

Unpacking Intersectional Women Entrepreneurship

From Nigeria to Canada: Unpacking Intersectional Women Entrepreneurship through a Transnational Feminist Perspective

Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to understand the entrepreneurial experiences of Nigerian women immigrants (NWIEs) in Canada. It goes beyond Western-centric frameworks to capture the specific challenges and motivations faced by this group and specifically addresses how intersecting cultural, gender, and transnational identities shape their business ventures.

Design/methodology/approach: This qualitative study draws on semi-structured interviews with NWIEs in Canada and employs thematic analysis to explore the interplay between migration, race and gender in shaping entrepreneurial experiences.

Findings: The findings reveal that the entrepreneurial experiences of NWIEs in Canada differ from those of local entrepreneurs, reflecting complex motivations such as self-actualization and role modelling, cultural representation, wealth creation, family support, and unemployment. Shaped by intersecting identities, NWIEs face challenges such as limited networks, multiple responsibilities, and racialized institutional barriers, highlighting the need for a transnational feminist perspective.

Originality/value: This study contributes to the literature on female entrepreneurship by applying transnational feminist theory to understand the unique experiences of NWIEs in Canada. It challenges the dominant Western-centric narratives by emphasizing the intersectionality of race, gender, and immigration status, thereby offering a nuanced perspective on their entrepreneurial motivations, challenges, resilience and aspirations. The study reveals unique insights on how NWIEs build resilience by seeking assistance, embracing self-care and relying on religious beliefs. By focusing on the cultural and contextual factors influencing NWIEs, this research highlights the importance of diverse experiences in shaping entrepreneurial practices and policies.

Introduction

Women entrepreneurs play a critical role in the economy, driving business growth, fostering innovation, and contributing to job creation across various sectors (Kelley *et al.*, 2017). The literature on female entrepreneurship has garnered significant attention (Brush *et al.*, 2023), highlighting the importance of gender-focused studies to better understand these dynamics. However, a critical perspective challenges the "sisterhood is global" approach (Morgan, 1984), which advocates a universal and homogeneous view of women's experiences and struggles. This approach, largely shaped by Euro-American perspectives, tends to overlook the diverse cultural and contextual factors that significantly influence women's entrepreneurial experiences (Collins *et al.*, 2019). Such a generalized perspective fails to account for the unique challenges faced by women in different cultural and socio-economic contexts, leading to an incomplete understanding of female entrepreneurship (Henry *et al.*, 2018). This critique aligns with Welter's (2011; 2020) argument that entrepreneurship is inherently context specific. Entrepreneurial activities do not occur in a vacuum; they are deeply influenced by the social, cultural, political, and economic environments in which they take place. Context shapes not only the opportunities available to entrepreneurs but also the resources they can access and the constraints they face (Stoker *et al.*, 2024). Studies have demonstrated that women entrepreneurs in different cultural contexts face unique challenges and opportunities. In patriarchal societies, for example, women may experience restricted access to capital and limited social mobility, which can impede their entrepreneurial ambitions (Jamali, 2009). However, in more gender-equitable societies, women tend to have better access to resources and networks, which can facilitate entrepreneurial activity (Terjesen *et al.*, 2016). This illustrates that context-specific conditions are essential to understanding the diverse experiences of entrepreneurs, especially those from marginalized groups, as these factors influence the journey from motivations to outcomes.

Given the critique, an emerging body of literature underscores the necessity of examining non-Western contexts through the lens of intersectionality theory, which investigates how gender intersects with race, class, and other identities (Stoker *et al.*, 2024). This theoretical approach has gained prominence in understanding the multifaceted entrepreneurial experiences of women of color, who often encounter distinct barriers due to their intersecting identities. Empirical evidence supports the notion that these intersections create unique challenges, influencing both their motivations and entrepreneurial pathways (Wingfield and Taylor, 2018). For example, research shows that Black women entrepreneurs frequently face obstacles such as restricted access to financial resources, exclusion from critical business networks, and racial biases, which substantially impede their entrepreneurial endeavors (Ogbolu, 2019). These difficulties are exacerbated by gender discrimination, resulting in a unique set of challenges for Black women in business (Smith *et al.*, 2016).

To further address the contextual limitations, transnational feminist theory (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994; Horne and Arora, 2013) extends beyond intersectionality's focus on identity to global power hierarchies and cross-border dynamics. Unlike intersectionality—which analyzes overlapping social categories (e.g., race, gender)—this framework centers on cross-border forces: colonialism, economic globalization, diaspora networks, and geopolitical inequities (Moghadam, 2015). It specifically investigates how these transnational structures shape women's entrepreneurship across national contexts (Brzozowski *et al.*, 2017; Elo *et al.*, 2018). Synthesizing these lenses offers a comprehensive analytical approach: intersectionality diagnoses identity-specific barriers, while transnational feminism reveals navigation of transnational power systems (Zerbe *et al.*, 2021).

This integrated approach critically broadens entrepreneurship discourse by centering non-Western perspectives and global dynamics (e.g., migration, diaspora). It is particularly suited to studying Nigerian women immigrants (NWIEs) in Canada—a demographic projected to reach 30% of Canada’s population by 2036 (Ng and Gagnon, 2020). Despite substantial economic contributions, NWIEs face culturally specific challenges: limited financial access (Orser and Riding, 2016), gendered expectations, and dual family-business burdens (Ram *et al.*, 2017). Their distinct trajectories in navigating cultural-structural barriers remain understudied (Ramadani *et al.*, 2019). By examining NWIEs’ motivations and challenges through this dual lens, this research provides nuanced insights into their socio-cultural contexts. Such understanding is essential for developing targeted policies supporting entrepreneurial success and economic integration (Corrêa *et al.*, 2024).

The subsequent section provides a comprehensive review of the literature pertinent to women entrepreneurs and the application of transnational feminist theory. Following this, the study outlines the research design, detailing the methodologies used for data collection and analysis, including thematic analysis. The findings are then presented, illustrated with direct quotes from participants that exemplify the diverse experiences of NWIEs. This section categorizes the findings into distinct themes, elucidating the intersections of their identities and the impact on their entrepreneurial journeys. Lastly, the discussion and conclusion sections summarize the theoretical contributions of the study, highlight practical implications and policy recommendations, and propose avenues for future research.

Literature Review

The Development of Female Entrepreneurship Literature within Western Contexts

The literature on female entrepreneurship has predominantly evolved within Western contexts, presenting significant challenges for understanding global entrepreneurial experiences (Henry *et al.*, 2018). Early research typically defined female entrepreneurs narrowly, emphasizing ownership and management roles within small to medium-sized enterprises, often framed by a Western capitalist lens (Cukier *et al.*, 2018). Literature grounded in Western feminist theory often focuses on the individualistic and competitive nature of entrepreneurship, emphasizing gender-based barriers within a predominantly Western context (Ahl and Nelson, 2015). Some researchers have focused on categorizing women entrepreneurs based on their motivation in Western settings. For example, they have identified in Canada three broad groups of women entrepreneurs—the classic, forced, and work-family (Hughes, 2006), who are motivated by a desire for independence, difficulty in finding employment, and the attraction of flexibility respectively. However, they frequently overlook the broader socio-cultural and transnational dynamics that shape the experiences of women from diverse backgrounds. This limited perspective overlooks the diverse realities faced by women entrepreneurs in non-Western settings, where cultural, social, and economic factors significantly shape their entrepreneurial journeys. For instance, empirical studies in the U.S. have identified specific barriers such as pervasive gender bias, limited access to funding, and challenges in navigating male-dominated industries (Robb and Coleman, 2010; Catalyst, 2019). However, these studies frequently fail to account for additional challenges encountered by female entrepreneurs in non-Western contexts. Research on women entrepreneurs in Nigeria, for example, highlights barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of access to education and training, and cultural expectations that prioritize traditional roles over entrepreneurship (Kayanula and Quartey, 2000; Olawale and Garwe, 2010). These differences underscore the necessity for a more nuanced understanding of women's entrepreneurial experiences across diverse cultural landscapes.

Intersectionality in Women's Entrepreneurship

While gender remains a critical lens for understanding entrepreneurial disparities, intersectionality theory deepens this analysis by revealing how overlapping social identities—such as race, class, and geography—create compounded barriers for women entrepreneurs (*et al.*, 2024). In Western contexts, Ahl and Nelson (2015) show how gender and race intersect to shape unique entrepreneurial challenges. For example, South African women entrepreneurs experience acute work-life imbalances (Swartz *et al.*, 2022), while African women entrepreneurs face a "triple vulnerability" to climate change (Gannon *et al.*, 2022). Their concentration in climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture, combined with structural barriers to adaptation resources and the disproportionate burden of household resilience, creates business challenges rooted in the intersection of gender, geography, and socioeconomic status.

These intersectional dynamics are similarly salient in North American contexts, particularly among Black women entrepreneurs. In Canada, recent studies highlight how Black women entrepreneurs contend with systemic racism, limited access to financing, and exclusion from mainstream entrepreneurial networks (Davidson *et al.*, 2021; Gallo Garcia *et al.*, 2025). The Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce notes that even among highly educated Black immigrant women, access to mentorship and capital remains critically low, exacerbating the challenges of business sustainability. In the United States, Black women represent one of the fastest-growing entrepreneurial demographics, yet they face loan rejection rates up to three times higher than white women and are increasingly affected by the rollback of DEI and supplier diversity programs (Wells Fargo, 2025).

Such compounded effects of gender, race, and immigrant status—including barriers in accessing financial capital, managing racialized expectations, or navigating dual cultural responsibilities—underscore the inadequacy of universal or Western-centric models in capturing the diverse realities of women's entrepreneurship. These findings highlight the importance of context-specific analyses and provide a foundation for moving toward more nuanced frameworks that transcend nation-state boundaries.

Toward a Transnational Feminist Lens on Immigrant Women's Entrepreneurship

While intersectionality has significantly advanced the study of women's entrepreneurship by foregrounding structural inequalities, it remains constrained in two important ways. First, its nation-bound focus often fails to capture the transnational realities of immigrant entrepreneurs who operate across borders. Second, its grounding in Western epistemologies limits its capacity to account for non-Western cultural contexts, where collectivist values and alternative economic logics frequently prevail (George *et al.*, 2016). This gap becomes particularly visible when examining African women's entrepreneurship, which is often shaped by communal networks, extended family obligations, and informal economies that challenge Western notions of individualism and formal business structures (Nwankwo, 2005). Nigerian women, for instance, face systemic barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, limited educational opportunities, and strong cultural expectations around gender roles—factors largely absent from dominant Western narratives of entrepreneurship (Kayanula and Quartey, 2000; Olawale and Garwe, 2010).

Transnational feminist theory addresses these limitations by foregrounding the interconnectedness of gender, migration, and global economic systems (Zerbe *et al.*, 2021). It draws attention to how geopolitical forces—including colonial legacies, racialized immigration

policies, and global capitalism—shape the lived experiences of immigrant women entrepreneurs in host societies (Grabe and Else-Quest, 2012). Rather than treating entrepreneurship as an individual or purely economic activity, transnational feminist theory emphasizes the structural and cultural conditions that shape how Nigerian women navigate the Canadian entrepreneurial landscape.

Empirical studies show that Nigerian women immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada face multiple, intersecting barriers, including limited access to formal financing, systemic racism, and conflicting gendered expectations from both host and home-country contexts (Brzozowski *et al.*, 2017). In response, they mobilize transnational networks that bridge Nigerian cultural capital with Canadian institutional systems. Their entrepreneurial efforts often reflect broader commitments to community and family, such as maintaining ties with Nigeria, transferring knowledge and resources, and supporting development back home (Liu *et al.*, 2021). These transnational practices challenge dominant entrepreneurial models that tend to emphasize local integration and overlook cross-border resource mobilization.

For example, Nigerian women in Canada have been found to use diasporic networks for market access, mentorship, and business innovation—mechanisms that help them overcome exclusion from mainstream entrepreneurial ecosystems (Amadasun, 2021). Yet, as Barrett and Vershinina (2017) argue, existing literature still tends to focus on local community support while underestimating the strategic value of transnational linkages. By centering these dynamics, transnational feminist theory offers a more nuanced and contextually grounded framework for understanding how Nigerian women immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada resist, adapt to, and negotiate the structural challenges they face—both within and beyond national borders.

Entrepreneurial Experience in Canada

The entrepreneurial experience of women in Canada is marked by both opportunities and significant challenges, particularly for immigrant women. Research indicates that women entrepreneurs in Canada face systemic barriers, including gender bias, limited access to financing, and challenges in navigating male-dominated industries (Cukier *et al.*, 2022). Immigrant women, in particular, encounter additional hurdles related to their status, such as discrimination, cultural differences, and difficulties in leveraging existing social networks (Chrysostome and Arcand, 2009). While studies have documented the entrepreneurial intentions of women and the innovative strategies they employ to overcome these challenges, there is a notable gap in understanding the specific experiences of immigrant women entrepreneurs. For instance, immigrant women are often driven by necessity rather than opportunity, influencing their business decisions and goals (Dirks, 2020). Despite this, much of the existing literature predominantly focuses on the broader experiences of women or immigrant entrepreneurs, leaving the intersection of these identities underexplored. This gap highlights the need for targeted research that examines the unique entrepreneurial journeys of immigrant women in Canada, considering the cultural, social, and economic factors that shape their experiences.

Entrepreneurial Experience in Nigeria

The entrepreneurial landscape in Nigeria, and Africa more broadly, is characterized by a vibrant mix of opportunity and significant challenges. Entrepreneurs in Nigeria often navigate a complex environment shaped by economic instability, regulatory hurdles, and inadequate infrastructure (Odeyemi *et al.*, 2024). Women in Nigeria face additional layers of obstacles, including cultural norms that prioritize male entrepreneurship and restrict women's access to resources and networks (Akanji, 2006). Despite these challenges, Nigerian women

entrepreneurs demonstrate remarkable resilience and ingenuity, often engaging in micro-enterprises that serve local markets and fulfill community needs (Afolabi, 2017). Research indicates that women play a crucial role in the informal sector, contributing to household income and community welfare while grappling with limited access to capital and training (Fapohunda, 2013). However, much of the existing literature primarily focuses on the domestic entrepreneurial context, neglecting the transnational dimensions that influence these women's experiences. By failing to consider how globalization, migration, and transnational ties affect entrepreneurial strategies and opportunities, current research overlooks critical factors that shape the realities of Nigerian women entrepreneurs, thereby creating a significant gap in the literature that warrants further investigation.

Nigerian women immigrants in Canada represent a unique group characterized by transnational ties, which significantly influence their entrepreneurial strategies. Many maintain strong connections with their homeland, utilizing resources and networks from both their home and host countries to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship (Barrett and Vershinina, 2017). This transnational identity challenges the individualistic assumptions of Western theories, highlighting the importance of communal support systems and cultural connections in shaping their entrepreneurial journeys.

Methodology

This study's epistemological approach is based on naturalistic inquiry following an interpretivist qualitative research paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Given that our research objective is to understand how Nigerian women immigrants experience entrepreneurship in Canada, it is appropriate to follow an exploratory qualitative inquiry method using an in-depth interview strategy (Brophy *et al.*, 2013). Qualitative research allows us to better understand how our participants experience their realities and take into account meanings that could be overlooked by other methods (Rynes and Gephart, 2004).

Sample Selection and Data Collection

In this study, we purposefully selected participants who are female business owners; moved to Canada within the last five years; and of Nigerian Nationality. Using snowballing approach (McGee *et al.*, 2009), the first author – a Nigerian Canadian woman, first reached out to four of such entrepreneurs and invited them to participate in the study. Then other entrepreneurs who met the sampling criteria were identified. As a result, 12 NWIEs were interviewed. The snowball technique is appropriate given the lack of public data from which the ethnicity of female entrepreneurs could be identified. Demographic information of the NWIEs can be found in Table I. All NWIEs were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

The data collection method was semi-structured interviews over Zoom. The interviews were conducted in English language and lasted 75 minutes on average. Open ended questions were used which provided large amounts of rich data (approximately 22-28 transcript pages per participant). The interview was divided into two major parts including questions about the business venture; and questions about the entrepreneur. Firstly, the participants were asked to discuss their business, why the business exists, what the business does and for whom. Furthermore, the participants were questioned about the start/creation of the business, the motivations for starting the business, successes, challenges and ways of coping with challenges. Secondly, participants were asked to talk about themselves (e.g., level of education, previous jobs or other jobs, family status, and the experience of relocating to Canada). Then participants

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were asked about the experience of being a female entrepreneur and being an immigrant entrepreneur, and if and/or how these factors have affected their business ventures.

[INSERT TABLE I HERE]

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006). We started by familiarizing ourselves with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts. Using NVivo 12 Pro, the first author and a research assistant did one round of open coding of the entire data set which generated 186 initial nodes. Then we searched for patterns across the nodes which may be clustered into themes. This process led to the identification of six themes and 22 sub-themes. Next, we realized that some themes overlapped or lacked sufficient data support. This led to reviewing and refining of themes as well as the selection of excerpts that will appear in the findings. We ended up with four themes (aggregate dimensions) and 16 sub-themes (2nd order themes). We concluded this process by defining the themes, linking the themes to the research objective and creating the data structure (See Figure 1).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Findings

We present our findings in this section with illustrations using power quotes from the data extracts (Pratt, 2008). The four main themes — *Motivations*, *Challenges*, *Resilience* and *Aspirations* showcase how NWIEs experience entrepreneurship in Canada, from creating the business, to navigating challenges and planning for the future. How these factors influence NWIEs' businesses is discussed in this section.

Theme 1: Motivation and Opportunities

The data showed that various factors stirred NWIEs to start their businesses. Our participants talked about how their motivation to start a business stemmed from the *passion for their craft and possession of local skills*—cooking, fashion etc. needed to create such businesses. These skills were mostly learned from parents and grandparents while growing up in Nigeria and some of the women had obtained their skills through some form of education or apprenticeship. The women in this study who rendered food services primarily cook Nigerian foods, and their customers are mostly Nigerians. For some women, the *desire for personal fulfillment* and the *need to be role models* to their kids pulled them into entrepreneurship. Martha stated "... if you want your kids to work hard, you should show them what hard work and diligence look like" (Martha, Clothing/Fashion).

Many of the women described entrepreneurship as a tool for *wealth creation and/or financial stability*. "Besides the self-fulfillment from doing something I am passionate about, it makes me money" (Kemi, Food/Catering). Financial stability is particularly important as these women must support their immediate family in Canada and extended family in Nigeria.

Many of the women ascribed *situational factors* such as Covid-19 pandemic, maternity leave, and unemployment to their venture creation. Tiara recalled,

I started the business in October 2020. Covid brought this opportunity to me because I lost my job ..., so I started making Nigerian spring rolls and I have got referrals, the business is growing (Tiara, Food/Catering).

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Similarly, Isoken reflected,

I tried to start the business many times before the pandemic, but I never had enough time. I cooked for family and friends as a favor, but it was nothing official. With the pandemic, plus I was on maternity leave, I had time (Isoken, Food/Catering).

The women described Canada as a land filled with many *market opportunities* which they recognized and maximized such as uninterrupted power supply. Imade said,

Now I have stable power supply which I didn't have access to in Nigeria and this is one advantage of moving to Canada. Now, I can plan my operations properly and run the business smoothly (Imade, Food/catering).

Other opportunities identified by the women are increasing number of Nigerian immigrants which creates demand for certain products and services, and Canadian government support for immigrants and entrepreneurs including grant opportunities, mentorship programs and networking platforms. Edna explained,

Canada has different programs to help immigrants settle easily and I attended one of such programs at the YWCA. Also being a female, there are more opportunities for female immigrants here to thrive because there are programs targeted at women. Due to the pandemic, the Government of Canada released funding for Black entrepreneurs, so there is special funding for black entrepreneurs. It has really been helpful (Edna/ Clothing/Fashion).

The women also mentioned *cultural pride and community impact* as motivating factors. They want an opportunity to contribute to the Canadian economy and to celebrate their culture and race. Martha explained that one of the reasons she started making custom made clothes is for African women to feel confident and beautiful

We African Caribbean women, have voluptuous curves and we love fashion. The problem is that ready-to-wear clothes doesn't suit everybody and getting the right size can sometimes be difficult for plus size women. I like to see our women feel confident and beautiful in their skin (Martha, Clothing/Fashion).

Theme 2: Challenges

The women interviewed described several challenges impacting their businesses.

Personal challenges. The *fear of starting something new* and/or *the fear of failure* was mentioned as a factor which made some women start their businesses later than they should have, or prevented them from committing fully to the business. According to Zara, "I want to invest as much as possible in my business, but at the same time I'm being cautious...what if it fails, so I have kept my full-time employment" (Zara, Jewellery/Fashion).

Another concern raised by the women was *financial constraints* which limited the efforts to start or grow the business. Ayo stated,

I am struggling with capital. It is the reason I still have to work to get more money to support my business. I use my own money and my husband's money to fund the business...everything is being pumped into the business for now to operate the models, to brand, to advertise, pay rent... (Ayo, Beauty/Natural products).

In many cases, the women have kept multiple jobs to get stable income to support their family and fund their business ventures. Keeping multiple jobs has caused *stress and burnout* for many of the women as they find it hard to have *work life balance*. They explained that as women,

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they struggle to meet family commitments to their partners and children, and to balance their other jobs with the responsibility of being entrepreneurs. Zainab said, "... one challenge I'm facing is time, obviously, I have a fulltime job. I'm a mom, I'm a wife, I have a home to run. I am juggling a lot of things" (Zainab, Multiple businesses).

It is at times like this that the women wished they had *support of family and friends* in Canada who could help with some responsibilities such as babysitting the kids and school runs. According to Layo (IT Consultant), "...Canada also has its own challenges. For example, back in Nigeria I had live-in nanny, I could afford that. Here in Canada that's luxury". Some of the women highlighted the *stress of settling in a new country* and how this takes its toll on their wellbeing including marriage. Martha explained that women look to their spouses for help when they encounter challenges, but in the case of immigrants, both husband and wife are stressed from the challenges of moving to a new country which makes it difficult to support each other emotionally and physically. Some of the women talked about how it is difficult to make friends with non-Africans due to *cultural differences*. They explained that as Nigerians who are more communal by nature, it is difficult to adjust to a culture that is more individualistic. According to Zara, "No one here talks to you. My neighbor doesn't even know my name, doesn't know that I have a business" (Jewellery/Fashion).

I would say I have never been as stressed in my entire life than these three years of living in Canada...when you're living in a developed country where you don't get as much social support, ...you can't just leave your kids with the neighbors to watch them, the kids can't just go out on the streets and play... you have to do everything by yourself (Martha, Food/catering).

Business-related challenges. Many of the women described the *operational issues* involved in running their businesses. Most of the women run the business as sole proprietors and do not have employees to help them. They complained about the difficulty of working alone and how this slows down productivity such as inability to deliver products/services to customers on time.

I am doing all the work. I am the finance person, I am my customer service, I am my social media handler, I am my tax advisor, all of that (Zara, Jewellery/Fashion).

There are also micro-operational issues that the women face such as having lots of downtime which no one pays for (e.g., prepping food, washing up), balancing time zones to work with key partners in Nigeria, lacking a framework to determine how to pay themselves salary from the business, and lack of clarity on issues such as pricing the product/service, and managing delivery service to customers.

Several participants mentioned that for the Black woman entrepreneur, *gaining market access can be difficult*. Some women described how there are gatekeepers who hoard information and delay business processes making the women miss out on opportunities.

Most people in the field, they don't really support new entrants. The "big boys" in the field, they want to keep the business within themselves, because this is a business that can be lucrative. They might withhold the process of giving licensing, they delay the process (Zainab, Multiple businesses).

Some women complained about their business *lacking visibility*. Nevertheless, many of them have made little efforts to gain visibility such as attending networking events, applying for

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government grants and intensifying marketing efforts. Yemi mentioned that “network is key but it’s just something I’ve not explored” (Food/Catering).

Only about half of the women we interviewed knew about grants opportunities and only two women had applied for grants. One of the women explained that

Being black is being a minority and there's a focus on helping such groups to grow and thrive in Canada. My business has been able to apply for one grant of \$4000, I haven't got the check, I am still waiting on it. (Edna/ Clothing/Fashion)

Some of the women assume that they are not eligible to apply for these opportunities because their businesses are at early start up stage. Ayo said, “for grants, I made two applications but was unsuccessful. Small businesses should have reached a baseline to be able to apply or get grants, but I am not yet there, I am optimistic, but I have to be very realistic” (Beauty/ Natural products). Sharing her knowledge about grants, Damola stated, “I’ve heard about grants, I haven’t explored it, I haven’t applied for any” Clothing/Fashion). Some of the women expressed their fear in applying for grants and if they could trust “free money” since they had no such opportunities in Nigeria.

Although some women recognized market gaps and opportunities such as cooking during the pandemic, the *market has become saturated* with many other Nigerian immigrant women coming into Canada and showing interest in the same or similar ventures. This has cut down the profit margin and market share previously enjoyed by the entrepreneurs and made some of the women question the sustainability of their business ventures.

Macro-level environment issues. The women spoke about some *regulatory and licensing issues* which are unfavorable to their business ventures such as strict importation and shipping policies which make it difficult to obtain some of the raw goods needed for their businesses from Nigeria. Reflecting on this, Martha explained, “I don't have access to cheap resources like I did back in Nigeria. They’re more expensive here and immigration policies wouldn't make easy for me to import fabrics. There’s been a lot of culture shock...the business climate is very different” (Clothing/Fashion).

These women find that navigating Canadian regulations can be difficult including rules for new business registration in Canada. While the process of registering the business itself is easy, the participants mentioned that they are required to take certificate courses such as food safety licenses and mandated to cook only from commercial kitchens which many of the women are unable to afford. The women find these discouraging. Yemi reflected,

I was required to get certifications, safety licensing, a commercial kitchen, all those rules which I was ignorant of when I started... I lived downtown and couldn't drive. The journey to the commercial kitchen was tiring and when I arrived, I would be too tired to do the cooking... that reduced my interest a bit (Food/Catering).

Some women mentioned that *grant application processes are long and difficult* and there are specific eligibility requirements difficult for start-up businesses to meet. Reflecting on her experience Ayo commented,

Government grants are tough to get, the application process is long. I attempted applying for two grants but realized that small businesses have to attain some basic requirements to get grants, and I don't have them (Ayo, Beauty/Natural products).

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Similarly, Isoken stated, “It would be nice if some policies are eased and if more grants are provided for Black immigrant women. With the strict restrictions, a lot of us cannot even benefit from the grant opportunities available” (Isoken, Food/Catering).

Some *economic factors* were mentioned by the women, for example high cost of shipping in Canada impacts their business. Some mentioned that bank charges for business accounts are too high and described it as “unfair” as it cuts into their profits. Other issues mentioned by the women include high cost of raw materials and labor cost in Canada compared to Nigeria, expensive local shipping and high taxes. Isoken explained,

I would have been able to do this business on a larger scale in Nigeria, getting cheaper labor and would have been able to be more hands-off with it (Food/Catering).

Speaking of how the Canadian government could support her, Edna said,

I would like the government to support made in Canada goods and provide an avenue for small businesses to have a location to work outside their homes. Also, government can make a way to lower the taxes for small businesses (Clothing/Fashion).

The women talked about how they must overcome *cultural bias* and *perceptions of incompetence* by non-Africans. Some of the women explained that to gain legitimacy for their business and overcome cultural bias, they have to go the extra mile to prove their worth and the show the value of their products/services.

Being new and being black and being a female immigrant, people tend to take advantage of you. Even customers feel that you are just new [to Canada], “so why would you want to charge me \$20.00 /hour for making this when you could charge \$15?” You need to know when to push back and when to say no, so I have had to put a price or value on myself because there's so many people who want to devalue you and give you less than what you deserve (Isoken, Food/ Catering).

Theme 3: Resilience

Speaking up and seeking help. Some women in our study mentioned that they have learned to ask for help when they need it particularly when they feel overwhelmed with multiple responsibilities. Sometimes they ask friends to help with the kids or to help with marketing strategies such as words of mouth and social media posts. Sometimes, the women pay professionals to provide household services such as cooking or cleaning. Some women ask their husbands for help with the household responsibilities or with the business venture. For example, when Tiara was struggling with the decision to offer delivery service or not for customers, her husband would help by driving to the customer’s homes to deliver the products. Some women have also learnt to leverage their partners’ skills to help with business functions. Isoken stated, “My husband has been very supportive, at the start of the business, he helped to design the logo and did all financial calculations because I am not good with numbers” (Food/Catering). Additionally, some women have begun employing workers to help with some of the responsibilities of the business.

Some of the women spoke about the importance of speaking up about the problems they might be experiencing and embracing therapy. These women emphasized the importance of more African women engaging in therapy, starting with challenging the cultural belief that therapy holds little value.

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Most Nigerians don't believe in therapy. It's not a Nigerian thing to embrace therapy, surprisingly I did. Being open and accountable to myself have helped me... I'll say our cultural background influences us and certain things should be unlearned (Yemi, Food/Catering)

Self/business development. To improve themselves and their businesses, some women have sought further academic or vocational education. Some women focus on courses such as business administration to learn more about managing their businesses, while others pursue knowledge to improve themselves or to give themselves opportunities for a future career change. Some women seek mentors and peers in the industry who are willing to share their knowledge.

Strategic pauses and adjustments. Many of the women described how they would take a break [especially from the business venture] to re-strategize and make changes for improvement. Over the years, many of the women have learnt the importance of prioritizing self-care. Sometimes this comes in the form of taking breaks and time off work to spend more time with family or just to take care of themselves. Recalling why she took a break, Edna said, "... the first community I'm most accountable to are my family and my children. So, the business took a backburner for a while just so I could focus on my mental health and supporting my family, but now it's back on" (Clothing/Fashion).

For some women, self-care comes in the form of exercise and healthy diets which they explained are healthy habits they picked up later in life after they moved to Canada.

I've felt a bigger sense of maturity since moving to Canada and I am learning to take self-care seriously. I need to take care of myself so that I can be strong and healthy for my children (Damola, Clothing/Fashion).

Although, some of the women acknowledged that taking time off might affect the productivity of their business venture, they have learnt to feel less guilty about this and to rate self-care higher.

Faith and Spirituality. Some women interviewed talked about their religion being a strong factor influencing who they are and how they run their businesses. These women were born into their religion and raised by their parents religiously. Some of the women described how prayers and faith guide their decision-making processes and gives them feelings of hope and joy despite the many challenges they face. Damola stated,

I think my faith as always helped me to thrive irrespective of the country I'm in. I'm a Christian and the roots of my joy has always been in my faith. ...In my religion, there's a joy you get when you spend time with God, ... sometimes I'm wondering about things and it sometimes feels like God is telling me "this is what you were created for, this is the life I want for you" and so that just gives me immense joy, I just accept it and I have joy in that because, he [God] knows tomorrow.

Some also described how their faith forbids certain behaviors such as lack of contentment. As such, they are content with what they have which might seem little to others.

My sense of contentment comes from my spirituality. I aspire for higher things but in my religion, it is important to be content. It is God who takes care of my needs,

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and I don't have to stress myself working multiple jobs and experiencing burnout. I am grateful for the things I have; life is not about chasing money...the greatest legacy I can leave my children...is the impact I have made beyond my immediate environment (Layo, IT Consultant).

Theme 4: Aspirations

Desire for expansion. Several interviewees expressed the desire to break into non-African markets and getting people of other races interested in their product/service. By reaching a diverse clientele, they would be able to gain more visibility and financial benefits. Ayo expressed this by saying, "I want to see this business being a global name, I want everybody to know about my business, not just in Canada, in Nigeria, US, UK, and all over the world". Some women also talked about expanding the range of services/products they offer, and some participants expressed interest in innovating within their industries such as creating new product lines (jewellery design or new recipes) and finding ways to reach international markets. According to Layo,

I see myself being able to operate and grow the business to a state where we have employees, more clients and maybe one or two partnerships with some Original Equipment Manufacturers [OEMs], ... also, to be able to mentor people (IT Consultant)

Formalizing operations. Some women spoke about plans to formalize their business operations such as moving from home kitchen to commercial kitchen and others mentioned the need to improve their business structure such as changing from sole proprietorship to a larger organizational structure.

Cultural preservation and influence. Promoting and preserving African culture is what some women aspire to do with their businesses. Ayo wants to share the beauty and health secrets that have worked for Africans with the world. "I want the world to know that Africa is beautiful" (Beauty/Natural Products). Damola (Clothing/Fashion) will continue her business in order to keep the Nigerian culture alive. Expressing concern,

My fear is, I don't want our culture to die. Nigerians are emigrating out of Nigeria at a high rate. My kids for example, I have a five-year-old son and a three-year-old daughter. They're British, they were born in England they haven't been to Nigeria before. How will they know about their culture? How will they know about their roots?

Isoken hopes to be a positive influence by building a business that can provide employment to new Nigerian immigrant women in Canada in the future (Food/Catering).

Discussion

Our findings reveal that Nigerian women immigrant entrepreneurs (NWIEs) in Canada engage in what we term transnational communal entrepreneurship—a distinct economic logic that fundamentally challenges Western entrepreneurial taxonomies. While Canadian women entrepreneurs typically pursue individualized success markers (financial independence, career advancement) fitting the "classic entrepreneurial profile" (Hughes, 2006), NWIEs demonstrate integrated motivations where wealth creation, unemployment mitigation, and family support converge into collective advancement imperatives. This motivational complexity positions them outside established Western categories, not as deviation but as manifestation of an

alternative entrepreneurial epistemology rooted in African communitarian values (Kayanula and Quartey, 2000).

The operationalization of this logic constitutes our most significant theoretical contribution. NWIEs transform the intersectional barriers they face—racialized exclusion, gendered care burdens, and immigrant status—into catalysts for innovative business architectures. Rather than simply "overcoming" restricted access to resources and markets, they engineer diasporic resource ecosystems by: (1) leveraging Nigerian networks as parallel market infrastructures, (2) converting cultural capital (culinary/fashion expertise) into transnational value chains, and (3) reframing extended family obligations as distributed risk-management systems. This represents a departure from resilience narratives toward constraint-based innovation—a phenomenon where limitations actively shape business models rather than merely being circumvented.

Culturally, NWIEs enact what we conceptualize as embedded hybridity: their businesses consciously maintain Nigerian communal ethics while strategically engaging Canadian market mechanisms. This manifests in practices like using Canadian food safety certifications to premium-price "authentic" Nigerian cuisine, where profits simultaneously sustain Toronto operations and Lagos family enterprises. Such models transcend the individualist-communitarian binary, creating what participants described as "businesses that feed two nations." This dual orientation functions as geopolitical negotiation (Mohanty, 2003), subverting neocolonial market exclusion through what we identify as calculated cultural arbitrage.

NWIEs construct sovereign market spaces—entrepreneurial zones where business creation enacts decolonial place-making through three novel mechanisms. First, they reconfigure racialized confinement by transforming ethnic enclaves into deliberate innovation labs, strategically leveraging spatial exclusion to develop hybrid products/services that simultaneously serve niche Canadian markets and Nigerian communal needs. Second, they transmute transnational care work from economic burden into venture architecture, engineering extended family networks into operational scaffolding that enables cross-border business scaling. Third, they convert cultural stigmatization into strategic authenticity capital through conscious rebranding of marginalized practices—traditional savings circles become "community investment pools," linguistic fluency frames as "global communication expertise"—transmuting colonial exoticization into competitive advantage.

Collectively, these practices constitute entrepreneurship as sovereignty practice, advancing diaspora studies beyond victimhood narratives while expanding transnational feminist and postcolonial theory. By treating colonial market asymmetries as actionable terrain rather than historical constraints, NWIEs demonstrate how: 1) spatial exclusion can be weaponized for specialized value creation; 2) social reproduction (Federici, 2012) functions as business infrastructure; and 3) cultural identity becomes deliberate entrepreneurial resource. This reframes business creation as decolonial world-making—where economic actions reclaim autonomy over value distribution and cultural representation through everyday market subversions that transcend symbolic resistance (Mohanty, 2003).

Implications for NWIEs and Policies in Canada

To overcome resource constraints, NWIEs in Canada should fully utilize their social capital by seeking help from friends and family members for both their household responsibilities and their business operations, which according to Nigerian traditions, are the roles for women and

men respectively. Now that they have immigrated to Canada, learning to adapt to Canadian culture and lessening gender roles will enable their entrepreneurship to thrive in the market. NWIEs in Canada may also embrace therapy, which in Nigerian culture, is considered invaluable (Ayonrinde and Okulate, 2012).

As the NWIEs' having limited access to resources and market in Canada bound their market to their ethnic community (Chrysostome and Arcand, 2009), such ethnic market limits the scalabilities to their ventures, despite increasing number of Nigerian immigrants. Since a non-ethnic market does not require any product sourced from Nigeria nor any Nigerian community in Canada, it can help expand the businesses of the NWIEs and improve their survivals, especially when importation policies in Canada hinder shipments of goods from Nigeria. By expanding to the mainstream market, the pool of labour who is willing to and can work without ethnic or cultural knowledge also enlarges, thereby decreasing the labour costs for the NWIEs. Since NWIEs in Canada tend to be skilled workers who are highly educated, one way to enter non-ethnic mainstream market in Canada is to base their businesses upon what they have previously studied in their education or have experienced in their previous profession. Another way for NWIEs to expand their ventures into non-ethnic market is promoting African culture in Canada, which aligns with their aspirations.

Many Nigerian women immigrant entrepreneurs (NWIEs) find that pursuing academic or vocational education and seeking industry mentorship not only equips them with essential business management skills but also enhances their job prospects and opportunities for advancement in their full-time employment. However, their risk aversion, driven by the need to maintain full-time jobs as a safety net against potential business failures and to balance family responsibilities, often limits their commitment to and the growth of their ventures. Emotional support from family, alongside faith and spirituality, can bolster their resilience in managing risks. Governmental support in the form of grants and low-interest loans exists in Canada for Black women entrepreneurs; however, many NWIEs remain unaware of these resources, indicating a need for targeted information dissemination through ethnic channels. Furthermore, promoting workshops that offer comprehensive business training and mentorship can help NWIEs navigate Canadian institutions more effectively, fostering greater trust in the system and enabling them to fully realize their entrepreneurial potential in Canada.

Beyond Canadian policy considerations, the experiences of NWIEs offer critical insights for global entrepreneurship debates within transnational, racialized, and postcolonial contexts. Their transnational navigation—leveraging Nigerian networks while operating within Canadian markets—exemplifies how migrant entrepreneurs reconfigure "borderland economies" (Brzozowski *et al.*, 2017), challenging nation-state-centric business models. Their racialized confinement to ethnic enclaves, despite high education, underscores how racial capitalism (Robinson, 2003) perpetuates systemic barriers that equate Blackness with limited market viability (Minto-Coy, 2019). Most significantly, their hybrid entrepreneurial practices—merging African communal ethics with market demands—constitute a postcolonial counter-narrative to Western neoliberalism. By prioritizing collective well-being over individual accumulation (Ebewo *et al.*, 2025), NWIEs demonstrate how entrepreneurship serves as resistance to colonial legacies of extraction (Mohanty, 2003), offering vital alternatives to universalized models of economic agency.

Conclusion

In conclusion, transnational feminist theory provides a robust framework for examining the entrepreneurial experiences of Nigerian women immigrants in Canada. By incorporating this

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perspective, we gain valuable insights into the intricate interplay of cultural identity, structural barriers, and agency that shape their journeys. This approach not only enriches our understanding of their unique challenges and motivations but also calls for more inclusive policies and support systems that address the specific needs of Nigerian women entrepreneurs. Moving forward, it is essential to integrate these voices into the broader discourse on immigrant entrepreneurship, ensuring that their experiences are recognized and valued within academic and policy discussions.

This study is limited by its focus on a specific group (i.e., Nigerian women immigrant entrepreneurs) in Canada, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other immigrant or entrepreneurial populations. Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews, while providing rich qualitative data, may be subject to participant biases or self-reporting inaccuracies. Future research could explore the experiences of NWIEs across different regions in Canada or compare them with other immigrant entrepreneur groups to uncover broader patterns. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable to examine how motivations, challenges, and business outcomes evolve over time.

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Table I. Demographic Information of NWIEs

Pseudonym	Immigration Status	Education	Age	Marital Status	Children	Industry/Sector
Edna	Permanent Resident	BA, MA	30s	Married	Yes	Clothing/Fashion
Isoken	Permanent Resident	BA, MA	30s	Married	No	Food/Catering
Ayo	Permanent Resident	BSc, Professional Certificate (1)	30s	Married	Yes	Beauty/Natural products
Imade	Permanent Resident	BA, Professional Certificates (5)	30s	Married	Yes	Food/Catering
Kemi	Permanent Resident	BSc, Professional Certificates (2)	30s	Married	Yes	Food/Catering
Tiara	Permanent Resident	BSc, MSc	30s	Married	Yes	Food/Catering
Zara	Permanent Resident	BA Executive Certificate (1)	30s	Married	Yes	Jewellery/Fashion
Damola	Nigerian/Canadian	BSc, MSc Professional Certificates (2)	30s	Married	Yes	Clothing/Fashion
Yemi	Nigerian/Canadian	BA, MA	30s	Divorced	No	Food/catering
Layo	Nigerian/Canadian	BSc, MBA Professional Certificates	30s	Married	Yes	IT Consultant
Zainab	Nigerian/Canadian	BA, MSc	30s	Married	Yes	Interior décor/social work/real estate
Martha	Nigerian/Canadian	BA, MA, MSc	30s	Married	Yes	Clothing/Fashion

Figure 1. Data Structure

