THE EDUCATION OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN:
PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES
FOR GHANAIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN CANADA

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Theory and Policy Studies
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University of Toronto

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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of the education of Ghanaian immigrant women who lived in Metropolitan Toronto from 1973 to 1993. Undertaken from a feminist perspective, the study probes the educational programs that were put in place for immigrant women and the women’s response to the programs. The focus on education stems from the links that exist between education, work and status. There is widespread agreement among scholars that education is the single most important factor in gaining access to better economic, political and social positions, although some believe that it will not necessarily create equality between marginalized groups and mainstream society. Feminist scholars believe that while education may not create the equality that women desire, it can enhance women’s status. It equips individuals and groups with the resources to access jobs that give social, economic, and political power.

For immigrant women, education assumes greater significance in light of sexist immigration and social practices that limit the kinds of opportunities available to them. Since education opens the way to sectors that may be closed to immigrants, educating them would be a step toward giving them access to such sectors. By putting Ghanaian immigrant women at the centre of analysis, this thesis asserts that immigrant women’s overall situation
in Canada improved with education. Investigating immigrant education is a way of ascertaining society’s efforts at empowering immigrant women by offering them access to resources.

A conclusion drawn from the study is that the education that was fashioned for immigrant women was inadequate for their employment needs. Its definition was narrow, involving mainly English as a Second Language (ESL) that did not prepare women for labour market demands nor did it have the potential of enhancing their status. Another observation is that inadequate attention was paid to higher education as a viable option for immigrant women. Consequently, immigrant women’s education did not have the potential to link women to jobs that could enhance their status. Ghanaian women who did not see ESL as the answer to their educational needs defined for themselves alternative educational avenues that held meaning for their lives and pursued these to their satisfaction and wellbeing.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II, substantial numbers of immigrants have arrived in Canada and the state has made efforts to ensure that these immigrants integrated into society. Federal and provincial departments of citizenship have had the responsibility of assisting newcomers to adjust, a responsibility that has involved introducing newcomers to the institutions, laws, and values as well as the rights and privileges of citizenship.\(^1\)

Education\(^2\) has emerged as one of the central means for helping immigrants to adjust, and language training is a crucial foundation for such adjustment. Immigrants' ability to communicate in the common, mainstream language(s) is thought to clear the way for effective and meaningful understanding and participation in Canadian life. Thus in 1947, English and French as second languages were introduced in citizenship training programs. The objective was to assist immigrants to acquire the linguistic resources to participate in society for, as Rosina Lippi-Green has noted, "language ... is more than a tool for communication between two or more persons. It is the most salient way we have of establishing and advertising our social identities."\(^3\) However, Sylvina Ciccarelli has argued that Canadian second language instruction was assimilationist, meant to forge national unity and not to help immigrants acquire proficiency in English.\(^4\)

In the 1960s and early 1970s, a new set of conditions made the need for education of immigrants more pressing. The removal of restrictive clauses and the universalization of

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\(^1\) Opening speech by the Hon Robert Welch, Provincial Secretary and Minister of Citizenship, at the First Ontario Conference for Teachers of English as a Second Language, Toronto, 1967, 1.

\(^2\) Throughout this dissertation, I follow the definition used by UNESCO at the Jomtien Conference on Education for All in 1990: the empowerment of individuals through the provision of learning. When such an inclusive definition is used, education denotes formal, non-formal and/or semi-structured activities and strategies that individuals adopt to understand the world around them and to realize self-satisfaction. See UNESCO, *Education for All: Purpose and Context* (Jomtien, Thailand: World Conference on Education for All, 1990), 2.


immigration regulations by the Liberal government of Lester Pearson in 1962 and 1967, the new wave of feminism in the late 1960s, the official promulgation of the Multiculturalism Act in 1971 by Trudeau’s Liberals, and an economic slump in the early 1970s were profound changes that had a bearing on the education of immigrants. Together, these forces influenced the nature, scope and goal of immigrant education. For instance, immigration analysts warned that although the number of years of schooling of the immigrants of the post-1960s was higher than that of the immediate post-war years, they still needed education to facilitate their adjustment and eventual integration. However, widespread unemployment raised the question of the effectiveness of education as the entry into jobs. That is to say, economic conditions at the beginning of the 1970s were not good and in such situations it was doubtful whether educating immigrants could change their labour market situations. At the same time, the women’s movement made calls for further education for women in order to give them more opportunities for advancement. These competing demands affected the types of programs offered to immigrants.

In the midst of these forces, was there immigrant education? How was it defined? What was its nature? For what purpose? Did it address women’s needs? The answers to these questions are explored in a case study of Ghanaian immigrant women in Toronto during a twenty-one year period, from 1973 to 1993. The study is undertaken from a feminist perspective by putting Ghanaian-Canadian women’s subjective experiences at the centre of the analysis. It posits that race, ethnicity, gender, and class, while not capturing every facet of the women’s experiences, played major roles in their lives and are important to the analysis. It is the thesis of this study that while education has been one of the main

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5 Canada, Department of Manpower and Immigration, Immigration Statistics, 1976; Barbara Burnaby, Jill Bell, Marjatta Holt and Mary Ellen Belfiore, A framework for Assessing Immigrant Integration to Canada. A Study prepared for the Department of the Secretary of State, Corporate Policy and Public Affairs, 1985, 94-95.
means of integrating immigrants into Canadian society, the education that was provided
immigrants has been inadequate and unresponsive to the needs of immigrant women,
including Ghanaians. The lack of a clearly defined and well-maintained apparatus to cater
specifically to the educational needs of immigrant women was a major determining factor in
Ghanaians' experiences in Toronto. Consequently, these women moved beyond
societal definitions of immigrant education and defined strategies that held meaning for their
lives and pursued these for their self-fulfilment.

WHY IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S EDUCATION?

The motivation to undertake the study from an educational perspective stemmed
from several issues. The first was political. It arose out of my own location as a Black
woman on a student visa. Although I recognized that being a visa student put me in a
different category from the participants in this study, I felt that through their narratives a
space had been created to tell my story and that of countless others whose experiences have
been shelved because of their visa status.

Second, my interest was motivated by the feminist ideology of equality of
opportunity for women, an ideology that can enhance the integration of immigrant women.
Feminists have conceptualized female equality in a variety of ways. The one factor that has
persisted is the issue of status. While status can be ascribed or earned, its link with education
cannot be overemphasized. Whether women’s status is measured by economic position,
social recognition, or power (both within public and private spheres), a common thread is
education. It opens up opportunities for self-realization. Although scholars generally agree
that women’s opportunities are limited relative to men’s, it is also generally conceded that

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3, no. 3 (1984/85), 7-8.
women with more education are more likely than those with less or no education at all to exercise some power in both public and private spheres. As Marcela Ballara rightly points out, education can be employed as the basis for the "promotion and improvement of women's status and as a tool to support their role as equal partners in society."\(^7\)

Her statement echoes the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

"Education opens the door to almost every life goal. Wherever women are denied equal access to education, they cannot be said to have equality."\(^8\) In a highly technological and industrialized society such as Canada's, immigrant women's education assumes even greater significance. Who gets access to what type of education can determine the extent to which education becomes the leveller of opportunities for everybody.

However, some studies have also shown that the economic benefits from education in Canada are not as attractive for women as they are for men. Notions about male breadwinners and dependent wives and children have resulted in men getting higher pay than women get even if they are employed in the same or similar jobs with similar qualifications.\(^9\) Other studies have also emphasized the cyclical nature of female poverty which is often the cause and consequence of women's low levels of education, for their poverty is maintained through lack of education which keeps them poor.\(^10\) When these two views are linked, it becomes apparent that in spite of the relatively low returns in education

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for Canadian women, it is still an essential condition for their well being. As participants to the World Conference on Education in 1990 observed, "education is precisely the key to development: it unlocks the potential of the individual for a fuller life, not just the economic, but also culturally and socially." Education assumes greater significance when its target is immigrant women, for their immigrant status, their gender and, for some, their colour put them in disadvantaged positions. Education can equip individual immigrant women with the requisite resources to take their place in society as equal participants in all its activities. While education will not remove some of the disadvantages, it can empower immigrant women as a group to work on behalf of their families, communities and society at large.

**Some definitional issues**

Against this broad background, the category “women” presented definitional problems for designers of education and for myself as a researcher in dealing with the complexity surrounding the competing needs of different groups of women. The arrival of substantial numbers of women every year with diverse educational achievements and skill levels, coming from different racial and cultural backgrounds, meant that it was difficult to advocate a uniform type of education for Canadian women. The diversity of Canadian women required constant definition and revision of educational and other social programs to suit the particular needs of Canada’s diverse population.

There was also a problem with the definition of the term “immigrant women.” It is important to note that the term “immigrant” does not have a uniform meaning. As Roxana

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12 Speech by Jim Fleming, Minister of State for Multiculturalism, at the national conference on The Immigrant Woman in Canada: A Right to Recognition, Part I, Toronto, March 20, 1981.
13 For instance, the Citizenship Act of 1947 defined a two-tier eligibility criteria for citizenship. For English or French speakers, the required period of residency was five years and for all others it was twenty. The language requirement was abandoned in 1977 and since the late 1980s all immigrants are required to satisfy a three-year residency period to become
Ng and Alma Estable explain, the term has both an official, legal meaning and a popular, common sense usage. In the official sense, immigrant could mean foreign-born and refers to people born outside the country regardless of citizenship; it can also mean a foreign-born individual who is legally resident in Canada but who is not yet a citizen. In the common sense usage, Ng and Estable distinguish between foreign-born people who neither see themselves nor are seen as immigrants and those who are seen as such due to their colour, Third World origin, language difficulty and/or accent, and their lower positions in the job market regardless of their legal status.° Hence, as they note, “there is a disjunction between the legal, official definition and the common sense understanding of the term immigrant woman…” The distinction is crucial in understanding the allocation of educational resources to different groups of immigrants. Throughout this study, immigrant and immigrant women have been used to refer to the common sense understanding of these terms.

Equally important was the definition of education by stakeholders such as women’s groups and adult education advocates. Strategies that were self-fulfilling but not remunerative did not attract attention and support like those that directly contributed to the human resource development of the country. For instance, Ghanaian women organized sessions in churches where they learned cooking, child-care, and provided support for one another. These activities did not receive attention because they, as women’s work, took place in the voluntary, private sector. To the extent that immigration is an economic policy,

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15 Ibid., 29.
educational (training) programs that were put in place were those that were likely to improve
the quality of the workforce. Immigrants, men and women, as well as the Canadian-born
who were not destined for the work force, could not benefit from some training programs or
when they could, it was at a cost that some could not incur.16

A major determinant of immigrant women's education revolved around who was
responsible for it. Sponsorship is a contract between individual sponsors and the federal
government. The sponsor undertakes to be responsible for the sponsored for a specified
period of time, usually between five and ten years. Unless the sponsorship agreement is
broken, the sponsored may not be eligible for certain services during those years. Yet, as
permanent residents or citizens of Canada, sponsored immigrants have rights as any other
Canadians but their immigrant status limits the extent to which they can claim their rights.
For instance, they have the right to education but they are not entitled to receive some types
of training allowances during the contractual period.

Since many women enter Canada as sponsored family class immigrants, they are
stuck with a complex arrangement that involves their sponsors, federal, and provincial
governments in the provision of education. The federal government is not responsible for
the formal education of Canadians, although it funds citizenship education through the
Secretary of State. Provincial governments are responsible for education but cutbacks in
educational funding over the years have limited the programs they can offer immigrants.
Sponsors may either not have the resources to support women's education or be influenced
by cultural factors to deny women the right to pursue an education. These are pertinent
issues that ultimately affect the kinds of programs that immigrant women may access in

16 Milagros Paredes, "Immigrant Women and Second Language Education: A Study of Unequal Access
to Linguistic Resources," Resources for Feminist Research 16, no. 1(1987), 23-24; Shirley Seward and
Kathryn McDade, Immigrant Women in Canada: A Policy Perspective (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory
Canada. Thus, in defining the type of education that has been put in place for immigrant women, one has to note the context and the complexity surrounding immigrant education. From this perspective, it will be argued that the definition of education for immigrant women has been narrow. It has been restricted mainly to language training. Immigrant women’s access to skill-training programs has been limited due to their gender and immigrant status.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The choice of subject is an important one for me as a Ghanaian immigrant woman. Ghanaians are gradually establishing themselves as a vibrant community in Canada, yet they are among those about whom there is little documentation. With the exception of the works by Opoku-Dapaah and a thesis by Thomas Owusu, there is very little written about Ghanaian immigrants in Canada. Information about them can be gleaned from the small amount of work on African immigrants. Literature on the women is scarcer still. Apart from a monograph produced by Nakanyike Musisi and Jane Turrittin in 1995 which made references to Ghanaian women,¹⁷ there is little information in the literature about Ghanaian immigrant women in Canada. One reason for this situation stems from the tendency of scholars and policy makers to homogenize African peoples and people of African origin as “Blacks”. While the term is significant, its usage requires qualification. Without that qualification the experiences of continental Africans will continually be shelved.

Many studies of Blacks refer to those from the Caribbean or the United States.¹⁸ For instance, the collection of essays in the book *We’re Rooted Here* offers excellent reading

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¹⁸ See, for example, Silvera Makeda, *Silenced* (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1983); Peggy Bristow, Dionne Brand, Linda Carty, Afua P. Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton and Adrienne Shadd, *We’re Rooted Here*
about the diverse experiences of Black American women as they negotiated life in a new and sometimes hostile Canadian environment. Similarly, Agnes Calliste and Vic Satzewich offer historical narratives of Caribbean women who worked as domestics and nurses in Canada. Although their work has helped us to understand Blacks’ experiences in North America, the authors neglect the experiences of African immigrants whose presence in Canada is relatively recent and mostly voluntary. The historical, cultural, social as well as economic experiences of North American and Caribbean Blacks are significantly different from those Blacks from Africa. For instance, Blacks in North America and the Caribbean have suffered a history of racism and discrimination as a result of a history of slavery but this is a phenomenon which African immigrants come to meet, one which might elicit different reactions and responses from them.

During interviews and in informal conversations with friends about racism and discrimination in this country, some women tended to believe that discrimination is a natural part of human behaviour, while others found it a white people’s problem which they have to deal with. Indeed one woman remarked that “when they [whites] show signs of hostility, withdraw from them.” Her view was generally typical of most Ghanaian women and as I will point out, there appears to be a degree of withdrawal and perhaps resignation on the part of some of the Ghanaian women I interviewed to racism. Race issues appear to be stronger

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21 Interview with Esi in North York July 26, 1998; see also CANACT, Country Profile: Ghana, 20.
among North American Blacks and people from the Caribbean than they are among the
majority of Africans.

Similarly, language and other symbols of cultural expression separate Africans from
Caribbean and North American Blacks. While Blacks in North America speak the language
of the dominant group, Africans have had to learn or use English (and French) as second
languages. The articulation of one’s thoughts and ideas in a foreign language serves as an
effective barrier to being understood and appreciated, and consequently being able to
participate in society equitably.

Moreover, certain cultural and traditional practices are unique to Africans, not all
Blacks. For example, while polygyny is widespread in Africa, it is not practised (perhaps
even not understood) by Blacks in North America and the Caribbean. Hence, any “Black
studies” that does not address issues specific to Africans eclipses the experiences of
continental African immigrants.

What this points to is that without recognition of differences between and among
Blacks, differences that move beyond class and the expression of ethnicity, there is a danger
of shelving issues specific to African Blacks, and among African Blacks, national and ethnic
groupings. Although I recognize that using the term “African immigrants” also risks
homogenizing a diverse group, this research draws attention to the need to accord African
immigrants a separate location from which to address issues relating to them specifically as
Africans.

It is also important to note that African women are absent in works on immigrant
women and education. Works by Monica Boyd that distinguished between immigrant
women and recognized national, ethnic and linguistic differences dealt with the education of
Asian and southern European women,\(^22\) while Cecil Klassen concentrated on Latin-American immigrants\(^23\) who had no knowledge of English. The questions they raised have not been adequately addressed, if at all, in regard to African immigrant women. Thus, it was an objective of this research to explore the themes suggested in the literature by examining the education of a particular group of African immigrant women. By focusing on a relatively small group such as Ghanaian immigrant women, I hope to conduct an intensive study; its results unveil some of the different ways in which Ghanaian immigrant women experience life in Canada.

Finally, the dearth of information about African immigrant women impoverishes as well as challenges feminist scholarship in Canada. While it has been the overriding aim of feminist historiography to document the experiences of women, that project becomes too narrow in its focus when it fails to document the life stories of different groups of minority women. The failure to incorporate the experiences of African immigrant women into feminist analyses confirms the racism of white feminist theories and the "patronizing" of Black (read North American) feminist theory. Black feminist scholars have criticized white feminist theories for their insistence on gender and class relations as the sources of female oppression; instead, they argue that we must see race, gender and class relations as intertwining systems of female oppression. Even so, Black feminist analyses sometimes assume that all Black women have similar conceptions of and experiences with racial discrimination.\(^24\) This study draws attention to the divergence and convergence of Ghanaian


\(^{24}\) Esmeralda Thornhill, "Focus on Black Women!" Canadian Journal of Women and the Law 1, no. 1 (1985\slash 86), 153-162.
immigrant women's experiences with white and Black women; it also calls attention to the need to acknowledge such differences so as to add to our knowledge.

The research covered a twenty-one year period, from 1973 to 1993, to coincide with the increased entry of Ghanaian immigrants (and refugees) to Canada and the establishment of a Ghanaian community. As well, the two decades that span the period of the study provided a long enough time to assess changes that occurred in Ghanaian immigrant women's lives. More importantly, the early 1970s were the period of heightened adult educational campaigns that could benefit immigrant women.\textsuperscript{25} Hence the period offers a lens through which to “see” the effectiveness of education for immigrant women. The study was restricted to metropolitan Toronto because of this city's large number of Ghanaian immigrants. It has been estimated that over 70 percent of the more than twenty thousand Ghanaian immigrants in Canada reside in Toronto.\textsuperscript{26} The population offered access to the issues of the Ghanaian community.

**HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Much has been written about immigrant women in Canada. Some feminist scholars, including Monica Boyd, Barbara Roberts, Sheila Arnopoulos, Roxana Ng and Agnes Calliste, have examined immigration as a feminist issue, demonstrating the various ways in which immigration policies and practices hurt women.\textsuperscript{27} Similarly, many have looked at

\textsuperscript{25} For example, the early 1970s were the period for campaigns for recurrent education, for more educational opportunities for women, as well as the beginning of language programs specifically for immigrant women. See Jarl Bengtsson, “Recurrent Education and Manpower Training: An OECD Perspective,” *Adult Training* 2, no. 1 (1976), 7-9; J.R Gass, “Recurrent Education- A Solution to the Crisis of Education?” *Basic Training for Skill Development Review* 2, no. 3 (April 1974), 31-37.

\textsuperscript{26} CANACT. *Ghana: Country Profile*, 12.

female education and have concluded that education is a feminist issue insofar as it is
offered differently to males and females and to some extent creates unequal outcomes
between men and women. Some studies link immigration and education as a feminist
issue. Some of the literature in this area is thematic while others present case studies. The
thematic approach may not always differentiate between immigrants from different socio-
cultural and economic backgrounds and can mask real differences that might make language
training, for instance, attractive to some groups but not others.

This section divides the literature into immigration and immigration and education
and focuses on issues within each area that bear on the experiences of Ghanaian women.
The review will begin with literature produced since 1970 to coincide with the arrival of
many Ghanaian immigrants, as well as the proliferation of feminist literature as a result of
the new wave in feminism.

One of the recurrent themes of the large body of immigration literature since the
1970s has been racial discrimination. Scholars of differing backgrounds and with varying
degrees of interest in immigration have commented on racial discrimination in Canadian
immigration policy. While the vast majority of scholars agree that Canadian immigration
policies had historically been racist, scholarly opinion is divided as to whether there was
racial discrimination after the changes effected in the period 1962 to 1967. At one end of the
spectrum are those who argue that racial and other forms of discrimination were removed
after 1962, to be replaced by universal criteria based mainly on education, skill and language
proficiency. Freda Hawkins, a respected analyst of Canadian immigration policy, represents
this school of thought. She notes in a 1974 study that “Canada officially abandoned racial
discrimination in immigration in 1962 not because of any public protest... Racial
discrimination at that time had become distasteful and impractical to the ruling groups in

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both major political parties..."29 It also made for bad international relations, and curtailed the number of skilled immigrants that the economy needed.30 Since racial discrimination appeared to be the overriding grounds for exclusion, its removal was believed to have signalled the removal of discrimination from Canadian immigration policies.

At the other end are those who continue to charge that racial discrimination still existed in Canadian immigration policy after the changes of 1962. In his examination of the entry of Caribbean domestics between 1962 and 1966, Vic Satzewich argues that the removal of racial clauses from immigration policy was strictly cosmetic. Satzewich quotes from an immigration official on policy issues who wrote that:

...our policy is not racially discriminatory and we are prepared to accept immigrants of all races and from all parts of the world. However, our policy is selective in the sense that we recruit only those with the education and training to establish themselves in Canada.31

In spite of this, the same official stated that:

...although our policy is not racially biased we do concentrate our main operations in those countries (Europe and the United States) which have traditionally given us most of our immigrants.32

What this suggests is that whites with similar ways were desired and others only when their labour was needed. Whether they were welcome as an integral part of society, regardless of their labour, was another issue. Satzewich also argues that although Caribbean domestics were needed for their labour, they were among the group that saw greater deportations as a result of their perceived promiscuousness, perceptions that arose out of racial stereotypes.33 Agnes Calliste’s work on Caribbean nurses also illustrates

30 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 92; Daiva Stasiulis, “Rainbow Feminism: Perspectives on Minority Women in Canada,”
how race structured their admission. Her work spans the period both before and after 1962, and illustrates the historical continuity of racial discrimination in immigration policies and practices against Blacks. Black Caribbean nurses needed to be “extra” qualified to gain admission into Canada and the nursing profession and, once admitted, performed tasks that white nurses would not do. Calliste’s explanation for this is that Caribbean women were so treated because of their race.\textsuperscript{34}

David Matas and Illana Simon state that “we don’t need racist laws to have racial discrimination in immigration - all we need is unlimited discretion.”\textsuperscript{35} They emphasize that allowing some nationalities to enter Canada without a visa, while others need visas even when they are in transit, discriminates on the basis of national origin. Similarly, they draw attention to the discrepancy in the number of immigration offices and the time of processing of applications in different countries. The number of offices and officials to staff them varied significantly in certain geographical regions. As late as 1968 there were only three immigration offices on the entire continent of Africa with its fifty countries, while the United States and Britain had as many as twenty between them. Insufficient personnel in some areas prolonged processing time.\textsuperscript{36}

Works that examine African immigrants specifically, while not dealing with discrimination in migration policy, have also demonstrated that after African immigrants have entered this country they suffer systemic discrimination.

In the first detailed work about African immigrants in Canada, A.B.K. Kasozi emphasized that due to discrimination African immigrants do not access the available

\textsuperscript{35} David Matas and Illana Simon, \textit{Closing the Door: The Failure of Refugee Protection} (Toronto: Summerhill, 1989), 33.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 34-40.
resources and facilities. He cited poverty as a debilitating factor in the integration of African immigrants and noted that the poverty rate for African immigrants was above the national average. Kasozi also stated that many African immigrants lived below the poverty line.\footnote{A. B. K. Kasozi, \textit{The Integration of Black African Immigrants in Canadian Society: A Case Study of Toronto CMA} (Toronto: Canadian African Newcomer Aid Centre of Toronto: 1986), 1-2.}

His views were echoed by Opoku-Dapaah in his study of Ghanaian refugees. He also noted that there are explicit cases of discrimination against Ghanaian refugees, and many had to rely largely on informal networks in order to integrate into Canadian society.\footnote{Edward Opoku-Dapaah, \textit{Adaptation of Ghanaian Refugees in Toronto}, (North York: York Lanes Press, 1993), 7-8.}

It is important to point out that racial discrimination as a theme in post-1960 immigration policy raises some issues that need careful consideration if immigration policy is to be understood and improved. Since the mid-1970s more non-white immigrants have entered the country compared with those from traditional sources. Indeed, since the 1980s over 80 percent of all immigrants to Canada have been non-white. Thus the case can be made that post-1960 Canadian immigration policy is “colour blind” and the number of people of colour entering the country is a reflection of a non-racist policy.

Yet, immigration statistics reveal that people from Hong Kong and other Asian countries have dominated the non-white immigrant population. Immigrants from Asia have outnumbered the combined total of those coming from Africa and Latin America since the mid-1980s. Is this an indication that within the non-traditional group Canadian immigration policy is “colour conscious”? Are people from Africa and Latin America not interested in Canada to the same extent as those from Asia? Is it a matter of relatively larger populations in Asia, or a reflection of an affluent and/or highly educated people? There are no simple answers to these questions (see chapter 2 for a discussion of some of these issues).
The criteria for selection, namely education, skill, language proficiency, and adequate financial resources, can mask incidences of racial discrimination. Thus, although the line between policy and process is a fine one, it is important to distinguish between discrimination in selection and racism in immigration policy. The reality does not explicitly point to Canadian immigration policy as racist; rather the selection process is discriminatory, favouring rich against poor, skilled against unskilled, the educated against the uneducated. These categories cut across racial lines and may not be frozen in time. Individuals and groups may feel discriminated against because of their race but this can be nuanced and render analysis difficult. However, the larger Canadian civic society is not "colour blind." Race features prominently as a determinant of life’s chances once immigrants enter Canada.

Like racism, gender discrimination in immigration policy is not frozen in time. In the mid-nineteenth century Chinese construction workers could not sponsor their wives; similarly, Caribbean domestics could not bring in their husbands and when they did the men faced limitations similar to what sponsored women face. The idea was to curtail the growth of these populations. Canada wished to stay predominantly white. After 1962, immigration policy appeared to be gender-neutral. While we may not find gender discrimination in immigration policy, we can find discrimination against the female immigrant population once they set foot on Canadian soil. Boyd has noted that some of the outcomes of policy implementation are gender-specific, biased against immigrant women.\(^{39}\) She argues that women’s entry status in the family class category, although useful for the entry of many women, nonetheless adversely affects their relations with their sponsors and limits the range of services that they may access.\(^{40}\)


\(^{40}\) Ibid., 16-17; Ruth Fincher, Wenona Giles, Lois Foster and Valerie Preston, “Gender and Migration,” in Howard Adelman et al., eds., *Immigration and Refugee Policy: Canada and Australia Compared*
Women who enter Canada in the family class category (and women increasingly enter as family class) are listed by immigration officers as not destined for the job market. As such, they are not eligible for training programs that can enhance their job prospects.

Thus some feminist researchers have characterized immigrant women as "doubly disadvantaged" because they are both women and immigrants. When they happen to be Black or other visible minorities, they are "triply disadvantaged" because they are women, immigrants and visible. The "triple disadvantage" framework speaks to the interconnections of race, gender, and class as systems of women's oppression. Roberts explained:

Our economic system and our social order depend on the supply of cheap timid workers to do low paid jobs, and on women to do unpaid and cheap work. Some of us are more likely than others to end up on the bottom and being female and from a subordinated immigrant group make us good candidates.

Scholars dealing specifically with language training point out that female immigrants face limitations in their access to educational programs due to their gender and entry category. Scholars such as Monica Boyd, Shirley Seward and Edith Ferguson note that most immigrant women do not qualify for language training because immigration officials list them as not destined for the labour market. Those who might qualify for language training may not qualify for basic allowance, a subsidy which immigrants can ill afford to lose. Others have had to prove that they have been out of work for a specified period of time before they could apply to work-related language programs. These constraints put immigrant women in a double bind. They might opt for language training without the

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benefits, thus making them dependent upon their sponsors, or they might go without training and remain mired in dead-end jobs. As Boyd notes:

The woman who is less well educated, who knows little or no English or French, and who because of her arrival status is ineligible for additional language and job-related training programs is constrained to a limited set of occupations with low pay and less desirable working conditions.44

However, scholars such as Floya Anthias, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Daiva Stasiulis have critiqued the “triple disadvantage” framework.45 Stasiulis, for instance, has argued that the diversity in Canada in terms of regional differences and differences between and among immigrant groups has given rise to different racisms. As such, it is inadequate to limit immigrant women’s experiences to only three categories.46 In spite of their criticism, the triple disadvantage framework has been employed to produce insightful microanalyses of some groups of immigrant women. The framework helps to shed light on the “hidden language” of immigration policy and practices.

The work on African immigrant women undertaken by Nakanyike Musisi and Jane Turrittin that examined African women’s labour force participation also noted that immigrant women were victimized in the areas of immigration, employment, and education.47 Maria Larrain made this observation at the 1981 conference on immigrant women in Toronto.48 Until the second half of the 1980s immigrant women who were not destined for the labour market were not eligible for certain types of language training. This

limitation was removed in 1986 when the Settlement Language program was established and then reintroduced in 1992 as Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC). According to Musisi and Turrittin, the number of immigrant women who accessed LINC increased from 28 percent in 1992 to 45 percent in 1994.49 Roxana Ng and Judith Ramirez, however, note that family responsibilities and objective conditions of work are important limitations to immigrant women’s participation in such programs.50

Immigrant women, including Ghanaian immigrants, face structural and objective difficulties due mainly to their entry category and ascribed gender roles (i.e., family responsibilities). Invaluable as these studies are to an understanding of the experiences of immigrant women, there does not appear to be an in-depth study of any African female immigrant group and how the members experience these limitations. Studying Ghanaian immigrant women provided a test case for determining the adequacy or inadequacy of language training programs and facilities for African immigrants. It offered an opportunity to determine some of the structural difficulties that immigrant women face.

CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In thinking about the education of immigrant women, I have gained insights from feminist theories that expose the diverse ways in which women have been marginalized and oppressed in society. In particular, I have found the works of scholars such as Gerda Lerner, Joan Scott, Joan Kelly, and Gisela Bock51 inspiring. From their various backgrounds, they

49 Musisi and Turrittin, African Women and the Metropolitan Labour Market, 33.
50 Roxana Ng and Judith Ramirez, Immigrant Housewives in Canada (Toronto: The Immigrant Women’s Centre, 1981), 48.
have examined the forces that precluded women "from making history," showing that what was deemed to be of textual significance and preservation were those activities in which women were excluded. Excluding women from history was discrimination, a play of power by men over women, resulting in female marginalization in or absence from historical records.

Black feminist critiques of white feminist theories regarding the over homogenization of "women" called for the incorporation of an analysis of racism into women's studies.\(^{52}\) It was believed to have established a sounder grounding for women's studies. However, Black feminist thought in turn was criticized for its totalizing deployment of race. As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has argued, Black feminist theory did not "permit sufficient exploration into the ideological spaces of difference among Black women themselves."\(^{53}\) Another feminist scholar, Daiva Stasiulis, has argued that Black feminist theory draws a dichotomy between Black and white without accounting for the experiences of other racial minorities.\(^{54}\) Some scholars, including Joan Scott and Angela Davis, envisioned women's oppression as occurring along three intertwining axes, namely, race, gender and class, and opened new possibilities for conceptualizing women.\(^{55}\) It has been possible for groups of women who had been left out of analyses of female oppression to be made visible in the records.

However, Roxana Ng and Judith Ramirez have noted that with respect to diversity in Canada, employing race, gender and class as categories of analyses would not be very

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\(^{54}\) Daiva Stasiulis, "Theorizing Connections," 290.

helpful. As they have stated, "The concepts and categories that they [that is researchers] have been taught to use in thinking about immigrant women’s situation do not match the reality which confronts them on a daily basis." In other words, the constraints that immigrant women encounter move beyond issues of race and class. Problems with language, intergenerational tensions, striking a balance between work, child-care and night classes, thinking about family left behind in the old country, etc. cannot be explained simply by race, class and gender. They arise as a result of women’s immigrant status.

In relation to this study, however, race, gender and class are useful conceptual categories in determining Ghanaian women’s bid to access educational facilities and, instead of these categories being tagged on to women’s immigrant status, they are presented as interacting within that status. While immigrant women may not be directly discriminated against in the migration process itself, they come up against blocks after their arrival that are structured by race, gender, and class. Examining the educational experiences of immigrant women within the context of race, gender and class dynamics provides a lens through which to view and understand the experiences of Ghanaian immigrant women.

As well, Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s work on the sexual and racial division of reproductive labour captures the interconnectedness of race, class and gender and helps us to understand the life experiences of minority and immigrant women. Glenn draws attention to the inadequacy of treating race and class as additive models in analyses of Black women’s experiences and employing gender to describe the experiences of white women. She emphasizes that race and class are not mere accessories to Black women’s experiences.

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56 Ng and Ramirez, Immigrant Housewives, 16.
58 Ibid., 1-2
(or those of other women of colour). Indeed, race and class as well as gender structure the experiences of both Black and white women.\textsuperscript{59} Her work also points to the ways in which white women are implicated in racial discrimination against Black and other minority women. Her work provides an analysis of why some women have been slotted into particular occupations.

Immigrant education also provides another perspective for thinking about continuity as a theme in feminist discourse. Judith Bennett, for example, has argued that women's work and status have not changed much over the years.\textsuperscript{60} She notes:

Women with college degrees still have the earning power of men with high school diplomas; most women in the university still work in the secretarial and clerical pink-collar ghetto; female faculty cluster in fixed-term and untenured positions...\textsuperscript{61}

Bennett argues that the tendency of feminist historians to emphasize change instead of continuity is an aspect of the nature of the subject. When history is viewed as a linear progression of human development, historians tend to focus on the periods and events that brought about change. She notes that in the so-called great periods of human development, women continued to occupy subordinate positions both at work and in the family.\textsuperscript{62}

Relating Bennett's arguments to the development of African women's history, Sandra E. Greene argues that major historical works have emphasized change instead of continuity to demonstrate that women have made great strides in history. Like Bennett, Greene believes that the nature of the subject calls for this kind of approach.\textsuperscript{63} Gerda Lerner

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\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Judith Bennett, "Confronting Continuity," \textit{Journal of Women's History} 9, no. 3 (1997), 73-94.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. 77-81.
\textsuperscript{63} Sandra E. Greene, "A Perspective from African Women's History: Comment on 'On Continuity,'"
\end{flushright}
on the other hand believes that change and continuity should not be dichotomized. To posit an either/or analysis using these categories denies the complexity of women’s experiences.\textsuperscript{64} We can also conceptualize women not as a broad mass of faceless individuals moving inexorably through history, but as historical actors whose lives could be transformed through education, and the kind of labour they can perform as a result of it. Analysis of change and continuity has been undertaken within the framework of national histories that do not account for the experiences of immigrant women. Continuity and change may not be mutually exclusive, as Lerner argues, and this study would be one way of testing the notion.

Additionally, much work about Black women in North America tends to homogenize “the Black woman.” Differences in experience that may emanate from different historical periods, geographical locations, immigration, and even culture, are at times glossed over in an attempt to demonstrate the resilience of Black women in the face of racial oppression.\textsuperscript{65} In thinking about this shortfall in (Black) feminist writing, I have found Ruth Roach Pierson’s work on dominance, difference and voice in feminist discourses very useful.\textsuperscript{66} While women could be invisible in academic discourses as well as in social and political situations, not all women are so disadvantaged or, among the disadvantaged group, occupy the same position. Whose voice is heard, when, and why, are crucial determinants in the writing of the history of some groups of women. Ghanaian women’s experiences have not been reflected in Canadian feminist literature. Examining their educational experiences is one way of redeeming their voices from obscurity.

\textsuperscript{64} Gerda Lerner, “A Perspective from European and U.S Women’s History: Comment on ‘Confronting Continuity,’” \textit{Journal of Women’s History} 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1997), 114-118.


\textsuperscript{66} Ruth Roach Pierson, “Experience, Dominance, Difference, and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women’s History,” in Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Randall, eds., \textit{Writing Women’s
METHODOLOGY

This study aims at exploring the educational experiences of Ghanaian immigrant women and a mixed method has emerged as the most viable methodology to use. There has been an on-going debate among feminist researchers regarding the type of methodology to use in studying women. While there is universal agreement as to the value of the qualitative research methodology (oral interviews) in addressing women’s issues, there is increasing interest in the use of traditional methods in tandem with the qualitative to “capture a more complete, holistic and textual portrayal.”

Arguing for a judicious mix of methods, Mary Maynard and June Purvis observed that “not only should the method adopted be the most appropriate to a specific set of research questions and the overall research context, but it is frequently useful to select a range of methods, with a view to maximising input to the research.” They further suggest that researchers could make traditional methods “feminist user-friendly” depending on how they treat subjects and how they use the information subjects give.

I undertook this research from a feminist perspective. Susan Geiger has argued that “there is nothing inherently feminist about …women’s oral histories or women doing women’s oral history.” According to Geiger, what makes a particular method feminist depends on the objective of the research, questions asked, research relations, audience and evidence against which data is verified.

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69 Ibid., 4.
my analysis and posited that their experiences have not been reflected in the literature due to their immigrant status. By putting these women at the centre of the analysis, I imply that their experiences are important and should form an integral part of knowledge about Canadian women. Oral interviews were the main means of gathering data about Ghanaian women because, according to John Van Maanen, they are the best way for us to come to understand, appreciate and describe the culture of the people we wish to study. Since people experience phenomena in different ways, an important way of understanding and hence generating knowledge is to examine the subjective dimensions of their experiences. Quality and not necessarily quantity could yield the type of information needed to understand the subjective part of experiences in the context of the dynamics of their time. In other words, while numbers could be important in establishing patterns, they are not as essential to a feminist analysis that values the subjective as very important in any study on women.

Moreover, Lynn Cannon, Elizabeth Higginbotham and Marianne Leung have also argued that "qualitative research methodologies are best suited to document and describe the experiences of women who have been excluded from the most basic building blocks of existing theories." While feminist theories have highlighted the experiences of different groups of women in the Canadian ethnic mosaic, Black African women have received short shrift in the literature. The racism and classism that characterized white, middle-class feminist theories, the tendency to treat Black women as a monolithic category by Black feminists, and the recent arrival of Ghanaian immigrant women have accounted for their absence in the literature. Hence it was useful in this research to explore Ghanaian women’s

experiences through their own accounts so that they could be incorporated in a more inclusive body of knowledge.

Although using the oral method was crucial in understanding women's subjective experiences, it was important to draw links between the experiences and the context within which they occurred; hence I also used quantitative techniques. I supplemented oral interviews with other data to ensure that the qualitative interpretation would be built on a solid empirical base. Since the study concerns immigrant women, it was important for me to examine the ways in which the migration process changed women's identity as Ghanaians to a new Canadian type: immigrant women. This examination could not depend solely on women's subjective account of immigration. It demanded the use of different analytical techniques that were essential to an understanding of how they became the "other," set apart from other Canadians by virtue of that identity. That meant examining and analyzing immigration statistics. These methods were then supplemented with primary and secondary literature describing the social, economic and political dynamics of the period under study to contextualize women's accounts. Thus, to quote Maud Blair, the study is "multi-sourced," the intention being not only to give voice to Ghanaian women and to account for their subjective experience, but also to provide the context within which the "experiences were experienced."

The qualitative method involved collecting life histories of a selected sample of women through open-ended in-depth face to face interviews. For one thing, as indicated above, there was very little documented material on Ghanaian women, hence, to understand their personal experiences necessitated these interviews. For another, as an exploratory study, the open-ended in-depth interview was ideal since it provided the means to delve into
personal issues that would not be possible with questionnaires. Oral interviews allowed the women to account for their experiences in their own terms. Using a quantitative method would have imposed pre-determined categories on the data and hence obscured the subjective. Commenting on the interview process, Valerie Yow has also argued that the open-ended interview technique gives research participants the freedom to answer questions as they choose and thus generate non-standardized data that allows researchers to examine difference among people and generate new hypothesis. The use of the oral method then was at once expedient and significant, directing the way to women's experiences without necessarily distorting their meaning.

I recognized, however, that "telling it like it was" would only reproduce individual women's fragmented experiences, unconnected with the experiences of others in the sample and stripped of context in which the experiences occurred. The study did not just intend to catalogue emotions, frustrations, and aspirations of individuals in a selected sample of women, although these were important dimensions to the women's experiences. Rather, I used oral interviews to establish linkages in women's experiences that would make their interpretations significant.

At the same time, I was cognizant of the fact that "women's accounts cannot provide us with everything we need to know." The mediatory effects of memory and interpretation

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74 Jayaratne and Stewart, "Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences," 227.
on experience suggested that there could be gaps and silences in women’s accounts which needed to be filled if I had to get a thorough understanding of their experiences. It was therefore necessary for me to supplement women’s oral accounts with additional data to be able to explain and give a valid account of their experiences. Hence, I administered semi-structured, open-ended questionnaires to a selected sample of Ghanaian men. This method also allowed for an understanding of the roles men played in women’s lives to be able to assess their impact on the women’s experiences. Administering questionnaires to men was far more expedient than conducting face-to-face interviews in view of time, cultural, and gender constraints that could result in gaps in their accounts. However, I interviewed three men whose responses to the questionnaire were quite significant. Interviewing the men pointed to the ways in which gender experience is relational. The women’s experiences had to be understood in relation to those of their male counterparts.

Finally, I incorporated interview data I had from 1996 about Ghanaian ethnic and cultural groups and churches. Since women had been active members in these organizations, including data from those sources further enriched and illuminated women’s accounts.

**The research process: locating participants**

Collecting personal data was two-tiered. First, I talked with friends at social gatherings such as funerals and baby naming ceremonies, at some cultural association meetings, and at shopping malls about the project. I explained in detail the topic of the research, the type of people I wanted to be part of the study, and the nature of data collection. I first met with interested men to take their phone numbers and mailing addresses after which I sent out questionnaires, including consent forms (see Appendix A). Seven participants mailed in their completed responses, eight handed them in at association

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meetings, and ten at social gatherings. In all, it took two months to get the 25 questionnaires. I selected 15 based on age, ethnic background, education, period of entry and status in order to reflect the diverse ethnic, class and age distribution of the Ghanaian immigrant population. Of the ten men (66.7%) I grouped as Akan, two arrived between 1974 and 1978 as independent applicants with post-secondary education, while eight entered between 1980 and 1990 as refugees, seven of them with secondary education, and one with a university degree. The ten men ranged between 28 and 57 years of age. The remaining five (33.3%) were made up of a Northerner, an Ewe and a Ga; two arrived in 1979, two in 1987 and one in 1991. The age range was between 28 and 44. This spread reflected the proportion of Ghanaians in Toronto by ethnic background.

I designed questions to test four things. The first set of questions, which dealt with personal information, was designed to ascertain the ethnic background, education and entry status of immigrant men. The second set of questions tested the men’s response to women’s desire to go to school. The rationale was to test male attitudes toward female education. The third set of questions dealt with domestic duties, the extent to which men were involved and how that affected women’s schooling and work schedules. The last set of questions were meant to ascertain control of family resources as a way of determining the extent to which education gave women power in the family unit. These questions were semi-structured and open-ended, allowing respondents to give as much information as they were able.

The second tier of data gathering involved locating women to interview. I made initial contact through a network of friends who introduced me to women who would be appropriate candidates. I needed Ghanaian immigrant women between 18 and 40 years of age, who had lived in Canada for an average of ten years and who had attended some school since their arrival in Canada. Thereafter, I made direct contact to formally introduce myself and to explain the research.
I arranged interview schedules with the women. They chose the place and time of meeting. At that stage interviewees were made to understand that I needed to tape record the interview; none objected. Taping the interviews was essential in getting minute but crucial details that could be missed if I were to write notes. For instance, a sigh, hesitation or laughter could be missed in writing but that might be important in explaining an issue or a point. I started out with six scheduled meetings within one month of beginning the process, and through snowballing, the interviewers recommended their friends, who also recommended people they knew. In all I contacted 30 women and interviewed 20. Of the remaining ten, while not openly declining to be interviewed, five did not return my calls and five kept postponing the interview date. To avoid previously interviewed men from influencing female family members, I did not interview women who lived with any of the men answering the questionnaires within three months of the men’s participation. In fact, I interviewed only two of those women. The number of interviewees was large enough to allow for identifiable patterns in their narratives and small enough to allow for detailed interviews.

I gave consent forms (Appendix B) to interviewees on the scheduled dates of interviews that were duly signed. In four cases, interviews were conducted over the phone so I sent the forms ahead of schedule which were read and signed before the actual interview could take place. Five interviews took place at the interviewees’ workplaces (in their offices), three in my apartment, and the remainder in the interviewees’ residences. All interviews were taped and later transcribed. An average interview lasted two hours. The longest took five hours, as a result of phone interruptions, the interviewer attending to clients, and off the record conversation that further explained some of the issues discussed during the interview. I began interviewing in June, 1998 and did the last one in March, 1999.
I had about forty-five hours of taped interviews that transcribed to more than three hundred pages of text.

I divided the twenty-one-year period under study into four-year ranges with the intention of assigning five women to every year range. The period of their arrival was important in examining and comparing the social and economic conditions that confronted immigrant women on their arrival. However, assigning women to time slots proved to be difficult especially for the 1989-1993 year range. Some of the women in this group who presented themselves for interview were still in school and did not fit my criteria. Ultimately, there were four women in the 1973-1976 year group, three for 1977-1980, three in the 1981-1984 group, seven in the 1985-1988 year group and three in the 1989-1993 group.

As with year of arrival, I grouped women into age cohorts based on the age at the time of pursuing an academic program. The youngest woman was 19 years and oldest 42. Similarly, I fit women into classes by the number of years of education they achieved in Ghana and the level reached. Four of the participants had completed secondary, three elementary, two university, and two were trained as teachers. Finally I categorized the women by marital status and entry category. All the women indicated that they were either married or living with boyfriends on their arrival and also at the time of going to school, while the majority (15) stated that their spouses or boyfriends sponsored them. Only two of the sample entered as independent applicants, and three indicated they were refugees. While I wished to have an equal number of women in each division, it was not always possible to achieve that (see Tables 1 and 2).
Classifying women in categories proved useful in determining how the variables interacted in order to establish a pattern in women's experiences. For instance, the decade of the 1980s opened with an economic slump while the late 1980s were relatively buoyant. It would be interesting to know whether the relative lack of employment opportunities in the early 1980s served as an impetus for women to go to school or whether job availability in the late 1980s made schooling less attractive. Such comparisons made it possible to determine whether period of arrival, for instance, had any influence over women's decision to go school.

In addition, it was necessary to determine the class background of the sample to ascertain how that influenced the women's decision to go to school. For instance, could
entry category alone be crucial in assigning women to specific positions? How did women who had high educational standards but who entered as sponsored fare? Since immigration policy requires sponsors to be financially responsible for the sponsored, it would be interesting to know how sponsorship affected people with education. Would sponsored women be restricted in their educational pursuits? Probing these issues was essential in yielding a deeper understanding of the different ways in which Ghanaian women's experiences could be conceptualized and analyzed.

**Difficulties locating participants**

What at first appeared to be a stimulating and easy thing to do turned out to be the biggest hurdle I had to surmount. Getting women who fit the sample to interview was not as easy as I presumed it would be. Perhaps as a result of believing in my location as a Ghanaian and a woman, I had assumed that women would readily agree to be interviewed when contacted. I was mistaken. It took approximately one month to begin seeing participants who had agreed to be interviewed.

While the initial interviewees recommended friends, I had to rely on their goodwill to make the initial contact for me. Sometimes, it seemed I was getting on their nerves when I kept calling to find out if they made contact. At times making contact became very frustrating. Other times I was given the phone numbers to make the initial call while the original interviewees promised to follow up. Some of the follow-up calls were never made and I found myself fearing that I would be rejected. In one instance, one woman retorted when I called: "who gave you my number? What did she say about me? I must contact her before I decide to grant you the interview!" The original interviewer later called to advise that it would be better if I did not interview that woman. I did not call her again.
Although the above scenario was atypical, it raised the question whether there was
more underneath the friendliness of the women I interviewed, whether some consented to
participate merely because friends recommended them. While I could be bothered by
thoughts such as these, I also believed that I will never know the motivation for their
participation and relied on their friendliness as a measure of their willingness to participate.

There was also the problem of balancing the informal pieces of information I picked
up in the community and in off-tape conversations with some participants with the formal
ones I obtained through interviews. Stories about the events that have shaped the
experiences and identities of immigrant women changed as the context changed. For
instance, the pressures of immigration policy elicited stories that created a specific identity
to suit an immigrant's claims while informally the same person presented an identity
different from what is officially known. Sometimes, during the off-tape conversations, some
interviewees explained how they had to claim some status in order to match their sponsors’
stories to immigration officials. Although these tensions suggested how life stories may be
narrated differently according to context and circumstance, the real problem lay with how
these contextual narratives could be reconciled in terms of writing a meaningful historical
account. In circumstances such as these, I de-emphasized the stories surrounding the entry
of participants and focused on the ramifications of having to enter in a particular category.

I also had difficulty getting documented data from some of the associations. Some
groups did not have files and those that did sometimes had patchy records. The exception
here was the Association of Ghanaians in Toronto (AGIT) whose president released the
association's files for my perusal.

It is significant to explain at this point conceptual difficulties I grappled with in
using a feminist perspective for the research. While I recognized race, gender and class as
important axes of power, prejudice and discrimination against women, I did not start off by
assuming that Ghanaian immigrant women were oppressed along those lines. I did not want to pre-impose a grid on women’s experiences since that could force the data into those categories to fit my assumptions. I rather wanted the data to reveal how these dynamics played out in women’s lives, if at all. In most cases I asked general questions so as not to lead conversations in any particular direction.

Yet another difficulty concerned a conceptualization of “Black women” as problematized by Black feminists. As previously mentioned, works by Black feminist scholars such as those contained in the anthology *We’re Rooted Here* offer the experiences of North-American and Caribbean Black women as though these epitomized the experiences of Black women in North America generally. While these works are invaluable to (Black) feminist analysis, I sometimes found it difficult fitting Ghanaian women into their analyses. The recent nature of Ghanaian women’s arrival and the fact that most entered Canada voluntarily could pose different sets of conditions that would not completely fit with the paradigm offered in those accounts. In spite of these problems, it was possible for me to gather valuable information.

**Organization of the Study**

The research has been organized in eight chapters. In this first chapter, I introduce the study by identifying the main issues to be explored, and the rationale for choosing to work in that area. I also examine relevant literature that has increased our understanding of the links between immigration and education, emphasizing the structural difficulties that immigrant women face upon arrival in Canada, as well the theoretical and conceptual framework within which the study was undertaken.

Chapter two is a discussion of the motivation for Ghanaians to migrate to Canada. I put emphasis on “push” and “pull” factors to link Ghanaian immigrants’ home conditions
with conditions in Canada especially with respect to immigration policy, to determine how it was possible for “undesirables” to gain entry into Canada.

Canada has prided itself as a land of opportunity for immigrants. In chapter three I examine the educational opportunities available to immigrant women. This chapter has been divided into two sections. The first section involves an examination of English as a Second Language (ESL) programs while the second explores alternative educational facilities and strategies for and by immigrant women.

In chapter four I move Ghanaian women to centre stage. Using their own stories, I present the conditions that enhanced or impeded the education of Ghanaian immigrant women. Here, I am thinking of issues such as the influence of married life and mothering in women’s lives, gender and racial discrimination.

Canada is multicultural and different ethnic and cultural groups have devised strategies to maintain their cultural identity within the Canadian mosaic. In chapter five I focus on Ghanaian cultural associations and religious groups as well as African organizations as adaptive agents. I explore the extent to which associations and agencies provided education for Ghanaian immigrant women.

The sixth chapter assesses the overall impact of formal and non-formal education on the lives of Ghanaian immigrant women. The issues I consider include women’s labour force participation, familial relationships, and involvement in community activities.

In chapter seven, I relate the study to broader themes in feminist literature. In particular, I draw on continuity and transformation in women’s lives, as well as family and gender dynamics. The conclusion summarizes the major arguments in the thesis and raises issues that can be taken up by other researchers.
INTRODUCTION

Until fairly recently, Black African immigration was conspicuously absent from the large body of immigration literature available in Canada. Given the fact that Black Africans did not enter Canada at the same rate as other immigrants, that absence was not surprising. However, within the past decade some attempts have been made to incorporate Africans into the scholarly literature, with the result that we are becoming increasingly aware of the numerous ways in which Africans experience their lives as immigrants in Canada. Yet, little has been done about Canadian immigration policy in relation to Africans and how it has affected their immigration. This chapter examines the migration of African peoples into Canada as a backdrop to examining the migration of Ghanaians into this country. I argue that while Black Africans were very mobile, their historical circumstance as colonized peoples coupled with racist Canadian immigration policies worked against them in both overt and covert ways. Historical circumstance prevented a large influx of Africans into Canada until 1962 when new immigration regulations opened possibilities for them to start entering this country in relatively large numbers.

It has been traditional for migration analysts to identify “push” and “pull” factors as motivating migration. “Push” factors refer to conditions in immigrants’ original homelands that make it expedient for them to move. These conditions may arise out of insecurities associated with war, natural disasters, economic slumps, or pure adventure. “Pull” factors refer to the conditions in a host country that make it the preferred destination of immigrants. These include tolerance, hospitality, economic opportunity, and political stability. Both “push” and “pull” factors must interact simultaneously to influence migration in a particular

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81 Agyemang Atta-Poku, *The Socio-Cultural Adjustment Question: The Role of Ghanaian Immigrant*
direction. Certainly, there have been "push" factors in Africa and "pull" conditions in Canada. However, the interaction of these forces to direct African migration toward Canada was fraught with impediments. On the one hand, Africans were constrained by their colonial status to restrict migration largely to the African continent. When international migration did occur, it gravitated towards the colonial metropolises in Europe. On the other hand, "pull" factors in Canada did not exist for Black Africans to attract them to this country until 1962 when the government removed restrictive provisions in the immigration laws and regulations. Even then, the migration of African peoples to Canada was modest in numbers.

**"Push" Conditions in Africa**

The movement of people due to war, natural disasters, population explosion, or economic considerations has been a significant theme in African migration history. What has been emphasized is that for most of the last century, until the 1960s, the movement of African peoples was intra-continental, involving mostly male migrants; thereafter both the character and direction of migration changed.  

Before European colonization migration involved whole families, villages or even entire ethnic groups in search of food, fertile land for farming or to run away from dangerous predators. During the colonial period migration was motivated by labour demand. It was undertaken on an individual basis, although some national groups dominated the process in certain cases. One scholar, Emmanuel Wallerstein, has noted that colonialism could affect migration in two ways. It either promoted migration as a result of the relative

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peace and security that characterized a region making the process easier and safer; or it checked migration since border controls and different currencies, as well as government directives, could effectively curtail migration. Whatever the case, the colonial period has been noted as a watershed in the migratory history of Africans. In Southern Africa, for example, forced as well as voluntary migrations drew people to settler plantations or mines. A similar phenomenon was observed in West Africa. In addition to plantations, migrants were attracted to the urban centres where they worked in a variety of capacities to meet their tax and other financial obligations.

K. C. Zachariah and Julien Conde, for instance, have documented that there was a massive movement of people in the West African sub-region before the 1970s due to opportunities that had opened up in urban centres. In West Africa, movement occurred in a north-south direction, with people from present-day Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, supplying the largest number of migrants. While migration continued after the colonial era, the motivating factors, the direction, and composition varied. Unequal regional development, rural poverty and strife have been cited as some of the factors that compelled people to migrate within and without their own countries. And women have been shown to be active participants in the post-independence migratory experience.

International migration, in the sense of moving out of national boundaries to neighbouring African countries, has been a salient feature of life in the post-colonial period.


86 Ibid., 31.

87 Ibid., 1-13

For instance, in West Africa, Ghana received the vast majority of immigrants because migrants could get ready employment as farm labourers on cocoa farms in the middle forest belt or as traders in the towns and cities, especially those along the coast. When economic conditions began to deteriorate in the late 1960s, many migrants redirected their attention from Ghana to the Ivory Coast. In the 1980s, the oil boom in Nigeria made that country the most popular destination of West African migrants. Many West African migrants engaged in either labour or commercial migration. The former, which was more popular, involved individual migrants who were attracted by job opportunities in urban centres, while the latter was a much more complex phenomenon, multidirectional in nature, at times involving whole families and predominantly undertaken by particular ethnic groups.

While the majority of Africans responded to changing economic, political, social and ecological situations by migrating, movement to Canada did not appear to be a favourable and/or popular option for most people prior to 1970. Due to the dearth of information on international migration it is difficult to offer an exhaustive explanation as to the causes of this situation. However, some patchy accounts in the literature give insight into what can be termed “African in-migration.”

In the first place, almost all of sub-Saharan Africa was under colonial domination from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the second half of the twentieth. As colonial subjects, Africans could not move at will. The human resource they provided was invaluable to the exploitation of other resources. Hence the implementation of forced migration by the colonialists to get Africans to work. Although forced migration was

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Afrikainstitutet, 1995), 257-268.
eventually abandoned, tax obligations and a new consumerism forced many Africans to move out of their familiar spaces to new places to work for money.

Additionally, at the beginning of the 1960s, many sub-Saharan African countries were involved in nationalist movements geared toward achieving political independence. Ghana had in fact taken the lead in 1957 when it gained political independence from Britain, the first sub-Saharan African country to do so. Nigeria followed suit in 1960. Other African countries were spurred on by Ghana’s example to fight for independence which they won in the 1960s and 1970s. The task of nation building and the promise of development and modernisation that the “new” governments committed themselves to achieve could also have absorbed the energies of potential migrants. This situation could have led to a low migration of Africans to international destinations, such as Canada. When they did migrate, they went to the colonial metropolises, namely London and Paris.91

On the other hand, weaker economies could export labour to the stronger ones, as was the case with Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta) to Ghana and the Ivory Coast in West Africa. In south central Africa, the rich mines in modern Zimbabwe and South Africa attracted migrants from Kenya and other neighbouring countries. Thus, when Canada opened its immigration doors in 1962 Africans were preoccupied with a sense of mission and of building nation states on their own terms. We can surmise that emigration might not have appealed to many Africans at that time.

Yet, the promise of freedom, development, and progress that were inherent in independence appeared to be only an illusion. Conditions in Africa did not allow Africans to achieve goals they had set for themselves. There were military interventions in constitutionally elected governments in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda.92

92 A. K. Ocran, Politics of the Sword: A Personal Memoir on Military Involvement in Ghana and the
Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Sudanese ethnic strife and civil wars disrupted life, while droughts and famines in Chad and Mali led to food scarcity. In short, artificial and natural factors combined with poor economic performance at home and abroad to disillusion many of Africa’s peoples. The cumulative result of these phenomena was to produce refugees and refugee-like conditions, social dislocations, economic hardship, and despair in those who believed that political independence would unleash the potential to develop and manage resources to the good of the populations. Political independence after all did not hold the key to the liberation of Africa.

There appeared to be a contradiction. On the one hand, Africans held out the promise of nation building and the desire for people to stay put and see that process through. On the other hand, they were faced with the uncertainty and insecurity that characterized the process of nation building. Ultimately the motivation to migrate grew stronger in the post-independence era and African peoples looked increasingly outside the continent for safer and peaceful places.

Yet, the direction of that migration depended on favourable conditions elsewhere to attract them. Canada was not a popular choice for independent immigrants until late in the 1980s when immigration from Africa began to pick up considerably. This situation raises two interrelated questions: were Africans not interested in Canada, or was Canada closed to Africans? The answer lies in an examination of conditions and attitudes in Canada that could attract or repel Africans.

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"PULL" CONDITIONS IN CANADA

As far as Canadian immigration policies were concerned, until the beginning of the 1960s, Africa was virtually non-existent. Although it is evident that a sense of pragmatism pervaded Canadian immigration policies and practices over the years, that pragmatism was guided by a belief in a Eurocentric culture that had to be protected and maintained against the encroachment of "undesirable" elements.

There has been a popular belief about Canadian immigration policies as being liberal and humanitarian and of Canadians as being tolerant and hospitable. The basis for these claims stems from the number and nature of the people that have entered this country and the relative lack of racial and ethnic outbursts. Millions of people from all over the world have entered Canada since the 1800s. However, there is another side to this successful immigration story. Canada accepted its immigrants in a highly discriminatory and racist culture. It readily accepted and even courted British and people of British heritage. The Canadian government brought eastern European farmers, Chinese and Japanese construction workers, and Caribbean domestics for the economic development of the country while at the same time making laws to restrict their settlement and eventual incorporation into society.

Canada did not appear to have a policy for Africans (and Central Americans). Canadian tolerance, liberalality and humanitarianism fell short where Africans were concerned. This situation appeared to be that Africa was off Canadian radar as a source of immigration because, in large part, Africa was off Canadian radar on all things. There was no meaningful

97 For instance, in 1923, the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted to bar their entry. The Japanese were interned during World War II and the Continuous Journey Act was aimed at East Indians. For a discussion of these see Hawkins, Critical Years in Immigration, chapter one; Alma Estable, "Immigration Policy and Regulations," Resources for Feminist Research 16, no. 1 (March 1987), 28; Victor Malarek, Haven's Gate: Canada's Immigration Fiasco (Toronto: Macmillan, 1987), chapter one.
Canadian stake in sub-Saharan Africa, including its human resources until 1962, when racial restrictions were removed from immigration policy and everybody could theoretically apply to live in Canada.

Certainly, from the beginning until 1962 Africans were among the least desired immigrants. To illustrate this point, I have developed a 3-point framework to explain the lack of "pull" conditions in Canada to attract African immigrants. The first framework examines some key immigration laws and practices to illustrate that Africans were missing from immigration policy-makers’ conception of immigrants. Following this framework, I compare the promotional activities carried on in Africa and elsewhere to show that the relative lack of exposure of Canada to Africans was a major delimiting factor in their migration to this country. Finally, I consider immigration practices as they affected Blacks in the Diaspora and public sentiment toward people of colour in Canada to argue that Blackness was anathema to white Canadians. In the case of Africans, geographic distance also served to keep potential migrants at bay without posing problems to immigration officials as to how to deal with them.

Immigration rules, regulations and practices

From 1896 when the first immigration laws were codified until 1962 when overtly racist provisions were removed, Canada embarked on an ambitious immigration program geared toward population growth and economic development. However, these objectives were achieved within explicitly racist and discriminatory paradigms. While immigration was pursued as a means of shoring up the population, Canadian policy makers were clear as to who would be part of the population. Canada preferred white people, particularly Anglo-Saxons, to populate the land; its historical link with Britain and the United States of America made migrants from these two countries the most desired. For instance, between 1896 and
1914, of the two and a half million immigrants that came to Canada, nearly a million came from Britain, about 750,000 from the US, and more than half a million from the rest of Europe. Preference and exclusion were entrenched in law and vigorously pursued in practice. Late nineteenth century forms of exclusion that were based on personal characteristics such as poverty, idiocy, or lunacy were expanded and new criteria that were based on racial and national origins were introduced in the twentieth. The most overt expression of exclusion and inclusion was contained in the 1910 Act, amended in 1919 and reproduced in 1952. Of particular importance was the section of the 1952 Act that prohibited people with

peculiar customs, habits, modes of life or methods of holding property...unsuitability having regard to economic, social, industrial, educational, labour, health, or other conditions or requirements existing temporarily or otherwise, in Canada or sending country...probable inability to be readily assimilated...

The Act also gave Special Inquiry Officers (SIO) wide powers to use their discretion in interpreting the law. That discretion, coupled with the principles enunciated by Prime Minister Mackenzie King in 1947 that Canada did not wish to change its white character through immigration, ensured that undesired, non-white immigrants could be effectively barred.

The preferred stock were arranged in a hierarchy, which began with Britain and whites from the United States, then included Northern and Western European groups, and ended with Eastern and Southern Europeans and Asians. Africa was not included in the list at all. Irving Abella and Harold Troper wrote:

100 Ibid., 41-44.
Canada's government still enforced a restrictive immigration policy with unabashed racial and ethnic priorities. With public support, it knew what ethnic and racial groups it wanted and how to keep out those it did not...Those groups that did not fit the national vision- especially Jews, Asians and Blacks- were ever more relegated by Canadian officials to the bottom of the list of those preferred.\footnote{Irving Abella and Harold Troper, \textit{None is Too Many} (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1982), xii-xiii.}

Freda Hawkins, for instance, has suggested that the meaning of Asia could be extended to include Africa.\footnote{Freda Hawkins, \textit{Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern} (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1972), 95.} If this was the case, one would expect that when considerations were made to bring in undesirable groups to perform some kinds of labour, the invitation could have extended to Africa. The fact that Africa was not mentioned at all in the immigration provisions reveals the lack of interest on the part of Canadian immigration officials in the possibility of African migration into this country.

In the interest of Canadian economic growth and prosperity in the first quarter of the twentieth century, certain racial and national groups that fell outside the preferred stock were admitted to perform some jobs. While public sentiment against peoples such as the Chinese and Japanese could be very intense, economic considerations were of paramount importance, and the convictions of immigration officials largely determined how such matters were handled. Clifford Sifton is credited as the man who spearheaded the move to attract otherwise undesirable immigrants to settle in Canada.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Sifton, minister of the interior under whose jurisdiction immigration fell, in a speech regarding his idea of a desirable immigrant, stated that:

\begin{quote}
When I speak of quality I have something in mind that is quite different from what is in the mind of the average writer or speaker upon the question of immigration. I think that a stalwart peasant in sheepskin coat, born to the soil,\end{quote}
whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and half a dozen children, is good quality.\textsuperscript{103}

With these words, the way was open for Eastern European farmers to enter Canada in droves to settle the Western Prairies. These included Doukhobors, Hutterites, Ukrainians, and Poles.\textsuperscript{104} Immigration officials were ready to make concessions to undesirable groups on whose sweat the white population would depend. Hence, when it was necessary to admit unwanted immigrants to perform certain specialized kinds of jobs or take up lands that Canadians would not farm, immigration rules were relaxed to admit them. The men in “sheepskin coats” described by Sifton at the turn of the last century would not have gained admission if the rules and popular sentiment had been enforced. Sifton had a dream, and that dream was to create a prosperous Canada through the sweat of immigrant farmers.

It is interesting to note that Africans who had worked in the United States of America mostly as farm labourers were not wanted to work the land in Canada. There was no law barring them from taking up land in the west, but there were no laws facilitating their entry either. Blacks occupied an ambiguous position which could only be contested at the point of entry where administrative practices ensured that they were mostly rejected. If American Blacks who were close to Canada were not welcome, then Blacks in far away Africa did not have any chance.

\textit{Immigration offices}

Among the several ways of attracting immigrants into Canada, the number of immigration offices in a given geographical area indicated the countries from which Canada

\textsuperscript{103} Quoted in Valerie Knowles, \textit{Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-1997} (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997), 68.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 69.
wanted to recruit immigrants. The structures that had to be put in place to make migration to Canada possible were simply not there in Africa. In comparison with other geographical regions of the world, Canada’s promotion of its image in Africa was minimal. By 1957, there were 20 immigration offices spread in European countries. There were five in the United Kingdom alone; one apiece for India and Hong Kong, and none for Africa.105 At the beginning of the 1960s when Canada opened up to Africa, its effort was decidedly lukewarm. As of 1967, there were only three immigration offices in Africa: one in Abidjan to serve West Africa, another in Nairobi for East and Central Africa, and one in Egypt (opened in 1963) for North Africa.106 Hence, before 1967, any Africans wishing to migrate to Canada had to do so through the office in Egypt, London or Paris. South Africa was a special case because the white settlers were included in the preferred stock, a preference that was revoked in December of 1977.

Considering that much of Africa was (is) relatively underdeveloped, and that communication could be very slow, processing an application in a country other than one’s own could take much longer. The majority of people would be unlikely to know about the existence of immigration offices in their area, let alone accessing the facilities the offices provided. Before the 1960s, the possibility of hearing about Canada and the opportunities it offered was effectively denied Africans. Thus, if any Africans had the desire to migrate to Canada the relatively small number of offices could make the realization of that desire a difficult one.

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**Immigration officials**

As well, the number of officials sent to manage the few immigration offices was woefully inadequate. While there are no figures for officers in Abidjan, there were only two officers in Cairo between 1966 and 1974. In Nairobi, there were three officers from 1973 to 1974; there were none for the preceding years.\(^{107}\) What this meant was that even though some people might have applied through these offices, the unavailability of officers could prolong the period of processing an application. One can draw from these facts that while in the decade of the 1960s local conditions favoured migration in the continent, certainly by the next decade the trend was more towards migration outside the continent. Africans were motivated, but the direction toward Canada was not pursued until the 1970s and 1980s partly because Canada was not adequately promoted to African peoples in the same way as it had been advertised elsewhere.

**Acceptance of Blacks in the Diaspora**

Another way of assessing “pull” factors is to examine the way Blacks from the US and the Caribbean have been received in Canada. Unlike the Chinese, the Japanese, and South Asians against whom specific laws were passed to either bar their entry completely or limit it, there were no specific laws that barred Blacks from entering Canada. When it was deemed necessary, only their labour was desired. After they had been admitted, Blacks, like Asians, were generally hounded and harassed by white Canadians. In her examination of the admission of Caribbean domestics between 1900 and 1932, Agnes Calliste provides ample evidence of immigration officials adopting overt and covert measures to prevent Blacks from entering Canada.

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When economic conditions necessitated their admission, they were brought in but once here officials invoked racial stereotypes to call for their deportation or cease their entry.\textsuperscript{108} White attitudes toward Blacks and other racial minorities cut across class and religious lines. A collection of essays about Blacks has documented how, in the early days of Black settlement in Nova Scotia, they were subjected to indignities because of their race.\textsuperscript{109} As late as 1929, an Anglican priest, Rt. Rev Doull, warned:

British Columbia is on the road to becoming British in name only. The whole future of our Province and our Dominion is being jeopardised by the large and increasing number of foreign peoples who are not only permitted, but also encouraged to come to Canada. The only solution of the problem that I can see is that all Canadians throughout the Dominion should bind themselves together and demand of whatever Government may be in power in Ottawa, that this country must be kept British and made more British still...\textsuperscript{110}

While this warning was specifically directed at Chinese and Japanese in Vancouver, Black settlers in Nova Scotia and elsewhere in the country could not escape its consequences. From the early 1900s to as late as 1930, nativist outbursts against Blacks could be observed in several parts of the country.\textsuperscript{111}

What this implied was that non-traditional groups were desired only when their labour was needed. Whether they were welcome as an integral part of society regardless of their labour was another issue. Some non-traditional groups that escaped racial discrimination in the migration process still had to contend with racism in Canadian society.

\textsuperscript{108} Calliste, "Race and Gender in Canadian Immigration," 72-87.
\textsuperscript{109} Peggy Bristow et al., eds., 'We’re Rooted Here and They Can’t Pull Us Up': Essays in African Canadian Women’s History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).
\textsuperscript{110} The Globe June 15, 1929, 16.
What has changed?

The end of World War II presented a new set of conditions that could not be met with the old immigration provisions still in place. A booming post-war economy, a reduction in the number of people coming from traditional sources, and Canada’s increasing involvement in international politics demanded the restructuring of immigration procedures. It would be embarrassing for Canada to continue to embark on exclusion based on racial or national origin when it had fought on the side of the allied powers to end Nazism. Canada needed people, and it was expedient for the immigration gatekeepers to look beyond the usual sources to attract immigrants to work.  

Accordingly, new immigration procedures were introduced in 1962 and again in 1967 that opened the way for nearly everybody to settle in Canada. In 1962 overtly racist clauses in immigration policy were expunged and in 1967 new selection guidelines were introduced. The government identified three groups of admissible classes, namely independent, family, and designated classes. Refugees were a special case. Independent immigrants are selected on the basis of the “points” system and family class on the basis of immigrants having close relatives in Canada. The government forecasts levels of admission taking into consideration economic and other demographic factors. As such the weighting on the classes may shift from time to time. When times are good, or when international pressure or commitment demands, more people are admitted; otherwise the numbers are restricted. Thus, the admission of African immigrants since 1962 has followed the flow and ebb of immigrants into the general Canadian population. However, administrative procedures such as inadequate staffing and prolonged periods of processing applications have curtailed the numbers of Africans entering Canada.

112 Hawkins, Critical Years, 39-40.
IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION POLICIES ON AFRICAN MIGRATION

Canadian immigration policies have resulted in Black Africans being among one of the smallest groups admitted. When immigration policy became standardized, the percentage of African immigrants in the population was small. Indeed, between 1946 and 1973, total immigration from the African continent to Canada was only 63,120. Even so, it is important to indicate that these figures belie the racial reality in Africa. They do not indicate race. Statistics reveal that South Africa, which was a preferred country, Egypt, and Morocco supplied the majority of African immigrants until the early 1970s. From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe sent a significant number of African immigrants. There was a strong British presence in these countries. There was also an influx of nearly six thousand Ugandan Asians in 1973 and 1974 who were listed as Africans. When these groups of people are added up together, it becomes clear that the actual intake of Black Africans until the 1980s was quite small.

While it can be argued that before 1962 immigration policy explicitly worked against any large influx of Black Africans, it is difficult to apply the same argument to the period after 1962 when restrictive racial clauses were removed from immigration policy. And yet, after that date, while the pattern of their immigration followed the general trend of immigration into Canada, the number of African immigrants in the general population remained low in relation to other geographical regions of the world. This situation continued until the late 1980s when African immigration increased significantly.

On the whole, whenever general immigration levels rose, African immigration rose accordingly and fell when the national intake declined. Since 1987, the percentage of African immigrants has been increasing, although as a percentage of the total immigrant

\[113\text{ Ontario Multicultural Branch, Ministry of Culture and Recreation, } \textit{Immigration Statistics, 1972-1975, 5-6.} \]
population, the figure is not very large. Nonetheless, from 0.7% in 1956, the percentage of African immigrants, including refugees, in the total immigrant population rose to 6.6% in 1993 (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3
Immigrant Landings to Canada by Selected World Areas of Last Permanent Residence, 1973-1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.K.</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>26,973</td>
<td>44,910</td>
<td>8,307</td>
<td>43,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>38,456</td>
<td>50,238</td>
<td>10,450</td>
<td>50,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>34,978</td>
<td>37,920</td>
<td>9,867</td>
<td>47,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>21,548</td>
<td>28,360</td>
<td>7,752</td>
<td>44,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>17,997</td>
<td>22,752</td>
<td>6,372</td>
<td>31,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>11,801</td>
<td>18,274</td>
<td>4,261</td>
<td>24,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>12,853</td>
<td>20,005</td>
<td>3,958</td>
<td>50,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>18,245</td>
<td>22,923</td>
<td>4,330</td>
<td>71,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>21,154</td>
<td>25,141</td>
<td>4,889</td>
<td>48,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>16,445</td>
<td>29,705</td>
<td>4,510</td>
<td>41,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>5,737</td>
<td>18,575</td>
<td>3,659</td>
<td>36,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>5,104</td>
<td>15,797</td>
<td>3,552</td>
<td>41,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>4,454</td>
<td>14,405</td>
<td>3,545</td>
<td>38,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>5,088</td>
<td>17,621</td>
<td>4,770</td>
<td>41,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>8,547</td>
<td>29,016</td>
<td>8,501</td>
<td>67,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>9,172</td>
<td>31,517</td>
<td>9,380</td>
<td>81,136</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>7,420</td>
<td>43,685</td>
<td>12,199</td>
<td>93,213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8,217</td>
<td>43,728</td>
<td>13,440</td>
<td>111,739</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>7,543</td>
<td>40,512</td>
<td>16,087</td>
<td>119,955</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>7,138</td>
<td>37,733</td>
<td>19,633</td>
<td>139,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>6,959</td>
<td>38,782</td>
<td>16,727</td>
<td>145,165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 295,829 631,599 176,189 1,370,183


aData for 1993 is preliminary.
Table 4  
African Immigrants to Canada as Percentage of Total, 1973-1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>%Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>184200</td>
<td>8307</td>
<td>4.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>218465</td>
<td>10450</td>
<td>4.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>187881</td>
<td>9867</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>149429</td>
<td>7752</td>
<td>5.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>114914</td>
<td>6372</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>86313</td>
<td>4261</td>
<td>4.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>112096</td>
<td>3958</td>
<td>3.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>143117</td>
<td>4330</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>128618</td>
<td>4889</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>121147</td>
<td>4510</td>
<td>3.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>89117</td>
<td>3659</td>
<td>4.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>88239</td>
<td>3552</td>
<td>4.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>84302</td>
<td>3545</td>
<td>4.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>99216</td>
<td>4770</td>
<td>4.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>152098</td>
<td>8501</td>
<td>5.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>161929</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>192001</td>
<td>12199</td>
<td>6.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>214230</td>
<td>13440</td>
<td>6.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>255819</td>
<td>16918</td>
<td>6.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>3658376</strong></td>
<td><strong>188382</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.15%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The increase in the overall number of African immigrants into the Canadian population in recent years can be attributed to interrelated factors: continuous conflict and confusion on the African continent that produced refugees, Canada's commitment to
provide a safe haven to refugees, and sponsorship. Post-independent sub-Saharan Africa has seen a lot of conflict. Some of these conflicts are the results of European colonialism and neo-colonial intervention and insensitivity to African ethnic arrangements. During colonialism rival groups were bundled within colonies which later sought independence as nation states. Conflicts were bound to flare up. Such was the case in Rwanda where the Tutsis and Hutus could not cohabit peacefully.

While ethnic conflict has been one source of Africa’s social instability, military intervention in government posed another very serious challenge to social and political stability. Confusion and conflict produced many refugees. In fact, it has been estimated that Africa provides the world’s largest number of refugees. Some have found their way to Canada as a result of Canada’s commitment to fulfil an international obligation to the United Nations.

Once accepted and having established a base many African immigrants took advantage of family reunification to bring in relatives. Sponsorship now appears to be a significant opportunity for most African immigrants. Apart from sponsorship, independent applications also constitute a large percentage of the African immigrant population. Due to the relatively high rates of admission in recent years and continued conflict in Africa, it is likely that modest increases in the African immigrant population will continue.

The demographic characteristics of African immigrants show similar features to immigrants from other geographical destinations in recent years. When African immigrants started entering Canada in appreciable numbers, the majority settled primarily in Ontario and Quebec, with the highest concentrations in Toronto and Montreal.

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115 Ibid., 37.
This pattern could be explained as an aspect of a general phenomenon that is informed by the availability of jobs, of family already established in these cities, and immigrant-friendly services. In Toronto, African immigrants have formed strong concentrations in particular neighbourhoods, namely North York and Etobicoke.\textsuperscript{116}

In addition, the gender composition of African immigrants and their class of admission are not very different from that of the general immigrant population. African immigrant men outnumber women but the difference is slight. Similarly, more women enter under the family class category than do men, although in relation to other racial groups the gap appears to be narrower. The African immigrant population is relatively young. The age differential shows men predominating in the 35-45 year range, while women number high in the 20-29 range.\textsuperscript{117} This can be explained by the fact that those men would be more likely to choose women younger than themselves for wives.

\textbf{Ghanaian Immigration to Canada}

Our knowledge of the presence of Ghanaians in Canada has been derived mainly from the works of Edward Opoku-Dapaah and Thomas Owusu.\textsuperscript{118} Opoku-Dapaah's works, in particular, trace the forces in Ghana that compelled many of its citizens to vote with their feet in increasing numbers in the 1980s. Invaluable as his works are, they are limited in their coverage. His focus was on refugees and not the entire Ghanaian immigrant population. He pays little attention to gender. His work leaves room to re-examine the migratory patterns of Ghanaians and how they fit into African migration to Canada.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
Unlike most African peoples, Ghanaians were traditionally less mobile in terms of international migration; their mobility was mostly internal. Indeed, K. C. Zachariah and Julien Conde have estimated that only one percent of Ghanaians lived in outside destinations in 1960. Their presence in Canada dates to the late 1960s. In fact, the first entries in the Canadian immigration statistics appeared in 1965. Thirty-three people were listed as permanent residents of Ghanaian origin. However, within the next two decades Ghanaians were among the most migratory of West Africans and one of the fastest growing groups among the African immigrant population in Canada. A CANACT study of 1986 listed Ghanaian immigrants as the largest group of all African immigrant groups in Toronto. Why did people leave Ghana in significant numbers? How did women figure in this migratory pattern? The following sections examine factors that precipitated Ghanaian migration to international destinations, especially Canada.

“Push” Factors in Ghana

Increased Ghanaian international migration is rooted in the 1960s, shortly after independence. The political and economic culture of Ghana was uncertain sometimes, chaotic at others, and explosive for most part after independence. Political chaos and economic decline are common bedfellows. Political intrigue coupled with economic mismanagement and underdevelopment threatened to arrest the development of the country and the welfare of Ghana’s people. The country that had formerly been labelled the “African Eldorado” and “The Black Star of Africa” was not showing much economic promise or political maturity. It could neither significantly expand nor diversify from the economic

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120 Manpower and immigration, Immigration Statistics, 1965, 22.
121 CANACT, Country Profile: Ghana, 12.
and other systems established during the colonial period. Nor could Ghana adapt political structures that would reflect new political realities and identities.\textsuperscript{122} Independence surely brought changes but it also ushered in conditions that made it necessary for mass emigration. Deborah Pellow and Naomi Chazan put it succinctly when they observed:

The(se) regimes... all exhibited problems of performance: tendency toward authoritarian rule, ethnic favouritism, intolerance of criticism, and above all, inability to overcome deterioration. Although one is hard-pressed to judge which regime was better or worse, the cumulative effect was one of social, political and economic decline.\textsuperscript{123}

\textit{Political conditions of the 1960s and 1970s}

Just nine years after Ghanaians had taken total control over the management of their country, a military coup forced the first president and many of his supporters into exile. The coup reflected the dissatisfaction that a large percentage of the population felt. President Nkrumah was intolerant of dissent. He wanted to establish a socialist, one-party state. There was no official room for opposition (which was very much in operation). A clamp down on dissenters was vigorously pursued and at times included party faithful who were critical of some of the policies and methods of the government.\textsuperscript{124} Arrests and detention without trial and other forms of human rights abuses occurred. People who stood in fear of being arrested and had the means left the country before they could have been arrested.\textsuperscript{125} The government was toppled in a military coup in 1966 and its functionaries, who had been the agents of detention, found themselves on the defensive. Some of them also fled the country.

\textsuperscript{122} Oppong and Abu, \textit{Marriage among a Matrilineal Elite: Seven Roles of Women}, 18.
\textsuperscript{123} Deborah Pellow and Naomi Chazan, \textit{Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty} (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986), 47.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
In 1969 Ghana reverted to civilian rule after three years of military control. That civilian government was short-lived. It too was overthrown by yet another coup in 1972. After approximately seven years of governance through military decrees, another military take-over occurred which was in turn overthrown in 1979. Indeed, military intervention in government was becoming something of a norm. Between 1966 and 1979 there were six governments in Ghana, two civilian and four military.  

It is difficult to assess how the volume, composition, and direction of Ghanaian migration were precipitated by the political turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s. While coups potentially posed especial danger to people in power and their families, they may not have accounted for substantial emigration. A description of the first few days of the 1966 coup casts insight into the fate of political opponents caught in the fray:

Detention buses began to work their way through the streets of Accra to Victoriaborg and Cantonments...Here they picked up the Ministers of State and other high party officials...The jails, newly emptied of old political prisoners, began to fill with new ones.  

It was possible that many political opponents were jailed rather than having the chance of leaving the country. Also, the 1978 coup was an in-house affair that involved replacing the head of state with a new military leader without any major social or even political dislocations. The witch-hunt that accompanied the Rawlings' regimes of 1979 and 1982 was not characteristic of earlier military take-overs. A young flight lieutenant who was dissatisfied with the military administration of the day, Jerry John Rawlings launched a coup which he described as a revolution, a "holy war" against corruption and decay in high places. What started as a purge of administrative malfeasance seeped down into the populace as the military looted and killed. Although women's public political

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126 Pellow and Chazan, Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty, 47.
activity was minimal, Rawlings’ men attacked them incessantly for allegedly hoarding goods. Consequently, many women fled the country.129

The direction of the movement was either toward neighbouring African countries or to Europe, specifically to Britain and West Germany. Canada did not appear to be a popular choice among Ghanaian migrants associated with political issues at that time. Rather, Ghanaians who entered Canada in the 1960s and 1970s were mostly independent immigrants and students and their spouses who may not have had political connections at home.

**Economic conditions of the 1960s and 1970s**

The real impetus for increased international migration among Ghanaians was caused by a mishmash of factors that intensified as the years went by. Some analysts of Ghanaian international migration have rightly pointed out that the political upheaval caused by the Rawlings coups of 1979 and 1982, and their adverse economic effects occasioned an unprecedented mass exodus of Ghanaians.130 It should be noted that conditions conducive to mass migration were already present before the coups were staged; Rawlings’ coup and its negative impact simply exacerbated those conditions.

Several observers of Ghana’s historical development indicate that the seeds of economic decline were sown before the sixties ended. Christine Oppong and Katherine Abu noted that,

> By the beginning of 1979...shortages of consumer goods considered essential, such as sugar, rice, milk, flour, soap, and batteries remained chronic and queuing

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had begun to constitute a way of life. Production was at a low ebb because of shortages of raw materials, machinery and spare parts.¹³¹

Frimpong-Ansah’s brilliant exposition of the politics and economic policies of the various governments of Ghana from Nkrumah to Rawlings corroborates that view. Assessing the economic performance of the Nkrumah government, he noted:

[Nkrumah] left behind a legacy of economic decline, with a fragile external sector, heavy debts, a delicate fiscal structure, an export sector in which the seeds of destruction had been sown...an impoverished urban class that was to haunt all successor governments.¹³²

Successive governments after Nkrumah could not arrest the economic problems that the country faced which combined with military intervention to exacerbate the worsening economic situation. Thus, even before Rawlings became a factor on Ghana’s political stage, Ghana’s economic promise had begun showing signs of deterioration. Ghana’s foreign debt piled up, cash and food crop production fell, and the value of the cedi, the unit of currency, declined. This last factor resulted in inflation, while salaries largely remained unchanged.¹³³

Salaried workers, including teachers, nurses, doctors and university lecturers, were especially hard hit. Their meagre wages could not match the rate of inflation. In the late 1970s, the minimum wage was four cedis a day while it required 15 cedis to prepare a meal for a family of five.¹³⁴ Coincidentally, at a time when Ghana’s economy was sinking into this economic abyss, Nigeria’s economy was booming due to the high price of petroleum. The proximity of Ghana to Nigeria and the absence of visa requirements made travelling there easy. Thus started the brain drain, the migration of Ghanaian professionals to Nigeria (and also to other African nations including South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana).

¹³¹ Oppong and Abu, Seven Roles of Women, 18.
¹³³ Ibid.
¹³⁴ Pellow and Chazan, Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty, 58.
The brain drain encouraged emigration of both skilled and unskilled labour. *Agege*, as Nigeria came to be known, became a common household word in Ghana. In an informal conversation about migration during the late 1970s and early 1980s, one man commented: “I wonder if there was a family in Ghana from which a member did not go to Nigeria.” The Akan group were the largest of the migrants perhaps as a result of their numerical superiority and because they dominate the retail trade in Ghana, a sector which had suffered substantially from economic decay.

While Nigeria had become a mecca to many Ghanaians, another form of international migration was taking place. Going abroad, especially to West Germany, was far more prestigious than going to *Agege* and many Ghanaians used Nigeria as their stepping stone to travel farther afield. Those who remained behind were particularly enthralled by *burgers* driving the latest model car, men wearing their hair in curls, women in leather pants, flaunting their newly acquired wealth and status. There were those who sponsored migrants to Germany expecting cars and other valuables in return. Parents convinced children to travel abroad in order to bring something back to the family. That perception was echoed in Margaret Prescod-Roberts’ observation that

...having family away...in North America or in Europe meant immediately the possibility of getting some money...family abroad meant the possibility of access to a wage, getting some kind of money, and also the things money can buy.  

The word *connection* assumed a new meaning and emerged as a network of informants, clerks and financiers working together to beat the immigration systems of countries where Ghanaians wished to settle and where it was difficult to enter as independent migrants. *Connection* depended on the ability to pay for the immigration

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135 Personal conversation with Yaw Manu, April 10, 1996.
process. Television documentaries exposed the dangers of connection but they did not deter migrants. As an eminent Ghanaian scholar noted:

There are older people who are experiencing the frustration and indignity of their life’s savings being eroded by inflation and who have been reduced to begging for their daily sustenance. There are also the younger people whose future recedes steadily into the bleak unknown.\textsuperscript{137}

Pellow and Chazan corroborate that view and note that the decade of the 1970s was bad for Ghana. Food production fell; essential goods were scarce; inflation was very high; smuggling, hoarding and profiteering reached unprecedented levels; and corruption (expressed in a new term: kalabule) was widespread. As they observe, “between 1974 and 1978, Ghana suffered a significant loss in human resources, as uneducated and educated men and women emigrated in search of better conditions.”\textsuperscript{138}

For older people, migration was not a viable alternative to living difficult lives; however, they could rely on their children abroad to support them and other less fortunate family members. Sponsoring children abroad was and is a form of insurance, a safety net against uncertain economic situations. Enterprising young adults also considered their own futures and commitments to looking after their parents. Migration was thought to be a solution. Thus the pre-1980 movement of Ghanaians abroad was motivated by economic considerations, although the economic factors that motivated migration had been shaped partly by the political climate in the country.

\textit{Political economy of the 1980}

What had begun for many Ghanaians as a voluntary movement intended to improve the quality of life turned into a “quasi-refugee” movement for some.

\textsuperscript{137} Frimpong-Ansah, \textit{The Vampire State in Africa}, 3.
\textsuperscript{138} Pellow and Chazan, \textit{Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty}, 58.
For others, the dangers unleashed by the Rawlings revolutionary machinery posed a threat to economic fortunes. An examination of the political climate in Ghana during the years of the revolution and the economic measures that were pursued concludes that these dual forces exacerbated an already decimated economy and created new political fears that many people could not cope with. It was the combined effect of political repression and economic impoverishment that intensified migration of Ghanaians abroad.139

The Early Years of the PNDC

The Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) which was established at the beginning of 1982 became the governing body of Ghana as a result of a coup staged by the ranks of the Ghana Armed Forces. Rawlings, who in 1979 staged a successful coup to topple the military regime of General Akuffo, headed the PNDC. Within six months of that take-over, Rawlings handed over power to a democratically elected government. Two years later, he was back on the scene, this time declaring a “holy war” against corruption. Politicians and professionals who opposed the policies and methods of the new regime, business people who were believed to have caused the economic decline of the country, and people of ethnic backgrounds who were suspected of being hostile to the new regime were all targeted as “enemies of the revolution” and harassed. Executions, disappearances, and imprisonment without trial, confiscation and appropriation of property: in short, a state of violence and insecurity reigned in Ghana until about 1985.140 There were public executions of former heads of state; the abduction and execution of three high court judges including a nursing mother;141 and a 6-to-6 curfew which made abductions at night easier to carry out.

and intensified the insecurity that many people faced. Indeed, it was a "time of troubles" for many Ghanaians.\(^\text{142}\) People who stood in danger of losing their lives, those who lost their businesses and/or property and those who were disillusioned by the violence left the country in increasing numbers.\(^\text{143}\)

Market women were particularly vulnerable. They were believed to have created artificial shortages hoarding goods. Claire Robertson's study of the phenomenon reveals the extent to which market women were targeted and brutalised. The central market in Accra (Makola) which had been the centre for most female traders was bulldozed in order to stop women from hoarding goods.\(^\text{144}\) Many lost their capital and businesses and a few lost their lives. Some rejoined their rural families while others stayed on hoping for good times.\(^\text{145}\) It is not possible to determine how many of these women actually fled Ghana as a result of losing their businesses, but considering that many well-established market women were middle-aged, it is probable that some may have sent their children abroad instead as a means of rejuvenating their capital.

Another aspect of the PNDC government that adversely affected Ghanaians was the introduction of structural adjustment programs (SAP) (commonly called economic recovery program, ERP) in 1983. SAP operated on a bilateral agreement with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to provide money for the development of the country.\(^\text{146}\) Ghana had to satisfy the conditions outlined by the financial institutions.

\(^{\text{142}}\) Opoku-Dapaah, "Decade of Repression," 13.
\(^{\text{144}}\) Pellow and Chazan, Ghana: *Coping with Uncertainty*, 60-62 and 82.
\(^{\text{145}}\) Ibid., 61.
These included devaluation of the currency, downsizing of the workforce, drastic budget cuts and the withdrawal of subsidies. The immediate effect of the implementation of these conditions was inflation and unemployment which, coupled with shortages of very basic but essential goods, created a volatile situation. Some interest groups responded through protests and strikes and these were severely repressed. Indeed, an analyst of the Ghanaian political economy commented that "to some extent, Ghana [was] a state only because the outside world assert[ed] that there was a Ghanaian state."  

Then in 1983 the rains failed. The accompanying drought and bush fires destroyed both cash and food crops and delayed the major farming season. Ghana was threatened with famine and immediate international food aid was sought. By September 1983, it was estimated that there was a shortfall of half a million tons of maize. Limited storage capacity prevented the Ghanaian government from asking for that amount from international donors. Several countries including Denmark and Libya, and donor agencies, such as the Red Cross and UNICEF, sent in medical supplies that were estimated to cater to 600,000 people in one month. Although it was a commendable effort, international assistance did not alleviate the crisis that lingered on for three more months. People who lost weight as a result of hunger were described as wearing "Rawlings’ chain" referring to their prominent collarbones. The manner in which scarce food imports were distributed left many people angry and hungry.

As the government struggled to deal with famine, the Nigerian government issued an order in January 1983 to expel illegal aliens. Thousands of Ghanaians were affected. Of

150 Ibid., 385.
about two million foreigners who left Nigeria in the wake of the expulsion order, about 1.2 million were Ghanaians. 151 Most of these people (returnees) had lost their Ghanaian jobs by extended stays in Nigeria and others were refugees who could not re-enter Ghana without arrest. Their return to Ghana exacerbated the famine. The uncertainty of beginning life anew in a country drifting in political, social and economic turmoil was a major impetus for many of the returnees to look elsewhere for a fresh lease on life.

Additionally, Ghanaians who had stayed behind joined in the exodus, some to flee the “revolutionary” wrath of the military junta and others to find safety from the human rights abuses. Many people leaving Ghana in the 1980s ended up in Canada, although their route was a circuitous one.

In his study of Ghanaian refugees in Canada, Opoku-Dapaah noted that there were 19,763 Ghanaian refugees living in 17 European countries between 1988 and 1989 and that an overwhelming majority of Ghanaian refugees who entered Canada did so from Europe, mainly Germany. 152 West Germany was a popular choice for Ghanaian refugees and others because from 1949 it had operated a system that allowed individuals to seek asylum. It was only in 1993 that the law was amended to cut the number. 153 Before that date, Germany was the destination for the majority of Ghanaian immigrants. Ghanaian immigrants used Germany as the base from where they could “read the connection” to know in which other countries they would have luck. Considering that Ghanaian immigrants had perfected the connection system, they knew which countries they could enter without jeopardizing their chances of acceptance.

Also, considering that most Ghanaian migrants looked abroad to better their economic circumstance, they gravitated toward places where they were more likely to do so. One aspect of Ghanaian migration that has not been dealt with in the literature that examines the patterns of migration among Ghanaians is the extent to which wealth could be accumulated from a particular source. North America, including Canada, might not have appealed to Ghanaians because people who came here did not exhibit the same level of affluence as those going to Europe or even Nigeria in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It should be noted that Ghanaians who came to North America in the 1960s and 1970s were mostly students who might not have pursued the kind of accumulation that later Ghanaian immigrants did.

Many might have perceived that claiming refugee status, which was their usual way of seeking admission to Canada in the wake of Ghana's mass migrations, would not have worked in their favour. Opoku-Dapaah has noted that, unlike other conflict areas in Africa, the Ghanaian revolution was given scanty international coverage, especially in 1983 when Rawlings turned to the IMF and The World Bank for assistance. That shift in policy legitimized Rawlings' rule with the result that Ghanaian refugees might not be accorded the same welcome as refugees from other well-known conflict zones.¹⁵⁴ Yet in 1991, Ghana was among the top ten sending nations of refugees. Again in 1992, it supplied a large number of refugees. It is interesting to note that in 1991, the military government was preparing to hand over power to a democratically elected government, which it did in 1992. Whether these people were political refugees or "economic" refugees cannot be ascertained, but they increased the total number of Ghanaians in the population.

¹⁵⁴ Opoku-Dapaah, "Decade of Repression," 10.
It is also worth noting that the number of Ghanaians in Canada at the beginning of the 1980s was not large enough to facilitate large-scale family sponsorship. However, although only a trickle of Ghanaian immigrants entered, it was a significant beginning. They formed the vital link between Canada and the thousands of Ghanaians both abroad and at home in Ghana who were waiting for an opportunity to enter Canada. That opportune moment came to many in the late 1980s when Canada was emerging from a recession and was in a position to admit more immigrants. The number of Ghanaian immigrants in the population began to rise significantly (see Table 5).

Table 5
Ghanaian Immigrants as Percentage of Total Immigrants to Canada, 1973-1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Ghana</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>184200</td>
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<td>0.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>218465</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>0.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>187881</td>
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<td>0.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>149429</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>114914</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>86313</td>
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<td>0.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>112096</td>
<td>137</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>143117</td>
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<td>0.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>89117</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>88239</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>0.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>84302</td>
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<td>0.23%</td>
</tr>
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<td>99216</td>
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<td>0.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>152098</td>
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</tr>
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<td>161929</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>214230</td>
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<td>252842</td>
<td>2451</td>
<td>0.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>255819</td>
<td>2185</td>
<td>0.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3658376</td>
<td>10775</td>
<td>0.29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"PULL" FACTORS IN CANADA

Like other African countries, "pull" factors did not attract Ghanaians to Canada until the mid-1960s when Canada opened its doors to all, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or race. Ghanaians were qualified like any other national group to enter Canada by provisions of the 1962 and 1967 Immigration Regulations, as well as the 1978 Immigration Act. In reality, the volume of Ghanaian immigrants was small in these years, reflecting the general African trend. It was only at the beginning of 1987 that the number began to rise, and did so consistently until 1992 when it hit an all time high of 2,451, second only to Somalia among African countries.\(^{155}\)

From 1973 to 1976 the number of Ghanaians entering Canada annually was above 220. Thereafter the figure fell below 200 for 9 years, reaching its lowest in 1982 when only 85 immigrants were admitted. When the Conservatives came to power in the early 1980s they pursued policies that affected the number of immigrants entering the country. Immigration levels fell to less that 90,000 total for each of three years running, picking up slightly in 1986. Accordingly, very few Ghanaians entered Canada within those years. Since 1987 when the trend increased Ghanaians have featured prominently in the total. They have entered as refugees, as independent immigrants, or as part of the family class.

GENDER AND GHANAIAN MIGRATION TO CANADA

Until recently, the literature on Ghanaian migration did not take into account the gender composition of migrants. That neglect or oversight might have been due to the popular conception of a migrant as male; whenever women were considered, they were seen in their roles as spouses or dependent children. They were not regarded as able to make independent decisions to migrate but rather "as followers of men, being dependent on the

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decision and act of migration of their husbands.\footnote{156} Lynne Brydon has explained that that approach reflected the type of activities in which researchers on immigration were interested, ones that were undertaken by men.\footnote{157}

There has been a shift in research focus and migrant women are now considered as a distinct category for analysis. What is emerging from the literature is that Ghanaian women migrated for the same reasons as Ghanaian men did. They migrated in response to political crisis, natural disasters, or for better economic opportunities. An examination of Ghanaian women who went to Nigeria and an overwhelming number in the Ivory Coast revealed that they were unmarried, independent migrants.\footnote{158} Referring to a study undertaken by Anarfi of Ghanaian women in the Ivory Coast, Brydon noted that just about 1.1 percent of the women migrated to join their husbands while 86 percent migrated for economic reasons.\footnote{159} Some of the reasons for female independent migration could be attributed to the short distances they had to travel to get to such destinations as the Ivory Coast or Nigeria, the relatively cheaper costs of travelling, and the absence of visa requirements to enter other West African countries.

On the other hand, an examination of the migratory patterns of Ghanaian women outside the continent reveals a reverse phenomenon. Many were indeed “followers of men.” Single Ghanaian immigrant women might have heard about the vulnerability of women, often exploited at the hands of Ghanaian men.


\footnote{158} Ibid., 95.

\footnote{159} Ibid., 96.
One interviewee who lived in Germany before coming to Canada had this story to tell:

_The moment we reached the airport the connection man told me his work was over, but he knew some friends who could help me. I needed to see those friends to get around, knowing that I did not speak German and my English was limited. The friends turned out to be one man, and he was willing to accommodate me on condition that I slept with him. Having very little choice, I stayed with this man for two weeks as an asala, after which time he sent me out to go and seek asylum. Obviously he had an endless supply of helpless Ghanaian women._

Stories such as this circulated in Ghana in exaggerated form. Exploited women were believed to engage in prostitution, a charge that carried social stigma. That charge may have prompted some women to wait for their spouses to sponsor them or for those already in transit to marry before entering Canada.

Additionally, women's economic and/or educational status in Ghana, like women elsewhere in the world, falls below that of men. Hence, an immigration policy that highlights skills and experience, which are outcomes of education, appears to be gender-neutral but imposes restrictions on the entry of Ghanaian immigrant women. Due to their relatively low levels of education they did not have substantial resources and the technological expertise to enter the Canadian job market. If they could not enter on their own merit, they could do so as spouses or dependent daughters of men who qualified to enter. Entering as family class was made possible by the government's commitment to reunite Canadian citizens and permanent residents with their families abroad. Given the fact that there were more men than there were women in the Ghanaian immigrant population, more men could sponsor women in their families (see Table 6 below). Sponsorship took the financial burden off women as well as allowing for otherwise unqualified women to gain

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160 Asala is the corrupted form of asylum in use by Ghanaian immigrants and refugees in Germany.
161 Interview with Afua in Etobicoke February 7, 1999.
entry. It also defined the status of women as dependants, and created a condition for their sponsors to treat them inequitably.

Table 6
Women as Percentage of Ghanaian Immigrants to Canada, 1973-1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ghana Male</th>
<th>Ghana Female</th>
<th>% Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1118</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2451</td>
<td>1584</td>
<td>867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2185</td>
<td>1246</td>
<td>939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>10511</td>
<td>6303</td>
<td>4208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Whatever the restrictions or disadvantages that Ghanaian women faced, they had a greater need to migrate. The economic and political situations described above put extra burdens on women. Being the primary caregivers in their families, Ghanaian women shouldered great responsibilities, especially in the provision of food. Having traditionally

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relied on their husbands and sons for "chop money," women increasingly found themselves bereft of their source of support as men either were run out of town or left on their own to seek greener pastures elsewhere. Women in farming areas worked more hours as they tended both food and cash crops that husbands left behind. Traders either lost their capital or suspended their trading for fear of being made scapegoats for hoarding goods. Although many women became primary providers and managers, their poverty was enhanced. Thus, when it was possible for them to migrate, they usually had to do so through other people, especially with international migration that involved substantial sums of money.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the entry of Africans, including Ghanaians, into Canada and argued that entry was dictated by historical patterns. The racist and discriminatory immigration policies pursued by Canada until 1962 effectively barred Black Africans. Incidentally, the time of restriction and racial discrimination coincided with the colonial period, an era that linked Africans more with the colonial metropolises than with "foreign" countries such as the Dominion of Canada. When immigration policies were standardized, many African countries were either on the verge of gaining political independence or had actually gained it and were engaged in new phases of nation building. While Africans continued to migrate during those years, Canada was not a popular choice. Conditions in Africa conducive to mass migration met with fluctuating "pulls" in Canada, with the result that although Africans might have been willing to enter Canada, the momentum did not take off until 1987, from which time many Black Africans have made

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163 In Ghanaian usage, "chop" can also mean eat. Hence, chop money literally means, "eat money", that is, housekeeping money.
Canada their home.

Ghana provides an example of African migratory patterns to Canada. Ghanaians entered Canada in a trickle until immigration provisions divested racially restrictive clauses. It has only been in the nineties that a strong Ghanaian presence has been felt in Canada, especially in Toronto. Despite the trappings of systemic patriarchy both in Ghana and Canada, women have featured prominently in Ghanaian migration. However, unlike men, many have had to enter as dependants. Entering as dependants sets up a situation where women are denied services that would ensure their smooth adaptation and enhance their status. In the next chapter, I examine education as one of the main areas in which Ghanaian immigrant women were denied equal participation with men and consequently denied a means by which to adapt and enhance their status.
CHAPTER 3: EDUCATION AND TRAINING: OPTIONS FOR IMMIGRANT WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

The education of immigrants to Canada has been premised on the notion that education equips individuals with the resources to participate in society. The ability of immigrants to participate meaningfully in society depends, to a large extent, on their ability to communicate effectively in the common language of discourse. Consequently, immigrant education has emphasized language training as an essential skill. Within a gender analysis framework, I examine language and other immigrant training programs as they were formulated and presented to immigrants. A gendered analysis provides a framework for assessing the differences and similarities in content and impact of educational programs on immigrant men and women. The central argument of this chapter states that while efforts were made to provide immigrants with some education, the definition and emphasis, and manner of delivery did not adequately address the needs of Ghanaian immigrant women.

It is necessary to state at the outset that French as a Second Language does not form part of the discussion in the chapter, although the focus of the chapter is national. The reason for this is that, with the exception of Quebec where French is the major language and New Brunswick where a sizeable proportion of the population speak French, nowhere in the rest of Canada is French widely spoken.\(^{164}\) English as a Second Language has been the more popular of the second language programs.

NEED FOR LANGUAGE AND OTHER TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR IMMIGRANTS

The need for language training for immigrants stemmed from the shift in sources of Canada’s immigrant supply. While immigration analysts reported that in the post-1960

period immigrants generally had more education than native-born Canadians, research results indicated that a large proportion of the immigrants who dominated this new wave of immigration did not either speak English or French or spoke them with difficulty. Women constituted nearly half of this wave of immigration and tended to be less fluent than men. That situation reflected a sexist bias in the educational systems of many cultures. In Ghana, for instance, historical analyses of gender disparities in education have revealed that parents encouraged boys’ education over that of girls because of traditional, economic, and “common sense” reasons. For instance, a Ghanaian sociologist, Felix Odei-Akuffo, argues that among the Akan, traditional expectations of the matrikin in relation to girls’ reproductive roles largely worked against the education of girls. Girls and women were expected to give birth to nephews who would succeed uncles and to nieces to bolster the prestige and perpetuity of the matrilineage. The time they would spend in school could “profitably” be used to have children. Therefore girls’ education was not attractive. Thus, language training was essential for post-1960 immigrants in general; for immigrant women its importance could not be overemphasized.

Since immigration has traditionally been linked with Canadian economic and demographic needs, federal and provincial bodies designed educational programs for immigrants within the context of the objectives of immigration in Canada and the competing demands of an ever-changing economy. Educational programs for immigrants were required

to be instrumental, integrative, or both.\textsuperscript{170} For instance, acquiring the skills, usually language, to enter the job market or to go for further training in order to enhance performance in the labour market is instrumental. Integrative refers to the acquisition of English for the purpose of functioning in Canadian society. Education and labour policies were linked with the aim of improving the quality of the labour resource of the country. In other words, the goals of education were not merely productive workers but also the highly qualified workers that a modern industrialized state requires.\textsuperscript{171} Such education should benefit individuals and society.

Writing for the journal \textit{Training 75}, Alan Gotlieb, the Liberal Deputy Minister of Manpower and Immigration, captured this notion when he surmised: "Training is expected to contribute to individual development and satisfaction while actively supporting the economic policies of federal and provincial governments."\textsuperscript{172} Education and training were symbiotically structured, designed to benefit trainer and trainee, without necessarily differentiating between native born and immigrant workers. However, the education offered to immigrants went beyond human resource development. It was also informed by theories of adjustment. Immigrants did not only need education that would place them in jobs; they also needed to be equipped with the tools to effectively interact in society. Educational programs emphasized language skills as crucial for both economic and social adjustment.\textsuperscript{173} Consequently, school boards and community organizations, in conjunction with federal and provincial government agencies, initiated and/or supported language and other educational programs as a means of helping immigrants adjust and integrate into Canadian society.

\textsuperscript{170} Newsham and Acheson, \textit{English as a Second Language in Canada}, 72.
\textsuperscript{172} Alan Gotlieb, "Forward", \textit{Training 75} 1, no. 1 (Summer 1975).
CONCEPTUALIZING PROGRAMS FOR IMMIGRANTS

Some scholars have argued that education is a system of selection and control.\textsuperscript{174} Hence, in tandem with integration, immigrant education could be conceptualized as a coercive system of conformation to the dominant culture. Sylvina Cicarrelli has argued that English as a Second Language (ESL) in Canada, was originally not intended to equip immigrants with the tools to acquire English. Rather, she says that ESL was a means to acculturate and assimilate new immigrants into Canadian society.\textsuperscript{175} She notes, "if immigrants are not learning adequate ESL, it is not because they have failed to learn, rather the system of ESL provision has failed them.... ESL was not meant as a tool for ESL proficiency but as a means to acculturate immigrants to Canada’s ‘values’, ‘norms’ and ‘way of life.’"\textsuperscript{176} Rosina Lippi-Green has also argued that language gives meaning to a group’s identity and when the language of a group is compromised, the group’s identity is distorted. She states that “language...is more than a tool for communication of facts between two or more persons. It is the most salient way we have of establishing and advertising social identities.”\textsuperscript{177} Similarly, Leo Dubbeldam has noted that through language people can transfer their knowledge, values and ideas to others and by so doing transfer their own culture.\textsuperscript{178} Language is therefore crucial to group identity and imposing another language on immigrant groups is both coercive and threatening.


\textsuperscript{176} Cicarrelli, “ESL for Nation Building,”5-6.

\textsuperscript{177} Rosina Lippi-Green, \textit{English with an Accent} (London and new York: Routledge, 1997), 5.

However, in a pluralistic society such as Canada's, conceptualizing immigrant education as a system of promoting conformity and control can shift attention away from the realities of life in a different culture. The need to understand as well as be understood compels immigrants to learn the language of their new society even if the end result requires an element of control. In an ideal situation, immigrants' attempts at learning about their new society and its institutions could be matched by attempts by Canadians to learn about immigrants. It requires both immigrants and native-born Canadians to learn about each other in order to co-exist harmoniously. In Canada, achieving that ideal would be difficult due in part to official bilingualism and also because of the diversity of the immigrant population. That is, the complex mix of languages and cultures of Canada's post-1960 immigrants defies simple analysis of who should learn what. A truly interactive educational process that would benefit both the mainstream and immigrant groups must take into consideration the language needs of all involved in the process.

Understanding immigrant education from such a perspective does not deny biases inherent in the programs. Rather, it highlights the shortfalls and the narrow view taken of immigrant education. Education of immigrants revealed the lack of commitment of the mainstream to reach out to immigrants to the same degree as it expected immigrants to adapt to the mainstream. Immigrants had to change to adapt to Canadian society.

On another level, immigrant education pointed to the realities of immigrants' lives. For immigrants who did not understand the standard language (s), learning about each other first required them to learn the language. Thus, unless immigrants belonged to institutionally complete ethnic communities, it was essential for them to be able to use English. In their study of second language learning in the United States, Elsa R. Auerbach and Nina Wallerstein noted how some Portuguese immigrants would not go to English language
classes because they indicated that they did not need it at work or at home.\textsuperscript{179} Judith Nagata, Joan Rayfield and Mary Ferraris made similar observations in their study of the Italian and Greek communities in Metropolitan Toronto. Nagata specifically noted that while some of her participants lacked fluent English, they did not go to classes. English was not spoken at home and 81 percent of Greek women did not speak English at work.\textsuperscript{180} As Nagata noted, "in some cases, the employer is Greek; in others, particularly in a number of factories, so many Greeks are employed that they are able to help each other in interpretation of instructions and information."\textsuperscript{181} In this case it was not necessary for the women to learn English.

However, not everyone found him- or herself in situations similar to those mentioned above. English was important to immigrants from non-English speaking countries for a number of reasons. Professionals who wished to work in their areas of expertise and had to be accredited, for example, had to write examinations that were administered in English. Also non-professional immigrants who wished to enhance their job options needed to know the language of work. Moreover, immigrants needed English to access social facilities and to understand Canadian institutions and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in order that they might acculturate into society.\textsuperscript{182} Simple things that Canadians take for granted, such as asking for directions, posed problems for newcomers or those who did not know the standard language.\textsuperscript{183} One of my interviewees recalled an incident two years after her arrival in Canada:


\textsuperscript{181} Nagata, "East Toronto English Project," 8.

\textsuperscript{182} Canada, Department of Secretary of State, 1973, 10.

\textsuperscript{183} The Women's Group, \textit{One Woman's Story} (Toronto: The Toronto ALFA Centre, 1993).
I bought a “Go” train ticket from Union to Ajax. I did not know that the machine that stood in the middle of the waiting area stamped tickets to indicate when they were bought. Because I didn’t know, I didn’t stamp my ticket before boarding the train, and never anticipated the embarrassment that was to come. The inspector came in and it got to my turn to show my ticket. It took some anxious moments to get him to understand that I didn’t know that I had to stamp the ticket. His comment, when he turned to go, was “that’s what they do all the time.” Who were “they”? Travellers, Blacks, women, who? I was so ashamed.\(^{184}\)

In another instance, a participant detailed how he gave liniment to his eighteen-month-old.

As he told me,

*The situation here is so different. In Ghana, they tell you how to take the medicine and so it does not matter whether you can read or not. You know which one is topical and which is oral; you know which one to take three times a day and which one is for sleep. In Canada, they assume you can read so they do not go into all those details.*\(^{185}\)

Immigrants’ predicaments were not gender-specific; they could befall anyone. Thus, on the surface, the need for English language went beyond gender. However, a closer examination reveals that immigrant women needed language instruction more than men did. They needed it for social interaction as well as to get work. In Third World countries, especially, tradition and custom have conspired to deny women equal educational opportunities.\(^{186}\) Since formal education is linked with the acquisition of skills and entry into the labour market, people who received formal education dominated the world of work. In their countries of origin women did not experience lack of education in the same way as they did in Canada. For example, in Ghana, boys and men got more education than girls and women;\(^{187}\) yet girls and women engaged in trading more than boys and men to compensate for their inability to get waged labour. In Canada, the proliferation of goods everywhere and laws governing retail did not permit Ghanaian women to engage in trading. Their chances

\(^{184}\) Interview with Philomina at her residence in Etobicoke on July 6, 1998. See also Deborah Barndt, *Getting There: Producing Photostories of their Lives* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1982).

\(^{185}\) Conversation with Kofi Mensah, Toronto, July 8, 1998.


\(^{187}\) Oppong and Abu, *Seven Roles of Women*, 20-22.
were limited and as a result they were forced to enter the waged labour market to be able to meet their economic needs.

Since immigrant women generally entered the employment market with initial disabilities, several studies have revealed the awful conditions under which some of them worked. Seydegart and Spears wrote:

Immigrant women are still disproportionately subject to discriminatory hiring practices and exploitation in the workplace in terms of working conditions, security of employment, wage scales and opportunities for advancement.\(^{188}\)

Studies also revealed that immigrant women’s concentration in such job ghettos was partly the result of their lack of relevant skills and/or knowledge of the English language.\(^{189}\) An essential initial condition for women to move out of work ghettos or get into further training programs in order to acquire employable skills was to acquire the English language, which was the common code.

Immigrant women also had a greater need for the English language for social interaction. Being primary caregivers, they were responsible for communicating in a wide variety of situations that necessitated using English.\(^{190}\) Some common problems that they faced, such as dealing with children’s schools and healthcare, could be alleviated if they knew English.\(^{191}\) With regard to their children’s education, they generally participated in parent-teacher interviews and association meetings. Without knowing the common code immigrant women found it difficult, if not impossible, to effectively participate in these

\(^{188}\) Seydegart and Spears, *Immigrants in Canada*, 45.


\(^{191}\) Edith Ferguson, “Immigrants and Education,” Talk given at Centennial College, Scarborough, May 1, 1975, 7.
meetings. These immigrant parents also found it difficult to help their children with homework.  

They also experienced difficulties interacting with medical staff, having to rely on their English-speaking children to act as interpreters, or on hospital interpreters who were not always able to describe exactly what a health problem was because translating verbatim was impossible. In addition, telling total strangers about confidential health problems made women uncomfortable.  

I was with a group of friends talking about women's health when one woman recalled an embarrassing situation she found herself in.  

*I had been in Canada for about four months when I realized I had *odepua*.*  

I had to treat it quickly since I could not go to work feeling that awful. I did not know the medical term for the ailment neither did I want to discuss it with anybody because of ideas people held about that thing. But then I went to see a doctor and there was this Ghanaian woman who was not a nurse but who had been called to interpret my complaint. If I had my way I would have asked the doctor to excuse her. She did not have to know my medical problem. But she got to know because I did not have the tool to deal with the doctor on a personal basis.*  

This woman's concern did not simply reveal her difficulty due to a lack of English but also the cultural underpinning of her dilemma. She was used to talking to a doctor with a nurse in attendance. Nurses were professionals who were privy to medical conditions. An "outsider" did not have that privilege. In her opinion:  

*How could I know that she was not going to tell somebody who would also tell somebody else? How would people see me if they got to know I had that kind of disease? You know these things can potentially jeopardize one's marital chances.*

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192 Ferguson, "Immigrants and Education," 8.
194 *"Odepu"* (also known as *white* among Ghanaian secondary school girls) is the Twi word for yeast infection.
195 Interview with Pokuaa in Weston on June 24, 1998.
196 Interview with Pokuaa.
Not only did immigrant women without functional English encounter problems in the larger society but they also had to deal with their immediate families and neighbours. While their children picked up English very fast in schools and spouses established a network of friends beyond the ethnic community, women usually interacted in their own small groups. Interaction within their own ethnic community alleviated women’s isolation but if they lived away from ethnic enclaves, immigrant women’s isolation and dependence on other members of the family could be frustrating.197 While the women spoke to their children in the vernacular, the children responded in English, and when there were many children in the house, they liked talking to one another more than to their mother who “persisted” in using the vernacular. One of my interviewees told me how in the early years of her arrival in Canada, her children would not want her to talk to them when their friends visited. She observed that:

*When they needed food, they would tell their father who in turn would instruct me as if I was the child in the house. The children did not want me to walk them to school when they missed the bus. I sensed they did not want me to meet the teachers.*

Lack of language left women isolated in some cases, dependent in others, sometimes infantilized, and certainly subject to the whims of their husbands, children, and others with power.

In their home countries, women could face limitations despite relative lack of education but these did not include language. Among Ghanaians, for instance, the presence of extended family members in one house, all of them speaking the same language and in close and constant interaction with each other, reduced feelings of isolation and dependence.

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198 Interview with Frema at Downsview on March 3, 1999.
even if such community did not obliterate them completely. As a result of immigration these living arrangements changed and women found themselves locked within nuclear families with new sets of problems, including language. Winnie Ng summarized immigrant women’s situation:

In this great land of opportunities, many immigrant women are walking in chains. These are chains of dependency, chains of being treated as a hand rather than as a person with a brain, and chains of having doors closed right in your face in the name of Canadian experience. It is a sense of vulnerability and helplessness, of being stripped of one’s own historical, cultural and social roots once you set foot on Canadian soil. It is also a sense of humiliation for having to rely upon a relative, a friend, a child or at times even a stranger to “speak” and “think” for you. Being illiterate for a non-English speaking immigrant woman is like “doing time” in a prison without walls.\textsuperscript{199}

As Seydegart and Spear noted, “until an immigrant women [sic] can speak and write one of Canada’s official languages fluently, she cannot even hope to participate fully in either economic or social activities.”\textsuperscript{200} Hence, when individuals and organizations called attention to the need to establish language classes for immigrant women, it was to address a real need. Language training was essential for many immigrant women. It was at the point of defining what should go into language programs and who should get access to these programs that selection based on gender became a crucial issue.

\textbf{Language Programs for Immigrants}


\textsuperscript{199} Winnie Ng, “Breaking Chains: Immigrant Women Workers and Literacy,” \textit{Canadian Woman Studies} 9, nos. 3&4 (Fall/Winter 1988), 41.
while education became provincial responsibility. Defining an education for immigrants thus required federal and provincial co-operation and co-ordination.\textsuperscript{201} Provincial boards of education and other stakeholders designed language programs and the federal government provided financial support. While it appeared that the federal and provincial governments were performing complementary roles, the situation was far more complex than that. Different governmental bodies with different ideologies targeted specific clientele with their language programs. The system was unwieldy and did not allow for easy assessment.\textsuperscript{202}

First, there were language programs administered by the Secretary of State "to ensure the equality of status of Canada's two official languages and to ensure their continued use and development in Canada."\textsuperscript{203} In the French-speaking provinces of Quebec and New Brunswick, English language acquisition was emphasized, while in the rest of Canada, French was emphasized. The target group included non-English and non-French speakers nation-wide, regardless of whether they were citizens or immigrants. It is important to note that with the exception of Quebec and New Brunswick where English-French bilingualism reached over 20 percent, nowhere in the rest of Canada did official bilingualism reach even 10 percent.\textsuperscript{204} Canada outside of Quebec is predominantly English speaking and within the Quebec population the greatest number of non-French speakers who needed language instruction were immigrants, constituting 12 percent of the population in 1976.\textsuperscript{205} Official English-French bilingualism was politically motivated to preserve national unity in response to Quebec nationalism.

\textsuperscript{203} Canada, Dept of Secretary of State, 1973, 10.
\textsuperscript{204} Newsham and Acheson, \textit{English as a Second Language}, 11.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
The Secretary of State also administered citizenship education for immigrants for integrative purposes. Citizenship education was designed to introduce new Canadians to the way of life and institutions of Canada. The ideology behind citizenship language instruction was to prepare new immigrants for effective social participation. The Secretary of State absorbed fifty percent of the costs and the provinces, the remaining percent. Yet, as Shirley Seward and Kathryn McDade have noted, there was no co-ordination between the provinces and the Secretary of State to ensure that funds released for citizenship instruction reached their target. Besides, the name of the program could deter many prospective learners. Citizenship education suggested that the program was limited to people who were not Canadians, although in practice it was open to all interested persons.

Closely related to the programs offered by the Secretary of State were those administered by the Multiculturalism Directorate. The multiculturalism policy enunciated by Premier Trudeau in 1971 was premised on the notion that:

The individual’s freedom would be hampered if he were locked for life within a particular cultural compartment by the accident of birth or language. It is vital, therefore, that every Canadian whatever his [sic] ethnic origin, be given a chance to learn at least one of the two languages in which his country conducts its official business and its politics.

To implement this policy the government proposed, among other things, to “assist immigrants to acquire at least one of Canada’s official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society.”

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207 Ibid., 18-23.
208 House of Commons Debates, October 8, 1971, 8545.
209 Ibid., 8546.
As with a common citizenship for all Canadians as a basis for civic participation, there was a need for a common language (or dual languages) that would give all Canadians access to civic participation. Thus the government’s proposal was not new to immigrant education. What was not clear was how the government proposed to deal with the contradiction inherent in an official policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework. Since language is a powerful tool of cultural expression, recognizing Canada’s cultural diversity without acknowledging its multilingual character was a contradiction in terms. An emphasis on two official languages meant, at best, partial recognition of other cultural groups in Canada. Multiculturalism threatened to be an assimilationist tool.\footnote{Neil Bissoondath, \textit{Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada}. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1994.}

To resolve a huge political problem, the federal government created heritage language programs to give fair linguistic representation to identifiable language groups. Even so, heritage language instruction was not meant for adults. This half measure satisfied some groups and left others with a bewildering array of choices. Heritage language instruction worked well for homogenous immigrant and cultural groups such as Ukrainians and Italians. Among African immigrants, for example, identifying a common language would be difficult if not outright impossible.

The cultural and linguistic diversity of the African immigrant population in Canada defies simple categorization of ethnic groups based on geographical or national origin. For instance, Ghana has over 50 major languages. To identify a heritage language among Ghanaian immigrants alone could pose problems. The Canadian government’s interest in heritage language programs not only reflected the mainstream practice of essentializing immigrants, it also revealed the Euro-centric bias inherent in the concept of ethnicity as well as the continued confusion surrounding an understanding of multiculturalism. Being
"ethnic" meant being foreign born or of foreign descent. It was a process of exclusion and inclusion with the object of enjoying resources. "Ethnic" and "immigrant" were sometimes conflated so that groups were viewed as "other," distinct from the larger Canadian society. Although heritage language programs remain an integral part of multicultural education, they are important in the education of immigrant children. Among adults, it is more symbolic than practical, exemplified in culturally sensitive issues such as wearing veils to class or observing prayer times during classes.

Apart from language for social integration undertaken by the Department of the Secretary of State and the Multiculturalism Directorate, the Department of Manpower and Immigration, renamed Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) in 1977, and now Citizenship and Immigration Commission, was and is still responsible for immigrants' economic integration. Its training programs were directed at adults destined for the job market or those already in it who needed to upgrade their skills to enhance their performance. Counsellors at various Canada Employment Centres (CEC) (now known as Human Resource Development Canada [HRDC]) assessed and then directed individuals to appropriate programs. In 1967, the federal government passed the Adult Occupational Training Act and in 1974, the Canadian Manpower Training Program (CMTP) was established as an instrument to develop Canada's labour requirements. Basically, the CMTP was not a language program as such but a type of clearinghouse where Canadian workers went to have their skills upgraded. CMTP included a language component in addition to other skill programs. Immigrant workers who had difficulty with English took language classes in addition to any skills programs they might pursue.

212 Personal communication with LINC instructor, Thistletown Multi-Centre, Etobicoke, June, 1998.
A renewed interest in adult education in the late 1960s and early 1970s had advocates argue for the importance of continuing (or the popular term ‘recurrent’) education to equip adults with the requisite resources to meet the challenges of an ever-changing global economy. Recurrent adult education was premised on the notion that there should be full-time learning for adults at points in their lives to equip them for changes in the economy as well as fulfilling individual growth. Recurrent education also served as the means to break the monopoly on higher education by the 16-19 age group. In Canada, the 1975 publication of a journal, *Adult Training*, advocated equal learning opportunities for adults. Education was hailed as an avenue for creating equitable relations and enhancing status because a direct correlation could be made between education and other forms of social and economic life. J. R. Gass, an advocate of recurrent education, pointed out that,

...more knowledge and higher skills are somehow the open sesame to individual, social and economic progress...and that access to knowledge and skills through education is one of the foundation stones of equality.

Like the specialized language programs offered by government agencies, adult education programs had a broad based appeal, speaking to the educational needs of adults whether immigrant or native-born.

Arguments advanced by advocates of adult education resonated with women’s advocates. The women’s movement in particular intensely scrutinized female status and made calls to raise women from their marginal social and economic positions. Education, they argued, was most crucial in women’s lives, especially at a time when technological

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215 Ibid.; Canada, Department of Labour, *Women’s Bureau Bulletin* 14 (March 1965), 1; The Humber College Centre for Women, “Helping Women to Help Themselves,” *Training* 75 1, no. 2 (Fall 1975), 36.
216 Gass, “Recurrent Education,” 34.
advancement no longer made it feasible for an individual to remain in a single occupation for all of their working life. Rapidly changing demands of the job market required workers, including female workers, to constantly change job strategies in order to stay employed.

Women's advocates also argued for increased educational opportunities for women as a source of empowerment. Women needed more education to foster among them "a self-concept stressing independence and adequacy to cope with life and in so doing to assist [them] to reach their full potential in whatever areas they choose." Continuing adult education became the channel through which women could redirect their lives and participate in activities and programs that could enrich them.

A major initiative by the Canadian government to address women's needs was the establishment in 1973 of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. While this body raised awareness of the difficulties women faced in Canadian society, its function, as the name suggests, was advisory only. It had neither the power to legislate nor to implement policies affecting women. What is more, the composition of the Advisory Council was predominantly mainstream Canadian-born women whose concerns and interests were often different from those of immigrant women. For instance, out of ten subcommittees established in 1973 by the chairperson to look into specific areas of women's lives, none focused on immigrant women.

The lack of differentiation between Canadian-born and immigrant women reflected the white women's movement's assumption of a universal womanhood. That assumption was flawed, revealing its Euro-centric character.

217 Canada, Department of Labour, Women's Bureau Bulletin 9 (July 1963), 1.
218 Humber College Centre for Women, "Helping Women to Help Themselves," 36.
Nonetheless, it had important consequences for immigrant women. The movement decided what was appropriate for immigrant women’s education. John Niemi’s characterization of training programs was equally applicable to the manner in which the women’s movement handled immigrant women’s education. He wrote:

Many programs haveounedered in the past because they have been based on the needs of the groups as perceived not by *them* but by persons in the dominant society. Programs have been traditionally based on minimal skills in reading and computation, instead of larger configurations offering choices from a wide array of lifestyles.\(^{220}\)

At a TESL conference in Toronto in 1981, participants identified key problems associated with a national policy of second language instruction. A summary stated:

Unlike other major immigrant and refugee-receiving countries, Canada has no universal scheme of second language provision to adult newcomers. Instead, we sort our adult newcomers into two distinct categories, according to whether they are bound for the labour market or not. The first group, the “breadwinners”, have been selected because they possess a skill or profession which would be marketable in Canada – if they had sufficient English (or French in Quebec). The course which is supposed to “unlock” this skill is the Manpower [sic] ESL program…\(^{221}\)

Commenting on the second group of immigrants that had been selected not based on their skill, the author continued:

The second group of adult newcomers have not been recruited for their skills and therefore do not normally qualify for Manpower ESL…The policy would appear to be that this category (often the wives of the breadwinners) will not work, and do not need English/French in order to run the home. If they do attend language classes they go to one of a variety of general programs, the best of which have teachers trained to teach language orientation content relevant to the learners’ needs.\(^{222}\)

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\(^{220}\) John Niemi, “Communicating with the so-called disadvantaged…Can we find a Common Ground?” *Basic Training for Skill Development* 3, no. 4 (1975), 4.

\(^{221}\) Ian Martin, “Toward a National Policy for Second-Language Provision to Adult Refugees and Immigrants,” *Contact* 8, no. 1 (Feb. 1981), 6.

\(^{222}\) Ibid., 7.
Having made these observations, the participants in the conference recommended, among other things, that “all adult immigrants, whether classified as bound for the labour force or not, should be eligible for a basic initial period of language-and-orientation. Universal access should be guaranteed by the provision of training allowances and day care.”

**Language Programs for Immigrant Women**

Such were the circumstances surrounding immigrant education in the 1970s. Indeed it was during this time that attention was drawn to the need to have specialized language programs for immigrant women in Ontario. Until that time language training for immigrant women had not been a priority anywhere in Canada. Immigrant women had actually been prevented from work-related language training programs because the programs were limited to only one adult, the head of the household. Since women could not apply as principal applicants until 1974, they could not be the heads of households. Although that limitation was removed in 1974, many women continued to be listed as dependants because they mostly entered Canada in the family class category. As dependants, they were not expected to work; therefore they did not need job-oriented language programs. Immigrant women’s educational needs were defined in terms of the availability of child-care, flexible hours to accommodate their busy domestic schedules and allowances to reduce their dependence.

Women who wished to enrol in language programs had to prove that their lack of employment was due to language difficulty. Women whose jobs did not require the use of English were not eligible. Those who satisfied these conditions but were sponsored were not eligible for a training allowance, whereas independent applicants who were admitted on the

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223 Martin, “Toward a National Policy for Second-Language Provision to Adult Refugees and Immigrants,” 7.

basis that they would be self-supporting were eligible for these funds. These conditions reflected the importance that the state attached to immigration as a means of supporting capitalism and women's place in the immigration process. Many immigrant women were in a double bind: their lack of skills put them in jobs that did not require extensive use of English while their jobs were used as the justification for denying them entry into language programs. These issues diverted attention away from women's needs in other areas as well.

At the first conference organized for immigrant women in Toronto in 1981, the importance of having separate language training programs for immigrant women was addressed. Speaker after speaker emphasized the need to provide language programs for immigrant women. In his opening speech at the conference, the Hon. Lloyd Axworthy, then Liberal Minister of Employment and Immigration and Minister of State Responsible for the Status of Women, noted that of all the services available to immigrants language training was the most important: it was the key to successful settlement for immigrant women. Another speaker, Maria Teresa Larain, observed that immigrant women were discriminated against in the areas of immigration, employment and education. The conference participants also noted that educational programs for them were inadequate and called on the federal government to provide "a universal program of language training for all adult immigrants and refugees." Two years later the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women issued a report that noted that "language and orientation programs for immigrant women proposed by the Council are still largely non-existent." Then in 1986 a

225 Boyd, Migrant Women, 20-22; Seward and McDade, Immigrant Women in Canada, 24.
227 Ibid., 7.
228 Ibid., 4.
Scarborough workshop noted the inadequate educational facilities provided for immigrant women.\footnote{Women of Many Cultures Planning Committee, “Immigrants and Education,” \textit{Resources for Feminist Research} 16, no. 1 (April 1987), 44.}

These reports raise a number of questions regarding the provision and sustainability of language programs for immigrant women. For instance, why were there no programs in spite of numerous calls for them, calls that were at times made by people who should provide them? Whose interests were served when women were denied an education? The continued silence over immigrant women's educational needs served both employers and the state. Employers, backed by the state, required a cheap supply of labour. Women's lack of language and other necessary skills would pin them down to low paying jobs while the state would be spared from providing the resources with which to train them. Thus, although federal and provincial governments identified language training as an integral aspect of immigrant education, efforts at providing programs specifically for immigrant women prior to 1980 were lukewarm.

Mainstream society, and indeed some immigrants, perceived \textit{all immigrant women} as having language problems. And the problem was couched less in terms of how it limited immigrant women's job options and more on how it impeded their social interaction. Immigrant women's lack of English fluency was believed to be the cause of the problems they encountered in society. Essentialized and stereotyped, they became the targets of programs whose focus was to train them to speak English to be able to perform as mothers, wives, and caregivers. While not wrong in essence, language for social interaction was inadequate and limited immigrant women's full participation in Canadian life. Similar assumptions were not made about immigrant men.
Before the 1980s, any language programs specifically for immigrant women were usually pilot projects designed from Euro-centric perspectives. In some provinces, programs that were designed for Canadian-born English speaking illiterate women were deemed appropriate for all women regardless of their cultural or educational backgrounds. Writing about one such program that was introduced in Saskatchewan in 1971, Dana Mullen, Director of the Second Language Component at the Citizenship Branch in Alberta observed:

The Fluency First program was created primarily to meet the needs of adults of native ancestry, but its methods and materials can be effective with adults from other language and cultural backgrounds, whether they are literate or not.\(^{231}\)

In Toronto, a language project was initiated among Italian and Greek mothers with pre-school children to assist them acquire language to be able to speak with their English-speaking children. The project was a pilot one and did not appear to be sustained after a year or so of its establishment.\(^{232}\) At Humber College, a course was designed for women in 1975 to enable those women who wanted to rejoin the job market do so while those who needed skills to start work could take advantage of it. The Humber College program was oriented toward women in business who needed management skills to perform efficiently.\(^{233}\)

Considering that many immigrant women did not have the resources to establish themselves as business people, it is apparent that the Humber College program was not designed with immigrant women in mind.

Like the project among the Greek and Italian immigrant women, the Humber program was short lived. Today the new centre offers employment counselling to mainly


\(^{233}\) "Helping Women to Help Themselves," 37.
professional immigrants who require some orientation to adjust to Canadian society. It opened in 1998.234

**LANGUAGE AND OTHER TRAINING PROGRAMS IN THE 1980s AND 1990s**

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, job-oriented training programs for immigrants were mostly reserved for men. Immigrant women constituted a low proportion of intake into skilled programs. For instance, Seydegart and Spears noted that in 1983-84 there were 33,600 trainees in the General Industrial Training Program and women formed 24 percent. In the Critical Trades Skills Program that trained people in high tech industries women constituted only 5 percent.235 In the 1980s women's issues increasingly came up in public debates and immigrant women too received attention.

At both the federal and provincial levels, significant changes occurred as immigrant and mainstream organizations teamed up to establish agencies to serve the needs of immigrant women. In Ontario, for example, the Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) was established in 1978 as a non-governmental organization to co-ordinate the activities of immigrant serving agencies in the province. Serving over a hundred and forty-eight agencies province-wide, OCASI lobbies both provincial and metropolitan governments to give more attention to the concerns of immigrants. It is supported by both private and public institutions, among them the United Way of Greater Toronto, The Trillium Foundation, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, Canadian Heritage, Health Canada, and the City of Toronto.

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234 Communication with Simone Grant, senior facilitator, Human Resources Development Centre, Albion, Etobicoke, June, 1999.
In its policy statement,

OCASI asserts the right of all persons to participate fully and equitably in the social, cultural, political and economic life of Ontario...OCASI and its member agencies work to improve the services and programs for immigrants and refugees. OCASI strives to facilitate effective participation by all Ontarians in building a prosperous and harmonious province.236

In line with these principles, OCASI provides a wide range of services to facilitate immigrant integration. The agency offers six broad programs in public education, regional networking, community and government relations, research, policy analysis and position development, skills training and information and referral. Within each program, specific issues are dealt with. For example, its public education program involves partnerships with media institutions to forge greater understanding of immigrants and refugees and to confront negative portrayal and representation of immigrants and refugees.237

Within the African community, the establishment in 1984 of the Canadian African Newcomer Aid Centre of Toronto (CANACT) was a major achievement. Out of that organization sprang the African Training and Employment Centre (ATEC) which was devoted to the educational and employment needs of African immigrants in Toronto. Although these agencies enjoyed provincial government financial assistance, it is important to note that for the most part immigrants and other private organizations started the agencies.

As in earlier decades, language training featured prominently in the education of immigrant women. The basic ideology underpinning language instruction for immigrant women did not change.238 Thus in 1984, the Settlement Language Program (SLP) was established to meet the language needs of immigrant women who were not in the labour force and could not benefit from Language at Work (LAW) programs that began in 1982.

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236 Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, OCASI Principles, not dated.
237 OCASI, OCASI Principles.
As with CMTP in 1974, the Liberal government announced the Canadian Jobs Strategy (CJS) as the framework for training Canada's labour force. Again, like CMTP, CJS training programs did not serve immigrants per se. Rather, the government identified six core principles for training targeted groups in defined areas.\textsuperscript{239} The job re-entry category that was specially designed for women who had been out of work and wanted to re-enter the work force had its limitations. Its eligibility criteria limited women's chances. For instance, participants had to have been out of employment for at least three years to qualify.\textsuperscript{240} Few immigrants, if any, could afford to stay out of employment for that long.

As in the 1960s and 1970s, education and training in the 1980s were still linked with labour in a partnership that would benefit all parties. Women's groups in particular made great strides in establishing training programs with the limited allocation. For example, there was Women Interested in Successful Employment (WISE) in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1987, STEP in Ontario, TechPrep in British Columbia, and WITE in Nova Scotia. These programs were designed to compensate for systemic barriers to women's labour force participation. The programs offered basic skills training as well as on-the-job training in selected sectors.\textsuperscript{241} Women who were not in these selected programs missed their opportunity. In Ontario, agencies and groups such as Advocates for Community Based Training and Education for Women (ACTEW) and Ontario Racial Minorities' Organizing Committee for Training (ORMOCT) made representations on the newly formed Ontario Training Adjustment Board (OTAB). These efforts were commendable but they had their limitations where immigrant women were concerned.

\textsuperscript{240} EIC, \textit{The Canadian Jobs Strategy}.
\textsuperscript{241} Ontario Women's Directorate, \textit{Meeting Women's Training Needs: Case Studies in Women's Training, Phase II Report}, prepared for Federal/Provincial/Territorial Joint Working Group of the
Once again, immigrant women were subsumed under Canadian women. Programs were generally undifferentiated except those provided by immigrant serving agencies. Immigrant women who were introduced to non-traditional programs still found themselves at the bottom at their workplaces.\textsuperscript{242} For instance, graduates of the Immigrant Women in the Electronic Industry (IWIE) program complained of underemployment and under-utilisation.\textsuperscript{243} With the diversity of educational programs it was not possible for the various stakeholders to co-ordinate their activities to ensure immigrant women were better served.

Since 1992, immigrant women's training needs have been expanded although the underlying ideology has not changed. Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), introduced in 1992, combines language training with skill instruction in computer skills. However, although they dominate the program's enrolment, LINC is not reserved for women alone. There are on-site child-care facilities for mothers with young children. But LINC does not have a training allowance, which is essential for women as they pursue training. There is also no program in place to follow up on graduates so it is difficult to determine the actual success rate of women who have pursued LINC.

**SUMMARY**

It seems clear that there were numerous educational opportunities for immigrant women in Canada. And yet availability did not necessarily mean accessibility.

Programs that were accessible to immigrant women in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s were those that did not prepare them for the labour market. Immigrant women were limited by eligibility requirements in training programs that were job-oriented. The education

\textsuperscript{242} Immigrant Women in the Electronic Industry: A Report (Toronto: Working Women Community Centre, 1990), 34.

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid.
of immigrants was usually part of a national plan, one aspect of nation building, and at other
times part of the education of the entire Canadian workforce. The lack of a clearly defined
immigrant education stemmed from the issue’s complexity. The importance of English
language training for social and economic adjustment of immigrants was not questioned;
however, language programs were provided by different agencies with different goals and
ideologies.

Additionally, eligibility criteria precluded many women from pursuing skills
programs that would launch them into jobs. With diverse ideologies and limiting
requirements and no one organization ensuring the effectiveness of language and other
training programs for immigrants, stakeholders had little feedback. The unequal provision of
educational programs for immigrant men and women explains the hierarchy in the
immigrant population in Canada.

Language training was a means to an end, but that end held different meanings for
immigrant men and women. Programs that were skill-oriented were reserved for those who
were destined for the labour market and were predominantly men. So far as immigrant
women were concerned, the aim of these programs generally was to socialize them.
Programs were useful for women in social circumstances but insufficient to equip them with
the skills needed to get them out of the job ghettos in which they were concentrated. On the
other hand, most training programs for immigrant men were designed to equip them with
the requisite resources to enter the job market. Ultimately, education did not equalize
opportunities for immigrant men and women. Immigrant women who wanted better
educational opportunities had to look beyond immigrant-defined programs into those that
held promise of advancement. It is in this broad context that we have to understand the
educational pursuits of Ghanaian immigrant women. In the next chapter, I examine the
participants’ decisions to educate themselves, difficulties they encountered in the process, and the strategies they adopted to overcome barriers.
INTRODUCTION

The ability of immigrant women to participate in the educational structure of society depends on a number of variables. For instance, the existence of programs that meet their needs is fundamental. Also, program curriculum and materials must be relevant to the needs of participants. The analysis so far has indicated that there were numerous options for immigrant women to pursue educational programs. However, eligibility criteria and notions about what immigrant women needed restricted their access to many training programs. In this chapter, I focus on the participation of Ghanaian immigrant women in Canadian education. I offer the stories of four interviewees whom I refer to as Naomi, Edna, Asantewaa and Serwaa. While not suggesting that these four women can adequately represent the twenty women I interviewed, I had good reasons to concentrate on their stories.

The four women’s lives captured many common aspects of Ghanaian women’s experiences. For instance, their experiences with husbands, problems with abuse, child-care, and schooling were so similar that to have recounted all twenty individual stories would have been repetitive. Second, their stories, bolstered by the others, addressed some of the common themes prevalent in feminist discourse and immigration literature that made them very appealing to me as a starting point for analysis. Their stories illustrate the convergence of race, gender, and class relations and how human agency interacts with these categories to structure the experiences of Ghanaian immigrant women in Canada. I also present the socio-cultural world the women lived in prior to migration. Understanding that world helps to contextualize the ways in which Ghanaian immigrant women responded to situations in their new environment.
GHANA: THE LAND AND PEOPLE

With an estimated 17.2 million people in 1994, Ghana, formerly the British colony of the Gold Coast, occupies an area of 238, 533 square kilometres. It is roughly the size of Great Britain, stretching 670 kilometres from north to south and 560 kilometres from east to west. The Gulf of Guinea borders it to the south and to its north, west, and east Ghana is bordered by the French-speaking countries of Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Togo. Ghana is ethnically diverse. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century Ghana, as we know it today, did not exist. The area was occupied by people of different ethnicities, some of them fighting for supremacy and control of the resources of the region. After the British annexed the area at the close of the nineteenth century, they divided their new acquisition into administrative units that overlapped ethnic subgroups. However, no region of the country was ethnically homogenous. The utter disregard of the autonomy of the peoples who make up modern Ghana has left a legacy of animosity and hostility that occasionally erupt in ethnic conflict between some groups.244

The post-independence governments built on the British example by creating more administrative units or regions. At present there are ten regions, none of them ethnically homogenous. There are about 100 ethnic groups speaking over 50 major languages. The largest ethnic group is the Akan, constituting about 44 percent of the population, and also the only matrilineal descent group in the country. Other large groups include the Mole-Dagbane 16 percent, Ewe 13 percent, and Ga-Adanbge 8 percent.245

244 The Nanumba and Konkomba in the northern part of the country, although resident in one region, have been fighting among themselves over land rights. In 1994, ethnic tension between these two groups led to a clash in which more than a thousand people were killed and over 150,000 displaced. See Library of Congress Internet Release, Country Profile: Ghana, October, 1999.
Not only is Ghana diversified in its ethnic makeup, the land is naturally divided into zones that have determined the main occupations of different ethnic groups. There is a coastal zone stretching a few miles inland that is composed of scrub and sandstone. It cannot support large-scale agriculture, but the lakes and lagoons are important sources of the country's salt and fish supplies. Fishing is the primary economic activity of the coastal peoples and the industry is gendered. Men go to sea and women smoke and sell the catch. Beyond the coastal belt lies the forest zone that runs in an east-west direction. It houses the country's major exports: cocoa, timber, and vast deposits of minerals, notably gold. In addition, a great bulk of roots and tubers are grown. Further north of the rain forest the vegetation thins into grassland which, coupled with light rains, supports the cultivation of grains, cereals and nuts and also the raising of livestock. Like the Akan, ethnic groups in the north are mostly farmers.

This ecological distribution affected Ghana's economic, social, and political development. Economic development has been uneven because of regional geographical variations and the unequal distribution of resources to the regions. Ghana is 33 percent urbanized with approximately 65 percent of the population engaged in agriculture. The majority of the 65 percent lives in impoverished rural areas. Until the late 1980s when the government embarked on a program of rural electrification, the majority of Ghanaians could not use electrically powered gadgets. Many places still do not have potable water and basic healthcare is inadequate. For these reasons, rural-urban migration has been increasing. Most people gravitate to the urban centres to eke out a precarious living from limited opportunities.

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246 Christine Oppong, *Marriage among a Matrilineal Elite*, 32
Girls and women have been relatively worse off in these developments. Since they are the least educated in the population, their social, economic, and political behaviour has largely been circumscribed. Traditional patterns of authority coupled with relatively limited resources available to women in terms of education, occupation, and income have largely determined gender relations. For instance, access to land is essential to the type of farming that women can engage in. Yet traditional land holding systems that entrust male clan or family heads with land ownership ensure that women do not get adequate land holdings on which to engage in large-scale agriculture.\(^{249}\) Even among the matrilineal Akan, women farm relatively smaller plots. While they do not belong to their husbands’ families, Akan women work on their husbands’ plots in addition to working on what Gwendolyn Mikell calls “own account” cocoa farms.\(^{250}\) Among patrilineal groups women work with and for their husbands. Lynne Brydon’s work among the Avatime, a patrilineal subgroup of the Ewe cluster, reveals that women were prohibited from cultivating rice as a result of beliefs associated with their natural reproductive roles.\(^{251}\) If rice were exportable, it would mean that Avatime women would not be able to participate in its production, and probably not share in its profits.

In terms of educational opportunities, scholars generally agree that cultural practices based on patriarchal notions of women’s roles and poor economic resources constrain female education.\(^{252}\) Most Ghanaian women work two or more jobs. Wage earners may sell


\(^{250}\) Ibid., 70.


after work while small farmers may also be small traders. In coastal areas where farming is not popular, women dominate the retail trade. Some of these women may be migrants who left rural areas to live in cities. Since they do not have access to resources to the same degree as men, some Ghanaian women rely on men to supplement their incomes. Others travel to neighbouring African countries to engage in prostitution. Lynne Brydon has noted that while some prostitutes may return with large sums of money to start trading businesses, many are not able to maintain their businesses; they may face poor economic conditions or have to use their money to cure venereal diseases. AIDS, for instance, has become a problem for some Ghanaian migrants. The United States Library of Congress profile on Ghana lists the country as having the second largest incidence of AIDS in the West African sub-region.

Among the matrilineal Akan, for instance, women are advised upon marriage to bring home property (which includes children) but to leave their debts for their husbands to settle. Women have thus kept separate accounts from their husbands as part of the property accumulation strategy. However, when the marriage breaks up, the man may not put his resources at his children's disposal.

Until recently, Ghanaian women's political participation was minimal. Perhaps as a result of their relative lack of education, disinterest, and the tumultuous nature of Ghana's post independence politics, women have not been very active in national politics.

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257 Christine Oppong, Marriage among a Matrilineal Elite, 32
For instance, there were no women in the legislative assembly that was formed in 1946, and only one in the government that led the country to independence in 1957.\(^{258}\) Even after independence, Ghanaian women were still marginalized politically. Of 108 people that sat in parliament from 1960 to 1966 there were only 10 women.\(^{259}\) The founding of the 31st December Women’s Movement, a quasi-political organization formed in the early 1980s that gave voice to Ghanaian women, broke the tradition. Its activists are urbanized educated women who are relatively better off than the thousands of rural women they lead.

The combined effects of these limitations are that instead of being dependent on men, many Ghanaian women are autonomous, devising strategies to improve themselves and protect their autonomy. One of such strategies is to look outside the country to seek greener pastures. Some have adopted the “get money quick” strategy: they go for any available jobs to make fast money and then return to Ghana. Others are more calculating. They settle and engage in activities that have long-term positive impacts on themselves and other members of their families. Ghanaian-Canadian women have adopted different strategies to improve their conditions. Some have relied on education as a route to their improvement. In the next sections I relate the stories of these women’s experiences as they negotiated Canadian education.

**GHANAIAN WOMEN AND CANADIAN EDUCATION**

*Naomi: I was here for School, but first...*

Naomi arrived in Canada in May 1971 on a visitor’s visa and settled in Toronto. She was twenty-three years old and had no children. Her original intention was to apply for


permanent resident status so that she could attend university. She seemed to have been well informed about available opportunities before she decided to immigrate. As she noted:

*I heard a lot about Canada and the universities over here from my Canadian Peace Corps teachers in Ghana. One of them who was a graduate of the University of Waterloo said I was doing so well and she encouraged me to apply to a Canadian university. Fortunately, my father had the means to sponsor my trip, so I did not wait to go through the process of applying in Ghana.*

Naomi also had another trump card. Her fiancé, having entered Canada before her on a student visa, had already obtained permanent residence status. Thus, before she left Ghana, Naomi had some idea about what to expect. Unlike many new immigrants, she did not have to search for housing because her boyfriend had already secured a place. Similarly, she did not have to seek English classes because she had already completed sixth form (the equivalent of grade 13) in Ghana where English was the language of instruction. Therefore, she did not have an immediate need to use any immigrant service agencies. She indicated that she did not know whether there were any such agencies in Toronto.* In the early 1970s, there were virtually no agencies that were specifically dedicated to the service of African immigrant women.*

Naomi had already known that visitors who wished to stay in Canada permanently at that time could apply from within. As such, she did not have to depend on her fiancé to sponsor her, although she needed his assistance in other respects. She applied on her own merit and obtained permanent residence status within three months of arrival. As a permanent resident if she went to school, she would have access to the same resources that were available to Canadian-born university students. However, in 1971, Naomi was not yet ready for school. As she said, "I was young and wanted to have fun before settling down to

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*260 Interview with Naomi in North York on June 22, 1998.
*261 Interview with Naomi.
*262 OCASI Information Manual.
do anything." Since she had obtained permanent residence status she was not under pressure to leave the country. Naomi wanted to see Canada's attractions. "Having fun" involved getting married and travelling to other parts of Canada. She noted:

I wanted to see Canada's big cities and other attractions. From the African Lion Safari to Niagara Falls in Ontario, we went to Montreal to have a feel of the French culture, and onwards to Vancouver.264

In late 1973, at age twenty-five, she got pregnant and had a baby before starting university in 1974. Naomi's explanation for choosing to have a baby just before she began university was quite revealing. She said:

Unlike men, women have a certain window of time within which to have babies. I did not know what lay ahead of me in the pursuit of an academic career, but I knew that I was growing older and that if I had to have a baby, I had to have it before venturing into the unknown.265

Having a baby for the first time and attending university at the same time as an immigrant woman were more daunting events than Naomi had ever imagined. Unlike in Ghana where family consists of a wide circle of relations who could be relied on for a variety of services,266 Naomi's family in Canada consisted of only her husband and the newborn. People who became family to her children later on were her close friends, not those related to her by blood. The first few months after delivery were both exhilarating and challenging for Naomi. She watched her baby grow and respond to her. She also knew that she would be going to school soon and had not yet figured out how the baby would be cared for while she was away from home. Her husband had full-time work and was "not used to handling babies."267 In her absence, he would refuse to get the baby ready in the morning for

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263 Interview with Naomi.
264 Interview with Naomi.
265 Interview with Naomi.
266 Oppong and Abu, Seven Roles of A Woman, 32.
267 Interview with Naomi.
the babysitter’s (if they got one) or pick her up in the evening. He viewed these parental
tasks as “women’s work.”

At her university there were day care facilities for students so Naomi did not expect
to have any problems. However, availability of day-care did not mean automatic access for
her child. Eligibility criteria disqualified some children. For instance, the Kidspace Day Care
at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) is
licensed to care for a maximum of twenty-four children between the ages of 2.5 and 5. The
Margaret Fletcher Day Care Centre, also at the University of Toronto, accommodates a
larger number but it also limits its intake to the 2.5 to the 5-year olds. As Naomi described
the child-care situation at her university:

_ I did not know that their policy limited intake to three-year olds and above._
_ Neither did I know that I did not have automatic enrolment for my child. I thought
that as a student I would just walk in and have my child listed. They had a long
list of children whose parents applied long before I had mine. There was no place
for my child and I had to look elsewhere._

As all the spaces were filled Naomi searched out alternatives. She could either get
a babysitter or pay the full cost for having her child in private day care. She decided to
have a live-in babysitter. She explained the reason for her choice:

_ The young woman who took up the position of a babysitter did more than
babysitting. She performed other house chores and that freed me from the burden
of having to come from school to cook and clean. It was expensive for a student to
have a live-in, despite the fact that I was married._

Naomi did not budget for a full-time babysitter when she applied for the Ontario
Students Assistance Program (OSAP). Consequently, she had to work after school hours to
supplement her financial needs. She got a part-time janitorial job at night. Full-time study
and night work interfered with her “womanly duties.” She did not have enough time to

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268 Interview with Naomi.
269 Interview with Naomi.
cook, clean and care for the house "as a woman should." Naomi spent only weekends with her daughter during the academic year. Her husband thought she was not a proper woman. Tension with her husband over these issues forced her to send the nanny away and take the child to a baby sitter. It was less expensive but added to her responsibilities. She took her daughter to the baby sitter and her husband brought her home in the evening. This continued for two years. When she secured a spot at the university child-care centre, she was preparing to finish the program and did not bother to change the day care situation.

At the university Naomi got involved in student politics, participating in protests and joining school councils. She believed she was gaining skills such as assertiveness and confidence that were essential in a competitive job market. Her husband felt otherwise. He charged that she had become "a militant feminist" and was no longer the woman he married. He wondered why she expected him to do housework and was especially affronted by her insistence that he help with the cooking and cleaning. In his opinion these tasks challenged his position as the male head of household. She explained to me that her husband had wanted a meek, pliant woman who would follow him around. She had become "enlightened" and he was intolerant. Marital problems began as Naomi became a threat to her husband.

Although Naomi’s husband was not available for comment, some of the men who participated in this research expressed sentiments similar to his. The men felt that Ghanaian women’s fight for equality at home was misplaced. One participant reflected that in Ghana women did all house chores and cared for babies without complaining. He put it bluntly:

"Some of the women who have gone to school behave as if they have not come from Ghana. When they were in Ghana they did everything without complaining. Now they are in Canada and they want to behave like white women. I will not put up with any of those women!"

270 Conversation with Kofi Mensah, July 8, 1998.
The man's comment reveals Ghanaian men's failure or refusal to come to terms with gender oppression. For him, racial difference between Black (Ghanaian) and white people should determine the behaviour of people in these racial groupings. By invoking racial difference as the basis for different behavioural patterns between Black and white women, the man portrayed two things simultaneously. His comments masked Ghanaian women's oppression by culturally justifying it while at the same time reflecting its multi-layered nature. The women did not have to shoulder all house chores and child-care in order to assert their difference from mainstream, white society.

On the one hand, Naomi's husband expected to be treated not just as any man but a particular kind of man—an educated man—but he did not believe that her education should change her position in life. He reflected the different points at which masculinity (and femininity) could be fractured along class lines. An educated man, Naomi's husband expected some type of treatment that an uneducated Ghanaian man may not expect. Similarly, as an educated woman, Naomi exhibited behaviour that was incongruent with her husband's expectations. These different gradations of behavioural attitudes associated with relative positions do not lend themselves to simple analyses based solely on gender subordination. His attitude suggested that education should not influence a woman's life.

Another male participant lamented that "Black women who used their education as a mask to demand that men perform housework are 'feminists,' white women in Black skins."271 This man's comment is interesting in light of the link he established between feminism and white women. He connected the two and thus suggested that feminism, however defined, is foreign to Black women. He revealed his lack of understanding of the central issues involved in feminism.

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That lack of understanding had roots in the media definition of feminism and the direction taken by the women's movement. Bell hooks has argued that lack of consensus on what feminism is has made it less appealing to some groups of people. Elizabeth Obadina adds that the direction that the women's movement took in the West—women seeking emotional, sexual and other satisfactions from fellow women—as well as media representations of the negative aspects of the movement at the exclusion of its achievements gave feminism a bad name and resulted in the tendency for some people to distance themselves from it.

Feminism is not a "white women's thing" because there are white women who are anti-feminist. The man did not grasp the deeper meaning that when Akan women lived with their matrikin and worked extra hours to cultivate their own cocoa farms, they were asserting their autonomy. When Ga women sold fish and would not have joint accounts with husbands, they were insisting on financial independence. When Ghanaian women married and did not adopt their husbands' names, they were preserving their individual identities. Ghanaian women gave practical meaning to Western feminist theorizing. The fact that they did not define their actions explicitly as feminist did not make them "non-feminist" or even anti-feminist.

The conflicting perspectives on women's roles affected the ways some Ghanaian women behaved.

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275 Greenstreet, "Social Change and Ghanaian Women," 352; Oppong and Abu, Seven Roles of Women 32.
276 Oppong, Marriage among a Matrilineal Elite, 34.
An educated woman who did not want to be stereotyped as “feminist” or to otherwise jeopardize her marriage due to her “feminist inclinations” did not boast of educational achievement at home. Yet educated husbands wanted to be treated as if they were special. That meant according them great respect, obeying their instructions and taking direction and inspiration from them, performing much (if not all) of the physical labour, and planning and organizing the housework. Naomi believed that she had as many rights as her husband. She risked negative stereotyping and eventually lost her marriage because she fought her husband’s oppression. Naomi’s attitude depicted the power of education to influence gender roles, thus supporting the popular observation that an individual’s class position affects the ways they experience gender relations.

Naomi was a full-time student during the day and a janitor at night. When she was in school, she had her books to occupy her. At home, she had a disgruntled husband to deal with. In between there was her baby with whom she had little time. Worried about the situation she took more courses so that she could graduate earlier. She took two and a half years to complete the undergraduate program, saving six months and at the end of it she was exhausted.

Naomi was not sure what work she could get with her history degree. She had a loan to pay off and a daughter to raise. She reasoned that with her degree, she could enter a professional program. She tried getting into teaching but changed her mind. She cherished the dream of becoming a lawyer. But then friends questioned her decision to go to law school. They convinced her that she would not get clients after training. Her own experience had taught her that higher education for Black immigrant women in Canada did not guarantee job offers. She had met other highly educated people, both Asian and white, who

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277 See “Serwaa” below.
278 Interview with Naomi.
were not working in their area of expertise. One participant told me that she was
discouraged from pursuing a master’s program in business administration because she was
told that she would not get hired. Naomi made a third choice. She decided to go for a
master’s degree.

In the fall of 1980, she enrolled at the University of Windsor. By that time she had
realized that she could expect very little support from her husband. Fortunately, she got a
teaching assistant’s position. Her daughter had started grade school, and required babysitting
after school hours. She did not need a live-in nanny then. Naomi indicated that the ability to
learn was not a problem. She was a competent student. A major obstacle was getting her
husband to be partly responsible for her education. He did not have to pay for her tuition,
because she secured a government loan, but he could have helped with child-care so that she
could have some time to study. Several other women participants in this study shared this
concern. They noted that child-care became their sole responsibility and it interfered with
study. However, all male participants believed that they greatly helped their wives in their
educational pursuits. This illustrates a glaring discrepancy in perspective. The men believed
that helping in their wives’ educational pursuits should be limited to issues that were directly
related to the process. Child-care, in their estimation, was not part of those issues. The men’s
efforts included driving the women to and from school and, when necessary, giving them a
commuting allowance.

Naomi completed the master’s program in two years and started work soon
afterwards. She has worked in both private and public organizations since graduating.
Currently she runs her own business and is a successful and highly respected woman in both
the Ghanaian and African communities in Toronto.

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279 Interview with Mercy at her office, June 10, 1998.
280 Interview with Naomi.
**Edna: I needed more than ESL...**

In 1976, Edna and her husband entered Canada as independent applicants. Although both Edna and her husband entered together as independent applicants, it was on the strength of her husband’s qualification as a machinist that they were admitted. Unlike her husband, she was not listed as destined for the labour market. Her situation was an ambiguous one and she was left as a “dependent” independent. As Roxana Ng has argued, “the official view of the immigrant family... is that of one ‘independent’ member on whom others depend for their sponsorship, livelihood, and welfare.” Thus, whether Edna had skills or not was important for her legal status. Her sex determined how she was designated within the family unit. She and her husband had lived in Germany for a number of years before they came to Canada. She was in her early twenties and had no children. Her educational background was the equivalent of grade nine. She knew enough English to carry on simple conversation. Her stay in Germany had familiarized her with amenities and services that some immigrants find difficulty accessing. She indicated that:

*I did not have problems fitting in [in Canada] and I had several options open to me. I could go to school, start a family or join the labour force, although technically my husband was the one who could work.*

Edna chose to work soon after arrival. She revealed a reason cited by many immigrants:

*I had to work because you came here for a reason. At home, once you travel, the expectation is that you have to bring something home. So you have to work, and you take whatever is available.*

That “back home” expectation did not consider the legal status of immigrant women and its implications in relation to their ability to work.

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281 Roxana Ng, “Managing Female Immigration: A Case of Institutional Sexism and Racism,” *Canadian Woman Studies* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1992), 21.
282 Interview with Edna at her office in Scarborough on December 1, 1998.
283 Interview with Edna.
Women who were listed as not destined for the labour market faced a dilemma: they had to work to satisfy a need in the new society or an expectation at home, yet immigration policy and other social controls restricted them from taking paid labour. Whether as single parents or members of extended families in Canada and Ghana, most Ghanaian women were financially responsible for their families. Among the Akan, for example, matrilineal descent placed women in positions of responsibility that might not pertain to women in other groups. Yet, their relative lack of education\textsuperscript{284} placed them in tough financial situations that were exacerbated by socio-political conditions that forced them to migrate. Therefore, the expectation to acquire the resources to cater to the needs of extended family members may be greater for Akan women than for others. As immigrants, Akan women may not return to Ghana to enjoy the fruits of their labour but they still relieve other family members, especially mothers and children, from the vicious cycle of poverty. One woman narrated:

\textit{Being in Canada masks some of the concerns that I have to deal with as a woman. The issue of inheritance that once scared me is no longer a problem. My children are here and I don't have to think about that. We [she and her husband] have a house in Accra that we jointly own, but I intend to have one in my village in case of any problems in future. Not that I can't stay in our house when I go to Ghana, I want to secure myself very well. Besides, my sisters and their children look up to me for support. If I have my own house they can rent out some of the rooms and use the money. My husband may help to put that one up, but it's going to be mine and I will bear the greater responsibility.}\textsuperscript{285}

Women from other ethnic groups may face similar problems but they tend to pool resources with their husbands in the interest of their children. An Ewe woman provided a different perspective:

\textit{Whether we live here or go back to Ghana, the children belong to his family. So when we put our resources together, we do so in the interest of the children. If my}

\textsuperscript{284} Oppong and Abu, \textit{Seven Roles of Women}, 20-22.
\textsuperscript{285} Interview with Esi in North York on July 26, 1998.
"husband dies today, his children inherit his property and I'm still in there, if you know what I mean." 286

Money that women sent home built a family house, started a trading business, or paid children’s school fees. For many, the solution was to take whatever work was available. Ghanaian immigrant women’s decision to work amid the competing claims of skills and immigration status should be understood from this perspective.

Edna had a greater need to work. Skilled or not, language or not, destined or not for the labour market, she was eager to work to get material things to send home. She got a job in a plastic factory as a general labourer, a phenomenon which has been extensively researched. 287 Most research on immigrant women suggests that language difficulty and discrimination based on the non-recognition of prior educational achievement are some of the major causes of immigrant women’s concentration in low paying, menial jobs. Edna did not appear to have problems with language but she did not have skills that could have fetched her better employment. Faced with such a situation, she was ready to take any available jobs.

Apart from considerations of work, Edna had to satisfy an expectation as a wife. That meant working to supplement her machinist husband’s income, cooking, cleaning and washing, as well as raising children. Child bearing was important not only for many Ghanaian immigrant women but also for their families in Ghana. One woman reminisced:

I was very excited when I got pregnant with my first child. I could not wait to have her and then go to Ghana and show her to the family. She was my first Canadian-born child and I felt the family had to see her.” 288

286 Interview with Florence in Mississauga on August 28, 1998.
288 Interview with Agnes in Scarborough on November 5, 1998.
Edna’s perspective on Ghanaian children who have Canadian citizenship has important implications for second generation immigrants. Families left in Ghana feel proud that they can count Canadian citizens among them. Further research could determine how second generation Ghanaian immigrants identify themselves and what they think their links to Ghana should be.

Edna had a lot of choices to make. Between 1976 and 1978, she worked as a homemaker and a factory hand. Work did not give her financial independence, especially when her husband demanded she hand him her meagre pay. Her refusal led to a pattern of emotional and physical abuse. Her husband would refuse to talk to her for several days and when he did it was to insult her. They quarrelled so much that friends refused to mediate. Many women I interviewed indicated that they had problems with husbands over their pay. Some were physically abused. One participant reported that within three months of her arrival, her husband had beaten her five times, and she had called “elders” and other family friends eight times for help. She explained that community settlement of marital problems was unfair to women. The arbitrators, who were mostly men, applied their own notions of acceptable wifely conduct. Her situation was further complicated by the fact that her husband sponsored her. She added:

*I always left arbitration feeling more vulnerable than previously. My husband’s claims were bolstered because he was made to believe that I was at fault. There was no reason why a woman should not comply to her husband’s wishes. He was strengthened to make more demands.*

Eventually Edna would divorce her husband and remarry but she refused to have joint savings with her second husband. Similarly, seven (35%) of the participants strongly opposed having joint accounts with husbands.

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289 Interview with Lucy at her residence in Etobicoke on July 6, 1998.
Others resented husbands' close monitoring of how they spent their incomes, especially when they bought personal effects like clothing. When they spent on their children, the men were not as critical. Indeed, one of the women stated:

*I cannot see a reason why a Ghanaian woman should have joint savings with her husband. If he brings home three thousand dollars a month and you bring a thousand, be content with yours and don't try to pull resources together. He will go to Ghana and marry another woman or build a house for his family. Joint savings are foreign to Ghanaians and they should remain so.*

Only two women (10%) held joint savings with their husbands and both were content with its management.

The men, however, believed that once they sponsored women, they had control over them. Almost all of the men who participated in the study preferred joint savings to individual accounts and yet only four out of the ten men held joint accounts with their wives. The others believed it was necessary to control their wives' incomes even when they held separate accounts. However, they would not subject their incomes to similar scrutiny by their wives.

During her first marriage, though, Edna neither believed in joint savings, nor did she allow her husband to control her income. The situation worked well for her for as long as she worked. The arrival of her first child in 1978 created problems. Unable to work, she became fully dependent on her husband for all her financial needs. As she described the situation,

*The time I had our baby was pay back time. My husband would not support me financially because I had not shared my money with him when I worked. He behaved as if having the baby was a singular responsibility.*

When she could no longer cope with the situation, Edna filed for divorce in 1980, only four years after she immigrated. She found herself at a crossroad. She could seek

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290 Interview with Mercy.
291 Interview with Edna.
social assistance or find work. There was an economic slump at the beginning of the 1980s so finding work that could support her and her child was difficult. She noted:

*Social assistance took away the will in the individual to do things for themselves. I needed the money, but that could have held me down since there would have been little incentive for me to go out there and do things for myself.*

She took high school courses to prepare for further training. Edna recognized that she could not hope to find a better job without proper training. Her status as an immigrant woman limited her chances. There were language programs but these were for people who could not speak English very well or at all. She did not need ESL. She explained:

*I didn’t need ESL because I didn’t have problems with English. The other CEIC training programs were mainly sex-typed, focusing on career skills such as welding, joinery and carpentry. Those were not programs I wanted to get into. I was looking for something higher, an academic program, and I wasn’t going to get it from the available programs.*

In the late 1970s when Edna made this decision, the women’s movement in Canada was calling for women’s entry into the skilled trades. Edna would not pursue any of those programs because she wanted something different. She had also carried over sex typing of work from Ghana where skilled trades such as carpentry or welding were seen as men’s jobs. Women generally did not engage in those trades. Among the Akan, for instance, women who ventured into such spheres were masculinized, depicted in descriptions such as *obaa kokonini* (literally woman-rooster) or *obaa barima* (woman-man), both designations intended to keep the women in check. When Edna rejected CEIC skills training programs, she was no doubt being influenced by such cultural mores.

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292 Interview with Edna.
293 Interview with Edna.
She also had to work to support herself and her son since she could not obtain loans to go to high school. Consequently, she worked full-time in a factory and went to night school. Describing a typical day, Edna told me that she would wake her three-year old up at 5 a.m. and take him to the babysitter's so that she could get ready to start work at 7 a.m. At 4:30 p.m. she was back at home not picking up her son because she then went to school. By the time she returned he would be sleeping which was her time to do assignments and make food for the next day all before going to bed. She sometimes wondered whether her son knew her and worried that she would be alienated from him. She sent the boy to Ghana to be cared for by her mother. This was the hardest thing that Edna ever did but she took solace from the fact that he was with his family. Changing babysitters constantly in Canada, the boy could not adjust. Having sent her son to Ghana, Edna then had time to concentrate on her studies. She took as many high school courses as possible, attending classes in the evenings and working during the day. In 1984, at almost thirty years of age, Edna started at the University of Toronto.

The road to university was not easy. The night school she attended did not address issues such as funding and program selection. She relied on informal sources, notably the suggestions of one tutor who recognized her potential and advised her to pursue a university education. Getting information about post-secondary education and sources of funding was especially critical for immigrant women. At a workshop organized for immigrant women at Centennial College in Scarborough in 1981, women identified lack of information as a major hindrance to their pursuance of higher education. The absence of an information bureau to advise them on educational opportunities hindered their chances of pursuing

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higher education. It was largely through the efforts of her tutor that Edna succeeded at this stage. Long after she had entered university, the tutor continued to be her mentor.

The excitement of gaining admission into University of Toronto soon subsided, as Edna became aware of her "disabilities" as an older Black woman with an "accent." Night school was different because most of the students were immigrants with "accents." The university was a predominantly white institution and an accent immediately identified one as different, "the other." She noted:

If you consider the percentage of Black students at the University of Toronto in the late 1990s, then you can imagine what the situation was like at the beginning of the 1980s. The percentage of Black students was small but diverse and it was not easy to forge friendships.296

Edna was not the only Black woman to find university cold. In her thesis on the education and activism of Black women in Canada, Marcia Wharton-Zaretsky describes Keren Brathwaite's frustration at the under-representation and marginalization of Blacks in Canadian higher institutions.297 Brathwaite's feeling of marginalization and powerlessness finally led to the establishment of the Transitional Year Program (TYP) at the University of Toronto as an avenue to empower Black youth.298 Although the program was firmly established by the time Edna entered university, it had been appropriated and incorporated into the university system and was no longer serving an exclusively Black (and other minority) student population.

Initially, Edna found it difficult making friends. She felt that few white students wanted to be friends with her. Furthermore, she felt she had a secret to guard: she was not just a Black student, she was also a mother. She said:

296 Interview with Edna.
298 Ibid., 213-214.
I did not know how students would react if they knew. I was hesitant to make friends for fear they would find out about me. And I was not even sure if any of the white students wanted to be my friend.\footnote{Interview with Edna.}

Edna became isolated. She was shy and did not have the confidence to express herself. She feared that she might say something inappropriate, risking ridicule. Edna did not know where to turn for either companionship or help and even when she knew, she did not always have the courage to do so. Edna recalled how she felt cheated in her marks in a sociology course but felt powerless to approach the teaching assistant. She explained:

I had been very quiet up until that time and I found it even more difficult going to this teaching assistant who had the habit of always reinterpreting whatever I said. I didn’t think I was prepared to confront him.\footnote{Interview with Edna.}

Her professors knew her as a quiet Black woman. She wondered if others knew her at all since classes were large and she was reserved. She thought her colour undermined her confidence to do things on her own. Gradually she understood that skin colour could open and close doors. Edna graduated in 1987 with honours, worked a year and went on to graduate school. Commenting on graduate school, she remarked:

By the time I enrolled in the master’s program I had come to understand a lot about Canadian society. I knew that skin colour racism was a problem that I could not change but I knew that I could change my circumstance through education. And that was what I was there for.\footnote{Interview with Edna.}

At the time of my interview with her, Edna had a master’s degree and was working with a reputable firm. Reminiscing on her days at the university, she noted that one thing that she did not have to worry about was child-care. Her ex-husband had collected their son from Ghana in 1985 and the two of them lived in Vancouver.
After graduation her son came to live with her and her mother came from Ghana to look after him. Edna looks back and concludes that getting an education was the best thing that ever happened to her. She also credits other non-formal ways of getting adjusted to Canadian society. For example, ethnic associations played important roles when she was virtually alone (ethnic associations and churches are discussed in chapter 5).

Asantewaa: I had to start from scratch…

Unlike the two women above, Asantewaa arrived in Canada at nineteen with very limited skills. She came in 1988 as a “refugee” to join her husband who was a laboratory technician fifteen years her senior. She could neither speak nor write English. The decision to learn ESL was basically her husband’s; she agreed because it was essential for her to know English to be able to function in Canadian society. Before she could start she got pregnant and developed complications. She recalled:

My husband didn’t want me to talk to anybody. He even asked me not to look up when I was on a bus. He said many Ghanaian men had divorced their wives because the women had bad friends who influenced them negatively. Since I didn’t speak English and he wouldn’t allow me to have Ghanaian friends, I totally depended on him to do everything. Sometimes he tried to tell me what was wrong with the pregnancy based on what his mother told him about pregnant women.

Asantewaa had to wait for school until after the baby was born. She said:

I matured beyond my years after I had the baby. I breast-fed her, bathed her, and washed her clothing before it was 7 a.m. Then I would have time to have my bath and breakfast and do odd jobs in the house. By the time my husband returned from work dinner would be cooking and then he would take over. If I were in Ghana, somebody else would do those chores except breast-feeding. But here was I, alone and stressed out with no one to turn to.

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302 Interview with Asantewaa in Downsview on July 17, 1998.
303 Interview with Asantewaa.
Asantewaa started ESL classes when the baby was three months old. With child-care facilities on site Asantewaa was able to study continuously for nearly six months. Then in February, 1990, she was upgraded to grade 9 at the age of twenty. Commenting on her age and relations with fellow students, she remarked simply, “when you are twenty and in grade nine you don’t tell your friends a lot about yourself.” She continued on to grade 11 before dropping out.

Several factors accounted for dropping out of school. First, she had become confident that she knew enough. She noted that:

I didn’t need assistance to fill an application form. I didn’t need my husband to tell me what to do or how to do things. I had passed the stage when he thought and spoke for me. I felt I had become me once again.

Second, she quit high school out of necessity. Since students do not pay for high school tuition, they cannot get public funding. They must rely on personal resources to go to school. Asantewaa had only her husband to financially support her high school education. Unlike other students who could take part-time jobs, Asantewaa was also a mother and a wife. She observed:

Juggling my roles within those identities was difficult enough. To have taken a part time job would have meant doing four jobs concurrently. It would have been more than I could have handled.

It was necessary for Asantewaa to work, as the family could not survive on her husband’s income. She was also fearful that her husband would lose his job, especially given the economy at the time. It was important for her to find a job to both supplement the family income and serve as security in case her husband lost his. Thus, as Ng and Ramirez

304 Interview with Asantewaa.
305 Interview with Asantewaa.
306 Interview with Asantewaa.
have observed, immigrant women become a "buffer" between their husbands' earning power and maintenance of the family.\footnote{Ng and Ramirez, \textit{Immigrant Housewives in Canada}, 45.} Asantewaa:

\begin{quote}
When you have a child, and you see others wearing beautiful things which you cannot afford to buy, and when your mother in Ghana asks you to send her money and you don't have it, and you live in a family where only one person brings in an income, it is difficult to stay in school.\footnote{Interview with Asantewaa.}
\end{quote}

The plan was short-lived. Within three months of getting a job in a car parts factory, she was laid off because she did not have appropriate skills. Her ability to speak English was a basic requirement to carry out other functions in Canadian society. However, it was not the deciding factor in acquiring a good job. Asantewaa had come full circle. She needed to decide whether to find another job or continue her education. A job would mean the constant threat of layoff; going back to school meant being totally dependent on her husband financially. Her solution was:

\begin{quote}
Better for me to depend on my husband and get an education than go to work and get minimum wage. Education would give me greater options in what I want to do. If I don't find something better to do he would think I'm being a drag on him.\footnote{Interview with Asantewaa.}
\end{quote}

Asantewaa's idea of dependency was as different from Edna's as was her situation. Both of them had the similar objective of having control over their lives. Edna believed being on social assistance would kill her urge to work. Asantewaa thought she should depend on her husband so eventually she could do things for herself. These different ways of interpreting dependency are important in assessing the strategies that Ghanaian women adopted in negotiating their lives in Canadian society. Education held out the possibility of independence whether things went wrong in the marriages or not. Asantewaa decided to continue with her education but did not know where to go to seek

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{Ng and Ramirez, \textit{Immigrant Housewives in Canada}, 45.}
\footnote{Interview with Asantewaa.}
\footnote{Interview with Asantewaa.}
\end{footnotesize}
advice or information. She had heard of employment centres but did not need employment counselling. She wanted to go back to school and she needed advice. She was aware that going back to high school would involve the same problems that caused her to drop out the first time. So, instead of continuing on to grade twelve, she decided to go to college where she could avoid the high school situation and receive government financial assistance. She intended to kill two birds with one stone.

Asantewaa was particularly attracted by media advertisements, especially those shown on television, depicting very successful individuals who got their training with little or no prior knowledge in their areas of current expertise. The images were powerful and attractive, and it did not take Asantewaa long to decide to go to DeVry Polytechnic to pursue a course in computer programming. During my interview with Asantewaa, she commented on making a bad choice by going to DeVry; she noted that:

I knew a Ghanaian man who was a student at DeVry [Polytechnic] who told me the programs were okay. The mistake I made was not ascertaining his educational background before entering college. When he said it was okay, I assumed it was okay so I went to write the entrance exam with my grade 11 qualification. When I passed well, I was convinced that I could pursue their programs. And that is where I feel in my heart that I was somewhat deceived. When I went to class, all the others had some knowledge about computers while I knew very little. They should have given me some information, but that didn't happen. So when I started, I could not compete with the others at all.

Asantewaa realized she needed help and she wished she could stay in school after classes to get assistance from her friends. But as she stated,

My husband would not allow me to hang out with people he did know or may not approve of. And he did not have knowledge in computers to help me with my work. I was thus faced with a dilemma: stay in school, get help and come home to meet an angry husband or come straight home after class and continue to flunk.

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310 Interview with Asantewaa.
311 Interview with Asantewaa.
Some of the women expressed having met with similar problems. One of them recalled:

*If my husband had been reasonable I would have gone on to the Registered Practical Nurses program instead of contending with a health-care aid certificate. He wanted me to be home when he returned from work so that I would serve him.*

A male participant observed that after a hard day’s work, a man would want to come home to his wife busily preparing for him. Staying in school after classes was an excuse by women to refuse to serve their husbands. Thus, it was not women’s education per se that was the problem. It was the sense of the loss of control and the challenge to their masculinity that disturbed the men. It was, to quote Judith Bennett, women’s challenge to “patriarchal equilibrium” that threatened Ghanaian men. Asantewaa attended DeVry for one semester and dropped out. She could not cope with the competition, and her husband wanted her to work. She recalled:

*The pressure was unbearable. I was constantly thinking of my poor performance at school, of my husband’s threats regarding divorce if I continued to ignore his advice, and of my needs as a woman. I wanted to avoid the stigma of being charged as an opportunist and yet I secretly hoped that he would leave me alone to complete the course.*

For the second time in less that two years Asantewaa dropped out and went back to work in a factory, this time working on computers so that she could somehow be connected to her unrealized dream. Working with people who had completed computer programs motivated Asantewaa to go back to college once more. She said: “I wanted the prestige that went with higher education, even if I would not get work that matched my expertise.” Asantewaa registered at Seneca College in 1994 and was placed in grade 10

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312 Interview with Margaret in Downsview on July 9, 1998.
313 Interview with Kofi Mensah.
314 Judith Bennett, “Confronting Continuity,” 83.
315 Interview with Asantewaa.
316 Interview with Asantewaa.
so that she could keep up with the rest. By that time her husband "was fed up with these little attempts at school that produced no results."³¹⁷ He would not support her. She was so frustrated she did not go to Seneca College. The desire to go to college gradually faded as she lost her motivation. When I asked her whether she would go to school again if she had the opportunity, she said:

_I may be able to speak well, but my writing has not improved since DeVry. The background with which I entered that place is the same that I have now. I can't go back to high school to refresh myself and I don't think I'm college material. If I have to go to school again, then it would be in some program to which I won't be fully committed because my heart would not be in it. Or else I could enrol in a Language Instruction for Newcomers program. And that is what I call stepping back in time._³¹⁸

Asantewaa’s facial expression and tone depicted her frustration and deep sense of personal failure. She was still working in a factory at the time of my interview with her. She had been in Canada for ten years and was a thirty-year old single mother. Asantewaa believed that she was a failure, despite the fact that she had acquired material things that would give her status in Ghana.

**Serwaa: I wanted to work in my area of Expertise…**

When Serwaa came to Canada in early 1986 at thirty, she had completed Form Five (the equivalent of grade 11), and had worked as a clerk in a securities firm in Ghana. She had three children aged five to nine years still in Ghana. Like many Ghanaian immigrants, she entered Canada via England. She had already spent six weeks in Holland and one year in England waiting for the “connection” to go through. Like Edna, Serwaa had already been exposed to some of the infrastructure that poses problems to many new immigrants.

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³¹⁷ Interview with Asantewaa.
³¹⁸ Interview with Asantewaa.
Again like many new immigrants with family already established in Canada, she did not have to seek housing. Her husband had a place ready for her. Although Serwaa did not have to deal with some problems initially, there was a distressing situation that confronted her.

Many Ghanaian immigrants relied on gossip for much of the information they needed about Canadian society. The telephone, often unavailable in Ghana, bolstered the gossip factor here. Although Serwaa had married under ordinance\(^{\text{319}}\) in Ghana, friends told her that she had to marry her husband again in Canada within three months of her arrival. Failure to do so would result in her repatriation. Serwaa:

\[\text{They told me that the only way I could continue living in Canada was to remarry my husband. A wedding would legitimate the relationship and would be the basis for sponsorship. I had a marriage certificate but I was told it was not valid in Canada.}^{\text{320}}\]

Within the first month of her arrival, "remarriage" became her major preoccupation. Then she tried to find a job.

In 1986, the economy was once again recovering from a recession and the job market was not good. Workers who had lost their jobs, as well as an influx of immigrants, flooded the market. Under such conditions, education and experience meant less. Serwaa's ambition had been to work as an executive secretary in Canada. She could not get work even as a clerk (work she considered as her area of expertise). Rather she worked as a sorter in a clothing chain. The pay was low and the job was not stimulating. She noted:

\[\text{I needed the money, especially with three children in Ghana who we had to remit constantly. But I did not require specialized skills to tell a damaged dress from a}\]

\(^{\text{319}}\) Ordinance marriage contrasts with traditional marriage and involves either marrying in church or in court according to English law (in recent years the laws have been modified to conform to Ghanaian laws on marriage). The woman takes her husband's name. Upon the husband's death the wife and children take one half of the man's movable property. See Christine Oppong, \textit{Marriage among a Matrilineal Elite} (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 42-51.

\(^{\text{320}}\) Interview with Serwaa in Weston on June 24, 1998.
Dissatisfied, Serwaa left for another job, this time in the food industry, packing cooked food into containers to be served on a Canadian airline’s international flights. Once again, she could not imagine prospects better than she had. Most of her co-workers were older women, some of whom could not speak English very well. She worried that she was going to be stuck in such situations.

Many Ghanaians she talked with concerning job opportunities convinced her that she could not work as a secretary because of her colour, accent, and her lack of Canadian experience. One of the women told me that when she arrived in Canada she heard stories about non-recognition of credentials. She explained:

*I went to Emery Collegiate to have my qualification assessed. They told me they would award me a diploma only if I took a three-month English language course since English is not my mother tongue. I did and was given thirty-four instead of thirty-two credits. I was awarded the Ontario School Diploma Certificate and with that I could teach in grade school.*

The gleam in her eyes as she told her story reflected one who was very proud of the positive assessment she got. Yet that woman trained as a teacher and taught for several years before migrating to Canada. Although her qualification and experience were recognized, she had an accent that she had to work on. And that took three months, at the end of which she could not discern any perceptible changes in her tone. Thus Rosina Lippi-Green has charged that “there is something deeply inequitable and unacceptable about the practice of excluding the few from the privileges of the many on the basis not of what they have to say, but of how they say it.” Ultimately, the woman stopped pursuing a teaching career since she

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321 Interview with Serwaa.
322 Interview with Sylvia at her residence in North York on July 6, 1998.
believed that her accent would be a major hindrance. Discrimination eroded her confidence and a belief in her worth, all aspects of strategies that held immigrants down in their place.

Serwaa’s husband in particular was convinced that these were the reasons. He had been an accountant in Ghana but he did not get work in his field because he did not have Canadian experience. As such he believed that Serwaa’s work experience in Ghana as a clerk would not amount to anything more in Canada. In short, her previous education and work experience were perceived as irrelevant in Canada.

Serwaa believed that she could reach her goal only by undergoing some kind of training. Her desire to become an executive secretary was backed by a strong conviction that she had the ability to train to become one. However, she did not know how to get information, having always relied on her husband and friends to tell her about Canadian society. Indeed, most sponsored immigrants rely on sponsors to get things done. Serwaa noted in an interview:

For me my husband was an authority on Canada. What he said was what I believed because he was here earlier than I did and knew Canadian society better than I did. When he said I could not be employed because I did not have Canadian experience, I believed what he said.324

Without professional certification, Serwaa could not find clerical or other office work. She noticed advertisements that promised chances of better jobs within a short time. She applied to a four-month banking course. “The decision to pursue that program,” she explained, “was due to the frustration and dissatisfaction with the jobs that I held until that time. I was confident I could do better than that.”325 After she completed this course Serwaa became convinced that she could pursue any program on which she set her mind. More importantly, her husband was very supportive, paying her school expenses. At that time her

324 Interview with Serwaa.
325 Interview with Serwaa.
children had not yet arrived from Ghana and she had few responsibilities. She got a job as a bank clerk in a Toronto bank.

Two years later, Serwaa was contemplating going back to school. She was still not the secretary she had always wanted to be, although she believed that there was more dignity in her job compared to those that some immigrant women had. Working as a customer service representative exposed Serwaa to diverse types of people and new ideas. Friends and family admired her and often complimented her for taking a bold step, although she was not very happy at her workplace. As a customer service representative and not a frontline worker, she thought that she did not require skills such as typing to be able to perform her job efficiently. In the beginning, she sought assistance with typing whenever she needed it. Her co-workers began to wonder if she was qualified to do the work. Although her confidence and expertise increased as time went by, she noticed that one Black woman made life at the bank very difficult for her. She was both angered and saddened by this. She observed:

*When a white person discriminates against you, he or she does so on the basis of difference. On what basis should a Black woman discriminate against a fellow Black woman? I don’t think it was on the basis of class, because we were both doing the same kind of job.* 326

Serwaa perceived difference within the framework of the colour bar. Her understanding of race was limited to the Black/white divide that did not account for other non-Black and non-white relationships, and other forms of racism. She explained:

*Because of the racism in Canadian society I thought that Black people would be the first to bond regardless of their background. I did not expect a fellow Black, and especially a woman, to treat me with disrespect.* 327

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326 Interview with Serwaa.
327 Interview with Serwaa.
Although racism based on skin colour is pervasive it is by no means the only grounds for people to suffer injustice based on difference. Stasiulis, for instance, has noted that reducing racism to skin colour leaves out situations between non-Black and non-white minority women.\(^{328}\) She states:

> The arguments most commonly expounded by Black feminism and taken up by Canadian feminists...have the effect of linking racism to skin colour, rather than to the structural location of particular groups of women in concrete and historically specific social relations and to the accompanying discourses that aid in the processes of denigration, subordination, and exploitation.\(^{329}\)

Serwaa also realized that there was very little possibility for advancement. Combined incomes supported she and her husband comfortably. However, they wanted to bring their three children from Ghana. She had to find a better paying job, or else “do double”, as some Ghanaian immigrants put it when they have two jobs. Serwaa went to community colleges to find out about programs, funding, and child-care. She had another baby in the spring of 1989, and her three children, then aged eight to twelve years, arrived. In September, at age thirty-three, nursing a four-month old, Serwaa began a one-year secretarial course at Humber College in Etobicoke.

Initially, funding was not a problem. However, the amount of the Ontario Students Assistance Plan (OSAP) she could get was calculated on the basis of her husband’s income. As a result, she got a small percentage of what unmarried students without an income received. Consequently, she worked part-time to supplement the loan. She also faced problems with child-care. There was no child-care facility at the site where she was enrolled. In some instances she could have left the twelve-year-old to care for the two younger ones after school. However, they had been in Canada only a few months and needed adult

\(^{328}\) Ibid.; see also Anthias and Yuval-Davis, Contextualizing Feminism,” 68.

\(^{329}\) Stasiulis, “Theorizing Connections,” 292.
supervision. Faced with these difficulties, she decided to have two baby sitters and applied to sponsor her younger sister for the job.

Serwaa had other problems to contend with at school. She still had not mastered keyboarding which was essential in her program. Determined not to drop out, she enrolled in a part-time typing class at an extra cost not covered by OSAP. She bought a typewriter and borrowed books from one of her tutors with which she practised. Like the other women described in this chapter, Serwaa was effectively doing four jobs: she was a mother and wife, both a full- and part-time student, and a worker. Explaining how she coped under these strenuous conditions, Serwaa said:

*I did not take my homework home. I stayed in school whenever there was work to do so that I would have time for the kids and help with their homework in the evenings. I encountered difficulty when homework clashed with typing class. But that was for a short while only, because soon I could type about sixty words per minute and didn't have to go for extra classes. Needless to say, I led a very hectic life for the duration of my program.*

In addition, Serwaa and her husband had a part-time janitorial job. With four children and other financial responsibilities (such as her sister's sponsorship), the family needed more money. Janitorial work seemed a good option because it was unsupervised and the hours were flexible. While her husband was at his regular work, she would feed, bathe and help the children with homework. Sometimes she fell asleep with them. Five nights a week, from 2 to 5:30 a.m., she and her husband left the children alone in the house and went to work. She was disturbed that they left the children alone at night. She only hoped that nothing would happen in their absence.

When they got home, her husband would bathe as she prepared breakfast. He ate and went to sleep because as Serwaa put it, "he worked in the afternoon and needed some sleep.

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330 Interview with Serwaa.
She could not get the sleep she needed. Serwaa got the boys ready for school, took the young one to the baby sitter, cleaned up and so on before going to school. She did not use the car because it meant picking up her husband from work at midnight. She went to school by bus.

On an average day, Serwaa had about four hours sleep. Apart from the paid janitorial work, her husband did little with the family. Child-care and housekeeping were her responsibility. Serwaa appeared to “understand” his attitude. She mused:

*You know a typical (educated) Ghanaian man. He would not do any kind of housework, and that included doing things for his children. Sometimes I asked him to lend a hand, but I could not ask all the time. I thought he would catch on.*

It was amazing how she could combine her numerous responsibilities. She admitted to me that she was oblivious to any dynamics at play in school. The important thing was for her to try to get what she was learning. It was essential for her to get an education. She did not know whether there was racism or gender discrimination at school. She said, “if it happened, I was not aware. I had so much to think about that sometimes I forgot what I was thinking.”

She was relieved when the sponsorship of her younger sister went through. Her sister kept house and babysat while the couple was out doing their janitorial job. Serwaa had more time for her studies. In August 1990, she graduated from Humber College with a secretarial diploma. She achieved her dream when she was employed as the personal secretary to a manager in a large organization in 1996.

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331 Interview with Serwaa.
332 Interview with Serwaa.
333 Interview with Serwaa.
She indicated to me that she did not intend to work in that capacity permanently. She had plans of going back to school. She wanted to go to the university to pursue a degree in languages. Her intention is to become an English-French bilingual secretary. She summarized her goals:

My education has been a big sacrifice not only for me, but also for everybody around me. My son missed kindergarten. My sister missed an early opportunity to go to school. My husband, an accountant by day, was a janitor at night. Now I have a good job and I’m happy. But I think I can widen my horizon. Who knows, if I become a bilingual secretary, I may end up with an international appointment and we will all be happier.334

Serwaa’s quest to become a bilingual secretary may not be as challenging as obtaining her first diploma. Her children are grown up and do not require child-care. She is more focused and has a clearer idea about what she wants to do and how to do it. All she requires is a spot on the admission list of her chosen university.

The four stories presented above are perhaps not atypical. However, they raise some analytical and practical questions that point to larger issues and themes in both feminist and immigration literature, thus offering another perspective for re-examining the lives of immigrant women in Canada. These themes, including the family and transformation in women’s work, follow subsequently.

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334 Interview with Serwaa.
INTRODUCTION

In chapter three I examined the range of educational programs that were available to immigrants and those specifically for immigrant women. I emphasized that language training was (still is) a very important component of immigrant education and concluded that official programs that prepare immigrants for the job market better serve immigrant men more than they do immigrant women. Chapter four focused on Ghanaian women's own efforts to educate themselves and highlighted some of the difficulties they encountered in the process. In this chapter, I examine the efforts both Ghanaians and the larger African community made to provide education for themselves. I focus on Ghanaian cultural associations and religious groups as well as African settlement organizations and the effects they had on Ghanaian women. I point out that the masculine and particularistic character of Ghanaian cultural associations and dwindling government financial assistance offered to the larger African organizations limited their potential to offer meaningful training to Ghanaian women. In other words, both internal and external barriers limited the extent to which the Ghanaian community could offer educational opportunities to its members.

The formation of associations among Ghanaians in Canada was not a new phenomenon that arose out of being immigrants. In Ghana, people formed associations on the basis of class, ethnicity, geographical location, religion and gender. Ghana is multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic\(^{335}\) and when people with similar affiliations found themselves in

the minority, they usually formed associations to reflect their identity. Among the Akan, for example, one word ohohoo describes both a visitor and a stranger (or an alien). One can become a stranger simply by travelling from one point to the other within the same locality or ethnic enclave. An individual’s status as a stranger becomes pronounced when he or she settles in a different region or among another ethnic group.

It was common practice in Ghana for “strangers” to band together in order to form mutual benefit associations. The most common of such associations were organized on the basis of town or village affiliation, and they flourished in cities and other large towns. One feature of these associations was that a “stranger” who was firmly established in one town could join that town’s association in another. The associations provided money to members in need and supported local development projects, while simultaneously maintaining a sense of community in foreign settings. For example, when a member died or was grieving, the group sent the body home in addition to making generous financial contributions. Town and village associations were not gender specific. They were open to both sexes, although the leaders were usually men.

Apart from town-based groups, there were also gender specific associations; however, literature on these is scarce. Segregated secondary schools led in this example. They formed “old boys” and “old girls” associations in places where their numbers were large. For example, past students of Prempeh College formed the “Amanfoo” group and established a web site through which they kept in contact and pooled resources to help their alma mater. Football (soccer) clubs also had fan clubs that used to be men only although in

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recent years women have been able to join. For example, the Asante Kotoko Football club, one of Ghana’s most popular teams, has “circles” that are predominantly male.

In my research I did not come across old girls’ associations that organized like Amanfoo in Canada but women’s groups had been popular in Ghana. Among the Akan, for instance, elderly women formed singing groups, nnwomkro kuo, that performed mainly at funerals. In towns and cities, nnwomkro groups were composed of women of varying age groups. Recently women have co-opted men to help beat drums. In my town and surrounding villages spinsters and divorced women formed the asugyafoo kuo. I do not know how widespread asigyafoo groups were but they played important roles at certain times in members’ lives. Both nnwomkro and asugyafoo kuo had close connections with funerals. However, the nnwomkro group usually performed for money but also provided “entertainment” for bereaved members. Asugyafoo kuo were formed with a different philosophy. In times of bereavement, they helped members pay for expenses which would have been borne by husbands had they been married.

In towns and cities, women’s groups included professional associations such as the International Federation of Women Lawyers, Ghana (FIDA Ghana), Ghana National Association of Teachers Ladies Auxiliary (GNATLAS), Ghanaian Association of Women Entrepreneurs (GAWE), and different market women’s associations. The most popular women’s group in Ghana in recent years has been the 31st December Women’s Movement, a quasi-political movement that mobilizes women at the grassroots level to engage in self-help projects. Some women’s groups cut across ethnic lines, others class, while still more are exclusively based on ethnicity. As mutual associations, most women’s groups in Ghana

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337 Among the Akan, there is only one word that describes the state of being unmarried or divorced.
supported members in stressful situations, met to entertain themselves on special occasions, and provided a networking opportunity.

In Canada, Ghanaian immigrants organized by the same principles that governed organizations in Ghana. There have been gender, class, ethnic and religious community groups. What had been private town or clan associations in Ghana became cultural associations in Canada, some of which sought official recognition. That is, some of the cultural associations have listed with the Multiculturalism Directorate as non-profit organizations (and have turned to the Directorate on some occasions to seek financial assistance).\(^{338}\) Women’s groups, however, have not flourished in Canada. Ghanaian women have had to operate in male dominated cultural associations. The churches, however, have provided avenues, albeit limited, for women to organize and to assume leadership roles that have not been possible with cultural associations. Outside of church associations the only other women’s group that I heard of was the Hi-Society that was formed in 1993. It was not functioning at the time of writing.

The first Ghanaian organization in Canada was established in the late 1960s when a group of university students resident in Toronto formed the Ghana Union. Ghanaian immigrants who were not students could become members. Men dominated since they constituted the majority of students. Their wives became members by association. Students in other cities such as Ottawa and Vancouver followed the Toronto example. Phone calls sustained the links between members of various branches.\(^{339}\) The fact that the core members of Ghana Unions were men from academia gave the unions an exclusive class characteristic.

\(^{338}\) Constitution of the Association of Ghanaians in Toronto (AGIT), 1988, Article 11 (b).

\(^{339}\) Interview with Dr Mensah, member of the Ghana Union and later president of AGIT, April 17, 1996.
that made other Ghanaians reluctant to join. That explained the Unions' narrow base and their limited impact on other Ghanaians in Canada.

Between 1981 and 1991, there was a proliferation of Ghanaian cultural and religious associations as the number of immigrants to Canada steadily increased. The impetus to seek official recognition stemmed from the Multiculturalism Policy of 1971 that encouraged identifiable cultural groups to maintain their culture within the Canadian mosaic. The budding Ghanaian community could also have drawn inspiration from other ethno-religious and cultural associations that had a measure of political clout in provincial and federal affairs.

Long before the establishment of a Ghanaian community and indeed an African community in Toronto, some ethnic groups had already established service agencies. These agencies served identifiable ethno-cultural groups such as Jews, Italians and Ukrainians. They not only satisfied individual needs, but also gave voice to the groups, thus giving them political power. Agencies attempted to protect their members against exploitation and discrimination. Organizing within such communities was relatively easy because religious bonds often bolstered ethnic homogeneity. Networks were dense, if not multiplex. Such was the case with Jews where a common religion united people of diverse national and linguistic origins.

The situation among Ghanaian immigrants was different. Neither language nor religion was an effective organizing principle for all Ghanaians in Toronto or Canada in general. Cultural identity in Ghana is often defined by language and sometimes by geographical location, an identity that can further be delineated along religious and, to a

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limited extent, political lines. With the numerous languages and dialects among Ghanaians, coupled with belief in different religions (Christianity, Islam and Animism), there did not appear to be common ground for all Ghanaians in Toronto. The unifying element among Ghanaian immigrants was their nationality, imposed by British colonialism at the beginning of the twentieth century. "Ghanaian" is not an ethnic category. Rather, it describes the legal and political status of the people who live within the boundaries of the geopolitical area called Ghana. Hence, when it was expedient for them to do so, Ghanaians organized on the basis of their cultural or ethnic affiliation, and not on their common nationality.

Cultural diversity within the Ghanaian immigrant community raises questions about ethnic identities and how they are constructed in Canada. People are often assumed to be ethnic based on national or geographic origin, or race. The characteristics of individual immigrants or immigrant groups can define their ethnicity. The process of ethnicization is therefore a factor pertinent to the immigrant experience, one that arises out of individuals’ membership in a particular group or origin from a particular geographical area. This is especially the case with people of colour and European refugees. Common categories are Black or Asian but seldom White and occasionally European. Europeans are usually identified by their national origins as, for example, German. When there is war, identity issues become highly sensitive and European groups are usually ethnicized to “respect” their cultural or ethnic identity, as in the case of “ethnic Albanians.” In other instances, ethnicization may be a form of disrespect, such as the labelling of Poles as “Polacks.” A recent example is that of “ethnic Albanians” in the Serbian crisis. There was no mention of

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“ethnic Serbs” although Serbs and Albanians lived within the same national borders. By constructing an “ethnic Albanian” identity that had to be respected and protected, Canada was ready to grant ethnic Albanians asylum. The ethnicization of non-European groups has not followed a similar process. Rwandan refugees, for example, were not seen as Tutsis when they were granted asylum. They were simply Rwandan refugees.

The case can be made that it is more expedient to homogenize certain groups for purposes of categorization and political action. However, it is significant to point out that this process denies individuals and groups the right to define their cultural identity. Blackness, for example, can have a political as well as ideological significance.\(^3\) For instance, Blacks in the United States were de-ethnicized through slavery. The sole way of carving out an identity was for them to emphasize their Blackness. Blackness became the ideological frame of reference, the rallying point, when they suffered racism and its forms of prejudice.\(^3\) In other instances, however, Blackness could not be so invoked as, for example, in the organization of cultural groups.\(^3\)

When culture becomes an issue, Blackness alone cannot be the organizing principle. Other factors such as language, geographical location and religion come into play. This partly explains why the ability of Ghanaians abroad to unite under a single identity has been fraught with difficulties. Their Blackness has not been enough to give them an identity and define them as a people. Ghanaian immigrants have organized in Canada along ethnic,

\(^3\) Ibid., 190-191.
religious, and class lines rather than on the basis of their Blackness or even nationality.

CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS WITHIN THE GHANAIAN COMMUNITY

The first officially registered Ghanaian cultural association in Toronto was the Ashanti-Canadian Multicultural Association. In late 1982, four Ashantis who had been members of the disintegrating Ghana Union mobilized other Ashantis to form the association. Soon afterwards, other cultural associations such as the Kwahuman, Brong Ahafo, Okuapeman and the Ewe groups were formed. Some of these cultural associations were really clans, distinguishable from each other only by dialect. For instance, the Ashanti, Brong, Kwahu and Akuapem are all branches of one ethnic group, the Akan, who speak variants of Twi, the language of the Akan group. None of the Akan groups wanted to lose their identity in Canada. Similarly, other cultural and clan groups wished to keep their identity. Cultural pride thus dictated against the formation of a "pan-Ghanaian" organization. Consequently, between 1983 and 1990, over 40 Ghanaian cultural associations sprang up in Toronto. First, there were regional (the equivalent of provinces in Canada) associations and within these groups were smaller ones organized on the basis of town and village residency. In times of trouble or need, such as bereavement or financial difficulty, members contributed to assist the affected individuals. Associations formed sub-committees to deal with funerals, entertainment, and youth programs, but there was none that was specifically devoted to women.

345 Interview with Nana Freduah-Agyemang, ex Asantefohene of Toronto, April 15, 1996.
346 Interview with Nana Fredua Agyemang; Ghanaian Business Directory, 1997, 27.
347 Interview with Nana Fredua Agyemang.
An individual could belong to more than one cultural association and derive benefits from all. Associations provided some services to their members but did not present the united front needed to build a stronger community nor were they sensitive to gender issues that would have made them more attractive to women. There did not seem to be much commitment to form a larger group. Leaders of the various associations who were mostly men did not seriously consider the changed circumstance of their ethnicity, clan loyalties or gender issues. They did not consider that in Canada nationality defined individuals and groups more than tribal affiliations. Ultimately, the mushrooming of small town associations created the need for a more powerful non-partisan association that could represent all Ghanaians in official issues. As the need for a unified community took hold gender issues completely got lost in the concerns of the organizations.

It is important to note that none of the associations could represent the entire Ghanaian community on government matters. People who believed in the establishment of a “pan-Ghanaian” association, some of them members of the already defunct Ghana Union, came together in 1987 to form a consultative council that would propose ways of forming an umbrella organization. The result of the council’s deliberations was the formation of the Association of Ghanaians in Toronto (AGIT). The leaders of AGIT were men and women who had been in Canada when the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau passed the Multiculturalism Act in 1971. They understood the importance of working with provincial and municipal governments in order to create a voice for the Ghanaian community. According to the first president of the association, AGIT did not concern itself with “small” issues.

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348 Interview with the president of the Association of Ghanaians in Toronto, (AGIT) April 17, 1996.
issues such as funerals and marital disputes. In other words, AGIT did not take responsibility for the same services that the cultural associations customarily provided. By assuming that cultural associations took responsibility for some issues AGIT ended up not paying attention to women’s needs.

AGIT recognized the significance of the smaller groups but it focused on getting representation on school, health, employment, and immigration boards in order to better serve the interests of Ghanaian immigrants in Toronto. Its policy was open door: all existing cultural associations as well as individuals who did not belong to any association were welcome. It tried to be representative of all Ghanaian interests. The AGIT leadership believed that there is strength in numbers, so it tried to bring the numerous smaller associations together under a common umbrella. It was thought that the constituent parts would feel protected even as they contributed to the whole.

Building a larger inclusive Ghanaian organization without the active participation of the strong small groups was like building a house in sand. It would sink. Yet the drive to incorporate existing organizations appeared to be more rhetorical than practical. The leaders of the old cultural associations did not identify with the new organization. They did not have direct representation on the governing council of AGIT. It is not clear whether their lack of representation led to their lack of interest in AGIT or vice versa. Cultural associations continued to thrive and work independently of AGIT. Nevertheless, the leaders of AGIT did not believe in organizing only Ghanaian immigrants in Toronto.

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349 Interview with AGIT president April 17, 1996.
350 AGIT Files: Membership and Area Representatives, 1989.
351 Letter from AGIT President to Chairman of the Reorganizing Committee, September 25, 1989; Meeting between AGIT President and the Advisory Council, not dated.
They desired a national association that would represent all Ghanaians wherever they might be in Canada. In late 1987, a few months after AGIT had been founded, delegates from Ghanaian associations in other cities across Canada met in Ottawa. They formed the National Council of Ghanaian Canadians (NCGC).

AGIT and NCGC were both umbrella organizations. The former was supposed to deal with Ghanaian associations in Toronto and the latter to co-ordinate the activities of all associations including AGIT. The office of the NCGC would be in Ottawa to reflect its national character, although the greater percentage of Ghanaians and some of the leaders of the new organization lived in Toronto.

Of the two, AGIT was more dynamic. NCGC was conceived too soon and too hastily and that affected its operation. Refugees had different concerns from other immigrants and there were tensions between old and new settlers, among those of different ethnic backgrounds, and those who held different political allegiances. Thus, there did not seem to be common ground on which the association could address issues pertinent to the community.\(^{352}\) The claims of the different segments of the community were varied and complex and the NCGC found it difficult to reconcile the myriad differences. AGIT faced a similar situation but unlike NCGC it dealt with a more cohesive geographic area and so it could focus its programs and activities. Furthermore, the fact that the cultural associations operated independently gave leaders of AGIT a sense of where they wanted to steer their association. For instance, AGIT entered into a contract with the metropolitan Toronto government to start a housing project that would serve mainly members of the Ghanaian community. Although the association disbanded before the project was completed, it

\(^{352}\) Martha Donkor, "The Ghanaian Community in Canada: Strategies for Maintenance or
succeeded in getting ten Ghanaian families to take up residence in the Lom Na Va\textsuperscript{353} Cooperative Housing in Mississauga when it opened in 1992.\textsuperscript{354}

An interesting aspect of these two broad-based organizations was that some of the leaders of AGIT were also leaders of NCGC and many of them were resident in Toronto. Without clearly defined roles, there was the potential of clashes over responsibility. For instance, some NCGC leaders made presentations to metropolitan bodies dealing with multiculturalism and AGIT leaders charged that their work had been usurped. They were accused of double-dealing and bad faith, especially as they were also leaders of AGIT and knew the extent of their influence. The power struggle that ensued disrupted both associations. Since the survival of AGIT revolved around continued commitment of its leaders, any incident that affected that commitment threatened the survival of the organization.

One after the other, members serving on the AGIT executive resigned. From June to August, 1989, three executive members resigned\textsuperscript{355} and when general elections were due in September, 1990, no one contested any position. Indeed, only thirteen people showed up for the annual general meeting of August, 1990.\textsuperscript{356} Without broad-based support from the community and shorn of some of its key organizers, AGIT gradually disintegrated. In 1991, the president closed the files and the association died.

\textsuperscript{353} Lom Na Va is an Ewe phrase that literally translates "If you love me come."

\textsuperscript{354} Minutes of the Board of Directors, Glen-Erin Housing Cooperative, 1990.

\textsuperscript{355} Letter from Treasurer to the Secretary, June 11, 1989; Letter from Toronto Area Representative to Secretary, July 5, 1989; Letter from member of Governing Council to Secretary, August 25, 1989.

\textsuperscript{356} Minutes of the General Meeting, Association of Ghanaians in Toronto, August 10, 1990.
Unlike the cultural associations and NCGC, the AGIT leadership counted more women in its number yet it did not identify gender issues as one of the areas around which to organize or seek government assistance. Considering that AGIT was more successful in dealing with the municipal government, its failure to represent Ghanaian immigrant women meant a missed opportunity.

The NCGC, on the other hand, did not enjoy popular support after the collapse of AGIT. Unlike AGIT, it did not recognize any of the small groups within the Ghanaian community. It wanted to do away with ethnicity and create a Ghanaian identity based on national origin. That ideology was inconsistent with the historical evolution of Ghana as a political entity. It disregarded linguistic, tribal, and even political differences that divided Ghanaians. As one of the leaders observed:

_The foundation of the NCGC was weak because it was elitist and did not recognize the smaller groups that would form the base of any meaningful organizing._ 357

Apart from its weak foundation, the association could not seem to find any means of generating funds. It relied on the federal government for money. Since the 1990s, funds for multicultural activities have been dwindling and the NCGC suffered as a result. With no money to carry on its activities, and with the departure of the president, the association has existed only in name since late 1996.

Besides the NCGC, there were other so-called umbrella organizations that purported to represent the voice of Ghanaian immigrants in Toronto. These included the Ghanaian Community Congress of Toronto, 1992 (GCCT), National Ghanaian Organization, 1993

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357 Interview with Dr Oti-Adinkra, former president of NCGC in his office at Etobicoke on March 7, 1996.
(NGO) and Canadian-Ghanaian Organization, 1993 (CGO). Unlike AGIT before them, these organizations did not look beyond Toronto to assemble a broader and stronger base for organizing. In the introduction to its policy statement, the GCCT, for instance, stated:

...Ghanaians in Toronto find themselves weakened, divided and disorganized... The community in Toronto is in dire need of a unified, strong, community-based organization which is capable of articulating, defending and representing the interests and welfare of all the members of the community... acting as the mouthpiece for all Ghanaians in Toronto and the suburban areas. 358

It is important to note that there were no marked underlying differences between these latter organizations and the ones before them. All of them appealed to a common nationality as the point of departure and they, like AGIT and NCGC, also believed that Ghanaians in Toronto needed to come together if they were to enjoy official recognition and assistance. The leaders were usually male professionals and university students who were highly regarded in the community. Where they seemed to have been different from AGIT was in their inability to carry out projects on behalf of the community. With the exception of the CGO that instituted the "Oman Ghana Award" to recognize excellence and achievement within the community, there was very little, if any, activity by the organizations. The Award has now become the Heritage and Achievement Award.

The fact that the leaders of these groups could not agree on their main goal could have stemmed from some members having personal ambitions that outweighed other considerations. A Ghanaian columnist in one of the community’s newspapers lamented:

I get frustrated when I think about us Ghanaians... because we are a very proud people, we have very high values, we have a very high work ethic when we put our minds to it... we are an educated bunch of immigrants; and yet we don’t have the foresight and the brotherly [sic] love needed to take care of ourselves as a group. We have all the ingredients to form a formidable community and make our...
children proud of our achievements when we are gone; instead we are forever fighting among ourselves...we are filled with petty jealousies and are so blinded with selfishness that we even reject what in the long run will benefit our own offspring.\textsuperscript{359}

Accusations and counter-accusations by leaders and members of the various associations did not create a conducive atmosphere to bring together an effective community. Under such circumstances women's issues were completely ignored.

One theme that emerged in talks with some of the leaders was their tendency to confuse multiculturalism with the establishment of an organization, whatever its policy and mandate. It seems to me that none of the groups that came after AGIT had the dynamism, dedication, and perhaps the depth of understanding of community organizing, as had the leaders of AGIT. Leaders of the post-AGIT associations were viewed with suspicion by Ghanaian-Canadians. They could not rally the support necessary to sustain their groups. The idea of the formation of an umbrella community organization was enough to whet the appetite of some Ghanaian immigrants, irritate others, and in the long run satisfied few. At the time of writing, talks were underway for the formation of yet another Ghanaian umbrella organization. The proposed name for the new association is the Ghana Union, perhaps a sad reminder that unity among Ghanaians in Toronto was urgently needed. Individual ambition and perhaps a lack of understanding of multiculturalism could have driven some people to start new groups instead of strengthening already existing ones. Some of the people believed that the mere establishment of an organization was the "open sesame" to official funds. Some of the

leaders accused others of collecting money from the Multiculturalism Directorate and not having anything to show for it. One man stated the matter forcefully:

_We could not sit down for certain individuals to collect all the money and put to personal use. If there was money at the Directory for one association, then there should be money at the Directory for another association. The matter was as simple as that._

Whether his accusation was true or not could not be ascertained. What appeared to be the case was that some community leaders regarded others with suspicion that was sometimes based on flimsy evidence. Nonetheless, mistrust among these leaders limited their scope of organizing on a broader base to benefit the larger community. Besides, the idea of building a unified community prevented the different groups from broadening their scope to include issues like women’s education and employment. In spite of the fact that the associations did not take especial interest in women’s needs, they still attracted many Ghanaian women.

It was the churches that offered Ghanaian women avenues for addressing some of their needs. They offered opportunities to deal with women’s issues and so attracted many women into their fold.

**Ghanaian Churches**

As with cultural associations, since the early 1980s, many Ghanaians have sought support from churches and prayer groups. A graduate student started the first Ghanaian church in Canada, the All Nations Full Gospel Church, as a prayer group in 1982. The founder and senior pastor of the church observed that he felt a void whenever he attended...

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360 Interview with John Asirifi, March 5, 1996.
what he called “white” churches. He noted that he missed the vivacity and conviviality characteristic of Ghanaian church services.\textsuperscript{361}

Many Ghanaians might have felt the same, for within three years of its establishment, the prayer group moved to larger premises twice due to increased membership. By that time it had acquired the name All Nations Full Gospel Church.

Similarly, the resident pastor of the Ghana Presbyterian Church told me that members who were scattered in mainstream churches felt that they needed an authentic Ghanaian way of worship. He explained:

\textit{Language was a major contributory factor to the formation of Ghanaian churches. Some of our people could not understand sermons in English the same way as they would in Twi. And then there was the link between church membership and other social functions. Weddings and funerals, for example, had to have that distinctly Ghanaian touch which was lacking in mainstream churches.}\textsuperscript{362}

The reverend also narrated the confusion that surrounded the death of a man who was of the Presbyterian faith in Ghana but joined a Ghanaian Pentecostal church in Toronto. The man’s church in Toronto assumed responsibility for sending the body home, but he was not a known member in his town. As such the church in Ghana did not perform the funeral. And the Presbyterian Church did not assume responsibility since by attending a different church, the man was assumed to have renounced the Presbyterian faith. Eventually, the man was buried as an “unbeliever.”

Many Ghanaian immigrants in Toronto were affected by that incident. Those who had joined the All Nations Church broke away to form branches of old churches.

\textsuperscript{361} Interview with Pastor Donkor at his office on April 11, 1996.

\textsuperscript{362} Conversation with Reverend Akumor on October 28, 1999.
In 1986, the Church of Pentecost was established. By 1993, there were also Ghanaian Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian churches as well as numerous spiritual and prayer groups. Indeed, there were over thirty Ghanaian churches in Toronto and at least two had branches in other parts of Canada.\(^{363}\) The Church of Pentecost and the Seventh Day Adventist Church also link up with Ghanaian branches in the United States and other European countries.

Ghanaians quickly joined churches for several reasons. First, churches provided a milieu with which the immigrants were familiar. An escape from the harsh realities of daily life into a spiritual sanctum provided a peace that these immigrants craved. In particular, the singing, clapping and dancing during church services released some of the stress and tension accumulated throughout hectic workweeks. Second, these churches provided a space for immigrants to meet and make new friends. A network of friends and families established through membership in a church helped many newly arrived immigrants seeking information and advice on how to effectively function in Canadian society. Third, churches functioned in the same manner as the cultural associations that provided services. They were socializing agencies and in that sense they operated as cultural associations.

Like cultural associations men dominated the leadership of Ghanaian churches. With the exception of the Methodist Church whose pastor has been a woman since 1997, men headed nearly all the other churches. Although women could not rise to the position of pastor or elder in most churches, a small number could occupy important positions. For instance, there are seven women on the 30-member SDA Church Board and the secretary is also a woman. In the Pentecostal churches some women rose to the rank of deaconess, the

position from which men are chosen to become elders. The conductor of the choir at the
Assemblies of God Church is a woman. Most of the Sunday school teachers at the Church
of Pentecost were women. Thus in almost all the churches women played important roles
that gave them a measure of authority that they did not enjoy in cultural associations.

Many Ghanaian women found participation in church activities to be very important
in their lives. For instance, 80 percent of the women that I interviewed indicated that they
were very active in church work or organizations. In fact, one of them worked full-time for
her church, and eleven of the remainder were executive members of the women’s fellowship
in theirs. In the Catholic Church, the women’s fellowship began a literacy class in Twi so
that illiterate members could learn to read the Twi Bible and other church material printed in
that language. Literacy in Twi was said to have formed the foundation for faster acquisition
of English as a second language.\textsuperscript{364}

Women also supported inter-faith activities. For example, the women’s fellowships
in the Roman Catholic and the Church of Pentecost engaged in talks on how to improve
their own and the lives of other family members. Serwaa, who was one of the speakers for
the occasion, narrated:

\begin{quote}
Women called me and sent me letters asking me to come again. I knew they were
blessed by my talk and I couldn’t be happier. If we are able to organize talks like
this on a regular basis, Ghanaian women will learn a lot of things. You know, life
in Canada should not be all work. We need to enlighten our women on issues that
affect their lives outside work.\textsuperscript{365}
\end{quote}

One interviewee praised the women’s fellowship of the Church of Pentecost:

\begin{quote}
They teach women a lot of things: how to cook, sew, take care of the house,
children, husband; there are so many things that they teach us. There are certain
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{364} Interview with Owusuua in Toronto on January 22, 1999.
\textsuperscript{365} Interview with Serwaa.
days they give to women to conduct the service. In our church, although a woman cannot become a pastor, there is opportunity for women to preach.366

The woman's praise for the church reveals the complexity of patriarchy exemplified in the church. On the one hand, the church reinforced women's subordinate roles that have placed them in marginal positions in society. On the other, when women preached, led group discussions or participated in literacy classes, they were learning how to become more assertive, independent, confident and resourceful. These skills were needed to successfully function in Canadian society. Ghanaian women's activities in the church thus reveal the mix of power and subordination in patriarchal situations. Thus, in analyzing their status in the church it is important to emphasize the context and the multi-layered character of relationships.

Some churches had advisory boards and councils that assisted church members to find jobs or enter into skills training. For instance, the All Nations Church had an employment advisory board that counselled members on job requirements and openings. It even ran English classes for members from its own resources. In some instances, churches became advocates for refugee claimants threatened with deportation. In that respect, they functioned in the same way as immigrant service agencies. However, churches were not intended to be service providers whose primary responsibility was to assist in the settlement and adjustment of immigrants. Churches were circumscribed in their programming because they could not directly receive either federal or provincial funds to carry on their activities. Consequently Ghanaian women were also circumscribed in their church activities because they had to rely on their own and the churches' limited resources to carry out their activities.

366 Interview with Philomena.
Thus the nature of Ghanaian community organizing made it necessary for members to seek assistance outside the community. Some turned to mainstream organizations while others felt the need for a distinctly African organization that would be sensitive to their needs.

AFRICAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS: CANACT AND ATEC

It was a welcome relief in 1983, when a group of African immigrants, among them a Ghanaian, established an agency that intended to serve African immigrants. The formation of the Canadian African Newcomer Aid Centre of Toronto (CANACT) was a response to the absence of such a specifically committed agency. One of the founders said:

A lot of the Africans who entered Canada in the early eighties had problems. Many of them claimed refugee status and were detained in refugee holding centres awaiting hearing. About 99 per cent of inmates in the centres were Africans who could not get people to sign the bond for them and there was no African community agency that could stand in for them.367

Apart from seeking ways to solve refugee problems, the founders believed that new arrivals had to be helped to adjust to Canadian society. They were motivated by their own settlement experiences. For instance, one participant narrated how her husband physically and emotionally abused her soon after her arrival in 1974. She said:

I came here at a time when there was no agency that was serving African immigrants. If there were others, I did not hear about them. I was beaten, I was starved, and I was threatened. When I could take it no more, I went to a friend’s house. There was nowhere else for me to go.368

367 Interview with Sophie Nsiah-Yeboah.
368 Interview with Frimpomaa at her residence in Brampton on July 13, 1998.
The founders of CANACT were well aware that they would have clients that needed this type of support. A former director observed in an interview:

*They knew they had to join heads to find a place where Africans could go for advice, direction as to how to seek accommodation, obtain health card, make refugee claims, things like that.*

He indicated to me that African immigrants and refugees could not effectively use mainstream organizations or other immigrant serving agencies such as COSTI due to cultural differences. In particular, language was a big hurdle for some Africans as they tried to negotiate their way among service agencies that served diverse groups. He further explained that due to the national or ethnic character of some organizations, personnel were usually members of a particular ethnic group and were limited in their ability to communicate in the numerous African languages. He added:

*People were coming from all over Africa with different linguistic backgrounds; and because the mainstream organizations didn’t have African employees, new African immigrants had a problem.*

As such, African immigrants could expect very little from these organizations. An agency that focused on the needs of Africans was desperately needed.

**CANACT** was the quintessential organization needed. The various cultural associations could focus their attention on providing specific services such as marital arbitration, funerals, and baby naming that facilitated settlement, in addition to relief funds and emotional support. However, the associations did not develop either the financial resources or the recognition they required that could move them beyond social activities and

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369 Interview with Wofa Yaw Nyarko in his office on February 4, 1999.
370 Interview with Wofa Yaw Nyarko.
into the larger mainstream society. Thus, a former director of CANACT put the issue succinctly:

*Take for instance one coming in as an immigrant and unable to speak English or not knowing where to go to seek assistance. If they rely on fellow immigrants, they may wait forever without taking action, because they may not get the correct information.*

As a social service provider, CANACT did not charge fees for client services. Staff assisted clients in many aspects of information and referral, for example, finding a job, seeking accommodation, obtaining health insurance premiums, and advocating on behalf of refugees. A founding member was instrumental in bringing the plight of African refugees in detention camps to the attention of the provincial government. She worked tirelessly to establish CANACT as a guarantor for African refugees. The agency’s signature guaranteed that refugees could be released from camps as their claims came up before the Refugee Appeal Board.

The agency also researched the African community in order to devise strategies to solve its problems. In 1986, CANACT sponsored a study into the African community’s employment-related issues. It concluded that the majority of African immigrants in Toronto were living below the poverty line, a result of the underemployment and unemployment of African immigrants. The rate of unemployment was twice as high for men and four times as much for women compared with the national average. Indeed, the unemployment rate of African immigrants in Toronto was found to be overwhelmingly high—37.6 percent.

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371 Interview with Wofa Yaw.
373 Ibid.
CANACT responded immediately to the research results by establishing an educational and employment department, the CANACT Skills Development Centre, which was renamed the African Training and Employment Centre of Toronto (ATEC) in 1990. The Skills Development Centre was incorporated (1987) as an independent agency. The motivation to establish ATEC might also have been due to experiences of established agencies such as COSTI. Immigrants needed more information, referrals and advocacy. They needed to acquire the skills that were essential for active participation in society. Other immigrant service providers already had educational programs in place and CANACT was determined to do so as well. Until 1990, the federal government funded the agency through the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC). After that date, and with the formal name change from Skills Development Centre to African Training and Employment Centre, the federal government transferred its funding to the Learning Enrichment Foundation (LEF).375

The transfer reflected the Liberal government’s declining faith in multiculturalism. The same government whose leaders had hailed Canada’s diversity as a source of strength and enrichment in 1971 responded to criticism that multiculturalism did not forge the kind of citizenship that Canada desired. Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Daiva Stasiulis, commenting on the Liberal Party’s position on multiculturalism, noted that the party bent to those arguing that multiculturalism ghettoised immigrants and that instead of having two policies—one for immigrants and one for the mainstream—there ought to be a single policy that

promoted citizenship. The transfer of funding from CEIC to LEF thus reflected the federal government's movement to de-emphasize multiculturalism.

Both African community leaders and some provincial politicians criticized that move as discriminatory. For instance, in a message of support that the Member of Parliament for Windsor, Howard McCurdy, sent to a meeting discussing the shift, he charged:

It is absolutely amazing to me that such an elementary principle as ensuring a community role in addressing community problems should be so presumptuously disregarded. Given...the usual considerations of affirmative programming, the systematic discrimination inherent in the selection process is all too obvious.

The transfer also suggested the government's ambivalence about the ability of the African community to govern itself without supervision. The shift was thus both discriminatory and derogatory, all aspects of the racism inherent in Canadian society.

While Abu-Laban and Stasiulis provide an alternative view for the government's action, it is not clear what type of citizenship that the government intended to promote. Since ATEC was not the only agency under the LEF umbrella, it could not hope to attract sufficient funds to carry on its projects especially at a time when the federal government was shifting away from funding of community-based organizations. The federal government claimed communities should do some of their own fundraising and in areas of social services to look to the provinces which had most of the jurisdiction in these areas.

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377 Ibid.
Organizations in Ontario were caught in a double bind once the Mike Harris provincial Conservatives, elected in 1995, further squeezed social services. Consequently, the directors of ATEC lobbied other sponsors such as the United Way, the Trillium Foundation, and Maytree Foundation.\(^{378}\) The agency also abandoned its six-month Microcomputer Skills Training Program and focused on community development, counseling and information services, pre-employment training and research.\(^{379}\) The government's action closed an important source of training for African immigrants. The agency's mandate, summarized below, could not be fully realized:

Our mandate is...to assist disadvantaged African-Canadians to gain basic skills by facilitating and providing accessible job skills training, life skills education, Canadian experience, job search assistance, settlement counselling, referrals to social services and educational institutions which would eventually enhance their integration to Canadian life...\(^{380}\)

Although CANACT and ATEC operated independently, their services were complementary. The former emphasized social integration while the latter focused on economic integration. Between them, these two organizations hoped that African immigrants had ample support for life in Canada. Ghanaian immigrants appeared to be “doubly advantaged” because they had the benefit of the services provided by their cultural and religious groups, and they could also access the services of CANACT and ATEC, thereby facilitating greater opportunities within the larger African and mainstream communities. In reality, the situation was more complex.

CANACT's mandate, for example, did not have provision for women's specific needs. Its activities were geared towards the settlement needs of the community as a whole. The director explained that CANACT had links with women's shelters where abused wives within the community could be directed to seek help. Depending on the context, Ghanaian immigrants relied more on the social networks established within the community than they did on outside service agencies. One woman recounted:

When I arrived in 1987 there was an African agency where a Ghanaian woman was helping Ghanaians so I went there to fill certain forms. I was shown how to go for welfare assistance so we started collecting social. They also gave us social insurance number. That one took quite some time in coming and because I could not work they had to look after me. That's why I collected social. I did not go there for any other service.\textsuperscript{381}

Another woman gave a different perspective on utilizing service agencies.

I claimed refugee status at the airport and they directed me to go some place for accommodation and warm clothing. It was nearing winter. Meanwhile my husband was waiting to take me home. I neither needed accommodation nor winter clothing from anybody else.\textsuperscript{382}

As regards work and upgrading, many Ghanaian immigrants relied on friends for information. Philomina, for example, explained:

We got information from Ghanaians who had been here before us. They told us about the work and educational opportunities available here and how we could take advantage of them. I remember a friend telling me that here the police do not harass people as they do in Europe. That was encouraging news.\textsuperscript{383}

While Ghanaian women used African service agencies when necessary, it is important to point out that these agencies were not necessarily their direct linkages to either mainstream society or other African immigrant groups. Both CANACT and ATEC provided

\textsuperscript{381} Interview with Philomina at her residence at Etobicoke, February 14, 1999.
\textsuperscript{382} Interview with Frema.
\textsuperscript{383} Interview with Philomina
ESL and later LINC and these programs would have provided a milieu for cross-cultural interaction. However, Ghanaians were not attending ESL (and LINC) classes.

**IMPLICATIONS OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR THE EDUCATION OF GHANAIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN**

The presence of diverse cultural and religious associations within the Ghanaian community had mixed implications for Ghanaian women seeking training programs. In the first place, cultural and religious groups were instrumental in the social adjustment of Ghanaian immigrants. They provided the cultural resources and structures to cushion members of the community. Inter- and intra-group interaction kept members informed about issues and events, in particular, those pertaining to education and work opportunities in the larger society. By word of mouth that had a snowballing effect, people heard about programs and accessed their services. For example, one woman observed:

*I was talking to my friend who said she knew a woman who had gone to school and was working and making good money. So I contacted that woman and she gave me directions to Seneca [College].*

For one thing, cultural associations were exclusive to particular groups within the Ghanaian immigrant community thus restricting their resources to members. For another, they were not charitable, incorporated agencies supported by government funding. Only the few that were registered, such as the Ashanti-Canadian Multicultural Association and the Ewe Cultural Association of Toronto, could apply to the Multiculturalism Directorate for funds to support cultural activities. And there were conditions attached to getting money for

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*384 Interview with Florence in Mississauga on August 26, 1998.*
multicultural activities. In the Prime Minister's speech introducing the policy in 1971, he emphasized that:

Resources permitting, the government will seek to assist all Canadian cultural groups that have demonstrated a desire and effort to continue to grow and contribute to Canada, and a clear need for assistance... (Emphasis mine). 385

The Leader of the Opposition, Hon Robert L. Steinfield, criticized the Premier's point on funding. He argued:

It is fine to announce a principle, but perhaps the most important thing is what the government is going to do to implement this principle. When the Prime Minister uses a phrase such as 'within available funds' we must keep in mind the importance of a balance here. I do not think that members of the other cultural groups with other cultural traditions are at all happy with the relatively pitiful amounts that have been allocated to the aspect of the diversity about which the Prime Minister spoke... 386

It seemed that only large cultural associations could hope to get their programs funded. Even so, it was not clear what a "clear need" was and who defined it. The ambiguous wording of the criteria for funding potentially limited what Ghanaian cultural groups could claim from the Multiculturalism Directorate. With the multiplicity of services among cultural and other associations within the Ghanaian community there was little opportunity for the whole community to get funding necessary to initiate training programs and other settlement programs. Most of the Ghanaian community organizations did not have a clear understanding of the nature of government funding.

As well, neither mainstream women's organizations nor other immigrant-serving agencies saw Ghanaian women's church activities as significant. One can only surmise that the separation between church and state puts religious activities outside the patronage of

386 Ibid.
state or provincial agencies, especially when the service they provide does not extend to the community at large. Consequently, women did not get financial support for their church activities. Mainstream women’s groups did not tap into Ghanaian women’s potential as organizers and language facilitators that could have enriched the lives of the Ghanaian community and enhanced their acculturation.

**Summary**

In a pluralistic society such as Canada, group cohesion is essential for the allocation of resources and maintenance of identity. When a community is internally fragmented, it may not necessarily affect the way the mainstream perceives it but it can limit the range of resources that the members require to sustain the group. Since a foundation of the Ghanaian community in Toronto was laid in the Ghana Union, several groups have been formed to sustain both cultural links and group identity. Cultural associations within the Ghanaian community have not given the community its identity. Rather, it is the myriad identities of the membership that make up the groups that have defined the community. This internal “mosaic” impacted the community in terms of the financial support it could obtain from the larger society. Trends have indicated that organizations in the larger African community on which many Ghanaian immigrants relied potentially faced dissolution. Without sufficient financial support to African organizations, Ghanaian immigrants turned to other sources whenever they needed assistance.

The establishment of both cultural associations and churches had great significance for the positive adjustment of Ghanaian immigrant women in Toronto. The bond of religious and/or cultural unity gave women the common purpose they needed to acculturate. Cultural associations helped group cohesion and the churches further strengthened group solidarity.
Solidarity was essential for the survival of women in a pluralistic and racist society. It reduced feelings of isolation and offered women networking opportunities that could open up avenues for their advancement.

In the next chapter I examine the impact of formal and non-formal education on the lives of Ghanaian women. For instance, to what extent did formal education prepare the women for the job market? Did education influence women’s community participation? How did they react in racist situations? These and other questions are the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 6: The Impact of Education on Ghanaian Immigrant Women

Introduction

The participation of Ghanaian immigrant women in formal and non-formal educational programs held important implications for their lives in Toronto. In this chapter, I analyze the women's participation in the labour force, their community involvement and family life as a means of measuring their adaptation to Canada.

There is no single index for measuring adaptation. Different analysts emphasize different factors. Some theories emphasize factors such as job security and mobility, cross-cultural relationships, utilization of social services, education and language facility as some of the indices that measure immigrant adaptation. Anthony Richmond, a sociologist and one of Canada's foremost and respected scholars of immigration, has defined adaptation as participation in the social, economic and cultural life of a host society in ways that work to immigrants' advantage. It is important to note that a framework for adaptation that emphasizes cross-cultural relationships, job security and job satisfaction etc. does not take into consideration immigrant women's initial conditions. It does not acknowledge differences in experiences between immigrant men and women and assumes that immigrant men and women have similar characteristics and therefore should respond to conditions in Canada in similar ways.

Cross-cultural relationships, for instance, largely depend on the extent to which women can use mainstream language(s). Language difficulty and cultural barriers can limit

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387 Anthony Richmond, Immigrants and Ethnic Groups in Metropolitan Toronto (York University: Institute for Behavioral Research, 1967), 61-68.
388 Ibid.
immigrant women’s ability to establish cross-cultural links. Similarly, cross-cultural relationships that emphasize friendships with mainstream white society do not take into consideration the multicultural character of Canadian society. In a multicultural society where ethnic and national groups organize to create and/or maintain an identity, immigrants would be more likely to interact within their communities than they would with mainstream society.

Standards for adaptation are not universal and scholars agree that education and language proficiency are essential for other factors to be effective. Education can help close the socio-cultural gap between immigrants and the host society and encourage immigrants to more fully participate in Canadian society. In his study of the impact of education on American immigrants’ short-term mobility, Ian Rockett, an American demographic sociologist, concluded that there is a direct correlation between immigrants’ educational achievement and their short-term economic performance. He noted that immigrants with college education and especially university graduates had at least two advantages over their less educated counterparts. He identified greater transferability of skills in the global labour market and familiarity with the English language as being advantageous to educated immigrants. These two assets gave educated immigrants “an advantage in their labour market negotiations in the short-term.”

Although Rockett’s study concerned African, Italian, Spanish, and white immigrant men in the United States, it points to the importance of education in the economic and social

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391 Ibid., 21-22.
392 Ibid., 27.
adjustment of immigrants. Educated immigrants are more likely to afford better housing, transportation and establish relationships beyond their ethnic communities despite the pervasiveness of racism. The class position of individual immigrants may spare them from some of the more overt forms of discrimination.

In Canada, education as a measure of short-term mobility can pose problems, especially for immigrant women. Systemic barriers such as non-recognition of immigrants’ former education and racism, along with poor English and inadequate information regarding job opportunities, all have adverse effects on labour market behaviour. These facts are borne out by Anthony Richmond’s research and supported by that of several others, such as Roxana Ng, Monica Boyd, Sheila Arnopoulos, and Nakanyike Musisi and Jane Turrittin. Indeed, Richmond noted that many immigrants suffered a loss of status on arrival in Canada; they were forced to take jobs of a lower status than those they held prior to migration. Many women entered Canada with initial disadvantages that, combined with systemic and pragmatic ones, made their economic situations critical in the short run.

Thus, although Rockett’s study is important, it does not offer an adequate framework for assessing the impact of education on the economic mobility of participants in this study. In the first place, his subjects were men whose experiences have frequently been different from women’s. Second, the study measured only the short-term mobility of the men, the period during which women in my sample were grappling with school and were not working in positions that would allow for measurable progress in their economic performance.

393 Anthony Richmond, *Immigrants and Ethnic Groups in Metropolitan Toronto*, 68
Barbara Burnaby offers a framework that can be used to analyze the adaptation of Ghanaian immigrant women. She has summarized the factors for adaptation into individual characteristics and societal variables.\(^{394}\) She notes that family, education, country of origin, and race are individual variables that can impede or enhance the adaptation process. For instance, people who have family already settled in Canada might have the support that can easily tide them over the initial stages of settlement while members of some racial groups such as Blacks could be targets of racial attacks that can impede their adaptation. Similarly, place of settlement, economic conditions at period of arrival, and tolerance on the part of the host society also affect adaptation and integration.\(^{395}\).

While useful, Burnaby's framework does not adequately take into account the changes that take place in immigrant women's lives over time. The various frameworks portray immigrant women's situations as fixed, unchanging and thus they are seen as lacking historical agency, vulnerable victims of forces beyond their control. By examining the impact of Canadian education on immigrant women's lives, I suggest an alternative for assessing changes in their lives as a way of understanding Ghanaian women. This approach does not reject the premise that other forces impinged on their lives. It is to show how historical developments, however recent, brought change into women's lives.

**EDUCATION AND WOMEN'S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION**

One conclusion that I draw is that immigrant women's ability to participate in Canadian educational programs improved their economic circumstances in the long run. The

\(^{395}\) Ibid.
level of education obtained in Canada directly correlated with the type of jobs that women did. Ghanaian immigrant women who pursued higher education in Canada worked at better paying, more prestigious jobs than those who did not. In other words, my research suggests that Ghanaian immigrant women’s chances in the labour market increased considerably with Canadian educational credentials and not the skills they already possessed on arrival.

Labour force participation was very high among these immigrants. Out of the twenty women that I interviewed, only two were unemployed. One of them explained that her unemployment was a personal choice and not related to the unavailability of work in her field. She had three young children to care for while her husband studied in the United States. It was expedient for her to be a full-time caregiver until her husband completed his program. Another participant worked for four years before she was laid off. Two of the five women who pursued higher education were lawyers, one was a teacher and the remaining two were social workers, one at a senior administrative position. The college-trained participants were also well represented in their areas of expertise.

The difference in the labour market opportunities of the university and college-educated immigrant women in relation to the high-school educated women can be explained by Rockett’s model. College and university-educated women had skills that combined with better understanding of Canadian society to close the socio-cultural gap. Thus, they could negotiate more effectively in the job market than other immigrant women.

That negotiation did not discount the fact that employers discriminated on the basis of gender and race. Employers seemed more likely to discriminate against immigrants than they would against Canadians. Frances Henry and Effie Ginzburg’s work clearly established that racial minority groups, especially Blacks and Indo-Pakistanis, were discriminated
against most frequently. They noted that “Blacks have to work very much harder and longer in order to secure employment.” Indeed, several works have cited non-recognition of immigrants and refugees’ credentials as discriminating against them. Education attained elsewhere than in the United States or Europe, particularly in the Third World, is assumed to be inferior. Therefore, under the guise of lack of Canadian experience immigrants’ educational attainments are sometimes rejected and their economic opportunities are thus circumscribed.

Insightful as these observations are, it is also important to relate immigrants’ prior educational attainment to the requirements of the Canadian job market. Serwaa, for instance, indicated that her friends advised her against seeking a job as a secretary because of her colour, accent and the fact that she did not have Canadian experience. In reality, Serwaa had not trained as a secretary. She did not have expertise in that area. Although she claimed to be a secretary, she could not type and did not have any computer knowledge. In Canada, computer literacy is a basic requirement for secretarial jobs. Serwaa had some experience with clerical work, such as filing, but she was not a secretary. In a society where employers require documentary evidence to attest to one’s credentials, Serwaa had a hard time convincing any employer that she had secretarial skills. Therefore, regardless of colour or accent, Serwaa was not likely to be employed as a secretary. The likelihood that she would have been rejected was high, and it is frivolous to say that she would have been rejected because of her colour or accent. In this instance there was a disjuncture between Serwaa’s

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expectation and conditions on the ground. That situation could aid employers because it could give them grounds to "discriminate indiscriminately."

Although some of the women recognized that acquiring Canadian experience was sometimes difficult because of discrimination, it is interesting to note that they believed that it was necessary for them to obtain it in their fields of expertise. For instance, Philomina worked as a registered nurse in Ghana and Nigeria. Yet, she had to go back to nursing school to obtain her license before she could work as a nurse in Canada. When I asked her whether the training was repetitive, she remarked:

_When you look at their equipment, there are things they use here that we don't have in Ghana...even names of common drugs such as Advil and Tylenol sound strange to us at first. In Ghana we use Chloroquine and Paracetamol, and we give injections liberally. Although we have trained as nurses, we come with a different background that may not fit easily into the Canadian nursing milieu. The problem, though, is that they do not allow us to work so that we can acquire the requisite knowledge._

Another participant, Mercy, was more candid. She indicated that after her graduation from the University of Ghana she worked as an administrative assistant for two years and then she and her husband went to South Africa where she taught history. She said:

_When I first arrived in Canada, I did not know whether I was a teacher or an administrator. I did not have a profession. I only had a first degree in history and religion and not a teacher's certificate. Without a teacher's certificate, I could not teach. And yet I was not an administrator to make me think of exploring possibilities in that area...Yet, I had about twenty years of schooling behind me._

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398 Interview with Philomina.
399 Interview with Mercy.
The issue of prior academic attainment and its non-recognition by Canadian employers is discussed in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that the Ghanaian women believed, despite discrimination, that Canadian experience was crucial for them to function effectively in the labour market.

There were also women in the sample who neither had the education nor the skills to perform specialized tasks such as data entry or machine operation when they arrived in Canada. Edna and Asantewaa represent this group. Although they recognized their limitations and took steps to remedy them, Asantewaa, in particular, did not pursue appropriate education. High school education was preparatory; it gave her only the basic requirements to pursue an academic or professional program. Like ESL, high school did not equip her with skills that Canadian employers mostly require. Asantewaa completed eleven years of formal education to read, write, and speak English. She was happy that she had acquired language skills in order to participate more fully in society but she also realized that her participation was still limited. Asantewaa was severely limited in the kinds of jobs available for her. Jobs that required the performance of specialized tasks were beyond her. Consequently, she settled for any job employers offered. Edna, however, did not end her education with high school certification. She went for a first and then a second university degree, after which she secured employment with good prospects. She was already in a senior administrative position at the time of our interview.

Individual agency played a role in the type of training that immigrant women pursued and subsequently the jobs that were available to them. It is important to note, however, that individual agency operated in context. Asantewaa’s and Edna’s families were immediate determinants of how they perceived life in the broader context. They both lived
in abusive marital relationships with children to care for. Edna divorced before she made choices about her educational training. Asantewaa eventually divorced but by the time she realized that she had to take charge of her own future, she had lost confidence in her ability to pursue further education. Gender relations thus constrained individual agency but, as Edna's story showed, those who rose above such constraints succeeded.

Some women pursued professional programs but did not get jobs in their fields. For example, at the time Florence began an accounting program in 1988 the economy was recovering from a recession and the opportunities for employment looked good. As a result the government increased immigration to satisfy market demands. Two years later when Florence graduated, the job market was experiencing another downturn and jobs were relatively scarce because there was more competition. Florence did not get work immediately, although she eventually secured a part-time job as an accounting clerk in a bank. At the time of our conversation, she had been laid off and was working at menial labour in a factory.

A number of factors explain her situation. Demand and supply are crucial determinants of job opportunities. When the job market is buoyant, training and skills may not be such strict requirements for some kinds of employment. When economic conditions deteriorate, some employers may use more stringent criteria, including race and gender bias. Florence was unfortunate to have been caught in the uncertainties of a fluctuating economy. She was said not to have Canadian experience and she could not get experience without the chance to work. Faced with a tough situation, Florence explored alternatives. But as she
remarked, "the fact that I have a qualification gives me hope. When market conditions improve, I am sure of getting something in my area." 400

Florence' case illustrates two issues. On the one hand, prevailing market conditions are crucial determinants to the kinds of jobs that immigrants (and indeed others) get. For example, Edna observed that she secured employment before she actually completed her master's program. She noted:

*Social workers were in demand in the early 1990s and I was smart to have taken a job before I graduated. Soon afterwards the available positions were filled and people who were still at school could not be as lucky as I was. At the moment [that is the time of the interview] we need more social workers. It does not mean that the demand is going to continue forever.* 401

On the other hand, some of those interviewed believed that prevailing market conditions did not preclude prejudicial treatment. Indeed, market conditions may exacerbate discriminatory hiring practices. It took Florence three months to secure a job in her field. In spite of her job, Florence thought that her Canadian inexperience and inability to secure a job immediately after her training was a result of her immigrant status. Since immigrant status can connote stereotypes, Florence further thought that her race and sex influenced her employment chances. For instance, she heard that some of her white colleagues secured employment soon after they graduated. She narrated:

*I went to two places in Mississauga and I was turned away because there were no jobs. After three weeks some of our white mates went to the same places and they were called for interviews. How do you explain that? We were all fresh from college and I supposed they were as inexperienced as I was.* 402

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400 Interview with Florence.
401 Interview with Edna.
402 Interview with Florence.
Florence's experience point to the subtle ways in which racism works in Canadian society and how many immigrant women have had to deal with it. When immigrant women were refused jobs, it was difficult to blame the refusal solely on racial discrimination. The link was sometimes tenuous because other conditions masked discriminatory practices. But discrimination was present nonetheless. What counted was how women acted in such circumstances. Florence did not sit and lament over her bad luck. She explored other possibilities and took the next best option. As she noted, she had faith in the education she had received and believed that when conditions improved she would secure a better job. Similarly, Naomi dealt with her confusion over what to do with her history degree by going back to school to obtain a master's degree. Another participant indicated that she did volunteer work after her graduation from the University of Toronto.

I was not a social worker but I felt I had to help other immigrant women. I had gone through difficulties before and I knew what it was like to be an immigrant woman with problems. Somehow I met this woman at the centre whose husband worked for a firm that was hiring. The woman introduced me to her husband who took me to the manager. Now I'm awaiting the results of the interview I had. I know I'm going to get this one.403

Frimpomaa had been working at odd jobs since she graduated in 1995. We had our conversation in July 1998; in August she obtained a full-time administrative position. It is important to note that these women looked beyond their immediate circumstances to secure the jobs they wanted. They confronted their situations by overcoming barriers, instead of conforming to popular assumptions of racism and sexism and resigning themselves to their fates. Ghanaian women's resistance resembled a counter-discourse embedded in Black

403 Interview with Frimpomaa.
African women’s feminism. On the whole, the influence of education on the women’s labour force participation was positive. The relationship was a linear one, and I suggest that Canadian-educated immigrant women did well in the labour market.

**EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

Apart from the impact of education on immigrant women’s ability to secure jobs, it is also important to assess the impact of education on women’s participation in society. In his study of the adaptation of immigrants in Toronto, Anthony Richmond noted that, although there is not a single measure of integration, there are conditions that must prevail for integration to occur. Central to what he calls objective integration is interaction with mainstream society, manifested in such situations as forging friendships, reading newspapers, and lacking ethnic employment. Forming relationships with non-group members opens the way for a two-way learning process that benefits both immigrants and members of the host society. Immigrants are able to participate in societal activities.

The formation of friendships outside the Ghanaian community varied with the educational achievement of the women. Almost all of the women said that they had non-Ghanaian friends, but most of these friendships were ephemeral, contextual and gendered. Most relationships were formed when the women were in school or at work. Once they left school or their jobs, the friendships fizzled out. Also, the women indicated that their friends were usually women. Asantewaa emphasized that as a married woman, she could not introduce a man to her husband as her friend, especially if he were non-Ghanaian. Other

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women agreed with her that it was improper for a married woman to have a male friend.

Asked whether their husbands could have female friends, seven of the women pointed out that there was nothing wrong with it, although five of them said they would prefer their husbands to have married women as friends.

It is also significant to note that friendships with whites were not as widespread as with other racial and ethnic groups. Only four women indicated that they had white friends with whom they exchanged visits or maintained close contact. The others did not say why they did not have white friends, but comments made by Florence suggested why some of them did not want to associate with white people. She explained:

I associated with people I could identify with. I was a mature student and could not hang out with teenage girls. Most of the mature students happened to be immigrants. Somehow, they were mostly coloured people. There was one white and she was of Polish background. You know, she was not as white as a British. I felt comfortable in their company.\(^\text{406}\)

While Florence’ comment referred to her days at school, it was indicative of the way she felt about white people. Her comment suggested that some white people were “more white” than others, thus further pointing out the variability of the category “race.” In most feminist analyses, race is used as a fixed, self-evident category. For instance, women are seen as Black, white, Asian, or Latino. Within these larger categories, feminist analyses usually focus on class differences among women, thus assuming a unitary definition of the racial categories.\(^\text{407}\) When Florence referred to her Polish friend as “not as white as a

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\(^\text{406}\) Interview with Florence.

\(^\text{407}\) See Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman, “Have we got a Theory for You!: Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for ‘the Woman’s Voice,’” \textit{Women’s Studies International Forum} 6, no. 6 (1983), 573-581.
British," she fragmented the white category. She related differently to the Polish woman because she could identify with her. As she further explained:

*Because of the racism in Canadian society, I find it difficult associating with white people. I can't be friends with people who think I'm inferior just because I have a dark skin colour. How do I complain when I'm discriminated against? Simply assume that my friend is a different kind of white person? I may be generalizing when I assume that all white people are racist, but...* 408

By calling all white people racist, Florence over-generalized and yet her insight is suggestive of the complexity of the category race. In other words, how she perceived whiteness was important to her relations with white people. She did not assume that white skin conferred privileges on all people having that skin tone. By differentiating between the not-so-white and white people, Florence suggested that some white women experience life in ways that move beyond the key categories—race, class, gender, or ethnicity. How do we, for example, analyze the relationship between Florence and the Polish woman within the framework of feminist discourse? When Black feminists reject grounds for a “common sisterhood” by pointing to the racism of white women and when some Black people choose some white women with whom they can identify, then how do we account for this complexity? That the Black is not Black enough, just as the Pole is not white enough? The answer lies in the ways immigration structures women’s lives. Their perceived difficulties with language and skills bond them in ways that encompass race, ethnicity and class.

Serwaa also said that she had a white friend but they did not visit each other. Unlike Florence, she did not think that only white people discriminate. She believed that prejudice and discrimination were attitudes that cut across racial lines.

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408 Interview with Florence.
She referred to Ghana where some ethnic groups believed they were superior to others. She added:

_You cannot abolish racism. In our own country there is racism...but you don’t walk about feeling inferior. You don’t allow racism to cloud your vision. This is their country and there is little we can do about their attitude toward us._\(^{409}\)

In a similar fashion Owusuaa shared Serwaa’s view of racism:

_There is discrimination in Ghana as there is discrimination in Canada. In Ghana when you have two people applying for a job, there is always the chance that you will take the one from your tribe, the one whose parents you know, the one who...; you know we do these things all the time. It’s human nature. It’s just that white people have taken it a step further._\(^{410}\)

Asantewaa also shared her views:

_I believe everybody is different whether they are Black or white and there is no need lamenting when somebody points out your difference to you. You know white people always want you to know how different you are from them. I don’t think I have time to confront them all the time on these issues._\(^{411}\)

Indeed, the women coped with racism by portraying an accommodationist attitude toward it or rejecting it. Women like Serwaa and Edna did not challenge racism but they understood how deep it went and the futility in confronting it. They believed that racism was so deeply entrenched in Canadian society that the way to confront it was to learn to live with it. Others constructed racism as a white people’s problem and tried to cope with it by constructing it as something that they could reject. By so doing they affirmed their difference and denied that they were part of white racist society. Ruth Pierson has pointed out that it is not “difference in experience alone, but difference in experience combined with

\(^{409}\) Interview with Serwaa.

\(^{410}\) Interview with Owusuaa.

\(^{411}\) Interview with Asantewaa.
power over" that makes racism dangerous. The dangers of racism did not scare Ghanaian immigrant women into submission. Edna recalled her days as a student at the University of Toronto and how she dealt with sensitive issues. She said:

Those things were always there. Except that Canadian "politeness" sort of covered it up. It was that type of covert racism...You could sense it, you could smell it, you knew it was there but you could not put a handle on it...You have racism that is so systematized, you learn to live with it. You work with it. And get out of there.413

Only Naomi said that she confronted people when she believed that they were discriminating against her. She said she learned to do so as an undergraduate. She particularly found the practice of being followed around in stores offensive. She carried a pay stub and whenever necessary, showed to store clerks so they could see that "I had money to spend. I was not there to steal, but to buy goods the same way as white people do."414 Naomi’s approach was atypical among the women I interviewed. The majority believed that Canada was not their country, regardless of their legal status. That feeling of alienation dictated their reactions in racist situations. While the women might not articulate feelings of marginalization their silence pointed to the need to incorporate discussions of racism in immigrant women’s experiences.415

The women had significant relationships within the Ghanaian community. Indeed, cultural associations and churches offered a milieu for women to network both with one another and the opposite sex. T J. Borhek has characterized this kind of behaviour as high

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412 Ruth Roach Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women’s History," in Karen Offen et al., eds, Writing Women’s History: International Perspectives, 90.
413 Interview with Edna.
414 Interview with Naomi.
ethnic cohesion. High group cohesion among Ghanaian immigrants suggested that they had successfully adapted. Again, because the women restricted their relationships mainly to the Ghanaian community, their activities were restricted to it. Women’s community participation usually focused on church and cultural associations. Only a few involved themselves in mainstream organizations. Two women who had obtained their master’s degrees in Canadian universities did not go to church at all. One of them defiantly stated that the Christian religion has been one of the main perpetrators of Western imperialism and she was repudiating it. Instead of church, these women were active in non-religious community organizing. They held executive positions in their respective cultural associations as well as on some mainstream organizations.

On the other hand, those who obtained post-secondary education in either Ghana or Canada were active both in church and community activities. Some taught language classes and led women’s fellowship and prayer groups while others held executive positions in their respective cultural associations. While men usually dominated leadership positions within Ghanaian organizations, educated women occupied important positions. For instance, the secretary of AGIT was a woman and so were other area representatives. Naomi was the only woman on its board of governors. Within the cultural associations, some of the participants said they had held executive positions at some point in time. Education enhanced the status of immigrant women in the Ghanaian community. This supports an observation made by Miranda Greenstreet, a Ghanaian feminist scholar, that educated women are highly esteemed in Ghanaian society.  

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Naomi summed up the impact of education on her life:

_I cannot believe that people hold me in such high esteem. Sometimes I wonder if they are not putting me on a pedestal where I don’t belong. I wish they would accept me the way I am: a human being with faults and weaknesses._" 418

**EDUCATION AND FAMILY LIFE**

The women’s participation in community life contrasted tremendously with their family lives. Their experiences at home involved three significant issues: household chores, management of the family budget and decision making.

A perennial source of tension between these women and their spouses concerned reproductive labour. Almost all the women admitted that they were solely responsible for the cooking, cleaning, and care of children. There was tension when some of the women asked their husbands to participate in the performance of house chores. I noted earlier that one man thought that demand was foreign and dangerous. Some women including Naomi disagreed.

_In Ghana I did not hear my father insist that mother should contribute part of the “chop money.” Mother did all the housework as her contribution toward the upkeep of the family. She was not obliged to contribute financially. That was father’s responsibility. There was no competition. Both ensured that the children were taken care of. In Canada the dynamics have changed. Both husband and wife have to work. I have to contribute fifty percent of the family budget, so why must I do one hundred percent of the housework?_" 419

Another interviewee held a similar view:

_Our men want to be treated like men when it comes to housework, but they are women’s equals when it comes to money matters. If the financial aspect of our family life is fifty-fifty, I understand because of the changed circumstances of life in Canada. It is fifty-fifty, and that goes for everything._" 420

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418 Interview with Naomi.
419 Interview with Naomi.
420 Interview with Owusuaa.
It was not possible for these women to achieve the kind of egalitarian relations that they believed in. Their views were not representative of the entire sample. Both were divorced with no intentions to remarry. What is significant is that they are professional women with well-paying jobs. In Ghana, they would either have had other female family members to do the housework or they would have had paid help. In any event, their class would have freed them from housework drudgery. Indeed, it is fashionable in Ghana for many working women (self-employed or civil servants) to have paid help or benefit from kin fostering. Kin fostering helped to alleviate housework for many working and married women. For other women, separate domiciles or husbands working in other towns leaves only women to perform chores. As a general rule, housework is not a bone of contention between wives and husbands in Ghana.

For some women, the first time they lived with their husbands under one roof was in Canada. Close quarters could have contributed to the problems because the roles and expectations changed. Some women believed that Ghanaian men could not change. Serwaa epitomized women who held that view. She did not challenge her husband’s failure to help with housework because she accepted that Ghanaian men generally did not do housework. Moreover, her Christian upbringing determined her role in the family. She called her husband “my lord” because that is how her church taught women to refer to their husbands. She remarked that:

*If you are a good Christian, there are certain things you do not challenge, even if you have been taught at school to believe otherwise. The Bible clearly states that*

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wives should submit to their husbands. So how can I disobey the Bible by refusing to understand my husband?\(^{423}\)

Going to school, working and doing all the housework and child-care put pressure on Serwaa. Yet she believed all that was part and parcel of being a woman, a mother and a (Christian) wife. Education did not alter her attitude. Some women were neither overly critical nor very accommodating to their husbands' attitudes toward housework. They appreciated their husbands' efforts to help around the house but they usually relied on older children and other family members who played important roles in the power dynamics between husbands and wives. Women who had older children and/or other family members living with them found housework less burdensome. Stella noted how she was relieved from most of the housework when her first-born son turned twelve. She explained:

You know how children start helping around the house at an early age in Ghana. I remember the times when we woke up at 4 a.m. to go to the riverside to fetch water. Sometimes I would be sleeping as I walked. I was six years old and in primary one. Here, children don't do any of those things. But my children did other things. They made their own beds and did the dishes in turns. The big boy, twelve at the time, cleaned the washroom on weekends. Because they helped, I had some time to do other things or just relax.\(^{424}\)

When Stella asked her children to do housework, she was revealing a phenomenon that has been widely commented on in studies about African women. Among Africans, age confers authority regardless of sex.\(^{425}\) Older women exercise authority over other women and young men. Stella transferred her lack of power with her husband to one of authority

\(^{423}\) Interview with Serwaa.
\(^{424}\) Interview with Stella in Toronto on June 25, 1998.
over her children. This power dynamic did not suggest abuse. Rather, it was to instill in
the children the value of work. As Stella further explained:

When boys do housework they are likely to continue to do so into the future. And
when they marry they are likely to share responsibility of housework with their
wives. When I trained my children, especially the boys, to do housework, I did so
with the understanding that self-service is not drudgery and service for family
members is not slavery.\textsuperscript{426}

A different set of power dynamics operated when immigrant women lived with
family members other than children. One interviewee, Sylvia, observed that when she
started school her husband sponsored his mother to come and baby-sit. She described the
situation:

I was nervous at first. I never lived with my mother-in-law until the sponsorship. I
did not know whether to serve her or allow her to do things for herself. I found it
hard giving her instructions in the morning as I prepared to go to school. But I
needed her services and I could not think of anything else to do. Sometimes I
sensed she was not happy when I asked her to do stuff. I guess that was part of the
reason she left soon after I had finished school.\textsuperscript{427}

There was a reversal of roles between Sylvia and her mother-in-law. In Ghana, not
only would Sylvia have served her mother-in-law because she was a guest, she would also
have done so because she was her husband’s mother. Her relationship with her mother-in-
law was not defined by her education.

As Sylvia remarked:

I have had it easy here. To think that I am asking my mother-in-law to cook! Where
would I stand to issue the instruction? That would well have been the
beginning of the end of my marriage. I would do that to my mother and not give it
a thought, but my mother-in-law? In Canada everything is different and I think
that is why she does what I say, though sometimes grudgingly.\textsuperscript{428}

\textsuperscript{426} Interview with Stella.
\textsuperscript{427} Interview with Sylvia.
\textsuperscript{428} Interview with Sylvia.
Sylvia also noted that her husband completely stopped giving an occasional hand after his mother's arrival. She explained that he felt two women in the house were sufficient to take care of everything. Besides, she asked: "why would he want his mother to know that he had been 'feminised'?" The presence of other family members took some of the pressure off immigrant women who were in school. Tension between spouses over housework shifted but depended on the relationship of the family member who helped to either spouse. Those without help performed housework under incredible conditions.

One woman had this to say:

*I do it, I complain. I'm bitter, but he does not care. He usually says, "today's Ghanaian women know too much. You come here and pick Western ways and that's why you are suffering."*

These different gradations of familial responsibility did not depend on a woman's education. Explaining why he refused to help with housework, a male participant noted that he would have done so if his wife had not tried to issue instructions. He further noted:

*The fact that she had gone to school did not make our home a schoolroom. I refused to comply because she was not my teacher and I was not her pupil. I finished secondary school before we left Ghana and I did not use that against her. Whatever she learnt in school here in Canada, I was not the one to bear the brunt!*

The men's attitude had deeper roots in Ghana where men do things that are not expected of women. For example, an educated man can marry a non-literate woman. Also, older men can marry younger women. The reverse is usually not the case. People frowned on

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429 Interview with Lucy.
430 Response to questionnaire by Nana Kwasi.
women who marry men younger than themselves. Nor is it common for highly educated 
women to marry illiterate men, even though some women may marry men without 
comparable or better academic standing. The underlying notion is that women marry to be 
taken care of financially; women serve men and the young serve the old. When an educated 
man or wealthy man with access to a wider range of resources marries an illiterate woman, it 
is assumed that the woman will benefit from his wealth.\textsuperscript{431} The same assumption is not held 
for women with more options. Among the Akan, for instance, proverbs reveal how this 
ideology functions. For instance, there is a popular proverb that literally translates: \textit{when a} 
\textit{woman buys a gun she keeps it in a man's room.}

In Canada, men's claims over women were bolstered by the women's immigration 
status. Since their husbands sponsored them, women were expected to be submissive and 
thankful. The last they could ask was for their husbands to perform house chores. Women 
could be educated, they could complain or be angry, but for most of the men, housework 
was not men's work. Whenever they did it, it was not because they thought it was their duty; 
they did it to help the women.

Closely related to the housework dilemma was control of the family budget. 
University educated women did not believe in joint accounts. Of the five women who were 
university graduates, only one had a joint account with her husband. Two were divorced but 
noted that they did not have joint accounts while they were married. Another indicated that 
she and her husband had a common fund from which they maintained the house, and each 
had separate accounts as well.\textsuperscript{432} The women's attitudes toward joint accounts correlated to

\textsuperscript{431} This information is derived from phone discussions I had with Dr. Yaw Oheneba-Sakyi, 
Director, Africana Studies, State University of New York, Potsdam, December 5, 1999. 
\textsuperscript{432} Interview with Sylvia.
the types of jobs they worked. If they had job security and brought home as much money as their husbands, they believed that financial independence was one of the ways women exercised autonomy over their lives.⁴³³ Women who attended community colleges tended to have joint accounts with their spouses. Only two women in this category did not. Serwaa, for instance, observed that one of the best ways to keep a family together was to acquire property together. That entailed pooling resources. Lucy, another of the interviewees, shared Serwaa's view. She believed that joint accounts gave couples common purposes.

However, Lucy was apprehensive about men acquiring property in Ghana without their wives' knowledge. Many Ghanaian couples have divorced because of this situation. The strategy that some of the women devised was to apply the principle of sharing everything "fifty-fifty" to family finances. Each spouse brought a percentage of their income to the family and kept the rest for his or her private use.

The men had different opinions about family budget. Many thought that women did not know how to manage money. In the words of one participant,

*If you leave a woman to control her income, she will turn your house into a junkyard. Women like spending unnecessarily. And the best way to stop them is to have total control over their earnings. Decide how much they need every month and use the rest for something important. They will forever be thankful to you.* ⁴³⁴

Edna's story corroborated the above. She noted how her husband had attempted to control her income even though they did not have a joint account. Her refusal to go along with his idea began the abuse that ended their marriage. Asantewaa also observed that when she dropped out of school to work, her husband stopped work so that she would take

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⁴³³ Interview with Naomi.
⁴³⁴ Conversation with Opoku on February 18, 1999.
financial responsibility for the family. His reason was that she had to learn to manage with limited resources. Philomina also indicated that she always argued with her husband over her wages. She took home more money than he did and he was uncomfortable. He did not ask for a joint account but wanted to manage her income so that “he would be able to put up some property for her family in Ghana.”

Philomina’s husband believed he was acting in good faith. He told me that it was right for a husband to manage his wife’s income. He insisted that his wife was misusing her money and that sooner or later she would be a burden on him. Ghanaian men thought they knew where to draw the line.

The control of the family budget had very little to do with the educational qualifications of the women. Friction in families that resulted from misunderstanding over who was in control was not peculiar to women with high degrees of education. It was the ideological underpinnings of those frictions that made a difference in the way the women experienced financial problems in their families. These had to do with the cultural meanings attached to gender roles and women’s place in the family.

Related to the control of the family budget was the level of involvement of women in decisions affecting the family. The level of education of the women did not necessarily determine the extent of involvement in decision making. Women’s involvement in decision-making sometimes depended on their own understanding of what their position was in the marriage. Serwaa, for example, said that she trusted “her lord” to make decisions because he was the head of the family. Her education did not compromise her beliefs.

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435 Interview with Philomina.
436 Conversation with Opoku.
Asantewaa on the other hand did not have any say at all, because as she put it:

_In Canada, every decision you make is couched in terms of money. Deciding where to live, the type of housing, what to eat, wear, send home...in fact, all life as I have known it in Canada is about money. And when you don’t have access to money, you don’t make decisions. He thinks for you because he is the one that brings home the money._  

Yet when she started to work and brought home some money, she still did not participate fully in decisions affecting the family. In this instance, it is clear that although money was important in the lives of immigrant women, it was not the key factor that determined decision-making in their families. Age and the education of the husband were important factors that also affected the decision-making power of some women. For instance, women who were married to older men and whose educational attainment fell below that of their husbands did not take an active part in decision making. Their husbands took total control over decision-making. This “marital paternalism” limited women’s life chances.

Other women believed that decisions affecting their families had to be undertaken by both spouses. They could disagree on some issues at certain times, but their involvement was joint. One participant noted how important their discussions were for her.

_Decision making time was not just a moment to decide on pertinent issues such as buying a house here or in Ghana. It was a time when we talked about our experiences as immigrants, our chances and our future goals. Sometimes, a meeting to decide on something important ended with a visit to a restaurant._

437 Interview with Asantewaa.
438 Interview with Pokuaa.
What is clear is that the higher the education of women, the more involved they were in decisions affecting the family. The distance between such women and their husbands closed appreciably. Indeed, the women made some major decisions in the family.

All the women indicated that they had positive relationships with their children. Obviously, language was not a barrier in relationships with children, especially as most of them spoke English before they even had children. Edna, for example, noted that the time during which she reunited with her son was one of the best in her life. As she observed, “I had a degree, a job, and a son. I was proud of myself and I was proud of my son. I guess he contributed to the good feeling because we got on so well.”

The women’s involvement in the educational system exposed them to the value of education in Canada. Asantewaa was emphatic on this point. She observed that she wanted her daughter to go beyond what she had wanted to achieve for herself but could not. She said:

My daughter is my biggest investment in Canada. I’m glad that she listens to me and has taken a keen interest in education. If she continues as she’s doing now, she’ll go places and my investment wouldn’t have been in vain. At the moment, all I can do is to continue to be fine with her. That is important if I have to win her confidence.

In that respect, she was willing to stake her resources on the education of her child. She had enrolled her daughter in a private music and dance class in addition to the girl’s regular schoolwork. Serwaa also glowed as she commented on the progress her children had made in school.

Looking back, I think I did a good job for my boys. And they have shown their appreciation in diverse ways. You should see us doing the laundry together.

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439 Interview with Edna.
440 Interview with Asantewaa
Almost all the women agreed that problems that some Ghanaian parents had with their school-age children partly stemmed from a lack of understanding of the value of education. Parents who valued education worked closely with their children towards that end.

It is also important to note that while Ghanaian immigrants could not resist the creation of nuclear families, they adopted strategies to adapt to such a family structure. Many women refused to have joint savings accounts with their spouses. By so doing they were able to fulfil their roles as mothers and other-mothers which enhanced their status if not in Canada then at least in Ghana. This coping strategy, while subtle in nature, was effective in giving the women a measure of financial autonomy. They had power to decide how they wanted to spend their money.

Additionally, “fifty-fifty”, while not common to all the women, suggested that Ghanaian immigrant women were redefining gender roles as a result of the immigration process. In Ghana they might not have contested their roles due to socio-cultural and economic factors. In Canada, changed circumstances due to severance of cultural roots and a new set of economic relations called for a reassessment of old practices and how they fit or not in the new environment. The women could not continue to singularly shoulder domestic roles while they worked outside home to support their families. Redefining gender roles was a way of redefining the self, an act that was threatening to their men. In particular, the women’s education bolstered their claim to an independent identity that was threatening to

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441 Interview with Serwaa.
their spouses. They expected to be treated like educated people, and not just women. That delineation between their womanhood and individuality was significant for the ways they saw gender roles. It suggests that female education is a threat to male egos, and that while it may not necessarily lead to the equality that feminists desire, it can have a sobering influence on men, including Ghanaian immigrant men.

SUMMARY

It is clear from the analysis that education was important in Ghanaian immigrant women’s work opportunities. However, the impact of education on occupation could be measured in the long run but not in the short. In terms of the types of work, about 80 percent of the women interviewed worked in so-called “feminized” jobs. Only two worked in non-traditional jobs, one as a lawyer, and the other in a paralegal status. The impact of education on familial relations was complex and defies simple analysis of whether education enhanced women’s status relative to that of their husbands. Women faced many challenges in their families and had to devise means of confronting those challenges. Education was an asset but it was not the key factor in determining how women related to their spouses. Motivation, confidence, and understanding of Canadian society were important factors in women’s attitudes toward family responsibilities.

As far as racism in the larger society was concerned, women adopted two strategies. One group constructed Canadian society as lying beyond them so that they operated from the periphery. The other group learned to live with racism because they perceived it as part of Canadian society and, indeed, human nature in general.
As a measure of adaptation, there can be no doubt that education enhanced the overall adjustment of Ghanaian immigrant women in Canada. Education opened up options that might not be available if they had not been educated. As one interviewee remarked:

I'm proud of myself. The fact that I can go out and do things on my own without anybody looking over my shoulder to see if I did it right is most satisfying. When I need something, I know what to do to get it. Those who came here and did not have the opportunity go to school have lost out. ⁴⁴²

Overall, a racist-sexist configuration interacting with women's immigrant status determined how Ghanaian women lived their lives. Within that configuration education appeared to be a valuable tool for them. It gave them the resources to manoeuvre within given sets of conditions. The women's experiences may not be unique but they address important issues in feminist and immigration literature. For instance, did transformations occur in the women's lives as a result of education? Do the experiences of these women support Black feminist theory concerning the importance of the family to Black women in racist societies? How did the women understand their status, whether as workers, wives or immigrants?

⁴⁴² Interview with Asantewaa.
CHAPTER 7: IMMIGRANT WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES AND FEMINIST DISCOURSE

INTRODUCTION

I concluded the previous chapter by stating that although the experiences of Ghanaian immigrant women may not be atypical, they addressed larger analytical and practical themes in feminist and immigration literature. In this chapter, I relate the women’s experiences to some of these themes. I emphasize work and family as the areas that define gender, race, and class issues in the lives of immigrant women. It is important to state at the outset that I draw on Black and white feminist discourses in this chapter as an inclusive strategy. That is to say, I draw on both traditions to emphasize the point that in writing immigrant women’s history we should aim at a holistic analysis that takes into account the issues particular to an immigrant group as well as dominant discourses that affect immigrant women’s lives. An approach such as this both enriches feminist scholarship and addresses issues specific to different women’s groups.

IMMIGRANT WOMEN’S WORK CONDITIONS

One of the recurrent themes in feminist immigration literature is the deplorable working conditions of immigrant women. Sheila Arnopoulos put it succinctly:

More than any other group, immigrant women are located in the poorly-paid labour market sectors where they work as domestics, chamber maids, dishwashers, waitresses, sewing machine operators and plastics workers. Ignored by unions and inadequately protected by provincial labour legislation, they occupy the bottom rung of the ‘vertical mosaic.’

Arnopoulos, Problems of Immigrant Women in the Canadian Labour Force, 3.

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Women's work situations have been tied to barriers such as lack of skills, Canadian society's non-recognition of their credentials, and their sponsored entry status. The result of these barriers is for immigrant women to be relegated to low-paying menial jobs. Menial jobs are thus feminized and "immigrantized."

A corollary of this characterization is that the category "immigrant woman" is homogenized. Yet several works have also pointed to the diversity of the immigrant population and the need to acknowledge that race, ethnicity, gender and class differences affect the ways in which immigrant women experience work life.444 Thus, while we expect immigrant women to come up against structural difficulties, we cannot expect, for example, a nineteen-year-old illiterate wife from a rural area in Ghana to experience these difficulties in the same way as a university educated urban Ghanaian woman would.

Thus within the same immigrant group we can expect differences in individual experiences. Ruth Pierson refers to this problem when she explores the place of the biography in women's history; she draws attention to the fact that experience and difference can distance men from women and some women from others.445 The authentic voice therefore would be that of the "oppressed person's own account of the lived experience of the oppression."446 While it is not possible to give every woman's account of their lived reality, it is also dangerous to homogenize women's experiences,

446 Ibid., 90.
for doing so assumes that conditions are the same for all women in time and space.

Immigrant women enter Canada with diverse cultural, economic, and ideological backgrounds that affect the ways they work. For instance, I argued in chapter four that Akan women had familial responsibilities that might not be expected of women from other ethnic groups in Ghana. Their responsibility went beyond services provided to immediate families in Canada; it also extended to family in Ghana. As such, many were pressured to work as soon as it was practical for them to do so. Serwaa, for example, had three young children left in Ghana whom she had to remit; she also believed she had to remarry her husband in order to acquire legal status. She needed money to do both and that compelled her to work. Edna had to send material things home to satisfy a need, while Asantewaa dropped out of school to work out of necessity.

Considerations of the type of work and questions of discrimination were not important issues to the women at that initial stage. After the confusion and uncertainty associated with the initial stages of settlement, the women became more aware of the limitations and barriers to their work lives. The length of time that they stayed in job ghettos depended on the interaction between their backgrounds, their sense of direction, and prevailing conditions in Canadian society.

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447 In a study of post-war immigrants in Canada, Franca Iacovetta recounted the story of Garuba, an abused immigrant woman who was ready to take any available job to be able to look after her children. This suggests that sometimes necessity forces immigrant women to take any jobs. See Franca Iacovetta, “Making New Canadians: Social Workers, Women, and the Reshaping of Immigrant Families,” in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds, Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women’s History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 261-263.

448 Barbara Bumaby, Jill Bell, Marjatta Holt and Mary Ellen Belfiore, A Framework for Assessing Immigrant Integration to Canada, A study prepared for the Department of the Secretary of State, Corporate Policy and Public Affairs, 1985, 87.
These women arrived in periods of fluctuating economic conditions that affected the types of jobs available to them. In times of economic slump employers adopt strategies to cut back on employees and get the best qualified. In such periods women’s employment suffers and many are forced to take on any jobs to support themselves. Edna, for instance, arrived in 1976, a time of economic bust. Given her background, she could not hope for a good paying job. Serwaa, on the other hand, arrived in a period of relative economic boom and had more options to choose from. While not denying that fluctuations in the economy have important consequences on employment for everybody, including immigrants, it is important to stress that immigrants may be more vulnerable to such fluctuations than the Canadian-born. However, Ghanaian women’s perceptions of society and how they saw themselves in it partly determined their long-term plans and the kinds of economic activities they would engage in.

Referring to Surinamese immigrants in the Netherlands, Philomena Essed identifies a three-phase process involving immigrant settlement. She notes that there is a “looking back” phase when immigrants think in terms of when they would return to their original countries. Then there is a second phase when returning home gradually gives way to thinking about dealing with the present. The final phase involves taking part in society and taking responsibility for their quality of life in that society. Essed does not offer specific timeframes for the different phases but her framework provides a lens through which to examine Ghanaian immigrant women’s actions and reactions in

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450 Essed, 60.
the economy. As I discussed in chapter two, most Ghanaian immigrants were forced to leave their homeland due to economic hardship. Because of these circumstances, looking back might not be couched in terms of when they could go home but what they could do to help those left behind. Since there was possibility for chain migration through sponsorship and “connection,” the need for most Ghanaian immigrants to work outweighed considerations of the kind of work.

The second phase was crucial for Ghanaian women in terms of how they envisioned their future in Canada. Whether they would settle permanently or go back to Ghana, the women felt that it was important for them to devise strategies to meet changing conditions. Education was one of the means through which they redefined their circumstances in the hope of establishing a more secure life in Canada. The women made conscious efforts to break out and take control over their lives. The story of that interaction is missed when immigrant women are continually cast as a group mired in low paying menial jobs. The history of their struggles to free themselves from structural barriers as well as their accomplishments is denied. Their situation is seen as immutable, putting them outside history.

Ruth Pierson and Alison Prentice have noted that while it is important to examine the structural barriers to women’s inequality to give insights into their past experiences, women should not always be cast as victims. To be sure, most immigrant women enter Canada with initial disadvantages that limit their chances. Some enter with less education and limited skills or are severely deficient in either of

the official languages. In such cases their work situations would not necessarily be the result of discrimination, but they are exacerbated by what Roxana Ng and Judith Ramirez call the objective conditions of the wage labour market. Some of the studies conducted in the 1980s noted that immigrant women were bi-modally distributed on the occupational ladder. Women from the United Kingdom and the United States occupied professional and managerial positions while those from southern Europe and other places worked in assembly and as sewing machine operators. One is left wondering whether that situation was accidental or by design. It is even more complex to analyze such a situation since some of the women who occupied low status jobs are white. What is apparent is that Canada had traditionally privileged immigration from the United Kingdom and the United States and might have followed the same policy in its hiring practices.

From this it can be argued that for non-British and non-American women to get to high positions they had to undergo Canadian education. Their prior education might not mean much in the Canadian context. The women who participated in this research started as factory workers and janitors and some ended in professional and managerial positions. These jobs could not be characterized as menial or low paying. The women attained their positions after periods of overcoming hurdles and acquiring the prerequisites for such positions. It is thus important to unearth the strategies they adopted to overcome their numerous limitations. Immigrant women may be caught in a

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452 Ng and Ramirez, Immigrant Housewives, 48.
454 Ibid.
web of barriers and limitations, but they act within those limits, illustrated by the life stories of Ghanaian immigrant women. When we acknowledge their struggles we are not playing down the barriers that limit their chances. We suggest an alternative way of examining immigrant women’s lives that emphasize their strengths and achievements.

It is also important to stress that unearthing immigrant women’s employment situations using macro analyses may not always be reflective of their daily reality. That is not to suggest that race, ethnicity, gender, and class do not matter in immigrant women’s lives. These are overarching axes of power that structures immigrant women’s lives in a general way. Sexist and racist immigration practices, an employment market that is segregated along gender lines, and racism in Canadian society are profound influences that adversely impact immigrant women’s lives. However, they do not reveal the nuances of interactions amongst those categories that are specific to different immigrant groups as a result of their own internal dynamics. In other words, tensions and dilemmas that may impact women’s lives at the micro level cannot adequately be captured using macro analyses based on broad categories such as race, gender, and class.455

For instance, the majority of the Ghanaian women were reluctant to have joint accounts with their husbands. Although some expressed their reluctance in terms of the men’s refusal to do housework, their attitude had deep roots in Ghanaian social mores and practices456 and was fuelled by work conditions in Canada. Among some ethnic

456 Oheneba-Sakyi, Female Autonomy, Family Decision and Demographic Behavior in Africa, 123-126; Oppong, Marriage among a Matrilineal Elite, 34.
groups, especially the Akan, conjugal property is kept independently. With increasing female education and changes in inheritance laws women have been pooling resources together with their spouses. Yet, the ideology of women having separate property from their spouses has been an underlying principle in the way Akan women view property accumulation. Women in other ethnic groups may not have the same concerns because once they marry they become members of their husbands' families. Even so, they too would want a large measure of financial autonomy. One woman expressed her view thus:

I work as hard as my husband does and I know that we are both responsible for the children. But I cannot relinquish total control of the money that accrues from my labour to him. I have to have control over my income, however small the amount.

When Ghanaian women insisted on "fifty-fifty" or expressed concerns over financial management they were asserting their right to personal control of their resources so as to be able to fulfil their responsibilities. The fact of their living abroad put an added spin on their need to have control over their finances. They were other-mothers and sisters, daughters and daughters-in-law. Their responsibilities had increased and the expectations were high. Pulled in different directions, they had to decide how to satisfy the various interests with the least friction.

Although it was not possible to investigate this issue these specific ways in which Ghanaian women experienced life could be different for second-generation women as well as those who marry outside the Ghanaian community. When we address

457 Ibid.
458 Oppong, Marriage among a Matrilineal Elite, 34.
459 Interview with Mercy.
these specifics in experience we enrich our understanding of Ghanaian women and prepare grounds for comparative analysis between first and subsequent generations of Ghanaian immigrant women. As Joan Scott has argued, we do not only have to show that women have been left out of history, we also have to unravel the ideological underpinnings of the absence. To embark on that project is to acknowledge the specificity and contextuality of women's experiences, including Ghanaian immigrant women's. Their experiences were structured by conditions both in Canada and Ghana. It is by understanding the ideological bases of these conditions that we can fully understand those experiences.

**WOMEN'S EDUCATION, WORK, AND STATUS**

A theme related to the women's stories involves the link between education, work, and status. Susan Wismer captures this link in her observation that “education and training...are viewed not only as critical to the improvement of women's situation in the short-term, but also as a bridge from current realities to a new and structurally different future.” Wismer suggests that women's education ultimately changes their statuses. Status and equality are closely linked. Feminists are aware of the different senses which equality denotes. Susan Vander Voet, for instance, problematizes equality as not meaning sameness. She emphasizes equity that denotes fairness and justice, and parity that suggests non-subordination.

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Putting aside questions of interpretation regarding what is fair and just, when equity and parity are linked, female equality approximates access to resources to the same degree as that enjoyed by men. Bell hooks takes the discussion further. She draws a distinction between equality envisaged by different groups of women. She refers to racial discrimination that puts Black men and other people of colour in marginal social, economic, and political positions. Then she emphasizes that women in such groups do not aspire to their men's already marginal positions. Therefore, when feminists argue that education enhances women's status, they suggest equitable distribution of educational resources that will give women equal access to jobs that have given men structural power over women: control of economic and political resources that places them in positions of authority over women. Female education is thus a bridge to those resources.

However, some scholars have argued that rather than equalizing opportunity educational systems maintain inequality by differential offering to segments of the population. Reflecting on education in the United States, Samuel Bowles pointed out that the schools have not evolved in the pursuit of equality but to meet the demands of capitalist employers and to “provide a mechanism for social control in the interest of political stability.” As immigrants, Ghanaian women's access to Canadian education and consequently jobs could be assessed on two levels: prescribed programs and actual programs that women pursued. Not only was their access to language and other

technical programs dictated by eligibility criteria, the women deemed the programs inappropriate for their employment needs.

Language programs, for instance, were not work-oriented although they could be the springboard to work-related training programs. Since immigrant-training programs were less useful for them, Ghanaian women did not patronize them. In that sense official educational provisions for these immigrant women were neither equitable nor suitable for long-term structural changes in Ghanaian women’s work situations. Immigrant education did not fit the feminist theorization of the power of education to equalize opportunities for women, including Ghanaian immigrant women.⁴⁶⁵

On the other hand, programs that women self-defined as satisfying their long-term needs actually brought changes in their work status. Ghanaian women’s pursuance of educational programs other than those designed for immigrant women revealed changes in their employment patterns. Nine women worked before migration and eleven did not.⁴⁶⁶ Out of the nine workers there were five teachers, three clerks and a nurse. After Canadian education, all but two of the twenty women worked. Of five teachers, only one remained in teaching; one became a lawyer, two social workers and the other a financial consultant at a bank. The rest of the women worked in the healthcare delivery system, in factories and as self employed. From a teacher in Ghana to a lawyer or consultant in Canada or from a clerk to a secretary represented a shift in

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⁴⁶⁶ I use work to mean those who engaged in waged labour in the formal sector. The eleven women who indicated that they did not work therefore meant their economic activities lay outside the formal sector.
employment and a boost in status. Similarly, from a designation of “never worked” to that of a health care aide or factory hand represented changes in women’s employment.

Hence, to determine the power of education as an equalizing agent between immigrant men and women on the one hand and between marginalized groups and the mainstream on the other, we have to distinguish between prescribed educational programs and education accessible to the dominant group. It is clear that mainstream educational structures had the potential of enhancing Ghanaian immigrant women’s status.

As well, the changes in women’s work did not have to be measured in terms of the nature of the work per se but in terms of relative changes in their lives that accompanied changes in work. This approach allows for an assessment of intrinsic transformations that occurred in women’s lives. While such an approach may not reveal marked shifts in women’s statuses, it does point to another way of conceptualizing status. Some scholars have argued that African women’s status or autonomy has to be defined in context. Yaw Oheneba-Sakyi, for example, notes that women’s autonomy cannot be completely captured by education or economic independence, or even by their control over their bodies or sexuality, although these are important indices for measuring autonomy and status. He emphasizes that “women’s autonomy in Africa is inherently part of the structure and meaning of larger family systems since women bear the major brunt of support and daily sustenance for dependent children.”

This categorization does not diminish the importance of women’s formal education in determining their autonomy. Indeed, scholars generally agree on the

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467 Oheneba-Sakyi, Female Autonomy, Decision-Making and Demographic Behavior in
importance of formal education in enhancing women's status. It is rather to stress the point that women's status could also be measured by what they are able to accomplish within their areas of operation. If as teachers, social workers and/or mothers Ghanaian women were able to successfully manage their resources, establish good relationships with their children and could talk of feelings of wellbeing, then it may not matter much in what capacity they accomplished those. What this points to is that an assessment of the potential of education to enhance the status of immigrant women, including Ghanaians, is a complex exercise. It also points to the culturally specific definition of status.

Some feminists have problematized the nature of women's work that ultimately affects their status. They have characterized women's work as traditional because of the close links between women's domestic roles and the types of jobs in the public sector in which they are concentrated. Professions such as teaching, nursing and social work in which women dominate have been feminized because they involve caring for others. Thus, whether women work at home or in the public sector, there is not a marked change in the work they engage in and consequently their status. Others have drawn attention to the hierarchy within so-called feminized occupations. In her work on institutional domestic work in the United States, Evelyn Nakano Glenn argues that the work was not only gendered but was also racialized, with Black women and other women of colour at the bottom of the hierarchy.468 Similarly, Agnes Calliste has shown

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468 Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Social Division of Paid Reproductive Labour," 3.
in the case of Canada that a racist script that portrayed Black women as fit for domestic work informed the admission of Caribbean nurses.469

Thus, although Caribbean nurses had to be "extra qualified" to be admitted into the nursing profession in Canada, they were consigned to backroom, heavy duty, dirty jobs and odd shifts.470 From this, one can only conclude that if race and gender determined some women's place in the capitalist system, then education would do little to change the status of such women. And yet this study has revealed that it would if women moved beyond prescribed programs and pursued those accessible to the mainstream. The Ghanaian women's stories reveal that moving beyond prescribed programs was not an easy exercise, and it is for that reason, if for nothing else, that their efforts in that respect have to be documented.

Ghanaian women's seemingly shifting class positions has important implications for immigrant feminist historiography. Judith Bennett, for example, has problematized continuity and change in women's work. She argues that there is historical continuity in women's work status.471 Referring to the work situation of European women, Bennett states:

European women work more often for wages than did their medieval predecessors, they more often travel away from home to a separate place of employment, and they also accrue welfare benefits through their work that would have been unimaginable to medieval women. But these changes have not transformed the work status of women; today, as in 1200, "women's work" in Europe is relatively low-status, low-paid, and low skilled.472

470 Ibid.
472 Ibid., 74.
Bennett distinguishes between changes in women’s experiences and transformations in their status, emphasizing that “there has been much change in European women’s experiences as workers over the last millennium, but very little transformation in their work status in relation to men.”473 Using the case of brewsters in early industrial England Bennett argues that as brewing became prosperous and the processes more elaborate, women were streamed into the production of the less lucrative ales as men took over the brewing of beer. Thus she concludes that the change in production methods did not bring marked changes in women’s work and consequently their status.474

Relating change and continuity to African women’s history, Sandra Greene stresses that the nature of African history in general and African women’s history in particular initially called for an emphasis on change. African historians developed a counter discourse to challenge Western notions of Africans as not having history until European contact and of African women as beasts of burden, overused by their men.475 African historians turned to great periods in Africa’s past to highlight achievements without foreign intervention and of women’s political and economic autonomy.476 In the 1970s there was a paradigmatic shift as historians of women focused on the erosion of African women’s economic and political power due to colonialism.477 In the 1980s and 1990s historians of women again shifted to a middle ground as they emphasized collusion between imperial and traditional patriarchal structures in subordinating

473 Ibid.
474 Ibid, 84-88.
475 Sandra Greene, “A Perspective from African Women’s History: Comment on ‘Confronting Continuity,’” 97.
476 Ibid.
477 Ibid.; see also Margaret Strobel, “African Women,” Signs: Journal of Women in
African women. These shifts in analyses, argues Greene, are the result of reactions to perceptions about Africans and of historical change. Thus Greene argues that the interplay between change and continuity in African feminist historiography results from the nature of African history.

Both Bennett and Greene offer valuable insights into feminist historiography. They draw attention to the significance of periods in the writing of women's history and in determining their status. Bennett, for example, has noted that Joan Kelly's pioneering work on the impact of the Renaissance on European women set the tone for historians of women to assess women's status in periods of change. Kelly wrote:

To take the emancipation of women as the vantage point is to discover that events that further the historical development of men, liberating them from natural, social, or even ideological constraints, have quite different, even opposite, effects upon women...there was no renaissance for women- at least not during the Renaissance.

As did Kelly, Bennett questions the assumption that so-called great periods bring change (whether negative or positive) in women's status, and gives four reasons for historians of women to approach their subject in that way. She notes, like Greene, that the development of women's studies, the structure of the discipline of history, the influence of feminism in academia and the lived experiences of feminist scholars have combined to engender a feminist historiography that emphasizes change. Bennett polarizes change and continuity, and argues that women's status

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Culture and Society 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1982), 111-112.
as workers exhibits continuity not change. Arguing for European and United States women's history, Gerda Lerner notes that change and continuity interact and reinforce each other.482

The perspectives offered by Bennett, Greene, and Lerner can be applied to Canadian immigrant women's history. Franca Iacovetta's Such Hardworking People, for example, captures the changing fortunes of immigrants in Canada during and after World War II. The post-war period began with increased immigration and the beginning of the shift in the sources of Canada's immigrant population, and so offers a frame to analyse the dynamics of change and continuity. Iacovetta captures the dynamic clearly when she writes about Italians immigrants:

On migrating to Toronto, many Italians underwent a transition from being peasants in an underdeveloped rural economy to becoming proletarians in an urban economy. For former peasants, and even artisans and shopkeepers who had once laboured in their own homes, the nature of the family economy changed profoundly on their arrival in Toronto.483

For the women who participated in this research, their jobs represented tremendous transformations in their lives. Some of the women had never worked in remunerative labour before immigrating. Their jobs in Canada meant great beginnings and hope for a better future regardless of whether these jobs were traditional or non-traditional. Some of those who worked in paid labour prior to immigration continued in their areas after Canadian education and training. While there was continuity in their

482 Gerda Lerner, "Perspectives from European and U.S Women's History: Comment on 'Confronting Continuity,'" Journal of Women's History 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1997), 114-118.
jobs, circumstances surrounding the jobs were decidedly better in Canada than they were in Ghana. Job security and satisfaction were paramount, as were the confidence, assertiveness and sense of personal achievement that characterized their education and training and ultimately their jobs. They did not have to cross gender lines into non-traditional jobs to experience those changes. Their experiences illustrate that continuity and change are not mutually exclusive.\textsuperscript{484}

Additionally, change and continuity as a theme in feminist historiography has to be contextualized to give meaning to the experiences of specific groups of women. When thinking about continuity or transformation one needs to take the class background and legal status of women into consideration.\textsuperscript{485} Women who have come from a culture in which access to education and work is relatively limited may not have the comfort of characterizing work as traditional or not, although a Canadian study on women’s education argued that women’s representation in non-traditional areas is important because that is the sector that shows much promise for future growth.\textsuperscript{486} White middle-class women, for example, may see teaching or social work as traditional, perhaps because access to these occupations has not been difficult for them. Ghanaian immigrant women were confronted with a different set of barriers that white women do not have to deal with. Getting and staying in traditional programs was hard enough for them. They had to overcome incredible odds to obtain an education. Their

\textsuperscript{484} Lerner, “A Perspective from European and U.S women’s History: Comment on ‘Confronting Continuity’”, 118.
\textsuperscript{485} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{486} Avebury Consulting, Decade of Promise, 35-36.
sense of personal achievement should be considered as part of the transformation that accompanied their education.

Another issue to consider with regards to women’s stories is the non-recognition of immigrants’ educational credentials. Writing about the African community in Toronto, A.B.K. Kasozi argued that African immigrants entered Canada with long years of education, and yet many of them worked in menial jobs and as couriers because their credentials were not recognized.\(^{487}\) Opoku-Dapaah and Nakanyike Musisi supported Kasozi’s findings in separate studies they carried out in the Ghanaian and African communities respectively. Opoku-Dapaah cited Ghanaian university graduates who came to Canada and worked as couriers because their credentials were not recognized.\(^{488}\) Musisi and Turrittin noted that of 123 women interviewed, 60.1 percent had educational credentials evaluated less than the Canadian equivalent and only 39 percent evaluated as equivalent to Canadian counterparts.\(^{489}\)

Yet in another work, Opoku-Dapaah noted that Ghanaian education is academic-minded, emphasizing theoretical values and ideals and not the skills that will prepare graduates to function in a high-tech society.\(^{490}\) Reflecting on the education of refugees, he noted that “…[an] educated Ghanaian refugee is often not equipped with adequate skills… there is very little specialisation [in Ghanaian education]… there is no functional relation between education and the employment market.”\(^{491}\) As such, many


\(^{491}\) Ibid.
Ghanaian immigrants might have entered Canada with long years of education but not the skills that employers require. The four main stories presented in this thesis illustrate that the length of education and the quality of education did not necessarily move in the same direction.

Also, (non)-recognition of credentials is closely linked with categories of immigrant admission. Shirley Seward and Kathryn McDade noted in a 1988 study that:

Labour market skills and training constitute important criteria for admission of immigrants – at least in the Independent Class; therefore it is especially frustrating and often seems unfair to immigrants when their achievements are not recognized by Canadian employers and associations.\(^{492}\)

Entering in the family class does not preclude women from having employable skills; it makes economic sense for families to migrate as a unit. Yet when they do, it is usually the man that is designated the principal applicant based on sexist notions of a male family head and breadwinner.\(^{493}\) So designated, most immigrant women are supposed not to engage in paid labour.\(^{494}\) Whether or not they have credentials or employable skills is not a serious issue for consideration. The question of their credentials and employability is settled before many immigrant women even set foot on Canadian soil. Gender discrimination in immigration policy, though covert, begins before immigrants enter Canada.

Seward and McDade also observed that a study commissioned by the Ontario government to identify problems associated with entry into professions mentioned


\(^{493}\) Roxana Ng, “Managing Female Immigration: A Case of Institutional Sexism and Racism,” *Canadian Woman Studies* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1992), 21.

teaching and medicine as having accreditation barriers. They also observed that policy required immigrating physicians to sign an undertaking that "there are virtually no opportunities to acquire further medical training in Canada leading to licensure." Furthermore, they indicated that 29 percent of immigrant women, compared to only 17 percent of non-immigrants, had university training and yet these immigrant women were less represented in professional jobs than were non-immigrants. Indeed, the percentages were 24 and 33 percent respectively. Among African immigrant women, Musisi and Turrittin reported that 45 percent were judged to have educational qualifications equivalent to college diplomas and university degrees and 39 percent were professionals; yet the unemployment rate among African immigrant women was 28.3 percent which was 15 percent higher than the unemployment rate for all women in Toronto.

An analysis of the issue of non-recognition of credentials and its associated problem of unemployment is a complex one. On the one hand, independent immigrants are admitted on the strength of their qualifications, skills, and personal attributes and they expect to use these in their own advancement. Some of them may not have job offers before they leave their countries and the onus falls on them to make their own arrangements to secure employment.

On the other hand, the federal government that is responsible for immigrant admission is not responsible for immigrants’ employment needs. Their employment

495 Ibid., 32.
496 Ibid., 36.
497 Seydegart and Spears, Beyond Dialogue, 32
498 Musisi and Turrittin, African Immigrant Women, 107-111.
rests on provincial legislation that is further carried out by autonomous professional bodies and institutions. Thus issues of comparability or equality of credentials and licensure are left mostly in private hands. This multi-layered nature of decision-making concerning independent immigrants' employment can mask incidences of discrimination. For instance, when Musisi and Turrittin noted that it is important to emphasize discrimination based on non-recognition of credentials, especially for independent applicants who were admitted on the strength of their education and skills, they were addressing a serious problem that some segments of the immigrant population suffered. Similarly, it is also important to emphasize the educational needs of immigrant women who may not have such credentials.

Much attention has focused on two groups of immigrant women: those with language difficulty and those whose credentials are not recognized. The emphasis has pushed women who do not fall in either category to the margin. This research has shown that there were immigrant women who neither had language difficulty nor credentials but who still needed education to enhance their circumstances. The stories presented in this study demonstrate that some of the women entered Canada without skills that would have secured them good jobs. Their problem was not rejection of credentials, but the absence of an apparatus to channel them to quality programs. Without considering the situations of such women, we risk essentializing immigrant women as having problems that are not universal. Attention is drawn away from issues pertinent to the lives of many immigrant women.

This research has also shown that neither the federal government nor the provincial Ontario government showed a serious commitment to define a phenomenon
that could specifically be characterized as immigrant education. The emphasis on language training for immigrant women reflected the "sexist and racist assumptions implicit in [immigration] policy." Immigrant women, unlike their male counterparts, were seen as needing the type of education that would make the performance of their "womanly duties" efficient. Also, their origin mostly as Third World peoples defined them as the "other," in need of the kind of education that would ease the process of adaptation. Language training thus served a social function that was underpinned by an ideology that once dominated debate in feminist discourse, namely the work versus family debate. Women were "natural" caregivers, not "workers", "dependants", not "breadwinners". The reasoning behind the terms applied to women—dependent caregivers—was contradictory. Men depended on the care women gave to the same extent that women were assumed to be dependent on men materially.

Although feminist theorization of the family/work (private/public) split has revealed it as a false dichotomy, it has not prevented the Canadian State from legitimating the ideology. The provision of educational programs for immigrant women revealed that the official view of immigrant women's place had not changed. Immigration policy defined immigrant women as non-workers, fit only for the home. Whether the definition depicted the realities of their lives or not, it still held important consequences for immigrant women. Both provincial and metropolitan educational providers designed programs to fit that definition and so created a condition for

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499 Roxana Ng, "Managing Female Immigration," 21.
immigrant women to be mired in low status jobs. This suggests that the divide between family and work is still relevant to immigrant feminist historiography. To ignore this point is to draw attention away from the ideologies that underpinned the provision of educational programs for immigrant women. Like most women, Ghanaian women straddled both the domestic and public spheres. They were wives, mothers, and benefactors to extended family members, in addition to being students and workers. These multiple identities and their accompanying role expectations defy analysis based on a split between family and work.

While mainstream feminists have moved beyond that initial limitation, they have not done so when addressing issues pertinent to immigrant women. The focus on language training limited or even deflected attention from examining higher education as a viable option for immigrant women. It can be argued on the one hand that women's groups and agencies were constrained by budgetary resources to effectively promote higher education for immigrant women. Yet, the agencies did not problematize higher education as an avenue that could enhance immigrant women’s lives in the first place.

A pattern was thus set for immigrant women’s education. Due to their perceived problems with English, they were considered to be different; if they did not have language problems and set their sights on higher education, they were left on their own like other Canadian women. This outsider-insider approach to immigrant women’s education was detrimental to Ghanaian immigrant women. When considered different they were offered doses of language programs that, rather than equalizing opportunities, marginalized them. When they had similar educational aspirations as mainstream

women, immigrant women’s particular problems were overlooked. In both cases, immigrant women, including Ghanaian women, suffered because their problems were not adequately conceptualized and addressed. It is also significant to observe that women’s groups that pushed for higher education for Canadian women closed their eyes to the efforts of Ghanaian immigrant women to secure for themselves higher education. That attitude could only point to class and race biases inherent in Canadian society in general and in the women’s movement in particular.

Education was restricted to formal academic and skills programs and not private activities that also had the potential of changing women’s lives. Judith Nagata’s study of Southeast Asian women’s church activities and Sylvia Hamilton’s of Black women in the Baptist Church reveal that the church has played an important adaptation role in the lives of immigrant women. Nonetheless, immigrant churches, like mainstream ones, operate as private organizations. The little interaction between “ethnic” churches and society occurs usually during election periods when politicians rush to campaign for votes or on festive days. A potential source of immigrant women’s empowerment is left untapped.

**IMMIGRANT WOMEN, RACE, AND RACISM**

Apart from the issues discussed above, it is also important to relate the women’s narratives to discourses on race and racism. Both Black and white feminists hold race as one of the main axes along which women suffer oppression. At the peak of

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feminist theorizing in the 1970s and early 1980s, Black feminists criticized white feminists for neglecting to theorize their experiences by not incorporating an analysis of racism in feminist discourse. Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, for example, charged:

Our concern...is to show that white, mainstream feminist theory, be it from the socialist or radical feminist perspective, does not speak to the experiences of Black women and when it attempts to do so it is often from a racist perspective and reasoning.\(^\text{502}\)

Gerda Lerner put the matter succinctly: as in the case of sexism, racist ideas prop up, reinforce, and constantly re-create racist institutions and practices.\(^\text{503}\) Race no doubt structured the experiences of Ghanaian immigrant women. Commenting on the participation of immigrants in Canadian society, Seydegart and Spears noted that:

One defining feature of this group of women [that is, immigrant women] is birth in a country other than Canada...membership in a visible ethnic or racial group, lack of fluency in English or French...and a cultural background that differs from the North American or European. Each of these attributes sets a person apart from the mainstream of Canadian society, consequently each can be a barrier to full participation in Canadian society.\(^\text{504}\)

Thus the fact of Ghanaian women’s “immigrant-ness” determined the extent of their experiences in Canada. Although the women did not have any special arrangements such as governed the admission of Caribbean domestics to Canada, they did not escape racialization and its accompanying limitations. For instance, they were bundled with other racial minorities as needing language instruction. They countered the racial discourse by defining what was appropriate for them and

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\(^{503}\) Lerner, “A Perspective from European and U.S Women’s History,” 116.

\(^{504}\) Seydegart and Spears, Beyond Dialogue: Immigrant Women in Canada, 14.
asserting their difference from white society by placing themselves on the margins. The act of "moving" to the periphery so as to avoid racist situations was a form of resistance, a strategy that Black women have historically adopted as a survival mechanism.\textsuperscript{505} For many of them, race and racism did not appear to be of immediate importance in their lives. In their narratives they de-emphasized race and racism and emphasized gender as oppressive.

There are two important issues to consider in the way Ghanaian women conceptualized race relations. First, their characterization offers a lens to examine some of the ways Black feminists have theorized race relations in contemporary situations and the effects of racism on Black women's lives. Filomina Steady, for example, argues that Black people's labour sustains the global economy that is dominated by whites, and poor Black women are at the bottom of this "unequal and unjust world economic order."\textsuperscript{506} She argues that "The experiences of the majority of Black women represent multiple forms of oppression rather than simple sexual oppression. Race and class are important variables in her experience and are significantly more important..."\textsuperscript{507} There can be no denying the deleterious influence of racism on Black peoples' lives arising out of slavery. Whether in Africa or the Diaspora, slavery and colonialism impoverished Black people and marginalized them in the global economic order. Thus Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham was right when she noted that race has served as a

\textsuperscript{506} Ibid., 4; see also Amos and Parmar, "Challenging Imperial Feminism," 5.
\textsuperscript{507} Filomina Chiorna Steady, "Introduction," in Filomina Chiorna Steady, ed., The Black Woman Cross-culturally, 3.
metalanguage in the subordination of people of colour. Yet she also cautions that over-emphasis on the power of the racism discourse masks differences among Black women. She argues that:

Such a discursive rendering of race counters images of physical and psychical rupture with images of wholeness. Yet...race serves as myth and a global sign, for it superimposes a ‘natural’ unity over a plethora of historical, socio-economic, and ideological differences among Blacks themselves...the characterization obscures rather than mirrors the reality of Black heterogeneity.

Like Higginbotham, E. Frances-White calls attention to the Janus-faced character of counter discourse and its potential to diminish consideration of differences among Black women. She notes that “Black women do not have an essential, biologically-based claim on understanding black women’s experience since we are divided by class, region, and sexual orientation.”

The implication of the above for Ghanaian women’s attitudes toward race and racism is that it is not simply adequate to emphasize the adverse effects of racism on Black women’s lives. It is also important to call attention to the strategies that they adopted in racist situations. An approach such as this gives women agency, instead of casting them perpetually as victims.

The second point to emphasize about the way Ghanaian immigrant women conceptualized racism deals with voice. A cardinal objective for doing women’s history

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509 Ibid., 270.
510 Ibid.
511 E. Frances White, “Africa on my Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse and African American Nationalism,” Journal of Women’s History 2, no. 1 (Spring 1990), 81-82.
512 Ibid., 82.
is to salvage women's voices from obscurity. That means validating and legitimizing women's experiences as they articulate them. In this respect, it is important to accord the Ghanaian women their rightful voice by emphasizing their priorities. Their stories revealed that sexism was a serious drawback in their lives. There was constant tension between the women and their husbands as the women defined and redefined themselves, arising out of constant interactions between old and New World ideologies. Ghanaian women did not deny the adverse effects of racism, but they considered racism to be less important in their immediate day-to-day activities.

**Immigrant Women and Family**

Another theme that the women's narratives address is the role of the family in women's lives. Feminists are divided in opinion over the role of the family in women's oppression. Early white feminists, whatever their persuasion, located the family as the primary site of unequal gender relations. Socialist feminists, for example, emphasized production and reproduction and how these left women dependent on men for their material needs while radical feminists emphasized gender relations. Black feminists and other women of colour criticized this view of the family because it spoke to the experiences not just principally of white women, but principally of white middle-class women. Amos and Parmar, for example, charged that:

A definition of patriarchal relations which looks at only the power of men over women without placing that in a wider political and economic framework has serious consequences for the way in which relationships within the Black community are viewed. Relationships within the Black community are structured by racism and it is a denial of racism and its

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513 Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 33-34.
relationship to patriarchy to posit patriarchal relations as if they were not contradictory.\textsuperscript{513} When Black feminists focused on the family, much effort dwelt on developing a counter discourse that would debunk the myths surrounding the Black family.\textsuperscript{516} Indeed, many of them pointed to the discord between white feminist theorization of women’s place in the family and the lived reality of Black women’s (and working class white women’s) lives. Thus, some have concluded that far from being the primary site of women’s oppression, “the family is commonly experienced by Black women as the least oppressive institution; rather, it functions as a site for shelter and resistance…”\textsuperscript{517} Analyzing family among recent immigrants such as Ghanaians is far more complex.

The constitutive elements of family as defined by Canadian immigration policy do not fit the extended family systems prevalent in Ghana.\textsuperscript{518} Among Ghanaians, family comprises members of both spouses’ families and other persons who may have tenuous relationships. Immigration imposed a different type of family and created a condition for new and varied forms of gender relations to emerge. These relations incorporated elements of patriarchal, class and ideological oppression and Ghanaian immigrant women experienced them in structurally different ways: at the level both of the family and of the state.

The majority of the Ghanaian women faced constant pressure and abuse at the hands of their spouses, a scenario that definitely does not suggest protection. Further

\textsuperscript{513} Amos and Parmar, “Challenging Imperial Feminism,” 9.
\textsuperscript{516} Angela Davis, Women, Race and Class, 15-18; Joyce Ladner, “Racism and Tradition: Black Womanhood in Historical Perspective,” 181-186.
\textsuperscript{517} Stasiulis, “Theorizing Connections,” 284.
\textsuperscript{518} Canada, Department of Manpower and Immigration, White Paper on Immigration, 13.
research is needed to determine whether female abuse in immigrant families is a widespread phenomenon that is the result of racism and economic emaciation of immigrant men. Like discourse on racism, emphasis on the importance of the family to Black women groups masks internal tensions.

The two views—immigrant families as protective on the one hand and oppressive on the other—present a dilemma for analyzing Ghanaian immigrant women's familial experiences. They draw an opposition between racism and sexism. Ultimately they suggest which of the two oppressive systems is less oppressive for immigrant women. To be sure, oppressions are not equal in their consequences, but they do not stand in isolation. Racism is pervasive in Canadian society, and it combines with other oppressive systems to exacerbate the marginalization of immigrant women. Also, there are other forces in the family that do not fit either paradigms—racism or sexism—but that are oppressive nonetheless. For example, the pressure put on women by mothers-in-law was a source of concern for some of the Ghanaian immigrant women. There is a need to discuss tensions associated with some kinds of woman-woman relationships that are neither informed by race nor class.

Equally important to family dynamics was the presence of children in the family. Much attention has focused on the child-care needs of working mothers and immigrant women in language training. Immigrant women who are not enrolled in language programs do not automatically have access to child-care facilities. Unless women make their own arrangements, child-care can pose serious constraints on their educational pursuits.519 Ghanaian women's problems with child-care revolved around

519 Martha Donkor, "We deserve to be Counted: Women Visa Students in Canada," Canadian
the ages of the children. Sometimes it was difficult to find care for children within some age brackets. For instance, some day-care centres in Toronto limit intake to children between the ages of two and a half and five.\textsuperscript{520} Ghanaian women had children who were either under or over the required age limit and so could not secure spaces for them. The women had to make their own alternative arrangements against the backdrop of limited financial resources. Sometimes children who needed care themselves became caregivers to their younger siblings. The stress that women went through grappling with children and the tension it brought between them and their spouses was crucial to the educational pursuit of women.

The lack of attention to the child-care needs of immigrant women who were not in language training again suggests the complexity associated with dealing with immigrant families. When they were perceived not to have problems, immigrant women, including Ghanaian women, were left on their own to deal with child-care problems. They completed their programs by sheer strength of will. Thus it is suggested that in dealing with the Black immigrant family racism and sexism should not be tagged on to each other, but should be seen as interacting systems that combine with other factors to structure immigrant women’s lives.

\textbf{Summary}

Relating immigrant women’s experiences to feminist and immigration discourses reveals interesting frameworks for understanding Ghanaian women’s experiences in Toronto. It also helps to understand the ideological underpinnings of

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\textsuperscript{520} Ibid.
some of the ways that immigrant women's issues have been conceptualized. In spite of feminist activism since the 1970s very little change has occurred in the way immigrant women's educational needs have been conceptualized and handled. Immigrant women's educational needs were (are) defined in terms of their ability to perform domestic functions, although the reality of their lives is that they have increasingly engaged in labour outside the home. The discrepancy between their lived realities and their presumed needs points to the salience of the interconnections of race, gender, and class as axes along which Ghanaian immigrant women experienced life in Toronto. However, the thesis makes the distinction that these categories have their own internal dynamics that make broad generalizations less useful in unearthing the situations of different groups of women. Thus this thesis suggests that micro-analysis based on all the categories has the potential of revealing nuances that may be overlooked in broad analyses.

It is also important to state that an emphasis on discrimination and racism in immigrant women's lives deflects attention away from women's agency. While it is necessary to call attention to injustices that immigrants face in Canada, it is also important to emphasize their individual and collective achievements. The thesis emphasizes that non-recognition of credentials is not universal. Some Ghanaian women entered Canada without credentials. They needed the type of education that would make them competitive in the job market. Thus, when they were discriminated against in education, it was not based on the non-recognition of their credentials, but rather on the lack of attention to their needs.
Regarding the power of education to enhance status, it is argued that not every kind of education can enhance status. Education that did not lead to better employment opportunities could barely avail women of the resources that give power. However, status should not always be conceptualized as position but what people are able to accomplish within those positions. It is in this sense that female education and status are intimately linked. Ghanaian women's education put them in positions in which they could take charge of their lives and that of other dependants. Their education eased some of the limitations that other immigrant women faced. Thus, the chapter concludes that analysis of Ghanaian immigrant women's lives defies simple characterizations of whether they were victims or heroines, since both converged in their experiences.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The thesis set out to investigate the educational opportunities for Ghanaian immigrant women in Canada and any impediments that might have limited their access to such opportunities. A central theme of the thesis has been that although there were numerous educational prospects for immigrants, officially designated programs for women did not adequately address their employment needs. The thesis further argued that the Ghanaian immigrant women who participated in the study who desired better employment and social opportunities went beyond officially designated programs and pursued those that would bring them the change they desired. While the life stories of twenty Ghanaian women cannot adequately speak for all immigrant women, this research nonetheless makes it clear that the Canadian education of immigrant women was fraught with obstacles.

A major challenge was the official perception of immigrant women's educational needs. Defined mostly in terms of women's ability to communicate in English as a precondition for effective participation in society, immigrant women's education was narrowly conceptualized. As Monica Boyd has emphasized, the socio-economic advancement of immigrants depended, to a large extent, on language acquisition. However, since jobs in which immigrant women were concentrated did not offer upward mobility, language was necessary but not a sufficient condition for majority of immigrant women. The educational needs of women who did not require language instruction were not as vigorously attended to, leaving such women in the grey area of "outsider-insiders." They were outsiders because they were immigrants

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521 Monica Boyd, "Immigrant Women in Canada," 50.
and not subject to the same resources as non-immigrants but insiders because their educational aspirations did not differ from that of mainstream society.

The disjuncture between a definition of “immigrant” that put women beyond social resources, and another undefined identity that purported to avail women of the same resources as mainstream women was a major factor in limiting immigrant women’s education and its associated consequences. Women whose ambition was to go on to other forms of training and into higher education relied largely on their own resources, the exception here being the oftentimes inadequate government loans. As recent immigrants, many Ghanaian women had very few resources to rely on. Consequently, they had to take on part-time jobs. While students’ part-time work was not unique to Ghanaian women in schools, the conditions under which they performed such work were very demanding and sometimes intolerable.

Another major obstacle to Ghanaian women’s educational pursuits lay in their experience of gender relations. Almost all the women were sponsored by their husbands and by virtue of the sponsorship relationship were put in dependent positions. While not suggesting that female independent applicants could not be subordinated to their spouses, this study revealed that Ghanaian women’s sponsorship status was crucial in their relations with their spouses.522 The immigration process occasioned a redefinition of gender roles amid competing claims of family responsibilities, school, and work. These pressures coupled with systemic ones exacerbated Ghanaian women’s educational pursuits in Canada. Thus, the thesis suggested that experience of gender

relations has to be contextualized in order to yield a lens through which to understand the multi-layered nature of Ghanaian women’s experiences in Canada.\textsuperscript{523}

Additionally, the obstacles that women faced in their educational pursuit spoke to the interconnections of race/ethnicity, gender, and class as systems of female oppression and their relevance to immigrant women’s historiography. Immigrants’ “other-ness” from mainstream society based on their race or ethnicity defined resources that were available to them. As well, gender determined what portion of the available resources went to women, while notions of women’s domestic responsibilities determined their location in the labour market.\textsuperscript{524} Since Ghanaian immigrant women suffered these limitations as a result of their immigrant status, one conclusion that the thesis draws is to examine race/ethnicity, gender, and class within a framework informed by women’s immigrant status. This conclusion underscores arguments made by others such as Ng and Ramirez that do not tag the three systems on to women’s immigrant status. Instead immigrant status provides the lens through which to “see” the interactions of the categories.

A central issue that the thesis raised is the link between education, work and status. There can be no doubt that education is at the heart of the modern economy. It determines who gets access to what jobs and consequently power. When people are denied education, they are basically denied the means to broker life as equal partners in society.

\textsuperscript{523} Anthias and Yuval-Davis, “Contextualizing Feminism: Race, Gender and Ethnicity,” 67.
\textsuperscript{524} Seydegart and Spears, Beyond Dialogue: Immigrant Women in Canada, 14.
Denying people education can mean offering them inferior programs that ultimately would not give them access to the resources that give other people power. The thesis has made clear that officially prescribed programs for immigrant women did not have the potential of enhancing their status. Immigrant women's education was limited in scope and depth. The driving force behind the provision of such education was the time worn ideology of separate spheres. In spite of evidence to the contrary, immigrant women were assumed not to enter the labour pool and hence not to need an education that would perform an economic function.

The narrow view taken of immigrant women’s education again revealed the configuration of systemic racism, sexism, and classism in Canadian society that structured the experiences of immigrant women, including Ghanaians. The configuration of these systemic barriers in immigrant women’s lives is not new. Indeed, numerous studies have drawn similar conclusions and this thesis has been a contribution to that body of literature.

Ghanaian women who desired more than social integration looked beyond officially designated programs that positively altered their economic circumstances in the long term. There were shifts in their work status as they moved into new areas or acquired more skills in their original areas of expertise. The thesis therefore indicated that while immigrant women might be concentrated in low-paying menial jobs, that condition is not necessarily a permanent one. Thus the thesis again suggested that in an assessment of the power of education to enhance status, a distinction must be made concerning the target group and the objectives of education. Official immigrant women’s education was not meant to enhance their economic status. Yet, it was also
argued that status itself is a fluid concept. It does not have to be linked with the type of work per se but what women were able to do given their education and work. In that respect, Ghanaian women’s ability to redefine gender roles and to take responsibility on a wide range of issues was a significant aspect of their education and status.

Similarly, the thesis made important observations regarding discrimination based on non-recognition of educational credentials. Non-recognition of credentials and Canadian experience have been perennial problems for immigrants in their bid to access employment opportunities. These twin limitations put immigrants in a double bind. Those who have credentials might face discrimination based on lack of Canadian experience, while their lack of Canadian experience might be a consequence of the non-recognition of credentials. For such immigrants, this has been a serious hurdle to their employment opportunities. Yet, this thesis has argued that not every immigrant entered with educational credentials. The Ghanaian immigrant women, for example, had different concerns. Some entered without credentials and had to build them up while others had education but believed they needed to refresh themselves. In both cases, the women needed quality programs that would prepare them to meet challenges in an ever-changing economy. And these programs were officially not available for Ghanaian immigrant women.

The kind of limitation that they faced was not solely that of non-recognition, for it was also linked to the absence of programs. Since research has usually focused on non-recognition and lack of Canadian experience, the situation of women such as the Ghanaian women has not been adequately theorized. Since the latter part of the last

525 Avebury Research and Consulting Ltd., Decade of Promise, 16.
century attempts have been made to address the employment needs of those who have education but lack Canadian experience. A similar attempt has not been adequately made with regard to immigrant women who needed more education to make them competitive. This suggests that there are gaps and absences in our knowledge of immigrant groups and the factors that hold them down. By unravelling the educational needs of Ghanaian immigrant women, this thesis makes clear that the lack of appropriate training programs for immigrant women was one of the main ways of consigning them to marginal social and economic positions.

At the beginning of this thesis I stated that an objective of the study was to incorporate Ghanaian women into feminist and immigration discourse as a step towards including African immigrants. With this thesis I hope to have accomplished that aim and to have enriched feminist historiography. Another important contribution that the thesis made to feminist and immigration scholarship is its emphasis that Ghanaian immigrant women were historical actors and not mere pawns in a seamless web of obstacles that they could not surmount. The thesis neither portrayed the women as victims nor heroines, but as individuals whose lives were accentuated by opportunities and obstacles, achievements and failures. The thesis further pointed out that while the gender, race/ethnicity, and class nexus of oppression is important in understanding women’s experiences, it is also necessary to adopt micro studies that dissect these categories so that internal dynamics that may be missed are brought to light. It is by adopting microanalysis that we may account for the particularities of women’s experiences. Thus, while Ghanaian women’s multiple identities intersected with other groups of women, there were specific ways in which they experienced life that were
unique to them as Ghanaians. Finally, the thesis pointed to the importance of unravelling ideologies that underpinned the ways in which immigrant women’s lives were structured. It is not just enough to pinpoint immigrant women’s concentration in low-paying menial jobs, or the non-recognition of their credentials or even the difficulties they faced negotiating higher education. It is equally important to probe deeper to unearth why immigrant women experienced life in those ways. That approach enriches our knowledge about the differences in experience of different groups of women.

The thesis suggests and points to new areas of historical inquiry. For instance, how do we begin to interpret Ghanaian women’s experiences? Were their decisions to educate themselves precipitated by a feminist consciousness informed by their oppression as racialized subjects? Were they making conscious efforts to break out of a capitalist class structure that put immigrant women at the bottom rung of the economic order? At what point do consciousness and motive intersect, and how do we, as historians, determine motive?

Throughout I have emphasized language programs for immigrant women as a major block to other skills training and advancement to better employment opportunities. It is possible that not every Ghanaian immigrant man entering Canada had command over one or the other official language. It would be informative to ascertain Ghanaian men’s perception of and response to language instruction and also to other educational programs as a first step toward examining attitudinal shifts and the writing of an inclusive history of Ghanaian immigrants in Canada.
Equally important, this research opens up the possibility of examining the education of sponsored immigrant men and to compare their situation with that of immigrant women. Such a study can reveal the uniqueness or otherwise of immigrant women’s situation and thus form a basis for theorizing about immigrant women.

Similarly, an issue that this thesis did not address and that can further feminist scholarship is a comparative study between similarly situated African immigrant groups. For instance, in chapter five, I argued that the lack of adequate community resources potentially posed a scenario for the breakdown of community barriers and absorption of such communities. Since most African immigrant groups are recent ones caught up in dwindling federal and provincial resources, it would be interesting to find out the extent to which multiculturalism actually helped to maintain cultural identity of recent immigrant groups.

In terms of education and its potential to lift immigrant women from job ghettos, this thesis suggests the need for a historically grounded study of other immigrant women to ascertain long term trends in their educational experiences and how that has affected settlement and adaptation.

Ghanaian immigrant women invoked traditional ideologies to redefine gender roles in Canada. One would want to know the long-term effect of separate banking accounts on women’s property accumulation in Canada and also on inheritance. For instance, what happens when a Ghanaian woman who held separate accounts from her spouse is widowed? How does she lay claim to the spouse’s estate? Or, how has the creation of the nuclear family affected women’s responsibilities towards others outside of the nuclear unit? While the thesis leaves these questions for interested parties for
future inquiry, it reiterates that Ghanaian immigrant women who pursued Canadian education improved their lives’ chances and that of their dependants. They rose above the numerous barriers that had been placed in their way as a result of their immigrant status, a status that was defined in terms of their race/ethnicity, gender, and class.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MEN'S CONSENT LETTER

May, 1998
Dear:

I am going to conduct a doctoral thesis research into the education of Ghanaian immigrant women in Canada. I will be exploring the educational opportunities available to immigrant women and how these opportunities are responsive to the needs of women. As you have lived with a woman who has gone through the educational system in this country, I am asking you to assist me with data by completing the attached questionnaire.

Let me assure you that I will be the only person to see your completed questionnaire. When the study is over, I will destroy it.

I do appreciate your effort in taking time to read this letter. Your response to the questionnaire will be valuable to the study, and I look forward to a fruitful outcome.

Yours truly,

Martha Donkor
May, 1998
Dear:

I am going to conduct a doctoral thesis research on the education of immigrant women in Canada with Ghanaian immigrant women as the target group. The study will involve an exploration of the educational facilities available to immigrant women, the extent of their responsiveness to the needs of Ghanaian women, and how women in turn responded to those facilities.

Having lived and attended school in Canada, you are one of the people I am asking to assist me gather data. Your input will be invaluable to an understanding of the experiences of Ghanaian immigrant women, and may prove useful to policy makers in developing strategies geared towards helping immigrant women.

I will require approximately two hours of your time for an interview. Choose a place and time that suit you.

Please be assured that the information you provide will be treated with the strictest confidence. After analyzing the information, the tape will be locked away in a filing cabinet. Your real name will be replaced by a code to ensure anonymity. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. If you agree to participate in this study please sign in the space provided below.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and I look forward to a shared learning experience.

Yours sincerely,

Martha Donkor (Researcher)

............... (Interviewee)
APPENDIX C: MEN'S QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Personal Information
   a. Name.............................
   b. Age..............................
   c. Sex..............................
   d. Home town......................
   e. Marital Status...................
   f. No. of Child(ren)..............
   g. Boy(s)..................Girl(s)...
   h. Age(s) of Children............

2. Academic/Professional Qualification
   a. Schools attended
   b. Level Attained: Elementary..... Secondary..... Post-secondary.....

3. Occupation
   a. Occupation ......................
   b. Position .......................

4. In Canada
   a. When did you come to Canada?
   b. What was your entry status, eg sponsored, refugee, independent applicant?
   c. How many years have you lived in Canada?
   d. Have you pursued any academic, professional or skill training program?
   e. If yes, describe it

5. Family
   a. What is your relationship to the woman in the house? eg wife, sister, niece?
   b. Did you sponsor her?
   c. In what year?
   d. As what, eg family class, assisted relative, refugee?
   e. Did you perform any house chore? If 'yes' describe what you did. If 'no' give reasons why?
   f. Who did the rest of house chores?
   g. Who made decisions in the house, eg buying a new house, furniture, car, etc?
   h. Why did decision making take that form?

6. School Information
   a. When did your wife (sister, niece etc) decide to go to school?
   b. Did she consult you in the decision making?
   c. How did you react to the decision?
   d. Why did you react that way?
   e. What contribution did you make toward her education, eg driving her to and from school, buying her bus tickets, books etc?
   f. If there were children at home, how did you take care of them?
   g. How did the woman's going to school affect family life, eg in the performance of chores,
for example cooking, cleaning etc?

7. School and After
a. After wife (sister, niece, etc) had graduated from school, did she get work commensurate with her training?
b. Did you realize any changes?
   i. in the performance of house chores after wife etc completed school?
   ii. in decision making, eg active involvement?
   ii. contribution of money (for food, children's upkeep, rent, etc).
c. Would you support your wife etc if she decided to go to school again?
   Give reasons for your answer.
c. How many years did you live abroad?
d. Why did you leave?
APPENDIX D: WOMEN’S PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Personal Information
   a. Name..................
   b. Age..................
   c. Home town..........
   d. Marital Status........
   e. No. of child(ren).....
   f. Boy(s)..........Girl(s)........
   g. Age(s) of Child(ren)....

2. Academic/Professional Qualification
   a. Schools attended:..........................
   b. Level Attained:.....Elementary.....Secondary.....Post-secondary.....

3. Occupation
   a. Occupation (in Ghana).................
   b. Position .................................

4. Travel Information
   a. When did you leave Ghana?
   b. Why did you leave Ghana?
   c. Did you come direct to Canada?
   d. If 'no' proceed to question 6. If 'yes' go to question 5.

5. 'Transit' Information
   a. Which country/countries did you live in abroad before coming to Canada?
   b. What was your entry status?

6. Entering Canada
   a. What was your entry status, eg., sponsored, refugee, independent?
   b. If sponsored, what is your relationship to the sponsor?
   c. Did entry status affect your access to certain services and facilities?
   d. What were these services and how were they affected?

7. Education
   a. When did you decide to go to school? Why did you make such a decision?
   b. How did you obtain information about schooling?
   c. How did you obtain financial assistance? eg from family, government loan, personal sources?
   d. How many years did you spend in school?
   e. Can you describe school life in Canada? eg did you meet with any difficulties in school, at home? How did you resolve such difficulties?
   f. Did the fact of your immigrant status affect your education in any way? How?
8. After School Information
a. Did you get a job commensurate with your training?
b. How would you describe your present job?
c. Do you think there has been a change in your life as a result of school? Can you describe that?

9. Family
a. How would you describe your family, eg nuclear or extended?
b. Do you perform any domestic chores? Can you describe what you do?
c. Does your educational attainment interfere with the performance of your domestic duties?
d. How do you create a balance between domestic work and paid labour?
e. Who makes decisions in the family, eg husband, wife or joint?
f. Who controls money in the family?
g. Do you see a break or continuity in family structure and organization in Canada?

10. Community
a. Do you belong to any Ghanaian association or group, eg church, old students association, town or regional association?
b. Do you belong to any non-Ghanaian association?
c. Have you participated in any community activity? What was the nature of your role?
d. Has your education improved your image in the community?
e. How do you know?
f. Do you have non-Ghanaian friends? Can you describe your relationship with them?
g. Have you been discriminated against (eg at work) in spite of your skills? How did you react?
h. If you had opportunity to go to school again would you do so? Give reasons for your answer.