



## Speaking Across Borders: Transnational conversation on Gendered Harm and the adaptation strategy in Social Work class

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### Abstract

This paper is reflection of two-hours lecture in the International Social Work class at Coppin State University on November 19, 2025, via Zoom by an immigrant professor from Africa and another speaker who lived across the border of a different country as a transnational pedagogical exchange drawing on personal narrative and global human rights frameworks. The lecture addressed two interconnected themes: (1) the lived experience in the identity reconstruction and survival adaptation of "transnational man" through the lens of African immigrant faculty in the U.S., and (2) the practice of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) in the Horn of Africa as a violation of human rights. By integrating the "Salad Story", an anecdote of domestic adaptation, with empirical data on gendered harm, the analysis highlights critical pedagogical implications. The paper emphasizes the necessity of cultural humility, trauma-informed education, and the integration of lived experience in preparing social work students for ethically grounded global practice. The analysis highlights pedagogical implications for international social work education, emphasizing cultural humility in practice, critical pedagogy, and human rights advocacy.

**Keywords:** Transnational Man, Immigration, Female Genital Mutilation, Cultural Humility, International Social Work, Critical Pedagogy

### Introduction

The invitation to return to Coppin State University as a guest professor carried profound personal and professional significance for me (the author hereafter referred to as "the presenter or he" according to APA seventh edition manual) via the invitation of the his PhD mentor and advisor. The invitation by Professor Errol Bolden, who was the presenter's dissertation chair and long-time colleague at both Coppin State University and Addis Ababa University, was

extended to speak in his International Social Work class. The session was conducted via Zoom and lasted two hours, featuring two guest speakers: me, reflecting on transnational identity and gender issues, and a female American scholar who had lived in Sudan and Saudi Arabia.

The convergence of these narratives created a rich comparative dialogue on migration, cultural adaptation, and gendered practices. For me, the lecture was not only a reunion with a mentor but also an opportunity to engage undergraduate students in critical conversations about social justice. For his presentation and speech in the international social work class, the host professor picked topics of transnational identity and female genital mutilation to highlight the intersection of his personal experience and global human rights concerns.

Pedagogically, the presenter employed a storytelling methodology that integrated different layers: first, by utilizing existing data on the context, based on synthesized scholarly literature concerning FGM/C in the country from peer-reviewed journals, international policy reports [18], and longitudinal demographic surveys [6].

Second, central to the lecture was a phenomenological reflection on the presenter's journey as a transnational immigrant in the U.S. Following the tradition of critical pedagogy [9], the presenter used his personal interactions with U.S. sociocultural adjustments since 2016 as a site for reflection. By sharing the presenter's adaptation strategies into the cultural expectation and striving to fit in, particularly during a period of heightened political discourse on migration, I aimed to use the proper "use of self" from social work value practice to his personal adjustment. Colleagues at the universities in Maryland (Bowie, Morgan, and Coppin State Universities) where the presenter served as an adjunct professor played a crucial role by offering guidance and, at times, sharing recipe books to support the presenter despite his limited cooking skills.

Finally, the presenter used a comparative analytical lens to look at how gender and the cultural division of labor work together in Africa and the US. By comparing the gendered division of task structures of back home with the individual expectations of the host society, and by thinking critically about how to reconfigure masculinity instead of meeting expectations through continuous self-reflection. This comparative lens allowed students to move beyond cultural stereotypes and instead analyze how migration forces a continuous negotiation of values and daily practices.

### **Transnational story and Gendered risks in Social Work Education**

The incorporation of lived experiences and global human rights issues into the social work classroom represents a pivotal shift toward a more context-based pedagogy. For this paper, telling a lived experience story as pedagogical testimony, a review of scholarly works between 2017 and 2026, on issues of the intersection of immigrant faculty stories, and the professional response to gender-based violence, focusing on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) used in this specific session.

Migration is frequently conceptualized in policy contexts as the acquisition of legal status, economic prospects, or demographic transformations. At its essence, it transcends the personal transformation of both the migrant and the host community. The presenter's account as a multinational individual exemplifies this reality. Coming from Africa, where community and gender norms frequently dictate everyday existence, the presenter faced a cultural difference landscape in the United States that demanded individual survival self-reflection and substantial contribution to the American academic system.

### **Transnational Identity and Cultural Adaptation abroad**

The modern social work classroom is increasingly shaped by "transnational perspectives" where faculty and students maintain multi-stance social relations that cut across geographic and borders. In this regard, the role of Immigrant Faculty Experience is paramount and promising in broadening the students' perspective to think beyond the limited area of knowledge and value gains which shape multidisciplinary and broader school of thoughts. Research by Delgado & Sun [5] and Subedi [15] in different areas highlights that immigrant educators often serve as "cultural bridges," yet they face unique challenges in navigating the Western academy. Their narratives of adaptation are not merely personal stories but also pedagogical tools that challenge the Eurocentric biases.

Since Fisher-Borne et al. [7] and more recent applications by Tervalon [16], the shift from "cultural competence" to cultural humility has become central. For immigrant faculty, sharing lived experiences of adaptation models a lifelong commitment to self-reflection and a new perspective for learners or practitioner-client relationships.

Fook [8] argues that critical social work pedagogy must center on "critical reflection," where personal narratives are used to deconstruct systemic inequalities. By using Zoom and digital platforms to bring transnational voices into the classroom, educators bypass traditional geographic limitations, fostering a "globalized connection of values" [16].

Morgaine and Capous-Desyllas [13] emphasize that international social work education often risks "othering" non-Western cultures. Using direct testimony from African immigrant faculty regarding their own cultural contexts ensures that global issues are discussed with evidence rather than through a lens of Western rescue fantasies. The synthesis of transnational identity and the study of gendered harm led to a more robust framework for international practice. Turner (2019) suggests that social workers must be prepared for "global" practice, understanding how global issues like migration and FGM/C manifest in local clinical settings.

### **The presentation approach**

Before the class presentation, the presenter reviewed relevant academic papers and policy documents about female genital mutilation (FGM) in the Horn of Africa societies and prepared a PowerPoint presentation. This helped the presenter to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of the practice based on evidence. and it facilitated the integration of his observations with existing research findings.

The knowledge and research the presenter participated in about female genital mutilation (FGM) practices in various communities was utilized to gain ethnographic insights into the associated social norms, motivations, and community dynamics. This was done during the first hour session of the class, where students asked a lot of questions in relation to the rights of women, the advocacy practices, and the role of men in stopping and promoting FGM/C.

The second session was about where you currently live and adaptation strategies in a different community as a transnational man or woman. Another presenter shared her story of living in Sudan and Saudi Arabia, going from America due to marriage and an international employment opportunity. The presenter also used a storytelling part by talking about his own experiences as an immigrant faculty member in the US. The analysis centered on interactions with U.S. immigration systems and bureaucratic processes subsequent to his arrival in 2016, a time characterized by intensified political discourse on immigration amid the U.S. presidential election campaigns. These experiences were utilized to analyze adaptation strategies, institutional challenges, and sociocultural adjustments faced in the host country.

We both used a comparative analytical approach to look at cultural practices in different situations. This included looking at how men and women lived together in the home, how they split up the chores, and how cooking and other household tasks were split up between the country of origin and the host society. The class presentation for international social work students illustrated broader themes of gender norms, cultural continuity, and transformation in the lives of migrants through the comparison of differences and similarities in the division and non-division of labor. We conducted a comprehensive and contextual study of FGM, migration, and cultural adaptation through a synthesis of literature review, experiential observation, and comparative cultural analysis.

Before the class, the presenter carefully reviewed different scholarly articles concerning female genital mutilation (FGM). The review covered peer-reviewed research papers, policy reports, and publications from international organizations to ensure an accurate understanding of the historical, cultural, and social components of the practice based on evidence. The literature review established a solid foundation for the discussion and facilitated a comparison of his observations with current research findings. In addition to secondary sources, his firsthand experience was utilized to put together the methodological framework. This involved firsthand observation of female genital mutilation (FGM) practices in many communities, employed to get ethnographic insights into the related social norms, motivations, and community dynamics.

A PowerPoint presentation that was both reflective and analytical demonstrated these observations. It also stated that FGM is less prevalent in certain cultures. The presenter integrated an aspect of storytelling by sharing his personal experiences as an immigrant in the United States. It focused on encounters with U.S. immigration systems and administrative procedures following his arrival in 2016, a period marked by heightened political discourse on immigration over the U.S. presidential election campaigns. These instances were used to examine adaptation tactics, institutional obstacles, and societal modifications encountered in the host nation. The presenter utilized an alternative analysis approach to look at cultural activities

across different contexts. This meant reviewing the shared lives of men and women inside the household, the division of domestic responsibilities, and the allocation of cooking and other household labor between the place of origin and the host society. The class presentation for international social work students demonstrated overarching themes of gender norms, cultural continuity, and transition in migrants' lives by comparing the distinctions and commonalities in labor division and non-division. We undertook a thorough and contextual examination of FGM, migration, and cultural adaptation by synthesizing literature review, experiential observation, and comparative cultural analysis.

## **Section I: Transnational man migration as identity reconstruction**

Migration is often understood in policy terms, changing someone's legal status, getting protection, economic opportunity, and demographic shifts. Yet, at its core, migration is a deeply personal transformation for the presenter due to its dual implications as a professional who worked with refugee officers and became an immigrant. The presenter's narrative as a transnational man in the United States illustrates this reality.

Coming from Africa, where gendered roles often structure daily life, where his life was highly dependent on family members or the community members in whatever form (free or paid), the presenter encountered a new cultural landscape in the United States that demanded self-reliance and self-service in all aspects, starting with daily routines and dealing with complex socio-cultural dynamics. The Presenter's own experience as a transnational man living in the United States illustrates how migration can transform the most mundane aspects of life into sites of identity negotiation. Upon arrival, the presenter encountered a cultural landscape that emphasized individual responsibility and self-sufficiency.

In Africa, men are often served by family members, with communal structures providing support in daily tasks. In addition, many daily tasks, such as preparing meals, laundering clothes, and household maintenance, are often organized within extended family structures or gendered divisions of labor. Lightman & Link [10] studied the gendered division of tasks across households at different levels of income, which is dominantly unpaid for women at the household level. In contrast, in the U.S. context, because the presenter arrived alone, it required the presenter to perform these gendered tasks by myself, which was not common where the presenter grew up. The shift from being served to serving oneself was not merely practical; it was symbolic of a broader reconfiguration of gendered identity. Learning to navigate grocery stores, kitchen equipment, and culinary techniques became part of a larger process of adapting to a new social order.

Moreover, the U.S. cultural expectation of independence required men to cook, clean, wash clothes, and perform other daily routines. These tasks, while seemingly mundane, became symbolic acts of identity reconstruction and, at times, incredibly challenging for men who were not properly oriented to such a kind of life and arrived alone. They represented not only adaptation to a new environment but also a redefinition of masculinity and selfhood. According to Martin [12], research on immigrants who arrive alone is limited, and few studies have considered their immigration experiences holistically.

Several studies have looked at this challenging effect of long distances in transnational care and contact relations between migrants [4]. This process was disorienting at times, and confusion in creating an ideal home seeking. The loss of communal support structures created feelings of isolation, disconnection, and feeling estranged, while the demand for self-reliance fostered resilience and relearning The Presenter's new environment.

Over time, these experiences reshaped The Presenter's understanding of gender roles and cultural expectations beyond the readings and the lessons he taught and learned in life. Migration, therefore, was not

merely a change of location but a transformation of orientation in which the person gradually adapts to whatever of someone's new place and community to survive, holding his values intact and sometimes compromised. De Winter & De Valk [4] noted that the distance between adult children and parents in the same country is typically commutable, but existing theories do not address international long-distance migration. As cited in Bi et al. [1], Minuchin (2002) stated that family is conceptualized as a complex dynamic system to interpret children's social, behavioral, and emotional development from systematic and cultural perspectives. According to the Ecological Model and Family System Theory, the family system is constructed by intricate subsystems, including the parent, child, and sibling. Each interdependent subsystem has implicit boundaries and mutually influences the others, and any individual changes would also have a significant impact on the whole family system.

Despite strong perceived family duties, long-distance relationships often see a decrease in face-to-face contact, especially among the highly educated, with contact shifting to other forms for immigrant families. Transnational studies across different countries evidence suggest that parenting style was associated with children's social skills, character cultivation, academic performance, physical and mental health, and behavioral problems [1]. More recent longitudinal studies also revealed a long-term and sustainable influence of parenting style on Chinese children's internalizing problems [19] and filial piety attitudes, as cited by Bi et al. [1]. However, the majority of previous studies have put their focus on the impact of parenting styles on children's development. In contrast, these notions created the idea that migrant parents have been living an estranged and critical life, searching for challenges of vagueness away from family. Among the major disorientations of being a transnational man is that, coming from a dominantly patriarchal environment where there is a division of labor, as in the house for women and in the field for men.

Today, these responsibilities fall upon everyone regardless of gender, especially within an anonymous urban landscape defined by intangible cultural shifts and the unpredictability of constant adaptation. To explain this, the presenter shared an anecdote with the students, a powerful teaching moment centered on The Presenter's very first salad-preparation challenge.

### **The Salad Story: Everyday Skills and Hidden Struggles of Immigrant Men**

During the Coppin State University virtual class, the presenter shared a specific story that crystallized these hidden struggles, starting with his personal story that resonated deeply with students and sparked discussion about the invisible challenges faced by immigrant transnational men in host communities. When the presenter first arrived in the United States, two professors at Coppin State University asked the presenter about his knowledge of cooking. After realizing that he had little experience, they kindly gave him a recipe booklet and later invited him to their homes, where they prepared meals for me. At the time, he did not pay close attention to the gestures; he assumed cooking was a simple skill he could manage when needed.

One day, the presenter decided to prepare a salad similar to the one he had eaten at his mentor's house. He recalled seeing others wash fresh vegetables in the sink and assumed the process was straightforward: wash, chop, and add water before serving. Following this assumption, he prepared his salad, but the result was sour and unappetizing, completely different in taste and appearance from the one he had enjoyed at the invitation home. Confused, he called the Professor who invited to ask for the proper steps of making salad, which revealed his misunderstanding of even the simplest cookery practices.

This anecdote became a focal point of classroom discussion. Students recognized the humor in the situation but also the deeper

lesson: immigrant men often face hidden, everyday challenges that are rarely acknowledged in public discourse. Tasks that host communities take for granted, such as cooking, cleaning, and navigating households, are normally significant sites of adaptation. For men from cultures where such responsibilities are delegated or structured differently, the transition to self-reliance can be disorienting and emotionally taxing. The salad story thus served as a pedagogical device to illustrate how migration reshapes identity at the level of daily life and to prompt students to consider the practical, embodied dimensions of cultural adaptation.

The role of the family is conceptualized as a complex dynamic system to interpret children's social, behavioral, and emotional development from systematic and cultural perspectives. According to the Ecological Model and Family System Theory, the family system is constructed by intricate subsystems including parent, child, and sibling [1, 14]. Each interdependent subsystem has implicit boundaries and mutually influences the other, and any individual changes would also have a significant impact on the whole family system.

The salad story illustrates the broader theme of hidden struggles, aspects of adaptation that are rarely spoken about but deeply affect the immigrant experience. It underscores how migration reshapes not only professional and social identities but also the most intimate aspects of daily life. For social work students, this anecdote served as a reminder that adaptation involves more than navigating legal systems or employment markets; it includes learning and relearning everyday practices that define independence and dignity in a new cultural context.

The lived experience described above aligns with theoretical work on transnationalism and gender. Levitt and Glick Schiller [11] conceptualize transnationalism as the creation of social fields that span national borders, where migrants maintain ties to origin communities while adapting to host societies. These transnational social fields are sites of cultural negotiation, where gender norms are contested and reconfigured. Connell's [2] work on masculinities further illuminates how gender identities are relational and historically situated. Migration can disrupt established gender orders, producing new forms of masculinity that incorporate domestic labor, emotional labor, and new forms of social participation.

For social work education, these theoretical perspectives underscore the need to teach students to recognize the multiplicity of masculinities and the ways migration reshapes gendered expectations. Practitioners must be prepared to address not only structural barriers, such as legal status and employment, but also the everyday, embodied challenges that affect well-being and social integration. In Africa, masculinity is often associated with authority and service by others. In the U.S., masculinity is redefined through independence and self-reliance. This shift illustrates how migration disrupts and reconstructs gender norms for migrant men.

## Section II: Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Ethiopia

The second phase of the lecture transitioned from personal narrative to a collective cultural practice and human rights-based examination of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). Utilizing a structured PowerPoint presentation, the presenter provided students with an overview of the practices, types, and prevalence of FGM/C, situating the country's context within a global framework. The presenter started with the definition of the concepts of FGM globally and in the country's policy, and the usage of the concepts and practices in the country. As defined by the World Health Organization [17], FGM/C encompasses all procedures involving the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. This practice is internationally recognized as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. In the classroom, it was framed as a fundamental breach of bodily integrity

and an extreme form of gender-based violence (GBV), aligning with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [3].

The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies FGM/C into four major types and emphasizes that the practice has no health benefits and causes significant harm [17]. FGM/C is recognized internationally as a violation of human rights, implicating bodily integrity, children's rights, and gender equality. Framing FGM/C as both a health and human rights issue is essential for social work practice, which must balance cultural sensitivity with advocacy for individual rights and well-being.

The practice of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) in the country remains a significant issue, demonstrating a large historical and current magnitude despite the modern "era of information network." The country presents a complex epidemiological landscape for FGM/C. While the country has seen a significant decline in the prevalence of FGM/C due to sustained advocacy and legal reform, the epidemiological landscape remains complex. According to the Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey [6], approximately 65% of women aged 15–49 have undergone some form of the procedure. The presenter emphasized that while prevalence is lower in urban areas, most likely due to increased access to education and the influence of information networks, absolute numbers remain high in rural and marginalized communities where the practice is deeply embedded in the social fabric.

## FGM/C Typology and Regional Patterns

The persistence of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is predominantly sustained by entrenched social norms, wherein social acceptance and marriageability constitute the principal motivations. Girls who remain uncut were frequently subjected to social exclusion and were perceived as unsuitable for marriage, purity, and social acceptance in some cultures. This dynamic is further reinforced by the belief that FGM/C, particularly Type III (infibulation), preserves purity and virginity through the regulation of female sexual desire. Additional rationales include concerns related to hygiene and aesthetics, rooted in the perception that external female genitalia are "unclean" or "unsightly." Moreover, in certain communities, the practice is erroneously regarded as a religious obligation, despite the absence of endorsement in major religious texts. Finally, in the Southern parts of the country, FGM/C also serves as a culturally sanctioned rite of passage, symbolizing the transition from girlhood to womanhood.

Reviewing the typology is essential for social work students to understand the varying levels of medical and psychological trauma survivors may carry. Hence, in his presentation, the presenter addressed what marked regional and ethnic variations characterize the practice of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). The Somali and Afar regions exhibit the highest prevalence rates, with certain ethnic groups disproportionately engaging in more severe forms, such as infibulation [18]. Urban–rural disparities are also evident, as prevalence tends to be lower in urban areas, reflecting the mitigating influence of education, urbanization, and sustained advocacy initiatives.

The World Health Organization [17] typology delineates four primary forms of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Type I, clitoridectomy, involving partial or total removal of the clitoris; Type II, excision, entailing removal of the clitoris and labia minora, and occasionally the labia majora; Type III, infibulation, characterized by narrowing of the vaginal opening through repositioning of the labia; and Type IV, encompassing all other harmful procedures. Types I and II are prevalent across multiple regions, whereas Type III is predominantly concentrated among the Somali and Afar communities. These regional and ethnic variations underscore the historical, cultural, and social dynamics that shape the practice.

Critically, understanding the localized meanings and justifications attached to FGM/C is essential for the development of interventions that are both culturally informed and community centered [6, 18].

FGM/C is sustained by an arrangement of social norms and drivers. Cultural continuity and identity preservation play a central role in many communities where FGM/C is perceived as a rite of passage, a marker of purity, or a prerequisite for marriageability [16]. Social pressure and fear of ostracism compel families to conform, even when individual members privately oppose the practice. Perceived religious requirements, though contested by religious scholars, also contribute to the practice's persistence. These drivers illustrate that FGM/C is not reducible to individual choice; it is embedded in collective expectations and normative systems.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) entails significant immediate and long-term health consequences. Acute complications include severe pain, hemorrhage, infection, and urinary difficulties, while chronic complications encompass pelvic pain, obstetric complications, sexual dysfunction, and psychological trauma [17]. Psychosocial harms such as anxiety, depression, body image disturbances, and stigma often persist across the life course, with survivors facing silence and marginalization that hinder access to care.

The country criminalized FGM/C under its 2004 Criminal Code and adopted a National Strategy to End Harmful Practices; however, enforcement remains inconsistent due to resource constraints, weak monitoring, and community resistance. Legal prohibition alone is insufficient, necessitating complementary community-based prevention, education, and survivor-centered services. Evidence highlights the effectiveness of community-led interventions, including dialogues, alternative rites of passage, empowerment programs, and engagement with religious and clan leaders. Declining support among younger women and urban communities signals promising shifts when interventions are locally led and sustained [6].

The lecture detailed the devastating life-course consequences for survivors. Immediate risks include hemorrhage, sepsis, and acute pain, while long-term effects involve obstetric complications, chronic infections, and sexual dysfunction. From a social work perspective, however, the psychosocial trauma is equally critical. Survivors often grapple with anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and a sense of betrayal. In the discussion, we explored how social workers can provide trauma-informed care that respects a survivor's cultural background while unequivocally supporting their right to healing and bodily autonomy.

### **Cross-Cultural Insights from immigrants in USA and Africa**

The direction of immigration is mostly perceived from other worlds to USA; it is multidirectional from anywhere to everywhere. The inclusion of a second guest speaker, an American scholar who lived in Sudan and Saudi Arabia, provided comparative perspectives that enriched the classroom dialogue. Her reflections on cultural immersion, gender norms, and professional practice in different contexts complemented his own narrative and highlighted both commonalities and differences across transnational experiences. Comparative narratives help students appreciate that cultural adaptation is not a monolithic process; it varies by context, gender, socioeconomic status, and the nature of migration (e.g., voluntary migration, forced displacement, expatriation).

Comparative analysis reveals patterns in how gendered practices are maintained, contested, and transformed. In some contexts, gendered norms are enforced through formal institutions (e.g., legal codes, religious edicts), while in others they are sustained through informal social sanctions and economic incentives. The comparative lens also underscores the role of diaspora communities in transmitting or contesting practices such as FGM/C. Diaspora engagement can

be a double-edged sword: it may perpetuate harmful norms through transnational social pressure, but it can also be a source of advocacy and change when diaspora members mobilize against harmful practices.

The classroom response to the lecture was immediate and intense about the disorientation of transnational men who struggle to adapt. Students expressed shock, empathy, and a desire to understand the structural and cultural roots of FGM/C. Their questions ranged from clinical concerns about health consequences to ethical questions about cultural relativism and human rights, social injustices, and extreme lifelong traumas, which need serious attention and global advocacy for women survivors and the generations to follow. The salad anecdote elicited laughter but also serious reflection on the everyday dimensions of migration. These reactions demonstrate that undergraduate classrooms can be powerful sites for cultivating critical consciousness and moral engagement.

Teaching topics such as FGM/C requires careful pedagogical planning. Instructors must create a safe learning environment that allows for emotional responses while maintaining analytical rigor. Strategies include providing trigger warnings, offering content notes, and integrating survivor-centered perspectives. It is also important to balance cultural sensitivity with a clear human rights stance: students should be encouraged to analyze how cultural practices intersect with power, gender inequality, and bodily autonomy.

Freire's [9] concept of critical pedagogy is instructive here. Education can be a practice of freedom when it empowers learners to question oppressive structures and imagine alternatives. The classroom discussion at Coppin State exemplified this approach: students moved from initial shock to critical inquiry, asking how social workers can support survivors, engage communities, and advocate for policy change. Embedding lived narratives within a critical pedagogical framework fosters reflexivity and prepares students to act as ethically grounded practitioners.

For social workers, comparative perspectives emphasize the need for cultural humility and contextual competence. Practitioners must avoid simplistic cultural explanations and instead engage in nuanced assessments that consider power dynamics, historical legacies, and local meanings. Cross-cultural competence involves listening to community voices, partnering with local leaders, and supporting community-driven solutions that respect human rights while acknowledging cultural complexity.

Social workers occupy a critical position at the intersection of service delivery, community engagement, and policy advocacy. Educators must prepare students to operate ethically in cross-cultural contexts, to support survivors with trauma-informed care, and to collaborate with communities to design sustainable interventions. Advocacy efforts should link local practice to international human rights frameworks, mobilizing multi-level support for change.

As cited in Martin [12], Skrbiš in 2008, Svašek in 2010, Dreby in 2015, Graham et al., 2015 and Siriwardhana et al. in 2015 stated Migrants have been documented to expend a great deal of emotional labor in attempts to maintain transnational ties with their family members in other countries. The impact on the individuals concerned and the relationship between them is argued to vary not only according to the success of attempts to maintain continuity in relationships through transnational communication and remittances, but also according to family structures and the perceived success of the migration itself.

Integrating personal narrative into classroom pedagogy offers several benefits. First, it humanizes abstract concepts, making theories of transnationalism and gender tangible for students. Second, it fosters empathy by inviting learners to witness the lived complexity of migration. Third, it models reflexivity: as an instructor

and practitioner, sharing vulnerability about adaptation challenges signals to students that professional competence includes humility and ongoing learning. For international social work curricula, incorporating first-person accounts alongside empirical data can deepen students' understanding and prepare them for culturally responsive practice.

### Lessons learned

The guest lecture at Coppin State University was both a personal reunion and a pedagogical intervention. By combining a transnational personal storyline with an evidence-based presentation about FGM/C, the session invited students to engage in the complex intersections of migration, gender, cultural meanings, and human rights. The salad story illuminated the everyday, often invisible struggles of immigrant men experiencing to adapting to host societies, while the FGM/C presentation foregrounded the urgent need for survivor-centered services, community-led prevention, and policy action advocacy. In other words, when men are at risk the vast majority professionals overlook due the commonsense patriarchal worldview that obscures this aspect of men lives.

International social work education benefits from integrating lived experience storytelling with scholarly analysis of contemporary social issues and human rights frameworks. Such integration fosters empathy, compassion, critical thinking, and practical competence in developing cultural humility with diverse groups client systems. Moving forward, social work curricula could prioritize community-engaged learning, experiential learning using social norms theory, and trauma-informed practice. Social workers and educators can continue to bridge personal narratives and global advocacy to support survivors of any form of problems presentation, challenge harmful practices, and promote social justice across borders within the context they serve.

Sharing personal narrative in the classroom serves as a powerful pedagogical tool where the students can relate their experiential learning to abstract traditional lectures. It encourages students to see migration as more than policy and political discourses; it is a lived transformation and pragmatism in social work practice with immigrant clients. For social work education, such reflections underscore the importance of cultural humility and the recognition of diverse masculinities in practice. By engaging in lived experiences, students develop empathy and critical awareness, preparing them to work effectively with diverse populations.

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