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‘Home Away from Home’: Experiences of African Women Immigrants

Living in Minnesota

by

Njeri M. Clement

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Science

in Social Responsibility

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Thesis Committee
Beth Berila, Chairperson
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Abstract

This study uses a feminist qualitative methodology and conceptual framework to explore the narrative experiences of African women immigrants living in Minnesota. Specifically, the study documents the multifaceted social, economic, and cultural factors that influence the ways in which these women construct and give meaning to their diasporic experiences. Through in-depth interviews of seven African women immigrants, this study explores the challenges that these women face in the process of settling in their 'new home' in the state of Minnesota. Additionally, this study identifies approaches that the women use to negotiate their sense of belonging in their 'new homes away from home'. This study is important because it not only contributes to the much-needed feminist research on African women immigrants in Minnesota, but also provides important knowledge and perspectives in responding to the needs of diverse communities. Finally, the findings of this study will be invaluable in the development of community and state policies for the betterment of the lives of immigrants living in Minnesota.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank God Almighty for giving me the strength, knowledge, ability and opportunity to undertake this research study. Without his blessings, this achievement would not have been possible.

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I am indebted to the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Eddah Mutua and Dr. Anthony Akubue, for their encouragement and insightful comments throughout this project. Special thanks to Dr. Beth Berila, the chair of my committee, for her invaluable guidance. You challenged me to aspire for excellence through your provoking ideas and feedback.

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My heartfelt gratitude to my siblings for their unfailing support and continued encouragement throughout my graduate school career and through the process of researching and writing this thesis. I hope this accomplishment will make you proud. Thank you.

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Finally, I want to honor the three generations of women in my family on whose shoulders I stand: My maternal great-grandmother the late Alexandra Mwihaki, my maternal grandmother Perpetua Wambui, my paternal grandmother the late Njeri Mwangi and my mother Mumbi Mwangi. Your lives epitomize a legacy of strong and visionary African women. I will forever value the wisdom that you have passed on to me over the years. You have played an important role in the development of my identity and in the shaping of the individual that I am today. I hope this study touches the lives of many more women from all walks of life.

Thank you,

Njeri

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Chapter I: Introduction

Background of the Study

The movements of peoples across cultures fleeing from natural and other disasters are as old as humankind (Nayyar, 2000). Today movements of people continue for reasons that range from civil wars, famines, and natural disasters, as well as economic needs. Although these reasons are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive, they nevertheless help in pointing out critical reasons why migration takes place.

The immigrant population in the U.S. includes people from every region of the world and represents a great deal of diversity in race/ethnicity, social class and cultural origins (Rumbaut & Portes, 2005). According to the Pew Research Center's analysis of the U.S. Census data, there were 1.8 million African immigrants living in the U.S. in 2013, accounting for 4.4% of the immigrant population; this figure is: up from 0.8% in 1970 (Anderson, 2015). Constituting the African diaspora in the U.S., the African immigrants make up a substantial share of the U.S. immigrant population, with the numbers growing—roughly doubling every decade since 1970 (Anderson, 2015).

The word 'diaspora' is defined as the dispersal of a people from the original homeland. In her article, *'Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse,'* Kim Butler (2001) identifies two specific characteristics of a diaspora and diasporic experiences as: (1) the existence of a relationship to an actual or imagined homeland and, (2) a self-awareness of the group's identity that binds the dispersed peoples not only to the homeland but to each other. Butler (2001) further argues that the consciously constructed diasporic identity of a group of people as a cultural unit has been pivotal to the survival of that group based upon that identity and heritage.

The African Diaspora

The African diaspora refers to people of African descent living in various societies outside of the continent who are united by a shared diasporic experience as a result of racial oppression, cultural violence, or wars, as well as political and economic hardships. Palmer (1998) states that the peoples of the African diaspora share an emotional bond with each other and with their ancestral continent, regardless of their places of origin in Africa, they face similar difficulties in re-defining themselves in the diaspora. However, because diasporic identities can also be experienced based on gender and other cultural expectations, this study will highlight the complexity of diasporic experiences of African women immigrants from different backgrounds and social locations living in Minnesota. Failure to reveal these complexities would obscure the understanding of cultural barriers that can impede African women immigrants' ability to navigate diaspora that render the diversity of their experiences invisible and unexplored. According to Weiler (1988) feminist researchers are engaged in "discovering and uncovering the actual facts of women's lives and experiences . . . that have been hidden, inaccessible, suppressed, distorted, misunderstood, ignored" (p. 62).

Gender and identity in the African diaspora. The terms 'gender' and 'African diaspora' evoke a desire to look into the social positions of power and the power inherent in those positions, to define social identities. In a diasporic context, the construction of 'woman' as female gender is also reinforced by being 'African' (black, slave or other) and also by the inherent patriarchal values and positions of power in defining those identities. To be black (African) and a woman in a world in which powerful patriarchal and racial forces construe both these identities as inferior is an important factor in understanding gender in the African

diaspora. I argue that recognizing that diasporic space is also structured by similar oppressive structures of patriarchy is important in understanding how women experience and function in the diaspora.

Consequently, diaspora must be understood from a gendered lens because men and women occupy different gendered spaces in society and because gender is overtly or covertly linked to the cultural values, ideologies, and power relations. Although migrating to other countries like the U.S. may provide chances to improve women's social or gender-related status, leading to improved life styles, migration can also expose women to vulnerabilities, including silence. From this perspective, this study aims to give voice to the experiences and challenges of African women immigrants living in Minnesota and illuminate ways that gender and gender inequality continue to be reinforced in the diaspora.

In her study *'We Will Have Gained Ourselves': Narrative Experiences of African Women Pursuing Higher Education*, Mwangi (2009) argued that it is in the realm of identity that many of the African women immigrants' predicaments and ambivalences reside, especially, in the process of negotiating diaspora. African women immigrants' gender identities take other dimensions, including 'Black', immigrants, third world, or 'other', all of which obscure and complicate their sense of 'selves' and compound the efforts to make sense of who they are in their 'home away from home.' It is evident, in a study such as this one, that all these multiple identities not only overlap but are also contradictory (Mwangi, 2009). For these women and other women of color who live in these multiple worlds, these multiple identities, differences, and multiplicity of contexts define their everyday experiences and often complicate how they make sense of their 'selves.' It is also apparent that for African

women immigrants, many issues related to negotiating or functioning in the diaspora continue to be compounded by gender identity, which places women on a lesser platform than men in various social, political and economic situations. Consequently, African women immigrants in the diaspora are positioned within the margin of the intersection of race, class, gender, and nationality, in ways that make it remarkably difficult and challenging to negotiate diaspora (Terhbrg-Penn, Harley, & Rushing, 1987).

Conversely, I also argue that while such social structures and patriarchal ideologies constrain African women immigrants, those same structures also somehow create spaces for these women's resistance and empowerment. Ultimately, the empowerment of African women immigrants will truly rest on their ability to see such structures, not simply as barriers to action, but also as preconditions and impetus for the possibility of making meaningful choices with limited options as they negotiate the diaspora.

Statement of the Problem

A literature review shows a paucity of study on African women immigrants as a group (Gathetu, 2013; Nintiema, 2014). In her study entitled, *The Challenges of Belonging: Personal Experience and Perception of Counseling among African Women Immigrants in the United States*, Beth Gathetu (2013) posited that the contributions and unique experiences of African women immigrants have not been considered because migration has largely been portrayed as a purely male phenomenon. For this reason, Gathetu (2013) focused her study on analyzing the narratives of African women immigrants' perceptions of counselling and counselling services in Minnesota. Additionally, Wend-Kouni Nintiema (2014) studied the experiences of African women students from Burkina Faso who were pursuing higher

education in American universities. Despite these studies, very little research has focused specifically on how African women immigrants make sense of their individual identities and their sense of belonging as they negotiate the diaspora.

This study, therefore, not only explores how personal experiences of African women immigrants living in Minnesota have shaped their own understanding of themselves, but also connects these experiences with other voices in charting the agenda and direction of feminist conversation in the context of the African diaspora in the U.S. By focusing on the stories of their personal experiences, this study hopes to document African women immigrants' presence and literal voices that are not only 'absent,' but also often times ignored in the mainstream research.

Purpose of the Study

African women immigrants are entering the stream of international migration away from the continent in unprecedented numbers. According to Gordon (1998), this exodus is what he refers to as the "new diaspora." In current discussions on immigration to the U.S., little attention has been given to the growing number of African women immigrants in Minnesota. This is an omission that is worth studying and which I seek to address. Little research exists on the intersecting effects of gender, race, immigration status, and nativity (Nawyn, & Gjokaj, 2014). By exploring the multifaceted interactions of gender, race, and nativity, from a feminist perspective, we can see how these statuses form a structure of relations that reproduce and sustain unequal systems of power relations between the immigrant communities and the dominant culture as well as within other levels of social interactions (Nawyn, & Gjokaj, 2014). Drawing on in-depth interviews with African women

immigrants in Minnesota, this study explores the narratives of African women immigrants and their perception of how their identities as immigrants have influenced their sense of themselves, families, culture and how they have navigated not only the disconnection from their countries of birth, but also the sense of marginality in the U.S.

The findings from this study will fill a gap in the literature on African women immigrants' scholarship in the U.S. It will also provide critical information for the community, policy makers and institutions in developing appropriate policies and practices that best serve this group of immigrants. I also hope that the study will assist policy makers in addressing other factors that influence the immigrants' integration process for the betterment of our diverse communities. By giving African women immigrants a voice to tell their stories about their experiences of migration to Minnesota and understanding the meaning they make of those experiences, it is possible to better understand the kind of support that is necessary and helpful for the women. This research will encourage government and other agencies to provide resources to help facilitate African women immigrants and their families integrate into Minnesota culture. This study also contributes to a body of knowledge on culture and ethnicity that is central to understanding cultural differences, and, in the process, help to promote the acceptance of a multicultural and diverse society.

Significance of the Study

The increasing diversity of cultures in Minnesota presents new and complex challenges. The main significance of this study is that it will contribute to the body of knowledge on diversity and social justice. Secondly, because feminists argue that the process of narrativizing women's stories gives voice and pays attention to not only what they say but

how they say it, the stories in this study will reveal the women's strength, resilience, and resourcefulness, which will be empowering to the women involved. This study will amplify the voices of African women immigrants by using their marginality to creatively produce knowledge from the reality of their lived experiences.

The Scope of the Study

This study explores the narrative experiences of African women immigrants living in the state of Minnesota. The scope of this research is defined by the main research question:

How do the African women immigrants make sense of their identities and how do they negotiate diaspora in the process of settling in their new 'home away from home'?

Additionally, the following specific questions will help explore varied experiences related to the process of negotiating diaspora.

1. What barriers hinder African immigrant women's integration and successful settlement in Minnesota?
2. What strategies are they using to address, make sense of, and negotiate their diasporic experiences?
3. How have personal experiences of African women immigrants shaped their understanding of their multiple identities at the intersections of race, class, gender, nationality, immigrant status, etc.?

This research will focus on the experiences of seven African women immigrants who are married and raising their families in Minnesota. This study does not include unmarried or young African women immigrants because the challenges of such a group would be different from those of women who are married. Although the study does not intend to generalize the

findings to the whole group of African women immigrants, it will shed light into the understanding of specific challenges that women generally face in negotiating the diaspora based on their gendered identity and positionality as immigrants from Africa (Mwangi, 2006).

Ethical considerations. At the heart of feminist research is the goal of making the research process liberating and egalitarian (Weiler, 1998). Another ethical feature of feminist research is the concept of self-disclosure where the researcher shares personal information within the research context to enhance an egalitarian relationship with the respondents. Therefore, as an African woman immigrant myself, who is studying other African women, I see myself as an ‘outsider–within’ researcher. Consequently, as a feminist researcher I grappled reflexively with how best to address ethical concerns at every stage of the process. In this study, I made conscious decisions to not only be constantly aware of my biases, but also to recognize and talk about how these biases influenced my decisions as the study progressed. For example, in my position as an ‘outsider–within’ researcher, I was constantly aware that my tendency to conflate my own ideas with those of the respondents might work to deny them the right to their own representation and voice. I also grappled with how best to listen to their own stories with dignity and without judgement even when I may not have agreed with what they were sharing. Linda Smith (1999) in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* argues that sharing is a good thing to do, it is a very human quality. To be able to share, to have something worth sharing gives dignity to the giver. To accept a gift and to reciprocate gives dignity to the receiver. To create something new through that process of sharing is to recreate the old, to reconnect relationships and to recreate our humanness (p. 105). This research accepts the women’s stories as a gift and the

finding from this study will become an integral part of indigenous research. This study will be giving African women immigrants a voice to tell their stories about their experiences of migration to Minnesota with dignity.

I developed rapport with my respondents by sharing my personal experiences as an African woman immigrant to help create a common bond and provide a conducive environment for the respondents to share their stories freely. I was constantly aware that when researcher's authority is not addressed as an ethical concern in a research process, such a research can be prone to becoming a tool of oppression (Bloom, 1998; Mwangi, 2009).

I strived to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of the respondents in this study in accordance with guidelines set by the Review Board. I ensured confidentiality of respondents by using pseudo names to protect their identities and coded their names in all notes and records, including tape recordings. In all stages of the research, I kept documents and computer files under locked security.

Positioning myself as a researcher. I came to this project from my own critical awareness of the absence of African women immigrants' voices in the immigration discourses in Minnesota. Based upon my experience growing up in Africa and relocating to the United States to pursue higher education, as well as the relationships I have created with other African immigrant women in Minnesota through the work I do as a women's advocate, I have witnessed the level of despair and frustration of individuals struggling to survive in an environment replete with a myriad of social, economic, and political struggles. According to Bloom (1998), "Feminist researchers frequently start with an issue that bothers them personally and they use everything they can get hold of to study it" (p. 147).

The gender dimensions of immigration have not been adequately researched and studied (Yeboah, 2008), yet immigration demands gender role re-negotiations as people migrate from their old ‘home’ (society, place, culture) into a new ‘home’ (Minnesota). My experience in the U.S. working as an advocate for marginalized women and African women in Minnesota, in particular, has opened my eyes to the challenges facing them. Informed by these experiences, I hold that alleviating poverty and instituting better stewardship of resources through social responsibility constitute the highest “common good” for people everywhere in the world. This “common good” encompasses the sum total of all conditions of social life (economic, social, and political) that are necessary for individuals, families, and organizations to achieve acceptable levels of social well-being. I argue that advancing common good requires social systems, institutions, and environments to work in a manner that is beneficial to all people in a specific community and in specific ways. My intention for this study is to raise important issues that will help communities and myself work towards the kind of world we want to see. Additionally, the study will help in informing ways that will encourage creating new policies as well as strengthening existing policies for the advancement of the common good.

I am currently pursuing two graduate programs: Social Responsibility program at St. Cloud State University and Public and Nonprofit Administration Program at Metropolitan State University. These programs have exposed me to a variety of diversity and social justice issues about the marginalization of people who are perceived as ‘other’. It is from this standpoint that I often wonder about the immigration stories of many women with whom I share the status of being an immigrant myself. In particular, I wonder: How do they

understand their immigration experiences and what do their experiences [and mine] have in common as immigrants and as women? Drawing on Collins's (1986), work on Black women's standpoint theory, I agree that many black female intellectuals have used their marginality—their 'outsider–within' status—to articulate a black feminist thought that reflects a specific understanding of the self, family and society. This 'outsider- within' position has influenced my commitment to doing this study for and on behalf of African women immigrants.

As an African woman immigrant researcher, I assume this 'outsider–within' position, which provides a vantage point for understanding the largely unexplored area of African women immigrant's' experiences. Another potential advantage of being 'within' is that women are comfortable confiding in me because we come from the same continent, same race, and in most cases, share similar experiences, unlike a researcher who doesn't look like them. On the other hand, being an 'outsider' who is looking at women's lived experiences from an 'outsider–within' position gives me the ability to see patterns that may be difficult to see if one is 'within'. The fluidity and dynamism of the 'outsider–within' position allows me as a researcher to be within a group but also move seamlessly outside of the group in order to critically examine and analyze women's experiences, patterns and details in ways that would not be possible if I was operating only from 'within' or 'outside' of the group.

Introducing my respondents. It is important to define exactly who I am referring to when I discuss African women immigrant women. The women in my study were born in the continent of Africa and were, at the time of this study, living in the state of Minnesota. Some of the women I interviewed migrated to the U.S., as refugees, others won a green card lottery,

while others came on student visas. African women who are undocumented were not included as respondents because of their immigration status; this group of women would require a specific study that recognizes and focuses on the specific challenges that face this category of immigrants. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms suggested by the respondents themselves were used. In the following section, I introduce the seven women who were the respondents in the study.

Angela;

Angela grew up in a large family, and attended secondary level boarding school until civil war broke in her country Uganda. She is now in her mid-'50s, arrived in the U.S with her family through a refugee resettlement program. She is married and has 4 children. Before coming to the U.S, Angela had attained a Bachelor's degree from Lesotho. On first arriving in the Midwest, she remembers getting her first job as a Lab technician in local company. She has attained a Master's degree and works with a local nonprofit organization. Angela and I met for our interview at a study room at the Great River Library -St Cloud, MN.

Mary;

Mary grew in in a middle-class family and attended a prestigious college in Kenya. She later found a job as a secretary before coming to the U.S. Her mother had travelled many times abroad. For Mary, her push to come to the U.S was out of curiosity, adventure and to further her studies. When she arrived in the U.S., Mary was housed by friends as she tried to enroll in school. She later moved in with her boyfriend, who then became her husband and the father of her two children. Their

relationship ended because he faced a lot of pressure from his family. They did not approve of his marriage because he had married outside of his tribe. She later got married to her current ex-husband but divorced since he was very abusive to her. Mary is in her mid-40s and a single mother of three. She just completed her Master's degree and works in the human services field. Mary and I met for the interview at her home in the Twin Cities.

Fatima;

Fatima was also fortunate to have grown in a middle-class family in Kenya. She attended college and was working in the banking industry before coming to the U.S. Before passing away, her mother wished that Fatima would pursue higher education in the U.S. Eventually, Fatima came to the U.S. on a student visa in 2001. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree and is working in the health field. Fatima met her husband in the U.S and they have three children. I met Fatima at her home in the Twin Cities for the interview.

Annabel;

Annabel is the third child in a family of five and was raised in a middle-class family in Kenya. She was attending a two-year college in Africa when her parents applied and won the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program (DV Program). This lottery program makes up to 50,000 immigrant visas available annually, drawn from random selection among all entries to individuals who are from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States. The DV Program is administered by the U.S. Department of State. Most lottery winners reside outside the United States and immigrate through

consular processing and issuance of an immigrant visa (Green Card through the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, 2014). Due to age eligibility requirements for the DV program, Annabel's two older siblings could not migrate to the U.S. Upon arriving in the U.S., Annabel and her family lived with family members. She remembers her first job at a fast food restaurant, which provided enough money for her family to move to an apartment. She was the sole bread winner at the time. Annabel later enrolled in college and attained her Bachelor's degree. She is in her early 30's, she is married, and has one child, and works in the health field. I met Annabel at her home in the Twin Cities for the interview.

Jackie;

Jackie had a good job working in the banking field in Kenya, but because of the restructuring that was going on in the banking world, she knew she her job was not secure. Jackie took the opportunity to pursue higher education in the U.S. She left her husband behind in order to come to the U.S to pursue a graduate program. Jackie was two months pregnant when she arrived in the U.S. A few months later, her husband joined her in time for the birth of their first-born son. Jackie worked part-time for the college to take care of her family. They later had another child. Jackie completed her graduate degree and is working in the counselling field. Jackie and I met at the Great River Library -St Cloud, MN for the interview.

Stella;

Stella comes from a very humble background in Togo. Her parents sent her to be raised by her aunt when she was 3 years old. Due to lack of money to pay for her

tuition, Stella dropped out of school at 6th grade. She then started working at her Aunt's business and later managed to start her own business as a seamstress and a hair dresser. Stella came to the U.S after winning the lottery DV Program. Upon arrival in the U.S., she stayed with a friend who helped her get a job and enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. She remembers her first job in a manufacturing company, where she was fired the next day because she was unable to drive a cart on the assembly floor. Stella now works for a health care institution. She is pursuing her high school diploma and hopes to enroll in college next year. Stella met her husband in St. Cloud and they have two children. Stella is in her mid-'20s. Stella and I met at her home for the interview.

Gwhite;

Gwhite came from a village in Kenya and had never lived in the city, so basically her life was very simple. When she was about 13 years, she met two American couples who were Peace Corps in her local school. She kept in touch with them even after they returned home to the U.S. When she finished high school, one of the couples invited her to come to the U.S to visit. Gwhite arrived in Florida where she lived with one of the Peace Corps couples who were 'more or like her 2nd set of parents.' Gwhite enrolled in a community college and started with pre-nursing program, then enrolled in a nursing program. After 6 years in the U.S, Gwhite went back home and got married and her husband joined her later in the U.S. They have three children. At the time of our interview, Gwhite was taking doctoral course work. Gwhite is in her early '40s. Gwhite and I met at the Great River Library -St Cloud, MN for the interview.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The United States began regulating immigration soon after it won independence from Great Britain, and the laws since enacted have reflected the politics and migrant flows of the times. The high numbers of new immigrants in the last decades have set off debates causing pressure in congress to introduce new laws that address refugees, undocumented immigrants and the reunification of families. With these issues of immigration so intertwined in the minds of policymakers today, I argue that it is crucial to study the history of U.S. immigration to examine all of the factors, both domestic and foreign, which have shaped the creation of the modern admissions system. The following pages examines the history of immigration and its evolution over time.

Migration laws. The U.S. immigration policy seeks to admit legal immigrants and refugees into the U.S. Although many comprehensive, congressionally enacted immigration policies did not emerge until the end of the 19th century. The first broad modern assertion of the federal regulatory power in the immigration area was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Fix & Passel, 1994). Changes in immigration legislation—beginning with the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, the Immigration Reform Act of 1990, (which included the establishment of the Diversity Lottery among other laws) —have made it possible for immigrants to enter the U.S from Africa, especially during the 1990s, as well as from other regions in the Global South (Osirim, 2008). A chronological list of major legislative milestones is stipulated in the table below.

Major Legislative Milestones in U.S. Immigration History

Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)

- Suspends immigration of Chinese laborers for 10 years.
- Bars Chinese naturalization.
- Provides for deportation of Chinese illegally in United States.

Immigration Act of 1891

- First comprehensive law for national control of immigration.
- Establishes Bureau of Immigration under Treasury.
- Directs deportation of aliens unlawfully in country.

Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1924

- Imposes first permanent numerical limit on immigration.
- Establishes the national origins quota system, which resulted in biased admissions favoring northern and western Europeans.

Immigration and Naturalization Act of June 27, 1952

- Continues national origins quota.
- Quota for skilled aliens whose services are urgently needed.

Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of October 3, 1965

- Repeals national origins quotas.
- Establishes 7-category preference system based on family unification and skills.
- Sets 20,000 per country limit for Eastern Hemisphere.
- Imposes ceiling on immigration from Western Hemisphere for the first time.

Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1976

- Extends 20,000 per country limits to Western hemisphere.

Refugee Act of 1980

- Sets up first permanent and systematic procedure for admitting refugees.
- Removes refugees as a category from preference system.
- Defines refugee according to international, versus ideological standards.
- Establishes process of domestic resettlement.
- Codifies asylum status.

Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986

- Institutes employer sanctions for knowingly hiring illegal aliens.
- Creates legalization programs.
- Increases border enforcement.

Immigration Act of 1990

- Increases legal immigration ceilings by 40 percent.
- Triples employment-based immigration, emphasizing skills.
- Creates diversity admissions category.
- Establishes temporary protected status for those in the U.S. jeopardized by armed conflict or natural disasters in their native countries.

(Source: Fix & Passel, 1994)

Making policy sense of the widely varying types of action represented in this chronological sketch requires clear separation of three distinct parts of U.S. immigration policy: (1) legal immigration, (2) humanitarian admissions, and (3) illegal immigration. Failure to keep these domains separate may be the most important source of confusion in the current national debate.

The federal government makes and enforces immigration laws, while state and local governments provide most of the public assistance to integrate immigrants, from education for immigrant children to welfare. While immigration has been steadily rising, federal support for programs targeted to immigrants, like the Refugee Resettlement Program, has been declining. The various parts of immigration policy are also motivated by different goals which are:

1. Social—unifying U.S. citizens and legal residents with their families;
2. Economic—increasing U.S. productivity and standard of living;
3. Cultural—encouraging diversity;
4. Moral—promoting human rights;
5. National and economic security—controlling illegal immigration (Fix & Passel, 1994).

A report commissioned by the office's Committee on Minnesota Workforce and Immigrants advises that Minnesota is in for at least two decades of slow or no economic growth unless it can attract more immigrants (Editorial Board, 2017). To maintain through 2045 the average annual 0.5 percent labor force growth rate it experienced from 2010 to 2015, Minnesota will need to more than quadruple the number of immigrants now projected to arrive in the state, the report says. Among immigrant women, those from Africa had the

highest rate of labor-force participation 65.6% in 2015, followed by those from Latin America (56.7%), Asia (55%), and Europe (49.6%) (American Immigration Council, 2017). Therefore, specific policy recommendations will need to address what can be done to make Minnesota a more attractive place for immigrants to live. How can Minnesota be as a state with an inclusive culture whilst not harming the conditions or opportunities of immigrants—and in this case, African women immigrants living in Minnesota?

Post-9/11 policies. In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the U.S. government implemented a series of critical and sometimes controversial immigration policy measures to respond to future threats of terrorism. As we commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, it is a timely moment to reflect on the current status and the lasting legacy of those policy measures. Immigration enforcement machinery was conceived that expanded vast databases for the collection and analysis of information that allow the government to screen individuals in a number of ways and in a number of places: before they are granted a visa to travel to the United States, at the points of entry, and after their entry to the country. These databases now link biographic, immigration, and criminal histories of individuals and are shared among law enforcement agencies in a fashion unprecedented before the 2001 terrorist attacks (Chishti & Bergeron, 2011). The current debate tends to focus on economic outcomes and internal security, too often neglecting the social, cultural, and moral goals of many of these policies. Thus, many critiques of immigration policies ignore the intent of their framers (Fix & Passel, 1994).

A report by the *Organizations Working with Latina Immigrants: Resources and Strategies for Change* shows that policies seemingly put in place to combat illegal

immigration have actually been detrimental to immigrant women's access to family planning, pre-natal care, and general health care, among other human rights in three main ways:

1. They have made access to many vital public services contingent on strict eligibility requirements;
2. They have created a climate of fear that restricts immigrants' mobility and discourages them from seeking services;
3. They have led to detention and deportation practices that undermine immigrants' parental rights (Berg, 2011).

Laws like Arizona's Proposition 200, for instance, require that anyone applying for benefits show proof of citizenship and makes it a misdemeanor for public officials to fail to report individuals they suspect are undocumented. As a result, immigrant women and their families often rely on the health services offered by community health centers or on health fairs held at local nonprofit organizations or religious congregations. While these services provide important forms of assistance, they do not fill the void. The end result is that communities suffer (Berg, 2011).

The recent reauthorization of the *Violence against Women Act and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act* reminded the nation that there are 'women's issues' in immigration law. Regardless of the fact that immigrant women make up a growing share of workers, entrepreneurs, single heads of households, and new voters, the laws crafted to reform the immigration system have often been insensitive to the obstacles and challenges immigrant women face in applying for immigration status (Giovagnoli, 2013). A significant criticism against immigration law has been that women who are full-time caregivers or who are only

employed part-time have no independent means to apply for legalization. The assumption that family members can or should ride along on an application isn't a problem in itself—it is often more efficient and less expensive to process a whole family at once—but it does assume a family dynamic that isn't always in place (Giovagnoli, 2013).

The Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007, which focused on Secure Borders, Economic Opportunity and Immigration, was a bill discussed in the United States Congress that would have provided legal status and a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants residing in the United States. The bill was portrayed by those who opposed to it as a compromise between providing a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and a path to increased border enforcement. On the contrary, this bill, if passed, would have drastically cut family-based immigration in favor of a points system that would privilege applicants with higher education and skills. In all likelihood, such a proposal could have hurt the chances of immigrant women to enter the U.S., as many currently enter under the family category—and may come from countries where their access to education or other opportunities is limited because they are women (Giovagnoli, 2013). Thus, an immigration system based solely on credentials at the time of entry would miss out on the rich contributions of many immigrant women who realize their true potential when they move to the United States. These concerns from past debates and others continue to be raised today due to efforts of a growing network of immigrant women's groups and the broader women's movement, who focus on lobbying Congress, marching on Washington, and pressing for a different kind of immigration debate (Giovagnoli, 2013).

Immigration in Minnesota. For the past two decades Minnesota's immigrant population, has been growing exponentially, with an increase far more than the immigrant population in the nation as a whole (Owen, Meyerson, & Ottenson, 2010). According to the U.S Census Bureau, Minnesota's population rose from 2.6% in 1990 to 7.4% in 2013. About one in five immigrants in the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI metropolitan area was born in Africa, which accounts for 19.2% (57,154) of all immigrants in the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI Metro area in 2009 (McCabe, 2011). Cities such as Duluth, Minneapolis, Rochester and St. Cloud have had significant population gain attributed to immigration (American Immigration Council, 2017).

One reason for the increase in Minnesota's immigrant population is the presence of voluntary agencies (VOLAG's) paid by the federal government to resettle refugees. VOLAGs are responsible for providing refugees with initial housing, essential furnishings, food, and clothing for the first 90 days after arrival in the United States. The following VOLAGs are under contract with the State Resettlement Programs Office to administer the Refugee Cash Assistance Program (RCA) Program:

- Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis.
- Catholic Charities, Diocese of Winona.
- International Institute of Minnesota.
- Lutheran Social Service.
- Minnesota Council of Churches.
- Arrive Ministries (Voluntary Agencies, 2015).

Since most African states have been characterized by poverty, corruption, conflict, and high rates of unemployment, women have been forced to migrate abroad. Another reason for migration is to pursue further education. In Minnesota, the number of immigrants with a college degree increased by 82.3% between 2000 and 2011 (American Immigration Council, 2017). These push and pull factors have led to the increase in participation of women in international immigration who come to join family members or migrate on their own. The increase in diversity in Minnesota present new and complex challenges in relation to addressing issues of immigrants, particularly women. Consequently, it is important to understand cultural barriers that can impede African women immigrants' ability to access needed opportunities and interventions.

Globalization and African women. Globalization has been credited for the opportunities it carries, such as access to markets, but then again it is also criticized for the many ills of its practices, such as gender inequality. The relationship between globalization and the market can have both positive and negative effects for women. The positive effects include increased employment opportunities, thus enabling them to provide for their families. For some women, this is empowering and contributes to enhancing women's capacity to negotiate their role and status within society. Although the demand for female employment brings about an array of opportunities and a sense of independence, the exploitation of women's cheap labor to maximize profits has led to the "feminization of poverty" (Moghadam, 1999). The negative and oppressive effects of globalization on women, particularly third world and immigrants, have been theorized by Postcolonial and Third World feminists, including African feminists. Postcolonial and Transnational Feminists identify four

key approaches to globalization and outline some of the distinctive characteristics of each theoretical orientation.

Gender injustices. First, global feminist approaches to globalization provide a framework to help us better understand the gender inequalities associated with globalization. They focus on issues that are widely perceived to be of great importance to women, which include: domestic violence, discrimination in their places of employment, and human rights violations against women. In addition, feminist theorists also contend that the “gender-neutral” global issues, such as war, global governance, migration, southern debt, and climate change, often have a gendered dimension (Parekh & Wilcox, 2014).

The second feature of feminist approaches to globalization is a shared commitment to core feminist values, including an opposition to the subordination of women. While they recognize that traditional understandings of human rights are male-biased, they contend that feminist re-articulations of these norms can help to recognize the gendered harms involved in sexual slavery, forced domestic labor, and the systematic withholding of education, food, and healthcare from women and girls that stem from severe financial deficiency (Parekh & Wilcox, 2014).

The third key feature of feminist approaches to globalization, particularly from the Third World Feminist perspective, is an emphasis on feminist methodologies and approaches, which tend to embody three key methodological commitments.

1. Intersectionality, which upholds that structures of oppression intermingle to produce injustices, and therefore gender injustices cannot be understood solely in terms of sex or gender (Ackerly & Attanasi, 2009).

2. The methodological commitment shared by feminist approaches to globalization strives to accurately reflect the diverse interests, experiences, and concerns of women throughout the world, and to take seriously differences in culture, history, and socio-economic and political conditions. Feminists argue that women's experiences of gender oppression are shaped by other forms of oppression, such as those based on race, class, disability, sexual orientation, colonialism and imperialism (Parekh & Wilcox, 2014).
3. Finally, feminist theorists are committed to developing self-reflexive critiques which critically examine feminist claims, with particular consideration to the ways in which feminist discourses privilege certain points of view. For instance, Schutte (2002) mentions that universal feminist values and ideas are likely to exemplify the values of dominant cultures, which further explains why the voices of women from developing nations are often taken seriously only if they reflect the norms and values of the West and conform to Western expectations. Therefore, Schutte asserts that feminists must engage in methodological practices that de-center their habitual standpoints and foreground perceptions that challenge conventional ways of thinking (Schutte, 2002).

Women in Africa and the African Diaspora

African feminism. The discourse of African Feminism is constructed in opposition to Western Feminism and constitutes a myriad of heterogeneous experiences of collective African Women across cultures. The below preamble of African Feminism charter created in

Accra, Ghana in 2006 expresses the audacious positioning of African Feminism as an ideological entity: thus.

By naming ourselves as feminists we politicize the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African feminists. We are African women—we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with 'ifs', 'buts' or 'however's'. We are Feminists. (Ahikire, 2014)

In the light of the foregoing, African Feminism is an important part of African women's lives in that women's collective interests have been voiced through increasingly effective mobilization of women through the creation of various platforms—networks, forums, nongovernmental organizations, and community-based organizations. There is no doubt that for the past century, African women have come to understand and embrace African Feminism as a tool needed to free themselves from colonial, neo-colonial and post-colonial domination. African women have long been organized around lineage and kinship groupings, around women's religious, cultural, and political duties, and around their productive and reproductive roles to defend their interests (Salami, 2013). Modern African Feminism was solidified during the landmark UN decade for women 1975-1985, which resulted in feminist activism and scholarship spreading widely across the continent and diaspora (Salami, 2013).

The African feminist movement has to do with grassroots activism as well as intellectual activism focusing on 'bread and butter' issues such as poverty reduction, violence

prevention and reproductive rights, as well as with lifestyle, popular culture, media, art and culture. No one but the African women ourselves can bear the responsibility to protect the histories of African women and to connect them to the situations of today. It is important to contextualize women's issues and meanings to fully understand them. That is, one has to consider the context in which they are situated, i.e. cultural, social, political and historical. They are systemically marginalized within both our local and global societies. Failure to contextualize these intersections restricts the understanding of women and reduces the impetus to promote gender equality with a global context.

Women in Africa and in the African diaspora are concerned with emphasizing the distinctiveness of African legacies and not always wishing to be identified with feminists in the Western world. In fact, they have often preferred to use alternative terms. For example, 'womanism' is a term attributed to the African-American writer Alice Walker and adopted by many African women, while others prefer the term 'Motherism' (Mama, n.d.). According to Walker (1983), womanism is "committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female" (p. xi). It is evident in Walker's statement that the common position of many African Women is that African Feminism, unlike some the Western Feminism, is inexplicably connected to their struggles against racism, economic exploitation, colonialism and imperialism.

Roots of African feminism. Historically, many factors may have influenced the development of African Feminisms, including slavery, abused female sexuality and bodies, and exploited female labor. Colonialism is associated with the political, cultural and economic domination of the African continent by European power. Colonialism not only disrupted the

traditional systems, including the family, motherhood, and wifehood, but also introduced new gender relations. These forces, combined with oppressive traditions, enhanced the subordination of women and created new, extreme forms of exploitation (Steady, 1996).

Even after the independence in most African countries, the structures of economic and racial inequalities remained intact and were reinforced by neocolonialism and imperialism. European and African traditional views of women or women's role and status in society remains unchanged and still continues to impose contradictory expectations on African women, even today in the 21st Century. Imperialism is also evident in their current global economic and political perspectives, which reinforce African dependence on the West through adaptation of exploitative models of development in African and other Third World countries through such systems as globalization. Globalization is directly related to the transnational migration of people from poor countries to the Western countries through the creation of the world as a global village. Other roots of African Feminism may also include wars, apartheid, chronic underdevelopment, the depletion of African natural resources, poverty, and diseases like HIV/Aids, among many others. It is because of all these issues and the pressure they exert on the lives of African women, both in and outside of this continent, that the need to keep redefining African Feminism has become inevitable (Mwangi, 2009; Steady, 1996).

New meaning of African feminism. One of the current challenges of African Feminism is to redefine feminism in its own terms and its own words. These new meanings are reflected in the kind of emphasis that is placed in its goals, objectives and concepts, such as;

1. Intersectionality, which deals with multiple oppressions.
2. Preservation of life and survival, communication and cooperation.

In the light of the foregoing priorities, the liberation from sexual oppression for African women is deeply connected with liberation from other forms of oppression, such as race, class, slavery, colonial imperialism and poverty, among many others. Additionally, the subject of African women's advancement is an integral part of the quest for social justice, not only at the household level, but also within the local, national and global levels. African Feminism, therefore, speaks against separating women's subordination from larger political and economic forces in societies of the world which are responsible for economic and political dependence that affect both women and men in Africa and in the African diaspora. In addition to providing a critical lens for looking at women's issues, African feminists' perspectives provide a unique critique of the role of 'nation states' and the global social order in perpetuating the low status of power of women in Africa and the African diaspora. Ultimately, it is these efforts and influences that we must consider in understanding the nature, ideologies and assumptions that underlie African Feminism in the past, the present and the future.

Language, Cultural Change, and Socialization

Language. Language as an important form of cultural capital is crucial in analyzing the cultural and material processes of migration as immigrants' lives are profoundly influenced by the symbolic status of their native and new languages (De Fina & King, 2011). Language as a material condition of colonization and globalization is inexplicably linked to migration. Therefore, the language of an immigrant is less likely to be spoken in host

countries. For many immigrants, including Africans in diaspora, language poses a significant barrier to work, education and other social services.

Cultural Change and Socialization

The process of cultural change is especially complex in regard to the role of African women immigrants. Women immigrants are expected to integrate their families into the American ways of life while still maintaining the cultures of their countries of origin. For most women, these responsibilities are difficult to reconcile in unfamiliar contexts with social isolation and often with limited English proficiency (Strum, Tarantolo, Jachimowicz, & Meyers, 2002). The challenge of a new ideal of womanhood and a new ideology about the home arises for many African women out of the new demands of cultural adaptation geared toward mirroring Western values. The family organizations and social activities are ordered by Western cultural systems which contrast their traditional African structures of these units (Smith, 1999, p. 151).

Addressing the complementarity of women in African traditional settings in order to maintain family harmony and stability, Nzomo (1997) observes that since gender ideologies are actualized within the context of socialization, African women immigrants are likely to continue to draw on the threads of African culture for the sake of continuity. Nzomo (1997) continues to reiterate that many African women immigrants in the diaspora tend to resist external pressure to redefine their roles along Western lines because, for them, particularly in the early stages of integration into the diaspora, culture and national identities take precedence over individual autonomy. Notably, the main diasporic challenge for many African women immigrants is the pressure to move away from traditional African gender limitations,

embodied in the roles such as motherhood and womanhood, while still trying to maintain cultural relevancy and connection to their homeland. Clearly, motherhood and womanhood, which are central to the African traditional ideology of domesticity, become important points of contention for African women's resistance and African feminist discourse (Mwangi, 2009).

African Womanhood, Motherhood and Resistance

In African womanhood, like elsewhere in the world, motherhood is an important concept and marker of women's social identity and shaping (Walker, 1995). Within the African context, motherhood is an ideological imperative in response to which the African female subject is constructed (Mama, 1995). The social constructions of African womanhood and motherhood are culturally and historically specific. These constructions are powerful in shaping how women perceive themselves and their everyday lived experiences and how they function in society. Although the prospects of migration for many African women immigrants promises an escape and freedom from strict African patriarchal and cultural binds, the reality is that migration reinforces the same cultural attributes on women in diaspora.

Motherhood is at the center of the African immigrant woman's representation as a powerful matriarch as well as a powerless victim, both of which constrain the possibilities for agency on the part of these women (Clark, 2001). All my respondents described themselves as mothers, and the description of myself as not having children of my own invoked two general responses. One was of shock, possibly because it is expected that an adult woman in her mid-30s should be having children of her own. For the most part, however, respondents were supportive and encouraging, offering their sympathies and urging me to 'keep trying' and to keep praying for a husband and/or a child. In Africa, a woman is seen as lacking if she does

not claim or perform motherhood as a vital aspect of her identity. In the African context, it is not uncommon for women who do not have biological children or whose children have died or are no longer living with her to be 'given' children (Sudarkasa, 2004).

The ambivalence with which African women immigrants experience and make meaning of motherhood and womanhood is not a new phenomenon. In her study of *African Women Pursuing Higher Education in the USA*, Mwangi (2009) argued that motherhood and womanhood are defined through the African traditional male gaze and actualized through the socializing of girls or women. She further argues that making motherhood and womanhood feminist issues and rendering them subject to feminist analysis and scrutiny opens spaces for women to develop critical consciousness and agency to redefine these terms using the language of resistance in ways that explode male discourse. When women do mothering from this vantage point, motherhood and womanhood become an act of resistance (to patriarchal constructions of motherhood) and agency a place of change and empowerment.

As feminist researchers, it is important to highlight the oppressive ways in which the images and perceptions of motherhood and mothering move us further away from the realities of African women immigrants and obscure their agency (Motsemme & Ratele, 2002). This study documents how respondents' identities as mothers have worked to challenge cultural norms and how they simultaneously resist and redefine their identity practices of mothering as they negotiate the diaspora.

According to Norquay, cited in Mwangi (2009), the "contradictory experience of both reproducing and resisting dominant norms and structures are key to the shaping of our actions" (p. 95). And, although African women immigrants are using their agency to

reconsider the definition of motherhood and womanhood, it is apparent that they are not yet ready to relinquish their maternal stances. Often times, as recorded in women's activism against patriarchy in Africa, when African women are pushed to the point of powerlessness, they always resort to the only power that nobody can take away from them—the power of motherhood (Maathai, 2008).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design

Feminist Research Methodology

The practice of feminist research implies intimate and empowering research that has an activist component. The worldview around this kind of research, therefore, must be different from traditionally scientific research. Starting from the politics of the personal in which women's experiences of everyday life become the site of values and of resistance to them, feminism generates new theoretical perspectives from which the dominant can be criticized, and new possibilities imagined (Mwangi, 2009).

Feminist research asks questions like 'What is real? For me? For you?', 'How is knowledge created?', and 'What is valuable'? These questions addressed from the feminist perspectives makes the methodology unique and constructs a worldview in which the research is grounded. This worldview also defines the feminist researchers' conceptual framework, which guided this study through the complex system of concepts, assumptions, expectations and theories. The theories used in this study include transnational, intersectional, post-colonial and postmodern theories. The role of these theories in informing the research process requires exploring, in a general sense, the values asserted in the discourses of each respective theory and how those values pertain to the topic of the researcher (Mann, 2012; Mwangi, 2009; Rinehart, 1998).

Transnational theory, much like the name suggests, involves thinking in a global sense about power structures and how they affect individual lives and the lives of communities—nation communities, state communities, and local communities. In other words, transnational theory challenges notions of ethnocentrism in a 'global community' by recognizing that local

forces, while not usually recognized as such, are active, not passive, forces of change within the global community. Transnational feminism, therefore, values the agency of local forces over broad ideas of 'global power' when making change, especially in the area of world history. While this is only a piece of what transnational theory involves, it is difficult to not think of its relevance to the topic of African women immigrants. Transnational Feminism is at work in this kind of analysis because it recognizes the agency of African women immigrants and empowers these women in recognizing their agency.

Intersectional theory takes a critical look at the multiplicity of women's lives and attempts to examine ways in which these different positions intersect simultaneously to shape individual women's lived realities. Intersectionality allows for marginal social locations to become vantage points for understanding the complexity of women's social lives.

Intersectional theorists recognize and place value on the lived realities of those whose voices are marginalized. Mwangi's (2009) study, *We Will Have Gained Ourselves*, is clearly influenced by intersectional theory when as a researcher, she critically looks at her own positionality at the intersection of her identities as a woman, including that of a mother and a wife. The author highlights her own multiple identities and the contradictions that happen when these identities intersect. Mwangi's (2009) study is relevant to this study because it draws on deep connection with, and unique understanding of, the multiple identities of African women immigrants, which are best analyzed through the lens of intersectional theory.

Mann (2012) defines postcolonial theory as "... a more critical concept that refers to engaging with and contesting the legacy of colonialism discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies" (p. 63). In other words, postcolonial theory is often used to analyze

challenges and deconstruct the effects of colonialism and imperialism on a colonized group of people. Mwangi (2009) underscores the importance of this theory when she states, “Any study ...that ignores the centrality of, and sensitivity to, cultural context within which African women operate is suspect and can only remain suggestive of the realities of African women” (p. 25). This quote captures one of the values of postcolonial theory: understanding that cultural contexts—specifically, contexts of colonialism and imperialism—have a tremendous effect on how African women experience the world. In this study, postcolonial theory is used to examine ways in which African women immigrants’ lives are presently shaped by the colonial and post-colonial history embedded in perceptions of many aspects of women’s daily lives, including motherhood and womanhood.

Postmodern theory allows for exploration of the complexity of women’s identities, thus providing a base for analyzing narratives of their daily lives. Postmodern theory involves deconstructing how knowledge is produced and reveals the power relations embedded in deciding who produces knowledge. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2009) say, “Postmodern thought enables feminists to look imaginatively at power, selves, and knowledge production and ...at how the power of language and representation operates” (p. 85). The values of postmodernism include always questioning assumed ‘Truths’ with a capital ‘T’ and examining, then reexamining, how knowledge is produced. For example, an analysis of how womanhood is constructed in the contexts of African immigrant women’s lives will benefit from postmodern thought to critically reflect on the interpretation of their lives and meaning-making process. One danger of homogenizing African cultures relative to the women in the study would be the possibility of obscuring the fact that these women’s perceptions of their

identities are impacted differently based on respective African cultures and compounded by immigration.

Transnational, intersectional, postcolonial, and postmodern theories each carry their own values which, as a feminist researcher, I have used to inform the methodology of this project in unique ways throughout the process of doing this research. These theories have deepened my personal relationship with the topic by connecting the project to the histories, struggles, and goals of African women immigrants. As with all aspects of feminist methodology, theories, are an integral part of doing feminist research, and they encourage researchers to critique, and examine their roles as researchers in producing knowledge from the people they study. Smith (1999) highlights that indigenous people's stories should become accepted as universal truths, because research has been conducted through 'imperial eyes'. Smith's words are an important reminder of the power of research and representation. Her comments highlight the need for researchers to critique their own 'gaze' and to reflect on the potential for their representations to be encoded as the "truth", and for alternative readings to be marginalized (Smith, 1999).

Research Design: Strategies for Doing Research

Life history narratives. This study uses life history narratives to explore the experiences of African women immigrants in Minnesota. Narratives as a way of telling stories is central to African women's socialization process and counts as an important aspect of women's ways of knowing (Mwangi, 2009). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) in their book *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, examined the epistemology, or 'ways of knowing', of a diverse group of women, with a focus

on identity and intellectual development across a broad range of contexts. Belenky et al. (1986) proposed five epistemological perspectives through which women know and view the world. Among the five, epistemological perspectives that proposes ‘subjective knowledge’ speaks directly to the process of analyzing women’s positions as they narrate their everyday lives as a way of knowing.

Life-history allows me, as a researcher, to explore African women immigrants’ experiences not only as lived realities, but also as a way of meaning-making. Life-history narratives also challenge me to listen for African women immigrants’ perceptions of their reality over time and how they may have been influenced by the decisions they made at specific times in their lives.

Research Questions

This research will be guided by the following overarching question: *How do the African women immigrants make sense of their identities and how do they negotiate diaspora?*

Specifically, the study will focus on:

1. What barriers hinder African immigrant women’s integration and successful settlement in Minnesota?
2. What strategies are they using to address, make sense of, and negotiate their diasporic experiences?
3. How have personal experiences of African women immigrants shaped their understanding of their multiple identities at the intersections of race, class, gender, nationality, immigrant status, etc.?

Identifying Respondents

To identify respondents for this study, purposeful sampling method was used to obtain the names of possible respondents in this study. Purposive sampling allows for identifying respondents who fit the group under study and who have themselves experienced the challenges of being African immigrants. Specifically, I identified women who have migrated as refugees, on a green card, on a student visa, on a work permit, or any visa. This is because women who may be undocumented immigrants would have a totally different experience of negotiating diaspora. A study on undocumented immigrants would require a separate research with different approach and strategies and would therefore be out of the scope of this study. To provide a diverse array of experiences and cultural contexts, I chose women from three African countries: Kenya and Uganda (East Africa) and Togo (West Africa). Specifically, I focused on women who are mothers and raising their children in the U.S. Pseudonyms were used to protect women's identities. Three of the women who are respondents in this study live in the Twin Cities and four live in St Cloud areas. Three of the respondents have attained Master's degree, two hold a Bachelor's degree, one is currently pursuing a Ph.D., and one is thinking of enrolling in college in the next year.

Methods of Data Collection

Interviews and interview process. In this study, I explored the challenges facing African immigrant women that hinder integration and successful settlement and the approaches they are using to make sense of their diaspora experience. Two 1-hour interviews were held with each respondent. The interview guides with open ended questions were used to guide the interview. The actual interview questions will be indicated later in the appendix.

The respondents were asked to choose the venue for their interviews to ensure privacy and convenience as they share their story.

The process of data analysis included the reading of transcripts repeatedly to identify the common themes and patterns of the respondents' stories. The themes were then color coded and organized to form the basis for discussion and interpretation.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis and interpretation as a feminist agenda is an important part of my research process. According to Forte as quoted in Mwangi (2009), “Writing an ethnographic monograph...involves breaking up vivid kaleidoscopic reality of human action, thoughts and emotions which lives in the anthropologist’s notebook and memory and creating out of pieces a coherent representation of society” (p. 50). Further, Kim (2015) notes that narrative analysis and interpretation work in tandem and that the two processes work together as an act of finding narrative meaning. The aim of interpretation and analysis is to understand the phenomenon under study as well as to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon for the reader.

Consequently, the process of data analysis that I used for my study included the process of reading of transcripts repeatedly to identify the common themes and patterns of the respondent’s’ stories. I identified the themes, and then color coded and organized them into a coherent manner that will make the discussion and interpretation clear and meaningful to me and my readers. The rigor of feminist research process ‘calls for the careful and critical work of unravelling the interwoven complexities of gendered meanings and social structures’ (Mwangi, 2009) in order to fully understand the experiences of African women immigrants living in the diaspora. As mentioned in the section on locating myself as a researcher, I have used my own personal experiences and insights to augment the narrativized ideas of my respondents’ mean-making.

The thematic analysis of the data from the participant interviews revealed three distinct themes:

1. Arrival: Stories of Displacement and Dis-ease
2. Negotiating Diaspora: Losses and Gains
3. '*We Aare Here to Stay*': Dealing with Loneliness and Isolation.

Theme I–Arrival: Stories of Displacement and Dis-Ease

In the section on African diaspora in this study, I noted that the word 'diaspora' is defined as the dispersal of a people from the original homeland. Dispersal denotes the displacement of people being uprooted from their original country for whatever reason. Arguably, whether the reasons for dispersal or displacement are forced or voluntary, the process of displacement in itself is disruptive. The effects of displacement are expressed in a variety of ways by respondents as they narrate their diasporic experiences. Serrata and Fischer (2013) name the five distinct stages of displacement for immigrants as seeking opportunities, emotional reactions, adjustment, rationalization, and acknowledgement. A significant part of the dynamic of the phenomenon of displacement is that African immigrant women have important commitments to their country of origin. Usually they have connections with family members and friends with whom they communicate and support financially.

For the African women immigrants, I interviewed, migrating to the U.S brought expectations that were different from the patterns identified above. For the first few months, they were bombarded by things that were not familiar. When I asked the women during our interviews about what they found different about living in the U.S., the first thing they mentioned was the weather. For the immigrant women who are from Africa's equatorial

climes, the shock of Minnesota's snowy season can elicit very different responses and the concept of snow is hard to describe.

While in Africa the women went about doing their daily chores without thinking about the weather. But on arrival to the U.S., they quickly realized they always have to check the weather before heading out for the day. The change to the cold climate was not only a terrible shock, but also a disruption. The harsh winter months and the very hot and humid summer months were difficult for the women who had never experienced them before.

Annabel spoke of her family's experience on arriving in the U.S.:

The family [that hosted us] who [had been] living here had told us it's pretty cold, so we wear warm clothing. When we arrived in October, we thought we were gonna get snow right away...there wasn't snow yet, but the cold was unimaginable. It was not the cold we had anticipated. Our jackets were [as thin as] paper...[yet] they were very heavy as we could barely carry them, but when we were hit by the cold in the [Minneapolis-St. Paul] airport it was unbelievable. It was so surreal.

Additionally, Fatima talked about:

The weather was so hot, my skin was peeling on my forehead and [on my]nose ...while in Africa really, it isn't this bad.

Mary talked about:

[I came to the] U.S in April...it was spring. Spring season is rainy season, I remember very well I was in a skirt and T-shirt it was so cold and [I was] freezing.

These comments are similar to my own experience about adapting to the climate shock, which meant abandoning meteorological cues from my 'old' home. I recall how, during my first

winter in Minnesota, I looked out my living room window and saw a bright sun against a luminous blue sky. In my country, when it's sunny like that, we go to the beach. I headed outdoors in sandals to take out the garbage and quickly learned that some of the coldest days in Minnesota come when the sun is out.

Based upon Angela's, Fatima's, and Mary Jones's narratives about displacement and dis-ease, it is evident that weather is central to their daily normalcy and it is an integral part of culture shock in coming to this different country. They all noted that in Africa, one never thinks about checking the weather every morning and therefore they continue to do their daily chores and travels without ever thinking about it. Weather becomes a culture shock when they arrive in the U.S. because weather becomes integral to how they organize their lives. Therefore, the experience of extreme cold is a form of disruption to what they already assume to be the normalcy of their lives in Africa.

Having been raised in Africa and having developed a schema that helps them survive and function within the African environment, experiencing snow, extreme cold and the very hot and humid summers challenges what they already know as important knowledge that determines the way they live and function in that environment. That schema, which encompasses the spirit of survival, is challenged when they come to the U.S. and they have no idea how to deal with such a situation that threatens not only their way of life but also their survival. How they deal with their everyday problems and how they live goes back to that schema that they learned as they were being raised and socialized in Africa. Therefore, experiencing climate shock in the U.S. challenges who these women are and directly impacts their identity. The experience of climate shock also questions whether they are capable of

dealing with the weather challenge for their survival and that of their families. Hence weather is a very powerful experience of displacement and dis-ease.

The concept of 'arrival' also denotes the process of entering both a contested and unfamiliar space. When African women immigrants enter U.S., for example, it is evidently clear that their identity as 'African', 'Immigrants', 'Third World', become contextualized as 'Other' in the Western space. According to Ku (2009), "naming these women, 'Third World' highlights the post-colonial connections and makes explicit the racialization and marginalization of these women in Western space" (p. 66). As will be discussed under the '*We Are Here to Stay*' theme, this naming of women as African immigrant women from the third world spells out the politics of race and representation. This politics of race and representation become the basis of how African immigrant women are defined in the communities in which they settle. Additionally, the race and ethnic relations become managed by state and state agents that deal with immigrant service and settlement and tend to be maintained within immigrant communities to reproduce 'Third world in the West' (Ku, 2009).

According to Hadijiyanni (2007), some form of cultural change is inevitable when immigrants find themselves in new spaces and circumstances. Upon relocation, many immigrants begin to re-evaluate their race, religion and cultural traditions in the process of creating a new sense of self or new identities, partly as a way to overcome that sense of dislocation. It is also important to note that for many African women immigrants, this process of self-identity is a very daunting task. Many choose to integrate their cultural beliefs and practices into the new 'space' rather than acculturating and trading their cultures for that of

their host country. For many African immigrants, this is a choice based on the concept of their self-preservation as an important aspect of survival.

Despite the challenges discussed in this section, it is evident that the level of adaptation that African immigrants display is undisputable. In a study done on African women in the new diaspora Osirim (2008) contends that in their efforts to the “Re-creation of Home” in the diaspora, African women are especially committed to building and improving life for their families and communities in the U.S. She argues that the ties that women have with their countries of origin have opened up and strengthened the development of women entrepreneurs and leaders of community organization in unprecedented numbers. In concluding this section, it is evident therefore that African women’s lives and experiences display distinct gains and losses in the process of immigration to the U.S. The following section focuses on what my respondents talked about in terms of the losses and gains they experienced in the process of negotiating diaspora.

Theme II–Negotiating Diaspora: Losses and Gains

In discussing ways that African immigrant women negotiate diaspora and how they articulate their sense of ‘losses and gains,’ it is imperative to pay attention to concepts like displacement and dis-ease, which are integral to their diasporic experiences. In the article *Displacement and Dis-Eease, Land, Place and Health among American Indians*, Walters, Beltram, Huh, and Evans-Campbell (2011) explains that ‘dis-ease’ (which literally means out of balance, disharmony, disequilibrium is tied to the holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of mind, body, spirit, emotions as an essential human condition). Additionally, ‘displacement,’ which means loss of place is also akin to loss of identity

because the concept of ‘place’ is often tied to the indigenous identity. Place, therefore, becomes a site of social and spatial interactions with which a person discovers his/her identity and purpose. Arguably, therefore the connection to ‘place’ not only creates health identities, but also provides protective space.

In the process of negotiating diaspora for the African immigrant women, the stories they told reflected on the losses as well as the gains of immigration. However, it is evident that their articulation of their losses and gains were integrally connected to the loss of ‘place’. The following excerpts about the women’s losses and gains reveal these nuances.

Stella: protective space or connecting to the ‘place’:

[Like we were discussing before] about having a problem, you have to talk to your sister or [if] you have something going on, you go and stay with your family for a while., I lost those things back home., you [would] go home for 2 days to[get] fresh air... [to] your moms house or your aunts house and just...[get away for] a weekend, you come back when you are fresh. That’s the one thing I’d say I have missed ... waking up one day and you just see them [both of her parents passed away and her aunt currently lives in Africa] ...miss them much.

Fatima:

In Kenya, [I]was working in a bank [which] was so prestigious, [I had] the money, [I was] young-twenty something, [I was] cool, [I had a] boyfriend... [there was] nothing to spend money on. When I came here on a student visa, of course you are limited on how much you can work.

My cousin had to go to work at 9.30pm, [while the] sun is still up, didn't know what was going on? They [kept] telling me I [need to] go sleep and I couldn't, [because the sun was still up] it was all new to me. Back home [working hours were] 8-5pm, [and you got] home at 7pm. Here, people work in shifts, [you] come in the morning, shower and go to school. I realized America isn't a bed of roses, no sleeping.

Mary Jane: loss of physical 'place' which was a protective space:

... because I am the only one here, ... if I miss them [family] I get home sick. [When I plan a trip back to Africa] I have to pack everybody [my children and I] and go there which is a very expensive occasion ... that part of the social life, togetherness with my siblings, my mom, my grandmother ...that part I miss a lot. I have realized that when I go back it's not like we pick up from where we left off ... they are different people. We don't talk the same language... I think the exposure here, the experiences here... you go to Kenya and you are not on the same level. You see things differently, you reason differently, things look slower, to me they are doing things wrong... so I don't know if I gained that new set of eyes or I lost what I knew from when I was born.

When you are in Kenya you are immersed in the culture, traditions... it's everywhere you don't have to think twice [how people reason] here you have to be deliberate on it... [If] I want to speak my language I have to find somebody who speaks it. I want to remember those [indigenous] songs...I have to watch some DVD or listen to the [Kenyan] radio...I have to be deliberate about it or I am going to lose it. I listen to the kikuyu stations, I watch Kenyan TV- those are things you have to be

deliberate about. I was fluent in reading in my [mother] language while in Kenya am losing that... and I don't wanna loose it.

Jackie: loss of spiritual 'place' which was a protective space:

...then also the Christian bit. I feel that's something that I have lost... [a place] where [I can] get filled up, [a place where] the cup [can] get filled up. I don't feel [it here in the U.S as] I used to [when I attended] church [in Kenya] you feel oh my gosh, you feel the presence of the Lord and you go feeling so good so I miss that.

Then [there is the] Christian values for the children. I like that I went to a Christian school and [you could talk about] the Christian values, you can talk about your God and how mighty He is and how good He has been, but I realize I have to bite my tongue all the time [here in the U.S]. We are trying to get that for our son [their son attends a private Christian school] but unfortunately you have to pay through the nose whereas it was free in Kenya ... so to cope up with that I watch TBN it's my favorite channel.

Angela: complexities of the meaning of 'place' as protective:

Well after the war broke, like I mentioned before, I had just finished high school- [A level], I was still very much interested in continuing with my studies, so we left as a family, for Congo, by then it was 'Zaire', from there I left with another family to go Sudan, to a refugee camp. I registered as a refugee, the UNHCR was helping people who still wanted to go to school, so they'd just access what level you're at, if you are able to join college and so on.

[My husband is] also from my area; he [also] went with his family to the Congo then to Sudan and [we] ended up under the same scholarship in Lesotho. After completion of [our] studies, [we had] to go back to where [we] came from. [The war had started] in Sudan, so I told UNHCR I didn't want to go home, I don't know what's going on there, I don't want to go to Sudan.

[On arrival in the US] we were [living] in a basement [of a house], I remember my husband wasn't happy, he thought that was done intentionally, [coming] from Africa where there [are] no basements. There were no windows [in this house]. He [my husband] wasn't happy and he made it known that wasn't right. He hadn't lived in [a [basement] one before. I think we spent a month there.

Angela's story reveals the complexities of the meaning of 'place' as protective because she had moved from one place to another. She doesn't find 'place' to be protective so for her; although her life in Africa offered that protective place for a period of time, war disrupted that place and therefore, for Angela, she is struggling to find that protective place here in the U.S. Their first experience of living in the basement reinforced displacement, even in the U.S., where they are finding a safe 'place'. The processes of immigration and displacement are complex and nuanced in the experiences of African immigrant women.

In theorizing the concept of 'losses and gains,' Mwangi (2009) argues that central to the women's stories are the unfolding concepts of 'loss and gain'. She argues that 'gains' presupposes 'losses' and that these two concepts are mutually inclusive. Most of these African women have lost their cultural ties, the warmth of their families, as well as power and privilege accruing from their social locations as African women. These women also have lost

the ‘comfort of the familiar home and country by immigrating abroad and are threatened with the loss of their own sense of identity as individuals and as women due to their dislocation’ (p. 23). Mwangi (2009) further suggests ways for women to make up the ‘losses’ they have suffered by focusing on the following major feminist liberatory approaches;

1. Acknowledging and naming the losses;
2. Narrativizing their experiences;
3. Defining new ways of re-defining themselves and creating a social and shared consciousness.

Throughout the process of doing this study, I as a researcher have in one way or another steered my women respondents towards recognizing the power of this approaches in re-directing their lives and gaining themselves. The following is a summary of Mwangi’s ideas under each of these approaches; 1) In the process of acknowledging and naming the losses, she argues that the women recognize the painful experiences and hurdles they had to endure to be where they are today. 2) The process of gaining themselves leads the women to a sense of empowerment and activism. And in narrativizing their stories about themselves, they find their identity and meaning of their lives. 3) Finally, by re-defining themselves and creating a social and shared consciousness of their experiences, the women become self-aware of their unique knowledge and insights that define who they are. In the following section, the respondents further articulate their ‘losses’ and ‘gains’.

‘I didn’t realize that I was black’

In discussing her loss Mary states:

...I didn't realize that I was black until I was in the U.S. it was very touching and it took me back. When you are called black you have to keep proving yourself in every situation.

It was also challenging during my undergraduate degree in psychology because I had no idea [who] the Instructor [was] and even the undergraduate degree in psychology was unfamiliar to me, the terminologies used by the instructor were also new to me so I used to sit there and later go to the library where I could meet some Kenyans who had been used to that English [accent], terminologies and pronunciation so that they can explain to me.

Instructors if they made a joke [in class, I had] no idea [what they meant], the [class] would laugh [even] more if they noticed [I] had no idea, [it took] a whole semester to get used to their jokes.

Mary saw these experiences as losses because she had graduated from college in Kenya, and she had a well-paying job, yet going to school in the U.S 'was hard as compared to Kenya'. She thought since she had attended college in her country of origin, she would not deal with academic challenges, social isolation, cultural adjustment or communication with her instructors and classmates. However, she realized that she was dealing with social isolation when engaging in class assignments and also different ways of thinking and doing in the college, and therefore she sought out help from fellow students who were also Kenyans whom she was familiar with to assist her with school work. Even in articulating her losses and her gains, she never regrets her decision of coming to the U.S. For example, she says:

overall, I don't think I would trade [my coming to the U.S] for anything, [I] have learned a lot and I see it [was] worthy for me [to come] to [the]U. S where I studied my Undergraduate and also my Masters [degrees].

Despite their myriad differences, my respondents continued to share their losses and grief, which are characteristic of the migration experience. It was evident that they left a part of themselves behind. This study seeks to understand what life was like for them in their countries of origin, what did they leave behind? How has their migration experience shaped and continue to influence their lives in the U.S.?

My next respondents, Jackie and Fatima, had to leave their homes, friends and families to pursue higher education in the U.S. Angela had to leave home with her family for better opportunities in the U.S. For these women immigrants, immigration meant the loss of their familiar community, the language, the customs and rituals, the food and music, and the comforting identification with the land itself.

Leave behind your home, your friends and family:

Jackie:

I was 2m pregnant in 2002 when I came ... after a few months... husband joined me... just in time for the birth of our first-born son who is now 11yrs old and then we have another one who is 6yrs old. The rest of my family is still in Kenya.

Fatima:

I lost lots of family connection[s]. You connect with few [family members and friends, but], you still feel [pause]... like one of my friends [whom] I visited [with while in] Kenya has a huge one-story house, and I thought will we ever have something like this

in America? That kinds of puts you down, then you realize some people you went to school with are either so rich or so poor, you don't fit anywhere because you can't identify with them down there neither those so up here, and then, they can't identify with you because they feel you went to America and you changed.

Sometimes you lose family member [through death] and you don't get to give your last respects, it kind of hits you hard. Distance separates people. You lose both sides when you come here especially with family.

Angela talked about the resettlement thus:

We knew we were going to Fargo[ND]... our resettlement was done through Episcopal Ministry for Immigration who worked together with the Lutheran Ministry of Immigration. We arrived in New York [and was to connect our flight] to North Dakota. [We had been given] a special bag [labeled ICR], all our documents were kept in it, so as you walk, everybody knows this person. We have that bag in the house, we look at it every now and then to remind ourselves, so when we walk out of the plane, that bag should be on display, they always instructed us to hold it in such a way that it can be seen. And it was called ICR (International Committee of Refugees).

There was a house where the church had [organized for us to temporarily live in].

We didn't have our luggage's because of a lot of [flight] changes, things went wrong, and we took different planes. However, we got them within a week or two. We lost some, we tried to trace them but in vain. One of the bags that got lost had our best valuables e.g. wedding albums, my husband's suits, our best clothes, graduation gowns.

One of the things I had thought about moving to the U.S is that we were gonna make enough money, so we can travel back [to Africa] every year, and that has not happened. [Laughs]. Because the money is not there ... When I look at my life, I have been straining [since] I left my family [in Uganda], it's like am just gliding through the air, as if I am looking for something to latch on ... am not there yet. I still have not found my niche ... of course at my age I should be thinking about retirement ...but I know that financially I cannot think that way because I haven't made the money ...and why haven't I made the money? Because I chose to be there for my kids ... I still feel I haven't done enough.

Conversely displacement—that is, being without place or being uprooted from the original place—leads to dis-ease, which is a form of ‘loss’ of meaning and identity. It is important to note here that African women’s commitment to maintaining the ties with Africa as expressed in most of their narratives is really an effort to re-establish meaningful ties to the motherland. This reconnection and the meaning given to the process constitute essential healing and transformational strategies for negotiating diaspora for African women immigrants.

When discussing immigration, the concept of displacement and dis-ease is disruptive, but also are the losses that African immigrant women experience. Often times, African women struggle with the losses and also celebrate their gains which arise from the shift from one cultural environment to another. This concept of ‘loses’ and ‘gains’ is another major factor to consider in the migration experience. In the article, *As Migrants We Leave Home in Search of a Future, but We Lose the Past*, Younge (2015) enumerates losses that are common

to many African immigrants, and which have also been expressed by many of my respondents. These losses include; losses of status, family roots, financial certainty, losses of support systems, losses of language, losses of identity and friendships, losses of cultural identities and losses of self-image. Because of their cultural transitions and experiences, many African immigrants suffer from significant social displacement, as well as psychological and physical health problems (Younge, 2015). Furthermore, while African immigrant women try to establish early social connections within their own ethnic communities, they often have limited meaningful social connectedness beyond these communities.

Theme III–*'We Are Here to Stay'*: Dealing with Loneliness and Isolation

In the light of the articulations of the 'gains and losses' of negotiating diaspora, in the previous chapter, this theme, *'We Are Here to Stay,'* embodies a powerful statement of women's resolve. In a literal sense, the statement epitomizes a powerful position that the respondents have transitioned into after their 'soul searching' journey of making sense of their diasporic experiences. The statement *'We Are Here to Stay'* embodies the 'out of the woods' metaphor that exemplifies the chaotic teasing out or unraveling of the complexities of women's diasporic experiences and mean - making. From a feminist perspective, using the concepts of 'body' and 'embodiment' allows for deeper understanding of the complexities in making sense of diasporic experiences.

According to Walters et al. (2011), 'bodies' are sites or records of processes and stories of lived experiences while 'embodiment' is the articulation of agency, that is the ability to act in an empowered way. Embodiment is an important construct that illuminate's ways in which the suppression of peoples' agency threatens their sense of wellbeing. The

statement, *'We Are Here to Stay,'* presents an embodiment of women's sense of agency from the stories they tell and their determination to act to change the circumstances and conditions of their existence in the host country.

The decision for my participants to want to stay in their 'new home' is not only an important issue in its own right, it also has crucial implications for their behavior. Since the participants have decided this is home, they have formed relationships to deal with loneliness and isolation. But in spite of all the challenges, my participants stated that they did not regret the decision to emigrate to the U.S. The following excerpts illuminate ways that my respondents dealt with loneliness and isolation.

Angela:

As far as the larger community, I didn't have much connection until AWA was formed. I got to know Jackie and I felt this is a great idea. Before I knew about the African Women Alliance, my involvement with the community was more through the church, when we moved here, we identified with St. Cloud Episcopal Church. I joined their bible study classes, helping in Sunday school where my kids were going. So, with my experiences, I feel like even though I didn't feel comfortable... like life was hard ... [yet] am still standing.

Right from the refugee camp, I started to live a life in such a way that, I'll do what works. If I had two to three choices, I'll do the one that is going to allow me to be safe, take care of my kids, but not the one my heart wants. I came last. I choose things because it works for the family because they come first. That has been a

struggle for me. Also, just knowing that it's hard to open up, because in the back of my mind they don't understand what I am going through or what I am feeling.

Also, like I mentioned early, I was brought up in a happy home, I felt loved, I was the first-born girl after four boys, so I was cherished, everybody was interested in me, I was cared for. So, having grown like that, then all that changes and you are alone with husband and kids, I feel anger, why did this happen, why did I grow up in a large family with a lot of love, and then my own life ends up being so narrow, just me and my husband and kids, I feel for my kids not having relationship with their extended family grandparents, cousins, aunties, uncles etc.

Fatima:

Yeah, I always have this group I hang out with... [we meet] for birthdays. The church has played a big role, you feel like you have a family there. I try to socialize and interact with people...I embrace where I come from. [This is] very important coz that's how we grew up. You get to know your cousins, your neighbor's etc.

Sometimes at work, I will make my traditional food and I want people to taste, like chapatis etc. and I am like hey I have my traditional food! And also, I invite friends to come over when I cook, and we hang out together and reminisce, instead of [going to] a restaurant. Sometimes it's interesting talking about life as we were growing up, you find somethings are so common across the board! Like sharing a bed with your brother etc., how we ate a lot of githeri [a Kenyan traditional meal of maize and any type of beans mixed and boiled together]. We are from different villages and so this brings us together as friends, because our life situations were similar growing

up. It made me open up about my late Mom, I speak up about what I go through, taking on [family] responsibility back home.

Jackie;

Well I will take you back to an organization that we formed, you know with these experiences of loneliness and isolation you come to a point where you realize really, probably even if you go back home it will take a while [for one to fit in. So it's important to connect with the people, the fellow Africans that are here, be their sisters, be there for one another, support one another as opposed to living in isolation and that's how we co-founded an organization African Women Alliance- where you feel like you have sisters, you have somebody to go to, the kids can play together because the way we bring our kids in the house is not great. But when [we know each other] you feel comfortable [to have the kids visit each other].

So, we do various activities we do the 'Welcoming of Babies' [One of African Women's Alliance's projects]. We will just go [to a new mom's home and visit with the newborn] just as we did back home. [We carry] whatever [gifts] we have, we dance, we are happy, and we tell her you are not alone... you have met cousins you have people you can call. The other month in Feb. one of us had twins so we went there again and welcomed the twins and told her you are not alone. If you need a baby sitter, [just] step out... help is only one call away.

Mary:

As a single mother, I joined a support system, we are three or four women who have children like me and we have same experiences, some of the women are married but

their spouses still have problems, I still have good friends who are single mothers whereby we share some experiences, my church is also of big help.

I [also] joined merry- go- round for 6 ladies whereby we give money every 2 weeks, it's hard for single mothers to save so when we raise 200 dollars and we give 1000 dollars to one women she can be able to save. We also assist each other on financial, social and emotional matters. When we are dealing with our children who are teenagers we are able to consult each on how [a mom] may handle her children during that stage, we still visit each other when one is unwell, lost a relative and during happy periods[times].

Sometimes when life is hard here I ask [my]mum [in Africa]for support ... yes, I am living below the poverty line here.

Gwhite:

Part of me wants to go home [Africa] from the time I came [to the U.S]. But the more you stay in America the more [going back to Africa] doesn't become reality. So, I was like once I get my public health degree maybe I can apply for jobs in Kenya, and maybe take a break from United States and just takes the kids so at least they can see a different world... and I have always dreamt of going home for a few years ..just to take a break and connect with people, run for some kind of position in the government but I am like ..oh no that's not going to work ...[laughs]...

So am always in both worlds, but this feels like home ...it's tough to go back home where their thought processes are different because they haven't been exposed.

The women's accounts help us to better understand their lives and shed more light on how they deal with loneliness and isolation and the reason they have decided to stay in their new 'home'. A central argument to be developed here is that women's experiences dealing with loneliness and isolation cannot be attributed solely to their cultural differences, but must also be understood within the framework of the larger social organization and the conceptual structures generated from outside of their experiences.

Loneliness arose as one of the stressors for the African women immigrants. The absence of friendships within the context of immigration was a new finding that emerged from this study. According to DeVoretz (2011) one of the groups most vulnerable to experiencing loneliness are immigrants. Moving to a new country, regardless of why and how, can be a very isolating experience for most migrants. This, in combination with government policies and popular myths about immigration that create a hostile environment for migrants, making the experience of migration difficult and potentially traumatic (DeVoretz, 2011). The transition to a new culture may result in loneliness, loss of self-esteem, a sense of uprootedness and the perception that one is unable to function competently in the new culture (Dalla, 2009).

Khan and Watson (2005) cited that immigrant women experience a number of challenges and hardships which create a stressful relocation journey. These include the loss of financial resources, unemployment, underemployment, and uncertainties about the future, emotional, cultural, and social losses. The loss of a social safety net is further aggravated by the sense of difficulty in forming new community ties in a new land (Rashid, 2011). Research with recent immigrant women reveals that isolation from people, absence from extended

family and friends, and sense of loneliness are some of the greatest difficulties they face during this major transition process (Martins & Reid, 2007). Furthermore, the reality of transitioning from one society to another requires immigrant women to maintain traditional ethnocultural values and at the same time to take on new cultural values (Rashid, 2011). Therefore, cultural traditions often clash with new situations and stress becomes a common experience (Schmitz, Jacobus, Stakeman, Valenzuela, & Sprankel, 2003).

This study notices that adjustment to the new ‘home’ rests on how African women immigrants have managed to adapt to new contexts that result from being away from old ‘home’. Even though the transition has been difficult, their indigenous cultures and homeland attachments are vital mechanisms of their identity. Disruption of such personal attachments, change of family roles, loss of identity, and difficulties in maintaining heritage create further stress (Timberlake, Farber, Wall, Taylor, & Sabatino, 2003). The following excerpts attest to their sense of stress.

Angela:

For me when I go to Uganda which I call home, and stay for 2 weeks, I start [asking myself] when am I going ‘home’-U.S. [Yet] I am here [in Uganda] with my mom. And when I am here [U.S] I wanna go ‘home’- So where is ‘home’? I see an advantage in that we can survive anywhere. We can be able to manage when things change but at the same time that loss is still there. I feel like I don’t belong to my[extended] family the way I did when I was growing up. Then I don’t feel like I belong here. I don’t have extended relationships to sustain me.

Mary:

I needed an examination called TOEFL [to enroll in college] and my [family] kept telling me if I don't succeed enrolling in school I should go back home. My mother had bought me a return ticket... she always told me you can come back. [At the time, I was living in a friend's one-bedroom house... I had to [contribute to basic needs] ... I therefore found myself calling my parents back home for more money. I now wanted to go back home when my mum advised me not, she said I should move to another family friend in Georgia.

Jackie:

You leave all the good friends that you knew... you leave your family. The friends that you make here [U.S] are good but it takes a while to really form that relationship where you can confide in one ... [you may also] go to the other and you don't get it [the relationship] right away. But as your communication gets better then you are able to make friends.

...At the same time, you are facing all this cultural shock. So, you are going through so much ... and at the time you don't have enough money to start calling to talk to friends that you left at home. That's a huge one.

When I [arrived] I lived in the [University] hostel and as international students you come early, one week early so in this hall probably I was all by myself at the beginning [of the semester] but a few others [joined me later]. The change of time was another culture shock, you are looking at the clock and you don't [understand] the time...confusion... and then you start asking yourself, where am I?

Fatima:

I lost lots of family connections. You connect with few, you still feel... [pause] ... like one of my friends I visited Kenya has a huge one-story house, and I thought will we ever have something like this in America? That kinds of puts you down, then you realize some people you went to school with are either so rich or so poor, you don't fit anywhere because you can't identify with them [and] neither [of] those [friends] so up here [in the U.S], and they too can't identify with you because they feel you went to America and you changed.

Sometimes you lose family member and you don't get to give your last respects, it kind of hits you hard. Distance separates people. You lose both sides when you come here especially with my own family.

This sudden change in environment and the transition from a traditional society to modern one can make the immigrant woman feel dislocated and uprooted (Choudhury, 2001). The transition process as mentioned by my participants from 'home' to a new 'home' is not easy, and can be a stressful experience for African women immigrants. The interviews indicate that some of the women experience stresses from within the context of the family. So, while recognizing that the family can be a source of support, one also has to be cognizant of the fact that the family can also be a source of stress. This situation perhaps becomes even more acute in immigrant families, when family members experiencing disruptions as a consequence of the uprooting from ones' homeland. In other words, the stress of being uprooted and trying to get ahead in a new country becomes an impetus for reconceptualizing family and social relationships among the women immigrants and their families.

In further analyzing the respondents' narratives under this theme '*We Are Here to Stay*', three sub-themes emerged: [Language Barrier, Resilience and Resistance, and 'Packing and Unpacking': Being Neither 'Here nor There']. These three sub themes will be discussed in the following section as key representations of women's responses to challenges of belonging and the resolve that they are here to stay.

Language Barrier

Disruption of life as lived in Africa with its own characteristics, features and relocating to an advanced country, is experienced as a cultural shock. Specifically, language differences negatively contribute to making the new 'home' culturally challenging to African women immigrants, compounding their sense of isolation and loneliness.

For many participants, language was a major barrier even to those who had learned English before migrating to the U.S. In some circumstances, language may be the most salient obstacle to the resettlement process, hindering immigrants' ability to reorient themselves in their new context (Colick-Peisker & Walker, 2003). Owing to communication barriers, immigrants usually find it difficult to trust and connect with not only other people, but also with other immigrants who speak different languages from their own. The African women immigrants in the study stated that they did not share personal issues among themselves mainly because of language barriers but also because they did not want to expose themselves. Feminist literature is replete with extensive theorizing of 'Silence' as a way of not only denying voice to women, but also as a way of denying women agency to talk about their experiences as an empowering process. Because of this lack of agency, therefore, many African women immigrants do not know that they are facing similar problems. While it can

be argued that a way to accelerate integration for immigrant women is to learn the language of the host country, it is also inevitable to understand, conversely, that women appropriate their cultural expressions through their native language as a means of survival, resistance and resilience.

Resiliency and Resistance

Congruent with Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs, these life challenges form a wide pyramidal base of survival needs and culminate in a peak of creative self-actualization that reflects immigrant women's resilience as well as their hopes for the future (Timberlake et al., 2003). The resources for meeting these needs and hopes include the personal, interpersonal, cultural, and spiritual strengths that shore up their resilience, the capacity to bounce back, to lean against the wind, and to move on.

Resilience is defined as the ability to "bounce back" from a difficult situation (Ross, Holliman, & Dixon, 2003). It is the practice of adapting well in the face of adversity, threats, or trauma (Crocker, 2008). Greene and Conrad (2002) describe that people who are resilient have the capacity to be flexible and empathetic; the competence to use problem-solving skills, and the ability to plan and think critically and reflectively. Over the last 40 years, resilience has emerged as an intriguing area of inquiry that explores personal and interpersonal strengths that can grow through adversity. Early resilience research focused on resilient individuals and their capacities (Rashid 2011). An individual's resilience is embedded in the larger social systems (Greene & Livingston, 2002) and greatly depends on the extent of the match between an individual's personal characteristics and the qualities of her/his environment (Greene & Conrad, 2002). Resilience consists of two components: The first is "thriving or succeeding

and the second is exhibiting this competence in a difficult situation or a situation where others often do not succeed” (Ross et al., 2003, p. 84). Resilience comes from within the human spirit and also from external social, ecological, and spiritual sources of strength (Richardson, 2002).

In this research, it is important to understand resilience as a way for African women immigrants to navigate resources and their communities’ in culturally meaningful ways. Resilience, therefore, can be defined as a social construct that identifies both processes and outcomes associated with what people themselves term as well-being (Ungar, 2008). This definition shifts our understanding of resilience from an individual concept to a more culturally embedded understanding of well-being (Rashid, 2011). This study shows that African women immigrants have been adapting and transforming their coping skills commensurate with the challenges that demand a higher level of abilities and resiliency, such as, the need for education or for better employment. However, it is also worth noting that simple skills like gardening have also transformed and deepened their sense of cultural identity and resilience through connecting to the soil and the continuity of life through the nurturance of food crops. Talking about the experience of gardening, the women say that touching the soil gives them the connection to Africa and reinforces their identity, but at the same time, gives them a sense of grounding in their ‘new home away from home’.

Jackie:

Then the other piece is about the garden ... personally I was brought up in a farm and [one of] the skills that I learnt was gardening... you know when [I was] one yr. old my mom could not afford house girls so [I would] go with her [to the garden] with just a

bag and [I] lay down there ... [and] I learnt to pick tea when I was 2yrs old. ... [Gardening] ...that's one thing personally I want my kids to learn... so that when they go to [Africa] they can be able to go and get dirty and really enjoy it. I know my son enjoys it and now he [wants] to have his own piece of land ... [and now] looking back its one thing that I liked to do [when I was growing up]. I know my [youngest] son enjoys it and now he likes to have his own piece of land.

[At the garden] women come together and meet, share and visit [like we did] back home and then there is a kid's area where the kids again can come together [and play]. So, we are bringing that piece together and I like to tour there and talk to some Somali women. It really helps them because it gives them a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose cuz what they tend to do especially those ones that are not educated, and can't get a job all they do is sit and do nothing, watch tv and that's depressing but they know [at the garden] they have that sense of ownership that [they] can go anytime and know they own it.

...it's like a meeting place, a meeting ground you go there and the [Somali women] are happy...and I tell you their gardens do best because they are always watering some of us probably will water once a day or twice if we get a chance but them they are there every timeand then throughout the year they have something to look forward to they know they will be gardening ...so we have seen it grow.

Talking about that connectedness it reminds you of home because when I plant those onions, when I plant the Sukuma wikis [collard greens] when I plant the spinach like back ...it really reminds you of home that when you want something you go and

get it fresh from the garden, you go and get the tomatoes from the garden ...even the food is tasty.

Fatima:

We just moved to this place [a new house] in November, [but when] we had our mobile home. I dug on the ground. Farming is still my favorite. My dad is a farmer and our farm was being used to teach farmers about farming. So my dad would divide shamba [farm] in to portions for all of us, he'd then teach us to farm and whatever we harvested, we would sell for profit. We kept the profits! He encouraged us to be responsible and so it was my passion. So, I'd plant sukumas [collard greens] and nyanya [tomatoes] and He (dad) would sell them for me, I'd get like \$5 etc. I was obsessed.

Other coping skills include; learning new information, such as attending nutrition classes; upgrading their education; accessing and utilizing community resources; building social networks; and actively seeking out information about their new environments.

According to Okuyama (2014), collective roles of African women, such as the role of mothering and motherhood, spirituality and connection to the earth (nature), are important expressions of resiliency and survival of immigrant women. This concept of resilience is inexplicably connected to women's mode of resistance. In line with the participants' narratives of gardening as a life nurturing process speaks to their appropriation of both resilience and resistance.

Third world feminist (Collins, 1996; hooks, 1989; Mama 1995; Mohanty, 2003; Nnaemeka, 2004; Oyewumi, 2003) who have studied third world women have emphasized

the importance of challenging the western feminists' perception of resistance as overtly organized actions and performances. African women immigrants' everyday life experiences constitute forms of resistance at the intersection of race, class, gender, ethnicity, etc. Consequently, the analysis and findings of this study highlight the complexity of African immigrant narratives, which challenge the construction of immigrant women as passive and unengaged. African women immigrants continue to struggle in very specific ways to establish their identities as well as their empowerment, despite the challenges of immigration.

'Packing and Unpacking': Being Neither 'Here nor There'

During the many informal conversations that I have had with the immigrant women, it is interesting to see how the narratives of their experiences can give powerful insights into their experiences of immigration and how they make decisions about whether or not they are here to stay. In one of those conversations in Brooklyn Park, MN (Clement, personal notes, October 7, 2016) one of the participants talked about the concept of *'Packing and Unpacking'* to describe the deep-rooted sense of instability and vulnerability as immigrants in this country.

The metaphor of *'Packing and Unpacking'* as a performance of migration is key to understanding how important women make sense of migrating and whether migration itself is permanent and absolute or it is temporal. Many women shared that they had not really 'Unpacked' their bags. Many felt that the sense of not having *'Unpacked'* has not given them the ability to see the U.S. as their permanent home. As the conversation progressed, the women agreed that it is important for them to *'Unpack'* their bags, literally. One of the women in a very pensive mood said this about *'Unpacking'*, 'it's like being neither here nor

there’! This shows that if African women immigrants are to embrace and take full advantage of their status as immigrants who are *‘Here to Stay’* then they have to *‘Unpack’* and embrace the absoluteness of being ‘here’. While its vital to ‘unpack’ if the women decide to stay in the U.S. it is important to highlight that some aspects of their culture and cultural identity cannot be ‘unpacked’ because they are elements of their empowerment, identity, resilience and connection. Part of the women’s journey will be to learn what they need to hold on and what they need to let go as they make U.S. their permanent home.

An asset-based needs assessment of the Tigrinya, Amharic and Oromo-speaking communities (primarily from Ethiopia and Eritrea) in Edmonds, Burnaby, concluded that the Oromo Community Association was offering Oromo language courses and educational services that are geared towards the preservation, continuity and development of the Oromo culture and historical heritage to members and the community at large. This has helped strengthen individual life, family unity, and group survival in times of emergencies and social needs (Bailey, 2017). Offering such resources could help the African women immigrant as they try to ‘unpack’ here in in Minnesota.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

'African women in general need to know that it is ok for them to be the way they are- to see the way they are as a, strength and to be liberated from fear and from silence'.

~ Wangari Maathai ~

The goal of this study was to explore the narratives of African women immigrants and their perception of how their identities as immigrants have influenced their sense of themselves, families, culture and how they have navigated not only the disconnection from their countries of birth, but also the sense of marginality in the U.S. I explored the experiences of seven African women immigrants and the challenges that these women faced in the process of settling in their 'new home' in the state of Minnesota. Additionally, I identified approaches that the women used to negotiate their sense of belonging in their new homes away from home. The significance of this study is that it contributes to the body of knowledge on diversity and social justice within feminist discourse on immigration. Secondly, it established a platform for African women immigrants to voice their stories, revealing their strength, resilience, resistance and challenges, of immigrating to the U.S. In analyzing narratives of the participants in this study, I identified the following three main themes;

1. Arrival: Stories of Displacement and Dis-Ease
2. Negotiating Diaspora: Losses and Gains
3. *'We Are Here to Stay'*: Dealing with Loneliness and Isolation.

Immigration Process as a Journey

It is significant to note that the three themes represent various stages of women's experience of the immigration process as a 'journey'. The metaphor of 'journey' as a

representation of the women's understanding of their immigration process is important for various reasons.

1. The 'journey'—gives the impression of movement or fluidity. This means that the women see their immigration process as evolving and as a means to an end and not an end in itself.
2. The 'journey'—allows for a sense of unpredictable passage or progress from one place to another. The African adage, 'The one who travels does not leave a banana baking in the ashes', attests to this unpredictability and the uncertainty of return.
3. 'Journey' refers to a process that is open to a variety of challenges that are inevitable for one's growth and astuteness in dealing with such challenges.

The three themes representing the three stages of women's immigration journey, i.e., *Arrival*, *Negotiating Diaspora*, and *We Are Here to Stay*, helps us not only to understand how women make sense of each stage of their immigration journey, but reveals also a framework for understanding the challenges at every stage of the journey and how to respond to such challenges through policy and programming. For example;

Theme 1: *Arrival: Stories of Displacement and Dis-Ease*, articulates women's experience of displacement and dis-ease as a disruption to the normalcy of their lives that can ultimately be healed only by re-establishing meaningful ties.

Theme 2: *Negotiating Diaspora: Losses and Gains* speaks to the losses and gains of immigration with particular emphasis to the loss of identity. Women talked about their struggles of negotiating diaspora through concepts of resilience and resistance. The study revealed the importance of women's resilience and resistance in constructing their identities

with the hope to achieve a more optimal level of wellbeing in their host country. It's through the dynamics of interaction with the new place where the women aspired to re-discover and reconstruct their own identities and their wellbeing. This reconnection and the meaning given to the process establishes important healing and transformational strategies for negotiating diaspora for African women immigrants.

The third theme, '*We Are Here to Stay*', as the final stage of their immigration journey is a pronouncement of their resolve that they are here to stay. By understanding the totality of the relocation process and the stressors that are common amongst African women immigrants across the relocation process, policy makers at both local and state level can tailor interventions to the specific, exhaustive needs of immigrant populations with cultural competence. The interventions will include; 1) Understanding the immigrant women through the telling of their stories within a specific sociocultural context; 2) Understanding, respecting and acknowledging the immigrant women's worldview as crucial in formulating appropriate strategies that will assist them as they resettle in Minnesota. As an African immigrant feminist researcher, I have endeavored throughout this research process to empower women by focusing on their strengths rather than pathologizing their experiences in order to make a contribution towards developing policies friendly to African women immigrants in particular and immigrant communities in general.

On the basis of my analysis, it is evident that the participants' immigration to the U.S. was inconsistent with traditional conceptualizations of female migrants as trailing spouses. Four of the seven participants arrived as independent unmarried women. Although many African women immigrants struggle with English as a language barrier, particularly if they

didn't have exposure to formal education in Africa, all but one of the participants', had substantial English proficiency because they had gone to high school or finished their first degree in Africa. However, it was still difficult to navigate the language in the U.S. because they were not used to the American English. As a form of resilience, however, six of my seven participants had attained diplomas from higher education and one participant was to enroll in college the following year.

This study has provided important knowledge that furthers the understanding of African women immigrants' life experiences vis-à-vis their resilience. It is evident that disruption of African women immigrants established ways of being and the sense of life's meaning exposes them to extremely stressful experiences throughout this adaptation process. It is also evident that migration is not just a matter of adjusting to a new culture, rather, it encompasses contradictory demands of continuing lifelong beliefs and values while embracing new ways of living in the 'new home'. What is also clear is that for many African immigrant women, an individual's sense of life's meanings, personal values, moral frameworks, and commitments are greatly influenced by the culture of origin, spirituality, and family (Timberlake et al., 2003). Despite the challenges of immigration, this study found that African women immigrants continued to etch their place in Minnesota society, and their children and grandchildren will be driven by similar values shared by other Minnesotans. In summary, this study concludes the following;

1. The findings from this study fill a gap in the literature on African women immigrants' scholarship in the U.S. The study also provides critical information for the community, policy makers and institutions in Minnesota to develop

appropriate policies and practices that best serve this group of immigrants. I also hope that the study assists policy makers in addressing factors that influence the immigrants' integration process for the betterment of our diverse communities.

2. Immigration denotes displacement, and, arguably, whether the reasons for dispersal or displacement are forced or voluntary, the process of displacement, in itself, is disruptive.
3. The concept of 'arrival' denotes the process of entering both a contested and unfamiliar space. When African women immigrants enter U.S., for example, it is evidently clear that their identity as 'African', 'Immigrants', 'Third World', become contextualized as 'Other' in the Western space. Consequently, politics of race and representation become the basis of how African immigrant women are often defined in the communities in which they settle. Additionally, because the politics of race and ethnic relations are managed by the State and State Agents, which deal with immigrant services and settlement, they tend to be reinforced within immigrant communities to reproduce the 'Third world in the West'.
4. By giving African women immigrants a voice to tell their stories about their experiences of migration and understanding the meaning they make of those experiences, it is possible to better understand the kind of support that is necessary and helpful for the women.
5. In deciding ways to integrate African immigrant women in the community, it is imperative to pay attention to concepts like displacement and dis-ease, which are integral to their diasporic experiences. Therefore, their connection to 'place' for

these women not only mean creating health identities, but also providing protective spaces.

6. It is also important to note that African women immigrants' commitment to maintaining the ties with Africa as expressed in most of their narratives is really an effort to re-establish meaningful connections to the motherland and constitutes essential healing and transformational strategies for negotiating diaspora.
7. Disruption of such personal attachments, change of family roles, loss of identity, and difficulties in maintaining heritage create stress of being uprooted and trying to get ahead in a new country. This study shows that African women immigrants have been adapting and transforming their coping skills commensurate with the challenges that demand a higher level of abilities and resiliency. Simple skills like gardening have also transformed and deepened their sense of cultural identity and resilience through connecting to the soil and the continuity of life through the nurturance of food crops.
8. Collective roles of African women, such as the role of mothering and motherhood, spirituality and connection to the earth (nature), are not only important expressions of resiliency and survival, but have also become an impetus for reconceptualizing family and social relationships among the women immigrants and their families.
9. The analysis and findings of this study highlight the complexity of African immigrant women's lives at the intersection of race, class, gender, ethnicity etc., which challenge the construction of immigrant women as passive and unengaged. African women immigrants continue to struggle in very specific ways to establish

their identities as well as their empowerment despite the challenges of immigration.

10. The metaphor of '*Packing and Unpacking*' as a performance of migration is key to understanding how important women make sense of migrating and whether migration itself, is permanent and absolute or whether it is temporal. Many women shared that they had not really '*Unpacked*' their bags, which expresses a deep-rooted sense of instability and vulnerability. Many felt that the sense of not having '*Unpacked*' has not always given them the leverage to see the U.S. as their permanent home.
11. The statement, '*We Are Here to Stay*,' however, denotes an embodiment of women's sense of agency and the determination to act to change the circumstances and conditions of their existence in the host country. African women immigrants in Minnesota should continue with their organizing, because this will create cultural spaces for connection and empowerment. This coming together of women acts as a radical response to the postcolonial theory which has shaped many aspects of their daily lives.
12. While social structures and patriarchal ideologies in both home and host countries constrain African women immigrants, those same structures also, somehow, create spaces for these women's resistance and empowerment. Ultimately, the empowerment of African women immigrants will truly rest on their ability to see such structures, not simply as barriers to action, but also as preconditions and

impetus for the possibility of making meaningful choices with limited options as they negotiate the diaspora.

In the light of the foregoing, the following section lays out recommendations based on the findings deduced from African women's immigrants' narratives in this study. The recommendations should be considered for implementations at the State and Community levels.

Recommendations

Further research. Over 2.25 million Africans reside in the U.S. today, yet research focusing on African immigrants is sparse; research on African immigrant women in the U.S. is nearly non-existent (Ward, Sellers & Pate, 2005). Minnesota is experiencing a large influx of immigrants and refugee families, yet studies indicate that there is limited existing research exploring resilience and coping strategies of immigrant women. Therefore, there is still need for further feminist research about African immigrant women in Minnesota. According to Mwangi (2009), feminist research has to have the three tenets: 1) feminist research should be based on the premise that reality and knowledge are socially situated and constructed; 2) feminist research should be characterized by an emphasis on women's lived experiences and the significance of their everyday lives; and. 3) feminist research should be transformative by having a strong political and ideological commitment towards changing the positions of women, and thus changing the society (p. 33). One of the recommendations is that there should be increased research on immigrant women and immigrants in general. As this study has indicated, it will be impossible to develop inclusive policies for immigrants' integration into Minnesota without including immigrants' perspectives and culture.

Orientation programs for incoming immigrants (Welcome to America 101 Class).

I recommend a Welcome to America 101 class for newly arrived immigrants in Minnesota that will highlight different topics that new immigrants will need to resettle in their new home. I am also recommending that such classes be taught by immigrants who have already settled in Minnesota. Such topics would include;

- Human Rights class-This class would provide knowledge about the laws in the U.S and about their rights, which can enable them lodge legitimate grievances against employers, landlords, or even law enforcement.
- Financial Coaching classes- these classes will help immigrants in learning more about the credit system in Minnesota, specifically how to work with their banks, and creditors.
- Asset Training- Since immigrant women have decided this is home, attending a class on asset- specific training would be important in providing information about home or business ownership.
- Employment Counseling sessions–In light of the fact that the immigrants come from diverse backgrounds in the world, it is essential to be aware of adaptations to be made in traditional counseling in order to promote effective career counseling. This would include having culturally competent counselors in workforce centers and temp agencies that can help immigrant women as they move into the American world of work.
- Renting 101 classes–create a classroom training where participants learn about the renting process.

- College–Having an introductory class on college preparation, financial aid application, career counseling, course registration, and institutional orientation.

I also recommend;

- Restructuring and expanding of programs that serve the immigrant population to be culturally competent.
- Developing a network of organizations that deal with immigrants to share information.
- Developing and including programs on race and race discrimination.
- Improving transportation so as to improve access to resources.

Cultural Competency Training

As demographics change in communities across the Minnesota, it is important for organizations and companies statewide to provide staff training in order to enhance a client-centered model so as to improve the delivery of culturally appropriate services. The training will build awareness, knowledge, and skills in developing and implementing inclusive and responsive practices.

Increased Priority Funding for Cultural Specific Projects

I recommend providing increased funding for projects, spaces and activities where immigrants can congregate with the community. Specifically, I recommend;

- African women immigrants’ Cultural day to help women come together and showcase their cultural contributions as immigrants to Minnesota.
- Supporting culturally specific organizations like African Women Alliance [AWA] and NGATHA International, which fill important cultural, identity and social gaps

in the lives of African women immigrants. These organizations have recognized the lack of connections and networks that African immigrant women experience and, therefore, they aim to make the women more active through activities such as gardening and nutrition classes, which allow them to also meet new people as a strategy to facilitate informal relationships.

Community Healing Circles

I recommend community healing circles that will draw participants from as many parts of the community as possible to exchange information face-to-face, share personal stories and experiences, honestly express perspectives, clarify viewpoints, and develop solutions to community concerns. Participants would include; religious communities, the school community-parents, teachers, administrators, and students, police, business owners, community members, elected officials and community leaders.

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Appendix A: Adult Informed Consent Form

Title: THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION ON AFRICAN WOMEN IN MINNESOTA

Primary Investigator: Njeri Clement

Telephone: 320-241-3539

Introduction

In current discussions on immigration to the US, little attention had been given to the growing number of African immigrant women in Minnesota, an omission that is worth studying and of which I seek to address. In this study I hope to explore the challenges facing African immigrant women that hinder integration and successful settlement and the approaches they are using to help them assimilate and settle in the day-to-day life in Minnesota.

Purpose

The study will document practices by which the women negotiate their identity, construct meaning of their new and old home and their diaspora experiences. This research will attempt to address some important questions that still face African women in diaspora. They include: 1) what barriers hinder African immigrant women's integration and successful settlement in Minnesota. 2) What strategies are they using to address the challenges of assimilation?

The study will involve interview sessions of 1 hour which will consist of several key questions that will help to define the areas to be explored.

Risks and Discomforts

I don't foresee any negative consequences for you in taking part. I will come to the interview process with resources such as counselling services, domestic violence shelters, sexual assault center, and mental health center should you need them.

Benefits

Your story will provide in-depth understanding of your migratory journey to the USA and the findings from this study will fill a gap in the literature among one minority sub group, African immigrant women. The findings in this study will translate into useful information for the community, policy makers and institutions of higher learning in providing programs that you would want put in place to best meet your needs.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the information gathered during your participation in this study will be maintained. Fake names will be used for identifiable elements such as your name, the name of the organization you belong to, work place, places you live to keep your personal identity unidentifiable and confidential. All digital recording will be saved, kept in a locked file in my tablet and SCSU student file on my personal computer accessible with a password accessible only to me. Demographic results of participants will be reported in aggregate with no more than 1-2 descriptors presented together. By federal law, I will keep signed informed

consent forms for three years (45 CFR 46.116) and will destroy the transcripts one year after the study is completed.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. The study investigator may stop your participation at any time without your consent for the following reasons: if it appears to be medically harmful to you, if you fail to follow directions for participating in the study, if the study is canceled, or for reasons deemed appropriate by my advisor to maintain subject safety and the integrity of the study. The results of my findings will be disseminated in writing in my thesis which will be accessible at the SCSU library and in the future published in a research journal.

If you need any further information, you can contact me:

Njeri Clement
Phone: 320.241.3539
Email: clnj0701@stcloudstate.edu

OR

Dr. Beth Berila (Advisor)
Phone: 320.308.3912
Email: es.berila@stcloudstate.edu

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have consent to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty after signing this form.

Subject Name (Printed) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix B: Interview Guide

The Challenges Facing African Immigrant Women in Minnesota Developed by Njeri Clement

Note: My research is based on semi-structured in-depth interviewing. Therefore, most questions below are probing questions prepared in case the interviewee needs to be prompted for additional information.

Criteria of Participants:

- Women born in Africa living in MN
- Between ages 25yrs – 55yrs
- Raising children
- Married or divorced while in the USA

Demographics

1. Name
2. Please pick a pseudo/fake name I can refer to in my study in order to maintain your confidentiality
3. Age
4. Where do you live in Minnesota?
5. Which country did you come from?
6. What is your current occupation?
7. (Rough estimation) how much does the family earn?
8. School background: What is your highest level of education?

Family and Immigration Background

1. Could you tell me about your family background?
 - What was your life like before coming to the USA?
 - What type of income were your parents bringing home? What did they do for a living? Did you consider yourself well off, somewhat well off or barely making ends meet? Did you and your parents experience any financial difficulties?
2. Tell me about your family.
 - Are you married?
 - Do you have children? If so, how many? _____ and how old are they?

 - How did you and your family immigrate to Minnesota?
 - When did you come here?
 - Did you all come at the same time?
 - What is a typical day for you?

3. Tell me about your personal Journey to USA
- Did you speak English before coming here?
 - Did you have some income?
 - Did you know anyone here?
 - Did you have a job waiting for you here?
 - Do you have other family members here?
 - Did you receive any help? If so, what kind of assistance did you get, financial help, housing services, job offers, educational training, any forms of assistance.

Work and Finances

- Could you tell me about your job history and your future plans?

Other Probing Questions

- Are you currently employed?
- What do you do for a living? how many hours do you work
- Do you have a good support system at work?
- What is your household income? How much do each of you contribute to this income? Is the household income enough to spend?
- How do you prioritize your expenses if the income is not enough?

Future Plans

- What are your future career-plans?
- Do you have a savings account?
- Do you put money aside for retirement?

Family in Africa

- Does your family in Africa depend on you in one way or another?
- Considering that you have experienced living in Africa and USA would you classify yourself as living in poverty? If so in what ways?

New 'Home'

- What are some of the challenges/ the most pressing problems you are facing here in the US
- What have you had to learn about living in US?
- Your experiences to these Challenges and others you may experience:
 1. Access to getting a job: what was your first job in the US, how hard was it to find a job?
 2. Access to indigenous Food?
 3. Access to Education in the US, how was the system different from the one you knew?
 4. Gender roles- Have gender roles changed with your coming to the US?

5. Parenting- What does parenting mean to you and who is doing it, how are you raising your children? enrolling children in school, disciplining their children.
6. Healthcare- Do you have access to adequate health care
7. Housing- How is your experience in dealing with housing issues?
8. Language- Was it easy to understand English etc?
9. Friendships?
10. Access to having a hairdresser do your hair:

Other Challenges you are experiencing not listed above?

Community/Cultural Engagement

- Could you tell me about your involvement with particular communities and close friends?
- Are you involved with any particular community? What kind of community? In what ways do you engage with the community around you to promote your culture
- What have you lost as a result of immigration?
- Do the African women make a mark in the community and if so what is it?
- What are the culturally-focused resources available for them?

Experiences with residency status

- Could you tell me about your experience in dealing with immigration issues?

Probing questions:

1. What is your status here?
 2. What do you have to do to maintain this status?
 3. Did you experience any prejudice and discrimination?
 4. Could you describe the process of applying for a residency card?
 5. Who did you talk to about immigration and residency status issues?
 6. Who or what organizations have provided support?
 7. How was your experience in dealing with clerks and other officials?
- How are you addressing your problems?

What program would you want to put in place to help you settle in the Minnesota?

What words of advice would you tell an immigrant woman who is new to the country?

Appendix C: IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South MC 204K, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Njeri Clement
Address 1036 22 nd Ave. North
 St. Cloud, MN 56303 USA
Email: clnj0701@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: Expedited Review-1

Project Title: The Impact of Immigration on African Women in Minnesota

Advisor Beth Berila

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

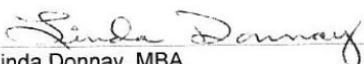
-Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.


- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-3290 or email ri@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

Institutional Review Board:


 Linda Donnay, MBA
 IRB Administrator
 Director, Research Integrity

IRB Institutional Official:


 Dr. Marilyn Hart
 Interim Associate Provost for Research
 Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 1549 - 1930

1st Year Approval Date: 2/9/2016

1st Year Expiration Date: 2/8/2017

Type: Expedited Review-1

2nd Year Approval Date:

2nd Year Expiration Date:

Today's Date: 2/10/2016

3rd Year Approval Date:

3rd Year Expiration Date:

African Women's Alliance

P. O. Box 2172,
St Cloud MN 56301

To Whom It May Concern

This is to confirm that African Women's Alliance will be supporting Njeri Clements to recruit subjects for her Thesis. We support her research on THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION ON AFRICAN WOMEN IN MINNESOTA. The study documents the multifaceted social, economic, and cultural practices by which the women construct meaning of their new home and their diaspora experiences. In-depth interviews of African immigrant women will be conducted to collect data. In this study I hope to explore the challenges facing African immigrant women that hinder integration and successful settlement and the approaches they are using to help them assimilate and settle in the day-to-day life in Minnesota.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. You can reach me on 320 203 8964 or florionzi@gmail.com.

Beth Gathetu

Vice Chair