

HOW IMMIGRANT WOMEN FROM AFRICA NEGOTIATE NEW GENDERED
ROLES WITHIN THE FAMILY IN CANADA

by

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Abstract

This research draws from the lived experiences of 15 African immigrants in Canada. While the focus of this study was on the new gendered roles within the family and how women negotiate these roles, the study found that it was difficult to separate gender from other oppressions, embedded in race, class, sex, age and nationality, that contribute to the experiences of women in Canada. Viewing immigrant women as an oppressed group and a critical community resource, points us towards a quest for understanding and recognising the diverse experiences that paradoxically situate the discourse of feminism and womanism.

I peg on studies by African American and African women writers for theoretical grounding of the experiences of women (see Bobb-Smith, 2002; Collins, 2000; Bobb-Smith, 2002; Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997). I lean on agency discourse in representing voices of oppressed groups emphasising what members of the group do to resist oppressive systems (Smith, 1987). This study contributes to our knowledge on existing inequalities and thus becomes a great source of consciousness-raising among the academics, policy analysts, social workers and the public.

Women in my study particularly used the following strategies: recreating new extended families, self dialogue, retraining and keeping several jobs. These strategies that women employ translate into consciousness-raising as immigrant women share with each other and pass this knowledge along to recent immigrants in ways that challenge the individualized liberal society that Canada is, redefine their goals and recreate a new sense of identity. Sharing knowledge and strategies is a cultural trait carried forward from Africa and transferred to Canada.

This study discovers that women's identity is tied to a collective conscious self that inspires sharing of knowledge with other women within both the extended family network and the formal and informal women's groups. Although structural forces challenge and shape women's lived experiences, recreated new extended families are a valuable source of support and identity validation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Swahili words *mama wa Afrika* (mother of Africa) commonly used to refer to women, denotes great responsibility in sustaining the community. It implies mothering others. A woman's sense of worth among many African communities is defined by the ability to live up to the expectations of being a mother (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997; Ogot, 1966). As an African woman, by virtue of being born and raised in one of the countries of Africa, I cannot help but wonder how this mothering ideology sustains communities. At times I find myself questioning if this belief acts as yet another burden unfairly placed upon African women, and therefore a need for African men to own up to their manhood and assist in carrying the burden. In my own interaction with African men, I have learnt that most men do not understand why women complain about their status. Some African men have argued that Western feminism has come to destroy African belief systems and the respect accorded women in the communities. As I examine my life and the life of women I grew up among, one thing for sure is that women have continued to strategize and raise consciousness among each other with regard to their relationships with men and their role in the community.

I am curious of the lengths African women will go to in order to be able to hold their communities together regardless of their geographical sites. Most of my curiosity is informed by the various fiction work by African women writers that resonate with my lived and observed experiences (see Ogot, 1993; 1989; 1976; Ba, 1989; Emecheta, 1980; Amadi, 1966). I ponder how much these women will be recognized for their efforts to sustain communities amidst patriarchal structures. I reflect upon my own childhood and

how my mother, grandmother, aunts, sisters and nieces all helped me to understand that though I may live in a society that is patriarchal, I have the ability within myself to share in the control and ruling if only I work hard. I now think of my own situation in Canada, and I reflect upon my experiences both in Kenya and in this new country where I have temporarily settled. I think about the different social and geographical contexts that immigrant women from Africa occupy. I am sociologically aware that they must change strategies to negotiate the patriarchal system in Canada. My main question then is, "how do women negotiate their new gendered roles when faced with institutional barriers to equal participation in Canada?" Where does the drive and inspiration to stay in control of their own lives come from when the mothers, aunts, grandmothers have remained in Africa? Do these childhood inspirations still linger or have they been reformulated in Canada, and if so, how?

Studies show that in general, immigrant women face varying economic and socio-cultural challenges in their new country. Immigrant women experience and confront these challenges differently, depending on their country of origin, educational level, economic status and their immigrant status (Creese, Dyck and McLaren, 1999; McLaren and Dyck, 2004; Berger, 2004; Patterson, 2003). Women immigrating to Canada experience both oppression and freedom that often revolves around gender issues. For example, many ethnic communities would like to see women transmit cultural practices to their children, yet some of these practices are highly patriarchal and oppressive to women (Okin, 1999). Multiculturalism in Canada is seen as supporting diversity, yet some immigrant males related to the women in this study continue to use multiculturalism for the benefit of protecting their autonomy within the family. Studies on immigrant women reveal the

tendency of some immigrant men to use multiculturalism to promote women's oppression within the family (Agnew, 1996; Okin, 1999; Berger, 2004). Studies show that women from Asia and the Caribbean negotiate structural oppressions using a variety of strategies (see Agnew, 1996; Bobb-Smith, 2003; McLaren and Dyck, 2004). However, little research has been done that discusses how African immigrant women deal with new gendered roles in the family in Canada.

The available research on immigrants from Africa in British Columbia appears in a number of policy papers explaining the challenges that immigrants face (Mensah and Adjibolosoo, 1998; Creese, Dyck and McLaren, 1999) but fail to draw from the experiences of immigrant women within the family to understand women's negotiation and survival strategies. Some research on immigrant women from Africa focuses on factors that may limit African women's access to work, particularly focusing on language and accent (Creese and Kambere, 2002) and non-recognition of credentials (Musisi and Turritin, 1995). These studies do not show how individual women from Africa strategize to overcome the new gendered challenges faced within the family in Canada.

To be an immigrant woman from a non Western country means having to resist daily the structural challenges embedded within a matrix of domination, a composition of all the institutions that reinforce and sustain subordinate status (Collins, 2000). For example, African immigrants have to negotiate the negative impact of the media and historical texts. The media often portray the continent of Africa as though it was a country, and focus mainly on such occurrences as war, corruption, hunger, poverty, disease and HIV AIDS (Mensah and Adjibolosoo, 1998). Historical texts mainly portray Africa as a savage and wild continent, full of jungles and beasts (Winks, 1971). Often

writings portray Africa as a homogenous country, neglecting to identify the differences that exist between the various countries of Africa (see Cutrufelli, 1983). In Canada, important institutions such as government, business, academia and media have few employees of African descent occupying key positions. This situation leads to limited knowledge on African people. African immigrant women in this study continue to raise awareness of who they are, where they came from and struggle to make inroads into the Canadian economy, for themselves and their children.

The experiences of immigrant women in this study show how gender, race, class, age, sex and nationality all work together to handicap women. To be able to achieve fulfillment of their lives, women use various strategies as they meet the challenge of race, class, gender, sexuality and nationality within their family. Women in this study used the following strategies: recreating new extended families, dialogue, retraining and keeping several jobs. The strategies that women employ translate into consciousness-raising as immigrant women share knowledge and experiences with each other and pass this knowledge along to recent immigrants, in ways that recreate a communal lifestyle within the individualized liberal society that Canada is. Sharing knowledge and strategies is a cultural trait carried forward from Africa and transferred to Canada. This study discovers that in Africa, women shared with other women within the extended family network and formal and informal women's groups as a way of surviving within a patriarchal, poverty and disease ridden environment (Ndunda, 1995). In Canada, women recreate new extended families and form groups that provide support and validation of their identity as they negotiate structural oppressions.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study does not seek to engage in debates about which studies best explain the situation of immigrant women. I therefore consciously avoid identifying analytic failures in existing studies. Rather this study seeks to bring to the discussions and dialogue on gender voices of 15 immigrant women and 5 community workers. This study undertakes to fill the absence of African immigrant women's voices with regard to experiences of gendered roles within the family. The study also returns focus on the family as an alternative route to understanding how patriarchal societies shape experiences of immigrant women. Using Smith's standpoint method that begins from the everyday world, the study examines some of the strategies that 15 immigrant women from Africa employ in negotiating their new gendered roles in Canada. The study identifies and brings into view the various ways in which immigrant women from Africa engage difference and subordination, beginning from the family level in Canada from the perspective of African immigrant women. The particularity of experience indicates that structural forces organize the experiences of immigrant women within the family. The study then further investigates how individual African immigrant women negotiate this organization and identifies these women's cultural contribution to Canada.

1.3 Problem statement

Studies show that immigrant women are more resilient in their new countries than men (Agnew, 1996; Bobb-Smith, 2003; McLaren and Dyck, 2004). The resilience displayed by women, as demonstrated by their ability to adapt to a new country, ensures the survival of these women's families and communities in both their home country and their residence country. However, this resilience can also lead to increased oppression

for women (Okin, 1999) especially when little support is provided based on the assumption that women will work it out (Agnew, 1996). An investigation into women's past, in their country of origin, and present (in Canada) provides an understanding of some of the hidden oppressions African immigrant women face and demonstrates how these oppressions are contextual and experienced differently by women in different localities. Lived experiences shed light to the dynamics of society, while pointing to coercive nature of social structures. However, as actors within society, individuals engage in negotiating and renegotiating their positioning within a given society. As actors, individuals shift strategies to fit specific circumstances in time and space. There is need to examine women's agency within the family in ways that can help inform policy makers, academics, social workers and the public. Little is known about immigrant women from Africa with regard to their gendered roles within the family because of the private nature of family life. Further, there is need to focus research on the cultural contribution that immigrant women from Africa bring to the Canadian society. Immigrant women from Africa enter into Canada with differing expectations of wife and mother roles learned in Africa.

1.4 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges do African immigrant women face in Canada?
2. What strategies do women employ to face these challenges?
3. How contingent are these strategies?

1. 5 Significance of the study

This study is significant as it contributes to emerging research on immigrant women from Africa. The study adds to research that begins from the everyday experiences. It is through their experiences that we discover how women maintain a sense of power and control through negotiation within their nuclear and recreated new extended family circles.

This study contributes to ongoing research that pays uses matrix of domination as a perspective for explaining experiences of people outside mainstream power domains. The study discovers the role of the ethic of care and independent ethic in negotiating oppressions. The study thus adds new insights into research by emphasizing the role of culture in negotiation. In so doing, the study dispels commonsense stereotypes about families of African immigrants as being lazy, welfare drainers, prone to violence and culturally oppressive to women. This study brings to view ways in which women recreate counter images such as strong, contributors to welfare fund, resistant to violence and agents seeking cultural change. Women's everyday interactions show the relevance of culturally specific categories of independence and care ethic, in resisting and negotiating cultural oppression. Women's self definition agrees with Collins' (2000) assertion that subordinate groups engage in dialectic relationships often resisting oppression but also bring about change through dialogic relationships. The stories of women in this study generally show resilience. However, the process of negotiation differed for women in this study, revealing heterogeneity of experience.

Negotiations that women engage also reveal that culture is not necessarily a negative static oppressive organ of the society (Cutrufelli, 1986; Okin, 1999), but one that

is constantly engaged, reconsidered and rebuilt because it constitutes beliefs, material contexts, thinking and doing. The level of this negotiation exists within an integrated system of oppression (the matrix of domination) where groups and mainstream cultures become both a hindrance and a strategy. The use of the ethic of care and independence as both resistance and negotiation adds a new dimension to the meaning of independence. Independence does not occur in isolation for the women in this study, but it is tied to caring that translates into a collective good for other African immigrant women, and non Africans.

Further, this study finds that immigrant women from Africa contribute to immigrant integration politics and thus help reduce social and mental health problems. Women in this study have become more conscious of their gendered roles within the family since arrival in Canada. This consciousness has led to creative ways of negotiating gendered roles, drawing from the cultural practice of oral history, where dialogue becomes a daily engagement. Women also recreate new extended families that become resource sites to its members. In doing this, women constantly contribute to Canadian heritage and assist in the integration of African immigrants to Canadian society.

This study has the potential of informing policy makers, and social workers as they design best practices. This study adds to existing debates that support the relevance of family (the private) as both a site of resistance and negotiation. The stories of women provide an alternative way of dealing with a gendered society but also contribute and validate arguments for research that begins from everyday experience.

1.6 Research context

This research was carried out in the greater Vancouver region of British Columbia. The number of immigrants from Africa arriving to Vancouver has been small in comparison with the number of immigrants arriving from Asia and the Middle East (Hiebert, 2003). However, the number of African immigrants has continued to steadily increase in recent years. Canada's 2001 census shows that most African immigrants settle for metropolitan areas. Although Toronto has a greater number of African immigrants (98,975 people, vs Vancouver's 24,700 in 2001), immigrants continue to move into metropolitan areas hence the need to include their voices to help create a diverse society because for as long as Canada continues to rely upon immigrants to bolster its labour supply, the number of immigrants arriving from Africa will continue to increase.

I interviewed women who came to Canada under spousal sponsorship. The women in my study occupied a middle class status in Africa although in Canada most of them occupy a low income household category. Their present marital status may have changed over time, which adds more flesh to the analysis, as I discover how the women have negotiated new gendered roles within Canada.

1.7 Participants

The study has two categories of participants:

1. Immigrant women from Africa who immigrate under family class as dependent on their male spouse.

2. Representatives from organisations that women interacted with as they negotiated new gendered roles. These included:

A) Advocate, Immigration Lawyer

B) Community workers

1.8 Researcher Background

I grew up in the rural parts of Western province of Kenya in East Africa. I recall how I struggled to survive within my family, where I was a fifth born. I followed a girl and three boys and constantly engaged my identity observing different treatment for boys and girls in my family. My mother lived with her in-laws and cousins. They lived in our family following the death of their father. My mother had been the first wife in my grandfather's home. She farmed and sold produce with my father to maintain the family, as a good wife and 'mother' to her extended younger relatives would. She was guided by a care ethic, instilled in her during her childhood years. My aunties and I did a lot more domestic work than my brothers. My mother was rarely home and did few domestic tasks. I wondered why I was expected to learn the domestic tasks, since evidently in my adult life I would not need to use them seeing that my mother never used hers, except occasionally when she had to make some special meal. My mother also had the means to pay for house help whenever my relatives were absent. I would do domestic tasks during the period when she was searching for house help while my brothers continued schooling. At school I realized that being smart in class had its way of making boys and girls equal, although boys were expected to be smarter, since the teachers would ridicule boys whenever a girl performed better. The patriarchal system served to prepare boys to occupy higher positions and be breadwinners while girls were oriented towards

household tasks. I liked to do better than boys. I often did, which made me catch up with my elder brother in grade two and, later, my other brother when he had to redo his national examinations. My dad was not amused, and often he wished aloud that he would rather I was a boy. The teachers ensured that siblings did not attend the same stream if they were in the same grade, so I was in West, while my brother was in East and my other brother was in North.

I realized that educational attainment can elevate the status of a girl, while it prepares her to be independent. I had my mother and my aunts all cheering me on, even when they themselves had dropped out of school due to lack of school fees, something that made me feel that I owed them my success and needed to help them financially as much as I could. Caring was instilled into me by their actions, and I sought to be independent and self reliant so I could care for them later.

My mother would sometimes tell me not to “look” at the boys until at least after I finished High School. She knew that getting pregnant would mess my education. She worked hard to pay for her children’s school fee. My eldest sister had been pregnant in high school, grade 10. My mother managed to relocate her far away from home where no one would ever know she had given birth. My mother was able to afford this; she had been a hard worker and had managed to move economically above her peer. My sister never breastfed her baby. The baby was briefly breastfed by my mum, before he was transferred to his father’s home. I liked the idea that although my sister carried the baby during pregnancy, the baby’s father shared in the responsibility, although the responsibility of raising the child still lay with the father’s female relatives since the father an army man only visited with his family during his annual leave. I also knew that

it was easy for the baby boy to be sent to his father, because he culturally belonged to the father's side. Being a patrilineal society, my Luhya ethnic group believed that children belong with their fathers, and more so if those children were boys, although often women perform childcare tasks. I knew I needed to avoid boys at least until after high school for many reasons, including the feeling that they were automatically favored while I had to work hard to earn the respect accorded to them.

In high school, my favorite teacher was the mathematics teacher who kept telling us (the girls) to know that what a man can do a woman can do too, and that, for the time being, the boys we attended school with would not ever be our husbands because they were too young. The assumption was that marriage was a necessity, but that girls mature faster than boys, and that our husbands were already working. Although gendered, this message was mine for keeps as I knew what she meant. I knew girls could do better than boys, as I brought home better grades than my brothers. And since I already had problems with some of my male classmates who wondered why I was performing better, I knew I did not have any admirers in the school. My husband was out there anyways already working! The female teacher continued the spirit of consciousness-raising that my mother and aunties had begun. She had become my role model and my greatest inspiration.

For me, school was the best place to be. At least I did not have to do domestic work. Regardless of the hardship acquiring formal education in the rural parts of Western Kenya, I was able to join a public university in Kenya while my brothers did not. My father openly boasted about me and often wished that I had been a boy. Education was crucial as it determined one's status. My mother would always say that during her

business trips to the major towns she saw women being driven by men. She hoped that I would become one of those women. She knew that although marriage would grant me such a privilege, education would do this as well. She would say, 'if you marry someone who has a well-paying career or a business man you would get a better life (economically sustainable) but if you get a good job you will be better off, because men cannot be trusted'. My mother shared her thoughts that men cannot be trusted, yet she endured an abusive relationship, sometimes saying she was doing it for us. As independent as she was, she stayed in the marriage. Perhaps she had invested too much in the family to leave. So when my father married a second wife and 'semi' deserted us, my mother cared for us. And when my dad fell sick and his other wife deserted him following the dwindling of finances, my mother, who had always been beaten, looked at my dad and refused to share the same bedroom with him. At his death, my dad had his own bedroom and my mother braved it all with her in-laws accusing her of not being a good wife to take her husband in.

When I discussed with my mother about coming to Canada, she knew this was my destiny. She had named me Jackline, after a girl who had left Kenya to study in Sweden. At the time of my birth she had wished that I would go out of Kenya some day. Yet part of her wanted me to stay in Kenya for the sake of my children and my husband. Did I not have a good job already and was I not being driven, just as she had hoped? I was in a higher socio-economic status than hers. Above all else, I was independent (economically), which would mean that I was able to negotiate gendered domestic roles. My sister was happy for me, as she looked me in the eyes and said she knew I could make it. My decision was made easier given my own troubled marriage, my sister's

broken violently abusive marriage, and my mother's survival within an abusive marriage. I wanted change and I longed for it.

In Canada, I realized that many more things challenged my independence. I found myself no longer in a position of influence. I was a student and a potential immigrant. I was prohibited from working off campus, meaning I had limited opportunities and ability to acquire resources. Was I dependant? While I was used to beating the odds and being different in Kenya, the difference I experienced in Canada was not liberating but oppressive. I felt that I did not belong. I desperately wanted to belong, or I would quit and return to Kenya. I stayed. I wondered how immigrants from Africa experienced their own difference during their initial years. I particularly wondered about married women from Africa who came to Canada having already tasted independence. I did not find enough research related materials to help me know. But I knew I was in a position where I could render such experiences known. I interacted with a number of friends from Africa whom I discovered were not regarded as men and women with unique experiences from diverse ethnic groups but as immigrants from Africa. Each friend had a different experience depending on whether they were citizens, landed immigrants, refugee claimants, students or student spouses. But they never marked themselves with this immigration discourse. We talked about being a mother and a wife here. It was different. Since some of my friends shared life histories slightly similar to mine, I set out to write about their stories. I knew as they knew that my writing would enable them to tell their stories and give their voices a place at the University of British Columbia. I wanted policy makers and social workers to hear these voices. This writing, as I have since learned, has been particularly important for me.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Literature review

Rather than begin my review of the literature prior to the study which is a common practice in Western writing, I chose to let the women I interviewed guide me towards the existing literature that would best speak to their various situations. I went into my research with the understanding that my research participants are subjects and participants who have the knowledge that I am seeking but who may also redirect my research in ways that could deviate from my initial focus. I found this to be particularly true as women moved from discussing their mothering and motherhood experiences as I had originally proposed, and turned instead towards engaging discussions regarding their womanhood in general. This meant invigorating discussions surrounding both motherhood in the home and motherhood that is satisfied by working outside the home. After the interviews, I returned to existing work, but only such work that analytically grounds women's stories and experiences. I found research by African writers (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997; Aidoo, 1997), the Caribbean (Bobb-Smith, 2003) and African American writers (Collins, 2000) useful in analytically situating my data, although I also build on research that has been carried out on multiculturalism (Biscoondath, 2002; Onik, 1999; Agnew, 1993). To some extent, this method follows Smith's standpoint methodology that begins from the everyday experiences.

2.2 Methodology

This study employed a standpoint methodology advanced by Smith (1987). Smith's standpoint methodology argues for research that starts from the everyday as the

research locus. Such a method recognizes that the members of the society who live outside the ruling apparatus know their world. An entry into the actualities of everyday world renders research participants as subjects not objects of research. Smith argues that researching from the actualities of every day lives provides space for the inclusion of different voices. The research begins from the premise that only the research subjects know and our role is to discover what organizes their knowledge and actions. Smith notes:

It is rather a method that, at the outset of inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds (1987:107).

Smith observes that treating research participants as subjects provides an entry into the everyday world that is “neither transparent nor obvious”, because the subject is not only a knower but also an actor. Because subjects are actors, they are agents who negotiate their everyday experience in ways that fit into the existing social settings that they live in. Being actors as well implies that the subjects have their own perception of the world around them. However, the researcher faces the challenge of interpreting this perception with an awareness of the ruling relations that form and inform this perception. According to Smith, the task for sociologists is to explicate ruling relations embedded in the complexity of the everyday world. Smith observes:

Locating the sociological problematic in the everyday world does not mean confining the enquiry to the everyday world. Indeed ... it is essential that the everyday world be seen as organized by social relations not observable within it. Thus, an inquiry confining itself to the everyday world of direct experience is not adequate to explicate its social organization (1987:89).

Standpoint as a methodology thus goes beyond descriptive writing of experiences, but maps out external influences to the personal. The researcher identifies forces that exist within the social structures that shape the women's perceptions and actions.

According to Smith, these forces are those institutions that organize women's lives. Women may or may not be aware of the power relations that exist. The forces, which Smith calls ruling apparatuses, exist as government, law, business and financial management, professional organization, educational institution and textual discourse. This ruling is external to the individual but shapes the everyday experience of the individual through inevitable interaction processes. Other theorists (Collins, 2000; Bobb-Smith, 2002) have provided a framework of understanding everyday world in the perspective of a matrix of domination.

Collins (2000) calls the apparatuses that organize women lives, a matrix of domination. Collin's matrix of domination defines all social organizations that help produce and sustain oppression. Collins observes that oppression does not work independently but interweaves through all the social classifications identified as oppressive. These oppressions include race, class, gender, sex, age and nationality. No one classification is superior to the other. They all work together, in a matrix of domination to oppress women. While Collins employed matrix of domination theory in studying African American women, Bobb-Smith (2003) identifies the intersectionality of these oppressions that lead to a culture of resistance for immigrant women from the Caribbean in Canada.

Bobb-Smith's (2003) study of Caribbean women's search for identity provides insights into women's agency. Most Caribbean women learn to resist dominance from

childhood. This dominance is manifest in gendered work, the class one is born into and one's race, or closeness to whiteness. The stories that women tell their grand daughters, nieces, daughters and observations of what older women do as they resist patriarchy and domination form part of the learning process for Caribbean women. According to Bobb-Smith, childhood learning provides the framework for an independent ethic. Bobb-Smith states:

I speak of independence as an ethic and not a quality or trait, because I associate it's presence with the use of agency by Caribbean women to free themselves from victimization, when necessary, in the private and public sphere. ... as a tool for both self definition and liberation, a Caribbean woman may know that her power remains invisible and be associated mainly with nurturing (2003:86)

Independence is achieved through work. Education is primary in acquiring this independence for most women in Bobb-Smith's study. However, some of the women who did not make it through high levels of education were engaged in business.

Although the Caribbean and African context are somewhat different, because of the degree of encounter with racism and slavery and disparate geographical locations Bobb-Smith provides a framework for understanding the African immigrant women's experiences as inspired by the independence ethic and self-redefinition. Women in Africa struggle to attain economic independence because poverty impacts women more than men. Women in Africa spend more time with children than men and have been socialized to maintaining good health for their children. It seems as if husbands are seen as children as well, because women are also socialized to care for their husbands just as much. Most African writers confirm this trend (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1987; Emecheta, 1989). Yet this care is tied to the need for economic independence for providence in the home to take place.

In this study women's experiences reveal that the private permeates the public in an intertwining relationship.

Further, Bobb-Smith's study is useful in understanding immigrant women's experiences in general as they confront issues of gender, race, class, age, sexuality and nationality. Caribbean women who come and are stereotyped as domestic workers have a different negotiation experience compared to African women who come to join their husbands in Canada. For African immigrants, the stereotype of coming from a continent known to be rife with civil war, hunger, poverty and disease challenges their identity and agency. For some women, the encounter with colonialism as narrated by grandparents and as learnt in schools forms an awareness for the women on their role in the society, at times as conflicting with white women who had the privilege of being served by the African men. While African husbands served white families, African wives struggled to raise and provide for their families. The colonial experience in Africa led to resistance to domination as much as it led women to negotiate control within the home as caring and independent individuals. While destroying the traditional lifestyle, colonialism paved way for post-colonial period which presently requires women to work and be self-reliant (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1996). Below is a brief summary of the colonial period to show the precarious relationship between Africans and people from the West in the early 19th Century and provide insight on control, dominance and resistance that has continued in the present day neo-colonialism.

2.3 Colonial Experience in Africa

During the colonial period in Africa, the Europeans arrived in Africa with the aim of discovering and civilizing Africa, the dark continent. Unlike previous contact with

Indians, Arabs and Portuguese, as was the case in East Africa that had thrived in better trade, contact with the Europeans meant pain, anguish and even death. Most Africans were determined to acquire self-rule and formed various movements like Maji Maji of Tanzania and Mau Mau of Kenya. Tignor (1976:4) notes that the first contacts with the British left a legacy of mistrust and ill will. Such feelings were a result of land losses, as the British amassed land for agricultural use. The local people were forced to work on these farms to pay newly introduced land tariffs.

The colonial state served the interests of non-Africans, occasionally using military force (Gordon, 1986). Gordon notes that for settler colonies, local people were denied independent production. Since money was useful for paying taxes, and since laws were introduced to prohibit trespass and therefore making it impossible to grow crops on the large farms now belonging to the settlers, the locals depended on Europeans for their survival. Myths and labels such as 'savage', 'uncivilized', 'less developed' Africans justified the use of force in enforcement of laws that protected the interests of Europeans. Gordon further observes that for non-settler colonies, particularly in West Africa, peasant-based commodity production was encouraged for the international market. As such, the locals received little profit from their produce, while the colonialists amassed more wealth.

The colonial regime was differently expedited within Africa. Gordon (1986:15) observes that in some areas imperial incursion served to breakdown existing systems; in other areas it rapidly transformed them; and in still others, it conserved the existing social systems. Colonialists applied all these maneuvers to their advantage. Where the breakdown of existing social systems would jeopardize profits, it was safe to leave the

system almost intact. The relationship between the colonialists and Africans was one of exploitation, as simple agrarian and pastoralists lifestyles were slowly replaced by industrial production.

Africans who were made dependant on colonialists were forced to go to church and attend mission schools that all condemned African practices and pressured the people to change African practices. The formal education that was provided was only useful to make the Africans work in subordinate roles such as clerks, teachers, evangelists and artisans. These roles were to be performed under European supervision. Tignor notes:

Because Europeans believed that Africans were inferior beings as well as inefficient labourers, they felt justified in giving them a wage that no European would have worked for. Missionaries and other educators argued that at the present stage of African development, the best form of education was one that stressed manual skills and did not provide much advanced literary learning (1976: 6).

A dialectic relationship ensued. Africans realised that they were being exploited and oppressed. They sought to resist and kept on resisting, even to the point of death, until they won independence. Inclusion of topics on slavery and slave trade in schools has continued to inform Africans about bitter historical experiences of their ancestors.

While the colonial period saw the advent of Christianity and Islam to Africa, most Africans have lived to use this religion for their own emancipation. Religion as experienced by Africans contains both traditional belief systems and the Christian/Muslim practices (see Mbiti, 1990; Mazrui, 1993). While radical resistance of European rule was necessary for the “overthrow” (because neocolonialism and globalization still has its hold on African Governments) of the colonial regime, negotiation of various African practices was necessary to make Christianity more functional in Africa. I argue that Christianity was reshaped to ensure obedience and

conformity and has continued to serve as a justification of colonial incursion. This explains why immigrant women in this study felt that Christianity is experienced differently among Africans as compared to the American or Canadians experience of Christianity.

African feminist writers on colonialism have pointed out how the colonial regime served to dehumanize African women because the system ignored women's need to have husbands to care for them, while elate the European women who accompanied their husbands as they received care from the African women's husbands such care that served to dehumanize the African men as well (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997; fiction work by Ogot). Nfah-Abbenyi observes that while colonialism saw African men go to work in traditional women roles, such as laundry, cooking and housekeeping in the city, the wives remained in the rural villages where they developed survival mechanisms and engaged in open market trades. A sense of community and togetherness for women who remained in the village was developed and was particularly necessary to fill the void following the absence of husbands. Independence through struggle for survival without the physical presence of husbands was tied to caring because women had to care for their family members and for other women through moral support.

Some women left to work in the city, often occupying traditional feminine work like typing and receptionists, while others engaged in prostitution. Sexuality was thus a means of income. However, African women writers have shown the gendered nature of sexuality in the sense that it served to fulfill men's desires, an aspect that women constantly engaged and negotiated (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997). Most fiction work (Ogot, 1976; 1989; 1993; Emecheta, 1980; Ba, 1989) attest to struggles and negotiations that

ensue. Skin color became important in defining beauty, and thus most women who had the means engaged in skin lightening beauty products.

Presently, African people continue to struggle to attain independence in the face of neo-colonialism. In its worst form, neocolonialism has promoted a corrupt leadership among Africans, with sanctions from World Bank and IMF making life particularly difficult for the common citizen (Lewis, 2005). Globalization has made it possible to glimpse at the utility of technology in improving lives, yet this technology remains difficult to access for the common citizen. Yet even in the midst of this struggle are struggles by women to overcome class and patriarchal oppressions (Ba, 1989; Amadi, 1966). At the individual level, Christianity/religion plays a greater role in connecting the individual to their inner souls and providing meaning amidst despair and strength to carry on, perhaps what Bobb-Smith (2003) notes as the role of spirituality in strategizing among the oppressed people. Women in this study particularly reworked their Christianity and made it a religion that instills hope and courage rather than submission and condemnation.

Migrating to Canada promises an experience of improved lives and so becomes a dream for many of the Africans who struggle for such an opportunity. Immigration also promises improved lifestyles for family members who remain in the home country. It is expected that the emigrant will send some money back to the home country and contribute to the household income. It is however surprising that upon arrival to Canada, the notion of "improved life" becomes a daunting challenge and only means improved struggles (see Creese and Kambere, 2002; Musisi and Turritin, 1995). Upon arrival in Canada, Africans have to engage the intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, age

and nationality. The spirit of determination that ensued during colonialism and neo-colonialism continues to spur Africans to struggle.

Faced with structural challenges African immigrants in this study continue to stay strong and positive drawing from their previous experience with negotiation while in Africa. Religion still plays a crucial role, and has been transformed into what is not really African or Canadian Christianity, but as a form of reaching out to the inner soul for strength amidst challenges. Bobb-Smith (2003) explores the use of spirituality among Caribbean women that lends relevance to the experiences of African immigrants in this study. Mbiti's (1990) work on African religions similarly show the importance of spirituality as part of everyday life among Africans which is identifiable in the stories of African immigrants in this study. This study finds that African immigrants experience migration struggles differently depending on migrant status, level of education, economic conditions, age, length of stay in Canada and marital status. These struggles become the focus of this study: the things that women enable them to overcome a subordinate status and attain independence in Canada.

In this study, I begin with lived experiences as insightful in revealing how gender is an oppressive social category that occurs intertwined with race, class, sex, age and nationality. The ethic of care and independence has played a crucial role for women in this study as they negotiate oppression within and without the family.

2.4 Identifying Research participants

I interviewed a total of 15 women married, divorced, single, widowed and separated immigrant women from Africa who came to Canada under family class. These women came as "dependants". As dependants, there are limitations to available resources

for women in Canada. I employed snowball sampling to help locate participants. The first three interviews were from women with whom I had developed a friendship. They each asked their friends to call me, and their friends identified some possible participants whom they referred to me.

I further interviewed 5 community organization workers whom women identified as having been resourceful. This method follows after Smith's (1986) method of beginning from the lived experiences of women, and allowing the interviews to lead the researcher to institutions that women directly interact with to identify how the ruling apparatus organize women's experiences. Smith's method progresses from everyday experiences level to the immediate interactions with institutions and further to policy levels. The lower level directs the shape of the interview with the upper level. Due to time constraints, I was not able to move the research from the community organizations to Government institutions and policy makers. I used existing literature to assist in explicating how the lived experiences are organized and shaped.

2.5 Research Location

Participants were drawn from the greater Vancouver area. This site was selected because of convenience and limited resources. Interviews took place at the homes of the participants, usually beginning with general stories told while preparing and sharing a meal.

2.6 Data Generation

Unstructured interviews were the major source of data generation. The first three interviews provided a framework that guided following interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed the following day. Listening to the interviews was useful in

identifying what questions generate more stories and what was of most importance to the women.

I conducted most of the interviews in English except when three participants sometimes switched to Swahili language. I did not need an interpreter since I am familiar with the language. For some participants, oscillating between Swahili and English gave them ease and confidence. They said they enjoyed being able to speak Swahili at an interview. Others from Swahili-speaking regions of Africa spoke in English throughout the interview. I wondered if this was to challenge stereotypes. Some spoke English when recording but would speak Swahili when I turned the recorder off. I wondered if this was to show the divide between scholarship and everyday life. Had I objectified my subjects? I turned back to memory, my lifelong learning tool. I remembered the stories and wrote them down upon arriving home.

The interview questions often depended on what the participants shared. Some of the discussions began with Canadian experience, drifted back to African experiences while others began with their African experiences, and finished with Canadian experience. The following topics, which were of interest to participants, were explored:

1. Childcare experience in Africa and in Canada
2. Work experience in Africa and in Canada
3. Child discipline in Africa and in Canada
4. Spousal relations in Africa and in Canada

These topics were useful in identifying the strategies that women employ in negotiating new gendered roles in Canada. Overall, women's strategies revolved around negotiating new gendered roles in Canada, redefining meaning through interactions in

Canada while at the same time seeking to be independent a feminine trait which in Africa meant being economically self reliant. Further, caring for household members required some form of independence that also meant that women had to negotiate their thinking on domestic tasks since it was difficult to perform these tasks on their own. In Africa the extended female family was useful for most care roles, whereas in Canada women strategize to involve their spouses and children, male or female.

We discussed how women interacted with childcare, child discipline, work, and spousal relation in Africa and how these varied in Canada. Women shared what the topics meant for them, and how these meanings continue to shift. They also shared the difficulties experienced in both sites and how they overcame the difficulties. Women discussed the various options available and usable at both sites (Africa and Canada).

Interviews with community workers were structured according to the stories that women shared. However, community workers volunteered further information, which helped put the stories that women shared to perspective.

2.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Although I strive to make voices of the women heard, I am keen on making their stories subject to both their own interpretation and the interpretation occurring beyond their localities. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2003:118) caution that one sided interpretation may tend “to leave the powerful to enjoy knowledge of their powers or to leave the subordinated to represent themselves only to themselves”. Take for example a situation where a woman states that she stayed in an abusive relationship because of her children. An African feminist might call this woman a strong woman and may be interested in knowing what this woman does that has enabled her to continue surviving

within the marriage. In Africa, structural changes have been slow to take place with regard to spousal abuse. A Western feminist may find this woman weak and overtly exploited by patriarchal structures, an argument that can easily be backed up within the social context of North America, where there are services in place to help abused women. An anti-racist feminist will probably question the systems that lead to such abuse and may point out the limitations inherent in the structural changes that favor certain women over others. By drawing from Western feminist theory, antiracist-feminist (see Hamilton, 2005; Agnew, 1997) and African feminist theory (Collins, 2000; Nfah-Abbenyi, 1987), I am not limited to any one analysis but rather can focus on how all of these views intersect, both complimenting and critiquing each other.

I analyze the data from the premise of understanding that feminists have been on the fore for the emancipation of women. I take recognition that women are agents who make the best of their lives, regardless of existing patriarchal and structural challenges (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Collins, 2000). Running throughout the interviews was an overarching ethic of care and an independent ethic, which translates into strength for the women as they negotiated gendered roles within the family. Although women do not encounter overt racism in some African countries, relations of ruling, structured in class, gender and sexuality, continue women's subordination. However, women negotiate this subordination at individual levels as they strive for a better future for themselves, their children and their fellow women. In Canada, race becomes more visible and has to be negotiated as well as nationality.

I am wary of writing a thesis that my participants and their families, an important audience, will not identify with. I take cognizance of Kirsch's (1999) argument that

writing women's stories is an illustration of a frozen moment in time. The interpretation might change over the years, but the reality of the stories as they occurred in the world of the women will remain as a historical memoir. I am also concerned about the credibility of my research given that it is based on people's stories and experiences, a horizon that has been critiqued by researchers who believe in objective scientific research (Smith 1987). Below I discuss issues of credibility and trustworthiness. I provide insights on how I have addressed these issues in my research.

2.8 Issues of Credibility and Trustworthiness

I am an embodied researcher bringing into research my experience as a married African immigrant woman with children. I took on this study fully aware of my own positioning as a researcher yet a fully experiencing subject who could learn from the collective knowledge that gives validity to our way of life as immigrants. However, because I had different life encounters during my childhood and how I negotiated my existence compared to other girls and women friends, I entered into this research with the understanding that experiences are not homogenous. I was able to relate to the women's experiences in Africa as I shared my own experiences with them, eager to know how they manage to negotiate their new gendered roles in Canada. Oakley (1981) argues that researchers ought to invest their stories into the research (see also Graham, 1984; Finch 1984; Cotterill 1992). Oakley notes that intimacy and perhaps long-term relations may result from such an encounter. Long term relations became a product of our shared experiences. However, pertinent to the research was the length of time each interview session took as we both created trust with each other. The creation of trust was not just for the benefit of the research, but also for me to be comfortable to share my intimate

stories with the women. The interviews took no less than 4 hours, as we generally talked about our experiences in Africa and Canada. The participants were excited about my research and about my own experiences. The women were glad to talk to me as they hoped that their experiences will be made known gave them a sense of agency as creators of knowledge and instigators of change. To some extent this provides credibility to this research as it is based on a shared trust between the researcher and the subject.

The women were eager to share their stories and I was there to listen, perhaps in ways that affirm Finch's suggestion that women oppressed within the domestic sphere welcome the opportunity to talk to a sympathetic listener (Finch, 1984:74). Perhaps I would not say sympathetic but empathetic since the women did not really need sympathy, as the data revealed. They were working out their lives resisting cultural constraints, and regenerating cultural belief systems to their own advantage. The path was not easy, yet it was vital for women to redefine themselves in Canada. For me, these stories are credible as they contain the subject's knowledge and reality.

Agnew (1996) observed that participants, particularly those from Asia were eager to share their stories when she carried out her research a trend that I identified in my research as well. The eagerness to participate stemming from shared ethnicity between the researcher and the participants can also be dangerous to research, where the participants assume that the researcher understands some of the details and where the researcher assumes that they already know the participants' story. In my research, where a participant would tell me that I know, I would agree, tell my part and encouraged them to say their part as well. Often it emerged that my experience was very different from the participants.

This excitement might be seen as a set back to research, with participants being selective on what they want the researcher to hear, and thus what they want policy makers, scholars and the public to know (Ramanzonglu, 2004). I argue that this is not necessarily a bad thing, because it empowers the participants and shows the level of consciousness among the participants on the role of knowledge to bring about change. The ability for this information to reflect reality remains a challenge for qualitative research (Finch, 1984). To ward off fears of fictional data, I attempted to reframe the questions later during the interview process to match previous answers or to compare previous stories. I often drew from my own understanding and experience with the role of a wife, a mother and a worker to analyze and check the credibility of the stories that the women shared.

The issue of power over the participants was less threatening during the interview process. Klein (1983) observes that researchers need to be aware of their own conscious or unconscious impositions over research subjects. I established trust with my participants usually by my own stories. We also cooked and shared meals, as the participants gladly celebrated their traditional saying: A visitor should never go away hungry. Was I a visitor? I was not, but I did not resist this treatment since it was important in creating trust. It also meant that I was not acting strange, by saying no. I was becoming part of a social network, part of an extended family.

Memory has been critiqued as a useful source of information (Brown, 2005). While diary keeping and other textual methods are common for storage of knowledge among people from the West, people from Africa are cultured into oral history and memory is a powerful reservoir. I have never been able to keep up to journal writing or

be consistent in keeping diary. Yet I am amazed at how much I recall when something happens to me that reflect my earlier experience. I know from my own experience that things that are stored in our subconscious can be triggered to the conscious. This remembrance may take some time and I allowed the participants time to think. There are remembrances that return to memory long after the story is told. I would ask the same question later within the interview to help in matching the answers earlier provided. I allowed women to also draw me back to their former stories, as they wanted to add something to what they had said earlier. This process justifies the four hours we could spent in a session earlier designed for one hour.

I drew attention to the issues of privacy and confidentiality outlined by the Ethical Review Board. The Ethical Review Board gave approval for the study (see appendix). I assured women of confidentiality and hence the women were able to share their experiences without fear that the information would trace their identity. As such their intimate lives were shared, in ways that gave them power over the future reader, since the reader would not trace the stories to the women just as the women would not know the reader.

However hard I try to relate the stories of women as close to their reality as possible, I must admit that my narration is informed by my own analytical subjectivity. I am aware of patriarchal systems that women must resist and I go into this study with one mind, that women are constantly resisting subordination and oppression. I wish then to discover how they actually resist, what makes it possible for them to resist and how are they able to live fulfilling lives within Canada. Below I discuss the strategies that women use.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Strategies for Negotiating New Gendered Roles in Canada

This study identifies four main strategies that the 15 immigrant women from Africa participating in this study employ as they negotiate new gendered roles in Canada. The strategies occur differently for individual women depending on the women's class, migrant status and age. The ethic of care and independence ethic is the thread that bonds women together in their struggles as they negotiate gendered roles. These strategies are as follows:

1. Forming New Extended Families
2. Engaging in Self Dialogue
3. Retraining
4. Keeping Several Jobs

3.1.1. Forming New Extended Families

Women in this study formed new relations based on shared experience as Africans in Canada to negotiate their new gendered roles. In this section, I begin with the reasoning behind the formation of the new extended family. I discuss how women reconstitute a new extended family. I then show the use of this extended family in negotiating gendered roles, particularly with regard to childcare, child discipline, and work within the home and outside the home, occasionally drawing from my own example.

Women in this study reconstituted what one might call a social extended family in Canada. The new extended family is made possible by a culture of caring and watching out for each other as members of the family already developed in Africa. The caring

culture is a way of life that seeks the interest of others through the things that people do.

A community worker observes:

However, we are very kind. We help a lot when we are in our country. An African will always cook a big pot of food, keep some just in case somebody knocks on the door. That is our nature. We don't measure food.

Caring for unseen guests revolves around the large extended family, but also calls for independence. African women require independence which helps them to be able to cook extra food. Food metaphorically represents helping people in need. The quote reflects the feelings of most African immigrant women in this study who said caring for other people, a relative, stranger or neighbor constitutes shared cultural values which women are prepared for often because women spend more time in the domestic sphere than men. It is this caring trait that manifests itself in Canada through reaching out to other immigrants assumed to share similar challenges.

The new extended family in Canada originates as part of negotiating the isolation found in societies where individualism is assumed as a virtue. Coming from a different cultural setting that encourages people to care for each other as much as is possible (see Nfah-Abbenyi, 1987), and faced with both systemic and family challenges (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Okin, 1999), the new extended family provides encouragement and information sharing. Most women in this study attest to the need for community which they find through meeting with other people, particularly those with shared backgrounds. The following quote expresses the needs of most women that led to a formation of an extended family relation:

Esther: I am involved in this society that caters for new immigrants here in Vancouver. So they have events every other time in the month like they bring mothers and children especially together, to meet each other and share experiences and you

know just to know each other a little bit and you know pick up from there and just to do some networking and things like that.... Coz sometimes it can be very stressful and very lonely. This is a very lonely society (laugh). As you may have known. Yeah it is working [the meetings help release stress] and it is very nice. Through that I have been able to know a couple of African families, and to interact, you know call each other up and just to interact and talk and discuss a lot of stuff together. And even go and visit. Yeah it is a very nice forum so far.

These forums provide support groups for the women and often reflect the kind of support groups found in the extended family in Africa, where one shares one's problems with sisters, aunts or uncles. In Kenya, for example, I would call on my sister to discuss issues affecting our marriages, or work in ways that helped me make informed choices. While I would not necessarily heed to my sister's advice, her role in sharing her thoughts and listening to me gave me greater insights into my decisions. I shared my experience with my sister because I knew she understands my experiences because she is going through similar situations, and I know she will not laugh at me because she is family. For women in this study, such a person is reconfigured in Canada. As women in this study are away from their extended family, they remake new families with other immigrants (African or otherwise) who either share similar experiences or are empathetic. Family is different from social networks because of shared intimacy, and thus rather than see this relation as social networks, a better term would be new extended family relations.

The sentiments of women in this study confirm the findings of other studies regarding isolation and cultural shock occurring among recent immigrants from developing countries (Hiebert, 2003; Creese and Kambere, 2002; Mensah and Adjibolosoo, 1998; Musisi and Turritin 1996). One of the ways that women negotiate the disadvantages and challenges as recent immigrants is through reconstituting an extended family in Canada. The general assumption that Canada is an isolating country make new

extended family a better description for these relations because these relations promote acceptance, encouragement and unwavering support. The use of family differs from social network because of the cultural relevance of the extended family discourse..

This study finds that women consciously form these new extended family relations because of the important role that these relations play in their lives as immigrants in Canada.

Akinyi: Yeah I think when we talk to each other during the meetings, then we release our stress. So when we come home we try to help our husbands as well, because we understand that they are suffering as well.

Although community groups have been useful in helping women recreate new extended families, some women formed the networks through their own conscious interaction with African immigrants. These meeting could occur on buses, in churches, in malls or on the streets. Fahari shows the process of such an adhoc interaction:

Fahari: Well you know when you see an African person you say 'hi' to them and then when they are smiling and you tell them where you come from and they also tell you where they come from. Then you exchange telephone numbers and then you keep communicating. You help each other, encourage one another over phone, and also you visit one another.

The new extended family helps women with issues of childcare. Trusting a family member with the life of one's child is common in Africa, as Christine observes:

Christine: Just like looking back home, most young girls because they must have in one point in their lives taken care of their siblings or children of aunts or other relations. ...When I was ten years I knew almost everything ... Because I was with her [the baby] twenty-four seven more than the mom. The mother was going to school. She just come back, take the baby, may be just carry her for a few seconds to breastfeed her, she calls me I take the baby...

Mothers often trusted the life of their babies with family members. Experience with childcare is essential, age notwithstanding, as is the case with Christine who was ten years old yet highly knowledgeable as a childcare giver for her sister's baby.

In Canada, however, regulated daycare guarantees safety of children. Because daycare is expensive, and not affordable for all women, their new extended family helped women form trust with non formal caregivers with whom they left their children.

Gertrude: Actually I talked to this lady and I was weighing her for sometime with the baby to see how she can manage. And actually I was satisfied with her. After a week or so, then I started to leave her with the baby. We are paying about six dollars an hour. At first she said that we must pay eight dollars but I told her that I am not able to manage eight bucks an hour.

Awoko: How did you meet this lady?

Gertrude: Oh, I met her through a friend of mine whom I met at the mother goose. Actually my friend told me that she is very good with the children and she is from Africa too. You know she is like a sister now. Otherwise I don't think she would have agreed to reduce the price. And my baby is not even one year old. But I trust her.

Another role that the new extended family plays is with strategizing on issues of lost identity. The new extended family helps women find validation of who they are sometimes as they are recognized for their former positions held in the country of origin.

Fahari: Yeah, this aunt of mine, I call her auntie, but she calls me auntie. So maybe I should call her my niece. But she calls me and because she knows I was a nurse in Kenya, she would ask me about her pregnancy and even after her baby was born. You know she is a funny girl (laugh) and then I tell her 'okay, call your doctor' (laugh). But you know Jackline, when you are in Africa, you ask your aunt about what is happening with your baby or pregnancy, especially a first one. So I often talk to her and listen to her. She is family.

To continue cultural transmission and community living, the new extended family attends birthdays and weddings and may visit during national holidays. This participation in holidays fosters community and may thus yield other benefits such as formation of an

African identity for the women and their children within Canadian society. The following conversation attests that although African immigrants celebrate Canadian holidays, these occasions build the extended family formed:

Awoko: What type of celebrations do you host in your house?

Indy: Christmas. Birthdays and thanksgiving, New Year that is all.

Awoko: Do you invite like your friends over or do you just celebrate with your family?

Indy: I invite some friends, you know they are like family. I host, and I go to see them too in their houses. And when the children meet you know they play freely with each other. That is good for them too, you know.

Cooking African foods help women maintain their sense of African identity within a multicultural Canadian society.

Women in this study operated within the new extended family as they would in their extended family in Africa. Women in this study volunteered time to be with the new family depended on their availability. As women took on more jobs and or training they limited how often they visited with the members of the new extended family:

Belinda: I only go to my work. I cannot go to look for people or to join people that have clubs, I come late, I go early... Before, the time I haven't opened my own business, I do go to them and we gather, I talk to them, I tell them to work hard and so they can help other people back home. Because some of them-they want to live on welfare.

Although Belinda affirms that her busy schedule denies her the chance to meet with her new extended family, she states how she initially dedicated herself to this membership. This is not to be construed as failure of the extended family as an organization in Canada. Like in my own example, when I did not have a job in Kenya, I was readily available for my family members and attended all occasions. However when I got a fulltime job it was impossible to attend all functions. Yet my family remained with me and we could chat on

the phone or visit whenever there was a crucial need. Similarly in Canada, I would visit with my 'new extended family' and look after their children, or they would bring their children to my house. When I started working, it was difficult for me to be of assistance. My relations were intimate and felt like family relations than social networks.

In this study women who found work negotiated ways to stay within the extended family through telephone conversations that often take up to one hour, acknowledging the importance of this kind of interaction for survival in Canada:

Natasha: Free time depends on whatever is happening. Most of the time when we have free time that is when we try to do maybe socialize over the phone. Because you find that you are so busy doing things, and they are busy too. But when you talk for one hour, because you see local phone is free, you save time for going to visit and for coming back home. You know you don't want to lose relationship. Another thing, again this place you don't want to be by yourself.

For some women, the new extended family helps reinforce discipline among children and sometimes couples as well. Jennifer works as a volunteer auntie, because of the way she is referred to as either aunt, or mother by the younger women she interacts with. She states:

Jennifer: I call them and talk to them. Some they call me and come to see me. and I try to make them feel good. And I give some gospel to them. Yeah. All the kids call me *Mami* (grandmother) Jennifer. Some when they are old the young ladies call me Ya Jennifer. Men they never call me by name. They call me Auntie Jennifer or mama Jennifer. Back home if I am old than you, you have to respect me. Either call them aunt or uncle. You can be rich you can be whatever you want but you have to respect me if I am old.

Unlike the extended family in Africa, the moral obligation fabric is weak and is primarily voluntary rather than duty bound. As well women negotiate the support they receive within these new extended families and are at liberty to recreate other new extended family relations. Christine wonders at some of the ideas shared with her friends

who hold onto an African identity, but her resistance informs us of the agency that each member within the new extended family contains:

Christine: When they say that we should remember that we are Africans, I just don't care so much. Because it makes no sense. We cannot live like we are in Africa when we are here. So me when he comes home, and I am tired I don't mind if he goes to the kitchen if he wants food. If he does not go to the kitchen he will go to bed hungry.

Although the extended family may attempt to set rules and guidelines of behavior for its members, adherence to these rules is not mandatory as in Africa, where the extended family has its own moral code of behavior, individual women are agents and determine their life's paths. For example, I often found myself disagreeing with some expectations as I grew up in Kenya. Divergent views continued to be held within my family.

Sometimes it was safe to stay away from family rather than cause greater pain and ache to oneself. We would often meet during inevitable moments when someone in the family died or when tuition had to be paid for one of the extended family members.

In conclusion, the new extended family unit is fluid and is one of the strategies that immigrant women in this study used. This strategy did not occur in isolation of other strategies that I discuss below. Fluidity of extended family relations is manifest in ways women make, remake and unmake these relations, depending on what benefit members gain from it. The new extended family is a strategy used to resist oppression (embedded in a matrix of domination) that affects women's everyday existence. Being culturally generated, the new extended family survives on trust, expectations and obligations for individual members. Although the new extended family has more members of African origin, African immigrant women included people of non African origin. This crucial strategy thus leads to another strategy that I name as 'dialogue', which helps women

figure out the shared information and experiences gained within the extended family as they continue to ponder on how to negotiate their new positions in Canada. I proceed below to discuss dialogue as a strategy.

3.1.2. Engaging in Self Dialogue

This section is lengthy but necessarily so because dialogue is a theoretically complex concept and I wish for a clearer understanding of why I name dialogue as a strategy. I first attempt to define the context in which I am using the term 'dialogue' sociologically as a strategy. I then proceed to give contextual meaning of dialogue in relation to other research that might fit the discussion of dialogue. I show what leads women to dialogue with themselves, then provide instances of dialogue and how dialogue has been useful in the development process of women as they face challenges negotiating their gendered roles.

Dialogue in this study mainly refers to the individual's specific reflections of variety of social interactions. It is talking to one self in a safe space, either in a bus, along the beach, in the mall, in bed or in social gatherings. Dialogue is safe, because it is in the hearts, unspoken and unwritten, unlike journal or web blog keeping. Dialogue includes taking stock of specific experiences and social encounters. Dialogue, more than diary or journal keeping involves taking conscious steps towards changing one's conditions such steps that will form and inform the next dialogue sessions. Dialogue is thus a continuous process, informed by variety of experience and knowledge gained from social encounters. This study seeks to write down some of the dialogues, the thoughts that immigrant women had, which gives meaning to social actions. This study, journeys through the thoughts to understand how women make sense of their social world. Dialogue becomes

a strategy because it provides women a time for self reflection as they draw strength from their past to carry on their future. Dialogue enables for change in behavior and belief systems and shows how women become agents, determining their own destiny.

Dialogue involves compromise and means that while African immigrant women give up some of their belief systems, they bring into Canada some beliefs that contribute to the Canadian heritage. Engaging in self dialogue means that women are rethinking their situation, and that they are open to new ideas and willing to go on rather than give up, or retreat into self pity. Lockhead (1988) observes that dialogue is not monologue. According to Lockhead, monologues bear the strain of isolation, hostility, competition and partnership. Monologic relationships are entered with a specific agenda and do not allow the other party's divergent point of view. However, Lockhead describes dialogue as going beyond the speaker's agenda. Dialogue involves openness and may result to change. However if the hearer sticks to their own beliefs or agenda, then dialogue is challenged and drifts to monologue which may lead to isolation, hostility, competition.

In research regarding African American women, Collins (2000) discusses how dialogue is used as a crucial strategy that brings about changed thought and action. Collins (2000) explains that social organization including schools, housing, employment, Government and other social institutions are propagators of the matrix of domination. According to Collins, most African American women are aware of the forces that propagate the matrix of domination. African American women negotiate the matrix of domination through dialogical rather than dialectic relationship in their individual and intellectual spheres. In dialectic relations, exploitation is resisted through creation of counter images. In dialogical relations, consciousness raising occurs and leads to change

of action. Collins (2000) observes that dialogic relationships helps African American women to bring about changed actions as they relate within the social structures. For instance, in a dialectic relationship, African American women are aware of the systems that lead to negative images of them as working mothers or “bad mothers”. Rather than internalizing this image, African American women create counter images of strong caring mothers. This relation moves to dialogical relation as women create awareness of their circumstances through local organizing. African American women in the academia create awareness of the effect of images on women. This has yielded fruits through changed policies and increased awareness about mothers’ paid work and how social structures organize their lived experiences.

At individual levels, Collins records an instance of a service worker prohibited from using the main washroom but however lets her employer on the discussion: “if I can go in their and clean them toilets, why cant I use them?” (Collins, 2000:30). Other instances include Sojourner Truth’s formidable question “aint I a Woman?” (Collins, 2000:14-15). Dialogue with the self thus becomes a strategy that helps women resist internalizing negative images but also initiates change. In Dialogical relationships, thoughts are shared and may bring about changed action. Collins explains:

On both the individual and group level, a dialogical relationship suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness... action and thought inform one another (2000:30).

Immigrant women in this study have thought about their circumstances and acted as agents. Dialogue is entered into with a hope of providing a different perspective and challenge to the status quo. It is not just forming a counter image, or resisting without conscious efforts to weigh social circumstances. Dialogue involves thinking about

existing ideologies and seeking ways to survive and cope. Dialogue here then means negotiation.

Most women in this study began thinking about their own childhood upbringing in relation to the challenges faced within the home in Canada. This interrogation is the dialogue that occurs with the self and becomes the point of disjuncture that awakens women to be aware of their gendered world. These learned domestic roles had become somewhat assumed as natural:

Fahari: You know you grow up you see other people doing it, and it seems part of life.

Fahari's admittance of what seemed to be a "natural" part of life. Being in Canada, makes it difficult to carry on the gendered roles and thus brings to question this naturalized roles. Ammy notes:

Ammy: So somehow, how we were raised back home, to respect your husband, to do things for him like cook for your husband, wash clothes for him, clean the house.

Being in Canada provides Ammy the chance to look at her upbringing retrospectively and to better articulate the gendered roles that exist in a patriarchal society. Ammy's description of a wife who maintains her husband is a generalization but not a real experience. Before coming to Canada had operated her own hotel business and she would be rarely home to perform the various duties usually expected of a wife in Tanzania. But she contributed to the social discourse that defined wifely/woman roles by living with female relatives.

Self dialogue as a process grows with women. From childhood when gendered roles are taught and instilled into children, girls develop dialogue with themselves on best methods to follow as they provide care to children for example. Dialogue is manifest in the actual work that Christine does:

Christine: When I was ten years I knew almost everything, I get up in the morning, I wash the baby's dresses, like most of the time when I get up I will rinse, like know if the baby poohs on the diaper, we were using cloth diapers. I would rinse them, boil water and put them inside. Still them, then when I go to school either during my long break, what they would call break here, either I can come for the break and rinse those things and dry them if I have time. If I don't have time I would just leave till when the school is over I come back I will wash them....

Although dialogue with the self is not easily evident, it occurs through action. Christine has to be self directed and work on her own thus develops mechanisms for retrospection. Women learn how to care for their families and communities at a very early age. Like most women in this study, the dialogue with the self is a crucial strategy in organizing one's schedule. Dialogue with the self on the importance of doing these tasks and completing them in given time shows women's resourcefulness at an early age. The need to do the task leads to dialogue. The girls know that someone has to do the tasks, and often the burden is on the older girls within the home as Fahari indicates:

Fahari: Oh you go to school, maybe sometimes in the morning you wake up, you have to go fetch water, you have to go dig a line of maize then you come home, you eat something, you run to school. Sometimes you come home there is no lunch, you stay hungry the whole day. We used to eat a lot of sugar cane (laugh) for lunch, sometimes if there is a season for mangoes or guavas yeah. Sometimes we boil corn, we call them maize and beans we carry them for lunch. Sometimes you come home in the evening, you have to take care of your young brothers and sisters. You have again to go clean up your yard, go in the garden cultivate maize, beans. Anything that you can be allocated by your mom or dad. We help them at home so much.

Yet this ability to work should not cover up the exploitation and overburden of the young child and women in general who bear the burden of domestic tasks. The shifting nature of age also means the shifting nature of the content of dialogue, in any given social contexts.

Although care is a crucial component of a women's identity, this care involves actual care within the home and ability to have money to purchase basic needs within the home. Dialogue with the self inspires the need to provide monetary care through working

outside the home. Only by working can women be able to buy whatever they feel is needed, often for themselves and their family members. Indy notes:

Indy: You know I grew up working and making my own money. So it looked difficult for me... I do not want to depend on my husband: for anything, I ask him, "I want to buy this, and I want to do that". So I want to have my own money to manage and to buy whatever I feel like. So I want self-dependence.

Indy shows that independence means freedom from dependence on spouse or males for providence. Indy dialogues with herself about the need to work and have her own money rather than relying upon her husband, thus challenging the traditional male breadwinner model. Similar stories run through the interviews with women in this study.

Although independence is crucial, women in this study also acknowledged that independence was tied to caring for husbands and their children. The following quotes show how women reflect on what they heard and/or saw and how this observation was part of the learning process. The need to provide for one's family and the sense of independence that followed overrides the cultural need to care for husbands. Women then become more recognized by fellow women for their work in providing for the family:

Fahari: My dad wanted his girls when they get married to be able to take care of their houses. You know when you grow up, they train you for adult life. As a woman, you have to make sure your house is okay

Fahari's talk about her father is in relation to her father raising caring wives, which promotes heterosexual marriages. The above quote inform us of the gendered nature of roles within the family. Sexuality is constructed and sustained within the family and is tied to gender. Women in this study reflected on the gendered roles that grounded their sense of self, often leading to self reliance rather than reliance on their spouses.

Damaris: You cant just stay at home. No one tells you, but you just do, because it is what every one is doing.... My mother tried to provide for us any time. She made sure food was ready, all that. (Silence) She was a very caring woman.

Natasha: My mum didn't go to school. Yeah. Her work was selling things. Mostly you go buy things and sell them at home.

The mothers of Damaris (from Eritrea) and Natasha's (from Zambia) fit the model of caring African women by the way they bring food to the table and provide for their children. Although Damaris had a father living within the household, she observed that her mother's work provided for the food they ate. Damaris thus grew up knowing that to care, one has to work outside the home and that women's participation in paid work was particularly essential. Care becomes seen as part of life, what one does because it is the essence that sustains human life, and because apparently only women have been delegated the primary care giving task. Domestic tasks are negotiated through finding help from female relatives or house-helpers. The negotiation that takes place within the home is mainly women's negotiation. This may contribute to a collective sisterhood and motherhood, although not without exploitation and resistance (Bobb-Smith, 2002; Collins, 2000). I discuss this later in the consciousness raising section.

In a socialization that instills work into women, it becomes difficult to stay at home and depend on the husbands after immigrating to Canada as dependents. However, the strength of dialogue persists as women engage with self dialogue concerning gendered roles within the family in Canada compared to the roles in Africa. Women in this study realized that the strategies employed in Africa to negotiate gendered roles required changing. For women in this study, roles are negotiated through personal dialogue, as women attempt to continue caring, and to be independent. The following

quote resonates with the sentiments of most women in this study upon their arrival in Canada as wives:

Natasha: So it is hard, it is difficult to do everything in the house on your own. But again you get to the point that you start to understand ... You start adjusting.

Natasha's arrival in Canada opens her mind to thinking about domestic work within the household. To continue living in Canada she finds that she needs to adjust her thinking about women as destined to carry out domestic tasks. Natasha here becomes aware that domestic tasks are gendered and how she needs to change this social construction.

Dialogue then shifts from self dialogue to dialogue with the immediate significant other, the husband with regard to sharing domestic tasks. This dialogue follows a series of own self dialogue and a clear understanding of gendered roles. Often the dialogue is informed by the social context:

Esther: When you are here it is a bit different. He (husband) has to now get involved in house work. Because you now do not have that third part to come in.

Esther observes that her husband has become more helpful than she imagined he would be if he was in Africa. Although Esther gives credit to her husband, she has also come to understand that her husband's change was crucial since there are no extended relatives to help her with domestic tasks. Esther uses dialogue to involve her husband in domestic tasks and to reconcile herself to this involvement.

Through dialogue, women in this study were more understanding towards husbands who made efforts to help with domestic tasks. Women in this study whose husbands helped with domestic tasks noted that most men engaged in repairs within the household and worked with machines such as vacuum cleaner rather than undertake cooking and childcare. Natasha observes of her husband:

Natasha: ...although, he likes to vacuum the house and to iron clothes more than to cook. Like some women in this study, Natasha did not fault her husband; rather, she appreciated the effort by her husband to shift his gendered upbringing.

Struggles within the family over task sharing are not unique to immigrants. Most research on families in Canada reveals the gendered nature of household work, with men doing less work in the home than women (Ambert, 2006). Working outside the home for women has become vital for the sustenance of the household in Canada (Ward, 2002; Ambert, 2006) requiring men to get involved in household work. Ward (2002) notes that although there have been strides to follow shared roles (where both men and women share provider role and domestic tasks) in Canada, women find themselves performing more conventional roles within the households. Ward notes that since most women often work part time, they tend to be at home more than husband is and therefore more inclined to do domestic tasks. When men are at home, they tend to engage in repairs and garden work (also Statistics Canada, 1999 p.14).

Immigrant women from Africa in this study performed more work within the home compared to their husbands, regardless of whether they worked more shifts outside the home or not. It was difficult for women in this study to get help from their spouses who worked. Self dialogue often helped as women thought through their circumstances. The following discussion shows how self dialogue has informed the actions that Christine takes:

Christine: I sometimes cook enough food to last the whole week, but when I am busy, he cooks for himself.... It is not like I really don't need the help, but then you see that the person who is here with you, he doesn't have the time to help you, so you are just like, you are forced to do it all by yourself.

Although Christine's dialogue with herself and with her husband left her pondering about her ability to get help with domestic work from her husband, she courageously commits to her own schedules, leaving her husband sometimes to cook for himself. Christine acknowledges the difficulty of getting help from her husband who takes on several jobs to sustain the family in Canada. This brings into the debate additional issues, such as the way in which employment and class shape the experiences of immigrant women. Working and bringing home money supports the traditional model of the male as breadwinner, and seems to give immigrant men validation of who they are. For example, Christine's husband takes more jobs (because his teaching credentials are not recognized in Canada) to meet financial needs of the household. He does not stay at home to care for the baby so Christine can go to work. Self dialogue reveals the critical nature of the situation and allows Christine to decide not to cook for her husband once the week long stored food is used up. Dialogue as a process involves compromise on both sides. Christine's husband cooks for himself eventually, regardless of his busy schedule, thus compromising his autonomy as one who should be cooked for, while Christine compromises her rights to equal task sharing by acknowledging that her husband rarely stays at home since he is away working. Christine's story not only challenges gendered role division within the family but also shows the ongoing dialogue that sustains the family unit. To find validation for herself, Christine engages in activities that would enable her to experience independence and provide care. Challenged by expensive day care and limited jobs, most immigrant women seek ways to attain independence, often drawing help from community resources:

Christine: You have to like struggle on your own to see whatever you do with your kid. Even out there, there are many resources. You just, you need to be resourceful. You can have everything for free for your kid to raise a child here.

Awoko: What do you mean by being resourceful?

Christine: If you are resourceful, you go to those community places, you talk to people, you are open, like you are not shy like say to ask for help. If you open, if you are willing to ask for help the help is there.

Awoko: What type of help are talking about?

Christine: Oh.. everything I mean from everything like if you want clothing, food everything it is there.

Rather than succumbing to the stereotypical notion that she should stay at home while her husband goes to work, Christine has managed to challenge such assumptions by being “resourceful”. While she may not bring home finances, nor is her contribution considered as household income, through her resourcefulness she is able to bring home valuable material goods that will help supplement the household income. Such resourcefulness allows Christine to feel self-reliant and independent enough to provide care to her child. Her resourcefulness is tied to her self-dialogue on gendered roles proffered upon her by the inadequate childcare policy as she says “when you are here, there is no one to help. In Africa everyone wants to help when you have a baby”. (Although in Africa the extended family would be equated to childcare policy). Christine seeks to be self reliant guided by the need to be independent and care in her own understanding redefining independence that is tied to monetary income. For Christine, rather than internalize oppression caused by the inability to find formal work and be independent, she resourcefully experiences a sense of independence by networking with other organizations in ways that enable her to

provide for her child, (care ethic) and even position her to share whatever she gets with other women or send to country of origin.

While some immigrant men from Africa would rather work as much as they can than stay home and take care of their babies, some circumstances make it difficult for men to work. Rather than take on several casual jobs, younger men often seek to retrain bringing in the age dimension to the experiences of immigrants from Africa. But also issues of class come into play as only men who can afford to pay for tuition join school. Moreover, men on study visas dedicate their time to school, which could serve as both an escape from domestic work, on the one hand, but also on the other hand reveal the eminent economic inequalities within the family in future. A series of self dialogue follow the decision to work or study, and most women in this study reconciled with such decisions. For some women, their immigration as dependants meant that they came to support their husbands. The status of immigration, together with cultural beliefs where men are encouraged to occupy instrumental positions, tends to favour husbands in furthering their careers rather than opting to do childcare:

Akinyi: we agreed that I should come over since he couldn't interrupt his studies to come back home. But it was easier for me to leave my job and come here. ...But it is part of being a woman. Like you have to sacrifice your time. You have to, you are there to help.

The belief that women are there to help is ingrained in a care ethic. But such a care ethic changes its form in Canada. Through dialogue, resulting from sharing experiences with other immigrants from Africa, Akinyi shifted her belief about being "there to help" as quoted above to a relationship that builds itself around domestic task sharing:

Akinyi: But like right now because we know that we are just the two of us, he just has to remain with the baby. And I appreciate the fact that we have people in Africa who can help you like the Aunties and nieces and nephews who are ready to help. So

our men were very respected by women. That is why we didn't want them to like carry the children. But it doesn't mean that if he is carrying the child or remaining with the kid that I don't respect him. I respect him very much.

Like other immigrant women, Akinyi redefines the concept of respect like other immigrant women. Self dialogue brings about new meanings for respect.

The help that men offer is subject to their availability, from a busy study or work schedule. Immigrant women from Africa who support their husbands now face the risk of dependence and may end up sustaining heterosexual marital relations in future. Although some immigrant women from Africa in this study would also like to go to school in Canada, often circumstances make it difficult to do so. Children, immigrant status (as spousal dependants and/or spousal student support) and poverty in their home country (the need to support families left in home country) combine to make it difficult for immigrant women to pursue careers. To continue surviving in Canada while maintaining their dignity, women dialogue with themselves and carry on the discussions to their husbands on finding work, a strategy that I will talk about in the later sections. However, I briefly mention here that dialogue enables women to continue providing for their families and their communities as they ground their sense of identity and worth. Gertrude engaged dialogue with herself as she sought to negotiate gendered roles in Canada. As a woman dependent, the system assumed that her husband will provide for her. However, as a woman supporting her husband, she sees the need to work so her husband can continue studying. She also dialogues with herself and makes decision based on the need to provide for her family in Africa. She then carries the dialogue to her husband who apparently does not resist her opinion. This example brings into discussion the relevance of class and gender, because women whose men are educated easily understand the need

for working spouses. But it also shows that her low income pushes her to work, while her migration status prohibits her to study. In addition, her gender that is engraved with caring and providence makes her unable to stay home:

Gertrude: I decided to start working because I found it was very difficult for my husband to pay rent, and he was going to school here and everything, and at the same time kids back home they go to day care they need money also and they need money for food. So I decided to go to work.

Awoko: Did this thought originate from you or from your husband?

]

Gertrude: It was in my head.

Awoko: Then did you share it with him?

Gertrude: Mh.

Awoko: Was it difficult for him to agree with you to start working?

Gertrude: No it wasn't difficult for him. He just agreed with it.

Dialogue helps Gertrude to share her practical ideas that would bring about care and independence. However, for Gertrude to provide this care she needs to negotiate domestic tasks as well:

Gertrude: You know he is a student. I have to work, and I bring home more money than he does. So, he continues with school, while he takes the child to day care in the morning. ... Sometimes he can do laundry, helps me to vacuum the house, doing some of the things ... Sometimes my husband can take care of the baby and I can go out to shop or sometimes I can go to the beach with my friends.

Natasha shares a similar experience with involving her husband. Natasha, whose husband was a student at the time of immigration, also recalls how her husband's involvement in childcare was limited to his availability, and even became a burden for him:

Natasha: Like the two of us. If he is there but remember he is a student he is going to school. That is why it was really tough on him. Because you know when you

don't sleep at night the baby cries, and he has to be there to help especially the night. And in the morning he has to go to school, yeah. In school he did not do very well, he has to think to come and help me.

Natasha empathized with her husband as she recalled her early days in Canada. Although her husband helped, Natasha felt the strain placed upon her husband. Yet, rather than blame herself for the strain, she speedily added that social setting in Canada made it particularly difficult for her husband to enjoy the comfort of fatherhood as would have been the case in Africa where there are extended family relations to help with childcare.

Although the interviews sounded as if it was a privilege to have a helping spouse, men earned respect from their wives through helping. Moreover, women's actions reveal that this help is crucial, often the essence that makes it possible for women to continue caring and to be able to attain independence. The following quote shows how Ammy uses dialogue to provide her with insights on how men should or should not behave in Canada as a measure of a good husband:

Ammy: The men they don't help you anything, and at the same time they want you to behave like Africa, like to respect them, to cook for them, clean for them to listen to them. Okay I have no one good reason why I want to listen to you. Coz you don't help me nothing! You don't even take kids to school for God's sake

Ammy puts into perspective the reasons that belie conflict in marriage. Her voice is sharp and urgent as much as it is full of dialogue as she ponders gendered roles in Africa and the present reality in Canada. For Ammy, spousal role sharing is necessary as it has the potential of averting abuse. Rather than bare the cruelty of the marital relations, Ammy has gone through two marriages and is currently single and content.

Voices such as Ammy's indicate that marriage is not meant to be oppressive; rather it is a site for negotiating equality within the households in Canada for immigrant

women in this study. Women in this study noted that their husbands blamed marital problems on legal protection for women in Canada, rather than the men's ability to adjust to shared domestic tasks. Unlike in Africa, where maintenance of marriage remains more of a women's responsibility, where women have to negotiate assistance from extended family, in Canada marriage remains a responsibility of both husband and wife. In Canada women find that they are able to engage in more discussions with their husbands. Women use dialogue with the self and with others in the extended family to think through best practices. This strategy helps avert self blame in the event of a failed marriage because the meaning of marriage and who is responsible for its maintenance shifts in Canada:

Gertrude: I think here sometimes when we had a problem, we can come to a situation and we can talk together and understand each other. And he knows that if he does something bad to me, he would be in trouble.

Community workers noted that lack of spousal involvement in domestic tasks can lead to greater stress on marriages already challenged by structural forces. Yet various community leaders had differing views on resolution of conflict in marriages, often following their own perspectives:

Petero Community Worker: But I always tell them to remain in marriage because of kids. Remember like our mothers back home, they would say, if it is not for you I would have gone. So your mother preservers. ...What is abusive marriage? It is different in all cultures. Men become depressed because of lack of work. Men sometimes become angry but when they get work they become okay. So the women need to persevere, it is a passing stage.

The above conversation attempts to explain the causes of marital conflict and suggests solutions that require women to take responsibility for the survival of marital unions. It also shows the ongoing dilemma among some community workers on preserving an African way of living. To such community leaders, talking women into

staying in marriages seems to validate their own identity as they dialogue with themselves on issues of new family relations in Canada. It also shows the dilemma of changing family patterns in Canada (Ambert, 2006), with a need for some immigrants from Africa to preserve traditional heterosexual family unit. The assumption is that since there are variety definitions of family with same sex marriages legally recognized, heterosexual family unit may yield a distinct identity for African immigrants (Ogolla, 2002). Family here is also regarded as a site for peace and rest away from the chaos existing in the outside world.

Anti-racist feminists have argued that the family can be a site for both oppression and strength to people affected by the matrix of domination (Agnew 1996; Bobb-Smith, 2003). Bobb-Smith observes that the home is a sphere of contradictions. She states:

Even though traditionally it is not uncommon to regard home as a private sphere, it can be viewed as a site of communal wisdom or a place of sexual oppression. ...Home for them [the Caribbean women] is a site where they learn to resist... a site for contradictions as well as an empowering space, a space that taught us to strategize survival (p. 108).

Family as a domestic and private sphere allows for sharing knowlegdes on the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, age and nationality. Family members are encouraged to resist oppression, learn to negotiate oppression and receive support and strength in the face oppression. Nevertheless, it also has its own contradictions as patriarchal dominance seeks its hold (Okin, 1999).

Most immigrant women in this study appreciated the difficulties in finding work commensurate skills for immigrants in Canada. The notion that men are affected more and need to be cared for within the family as noted by one community worker could overwork women and lead women to undue suffering within the both outside and within

the home, especially under the cultural assumptions of gendered roles. However, the women noted that inability to find suitable work affected both men and women immigrants:

Natasha: Like in general in Canada when you are a foreigner, it is hard to find good work. I can tell you this to be honest. Everybody I knew in Saskatoon had to do housekeeping. Whether you had been educated back home in Africa, you have the paper whatever you have, PHD degree or Masters, you do housekeeping first.

Natasha recognizes that the issue of non-recognition of credentials affects every immigrant. It is from this understanding that women negotiate help from spouses with domestic tasks as part of negotiating external oppressions. In dialoguing with herself, Natasha notes:

Natasha: But here I know and he himself he knows... We have to help each other. It doesn't mean that even he can't cook. He can. It is like helping each other. He is just helping. Because he is cooking food it is for us, he gonna eat. If I cook it is the same thing, he gonna eat why not? I think it is okay...

Natasha's dialogue with herself is crucial in shaping her husband's thinking. Natasha has thought about her husband's help with cooking. Then she carried on this dialogue to her husband who has been helpful, although he likes using equipment rather than do 'hands on' work as Natasha admitted earlier.

Rather than allow their husbands to become less involved in domestic tasks with the excuse of emerging depression caused by racism, immigrant women in this study echo the saying:

Hellen: When you go to Rome, you do what Romans do... If Roman husbands help their wives, you also help.

Most female community workers of African descent observed that conflicts within the homes emerge from the inability of husbands to adjust to a shared task pattern within the household in Canada:

Felicia Community Worker: Very few of African men manage to adapt to the Canadian system where it is a shared responsibility. Very few of them get to that stage. Thirty days they are gone with friends to have a beer or two or chat somewhere. So you are left with the kids. During the week she is going to work because she thinks she has to fend for the family.

Men find it difficult to culturally adjust to domestic task sharing in Canada. After a series of self dialogue, women either continue in the marriage or quit without feeling guilty.

Religion is one of the ways that women seek to cope within the family in Canada.

Women in this study engaged in dialogue guided by their religion. For as long as endurance was possible, women dialogued with their God to change their husbands as the women engaged their spouses in discussions hoping to create positive thoughts and change for their husbands. The following quote shows how the dialogue progresses:

Indy: He doesn't have anybody he is saying hello to. So I say it is me only. It is me and his children only... It is too much for him, than me... Pause. I always told him 'money is nothing. Be happy'. But he just worry for every single thing you know ... 'Take it easy you know'. He says 'Oh you act like you haven't had a problem'. 'What do I care about past?' I continued to suffer silently.... I pray to God to change him... One day he wants to hit me and I go to the community centre for help.

After a long time of offering support to her husband, Indy re-dialogued with herself. She had to overcome her husband's demands and his inability to change. For Indy, religion is a crucial site for dialogue as she engages God into conversation, given the cultural barriers that surround sharing bedroom information in public, as a community worker explains below:

Carolina Community Worker: The African woman will not come out to tell you 'oh my husband abused me'. Because culturally you have been cowed. Even in my country if you report that 'my husband hit me', they will tell you, 'isn't he your husband? Please go back to your husband and beg him'. Secondly, you go back if you do that and he will mistreat you. Thirdly, you are so incapacitated you don't have money, you don't have education, you don't have a job.

Carolina notes that African women often called a friend in time of distress. Such dialogue with friends became the strength that brought about changes in women's resistance to patriarchal dominance within the home. It exists in the formation of new extended family relations discussed earlier.

Community workers echoed some of the immigrant women's conditions in this study, tied between the need to keep the marriage and to escape difficult marital unions:

Aminata Community worker: And some women, they are really in abusive relationships. And you tell them of their rights. Though their husbands they don't like that because that creates divorce (laugh).

Carolina Community worker: When they [women] are educated here in North America, and they know that 'yes I am a woman and that I am also a person, and I have rights'. They are still going to be behaving like they are in Africa until they are educated and they bring about the change.

The education that comfort talks about is embedded in dialogue that happens with women on their own, with other women and as they meet community organization workers.

Most immigrant women in this study shared a similar inclination to religion. For these women prayer and trust in God provided strength and courage to overcome many obstacles. Yet some religious ideologies do not sustain themselves as women shift their thinking by making reference only to such Christian beliefs that give them hope. Religion thus provided opportunity for dialogue with God and with oneself, thereby instilling courage to most immigrant women in this study. Where God seems unable to change

their spouses (as Indy's above example shows), women move to use legal protection, making religion an ideology that women flex to suit specific situations. Religion promotes perseverance and courage and gives hope. The following quote resonates with most of the women's thinking:

Fahari: I don't think I am in religion Jackline. I have a personal relationship with God. And the faith and salvation I received in Jesus Christ is so strong that no body can shake it. I believe in that so much that it has given me a big faith. So I have faith in everything I do.

Bobb-Smith (2003) explores how spirituality is crucial in Caribbean women's lives. Bobb-Smith observes of Caribbean women in her study:

Their use of, and reliance on, notions of spirituality was dependent on their intellectual as much as it was on their practical need to take initiatives (p.156).

Resonating with most of the sentiments held by women in my study, Yaa, a participant in Bobb-Smith's study notes:

When there were hardships, you resort to prayer to work through things. I remember there was emphasis on praying and thanking God for whatever came our way (2003:159).

The foundation laid within families prepares immigrant women to deal with hard times through dialogue with God, a time to help work things through. Women in this study were concerned about the limited emphasis on religion in Canada. However, women made a commitment to train their children and establish faith within the home. The reason for an urge to ground one in religion lies in the way women can tell God all their needs, problems and discuss with God on ways to solve them. Christianity for some becomes a major drive that foregrounds self dialogue. For Esther, her main task is to ensure that her children are rooted in Christianity something that she finds lacking in Canada:

Esther: Christianity is very important. And we want them to know about God and the importance of God and the bible and Christianity. And so they can also belong to the Christian world. Because that is also one of the big challenges out here. You can choose to either believe in God or not, which is something we don't believe in back home. Even if it is in a different way we all believe there is God and believe in God. But here you can believe in Santa Claus and not believe in God and that is okay (laugh). You see yeah. I want my children to believe in God...Coz in school they don't teach Christianity here so they can easily sway off. Yeah and they may not get the opportunity to experience that in school. Coz if you base it back home they teach Christianity in school, and basically taking them to church on Sundays. And even Sunday schools they are taught a lot about Christianity. But here in school there is no back up. So they can sway off coz of the peer pressure. That is the fear. But you know you have to keep them on their toes. You know keep them strong in it. So that they also have that strong will to go on even despite the fact that there are other kids who might not want it or who don't know it. But if they have that strong will, if you have built that Christianity in them then it is there in them. Then they should not be shaken in any way.

The need to ground children in Christianity follows a dialogue with one self and the realization that religion or spirituality is important in enhancing survival and creating a positive identity. This need shows the magnitude of the struggles that women go through in Canada, that they become convinced that God is a sure way to go, someone to always talk to, what I refer here to as dialogue with oneself. In Africa, women are able to cope with gendered roles through self dialogue which manifested through songs they compose or echoed. I remember as a child how my mother would ask me to sing a certain Christian song whenever I felt exhausted or about to give up. The theme of the song was perseverance and endurance that brings victory. Singing was part of our world as young girls living in the rural parts of Kenya. Depending on the task and the level of stress, we composed songs while going to look for firewood for cooking or to draw water about 10 kilometers away during the dry season. Most of our songs carried praise themes as we knew we were crucial members to our families. Women in this study who preferred to follow this pattern reveal the difficult circumstances under which they survive.

Another area where women in this study used dialogue to negotiate their new gendered roles is with the issue of discipline. In Africa, women in this study found that child discipline formed a communal pattern, where extended family relations, neighbors, the school and the government structures offered assistance. (Although this is changing, particularly with increased child rights campaigns, as is the case in Kenya, and depends on whether one stays in the urban area or in the rural area).

In Canada immigrant women in this study found that the state constantly watches parents as they perform their disciplinary role. Spanking remains a subject of debate among scholars (Ambert 2006), as they argue out the implications on the development of the child's psychology. While spanking is legally allowed it is mainly a discouraged form of discipline. Women in this study took to dialogue with their children. They believed that when a parent establishes a relationship with their children, and allowed for open communication, children will often try to do the right thing. Adjustment to Canadian discipline occurred after a series of dialogues with oneself and with other women. Women then took on dialogic relationship with their children. Fahari had initially wanted to stay in control of her children as a dominant figure. However, she realized this was much more strenuous and so she dialogued with herself as she listened to her friends:

Fahari: I still wanted to be that African mother. The child comes home tells me something, I am the one who is right, they are wrong, I am right they are wrong. You know a friend of mine told me, you know this is a different culture and you come from a different culture and if you continue doing this you will just mess up your papers, and your children. You have to listen to friends too. So I had to listen. And then children come home we have to talk and communicate. I say, I wasn't brought up like this but I had to adjust that.

Fahari carried on cultural ways of bringing up children in Canada, but soon realized that some of the ways are not appropriate in the Canadian context. Self dialogue enabled

Fahari to way what works in the Canadian context. Aminata, a community worker, notes that in Canada, while women resist dominance so do children:

Aminata Community Worker: So even the kids themselves they make parents too scared, 'if you beat me, I will call 911'. It is like husband and wife. (Laugh). 'You create problem I call 911'. The police come and get the husband out. Or you beat him and make a mark, then they go to school and the kids say, 'oh my mum beat me', and there, all the kids you have will go for foster care.

Aminata's observation perhaps tells much about the ability for women to use dialogue rather than command, based on their own experiences with their spouses, and drawing from women's need to change obsolete practices.

Dialogue with children becomes a key strategy in instilling discipline. As women in this study dialogue with their children, they socialize them into responsible citizens. Dialogue eases the burden of disciplining children in Canada. For Fahari, dialogue with one self moved on to dialogue with friends, and later with her children. This dialogue made Fahari to shift her thinking:

Fahari: You have to have your own culture and mix it with this one so that you can really bring up children in a good way. Otherwise, if you just become hard, 'I am an African I need my way'. It is two ways. If you don't make it that way then you have hard time.

Jasmine as well believed that dialogue serves a crucial role in disciplining children into responsible caring adults. Talking is accompanied with observation, often drawing from African learning styles (story telling and observation):

Jasmine: You have to talk to your kids all the time so you can know what they are thinking... They have to go to school, go to work, they can't just stay there and wait for welfare, no. I tell them life is not easy. They have to work and look for job. And when you go somewhere, you see friends they go to school, they work. Because that is the way people live here

In disciplining children, women taught their children self dialogue. Jasmine here lets her children observe what others are doing. She guides her children to self dialogue, lets them see and act appropriately.

The effectiveness of talking was coupled with role modeling, perhaps echoing a Swahili saying *maneno matupu hayamtoi nyoka pangoni* (“empty words can not remove a snake from the cage”):

Natasha: They know that I work hard, and they all work hard as well.

Natasha’s two children attend university. They work part time to pay for their tuition rather than take student loans.

The socialization that women in this study provide to their children is geared towards survival in Canada. Some of this socialization breaks away from conventional socialization with defined gendered roles that women in this study had been raised with:

Esther: And my children, they have to know how to cook, clean up. It is not just my daughter but my son too. They have to prepare themselves to life here.

Natasha: Oh yeah, I realized that it was unfair the way back home they give girls more work than boys. So my own kids now I try to train them like equal. You know.

Dialogue as a strategy thus generates help with domestic tasks from children. Women in this study dialogued with their children on the need to learn domestic tasks. On the one hand, dialogue thus becomes a crucial strategy for dismantling patriarchal dominance within the household. On the other hand, dialogue becomes useful in sustaining care as women provide household income while the children provide domestic help.

Women in this study prepared their children for self dialogue as a strategy to negotiate discrimination. Helen for instance observes that discrimination is tied to race,

material conditions and the biological extended family available for white women than recent immigrants from Africa:

Helen: If you look at a Canadian woman who is born woman who is not educated just like one who came from Africa, still the Canadian woman is a little bit higher than the African woman. Simply being because her mum is here, her sister, her brother, her auntie, her uncle her grandma. Her kids they are not gonna be needy as the African child. An African child everything is just coming from the mum, you know. Maybe your auntie is here but your auntie is also struggling you know. She just came here, she goes to school, maybe she does odd jobs, whatever she gets, she is just paying rent. But this other lady you are at the same level, she doesn't have education, she doesn't do anything she just takes welfare just like same lady who takes ESL class. And her kids are more happier and more provided for and more stable in heart than our kids. That way those two kids, when they are playing outside, kids you know they throw words. They say things to each other, the kids are very honest. They will say something oh, he is already damaged he comes back.

Hellen's awareness of the structural influences on the lives of immigrant children is important. Dialogue for Helen involves making clear to her children the forces that affect their lives. For improved lifestyles and therefore upward economic movement, Helen insists that her children concentrate more on education than work:

Helen: The only thing my son asks me is 'Mum I need a job, I need a job. My friends are having jobs, every time they have money in their pockets'. But I tell him 'No you have to bring good grades first'.

Most immigrant women shared the sentiments of Hellen and encouraged their children to concentrate on school. This emphasis on education runs through most research with immigrant families (McLaren and Dyck, 2004; Bobb-Smith, 2003).

Community workers reported that women often shared their concerns on how discrimination affects their children:

Carolina Community worker: The women talked about this and their children, because the mothers felt that their children are discriminated

This awareness becomes informative to the process of dialogue, as women initiate mechanisms to help reduce discrimination and internalizing stereotypes so that their children can concentrate more on education.

Most women pass on the strategy of self dialogue to their children, particularly the dialogue with one self, or with God to overcome internalizing discrimination:

Fahari: You just need to follow your spirit. Wake up, and say talk to yourself and say 'Fahari you are good enough, wake up and do this. If you could do this you can do that'. Discrimination will go on and on, we cant deny that. But you don't need to dwell on it.

Some women draw strength from a recreated extended family:

Jennifer Community volunteer: I call them and talk to them. Some they call me and come to see me. and I try to make them feel good. And I give some gospel to them. Yeah. All the kids call me *Mami* (grandmother) Jan.

The extended family thus employs dialogue in guiding children into becoming caring independent individuals. However, where discipline fails, women in this study dialogued with themselves often examining how the wider society affected their inability to positively influence their children.

In summary, dialogue is an important strategy that permeates through the everyday experiences of women in this study, both in the family and outside the family. Immigrants from Africa in this study engage I in with self dialogue as they ponder on actions that ground who they are. An important finding of dialogue as a strategy reveals that immigrant women in this study receive mixed messages when discussing and sharing their experiences. Dialogue does not mean agreement, rather it allows for parties to make decisions that they are at peace with. Community workers have their views, yet the onus

is on individual women to take necessary steps. This practice treats women as agents rather than victims who simply take up advice.

Dialogue provides an escape from internalizing stereotypes or self-blame emerging from changed cultural contexts. The kind of dialogue that women engage, emerge from their own experiences growing up, living in a different cultural context, and sharing their experiences with other women. Women in this study dialogued with themselves on the need to retrain as a strategy for meeting the new gendered demands within the family.

Below I discuss retraining as a strategy and its contingent nature. Retraining as a strategy also reveals the complexity involved in separating family life assumed as private, from public life that is found outside the confines of one's own home/family.

3.1.3. Retraining

In this section I give a background of the value of training to women in this study to show how important it is that they use retraining as a strategy. The findings show that while retraining is crucial for attaining independence and care, not all women were able to retrain because of lack of funds to care for their children, pay tuition and support families back home. In addition, their migrant status that made it difficult to join school in Canada.

This study found that guided by the ethic of care and independence, women retrain as a strategy to negotiate new gendered roles in Canada. Most studies on immigrant people from non-Western countries have identified retraining as a crucial strategy for women to gain independence and participate in socio-economic development of their countries of origin and residence. Studying immigrant women from the Caribbean in Canada, Bobb-Smith (2003) notes that the women in her study experienced independence as embedded in a culture of resistance to domination (where race played a crucial role) and patriarchal ideologies. Most immigrant women from the Caribbean had been associated with domestic work in Canada. However, women in Bobb Smith's study resisted by seeking retraining and work outside the domestic sphere. This resistance is a key component to achieving independence from domination, an independence that allows women to care for their communities as well. Bobb-Smith affirms:

Generally speaking, a Caribbean woman's thinking of education as a strategy of resistance focuses on its liberatory effects and its significance for the use of independence (2003:135).

Elders in Caribbean society lay emphasis on education's role to free and equip women for the challenges resulting from the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class age and

nationality. It is this knowledge that became the impetus for women in Bobb-Smith's study to retrain or pursue further education in Canada.

In exploring the themes in African women's writing, Nfah Abbenyi (1997) observes that women in Africa daily negotiate meaning in gendered/patriarchal social structures in different ways, although education promises more liberation. Nfah-Abbenyi notes that women in Africa constantly challenge stereotypes and identities that bind women to their sexuality/reproductive roles following the dismantling of traditional structures by colonialism. The difference in negotiating these identities belies in some women carrying out abortions, some contemplating but not really carrying out abortion, some going into prostitution, some acquiring formal education where they can, while others move to the city in order to live an independent life with less dependence on men.

Nfah-Abbenyi notes that most women who drop out of school for marriage regretted such a move. The regrets followed untold psychological suffering that ensues when husbands subsequently marry other women. Nfah-Abbenyi questions the assumption of biased sexuality:

The expectation that women will be faithful to one man, or, in the case of polygamy, that the wives will harmoniously share their husband raises problems, given that they do not have the same rights to pick and choose other men in their lives as their husbands or lovers do. Sharing one man or having one's sexual needs and rights not fulfilled by the husband becomes an issue to reckon with (1997:80).

Control of women's sexuality overlooks the individual erotic needs of women, but also shows how women are demeaned in patriarchal societies. Women are assumed to serve the needs of men.

Nfah-Abbenyi points out that most women's writing details how prospective husbands- usually older and wealthier than women's family- shower gifts to the women's

family in ways that lure women to agree to marriage. Such a marriage promises providence to the wife's mother and siblings. Yet even with such a pattern, Nfah-Abbenyi explains that while some women stay in the marriages to meet the needs of their maiden family, others were able to escape this marital entrapment. According to Nfah Abbenyi (1997:81), "the only way out of such control is to become economically independent". Education becomes key in attaining economic independence in terms of paid work, but also liberates the mind. The stories of immigrant women from Africa in this study testify to such a trend that embraces education, making retraining crucial to the lives of women.

Aidoo (1984), an African woman writer from Ghana, identifies the role of education in empowering women. In her fiction work, Aidoo elevates education as vital, even more important than marriage. In so doing, education challenges discourses that see women's sole vocation in motherhood and wifehood. Aidoo's father encouraged his children to pursue education "as the answer to the limitations of untrained mind, and to the definite waste that was the sum of female lives" (in Nfah Abbenyi, 1997: 51). Aidoo observes that although the society in which she grew up celebrated education more than marriage, in reality it is assumed that women should be married to be complete individuals. Majority of women in Aidoo's writing have however negotiated this construction of "ideal woman" by placing emphasis on their careers in ways that have drastically affected their marriages.

In this study I sought the relevance of education and training in the lives of immigrant women from Africa in Canada, particularly with regard to negotiating their new gendered roles. Most immigrant women in this study had acquired formal education

and pursued careers while caring for their husbands and children in Africa. They identified education as critical in providing independence for their own satisfaction, in that they do not ask for money from husbands for “whatever it is they want to buy or whomever it is they wish to support in home country” (as Natasha, a participant clearly states).

Women in this study came to Canada already aware of the significance of formal education in empowering women to be better care givers. Women in this study who came from two parent heterosexual families noted the role their parents played in providing education:

Christine: So they [fathers] were like, say after the first seven years that is enough education for the female child, to get out and get married or help your mothers at home. Only the boys are supposed to go to school. But my father wasn't like that. If he sees the potential in you, he will help you out. He wasn't that educated but he had that mentality that if a child is capable of doing something don't stop him. So that is just how, it is not like all of us in the family are like that. Some of my sisters when he found out that they couldn't proceed, he had to let them to get out and to get married because there was nothing else they could do. But he always tried to see that they, either he would send them to some of these vocational colleges to learn a trade. Just sewing or something else for the girl for their husband's houses.

Christine's father saw education as useful in helping women stay independent, such independence that is tied to the communal good. Christine was born in Cameroon but her experience is similar to Fahari's who was born in Kenya:

Fahari: It was good because some people would tell you 'Oh you know my dad didn't want me to go to school because I was a girl and he only favored boys'. My dad never did that. He wanted everybody to go to school. And that is why I went to school. But neighbors were telling him, 'why are you educating girls? Tomorrow they get married'. My dad wanted his girls when they get married to be able to take care of their houses.

The above quotes show that there has been progress in getting men engaged in emancipating women from overt control by husbands in Africa through education. However, this emancipation remains tied to fulfilling gendered roles, while easing the burden of dependence from men/husbands. However, it is worth noting that these quotes obscure the voices of mothers who I speculate might have played a role in convincing their husbands on the need to educate daughters. In my own experience, I remember how my mother kept telling my dad to educate all of us. My mother was so driven to educating her daughters that my dad had no choice but to embrace education for his daughters. Yet I would overhear him say he wished I was a boy, whenever I would bring home better grades than my brothers would. The essence of African feminisms lies in working with cooperative men as women struggle for their empowerment in Africa (Ogolla, 2002).

Single mothers continue to ensure that their girls acquire education. Akinyi from Kenya, for example, shows how single mothers struggle to ensure education for their children, even where extended male relations fail to provide support with tuition:

Akinyi: But my mum, struggled with us. I was sent to the boarding school. I had to work hard in school, because I saw how mum was struggling. If she was not working herself maybe we would not have gone to school. So she would urge us to work hard so we can take care of our families too. When I finished high school, I took accounting course, because it was more marketable and paying well. After college I got a job and helped my mum pay fee for my sisters. I still help even now. My uncles are there but they don't help. They did not help my mum raise us. Also because my mum did not want to be inherited. But she managed to take us to school through her salary and loans. She would also trade in farm produce.

Akinyi's mother illustrates resistance to practices that promote patriarchal dominance.

But she is also a testament to the role of education in promising emancipation from patriarchal dominance. Women struggle to attain liberation and pass this struggle on to

their daughters. Such stories of single mothers struggling to educate their children are also reflect in Zambia. Natasha from Zambia observes of her single mother:

Natasha: My mum yeah I know I remember, like my mum. She was just a single mum. And back home we have school but we pay. You know you pay everything, it is not like here where everything is free. So she had to send us to school, me and my brothers. That was not easy. And that is a good thing too that she did for me.

Although Natasha's mother could not afford to pay for higher learning for her children, she nurtured Natasha into believing in education as a route to self-reliance.

Rather than acquire education to support a heterosexual marital union, women renegotiated this meaning, acquiring education for their own independence while they care for their household members. Education for women thus is as important as education for men. Esther describes cases of women excelling in school in order to show that they are as capable as men. She argued that Education ought not serve the purpose of maintaining a home or marriage, but rather enable women's participation in socio-political and economic progress:

Esther: You know women are going to school, and getting more educated and getting these very good jobs. Yeah it is changing now, I wouldn't say that a woman's role in an African society is stay back home and take care of the kids. But to go to school and get the education that is required, and prove yourself to the society that even women can do these things.

Immigrant women arriving in Canada find that their access to jobs is challenged by the lack of recognition of their credentials, the education that they so much valued. Studies on immigrants in Canada have shown how lack of credentials affects participation in and enrichment of the Canadian economy (McLaren and Dyck, 2004; Hierbert, 2003; Creese and Kambere, 2002). Immigrant women from Africa in this study found it necessary to retrain. Retraining became crucial as it opened up the job market

and equipped women with the tools to continue providing for their households: an indicator of good wives and mothers based on independent identity. Thus retraining helped improve self esteem for the women in this study. Changes in career typically occurred after a series of dialogue after sharing knowledge with other earlier immigrant women who had to change careers to find jobs:

Esther: Most people when they come here, they sort of change their line or they either go back to school or they are forced to do jobs that are not relevant to what they did back home or to what they studied back home.

Thirteen women out of the fifteen women in this study changed their careers and took on training in the more “marketable” fields. The two women who carried on their careers had to retrain to have their credentials accepted in Canada. Retraining into more marketable field illustrates women’s agency and need to control their own lives:

Esther: Yeah you know most people don’t expect to do such jobs especially when you come and back home you have a very good job. And now you are being told the only jobs available are a, b, c, d, jobs that you never thought you would do... Most people catch specific fields in the health sciences you know you are a nurse. And when you come here you just can’t practice that. So you are forced to do what, to go back to school... Well I am thinking seriously to change my field in a more advanced way, rather than the diploma I am undertaking in health field, either go back to the university or get into the job market.

Esther chose to change her career from a sales executive to a healthcare worker. Esther understands the experiences of immigrant women whom she has interacted with while undertaking training in the healthcare field. The need to stay independent in order to care for household members in Canada and the community left in the home country facilitates career adjustment. Yet rather than do non-skilled work, Esther used her financial base to retrain. From the interview with Esther, it is apparent that she is not settling for diploma, as she ponders a university education. Esther’s negotiation of women’s role and her need

to prove to the world that “women can” becomes her driving force. In so doing women like Esther challenge the system that organizes the matrix of domination.

Some women do not settle for work that immigrants come to Canada to do, such work that Canadians are not comfortable doing (Musisi and Turrutin, 1995). Yet, for some immigrant women, the matrix of domination becomes difficult to dismantle. Musisi and Turrutin (1995) found that most immigrants from Africa were ready to take on any available work, and retrained later because of their lower location within the Canadian mosaic. Most studies reveal that work is inevitable for women in low income households. Baker (2005) observes that women’s earnings have become increasingly significant, accounting for about a third of income earned in dual-earner heterosexual families in Canada. Immigrant women in this study who were in average income households in Africa, found themselves in low income households in Canada. To be able to live up to their own expectation and to the expectation of their community in the country of origin, women undertake retraining.

Women in this study modified their careers as they sought to regain independence and provide for their own families in Canada and in Africa. Thus, although career changes may seem negative for women’s advancement (Boyd, 1988), women in this study redefined themselves and established themselves as they adjusted their careers, guided by the ethic of care and independence. Women found it necessary to enjoy what they were doing because of the harsh reality of the intersecting oppressions of race, class, age, gender, sex and nationality. The need to work emerged from an overarching urge instilled in women to care for family members in Canada and in home country. Belinda from Nigeria observes:

Belinda: I like to help the poor people. When I see the poor, I see them and remember when I was small, my dad passed away. And I suffer a lot. I suffer very very hard.

While economic challenges in their home country instilled a struggle for survival, it also called for care to those in need. Independence that comes with retraining is governed by the need to care for the community, the family relations and friends left behind in the country of origin. Immigrant women from Africa thus struggle to acquire paid work in Canada. In this struggle, women learn quickly what other immigrant people do or are required to do:

Akinyi: To get a job like I have to do some courses here so that they can recognize the accounting course I did back in Kenya... You opt to do like any job that can give you money. At the moment I am currently considering changing my profession maybe from accountancy to nursing aid. I realise that it is very marketable to do nursing aid in this place. But again as you can see, it is difficult when you have a baby, with no one to help.

The dilemma that Akinyi faces revolves around maintaining the profession she held back home, which she cannot do unless she retrains. But this challenge also comes with the dilemma she has taking care of her baby and going back to school. In Africa, Akinyi would readily have available extended family to care for her baby as she pursued work or training. In Canada, daycare is expensive and adds a burden to the already constrained household income. Given the option of retraining, Akinyi tried to apply into the Bachelor of Commerce program at both UBC and SFU but she was not admitted. Now Akinyi ponders about going into readily available career paths for immigrant women, in the health sphere as a care provider.

A community worker who provides information to immigrants from Africa on available opportunities affirms this trend:

Petero, Community worker: You can take any course and you don't know if it will land you any job. It is what we are trying to urge people to tell them what course to take, where that course can land you. What is here now for us... Most women take homecare. A lot of people go there.

According to the director of Centre for Integration of African Immigrants, the direction taken for most immigrant women from Africa is for women to retrain in more available jobs that are gendered. Mensa and Adjibolosoo (2000) attest to this claim. However, this strategy seems to return women to low paying/ less valued work. However, women who have taken on such gendered jobs have found satisfaction in focusing on the benefits accruing from their changed career rather than view themselves as victims:

Fahari: I volunteered working for the abused mothers, and those whose homes are broken. So you just volunteer to take care of their kids. And then you learn about how things work here for the immigrants... I work as a home support worker not a midwife nurse that I was back home... And now I am happy, I have my own condo and I support my family back home.

Fahari, a former registered nurse in Kenya, took a six-month's course in home support and volunteered in a community centre to get adjusted to the job market. Fahari accepts her downward career movement while she focuses on the results that her present career has yielded. Fahari draws from her Kenyan background where she relies on thinking positive and caring for others to stay happy with herself and her achievements.

While retraining promises advancement, sometimes women take on several career paths as they attempt to get a more fulfilling career. Rather than stay in gendered work, some opted to work in non-skilled, non-traditional work:

Damaris: I did many courses here. But I never got a job that was satisfying. I preferred when I was working in Eritrea as a social worker. There you know you are needed. Here you try hard but you don't get a promotion even from volunteering. You see young people come in and they are employed but you still stay. I tried computers, I tried catering, but all it was difficult. Now I work at the fisheries, just using my hand skills.

Retraining thus does not automatically guarantee jobs, neither does retraining provide satisfaction to all women. Damaris faced the challenges of being promoted or hired at the Mosaic where she was volunteering. She attributed this failure not to racism but to her age. The young volunteers who were hired had been whites not Africans. Yet in this discriminatory practice, Damaris chooses not to name racism. Damaris had the education needed since she had retrained yet she did not get hired as a social worker. Damaris also has steady relations with Caucasian people, thus increasing her social networks and inspiration level. Contact with Caucasians who keep telling her that she deserves better perhaps explains why Damaris is not satisfied with her life because her friends are a constant reminder of her situation. Presently working in a fish cannery, Damaris says she no longer tells people her work experiences and educational qualification.

As for Fahari trained as a nurse and who retrained as a home support practitioner, age became the reason why she could not go back to the school of nursing, obscuring other conditions that hindered her:

Fahari: Most of the people I meet when I tell them that I was a nurse and what I am doing now, they say 'oh that is good, you can pursue this one here'. But when I look at it, comparing my age and I go back to school, I need money, I don't have money. I would get a loan from the Government, and by the time I need to pay back it will be too late.

Fahari assumes that although she can retrain and get into nursing, her age would impact her chances of practicing as a nurse. Her immediate financial need also made it difficult to pursue training in nursing. On the other hand, age and class are not the only hindrances. Non recognition of credentials and regulation of the profession contribute to the difficulty for Fahari to pursue her nursing career:

Fahari: They were telling me I should go back to school and upgrade my grade 12. Because when you come here with you diplomas and you don't practice your nursing for the last five years, then your nursing is outdated. So I had already finished five and a half years. Oh they were telling me to go back to school. So I decided, I read another program they were training people to look for jobs. So I went to the welfare office and they told me about it. I went there for three months and after three months I went to apply for this job I have now.

Above, Fahari shows the gaps that exist in the Canadian regulatory body that renders some skills obsolete, rather than provide affordable retraining and upgarding. The story points at how the matrix of domination is organized. Within the five years of migration, it would be a challenge for immigrants who are in low income households and with children to retrain, get hired and practice as nurses. The system carefully keeps out some people and may shift the blame to individuals for not working hard enough to meet and abide by the rules and therefore certify the nursing requirements. Fahari had spent her five years working in non-skilled work that took her further away from nursing career. Fahari decided to enjoy her changed career path.

Racism is a sensitive issue. A community worker notes:

Petero Community Worker: You know people don't want to talk about racism in Canada, when Canada is the most racist place in the world, especially British Columbia. People are shy to talk about truth, but it is there. There is a lot of discrimination, Canadian experience, and hidden job market. They don't talk about available jobs. Then people don't know about Africans well enough.

Racial feelings are not uncommon to most immigrant women in this study.

However, the women managed to negotiate these feelings, rather than let such feelings dominate them:

Gertrude: No, no, no, I don't mind to get another job or even to stay here I don't mind. But I don't like that reason to quit a job because of someone saying that they don't want to be near black people. No. I won't quit the job. ... So if she don't like to be near me it is okay. Me I don't care.

Gertrude negotiates racism by putting on a brave front, one that perhaps aims at raising consciousness among non-blacks at her workplace when a workmate asks her boss to change sitting positions. Indy also depicts such a need to raise consciousness rather than internalize oppression resulting from racism she draws from her spirituality:

Indy: So if somebody says I am black, I will not feel bad because myself I feel God put us in this world knowing that all of us are his children. And us being black and white, is a flower. We are flowers to the lord.

Some women in this study connected denial of service to racism:

Fahari: Nobody tells you that because I am this [black] that is why I am not being given this, you just feel it. And it is there. That one I cannot deny.

Later Fahari shows how she negotiates racialised feelings:

Fahari: If I had given up Jackline I could still be living on welfare. There are people who give up their lives and they go crazy. You can even live on the street. But you do not need to do that. You just need to follow your spirit wake up, and say talk to yourself and say Fahari you are good enough, wake up and do this. If you could do this you can do that. Discrimination will go on and on, we cant deny that. But you don't need to dwell on it.

For Jasmine, racism is a unique term that she equates to nepotism, favouring one's own relatives for job position. Nepotism is common in African countries. Jasmine draws her negotiation strength from her past experience in Africa with discrimination and work:

Jasmine: But I tell my people come with me come with me, never get discouraged. It is not because of skin. Yeah I don't accept the argument. We know, I go there they give to this white girl the job. But don't give up, go to someplace else. Everyone they are not the same. It is like us too. You see your sister, but another person comes and she is more qualified than your sister, but you give to your sister. It is the same thing. But don't give up. Just keep looking.

Immigration restrictions that hinder women's access to available opportunities greatly challenge women who come to Canada as dependants. Women who were still waiting for immigration papers and those who came as "student spousal support" found it extremely expensive to retrain because of high tuition charges for international students.

Gertrude: It was very difficult for me to get a job because they said I must go to school first but I can't afford the money to go to school here. I need a student authorization to go to school.

Gertrude recognizes the importance of retraining in Canada. However, she remains challenged by high educational costs.

Some women in this study attempted to raise consciousness with their husbands on the need to retrain.

Belinda: I urged him to take driving test so he can change his career. He cannot listen. And years go by. All he wants is go get paid eight dollars per hour and drink beer [with] all the money he earns. I said this is not my type

Belinda could not continue living with her husband who was not ready to change his career path and seemed stuck in non-skilled warehouse work. Although women cared for their husbands, in Canada they were at liberty to redefine their destiny rather than stay in unhappy marriages.

Regardless of the challenges faced when looking for work after having retrained, women in this study saw great value in education acquired in Canada. They urged their children to focus on achieving at least a high school diploma. Some women allowed their children to work, depending on whether they were performing well in school. Mothers whose children completed a high school education felt proud of themselves and of their children:

Fahari: When my children were going to school, I encouraged them not to think about working first. They should go to school first. Because going to look for a job, you know they need money. Because here children start working when they are age 14, when they are young. And they have their own money. So my children also wanted that. Because sometimes I couldn't provide everything they wanted, so I told my daughter you better go to school first then you will work later... And my son he finished high school and now he is working at Safeway. But when they were going to school, I told them not to get so much pressed up to have a job I told them they can't interfere with their schooling.

For Fahari, the challenge was to provide for her children. Given her low income she worried that her children may forego school to work. From Fahari's experience, education in Canada was necessary in alleviating one's economic conditions, and so she wanted her children to have education.

Not all women have access to education in Africa. However, two women in this study who never got the opportunity for higher education recognized the value of education, and appreciated the effort made by their parents to take them to school. This effort was severely challenged by economic conditions. Economic challenges within families thus subject some women to the mercy of men:

Helen: Once you are educated in Africa, even if you are a woman, you will get a lot of respect from your family. Aren't you doing what you want? But then we don't get that opportunity, most of us. Because we are poor people, we can't afford education... My husband I treat him like a king (laugh). Because I don't have the money and I did not finish my high school, I looked at him for my future.

To negotiate their dependence, some women as the case of Helen treat their husbands well so they can get financial help. Others start their own business:

Natasha: My mum yeah I know I remember, like my mum. She was just a single mum. Because back home you can sell things at home. She had her own business.

Natasha focused on education for her children as a way to empower them for the future, learning from her own experience and the knowledge passed on from her mum as she struggled to take her children to school.

Helen pursued high school education upon arriving in Canada, rather than continue serving her husband. After divorcing two husbands, Helen stays committed to ensuring that her own children acquire education:

Helen: The only thing my son asks me is 'mum I need a job, I need a job. My friends are having jobs, every time they have money in their pockets'. But I tell him no you have to bring good grades first.

Gender, class, race, age and nationality intersect to further the oppression for women. However, some immigrant women in this study retrained as a crucial strategy to emancipate themselves from oppression. Although retraining may have deviated from what women did in their home country, it was necessary for women to be independent and to care for family members. They also sought to have their children acquire education, a key component in destabilizing the matrix of domination, but one that the matrix of domination challenged. Retraining was tied to material conditions at the time of entry into Canada, but also took place after staying in Canada for a while. Some women in this study who did not have material conditions to enable retraining, took on several jobs. As a strategy for survival within Canada, taking on several jobs offered capital required for retraining for some while others established themselves from accruing savings, while others started their own business.

3.1.4. Keeping several jobs

This study found that guided by the ethic of care and independence some women keep several jobs as a way of negotiating new gendered roles in Canada. Although in Africa most women in this study kept one job, in Canada several jobs were required to meet the financial needs of their families. A contractual job system makes this strategy necessary. Limited hours that are offered on contract usually make survival in Canada particularly difficult for recent immigrants from Africa who come expectant of assisting families left in home country.

Belinda: You have to struggle and struggle to get a job. Even if at that the one you get is a nine-dollar job or eight-dollar job, no more than that. I do three jobs before. Then I save and start my own cleaning and care company.

For Belinda, the non-skilled work that she did was essential for building up capital for retraining and starting her own business in the housekeeping and care industry.

In Canada, there is more availability of non-skilled underpaid work rather than work that suits women's skills acquired in their country of origin. Many of the non-skilled jobs support traditional women's work, such as cleaning and care work, thus reinforcing gendered work for women.

Akinyi: As in it was very tough like you can't get the same type of job that you were doing there at home (silence). And at times it makes you consider like doing some other odd jobs, like the jobs that you never expected that you would ever do. Doing like jobs that do not require training. Like you would need your hands to do them (not your brain). You opt to do like any job that can give you money.

Community workers claimed that most women who went to various community organizations want to be helped to get jobs. A visit to a community organization is a strategy that enables women gain independence and ability to care:

Carolina, community worker: Women come to the center with the need to find jobs. We train them on writing a resume. Or start a business, such as hair braiding, tailoring work, jewelry, cleaning company.

Although some of the available jobs support gendered conventional work, women gladly took on these jobs. For some women, working in Canada was essential in defining oneself and sometimes meeting the expectations of their community in their country of origin.

Women in this study did not live individualized lives, but continued communal living tied to the country of origin. The ability to send money to their country of origin provided great satisfaction for these women. As such, women in this study did not mind taking on several jobs:

Esther: And you also want to help guys home. You know you want to send some money and feel that people are comfortable because, you know when you are out here, in Canada, people back home mostly look up to you to really help in a,b,c. ... You also want to work hard and really meet that kind of expectation.

Belinda: And I had to help many children in my village. I have to work hard in Canada, if you didn't work hard, you can not have money to pay your bills, your hospital, your feeding, and other things, other needs you need. So to live here you have to work hard, every morning you have to wake up and go to work. You have no mama or no papa here to go to. So I start with work as a dish washer, and then care aid.

Women in this study employ ongoing strategies for survival, often continuing the independent ethic and care ethic acquired in their country of origin. The constraints placed on skill-based employment did not deter women from working, because working is part of who they are:

Indy: You know I grew up working and making my own money. So it looked difficult for me... I don't want to depend on my husband. You know.

Damaris: When you are first born you work hard and help your brothers and sisters.

Fahari: I have to work so hard, to achieve something you have to work very hard. I learned a lot from my parents. I learnt a lot how if I have some money I need to save this.

In working, Gertrude overcomes an ideology that defines her as a dependent. Gertrude joined her husband under the immigrant category of student spousal sponsorship. For Gertrude, work affirms her autonomy, as she notes:

Gertrude: We actually, I am the one who puts more to our income because as I said he is not working, I am the one who puts more money... Yeah the papers say I am depended (laugh), but right now I am not depended. To be honest, even if he is here (laugh), he knows that.

Women in this study work in Canada because of the acquired work ethic from childhood and that promotes self reliance than dependence.

Getting several jobs allowed immigrant women in this study to have a financial voice within the home. Although there were problems emerging from husbands who wished to control their wife's finances, peace existed where women had control over their own money. Women made efforts to care for their husbands through working and either controlling the money or engaging financial discussions. As such, the ability to have a paying job is a strategy that women use to reduce spousal stress, while at the same time it is an important strategy that reduces women's subordination within the family:

Natasha: We all have our own accounts. ...If I want to send money home, he doesn't complain, because I also don't complain if he wants to send money to his family. I don't bother about his money, he does not bother about mine. We share bills and grocery equally.

Separate accounting is tied to women's care for their husband's feelings, while at the same time striking a balance to care for extended family back home. Natasha keeps separate accounts because she is aware of the arguments that might follow when money

has to be sent to one's family in the country of origin. Separate accounting is an empowering form of independence to the women in this study but is largely tied to the ethic of care, for communities back home and to protect spousal feelings.

Some women concurred that in Canada, there are various jobs that one can do to survive. Referring to their own struggles in Africa, some women found that they would do any jobs available that would help them raise their children and support their families back home.

Natasha: We had to struggle. We knew that and we struggled. And we had to work hard. I was working to keep the family going to provide and he is also. ... He just keep doing this and I am doing that and we just keep on going and going and going. We kept reminding each other that we are working for our children and for his PhD. So even if he does odd jobs, it doesn't matter, you know.

Women take on several jobs as they strive to change their socio-economic conditions. For Natasha, working hard as a recent immigrant was crucial and her hard work brought her satisfaction ten years later. Like most immigrant women in this study, Natasha struggled in the present moment while investing in her children's future. Such finding has been noted by McLaren and Dyck (2004) in their research with immigrant women from Asia.

Keeping several jobs was equally important in promoting independence rather than dependence on the state. Already aware of available jobs (regardless of whether the jobs are different from what women did in their country of origin), women sought independence not only from reliance on husbands but from the state as well. Women in this study kept their sense of pride by keeping several jobs rather than accept welfare. The experience with welfare is not only belittling, but the money earned from welfare is insufficient in meeting the needs of individual women:

Jasmine: I was on welfare for some months after that I leave welfare. My experience was too bad with welfare. They give you headache. They push you, they push you. But

they make you feel bad. Like you are nothing. All the time they call you, you go there they don't treat you good at all. They don't speak to you badly. But some time they give you pressure. Sometimes they don't sent you a check, they tell you come pick your check here. You go there they make you move up and down. You feel bad. Like they give you money from their pocket. But it is Government help. They make you feel like you are miserable, and they are treating you like nothing. Sometimes they make you feel like you are not at home, and they don't need you, they don't care about you. But if you like yourself, hide away from welfare. If you like your personality, you say okay thank you.

Fahari: I wanted to be independent, I wanted to work hard do something in my life. At least when you are on welfare you have no opportunities to do anything you want. Like you can't be on welfare and you say I need to buy a car, I need to buy a house, I need to go home and visit my parents. You don't have enough money.

Women in this study found welfare insufficient and sought paid work. Since retraining in well paying careers was expensive, women accepted low paying non-skilled jobs.

With expensive daycare, immigrant women in this study sought non-formal childcare among African immigrants. As the women in this study seek childcare among African immigrants, they provide a crucial source of income to the caregivers.

Jasmine: I sometimes care for children of mothers who are going to school or working. They pay me sometimes \$400 per month, sometimes less. It all depends on individual case. Most of the women who bring their children are referred to me by someone who knows me, while some when I attend community meetings.

While non-formal day care is an affordable alternative, most of this care is less structured. The school system is more structured and therefore requires raised within the non-formal setting to readjust more than their counterpart who accessed formal structured daycare. Ambert (2006) observes that children in low income households have low cognitive ability often associated with absence of working mothers and financial stress. While this may be true, it is also important to factor in how non formal childcare contributes to the results found in the formal assessment of cognitive ability.

Keeping several jobs is an important strategy for women as they seek independence within the household and as they seek to provide care. For most women in this study who took on several jobs, work was an important means to achieving an end, either the need to save and retrain, start a company, travel or for the survival of the household. Women in this study drew strength from other immigrant women who shared similar experiences with challenging work opportunities. The ability to adjust emerged from a shared consciousness on the reasons for taking on non-skilled work. As women care for other women in similar situations, they engage in an ongoing consciousness-raising among themselves and the community where they live. I discuss consciousness raising in the following section as a form of organizing by women in this study which would open up further research and discussion about the importance of such organizing in bringing about legislative change.

4 CONCLUSION

Women use variety of strategies to resist domination and continue in the struggle for liberation. Evidently, patriarchal structures organize women's lives. Immigrant status, race, class, age and nationality impeded the process of liberation. I conclude below by discussing the strategies that women employ in relation to existing literature and possibilities for alternative ways of defining our world.

4.1 Consciousness-Raising

Women have been on the forefront of teaching each other and helping each other overcome the obstacles that they experience because of their gender, race, sexuality, age and nationality. It is this non formal organizing that I refer to as consciousness-raising. Various feminists observe the importance of consciousness-raising in mobilizing and emancipating women (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Collins, 2002; Ndunda, 1995; Nnaemeka, 1998). The ethic of care explains why women engage in helping each other. I consider consciousness-raising as a part of an ethic of care that seeks out the other in search of cooperation towards achieving justice and promotes self determination.

Consciousness-raising as a theoretical term was first used during the women's movements in 1960s. It was primarily tied to the political mobilization that was crucial in effecting change in the laws regarding reproduction rights, equality of employment (Hamilton, 1996).

Consciousness-raising has been an ongoing practice among African women since the colonial times. In Canada consciousness raising has continued as a force that brings women together as women when they meet as mothers, race aside, but also as women who continue to suffer the burden of intersecting oppressions of gender, race and class

and nationality (matrix of domination). Most African and antiracist feminists in United States of America and Canada have discussed the need for white women to self interrogate how their practices might be conceived as racism. Collins (2002) identifies how African American women continue to challenge racial practices by moving from a dialectic relationship where oppression is resisted, without giving room for dialogue to dialogic relationship, which involves raising consciousness with people sharing in sustaining the oppression. In a dialectic relation of oppression and resistance, Collins argues, there will be limited change of conditions. However, by dialoguing individuals are able to effect changes in their everyday encounters.

The consciousness-raising that I discuss here differs from the definition of consciousness-raising of the 1960s. In the later, women's movements were proactive and gained support from the public coupled with good will from spouses occupying influential positions (see Hamilton, 2005). The consciousness raising I speak of here lacks political good will and public support. Immigrant women raise consciousness among each other to affect changes in their everyday lives with a multicultural context that tends to seclude them from the mainstream (see Biscoondath, 2002). In naming consciousness-raising in this study, I show how women have continued to be agents rather than victims of the ruling relations that organize their lives. Continued oppression experienced by immigrant women from Africa emanates from limited political goodwill and perhaps a conscious effort to sustain social inequality. Resilience does not necessarily mean that women can always make it, rather it means that something needs to be done at the policy level to grant immigrant women an equal status as women.

Documented or not, consciousness-raising has always existed among the oppressed group wherever there are inequalities. Bobb Smith's (2003) work for example, shows how older women in the Caribbean provided stimuli for younger women. Through acting in resistance to gendered, racial and classed category that women were born into, the older women showed younger women resistance and negotiation. The struggles of Bobb-Smith's aunt engraved hard work in Bobb Smith. Women in Bobb Smith's study learned survival strategies from their grandmothers, mothers and elder sisters. Bobb-Smith observes of the stories of women:

The socialization process differs only in the degree among Caribbean people who are materially distinct in class, yet theoretically, they are similarly grounded, particularly by exceptional older women, in a resistance to economic and patriarchal domination (p.39).

In resisting economic and patriarchal domination, older women succeed in creating awareness and consciousness among other women and men, through what they do and the advice they provide. Nnaemeka (1998) refers to this as African feminisms which are tied to doing. Nnaemeka states of such feminism:

It is what they do and how they do it that provide the "framework". It is the dynamism of the theatre of action with its shifting patterns that makes the feminist spirit/engagement effervescent and exciting but also intractable and difficult to name (p.5).

It is in this line of understanding that women then create a consciousness among not only their own gender but of men as well. Women's efforts to resist economic and gendered oppressions have yielded fruits as evidenced in both changing trends, where some fathers take their daughters to school (as this study showed) and the work by most African women writers (Ndinda 1995, Nfah-Abenyi 1997, Aidoo 1998, Nnaemeka 1998, Wane

2002). Yet more effort is needed for men to be more involved in creating space for equality of gender.

Stories of women show how their mothers, aunts, elder sisters and grandmothers promoted the initial conscious-raising that encouraged women to work hard: the core essence of being a good mother and or wife. In raising consciousness, women are able to overcome internal oppressions (Collins 2000). According Collins (2000) dominant groups suppress the views of subordinate groups in ways that mark some practices as better than others. In this way, the subordinate group may internalize oppression by blaming themselves for their conditions. However, most immigrant women, regardless of their economic and educational status, learn to redefine their situation through grounding themselves into caring roles, but also by their ability to become economically sustainable. Resonating to the African feminism that emphasizes what women do, women learn how to behave and how to care by seeing what their mothers did and still do.

Akinyi: And you help because you see your mother helping her relatives, and you know when you reach there you will also help. ... After college I got a job and helped my mum pay school fee for my sisters. I still help even now.

Akinyi's story indicates how observation plays a great role in educating women about their responsibilities. Independence that Akinyi's mother achieved enables her to pay tuition for her children. This caring independence is passed on to her daughter who pursues such independence because it turns out to be her responsibility. Even when Akinyi is in Canada she feels obliged to care for her siblings in Kenya, her home country. Yet by listening to these stories of women, the challenge for the wider society is to conceptualize women's experiences in ways that bring about changed practices, both

locally and globally, as we question ourselves about how our own societies contribute to these experiences, through either international policies or local policies.

Women have used their past experience in asserting for themselves a lifestyle that their own children would learn from. They pass on this knowledge to each other here in Canada as they establish what Collins (2000) identified in the US as mothering relationships formed among African American women.

Collins (2000) argues that the shared experiences among African American women based on their race has been a powerful force that inspires women to urge each other to keep going. Emerging from a shared background of community living in Africa, most women in this study sought to help each other as an alternative to the individualized lifestyles in Canada. Women in this study noted how they shared a similarity of experiences upon arrival in Canada. Some of the similarities included being seen as dependants according to immigration law; lacking Canadian education and experience (as do their husbands); having children whom they must be careful how they raise them without risking conflict with the child protection officers; lacking the extended family and house help to provide care; and being defined by their skin color. Commonality of experience inspires women to seek out one another and provide support for another. While forming new extended familial relations might be considered a cultural heritage, these relations are a resistance to oppression organized within a matrix of domination. This oppression manifest itself as immigrant women under the family class entry category are defined as dependants, unable to access welfare opportunities (schooling, health, employment and some social gatherings), as classed people who find themselves

inhabiting marginal housing, unable to attend expensive social gatherings or recreational activities, among other shared challenges.

Some of the stories that women share seem to be an encouragement to stay strong when they experience racism. Where the system does not allow for open racism, racism has continued subtly and may lead to a belittled feeling. Racism occurs in public places and in work places. The following stories indicate women's unyielding spirit:

Gertrude: Actually she was talking to my boss and someone was near them. And that girl told me that she was talking to my boss that she doesn't like to sit near (laugh) to sit near me.... We don't talk to each other. ...Even if I say good morning she doesn't answer... You know if I say, "okay she says she doesn't want to be near me, maybe in the end I will quit the job because of her.No, no, no, I don't mind to get another job or even to stay here I don't mind. But I don't like that reason to quit a job because of someone saying that they don't want to be near black people. No. I won't quit the job. ..." So if she don't like to be near me it is okay. Me I don't care.

Gertrude does not quit her job because she attempts to raise consciousness among her white workmates. Most women in this study share this unyielding spirit when they meet socially (during community group meetings, birthdays or on the phone). Some women negotiate racism by seeking other work places:

Jasmine: We know, I go there they give to this white girl the job. But don't give up, go to someplace else. Everyone they are not the same. Some people they give you a job by your experience, others by your skin... But don't give up. Just keep looking

Jasmine does not only use this strategy and keep it to herself but she shares it with other women in similar situation. Her mothering sentiment can be traced in her voice when she says "but don't give up, just keep looking".

Community is key in helping immigrant women deal with their objectified 'other' status in Canada. Through community meetings, self starter talks and visiting one

another, women inspire each other to continue with a spirit of self determination and independence. Some statements that reassert blackness can be said to be useful in helping women negotiate their objectified 'other' status:

Indy: So I don't feel discriminated when someone says "oh you are black". I say "Oh I am happy, I am happy to be black because God loved me to be black. He created me to be black. I am his flower, a different colour". So I don't think it is bad. Our blood is the same (laugh). Like if you cut blood of white, blood of yellow, blood of black, it is all the same. It is red. That is what I look at. Everybody has to look at it that way. Yeah.

This negotiation of racism helps explain the success that most African immigrant women experience with integration in Canada. Women have not internalized racism. Collins (2000) observes that for African American women, living dual lives is an important strategy that helps prevent women from internalizing of oppression. Living dual lives is a principle that people employ to suit their situation and often for survival purposes.

Collins observes:

Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other" (2000:99).

Having an own identity thus allows women to experience the outside self and the inside self, changing accordingly to suit specific situations that confront them.

Immigrants from Africa continually negotiate their own status. Before arriving in Canada, women in this study occupied middle class status. Their sense of self as defined by their own self determination emanates from a learning passed on by other women in Africa. The women come ambitious to excel in Canada and continually support their communities back home. They then have to negotiate their present objectified other as

African immigrants, a status that determines their identity and glosses over their heterogeneous experiences.

Women share with other African immigrants on how to access resources and services in Canada. While sharing, they also have been cheerleaders to one another, not just with regard to racism but gendered roles. Agnew (1996) observes that access to services occurs through word of mouth among immigrants. Agnew recognizes the sensitivity surrounding issues of wife abuse and thus applauds the availability of various community groups that translate information in ethnic languages. There are limited community groups funded by the Government that specifically cater for the needs of African immigrants. Women negotiate this challenge through creating awareness among recent immigrants, while conscious of the danger of being identified by husbands to their friends as "trouble makers":

Felicia Community Worker: When you are married, you don't have these advantages. That is just how it is. When you are married they (Government) assume you have a support system who is the man. It is very interesting but this is the reality the women face here. So like the Ministry of Social Services- they are against violence. Like the way sometimes, men would beat women at home, this place, that is an abuse. You are heading for a separation. And the resources are there to help the women. But once you are together, you don't find these resources because you are married. And now for some of the women they were telling me, there is child tax benefit, for low income families. When the women come with the men, the men keep this money. When you separate it goes to you with the kids.

Carolina, Community worker: They brought that same thing here. One person and she did not report it, but a friend called me at night and said there was fight. I had to drive there that night. And the man refused to come out of his room. The woman still stayed there. And that was not the first time. Their community stepped in at some point to caution the man. Now the woman has a good job, and now she is okay she stays alone. Another case I was also called and we had to report to the police, because the man hit her and she was pregnant. Another one she complained that her man doesn't work, she is the one working but he beats her. That woman was wise enough to move away. One woman moved away without reporting. The men

don't follow them, because the women threaten that if they do so they would call the police.

These stories show the complexity of issues of abuse. Addressing these issues calls for sensitive tactics by women who work as community activists or volunteers. The role of established networks in helping women and the knowledge of the existence of such help all work to empower women within their households. Women know whom to call when the need arises, and whenever these calls are made, the person called responds accordingly. Collins (2000) observes that women who have a strong sense of empowerment and self reliance often suffer abuse because they feel like failures when they ask for help. According to Collins, creating space for new self evaluations has great potential for women to redefine themselves in the face of abuse. In this study, community organizations and new extended families provide such safe spaces for immigrant women.

The need to help each other is a trait acquired during childhood. Stories of some women indicate a conscious need to lift the future living standard of women who serve as paid house helps or of unpaid female relatives. Women paid school fee/tuition for their sisters, nieces and aunties who helped with childcare. From my experience working in Kenya as an assistant coordinator of a school drop out center for girls and as a children's officer, I came in contact with house-helps who had been given school opportunities by their female employers. I also recall that while living with my elder sister, I would provide childcare and look after her children during school holidays while she would pay for my high school tuition. In my family as a grown up woman with children, I lived with my cousin who would go for tailoring classes in the evening while she helped care for my children during the day. This mutual relation, although limited in scope, serves to prepare

women for their adult life. An independent caring ethic is imparted to young women in this way. The extended family then becomes not a burden, but an institution within which poverty is resisted while an independent ethic is created.

Helping females within the household extends to helping women outside the household. In Kenya for example, women form self help groups to meet the challenge of poverty. Self help groups have been instrumental in providing women with economic, social and spiritual support. Most women in this study were involved in small groups, either in church or through organized groups among friends. Some of the groups operated as mini cooperatives, enabling saving through rotational monthly contributions among individual members. Ndunda (1995) observes that while in pre-colonial times gendered age groups were crucial learning and empowerment sites, present women's groups have become important sites of resistance. Quoting Ahlberg-Maina, Ndunda states:

Collective participation of women has not just offered a link between the past and the present, it constitutes a process of consciously selecting positive cultural traits and adapting them to meet new challenges (1995:34).

Through acting as a collective, women engage in consciousness-raising, resulting in the development and sustenance of their communities.

In Canada immigrant women in this study continue to inspire each other through established contacts. These contacts then generate safe sites for discussing women's experiences, where they identify the needs for each other, and encourage each other. The stories of women are rife with words that are full of hope and encouragement, even inspiration. These sites are crucial for they are where women enhance their leadership and mentoring roles:

Aminata Community Worker: Me, I used to volunteer a lot even up to now. I work for women and I am not alone. Most of us work- just volunteer to help new

immigrants. It is something that is in us, only in Africa we don't call it 'volunteer'. We just help people who are in need.

Immigrant women from Africa continue to care for each other in Canada. The need to care has led to formation of new extended families. Immigrant women in this study consciously recreated extended families after becoming aware of the changed cultural context. In Canada, women find that the need to redefine themselves. Knowing the importance of new extended family networks, immigrant women in this study recruited members in aggressive ways:

Akinyi: first when you meet somebody on the road and you talk to this person. They will give you a contact and when you explore further you later on become friends ... she contacted me and let me know about the things that they were doing and I was interested in being a part of it. So I decided to go and join in. Well since I realised that it was good I decided to introduce my friends, and it is like now it is a big network of 'ah' many people from different countries. Like I know there are people from Nigeria, there are people from Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, Zaire. And you learn many things from all these countries.

This organizing goes unrecognized, yet it is crucial for integration into the Canadian system. These forums provide a safe space for talking about experiences and thus help women in strategizing for survival. The following voices reflect the negotiation that women engage in once they share sentiments in community meetings. Often women have to decide alternative ways of acting:

Jasmine: I tell the family and they say I should be cooking meals for him so he can start feeling in control of his house. But we all come home tired from work.

Petero Community worker: But I always tell them to remain in marriage because of kids. Remember like our mothers back home, they would say, 'If it is not for you I would have gone'.

The challenge that community workers face is that of negotiating their own cultural values with the cultural values of Canadian society. Most women in this study resisted

acting as though they were in Africa since this meant more work in addition to paid work, childcare and domestic work. Jasmine negotiates cultural views expressed in at the meetings with community workers based on her actual experiences. Jasmine notes that both spouses come home exhausted hinting at the need for the husband to be involved in domestic tasks. Different community groups helping African immigrants have different perspectives on cultural maintenance:

Aminata Community worker: I tell women to help themselves, not to stay stuck in a really bad situation just so they can be 'African'. We are already African, we don't have to prove anything.

Carolina Community worker: Once they are here they talk to others, and they realize that they have money too and so why should they stay in an abusive marriage?

These different opinions help women make informed choices with regard to culture. The voices of individual women and the community workers reveal a pertinent fact:

regardless of information acquired, only women themselves can change their situations.

Collins affirms this:

According to many African-American women writers, no matter how oppressed an individual woman may be, the power to save the self lies within the self. Other black women may assist a Black woman in this journey toward personal empowerment, but the ultimate responsibility for self definitions and self-evaluations lies within the individual woman herself (2000:119).

Community gatherings and extended family networks are important sources of information on how the system operates. For instance, women's experience with welfare becomes relayed to community members. Experiences with social services serve to make women aware of stereotyped welfare assistance:

Christine: I think that from what I hear about welfare, it does not help reach that goal that you set for yourself. But it is good to have welfare for those who do not have anything else, you know, to help them stand on their feet.

Christine has never been on welfare but she may not consider going on welfare because of what she has heard about welfare.

Community groups and new extended families are institutions that help women share information that might not be discussed elsewhere. These groups become safe spaces. Collins (2000) notes that safe spaces are crucial for nurturing of women's consciousness. In the United States, safe spaces were in the form of extended families, churches, black community organizations. These sites were crucial for forging a resistance to oppression. Collins notes:

These institutional sites where black women construct independent self definitions reflect the dialectic nature of oppression and activism (2000:101). For African immigrants in Canada, these sites are places for negotiating new roles as mothers and wives in Canada. These sites are a primary site for activism, as women in this study engage in analyzing structural systems that are a grounding for racism, gender, class and sexuality. Women use these sites to safely interrogate their presence in Canada. For instance, women in this study question the validity of staying in an abusive marriage, they question the role of welfare in relationship to their care roles, they question gendered roles and socialization. They also question such systems that lead to their subjugation, systems such as restrictive employment policies that are out of their ability to change. As women engage in low paying non-skilled jobs, they do not internalize the oppressive effect of this downward mobility. They are able to overcome internal oppression by sharing their previous work experience with other women in safe sites, because they realize that the non African immigrants do not seem to understand why women ever leave their jobs to come to Canada and why they do the jobs they do in Canada. Perhaps some

may argue that staying on welfare is preferable to doing such jobs. However, the women in this study do these jobs as a means to an end:

Belinda: You have no mama or no papa here to go to. So I start with work as a dish washer, and then care aid, and now I have my own cleaning company. I hire people from Africa as well as Phillipines, and China.

As women share their experiences with finding work that matches their skills acquired in their home country, it becomes more clear to recent immigrants that however hard the situation might seem, victory is along the way. Aminata notes:

Aminata community worker: I tell them "when I came here I was an immigrant". I give them hope. I tell them they are in a very good country. I tell them they have a lot of opportunity. They can do better for themselves and for their children. Back home they are used to working hard. When they come here, they get problems, they don't know what to do for the first two years. They don't know this system, or they don't know the language. As soon as they know the system and they know a little bit language, yeah. They become very successful. There are a lot of women who are successful in business, who find work.

Women raise consciousness among their children about the importance of formal education in Canada. In Africa, an independent woman is believed to be more capable of resisting abuse within the family. Some of this resistance happens by ignoring spouses or male relatives who are irresponsible. Jan, for example, decided to ignore her husband who had subjected her to emotional abuse as she worked hard providing for her children:

Jennifer: I would ignore him and go for business trips to make sure I have money for my children's school. I stopped caring about his other women (mistress). And I could not get myself to cook for him either, whether he complained or not.

Akinyi's mother, on the other hand, decided against being inherited following her husband's death, because she would not accept the principles that sustain male control. When her husband's brothers refused to help pay for her children's school fee, she worked hard and provided for her children, ignoring all comments from the family that

branded her as a deviant. Akinyi looks at her mother as a hard worker, and by this act, her mother has been able to create a strong caring woman out of Akinyi. Akinyi's mother raised consciousness by acting against the expectations of the rural Luo community of Kenya. Many more women in this community have resisted this practice, especially with the HIV AIDS pandemic and increasing women rights awareness in African communities. Some women seek redress with the local administration, the chiefs, and or such bodies as Federation of Women Lawyers, FIDA.

Although fathers paid for school fees in Africa, it was up to mothers to caution their girls against getting pregnant since this would terminate their pursuit of formal education. At this juncture, women engaged in consciousness-raising, encouraging and advising their daughters on the dangers of pregnancy. Ndunda (1995) observes that pregnancy has been the main cause of school dropout rates for girls, thus denying women the chance to professional careers. Ndunda (1995:2 states "Girls who get pregnant are blamed and are forced to withdraw from formal education system".

The experiences of women in relation to education are similar to Caribbean women in Bobb-Smith's study. Bobb-Smith notes:

My determination to improve my position emphasized that I had been socialized to regard myself capable of progress through achieving a strong education. I can now state in reflection, that education as a strategy of resistance was part of a Caribbean ideology (2003:41).

In Canada, women continue to encourage their children to focus on education. Some women have restrained their children from undertaking waged employment until they can bring home good grades.

Fahari: When my children were going to school, I encouraged them not to think about working first. They should go to school first. Because going to look for job, you know they need money. Because here children start working when they are age

14, when they are young. In addition, they have their own money. So my children also wanted that.

While this restraint serves to ensure that children acquire education that will enable them get better paying jobs in adulthood, it hinders children from acquiring work experience and from being able to live as other working children in Canada:

Helen: The only thing my son asks me is mum I need a job, I need a job. My friends are having jobs, every time they have money in their pockets. But I tell him no you have to bring good grades first

As a consequence, allowing children to work is a decision that immigrant women in this study differed on. Natasha for example allowed her children to work:

Natasha: No, that was not a problem to go to work. Because I realized that it was okay for them to work so that they can get experience. And also, at the same time so we don't need to support them so when they need something they will use the money that they are working for, yeah. But again because my husband, he was helping them with homework and they were doing well in school, you know. Now they are in the university.

Natasha seems to indicate that although there are advantages for allowing the children to work, education cannot be compromised. It seems as if her children's entry into paid work occurred because the children performed well in school, and because their father helped them with homework.

The agency in consciousness-raising emerges from women's feeling alone in a vast community that discriminates against them. Yet women realize that they need to create awareness to their children. Safe sites (reconstituted extended families and community organizations) become useful in creating this awareness because women want their children to know so much:

Ammy: We have, everybody have problems, we have bad side, problem side and good side. But somehow our children know more of the bad side, the problem side. So they want to refuse if you tell them to have African values. And that is a big problem itself. Because you want them to know where they come from.

Esther: And basically the African community is disadvantaged, in the sense that they are, just put it openly they are looked down upon basically because of the way Africa is looked down upon you know. So they face that challenge in the community.

The reconstituted family then becomes important in supporting women as they negotiate parenting. Women use available forums to reeducate the public about Africa, to solve the impact of the public's limited knowledge on their children. In sharing experiences with non Africans in Canada, immigrant women in this study have educated non Africans, but also learnt from non Africans in ways that have contributed to adjustment to life in Canada. In attending community meetings and sharing their knowledge of childcare and Africa, the women have managed to situate themselves as informers, rather than silent recipients of programs:

Christine: So sometimes, we just come, it is like an open group we talk with the moms.

Esther: Usually it is Africans. And we have whites coming to give a talk and also just share and learn more, coz they also admire African culture and they like it. So when we have those outdoor meetings, the social gathering, they see what we do and they really admire it. And they learn so much from us. Coz most whites don't know much about Africa. All what they see is the bad things they see on TV. Like famine, AIDS, sicknesses, and begging and stuff like that. But you know when they interact with us they get to get very enlightened about Africans. And they appreciate it. And yeah that forum has really been working.

In Canada, the "extended family" assists with childcare and discipline. Since family can be trusted with the lives of the children, from the experience in Africa, the new extended family is similarly trusted to care for the children. Most women in this study had to find suitable alternative daycare since they could not afford expensive daycare fees charged in the regulated daycare. The reconstituted family is useful in providing affordable childcare for the immigrant women in this study. While this engagement is enterprising, it also shows how class and race deny children equal

opportunities to regulated daycare, thus promoting otherness. Women inform each other on new discipline strategies resulting in a shift from spanking (that would aggravate violence in children) to dialogue. Women involve reconstituted aunties and uncles in disciplining their children.

Immigrant women from Africa while they are financially challenged to help each other, still share gift packages they get with other immigrant women who have no access to these resources. Akinyi noted that she had received a bread maker and rice cooker from Fahari, who had been given these items by Canadian white friends as birthday gifts. During my interview session, I also became a beneficiary of a water kettle from Belinda who insisted that I have it since I did not have one and she had two, given to her by a previous employer. On my journey to visit Damaris whom I had been introduced to by Belinda, I was amazed to see Belinda carry foodstuffs to give to Damaris.

These stories indicate the consciousness-raising among African immigrants of their own situations and their ability to help each other. The ethic of care guides women into watching out for each other. Rather than decline gifts, women accept them and pass these gifts on to other African immigrant friends who have need of such items. The willingness of white people to help their African friends is a fine step towards reducing inequality among races. Such kind of sharing has the potential to reduce discrimination and change stereotypes as it. More work is needed in this area, for instance to find out how interactions among African immigrants and Caucasians help change ways of acting.

Overall, consciousness-raising is an important strategy that leads to empowerment, affirmation and self redefinition for the immigrant women in this study as they negotiate their new gendered roles in the family in Canada. In raising consciousness,

women in this study reveal their knowledge of how their lives are organized in a matrix of domination, the intersectionality of gender, race, class, sex, age and nationality in furthering women's oppression. Women in this study determined to resist these oppressions, share their experiences with each other and make their experiences known beyond the African immigrant community.

4.2 Multiculturalism and Black Identity in Canada

One line of thinking among multicultural organizations dealing with African immigrants hopes to preserve a heterosexual family as an identity for African immigrants. In this thinking, most African male community workers have sought to re-educate immigrant women from Africa on the need to care for their husbands and persevere within marriage. Men are strategizing on maintaining control within the household. The other line of thinking seeks to re-educate African immigrants on the opportunities available for them in Canada, and how to access these opportunities. Female community workers who believe in women's autonomy promote most of this thinking.

Most organizations that seek to re-establish distinctly 'African culture' may work as obstacles to women's freedom in Canada (see Onik, 1999). Further, this may lead to women's alienation in the event that they do not exhibit what is claimed as an 'African' identity. The emphasis, for example, on what 'our' mothers did and the encouragement to persevere in marriages as 'our' mothers serve to oppress women. This claim makes false generalizations, because stories of women show the existence of single mothers. In this case, a divisive politics operates for some women to consider themselves more African, while labeling others who have divorced or included men in domestic tasks as

Canadianised. The labeling works to divide women and removes focus from the wider intersecting oppressions of gender, race, class, age, sex and nationality that organize women's everyday lives. This labeling also leads to the question: at what point is one Canadianised? Should practices that promote women's oppression continue, in the pretext of protecting an African identity? In this study, women had different experiences of family. Some found themselves in constant emotional and physical abuse from their spouse. The differences in experiences challenge any tendency to create a homogenous African identity based on family.

Further, this study challenge findings that view the family as a place for strength in a racialized society. Agnew (1996:59) indicates that most antiracist thought observed "Contrary to the white feminist view of the family's role in oppressing women, for the female slave the family was a meaningful and emotionally supportive". In the nuclear family, immigrant women bear the burden of comforting their children and husbands as they are challenged with oppressive structures of race, class and age. Women in this study found various groups resourceful in offering spaces for sharing experiences. The extent to which the family is supportive can be traced in the new extended families that immigrant women in this study reconstituted. The marital nuclear family then is not a place of refuge for some women.

Labelling of certain women as 'good women' serves to increase women's oppression. Jennifer noted that Congolese women are seen as the 'best' wives. Jennifer noted that Congolese women respect their husbands, and appreciate the effort their husbands made in sponsoring them to Canada. Jennifer notes that the Congolese community has networks in the model of the extended family in Africa where elders

solve disputes here in Canada. The contrast here is that Jennifer a Congolese woman has struggled to raise her children as a single mother, escaping an abusive marriage. Jennifer has had to reconcile herself to the Congolese generalizations and assumed heterosexual model by forming new extended family networks. Following after the model of African problem solving, is a challenge that needs redress.

The problem with the country specific community groupings is that it serves the interests of the men in a patriarchal family unity. Men casually comment that as black single males, they can marry anyone. Using such words as “once you go black there is no turning” men assume that they are doing their African women a favour by staying married to them. This stereotypes about blackness and male sexuality was used to prevent white girls from having sexual relationship with blacks (Deliovsky shares her experience dating a black man in Wane et al., 2000). African men have used this statement to show that they will always have women, white or black, while their wives grow old and with children making them less sexually desirable. The existence of other community workers helps women in seeking redress outside country specific community grouping.

Women form informal gatherings where they seek to create consciousness among African immigrant women based on their own experiences with hardship. They set out on a mission to save African immigrant women from self rejection, and loss of self worth. As women meet during multicultural events or their own parties, they create strong images as a way of countering discourses that tend to belittle them. Women say they are strong African women rather than internalize challenges they face in the wider society. Women inspire each other to work hard and create a positive image of Africans. In this

way, multicultural organizations are useful in helping women reclaim and form new identities in Canada.

To challenge notions that their men are doing them a favor by staying married, women often said they were respectable and good models for their children. Women tell each other to prove that single mothers can as well make it. Collins (2000) observes that creation of strong images forms part of women's resistance and self redefinition. These efforts echo the words articulated in the Combahee river collective:

We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us...Our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because of our need as human persons for autonomy (1981.212).

This study found that in British Columbia African immigrants experienced racism not just from some Caucasians, but also from some Asian and some Caribbean immigrants. The struggle for African immigrants in this study has been to liberate themselves from racism manifested in every aspect of their daily lives. For instance, some participants in this study observed that for them racism included not only non-recognition of credentials, but also the difficulty with finding jobs among Asian-owned grocery stores and restaurants. Moreover, they noted that an Asian person would have less courtesy, for example by stopping their car at pedestrian crossings, which the women interpreted as racism upon Africans. On the other hand, the African immigrants in this study observed that Caribbean blacks rarely initiated a conversation with other blacks they met on the streets. Most of the participants made contacts through unplanned chats. Caribbean people resisted such abrupt chats with strangers, making the participants construe this as racist. African immigrants in this study interpreted these experiences with

Asians and Caribbean as a result of the poor portrayal of Africa and the history of colonialism as having a bearing on how Caribbean Africans perceive African immigrants.

Women wrestled with racism as they faulted the racist portrayal of Africa in the media as a place of disease, hunger, and war. The inability for society to accept women's educational and work experiences from their countries of origin reinforced racist ideology. These racist practices to some extent validates colonial experiences where colonizers considered themselves superior. This colonial experience and ideologies of domination seem to manifest in present day discriminatory practices. Immigrant women in this study thus resolved to draw strength from one another.

Kelly (1998) observes that the European immigrants who had previously used black slaves brought into Canada the slavery mentality. Most blacks fleeing slavery in the US found themselves occupying subordinate positions in Canada. Winks (1975) notes that it was difficult for educated Blacks to occupy higher positions in Government. European immigrants harboured negative images, stereotypes and representations of Africans, that had earlier been used to justify colonialism and slavery. Kelly (1998) found that in 1967, for example, even with revision to the Immigration Act, Black people underwent more scrutiny at the airports than whites. Kelly (1998:40) observes: "Blacks were excluded from becoming Government officials. They occupied low paid jobs and were a source of temporary labor".

Most immigrant women in this study develop mechanisms of coping with both conscious and unconscious racism and become educators on issues of race. African immigrant women in this study have taken it upon themselves as part of their care ethic to not only deal with racism but also share their experiences and encourage each other.

Women in this study who shared their experiences felt independent and wanted to pass on their independence to others. Organizations initiated by African immigrant women, seeks to educate women on negotiating new gendered roles. These centers offer women access to resources for their children such as aid with homework, discipline issues using role models, both male and female elders, stories on the continent Africa, that are telling of life as it is in Africa often different from the negative media portrayal, stories that give a both negative and positive picture.

Although multicultural centers are useful informers on the history of Black people in Canada, most women dialogue with this information. For some women the the drive is to keep pressing on in protection of one's values. Not everyone is racist. For others, the skin color ought not make one feel inferior. Women value life and use humanity sameness to resist and negotiate racism. The words that Indy, a participant in this research, echoed have been poetically narrated by Wing:

For blood has only one color

Red

For Love

The earth mother beckons

Save the world!! She says.

Love my children (2001:270)

The need to protect an African identity seems to lie beyond an "African culture". Agnew (1993) observes that multiculturalism tends to assume that communities are homogenous. By doing this, Agnew (1993:7) notes that multiculturalism "unfortunately and inevitably constitutes closures rather than an opening up to new cultural tolerances".

Further, Biscoondath (2002) argues for acceptance rather than merely tolerance.

Biscoondath faults multiculturalism for promoting safe spaces for only the performance of songs, dance and food, in ways that do not tell about people's cultures since most of these events are removed from their social contexts. According to Biscoondath, cultural events are tolerated only as long as they do not interfere with the dominant culture's comfort, which has often meant oppression and suppression of other cultures. It is this inability of multiculturalism to forge for a politically inclusive society perhaps that make African immigrant women to negotiate inclusiveness in the everyday world through forming new extended families that go beyond racial boundaries. Women have used multiculturalism to connect with others and share their knowlegdes.

Women have become important in raising consciousness among males on gendered roles. Regardless of their marital status, women train their sons to cook and care for babies, as they argued that this was crucial for their adulthood. It is this consciousness-raising that Collins (2000) observes as core to resisting domination and aids in changing perspectives. Women in this study have used reason to change gendered roles. Women argue that if the sons go to college, or marry in Canada, they will need to cook for themselves or for their spouses. For working women, the need to train boys helps in easing the burden to cook on the part of the mother as much as it frees the boy from too much dependence on the mother. Training boys to cook was a common feature among women regardless of their educational level. This shows women's own need to change the gendered patterns that organized their lives as women.

In a way, this act of learning domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning reduces boys' dependence on their mothers, or future partners. Further, the boys then learn that

nurturing is a good trait for both boys and girls. Given the background of the women under this study, it should be noted that this is a major leap. The women deserve credit for their ability to reconcile changing trends in cultural practices.

Reflecting on cultural practices in Africa, women in this study noted that they included primarily communal living where people were concerned about each other and helped preserve the social fabric through discipline and respect for elders. They also observed that part of African culture includes a clear division of gendered roles. For the most part, women have gone beyond preserving these cultural practices through engaging in a disciplining process that is filled with dialogue. They have refused to stay in abusive relationships waiting for mediation from the elders.

In many ways, women have negotiated their social environment and made necessary adjustments, adapting the new but also bringing in their old practices. As of now, their cultural heritage remains manifested in cooking their traditional food. Some women who engaged in hotel business sell Ethiopian foods with customers from both African and non African origins. Other indicators include occasionally dressing up in the outfits commonly worn in the countries of origin, speaking their country national languages with people from their country (and ethnic languages wherever they come in contact with people from their ethnic groups) and by keeping African curios. So if women have adapted to the new system, why do they not identify themselves as Canadians?

Women identified themselves with their country of origin because they still hold the cultural values as taught and learned in their childhood. The whole notion of identifying oneself with a nationality, and even a continent is troubling and calls for

further research. The various cultural and ethnic differences, within a given country make it difficult to say one is Kenyan for example, unless identity means geographical location. Even if it were so, then African immigrant women in Canada would be Canadians and not Africans. For me to say I am a Kenyan obscures my whole identity, and I have wondered if indeed I am justified in saying so. Yet when my colleagues, strangers and friends have asked me about my origin, I say 'I am Kenyan', or 'I am from Kenya'. I have done this because that is what they expect to hear. Yet I know that to say 'I am Kenyan' is problematic. I need to say I am a Luhya, implying an ethnic group with specific cultural practices; yet even so, not all Luhya's observe the same cultural practices. When I went to Sweden, I identified myself with the Government of Kenya as a representative of the Children's Department. I did not just say 'I am Kenyan'. I was more specific because we had various departments represented at the workshop from Kenya. My identity had to be specific as was the identity of those who represented other Government departments, the media and the non-Governmental organizations. Identity here was contingent. Further research ought to explore on the issue of identity and how an imagined African identity overlooks country differences, how women reconcile with these differences and why women readily identify themselves with their country of origin. How is it that women who had previously defied the cultural impositions while in their country of origin and had taken on the Western culture now feel a need to return to the culture they did not necessarily practice?

Most women sought to improve the living standards of their immediate families, extended families and communities in Africa (communities here extended beyond the extended family to the neighbors, friends and villages). Women who had limited finances

contributed financially only to the needs of their extended family in Africa. However, they sought to contribute to the material needs of their communities in Africa by lobbying for donations which they sent home, as is the case of Damaris and Akinyi. In this way, women live transnational lives. Caring for community is engrained in women right from their childhood and becomes a mover in continued search for independence in Canada.

Identifying with one's country of birth can pose problems in terms of how children integrate into the Canadian system. If women feel excluded and reject the system, this poses challenges for the educators. As well it could hinder the formation of networks among the children of immigrants, thus restricting their knowledge and information base. However, this study shows that multicultural organizations provide forums for sharing information and inspiring women to mother their children in ways that help them integrate into the Canadian society.

Multicultural organizations and the state then have a responsibility of working at creating an inclusive society, one where the African immigrants would be enabled to feel included, rather than letting this process remain a personal problem that women must negotiate on their own. Critics view multiculturalism as a state tool that preserves status quo (see Bischoodath 2002). For instance, the state may contribute to an inclusive society by changing conditions that lead to women's oppressions. Agnew (1993) observes that multiculturalism tends to homogenize the various cultures and linguistic groups within a country. By doing this, multiculturalism favors the dominant cultures and becomes a site for resistance by the people deemed as minority (the other). For most African immigrant women, this resistance is ongoing. Women in this study particularly resisted through consciousness-raising. While multicultural organizations are a basis of much debate as

state mechanisms of control (Biscoondath, 2003), individual women have used formed organizations as safe spaces and reworked their own meanings.

The main limitation of this research is that it is not representative of the experiences of immigrant women from Africa in Canada as a whole. It is limited to 15 women who live in greater Vancouver and who came to Canada having enjoyed middle class privileges in their country of origin. Immigrating as dependants means their experiences may differ from women who come independently. Their perceptions may vary from perceptions of other immigrant women from Africa who come from Anglophone countries, challenged with English as a fourth language. Besides, the research does not speak of women who arrive as refugees who have to deal with the trauma of war and abuse. However, if these experiences resonate with the experiences of other immigrant women from Africa residing in British Columbia or other parts of Canada, then this study will have achieved a higher goal, of making known some of the experiences of African immigrants. If these findings generate further discussions, then the purpose of this study, to engage scholarship, is achieved. If policy makers and social workers become more interested in the specificity of African immigrant women's experiences and how the ethic of care and independence empowers women within the family in Canada, then my case rests.

Notes:

Definitions of terms used by participants

Family: Includes the extended family in Africa defined by blood relations comprising of father, mother, children, cousins, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, uncle, aunts, and grandparents.

New extended Family: Includes the extended family in Canada defined by social relations comprising of father, mother, children, friends (filling in as uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins, depending on their age) and their children.

Race: People who are distinguishable by the color of their skin and marked by gender, class, age, nationality and sex.

Racism: Denied opportunity attributed to a people's race.

Nationality: Includes geographical boundaries and the legal status of residence (citizenship) in relation to societal expectations.

Gender: The demands and expectations associated with being a woman or man shaped by race, class, age, nationality and sex.

Age: Number of years lived and how this is shaped by societal expectations and intersects with sex, gender, nationality and race

Recent immigrants: Newly arrived within the past two years

Canadian: Fully integrated into Canadian way of life

African: Born in Africa and/or holding onto African beliefs

African Canadian: A blending of African and Canadian identity

Theoretical definitions emanating from this study:

Ethic of care: A way of life that seeks the good of the others more than the self

Work ethic: Ability to contribute to household income: monetary and material.

Independent ethic: Ability to provide for and depend on oneself. Can be observed through work and care.

Consciousness-raising: creating awareness and encouraging action, usually stems from an ethic of care. Women in this study care for other immigrant women who may share similar experiences. They inspire one another and encourage one another in ways that bring about independence and freedom.

Matrix of Domination: Perspective that recognizes the intersectionality of gender, race, class, age, sex and nationality in understanding women's experiences

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(Weka alama ifaavyo)

Ningependa kufika kwenye “kurarua mbuzi” ambapo nitakutana na wamama wengine.

_____ Ndiyo. _____ La.

Ningependa kukutana na wamama wengine katika shughuli ya kutafakari kwa ujumla yatakoyodhiri kwenye somo hili.

_____ Ndiyo. _____ La.

Ningependa kuulizwa kibinafsi kuhusu yale niliyoyazungumzia.

_____ Ndiyo _____ la.

Jina la Mshiriki _____

Nambari ya simu _____

Anwani ya mtandao wa interneti _____

Sahihi _____

Tarehe _____

Appendix IV: Interview Questions Guiding Narration

The following questions will guide the interviews based on the three topics: spousal relation, childcare and child discipline, work outside the home. These topics are useful for understanding gendered roles:

1. What is your experience as a wife in Canada? What was this experience like when you were in your country of origin?
2. How has it been like for you taking care of your children in Canada?
3. What are your experiences with disciplining your children?
4. Do you have any concerns with your own childhood experiences and those of your children?
5. How have you dealt with concerns about how a girl should behave and how a boy should behave drawing from your own experiences?
6. What has been helpful for you in Canada as a wife and mother?
7. Have you experienced different treatment as an immigrant because of your immigrant status?

Appendix V: Profile of Research Participants

Pseudonyms used to protect participants' privacy as per Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB)

Participant	Nation Of Origin	Years of education	Occupation in Africa	Current occupation at the time of interview	Length of stay in Canada at the time of interview	Age of children	Immigrant status
Akinyi	Kenya	14	Accountant	Paper deliveries	1 yr	8months	Visa PR papers in progress
Belinda	Nigeria	14	Religious Nun	Cleaner	4 yrs	10, 14,20 yrs	Refugee/
Christine	Cameroon	17	Student	Paper deliveries	3 yrs	8months	Visa
Damaris	Ethiopia	14	Social worker	General contracts	19 yrs	12, 16 yrs	Refugee/Citizen
Esther	Kenya	16	Sales Executive	Training in Health care	8 months	4,6 yrs	PR
Fahari	Kenya	14	Registered Nurse	Home care	14 yrs	19, 21 yrs	Citizen
Natasha	Zambia	11	Own Business	Cleaner	14 yrs	20,26 yrs	PR
Gertrude	Zimbabwe	16	Project officer: Hotel and Tour	General staff/hotel	3 yrs	9months	Visa
Indy	Ethiopia	11	Restaurant Supervisor	Dishwasher	14 yrs	6, 14, 14, 20,24	Citizen

						yrs	
Helen	Kenya	9	Home maker	Community worker	14 yrs	6, 12, 17 yrs	PR
Jasmine	Congo	14	Hairdresser/business	Hairdresser	8 yrs	13, 17, 19, 21, 23 yrs	Refugee claimant
Ammy	Tanzania	12	Restaurant owner	Restaurant owner	10 yrs		PR
Winnie	Kenya	14	Pharmacist	Care worker	3 yrs	5yrs	Visa
Lily	Cameroon	14	Nurse	Homemaker	2 yrs	1yrs	Visa
Rosalia	Kenya	18	Lawyer	Lawyer	4 yrs	5, 17 yrs	PR
Community Workers with more than 5 years Experience:							
Petero	Director, Community Organisation 1						
Felicia	Community Volunteer and facilitator, Community Organisation 2						
Carolina	Facilitator, Community Organisation 3						
Jennifer	Community Volunteer, Board member, Community Organisation 4						
Aminata	Director, Community Organisation						