating a cultural dissonance. Similarly, Toheeb shared the shock of splitting bills on a date:

The first time I went out with my partner here and she was with her friends… I was putting my card on the table, wanting to pay for everyone because I thought, oh, that's the norm at home. That's what you typically do, only for her to call my attention and say, no, they would pay for their food, and everyone just went to pay for themselves.

In Nigeria, men are traditionally expected to bear financial responsibilities in relationships, a marker of their masculinity and capability (Olawoye et al. 2004). This norm is strongly tied to societal perceptions of men as providers and leaders. Toheeb's encounter with women who elect to pay their bills themselves while he is there as a male figure disrupts this expectation. David also elaborated on the challenge of asserting authority in relationships, a practice often central to the African man's role:

In general, the African man in that attempt to be a leader and to take responsibility, tends to command some level of authority … but in social settings here, that wouldn't work. You cannot command an American lady, right?... I think the word to use is not necessarily command, but you get the point.

David's narrative presents the transition from a culturally accepted hierarchical dynamic to an egalitarian model more prevalent in the U.S (Pessin 2008). Here, the African man's leadership role, often associated with guiding or directing, tends to be reinterpreted as controlling or authoritarian, and thus, necessitates careful negotiation of relational boundaries. This tension was further illustrated by Oloruntobi:

You're in a relationship… and you want to exert some authority… but the women might see it as you trying to boss them or cage them… Like, you know, you're telling someone, oh, you don't have to like dress this way because it doesn't speak good of you. They be like, it's my body… and it becomes something you have to like, navigate. So yeah, it could be challenging in that aspect.

These findings resonate with the theoretical stance of transnational masculinities, which emphasizes that migration disrupts traditional gender roles and often forces migrant men into positions where they must recalibrate their identities to align with new cultural expectations (Pasura and Christou 2018).

2) Family roles and dynamics

Family roles and dynamics represent a critical area where Nigerian men encounter and navigate cultural shifts after migrating to the United States. These changes challenge traditional patriarchal roles and the communal support systems that underpin family structures in Nigeria, requiring men to renegotiate their responsibilities and adapt to new expectations within their households. Ikenna highlighted the ingrained expectations for men in Nigerian families, emphasizing the weight of responsibility placed on them

Back home… you are meant to believe that you are in charge… You take care of the bills… responsible for all that happens in the family... The women are very well accepting of such because they are, they were also brought up in such environment.

This statement reflects the patriarchal nature of Nigerian family structures, where men are socialized to view themselves as the ultimate providers and decision-makers (Ayodabo 2021; Olawoye et al. 2004). This belief shapes their identity and interactions within the family. However, in the U.S., where family dynamics are often more egalitarian (Pessin, 2018), these roles are redefined, leading to significant adjustments. Ozoemena further described the absence of communal support systems in the U.S., which fundamentally alters the dynamics of family life:

In Nigeria… there's that community that is provided for the woman that buffers the society… In America, you've lost those communities… you become more understanding as to be a helpmate.

In Nigeria, extended family members and neighbors often share responsibilities such as childcare and domestic tasks, creating a network of support. The loss of these communal systems in the U.S. shifts much of the domestic workload directly onto nuclear families, requiring men to take on roles traditionally perceived as feminine, such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing. Kazeem illustrated how traditional expectations of male dominance in the household, as seen in Nigeria, are incompatible with the realities of life in the U.S:

Back home… if I want to look at it from the mindset of a typical Yoruba man, you know, like I'm the *Baale* (head of the household) you know, those stuff, you expect your wife to be kneeling down for you and serve you your food, you know, all those things… but coming to this new environment… it will not work.

In addition to these shifts, Ozoemena further noted the increased emotional and physical demands placed on men in the absence of extended family support:

You are almost like the community for your family… what your partner could have drawn upon (from others), can only be drawn upon at home, which is you.

This comment presents the intensification of responsibilities for men in the U.S., as they become the sole source of network support for their families. This added burden, besides reshaping their familial roles, may also impact their mental and emotional well-being.

3) Workplace

The workplace represents a unique context where Nigerian men encounter cultural and gendered dynamics that challenge their understanding of professionalism, hierarchy, and interaction. Obaloluwa recounted an incident where his polite request was misinterpreted by an American colleague

I happened to tell my colleague to help me pick something… I told her… Could you help me to pick this item? And she replied, oh, okay, it's fine. You could order me around. Then I was then I was kept aback, and I was like, in my mind, this person interpreted my statement as me trying to order around… back home, it's a polite request… she felt I was trying to use my position as a man to order around.

This quote illustrates a cultural mismatch in communication styles and gender expectations. In Nigeria, such requests might be seen as polite and within the bounds of professional interaction. However, in the U.S., where workplace interactions are heavily informed by sensitivity to power dynamics and gender equity, the same behavior can be perceived as authoritative or condescending. Similarly, Durojaiye expressed the need for vigilance in how he interacts with colleagues:

I am a teaching assistant, and I have colleagues, and some of the colleagues are female, also, like, you know, Americans (so) I try as much as possible to watch what I say and how I say it, so it won't come across the wrong way… This society is very sensitive to gender and pronouns. so as not to come off, as you know, being misogynistic.

Durojaiye's experience highlights the heightened cultural awareness Nigerian men must develop to navigate gender and identity sensitivities in the workplace. This involves an additional cognitive load, as they balance their intentions with the potential implications of their words and actions in a culturally diverse environment. Aleshinloye shared an experience where an offhand comment in describing a student's physical appearance led to unintended consequences:

Me and my students interact well, but one day, I kind of told her, oh, I think I saw your twin sister around... I kind of told her… Is she a bit slender than you are? And she says, are you calling me fat? And I'm like, no, that's not what I meant, I wanted to be sure I have the right person. And it became a very big, you know, issue, like, errm… it escalated… I had to apologize.

Although these interactions reflect how culturally acceptable comments in Nigeria—often intended as descriptive or humorous—can be perceived as offensive or inappropriate in the U.S., it also underscores how the professional space further amplifies these sensitivities. For Nigerian men, particularly in academic or workplace environments, the stakes are even higher, as their words and actions are filtered through intersecting lenses of race, gender, and foreignness. Durojaiye's awareness of his positionality as a Black and African migrant man means that any perceived misstep can carry disproportionate consequences, influenced by racialized power dynamics and implicit biases in predominantly White professional settings (Ferguson and Dougherty 2021).

4) Sociocultural norms and values. Sociocultural norms and values significantly shape Nigerian men's experiences in the United States, challenging their cultural expectations and requiring them to navigate new societal landscapes. These norms impact daily interactions, behaviors, and perceptions of masculinity, as they grapple with reconciling their heritage with the host society's expectations. Participants often reflected on how basic social norms differ between Nigeria and the U.S. Durojaiye highlighted the cultural gap in greetings:

The way I greet my professor… I bend down to greet them like we do in Yoruba culture. But here, it's not common among those that grew up here.

For Kazeem, addressing superiors posed a similar challenge:

Back home, I cannot call my supervisor by name… But here, it's still very hard to just call my PI by name.

The transition from hierarchical to egalitarian social norms often causes internal conflict, as participants navigate the boundaries between cultural respect and professional familiarity. Norms around dress and public behavior also presented challenges. Nwabueze noted the stark difference in reactions to provocative clothing:

Back home, we call out inappropriate dressing… but here, you are restrained. Even though you want to react, you can't.

Similarly, Kazeem described the cultural shock of encountering relaxed moral norms:

During summer, *your eye go see shege* (referring to revealing clothing), there was a time I was even asking myself what has happened to my heart.

More so, practices like tipping in restaurants revealed significant cultural differences (Kim, 2024). Nonso described his bewilderment at the expectation to tip for self-service:

They've designed their payment platform to say, do you want to tip, I'm like, what am I tipping for?

Additionally, approaching women for romantic purposes emerged as another area where sociocultural norms diverged significantly. Obaloluwa explained:

In Nigeria… approaching women for dates is seen as a norm… But here, it's perceived as stalking or harassment.

The need to suppress certain ingrained behaviors was a recurring theme. Nonso provided an example of how humor and non-verbal communication like winking, often used casually in Nigeria, requires careful consideration in the U.S.:

Back home, we joke about body size… call someone *biggy* or *smallie*, and it's humor. But here, it's body shaming… There are other cultural things. Like, you know, you see somebody and say, hey, how are you? and you wink. Things like that can be seen as flirting. And you know, in our place, these are not.

Speaking of communication, participants noted that cross-cultural interactions require a great deal of thoughtfulness. The directness often associated with confidence and assertiveness in Nigeria may be perceived as rude or overly blunt in the U.S. Obaloluwa articulated this distinction:

There's this swagger with which a Nigerian will talk, or confidence that a Nigerian exudes that may likely be perceived as pride, or as being aggressive by a non-Nigerian… Also, there's a way a Nigerian would present a matter or an issue, and there is a way Americans present issues, especially critical issues… I found the way Nigerians speak very direct, which could seem as though confrontational for an average American.

5) Gender relations

Gender relations emerged as a critical theme in the experiences of Nigerian men navigating life in the United States. Participants shared stories that revealed the ways in which gender expectations and interactions differ starkly between Nigerian and American cultures. These differences often challenge deeply ingrained notions of masculinity, requiring participants to negotiate their behaviors and attitudes in significant ways. For many participants, the perceived independence of American women often clashed with their expectations based on traditional Nigerian norms. Nonso described a moment of surprise when his offer to help a woman lift a heavy object was declined

You see a woman lifting something (heavy) out of a car… and you want to help. She'll be like, no, no, I got it. But I am stronger, and back home, it's natural for men to offer help… Here, you don't want to appear misogynistic.

Similarly, Nonso recounted a disclaimer from a woman who sought his assistance:

In one of the cases, one of the ladies asked for a help… She's in her 50s… but made a disclaimer that she is not saying I should do this because I'm a man and she's saying I should help her do it because I am taller than her.

Several participants also shared experiences where their words or actions were misinterpreted through the lens of gender sensitivity. Aleshinloye described an interaction during a recreational activity:

I hit the ball at the lady on the other side of the net and I smiled and said, I know you won't be able to hit that ball back at me, then she comes back and tells me, oh that's being misogynistic. I was just like, oh, if it was in Africa, where I'm from, it's not a big deal… the comment was not in any way trying to shade down her ability to hit the ball back.

This incident reflects the cultural differences in interpreting casual comments. In Nigeria, such a remark might be seen as playful banter, but in the U.S., it was perceived as undermining the woman's abilities, reflecting heightened gender consciousness (Jaunait 2022). Obaloluwa described a professional interaction where a similar dynamic tends to unfold:

Even the way I speak to somebody… they might think I'm using harsh tones because I'm a man, but I'm just being assertive.

The participants' narratives present how Nigerian men experience the need to carefully calibrate their communication styles in a culture where assertiveness can be misread as aggression, particularly when it intersects with race and gender dynamics. For Nigerian men, this negotiation is further complicated by their racial categorization in the U.S. context. As scholars like Doris E. Acheme and Ioana A. Cionea (2024) have noted, Blackness in the United States is not just a racial category but a social condition laden with historical and symbolic weight. Upon migration, Nigerian men, many of whom may not have previously identified themselves as "Black" in the U.S. sense, find themselves subsumed under the

broader, racialized category of Blackness (Asante et al. 2016). In this space, the stereotype of the hyperaggressive Black man becomes a lens through which their behaviors are often interpreted, regardless of intent. At the same time, they carry the burden of being marked as African, an identity often filtered through Western tropes of backwardness, primitivity, and cultural incompetence (Acheme 2021). These intersecting stereotypes intensify their vulnerability as migrant men and often demand heightened self-regulation in order to appear "professional" or "safe" in majority-White spaces, effectively pushing them to navigate a minefield of perception that continually challenges the expression of their authentic selves.

Strategies

1) Resist: Resistance emerged as a powerful strategy employed by Nigerian men in navigating their masculine identity in the United States. For these men, resistance often took the form of holding onto cultural values, traditions, and behaviors that they viewed as integral to their identity (Adida and Robinson 2023). These acts of defiance against cultural assimilation reflect their efforts to preserve their sense of self in the face of external pressures to conform. For instance, Babatunde shared:

I choose to hold on to my cultural beliefs that, okay, a man should be in charge.

His statement reflects the intentional preservation of a leadership role, which is rooted in Nigerian notions of masculinity. For Babatunde, this belief provided him a sense of stability and continuity in his identity, even within the unfamiliar cultural dynamics of the United States. Resistance sometimes took the form of subtle, almost imperceptible actions. For instance, Babatunde recounted a situation where he rejected the norm of shared financial responsibilities in dating:

I was actually dating someone, and then we went out on a date and we're supposed to pay and then she said she was going to pay for both of us… She put her card (in the payment slot) and went to the bathroom … I switched the card and put my card in there.

Similarly, Oloruntobi articulated his commitment to cultural practices, such as offering seats to elders and addressing professors with honorifics:

When I see an elderly person… I would wanna stand up for the person to sit… I still add honorifics when I talk to my professors. It's part of my culture. It's something I just don't change. It's me.

This act of resistance is rooted in cultural respect, emphasizing the importance of honoring elders and authority figures, which is a hallmark of Nigerian values (Osalusi and Ajayi 2021). For David, resistance was tied to a broader effort to maintain his African identity. He described how he consciously retained African values and traditions despite prolonged exposure to American culture:

To a very large extent, I'm still African… I feel like I'm at my best when I operate in my original nature… even if I stay in America for another 50 years, I'm an African man.

David's narrative reflects a deep connection to his cultural heritage, which serves as a source of strength and authenticity. He emphasized the importance of family consent in marriage, a practice he regarded as essential despite its diminished significance in the U.S.:

Back home, you need the consent of the family to move forward… Here, two people can just agree and get married, but I still know that I need to do what I need to do.

The notion of resistance as a means to express cultural pride was also contained in the sentiments of Durojaiye and Nwabueze who divulged similar views about maintaining traditional forms of respect, such as addressing professors by their titles rather than their first names:

The fact is that I can't bring myself to, like, call my professor's name… I always use their title, just as a form of respect. (Durojaiye)

That value has always been with me. I still call them by their title and last name. (Nwabueze)

Resistance also manifested through self-advocacy, as participants actively asserted their masculinity in situations where they felt it was being undermined. Nwabueze described this dynamic vividly:

I have been in a setting where … I don't feel my role as a man is being respected. How do I negotiate that kind of setting? I need to call it out. For instance, maybe the way you talk to me, or the way you say things to me, or send me on an errand. I would tell you, no, you don't talk to me that way, or you don't send me on an errand. I try to make it known that even though we respect each other, I still expect you to respect me as a man in this setting.

2) Learn and Adapt

Adapting to the cultural environment of the United States was a central strategy employed by Nigerian men to navigate challenges to their masculine identity. Unlike resistance, which emphasized cultural preservation, adaptation reflects participants' willingness to adjust their behaviors, attitudes, and practices to align with the expectations of their new context. Babatunde described his journey of self-reliance and learning

Back in Nigeria, I pretty much didn't know how to cook. When I came to the U.S., I had to start learning these things from scratch… cook by myself, do all these things by myself.

Similarly, Ozoemena recounted the practical adjustments he made to support his family:

In Nigeria, we are made to believe that those are women's stuff… but over here, I see that there is no help for the spouse. To make things work, I need to be physically involved.

These narratives highlight how migration reshapes the division of labor within households, prompting Nigerian men to adopt a more egalitarian approach to domestic responsibilities (Torosyan et al. 2016).

Participants also adapted their communication styles to navigate cultural sensitivities. Kazeem emphasized the need for politeness per American standards in interactions:

In Nigeria, if you mess up, I'll tell you directly. But here, you want to be very polite… I'm learning how to treat everyone equally, how to make everyone's voice count.

This adjustment reflects how cultural adaptation often involves unlearning ingrained behaviors and adopting new norms that align with the host society's expectations (Ward 2024). Participants also identified several factors that aided their ability to adapt. Ikenna credited his open-mindedness for easing the adaptation process: "Before I left Nigeria, my view of life could be said to be very liberal… it was not so difficult (to adapt)." Similarly, Ayinde explained how his progressive views on gender roles helped him integrate more seamlessly: "even back home, I did not believe in specific gender roles… Whoever has more strength in certain areas should do it." Durojaiye also claimed that his cultural awareness also helped him integrate and adapt: "I'm aware of the fact that the idea of masculinity or gender roles is very diverse, depending on the society you find yourself." For some participants, external support systems facilitated their adaptation. Ayinde highlighted the role of a host family in broadening his perspective:

We are attached to a family that invites us for dinner… I observed that they see family roles as joint tasks. It doesn't matter whether you're a man or a woman.

Past exposure to other cultures also helped participants adapt more easily. Remilekun explained: "Before leaving Nigeria, I was exposed to different cultures… U.S. culture wasn't the first Western culture I encountered." Nwabueze, on the other hand, attributed his ease of adaptation to his academic background: "I have three degrees from three different continents… These experiences… prepared me for adapting to different cultures." While participants embraced adaptation, they also expressed a desire to maintain their identity. Ozoemena described the delicate balance required:

Adapting is a survival strategy… You don't want to be seen as taking too much advantage, but you also adapt to societal changes where men need to be more domesticated.

This quote captures the complexity of adaptation, which often involves finding a middle ground between cultural preservation and integration. While adaptation was a necessary and pragmatic strategy, participants also frequently described it as emotionally taxing and fraught with internal conflict. Babatunde, for example, expressed significant discomfort with adapting to certain social norms, particularly around dating customs: "I'm struggling to, like, come to terms that this is America… When a woman pays for me, it's like it's reducing my masculinity steeze."

This internal tension underscores how ingrained traditional Nigerian masculine expectations can be, making even seemingly minor adjustments profoundly unsettling. Similarly, Nwabueze articulated the challenge of adapting to more liberal social norms, particularly regarding same-sex relationships, which starkly contrast with the conservative moral framework he had internalized from Nigerian society: "You

need to subdue those moral values that you have been trained with and are forced to accept this setting the way it is, even though you still battle with it inside you." His account highlights the psychological conflict and moral dissonance many Nigerian men face as they attempt to reconcile held beliefs with the cultural realities of their new environment. Additionally, adaptation sometimes required participants to moderate their behaviors and suppress aspects of their authentic selves to align with American societal expectations, with participants describing this phenomenon as an uncomfortable compromise and one that also heightens their cultural awareness, consequently necessitating constant self-monitoring:

"I find it as a real toning down my identity, which is not the best thing to do." Obaloluwa

"In Nigeria, you can always shout… But if I shout Tayo here, people will look at me. So, it's like I'm walking on eggshells." Aleshinloye

3) Cultural Sensitivity and Communication: Participants frequently shared how they adjusted their language and behavior to avoid misunderstandings or offending others. Aleshinloye described learning to modify compliments to align with U.S. cultural norms: "I had to understand that certain compliments can be misunderstood. I now say, 'Oh, what you're wearing is nice,' instead of you're looking beautiful." Similarly, Obaloluwa described becoming more thoughtful in constructing his language: "In subsequent occasions, I had to think twice about how I construct my language in order for her not to read meaning into it." Participants also emphasized the need to understand and respect the cultural practices of others. David shared how he approaches daily interactions with an open mind: "In daily interactions, I try to understand other people's culture and respect it… I give people some level of advance to accommodate behaviors that don't align with my culture." This deliberate effort to respect cultural differences fosters mutual understanding and reduces the potential for conflict. Durojaiye expanded on this by highlighting the importance of recognizing the diversity of gender expectations: "In the context of the United States, you don't automatically assume what you are supposed to do as a man. You need to check with the opposite gender."

4) Silence and Caution

Silence and caution emerged as significant strategies employed by Nigerian men to navigate potential conflicts and avoid misunderstandings in their interactions within the United States. Several participants described moments where silence became a deliberate choice to diffuse tension or avoid confrontation. Aleshinloye shared an incident with a student in his class that escalated unexpectedly

There is this student… when you give instructions, she's always trying to do the other thing… I felt very disrespected… Eventually, the girl started crying, and it became a very big issue. It's more like, when you're dealing with like white people, be more silent… Just be silent, because things can switch on you.

The situation Aleshinloye encountered was particularly delicate, as it unfolded within the broader context of racial dynamics and power imbalances that often characterize cross-racial interactions in the United States. As a Black man and an African immigrant dealing with a White student, his sense of being

disrespected was complicated by an acute awareness of how easily such situations can escalate. In the current sociopolitical climate where immigration enforcement has intensified, and anti-Black biases continue to shape institutional responses, his decision to “just be silent” was not simply an act of retreat but a calculated move rooted in self-preservation. Recognizing the vulnerability of his positionality, both as a racialized body and as an immigrant in a predominantly White academic space, Aleshinloye opted for silence as a protective strategy to de-escalate a potentially volatile scenario. This kind of strategic silence aligns with what Scott et al. (2023), Wong et al. (2022), and Jemiluyi (2025a) describe as a common coping mechanism among marginalized groups navigating America’s racialized social terrain.

Additionally, Oloruntobi described exercising silence as an act of restraint during a frustrating encounter: “I was in the bus… someone did something, and I wanted to react, but I was like, what if she’s your junior sister? What if she’s your wife? You just have to accept it and not make a fuss about it… Sometimes you just have to keep things to yourself.” For Oloruntobi, silence was about maintaining composure and reframing situations to avoid unnecessary confrontation. Caution often accompanied silence as participants navigated cultural sensitivities and potential consequences. Aleshinloye articulated the stakes of missteps in the U.S. compared to Nigeria: “Back home, they accommodate you, even if you say trash… But here, just a slight misuse of words can get you into something you don’t expect.” Nonso echoed this sentiment, describing how he adjusted his behavior to align with cultural norms: “You have to watch what you say… There are ways you talk on the phone, or interact, so people don’t feel offended.” To include, Participants often framed their restraint as a reflection of maturity and masculinity. For Oloruntobi, letting go of minor frustrations became an act of strength: “As a man, you have to be able to let go of things… Silence doesn’t mean you’re complicit; it’s about knowing when to speak and when to hold back.” This redefinition of masculinity, emphasizing emotional regulation and strategic silence, reflects participants’ efforts to align traditional values with the expectations of their host society.

Altogether, the strategies Nigerian men employed to navigate and negotiate their masculine identities in the United States reflect a broader phenomenon of transnational masculinities; fluid, context-dependent identities shaped by the interplay between homegrown gender norms and the expectations of host societies. Rather than functioning as passive subjects of cultural displacement, participants demonstrated agency through varied and sometimes conflicting responses such as resistance, adaptation, strategic silence, and cultural sensitivity. These strategies illuminate the dynamic processes through which masculinities are deconstructed and reconstituted in transnational spaces. As Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell (2005) note, African masculinities are not static but are constantly remade in response to shifting socio-political realities. In the context of migration, this remaking is particularly urgent, as men must engage with host environments where traditional gender roles, power dynamics, and social expectations often stand in contrast to those ingrained during their upbringing.

Further Discussion and Conclusion

This study has explored the complex ways in which Nigerian men negotiate their masculine identities in response to migration-related cultural changes encountered in the United States. The findings reveal that

migration significantly shifts Nigerian masculinities by prompting men to confront cultural dissonance across diverse areas including dating practices, familial roles, workplace dynamics, gender relations, and sociocultural norms. To navigate these challenges, participants actively employed various strategies, including resistance to preserve core aspects of traditional masculinity, strategic adaptation to align with the new cultural environment, heightened cultural sensitivity and communication adjustment, and strategic silence and caution to mitigate misunderstandings and potential conflicts, demonstrating their agency rather than functioning as passive subjects of cultural displacement.

Additionally, this study contributes to the understanding of transnational African masculinities by grounding it in the lived experiences of Nigerian men in the United States. It demonstrates that these masculinities are not only shaped by the disruption of access to traditional patriarchal hierarchies (Pasura and Christou 2018, 541) but are also continually redefined through processes of negotiation, adaptation, and affective labor within racially stratified and institutionally gendered settings. In this context, Nigerian men engage in strategic, situated, and reflexive performances of identity as they navigate the intermingling structures of race, gender, and migration, of which are structures that compel them to reimagine what it means to be men across cultural, moral, and geopolitical boundaries. Equally important to note is that while the strategies of resistance and adaptation have been previously recognized as familiar negotiation tactics within transnational African contexts (Jemiluyi 2025b, 2025c; Pasura and Christou 2018), the emergence of cultural sensitivity and communication alongside silence and caution in this study introduces new dimensions to the discourse. These strategies highlight the significance of tactical restraint, emotional intelligence, and situational awareness as vital resources through which African men navigate transnational environments charged with racial and gendered sensitivities.

More specifically, the strategic adoption of silence and caution, mirroring the pragmatic disposition of “intentional disregard” that many Nigerian men employ to navigate stereotypes in the diaspora (Jemiluyi 2025a, 15), reflects a form of culturally informed cautiousness guided by self-preservation, restraint, and situational awareness. Hence, this study contends that beyond visible performances of masculinity, homegrown philosophies play a critical role in shaping how African men negotiate identity and belonging in transnational contexts. And consequently, accounting for these indigenous logics of navigation, and recognizing them as crucial cultural resources, is therefore essential to understanding how men mediate power, vulnerability, and adaptation across shifting global terrains. Likewise, this study foregrounds the significance of cultural capital in theorizing transnational African masculinities (Bourdieu 1986), unveiling its operation as a form of gender capital in the diaspora; a performative asset through which men assert legitimacy and negotiate dignity within racialized hierarchies. The capital, in this case, manifests through education, linguistic fluency, and global exposure. Most participants in this study, as graduate students or professionals, strategically mobilized their academic status and cosmopolitan competence as symbolic resources to mitigate racial and gendered vulnerabilities. Their educational attainment enabled them to reinterpret adaptation not necessarily as a loss of masculine status but as an affirmation of intelligence, discipline, and cross-cultural literacy—effectively re-signifying masculinity through competence and respectability. This finding, thus, show that African masculinities in

transnational contexts are as well negotiated through classed performances of knowledge, refinement, and adaptability, thereby complicating monolithic portrayals of African men as hegemonic, hypermasculine, or culturally rigid (Chitando et al. 2024, 1–2).

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that while the deployment of various strategies enables Nigerian men to navigate the constraints of their new environment, the negotiation of masculinity remains profoundly emotional work. Beneath the surface of strategic adaptation, there also exists a troubling undercurrent of tension, fatigue, and constant self-surveillance that reveals the psychic costs of maintaining dignity and identity in a foreign, racialized context. For Nigerian men in the United States, the process of becoming transnational subjects is fraught with contradictions; for to belong, they must unlearn parts of themselves and, as some participants noted, consciously temper their identities. And, to remain whole, on the other hand, they must hold fast to cultural anchors that affirm their sense of self. The emotional labor of self-policing; monitoring one's speech, being mindful in gestures, or even laughter to preempt racialized misinterpretation and consequences, renders everyday life a continuous act of vigilance. This dimension further cements that transnational African masculinities are as much as affectively endured. The negotiation of identity, in this sense, informs significantly a great deal of emotional strain and recalibration. By bringing these affective tensions into discourse on transnational African masculinities, this study grounds a crucial emotional contour to the theorization of transnational masculinities to posit that the making of African male subjectivities in migration is as much about *feeling one's way through* contradiction as it is about navigating structural and cultural constraints.

Practically, the insights provided by this study have important implications. Community organizations and policy makers can leverage this research to develop culturally sensitive integration programs aimed at supporting African migrant men in navigating complex cultural transitions. Future research could also further engage with a broader and more diverse sample of Nigerian men across varying socioeconomic statuses and immigration pathways. Comparative studies involving other African migrant groups could offer deeper insights into how different cultural backgrounds influence the negotiation of masculinity. Additionally, longitudinal research examining how migrant masculinities evolve over time within diasporic communities would enhance our understanding of identity adaptation as an ongoing and dynamic process. Future research should further explore the nuanced intersections identified here, particularly by engaging a broader and more diverse sample of Nigerian men across varying socioeconomic statuses, ages, educational backgrounds, and immigration pathways. Comparative studies involving other African migrant groups could offer keener insights into how different cultural backgrounds influence the negotiation of masculinity. Additionally, longitudinal research examining how migrant masculinities evolve over time within diasporic communities would enhance our understanding of identity adaptation as an ongoing and dynamic process.

Declarations

Author Contribution

The author did the research from beginning to the end and prepared the manuscript.

Data Availability

Given the qualitative nature of the study and the sensitivity of the interview material, full transcripts are not publicly available to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality.

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