Transnational Motherhood and the Challenges of Grandparenting

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my Parents: Augustine Emaikwu and Aladi Emaikwu.

ABSTRACT

Transnational Motherhood and the Challenges of Grandparenting

This thesis examines the lived experiences of Nigerian transnational mothers living in Canada whose children remain in Nigeria under the primary care of grandmothers. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Nigerian mothers who had at least one child residing with a grandmother in Nigeria. Guided by transnationalism and attachment theories, the study explores how these mothers understand and enact motherhood across borders, maintain emotional bonds with children, and interpret grandmothers' caregiving roles within broader migration projects.

Analysis generated three overarching themes: experiencing and making sense of motherhood across distance; emotional bonds, guilt, and cultural expectations; and caregiving arrangements, relationships, and safety. The findings show that motherhood is not suspended by migration but reorganized into a transnational, technologically mediated practice, as mothers structure daily life in Canada around children's routines in Nigeria and use phones, messaging apps, and, in some cases, surveillance technologies to sustain connection and oversight. Mothers navigate significant emotional labour and moral scrutiny, drawing on faith, future-oriented narratives, and selective engagement with Nigerian and Canadian parenting norms to "give themselves grace" in the face of ambiguous loss and shifting attachment relationships. The study also foregrounds grandmothers as everyday mothers in a risky context, highlighting their extensive

caregiving work, health strains, and central role in sustaining family life amid concerns about children's safety and Nigeria's social conditions.

By centring Nigerian mothers' perspectives in a Nigeria–Canada context, this thesis extends scholarship on transnational motherhood, attachment, ambiguous loss, and intergenerational care. It underscores the need for policies and supports that recognize the emotional, temporal, and intergenerational work involved when mothers care "in two places at once," including services that attend to the wellbeing of both migrant mothers and the older women who raise their children.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background to the Study

Modern family life is increasingly interconnected through global migration, particularly from the Global South to the North. The rise of transnational families, in which members live in different countries yet remain closely linked emotionally, socially, and financially, illustrates how family life now often unfolds across borders (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Redmond & Martin, 2023). Migration is typically not an individual endeavour, but a family decision driven by economic survival and household welfare. Migration patterns are also embedded within broader structural inequalities between sending and receiving countries, where disparities in economic opportunity, labour markets, and social conditions shape mobility (Parreñas, 2001, 2005; Yeates, 2012). Women now constitute a substantial share of global migrant workers, and many migrate from the Global South, including Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, to wealthier nations in search of employment and educational opportunities (International Labour Organization, ILO, 2021; Parreñas, 2001).

Within these global movements, transnational motherhood has emerged as a prominent area of scholarly and policy concern. Transnational motherhood refers to situations in which mothers migrate in pursuit of improved economic opportunities, education, or living conditions while their children remain in the country of origin, usually cared for by grandmothers or other relatives (Muñoz, 2019; Redmond & Martin, 2023). Global migratory patterns now depend heavily on this phenomenon, particularly for women from the Global South, who often work in low-wage caregiving or domestic

sectors abroad while their families rely on remittances at home (Parreñas, 2001; Parreñas, 2005).

Although transnational motherhood is frequently framed as a strategy for family advancement and economic survival, it simultaneously produces emotional strain, moral scrutiny, and complex caregiving negotiations (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). Societal norms across many cultural contexts, including Nigeria, continue to define "good motherhood" in terms of physical presence, hands-on caregiving, and emotional availability (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Oyěwùmí, 1997). As a result, mothers who parent from a distance often experience guilt, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy as they attempt to balance economic provision with the emotional and relational demands of parenting across borders (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Parreñas, 2005).

Transnational motherhood also reshapes gender roles and family power dynamics. When migrant mothers become primary financial providers through remittances, they may gain greater influence over household decisions, even while physically absent (Schmalzbauer, 2004). At the same time, caregiving duties are redistributed within extended families, typically to grandmothers and other female kin (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). From transnational mothers' perspectives, these arrangements can effectively transform grandmothers from supportive relatives into primary caregivers responsible for children's daily care, discipline, and emotional wellbeing (Mazzucato et al., 2015).

These caregiving shifts occur within the broader context of global population ageing and limited social protection in many African countries. Transnational mothers often express concern that caregiving responsibilities are transferred to grandmothers who may already be navigating age-related health concerns, financial insecurity, and

social vulnerability (Mthembu et al., 2022; Sear & Coall, 2011). The intensification of caregiving demands in transnational families may compound these challenges, particularly in settings where formal eldercare systems and pension schemes are underdeveloped (Yeates, 2012). Despite their central role in sustaining transnational family life, grandmother caregivers often remain invisible within migration research and policy discourse (Dolbin-MacNab & Yancura, 2018; Yarris, 2017).

Family separations resulting from migration require adaptability and bidirectional coping by both migrant mothers and caregivers at home. Research on transnational families shows that resilience is a shared process developed through emotional work, adaptation, and ongoing communication about caregiving responsibilities, rather than the responsibility of any single individual (Bohr & Whitfield, 2011; Patterson, 2002). Transnational mothers describe the complex balance grandmothers must maintain among personal wellbeing, caregiving responsibilities, authority, and emotional intimacy when caring for grandchildren in their absence (Coe, 2017; Yarris, 2017). These dynamics can strengthen intergenerational ties and promote understanding but may also create tension, conflict, and emotional exhaustion, particularly when expectations between migrant mothers and caregivers are misaligned (Bernhard et al., 2009; Madziva & Zontini, 2012).

Nigerian Transnational Motherhood and Grandparental Caregiving

In Nigeria, transnational motherhood entails a profound shift in traditional cultural expectations, in which mothers have historically been regarded as primary, physically present caregivers and the moral foundation of the family (Amadiume, 1987; Oyěwùmí, 1997). Parenting and caregiving have long been shared within extended

families, with grandparents, especially grandmothers, holding respected but largely supportive roles (Oluwatobi & Olawale, 2022). However, as more Nigerian women move abroad to countries such as Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom for education, employment, or economic opportunities, these traditions are evolving in new and complex ways (Adeyanju et al., 2017; Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018a).

Children left behind in Nigeria are often cared for by grandmothers who assume extensive parental responsibilities, sometimes for extended and indeterminate periods (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Olaiya, 2016). This shift redefines grandmotherhood, expanding it beyond supportive kinship to include intensive daily caregiving, emotional regulation, moral instruction, and, in some cases, financial management (Coe, 2017; Yarris, 2017). While some grandmothers find caregiving a source of purpose and identity, others face significant physical strain, emotional burden, and financial pressure, shaped by their age, health status, socioeconomic resources, and the quality of relationships with migrant daughters (Coe, 2017; Mthembu et al., 2022). Although grandmothers are critical to supporting Nigerian transnational families, much of the literature focuses primarily on migrant mothers, examining their emotional support, financial assistance, and sense of identity (Parreñas, 2001, 2005; Fresnoza-Flot, 2018). The daily caregiving experiences of grandmothers in their home communities and how these are perceived and interpreted by transnational mothers have not been examined in depth. This gap limits understanding of how Nigerian transnational mothers make sense of emotional strength, resilience, and the challenges grandmothers face in maintaining family connections across borders.

The Nigeria-Canada Context

Nigeria, often described as the vibrant heart of West Africa, occupies approximately 923,768 square kilometres and is home to an estimated 223 million people, making it the most populous country in Africa (Afreximbank, 2024). It encompasses over 250 ethnic groups and around 500 languages, reflecting significant cultural and linguistic diversity (Encyclopedia, 2024). Traditional Nigerian family culture is deeply rooted in communal values, emphasizing extended kinship networks, intergenerational connections, and collective responsibility for child-rearing (Oluwatobi & Olawale, 2022). Within this extended family system, grandparents, particularly grandmothers, play important caregiving roles, especially when parents migrate or move for work (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002).

At the same time, Nigeria faces persistent economic and social challenges, including high unemployment, slow economic growth, and limited access to quality social services. These conditions contribute to outward migration as Nigerians seek improved opportunities abroad (BBForPeace, 2023; Adeyanju et al., 2017). Nigerian society is largely patriarchal, with men typically occupying positions of authority and women expected to serve as primary caregivers and home managers (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a, 2012b). When mothers migrate and become economic providers, these gendered expectations are disrupted, prompting renegotiations of maternal roles, authority, and responsibility within transnational families (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Kastner, 2010).

Canada has become a key destination for Nigerian migrants, reflecting both Nigerian push factors and the pull of Canadian educational and economic opportunities. Nigeria is now among the top African source countries for permanent residents and

international students, with over 21,000 Nigerians arriving annually and a Nigerian-Canadian population exceeding 100,000 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, IRCC, 2024; Statistics Canada, 2024). Nigerians migrate through pathways such as Express Entry economic programs, Provincial Nominee Programs, family sponsorship, and international education, with many transitioning from temporary to permanent status (IRCC, 2023).

Nigerian immigrants contribute significantly to sectors facing labour shortages, including healthcare, information technology, construction, and services, but they also encounter barriers such as non-recognition of credentials, demands for "Canadian experience," and racialized discrimination (Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018a; Olayiwola, 2022). Community organizations and Nigerian associations in Canada provide settlement support, social networks, and cultural connections, helping families navigate these challenges (Newcomers Integration & Empowerment Initiative NIEI, 2023).

For Nigerian transnational mothers, migration to Canada often entails balancing academic or professional responsibilities with sustained caregiving obligations to children and relatives in Nigeria. As women increasingly assume the role of primary breadwinner abroad, extended family members, especially grandmothers, continue to provide everyday care for children left behind, highlighting both the adaptability and the strain within Nigerian family systems (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Olaiya, 2016). These Nigeria–Canada linkages provide the specific transnational context for this study.

Problem Statement

Although research on transnational families has expanded, much remains to be learned about how transnational mothers personally experience and interpret their roles, particularly when grandmothers step in to care for children left behind in their countries of origin. Many studies focus on broad aspects such as remittances and migration trends, or on the experiences of those who remain in the home country, without centring migrant mothers' own meaning-making (Carling, Menjívar, & Schmalzbauer, 2012; Parreñas, 2005). In the Nigerian context, there is limited qualitative research exploring how transnational mothers understand their parenting, emotional bonds, and relationships with both their children and grandparent caregivers (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Olaiya, 2016).

The journey of motherhood for Nigerian transnational women is profoundly shaped by cultural norms that place heavy emphasis on daily care, physical intimacy, and moral obligation (Amadiume, 1987; Oyěwùmí, 1997). Separation from children can lead to emotional distress, ethical dilemmas, and ongoing negotiations with grandmothers about caregiving responsibilities (Bernhard et al., 2009; Madziva & Zontini, 2012). However, these tender and complex experiences are frequently overlooked in research, especially in studies that foreground mothers' personal voices and meaning-making processes. Without an in-depth understanding of how Nigerian transnational mothers perceive and interpret the delegation of caregiving to grandmothers, support systems for settlement and social connection may overlook the intricate emotional, relational, and cultural realities that shape family life across borders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of Nigerian transnational mothers whose children remain in Nigeria under the care of grandmothers. I use a qualitative research design informed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which foregrounds mothers' own meaning-making about separation, grandmother caregiving, and motherhood across borders. It also examines how they perceive their relationships with their children and with grandmother caregivers in these transnational family arrangements, and how they interpret the roles, challenges, and contributions of grandmothers who have become primary caregivers (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Coe, 2017). Guided by transnationalism theory and attachment theory, the study interprets Nigerian transnational motherhood as shaped by both global migration structures and deeply embedded emotional bonds among mothers, children, and grandmothers (Abrego, 2009; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Jones, 2015).

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

How do Nigerian transnational mothers experience and make sense of motherhood when their children are cared for by grandmothers across national borders?

How do transnational mothers perceive and navigate the emotional, cultural, and relational challenges associated with parenting from a distance?

How do transnational caregiving arrangements influence mothers' relationships with their children, grandmother caregivers, and broader family dynamics?

These questions closely reflect the main aim and sub-objectives articulated in the proposal, which focus on (a) mothers' strategies for managing motherhood and emotional bonds across borders, (b) the roles and challenges of grandparents as caregivers, and (c) the influence of gender roles and expectations on transnational mothers' experiences (Abrego, 2009; Redmond & Martin, 2023).

Significance of the Study

Both practical and academic considerations inform this study. From a practical standpoint, my interest in this research stems from awareness of the often underexamined emotional and relational complexities of transnational family life. As a Nigerian international student with family members residing in Nigeria, I am personally aware of the pressures of navigating settlement in a new sociocultural environment while maintaining ongoing emotional, cultural, and familial obligations back home. These pressures are particularly salient for women, who are frequently positioned within Nigerian sociocultural contexts as primary caregivers and custodians of family wellbeing (Amadiume, 1987; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Oyěwùmí, 1997). Therefore, it entails not only geographic relocation but also the persistent negotiation of caregiving expectations, gendered responsibilities, and culturally embedded ideals of motherhood across borders. This experiential awareness sensitizes me to the emotional, moral, and relational dimensions of transnational motherhood explored in this study.

Beyond individual experience, observations of shared challenges among Nigerian migrant women and international students underscore that transnational responsibility often entails balancing personal adaptation with enduring familial obligations. These realities highlight the need for research that foregrounds mothers' lived experiences rather than treating transnational caregiving solely as a structural or economic arrangement (Bohr & Whitfield, 2011; Parreñas, 2005).

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to broader debates on the transformation of family life amid global migration. Transnational motherhood challenges conventional understandings of caregiving, family structure, and maternal presence by decoupling motherhood from co-residence and territorial boundaries (Bohr & Whitfield, 2011; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Research demonstrates that family ties and responsibilities are not diminished by distance but are actively created, maintained, and reshaped across borders through practices of “doing family” (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Vuorela, 2002).

Existing studies have documented the emotional consequences of maternal migration, including guilt, grief, ambivalence, and relational strain (Parreñas, 2001, 2005; Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Bernhard et al., 2009). They also show how transnational motherhood intersects with shifting gender roles, caregiving expectations, and resilience processes within migrant families (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Peng & Wong, 2013; Merry et al., 2023). Additionally, global ageing dynamics complicate caregiving arrangements, as reliance on grandmothers may intensify pressures on older women who are already managing health, emotional, and financial challenges (Mthembu et al., 2022; Coe, 2017).

Despite these contributions, Nigerian transnational motherhood remains comparatively underexplored, particularly within the Canadian migration context. Little research examines Nigerian mothers' own meaning-making regarding their relationships with grandmother caregivers and children across borders. By centring Nigerian mothers' lived experiences and using IPA, this research adds a phenomenological and culturally grounded perspective to the existing literature, helping to develop more context-sensitive theoretical frameworks, policies, and support systems that recognize the relational and emotional dimensions of migration (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study by outlining the research context, problem, purpose, research questions, and significance. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework, drawing on transnationalism and attachment theories to interpret Nigerian transnational motherhood and grandparental caregiving. Chapter 3 reviews relevant literature on transnational motherhood, grandparental caregiving, ageing, emotional labour, and African/Nigerian migration contexts. Chapter 4 describes the research methodology, including the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), participant recruitment, data collection methods, and analytic procedures. Chapter 5 presents the study's findings, including a description of the participants and the key themes that emerged from their narratives. Chapter 6 offers a reflexive account of the researcher's positionality, assumptions, and influence on the research process and the interpretation of findings. Chapter 7 presents the thesis's main discussion and conclusion,

situating the findings within existing research and theoretical perspectives, and considering implications for practice and future research.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework that guides the study, drawing on Transnationalism Theory and Attachment Theory to explain how Nigerian transnational mothers in Canada experience, interpret, and negotiate motherhood when their children are cared for by grandmothers in Nigeria.

This study is guided by two complementary theoretical perspectives, Transnationalism Theory and Attachment Theory, which together offer a multi-layered lens for understanding how Nigerian transnational mothers living in Canada experience, interpret, and negotiate motherhood across national borders (Abrego, 2009; Jones, 2015). Transnationalism Theory situates participants' experiences within broader structures of global migration, cross-border family practices, and gendered care arrangements (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Vertovec, 2009). Attachment Theory provides a relational and psychological framework for interpreting the emotional and embodied dimensions of maternal separation, including connection, guilt, longing, and anxiety (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Bretherton, 1992).

While Transnationalism illuminates the structural and sociocultural contexts that shape transnational family life, Attachment Theory deepens understanding of the emotional processes by which mothers make sense of absence and continuity. Guided by the thesis proposal, these frameworks help explain how Nigerian transnational mothers manage motherhood and maintain emotional bonds with their children across borders, how grandmothers assume and experience caregiving responsibilities, and how gendered expectations shape these dynamics in Nigerian and Canadian contexts (Abrego, 2009; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Jones, 2015). The integration of Transnationalism and Attachment Theory, therefore, enables this study to conceptualize transnational

motherhood as both a structurally organized social phenomenon and a deeply lived relational experience.

Transnationalism Theory

Conceptual Foundations

Transnationalism refers to the processes through which migrants sustain meaningful social, economic, political, and emotional ties across national borders (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Vertovec, 2009). Rather than viewing migration as a definitive rupture from the country of origin, Transnationalism conceptualizes migrants as embedded within multi-sited social fields that span both sending and receiving societies (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Vertovec, 2009). These transnational social fields encompass networks of kin, community organizations, religious institutions, and state policies that shape migrants' opportunities, obligations, and identities (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Abrego, 2009).

Within transnational family formations, relationships are maintained through diverse practices, including remittances, communication technologies, emotional exchanges, and decision-making processes that circulate across borders (Baldassar, 2007; Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Mazzucato et al., 2015). Care, responsibility, and authority are thereby redistributed rather than dissolved, as migrants and non-migrants negotiate how to meet children's needs, uphold cultural norms, and manage limited resources (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011b). In African and Nigerian contexts, these transnational ties are often anchored in extended kinship networks that connect migrant

parents, left-behind children, and caregiving relatives, particularly grandmothers (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011a, 2011b; Mazzucato et al., 2015).

These extended networks facilitate ongoing exchanges of material support, emotional reassurance, moral guidance, and a sense of belonging (Baldassar, 2007; Coe, 2017). They also reflect long-standing histories of labour migration and intergenerational caregiving in West Africa, where grandmothers and other kin have long served as key caregivers when parents relocate for work or education (Bledsoe & Brandon, 1992; Mazzucato et al., 2015). Transnationalism Theory, therefore, provides a structural and relational framework for understanding how Nigerian families reorganize family life across distances.

Transnational Motherhood

Transnational motherhood describes family arrangements in which mothers migrate while children remain in the country of origin, cared for by other family members, most commonly grandmothers (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Baldassar, 2007; Parreñas, 2005). Foundational scholarship challenged deficit narratives equating maternal migration with abandonment, showing that mothers maintain active caregiving roles across borders through financial provision, emotional support, and symbolic presence (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2005). Research in Global South contexts has since documented how maternal roles are reconfigured through long-distance communication, remote decision-making, emotional labour, and practices of "doing family" across distance (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). In this study, these practices are understood not simply as

evidence of continued contact but as part of the ongoing work through which family relationships and maternal identities are actively maintained across distance.

The concept of "doing family" is central to this understanding because it emphasizes that family is not only a static structure but also an ongoing accomplishment produced through everyday practices, obligations, and emotional work across time and space (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). In the context of transnational migration, doing family includes the routines through which mothers sustain belonging and responsibility, such as calling children, sending money, coordinating school matters, negotiating caregiving decisions with grandmothers, and remaining emotionally present despite physical absence. Rather than treating distance as the end of family life, this concept highlights how family is continually made and remade through action.

Relatedly, this thesis uses "doing motherhood" to refer more specifically to the practical, emotional, moral, and relational work through which participants enacted motherhood across borders. Although the terms "doing family" and "doing motherhood" are closely connected, they are not identical. Doing family refers to the broader set of practices through which transnational relationships, care obligations, and family belonging are sustained, whereas doing motherhood refers to the gendered and culturally loaded ways participants carried out, defended, and interpreted their maternal roles within those wider family arrangements.

This distinction is especially important in a Nigerian transnational context where motherhood is strongly associated with physical presence, daily caregiving, sacrifice, and moral accountability (Amadiume, 1987; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a, 2012b). For these mothers, doing motherhood involved more than staying in contact; it included managing

guilt, monitoring children's wellbeing, directing care from afar, sending resources, maintaining discipline, and demonstrating to others and to themselves that they remained "good mothers" despite migration. In this sense, doing motherhood can be understood as a gendered accomplishment that resonates with broader scholarship on "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987), where social roles are not merely held but repeatedly enacted and recognized through everyday interaction.

Framing the study in this way strengthens the interpretation of participants' narratives. It clarifies that transnational motherhood is not simply motherhood interrupted by migration, but motherhood reworked through cross-border practices shaped by gender norms, immigration realities, and intergenerational caregiving relations. It also helps explain why participants' accounts constantly shift among emotional attachment, practical caregiving, moral self-evaluation, and negotiation with grandmother caregivers: these are all part of how motherhood and family were actively enacted across distance.

Within many Nigerian sociocultural contexts, motherhood is strongly associated with physical proximity, daily caregiving, and moral accountability (Amadiume, 1987; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a, 2012b). Mothers are commonly regarded as primary caregivers and moral custodians of children's wellbeing, while extended family members provide support within a patriarchal family structure (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Oyěwùmí, 1997).

Consequently, maternal migration may intensify moral scrutiny, as mothers must continuously demonstrate commitment and responsibility despite geographic separation (Parreñas, 2005; Fresnoza-Flot, 2018). They often frame migration as a sacrifice for

children's futures, even as they grapple with guilt, ambivalence, and concerns about how others judge their maternal adequacy (Parreñas, 2005; Bernhard et al., 2009).

Transnationalism Theory provides the primary structural lens through which this study interprets how motherhood is reorganized rather than relinquished, how maternal authority is negotiated across borders, and how grandparental caregiving becomes embedded within migration systems (Abrego, 2009; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). It enables analysis of how Nigerian transnational mothers navigate immigration regimes, labour markets, and racialized settlement contexts in Canada while sustaining obligations and relationships in Nigeria (Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018a; Salami et al., 2021).

Care Circulation and Gendered Responsibility

Transnational family scholarship conceptualizes care as a multidirectional process that circulates across borders rather than flowing in a single direction (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Yeates, 2012). Within Nigerian and broader African contexts, migrant mothers often provide financial and emotional support from abroad, while grandmothers and other female relatives assume responsibility for daily physical and emotional caregiving in the country of origin (Baldassar, 2007; Mazzucato et al., 2015). These arrangements are deeply gendered: women, particularly mothers and grandmothers, disproportionately shoulder caregiving and emotional labour across transnational spaces (Hochschild, 2000; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a).

Research on Nigerian and West African families underscores the centrality of grandmothers in childcare, moral socialization, and emotional stabilization, especially when parents migrate (Mazzucato et al., 2015; Sear & Coall, 2011). Grandmothers often become primary caregivers, managing children’s schooling, discipline, and health, while

also upholding cultural norms of respect, gendered behaviour, and communal responsibility (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a, 2012b; Coe, 2017). However, this caregiving role can involve significant physical strain, financial pressure, and emotional burden, particularly for older women with limited resources and formal support (Dolbin-MacNab & Yancura, 2018; Mthembu et al., 2022).

For Nigerian transnational mothers living in Canada, these caregiving dynamics intersect with broader experiences of racialized migration, labour precarity, and systemic inequality across settlement, employment, and healthcare systems (Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018a; Salami et al., 2021). Transnationalism Theory, therefore, situates participants' narratives within larger structures of gendered migration and global care chains, highlighting how Nigerian women's caregiving and breadwinning roles are reconfigured in relation to both Nigerian family norms and Canadian institutional contexts (Hochschild, 2000; Yeates, 2012).

Attachment Theory

Theoretical Foundations

Attachment Theory, originally developed by Bowlby (1969/1982) and expanded by Ainsworth (1978, 1989), holds that emotional bonds between children and caregivers are central to psychological security, identity development, and relational functioning. These relationships are sustained not only by physical proximity but also by perceived emotional availability and responsiveness (Bretherton, 1992; George & Solomon, 1999). Classic attachment research shows that consistent, sensitive caregiving supports secure

attachment, whereas prolonged or unpredictable separations can produce anxiety, distress, and behavioural difficulties (Ainsworth, 1989; Cassidy & Berlin, 1994).

In Nigerian and other African family systems, attachment relationships are often embedded in extended kin networks, where caregiving responsibilities are shared among mothers, grandmothers, older siblings, and other relatives (Mazzucato et al., 2015; Sear & Coall, 2011). This sociocultural context complicates Western assumptions about single primary caregivers and nuclear-family forms. Multiple attachment figures can coexist, and children's sense of security may be grounded in networks of caregivers rather than a single parent (Hrdy, 2009; Lam & Yeoh, 2018). Attachment Theory thus requires context-sensitive application to reflect the normative role of intergenerational caregiving in African families.

Maternal Attachment and Separation

Attachment processes operate bidirectionally: both mothers and children develop deeply embedded relational bonds that shape their sense of self and emotional wellbeing (Bretherton, 1992; George & Solomon, 1999). In transnational motherhood, maternal separation may evoke anxiety, guilt, hypervigilance, and chronic longing, especially where cultural norms strongly equate "good motherhood" with physical presence and daily care (Parreñas, 2005; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a). Empirical studies of transnational mothers in Latin America, Asia, and Africa document persistent emotional ambivalence as women navigate the tension between providing materially and being physically absent (Bernhard et al., 2009; Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002).

Participants' narratives in this study reflect emotional experiences consistent with attachment-related processes, including persistent monitoring of children's wellbeing,

distress following mediated communication (such as video calls), concerns about relational continuity, and fears of weakened bonds over time. In Nigerian contexts, where maternal responsibility is highly valorised, these attachment-based fears are further intensified by community expectations and moral judgements surrounding maternal migration (Amadiume, 1987; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a, 2012b).

Attachment Across Distance

Contemporary research acknowledges that attachment relationships may be sustained through symbolic and technologically mediated forms of connection (Madianou & Miller, 2011; Baldassar, 2007). For transnational mothers, practices such as frequent phone calls, video calls, messaging, emotional reassurance, and remote involvement in schooling and discipline serve as strategies for maintaining relational bonds (Baldassar, 2007; Fresnoza-Flot, 2018). These practices can support a sense of psychological proximity and continuity, particularly when combined with stable caregiving arrangements in the country of origin (Bohr & Tse, 2009; Mazzucato et al., 2015).

However, mediated communication may also intensify longing by continually highlighting absence (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Madianou & Miller, 2011). Mothers may interpret children's behaviour, silence, facial expressions, or emotional tone during calls as indicators of attachment continuity or disruption, sometimes experiencing heightened distress when children appear distant, distracted, or less responsive (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). Attachment Theory, therefore, provides a framework for interpreting maternal guilt, relational anxiety, and future-oriented reunification narratives as expressions of deeply relational processes, rather than individual emotional weakness.

Ambiguous loss in transnational motherhood

Pauline Boss's concept of ambiguous loss is particularly relevant for understanding transnational family life, including situations in which a parent is physically absent but remains psychologically present for family members, making it difficult to achieve emotional closure. Ambiguous loss captures the ongoing uncertainty, lack of closure, and emotional "stuckness" that can arise when relationships are neither fully present nor definitively ended, such as when a migrant mother is still actively involved emotionally and financially but cannot be physically present. For Nigerian transnational mothers, this may take the form of constant concern and involvement in children's lives while simultaneously feeling that they are "not there" in the ways good mothers are expected to be.

Integrating ambiguous loss with Attachment Theory allows this study to conceptualize separation not simply as a rupture of attachment but as an ongoing, ambiguous condition in which mothers and children renegotiate emotional bonds over time. This lens helps interpret mothers' accounts of being both present and not present in their children's lives, their persistent self-questioning ("Am I really meeting their needs?"), Moreover, their efforts to maintain a sense of secure base through frequent communication, faith, and future-oriented narratives of reunion.

Integrating Transnationalism and Attachment Theory

The integration of Transnationalism Theory and Attachment Theory enables a layered interpretation of Nigerian transnational mothers' lived experiences. Transnationalism Theory situates mothers' narratives within broader structures of

migration, gendered labour, racialized inequality, and cross-border caregiving systems (Abrego, 2009; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Yeates, 2012). It highlights how Nigerian mothers and grandmothers navigate immigration policies, labour markets, and transnational obligations that shape their options and constraints (Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018a; Salami et al., 2021).

Attachment Theory deepens this structural analysis by illuminating the emotional, relational, and embodied dimensions of maternal separation (Ainsworth, 1989; George & Solomon, 1999). It helps explain why separation is experienced as morally charged, physically felt, and emotionally ambivalent, and why practices such as constant communication, ritualized calls, and future-oriented hopes of reunification are so central in mothers' narratives (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002).

Together, these frameworks reflect the study's dual analytic commitment to understanding transnational motherhood as both a structurally organized social arrangement and a profoundly lived relational experience. In line with the thesis proposal, this integrated framework supports examination of how Nigerian transnational mothers manage motherhood and emotional bonds with children across borders, how grandmothers assume and experience caregiving roles, and how gender roles and expectations shape these experiences in transnational family systems (Abrego, 2009; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Redmond & Martin, 2023).

Alignment with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

These theoretical perspectives complement Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) by supporting the interpretation of participants' lived experiences while

situating their meaning-making within broader sociocultural and structural contexts (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Consistent with IPA, theory functions here as an interpretative resource rather than a deterministic framework: participants' accounts remain the primary starting point, and Transnationalism and Attachment are used to illuminate, rather than impose, meaning. By combining Transnationalism Theory and Attachment Theory with IPA, this study is able to attend simultaneously to mothers' subjective interpretations of separation, responsibility, and caregiving, and to the wider Nigerian–Canadian transnational fields in which these interpretations are produced.

IPA is particularly well-suited to this study because transnational motherhood represents a phenomenon marked by profound emotional complexity, moral ambivalence, and identity negotiation that cannot be captured through standardized measures or broad thematic categorization. Nigerian transnational mothers navigate contradictory realities: they are present yet absent, providers yet perceived as abandoners, empowered breadwinners yet constrained by guilt and cultural judgment. Their experiences involve simultaneous pride and pain, hope and grief, agency and vulnerability emotional states that coexist rather than cancel each other out. IPA's idiographic commitment enables close attention to how individual mothers hold these contradictions together, interpret their meaning, and construct coherent maternal identities despite ambiguity (Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, transnational motherhood is deeply embedded in culturally specific meanings of "good motherhood," making it essential to foreground participants' own sense-making rather than imposing external frameworks (Eatough & Smith, 2017). IPA's phenomenological orientation ensures that Nigerian mothers' lived experiences remain central, while its interpretative dimension allows the researcher to situate these

experiences within broader sociocultural and structural contexts illuminated by Transnationalism and Attachment Theory.

The integration of IPA with Transnationalism Theory and Attachment Theory directly supports each research question. **RQ1** *How do Nigerian transnational mothers experience and make sense of motherhood?* This is fundamentally a question about meaning-making, which aligns with IPA's core focus on subjective interpretation and the concept of "doing motherhood" from Transnationalism Theory, enabling analysis of how mothers actively construct maternal identity through cross-border practices. **RQ2** *How do mothers perceive and navigate emotional, cultural, and relational challenges?* requires attention to emotional ambivalence, moral tension, and coping strategies, which IPA's interpretative depth can illuminate alongside Attachment Theory's insights into separation anxiety, guilt, and relational continuity across distance. **RQ3** *How do transnational caregiving arrangements influence relationships?* calls for nuanced exploration of power, authority, reciprocity, and emotional exchange within family systems, which IPA supports through case-by-case analysis, while Transnationalism Theory situates these dynamics within gendered care structures and immigration regimes. Together, this methodological and theoretical integration allows the study to move beyond descriptive accounts of *what* transnational mothers experience to an interpretative understanding of *how* they make sense of those experiences, *why* certain meanings emerge, and *how* individual narratives reflect broader patterns of Nigerian transnational family life. This alignment between theory and method reflects the original proposal's design and provides the conceptual foundation for the analysis presented in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

This chapter reviews scholarly literature on transnational motherhood, with particular attention to transnational families and migration; transnational motherhood; emotional labour and maternal wellbeing; attachment and separation across distance; and grandparental caregiving in African and Nigerian contexts. The review situates the present study within existing academic debates and identifies the conceptual and empirical gaps this research addresses. Although transnational motherhood has been widely examined in migration studies, much of the literature privileges structural analyses of labour markets, immigration regimes, and global care chains over in-depth exploration of lived, subjective experiences (Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2001, 2005; Yeates, 2012).

Consistent with this study's Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, the review emphasizes the emotional, relational, and meaning-making dimensions of transnational motherhood, drawing on Global South and African scholarship where possible (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Mazzucato et al., 2015; Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018a). In doing so, it directly reflects the thesis proposal's focus on the challenges faced by transnational mothers, the roles and experiences of grandmothers' caregivers, and the influence of gender roles and expectations in Nigerian transnational families (Abrego, 2009; Redmond & Martin, 2023).

Transnational Families and Migration

Global migration has profoundly reshaped family structures, giving rise to transnational family arrangements characterized by geographical dispersion and sustained

cross-border ties (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Vertovec, 2009). Within these arrangements, family relationships are sustained through remittances, communication technologies, caregiving practices, and emotional exchanges that cross national boundaries (Baldassar, 2007; Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Madianou & Miller, 2011). In African contexts, such transnational ties are deeply rooted in long-standing histories of labour migration, extended-family caregiving, and obligations to kin "back home" (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011a, 2011b; Mazzucato et al., 2015).

Recent scholarship conceptualizes transnational families as dynamic relational systems in which care, responsibility, and belonging are reorganized rather than dissolved (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Carling, Menjívar, & Schmalzbauer, 2012). These studies highlight the fluidity of familial roles and the persistence of emotional and moral obligations across borders, including among African migrants in Europe and North America (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018a). Research on West African transnational families points to both opportunities, such as improved access to education and income, and risks, including psychological strain among left-behind children and caregivers (Mazzucato et al., 2015).

For Nigerian families specifically, transnational migration intersects with extended kinship networks and patriarchal gender orders, shaping who migrates, who stays, and who assumes caregiving responsibilities (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Understanding gender issues in Nigeria, 2021). These dynamics form the broader context within which Nigerian transnational mothers and grandmother caregivers negotiate their roles.

Transnational Motherhood

Transnational motherhood has emerged as a significant area of inquiry in migration and family studies. Foundational scholarship challenged dominant narratives portraying maternal migration as abandonment, showing that mothers maintain active caregiving roles across borders through financial provision, emotional support, and symbolic presence (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2005). Subsequent research has documented how maternal roles are reconfigured through long-distance communication, emotional labour, and remote decision-making across diverse contexts in the Global South (Baldassar, 2007; Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Madianou & Miller, 2011).

Studies highlight the profound influence of culturally specific definitions of parental responsibility and regionally located gender norms on transnational parenthood (Parreñas, 2001; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015). In many African societies, including Nigeria, motherhood is closely associated with physical presence, daily caregiving, and moral accountability (Amadiume, 1987; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a, 2012b; Mazzucato et al., 2015). Consequently, maternal migration is frequently framed within discourses of sacrifice, endurance, and responsibility for children's futures, even as mothers are subject to moral scrutiny and social judgment (Parreñas, 2005; Peng & Wong, 2013).

Research consistently identifies emotional strain as central to transnational motherhood. Migrant mothers frequently report guilt, longing, anxiety, and moral self-surveillance as they navigate tensions between economic provision and physical absence (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). Maternal absence is often evaluated through culturally embedded ideals of "good motherhood" that privilege proximity and embodied caregiving (Parreñas, 2005). Within Nigerian contexts,

gendered expectations surrounding motherhood are further shaped by patriarchal social structures that position women as primary caregivers and moral custodians of family wellbeing (Amadiume, 1987; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Oyěwùmí, 1997). These norms intensify the emotional and moral complexities associated with maternal migration, as Nigerian transnational mothers must negotiate responsibility, identity, and legitimacy across distance. Their experiences align directly with this study's focus on how gender roles and expectations shape transnational motherhood, as outlined in the proposal (Abrego, 2009; Redmond & Martin, 2023).

Emotional Labour and Maternal Wellbeing

Emotional labour theory has been widely applied to understand the affective dimensions of transnational caregiving. Transnational mothers often engage in intense emotional regulation, balancing expressions of strength, reassurance, and gratitude while suppressing distress in interactions with children, caregivers, and employers (Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2001, 2005). Studies describe how mothers manage their emotions to protect children from worry, maintain authority at a distance, and present themselves as responsible, caring migrants, even when they feel overwhelmed (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002).

Past research also reveals diverse coping strategies, including rationalizing migration as an investment in children's futures, reliance on religious faith, future-oriented hope, and emotional containment (Del Villar-Toribio et al., 2024; Zikhali, 2025). At the same time, emotional labour can contribute to exhaustion, depressive symptoms, and feelings of isolation, particularly when mothers face racism, precarious

work, and legal insecurity in host countries (Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018a; Salami et al., 2021). These findings underscore the intersection of gender, race, class, and migration status in shaping maternal wellbeing.

Importantly, emotional labour is not experienced uniformly, underscoring the need for idiographic approaches that capture experiential nuance and heterogeneity (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Carling et al., 2012). This provides a rationale for this study's use of IPA to foreground Nigerian mothers' own meaning-making around emotional labour, guilt, resilience, and care at a distance.

Attachment, Separation, and Distance

Attachment Theory provides a relational framework for understanding the emotional consequences of separation within transnational families. Classic attachment research emphasizes that stable, responsive caregiving relationships support children's emotional security, whereas prolonged or unpredictable separations can generate anxiety and behavioural changes (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Bretherton, 1992). In transnational families, physical separation is often long-term and shaped by visa policies, economic constraints, and border regimes, raising questions about how attachment is sustained across distance (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002; Mazzucato et al., 2015).

Research highlights how communication technologies enable emotional continuity by allowing regular visual and verbal contact, shared rituals, and ongoing decision-making, while simultaneously intensifying awareness of absence (Baldassar, 2007; Madianou & Miller, 2011). At the same time, attachment-based interpretations have been critiqued for insufficiently accounting for collectivist and extended-kin

caregiving systems characteristic of many African societies, in which children often form strong bonds with multiple caregivers, including grandmothers, aunts, and older siblings (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Sear & Coall, 2011). These critiques call for context-sensitive applications of Attachment Theory that acknowledge multiple attachment figures and the normative role of intergenerational caregiving in African families.

This study draws on such context-sensitive perspectives by considering how children's attachment relationships may be distributed across mothers, grandmothers, and other relatives in Nigerian transnational families, and how mothers interpret these distributed attachments emotionally and morally.

Grandparental Caregiving in Transnational Contexts

Grandmothers play a central role in transnational caregiving arrangements, particularly within African societies. Studies show that grandmothers often provide daily physical care, emotional support, and moral socialization for children whose parents have migrated internally or internationally (Bledsoe & Brandon, 1992; Mazzucato et al., 2015; Sear & Coall, 2011). In Nigerian and West African settings, grandmothers act as key moral authorities and custodians of cultural norms, teaching children appropriate gendered behaviour, respect for elders, and communal values (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a, 2012b).

At the same time, scholars identify tensions embedded within these arrangements, including intergenerational negotiations of authority, responsibility, and emotional dependence (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Yeates, 2012). Grandmothers may experience

increased workloads, financial strain, and health challenges as they care for grandchildren in contexts of poverty and limited social protection, particularly among ageing African populations (Baldassar, 2007; Dolbin-MacNab & Yancura, 2018; Sear & Coall, 2011). Research also documents emotional ambivalence among grandmothers, who may feel pride in supporting their children's migration projects while also experiencing loneliness, resentment, or worry about prolonged separations and the uncertainty of reunification (Del Villar-Toribio et al., 2024; Zikhali, 2025).

These dynamics are especially salient in Nigerian transnational families, where patriarchal norms and expectations of female caregiving converge with high rates of labour and educational migration (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Mazzucato et al., 2015). However, as the proposal highlighted, grandparent caregivers, particularly grandmothers, often remain marginalized in research that primarily focuses on migrants or left-behind children (Redmond & Martin, 2023; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). This study responds by foregrounding mothers' perspectives on grandmothers' roles and challenges.

Nigerian Sociocultural and Migration Context

Transnational motherhood challenges conventional conceptualizations of family by decoupling caregiving from co-residence (Bohr & Whitfield, 2011). Within transnational family systems, ties and responsibilities are actively sustained across distance through emotional, financial, and communicative practices (Vuorela, 2002; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Research consistently documents the emotional consequences of maternal migration, including persistent guilt and grief associated with missing significant milestones in children's lives (Parreñas, 2001; Fresnoza-Flot, 2018).

These emotional experiences are further shaped by culturally specific expectations surrounding motherhood, particularly in societies where maternal presence is strongly valorized (Peng & Wong, 2013; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a).

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, has an estimated population of more than 223 million and is characterized by significant linguistic and cultural diversity, with more than 500 languages (Afreximbank, 2024). Despite this diversity, Nigerian family systems commonly emphasize strong extended kinship networks in which caregiving responsibilities are shared across generations and households (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Understanding gender issues in Nigeria, 2021). Family life is deeply embedded in collectivist traditions that prioritize interdependence, reciprocity, and relational obligation, particularly among women.

Extended family members, especially grandmothers, play central roles in childcare, socialization, and emotional support, and grandmothers often assume significant caregiving responsibilities when parents migrate or pursue work outside the home (Mazzucato et al., 2015; Sear & Coall, 2011). These caregiving arrangements are shaped by broader gendered norms within Nigerian society, which remains largely patriarchal; women are frequently positioned as primary caregivers, reinforcing expectations surrounding maternal responsibility, sacrifice, and caregiving labour (Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a, 2012b). Consequently, maternal migration may generate emotional and moral tensions, as motherhood is culturally associated with physical presence and daily caregiving, and migrant mothers must navigate social judgements about “good” and “bad” mothering.

Canada has emerged as a major destination for Nigerian migrants, with over 21,000 Nigerians immigrating annually through pathways including skilled worker programmes, international education, and family sponsorship (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024; Nigerian Economic Summit Group, 2025). Nigerians in Canada now exceed 100,000, reflecting growing transnational linkages between the two countries and the increasing presence of Nigerian families in Canadian cities (Newcomers Integration & Empowerment Initiative, 2023; Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018a). Marked demographic contrasts between Canada and Nigeria, such as lower infant mortality, lower fertility, and higher life expectancy in Canada, further contextualize migration motivations and family restructuring, highlighting structural inequalities that shape migration decisions and transnational caregiving arrangements (Afreximbank, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

Understanding these sociocultural and demographic contexts is essential for interpreting the lived experiences of Nigerian transnational mothers whose narratives are embedded within both Nigerian family norms and Canadian migration structures, including racialized labour markets and healthcare systems (Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018a; Salami et al., 2021). This directly aligns with the proposal's emphasis on the Nigeria–Canada transnational field as the setting for this study (Abrego, 2009; Redmond & Martin, 2023).

Summary and Research Gap

The literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrates that transnational motherhood is a structurally complex, emotionally demanding, and culturally situated

phenomenon. Existing scholarship has made significant contributions by theorizing transnational family formations, documenting global care chains, and illuminating the gendered organization of cross-border caregiving (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Parreñas, 2005). Research across Global South contexts consistently highlights the emotional labour, relational strain, and moral tensions associated with maternal migration (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002).

In African and Nigerian contexts, studies further underscore the centrality of extended family networks, intergenerational caregiving practices, and culturally embedded constructions of motherhood that privilege physical presence and moral accountability (Mazzucato et al., 2015; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a, 2012b). Nigerian gender scholarship also highlights how patriarchal social structures shape expectations of maternal responsibility, sacrifice, and caregiving labour (Amadiume, 1987; Oyěwùmí, 1997). Together, these bodies of work establish that transnational motherhood cannot be understood solely through economic or structural frameworks but must also be examined as a deeply relational and meaning-laden experience.

Despite this scholarship, significant gaps remain.

First, Nigerian transnational motherhood remains underrepresented in the literature. While transnational families have been widely examined across diverse Global South contexts, relatively few studies focus specifically on Nigerian mothers, particularly within the Canadian migration context.

Second, existing research has devoted limited attention to grandmothers' perspectives and experiences within transnational caregiving arrangements, even though

grandmothers are central caregivers in many African family systems (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Bledsoe & Brandon, 1992).

Third, the lived, subjective experiences of motherhood within transnational family structures are insufficiently explored. Much of the literature privileges structural or broadly thematic analyses, with comparatively limited idiographic inquiry into mothers' meaning-making processes (Carling et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2009).

These gaps align closely with the thesis proposal's main aim and sub-objectives: to investigate how Nigerian transnational mothers manage motherhood and maintain emotional bonds with their children across borders; to analyze the roles and challenges of grandmothers as caregivers; and to examine how gender roles and expectations shape the experiences of transnational mothers (Abrego, 2009; Redmond & Martin, 2023). This study addresses these gaps by employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to foreground Nigerian transnational mothers' lived experiences and to situate their narratives within culturally and structurally embedded contexts.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study. The research aimed to explore the lived experiences of Nigerian transnational mothers residing in Canada whose children are cared for by grandmothers in Nigeria. Given the study's focus on subjective meaning-making, emotional experience, and personal interpretation, a qualitative research design informed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed. IPA functions as the guiding methodological framework for the thesis because it focuses on how individuals interpret and make sense of significant life experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Eatough & Smith, 2017).

This chapter describes the research design, participant recruitment and sampling strategy, data collection procedures, analytic process (including the use of MAXQDA software), researcher reflexivity, ethical considerations, and strategies used to ensure methodological rigour.

Research design

This study adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suited to research questions concerned with understanding lived experience, meaning, and interpretation rather than measurement or prediction (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study sought to capture how Nigerian transnational mothers make sense of motherhood across distance, emotional strain, caregiving arrangements, and identity.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as the methodological framework due to its emphasis on exploring how individuals interpret

and make meaning of significant life events and relational contexts (Smith et al., 2009; Eatough & Smith, 2017). IPA is especially appropriate for topics that are complex, emotionally charged, and deeply embedded in participants' sense of self, such as transnational motherhood and grandparental caregiving.

Methodological approach: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is a qualitative approach concerned with examining how individuals make sense of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009; Eatough & Smith, 2017). IPA is grounded in three key theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.

Phenomenology emphasizes the study of lived experience as individuals perceive and describe it. Hermeneutics highlights the interpretative nature of understanding, recognizing that research involves a "double hermeneutic": participants make sense of their experiences, and the researcher, in turn, makes sense of that sense-making (Smith et al., 2009). Idiography prioritizes detailed, case-by-case analysis, enabling close engagement with individual narratives before identifying patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2009; Eatough & Smith, 2017).

IPA was particularly appropriate for this study as transnational motherhood represents a complex, emotionally laden, and meaning-rich experience. The approach allowed for nuanced exploration of both convergence and divergence across participants' accounts while maintaining attention to the particularity of each mother's story.

Participants and sampling strategy

IPA studies typically employ small, purposively selected samples to enable idiographic depth rather than statistical generalisability (Smith et al., 2009; Eatough & Smith, 2017). Consistent with IPA's idiographic commitment, each transcript was first analyzed case by case, with attention to the particularity of each mother's story. For each participant, I developed detailed experiential statements and emergent themes before moving to any cross-case comparison. Only after this individual-level analysis did I examine patterns of convergence and divergence across cases, moving back and forth between personal experiential statements and more general experiential understandings of Nigerian transnational motherhood.

Consistent with this methodological orientation, five Nigerian transnational mothers residing in Canada participated in this study. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria required participants to: (a) identify as Nigerian mothers; (b) reside in Canada; (c) have at least one child residing in Nigeria; and (d) have children cared for by a grandmother. This sampling strategy ensured that participants possessed direct experiential knowledge relevant to the study's research questions.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through community networks, social connections, and referrals. Interested individuals were provided with information about the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and voluntary nature. Upon obtaining informed consent, interviews were scheduled at times convenient for participants.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom to promote comfort, flexibility, and access for participants, while balancing work, study, and family responsibilities. Conducting interviews online is compatible with IPA, which prioritizes depth and rapport rather than a specific physical setting, provided that privacy and audio quality can be maintained (Smith et al., 2009).

Data collection: Semi-structured interviews

Data were collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews are consistent with IPA's flexible and participant-led orientation, allowing exploration of participants lived experiences while providing space for emergent meanings (Smith et al., 20participants'09; Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Interviews were conversational in style, encouraging participants to describe experiences, emotions, interpretations, and reflections in their own words. An interview guide was used to ensure coverage of key topics (e.g., separation from children, relationships with grandmothers, coping strategies), but probing questions and prompts were employed to deepen exploration of moments that appeared particularly significant or emotionally charged.

With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve experiential detail, including pauses, emphasis, and emotional expressions. Transcripts constituted the primary data for analysis.

Data analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Data analysis followed established IPA procedures as outlined by Smith et al. (2009) and Eatough and Smith (2017). Analysis was iterative and cyclical rather than strictly linear, with movement back and forth between individual cases and developing themes. To support this process, the transcripts were imported into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. MAXQDA was used to organize the data, attach codes to relevant segments, and visually explore patterns across cases through code frequency tables, subcode statistics, and simple word-frequency displays. These tools complemented the manual interpretative work by helping to track emerging themes and ensuring that the superordinate themes reflected what was most salient across participants' accounts.

Step 1: Reading and re-reading. Each transcript was read multiple times to foster immersion in participants' narratives. Initial readings focused on gaining a holistic sense of each mother's story, while subsequent readings paid closer attention to specific details, emotional tones, and shifts in meaning.

Step 2: Initial noting. Detailed exploratory comments were generated in the margins of each transcript, focusing on descriptive (what is being said), linguistic (how it is said, including metaphors and repetition), and conceptual (more abstract or interpretative) aspects of the text (Smith et al., 2009). In MAXQDA, these observations informed the initial creation of codes attached to specific transcript segments.

Step 3: Development of emergent themes. From these exploratory notes, emergent themes were identified that captured essential aspects of participants' meaning-making in more concise phrases. These emergent themes represented an initial interpretative move

away from the transcript while remaining grounded in the participant's own words and context.

In MAXQDA, these emergent themes were translated into a code system linked to specific transcript excerpts, allowing ongoing refinement of theme labels and groupings as the analysis progressed.

Step 4: Idiographic case analysis. Each case was analyzed individually to preserve IPA's idiographic commitment. Emergent themes for each participant were clustered into higher-order groupings, and preliminary maps of how themes related to one another within that case were developed. MAXQDA's document and code overview features helped maintain a clear sense of each participant's narrative while working with multiple codes and memos.

Step 5: Cross-case analysis. Once idiographic analyses were completed, patterns of convergence and divergence across participants were examined. Related themes across cases were grouped into superordinate themes that captured shared experiences, while also attending to distinctive or idiosyncratic elements (Smith et al., 2009). MAXQDA's code matrix and summary tables were consulted at this stage to check how often particular codes appeared across participants and to ensure that cross-case themes were grounded in multiple mothers' accounts rather than in a single powerful narrative. This process led to the development of the five master themes presented in Chapter Five.

Throughout the analysis, interpretation remained grounded in participants' narratives while incorporating reflexive awareness of the researcher's interpretative role.

Researcher reflexivity and praxis

IPA recognizes the researcher as an active interpretative agent rather than a neutral observer (Smith et al., 2009; Eatough & Smith, 2017). Given the researcher's cultural proximity to participants' experiences as a Nigerian woman and migrant, reflexivity was central to the analytic process.

Reflexive engagement involved continuous examination of assumptions, emotional responses, and interpretative positioning. After each interview, reflexive notes were written about the researcher's reactions, moments of strong agreement or discomfort, and potential biases. During analysis, analytic memos were used to document emerging interpretations, theoretical insights, and questions about alternative readings of the data (Finlay, 2002). MAXQDA provided a space to link these memos directly to coded segments and developing themes, further supporting transparency in how interpretations were formed and revised.

This reflexive praxis enhanced interpretative depth while supporting methodological transparency. It also helped guard against simply confirming pre-existing ideas about transnational motherhood by encouraging systematic return to the raw transcripts and openness to complexity and contradiction.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality protections, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Given the emotionally sensitive nature of discussing maternal separation, interviews were conducted with attention to participant wellbeing. Before each interview, participants were reminded that they could decline to answer any question, pause, or stop the interview at any time. During the interviews, signs of distress were monitored, and breaks were offered when mothers became tearful or upset. At the end of each interview, participants were thanked for their contributions and reminded of available support resources.

Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details from transcripts and reporting. Audio files and transcripts were stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher and supervisor.

Methodological rigour and trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to enhance methodological rigour and trustworthiness, consistent with qualitative research standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, idiographic depth was prioritized through detailed case-by-case analysis before moving to cross-case comparisons, in line with IPA's core commitments (Smith et al., 2009). Second, verbatim transcription preserved experiential nuance, allowing close engagement with participants' language. Third, reflexive memos and supervisory discussions supported interpretative transparency by making the researcher's assumptions and decision-making processes explicit.

Fourth, attention was paid to both convergence and divergence across cases rather than seeking statistical generalisability. The aim was to develop rich, contextually grounded accounts of Nigerian transnational mothers' experiences that are credible and

illuminating, rather than broadly representative. MAXQDA also contributed to rigour by providing an audit trail of coding decisions and theme development, which could be revisited and discussed in supervision. Finally, a clear audit trail was maintained more broadly, documenting analytic steps from initial coding to the development of superordinate themes.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the qualitative research design, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis framework, participant recruitment and sampling strategy, data collection procedures, analytic process (including the use of MAXQDA), reflexive practices, ethical considerations, and strategies for ensuring rigour. Together, these methodological choices supported an in-depth exploration of Nigerian transnational mothers' lived experiences of parenting across distance while grandmothers provide everyday care in Nigeria. The next chapter presents the findings of the analysis, organized around the three research questions and the superordinate themes that emerged from participants' accounts.

Chapter Five: Findings

In this chapter, the findings from the interpretative phenomenological analysis of interviews with five Nigerian transnational mothers living in Canada, whose children are cared for by grandmothers in Nigeria, are presented. The chapter begins with an overview of the participants and analytic approach, then presents the findings organized by research question and associated themes. Together, these themes illuminate how mothers experience and make sense of motherhood across distance, navigate emotional and cultural tensions, and negotiate transnational caregiving arrangements in which grandmothers serve as everyday caregivers.

Participants

Five Nigerian transnational mothers residing in Canada participated in this study. All had at least one child living in Nigeria under the care of a grandmother, and all had come to Canada through international student pathways. This common pathway is significant because it places participants' experiences within a broader context of temporary status, educational commitment, and uncertain transition rather than settled migration.

Although the women shared the broad category of student migration, their lives were shaped by different educational programs, settlement pressures, and future immigration possibilities. International student routes in Canada are often experienced as layered pathways that may move from study permits to post-graduation work permits and, for some, into later permanent residence streams depending on employment, field of work, and eligibility requirements. For participants in this study, these pathways formed

part of the background condition of mothering from a distance, because decisions about work, finances, housing, and reunification were being made under conditions of uncertainty.

This context helps explain why participants' caregiving arrangements with grandmothers extended beyond a short-term separation. For these mothers, leaving children in Nigeria was often bound up with the hope that education in Canada would produce longer-term opportunities for security and mobility, even though the route toward that security was not guaranteed. The uncertainty associated with student migration, therefore, intensified the emotional and relational burden of transnational motherhood by delaying reunification and requiring participants to sustain maternal roles while navigating study, work transitions, and immigration precarity.

Table 5.1 provides an overview of the participants' demographic and migration characteristics. In addition to summarizing age, marital status, number of children, and caregiving arrangements, the table also shows that all participants entered Canada as students. This common feature should be read as more than a demographic detail; it signals that their accounts emerged within the uncertainty of temporary migration pathways and the hope, but not certainty, of longer-term settlement and family reunification.

Table 5.1

Participant ID	Years in Canada	Immigration pathway	Spouse in Canada	Children 7–12 years	Children 1–6 years
P1	2.2	Student	No	2	0
P2	1.2	Student	No	1	2

P3	1.6	Student	No	1	0
P4	3.0	Student	Yes	3	0
P5	2.3	Student	No	2	1

Overview of participants and children's age groups

As Table 5.1 indicates, all participants migrated to Canada as international students and had between one and three children, most of whom were in the 7–12-year age range.

Overview of analysis and themes

Consistent with the approach outlined in Chapter Four, close attention was first given to each mother's narrative before patterns across the five cases were identified. The MAXQDA code system was structured around the three research questions, and summary tables, subcode statistics, and word-frequency visuals were used as heuristic tools to check that the superordinate themes reflected frequent and salient patterns across participants' accounts. Detailed coded segments, however, guided the interpretative narrative presented in this chapter.

Across the three research questions, the following broad patterns emerged, which are summarized in Table 5.2.

RQ1: How do Nigerian transnational mothers experience and make sense of motherhood when their children are cared for by grandmothers in Nigeria?

RQ2: How do transnational mothers perceive and navigate the emotional, cultural, and relational challenges associated with parenting from a distance?

RQ3: How do transnational caregiving arrangements influence mothers' relationships with their children, grandmother caregivers, and wider family members?

Table 5.2

Research question	Superordinate themes
RQ1: How do Nigerian transnational mothers experience and make sense of motherhood when their children are cared for by grandmothers in Nigeria?	Redefining motherhood across borders; Time-zone daily routines; Technology-mediated mothering; Emotional costs of separation; Future gains and hopes
RQ2: How do transnational mothers perceive and navigate the emotional, cultural, and relational challenges associated with parenting from a distance?	Guilt and self-evaluation; External judgement and stigma; Nigerian gender norms and "good mother"; Host-country parenting norms; Emotional closeness and distance with children; Coping strategies and self-care; Faith and spirituality; Support networks in Canada; Immigration and legal constraints
RQ3: How do transnational caregiving arrangements influence mothers' relationships with their children, grandmother caregivers, and wider family members?	Changes in the mother–child relationship; Children's reactions to separation; Health and safety concerns for children; Grandmothers' caregiving work; Mother–grandmother relationship;

	Fathers' roles and adjustments; Financial support from abroad; Nigeria as a push factor

Research questions and superordinate themes

For RQ1, mothers described the impact of separation, their reliance on technology, the way they structured daily routines across time zones, the work of mothering from afar, and their orientation toward future hope. For RQ2, they discussed emotional closeness and distance with children, guilt and self-evaluation, Nigerian gender norms and host-country parenting norms, and the role of faith, coping strategies, support networks, and immigration constraints in making sense of their situation. For RQ3, they portrayed grandmothers' caregiving work, strain and safety concerns, Nigeria as a push factor, children's reactions to separation, fathers' roles and financial support, and the evolving mother–grandmother relationship. The remainder of this chapter is organized around these research questions and themes.

Experiencing and making sense of motherhood across distance (RQ1)

This section addresses RQ1. Drawing on themes of the impact of separation, mothering with technology, structuring daily routines across time zones, mothering from afar, and future hope, it shows how mothers work to "live in two places at once," combining emotional labour, practical routines, and future-oriented meaning-making.

The impact of separation

Mothers described separation from their children as an ongoing emotional strain rather than a single event. They spoke of shock at the initial parting, daily crying, and a

persistent sense of an emotional gap in their relationships with their children. Some also felt that the nature of attachment had changed over time, even when contact continued; a few sensed that children had become more emotionally reserved or were now turning first to siblings or grandmothers for comfort.

One mother captured the early period after migration as "not really, really easy," recalling a "short shock" when she realized that her children were now far away and she could no longer participate in everyday routines. She reflected that "emotionally, I knew it affected them, it affected me," and noted that "there are days that don't pass that I don't cry," particularly when children said that they missed her, wanted to hug her, or wished she were physically present. Another described how separation made her question the entire migration decision: in her first months in Canada, she "felt like giving up the whole degree I came for… I just felt like going home," feeling terrified and "full of regret."

For some, separation disrupted a previously intense everyday attachment. One mother explained that before she left, her daughter "will not sleep until I sleep… I must be beside her before she sleeps every day," but after migration, the girl cried throughout the day, and teachers called to report that "she wants to see you." Another mother said that she now feels "the gap" and "the space," adding, "I don't feel that so much attachment anymore," even though she remains in regular contact. Another participant said that her child "preferred to call her elder sister mommy because she was doing everything to her," underscoring the way caregiving roles could shift in the mother's physical absence. These accounts show how separation reshaped mothers' emotional lives and their sense of themselves as physically present, hands-on caregivers.

Mothering with technology

Participants consistently identified phones, messaging apps, and, in some cases, home surveillance cameras as crucial tools for sustaining everyday mothering from a distance. Technology was experienced as both enabling and limited: it allowed mothers to see, hear, and guide their children, yet constantly reminded them that mediated presence is "not the same" as being there in person.

One mother described building a layered system to "stay in touch" with her children: she maintained phone credit, used an international calling app, and accessed a CCTV camera installed in the family home. She explained that she tried "as much as possible to include technology because technology is the only thing that is helping me at this point to stay in touch," checking the camera to "see the compound" and calling children out by name when she saw them on the screen. Others relied mainly on WhatsApp audio or video calls because of cost and connectivity constraints. One participant noted that WhatsApp was "the only" tool she used because direct international calls were too expensive, even though the network was sometimes poor. Another described how everyday mothering tasks were carried out over the phone: her children "report themselves," and she settled disputes, supervised homework, and offered reassurance.

Mothers emphasized that these efforts allowed them to remain involved, but also repeatedly remarked, "it's not like the same way you are present… I'm not there," underscoring both the possibilities and limits of technology in transnational mothering. Some explicitly stated that, despite frequent calls, they still felt absent at key moments, such as school events or when children were ill, and worried that this absence might affect children's sense of security.

Structuring daily routines across time zones

Mothers in Canada organized their own days around children's schedules in Nigeria, effectively living by two time zones. Their accounts show how school runs, meals, and bedtime routines in Nigeria continued to shape sleep, work, and study patterns in Canada.

One participant explained that, because of the time difference, she had to "be up earlier" to speak with her children before school: "They go to school in Nigeria for 8 am… So, I have to be up as early as 4 a.m. to 'okay, have a nice day at school'… I plan my life around them while I still live for myself and for my husband in Canada. So, I am divided into three." Her phrase "divided into three" conveys how she experienced herself as split between responsibilities in Nigeria, responsibilities in Canada, and care for her spouse living with her in Canada.

Other mothers similarly described planning calls around work or study breaks to track children's movements between school and home. One said, "I wake up as early as possible, try to catch up with them before they go to school… later during my break… I try to find out if they're out of school and back home… I also try to ensure that they go to bed at the right time… this is what I do daily." Another described calling "after school… during my break time" but emphasised that although she could speak with them, "if they are having any activity in school that I'm supposed to be at, I am not there." These narratives illustrate that living in "two places at once" was both an emotional and practical reality, requiring constant calculation of time differences and daily routines.

Mothering from afar

Whereas the previous themes emphasized the emotional impact of separation, reliance on technology, and time zone management, this theme focuses on how mothers continued to enact core aspects of motherhood guidance, moral education, and discipline from a distance.

Beyond daily routines, mothers described broader efforts to "do mothering" from afar, including educating children, giving moral guidance, and managing discipline. They emphasized that many core aspects of motherhood could be maintained across borders, even as they acknowledged that absence made this work harder. One participant spoke about giving her daughter sex education over the phone after noticing physical changes on a video call, explaining that, as a mother, she felt responsible for providing this guidance even though they were apart. Another described continuing to guide her children's behaviour through conversations with both them and their caregivers, explaining that she called to "settle issues" and reinforce expectations when conflicts arose. These examples suggest that mothers saw themselves as responsible for children's moral and emotional development, regardless of location, and actively claimed this role.

At the same time, participants recognized the constraints of remote mothering. Some expressed sadness that they were no longer the ones carrying out everyday hands-on activities, saying that they felt they were "no longer there to do all those" tasks, even though grandmothers and other caregivers stepped in. Others described a sense of shared adjustment, noting that "I'm adjusting, they are also adjusting" to new ways of relating, in which presence is mediated by calls and messages rather than by shared physical space. For these mothers, mothering from afar was ongoing work that brought both satisfaction and strain. They could still guide and support their children and feel

unease because they remained unsure how fully such a mediated presence could replace everyday physical care.

Future hope

Despite the pain of separation, mothers framed their current experiences within a forward-looking narrative centred on their children's future. Hope for eventual reunification and improved opportunities was integral to how they made sense of transnational motherhood.

Several participants described migration as a sacrifice they believed would "be worth it" in the long term. One mother explained that although she was homesick, she believed that "at the end of it all it will be worth it… these kids will grow up tomorrow to appreciate you… It is indeed a sacrifice to stay away from your kids… but I believe… it's a win-win at the end for me and them." Several mothers linked this "win-win" to concrete anticipated benefits such as better education, safer environments, and more stable employment opportunities for their children in Canada. Another expressed confidence that her children would one day see her efforts, saying that once she had "achieved everything, it will be a thing of the past and they too will see that yes, their mommy has tried for them." A few also saw their migration journeys as a form of role modelling, hoping that children would one day view them as examples of courage and persistence rather than simply as mothers who had "left."

Participants frequently linked hope to concrete aspirations for their children's lives, such as a "stable future," "stable job," "better education," and "better health," often in contrast to conditions in Nigeria. For some, the prospect of family reunification through immigration processes was central; they spoke of not being able to "wait" for the

day their children would join them in Canada. These future-oriented narratives helped mothers hold together present hardship and a sense of purpose, framing their experience of motherhood across distance as an investment in their children's long-term wellbeing.

Future-oriented narratives about immigration and reunion also helped mothers hold together pain and purpose. Some believed that "at the end of it all it will be worth it," that "these kids will grow up tomorrow to appreciate you," and that current separation was "indeed a sacrifice" aimed at a "win-win" outcome. Others expressed a strong desire for "all this" to "come to an end very soon" so that they could be reunited and "everyone" could benefit from the opportunities they were working to secure. In this way, guilt and ambivalent emotions were not simply endured; they were actively worked on and partially transformed through faith, imagined futures, and narratives of sacrifice and responsibility.

Emotional bonds, guilt, and cultural expectations (RQ2)

This section addresses RQ2. Drawing on themes of shifting closeness and questioning adequacy, guilt and self-evaluation, Nigerian norms and host-country parenting, and faith and coping, it explores how mothers understood shifts in their relationships with children, evaluated themselves as mothers, and drew on cultural and religious resources to make sense of their sacrifices.

Shifting closeness and questioning adequacy

One participant captured her discomfort by asking herself, "Are you really meeting the needs of these children?" Mothers often sensed that emotional closeness with their children had changed since migration, particularly as separations lengthened and

children's responses evolved. Some described children withdrawing, refusing to talk, or redirecting their attachment to siblings or grandmothers, which they experienced as deeply painful.

One participant reflected on her unease about whether she was still truly meeting her children's needs. She described asking herself, "Are you really meeting the needs of these children?" and concluded that "there's nothing I can do, and I give myself grace," yet added, "I still feel like I could do better… I don't know how best again I want to do this. It's so hard." Her repeated questioning and phrases like "give myself grace" convey an ongoing internal dialogue about adequacy and limitation: she recognized her efforts yet remained haunted by a sense of falling short.

Other mothers described specific moments when the impact of separation felt especially intense. One recounted how her youngest daughter stopped calling her "mommy" and instead called her older sister by that name "because she was doing everything for her." Another described her previously very close youngest daughter refusing to speak on the phone after a promised six-month return did not happen; the child stated that she did not want to talk to her because "she promised she will come back… she has not come back," leaving the mother "just down" and "crying." Participants also recalled missed milestones as particularly painful reminders of absence, such as a son's graduation, where the mother felt more pain about missing his ceremony than she had felt about her own graduation without family present. In this way, children's achievements became mirrors for their mothers' absence, intensifying awareness of distance.

Guilt, comparison, and self-evaluation

Alongside altered closeness, mothers spoke repeatedly about guilt, self-judgement, and feeling scrutinized by themselves and by others. Guilt was often triggered by ordinary scenes in Canada, such as seeing other families together, and by internal comparisons with ideals of constant maternal presence. Mothers also measured themselves against external, gendered expectations about motherhood in their communities, where "good mothers" are expected to remain physically with their children.

One participant described how everyday encounters provoked internal pressure: she noted that "the pressure back home is there and the pressure here also, but nobody's pressuring me here," yet when she sees mothers "with their kids" or hears others talk about being deeply involved in their children's lives, she feels "jealous… that this could be me," and that "the guilt… nobody's giving me here, but I'm feeling the pressure and the guilt here by myself." She went on to say that she "still needs to work on my personal guilt," while also insisting, "I will still give myself grace… I still think I'm better." Others expressed guilt about what they believed children should ideally have, such as co-residence and daily guidance. Some wished that their husbands, rather than themselves, had migrated, suggesting an ongoing struggle with having become the parent who left.

Nigerian norms, host-country parenting, and external judgment

Participants located their feelings of guilt and self-evaluation within wider cultural expectations of motherhood and shifting parenting norms in Canada. They described explicit criticism or gossip in Nigeria that framed them as women who had "left" their children, as well as their own encounters with new parenting ideals in Canada.

One mother recounted how neighbours in Nigeria said of her children, “Look at these ones that your mom left them,” and that some friends no longer spoke to her, asking, “Why would you leave your children?” Another remembered being whispered about in a salon as “another woman that left her family.” She confronted the woman, insisting, “I never left my family… do you expect me to stay back in this village with you people… I’m a step ahead of you… I took a step I believe you can’t take.” These narratives show how mothers were positioned as morally suspect women who had left their children, yet they resisted this framing by re-narrating migration as a responsible and courageous act on behalf of their families.

At the same time, living in Canada exposed mothers to different parenting styles and expectations. One participant contrasted Nigerian practices of scolding and physical discipline with Canadian norms, explaining that in Nigeria, parents may “correct” children through punishment or moderate beatings. In contrast, in Canada, she perceived many children as having “100% rights,” leading some to not “respect their parents.” Another explained that she was actively trying to learn from Canadian “gentle parenting” approaches, attending childcare sessions and reflecting on “negative” aspects of Nigerian child-rearing that she wanted to “drop,” while adopting aspects of the “positive impact” she observed in Canadian families. She described gradually changing her own approach so that, by the time her children joined her, they would be able to adapt more easily. These reflections suggest that mothers were simultaneously subject to Nigerian expectations that condemned leaving children and to Canadian norms that challenged some of their inherited practices.

Faith, coping, and giving meaning to sacrifice

To manage guilt and emotional strain, mothers drew on faith, deliberate coping strategies, support networks in Canada, and future-oriented narratives about reunion and sacrifice. Faith provided a framework for interpreting their situation as purposeful and finite, while everyday practices helped them avoid being overwhelmed by worry.

Participants described faith as a key source of endurance, stating that they "put God first" and encouraged themselves to "keep believing" that their children would join them. Some emphasized staying busy with work, study, volunteering, or spending time in the library, explaining that when they were idle, "you begin to think" and feel overwhelmed. Others highlighted communication itself as a coping tool: seeing and hearing the children via video calls brought "a little bit" of relief and was described as a "major coping strategy." Support networks in Canada, particularly churches, were important but often limited; one mother described her church as a key source of comfort when she was alone and crying.

Caregiving arrangements, relationships, and safety (RQ3)

This section addresses RQ3. Drawing on themes of grandmothers' caregiving work, strain and safety concerns, mother–grandmother tensions, fathers' roles and financial support, and Nigeria as a push factor, it examines how participants understood grandmothers as everyday caregivers, the burdens and tensions in these arrangements, and the ways wider family roles and concerns about Nigeria shaped relationships.

"She is basically like the mom": Grandmothers filling the care gap

Mothers repeatedly framed grandmothers as de facto mothers for their children in Nigeria. Grandmothers were responsible for daily routines such as school runs, meals, supervision, and moral guidance, whether maternal, paternal, or both.

One participant described her own mother's role: "She's basically like the mom… she buys, she cares for the house… monitors if they had their baths, get them dressed, make sure that they do their laundry, make sure that there's food in the house… sometimes she supports them in the kitchen… she's our caregiver… she's our mom." Another mother, whose children lived with their paternal grandmother, similarly explained, "She takes them to school. She brings them back home. She prepares their meal for them… basically what me as a mother would do, that's what she is doing… she takes care of them like her own kids."

Participants emphasized that this caregiving often drew on strong pre-existing bonds and histories of support. One mother noted that her own mother "trained me" and that she trusts her to "train my children as well." In another family, children were able to move between or receive support from both maternal and paternal grandmothers, reflecting the flexibility and depth of extended-family caregiving in Nigerian contexts.

"More than her body can carry": Strain, health, and safety concerns

Alongside gratitude, mothers were acutely aware of the burdens placed on grandmothers, especially older women with health challenges. They worried about both grandmothers' wellbeing and children's safety in Nigeria more broadly.

One participant's children lived with a stroke-affected paternal grandmother whose right leg and arm were impaired; she explained that the grandmother "can't do laundry for them," yet "still tries to use the left hand to feed the kids each time they are

sick," and had "learned how to manage and navigate with it." The grandmother described the workload as "overwhelming" and lived with hypertension, leading the mother to feel that she was "doing more than her body can carry."

Even relatively healthy grandmothers were reported to feel overworked, particularly after previously living alone. One mother described how her mother now had to consider the children before going out, cook for more people, and cope with the noise and demands of "kids [who] will always be kids." Mothers tried to ease the burden by sending money, listening when grandmothers felt overwhelmed, and being flexible when their expectations clashed.

Mothers also associated grandmother care with both challenges and growth in their children. One participant worried about behavioural changes, describing how her son "will come home and use words on his sister" and declare that "once daddy is not around, he's in command," fuelling her fear that if the children "turn out bad," people would say it was her fault because she travelled and left them. At the same time, she noted that "staying with your grandma, an African grandmother, you will learn how to sweep… mop… cook, do your things yourself," observing with pride that even her "last baby can make a bed… do our dishes, do laundry." Beyond the household, mothers expressed broader safety concerns, describing Nigeria as "not safe right now" because of "killings" and "child abuse and all of those" issues.

"Come and carry these, your children": Tensions and mother–grandmother relationships.

The intensity of grandmothers' caregiving sometimes led to conflict and emotional tension between mothers and their own mothers or mothers-in-law. Mothers

navigated feelings of indebtedness, guilt, and frustration as they relied on grandmothers while also wanting to protect them from overload.

One participant described her mother-in-law's exasperation: "Sometimes she's like, 'come and carry these your children… they're stressing my life'," and recounted an incident in which the grandmother cried, asking whether she was "not doing enough" given how much she was already doing. The mother acknowledged that the grandmother was "doing more than what she ideally should be." She described how they occasionally had "misunderstandings" but that, for the children's sake, she tried to resolve them quickly. Another mother spoke about balancing her expectations with respect for her mother's role as a grandmother, noting that she had to "allow her to have that grandma [role]" and not treat her simply as hired help.

Despite these tensions, participants emphasized ongoing gratitude and efforts to maintain positive relationships. They described frequent calls not only to check on children but also to encourage grandmothers, inquire about their health, and send money when possible. These dynamics suggest that transnational caregiving arrangements reshaped mother–grandmother relationships into complex mixes of partnership, obligation, and strain.

Fathers' roles, financial support, and wider family dynamics

Mothers' accounts also highlighted how fathers and other family members fitted into caregiving arrangements. Some described fathers as practically involved in daily care in Nigeria, while others portrayed them as largely absent due to work obligations.

One participant noted that the children's father "will pick them up from school" and handle some daily logistics but also felt that he sometimes struggled with the

emotional bond between the mother and the children across distance. She described how he noticed the children confided in her about issues they did not share with him, initially leaving him feeling left out before he recognized that their "emotional attachment" to her remained strong even in her absence. In other families, fathers' long work hours meant that grandmothers carried most of the day-to-day caregiving, reinforcing their central role.

Financial support from abroad was presented as an integral part of mothers' caregiving. Coming to Canada enabled some mothers to send money home to cover school fees, food, healthcare, and other essentials, which they saw as central to their responsibilities. For several, this support supplemented or exceeded what fathers could provide, subtly shifting family power dynamics and reinforcing mothers' roles as economic providers. At the same time, children's financial dependence on mothers abroad sometimes coexisted with emotional reliance on caregivers in Nigeria, adding another layer to parent–child relationships.

Children's reactions to these arrangements also fed back into family relationships. Mothers reported children's questions, such as "Why did you leave in the first place? If you love us, you wouldn't have left," and comments relayed from peers and neighbours, such as "That's why your mommy left you." These comments not only hurt mothers but also highlighted the moral scrutiny surrounding transnational arrangements within their communities.

Nigeria as a push factor and plans

Finally, mothers' narratives connected current caregiving arrangements to broader assessments of Nigeria as a push factor and to their plans for eventual reunification. They

contrasted conditions in Nigeria, such as insecurity, limited healthcare, and economic instability, with their hopes for their children's futures in Canada.

One mother described how "killings" and everyday violence in Nigeria shaped her desire to move her children to a safer environment. Another emphasized concerns about child protection, referencing "child abuse and all of those" issues and her wish to protect "my girls and my boy." For these mothers, leaving children temporarily with grandmothers was part of a longer trajectory toward relocation, not an endpoint. They hoped that, in time, their children would join them and that grandmothers would be relieved of intensive daily responsibilities, even as they would remain important figures in the family.

Summary

This chapter has presented findings from an analysis of five Nigerian transnational mothers' accounts of parenting across borders, conducted using IPA principles. Organized by the three research questions, the themes show that motherhood in this context was experienced as emotionally demanding yet purposeful, mediated by technology, shaped by powerful cultural and gendered expectations, and sustained through the labour of grandmothers and other family members in Nigeria. Together, these themes show that Nigerian transnational mothers continue to "do" motherhood across distance in ways that are emotionally demanding, culturally situated, and deeply dependent on grandmothers' caregiving in Nigeria.

In the next chapter, I shift focus to a reflexive account of my role as a researcher, examining how my positionality, emotions, and interpretative choices shaped the

production of these findings. Chapter Seven then provides the main discussion and conclusion of the thesis, situating the results within existing literature on transnational motherhood, ambiguous loss, attachment, grandparental caregiving, and gendered migration, and outlining implications for practice and future research.

Chapter Six: Reflexivity

Building on the findings presented in Chapter Five, including the overview of participants and caregiving arrangements (Table 5.1) and the mapping of research questions and superordinate themes (Table 5.2), this chapter turns inward to consider the researcher's role in producing those results. It offers a reflexive account of how my positionality, assumptions, and emotional responses shaped the study's design, my engagement with participants, and the interpretative moves underpinning the themes reported in Chapter Five.

I situate myself in relation to the participants and the research topic and reflect on how my background, values, and experiences shaped the research process, from designing the study and conducting interviews to analyzing and interpreting the data. Drawing on my position as a Nigerian woman, wife, and international student in Canada, and on my childhood experience living with my grandmother, I consider how these biographies have informed my understanding of transnational motherhood and grandparental caregiving.

I also discuss the emotional impact of the research, the steps I took to navigate power dynamics and ethical responsibilities, and my responses when participants became tearful or distressed during interviews. Recognizing these influences does not remove them, but it makes them more transparent and allows the findings in Chapter Five to be read with an awareness of the relational and interpretative processes through which they were produced. Reflexive practice also supported the analysis itself: by continually examining how my own experiences and expectations shaped what stood out to me, I worked to avoid simply projecting my perspectives onto participants' accounts. Instead, I returned to their words to check and refine my interpretations.

Researcher positionality

I approached this study as a Nigerian woman, a wife, and an international student in Canada, with an understanding of the cultural expectations placed on women in Nigerian society. I am familiar with how women are expected to prioritize marriage, caregiving, and family reputation, and I have relatives who have had to choose between their marriages and their careers. These experiences sharpened my sensitivity to participants' descriptions of sacrifice, judgment, and the pressures of being seen as a "good woman" and a "good mother." As discussed in Chapter Two, Nigerian gender norms strongly tie women's moral worth to their willingness to endure hardship for their families and to remain physically present with their children. In contrast, migration can be interpreted as a failure to meet these expectations. Being attuned to these cultural scripts helped me hear how participants positioned themselves in relation to them, whether by internalizing, negotiating, or resisting such ideals.

My own childhood also involved a period of living with my grandmother, which gave me early, embodied insight into grandparents' caregiving and the emotional experience of being cared for by an older generation, for example, the mix of security, strictness, and different routines compared with my parents' home. This personal history helped me appreciate the central role that grandmothers play in children's everyday lives and in sustaining family continuity. It also enhanced my capacity to conduct this research: I could more easily build rapport when mothers spoke about relying on grandmothers, and I could recognize the weight of gendered prescriptions that frame "good mothers" as those who remain physically present. At the same time, awareness of these dynamics prompted me to question my own assumptions and ask follow-up questions rather than

take shared understandings for granted, which supported a deeper and more critical analysis of the data.

I therefore occupy multiple positions in this research: as an insider, with shared cultural references, familiarity with migration and extended kinship arrangements, and some experiential understanding of living with a grandmother; and as an outsider, who is not living each participant's exact circumstances and who holds the institutional role of researcher. These overlapping positions influenced how participants saw me, what they chose to share, and how I listened to and interpreted their accounts. This combination of insider and outsider standpoints aligns with feminist and qualitative traditions that view knowledge as situated and positional rather than neutral or detached.

Reflexivity in data collection

My cultural and linguistic familiarity with participants' backgrounds appeared to facilitate rapport and trust. Several mothers commented that they felt able to "talk freely" because they sensed that I understood Nigerian family dynamics, immigration struggles, and the meaning of leaving children behind. Sharing a Nigerian background and, in some cases, a similar Christian faith helped create a sense of safety during interviews, particularly when participants spoke about guilt, judgment, or painful moments with their children and grandmothers.

At the same time, this sense of closeness meant that participants sometimes assumed shared understanding and left certain experiences "unsaid," expecting that I would "know what they meant." I became aware that I could easily fill these gaps with my own assumptions, especially around what it means to be a "good Nigerian mother,"

the role of grandmothers, and the challenges of immigration. To reduce this risk, I used open-ended prompts and follow-up questions to encourage clarification and elaboration, even when I thought I understood, and I explicitly asked, “Can you tell me more about that?” or “What does that look like in your family?” when participants used shorthand expressions. I also paid attention to moments where I found myself nodding or agreeing quickly and tried to slow down and invite more detail.

During the interviews, I often affirmed participants’ courage and acknowledged the difficulty of their situations. While this helped create a supportive atmosphere in which mothers could share painful experiences, it also risked positioning me primarily as a sympathizer rather than as a questioning researcher. I tried to balance empathy with curiosity by validating participants’ emotions while probing the meanings and contradictions in their responses. This balance was particularly important when mothers spoke about feeling judged or about their own doubts; I wanted them to feel heard without steering their accounts toward my own preferred narratives of strength or sacrifice.

Reflexivity in analysis and interpretation

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis emphasizes the “double hermeneutic”: participants are making sense of their lived experiences, and I, as the researcher, am making sense of their sense-making. My cultural proximity to participants meant that I often resonated strongly with their descriptions of guilt, pressure to be a “good mother,” and reliance on grandmothers. At times, I noticed myself quickly agreeing internally with participants’ interpretations, especially when they framed migration as a sacrifice, spoke

about judgment from neighbours, or described Nigerian expectations that mothers must be physically present.

To guard against simply confirming my own expectations, I used several strategies. After each interview, I wrote reflexive notes about my emotional reactions, points of strong agreement, and any assumptions I noticed. During analysis, I returned repeatedly to the raw transcripts to ensure that emerging codes and themes were grounded in participants' actual words rather than in my prior ideas about transnational motherhood. As part of the double hermeneutic, I first summarized, in my own words, what each mother seemed to be saying and then asked what meanings and assumptions were embedded in that account, for example, how she positioned herself as a "good" or "responsible" mother, or how she interpreted the grandmother's role. Analytic memos distinguished between descriptive summaries and more interpretative moves, and I revisited them to see where my own experiences might be shaping the sense-making.

When I felt particularly close to a story, for example, around immigration frustrations or church support, I deliberately asked whether other interpretations were possible and looked for data that might complicate a straightforward reading. Discussing preliminary themes with my supervisor also helped me consider alternative perspectives and avoid highlighting only suffering and guilt. This reflexive engagement influenced how I framed the superordinate themes in Chapter Five, not only as narratives of loss and strain but also as accounts of creativity, negotiation, and hope. These strategies reflect IPA's emphasis on a reflexive double hermeneutic, in which researchers continually examine how their own lenses shape the process of making sense of participants' sense-making.

Managing power, ethics, and emotional impact

Although I shared cultural and migration experiences with participants, important power differences remained in the research relationship. I designed the study, set the interview agenda, asked the questions, and ultimately decided which parts of their stories to highlight in the thesis. Participants, in turn, entrusted me with intimate details of their mothering, their fears about their children, and their frustrations with immigration systems and family expectations. I was aware that some mothers saw participation as an opportunity to have their struggles "heard" beyond their immediate circles, including by institutions and policymakers, which added a sense of responsibility to represent their accounts with care and integrity.

Ethically, I was particularly attentive to emotional safety during interviews. Several mothers became tearful when speaking about children's illnesses, missed milestones, or feeling judged. In those moments, I paused the interview and explicitly asked whether they were comfortable continuing, offering them the option to take a break, skip a question, or stop altogether. When participants chose to continue, I slowed the pace of questioning and allowed more silence so they could regain their composure. At the end of the interviews, I reminded participants of available support, including community and counselling resources. I invited them to contact me if they had concerns about how their words were being represented.

Listening to repeated accounts of separation, guilt, and anxiety had a significant emotional impact on me. As a wife and student in Canada who is also navigating migration-related pressures, I sometimes felt sadness, heaviness, or a strong desire to reassure participants beyond what was appropriate in my role as researcher. I responded

by spacing interviews and analysis sessions when possible, debriefing with my supervisor after particularly intense encounters, and allowing myself time to process my reactions. These practices helped me stay emotionally present with participants' stories without becoming overwhelmed or allowing my own distress or identification with them to overshadow their voices. Attending to these power dynamics and emotional responses aligns with ethical guidance in qualitative research, which positions reflexivity as part of researchers' duty of care to both participants and themselves.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined my positionality as a Nigerian migrant researcher and has reflected on how my background, emotions, and interpretative choices shaped the design, conduct, and analysis of this study. Recognizing these influences does not remove them, but it makes them more transparent and allows the findings in Chapter Five to be read with an awareness of the relational and interpretative processes through which they were produced. In the next chapter, I move to a broader discussion of how these findings relate to existing literature on transnational motherhood, grandparental caregiving, ambiguous loss, and gendered migration, and what they suggest for policy and practice.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter provides the main discussion and conclusion of the thesis. Drawing on in-depth semi-structured interviews with five Nigerian mothers and an analysis informed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this chapter discusses the main findings and considers how they extend scholarship on transnational motherhood, attachment, ambiguous loss, intergenerational caregiving, and gendered migration, while also considering how the study extends these conversations in a specifically Nigerian-Canada context. This chapter places stronger emphasis on conceptual and theoretical contributions than on policy implications. It therefore focuses on what the findings reveal about the lived complexity of motherhood across borders, the redistribution of care and authority across generations, the role of technology in maintaining and straining relationships, and the ambiguous character of family life in transnational settings.

In this chapter, IPA informs my interpretation of the findings rather than serving as a step-by-step analytic template. Consistent with IPA's focus on lived experience and meaning-making, I attend closely to how each mother described and interpreted her own situation and then develop broader interpretative claims across cases. However, the chapter does not reproduce every procedural step of IPA, such as individual case tables or line-by-line noting. Instead, it presents a synthesized, thematically organized discussion that draws on IPA's principles of idiographic depth, double hermeneutics, and reflexive interpretation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Eatough & Smith, 2017).

The chapter begins with a summary of the key findings organized around the three research questions (Table 7.1). It then discusses the findings in relation to these questions, with particular attention to five interconnected arguments that emerged strongly across the data: motherhood as a transnational and temporally organized practice; emotional

ambivalence, self-evaluation, and moral pressure in mothering from afar; grandmothers as central yet burdened caregivers; shifting power dynamics when mothers become principal providers; and the paradoxes of technology and family life, in which connection and strain coexist. The chapter concludes with limitations, directions for future research, and final reflections on the study's significance.

Summary of Findings by Research Question

My thesis was organized around three research questions, and Table 7.1 presents the key themes that emerged for each. Taken together, the findings show that transnational motherhood in this study was neither a simple story of absence nor a purely economic migration strategy. Instead, it was a deeply relational and emotionally demanding form of family life in which women worked continuously to sustain motherhood, connection, and authority across borders.

Table 7.1.

Research question	Themes	Interpretive direction
RQ1. How do Nigerian transnational mothers experience and make sense of motherhood when their children are	Technology-mediated mothering; mothering across time zones; emotional presence across distance; sacrifice and future hope	Motherhood was not abandoned by migration; it was actively reworked through digital connection, emotional monitoring, provision, and

cared for by grandmothers across national borders?		future-oriented responsibility.
RQ2. How do transnational mothers perceive and navigate the emotional, cultural, and relational challenges associated with parenting from a distance?	Guilt and self-questioning; moral pressure around good motherhood; emotional strain and coping; faith and endurance	Participants experienced distance as emotionally costly and morally demanding, but they also developed ways of enduring it through meaning-making, faith, and the reframing of migration as sacrifice for children's futures.
RQ3. How do transnational caregiving arrangements influence mothers' relationships with their children, grandmother caregivers, and broader family dynamics?	Grandmothers as everyday mothers; shared and contested authority; intergenerational dependence; changing family roles	Transnational caregiving redistributed care rather than removing it, but this redistribution created new negotiations of power, closeness, obligation, and strain within families.

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RQ1 asked how Nigerian transnational mothers experienced and made sense of motherhood when their children were cared for by grandmothers across borders. The findings showed that motherhood was interpreted through practices such as frequent calling, coordinating children's routines across time zones, sending money and care, and remaining emotionally watchful from afar. In this sense, the women were practicing motherhood through cross-border routines that sustained symbolic, practical, and emotional presence even when physical co-presence was impossible.

RQ2 asked how mothers perceived and navigated the emotional, cultural, and relational challenges of parenting from a distance. Several themes pointed to guilt, anxiety, self-questioning, and the burden of cultural expectations that equate good motherhood with physical closeness and everyday care. At the same time, participants interpreted migration as sacrifice, relied on faith and endurance, and used future-oriented hope to make separation bearable, showing that emotional survival was part of the work of transnational motherhood itself.

RQ3 examined how transnational caregiving arrangements shaped mothers' relationships with their children, grandmother caregivers, and broader family dynamics. The findings

showed that grandmothers often became everyday mothers who carried out school runs, meals, supervision, discipline, and moral guidance, while mothers abroad remained emotionally involved and financially responsible. These arrangements created both support and strain, because they depended on intergenerational cooperation yet also produced tensions around authority, decision-making, adequacy, and the unequal burdens carried by grandmother caregivers.

Motherhood Across Distance

Motherhood as a transnational practice

The first research question asked how Nigerian transnational mothers experienced and made sense of motherhood when their children were cared for by grandmothers in Nigeria. One of the clearest conclusions from the findings is that these mothers understood motherhood not as something ended by migration, but as something reorganized across space, time, and relationships. This supports transnational family scholarship that conceptualizes family life as actively maintained across borders rather than dissolved by geographic separation (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Baldassar & Merla, 2014). However, the present study adds further nuance by showing how intensely practical, embodied, and time-sensitive this maintenance work is.

Participants described living in two places at once. Their daily routines in Canada were shaped by the routines of children in Nigeria. Calls had to be made before school, after school, in the evening, or during emergencies. Some mothers woke up at odd hours, managed sleep across time zones, and structured work or study breaks around their children's availability. This temporal reorganization extends scholarship on doing family

across borders by showing that transnational motherhood is not only emotional and financial but also profoundly temporal. Mothers were not simply connected across space; they were living by multiple clocks. Their narratives suggest that the transnational field is experienced not only as spatial dispersion but also as ongoing temporal coordination.

This temporal dimension is an important concept because it reveals that motherhood across borders is sustained through routine, repetition, and vigilance. The mothers' accounts were full of recurring acts: checking in, reminding, guiding, monitoring, and reassuring. These were not symbolic gestures alone; they were part of an everyday discipline of care. Such findings deepen transnationalism theory by showing that care circulation is structured not only through money and emotional exchange but also through temporal labour. In this sense, the study contributes to scholarship by foregrounding the hidden scheduling work of transnational mothering.

Sacrifice, purpose, and future hope

Participants consistently framed migration as a sacrifice for children's futures. Their narratives framed separation as painful yet meaningful, often linked to education, safety, stability, and long-term mobility. This aligns with research showing that migrant mothers commonly make sense of separation through future-oriented narratives that justify present suffering in terms of future family advancement (Parrenas, 2005; Fresnoza-Flot, 2018). In the present study, this future orientation helped mothers endure current pain and maintain moral legitimacy in the face of social judgment.

At the same time, this framing should not be read simply as a coherent narrative of heroic maternal sacrifice. Mothers were not uniformly certain or emotionally settled. Some questioned the migration decision, especially in the early months. Others described

periods of regret, crying, or wanting to abandon the journey and return home. The idea of sacrifice, therefore, functioned as both a meaning-making resource and an emotional burden. It allowed mothers to explain why they stayed apart from their children, but it also intensified pressure to prove that the separation would be worth it.

This ambivalence complicates simplified depictions of transnational mothers as either victims of migration or strategic agents pursuing mobility. The mothers in this study were both constrained and agentic. They acted within structurally unequal conditions linking Nigeria and Canada, and they made deliberate choices within those constraints. Their accounts suggest that sacrifice should be understood as a relational and moral practice rather than merely an economic strategy. It was a way of holding together love, pain, hope, and legitimacy.

Emotional Meaning-Making

Ambiguous loss, attachment, and self-questioning

The second research question examined how mothers perceived and navigated the emotional, cultural, and relational challenges of parenting from a distance. The findings strongly support the usefulness of ambiguous loss and attachment-informed perspectives for interpreting these experiences. Mothers remained deeply involved in their children's lives, yet they repeatedly described feeling absent, inadequate, and emotionally unsettled. They were psychologically present but physically absent. This is precisely the kind of unresolved condition that ambiguous loss helps illuminate (Boss, 1999).

The present study extends the scholarship on ambiguous loss by showing how this condition was sustained in everyday life through routine acts of transnational care.

Mothers called, monitored, instructed, prayed, and worried, but these acts did not resolve the uncertainty they felt about their role. Instead, many continued to ask whether they were really meeting their children's needs. Their emotional distress was not simply about missing children; it was about the unresolved status of their motherhood. They were still mothers, actively caring, yet they were not there in the way motherhood was culturally expected to look.

Attachment theory also helps interpret the pain mothers felt when children withdrew, became emotionally reserved, or shifted reliance toward siblings and grandmothers (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Ainsworth, 1989). Several mothers described feeling an emotional gap or sensing that the attachment had changed. One of the most striking findings was that mothers often interpreted children's responses as indicators of relational continuity or rupture. Silence on the phone, reluctance to talk, disappointment after postponed returns, or calling another caregiver "mommy" were experienced as deeply consequential. These moments became evidence through which mothers assessed the health of the bond.

At the same time, the study also supports culturally sensitive critiques of narrow attachment assumptions. In these Nigerian transnational families, attachment is not centred exclusively on a single mother–child dyad. Grandmothers, siblings, and sometimes fathers also became emotionally significant figures. Children's comfort with multiple caregivers does not necessarily indicate relational failure. Yet mothers often still interpreted these distributed attachments through dominant ideals of maternal presence, which made such shifts painful. The study, therefore, contributes to attachment-informed

discussions by showing how emotional meaning is shaped not only by relationships themselves but also by cultural norms about what those relationships should look like.

Guilt, grace, and moral evaluation

A major feature of mothers' narratives was ongoing moral self-evaluation. Participants repeatedly asked themselves whether they were doing enough, whether they had failed their children by leaving, or whether the benefits of migration justified the relational costs. This supports existing literature showing that transnational motherhood is saturated with guilt, moral scrutiny, and self-surveillance (Parrenas, 2001, 2005; Fresnoza-Flot, 2018). However, the present study adds important nuance by showing that mothers were not simply overwhelmed by guilt; they also actively worked on guilt.

Several participants described giving themselves grace, drawing strength from faith, or consciously reframing their circumstances to continue. These practices can be read as forms of emotional labour and moral repair. Rather than eliminating guilt, they enabled mothers to live with it. Faith, prayer, and future hope were not peripheral coping devices; they were central interpretative resources through which mothers maintained a coherent sense of themselves as caring and responsible.

This finding contributes to scholarship on emotional labour in transnational motherhood by highlighting not only the suppression or management of feeling in interactions with others, but also the inward work of preserving a morally viable maternal identity. The mothers in this study were constantly negotiating between dominant Nigerian ideals of good motherhood and the realities of migration. Their self-talk, prayer, and reflective reframing reveal the interior work required to remain emotionally functional while living with contradiction.

Cultural negotiation and the meaning of good motherhood

The data also show that participants were negotiating between Nigerian cultural expectations and new experiences in Canada. Nigerian norms strongly tied good motherhood to physical presence, daily care, sacrifice, and moral responsibility (Amadiume, 1987; Mojekwu-Chikezie, 2012a; Oyewumi, 1997). These norms intensified the emotional weight of separation because mothers were aware that absence could be read as selfishness, abandonment, or maternal failure. Participants' accounts of judgment from children, relatives, neighbours, or community discourse illustrate how motherhood remained socially monitored even across borders.

Yet participants were not simply reproducing these norms. Some selectively reworked them by emphasizing education, breadwinning, safety, and long-term planning as legitimate dimensions of motherhood. In doing so, they expanded the meaning of responsible mothering beyond physical proximity alone. This is an important contribution because it shows that transnational motherhood is also a site of cultural reinterpretation. Mothers were not only constrained by Nigerian ideals; they were also actively revising them under migratory conditions.

This revision was incomplete and often emotionally costly. Mothers could articulate a broader understanding of mothering while still feeling judged by older standards. The result was not resolution but tension. The findings, therefore, suggest that good motherhood in transnational contexts becomes a contested moral category, negotiated between embodied care, economic provision, emotional responsiveness, and future aspiration.

Intergenerational Care and Power

Grandmothers as everyday mothers

The third research question asked how transnational caregiving arrangements influenced mothers' relationships with their children, grandmother caregivers, and wider family members. One of the most significant findings here is that grandmothers emerged as central actors in the reproduction of family life. Participants described them as basically like the mother, performing tasks that mothers themselves would have done if present. These accounts strongly reinforce literature on intergenerational caregiving in African family systems, but they also extend it by showing how grandmother care becomes intensified and transformed under transnational conditions (Coe, 2017; Yarris, 2017; Mazzucato et al., 2015).

Grandmothers were not merely supportive kin who stepped in occasionally. They were the ones waking children, preparing meals, monitoring school routines, offering emotional comfort, teaching discipline, and guiding moral behaviour. They carried the embodied and practical dimensions of care that migration had displaced. In this sense, the study confirms that transnational motherhood cannot be understood independently of grandmother labour. Mothers' ability to study, work, and remain in Canada was materially dependent on the caregiving work of older women in Nigeria.

At the same time, mothers were acutely aware that this labour could be physically and emotionally costly. They worried about stroke, hypertension, exhaustion, age, and the growing burden of responsibility. These concerns complicate idealized accounts of extended family support by showing that care circulation also involves strain, uneven sacrifice, and the transfer of burden to older women. This contributes to scholarship by

centring the embodied cost of grandmother caregiving rather than treating it as a culturally available family resource without limits.

Shifting power dynamics and maternal breadwinning

A major interpretative contribution of this study concerns power. The findings show that when mothers migrated and became significant financial providers, family power relations subtly shifted. Several mothers described their remittances as covering school fees, food, healthcare, and daily needs, sometimes supplementing or exceeding fathers' support. This financial role gave mothers a stronger voice in decision-making and reinforced their authority over children's welfare even across distance.

This finding resonates with literature suggesting that economic provision can reshape authority within transnational households (Schmalzbauer, 2004; Parrenas, 2005). However, the study adds an important paradox: increased financial power did not translate into uncomplicated empowerment. Mothers' new breadwinning role existed alongside continuing guilt, moral surveillance, and emotional vulnerability. They could fund care but not fully control its emotional consequences. They could influence decisions but not erase the pain of absence. Their power was therefore partial, relational, and contested.

The study thus contributes to gender and migration scholarship by showing that economic provision may strengthen maternal authority while leaving intact the gendered expectation that mothers should also be physically present, emotionally available, and morally accountable. In other words, the breadwinner role did not replace caregiving expectations; it was layered on top of them. Mothers were expected to provide and

remain effectively central. This dual burden reveals how transnational migration reconfigures gender without necessarily dissolving patriarchal norms.

Fathers' shifting roles and gendered expectations

Participants' accounts of fathers were mixed. Some fathers remained involved in transport, school logistics, or financial contributions. Others were less central to daily care. What stands out in the findings, however, is that fathers' involvement was more variable and less morally scrutinized than that of mothers. Mothers' absence generated questions, self-doubt, and judgment in ways that fathers' relative distance often did not.

This asymmetry is theoretically significant. It suggests that transnational family arrangements remain deeply gendered even when roles shift materially. Mothers' migration was interpreted through a moral vocabulary of sacrifice, adequacy, and presence, whereas fathers were less often positioned as the primary bearers of emotional accountability. This supports feminist migration scholarship, which shows that women's care responsibilities remain more morally visible and heavily policed than men's, even when women become key economic actors (Parrenas, 2001, 2005; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015).

The study, therefore, highlights that power in transnational families operates through more than money or formal authority. It is also shaped by culturally embedded expectations about who is answerable for children's emotional wellbeing. Mothers bore this burden disproportionately. Their narratives reveal that gender asymmetry persisted not because mothers lacked agency, but because the moral economy of family life continued to locate ultimate responsibility in them.

The paradox of technology: connection and pain

One of the most compelling findings in this study is the paradoxical role of technology. Phones, WhatsApp calls, video calls, and, in some cases, CCTV cameras were described as essential for staying connected. Through these technologies, mothers monitored routines, settled disputes, supervised homework, checked children's wellbeing, and maintained a form of remote presence. Technology enabled what can be described as remote vigilance: a digitally mediated way of watching over children and remaining responsive to their daily lives.

Yet technology was never experienced as a full solution to separation. On the contrary, mothers repeatedly emphasized that mediated presence was not the same as being there. This tension is crucial. The same tools that allowed mothers to hear and see their children also made visible the milestones, physical changes, emotional shifts, and events they were missing. Video calls could offer comfort, but they could also intensify longing. A child's face on a screen could reassure and wound at the same time.

This finding extends existing work on communication technologies and transnational families by demonstrating that technological connection may actively reproduce ambiguous loss rather than resolve it (Madianou & Miller, 2011; Baldassar, 2007). Technology keeps mothers psychologically present, but it also repeatedly exposes the limits of that presence. Each call can become both evidence of connection and a reminder of absence. In this sense, the study challenges overly optimistic assumptions that digital communication substantially solves the relational problem of separation. It does not erase absence; it structures how absence is lived.

The data also show that technology intensified the temporal demands of motherhood. Mothers had to coordinate calls across time zones, maintain availability, and integrate Nigerian routines into Canadian life. This supports the argument that technologically mediated care is not simply convenient communication; it is labour. It requires planning, emotional readiness, responsiveness, and sustained attention. The study, therefore, contributes to scholarship by highlighting the intersection of technological mediation, ambiguous loss, and temporal labour in transnational motherhood.

Ambiguous family dynamics: beyond harmony

A second paradox emerging from the findings is that family life was not best understood as harmonious, but as ambiguous and negotiated. Participants expressed gratitude, love, and trust toward grandmothers, and they valued the continued connection with their children. Yet their accounts also contained tension, miscommunication, frustration, disappointment, and emotional strain. This suggests that transnational family arrangements are neither simply broken nor smoothly adaptive. They are held together through ongoing negotiation.

Mother-grandmother relationships illustrate this clearly. Mothers appreciated grandmothers' sacrifices and often trusted them deeply, especially when there were longstanding bonds. At the same time, there were moments of complaint, fatigue, or misunderstanding that revealed how burdensome caregiving had become. Grandmothers' frustrations were not signs of failure; they were expressions of strain and bids for recognition. Mothers responded with what may be understood as gratitude work:

emotional reassurance, financial support, regular encouragement when possible, and acknowledgement of grandmothers' efforts. These practices helped stabilize relationships, but they did not remove underlying tension.

Mother-child relationships were similarly marked by ambiguity. Children missed their mothers, sometimes longed intensely for them, and at other times withdrew, became angry, refused to talk, or shifted their attachment language toward other caregivers. Mothers experienced these changes painfully, often reading them as signs of relational weakening. Yet such shifts can also be understood as children's adaptive responses to complex caregiving environments rather than straightforward evidence of lost bonds. The findings therefore support a more nuanced conceptualization of transnational family life as emotionally layered, adaptive, and conflictual.

The phrase ambiguous family dynamics captures this complexity. It signals that these families are not defined by harmony, but they are not reducible to dysfunction either. They are relational formations characterized by love, strain, obligation, dependence, adjustment, and unequal burdens. This conceptual contribution may be especially useful for interpreting transnational care arrangements in contexts where extended kinship networks sustain family continuity but also absorb significant pressure.

Nigeria as home and push factor

Another important layer of ambiguity concerned mothers' relationship to Nigeria. Participants spoke of Nigeria as home, the place where children, grandmothers, kinship, and cultural belonging were located. At the same time, they described Nigeria as a push factor marked by insecurity, limited opportunities, and structural conditions that made

migration seem necessary. This dual positioning complicates simple narratives of home and away.

Mothers were emotionally tethered to Nigeria through family, obligation, and identity, yet they were also critical of the conditions that made separation from children appear worthwhile or unavoidable. This finding reinforces structural analyses of migration while preserving the emotional complexity of mothers' narratives. They did not leave because attachment to home had weakened. They left while remaining deeply attached to home. This reveals that transnational motherhood is shaped by a form of structural ambivalence: home is both anchor and pressure point.

Conceptually, this matters because it situates maternal decision-making within unequal global conditions without flattening it into deterministic push-pull language. Mothers' decisions were not merely responses to economic calculus. They were relational decisions made under constraint, with consequences that were emotional, moral, and intergenerational.

Contributions to Knowledge

Taken together, the findings make several contributions to scholarship. First, the study deepens transnationalism theory by showing that motherhood across borders is intensely temporal, technologically mediated, and dependent on routine forms of remote vigilance. It highlights how family life is organized not only across places but also across multiple clocks and repeated acts of care.

Second, the study extends scholarship on ambiguous loss by showing how transnational mothers actively live and work within unresolved absence. Their emotional

labour, future-oriented narratives, faith practices, and self-questioning reveal ambiguous loss as an ongoing relational condition rather than a static feeling state. The findings also show how technology can reproduce this ambiguity by sustaining connection while exposing absence.

Third, the study contributes to culturally sensitive attachment discussions by illustrating how children's bonds are negotiated within wider caregiving networks that include grandmothers and siblings, while mothers still interpret these shifts through culturally powerful ideals of maternal presence. This demonstrates the importance of reading attachment experiences through both relational and sociocultural lenses.

Fourth, the study advances scholarship on intergenerational care and gendered migration by centring grandmother caregiving in the Nigeria-Canada transnational field. It shows that mothers' mobility relies on older women's labour and that this labour is often physically demanding, emotionally taxing, and insufficiently visible in accounts focused primarily on migrant mothers.

Finally, the study contributes a more nuanced understanding of power in transnational families. Mothers' financial contributions reshaped authority, but not in a way that freed them from gendered expectations. Instead, economic power coexisted with guilt, scrutiny, and ongoing emotional responsibility. The findings, therefore, show that empowerment and burden can coexist in transnational motherhood.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a small purposive sample of five Nigerian transnational mothers living in Canada. This is

appropriate for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which prioritizes depth and idiographic understanding, but it limits the transferability of the findings to other populations, migration pathways, and national contexts.

All participants had migrated to Canada through international student pathways and were interviewed at a particular point in their migration trajectories; experiences in other destination countries or among migrants with different legal and economic statuses may differ. This sample characteristic reflects not only purposive selection but also accessibility constraints shaped by immigration precarity itself. During recruitment, I encountered several potential participants who had arrived through other pathways but declined to participate due to immigration-related vulnerabilities. Some were protected persons who expressed concerns about confidentiality and feared that their stories, even with pseudonyms, might be identifiable to immigration authorities or others in their communities. Others were living with expired or precarious immigration status, including individuals who had fallen out of status after being unable to meet re-enrollment criteria for study permits or other visa conditions. For these women, the risks of sharing their experiences, even in a confidential research context, were perceived as too high.

This limitation reflects broader structural inequalities and the climate of surveillance and fear that shapes immigrants' willingness to participate in research (Bernhard et al., 2011; Magalhaes et al., 2010). It suggests that the most vulnerable transnational mothers, those facing the greatest immigration insecurity, those with refugee backgrounds, and those living without legal status, are systematically underrepresented in qualitative research on transnational motherhood. Their absence from

this study means that the findings likely underestimate the full range of precarity, fear, and constraint experienced by Nigerian transnational mothers in Canada.

Second, the analysis draws solely on mothers' perspectives. Children, grandmothers, and fathers were not interviewed directly, so their interpretations of separation, care, and family relationships are only inferred. Future studies that include grandmother caregivers' narratives and children's own accounts would provide a more complete understanding of how transnational family life is experienced and negotiated across generations and geographic locations.

Third, the study provides a cross-sectional view of transnational motherhood; it does not follow families through reunification or later life stages when caregiving arrangements and attachments may shift again. Longitudinal designs that track families over time would illuminate how relationships, roles, and meanings evolve as children grow, grandmothers age, and immigration statuses stabilize or change.

Despite these limitations, the design is appropriate for the study's aims: IPA's in-depth, idiographic approach allows for a rich exploration of how a small number of mothers interpret and give meaning to their experiences within a specific Nigeria-Canada context. The study's contribution lies not in statistical generalizability but in its thick description of lived experience and its theoretical depth in interpreting transnational motherhood through the integrated lenses of transnationalism, attachment, and ambiguous loss (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Directions for Future Research

Several productive directions emerge from this study's findings and its limitations. Future research could usefully incorporate the voices of children and grandmother caregivers to develop a more multivocal understanding of transnational care. Interviews or participatory methods with children in Nigeria and grandmothers who provide daily care would deepen insight into how they experience separation, obligation, and attachment, and how they perceive mothers' efforts from afar. Such research could illuminate not only children's and grandmothers' experiences but also how caregiving arrangements are negotiated across generations and how meanings of family, duty, and sacrifice are constructed from multiple standpoints within the same transnational household.

Second, and particularly urgent given the limitations of the present study, future research should develop methodological and ethical approaches that enable transnational mothers in the most precarious immigration situations to participate. As noted in the limitations section, this study encountered potential participants who declined to participate due to immigration-related vulnerabilities, including protected persons who feared identification and mothers with expired or irregular immigration status who perceived the risks of sharing their stories as too high. The systematic exclusion of these mothers from qualitative research means that existing knowledge likely underestimates the full range of fear, precarity, and constraint experienced within transnational motherhood, and reproduces hierarchies of visibility in which only those with relatively stable status are heard.

Future studies should therefore prioritize trauma-informed, community-based research designs that build sufficient trust and safety to enable participation by mothers navigating asylum claims, irregular status, deportation risk, or other forms of legal precarity. This may involve co-designing research with community organizations, using peer researchers from within affected communities, offering flexible interview formats that do not require identifying information, ensuring robust data protection and anonymization protocols, and providing clear information about researchers' legal obligations and limits of confidentiality. Research that centers the experiences of protected persons and out-of-status mothers would deepen understanding of how immigration enforcement, deportability, and legal exclusion shape transnational family life, maternal wellbeing, and intergenerational care arrangements.

Third, comparative studies across different host countries, immigration pathways, and migrant categories could examine how immigration policies, work conditions, and social support shape the possibilities and limits of mothering from a distance. For instance, comparing the experiences of international student mothers, economic migrants with permanent residence, and mothers on temporary work permits would illuminate how legal status, work restrictions, access to family reunification programs, and settlement support interact to structure transnational caregiving arrangements and emotional wellbeing. Cross-national comparisons could similarly explore how policy contexts in different receiving countries shape conditions for family reunification, remittance flows, and mothers' ability to travel back to Nigeria.

Fourth, longitudinal research that follows families over time, including periods of reunification in the host country, would help to show how emotional bonds, parenting

practices, and grandmothers' roles evolve as children grow older and migration projects unfold. Such studies could track shifts in attachment relationships, changes in mothers' and children's wellbeing, renegotiations of authority and caregiving responsibility after reunion, and the ongoing or diminished involvement of grandmothers in children's lives post-reunification. Longitudinal designs would also enable examination of how ambiguous loss and future-oriented hope transform when physical separation ends, and whether mothers' narratives of sacrifice and guilt persist or resolve over time.

Methodologically, this study also points to productive future uses of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in research on transnational motherhood. IPA's idiographic and meaning-focused orientation was well-suited to illuminating how Nigerian transnational mothers make sense of separation, obligation, and care, but it also involved working with a relatively small and self-selecting sample. Future studies could extend this approach by using IPA with other actors in transnational care chains, such as fathers, children, and grandmother caregivers, and by combining IPA with complementary qualitative or mixed-methods designs to explore the extent to which particular experiences or meaning-making patterns are widespread.

Finally, mixed-methods designs could build on qualitative insights by exploring the prevalence of experiences or coping strategies among larger groups of transnational mothers, thereby connecting idiographic findings to broader patterns. Quantitative components could examine associations between length of separation, frequency of contact, immigration status, and maternal mental health outcomes, while qualitative components could continue to foreground lived experience and meaning-making. Together, these directions would advance a more inclusive, longitudinal, and multi-sited

scholarship on transnational motherhood that attends to structural inequality, legal precarity, and the voices of those currently most marginalized within migration systems.

Concluding Reflections

This thesis has shown that Nigerian mothers who leave children with grandmothers in Nigeria do not step away from motherhood; they reconfigure it across borders, time zones, and generations. By tracing how they organize daily life around distant children, negotiate guilt and cultural expectations, and depend on grandmothers' labour in a context marked by risk and constraint, the study portrays transnational motherhood as a form of gendered migration that is both deeply painful and profoundly agentic.

The study also shows that transnational motherhood is shaped by contradiction. Economic provision can increase maternal authority while intensifying pressure. Technology can sustain connection while deepening awareness of absence. Family members can be deeply loving while also burdened, frustrated, and emotionally stretched. Grandmothers can be sources of continuity and care while carrying heavy physical and emotional responsibilities. These paradoxes are not incidental; they are central to understanding the lived reality of transnational family life.

By foregrounding Nigerian mothers' meaning-making in a Canada-Nigeria context, this study contributes to more nuanced understandings of transnational motherhood, ambiguous loss, attachment across distance, grandmother caregiving, and gendered migration. It argues for seeing transnational family life not as harmonious or broken, but as relationally complex, negotiated, and sustained through unequal yet deeply

meaningful forms of care.

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Appendix: A

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Study Title: Transnational Motherhood and the Challenges of Grandparenting

Principal Investigator: Ene Emaikwu

Email: ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca

Institution: Mount Saint Vincent University

Program: Master of Arts in Family Studies and Gerontology

Supervisor: Dr. Zachary Zimmer

Email: Zachary.Zimmer@msvu.ca

Purpose of the Interview

The purpose of this interview is to explore the lived experiences of Nigerian mothers living in Canada who are raising their children transnationally, specifically, whose children are being cared for by grandmothers in Nigeria. The questions are designed to elicit reflections on their experiences, challenges, parenting roles, emotional connections, and cultural expectations. The interview is expected to last approximately 60–90 minutes. The interviews will be conducted online.

Interview Questions Section

A: Background and Context

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself, where you are from in Nigeria, and how long you have lived in Canada?
2. How old are your children, and who currently cares for them in Nigeria?
3. How long have you been separated from your child(ren)?
4. Can you tell me how you became a transnational mother?

(Explanation for participants: A transnational mother is a woman who lives in a different country from her child(ren), usually for reasons such as work, education, or seeking a better life for the family. She continues to provide care by sending money, staying in touch, and making important decisions.)

Section B: Daily Life and Mothering Practices

5. Can you describe a typical day in your life as a transnational mother? How do you incorporate your role as a mother into your daily routine here in Canada?

6. How do you stay in touch with your child(ren)?

7. Are you able to remain emotionally close to your child(ren) while living in another country? If so, how do you maintain this closeness?

8. Since moving to Canada, how has your role as a mother changed?

9. How do you manage the pressure to be a 'good mother' while also dealing with life in a new country?

Section C: Emotional and Personal Reflections

10. Could you share a memorable moment when you felt the impact of being physically separated from your child? What happened, and how did you feel?

11. What do you think is the most significant part of being a transnational mother?

12. In what ways do you think being a transnational mother benefits your family and your future?

13. Do you feel supported or judged by others because you are a mother living far from your child(ren)? Can you explain?

Section D: Grandparental Caregiving

14. What kind of care do the grandmothers give to your child(ren) while you are away?

15. What challenges do the grandmothers face while looking after your child(ren)?

16. What is your relationship like with the grandparents who are helping care for your children?

Section E: Cultural and Gendered Expectations

17. How have ideas about what a mother should do in Nigerian culture affected your choices and experiences?

18. How do you think gender roles have influenced your experience as a transnational mother?

Section F: Closing

19. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a transnational mother?

20. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B

Recruitment Materials

Study Title: Transnational Motherhood and the Challenges of Grandparenting

Principal Investigator: Ene Emaikwu

Email: ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca

Institution: Mount Saint Vincent University

Program: Master of Arts in Family Studies and Gerontology

Supervisor: Dr. Zachary Zimmer

Email: Zachary.Zimmer@msvu.ca

Invitation to Join a Research Study

Dear Association of Nigerians in Nova Scotia,

My name is Ene Emaikwu, and I am a graduate student at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am

conducting a research study on the experiences of Nigerian mothers living in Canada whose

children are being cared for by grandparents in Nigeria.

I am kindly asking for your support in sharing this study with members of your community who

may be eligible and interested in participating. The interviews will be conducted online and will

take approximately 60–90 minutes.

Eligibility Criteria:

Participants must be Nigerian mothers currently living in Canada who have at least one child aged 12 or younger living in Nigeria with a grandparent. The separation from the child must have lasted at least one year, and the grandparent, usually a grandmother, must be actively involved in the child's care.

Participants must be able to speak and understand English, as all interviews will be conducted in English via the Zoom platform. In addition, participants must have access to an active email account and the Zoom platform, which will be used to send and receive study-related materials and to conduct the interview online.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and individuals may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. All information shared will be kept private and confidential within the limits of the law.

If someone is interested in participating or would like more information, they can contact me directly at:

Email: ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca

Thank you for helping with this research.

Sincerely,

Ene Emaikwu

Telephone Script

Hello, my name is Ene Emaikwu. I'm a graduate student at Mount Saint Vincent University. I'm conducting a study on the experiences of Nigerian mothers living in Canada whose children are cared for by grandparents in Nigeria.

To be eligible, you must be a Nigerian mother living in Canada with at least one child aged 12 or younger currently living in Nigeria with a grandparent. You must have been separated from your child for at least one year, and the grandparent, usually a grandmother, must be actively helping to care for your child.

You also need to be able to speak and understand English, as the interview will be conducted in English. In addition, participants must have access to an active email account and the Zoom platform, which will be used to send and receive study-related materials and to conduct the interview online.

I would like to invite you to participate in an online interview lasting about 60–90 minutes. Participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time. Everything you share will be kept private.

Do you have any questions, or would you like to schedule a time for the interview?

Email Script

Subject: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Association of Nigerians in Nova Scotia,

My name is Ene Emaikwu, and I am a graduate student at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am conducting a study on the experiences of Nigerian mothers living in Canada whose children are being cared for by grandparents in Nigeria.

Eligibility Criteria:

To participate, individuals must be Nigerian mothers living in Canada who have at least one child aged 12 or younger currently living in Nigeria with a grandparent. The separation must have lasted at least one year, and the grandparent usually a grandmother must be actively involved in the child's care.

Participants must be able to speak and understand English, as all interviews will be conducted in English via the Zoom platform. In addition, participants must have access to an active email account and the Zoom platform, which will be used to send and receive study-related materials and to conduct the interview online.

If you know someone who may be interested, or if you would like more details, please feel free

to contact me at:

Email: ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca

Thank you,

Ene Emaikwu

Appendix C

Study Information Sheet

Study Title: Transnational Motherhood and the Challenges of Grandparenting

Principal Investigator: Ene Emaikwu

Email: ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca

Institution: Mount Saint Vincent University

Program: Master of Arts in Family Studies and Gerontology

Supervisor: Dr. Zachary Zimmer

Email: Zachary.Zimmer@msvu.ca

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring the lived experiences of Nigerian transnational mothers living in Canada whose children (aged 12 or younger) are cared for by grandparents in Nigeria. The goal of this study is to better understand the challenges and joys of mothering across borders and the role of grandparents in transnational caregiving.

Inclusion criteria

You are eligible for this study if you are a Nigerian mother living in Canada and have at least one child aged 12 or younger who is currently living in Nigeria with a grandparent. You must have been separated from your child(ren) for at least one year, and the grandparent usually a grandmother must be actively helping to care for your child.

You also need to be able to speak and understand English, as the interviews will be conducted in English via the Zoom platform. In addition, you must have access to an active email account and the Zoom platform, which will be used to send and receive study-related materials and to conduct the interview online.

What Will Happen in the Study?

If you agree to participate, you will take part in a ~~one-on-one~~ interview conducted via Zoom. The

interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will be scheduled at a time that is

convenient for you. The interview will be ~~audio-~~recorded with your permission and later

transcribed for analysis. You will also have the opportunity to review your interview transcript to

confirm its accuracy if you wish.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any questions and may stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. You may also withdraw from the study up until the point that the data have been analyzed and anonymized. Withdrawing will not affect your relationship with the researcher, the university, or any community organizations.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Your information will be kept strictly confidential. However, in rare and exceptional circumstances, disclosure may be required such as when there is a risk of harm to yourself or others, if abuse or neglect is disclosed, or if legal obligations mandate reporting. In such cases, the researcher is ethically and legally required to notify the appropriate authorities.

Your name and any identifying details will not appear in any reports, presentations, or publications resulting from this study. Only the research team will have access to the information you provide.

If you contact me or if I contact you using my phone or email, your contact information will be used solely for scheduling or conducting the interview. It will not be shared with anyone else. Your phone number will be deleted once the interview process is complete. Please note that only I have access to my phone and email, ensuring your contact details remain confidential.

Any recordings or notes from the interview will be securely stored on password-protected devices. These materials will be destroyed after the study is completed, in accordance with university policy.

Risks and Benefits

The risks of participating in this study are minimal and may include some emotional discomfort

when discussing personal experiences. You can take breaks or stop at any time if you feel upset.

You may also benefit by sharing your story in a supportive, confidential environment and by

contributing to knowledge that may improve understanding and services for transnational

families. I will provide information about community and support services that you can access at the end of the interview.

Compensation

There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study. However, your insights will be greatly appreciated and will contribute to a better understanding of transnational motherhood and caregiving.

Contact Information

This research project has undergone ethics review by the University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you are encouraged to contact ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca, Zachary.Zimmer@msvu.ca, and the Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University at ethics@msvu.ca

Appendix D

Participant Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Transnational Motherhood and the Challenges of Grandparenting

Principal Investigator: Ene Emaikwu

Email: ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca

Institution: Mount Saint Vincent University

Program: Master of Arts in Family Studies and Gerontology

Supervisor: Dr. Zachary Zimmer

Email: Zachary.Zimmer@msvu.ca

Purpose of the Study

This study explores the unique emotional, cultural, and relational challenges faced by Nigerian mothers living in Canada whose children are cared for by grandparents in Nigeria. It will also look at the roles and challenges of the grandmothers and the children involved in this caregiving arrangement.

What Participation Involves

You will be asked to take part in an online interview (Zoom) lasting about [60–90 minutes]. The interview will include sensitive topics. These topics will focus on your experiences of moving to Canada, being separated from your children, and how you maintain connections with them. Questions will also explore the roles and challenges of the grandparents who are helping care for your children, as well as your relationship with them and the children.

For example, questions that I ask may include:

- Do you feel supported or judged by others because you are a mother living far from your child(ren)? Can you explain?
- How have ideas about what a mother should do in Nigerian culture affected your choices and experiences?
- What is your relationship like with the grandparents who are helping care for your children?
- Could you share a memorable moment when you felt the impact of being physically separated from your child? What happened, and how did you feel?

- With your permission, the interview will be ~~audio~~-recorded to make sure your words are captured accurately.

Possible Risk

There are no major risks expected from participating in this study. However, the interview will include sensitive topics, and some questions may bring strong emotions. You may be asked to reflect on your own challenges as a mother, as well as the experiences of your children and the grandparents who care for them. This could sometimes feel emotional or uncomfortable.

You do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable, and you may pause or stop the interview at any time.-I will provide information about community and support services that you can access at the end of the interview.

Benefits

You may not benefit directly, but your insights will help increase understanding of the experiences of transnational mothers, grandmothers, and children.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Your information will be kept strictly confidential. However, in rare and exceptional circumstances, disclosure may be required such as when there is a risk of harm to yourself or others, if abuse or neglect is disclosed, or if legal obligations mandate reporting. In such cases, the researcher is ethically and legally required to notify the appropriate authorities.

Your name and any identifying details will not appear in any reports, presentations, or publications resulting from this study. Only the research team will have access to the information you provide.

If you contact me or if I contact you using my phone or email, your contact information will be used solely for scheduling or conducting the interview. It will not be shared with anyone else. Your phone number will be deleted once the interview process is complete. Please note that only I have access to my phone and email, ensuring your contact details remain confidential.

Any recordings or notes from the interview will be securely stored on password-protected devices. These materials will be destroyed after the study is completed, in accordance with university policy.

Voluntary Participation and Your Rights

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. For training and quality assurance purposes, my thesis supervisor may be present during the interview. However, you have the right to decline his attendance. If you prefer to speak only with me, your decision will be fully respected and will not affect your involvement in the study.

At the end of the interview, I will ask if you are open to being contacted again if follow-up is needed. Any potential follow-up will take place by my emailing you and asking if you are willing to answer one or a few more questions. I will provide these questions in an email and ask that you respond to me in writing. It is up to you if you wish to respond to these follow-up questions.

You are free to skip any question or stop the interview at any time, without penalty. You also have the option to withdraw your data for up to 20 days after your interview. To do so, please contact me by phone or email (see the Information Sheet for contact details). After this period, your data may already be included in the analysis and cannot be removed.

After the Study

If you request, you will receive a general summary of the study's findings once the research is

complete you request it. This summary will not include names or identifying information.

Reviewing Your Transcript

After the interview, you may request a copy of your transcript. If you do, it will be sent to you within three days. For your security, the transcript will be sent as a password-protected file by email, and the password will be provided in a separate email.

You will then have ten working days to look over the transcript. During this time, you may

correct any errors, ask that certain sections be removed, or simply confirm that it is accurate. If

no feedback is received within 10 working days, the transcript will be treated as approved.

Contacts

This research project has undergone ethics review by the University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you are encouraged to contact ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca, Zachary.Zimmer@msvu.ca, and the Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University at ethics@msvu.ca

Consent Statement

By signing below, you agree that you have read and understood this information and that you

voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator (print): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Please send the completed form by email to ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca before the interview.

Appendix E

Debriefing Information Sheet

Study Title: Transnational Motherhood and the Challenges of Grandparenting

Institution: Mount Saint Vincent University

Program: Master of Arts in Family Studies and Gerontology

Thank you for taking part in this interview. Your time, insights, and experiences are deeply appreciated and contribute meaningfully to this research.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Your information will be kept strictly confidential. However, in rare and exceptional circumstances, disclosure may be required such as when there is a risk of harm to yourself or others, if abuse or neglect is disclosed, or if legal obligations mandate reporting. In such cases, the researcher is ethically and legally required to notify the appropriate authorities.

Your name and any identifying details will not appear in any reports, presentations, or publications resulting from this study. Only the research team will have access to the information you provide.

If you contact me or if I contact you using my phone or email, your contact information will be used solely for scheduling or conducting the interview. It will not be shared with anyone else. Your phone number will be deleted once the interview process is complete. Please note that only I have access to my phone and email, ensuring your contact details remain confidential.

Any recordings or notes from the interview will be securely stored on password-protected devices. These materials will be destroyed after the study is completed, in accordance with university policy.

Support

Some questions may have brought up strong emotions or personal reflections. If you feel the need for support, we encourage you to contact the resources listed at the end of this document. These services are available to help you process any feelings that may arise.

Future Contact

At the end of the interview, you were asked whether you would be open to future contact for

follow-up questions or clarification. If you decline, we will not reach out to you again.

Questions or Concerns

This research project has undergone ethics review by the University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you are encouraged to contact ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca, Zachary.Zimmer@msvu.ca, and the Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University at ethics@msvu.ca

Appendix F

List of community resources

Study Title: Transnational Motherhood and the Challenges of Grandparenting

Principal Investigator: Ene Emaikwu

Email: ene.emaikwu@msvu.ca

Institution: Mount Saint Vincent University

Program: Master of Arts in Family Studies and Gerontology

Supervisor: Dr. Zachary Zimmer

Email: Zachary.Zimmer@msvu.ca

Resources

Wellness Together Canada – Free, 24/7 phone, text, and online counselling for all Canadians, including newcomers.

211 Canada – A multilingual helpline connecting you to local health, settlement, and social services; available 24/7.

HERConnect Initiative (Calgary): Provide free, round-the-clock counselling tailored to Black women and girls from Africa/Caribbean, provided virtually or in-person by Black therapists

TCLI Foundation's Sisterhood Project: A peer-support program for African immigrant women offering workshops, safe space, networking, and mental-wellness support across Canada

Access Alliance Multicultural Health (Toronto) Culturally sensitive counselling for immigrants/newcomers in multiple languages; includes women's groups, expressive arts, newcomer-specific support circles, multiculturalmentalhealth.ca

Focus Area	Resource	Highlights
Black women's health	**Nova Scotia Sisterhood**	Primary care + mental health by Black professionals
Advocacy & navigation	**ABSW Support Line**	Counselling & system navigation for African Nova Scotians

Community wellness	**Thrive in Black**	Healing circles, skills workshops, creative support
Newcomer-focused care	**ISANS & Circle of Women**	Settlement + traumainformed peer support
Family & youth	**IWK ANSS**	Culturally safe therapy for Black youth/families
Specialized psychiatric care	**Nova Scotia Hospital**	Province's primary mental health facility

Appendix G

Certificate of Research Ethics Clearance

Certificate Of
Research Ethics Clear