The Career Transitioning Experiences of Nigerian Economic Immigrants in Canada: Reliance on Christian Faith and Personal Agency
Les expériences de transition de carrière chez des immigrants économiques nigériens au Canada : se fonder sur la foi chrétienne et l'agentivité personnelle

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ABSTRACT

Career transitioning among immigrants in Canada is a widely studied phenomenon. However, little research exists on the experiences of sub-Saharan African immigrants. In Canada, immigrants from African countries represent a significant proportion of the immigrant labour force, yet they experience the highest unemployment rates compared to their counterparts from all other continents in the world (Yssaad & Fields, 2018). The current study used phenomenology as a methodology and intersectionality as an epistemology to explore the challenges and coping strategies of six Christian Nigerian economic immigrant (NEI) women and men undergoing career transitioning in Canada. Results revealed the salience of career transitioning in the socio-cultural, occupational, and socio-economic aspects of NEIs' lives. Their Christian faith and personal agency were interconnected sources of strength for overcoming transitioning challenges. Implications for counselling and further research are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

La transition ou réorientation de carrière chez les personnes qui immigrent au Canada constitue un phénomène qui est l'objet de nombreuses études. Toutefois, on a très peu étudié les expériences des migrants de l'Afrique subsaharienne, qui représentent un pourcentage important de la main-d'œuvre canadienne mais qui connaissent également les taux de chômage les plus élevés. Dans la présente étude, on a eu recours à la phénoménologie comme méthode et à l'intersectionnalité comme outil épistémologique en vue d'explorer les défis et les stratégies d'adaptation chez six Nigériennes et Nigériens chrétiens immigrants économiques (NEI) en cours de transition de carrière au Canada. Les résultats ont révélé l'importance de la réorientation de carrière sur les plans socioculturels, professionnels, et socio-économiques de la vie des NEI. La foi chrétienne et l'agentivité personnelle des NEI constituaient des sources de

force interreliées favorisant la capacité de relever les défis de la transition. On présente une discussion sur les implications pour le counseling et pour la recherche à venir.

Given that immigration is a major driving force behind population and economic growth in Canada, immigration research has proliferated within the past two decades. Recent immigration literature has explored how immigrants' experiences are being shaped by social categories (e.g., country of origin, race, gender, age, language, etc.; Sinacore et al., 2009). Between 2015 and 2020, immigrants from African countries to Canada were the second largest group of immigrants after those from Asia, representing 14% of recent immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2021b). African immigrants represented 14% of the permanent residents who arrived in Canada between 2015 and 2019, and 74% of these African immigrants came from sub-Saharan African countries, which have predominantly Black populations (Statistics Canada, 2021b). The 2016 Canadian census stated that 60% of Black African immigrants (BAIs) who were between the ages of 25 and 59 in 2016 had arrived in Canada between 1980 and 2016 through economic and family reunion immigration programs (Houle, 2020). BAIs who were accepted through the economic immigration program (i.e., Black African economic immigrants; BAEIs) possess competitive educational and occupational credentials that should help them integrate well into the Canadian economy. However, recent statistics show that African immigrants are experiencing significant delays in entry into the Canadian labour market. For example, as of 2021, the rate of unemployment for African immigrants who had immigrated between 2015 and 2020 was 18%, whereas the average rate of unemployment for people in Canada who had immigrated between 2015 and 2020 from continents besides Africa was 12% (Statistics Canada, 2021a). Similarly, as of 2021, the rate of employment for African immigrants who had immigrated between 2015 and 2020 was 57%, whereas the average rate of employment for people who had immigrated from continents besides Africa to Canada between 2015 and 2020 was 67% (Statistics Canada, 2021a). Therefore, further research is needed to investigate the inequitable economic outcomes of African immigrants and to explore their lived experiences.

Career Transitioning
According to Louis (1980), career is defined as "an accumulation of role-related experiences [gained] over time," whereas career transition is defined as "the period during which an individual is either changing roles … or changing orientation to a role already held" (p. 330). A review of 40 years of the literature on career transitioning by Sullivan and Al Ariss (2021) yielded five perspectives on career transitioning, including career stages, career decision-making, career adjustment, the relational perspective, and identity changes. The career adjustment

perspective posits that individuals tend to transition across work projects, organizations, and countries, and the current paper will use this perspective to explore the career transitioning experiences of BAEIs. Attaining employment is often an area of concern for immigrants in Canada, given their lower job success rates compared to those of Canadian-born individuals (Sinacore et al., 2015). Immigrants categorized as "visible minorities" experience even greater employment difficulties due to widespread discriminatory practices that devalue immigrants' skills and credentials based on their race and their country of origin, despite the supposed societal commitment to multiculturalism in Canada (Foster, 2010).

Black African Immigrants

In the context of this paper, the term Black African immigrants (BAIs) refers to people born in sub-Saharan African countries and to their Canadian-born children, who are likely to be assigned to the Black racial category due to their physical characteristics (Imoagene, 2017), whereas the term Black African economic immigrants (BAEIs) refers to BAIs who arrived in Canada through the economic immigration program. Meanwhile, the term African Canadians refers to people who were born in Canada to parents whose ancestry can be traced to the African people who were historically enslaved in North America. As is consistent with the literature on BAIs, the term African Canadians will be used interchangeably with the term Black Canadians (Este et al., 2018). While the experiences of Northern African immigrants are equally valid and important, the researchers chose to focus only on African immigrants from sub-Saharan African countries due to their under-representation within immigration discourse.

The difficult experiences of BAEIs in the Canadian labour market need to be situated within the historical context of slavery from 1629 to 1834 and of centuries of explicitly racist immigration policies. Such policies restricted the entry of Black African, Black Caribbean, and many other non-European persons and were not reformed until 1967 (Lorenzetti & Jacob, 2018). Black people have resided in what is now called Canada since the onset of transatlantic settlement. Black settlers were forcibly removed from their home countries and enslaved in Canada between 1629 and 1834 (Williams & Walker, 2021) and in the United States between 1619 and 1865 (Onion et al., 2021). During the American Revolution, some Black people who were enslaved in Britain were brought by White British slave masters from Britain to the Canada and the United States (which was formerly known as British North America; (Williams & Walker, 2021). During the war of 1812, British loyalists offered freedom from slavery and parcels of land in Canada to the enslaved Black people who had been brought from Britain (Williams & Walker, 2021). These promises were made on the condition that they remained loyal to British rule in Canada. The enslaved Black people accepted the offer, and some even fought in support of British rule during the war of 1812 (Williams & Walker, 2021). Unfortunately, following the victory of

British loyalists, the promises for freedom from enslavement and lands were only partly kept. Enslaved Black people were assigned to several isolated rural settlements with lands that were unsuitable for farming, which made it impossible for people to build vibrant communities and ethnic economies (Williams & Walker, 2021). After the abolition of slavery, when Black people relocated to urban cities to seek employment, most of them had access only to unskilled or low-skilled jobs that yielded a meagre salary (Williams & Walker, 2021). Therefore, the combined influences of limited land capital and low occupational status led to a perpetually low socio-economic status among Black Canadians from the 1800s to the present day. BAEIs also face occupational and economic inequalities similar to those faced by Black Canadians due to their similar physical characteristics and to the tendency of Canadian institutions to treat them as a homogeneous group (Este et al., 2018). For example, in 2015, Black men in Canada had a median annual income of $41,000, which was 27% lower than that of other men in the population ($56,000; Houle, 2020). In addition, both second-generation Black African immigrant women and Black Canadian women earned $7,000 (15%) less than their non-Black counterparts in 2015 (Houle, 2020).

Over the past four decades, research has documented experiences of racism that pose significant barriers to the occupational transitioning of BAEIs. These experiences included limited access to entry-level jobs, non-recognition of foreign academic and occupational credentials, loss of previously high occupational status, discrimination against African English accents, religious discrimination, hostile treatments in work settings, and derogatory remarks about their heritage (Adekoya & Sinacore, 2019; Creese & Wiebe, 2012). Gender-related challenges were also documented in past research studies. For example, women were overrepresented in precarious work involving low pay and unstable hours. Such low-paying jobs limited their ability to afford child care in Canada, a cost they did not have to cover in their countries of origin due to unpaid child care support from their extended families (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018; Umaigba, 2017). Also, men faced a double standard that considered them unqualified for jobs in their fields of expertise and overqualified for low-skilled jobs. Even those men who secured low-skilled jobs still faced constant surveillance (Nyaga, 2019; Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018).

The strengths and coping strategies of BAEIs were also identified in the literature. Employment search strategies among BAEI men and women included returning to school to pursue post-secondary degrees from Canadian universities, naming the racism they encountered in the labour market, and subsequently applying to organizations with explicitly anti-racist policies (Creese & Wiebe, 2012). Nevertheless, only women experienced upward mobility from low-skilled to semi-professional jobs (Creese & Wiebe, 2012). Also, to perform well in their universities and workplaces, Kenyan immigrant men drew on strengths from their indigenous masculinity that helped them to be firm, to accept their own

identities, to use silence as resiliency, to deny the influence of racism, and to build community among other Black men (Nyaga, 2019). Finally, an overarching strength of BAEIs is that they hold higher levels of educational attainment than people of the general population and they are present in every occupational category in Canada (Williams and Walker, 2021).

Research Purpose and Question

The above Canadian studies have revealed that the career transitioning challenges and coping strategies of BAEIs are influenced by race and gender. Yet, the influences of other social locations and group memberships such as country of origin, language, religious affiliation, and socio-economic status remain unexplored in terms of their career transitioning experiences. As such, in addition to the influences of race and gender, the present study aimed to understand which other intersecting social locations and group memberships recent BAEIs would consider relevant to their experiences of career transitioning.

Method

Epistemology

The current study utilized intersectionality as the epistemological frame (i.e., the way of knowing what is being studied). With its roots in standpoint theory (Crenshaw, 1990), intersectionality proposes that individuals occupy varying and interacting positions of privilege and oppression that provide or restrict their access to knowledge and power in various contexts (Sinacore & Enns, 2005). These positions include social locations such as age, race, class, language, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, immigration status, and Indigenous status as well as group memberships such as religious organizations, ethnic communities, professional associations, and political parties (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The researchers deemed intersectionality to be an appropriate epistemological frame for the current study because BAEIs occupy various intersecting positions (e.g., age, race, gender, and religious affiliation) that may influence their career transitioning experiences.

Methodology

The researchers chose the hermeneutic phenomenology (HP) method, which seeks to understand deeply the meaning, the structure, and the essence of a phenomenon (i.e., an aspect of human experience; Bhattacharya, 2017; Howitt, 2013). Career transitioning is the phenomenon under investigation in this study. HP is also rooted in its own epistemological framework that posits that the meaning of a phenomenon is facilitated through cultural symbols such as language, religion, and history (Bhattacharya, 2017). As authors of this study, we hold the ontological assumption (i.e., the belief about the state of being) that

humans exist through relationships with other humans. Our assumption fits well with the current study because career transitioning is a negotiation of roles in relation to other human beings. For BAEIs, the process of negotiating occupational roles in a new environment is further complicated by how representatives of the Canadian labour market respond to intersecting aspects of BAEIs' identities. Thus, we consider intersectionality as an epistemology to be an appropriate fit for the HP method because the combination of intersectionality as an epistemology and the HP method helps us understand the phenomenon of career transitioning within the context of the intertwining social influences of race, gender, class, and religion in the lives of BAEIs. The researchers carefully implemented the methodology to ensure credibility and ethical and procedural rigour. A detailed description of the participants was also provided.

Credibility and Ethical and Procedural Rigour

Ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics board of the researchers' academic institution. Word of mouth, social media, wall posters, and mailing lists of African cultural and religious organizations were used to advertise the study. In order to be eligible for the study, prospective participants needed to have arrived in Canada within the past 1 to 10 years through the economic permanent residency class from an African country, self-identify as Black, and be within the ages of 25 and 44 at the time of the interview. The age range of 25 to 44 was chosen to involve a core segment of individuals in the Canadian labour market who typically would have completed their schooling but had not retired (Yssaad & Fields, 2018). Purposive sampling was undertaken whereby individuals who could provide rich descriptions of their career transitioning were intentionally selected (Polkinghorne, 2005). Although 12 participants are recommended for qualitative studies to attain saturation, at which point no additional theme is likely to emerge from any additional interview conducted, the researchers recruited only six participants as was feasible for a master's research project (Guest et al., 2006). Interviews took place between December 2017 and February 2018. The duration of 3 months was appropriate for the scope of the study, as this time frame was sufficient to answer the research question (Patton, 2002, as cited in Orwenyo, 2020). Each selected participant met the first author individually in the private room of a public library or over a secure video-conferencing application. After securing informed consent, participants completed a 90-minute audio-recorded semi-structured interview. The researchers used open-ended questions to encourage participants to elaborate on their employment, educational, and financial experiences.

The use of the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis allowed the researchers to make an in-depth description of participants' career transitioning experiences and their ascribed meanings (Howitt, 2013). The audio-recorded semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and further verified for accuracy. Member

checking was performed, during which time a summary of the interview was sent to the participants for confirmation and adjustments (Reason & Riley, 2008). Each transcript was read repeatedly, and the first author noted initial impressions. A research assistant conducted external verification to verify the primary researcher's initial impressions of the transcripts. Externally confirmed impressions were recorded as focus points (e.g., career redirection) and matched with line numbers corresponding with statements within the individual transcripts. Afterwards, all focus points from individual transcripts were examined and similar focus points were merged into units called major themes across transcripts. For example, focus points such as "career redirection" and "strategy for occupation integration" were merged into a major theme called "career and educational experiences and aspirations." Major themes were verified and further collapsed by the second researcher.

Finalized major themes were matched with line numbers corresponding with statements in individual transcripts. Finalized major themes consistent across all transcripts were collapsed into units called sub-themes. For example, the major theme "career and educational experiences and aspirations" appeared across all transcripts with no similar categories with which to merge; hence, it became a sub-theme. Finally, sub-themes within each finalized major theme were matched with line numbers across all transcripts. Following transcript analysis, data were compared to participants' demographic information to confirm consistency and to attain data triangulation. Triangulation is a stage in the analysis where data collected through various methods are thoroughly analyzed to the point of redundancy (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The researchers ensured credibility by keeping an audit trail of (a) the step-by-step process of analysis to allow for reconstruction by others and (b) self-reflection journals about the researchers' experiences, thoughts, and biases concerning each participant (Howitt, 2013).

Participants

The recruitment resulted in six participants hailing from Western and Eastern Canada. They consisted of four women and two men who had been born in Nigeria. Given that all participants were from Nigeria, a summary of the country will follow. Nigeria is located in West Africa and is the most populous country in Africa. It is classified as a lower-middle-income country. In 2019, Nigeria had a gross national income per capita of USD$5,170, an equivalent amount in Naira, which is Nigeria's national currency (World Bank, n.d.). Nigeria's official language is English, given its history of British colonization. Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo are the dominant ethnicities, and a communal lifestyle is highly valued across ethnicities (Ojie, 2006). A majority of Nigerians identify with the two religious traditions of Christianity and Islam, and religious practice is a vibrant aspect of daily life and society (Ojie, 2006). The social system in Nigeria does not effectively cater to citizens, such that they do not have consistent access to

clean water, electricity, security, or quality basic education. Although elementary and secondary education is free and obligatory, there are very high rates of non-attendance, especially in the northwestern and northeastern regions, where poverty is prevalent (Dapel, 2018; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, n.d.). Higher education is non-accessible to citizens living in poverty both in northern and southern regions, but citizens in the middle and upper socio-economic classes easily access private university education and even aspire to emigrate to high-income countries for better educational opportunities (Connor & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2019).

In the current study, participants represented two ethnicities, self-identified as heterosexual and as Christian, and were married with children. They spoke English as well as their native languages fluently. The four women were between the ages of 30 and 36 and the two men were between the ages of 30 and 45. All participants were given pseudonyms.

Ebun moved to Canada to support her husband through school. She acquired a bachelor's degree in nursing, with specializations in public health and midwifery, and worked as a registered nurse in Nigeria. At the time of the interview, Ebun was a part-time medical orderly.

After completing a bachelor's degree in psychology and working in the customer service sector in Nigeria, Precious moved to Canada to give birth to one of her children and to attain better life opportunities. At the time of the interview, she was unemployed.

Tomide and Tolulope were the only couple in this study, although they were interviewed separately. Tomide and Tolulope acquired bachelor's degrees in resource management and insurance in Nigeria, respectively. Tomide moved to Canada to complete a master's in engineering and Tolulope moved to reunite with him. Prior to their arrival in Canada, they had taught in a school for a year in Nigeria; and Tolulope had also trained and worked for 18 years as a hairstylist in Nigeria. At the time of the interview, Tomide was a full-time machine operator and Tolulope was a full-time house cleaner in Canada.

Amaka moved to Canada to attain international work experience and to give birth to one of her children. She had obtained degrees in pharmacy and occupational health in Nigeria and had worked in the health sector there. At the time of the interview, she was unemployed and was completing Canadian pharmacy licensing exams.

Daniel moved to Canada from a European country due to its unwelcome political climate. Prior to leaving Nigeria, he had obtained a degree in dentistry and had operated his own dental clinic. During his stay in the European country, he acquired a graduate degree in public health and worked in the public health sector for several years. At the time of the interview, he was working full time in the public health sector in Canada.

Results

Two overarching themes emerged from the data analysis, namely Christian faith and personal agency. Three sub-themes were consistently found within these two overarching themes, namely the socio-cultural, occupational, and socio-economic aspects of participants' lives.

Socio-Cultural Transitioning

Participants discussed their perceptions of the social system, their interactions with fellow members of society, and their efforts to address barriers to their societal participation.

Admiration for Social Infrastructure

Some participants expressed their appreciation for Canada's economic development and cultural diversity. They admired the availability of social amenities (e.g., quality roads), technology (e.g., accessible Internet), and social services (e.g., child benefits). Precious said, "Canada is a beautiful place. The people are welcoming. The authorities want you to be as comfortable as you can, especially when you have children."

Mixed Experiences of Social Belonging

Daniel, Amaka, and Tolulope described experiencing public courtesy, which fostered a sense of belonging to Canada. For example, Tolulope explained, "The way people are accommodating and ready to help makes me feel like Canada is a place to be."

Conversely, Precious and Tomide described not feeling a sense of social belonging in Canada. As Tomide stated, "There's a kind of isolation in Canada. You just have to learn to be on your own." Precious also said, "My children are integrating well, … but I've just not been able to settle." Tomide explained that his experience of people being unwilling to help him learn the social system led to his sense of social isolation: "Everybody is busy trying to catch up with something.… You don't even have anyone who's interested in providing the answer."

Participants took the initiative to counter their social isolation and their lack of support by establishing small networks of Nigerians in their neighbourhoods, thereby demonstrating personal agency. These networks fostered a sense of connectedness among NEIs and served to revive the communal lifestyle they had enjoyed in Nigeria. As Tomide explained,

> A few of [us] that live in the neighbourhood find a way of helping each other. You could pick [up] your friend's child in school … and you plan it together that on a particular day, they are going to pick your child [up] for you.… We could also find a friend and brother in them.

Occupational Transitioning

Having acquired one or more post-secondary degrees and worked for an average of eight years in their professional fields, the participants stated that they had come to Canada expecting to work in similar high-skilled occupations. They described the processes and challenges of acquiring such positions, including securing academic and credential equivalence, applying for jobs, and experiencing unemployment and underemployment. Nevertheless, they recounted how they demonstrated personal agency through self-empowerment and self-advocacy.

Participants' experiences with the recognition of their academic and occupational credentials varied based on whether their professions were regulated in Canada. In Canada, regulated professions require individuals to acquire specific academic credentials, work experiences, or licences to use the title and enjoy the rights associated with the profession (Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, n.d.). Participants who were in regulated professions faced barriers during formal evaluation procedures, such as having difficulties accessing licensing information, meeting French proficiency requirements, needing additional courses, and having to write expensive licensing exams. Daniel, who had previously worked in public health and dentistry, initially tried to pursue dentistry in Canada. To do so, however, he would have had to return to school for 2 years before taking the dentistry licensing exams. He indicated that this was impossible, since "it would have taken me a lot more time. [There was only] one family income." As a result, he pursued a public health career in which no equivalency evaluations were required.

Participants described using several strategies to maximize their chances of attaining high-skilled jobs, including researching the profession, networking, volunteering, undertaking internships, preparing high-quality documents, and doing mock interviews. They also received support from immigrant or university career services, professionals' integration programs, and public libraries. For example, Amaka explained, "I'm doing a bridging program.… We have five mentors that are practising pharmacists in Canada." Despite their thorough preparations, participants faced multiple rejections from job opportunities. They were given reasons such as a lack of Canadian work experience, a lack of Canadian education, or a lack of French proficiency for participants living in a French-speaking province. Tomide remarked, "I sent out several applications without feedback.… I didn't know what the problem was." After receiving repeated rejections for jobs in their fields of expertise, participants expressed feeling disappointed and degraded. As such, some participants accepted low-skilled jobs while still hoping for openings in their fields. Ebun, an experienced registered nurse in Nigeria who worked as a medical orderly in Canada, remarked, "I see myself as if I am descending so low from where I am coming from."

Despite facing the negative emotional impacts of employment barriers, participants responded with persistence, patience, and generativity. Their ability to remain courageous and optimistic kept them motivated to continue applying for jobs. For instance, during her international pharmacists' bridging program, Amaka had only 6 days before the deadline to secure a pharmacy internship. Despite being repeatedly rejected for internships, she remarked, "Being an African, you've heard all these stories that people pass through, right? Determine in your mind that no matter what, you'll [sail] through." She reported that she visited one of the pharmacies for the fourth time and was finally accepted.

During their interviews, participants described a mix of positive and negative workplace experiences after they acquired jobs or volunteer positions. Tolulope's experiences will be used for illustration in this section. Tolulope described positive experiences at her cleaning job: "Some of them accommodate me very well … try to say, 'thank you … looking forward to seeing you more.'" She added that these expressions of appreciation "gave me joy" and kept her from thinking she wasn't "doing what I'm supposed to [be doing]." Conversely, she described being harassed by a client during a work shift: "The lady treated me like I was a slave, telling me to do this—I'll do it—but still going back to say, 'Why didn't you do it?'" She spoke of the client's unrealistic demand that she clean the entire house within four hours and of the poor treatment she received at the end of her shift: "I told her I couldn't go further—'My time is up'—and she was like, 'No! What have you done?' … She was just [shouting at] me, [calling] the office, [saying] I'm not fast enough." Tolulope described the emotional impact of this incident after her shift: "I was so mad, and I was crying." Participants demonstrated agency during such incidents by advocating for themselves. For example, Tolulope set appropriate limits at her workplace by insisting that the administrators increase her assigned hours: "I told them, 'You have to add more hours to her hours so that … I will have more time to round up anything I want to do with her.'" The increased hours yielded a better experience in her next work shift: "That day, she actually co-operated."

Finally, participants who were dissatisfied with their low-skilled jobs attempted to start their own businesses. For participants, entrepreneurship meant being financially independent and contributing to the Canadian economy. Tolulope, a bachelor's graduate in insurance and a hairstylist with 18 years of experience, was facing unstable work hours in her housecleaning job. Although she was not hopeful about re-entering the insurance industry, she described starting her own small business as a hairstylist: "[I am] trying to register the business. Maybe by so doing, I will have the capacity to open it up in a bigger way." Tolulope was confident in her skills and optimistic about the prospects of financial independence: "I know that I know how to do this work very well and I can really establish

myself and be the boss of myself." Overall, participants addressed their challenges through self-empowerment, self-advocacy, and entrepreneurship.

Socio-Economic Transitioning

Participants reported being wealthy and living comfortably before immigrating to Canada, except Tomide and Tolulope, who had earned a minimum wage in Nigeria. After their immigration, participants experienced a drastic decline in their financial capacities that negatively impacted their socio-economic status. Yet, they navigated their socio-economic challenges through endurance and prudence, which testified to their personal agency.

Decline in Income After Immigration

Due to the aforementioned barriers, participants' job searches were prolonged. The prolonged search process significantly hindered them from gaining sufficient income over the course of 2 years. Tolulope, Tomide, and Ebun eventually accepted low-income jobs because they were desperate to gain an income. For example, Tolulope, who took a housecleaning job, remarked, "The money I am gaining from the work I do with the agency is a very low income." Precious and Amaka were still unemployed at the time of the interview.

Socio-Economic Status

Participants' difficulties acquiring higher-paying jobs influenced their average to low socio-economic status in Canada. Participants covered fixed expenses and occupational integration fees while remitting funds to family members back home. Employed participants earning an average to low income described having just enough to fulfill their financial responsibilities. For example, as a family, Tomide and Tolulope reported working three jobs between them to break even each month. Tolulope expressed contentment with their household's socio-economic status: "I'm an average person—at least I can finance my family, and we can live well even without borrowing or [using our] credit card every time."

Unemployed participants had significant difficulties in fulfilling their financial responsibilities. For example, due to a lack of income, Precious could not "cater to the needs of my family at home." Financial difficulties led to negative consequences such as feeling stressed and degraded, experiencing low moods, and lacking a sense of fulfillment in life. Precious described how her lack of earnings impacted her self-image and her sense of self-efficacy:

> Even as a woman, you need to feel fulfilled: like you go out every day, meet new people, have something challenging daily, and can overcome it. I don't usually sit around, but not getting an income is really sad. It's disturbing.… Sometimes I feel like I'm a nobody.

To tackle financial difficulties, participants described managing their finances conscientiously to meet their financial responsibilities. For example, Tomide remarked that, through frugality, he was able to meet numerous financial obligations despite earning an average income: "I know how much I earn, I know the bills I [must] pay, so I [buy only] what I can afford."

Furthermore, participants focused on their career goals in hopes of attaining a brighter economic future. Daniel said,

> I was very excited because I knew I would soon be established. I would soon move on from that stage; so, it was temporary. But if I took away that hope, that goal I had set for myself, it was a little bit like suffering.

Eventually, Daniel's period of exclusive preparation for job applications yielded a positive outcome. Based on his previous job application experiences in a European country, he stated that he kept to a high-income threshold: "I set my target and said I won't [apply for] any job below $75,000 per annum … so that gave me a focus. It was high, but I just said, '[Those are the jobs] I'd be [applying for].'" He eventually reported obtaining a job above his set amount. At the time of the interview, he described an upgrade in his immigration status, which positively influenced his high socio-economic status and standard of living:

> I think I'm a little bit settled now because, immigration-wise, I now have my Canadian citizenship. In [year of event], I did my ceremony.… That was the happiest day of the year for us. We had good things happen, including buying a new house and settling.

Role of Christian Faith in Transitioning Experiences

Participants spoke about a personal dimension to their Christian identities, which involved a belief in God, the regular study of the Bible, regular prayer, and applying Biblical principles to their day-to-day experiences. Their personal practice of Christianity will be referred to as Christian faith. The analysis showed that Christian faith was central to how participants confronted barriers to career changes in terms of occupational, socio-economic, and socio-cultural transitioning.

Role of Christian Faith in Occupational Transitioning

Participants recognized the importance of relying on God to manage the negative effects of occupational challenges on their psychological well-being. For example, Ebun explained how she resolved feelings of devaluation when she was rejected from nursing positions and was faced with low-skilled job options. She said: "It was really painful, but me, as a Christian, the first question was 'God,

why am I here? Why should I come and be passing through all this?'" She reported receiving a response from God:

> The message that God gave me was "Joseph [in the Bible] was a slave in Potiphar's house." Joseph was like a housekeeper in Potiphar's house, taking care of the house. God [told] me that He is sending me there to impact the person's life, that he just wants to use the avenue to win them to himself.… Although, I would go like a housekeeper, like a whatever, to take care of the house, that is not the purpose why He is sending me there.

In the message she received from God, Ebun referenced a story in the Old Testament in which Joseph (the 11th son of Israeli patriarch Jacob) is sold into slavery in a foreign country but later emerges as the country's vice president (*King James Bible*, 1769/2021, Gen. 37:39–41). Remembering this story in her prayers changed her perspective by identifying a God-given purpose for temporarily doing low-skilled jobs. Ebun remarked: "That word was a comforting word to me." For Ebun, being obedient to God's will made her more willing to apply for low-skilled jobs:

> I said, "Okay, God, let your will be done. If that is what exactly you want to accomplish." So, with that, I now had a free mind to look for whatever job. Even if I apply for jobs that are not my calibre, I wouldn't mind because God has a purpose.

Ebun eventually accepted a home-based caregiving position, which she worked in until she went on to pursue her nursing licence.

Furthermore, participants who could not enter their original fields gained insight on pursuing alternative careers through their Christian faith. Precious was a former banking professional who had been unemployed and had felt depressed for three years. However, she declared that she experienced a transformation in her emotions and in her career direction through her relationship with God: "Lately, God has been giving me my own life description, my purpose on earth.… Enough time has been wasted trying to be [in] the wrong lane; it's like God [is] redirecting my steps." She also reported receiving a message from God: "I'm gonna be sending you this time around. I want you to have an orphanage, [to] care for children." To that effect, Precious began seeking positions in child care. She said: "For career right now, I'm looking at places where they cater to children and their needs. And I'm willing to start at any level!"

Role of Christian Faith in Socio-Economic Transitioning
Participants spoke about how their Christian practice of generosity helped them deal with the negative consequences of having low-income employment.

Participants emphasized the importance of giving generously regardless of their income level or stability. For example, Precious described how she was moved by her Christian faith to give consistently despite being unemployed: "I had this habit of giving. I had nothing, but I would [host] people and feed them, and I was not the one working." However, she described struggling to balance her faith-based giving with her financial needs in her lowest fiscal period; hence, she "got my fingers burnt with people's attitudes." Nevertheless, Precious was reassured by interpreting her giving as periods of sowing, which she reaped through obtaining clarity from God about her career direction. Overall, she was guided by the following principle: "How can you say you love God when you don't love the second person you see?"

Role of Christian Community and Christian Faith in Socio-Cultural Transitioning

Participants joined church communities in Canada where most members were from a range of African countries, except for Amaka's Catholic church. African Christian churches provided relevant integration information, social belonging, and spiritual empowerment.

Tomide and Ebun acknowledged the benefit of accessing important career information and of finding a place of belonging in their churches among fellow immigrants. For instance, as Tomide stated, "I got the job because I got to know about the opening through a member of the church." Also, having experienced social isolation within the larger society, Tomide expressed appreciation for being part of a community that felt like home, with the added benefit of cultural exchange: "You learn to sing their songs, learn how they dance … and there's this sense of togetherness…. It makes me feel home, even when I'm far away from home."

In contrast, Precious remarked that her church was neither a source of integration information nor of social belonging but that her church met her spiritual needs. When the interviewer asked her what support she was getting from people in her church, Precious replied, "Only spiritual support. I get fed—it's like my spiritual diet is balanced." Precious also described being re-energized by prayers from fellow members of her church: "Sometimes I could feel a little bit down, and they pray for and encourage me, and I'm back up." She also stated that she attended the church's daily public theology classes, which deepened her understanding of God: "They teach about God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus … [to] know them as personalities, not just as an abstract thing."

Exceptionally, Amaka, who did not attend an African church, felt that she did not receive support from her church to deal with her career transitioning challenges. Amaka was unemployed, pursuing her pharmacy licence, and living alone with four children while her husband worked in Nigeria. Hence, she struggled with the burdens of child care and of emotional isolation. Nevertheless,

she explained that she survived by holding on to her Christian beliefs of positivity and hope. As she remarked, "My cardinal belief is that things will work out." She was also motivated by her husband's axiom: "Just put your leg first, and the path will appear." Ultimately, she declared that depending on God got her through her challenges: "How I've survived [here], as an African and being a Christian, is I owe everything to God." After her first year of arrival, Amaka was able to establish connections with her non-African neighbours, who eventually supported her in terms of child care: "I have friends around here, people that [help me]—these are not Africans. So being positive, you will magnet positive things."

Discussion

Consistent with the BAI literature, career transitioning was most salient in the socio-cultural, occupational, and socio-economic aspects of Nigerian economic immigrants' (NEIs) lives. They sometimes felt a sense of belonging to the Canadian society due to welcoming public gestures, but at other times they felt the absence of such a sense of belonging (e.g., when they did not receive an answer to their questions). As is common among immigrants of a visible minority background, NEIs could not find jobs in their professions and thus needed to accept jobs below their qualifications (Foster, 2010). NEI women mostly did precarious work, as is common among immigrant women of colour (Umaigba, 2017). NEIs faced underemployment and unemployment, which led to financial challenges and elicited negative emotions (Okeke-Ihejirika & Salami, 2018). Despite their downward mobility from the middle socio-economic class in Nigeria to the lower socio-economic class in Canada, NEIs still earned enough money to survive in Canada and to sponsor family members in their home country. Their extension of financial support to family is consistent with their communal lifestyle. NEIs' remittances from Western countries to Nigeria totalled USD$25 billion just in 2018 (Nevin & Omosomi, 2019).

An unexpected finding in this study was the extent to which Christian NEIs relied on their Christian faith to cope with transitional challenges. This finding is consistent with the broader literature on psychospiritual coping with racial discrimination against African Canadians and African-Caribbean immigrants in Canada (Dixon, 2015; James et al., 2010). However, it is not common in the BAI literature. The current study was not focused on religion and spirituality, but the open discussion of study participants about this dimension of coping in their career transitioning demonstrates the need for further discussion and research in this area. Participants used their Christian faith in understanding their career-related challenges. They made meaning of their difficulties through praying to God, waiting to hear an answer directly from God, or reading the Bible. These practices led to new interpretations of their career challenges, which buffered negative consequences such as disappointment, degradation, and low

self-esteem. When faced with persistent blockages to their desired professions, participants relied on their Christian faith to pursue alternative career paths. Through a Christian perspective, participants prioritized generosity during their periods of financial hardship. They practised the Christian principle of giving and receiving through making donations and showing hospitality. In contrast to the lack of fulfillment brought about by unemployment and underemployment, acts of generosity appeared to provide a sense of meaning. Hence, they were able to benefit from a form of social participation that transcended their limited financial capabilities.

Further, the role of religious and ethnic communities was central to participants' career transitioning experiences. To foster environments that promoted the communal lifestyle that they were used to in Nigeria, they were intentional about maintaining contact with, extending and receiving help from, and making sacrifices for their family members and other Christian BAEIs they met in Canada. They joined African churches, where they experienced a sense of belonging, received information on migration and employment, and felt spiritually empowered. Participants' accounts suggest that African churches extended their function beyond spiritual encouragement to provide NEIs with the necessary information to ease their processes of career transitioning. These churches also served as sites of connection and belonging for NEIs to feel at home in Canada. Creese (2011) found that BAEIs in Vancouver identified churches as major places of belonging and for frontline settlement support. Therefore, the positive impacts of Christian faith and community on study participants' ability to cope with career transitioning difficulties suggest that this dimension of human experience is protective for NEIs' psychological well-being in Canada.

Throughout their accounts of career transitioning, study participants demonstrated personal agency. They drew on strengths afforded them by their Christian faith to advance their career transitioning despite opposition. First, they were able to address their occasional lack of support in their social transitioning through forming neighbourhood Nigerian communities, thereby bolstering their sense of social belonging. Second, they developed creative strategies (e.g., heavily utilizing career resources) to compete for high-skilled jobs. They resisted discouragement from low acceptance rates but instead accepted multiple low-skilled jobs, kept applying for high-skilled jobs, and began exploring entrepreneurship opportunities. In their workplaces, they spoke up for themselves to confront maltreatment. Finally, participants endured the economic hardships that ensued from underemployment. While aspiring toward a brighter economic future, they pursued their financial goals, spent frugally, and gave generously.

Their agentic actions were driven by personal values such as determination, patience, self-reliance, and social contribution, which guided the processes of navigating their challenges. These findings contradict the negative portrayals of continental Africans as illiterate and impoverished, which often extends to

them being stereotyped in host countries as uneducated, passive, and uninformed about their rights. Although there is undoubtedly a pervasive experience of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria, immigrants to Canada are more likely to be from middle-class backgrounds. Among the 37,470 Nigerians who arrived as permanent residents between 2015 and 2019, 80% were admitted through the economic immigration program and only 10% were admitted as refugees or asylum seekers (Statistics Canada, 2021b). The NEIs who were part of this present study were able to resist African stereotypes by advocating for themselves. Their ability to navigate career-related barriers in Canada successfully was enhanced by their privileged access to higher education in Nigeria and to their Christian faith and communities. Thus, the current study supports Dixon's (2015) assertion that personal agency is an important part of survival for immigrants of colour. In conclusion, this study showed that the career transitioning experiences of NEIs are influenced by the intersections of ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic class.

Implications for Career Counsellors and Psychotherapists

In this study, study participants referred to their Christian faith as a valuable and robust source for coping with setbacks in their career transitioning experiences. Therefore, career counsellors and psychotherapists (i.e., service providers) may benefit from maintaining a curious and open stance to understand how religion and spirituality may be central to the lives of NEIs and to their approaches to addressing career transitioning difficulties. Prayer could be encouraged, if already practised, for clients to receive reassurance from God about their situation. Clients could also be guided in interpreting difficult situations through the Bible and their Christian values. Nevertheless, service providers need to reflect on how their own beliefs about religion and spirituality may influence their willingness to explore the religious and spiritual dimensions of clients' lives (Dixon & Arthur, 2019; Fukuyama et al., 2014).

Furthermore, it is important to note that mental health challenges are highly stigmatized in Nigerian society (Gureje et al., 2005). As such, seeking help from a mental health professional is often seen as necessary only for people with severe mental disorders (Brammer, 2010). Only one NEI in this study admitted to experiencing depressive symptoms, although others reported emotional distress. The results also showed that NEIs prefer to seek help from relatives and from fellow members of Nigerian or BAEI communities. Therefore, NEIs seeking professional help may have exhausted their social support network or may already experience significant stigma toward their challenges. As such, it is crucial for service providers to build a strong therapeutic relationship in which mental health stigma and negative assumptions about Nigerians are explicitly addressed.

Finally, services offered to NEIs must always consider clients' agency. For example, during assessment sessions, service providers could ask their NEI clients how their current career transitioning difficulties would be addressed by a mentor

or an inspirational figure in their Nigerian community or in their profession. In the absence of ideas from the client, service providers could share positive stories of NEIs' personal agency (e.g., creative problem-solving, entrepreneurship, and self-advocacy) presented in this study. Such examples may inspire NEI clients to propose new strategies for addressing their career transitioning challenges. Service providers could then integrate client-generated strategies into a collaborative intervention plan.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study had considerable strengths. The unique findings revealed that Christian faith is a core strength among NEIs who undergo career transitioning in Canada. The use of the hermeneutic phenomenological method of qualitative research afforded the researchers a depth of description into NEIs' experiences. Intersectionality, as an epistemology, provided a framework for the researchers to understand the aspects of career transitioning in which NEIs were privileged and disadvantaged across the contexts of their home and host countries. Rigour in documentation was ensured through establishing a consistent relationship among the phenomenon of study, the methodology, and the recommendations given (Ryan et al., 2007). The findings of this study have the potential of being generalizable in two ways that are consistent with our paradigm assumptions. First, naturalistic generalizability shows that research findings resonate with readers personally or vicariously (Smith, 2018). Two readers of the publication manuscript from Nigerian immigrant backgrounds indicated that the results were relatable. Second, transferability is achieved when the results can be applied to other settings (Smith, 2018). The current study has the potential to be transferable to the situations of other Christian immigrants given that religious experiences transcend culture (Fukuyama et al., 2014).

The research study also had certain limitations. The small sample size of six participants reflected the capacity of the study as a master's research project. However, a larger sample size of at least 12 participants would be needed in future studies to increase the likelihood of achieving saturation. Finally, since this study focused on the experiences of NEIs who had Christian faith, Nigerian immigrants' experiences with other faiths (e.g., Islam) need to be explored in future studies.

Implications for Future Studies

The current study provides implications for further research questions. This study uncovered how NEIs used Christian faith to overcome their career transitioning barriers, thereby nuancing the role of religion and spirituality as a source of strength in immigrants' career transitioning. There is growing evidence that religion and spirituality are core aspects of the lives of many Africans in diaspora (Dixon, 2015). Therefore, these findings uniquely contribute to the BAI literature in Canada, within which only a few studies have examined the role of religion

and spirituality in the career transitioning experiences of BAEIs (Ayo, 2016). Finally, future research on the nuanced roles of religion and spirituality in the career transitioning experiences of other immigrant groups in Canada is needed, as experiences of religion and spirituality cut across countries and continental regions.

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