WELCOME TO CANADA!
AN INQUIRY INTO THE CHOICE OF NURSING AS A CAREER
AMONG IMMIGRANT WOMEN OF NIGERIAN ORIGIN

by

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This thesis investigated the choice of nursing among immigrant women from Nigeria in Canada. I sought to understand why increasing numbers of immigrant women from Nigeria with degrees and professional backgrounds are opting for careers in nursing. The study was conducted through an antiracist feminist lens and uncovered the many dimensions in which African immigrant women encounter marginalization and discrimination in the Canadian labour market, resulting from entrenched norms and values. I placed centre stage the voices of the Nigerian women, and through their narratives found that the decision to change careers was based on barriers they faced, the availability of jobs within nursing, as well as personal perceptions and interactions with other Nigerian women who had successfully changed careers.

The conclusion reached is that despite the structural barriers faced, the choice of nursing had overall benefited the women, elevating their status and improving their economic situation.
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Chapter One
Introduction

The process of settling in Canada is fraught with many challenges for every new immigrant. An issue which has gained much currency is the issue of deskilling, deprofessionalization and devaluation of foreign credentials of African immigrants in Canada. With the numbers of African immigrant women slowly on the rise in Canada, this thesis focuses on how Nigerian women in particular negotiate these issues and how they pursue action plans that help them surmount obstacles and redefine their careers in attempts to resist their conversion into low-class exploited citizens. I have observed an interesting trend among African immigrant women from Nigeria: increasing numbers of them are choosing nursing as a career after their arrival in Canada. There is a standing joke in the Nigerian community in Canada that every third woman in the community is becoming a nurse. Every time a Nigerian woman reveals a return to studying, the first question she encounters is: ‘are you studying nursing?’ Rather than see this claim as something to laugh about, it opened for me an avenue to research the choice of nursing as a career among Nigerian immigrant women. This thesis examines why Nigerian immigrant women are demonstrating a preference for nursing as a career in Canada. The women at the center of this analysis are women who held degrees and had experience in other professions prior to migration. Why choose nursing? How do their lived experiences as African immigrant women underscore the choice of nursing? What particular appeal does the nursing profession hold for Nigerian immigrant women? Are there economic, social or systemic factors that drive Nigerian women towards a career in nursing? Are they demonstrating agency in the choice of nursing and what are their perceptions about the nursing profession in Canada? How has the choice of nursing affected their lives?
I intend to problematize the choice of nursing among these women who had been working in different professions prior to immigration, gainfully employed in other areas and also in the light of other career options which have become available to women in the Western world and to uncover how the interplay of race, gender, ethnicity and class determine this choice of career. It is imperative for me to state that my purpose in this study is not to evaluate the nursing profession but rather it is to discover how systemic, social and economic structures channel Nigerian immigrant women into the nursing profession.

I consider their choice of nursing problematic in view of the fact that these women were practising in different professions prior to migration. It would seem plausible that continuing in those professions would be the next steps or probably exploring more prestigious professions in the light of the many options available in a developed country like Canada. Career changes in adulthood are common and recognized as part of a natural desire to keep improving and developing (Denniston & Imel, 1982), choosing any occupation is a function of interests and values (Suto, 2008) however agency is required. Amundson (1995a, as cited in Chen, 2006) and Chen (2006) assert that actions need to be initiated by agents in order to make changes in the place of career pursuits; personal agency is requisite in responding to life changing circumstances and an attempt to “exert more control over long time effects” (Amundson, 1995a, as cited in Chen, 2006, p. 11). However occupational theorists also recognize that the agency an individual has to pursue life career choices is constrained or enabled by features within an environment (Suto, 2008). Essed (1991) also argues that “entrenched norms and values of dominant groups” (p. 39) limit human agency.

It is my argument in this thesis that the choice of nursing by Nigerian women is a response to labour market discrimination and it is an act of resistance to the societal forces that
would convert them to low-paid and exploited labour market commodities. For foreign-trained professional women who would actually prefer to continue in their professions, there are gargantuan barriers to entry. The process of Canadianization (Mojab 1999) of their foreign credentials proves to be neither simple nor straightforward; it is fraught with frustration, very lengthy, time consuming and cost demanding (Guo, 2005). As jobs within Canada are “associated with gendered, sexualized and racialized workplace cultures” (Creese 2007, p.194), systemic, social and economic structures hence inform the choice of nursing among this group of immigrant women and constrain them from exploring other possible options.

Research Questions

My research seeks answers to these questions:

1. Why are increasing numbers of Nigerian immigrant women choosing nursing despite having been in other professions before migrating to Canada?

2. What are the social, systemic and economic which influence this choice?

3. What are the outcomes of this choice?

Starting from I

When I immigrated to Canada, my job search process was a very tedious one; being a wife, mother and a newcomer to the country, I had all kinds of pressures. There were time pressures, financial pressures and no knowledge of where to go for information. I had to depend on family and friends and other Nigerian immigrants to inform me about what to do and how to go about it. Of course, many times I was misinformed because my informants gave information within the limits of what they were aware of.
I came to Canada with a first degree in Economics and some graduate studies in managerial studies and attempted to apply for jobs that were suited to my educational background and experience but with no success. I was advised to apply for lower level jobs but to omit my degrees as I would be screened out due to overqualification; even with these jobs I was told I had no Canadian work experience. This brick wall called Canadian work experience was a new thing for me, but as I compared notes with other newcomers, I discovered it was something routinely used to reject immigrants for jobs. I turned to a relation who lives in the United States of America to understand if the situation was the same in the United States; although I was quite aware of the difficulties experienced by all immigrants to the United States, I was curious about this brand of work experience. I asked if they had a requirement for ‘American work experience’ on the other side of the border; he laughed hard and said, “You are so funny, and what on earth would that be? Isn’t work experience the same wherever it comes from?” “I thought so”, I said in reply, “but they don’t seem to think so here in Canada”.

After all attempts to get a job in the financial services industry, in which I had years of experience prior to immigrating to Canada proved futile, I decided to foray into customer services and telephone sales as a last resort. Finally, I met with some success as Canadian work experience was no longer a huge requirement. Every day on the job felt like the great tribulation; I hated talking non-stop on the phone to people who were not interested in buying anything, I hated the responses of people to my intrusive calls, I knew I was over-qualified for the job I did and as I got to know my other coworkers, I discovered all they had were high school diplomas. When eventually I left the job, it was with a great sense of relief and a determination never to do a job that made feel so devalued.
It became expedient and necessary to spend some time in an evaluation of my interests, skills and what was available in the Canadian environment in order to determine the way forward. With all the pressures from being the mother of several small children, I took a breather and stayed home with my children. In this period I started a lot of personal studying; however, I became aware that for me to get anywhere in the new land where I had chosen to reside, a Canadianization (Mojab, 1999) of my education and my credentials was inevitable. I received so much advice from well-meaning friends who suggested many different professions that I could go into. Interestingly, one that consistently came up was ‘why don’t you try nursing?’ I had also observed that a lot of women I knew were returning to school to study one thing – nursing. I rejected the suggestion each and every time, because I felt that it was unfair in a land that had been proclaimed as a place of great opportunities and a land where I could live a better life, I had to be compelled or forced into a profession in which I had no interest whatsoever; simply because it appeared to be the most readily available option.

My first term at OISE brought me into contact with a course called “Understanding Research Traditions” with Dr. Nancy Jackson. I was thrilled to discover qualitative research as a methodology which centers the voices and experiences of participants while recognizing the subjectivity in research. The recognition that all research is value laden and subjects are important in research prompted me to investigate the experiences of these immigrant women whose experiences are trivialized and seem to be of little importance in the general scheme of things in Canada.
Justification for the Study

My motivation for studying this group of women primarily arose out of my own experiences as an immigrant woman of Nigerian origin in Canada. The pedagogies of devaluation, deprivation, discrimination, survival and navigation which I learnt were a crucial part of developing strategies which would help me in the pursuit of my own goals within my new location. I felt it was necessary to create a space where the stories of many other Nigerian women; their travails and triumphs, can be told within an environment where the experiences of African women are trivialized. Although I had never been a nurse and had not considered a career change to nursing, certain questions which were raised in my courses of study put this research question in proper perspective for me.

The Nigerian community in Canada is made up of immigrants who gained entry under different immigration categories: economic class migrants, family class migrants, students on temporary visas as well as refugees. Apart from very basic immigration data from government sources, very little information and documentation is found about African immigrants in Canada in general and even less about Nigerians in particular. My attempts to gather specific information about the labour market challenges or prospects of Nigerian-Canadian immigrants turned up very little. Documented information about the activities of immigrant Nigerian women in Canada is scarcer still as they are absent from the literature. Donkor (2000) argues that the absence of African women in the literature arises from the tendency of scholars and policy makers to homogenize continental Africans and people of African ancestry (Caribbean and African Americans) as a group known as Blacks. Although the term is significant, Donkor (2000) posits that its use requires some qualification, otherwise “the experiences of continental Africans will
continually be shelved” (p. 8). The experiences of these recent arrivals to Canada will be found to differ from those of other women within the broad category called *Black*.

This study adds to the small body of literature on the experiences of African immigrant women within the Canadian context and explores how the interplay of several intersecting systems of oppression informs the choice of new careers among these women. A closer understanding of the activities of Nigerian women in Canada will be useful in the design of programs and policies that assist African women in their integration into Canadian society and unleash their potential to be contributors to Canadian life.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is presented in seven chapters. In this first chapter, I have introduced the issues to be investigated and my justification for choosing this study.

Chapter Two gives a historical and contextual discussion about Nigeria and Nigerian women, the factors that induce or compel immigration as well as an examination of literature relevant to immigrant women and their labour market experiences in Canada.

In Chapter Three, I present my discussion on methodology and the theoretical framework that underpins this study.

In Chapters Four and Five, the central question of this study is answered by locating the voices of Nigerian women in the centre of the analysis. Through their narratives, the factors that led to their choice of nursing as a career in Canada are presented as well as the challenges that were faced by these women in their bid to overcome exclusion from the Canadian labour market.
Chapter Six reveals how the women perceive the outcomes of this choice and attempts to assess the impact of the choice of nursing on the lives of these Nigerian women.

Chapter Seven is the conclusion of the thesis in which I also make a recommendation with the objective of easing the frustration and disappointment which accompany new immigrants’ labour market access and integration into Canadian society.
Chapter Two
Nigerian Women and Immigration

Introduction

As a precursor to understanding the lived experiences of Nigerian women from the point where they become (Ng, 1996) immigrant women, the country Nigeria, the characteristics and culture of Nigerian women and the compulsion to migrate from Nigeria need to be examined. This chapter progresses from a historical perspective of Nigerian women in Nigeria to Nigerian women as immigrants in a Canadian context; the Canadian historical perspectives of Black people as ‘undesirable’, Canadian immigration policy, images and representations of other Black groups that have framed the location of continental Africans in the Canadian milieu. The final part of this chapter reviews the literature available on the labour market experiences of immigrant women in general and the experiences of African immigrant women in particular.

The Country Nigeria

Nigeria lies between the Equator and the desert zone to the north and to the south lies the Atlantic Ocean and the gulf of guinea. Nigeria is located in the Western part of sub Saharan Africa and shares boundaries with Republic of Benin to the west, Chad and Cameroon to the East and Niger on the North (Falola, 2001). Within the geopolitical boundaries of Nigeria there are numerous ethnic groups with diverse dialects (languages), customs, belief systems and levels of political sophistication. There are about 250 ethnic groups within Nigeria with three groups being in the majority; Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Members of each ethnic group speak the same language or dialects of the same language (Falola, 2001). Nigeria is known as Africa’s most populous Black nation with a population estimated to be about 160 million (United Nations
Population Fund, 2011); a number which remains in dispute due to the inaccurate numeration practices based on customs and beliefs of the populace. The official language in Nigeria is English and is mostly spoken in workplaces and in the conduct of business affairs; English is also the language of instruction in schools and most places of learning.

Nigeria as an entity did not exist prior to the coming of the British to colonize Africa, although there had been interactions among these different groups (Erhagbe, 1997). The country is a conglomeration of many indigenous and independent nations conquered by the British in the 19th century and brought together as an administrative zone. The name Nigeria itself is a legacy of colonial rule as the name was bequeathed to the nation by the colonial government. Despite much agitation for a name change, many factors have ruled against this proposal and as such the name Nigeria has endured.

Nigeria remained under British rule until 1960 when the Nationalist Fathers fought for and gained independence from the Colonial British government. On October 1, 1960, Nigeria became a sovereign nation and thus began the arduous task of nation building. The post independence period involved a lot of policy making and nation building efforts which were fraught with ethnic tensions and political problems. The nation depended solely on incomes from its exports of crops which were dwindling in price in the international market. Fortunately, the Nation discovered crude oil and thus the oil boom period dawned in Nigeria. The oil boom in the 1970s launched the country into a position of wealth and opulence in the African continent and a decade of lavish and reckless government spending on white elephant projects, red herring schemes and gross misappropriation of public funds. It was only a matter of time before the nation’s trade surpluses were depleted and being unable to pay her numerous trade partners, the
nation resorted to loan facilities from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other European lending institutions.

By the 1980s, the IMF imposed sanctions which required the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program and further austerity measures as a means of reducing the nation’s deficits. The untold economic hardships which came to the Nigerian citizenry as a result of these programs coupled with the political instability at this period of time led to mass migrations and the term checking out was introduced to Nigerian parlance. A term made popular by advertisements on television and other mass media exhorting citizens to endure the hard times and resist the desire to move out to Western nations in search of greener pasture. Hence the period from the 1980s, has witnessed economic and political deterioration with more and more people who possess professional skills, economic resources and international networks continuing to seek abode outside Nigeria, in the European countries and North America.

A Portrait of the Nigerian Woman

The Nigerian woman; the ravages of weather do not daunt her. Let the rains lash and whip her body. Let the blazing sun beat down upon her mercilessly. Her work must go on and on it goes. (Pestalis, 1990, p. 22)

A portrait of the Nigerian woman is a necessity in shaping an understanding of how this group of women negotiate the intersecting oppressions of race, gender and class in the Canadian space. Although it is often assumed that Nigerian women like all African women have been kept in subjugation and have remained in the historical background, studies of many ethnic groups in pre colonial times prove the contrary (Adediran & Ogen, 2011). Adediran and Ogen (2011) contend that women were not as passive in traditional society as they have been portrayed in literature; they had played highly significant and often elevated roles in the economic, political,
religious and social arena in traditional times. Examples of such outstanding women include Moremi of Ife, Emotan of Benin and Queen Amina of Zaria; whose activities have been documented in historical records. Nigerian women have long been known as active participants in their traditional precolonial societies. Their roles in farming, agricultural processing, crafts and trading industries have always been recognized as important even though perceived as subordinate to men’s (Dennis, 1988; Hodder & Ukwu, 1969).

Osuntogun (1988), Denzer (1989, 1994) and Awe (1992) all submit that Nigerian women especially those in the Southern part of the country had always participated actively in the development of their societies prior to colonization. Yoruba and Igbo women have always worked outside their homes because polygamous marriage practices allowed specialization and division of labour within the family unit. The structure and arrangement of the family allowed older women some respite from domestic duties and as such were able to engage in trading and craft activities which often times afforded them a level of economic independence from their husbands (Adeyokunnu, 1998; Afonja & Aina, 1995).

Colonization brought about many profound changes to the traditional realm of economic and political life and the value systems in Nigeria with an accompanying deterioration to the status of women. Contrary to the widely held beliefs that the advent of modern civilization led to the upliftment of African women, many scholars have argued that the denigration, exploitation and oppression of African women was institutionalized under colonial rule (Ekpo, 2011; Pestalis, 1990; Rodney, 1972). In colonial times the rights and privileges previously accorded women were taken away, economic exploitation was heightened and many discriminatory practices emerged in response to the new economic, social and political order (Ekpo, 2011; Rodney, 1972). Pestalis (1990) contends that women lost all under colonial rule as women were
especially disregarded; emancipation and education under the colonialists were a fantasy. Under colonization there was a deconstruction of the traditional male and female relations within the traditional societies and the people experienced a reconstruction and socialisation into gender defined roles which the colonialists approved of (Ng, 1993).

Although colonization and capitalist expansion presented difficult challenges to Nigerian women, they continued to resist and negotiate their position. Women education in colonial times was restricted to training girls to take domestic roles and being better home makers for the new elite group of men that were being educated in schools to take up clerical and administrative occupations within the colonial government (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004). Formal education was initially deemed for males but from the 1920s a small number of women received university education and opened the doors for many more to aspire and attain tertiary education. By the 1940s women had entered into teaching, nursing, legal and medical professions (Alele-Williams, 1988). As Nigeria transitioned to a sovereign nation, more women sought secondary education and went over and beyond to attain tertiary education. In the 1970s, the oil boom revenues brought about the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) which was of huge benefit to all female children especially those in the Northern part of Nigeria who had been denied access to education. Female education took a new turn in Nigeria, and in places were female education had been neglected and in many cases discouraged, the numbers of girls found in schools rose remarkably in all levels of education. With more access to education, Nigerian women are going on to find fulfillment within other occupations which were formerly male dominated, they are breaking out of occupations and professions that confine them to their perceived domestic role which are mere extensions of domestic work; they are reaching for and attaining more prestigious occupations and professions. These educated women have introduced
a class of working women saddled with a tedious charge of bridging the gap between traditional norms and Western practices (Alele-Williams, 1988). For the modern Nigerian woman education is positioned and acknowledged as the only way to emancipation and elevation of status.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) asserts that:

> The greatest strength of Nigerian women lies in their right and ability to work in addition to their resourcefulness and great capacity for emotional survival….All of them however believe in education as a way out of their differing oppressions, a way of providing the social and economic basis and security from which they can resist subjection and indignities. (p. 128)

Also Sola-Onifade (1990) states:

> Nigerian women are coming forward with enthusiasm and energy to take advantage of the possibilities for higher status and broader and more satisfying roles. Nigerian women have been recognised as high achievers. Nigerian women have been known to break into areas and professions that were traditionally male dominated such as engineering, architecture and mechanics, aeronautics, journalism. They are hardworking, perseverant, nurturing and supportive mothers; they are industrious and are known to cope very well with the obligations of both work and home. (p. 7)

Okeke-Ihejirika (2011) applauds the fortitude, ingenuity and agency of the Nigerian woman in resisting oppression, being able to contest social expectations and her will in escalating societal limitations which are foisted on her.

**Status of Nursing in Nigeria**

Colonial education for women in Nigeria, as I noted in the previous section, was focused on training girls to take up domestic roles and being homemakers and only males were expected to go for formal education. Thus education under colonial government in Nigeria was both racist and sexist; it most definitely portrayed the knowledge of the Europeans as superior and inferioritized all indigenous knowledge while it moulded the girls into dutiful wives armed with
the necessary domestic skills of sewing and cooking. However time brought about changes that saw women going into the gendered occupations such as teaching and nursing. Teachers’ Colleges and Nursing schools were opened up mostly in the Southern part of the country to educate females. Formal apprenticeship training for nurses started in 1930 in the mission and government hospitals. Completion of standard six was the basic requirement for admission into the 1-year training program. The formation of the Nursing council of Nigeria in 1946 took nursing to a new level as it laid down clear requirements for the “education, examination and registration of nurses in Nigeria” (Adebanjo & Olubiyi, 2008, p. 2).

Females who attended these institutions were regarded as privileged and were accorded a new status in Nigerian society. As more opportunities for women’s education opened up in Nigeria, women were presented with more choices in various professions. Nigerian women like women in other countries of the world; are opting to go into more prestigious professions and have shunned the more traditional occupations like teaching and nursing to find fulfilment in medicine, business, pharmacy and law (Adejumobi, 1986). Thus the schools of nursing have been filled more and more with females who have been unable to obtain University admission or those without the financial resources for University education. There has been a gradual decline in the number and quality of applicants to the Nigerian schools of nursing. Jinadu and Jaiyeoba (1983) also identified high levels of dissatisfaction among Nigerian nurses as a result of their salaries, poor working conditions, lack of on-the-job training and bad promotion policies within government health establishments. In a study by Adejumobi (1986), it was established that nurses in Nigeria suffered from a negative image; some of the words used to describe them included ‘drop out, promiscuous’ in addition to all the other work related issues. For Nigerian women who come from a background where nursing would not have been considered by women
who are brilliant and have great prospects, it is therefore important to investigate how this group of women come to a decision to pursue a profession which is not greatly esteemed in Nigeria.

**Factors Which Compel Nigerian Immigration**

The subject of Nigerian immigration will be discussed under the broader lens of African migration since the features and issues of most sub Saharan African countries are the same or similar. Of all the migration theories, the one most popularly advanced to explain African immigration is the Push / Pull theory. Migration is not a new phenomenon to the African continent; for as long as communities have existed, there has been migration among the many ethnic groups within Africa mainly for economic reasons. However with globalization, migration from Africa towards the developed economies and more advanced polities of the world has intensified.

Some of the push factors that have been documented by scholars of African migration include wars, famine, ecological disasters, unemployment, underemployment, low wage structures for professionals, fear of persecution, political instability, deteriorating tertiary education, globalization and returnees’ roles in spurring further migration (Arthur, 2000; Okome 2003; Takyi & Konadu-Agyemang, 2006; Yewah & Togunde, 2010). The pull factors on the other hand are those conditions in the host country that make it an attractive destination for African immigrants; these have been identified as improved or better standards of living, opportunities for higher income, safe environments, opportunities for professional development (Okome, 2003, 2006; Udogu, 2004). Okome (2003) argues that the push / pull factors are not either/or causal factors as often presented in debates, rather it is a more complex mix of factors that generate the desire to migrate, hence both the push and pull factors work in partnership. So
in making decisions to migrate there are those conditions in the immigrants’ home country that ‘push’ them to migrate and conditions in the host country that make it favourable destination for the immigrants.

As more Africans especially professionals apply for residence in Canada, the United States of America and European countries more are becoming aware of the opportunity to migrate and as such there are increasing numbers of migrant professionals from Africa every year searching for greener pastures and the dream of a better life. This massive outflow of human capital from the African continent has led to a situation that several scholars have termed the brain drain (Odunsi, 1996; Oni, 2002; Udogu, 1997). The brain drain describes the loss of highly skilled labour to the Western countries and in some cases the middle-Eastern countries which are willing to pay handsomely for their skills. The cost of the brain drain even though it cannot be quantified in monetary terms alone is estimated to cost the African continent about $100 million every year in recruitment of expatriates to do jobs that Africans could have done.

In the next section I shift my focus to the historical dimensions of the story of Black in an imagined White nation, a brief history of Canadian immigration policies and how this plays out in the lives of Nigerian immigrants in Canada.

**The History of Black in White Canada**

Canada as an immigrant nation has always depended on immigration as a crucial part of the nation building process and has actively solicited for people to populate the land and contribute to national development, however, the desire to preserve and maintain the White character of Canada gave form to its immigration policies. The enactment of many immigration laws were designed to curtail the influx of characters that were considered inimical to the growth
of the Canadian nation and to discourage immigration from certain places (Kelly & Trebilcock, 1998). Even though there were several waves of immigration when Canada actively and aggressively recruited immigrants to Canada, the focus had always been Britain. The selection of immigrants to Canada was based entirely on racial characteristics, it was extremely exclusionary and the state determined who was acceptable, suitable or deemed inassimilable. The British and Western Europeans were the portraits of desirable citizens, well favoured and actively sought out with the provision of many incentives to entice them to immigrate to Canada. Of paramount importance to the early settlers was the preservation of the White character and content of Canada and as such there was the prohibition of entry to people “with strange customs” (Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998, p.144).

The history of the people of African ancestry in Canada is a long and chequered one dating back to the periods when Black African people were brought in as involuntary immigrants during the period of slave trade. Thereafter significant numbers of Black people fleeing slavery and oppression from the United States of America found a haven in Canada which had already abolished slave trade. It is estimated that about 30,000 Black slaves found refuge in Canada via the Underground Railroad around the 1780s; however with the abolishment of slavery in the United States, there was a mass return to the United States (Tracey, 1999). The reasons for their return can be found in the fact that they fared no better in Canada than in the United States of America; the Blacks in Canada experienced disenfranchisement; they faced extremely discriminatory and blatant racist treatment in the land they had imagined to be a haven and a place of opportunity and promise. Blacks were domiciled in segregated communities on the outskirts of larger towns. They were used as sources of cheap labour and lived in poverty and destitution (Pachai, 1987; Tracey, 1999).
Particularly repulsive to the White settlers was the idea of allowing entry to people of African ancestry resulting in applications from Black people being rejected for every flimsy reason especially on health grounds. Immigration officers were encouraged to apply a great deal of discretion in assessing the applications of Black people and bonuses were granted to every immigration officer who rejected an application from a Black person (Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998). On August 12, 1911, a law was declared in order of council and approved by the Canadian Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier:

For a period of one year from and after the date hereof the landing in Canada shall be and the same is prohibited of any immigrants belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada. (Shepard, 1997, p. 100)

The proposed law was in response to the migration of African Americans from Oklahoma to the Canadian prairies. The law was never enacted; nevertheless, the intent of the law spoke volumes about how Black people were perceived in Canada.

Historically, Canada has always imported labour in periods of shortfalls (Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998) hence in the 1900s when there was a shortage of labour, Black male and female workers were recruited from the Caribbean to perform manual labour in the steel mills and to work as maids (Calliste, 1993). This importation of Black domestics was perceived not to be in the State’s interests and Calliste (1993) argues that State policy of Black exclusion was in tension with employers’ demand for cheap, unskilled and domestic labour. Black labourers were paid half what White coworkers were paid for doing the same job, were treated unfairly and in a lot of cases were deported on false charges. The government actively pursued policies that would discourage Black people from permanently residing in Canada.
As restrictive Canadian immigration policies were relaxed in 1962, African migrants found their way into Canada in minimal numbers. With the introduction of a point system into Canadian immigration policy in 1967 and the adoption of a more open approach, skilled professionals from all over the world have been targeted; luring them to Canada as a land of opportunity and promise.

According to Palmer (1975), the 1967 immigration regulations are perceived as a *breakthrough*. The openness and non exclusionary stance of the policy is celebrated and its benefit to the Canadian nation is underscored. Palmer (1975) posits that the 1967 immigration policies:

> Established without reservations a policy which is universal, non discriminatory, selective and particularly directed to meeting Canada’s manpower needs. For the first time, the principles governing the selection of immigrants were spelled out in detail, and a nine point assessment system (with a major emphasis on education and training and occupation demand in Canada) was introduced enabling immigration officers to use the same criteria for admission everywhere in the world (p. 72).

While scholars like Palmer (1975) praise the openness and absence of discrimination in the new Canadian immigration policy others like Satzewich (1989) contend that the removal of racial clauses was merely superficial.

The point system assesses applicants under the economic migrant class based on their educational qualifications, occupation, work experience, age and ability to speak either English or French and awards points for these criteria, thus immigrants have been selected on the basis of their skills rather than their racial background. These changes in immigration policy have reversed immigration sources from the traditional European countries towards Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America (Mojab, 1999; Opoku-Dapaah, 2006; Whitaker, 1991)
Although all racial overtones had been expunged from Canadian immigration policy and in theory anyone with the required skills can apply for immigration to Canada, in practice there are still covert discriminatory practices aimed at controlling the entry of Black people into Canada which signify a perpetuation of the racist and exclusionary attitude Canada had adopted towards Blacks in the past. Carty (1994) argues that the lowest immigration quotas have been for people of African descent and this consistently low quota is an intentional way of controlling the size of the Black population in Canada.

**African Immigration to Canada**

The presence of Continental Africans in Canada is more recent and in most cases voluntary while the presence of people of African ancestry generally known as Blacks was a case of involuntary relocation (Yewah & Togunde, 2010). The choice of Canada as a destination for immigration among Africans was not well known in contrast to the choice of the United States of America. Even though Africans have been migrating to Canada in small numbers since the removal of all overtly exclusionary clauses in Canada’s immigration policy, it was in the decade of 1980–1990 that the entry of immigrant Africans became of any significance to Canada’s immigration system and by the 1990s, African immigrants to Canada rose to about 8% of the total annual immigration numbers (Opoku-Dapaah, 2006). Since year 2000, Canada receives on average between 220,000 and 260,000 immigrants each year as permanent residents (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011) yet Africa as a continent is still grossly underrepresented in these numbers.

It is surprising to note that Canada presently has no immigration policy for Africa (Clark, 1991; Opoku-Dapaah, 2006). Clark (1991) posits that Africa is not a priority in the eyes of
Canadian politicians and government and Opoku-Dapaah (2006) reports that there is a conflict between official sentiments and the attitudes and practices of Canada towards Africans. Africa has the smallest number of on-site immigration and refugee processing services in spite of the size and population of the continent; long delays and slow processing times are the result while in contrast, many processing centres were liberally established Europe and Eastern Asia. All these are indicators that Canada is not interested and does not encourage “large-scale migration” (Opoku-Dapaah 2006, p. 72) from Africa. Canada’s attitude towards sub Saharan Africa should not be surprising in light of her historical relations with Black people. Donkor (2000) argues that if the neighbouring Blacks from the United States of America were considered persona non grata in the Canadian space, what chance do those who live in far away Africa have?

From the 1990s to date there has been a spike in the number of immigrants under all classes who have been allowed entry into Canada from Africa. The dearth of information about immigration opportunities to Canada has been rapidly replaced with a great deal of interest and increasing numbers of applicants under the economic migrant category. Discourses among scholars about African migration have shifted focus towards the more recent African immigrants (Yewah & Togunde, 2010). Many studies have been done on the growth and challenges of African diasporic communities in the United States but studies in Canada remain grossly inadequate.

Africans arrive in Canada with very high hopes and a great deal of optimism about their future based on an immigration process which is perceived as open and one based on merit. Their skills, education and years of experience are awarded points and are rated highly as the basis for their success and integration into the Canadian labour market. Unfortunately these hopes are met with frustration as Recent African Immigrants (RAI) (Babatunde, 2010) discover
immediately after their arrival as their primary motive of economic prosperity which inspired their migration becomes elusive (Opoku-Dapaah, 2006). Babatunde (2010) argues that immigrants are perceived as the other in opposition to the norm, however recent African immigrants are seen as the complete other and as such the African immigrant “suffers from three strikes – race, immigrant status and blackness” (p. 62).

Canada’s image as a multicultural society with a great deal of racial tolerance obscures the saliency of race in the social, economic and systemic structures that make up Canadian society. Elabor-Idemudia (2000) asserts that Canadian immigration policy is still deeply rooted in racial and class bias and is highly gendered in spite of the multicultural ideology, tolerance and equal opportunity proclamations. According to Omi and Winant (1993) “it is now possible to perpetuate racial domination without any explicit reference to race at all. Sub textual or ‘coded’ racial signifiers or the mere denial of the continuing significance of race may suffice” (p. 7) and as demonstrated in the case of African immigrants, constrained work access arises from oppressive racist relations which privilege certain groups and devalue the knowledge and credentials of others (Calliste, 2000; Dei, 1996; Essed, 1991).

Opoku-Dapaah (2006) asserts that although some African professionals have the highest levels of educational attainment in Canada, they are still behind in terms of rewards and occupational mobility; many have been marginalized and live “on the fringes of Canadian society” (p. 79). His study shows that African migrants have weak labour force participation and are concentrated in low-paying and low skill jobs, they experience higher levels of unemployment when compared with other ethnic groups and Canadian born populations, they face harsher accreditation and licensing procedures and have to contend with covert forms of discrimination in the Canadian labour market. These well educated and highly skilled and
experienced African immigrants have created a pool of educated and experienced professionals for the Canadian labour market. Unfortunately the Canadian employers have been unable or unwilling to assimilate these new immigrants, creating a situation which has been described as brain waste (Reitz, 2001b) where professionals are unable to find jobs within their fields of training and expertise and have to take up unskilled jobs on arrival in Canada. As the number of immigrants entering into Canada each year has increased, especially with more immigrants arriving from the non traditional countries such as Africa and Asia, many issues have arisen with respect to the labour market access of new immigrants; most evident is an overrepresentation of African people at the lower strata as racialized stratification of the labour market has occurred (Galabuzi & Teelucksingh, 2005; Man, 2004)

Henry and Ginzberg (1985) in their studies of racial discrimination in employment in Toronto found that “whites have three job prospects for every one for blacks” (p. 5). They also reported that job seekers despite their qualifications and training were “consistently denied equal access because of the colour of their skins or foreign accents” (p. 5)

**Immigrant Women in the Canadian Labour Market**

As Canada has called for the brightest and best from all over the world, there has been an overwhelming response with an influx of highly skilled immigrants changing the face of Canadian immigration. About 51% of new immigrants to Canada between 2001 and 2006 hold degrees from other nations when compared with only 20% of the Canadian born population (Statistics Canada, 2008). On the other hand immigration to Canada has shifted from the traditional sources of Britain and the United States of America to the countries of the global South such as Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean (Boyd, 1985; Mojab, 1999;
Wanner & Ambrose, 2003; Whitaker, 1991). Hence, there is an intersection of highly skilled and experienced immigrants with labour market discrimination in Canada (Slade, 2003). The experiences of new immigrants in the Canadian labour market and the difficulties they face in attempting to secure employment suited to their education and experience are well documented in the literature and many studies show the disadvantaged position foreign born residents occupy in the labour market (Basran & Zong, 1998; Boyd, 1985; Galabuzi, 2005; Hawthorne, 2007; Li, 2003; Mata, 1999; Mirchandani, 2004; Pendakur & Pendakur, 2007; Picot, Hou, & Coulombe, 2007; Reitz, 2001a, 2001b ; Statistics Canada, 2008; Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2005; Vosko, 2006; Wanner & Ambrose, 2003).

Previous research on migration rendered women invisible as migration was considered a masculine activity and female migration was assumed to be in response to male migration (Simon & Brettell, 1986). However, the gendered nature of migration studies was brought to light with the works of authors such as Simon and Brettell (1986) and studies which recognize the impact of gender in negotiating migration, settlement and occupational attainment have continued to gain momentum (Boyd, 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999, 2000; Pessar, 1999).

Scholarship on the experiences of immigrant women in Canada has burgeoned since the pioneering work of Ng (1996) on Chinese garment workers. Ng’s study uncovers the complex relations that produce the social category known as Immigrant women. Ng (1996) argues that immigrant woman, is a socially constructed category with an assumption of a labour market relation in which immigrant women are commodified by employers and thus become the most exploited category in the Canadian labour force. The term *immigrant women* has become a “codified word” (Guo, 2006, p. 201) for people of colour who either do not speak English or speak English with an accent and occupy low-paying jobs in the labour market (Ng, 1996; Li,
Studies that capture the combination of race and gender have become important as “race and gender fuse to create unique experiences” (Brown, 2003, p. 1). Ng (1993) supports this as she argues that gender, race and class “are not merely abstract theoretical categories; they are concrete social relations that are discoverable in the everyday world of experience” (p. 50). Ng submits that these relations define how people are perceived and determine their participation in social life. Gender has thus become a valid category for analysis in the examination of immigration experiences among many other categories (Brettell, 1986). Feminist scholars have studied immigrant women in unpaid and unskilled labour (Mirchandani et al., 2008; Ng, 1996; Ng & Ramirez, 1981), the lives of refugee women in Canada (Beiser & Hou, 2000; Matsouka & Sorenson, 1999; Mohammed, 1999) and the settlement activities of immigrant women in Canada (Donkor, 2000).

More recent studies have focused on immigrant professional women and their labour market experiences (Boyd, 2006; Mojab, 1999; Musisi & Turrittin, 2006; Preston & Man, 1999; Slade, 2003). In comparative studies of labour market outcomes for migrant professionals, Reitz (2001a) and Hawthorne (2006) both show that in Canada migrant women experience far worse employment outcomes than men within generic degrees, the same age group and field of work. Even though foreign born and trained women in Canada now possess higher levels of education when compared with their Canadian counterparts (Boyd, 2006; Krahn, et al., 2000; Mirchandani, 2004; Mojab, 1999), the labour market has not rewarded them accordingly. Boyd (2006) and Creese (2007) observed a very low participation rate of immigrant women in the Canadian labour market, and Boyd (2006) submits that immigrant women are at risk of precarious employment; a position which is supported by with studies by Mirchandani et al. (2008),
Immigrant professional women like immigrant men to Canada encounter often insurmountable barriers to the labour market; but unlike the men they bear an additional burden of gender hence their difficulty in accessing their professions is predicated upon the intersection of oppressive systems based on gender and race. According to Ng (1996), “some women become immigrant women in Canadian society” (p. 13) through the working of gender, race and ethnicity to organize their class location. Mojab (1999) argues that highly skilled immigrant women are positioned as a source of manual labour and as such they face deskilling in Canada. Mojab (1999) agrees with the position of Ng and contends that access to the labour market is contingent upon such factors as gender, race and ethnicity since immigrant women from advanced countries are treated differently from immigrant women of colour who originate from third world countries.

The challenges faced by immigrant professional women have been identified by many scholars: occupational mismatching leading to deskilling and downward mobility (Boyd, 2006; Mojab, 1999; Slade, 2003, 2008), language difficulties(Elabor-Idemudia, 2000; Wang, 2008) devaluation of foreign credentials (Guo, 2006; Man, 2000; Mojab, 1999), lack of Canadian work experience (Slade, 2008) and discriminative practices of professional bodies resulting in long and convoluted licensing procedures (Basran & Zong, 1998; Li, 2001 ; Mata, 1999 ; Slade, 2003). Porter (1985) submits that barriers to occupations are determined more by social arrangements rather than abilities and states that “the established features of social structure in their varying degrees of saliency provide a set of conditions against which occupational mobility take place” (p. 311).
Racial and gender discrimination have historically determined how immigrants integrate into the labour market (Boyd, 1985) and it is obvious that immigrant professional women face discrimination in the Canadian labour market. They are accused of many deficiencies in a bid to justify their marginalization and exclusion from the labour market. Henry and Ginzberg (1985), argue that discrimination works against the ability of immigrants to find appropriate employment. Wanner and Ambrose (2003), Phillips and Phillips (1993), and Crompton and Sanderson (1990) named certain types of discrimination which work against the hiring of immigrants in the labour market. Systemic discrimination: policies or practices of an organization which disadvantage racialized groups, statistical/exclusionary discrimination: racial or gender discrimination based on stereotypes, and economic discrimination which involves paying racialized employees lower wages or not promoting them even when they are qualified.

The labour market experience of immigrants appears to be at odds with Human Capital theory which suggests that the labour market access of people is increased with greater investment in human capital; the more skills, training and education an individual possesses the greater the rewards obtained from the labour market (Krahn & Lowe, 1988; Li, 2003). The available evidence shows that although new immigrants now possess more educational qualifications and experience than before, the labour market has not rewarded them accordingly. According to Krahn and Lowe (1988), well educated and highly skilled immigrants are less able to convert their higher education to high-status jobs than native born Canadians. Creese (2007) submits that the evidence suggests that the “evaluation of human capital is coloured by race and gender” and the Canadian labour market is an ongoing site of racialization where White privilege is reproduced (p. 196). Creese further states that racialized patterns of employment and unemployment show the disadvantaged position some groups occupy in the labour market.
African Immigrant Women in the Labour Market

Within the socioeconomic location of immigrant women, experiences vary (Bannerji, 1993; Donkor, 2010; Wang, 2008). Studies among different ethnic groups reveal uniqueness in experiences even when there are commonalities among immigrant women. Some scholars have studied the activities of particular ethnic groups in Canada and their labour market experiences (Donkor, 2000; Musisi & Turrittin 2006; Preston & Man 1999). Studies on African migrant women in general are sparse while studies on those within the Canadian context are meagre still. It has often been assumed in migration studies that African women are dependent on their husbands and as such have not been viewed as active and independent participants in migration; the result being that the effects of migration are seen only through the male lens (Arthur, 2009). Arthur (2009) argues that the overshadowing of African Women in the literature by their male counterparts is a gross oversight because of the uniqueness of their coping strategies. Arthur contends that African women “are not passive and mere appendages of their male counterparts” (p.2) and the unique processes by which African migrant women “come to shape, forge, and create self sustaining social, cultural and economic capacities to enhance their empowerment and status are sociologically interesting and invigorating” (p. ix). Babatunde (2010) posits that if African immigrants have three strikes against them, then the African Immigrant woman has four. Roberts (1990) has described them as ‘triply disadvantaged’: being immigrants, women and a visible minority.

I submit that the ethos of the African woman in responding to the vicissitudes of life which she encounters in a new and foreign culture, how she mediates exclusion from and integration into Canadian society, how she attempts to contest her disadvantaged position in the
Canadian labour market and her responses to balancing multiple roles and societal expectations bear investigation.

In studies by Musisi and Turrittin (2006), they revealed that over 75% of African women surveyed had unmet work expectations in Canada, 64.3% reported being overqualified as a job barrier, 70% found the job search process inequitable in Canada and had experienced discrimination on their first jobs while 33% sought jobs in areas different from their qualifications. According to Essed (1991), constrained access to work among immigrant women arises due to oppressive relations and “gendered racism” (p. 31).

Devaluation of foreign credentials and work experience was commonly reported by African women as very significant in determining their labour market participation in Canada (Musisi & Turrittin 2006). African women are often positioned as deficient job seekers with qualifications that are considered inferior when they are obtained from their home countries and lack an essential intangible qualification for the Canadian labour market commonly known as Canadian work experience. Slade (2008) contends that Canadian work experience is an intangible which serves as a regulator of immigrants’ access to the labour market, positions immigrants as deficient in requisite skills and “acts as a marker of difference in a system of classification” (p. 3) where immigrants especially those from Africa are positioned as inferior. Canadian work experience is invoked with impunity against African women by Canadian employers as part of “a sophisticated and elaborate scheme of discrimination” (Musisi & Turrittin, 2006, p. 222) and the only justification for it must be that it is a design to exclude African immigrant women from the labour market. In the study by Musisi and Turrittin, it was reported that 45% of the women had qualifications equivalent to college diplomas and degrees; 39% were professionals however unemployment rate among African immigrant women was
twice the unemployment rate for all women in Toronto. Canadian work experience masks a more fundamental problem of xenophobia and a reinscription of colonial prejudices which are intended to maintain African women as exploited commodities by suggesting volunteering as a channel to acquire *Canadian work experience* hence getting highly trained professionals for free and maintaining them in low-paid, low status jobs located at the bottom of the social strata. For many women who had professional careers before immigration, “their employment trajectories are radically altered” as they learn to navigate and settle in the new environment. (Suto, 2006, p. 418).

The denigration and systemic devaluation of African women may be founded in the historical construction and location of Black women within Canada. Carty argues that historically most of the jobs Black women have had in Canada have been in the service sector. Brand (1994) and Carty (1994) state that the only jobs available to Black women immediately after slavery was domestic work, although this was not unique to Black women. Both Black and White women faced this lack of choice, as the available jobs at that time were gender defined; however with changing times and industrialization, White women were presented with more options and were able to move away from domestic labour to more lucrative jobs. Black women were denied access to other jobs and had to remain in domestic labour which the White women had rejected. Their continued subordination and exploitation in the domestic worker role appears to have stereotyped them as only suited for domestic labour.

As industrialization took Canadian women away from domestic labour into other employment, there was a need for more domestics to serve the upper and middle class families in Canada. Originally domestics were imported from Britain and Ireland (Silvera, 1994) but the turnover rate was high due to the gruelling conditions of the job and as the domestics completed
their terms they were easily assimilated into Canadian society which considered people of European origin preferred Canadian citizens. There was still a growing demand for domestics that could not be filled with White women which compelled the Canadian state to look to the third world countries. Recruitment of female domestics was initiated by the Canadian government with West Indian and Caribbean women in 1955 (Silvera, 1994) and these women came to Canada in multitudes. However their treatment was very different from that of the domestics from England and Ireland. They had very few or almost no opportunities for improvement, were not given automatic residence and as such their assimilation into Canadian society was very difficult (Calliste, 1993; Silvera, 1994).

The stereotype of Black women being suited for only domestic work is perpetuated by the State through Canadian government immigration policies which encourage Black women to come to Canada under the Foreign Domestic Workers program even at the expense of their families. Carty (1994) and Brand (1994) submit that Black women are disproportionately found within domestic work in Canada. With respect to this, Brand (1994) argues that:

the racialist structure of the Canadian state has given rise to a racially gendered labour market in which Black women have historically found it difficult to move beyond certain stereotyped roles primarily involving domestic work which has long been regarded as black women’s work. (p.220)

I will now narrow my focus to hone in on the professional African immigrant woman from Nigeria who seeks economic and social advancement within Canada who has been severely limited by the interplay of several factors.
The Case of Nigerian Immigrant Women in Canada

Among third world nations with increasing numbers of immigrants to Canada is Nigeria, a country situated on the Western coasts of Africa. Nigerian citizens have also found the lure of a better life and a brighter future in Canada irresistible. The period from 1991 to 2000 registered the total number of immigrants from Nigeria as 2,480. Since the year 2000 immigration numbers from Nigeria reveal an increasing number of immigrants from the country; the period between 2001 and 2006 registered a total number of 7,285 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009) As with other nations, there has been a major increase in the number of immigrants from Nigeria who have chosen the Canadian space to be their new home and appears to be the leading source country in sub Saharan Africa. It is interesting to note that in the same period, immigration numbers from the neighbouring country Ghana has dwindled. That Nigerians have found the lure of a better life in Canada irresistible is obvious from the statistics available. Many well educated and experienced professionals from Nigeria have migrated en masse to Canada compounding the African brain drain discussed in a previous section while the Canadian receiving country has produced brain waste (Reitz, 2001b) of these professionals.

As I previously noted, immediate past generations of Nigerian women consider education the means for economic and social emancipation of women and have agitated for the education of girls which had previously been neglected in favour of the education of male children. Nigerian females are thus socialized to value western education highly; as all her hopes of getting and sustaining a good job rests on the continued acquisition of more certificates and degrees. These women arrive in Canada armed with their degrees and many years of experience to find that these are worth little or nothing to the Canadian employer. Nigerian women thus
enter into Canada triply disadvantaged: being women, immigrants and a visible minority despite their higher qualifications.

The response of Nigerian women to this marginalization and exclusion in the Canadian labour market is to seek out education in any field of endeavour with the likelihood of improving their labour market outcomes. Nursing appears to have become a haven for Nigerian women who have endured long and convoluted recredentialing procedures which have ended in frustration, those who made informed decisions not to undergo the frustration and agony of recredentialing and those who have proactively considered action plans that would prevent their conversion from highly skilled to exploited and low-class workers. The choice of nursing among these women is in agreement with the position of Phillips and Phillips (1993) who contend that an educational channelling of women into traditional jobs which are lower paid and are an extension of household functions continues unabated in Canada. They submit that although there has been an improvement in the number of women entering into non-traditional jobs, ‘the concentration of women in traditional professions of teaching and nursing remains distressingly high’ (p. 73). The feminization of certain occupations; jobs ‘heavily imbued with the maternal and caring elements of the stereotypical female role’ (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990, p. 162) has also helped to ensure that racialized women are concentrated in traditional sectors of female employment (Creese, 2007).

I would not be wrong to presuppose that were these same women still in Nigeria, they would never have considered a career in Nursing because of the social status associated with nursing. This may be due largely to the fact that women in Nigeria, like women in other countries of the world; are opting to go into more prestigious professions and have shunned the more traditional occupations like teaching and nursing to find fulfillment in medicine, business,
pharmacy and law (Adejumobi, 1986). In a study conducted on students in a nursing program in Nigeria, 75% of the participants acknowledged an existence of a negative public image of nurses. Nurses were perceived as harsh, impatient and unsympathetic in their relationship with patients while the nurses themselves were described in terms such as ‘proud, cheap, dropout, promiscuous’ (Adejumobi, 1986, p. 342), as a result, there has been a gradual decline in the number and quality of applicants to the Nigerian schools of nursing.

In countries like the United States of America, United Kingdom as well as Canada, statistics show the possibility of a severe shortage of nurses by the year 2021 if steps are not taken immediately (Canadian Nurses Association, 2005). There has been a marked decline in the number of candidates who apply to the nursing profession. The change in women’s status accompanied with increased career options for women has led to many women opting for higher status occupations like men (French, Watters, & Matthews, 1994). Nursing in Canada enjoys the status of a profession and appears to be more favourably positioned also having to study in the university and obtain a degree makes it more appealing to Nigerian women who are definitely ‘degree conscious’ (Nigerian terminology). This perception of nursing may be one of the factors that channel Nigerian women towards this career. It is interesting to note that a difference in perception exists between ethnic minorities and dominant groups about the pay associated with nursing as demonstrated in a study by Firby (1990). In a study on high school students in London England and their perception of Nursing as a career; Firby (1990), concludes that while nurses are well educated and enjoy a high social status in England, the low pay and hard working conditions make the profession unattractive to young people. However, within the same population surveyed, it was observed that students from ethnic minority groups still viewed nurses as well paid.
From the foregoing it is evident that Nigerian women experience hardships and difficulty accessing the Canadian labour market. Nigerian women who held degrees from Nigeria are faced with both sexism and racism as they attempt to pursue their professions in Canada. It is the purpose of this study to bring to light the perceptions of Nigerian women of the nursing profession in Canada, the factors that have influenced their choice and the outcomes of their choice.
Chapter Three
Methodology

In undertaking this research I have found the works of antiracist feminists very illuminating and their quest to expose the different dimensions in which women; especially women of colour are marginalized or excluded and how their voices have been obscured within dominant society very uplifting. The works of African-American scholars in the United States of America such as Patricia Hill-Collins and bell hooks; in the Canadian context scholars such as George Dei, Agnes Calliste, Kiran Mirchandani, Roxana Ng, Himani Bannerji, Sherene Razack, and Enakshi Dua have helped my understanding of how race, gender and class interconnect in the lives of immigrant women from various backgrounds to produce a new category of women in Canada who are systematically devalued and systemically channelled to the lowest strata of Canadian society. Through the impact of these works I have been compelled to challenge as the norm the experiences of immigrants of colour which I had hitherto accepted as part of the ‘settling down’ process in Canada.

This research is a qualitative study undertaken through an antiracist feminist framework. I will be putting the voices and experiences of Nigerian women at the centre of the analysis. Since not much is known about the activities of Nigerian women; as is the case with most continental African women within the Canadian context; I hope to bring to light their travails and triumphs, their challenges and their victories, with a view to putting an end to their silence and removing their obscurity. An obscurity in Canadian literature which I ascribe to several reasons:
1. Their more recent presence in Canada. African immigrants from the continent only began to appear in Canada in appreciable numbers from the 1990s and have been growing considerably ever since.

2. Based on historical evidence, their Black immigrant status may tend to trivialise their experiences and render them unworthy of documentation.

3. The tendency to homogenize the experiences of all Black people in North America without accounting for the differences within the large category that may be labelled ‘Black’. Within this category experiences and backgrounds vary and using the experiences of Blacks in North America or Caribbean as representative of all Black people diminishes our understanding of Canadian feminism. (Donkor, 2000)

In undertaking this arduous task, it became necessary to center the voices of Nigerian women as a crucial part of understanding their lived experiences which is a major tenet of antiracist feminist theory. Calliste (2000) states that “anti-racist feminism locates the dialogue in the reality of women’s lives and the intersections of race, gender and class” (p. 15).

Due to the almost nonexistent documentation on Nigerian women, I employed face to face, in-depth interviews making use of open ended questions in semistructured formats. In the interviews, the participants were able to freely express themselves and explicate their understanding of certain issues without any restrictions. This enabled me to deeply examine the issues which are to be explored in this study, recognizing that interviews are not merely for data gathering but must be geared towards the validation of women’s subjective experiences (Oakley, 1981). Calliste (2000) also argues that antiracist feminism acknowledges the power of subjective knowing and political agency. The interview sessions allowed the participants to elucidate the
circumstances and the peculiar situations which informed their choices and at the same time it
served as a period of appraisal of the consequences of their choice of career. Since open ended
questions were used, the participants were more liberated to express themselves in their own
terms, with some of the participants’ answers generating further questions which were of great
value in an exploratory study such as this one.

Dua (1999) defines antiracist feminist theory as “a body of writings that attempts to
integrate the way race and gender function together in the structuring of social inequality” (p. 9).
Previous feminist theorizing was sadly inadequate as it did not include the works and
experiences of women of colour (Dua, 1999; Hill-Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981), and this glaring
invisibility of racialized women challenged feminist thought. Antiracist feminists have asserted
the need to integrate an analysis of race into feminist theorizing since oppression of gendered
subjects tends to differ based on race. According to hooks (1981),

Women liberationists did not invite a holistic analysis of women’s status in
society that would take into consideration the varied aspects of our experience. In
their eagerness to promote the idea of sisterhood they ignored the complexity of
women’s experiences. (p. 12)

Antiracist feminist thought recognizes the impact of race and gender upon the lives of
women who have been racialized; it explores how the interconnection of race, gender and class
frames the experiences of those women who exist at these interconnections (Dua, 1999).
Antiracist feminist theory focuses on the social location of women as a result of the interlocking
or intersecting oppressions which serve to exploit, subordinate and denigrate them (Mirchandani,
2003).

As Nigerian women ‘become immigrant women” within the Canadian context, how they
make meaning of their circumstances and negotiate the demands of the new terrain are the issues
in which antiracist feminism is interested. Dua and Robertson (1999) argue that antiracist feminism seeks an understanding of “how gendered and racially minoritized bodies do negotiate their identities and politics across several historical domains” (p. 5) According to Bannerji (1993) the social relations that arrange women of colour’s location and experience “hold clues to the entire society’s organization and her experiences offer critical entry points into it” (p. xix)

It is the place of antiracist feminism to question White privilege and power and how these power relations structure social inequalities; as Ng (1996) demonstrates in her study the role of governmental institutions in converting immigrant women to low-paid and exploited workers in the Canadian labour market. This epistemology also questions the role of state, governmental institutions and society in reproducing these racial and gender inequalities. It seeks to promote change by exploring how gendered and racialized bodies make sense of their everyday experiences and the implications. Antiracist feminist thought refuses to accept inequities as a social norm; it seeks to interrogate these norms and sheds light on how roles and social arrangements are determined and accepted (Calliste & Dei, 2000).

It is a well acknowledged fact that the racism which exists in Canada is in more subtle and overt forms. It is found under a veneer of extreme politeness, political correctness and meaningless references to Canadian work experience and recredentialing. Bannerji (1993) submits that racism in Canada is so much embedded in everyday life that it becomes difficult to talk about even though it pervades the immigration policies of the state, the segmentation of the labour force and the Canadian social institutions which reproduce it.

Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) submit that “racisms are modes of exclusion, inferiorization, subordination and exploitation that present specific and different characters in
different social and historical contexts” (p. 2); they argue that immigration and colonization are ways through which ethnic, national or racial categories are formed. They further argue that “racism is a set of postulates, images and practices which serve to differentiate and dominate” (p. 15) and in addition “they serve to deny full participation in economic, social, political and cultural life by the essence they posit”. Antiracism acknowledges material conditions which structure social inequalities, questions White power and privilege and its rationale for dominance, it questions the role that state and societal institutions play in reproducing these racial and gender inequalities. While certain things are seen and accepted as the norm, antiracism interrogates these norms and troubles the basis for acceptance of societal roles and locations (Dei, 1996).

Calliste and Dei (2000) argue further that antiracist feminism addresses issues of access, social equity and the participation of all groups in constructing and structuring what is considered valuable. They submit that the answers can only be found in a critique of the status quo:

Despite knowledge generated and insights gained from theoretical analyses and frameworks, we still strive for greater understanding of the institutional practices and societal processes that contribute to create, sustain and ferment the glaring disparities and inequities structured at least along the lines of race, gender, ethnicity, language, religion and class. (Calliste & Dei, 2000, p. 13)

The importance of this thesis stands in agreement with Calliste and Dei’s assertion that “anti-racist feminism looks beyond the notion of the marginalized as the quintessential victim” (p. 15), it seeks to explore or examine ways in which people marginalized by class, gender and race attempt to assert agency and express creativity in subverting social and economic forces poised to victimize them. According to Calliste and Dei (2000) antiracist feminism is interested in how to support difference in more subjective terms of human agency and creativity.
Sample Method

The research was carried out from an antiracist feminist perspective with the objective of bringing out the voices of the participants in an authentic manner. The sampling method employed was snowball sampling. My snowball sample was based on three initial contacts recruited from my personal networks. These first three women were known to me personally and agreed to be interviewed; at their interview sessions they voluntarily referred me to other female nurses known to them from the Nigerian community. The choice to snowball is based on the tendency of Nigerian women to refrain from responding to advertisements for participants in studies neither do they grant interviews to unknown people. All the participants were either Registered Nurses or Registered Practical Nurses who were educated and trained as nurses in Canada but had previous professional expertise and experience or possess education and degrees in areas other than nursing prior to their immigration to Canada. The participants in this study were limited entirely to women who were not trained as nurses prior to their migration to Canada. I have excluded women who were trained as nurses prior to immigration but had to retrain on arrival in Canada. In the course of my investigation, I came across such women however; they had to be excluded from this study due to another set of questions raised by their peculiar circumstances such as licensing procedures and difficulties faced by foreign-trained nurses who seek recredentialing in Canada (Kolawole, 2009). While these issues are very important and are faced by many women within the Nigerian community, they are currently beyond the scope of this study.
Locating the Participants

A total number of 10 participants were interviewed, a number which is sufficient for research at this level. Interestingly, at the onset I presumed that to be quite manageable and felt that it would be a simple thing to get 10 women to serve as co-investigators, but how wrong I was! Although women were referred to me, many of those I screened did not fit my sample perfectly. Eventually when I was able to locate women who matched my sample, their busy schedules made it incredibly difficult to pin them down. On several occasions I had gone to some participants’ homes after an appointment to find they had completely forgotten about the interview and were not home. On a number of times appointments had to be cancelled or rescheduled due to unforeseen circumstances. Of the 10 interviews, 6 were conducted face to face and 4 were over the phone. The decision to have over the phone interviews was due to the distance of the women: one I considered important to the study because of her previous profession, had relocated to the United States of America while the other 3 live a distance away from me even though they are within the GTA. We were never able to reach an agreement as to a time and a place that was mutually convenient. All the face to face interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes with the exception of one who invited me to her office and spent her lunch hour doing the interview. The interviews carried out in the homes of the participants ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour 20 minutes in length. After the interviews, the data was transcribed and each participant was assigned a pseudonym in order to protect them and to ensure confidentiality. Nine of the participants were Registered Nurses (RN) and only one held the Registered Practical Nurse (RPN) designation. Three of the participants were personally known to me and could be described as friends and they referred the other women. The Nigerian community being a small community, I discovered I had met with these other women in one
forum or the other prior to the interviews and were not entirely unknown to me. The interviews were conducted over a period of seven months from June 2011 to March 2012.

All the interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, and I opted not to take any notes during the interviews, instead making mental notes to avoid making the participants uncomfortable. Two of my participants seemed a little hesitant and slightly anxious of being recorded, however we were able to overcome the anxiety with a little reassurance that the interview was not intended to be a kind of examination. I noted however that the participants became freer in their expressions once the recorder had been turned off. The others however were quite comfortable and very enthusiastic during the interviews and they expressed themselves freely and were able to articulate their thoughts without much prodding.

The interviews were transcribed on some occasions immediately after the interviews depending on my schedule and sometimes some days after. However, my mental notes were documented in my field notes right after the interview so I would not forget any impressions and observations I may have had. My best interviews were those held in the homes of my participants at the times when their children were at school, as they were able to give me their undivided attention. Since all my participants were mothers with young children, there were no disruptions at those times and we were able to concentrate and actually enjoy the interviews. Two interviews were held in the late afternoon or early evening when the children were back from school and were clamouring for attention. Despite the mothers’ attempts to restrict the children, there were the distractions and the general hyperactivity associated with a home with young children. Since three interviews were conducted over the phone, I probably missed some non verbal cues which I could have noted had I spoken with my participants face to face.
The transcription of the interviews took hours and hours and translated into almost a hundred pages of text. After the transcription, the text was read over and over again for analysis. The data source for this study was narratives of the participants; however I also referred to 2006 census micro data and secondary reports from Statistics Canada as important sources of information.

Data Analysis

In analysing the data, the data was coded over a number of days to identify significant themes for the study. The analysis of the qualitative data focused on categorisation of the data with simple codes in order to uncover common themes in the participants’ answers. The analysis proceeded from preset categories which I was interested to know about and went on to identify other themes which emerged from the narratives of the participants. When I asked the participants the question: ‘Why did you choose nursing?’ which of course is the central theme of this study, the analysis of data revealed some themes for which I had no preset codes. This led me to adjust the preset categories to accommodate emerging themes and to create new categories which helped in drawing out meaning from the analysis. The interview questions were designed to ascertain the educational backgrounds of the participants and to ensure I was dealing with a similar group of women i.e. women with a background in another profession. Secondly, the questions were to understand their experiences accessing the Canadian labour market and the events that led them to opt for a career change. Thirdly, the questions were to reveal the reasons for choosing nursing in particular; why nursing and not something else? And lastly, the questions had the objective of assessing the outcomes of their choice. In what ways had their choice changed their lives, how has the change of career impacted their lives in Canada? Would they still choose nursing given other opportunities? I also asked a few questions on discrimination in
their workplaces to introduce an analysis of race into the study. Probing these issues was very pertinent in understanding how Nigerian women made meaning of the choice of career in Canada.

Profiles of Respondents

**Remy**

The interview was conducted at her house on Sunday evening and was free of interruptions because she has teenage children. At the initial stage of the interview she was a bit self-conscious and slightly uncomfortable at the prospect of being audio taped but as time wore on she loosened up a bit. She positioned her choice of nursing purely as a desire to go to school and study; she expressed a love for studying, which was the reason why she went back to school, however she also acquiesced that what to study also depended on what was available after graduation. Remy had previous degrees from Nigeria, a first degree in accounting and a graduate degree in managerial psychology. She was very emphatic in answering some questions while she appeared non committal on a couple of others. She became passionate and animated when she answered questions relating to her job. Remy had tried to get a job in human resources which was her professional background but was unable to. She cited her major barrier as a lack of Canadian work experience despite her Masters’ degree. She took up a survival job as a grocery store clerk which made her feel devalued. The experience crystallized in her the decision to return to school. She decided that going back to school would improve her labour market chances and settled for nursing at the advice of others and after doing some personal research which assured her of the abundance of opportunities in nursing. She stated that statistics on the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) website played a role in influencing her choice of nursing. She had very strong and forceful opinions about the diversity and multiplicity of options which
she discovered were available in nursing and she claims she has become an advocate for nursing among recent Nigerian immigrants.

**Folarin**

Her interview was quite memorable and I found her bubbling over with excitement and a desire to talk about her chosen profession. Her answers flowed readily and smoothly as she answered my questions. Folarin had just finished her nursing degree and was yet to write the licensing exams when I first spoke with her in 2011 and as I reflected over my time with her, I explained her excitement and enthusiasm as a result of just finishing school. Folarin passed her board examination and took up bedside nursing. I took the time to go back and speak with her; I was curious to know if her enthusiasm and excitement had waned since the last time we spoke; I thought probably her romantic notions about nursing might have been altered but discovered she was very much satisfied with her choice and actually registering for specialized studies that would make her a more skilled nurse.

Folarin had studied Philosophy prior to migration, changed to Computer Information systems when she arrived in Canada; worked as an executive assistant, owned her own business for a while before finally returning to school to study nursing. She had experienced marginalization in the Canadian labour market and according to her the only very bright period for her had been during the ‘dot com’ boom when anyone with some qualifications in computer information could get a job, when the market went down her job went down with it. She asserted that Canadian work experience was the coded way of refusing African immigrants entry into the Canadian labour force and with the market crash, discrimination became more rampant. She chose nursing after trying her hand out at a few other jobs which left her dissatisfied, she was certain that nursing had a guarantee of employment and stated that there were other women who
had gone to school at the time she did; they had studied in other fields but could not find a job after graduation. While studying nursing; she was a full-time student during the day and held a full-time job at night in addition to being a wife and a mother of three little children. All her responses to questions were very clear and she made every effort to elaborate on answers she gave to questions which I might have phrased in such a way as to elicit monosyllabic responses. Despite the rigour of her work she seemed to be upbeat and very confident. She was passionate and forceful in her opinions and is convinced that nursing is a profession that offered practitioners a variety of options; she did not consider it a ‘last resort’ profession. She believes nurses are not paid enough for the kind of work that they do, according to her, “you cannot pay anyone enough to be a good nurse”.

Stella

The interview was at her home in the afternoon and went on till her children got back from school, once they came in I had to wrap up the interview as they immediately wanted her attention so further discussion became impossible. It was a very lively interview and we spent some time laughing due to her funny comments and her tendency to make light of otherwise very painful experiences. She had a Diploma in mass communication from a polytechnic in Nigeria and just missed her final exams for the HND (which is equivalent to a Bachelors degree) because she had to come to Canada to be with her husband. Although she had worked in a media establishment after her diploma, she had intended to go into teaching after her HND as teaching would fit into her schedule as a wife and mother. On arrival in Canada, the idea of being a teacher had to be reevaluated because she was told she had a ‘heavy accent’ and could not be easily understood. When I asked if her accent had ever been a problem in Nigeria, she laughed long and replied, ‘I was one of the good ones in school’. She perceived language (her accented
English) to be a barrier in becoming a teacher and abandoned the desire to go into teaching. She actually attempted to take ESL classes but discovered she was better than the English teacher. In agreement with her husband, also a health practitioner, she made the decision to study nursing. When her qualifications were evaluated, she was told by the admissions officer that her prior qualifications did not count here in Canada; she had to do some high school prerequisites before getting into the nursing program. The nursing program was especially challenging for her as she had her babies while she was in school; but her determination to prove a lot of people wrong in their evaluation of her abilities and to change her life in Canada prevented her from abandoning the program. She asserts that nursing has accorded her a change of status within her extended family and community; she shows pride at being able to accomplish and possess the Registered Nurses designation.

Aidee

The interview took place at her office downtown Toronto during her lunch break. I had to wait a while because she had been in a meeting which had gone longer than anticipated. My first impressions about her were that she was a very efficient person with a take charge attitude, I found the interview quite stimulating and engaging as she was very clear about her opinions and well able to articulate her thoughts. This was not surprising as I discovered that she had held many job positions since her nursing degree and one of them was course instructor in a nursing program.

Although the interview was in a little alcove close to the food court with a lot of noise in the background, the interview was uninterrupted and very engaging, we discussed a lot of off topic issues and she shared a few on-the-job experiences with me and how she handled them after the recorder went off. We had to work quickly in view of the limited time she had for lunch
break and as she was quite concise in her responses there was not much need to probe further on some issues.

She had a degree in Business Administration from Nigeria with many years of experience. She graduated from the University in 1982 and worked in insurance, she had almost become a manager when she had to travel out of Nigeria with her husband in 1994 where she remained until her immigration to Canada in 2002. Her attempts to get a job in the corporate world had not met with success as she lacked Canadian work experience even though she had a business administration degree and many years of experience working in insurance she was only able to get a job as a cashier in a staples store. She decided to take some management and administration courses in the health care field at the university; however she came to the understanding that, with health administration she could ‘hope to get a job’ but with nursing she was ‘guaranteed a job’. She opted to switch to nursing and went back to school when she was 41 years old. She has worked in many capacities as a registered nurse and possesses a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN). She asserts that her choice of nursing has been a ‘pleasurable ride’ for her.

Ola

This interview was held in Ola’s home in the late evening; not the most tranquil of settings for an interview as her children were about to have dinner and an older one was in the middle of getting homework done. She graciously allowed me in at such notice because we had cancelled appointments a number of times and finding a perfect time seemed elusive. She appeared to be tired as she yawned over and over again in the course of the interview nevertheless, she was still able to answer my questions in detail and did not seem to resent my probing on a number of issues.
Ola came to Canada with an HND (equivalent of a Bachelors degree) in Microbiology; had a few years’ experience working in laboratories and intended continuing within the field, she took a phlebotomist certification course to ease her entry but could not find a job. Canadian work experience was a major hurdle that precluded Ola from getting any jobs within her area of training and experience, the certification in phlebotomy did nothing to improve her labour market chances. After working a few menial jobs at Wendy’s and a hotel she decided to chart herself a new course in Canada. Based on research done by her husband she opted for nursing; his research revealed a huge demand for healthcare workers especially nurses. Her online searches and advertisements in all kinds of print media consistently pointed to a shortage of nurses and a consequent demand for nursing services. Ola did not have the privilege of receiving advice from anyone; she chose nursing based on the demand for nurses she had observed. Ola trained as a Registered Practical Nurse for a period of 1 year and got a job immediately. After a few of years in that position, she decided to go for her BSN and MSN program in the United States of America. At the time she returned to the University for her degree she had two young children and was pregnant with another. She successfully completed her program in the US, went for another masters’ program at York University and has become a manager in her workplace. She believes nursing gave her that break and is considering going on to do medicine if an opportunity opens up.

Hafsat

This interview was conducted over the phone as Hafsat had moved to the US after her training and a brief stint at a job in Canada. I considered an interview with her a very important part of this study as she had been a lawyer in Nigeria before immigrating to Canada and as such I made a concerted effort to seek her out. It took some ingenuity to be able to contact her as I had
to search her out on face book and send her a message explaining my project to her. She responded and sent her phone number and after several attempts, she was able to give me an appointment for an interview.

Hafsat had been called to the Nigerian bar and had an LLB in law and had practiced for 5 years in criminal and family law before immigration to Canada. She attempted recredentialing but was faced with what appeared to be a long and expensive journey which she had to call off and examine other options. For her, pragmatism superseded the long journey of recredentialing to become a lawyer. She mentioned some individuals she had met who were still struggling in the process after 5 years. She had to take several jobs to put food on her table and pay the bills; she described the jobs as ‘ridiculing’, ‘demeaning’ and preferred not to remember them as they brought back memories of how belittled she felt at the time, going from being a professional to becoming a factory worker. She remembers her late father had advised her to go into medicine but she thought she had no aptitude for it at the time; so she based her choice of career on something that would still give her a professional status, was needed in the labour market and would not take too much time to get into. She had to take prerequisites before she was accepted into the nursing program and for her there were serious financial challenges so she had to work weekends when she was not in school. She is currently working on her masters’ degree and hopes to go on to become a Nursing Practitioner so she can run her own office.

Vicky

The interview took place in her home on her day off work, the house was quiet and there were no distractions as her children were at school and her husband at work. It was a very engaging interview and she shared her experiences thoughtfully and carefully. Hers was one interview I came away from with an appreciation of how much these women go through in
resisting a system designed to inferioritized and relegate them. Vicky had a degree in medical lab science from Nigeria and many years of experience before her immigration in 1999. She attempted to recertify so she could continue in her profession when she arrived in Canada; however, she got confusing information and different layers of bureaucratic bottlenecks in the process of having her credentials evaluated by the Medical Laboratory Scientists of Ontario. The profession being regulated, she was unable to apply for jobs within the field as she had no Canadian certification and on the other hand the recertification process was a long and convoluted route which she eventually had to abandon due to the mounting expense and dwindling financial resources. She found work in a factory but she describes her feelings of being “devalued” and having been “deceived” by the Canadian government into thinking that her profession was needed. She remembers that their immigration application received top points for being a professional in the medical laboratory field which had made her hopeful about her job prospects in Canada nevertheless on arrival she was reduced to a factory worker. She later went to study to become a personal support worker so she could get a job quickly. She was identified on the job as a person with more skills than that of a regular health care aid worker and she received encouragement from her supervisor to go into nursing. She claims she had been interested in nursing after her High school but because she had such good grades in school she did not want to settle for nursing which seemed to be for people who could not make very good grades back in Nigeria. She found the time and cost involved in being a Registered Nurse daunting and settled for Registered Practical Nurse. After a few years she decided to improve her situation and went over to the States for the BSN program in nursing. For her it was a great challenge commuting every day to Buffalo, New York and in an attempt to reduce stress she moved to the States and left her family behind in Canada coming home on weekends to set the
home in order. She finished her BSN program a few weeks to her 50th birthday and is glad she was able to do what she had to do as her role at work has changed and she has so many more options. She is looking forward to doing a masters’ program soon.

**Beesoil**

I had to settle for a telephone interview as we could not find a time that was mutually agreeable for us after a couple of attempts to meet. Her availability coincided with the time when the children had come back from school both in her home and mine. Even though I had tried to seclude myself, I had a couple of interruptions and I could hear her on the other end of the phone trying to get her children to stay out while she was on the phone. Since I could not see her face as she spoke with me, I can only make conjectures as to how she felt about certain issues we discussed. She sounded a little uneasy and a bit unsure as to what my expectations were and kept pausing as if expecting me to assure her that she was saying what I wanted to hear. I made her understand I was not looking for particular answers but was just looking to have her share her experience. It seemed obvious to me that she had never had to think through a good number of the questions I asked in the course of the interview and in some of her answers I sensed she wondered why I had to keep probing so much. She kept her answers short so I had to follow up with a few more questions.

Beesoil had a degree in accounting and business administration from Nigeria and had been a financial analyst. With the intention to immigrate to Canada, she decided to go to school for 1 year to study French, a smart move which was designed to improve her chances in the Canadian labour market by giving her bilingual capacities. She was able to get a bilingual job on contract with the Ontario government about three months after her arrival. While she was worked she became aware of a demand for nurses in the healthcare system of Ontario and
decided a career change was a good idea basically because she wanted the flexibility and proximity to home that the career would afford her as a mother of two toddlers. She studied part time for 3 years and obtained the Registered Practical Nurse (RPN) designation. For her, the career move has not particularly changed her financial situation, as she appears to be on the same level she had been before. The other benefits lie in the time now available for her to be with her family and the proximity of her workplace to her home; her old job had demanded long hours of commuting which she found tiring. She is currently working on her BSN on a part-time basis.

Yemi

This also was a telephone interview due to logistic issues. She resides a distance away from my city in the GTA and the drive down was not feasible so we settled for a telephone interview. The discussions were quite interesting and she was candid in her opinions, she was not interested in making an impression she just stated things as she had experienced them.

She came to Canada with a Bachelors degree in Home Economics and a Masters in Human Nutrition from Nigeria and immediately sought accreditation with the college of registered dieticians. She proactively tried to fulfill all the requirements for registration as a dietician even when they appeared strenuous and unnecessary she eventually abandoned the process when it appeared there was no quick end to the accreditation process in sight. She had spoken with other Nigerians who had been through the recredentialing process and was informed of the length of time they had invested to get accredited. When faced with these hurdles, she decided not to invest that length of time for a job that offered her no guarantees. She opted to do a 2-year nursing program at U of T, took the necessary prerequisites, completed the BSN and passed the licensing board exams. She opines that nursing is a less prestigious profession than being a dietician but believes the pay is similar. For her, going for a less prestigious profession
with guaranteed employment made a lot of sense to her at a time when she was faced with waiting 7 years to complete the certification process to be a dietician.

She is not interested in pursuing more education in the nursing field now as she has a business on the side which she plans to grow. Her energies are concentrated more on growing the business than getting more degrees.

**Molly**

I interviewed Molly on the phone as she found this more convenient for her very tight schedule. She came across as very confident and quite comfortable talking about her choice of career; despite a cold she sounded very enthusiastic although she had a very tight weekend schedule. She had just come in from church; was going to work that night so she needed some nap time before leaving for her night duty. As a result I tried to contain the interview in a one hour frame.

She had a degree in Microbiology from Nigeria and had worked in medical laboratories prior to her immigration to Canada. She applied for jobs in that field but could not get any, according to her she had sent out tonnes of applications but she only got one interview which ‘did not go very well’. Even though she was not told directly, she understood her foreign credentials were a source of her constant rejection in the job application process. She found a job in a call center which left her dissatisfied and searching for more fulfilling options; she did not need much persuasion to apply for nursing since medicine had been her first choice in the University but had settled for Microbiology when she did not get admission for medicine. She acted on the advice of other women and what was available readily in the job market and chose to study nursing. She chose to go into Public health and is finding a lot of fulfillment in her
current roles and she is looking forward to getting the Nursing Practitioner (NP) designation or going for medicine if presented with the opportunity.

Summary

All the women interviewed had degrees prior to their immigration to Canada and two had graduate degrees; however these degrees did not translate into any advantage for them in the Canadian labour market. The narratives of the women revealed they had experienced exclusion from the Canadian labour force. Exclusion in its varying forms which were ultimately designed to relegate African women who were professionals with years of experience in their different fields to low-paid workers, unskilled labourers and position them as deficient job seekers. The women experienced a loss of economic and social status and sought out ways to remedy their situation. Although they faced several barriers; systemic schemes which structure the inequalities in the social strata of Canada; the women were determined not to remain victims within the complex system of relations within Canada. The differentiation of the women as deficit in certain workplace skills or requirements denied them full participation in the economic and social spheres of Canadian life however they fought against this by choosing an entirely different career path which held for them a promise of elevation and improvement in their lifestyles.
Table 1

*A Comparison of the Participants’ Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age of participant at time of going to school</th>
<th>Years in Canada before going to school</th>
<th>Previous degrees</th>
<th>Length of nursing program (in years)</th>
<th>Nursing designation</th>
<th>Years of experience before immigration</th>
<th>Marital status at time of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Remy</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>HND Accounting MSc</td>
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<td>RN, BSN</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>11</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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Chapter Four
Systemic, Social and Economic Challenges That Influence
Nigerian Women’s Choice of Nursing

In this chapter I analyze the systemic, economic and social factors that influenced the choice of nursing for the women involved in this study. Although all the women were well educated and had worked in professional capacities, they were unable to convert their human capital into any appreciable economic benefit on arrival to Canada. They all struggled to find jobs that were suited to their training and experience without success. They then resorted to doing menial and low-paid jobs in order to survive. As a way out of this precarious situation, the women interviewed chose to obtain credentials in Canada; they had observed that Canadian credentials were necessary to making headway professionally in Canada.

To understand their choice of nursing, I asked some background questions about their previous professions, how long they had been in those professions and their job search experiences after they arrived in Canada. After receiving information on these issues I proceeded to ask the central question: “Why did you choose nursing?” In the analysis of the data, certain themes emerged consistently from the accounts of the participants.

In this chapter, the voices of the women are placed front and centre in the discussion of the social, systemic and economic factors in the Canadian environment that influenced them to choose nursing as a career.

Lack of Canadian Experience

All the women, with the exception of Beesoil, experienced extremely challenging job searches on their arrival to Canada. Beesoil had received information that led her to study French
while she was in Nigeria; she started studying French the moment she received acknowledgment of her immigration application. On her arrival her job search was relatively easy; she was able to find a bilingual role within a three-month period. The other participants found themselves faced time and again with employers who required Canadian work experience as they looked for work. Getting jobs within their areas of training and previous experience proved virtually impossible because of this demand for something that no new immigrant could possibly have: Canadian work experience.

Many scholars on immigration issues have identified lack of Canadian work experience as a major barrier to immigrants’ participation in the Canadian labour force. Slade (2008) describes lack of Canadian experience as the “new head tax” levied on new immigrants to limit their participation in the labour force. Lack of Canadian experience is intangible, it defies an apt description but it is constantly invoked by Canadian employers to determine who is in and who is out. The narratives of the women in this study support the submission of Musisi and Turrittin (2006) that the Canadian experience requirement is part of “a sophisticated and elaborate scheme of discrimination” (p. 222) designed to exclude African immigrant women from the labour market. Some of the women expressed frustrations when they encountered rejection based on a lack of Canadian experience. For instance Remy stated:

Coming all the way here from wherever you have come and they ask you for Canadian experience, I don’t know where to get Canadian experience except there is a school where I can get Canadian experience. So there is a gap when you are a professional coming from another country, there has to be something in between.
Folarin argued:

First and foremost people would talk about Canadian experience, you are coming in fresh as an immigrant and it does not matter how many years of experience you have wherever you are coming from, you are expected to pay your dues and join the queue and so everywhere you go people are talking about Canadian experience, Canadian experience, where are you supposed to get that when you are not given a job? That is a major barrier and I see it more or less like a glass wall.

Lack of Canadian work experience is used to disqualify immigrant women, especially African immigrant women, from jobs within their areas of training and qualification. Interestingly it is not an issue when they apply for low-paying jobs. The demand for Canadian work experience serves to shut out many immigrants from the Canadian labour market and pressures them into taking low-paying jobs so they can pay their bills and feed their families. All the women in the study, with the exception of Beesoil, had to take survival jobs in order to make ends meet and sustain their families. Remy had to take a job as a grocery clerk, Vicky took a factory job, Yemi got a job in customer service, Aidee got a job as a staples cashier, Ola found a job with Wendy’s and Folarin chose to go to school for the in thing, which was computer information systems at the time of her arrival.

**Devaluation and Inferioritization of Foreign Credentials**

With the exception of Beesoil, whose knowledge of French gave her an advantage in the Canadian labour market, all participants experienced a devaluation of their Nigerian credentials and believed their Nigerian education was assessed as inferior. As a result they were required to take more courses in Canada before they could be certified by Canadian regulatory bodies.
According to Aidee, merely having qualifications from a third world country shuts African immigrants out of the labour market:

People don’t have a way to quantify what you have, they’re seeing your resume and they are seeing a degree that is not from a Canadian university and they don’t have an appreciation for it. Since they are not able to quantify what you bring to the table they do not give you that opportunity to come in and prove yourself. But subjectively, I say subjectively because this is my own submission, here is an immigrant that has an accent and this is a Canadian corporation that needs to have or be represented by “Canadians,” so they just didn’t feel comfortable giving you that opportunity and because I didn’t have that opportunity I didn’t get to prove myself because you can only prove yourself at a job when you are given that opportunity. They just felt this is an immigrant that has an accent, has gone to a non-Canadian institution that is not of the western world then she might not be able to fit into and meet the protocol of the Canadian business world.

According to Yemi, the two dieticians she spoke with on arrival to Canada had two different experiences with recertification. While the dietician who trained in the United Kingdom was recertified in 1 year, it took the Nigerian-trained dietician 7 years.

I checked with some other foreign-trained dieticians who had crossed the hurdle and were practicing at the time and they said it took about 7 years. …Yeah to get into practice, but that is for someone who trained from Nigeria, another dietician who trained in the UK, it took her less than a year to get into the practice.

Vicky had this to say about her recredentialing attempts:

When I got to Canada, I was at a loss concerning how to get the job because of what was presented to us back home in Nigeria. It was like they were in need of this particular field; they gave us marks as part of the assessment for immigration. Medical lab then was in a top mark as if they were in need of them. Not that we wanted to walk into the laboratory and start working, we thought there was some
sort of orientation for a number of weeks and then you start. But when we came
they did not even recognize the education we had, they did not count our
education as part of education. It was like we had nothing.

Guo argues that “although certain forms of knowledge are legitimized as valid, the learning and
work experience of internationally trained professionals are often treated as suspicious or
inferior” (Guo, 2006, p. 199). It is well documented that the education, credentials and
experience of immigrants of colour, particularly African immigrants, is undervalued and heavily
discounted (Dei, 1996; Essed, 1991; Musisi & Turrittin, 2006; Opoku-Dapaah, 2006). Although
their credentials and qualifications played a major role in their selection as migrants to Canada,
these are quickly devalued and discounted on their arrival leading to downward mobility and
deskill in Canada. Opoku-Dapaah (2006) contends that African professionals, despite their
higher levels of educational attainment, are still behind when it comes to rewards and
occupational mobility.

When Stella applied for admission to study nursing at a college in Canada, her
polytechnic diploma was disregarded by the admissions officer who assessed her credentials. She
remembered: “while I was applying for admission, I brought out all my certificates for
assessment, but I was told that ‘all those don’t count here’”. Stella was required to return to high
school to upgrade her education in order to gain admission to the nursing program.

From the accounts of the women, it is apparent, as Creese (2007) posits, that the
evaluation of human capital is indeed “coloured by race and gender” (p. 196), and in the
hierarchy of education, third world education is ranked very low.
Difficult Recertification Procedures

The devaluation of the foreign credentials of Nigerian women led to difficulties in recredentialing or recertification. For the women who had been in professions that were strictly regulated, their major challenge was recertification by the professional bodies in Canada. As their education had been constructed as inferior, certification by professional bodies was almost impossible, being *outsiders* the doors to their previous professions were shut to keep them out. Professional bodies are known to be self-regulated; they are imbued with the authority to determine standards as well as the power to admit or reject new members. According to Collins (1979), the strength of these bodies comes from their ability to keep those they consider to be outsiders out of the profession.

Women who needed licensing to be able to practice in their professions, such as Yemi, Vicky and Hafsat, were faced with very difficult, expensive, prolonged and convoluted recertification procedures with very uncertain conclusions. The costs for recertification were prohibitive and the information they received about the process was unclear and confusing. Their initial attempts were marked by demands from the regulatory bodies that appeared to differ depending on the country in which the qualifications were obtained. For instance, in the case described by Yemi of two women of Nigerian origin who had qualifications from different countries, the one who had trained in the United Kingdom and was able to recertify in 1 year while the one who had credentials from Nigeria was only able to recertify after 7 years. Why the gross disparities in the length of time required for recertification? This instance shows that credentials from third world countries are perceived to be inferior to those obtained from Western countries.
Costs Associated With Recertification

All aspects of the recertification process have costs attached; the evaluation by the regulatory bodies, the application to the colleges, the requests for transcripts and the shipping of transcripts from the home country. These costs presented a challenge for the women who were already in tough economic times because they had not been able to get jobs while they pursued recertification. Yemi had been asked by the College of Registered Dieticians to present course descriptions of every course she took at the University in Nigeria after she had sent in her transcripts; meeting this demand was laborious and time consuming. After all the expense and effort she had expended to provide the course descriptions, the process still had no near end in sight. In describing her efforts at recertification she said:

There were costs. For instance, the evaluation from U of T had to be paid for and for the College of Dietitians to evaluate your credentials you had to pay them as well although I can’t remember how much. And even the pain of getting your transcripts from Nigeria, it was not just transcripts it was a course description of all your class work. They wanted a description of all the courses you took in the university. That was a very tough requirement because I remember my late father at 70 had to travel from Lagos to Ife at that time to look for course descriptions of what I did from 1983 to 1987, that was a very tough requirement, but we did, we met all the requirements. The next hurdle was now to get an internship, but at that point I just couldn’t invest so much of my life to get that.

Hafsat, a lawyer, was required to return to school to take seven law courses after she sent her credentials for evaluation, a requirement that did not apply to all applicants. Not only was she required to expend time and effort on a number of courses, each course she registered for in a Canadian law school would cost her more money than she could afford.
I applied for the certification and for each course it was going to cost about $700 and I was supposed to write about seven courses and these were supposed to be independent study exams and I had to practically study on my own in addition to having the money on hand. … Not everyone had to do the same number of courses, some four, some six. … I think it depends on some other things.

What the “other things” were, Hafsat could not clarify, but it was obvious that not all applicants to the Canadian law Society for recertification had the same demands placed on them.

**Confusing Information About Recertification**

Vicky, a professional medical laboratory scientist, received confusing information about the recertification process. She described bureaucratic layers of evaluating bodies which all required a fee to assess her credentials. Vicky’s quest for recertification was made more difficult because she did not have access to timely and accurate information. She claimed there was no place to go for helpful information. She kept getting the runaround in all her efforts. Vicky reminisced:

There was no one to enlighten you on what to do. I knew my profession was a regulated profession so I was prepared to do whatever. I was expecting there were some people we would go to for information about how to become part of that body, but there was none. So I went from place to place and I was tossed around … ‘go here go there’. And after a while I got to know I was to contact Michener Institute in Toronto here. I sent my transcript and everything to them and I was told I had to do some refresher courses that would last some 3 months and then another course for one month. There was no cogent information about how to register in the profession and how to get assimilated into the profession, so it was extremely difficult and that is when you are in the process of doing all this, all the money you came in with is going and you need to keep and sustain your family. So you start looking for anything that will just sustain you and family. This is
what happened to me. As for profession, I tried but there was no one to put me through how to get assimilated into the profession.

This aptly describes the situation of a lot of immigrant professionals who attempt recertification but give up when they appear not to be making much progress. Vicky ended up getting a job in a factory and abandoning the licensing procedure because her family was faced with dire straits.

**Uncertain Outcomes of Recertification**

Remy recognized that the process of certifying in her former occupation as a human resources (HR) specialist would take a while and involve private study and no guarantees of employment. She weighed her options and the recertification process seemed the least desirable for her due to the unclear timelines for the process. According to her: “If I opted for the HR it meant studying on my own and doing the professional exams in probably 2 or 3 years, but with nursing there was a timeline; I knew when I would be done.”

Aidee had a background in business administration and many years of experience working in the corporate and business world. Although no licensing or recertification was required in her line of work, she took courses in health administration hoping to facilitate her entry into the corporate world, but she admitted:

I started taking all the other courses in health administration and I was in class with a lot of nursing students, those were mainly nursing courses, healthcare courses, they were generic nursing courses. So I started realising that if I go into nursing I am guaranteed a job. If I do health administration I hope I will get a job. So I decided that instead of me taking these courses and coming out and fighting and looking for a job I better just change to nursing where I know I will get a job.
For all these women, it was a choice between going through lengthy and frustrating procedures with an uncertain end result or a complete career change. Changing careers became a more attractive proposition for all the women because the pursuit of recertification appeared to be an exercise in futility. They chose rather to redirect their efforts and resources to an option that seemed certain to lead to gainful employment.

Demand for Nurses and the Prospect of Guaranteed Employment

Every single participant acknowledged that the healthcare sector appeared to be the sector with the best prospects for them in Canada. All of the women had observed that there appeared to be a guarantee of employment in nursing; by referring to statistics and checking out advertisements online and in print media, the women concluded nursing held a major appeal for them. All of the women were in agreement that the lure of nursing among Nigerian women was probably the greater prospect of employment upon graduation compared with other professions or fields of study. They stated unequivocally that they knew with nursing they would not have to struggle to get jobs. Folarin stated:

When you go to school and you finish, either you have taken OSAP [Ontario Student Assistant Program student loan] or you have worked your fingers to bone to pay your tuition, you want to be sure that you can finish and get a job right away. And when you work as a nurse there is job availability because you want to be sure that when I finish not only will I be able to put food on the table I will be able to pay back the loan.

Aidee’s words also support Folarin’s assertion about the apparent demand for nurses in the Canadian health system. Aidee said “So what brought me to nursing initially was the need to be assured of a job on completion of my degree”.
According to Yemi, researching into a career that would take her from her job in the call centre, since she could not meet the requirements for recertification as a dietician, to a more fulfilling life led her to nursing.

I investigated what the two careers would offer and found that being a registered dietician is probably a little bit more prestigious than being a nurse because there are not too many of them, but at the same time, the job opportunities are not equally as available. For instance in a hospital they could hire 100s of nurses versus two or three dieticians. In that wise I figured out that being a nurse would offer me more versatility with job opportunities, the opportunities for getting a job broader and the salary pretty much the same with the dietician even though in terms of prestige, it was more prestigious. At that point I just thought 7 years to get a “prestigious” career or 2 years and I’m working as a registered nurse, I decided to go that route.

In the case of Hafsat, who had been a lawyer previously, being a legal assistant appeared to be a demotion so she opted for a complete career change. By doing some research on what opportunities were available as well as how long it would take to qualify in various professions, she chose a career in nursing.

I kind of looked around and did some job searching, what could I do faster, be a professional and still be solid financially and be able to manage my time. I considered the job market then and searched for what they would always want, something that would be in demand in the community or society, and that is something in healthcare. And that drew me into nursing.

Although a career in nursing would bring about another set of challenges, all the women were convinced that the opportunities and availability of jobs in nursing would assuage the impact of
those challenges on their lives. Ola also had this to say about how she was convinced nursing was the way to go:

Every day we would get newspapers and there would be like 30 jobs in nursing, several in nursing, and nothing in other fields, every single day. That was convincing for me and the rates of pay were b/w 18–20 while the pay for PSW was 12. There were always job opportunities because nurses were in high demand. To me that was key.

Beesoil claimed that despite her bilingual finance job with the government she became interested in nursing through the advertisements for nursing professionals by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and other government agencies and the promotion of nursing as a great career by the colleges.

It was the information from HRDC as well and there was information from all those schools about different careers and how it gives you time for yourself. The awareness of nursing was through the HRDC, the colleges and the government of Ontario. There were advertisements for hiring nurses.

According to Vicky:

When I looked at the healthcare system in Canada after I came in I knew that I could not go for courses where I would not get a job. So when I looked at medical lab then I only knew of one lab. … I didn’t know any other lab then. Unlike in Nigeria where they were everywhere, they were really limited. So I looked at other professions I could go into, then I saw that nursing has broad areas of working, not only in the hospital but in other areas within the healthcare system. That was what attracted me to nursing because I did not want to be a healthcare aide for the rest of my life. I want to move forward.
Not only was the choice of nursing of immediate value to some of the women here in Canada, some of the women opined that nursing would also be relevant in other contexts. According to Stella:

I said with this [i.e., nursing] wherever I decide to go the knowledge will always be there and I can do something with it and make money from doing my own thing.

The women were convinced that with nursing there was no need to struggle for jobs as there was a high demand for nurses. Their optimism was not without basis as all available statistics indicate that the healthcare sector will continue to be a major employer for healthcare professionals. According to the Canadian Nurses Association (2005), there is a shortage of nurses in Canada due to increases in the number of retiring nurses accompanied by increased demand for healthcare services as a result of an aging population in Canada. As baby boomers continue to reach retirement age, declining health and increased incidence of chronic diseases, the healthcare sector and personal support occupations have become the fastest growing occupations employing about 10% of the total workforce in Canada.

Summary

As previously stated, the agency demonstrated by an individual in pursuing life career choices is constrained or enabled by features within the individual’s environment (Suto, 2008). The women’s choice of career was determined by the available options and the option that offered them the best chance of success as immigrant women. As professional women, they faced several barriers as they attempted to access the labour market on arrival in Canada. However they demonstrated agency and showed some creativity by pursuing a career that rescued them from economic precariousness and downward mobility. Of the 10 women
interviewed in this study, 9 of them had to take jobs that were below their previous qualifications and education when they could not find jobs that recognized their prior training and experience. The lived experiences of these women bring to light a system of racist relations that devalues the knowledge and credentials of African migrant women resulting in constrained access to employment opportunities. In their location as immigrant women in Canada, they experienced “modes of exclusion, inferiorization, subordination and exploitation” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992, p. 2). The response of the women was to resist exclusion and exploitation by obtaining Canadian qualifications. For the women, not only was it important to possess Canadian credentials, the credentials had to be in a field that offered them a guarantee of employment without any barriers, which, from all available information, appeared to be nursing. All the women were able to recognize the demand for nurses and went ahead to avail themselves of the opportunity it provided. According to Aidee, pursuing her previous career was a case of “hoping to get a job” versus “knowing she would get a job” if she changed over to nursing. Folarin also stated that with nursing, “sick people don’t care what colour you are or if you have an accent”. The current shortage of nurses, a shortage that might have required the importation of nurses from other countries, as has been done in the past, has opened a door for Nigerian women to enter into the nursing profession in Canada.
Chapter Five
Internal Influences Determining the Choice of Nursing Among Nigerian Women

The analysis in the previous chapter uncovered the systemic, economic and social factors that worked together to inform the choice of nursing among Nigerian women in Canada. These are factors I considered to be beyond their control. They relate to social arrangements, societal perceptions and organizations in Canada that shut out African women and inform a change in career.

In this chapter, I elucidate other factors that came out in the course of this investigation as crucial influences on Nigerian women leading them to choose nursing. These factors are considered in a separate chapter because they are quite different from those discussed in Chapter Four. I label these internal influences. These are factors that arise from the individual perceptions, backgrounds and aspirations of the Nigerian women in the study.

The Professional Status of Nursing

As I have argued earlier in the thesis, the appeal of nursing among Nigerian immigrant women also lies in the qualifications attached to the profession as they are from a credential conscious society. I asked the women if they would have felt the same way about nursing if they did not have to go to university or college to study in Canada. They all answered in the negative. Some of the women had been interested in nursing back in Nigeria but had not pursued it because it was not offered at the degree level and it was not considered to be a career for young women who had many options. Aidee, Vicky and Stella had considered nursing as young women but they had been discouraged by family members due to the societal perception that nurses were "dropouts and promiscuous" (Adejumobi, 1986, p. 342). Nursing colleges in Nigeria were for...
those young women who could not pass all their subjects at the West African School Certificate (WASC) level and were not offered admission into the university. This view was held consistently by most of the women in the study.

However the image and status of nursing, the rigour and study involved in becoming a nurse in the Canadian context distinguish it from the Nigerian context, and accord nurses a “professional” status.

At this juncture, a discussion of what constitutes a profession would seem apt in order to position the choice of nursing vis-à-vis their previous professions. Many of the women I spoke with saw themselves as professionals. And even though they had previous degrees, they spoke about the rigour and study involved in nursing and they described the knowledge they acquired as fascinating and said that it had endowed them with a lot of skill.

The words *profession* and *professional* have been used in reference to many occupations. Almost all trades or crafts requiring some certification lay claim to the term *professional* in order to signify a “degree of competence” (Jarausch, 2006, p. 1876). Although there is no generally accepted definition for *profession*, scholars appear to be in agreement about some basic common factors among those occupations known as professions. Historically, the word *professional* meant one who had professed or declared publicly their commitment usually within a religious order (Armstrong, 1994; Jarausch, 2006). Over time, the term came to be used to refer to an occupation in which one professes a skill and traditionally was used exclusively for the learned professions of divinity/theology, law and medicine (Armstrong, 1994; Jarausch, 2006; Klass, 1961). Klass (1961) notes that the earliest universities were founded mainly to educate students for the professions. Klass (1961) posits that “a profession inherits the ideas and ideals of a
university: scholarship and research with the simple aim of excellence” (p. 699). In essence, the quality and skill of the professions depended on the shaping and instruction of the students who had passed through the universities.

Armstrong (1994), Christensen (1994), Jarausch (2006), and Klass (1961) are all in agreement as to what criteria are generally required for any occupation to be regarded as a profession. First, professional expertise is acquired through a period of extensive study involving a combination of formal instruction and apprenticeship. Second, professionals are proven through rigorous examinations that establish competency and bestow upon the practitioners a degree, a licence or both. This also establishes barriers to entry and restricts the unregulated entry of practitioners into the occupation. Third, the profession must be governed by a code of ethics and a promise or profession to act in ways that benefit the public and do no harm. Fourth, practitioners are able to self-regulate: to exercise autonomy and to impose sanctions on members who violate the code of ethics.

Nursing in Canada is a profession that meets all the criteria discussed above. The women in the study perceived nursing to be a full-fledged profession despite the ongoing politics of professionalization that tend to trivialize and feminize occupations that are dominated by women and position these occupations as paraprofessions. To this Folarin argued that:

Nursing is a profession and nursing is still fighting to be fully acclaimed as a profession. There are many things that make it appealing, the knowledge aspect, the fact that you are autonomous, you are responsible for your practice, if you do anything it is your licence on the line

Her statement succinctly captures that nursing is all that a profession is supposed to be. To Hafsat nursing was a way of regaining her previous professional status as a lawyer:
On getting to Canada I said if I cannot be a lawyer that I’ve always been what else can I do? Number one, I want to be a professional and I love to care then financially something that could get me some money at least at the same level if not higher.

When Hafsat faced barriers to entering the law profession in Canada, she quickly reassessed her options. She wanted an occupation in which she would not forfeit her professional status completely, one that would give her a decent income and relatively quick access to the labour market. She discovered that nursing not only met her needs but also helped her fulfill her career aspirations.

Vicky was one of the women who had been interested in nursing as a young woman but had steered away as a result of the lack of rigour and higher learning in Nigerian schools of nursing. The status of nursing in Canada appealed to her. She stated that: “Nursing is a very unique and important profession and it has impacted my life in many ways”.

Aidee, who had been in business administration, chose to pursue a nursing career because she was convinced that with nursing she was guaranteed a job. She had expressed an interest in nursing earlier in her life, her parents dismissed this as unacceptable due to the image of nursing at that time in Nigeria. According to Aidee, nursing as a profession had many benefits and one was the prestige the profession ascribed her:

As I started doing nursing I started loving it more and more. I started seeing it more and more as a profession that’s a combo. It gave me time for my home, it gave me time for my children, it gave me the prestige that I needed and so it’s like a combo.
All of the participants had discovered there was a diversity of options available in nursing and felt it was a good choice that could take them to any level they desired. Remy, Aidee, Folarin, Hafsat, Molly, Beesooil, Vicky, Stella and Ola all concluded enthusiastically that nursing is suited to almost all aspects of human endeavour and nurses could work anywhere they chose. Molly, Vicky, Stella and Aidee spoke about the dignity the job provides and the respect accorded them when people meet them in their scrubs (uniform). Yemi was the only participant who stated explicitly that nursing was a “step down” for her. Yemi had been a dietician in Nigeria with a master’s degree and chose nursing when barriers to licensing precluded her from practicing in Canada. She believed that dietician was a more prestigious profession than nursing, but she had to choose nursing for reasons of practicality and expediency and in order to avoid downward mobility.

I asked if the women considered nurses to be subservient to doctors in performing their duties. All but one replied in the negative. Ola felt that nurses were still subservient to doctors in that they were not allowed to write prescriptions and diagnose patients regardless of their years of experience. All the other women spoke about having autonomy and a scope of practice that differed from a doctor’s, being able to question doctors when it came to the treatment of patients and being very actively involved in their patients’ care. According to them, nursing had progressed from simply carrying out doctors’ orders to being able to collaborate and communicate with doctors about patient care. They reported that they have been involved closely with doctors in developing a treatment regimen for patients and have been approached for their opinions by doctors as professionals within their own field of practice.

Molly asserted that “I am not helping a doctor, he does his job and I do mine. Our roles are different and are both well defined. I am not a doctor’s assistant but a nurse.”
The women all considered nursing to be a profession that gave them respectability as they were seen to be knowledgeable and skilled people within the community.

**The Success Stories of Other Nigerian Women in Nursing**

Among the participants in the study only one woman, Ola, stated she had not known anyone in nursing prior to choosing practical nursing; neither had anyone encouraged her to go into nursing before she made her choice. All the other women described, in one form or another, the influence of other Nigerian women on their choice. For some of the women nursing had been suggested to them by someone; while for others, it was the changes they observed in the lives of the women who took that chance and returned to school to study that influenced them to also make the move to go into nursing. The success stories of those who had gone through the period of rigorous study and had overcome their challenges also motivated others to say, “I can do this too”. Aidee stated:

At that time, almost two out of every three Nigerian women that I knew, that I had met here, were in nursing; they had jobs, and two out of every three women that were not in nursing had no good jobs.

By mere observation of the job prospects among the group of Nigerian women Aidee knew, she was able to conclusively decide that nursing would enhance her labour market chances.

In Yemi’s case, while she was trying to find a new career path that would take her out of low-paid employment, a coworker suggested, “Why don’t you do this nursing? With U of T you would get a degree in 2 years”. The suggestion led her to further research about a career in nursing and discussions with women who had already completed the nursing program; all which motivated her to go to school for nursing. Some women had never even considered nursing as an
option until other Nigerian women suggested it to them, and told them about the schools that
offered it in an accelerated program.

Vicky had been frustrated with the recredentialing process and had eventually abandoned
it as a result of financial pressures. She had taken up a survival job in a factory before going to
train as a personal support worker. In going on to study nursing she had also received
encouragement from another Nigerian woman. According to Vicky:

There was a woman who came from Nigeria who was trying to get into her
profession, she had been a dietician with a master’s degree from Nigeria and she
was in the process of getting recertified but it was taking so long and she had to
do something else and she went to the University of Toronto and studied for 2
years. After she finished she encouraged me and said, “let us not take no for an
answer, let’s do something, they think we cannot do this but let’s prove we can do
it”. That was when I decided to go higher and do my diploma at George Brown
College.

The recommendations and experiences of other Nigerian women played a significant role
in influencing the women’s choice of nursing. The cases of the Nigerian women in the study
suggests that there is a correlation between group support and patterns of occupational choice
among immigrant women.

Dissatisfaction, Disappointment and Denigration

The motivation to go back to school and overcome barriers to appropriate employment
was borne out of the feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction with the jobs that the women
were compelled to take in order to survive. The only exception was Beesoil whose fluency in
both French and English gave her a job that was suited to her qualifications. None of the women
were contented with the jobs they found on arrival to Canada and felt there had to be a way out of the denigration they experienced. The women worked in factories, as cashiers in retail stores, as customer service representatives or as personal support workers. This situation is well supported in studies of various scholars on immigrants’ issues. Elabor-Idemudia (2000) reports that Black immigrants, particularly women, are found more in unskilled and semiskilled jobs with low pay and minimal job security. Stigmatization as people who do not speak English or speak English with an accent is common and they are seen in Canada as people who have cultures different from “our” own (Bannerji, 1987, p. 10). Elabor-Idemudia’s study on African women and their labour market challenges found that 60% of African immigrant women experienced downward mobility in their occupational status when they entered the labour force in Canada; 15% were unable to find any jobs even though they were educated. It is not surprising, therefore, that women who had degrees prior to immigration began to feel restive with the jobs they had. Yemi who worked as a customer service representative in a call centre felt acute dissatisfaction after a while. She said:

I got home that day and I felt really depressed and I said to myself I don’t belong here, I should not be doing the same job as a Grade 12 graduate. That was one of the things that really pushed me to say, “I can’t do this for long.”

The other women, who were employed in other sectors, also expressed that they had always had a desire for something more than they were doing. Aidee, who was a personal support worker, stated that “it was just meeting my need at the time there. It was not meeting my professional goals”.

Vicky and Hafsat reported very demeaning and denigrating job transitions from medical laboratory professional and lawyer respectively to factory worker. According to Vicky:
I felt like Canada had deceived us into coming here and this was really the job they had for us and instead of telling everybody to come, they look for professionals and they dump them in the factory and devalue them. I felt devalued, I felt sometimes like I was dreaming because this was not why I went to school for 4 years. As hard as my country is I know what I was doing there, not this kind of work. It is not that I am talking down on people who work in the factory, but I know if they have the kind of certificate I have they will not be working in the factory they will be working in a better place. So that is how I really felt then.

When Hafsat tried to recollect some of the jobs she had to take to survive, the mere thought of those jobs brought back a feeling of humiliation that she preferred not to remember. She stuttered and paused at this point in the discussion and her embarrassment at the memory of the jobs she had to do was palpable over the phone. Attempting to describe the jobs she said:

I did so many. I’ll just tell you a few. I worked in security. I also worked in other companies like … I can’t even remember them because I don’t want to remember them cause they are so ridiculing, so ridiculing … packaging, I can’t remember them, but I did so many odd jobs in addition to security.

Remy worked as a grocery store clerk and also expressed dissatisfaction with her job. About the job she stated: “I knew what I could do and I knew I could do better and I just knew that is not the place for me, I could do better”.

All the women were convinced that they could do better and would not remain in the low-paying jobs. They all decided to resist relegation to the lowest strata of the Canadian labour force and used the feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction they experienced as a driving force to improve their situations and strove to meet professional goals through nursing.
Altruistic Reasons

A few of the women cited a desire to care for others as a reason for going into nursing while the others reported it had never crossed their minds while they were in Nigeria. In the cases of Aidee and Vicky, they had expressed an interest in nursing sometime earlier in life but had not pursued it because of the lack of status of nursing back in Nigeria. However for those who stated this as their reason, I observed it was paired or mentioned with other reasons such as availability of jobs, guaranteed employment or improved status. This suggested to me that the women who cited caring for others still perceived that the essence of nursing was to care for others and this could not be removed completely from other reasons for going into nursing.

Hafsat explained her choice of nursing as a desire to care for other people among other things:

I want to be a professional and I love to care, then financially something that could get me some money at least at the same level if not higher and you know something I have a passion for which is caring. That brings me back to caring: as a lawyer my duty then was to care for people though in different aspects and in nursing, too, I’m out there caring for people. What is there? That is the passion also. That is why I ended up in nursing

Aidee, who wanted to be a nurse initially, said:

Back in Nigeria nursing was actually something I wanted to do but my parents would not allow it. My parents wanted me to go to med school, but I did not want to be a doctor. I ended up going for business administration; bear it in mind that at that time, that was in the late 70s, nursing was a respectable job but it was not a good paying job, which was one of the reasons why my parents didn’t think it should be my priority. Whereas business administration gave you a good job in the bank and you could make a lot of money. Which was why they didn’t want me to go there. Medicine also you could make a lot of money but I didn’t want to be a doctor because I didn’t want to be in school for a long time.
Vicky was also interested in nursing right after high school:

I have always been interested in nursing, but back home in Nigeria the kind of certificate awarded was a diploma and the kind of result I had after school cert then, I could not just go for diploma I wanted a degree. That is why I couldn’t follow nursing. I liked it as a profession it is a caring profession but because it was not a degree awarding, you know if you go to the degree level you won’t be in direct patient care you’ll be in teaching and I wanted to be in the direct patient care and I decided not to limit myself to the diploma so I had to change to medical lab back in Nigeria. When I got here I saw that nursing could be to the degree level and you still got to be with patients, you can get to NP [nurse practitioner] and still be in contact with the patients.

Their statements support my previous submissions about the status of nursing in Nigeria: nursing was not seen as a first option for brilliant young women who could do anything they chose to. However, in Canada, they discovered that nursing enjoyed a different status, still retained a measure of nobility and of course the pay of nurses was commensurate with their level of education. When I asked the women if they felt that the profession was feminized and that women were being relegated to traditional roles of caring in Canada, they all replied in the negative and stated that more men are enrolling in nursing schools now than ever before.

**Flexibility**

Beesoil was the only participant who stated that flexibility was her primary reason for choosing nursing. However, in discussions with the others, flexibility came up quite frequently as a benefit of nursing. To my question “why did you choose nursing?” Beesoil responded: “I changed careers because I started a family and I wanted flexibility and I thought nursing had that for me”.
Flexibility for Beesoil implied being able to structure her time and work around the needs of her family, as well as not having to commute the long distance she had to in her previous job. She stated that since becoming a nurse, she has worked very close to home and is able to attend school functions with her children; she can take them lunch at school and is within reach if the school had to call her. However, she claimed there had been no changes in her financial situation as her pay was still the same as in her previous job. The other women also cited the flexibility of being able to reject or change shifts in order to fulfill family obligations a benefit of nursing, however it was not a fundamental reason for choosing nursing.

Summary

The pursuit of nursing for the women was not an easy task when all things were considered, however the other factors that influenced their choice made it possible for them to persevere under extremely difficult circumstances. In the next chapter, I discuss some of the challenges they encountered in the course of their studies, the strategies they adopted to overcome those challenges and the outcomes of their choice. The stories of women who had gone through the difficult times and had emerged from being factory workers, call centre employees or personal support workers to become professionals and well respected contributors to Canadian society were inspirational for new immigrant women. The motivation for more women to go into nursing stems from the apparent successes of those who have undertaken the change when dissatisfaction with their reduced status and a resistance to the devaluation they were experiencing propelled them to alter the trajectories of their careers (Suto, 2008).

As I have argued earlier in this thesis, education to the Nigerian woman is the platform from which change can be effected in their lives; this is demonstrated in the words and activities
of the women. It is interesting to note that 8 out of the 10 women I spoke with are either currently pursuing or have completed advanced degrees in nursing and 1 intends to go on for more education. Only one participant stated that she was not interested in graduate studies.
Chapter Six
Challenges and Outcomes of the Choice of Nursing

The Challenges They Faced and Overcame

According to the women, the decision to return to school was not an easy one. And while it might be assumed that nursing is an easy field of study considering the number of women opting to go into that career, from the narratives of the women and from taking a look at the course requirements and demands of the course, especially for the women who had no previous knowledge of the sciences, it was no mean task. The choice of this career is made doubly challenging by the other duties the women had to juggle while in school. As I note in the profiles of the participants, all the women were married with family obligations at the time they decided to pursue a career change. Each one had at least one child and the average number of children the participants had was two. Seven of my participants had to work either full time or part time to make ends meet. One worked full time and studied nursing part time. Four of the women, Yemi, Stella, Hafsat and Beesoil, had babies or toddlers at the time they started school and had to find a daycare or other babysitting arrangements for the times they were in school. When asked the question, “what were the challenges you faced when you were studying?” many of the women sighed deeply before responding. The challenges were definitely memorable.

In this chapter, I give a brief description of the challenges these women faced while going through their education, how they were able to surmount those challenges and the outcomes of their choice of nursing as articulated by the women. I have argued earlier in this thesis that Nigerian women see education as crucial and fundamental to improving their lives, getting out of poverty and elevating their status; this is demonstrated by the choices made by the women I
interviewed. It may be tempting to assume that nursing presented the women with the path of least resistance, but a look at the conditions under which their studies were taken proves the contrary. The pursuit of nursing for the women was challenging to say the least. However the factors described in this chapter made it possible for them to persevere under extremely difficult circumstances.

**Time Management Pressures**

A major challenge for all the women was how to fit all they had to do within the time available. Juggling their many responsibilities and duties was something that demanded a great deal of creativity and emotional stamina. Nursing children, taking children to school and extracurricular activities, cooking, cleaning, going to school, finding time to study and, for some of the women, going to work had to be done on a daily basis.

**Family Obligations**

All the women interviewed were mothers of very young children at the time they went back to school. A number of them had babies just before starting school, and some had babies in the course of their training. One of my participants, Stella, had three children in the 3 years she was at school! The challenges of caring for the children, finding daycare or babysitting as well as studying were huge sources of physical and emotional strain on the women. A number of them told me after the audio tape had been turned off, about various occasions when they had felt very guilty about pursuing a career because the welfare of their families was neglected. Their only consolation was that it would only be for a little while and afterwards they would be able to schedule their time around their families’ needs as well as improve their families’ economic status.
Financial Challenges

Another challenge that was common to all the participants was that of finances. Beesoil had to study nursing part time so she could have an income which went to paying for her school tuition. Folarin was a full-time student and a full-time worker who worked nights at a group home so she could pay for her tuition and her children’s daycare. Hafsat had to work weekends to make ends meet even though she got a loan. Yemi describes a time when she was so broke, a friend gave her a gift of $20 and she could not stop crying. Merely listening to their stories made me want to cry. For the women who had to work while going to school, they had to make that choice because they were ineligible for loans from OSAP. Even for the women who were eligible for OSAP, it was still a very trying time. Most of the women stated that their families had to survive on basics because even their husbands were not making much and his income had to go towards paying the bills.

Two of my participants, Ola and Vicky, had to go across to the United States to study for their BSN; they recalled the costs of getting new apartments and running second homes as well as the tuition that they had to pay as international students. Ola was able to get a scholarship in her 2nd year, which helped with the cost of tuition. Most of the women bemoaned the amount of student debt they were saddled with after school except for Aidee who was able to get a scholarship while she was in school.

Commuting Long Distances

For the 2 participants who studied in the United States, aside from the financial challenges of schooling in the US with a family in Canada was the additional stress of commuting long distances. Before Vicky made the decision, in agreement with her husband, to
rent an apartment close to her school, she had to travel every day from Canada to Buffalo, New York. A group of colleagues from work started the program with her but after a while the others dropped out because they could not cope with the stressful conditions of study. Vicky went on to travel by Greyhound bus to Buffalo every day until it she concluded it was a safety and health risk. Even with apartments close to school, both Ola and Vicky had to make frequent trips back to Canada to check on their husbands and homes.

**How They Overcame the Challenges**

From the foregoing, it is apparent that the women refused to be hindered by the difficult circumstances that bounded them and were resolute in their determination to obtain their education. They confronted and overcame all forms of barriers to the achievement of their goals within the Canadian milieu; they refused to succumb to systemic forces that would have them become low-class, exploited workers. They actively resisted the denigration to which they had been subjected rather than sitting passively and complaining about how difficult life in Canada was.

I would like to reiterate Ogundipe-Leslie’s (1994) assertion that “the greatest strength of the Nigerian women lies in their right and ability to work in addition to their resourcefulness and great capacity for emotional survival” (p. 128). Although Ogundipe-Leslie writes from a different context, her words about Nigerian women are still very relevant in the Canadian context. From the narratives of the women in this study, they indeed demonstrate resourcefulness. For instance, in the cases of Ola and Vicky, they chose to go to the United States to study so they could complete their training in a shorter period of time than was possible in Canada. Their great capacity for emotional survival is evident in their ability to combine their
different roles as student, wife, mother, worker and caretaker without complaining and being able to stay the course until the goal was achieved. Among the women I interviewed, it was not a choice between their homes and their education, both were important to them; they did not believe there had to be a trade-off between having an education and keeping a home. “All of them however believe in education as a way out of their differing oppressions, a way of providing the social and economic basis and security from which they can resist subjection and indignities” (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994, p. 128).

I asked the participants how they were able to make it through such difficult times and asked them to describe their coping strategies. Beesoil remarked that: “It was hard! It was hard, I don’t know, I don’t know, I still wonder myself how I went through that.”

However, they were all able to go through successfully. How they accomplished this is described in the next sections where the coping strategies they shared are discussed.

**Prioritizing**

Whether it was in doing an activity or in spending money, they had to prioritize so that the most pressing needs were met. A lot of the women described having to become selectively antisocial so they could meet the demands of family, school and work. Some women said that having a perfectly clean house became secondary to spending time with their children and husbands.

**Presence of a Strong Support System**

All the women cited the presence of a strong support system as a major factor in their being able to get through the hard times. The women were able to complete their programs because of supportive husbands, family and friends, church families and strong community
networks. They all spoke about the concern of their family members, their friends who were willing to babysit their children for free when they desperately needed help and the encouragement they received from their church families and the wider community.

**Faith in God**

All the women stated that they were able to draw strength and inspiration from their faith whenever they felt discouraged. All through the discussions, their narratives were punctuated with phrases such as “I thank God”, “the grace of God” and “God was with me”. To them divine enablement was very important to their being able to face the challenges that arose as they sought to negotiate the new territory.

**Determination**

The women asserted that their determination to succeed helped to get them through; they submitted that dropping out of school was not an option for them. All the women had experienced a loss of status due to immigration and were determined not to return to the frustrations of the jobs they did before they went to school, so they endured the pain and hardships associated with school. I asked them if they ever considered dropping out of the program. While most said it had never been an option, 2 participants said they had considered dropping out at a particular point in time. However, they stated that the thought of failure and returning to factory jobs kept them from doing so. No matter what they faced they were convinced it was temporary and in the words of Vicky: “It was tough and being tough made it worthwhile”.
The Outcomes of Their Choice of Nursing

Many of the participants initially went into nursing just as a means of avoiding unemployment or low-paying jobs. However, the narratives of the women showed that their perceptions and conceptions of nursing changed as they became practitioners and were able to negotiate outcomes that improved their lives. They went from seeing nursing as a means of putting food on the table to seeing it as a career that fulfilled their aspirations.

I asked the participants if they had any regrets about their choice of career and with the benefit of hindsight what other careers could they have chosen if given the opportunity to change. They all responded with a firm “no” to the question of whether they regretted choosing nursing; however one of the participants stated that with the benefit of hindsight she would probably have chosen medicine because of the greater prestige and financial benefits associated with the profession. Overall, their responses showed that they all appeared to have found fulfillment in the choice of nursing. They went further to enumerate the benefits that had accrued to them and how their lives had been changed for the better.

Job Availability, Guaranteed Employment and Job Security

For all the women, a career in nursing assured them of jobs in North America since nursing and healthcare services were greatly in demand, thus they had no fears about job security. When compared with other jobs, they were convinced nurses would not be faced with job loss because of an aging population and the shortage of nursing professionals in North America. The participants had received multiple job offers since they went into nursing and, according to them, they had never been without jobs except by choice.
Professional Status of Nursing

The women were gratified by the status that nursing conferred on them; they were viewed by society and their communities as knowledgeable and in a position to help others. Also having a degree rather than a diploma gave them a sense of accomplishment. They all exhibited a sense of pride in having a profession that was respectable and having a skills that were highly sought after not only in Canada but all over North America.

A Sense of Empowerment

All the women felt empowered and totally confident as a result of choosing nursing. They felt a restoration of their sense of worth, which had been eroded due to the barriers they had faced when attempting to access the labour market. They experienced a reinstatement of their dignity and confidence and perceived themselves to be contributors to society. Their choice of nursing had empowered them to empower others through the leadership and problem-solving skills they had developed. In their jobs they had become advocates for their patients and advocates for change; they were able to advocate for change in policies and treatment of patients.

Improved Standard of Living

Although some of the women claimed that nurses are not paid well enough for what they do, they still agreed that a new nurse’s pay was commensurate that of other new graduates. Even though one participant claimed there was nothing “fantastic” about the pay of nurses, they all said there was a minimum level of income that they expected to receive and that experience and further education played important roles in improving remuneration. All the participants acknowledged that the choice of nursing had improved their financial standing and now they had decent incomes. However, they stated that nurses in Ontario were still overworked and
underpaid: the pay for nurses could be better. It is evident that their decision to return to school, to spend time acquiring knowledge had translated into an economic benefit for them.

**Versatility of Nursing**

All the participants were unequivocal about the versatile nature of nursing and the myriad of options it presents. Every one of them stated that there were abundant opportunities available in nursing and the options appear to be endless in terms of what to do and where to work. Their initial impressions of nurses being only by the bedside had changed as they discovered that nurses work in a wide variety of contexts. Nursing has progressed from being practiced only in the hospital even into the corporate world. Nurses now work in a variety of establishments, such as government offices, doctors’ offices, within the community as community nurses, in health and safety programs, in administration, research, teaching and other practice settings (Canadian Nurses Association, 2005). As a result the women did not feel restricted to the physically demanding job of bedside nursing and most had opted for other forms of nursing that did not compel them to wear the scrubs, carry patients, or work shifts. Of the 10 participants in this study, only 4 were employed as bedside nurses, 4 had never worked as bedside nurses, and 2 were in managerial roles although they had worked in various places in different roles ranging from community nurse to bedside nurse.

**Healthier Lifestyles**

Some of the participants had developed healthier lifestyles for themselves and their families as a result of choosing nursing. The women stated that their education had made them more health conscious and thus more discerning in the way they handled the health issues of their immediate and extended family members.
Fulfillment in Helping Others

In their new roles, the women observed that they had become not just people who cleaned patients but also educators to their patients or clients and they were looked to for information and knowledge about health-related issues. Being able to help patients or clients get better and make a difference in their lives gave the women a great deal of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Flexibility

According to some of the women, a career in nursing offered them flexibility that allowed them to fulfill their family obligations and roles as nurturer and carer in the family. For these women, nursing had allowed them to spend more time with their family by shortening their commute time to work (some worked very close to their homes) and allowing them to arrange their schedules to accommodate their family obligations and to undertake other ventures.

Becoming Role Models

All the women revealed that they had become role models to their children and others within their community. That they were able to return to school despite all the hardships they faced served as inspiration for others and they had found themselves giving advice and encouraging many more people to take the challenge of going back to school. Most of the women enthusiastically proclaimed they would recommend nursing to other people without any reservation based on their experiences as nurses. Some of the women saw it as a sure way of escaping unemployment and have been actively recommending it to other newcomers who are considering a career change.
Nigerian Women’s Responses to Discrimination and Marginalization

Towards the end of the interview sessions with my participants, I asked about how the women responded to issues of discrimination and marginalization at work. Reading from the works of scholars such as Calliste (1996) and Das Gupta (2009), who studied the discrimination faced by Black nurses at work, I was curious to know what their experiences were in this profession about which all the women had spoken glowingly, how they dealt with these experiences and if the experiences affected their feelings about nursing.

Of the 10 women, 4 claimed never to have experienced discrimination and marginalization. They were convinced that the “zero tolerance” policy for discrimination that their workplaces promoted were adhered to strictly and as a result they had never had to deal with such issues. I observed that all 4 women worked in settings other than hospitals. Vicky reported that she enjoyed a very cordial relationship with all her colleagues at work and the only acts of discrimination she could remember had been directed towards her by another Black woman from the Caribbean. These were acts similar to those described by Das Gupta (2009) such as talking down to her or being unduly critical of her work. The other women had experienced discrimination from either their colleagues, supervisors and, for those who worked at the bedside, from their patients. When I asked Folarin how she dealt with these issues, she responded by saying:

Nursing is a profession where you can easily find a job even though there is racism in nursing, there is racism everywhere. When you are really sick you won’t care who is providing the care as opposed to some other fields where it faces you every day whether you like it or not.
Handling her patients gently but firmly had been her way of dealing with prejudiced patients; however with her coworkers, she claimed that the only way she can deal with marginalization is by being the best she can be at her job. She believed that keeping herself well trained and remaining at the cutting edge of the profession would preclude her from being discriminated against or marginalized. Aidee, Hafsat, Yemi and Ola all appeared to share Folarin’s sentiments. To all these women discrimination or racism is found everywhere in Canada in whatever profession an African woman or person of colour may be found. Their views echo Bannerji’s submission (1993) that racism in Canada is embedded so deeply in everyday life that it is difficult to talk about despite its pervasiveness. Aidee and Hafsat claimed that acts or actions perceived as discriminatory should be confronted and addressed immediately in a nonaggressive manner; not dealing with such acts lead to perpetuating them. Both women stated that African women are under pressure to prove themselves and earn the respect of supervisors and colleagues by exceeding expectations. Ola and Yemi held a different opinion about addressing issues of discrimination at the workplace; It was their view that trying to discuss such issues produces no results, since most offenders will deny being racist. Both women saw racism as part of Canadian culture and posit that it cannot be changed; to them the panacea is to ignore it and not dwell on it. Ola opined that “the status quo cannot be challenged” successfully.

Indeed challenging the status quo and refusing to accept inequities as the norm is a tenet of antiracist feminism. While some Nigerian women recognize and confront racism in their workplaces, others tend to ignore it and even refuse to acknowledge it.
Summary

Nursing brought about profound and gratifying changes in the lives of the Nigerian women in the study here in Canada. Although their professions had been altered in directions they would not have taken had they not immigrated, they were satisfied with the way things had turned out for them. They had been able to overcome barriers to the Canadian labour force, such as lack of Canadian work experience, nonrecognition and devaluation of previous qualifications and difficult recertification procedures. They had also faced challenges in their personal lives: emotional, financial and domestic duty challenges. All these combined together present an overwhelming picture of the effects of immigration on the lives of the women. Nevertheless, Nigerian women are known to be strong, hardworking and determined (Pestalis, 1990); well able to face and overcome daunting challenges.

All of the women reported that nursing would not have been an option for them had they stayed in Nigeria due to societal perceptions of nurses and the more prestigious jobs that were open to women in the country. However, for these women from a credential conscious background, the study, rigour and the degree conferred on them by nursing (9 of them were RNs, and 8 held a Bachelor’s degree in nursing) gave them a sense of satisfaction and pride. By pursuing higher education and making extra efforts to get specialized training, the women were not just escaping unemployment but were aiming to make the most of their new career. A few of the women had chosen fields of nursing in which very little or no body work was required; they had moved from the more traditional roles of nurses to the corporate world. Those who were involved in bedside nursing were moving into more specialized areas of care, thus avoiding the heavy lifting and labour intensive areas of nursing.
All these go to show that Nigerian immigrant women, even though faced with many difficult barriers in accessing the Canadian labour market and marginalization by race, class, gender, language (accent), express creativity and assert agency in avoiding victimization. The women in the study refused to conform to the notions of racism and gender oppression by defining new and profitable lives for themselves. Nigerian women’s resistance to systemic exclusion and marginalization in Canada underscores the importance of antiracist feminist research, which sees them not as mere victims of their environment but as active agents in pursuing changes that hold meaning for their lives. For all the women, Canadian education (Mojab 1999) gave them greater opportunities in the Canadian labour market. Not one of the women complained of having to go from one employer to another since going through the nursing program, they had all been hired right out of school, and some even before the completion of their program. Overall the choice of nursing had a positive effect on their labour force participation in Canada.
Chapter Seven
Conclusions

My initial hunch was that nursing was a way out of the economic precariousness, underemployment and unemployment Nigerian immigrant women experienced on arrival to Canada. Proceeding from my personal experience as I sought to navigate the Canadian labour market, and the suggestions I received from well-meaning people within the Nigerian community to explore a career in nursing, which I declined, it was evident that abundant opportunities exist in the field of nursing. My refusal to pursue nursing lay not in a dislike of the profession but rather in a desire to educate myself in an area where my interests and calling lay rather than take up a career based on expediency. However, I also recognize that my personal circumstances may have differed from those of other women who probably had to be more practical in their career choice. Nonetheless, all the women involved in this study were convinced, as I was, that a Canadian education is nonnegotiable in the improvement of their lives and labour force participation in Canada. Similar to the women in this study, I pursued an education, although in the area of my interests, the wisdom of which remains to be seen as I have yet to face the labour market. Significantly, the women in this study had deliberately chosen a profession that presented them with guaranteed participation in the labour force. All the women acknowledged the existence of other options based on their educational backgrounds; however practicality and availability took precedence over other options. Although nursing is not the only profession open to Nigerian women in Canada, they can be found in many professions in small numbers (the total population of Nigerian immigrants is still small in Canada), all the women in this study reported that increasing numbers of women as well as men, are taking up nursing for a cornucopia of reasons of which job guarantee was identified as most salient. Eight out of the 10
women stated that at least 10% of their classes in nursing school consisted of Nigerian immigrants, a proportion that had increased by the time they graduated as many students dropped out or were eliminated during the course of study. The participants also spoke of other women who had been involved in other fields of study at the same time they had been in school but could not find jobs after graduation. The choice of nursing was a “smart choice” to them since it eliminated completely any chance of not having a job after graduation and being forced to continue with the menial jobs that had prompted them to go to school in the first place. These women demonstrated some agency in negotiating their careers in order to escape their conversion to contingent workers subject to employers bent on exploiting immigrant women of colour. Highlighting their creativity and agency, I represent them not as victims, even though they had experienced marginalization and discrimination, but as women who have triumphed over a system designed to denigrate them.

“Welcome to Canada” is an expression commonly used within the Nigerian community in Canada when a newcomer expresses dismay at the drastic changes they have to undergo and the barriers, such as the demand for Canadian work experience, lack of information and difficult recredentialing procedures, they encounter when they attempt to access the Canadian employment market. The phrase embodies the frustrations and disappointments that new immigrants experience in their attempts to integrate into Canadian society. New immigrants arrive in Canada with a lot of high hopes and great expectations, the lure and promise of a better life drives them to abandon their previous lives, their families, their loved ones, their businesses or jobs, their social and economic status, all that was known and familiar to them, to embrace a land presented to them as a place of so much promise and opportunity. On arrival they experience a drastic diminishing of status and many times great disappointment and many feel
that they had been “deceived” into expecting that the drive for the immigration of professionals was due to a need in Canada. Some of the women I interviewed stated without reservation that the aim of luring immigrant professionals to Canada was to devalue them not to fulfill a need for their services.

Nigerian women professionals encounter a bewildering complexity in Canadian power relations, which are based on gender, class and race, and respond creatively to reduce the impact of hegemonic practices on their psyches. As earlier stated, this study does not seek to portray these women as victims of racist practices in Canada but rather as women who sought out opportunities, faced challenges and persevered in the face of tremendous difficulty. While the labour market experiences of immigrant women in Canada are similar, women of African origin encounter unique difficulties based on preconceived notions about Black inferiority that they work very hard to erase. Nigerian women professionals who undertook Canadianization of their education were able to overcome the onerous barriers placed before them to limit their integration into Canadian society resulting in an improvement of their lives and status in Canada.

This study explores the different dimensions in which Nigerian women encountered barriers to the Canadian labour market, their responses to these barriers and the outcomes of this response. “Welcome to Canada” evokes the image of professional women of Nigerian origin responding to the unspoken expectations and conditions that the new life in Canada demands of them. Within Canadian social life and institutions there still exists deeply embedded racism that structures the assessment and evaluation of the credentials of foreign-trained professionals. The knowledge and qualifications acquired in developing countries, especially Africa, are inferioritized and discounted in the Canadian context. Whereas explicit discriminatory and exclusionary clauses have been expunged from immigration policy, the spirit of such racist
policies and clauses still persists. According to Slade (2003), “As immigrant professionals seek to establish themselves in Canada, the tension between the unspoken racialization of elite professions and the place of people of colour within the labour market is exposed” (p. 116). Slade posits that the inability of immigrant professionals to establish themselves is not due to individual failure but rather as a result of systemic barriers.

As the Canadian government attempts to lure immigrant professionals from all over the world, it would be helpful for prospective immigrants, if the government would include a system of credential evaluation in the immigration process. The different professional regulatory bodies should be made aware of their role in the successful integration of new immigrants and prompt evaluation of credentials should be mandated. Immigrant professionals should be required to submit their credentials along with their immigration applications; the assessment and results of such assessment should then be communicated to the prospective immigrant before they embark on the voyage to Canada. This would not only assist immigrants in facing the labour market but also help them manage their expectations of their new place of abode. As is evident from the experiences of the women in this study, concrete and concise information as well as clearly stated requirements would have eased their frustrations and alleviated some of the pain associated with settling in Canada.

In undertaking this study, it was my intention to document the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women and to rescue their voices in Canada from obscurity. I hope I have succeeded in doing that and bringing their experiences and voices to light. There are still many other areas of research that can be undertaken with this group of women. It would be interesting, for example, to discover whether the immigrant status and educational background of the women played a role in the choice of career. All the women involved in this study were permanent
residents at the time of immigration and all had at least one degree before returning to school to study nursing.
References


Brand, D. (1994). We weren’t allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war: The 1920s–1940s. In P. Bristow (Ed.), *We’re rooted here and they can’t pull us up: Essays in Canadian women’s history* (pp. 169–191). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.


Appendix A

Information/Consent Letter to Participants

[Printed on OISE, University of Toronto letterhead]

Date May 04, 2011

Dear Registered Nurse,

My name is Yetunde Banjo and I am an MA student in the Adult Education and Counseling Psychology Department at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Thank you for considering participating in my research project. I am doing this research in fulfillment of my MA degree and will be writing a thesis. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing and to decide whether or not to participate. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time or you may choose not to answer any question without consequence.

The name of this research project is “Inquiry into the Choice of Nursing As a Career Among Immigrant Women of Nigerian Origin”. The nature and purpose of the research is to understand why women of Nigerian origin choose nursing as a career after immigration to Canada and the number of participants is 10.

What, essentially, I am doing is interviewing registered nurses and registered practical nurses who were educated in Canada to gain insight into why they chose nursing. I am inviting you to participate because you are a trained nurse with Canadian credentials. Your part in the research, if you agree, is to participate in an audio recorded interview which will take an hour at your home or another venue agreeable to you. The date will be mutually agreed on.

Areas which I hope to touch on are your professional background prior to migration, your nurses training, and your length of time in Canada. Examples of questions that I have in mind but may or may not ask depending on priorities which emerge and how the dialogue evolves are:

- What jobs did you do in Canada before deciding on nursing?
- What other options did you consider alongside nursing?
- How do you feel about nursing now that you are in the field?
- Can you share your experiences when you were in training?
Once the audio tapes of the interview have been transcribed, the original data will be stored under lock and key in a filing cabinet in a locked office at my home. I will be the only person with access to the filing cabinet. In the transcripts, names and any other identifying information about you will be systematically eliminated. Identifying codes that could connect you with pseudonyms provided will also be kept under lock and key in the place designated above. The raw data will be destroyed two years after the completion of my thesis.

I will be sharing major aspects of my preliminary analysis with you and you will have an opportunity to provide feedback. I will be doing this by preparing a one-page report for easy reading. You may kindly provide me with feedback through email or by giving me a phone call.

While there will be no compensation, potential benefits which you might derive from participating are the opportunity to reflect on your career choice and the satisfaction of participating in a study which may assist other immigrant women in career making decisions. Potential harm if any is minimal. While unlikely, you may be disappointed in the results.

As is clear from the forgoing, I will be taking measures to protect participants’ confidentiality and privacy. A potential limitation on my ability to ensure confidentiality and privacy is the chance that you may be identified by the participant who referred you.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may contact me at any time or my research supervisor, Dr. Kiran Mirchandani. Her contact information can be found below. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Below, there is a place for you to sign to give your consent, should you decide to do so. There is also a place for you to add any stipulations. Should you decide to participate, please return one signed and dated copy to me and keep the other for your reference. All participants will receive a summary report of the research findings. The findings could be used for future research publications.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Yetunde Banjo
647 Dolly Bird Lane
Mississauga, ON
L5W 1G8
647 231 5220

Dr. Kiran Mirchandani
OISE
252 Bloor Street West, 7th Floor
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
416 978 0884
To Be Completed by People Choosing to Participate

I have read through this document. I understand and am satisfied with the explanations offered, feel that my questions have been addressed, and agree to participate in the ways described. If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are:

__________________________________ (Signature)
__________________________________ (Print)
__________________________________ (Date)
Appendix B
Sample Interview Questions

PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND BEFORE IMMIGRATION.
WHAT WAS YOUR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND BEFORE IMMIGRATION?
DESCRIBE YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE AFTER IMMIGRATION TO CANADA.
WHAT CAREER OPTIONS DID YOU CONSIDER?
WHY DID YOU CHOOSE NURSING?
CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT SOME CHALLENGES YOU FACED WHILE YOU WERE STUDYING?
DESCRIBE THE CHALLENGES YOU FACED WHILE YOU WERE IN SCHOOL
HOW DID YOU HANDLE YOUR MULTIPLE RESPONSIBILITIES DURING YOUR TRAINING?
WOULD YOU SAY YOU HAVE FOUND FULFILLMENT IN YOUR CHOICE OF NURSING?
IN WHAT WAYS HAS BEING A NURSE CHANGED YOUR LIFE?
WOULD YOU HAVE CHOSEN NURSING IF YOU HAD BEEN IN NIGERIA?
HOW ARE NURSES PERCEIVED IN NIGERIA COMPARED WITH HOW THEY ARE PERCEIVED IN CANADA?
IF YOU COULD CHOOSE ANY OTHER PROFESSION, WHAT WOULD IT BE AND WHY?
WOULD YOU RECOMMEND NURSING TO OTHER WOMEN?
WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN FACED WITH DISCRIMINATION AT WORK?
Appendix C

Email Invitation to Participate in Study

Dear Registered nurse,

You were referred to me by a registered nurse to participate in a study on Nigerian immigrant women and the choice of nursing as a career as part of the requirements for my graduate research thesis at OISE in U of T. Please be assured that you are absolutely under no obligation to participate and I will not be upset if you choose not to participate. There are no consequences whatsoever for not participating. This research seeks to understand why you like many other women within the Nigerian community resident here in Canada choose the nursing profession.

If you are interested in participating and will be willing to grant me an interview, please send an email to yettie.banjo@utoronto.ca telling me when you will be available and providing me with a number where I can call you. The interview will take place at your home or any other venue agreeable to you. If I receive an email from you I will follow up with a phone call to set up an appointment.

Telephone Script:

Hello, this is Yetunde Banjo. I received your email indicating your interest in participating in my research project about Nigerian women and the choice of nursing as a profession in Canada. I would like to reiterate that you are under no obligation to do this and you may opt out if you find it necessary to do so at any time. Do you have any questions about the project that may help you decide if you want to participate?

If NO: Great! The interview will last one hour. Where would be the most convenient place for you? What date and at what time? Excellent! I will see you then. Thank you very much.