

**THE POWER OF AGENCY: TRANSFORMATION OF GENDER ROLES AND  
MARITAL RELATIONS AMONG NIGERIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN  
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA**

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Department of Women and Gender Studies  
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## **Abstract**

This research explores the shifting subjectivities of eight Nigerian immigrant women as they negotiate gender roles and marital relations in Lethbridge. Using the Gendered Geographies of Power framework, this study uncovers a reflexive relationship between the social location of participants, and the type and degree of agency that they display as immigrant women, mothers, and wives, within geographies that include, the Canadian labour market, extended family networks in Nigeria, and nuclear households in Canada. Overall, findings show that by demonstrating agency, participants were able to appropriate social-cultural realities of migration and transnational living for the transformation of marital relations in ways that promoted gendered wellbeing and positioning within their marriages.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1.0 Starting From I: Why and How I Came to Choose My Research Study

“No Research is carried out in a vacuum. The very questions we ask are always informed by the historical moment we inhabit” (McRobbie, 1982; pp. 48).

The idea for this research was first conceived as an attempt to understand my own experience as a Nigerian immigrant woman living in the United Kingdom (UK). Shortly after my marriage in 2010, I migrated to join my husband who lived in the UK. This gave me the opportunity to attain the status of an “ara ilu oyinbo”, a Yoruba<sup>1</sup> colloquial for someone who lives abroad. I consequently joined the teeming population of Nigerian women leading transnational lives abroad. In this new environment, I met and befriended a number of married Nigerian women. I became intimate with their triumphs and struggles as they negotiated familial—marital, kinship, motherhood— and other social relationships that are not entirely foregrounded in the new home space, but reach back and forth to the home country—Nigeria.

In the first few months of my arrival in the UK, I observed the circulation of a particular narrative concerning Nigerian immigrant women among some Nigerian men, and a few non-Nigerian friends both male and female. Many of them expressed a view that Nigerian women tend to gain varying degrees of empowerment in their social conditions once they migrated to western countries. For instance, the narratives told of Nigerian immigrant women who were economically disadvantaged prior to their migration, taking advantage of economic opportunities in the new country of residency.

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<sup>1</sup> Yoruba is one of Nigeria’s many ethnic languages

This, according to the narratives, paved the way for their economic independence. The men further suggested that this economic empowerment led to wider social empowerment with a disadvantage to marital harmony. For example, they claimed that such women become “uncontrollable” and clamour for greater influence in marital bargaining, which subsequently led to marital conflict. In response to such narratives, I was often on the defensive, viewing such narratives as lazy and myopic attempts to explain the migration realities of these women. Overall, I concluded that such narratives were inadequate generalizations on the realities of Nigerian immigrant women in western countries. Also, I felt they sought to establish that all Nigerian immigrant women came from a position of inequality, passivity, and subordination prior to migration. Secondly, I believe it objectified the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women without taking into consideration their agency—the freedom of individuals to continually act in ways that promote their wellbeing and subjective identities within social relationships and processes (Davis, 1991).

I concluded, then, that popular ideas about Nigerian immigrant women were broad sweeping statements with limited empirical evidence. However, I could not stop thinking about the possibility of conducting a study that would explore the assumptions highlighted above, and produce a thesis that will present the lived realities of Nigerian immigrant women living in a western context; taking cognizance of their unique experiences with regards to their migration goals, background, class, immigration status, and religious background. This motivated me to investigate marital relationships among Nigerian immigrant women in Southern Alberta.

I started this academic journey in January 2013 with two personal goals in view. First, I hoped that, like many feminists before me, (Reinharz, 1992; Blackman, 1998; Bettie, 2003; and Blackman 2007), I would be able to understand my own reality better through this research. Secondly, I hoped to contribute to the feminist scholarship on Nigerian immigrant women in Canada. An evaluation of these two personal research objectives in the light of McRobbie's (1982) submission that feminist research can result in emancipation, contribute to academic debate, and help researchers find meaning in their social locations. Hence, feminist research can have shifting functions for social actors involved in the research such as research participants, academic community, and researcher.

### **1.1 “We Are Here”: Establishing the Presence of Nigerians in Canada**

Post-independent Nigeria has witnessed mass emigration of its people to other parts of the world at various times of economic and political uncertainties. One such notable period was during the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of 1986<sup>2</sup> by the second republican government under the leadership of General Ibrahim Babangida. Since then, the country's fortune has gradually declined due to persistent economic downturn, corruption, and political instability. All of these fostered further emigration (Afolayan et al., 2008). In the 2000 census, the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty (DRC) estimated that a little over a million immigrants from Nigeria live abroad and expected the figures to steadily increase over the years (DRC, 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> The Structural Adjustment Programme of 1986 was a fiscal policy response of the government of Nigeria to the sharp fall in the price of crude oil, which was the main source of income for the country at the time. This led to the devaluation of the nation's currency and the removal of government subsidy from social services such as health that adversely affected low income earners particularly women (Thomas-Emeagwali, 2002).

Canada is one of the destination countries for immigrants from Nigeria due to the fact that Canadian immigration policies dovetail with the state's commitment to a rhetoric of multiculturalism. Presently, Nigeria is officially the number one source country for economic migrants coming to settle permanently in Canada from Africa (Government of Canada, 2015). During the period 2013 to 2014, an estimated annual average of 4,170 landed immigrants of Nigerian origin were welcomed into Canada in comparison to estimated annual averages of 3,660 and 2,870 respectively for Egypt and Tunisia, which were two other top source countries of permanent residents that came to Canada from Africa within the same time-frame (Government of Canada, 2015). The top position of Nigeria is no surprise considering that Nigerians are a globally mobile population. Language compatibility with many English-speaking nations, established social networks across migrant receiving countries, and a high literate population makes Nigerians globally mobile (Oucho, 2011).

Currently, aside from very basic information on African immigrants in Canada provided by the Canadian government, there is very little up-to-date data relating to the accurate number of immigrants of Nigerian origin living in different provinces across Canada. With this gap in statistics it is difficult to get a clear picture of the total population of Nigerians residing in Canada today. Addressing the dearth in official statistics, Banjo (2012) suggests that due to the lumping together of immigrants from continental Africa into a single category of "blacks" of African origin on census documents it is impossible to know the exact number of immigrants from specific African countries living in Canada.

However, if we are to go by the number of Nigerian Cultural Associations in Canada, we can conclude that Nigerian immigrants have a significant presence in the cultural mosaic of Canada. From my personal networks and web search, I have discovered that almost every major city in Canada has one Nigerian cultural organization of some sort; for example, there are active Nigerian immigrant associations in Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Vancouver, Toronto, and Lethbridge. These organizations are set up as not-for-profit cultural and educational organizations with the aim of providing social and economic assistance to Nigerians living in specific geographical areas in Canada. The formation of these cultural associations in Canadian cities is a reflection of pre-existing social organizations that are common in various urban areas around Nigeria, often formed along ethnic and hometown cleavages (Abott, 2006). However, in contrast to these ethnic and hometown associations, most Nigerian immigrant associations in North America are mostly formed and based on a shared sense of national identity rather than strict ethno-cultural basis.<sup>3</sup> A few studies, conducted largely in the United States, have shown Nigerian immigrant associations to be valuable avenues for immigrants to sustain transnational ties with their homeland (Abbott, 2002; Honey and Okafor, 1998; and Trager, 2001). They do so through activities like Nigerian celebration of national holidays, organizing philanthropic initiatives such as building of schools and awarding of scholarships to indigent students in Nigeria.

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<sup>3</sup> Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation, with more than 250 ethnic groups. Ethnocentrism, whereby people are socially and politically divided along ethnic lines is a problem common to Nigeria (Uzoigwe and Nwadiolor, 2013).

## 1.2 Scope of Research

Migration is the history of the world (Bonifacio, 2012). From time immemorial migrants or immigrants—people who physically move from one place to another to settle temporarily or permanently— whether as individuals or groups move from one place to another motivated by economic and socio-political factors (Hondagneu-sotelo, 1999). A common reason for migration is the search for better economic opportunities that will enhance the acquisition of life’s perceived necessities and luxuries. This is the case of migrant workers that move across national borders to engage in paid employment in the receiving countries. Socio-political reasons for migration include escape from political persecution and unrest, or even natural disasters in the home countries. Regardless of the motivation to migrate, studies have shown that the processes and experiences of migration, in varying degrees and manners, impact the lives of migrants and those that are connected to them but do not move, as well as institutions and structures located in both sending and receiving countries.

According Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), transnationalism, a concept that describes the multiple ties and relationships that link individuals across national borders, recognizes that immigrants maintain both tangible and intangible connections between their home-countries and their country of settlement. Although immigrants have moved from their home countries, they continue to engage in everyday socio-cultural, political and economic practices and processes rooted there as though they were still in their countries of origin. Meanwhile, as they participate in processes and practices foregrounded in their home countries, they are also encountering and negotiating new process and practices in their new countries of residence. One result of simultaneous

interactions by immigrants in both their home and host countries is the opportunities to either sustain, reconfigure, or transform pre-immigration status quo in relation to gender and social relationships, depending on the degree of difference between home and host societies (Mahler and Pessar 2003; Jibeen and Hynie 2012; Ojong and Mathuki 2010).

Gender is the social and cultural construction of what it means to be masculine and feminine (Lorber, 2006). Furthermore, gender ideologies are attitudes regarding appropriate role, rights and responsibilities of men and women in public and private spheres such as familial, legal, political and economic, which are held by particular societies (Kroska, 2007). Gender and gender ideologies are intrinsic elements that shape social life. Accordingly, scholars such as Hondagneu-Sotelo (1999) and Mahler and Pessar (2006) advocate that such concepts should be integrated in immigration studies. To a large extent, gender ideologies not only shape the direction for gender relations among individuals in a particular society but they also form a basis for differentiating one society from the other (Hofman, 2014). According to Davis and Greenstein (2009), societies can be differentiated and identified along gender ideologies spectra, which range from patriarchal/traditional societies to less patriarchal/egalitarian societies.

Patriarchal or traditional societies refer to societies that adhere to culturally inscribed gender ideologies to a large extent. Within these societies, the set of expectation, beliefs, and norms regarding men and women's roles, responsibilities and rights are strictly delineated. Men are predominantly positioned within the public domain of social processes, structures and institutions, and they hold primary decision-making roles within the private sphere of households. In such societies, women are restricted to the domestic sphere and hold secondary decision-making roles (Davis and Greenstein, 2009). In

contrast, Davis and Greenstein (2009) note that egalitarian societies rhetorically promote equal opportunities for men and women. Both genders presumably have equal influence in decision-making processes in both public and private spheres of an egalitarian society.

It should be noted that categorizing a society as either traditional or egalitarian does not completely rule out egalitarian tendencies among individuals in the former, or patriarchal tendencies directed towards individuals in the latter society. Rather, as Lorber (2006) asserts, gender is placed in the centre between ideological factors and structural factors within society. She explains that gender ideologies and structural factors interrelate in ways that condition gender relations in a particular society, and changes in one spectrum can affect gender relations to another. For instance, while post-industrialized societies like Canada and the United Kingdom may not claim that gender equality ideology is prevalent in all spheres of their social life, the structural properties within the legal institutions in these two societies have evolved through time to the point of applying equality to both men and women (Lorber, 2006). The legal systems in these post-industrialized societies provide significant equal protections about rights and responsibilities of men and women with regards to family support and maintenance, childcare, and economic independence. The egalitarian structures of these societies enhance the adoption of egalitarian ideologies among individuals. In contrast, Nigeria has a slowly evolving legal institution that is not as egalitarian with regards to extending equal rights to both men and women like in Canada.

Regardless of my categorization of Nigeria and Canada as traditional and egalitarian contexts respectively, there are traces of patriarchal displays in both societies. From my experience living in both countries, what distinguishes one from the other is the degree to

which patriarchy is enunciated in social relationships. In Nigeria, there is pronounced public acceptance for reproducing traditional values in social life in comparison to the Canadian context. For instance, wife battering is easily accommodated as a family matter that should be settled at the domestic level, even when cases are reported to protection agencies such as the police. Conflict resolution at the family level often involve blaming wives for their experience of physical abuse, or at best appealing to battered wife to forgive errant spouses. At this level, there is no tangible means for such women to seek redress against abusive husbands. Women who choose to pursue formal redress through the justice system can often be openly confronted and labeled as unforgiving and overbearing by acquaintances. Meanwhile, the same case of wife battering in Canada is openly recognized as criminal by society. There are law enforcement agencies and social support networks in place to help battered women seek redress. Yet, individuals working within these agencies in Canada can sometimes hold patriarchal tendencies shrouded in discrimination and prejudice against battered women that approach them for redress and support, which could impact the quality of service they provide for such women. A good example of this is evident in the poor handling of domestic violence cases involving Aboriginal women in Canada, due to institutionalized displays of racism and class discrimination in the police and social services system (Dylan, Regehr and Alaggia, 2008).

Intersecting differences in ethnicity and race among countries are foregrounded in history and cultural evolution. These account for the differences in prevailing gender ideologies observable among diverse societies (Davis and Greenstein, 2009). It is on the basis of the foregoing differentiation between traditional societies and egalitarian

societies that I identify and differentiate Nigeria and Canada in this research. Although I foresee criticism of my use of traditional versus egalitarian nomenclatures to differentiate between societies as simplistic, I believe it is a good takeoff point for differentiating between countries or societies without resorting to the use of ambiguous constructs such as “Third World” and “First World” countries.

A review of migration literature reveals that a lot of attention is being paid to investigation and understanding of migration experiences of women who migrated from traditional societies to egalitarian societies. The difference in the socio-cultural make up of the sending and receiving countries makes it worthwhile, to study the impact on the lives of immigrant women within significant social scales like the family, kinship systems, and community based in the origin and host countries.

Foner (1997) observes that many female immigrants live much of their lives in the context of family units as wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters. It is within the social scale of family life that scholars investigate how the realities of these women are shaped by a complex interaction of socio-cultural processes, practices, structures situated *both in their countries of origin and residency*. The emphasis placed on “*both in their countries of origin and residency*” is to highlight the argument made by immigration and transnational scholars (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, 1995; Vertovec, 1999; Pries 2001; Itzigson and Saucedo, 2002; Portes and Zhou 2012; Strunk 2014) that immigrants living outside their countries of origin do not lose touch with their homeland. Instead, they live with consciousness, and appropriate ways to participate in socio-cultural practices, processes, and structures in their sending countries even though they are physically living in a new country. Migration scholars note that the

condition of simultaneous negotiation of social life between countries where the cultural norms, beliefs and values differ from those encountered in the new destination can have unprecedented consequences for the household dynamics and relationships of immigrant women, in ways that could be subjugating, empowering, or transformational for the women (Foner, 1997; Jibeen and Hynie, 2012; Kabeer, 2005; Ojong and Muthuki, 2010; Pesser, 2005; and Zentgraf, 2002). In the following paragraphs I discuss studies that illustrate varying outcomes of immigration realities in the lives of immigrant women from traditional societies as they negotiate marital relations in less traditional societies.

Kibria (1990) carried out an ethnographic study among Vietnamese immigrant women's networks and groups in the United States. She explored the impact of migration on the gender roles and marital relations of participants. These women migrate from a largely patriarchal culture where women's roles are restricted to childcare and homemaking, and men hold breadwinning role. Women's roles as mothers and homemakers significantly position them to be economically disadvantaged. They therefore depend on their working spouses for their livelihood, a situation which exposes them to gender inequalities with regards to influencing household financial decisions.

However, regardless of the economic marginalization experienced by the general Vietnamese immigrant population in the United States, Vietnamese women were more resourceful in maximizing the limited economic opportunities available to them in the receiving country. Groups of immigrant women used their collective resources to set up and work in Vietnamese-owned service establishments such as grocery stores and beauty parlors. As a result, they were economically empowered to contribute to their household economies in greater measure in comparison to their pre-immigration situation.

Meanwhile, immigrant men experienced decline in their economic mobility, which displaced them from their pre-immigration breadwinning roles (Kibria, 1990).

As a consequence of economic empowerment, women began to express dissatisfaction and clamoured for greater influence in marital relations. However, male spouses resisted the women's expression of dissatisfaction with patriarchy in marital relations, and this resulted in constant marital disputes. As a means to cope effectively with patriarchy and ensure marital continuity in the face of resistance from men, Vietnamese women relied on their ethnic women's groups and networks, as a source of collective power and support to mediate in marital disputes in United States. This way Vietnamese immigrant women appropriated the social and economic resources provided by their women's network to bargain within patriarchal structures in manners that maximize their power and options—in this case, the opportunity to reconcile with estranged spouses—as they continue to go through intense period of renegotiation of gender roles and marital relations with their spouses (Kibria, 1990).

In another study, Darvishpour (2002) highlights how changing power relations between Iranian spouses in the Swedish context aggravate marital tension and eventual separation. Following their migration from Iran, considered another traditional society, Iranian women were more amenable to spousal separation and divorce—outcomes that they viewed as objectionable prior to migrating—as reasonable options for them to exit abusive and patriarchal controlled marriages. The inability of Iranian immigrant men to continue in their pre-immigration careers displaced the men from their breadwinning roles in households. Consequently, wives that had prior to migration stayed out of the labour economy in order to be full-time homemakers, as culturally determined, became

pressured to seek economic opportunities in the Swedish labour economy to support their households' resettlement expenses. For those that had no prior higher-level education, they were able to access social support to upgrade their education. This improved their economic and social standing in Sweden.

Darvishpour (2002) argue that with Iranian immigrant women's educational advancement and increase participation in the labour economy, the difference between Iranian men and women's educational and employment levels became significantly reduced post-immigration. The situation increased women's economic independence since they depended more on the state and the market, rather than on their spouses, as was the case prior to migration. Opposed to the economic emancipation of the women, Iranian spouses attempted to undermine women's post immigration autonomy by insisting on the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and patriarchy at home. Emancipated wives openly opposed such attempts. In response to women's opposition to patriarchal traditions, male spouses resorted to wife battering to reinforce their male-authority in the household. Rather than endure abusive relationships, some Iranian immigrant women used their knowledge of egalitarian norms, societal acceptance for divorce, and the Swedish family legislations that protect the rights of women, as resources to initiate marital separations and eventual divorce. As separated women and divorcees, Iranian immigrant women in Sweden adopt a new identity that is not based on their traditional roles within the family. This transforms their relationships with their ex-spouses.

The studies by Kibria (1990) and Darvishpour (2002) demonstrate the varied impacts of migration in the lives of immigrant women. These researches represent a small tip of

the iceberg with regards to the countless number of studies on the impact of migration on marital relations of immigrant women from traditional societies. Kibria (1990) and Darvishpour (2002) address how the contexts of receiving communities present opportunities and challenges for immigrant women to intentionally and strategically renegotiate and transform traditional gender roles in marital relations. These strategies are either ingrained within their home culture, as in the case of Vietnamese women (Kibria 1990), or connected to resources available in the immigration context, as in the case of the Iranian immigrant women in Sweden (Darvishpour, 2002).

Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale and Chinichian (2011) commend the increased interest by migration scholars into studying the lived experiences of immigrant women from traditional societies. In their view, findings from such studies will provide a foundation from which receiving countries can design community based programs and integration policies that acknowledge the public and private challenges faced by immigrant women as they try to settle down in the new country. However, Darvishpour (2002) advocates for such studies to be increasingly contextualized. This implies that studies should present culture-specific researches that have been narrowed down to homogenous immigrant women's experience within particular immigration context. For example, instead of studying the experience of African immigrant women in Canada as a broad approach, research can be narrowed down to study Nigerian immigrant women living in Canada, and then even made more specific in as to where in Canada these live.

The call by Darvishpour (2002) for contextualized studies on immigrant women's immigration experiences is based on the observation that there is a tendency for mainstream populations in host countries to over-generalize findings of few studies—

particularly those that elaborate on their experiences of disadvantage and oppression—to the greater population of immigrant women from traditional cultural backgrounds. To apply research findings broadly disregards the reality of diverse differences with regards to immigration status, generation, class, religion, ethnicity, and race among immigrant women. These differences intersect with conditions unique to each receiving country to produce particular immigration experiences for women. The heterogeneity in the social positioning of immigrant women contributes to differences in the ways they negotiate and accommodate structures and social relationships that they encounter in receiving countries (Heisg, 1997).

Amid calls for contextualized research into the lived experiences of immigrant women, Mahler and Pessar (2001) express concern about the approach of migration researchers in investigating and analyzing data about the experiences of immigrants in general. They opine that many research claims are established in isolation of a gendered analysis that acknowledge the agency of immigrants in relation to their resourcefulness vis-à-vis their social location within multiple hierarchies of power in their home and host countries. They therefore recommend a gendered analytical framework to help migration researchers carry out case studies and comparative analysis of the experiences of immigrants. Much of Mahler and Pessar's (2001; 2003) proposed analytical framework—Gendered Geographies of Power (hereafter GGP)—is discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. Following Darvishpour's (2002) challenge for contextualized studies on immigrant women, I use the GGP framework to investigate the lived realities of Nigerian immigrant women living in Lethbridge, Alberta. This study contributes to the body of

contextualized studies on immigrant women from traditional societies negotiating life in egalitarian societies, presenting a gendered viewpoint through the GGP framework.

### **1.3 Research Problem and Questions**

Migration and transnational studies (Dasgupta 1998; Bonney and Love 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford 2006) have established that female immigrants live much of their lives in the context of family units as wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters. Significantly, their subjective realities are shaped within these familial contexts by a complex interaction of their social positioning within intersecting axes of difference. These axes of difference include gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and age—alongside socio-cultural and political processes, and practices operating in both their countries of origin and residency due to conditions of transnational realities.

A review of feminist migration literature shows that the experiences of immigrant women who move from traditional societies to egalitarian societies have attracted attention lately. For these women, the move from a society where cultural norms, beliefs and values regarding gender differ from those encountered in the host society is said to promote unprecedented consequences for family relationships (Jibeen and Hynie, 2012; Ojong and Muthuki, 2010; Pesser, 2005; and Zengraf, 2002)). Notable among such consequences is the assertion that it has the potential to transform gender roles and marital relationships particularly if the structures in the new society promote less patriarchal gender ideologies and tendencies in comparison to those of the sending country. I investigate how this assertion applies to Nigerian immigrant women in Lethbridge—a small southern Alberta city in Canada—in the light of their social agency. To this end, my research focused on the following questions:

- a) What is the impact of migration and transnational living on the gender roles and marital relations of Nigerian women living in Lethbridge?
- b) In what ways have Nigerian immigrant women used their agency to propagate possible changes in their gender roles and marital relations post-migration?

#### **1.4 Limitations of the Research**

A major limitation of this research was time. A longitudinal study would have enabled me to observe the changes in marital relationship of the participants over an extended period. However, this was not possible within the time frame available for the study. The conclusions drawn from this six-month study represent a snapshot of the lived experiences of participants during the time frame of the study. In addition, my study site was limited to Lethbridge due to reduced mobility. I tried to recruit participants from other neighbouring towns but was inhibited by the absence of affordable and reliable transit system that connects towns in southern Alberta. Nonetheless, I do not expect this to have a significant impact on the quality of the research because most towns in southern Alberta are similar; collectively they are considered socially conservative (Adams, 2014). Also, as the data collection method was purely qualitative requiring a small sample size, my research findings is not representative of the experiences of every Nigerian immigrant woman in Canada.

#### **1.6 Outline of Chapters**

This thesis is presented in seven chapters. In Chapter One, I set the stage for the study by highlighting my personal motivations for conducting the research. I established the presence of Nigerian immigrants in Canada. I also framed the research scope,

problem and questions based on relevant literature. I concluded with a discussion of the limitations of the study.

In Chapter Two, I introduce the heterogeneous identities of Nigerian women through time and space in the Nigerian context. In addition, I highlight prominent scholarly studies that explore the transnational experiences of Nigerian immigrant women from different perspectives such as their labour and leadership experiences. I then situate my own study as an attempt to give a feminist account of their lived experiences as they negotiate marital life in Canada. In Chapter Three, I discuss the theoretical framework that guided my research. I introduced the GGP framework as an analytical tool for studying the contextual realities of participants, with regards to their gender roles and marital relations.

Chapter Four discusses the research methods and methodology used in carrying out this study. This chapter presents the research philosophy, epistemology, research design, and strategy of the study. Issues relating to ethical considerations are also highlighted, as well as a detailed profile of the eight Nigerian immigrant women who participated in the research.

Chapter Five thematically presents analyses of findings relating to the motivation of participants to relocate to Canada as a family unit. This provides more understanding into the social location of participants prior to migration. Next, it elaborates in detail the settlement challenges encountered by participants post-migration and feelings regarding these. Finally, Chapter Five highlights the strategies used by households to negotiate settlement challenges mediated by their social positioning with regards to gender, race, class, and status within the Nigerian and Canadian contexts. This

includes brief insights into the process of consultation used by couples to decide on strategies used to mitigate challenges of settling into a new country. It also provides an understanding into the nature of gender roles and marital relations among couples.

Chapter Six discusses research findings relating to the ideologies that moderated marital relations of participants. Also, I discuss passiveness and submission as substantial initiatives of agency for breaking down patriarchal constraints; and redefinition of marital equality among participants. Another theme highlighted in this chapter is participants' experiences of cultural policing—the use of some control, or safeguarding of particular culture to ensure that members affiliated to a cultural identity behave in ways that are considered culturally correct—as a constraining condition for improving marital positioning.

Chapter Seven returns to a discussion of the GGP, assessing its usefulness in my study. It also shows how my research enhances its relevance for further gender and migration studies. Finally, I provide my conclusion on the thesis by presenting a summary of the study, reiteration of key findings, and recommendation for future studies.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Historical and Social Context of Study**

#### **2.0 Roles in Household Economy and Gender Relations through Time**

It is important to understand the historical influences that shape Nigerian women today and their roles in the household. An attempt to look at the past in order to establish the position of Nigerian women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is by no means an attempt to objectify their identities. On the contrary, the purpose is to shed light into how societal structures at various historical points have helped to shape their identities particularly in Nigerian society. Insights provided throughout this chapter will show how history has presented women with possibilities and challenges, which influence their wellbeing and exercise of agency (Lerner, 1975).

Nigeria is a former British colony located in the western fringes of the African continent. “Nigeria”, as a socio-political entity, did not exist until 1914 with the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates of the Niger area by the British colonial power (Falola and Heaton, 2008). The country remained under British rule until 1960 when it gained independence. Based on its colonial history, Nigeria can be divided into three distinct historical periods: pre-colonial era (pre-1800’s), colonial era (1800-1960), and post-colonial era (1960 to date). In this section, I trace the roles played by Nigerian women in household economies and gender relations through these periods.

##### **2.0.0 Pre-Colonial Era (pre-1800’s)**

Pre-colonial Nigeria was made up of a number of sovereign kingdoms and empires (Falola and Heaton, 2008). Notable among these sovereign areas were the northeastern Kingdom of Borno; the Hausa kingdoms of Kano, Katsina, Zaria and Gobir;

the Yoruba kingdoms of Oyo, Ife and Ijebu; the Great Benin Kingdom; and the Igbo communities of the Eastern regions. These political entities were spread out from the North to the South, East, and West of present day Nigeria. Each community had its own traditions and customs from which individuals derived their traditional roles and identities. During this period it was uncommon to find women at the helm of public affairs, although a few strong women rose to power such as the renowned Queen Amina of Zaria and Ebele Ajanu of the Igala Kingdom. These women were in the minority, and attained political power due to their strong will and exceptional display of courage in their community where men had failed to provide leadership (Falola and Heaton, 2008).

At the economic level, women were in charge of household production and trade, while men were more involved in primary production: that is, they worked the land and harvested the abundant resources provided by nature. Women were in charge of converting them into commercial products that they sold or bartered for the economic sustenance of their family. The relationship that existed between men and women in the economic life of the household was complementary based on traditional gender ideologies. Men and women had clearly defined gender boundaries in terms of their roles in the household. Such division in roles allowed each gender to have autonomy in their area of influence (Kure, 2011). For instance, women had more say in the home and market places, while men were concerned with managing communal rites and rituals in the community formed on the basis of their agrarian occupations. Regardless of the complementary nature of the relationship that existed between men and women economically, there was an unspoken truth that men were the head of the family and women simply supported them in this role (Falola, 2001 and Falola, 2013). Indigenous

religious beliefs were used to rationalize this kind of gender and power imbalance in marriage as most societies were organized along religious lines (Thomas-Emeagwali, 2002).

At the domestic front, women played vital roles as mothers and caregivers. A woman's ability to improve her position within the household was significantly dependent on her ability to bear children, with a preference for male children (Falola, 2013), and raise them to be good citizens according to the cultural standards of her people. Respectable women were those who ensured the preservation of tradition and the continuity of the community by adhering to their roles as mothers and caregivers (Falola, 2013). Aside from the ability to procreate, women were also able to gain respect and power by age and seniority among the ranks of women married into the extended family unit. The older a woman was, and the longer married, the more respect and influence she had within the larger family unit (Falola 2013). Despite women's access to power and respect in the household through motherhood, age and experience, most households operated on a hierarchy of privileges, which was a reflection of how things were in the larger community. This sort of hierarchy of privilege profited men more than women (Kure, 2011). For instance, elderly men were accorded more respect than their female counterparts; husbands more than wives, and sons more than daughters.

### **2.0.1 Colonial Era (1800-1960)**

Falola and Heaton (2008) note that societies in pre-colonial Nigeria had maintained a vibrant relationship with the outside world, particularly Britain. The British had a longstanding relationship based on trade and missionary activities with various socio-political groups that make up present day Nigeria. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

however, Britain unfairly consolidated the relationship by amalgamating the southern and the northern protectorates into a single entity under the rule of the British Empire; thus making Nigeria a British colony. With the colonization of Nigeria, the British authority imposed Eurocentric ideologies on pre-colonial societies, which led to the establishment of formalized patriarchal structures. For instance, a formal education system, which did not exist in pre-colonial Nigeria, was formed and tailored to train more men than women to take on positions in the Nigerian civil service. Patriarchy once formalized ensured that men and women were segregated in society along gender lines, with men having privy to prestige and power at the expense of women. This development contributed to the undermining of what little power women had in the private and public space before this period (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004; Thomas-Emeagwali, 2002).

As noted by Falola (2013), colonialism at any point in time has the potential to negatively strengthen or weaken indigenous cultures to suit the desired achievement of goals of the colonial authority. This assertion rang true in the Nigerian colonial experience. The British promoted Eurocentric ideas in Nigeria consistent with its agenda of colonization. The disenfranchisement of women, the allocation of property rights to men, and the recognition of men as representatives of their families were some of the Eurocentric ideas pushed forward by the colonial powers, which was a reflection of the situation in Great Britain in this period (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004). British society at the time was largely patriarchal and law was used to control women's sexuality, fertility, and life choices (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004). British colonial authorities therefore used laws to promote inequality of the sexes, which was exaggerated in all aspects of life, both in the public sphere and privacy of the household (Kure, 2011).

Notwithstanding the inequalities between the sexes, Nigerian women were still able to make some progress during the colonial period with respect to social status. British Christian missionaries, who arrived a few decades before formal British rule was established, introduced Western education in pre-colonial Nigeria particularly in the Southern part of the country. This was because the culture of Southern Nigeria was more receptive to the idea of girl-child education in contrast to the Northern where the purdah culture secluded women and girls from attending schools (Kure, 2011). Nonetheless, even in the South, few women took advantage of educational opportunities offered by Christian missionary groups. Even with their access to western education these were significantly limited in their life choices.

Women who went through formal education were trained in occupations that reflected the traditional ideologies regarding female roles as homemakers and nurturers. Such occupations included nursing, teaching and dressmaking, Aside from the gendered nature of these professions, they were also far less compensated in the labour market in comparison to male dominated professions such as engineering (Kure, 2011). Hence, the empowerment potential of education for women at this time was exaggerated (Falola, 2013) as it did little to improve their socio-economic position. Coupled with this reality was the fact that women who worked outside the home still had to maintain their traditional roles as mothers and wives within the household, placing more stress on their time. Although women had carried the responsibility for raising children in the past, with the onset of colonialism the burden of care increased. Women more than men spent most of their time raising children with limited flexibility on their personal time. This was significant because children that would otherwise have spent part of the time with their

fathers on the farm, allowing women more time to engage in other social and economic activities, now became a major responsibility of women. As colonialism put extra burden on women's time, it also significantly limited their chances to work in the public sphere. A consequence of women's limited participation in the public sphere allowed men to work outside the home and earn more. This difference in earning capacity in favour of men subsequently resulted in power imbalance in marriages (Falola, 2013).

### **2.0.2 Post-Colonial Era (1960 to date)**

Okeke-Ihejirika (2004) notes that after the Second World War, Nigerian nationalists fought for and won independence on October 1, 1960, thus ushering in the era of post-colonialism. However, despite this political liberation, the position of women in society remained the same for the better part of the first decade after independence (Mikell, 1995). They continued to be disadvantaged by their gender, status, class, and geographical location. There was a marked difference in the experiences of women from the South and North with regards to their socio-economic status (Callaway and Creevey, 1994).

Kure (2011) argues that women from the Northern part of Nigeria experienced more severe forms of marginalization compared to their counterparts in the South. This was based on the conservative nature of the culture, reinforced by the Islamic religion embraced by the people of the North. Young girls were married off in their teen years and then physically secluded from public life by their husbands. The practice of seclusion limited women's participation in the social and economic life of their communities (Callaway and Creevey, 1994), which contributed to uneven power relations in marriages and heavy dependence of women on their breadwinning spouses (Aja-Okorie, 2013).

The experience of women in Southern Nigeria was considered to be more advantageous compared with their counterparts in the North (Kure, 2011). Women in Southern Nigeria were culturally allowed to have more access to public life. This made it possible for them to seek education provided by various Christian missionary groups working in the region at the time (Falola, 2013). Despite access to education Falola (2013) argues that it provided women with limited empowerment as they were channeled into gendered and low paying professions. Overall, in the first decade after independence, Nigerian women's socio-economic advancement was far behind that of their male counterparts in the country. There was a big disparity between male and female enrollment in formal education. UNESCO (1989) reported that 12.6% of girls in comparison to 22.4% of boys between the ages 6 and 23 were enrolled in formal education between 1960 and 1970.

Despite the disadvantaged position of women in the early years after independence, many actively attempted to redefine their position in both the private and public spheres of society (Kure, 2011). The pattern of social relations in most Nigerian communities leads to the strong belief in collective ethos, where individual interest can be sacrificed in order to fulfill the desires of the larger family group (Falola, 2013). Children are socialized in such a way that they grow up having a deep sense of affiliation with a group such as the extended family, age group, and community (Thomas-Emeagwali, 2002). To have an individualistic mindset is often construed as a deliberate attempt to be deviant. Furthermore, Falola (2013) observes that social groups in such communities tend to take collective pride in the achievement of one individual from the group. The practice of group accepting credit for the success of a single member has

served and is still serving women well in their attempt to empower themselves. Today, Nigerian women tend to rationalize that “their success is the success of all” as a valid justification for their desire to obtain education and economic empowerment for themselves and their daughters. This has worked in favour of Nigerian women. There are now more women receiving education and opportunities for self-advancement that would not have otherwise been accessible to them in the past, although they are still limited by patriarchal values in society (Offorma, 2009). For example, in their gender analysis of student enrollment in Nigerian universities between 1989 and 1997, Adeyemi and Akpotu (2004) observes a 43.09% increase in the number of female enrollment from 40,125 in 1988 to 74,300 in 1997. However, they also found that despite this increase there was not much difference in the rate of female enrollment in science-based courses such as medicine and engineering over the period. Adeyemi and Apotu (2004) concluded that a ratio of 10 males to 1 female student enrollment in science-based programs was largely disproportional.

Since science-based occupations are generally given more prestige and compensation in the job market, it means that men are more likely to earn more than women in the long run. Adeyemi and Akpotu (2004) note that this lack of progress in female enrollment in science courses is due to social and cultural factors. For instance, there is the stereotype that certain fields of engineering like mining are dangerous occupations for women. Also, parents encouraged their daughters to go for non-science related programs because they took less time to complete, which gives them more time to get married and settle down.

Meanwhile, by the 1980's, the harsh socio-economic reality and its attendant policies introduced by the government helped to improve women's participation in the Nigerian economy. The infamous Structural Adjustment Program (hereafter SAP) was introduced in response to the poor domestic economic forecast at the time. SAP came with the removal of subsidies from health, education and other vital social services, the devaluation of the currency, and trade liberalization (Thomas-Emeagwali, 2002). The economic situation meant that it was no longer practical to have one breadwinner in the family. Dual earning households became more desirable for coping with economic hardship. Significantly, this period witnessed a loosening of certain patriarchal beliefs in society so that more women could become economically productive and contribute financially to the sustenance of their households. For instance, purdah practice common among Muslim households, which promoted the strict seclusion of women to the homestead was relaxed. More than before, Muslim women became increasingly visible in economic settings like the market place.

Scholars are divided on the impact of women's increased contributions to the household economy. While Thomas-Emeagwali (2002) argues that this did not significantly affect women's bargaining power in family relationships, Opeola (1995) suggests that it has allowed a more collaborative form of relationship to develop between couples. Opeola (1995) believes that most Nigerian marital relationships in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are in reality more egalitarian than couples would have outsiders believe. This is because there is an awareness of the cultural expectation for men to have the upper hand in marital relationships, and the constant cultural policing of relationship that goes on

around couples. Consequently, otherwise egalitarian couples give outsiders the impression that they are traditional in their marital relations (Opeola, 1995).

## **2.1 Lived Experiences of Nigerian Immigrant Women in North America**

I conducted a thorough search of academic databases on studies carried out on Nigerian immigrant women in Western societies, such as Europe and North America within the last two decades. My search revealed very few results, which corroborates Yesufu's (2005) claim that there is currently a paucity of studies that address the lived experiences of specific groups of immigrant women from Africa. A number of reasons can be given for the limited representation of Nigerian women's voice in migration scholarship. The first is the focus on Nigerian immigrant women in studies related to crime and immigration in European context.

In the wake of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many countries including those in Western Europe, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, France and Italy have had to deal with issues of economic uncertainty (Schierup, Hansen, and Castle, 2006); ethnic and racial tensions; and national insecurity (Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Koffman, 2005). Many of these countries have reconsidered their stance on the politics of belonging and citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2006) as a means to protect their socio-economic future and national security. Some of these measures have come in the form of tightening immigration laws dealing with issues of trafficking (Paoli and Reuter, 2008), which undermine border security and government authority. Hence, migration scholars within these contexts have been more interested in investigating the location of Nigerian women in immigration-related crimes, whether as perpetrators or victims. A result of these developments is the growing discourse on crime and immigration, and the management of immigration

selection processes. Some scholars have therefore used this as an opportunity to locate the voices of some Nigerian immigrant women in the discourse on crime and immigration, whether as sex-trafficked victims, or as individuals seeking flexible citizenship by capitalizing on loopholes and manipulating technicalities in immigration laws (Angel-Ajani, 2003; Carling, 2006; and Okonofua, Ogbomwan, Alutu, Kufre, and Eghosa, 2004, Bledscoe, 2004; Lentin, 2004; and Luibheid, 2004). Taken together these studies present a narrow perspective on the lives of Nigerian immigrant women in receiving countries. A richer view would include their narratives as law-abiding individuals negotiating everyday life in both receiving countries and transnational spaces.

A second reason for the paucity of studies on Nigerian immigrant women that address their everyday experiences is due to their recent immigration histories compared to other immigrant women from Europe and Asia, particularly China (Banjo, 2012). According to the Justice Department of Canada (2015) individuals from European countries formed the majority of earliest immigrant populations in Canada. Canadian immigration policies prior to 1967 were explicitly racist, and were focused on attracting white immigrants. This migration trend was reversed with the immigration reforms in 1967, which introduced a universal point system, whereby immigrants regardless of country of origin or race were accepted to come into Canada based on their education and occupational qualifications, among others (Justice Department of Canada, 2015). The main reason for the change was to attract more immigrants to Canada with high educational qualifications and technical skills to support economic growth. As a result of this, Canada became more accessible to immigrants from other parts of the world. Notably, Chinese immigrants took greater advantage of immigration changes ahead of

their African counterparts. Historically, Canada had relied on waves of male labourers from Chinese descent in the development of industries and infrastructural projects, such as the railway, but they were restricted from settling permanently in Canada. The Chinese Exclusion Act, also known as the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, imposed heavy head tax on Chinese immigrants. This effectively closed off Chinese migration to Canada until 1947 when it was repealed after Canada signed the United Nation's Charter of Human Rights (Gyory, 1998). The revoking of the Chinese Exclusion Act meant the establishment of Chinese presence in parts of Canada, and this was further enhanced by the 1967 reforms. Significant migration of immigrants from parts of Africa would follow in the 1980's and 1990's (Justice Department of Canada, 2015). This history of migration means that more studies have been conducted on the lived experiences of European and Chinese immigrants than Nigerians in Canada.

Finally, Yesufu (2005) suggests that another reason for the limited study on Nigerian immigrant women in North America is the tendency among western academics to over generalize the experience of all women from the African continent. The homogenized category of *women of colour* is applied to all African immigrant women without taking into account cultural and material differences among different ethnic groups in continental Africa.

There are a few studies that contribute significantly to scholarship on the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in North America, both at the household and community levels. I highlight five such studies based on purposeful selection. They highlight different aspects of Nigerian immigrant women's realities in terms of their motivation to immigrate alone; their socio-economic and labour market experiences; and

familial and marital household dynamics. The overall purpose of the review of literature as presented in this section is to situate my study within broader scholarship focused on the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in transnational contexts.

Among Nigerian immigrant women in North America is a small but significant population of professional women that choose to migrate alone without their spouses, even though they are still married. They often make the migratory move with their children, if they have any. Using qualitative research methods, Reynolds (2006) explores the push factors that motivate some of these women in Chicago. She draws attention to how unrealistic cultural expectations regarding Nigerian women's role in household economy influenced participants' migration decisions. These women are described as members of the working middle class in society, hence they have the social and economic capital to plan and make the transition from Nigeria to North America.

Following the Structural Adjustment Program of the Nigerian government in the 1980's as an intervention to boost the economy, more women were socially and culturally expected to contribute to the household economy (Thomas-Emeagwali, 1995). A Nigerian woman's educational or class status dictates whether or not she is expected to be a breadwinner or joint provider with her husband. As the economic situation of Nigeria gradually worsened in the 1990's, professional women began to find it more difficult to meet their role as contributors to the household economy. What was perhaps a significant breaking point for many women was the decline in autonomy to spend their limited financial resources as they wished. Women were subjected to stricter financial regulations by their husbands and demands from extended family members, based on

patriarchal values that required women's submission to their spouse and extended family members such as in-laws and parents (Reynolds, 2006).

These unequal familial obligations and relationships lead some professional women to emigrate without their spouses. An excuse commonly given by immigrant women to their non-immigrant spouses and extended families to gain their consent is that the transition is for the good of the children. Their decision will give their children the best possible prospects in life. This is justified by the perception that immigration can facilitate inter-generational social mobility due to a more advanced and stable educational system in most immigrant receiving countries (Hagan, MacMillan, and Wheaton 1996). However, Reynolds (2006) reveals other hidden motives of women in their decision to migrate. These women opt for lone migration with their children in order to enjoy benefits such as legal guarantee of the right to financial privacy, control of earnings, a chance to attain professional development for themselves, emotional security, and freedom from a bad marriage without having to deal with the stigma attached to getting a divorce, or engaging in a legal battle for custodial rights of their children in Nigeria. In the light of these other reasons, the claim of immigrating for the greater benefit of children becomes a way for professional Nigerian immigrant women to creatively appropriate their role as "good and sacrificing mothers" in order to seek freedom in a new country.

A significant number of studies have established that immigrants are disadvantaged in the labour economy of their host society (Slack and Jensen, 2007; 2011; De Jong and Madamba, 2001; Hamilton, 2011; Grant and Nadin, 2005; Yesufu, 2005). Intersecting factors of gender, ethnicity, race, and geography have contributed to their

poor labour market performance and socio-economic status after immigrating (Elabor-Idemudia, 1999). Many immigrants, who are not able to integrate into the labour market, become unemployed, or underemployed due to discrimination, devaluation of their social capital such as language and accent, and non-recognition of pre-immigration credentials. Against this backdrop, Grant and Nadin (2005) note that immigrants respond to their poor labour market performance in a number of ways. These include retraining in the new country, volunteering to get work experience, continued engagement in survival jobs that are low skilled and low paying (Elabor-Idemudia, 1999), and choosing to be unemployed and dependent on the welfare system (Creese and Wiebe, 2012).

Banjo (2012) explores the process of retraining as a settlement strategy among Nigerian immigrant women in Toronto, Canada. This research investigates the reasons why many Nigerian immigrant women with degrees and experience in various occupations from their country of origin choose to pursue education and careers in the nursing field. Although the research originates from the field of adult education, Banjo (2012) recognizes the value of addressing the issue from an anti-racist perspective in order to uncover the many ways by which Nigerian immigrant women deal with the challenges of marginalization and discrimination in the Canadian labour market. It is also a feminist endeavour because it puts forward the voices of the Nigerian immigrant women who participated in the research by sharing their narratives about their decision to pursue a career in nursing, the actual steps taken to achieve their dreams, and the barriers faced in the journey to becoming qualified nursing professionals.

The decision of many Nigerian immigrant women to pursue nursing careers, despite years of experience and practice in different occupations prior to immigration to

Canada, is influenced by a desire to find a way out of economic precariousness, which is a characteristic of “survival jobs” (Creese and Weibe, 2012). Banjo (2012) identified factors that motivated participants to retrain post-migration. These include the feminization of the Canadian health system that favours the employment of female care workers over males due to the gender stereotype that women are better at it than men, the availability of jobs in the nursing profession due to the aging population in Canada, and the positive perception and support from individuals within their social network who had successfully followed a similar career path.

Nonetheless, the journey towards retraining was not without challenges. Participants in Banjo’s study were faced with obstacles such as managing time between school and family commitments, financial difficulty, and the stress of commuting long distance to and from school. These challenges, according to Sears (2001), are common among women attending formal educational institutions generally. Women with marital and care responsibilities have to balance the demand of life in and outside the classroom, which can often be challenging both physically and mentally. Banjo (2012) reports that Nigerian participants were able to overcome the above challenges by drawing physical and emotional strength from their social network within the immigrant community. Other factors that helped immigrant women succeed in making career transitions into the nursing profession includes: prioritizing of needs and obligation; faith in God based on strong religious convictions; and adopting a positive attitude towards challenging assignments. Banjo’s research concludes that despite challenges encountered in trying to pursue a career in nursing, Nigerian immigrant women in Canada who completed their

retraining were eventually rewarded. They had access to financially rewarding nursing jobs, improvement in social status, and an intrinsic feeling of achievement.

Aside from overcoming structural barriers and finding high-paying jobs, another issue faced by immigrants are barriers in attaining leadership positions in the workplace. This is a major issue for immigrant women as they are doubly disadvantaged by their immigrant status and gender in the workplace (Browne and Misra, 2003). This makes them susceptible to the experience of discrimination, glass ceiling effect, and devaluation of their credentials. Nwabah and Heitner (2009) take a look at the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in terms of their leadership attainment and participation in the workplace.

Nigerian culture is still highly patriarchal in structure, both in the private and public spheres of life. Women are expected to be submissive and passive within circles that include men, even in the workplace (Aladejana and Aladejana, 2005). Nwabah and Heitner (2009) argue that when Nigerian immigrant women come to a egalitarian society such as the USA, they have the opportunity to breakaway from such traditional gendered norms. Host societies offer possibilities for Nigerian immigrant women to pursue professional advancement (Reynolds, 2006), which opens doors for leadership attainment in the workplace. However, education alone does not seem to guarantee immigrant women's leadership positions in their occupations. They have to work harder than their counterparts to prove their worth to the organization. A majority of the women in Nwabah and Heitner's (2009) study mentioned that their faith played a major role in their leadership attainment. This is not surprising among this population facing integration challenges. Tubergen (2007) argues that social integration and religiosity are related.

Immigrants having trouble integrating often turn to religion to compensate for this shortcoming.

Meanwhile, Nigerian immigrant women in leadership positions express a positive sense of fulfillment when they attain leadership advancement; but such advancement can also cause immigrant women negative emotions linked to cultural factors such as not having the right social capital such as the American accent, and subordinates' perception of them as inferior because of their race and ethnicity. Significantly, the quality of marital relations in the home helped to ameliorate any negative experience of leadership in the workplace for Nigerian immigrant women. Households governed by traditional and patriarchal ideologies regarding gender roles were found to contribute to a negative experience of leadership for women. Conversely, domestic situations that were egalitarian served as a support system, and helped to make negative realities in the workplace bearable for immigrant women in leadership positions.

Nwabah and Heitner's (2009) study is feminist in design and motive as it focuses on the lived experiences of immigrant women. It also involved analysis of how factors within the private realm of the household come together with social and institutional factors to determine the quality of experience of Nigerian immigrant women. I argue that the study could be enriched if the scope of leadership participation had gone beyond the scope of their involvement in paid employment to include participants' narratives as leaders in community-based voluntary associations. Such an endeavour could provide scholarly evidence on how Nigerian immigrant women are appropriating their position in their host community at the grassroots level.

Opeola (1995) investigates the impact of migration on the socio-economic life of immigrant families in Toronto. He looks at how immigrants' performances in the Canadian labour market influence marital, gender, and family dynamics within immigrant households. At the centre of his analysis is participants' labour market experience, and how the quality of their experiences impacted not only their living standard, but also, their transnational care practice of extending financial support to their non-migrant relatives.

Nigeria, like most other developing nations, has a low level of state involvement in the provision of social support to citizens due to combination of factors, such as adoption of SAPs, corruption and the unwillingness of many political leaders to commit to social causes. A large percentage of the Nigerian population relies on family support and community networks to meet social needs such as food, health, education and security. Remittance from migrants therefore becomes a critical source of income for non-migrant family members. Merla (2010) suggests that such transnational care practice of remitting money back to the home country is dependent on a set of capabilities on the part of the immigrant family member. Some of these capabilities are related to the labour market experience of immigrants such as paid work and access to vacation. Opeola (1995) finds that Nigerian immigrants who are successful in the labour market are better placed to meet their financial obligation to their families back in Nigeria than those who were unemployed or underemployed.

Another issue Opeola (1995) links to immigrants' performance in the paid labour economy is marital equality between spouses. Opeola (1995) notes that in Nigerian immigrant households there is the tendency for gender role reversal, which does not

address unequal power relations between spouses in marriage. The widespread experience of unemployment and underemployment among immigrant professionals in Canada (Creese and Wiebe, 2012) and the feminization of the Canadian semi-formal labour sector make it relatively easier for immigrant women to secure semi-skilled jobs compared to their male counterparts. Besides, employers find women to be a cheaper source of labour compared to men (Rose and Villeneuve, 1993). As a result, it is common to find Nigerian immigrant women replacing the pre-immigration roles of their husbands as breadwinners. The implication of this for immigrant women is that unemployed spouses with patriarchal attitudes attempt to retain hegemony in the home to compensate for their disempowerment in the labour market (McIlwaine, 2010). However, in dual earning households, Opeola (1995) finds that there is more likelihood for egalitarian relations between husband and wife, especially when other social factors such as education, socialization to gender norms in the new environment and religious belief of couples support marital equality.

Meanwhile, Nwosu (2006) argues that in Nigerian immigrant households where patriarchal tendencies exist, women are often exposed to domestic violence and abuse. In a recent study, Nwosu (2006) highlights and promotes awareness of the diverse forms of domestic violence experienced by Nigerian immigrant women. Domestic violence among immigrant women is a serious social problem in host societies and has only recently begun to receive attention in migration literature. Raj and Silverman (2002) believe that immigrant women's cultures, contexts, and legal status increase their susceptibility to domestic abuse. Although there are no figures available on the prevalence of domestic abuse and violence among Nigerian immigrant women in Canada, Statistics Canada

(2013) highlights that there are as many immigrant women as non-immigrant women reporting cases of intimate partner abuse. However, Nwosu (2006) suggests that data provided by government and women assistance agencies on the rate of abuse among immigrant women do not give a true reflection of the situation. Nigerian immigrant women who experience intimate partner abuse are unlikely to contact and seek assistance from agencies within the social and justice system, such as the police or women's shelters (Nwosu, 2006; Raj and Silverman, 2002). Instead, they were more likely to seek informal help from their social networks within their ethnic community.

A reluctance to involve the social and judicial system in order to seek redress for domestic abuse experiences is not a reflection of ignorance of these avenues on the part of Nigerian immigrant women. Rather, based on Nwosu's (2006) study in Toronto, many abused Nigerian women choose to keep silent and not expose their erring spouses to the judicial system because they believe that doing so will negatively impact on their marriages in the long term. They fear that doing so could lead to marital separation, and even divorce. There is a strong value among immigrant women to keep their children in a traditional two-parent household, and the fear of ostracization within their ethnic community. These could result if there is marital separation or divorce between couples. In addition, there is also a significant level of mistrust for social agencies that help women in domestic crisis. Many immigrant women facing abuse fear documentation of personal domestic cases, and the misrepresentation of facts by agencies under the judicial system. This is based on the perception that documentation of domestic cases could have adverse effects on their spouses' chances in employment and advancement, which could result in further tensions in marriages (Nwosu, 2006).

The studies presented so far reflect the varied experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in their host communities. They are portrayed as individuals exercising agency to improve their welfare in the midst of patriarchal demands on their role as wives, mothers and breadwinners (Reynolds, 2006). Also, we note that Nigerian women are not immune from the social and economic hardship faced by immigrants during the process of resettlement in host society. Banjo (2012) shows how they are striving to adjust to life in the host society by retraining to become more employable in the labour market, while Nwabah and Heitner (2009) give a glimpse into the struggles and successes encountered by these women as they try to reach leadership positions in their workplaces. Showing a relationship between the public and private lives of Nigerian immigrant women, Opeola (1995) reveals their unique experiences in marriage shaped by labour market experiences of themselves and their spouses in the host society. Finally, Nwosu (2006) highlights how structures in the home and host societies help to shape Nigerian immigrant women's experience of domestic abuse. Finally, as part of my contribution to the migration scholarship on Nigerian immigrant women in North America, I investigate the dynamics of gender roles and marital relations among these women as a result of their migration experiences. The next chapter therefore introduces the theoretical framework of gender geographies of power, which will be used to analyze the aspects of social life of immigrant women that is the focus of this study.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter begins with discussions surrounding the clamour to position gender more intentionally in migration studies, due to its constitutive role in distinguishing the experiences of men and women in transnational contexts. I introduce the gendered geographies of power (GGP) as a relevant conceptual model that promotes gender in migration studies. I discuss the meaning of the terms “gender” and “transnationalism” as articulated by proponents of the GGP model, and then I present the GGP framework, paying attention to unraveling its constituent parts—geographies, social location, and agency. Finally, I briefly discussed a major research by Brennan (2001), which is argued to represent as an effective reference guide for understanding how to use the GGP model to carry out transnational and migration studies.

#### **3.1 Engendering Transnational and Migration Studies**

There is no doubt that gender is an important element intrinsic to every individual’s social life, equally so in the lives of transnational actors—people who move across nation borders. The impact of gender is significantly felt in transnational processes and practices as a key constitutive variable that intersects with equally significant axes of difference such as generation, class, religion, race, and ethnicity in ways that enable the creation, transformation, and fortification of transnational social spaces (Donato et al, 2006; Constable, 2005; Mahler and Pessar, 2006; Parreñas, 2009). Bringing a gendered lens to migration studies thus produces immeasurably enriched understanding regarding

individuals' motivations for migration; their abilities and inabilities to migrate; as well as how they negotiate social networks and structures in their home and host countries.

Gender, as a variable in transnational studies, has gained much attention in the last two decades. It had remained relatively obscured in many studies before this time. Early studies paid greater attention to providing economic and political viewpoints on male-centered migration. Male migrants received more attention as primary actors in migratory flows mediated by economic goals, with women and children regarded as secondary actors due to the general presumption that the latter group migrates to accompany or reunite with highly mobile breadwinning male spouses and fathers (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2011). Studies that adopt such an approach, applied notions of gender in a fashion described by Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford (2006, p. 106) as “add and stir.” The experiences of women were examined and measured as secondary variable in research focused primarily on migrant men. This was done without giving gender a proper place in terms of analyzing how it organizes complex social relationships and systems, such as familial relations and kinship networks of migrants and their non-migrant relatives (Mahler and Pessar, 2006; Parreñas, 2009). They fail to promote gender as a constitutive element in migrants' lives, and therefore conceal how gender inequalities are reinforced in transnational processes (Parreñas, 2009).

Mahler and Pessar (2006) note that this gap, in part, had been due to the long absence in theoretical viewpoints that recognized, and placed “gender centrally into the field of migration studies” (p. 29). Credit therefore goes to the many scholars (Brettell and deBerjeois, 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Mahler and Pessar, 2001; Mahler and Pessar, 2003; Pessar, 2008) who tirelessly advocate that migration scholarship should

incorporate gender analysis in a more deliberate manner, since it is after all significantly relevant to the way social life is organized (Hondagneu-Sotello, 2011).

Profound contributions to ensure that gender as a constitutive variable gets the attention it deserves in migration and transnational studies are made by Mahler and Pessar in their works (2001, 2003 and 2006) and Pessar (2008). Through their efforts and consultations with works of other notable researchers (Massey, 1994; Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2001; Brennan, 2001), Mahler and Pessar introduced GGP as a theoretical framework that aims to facilitate the interrogation of gender as it contributes to the “processes of creation, transformation, and also fortification of transnational social spaces” (Mahler and Pessar 2001, p. 441). GGP affords migration scholars the opportunity to carry out case analysis, and comparative studies that show the important role gender plays in transnational processes, by prioritizing analysis that centres gender and the agency of transnational actors the focus of empirical studies. The use of GGP as a basis for theoretical analyses has enriched our understanding of transnational processes such as migration. It has also shown how the study of gender in social life is only one axis of difference that “creates inequities and promote containment, negotiation, and struggle” (Pessar, 2008, p. 2) as individuals imagine and act out their personhood within structures of social reproduction.

Mahler and Pessar (2003) argue that transnational spaces contain gendered processes and ideologies working within them to shape the negotiation of gender relationships between men and women. What is perhaps unique about the GGP framework is its gender-inclusiveness. This means that the realities of men and women’s lives within transnational spaces are studied in a manner that does not promote gender in

migration studies as the study of only women's realities, thereby ghettoizing research endeavours and "inadvertently suggesting that men are without a gender" (Parreñas, 2009). Concurrently, GGP has also helped researchers show that migration processes grounded in hierarchies of power and ideologies can mediate a realignment of privilege and status of both men and women as they display agency across physical spaces and places (Constable, 2005; Van Hear, 2010; Ghosh, 2009; Sondhi, 2013; Zontini, 2010).

The GGP model elaborates on how and why gender relations are negotiated in transnational spaces. The first step in this elaboration is usually the identification of where men and women, boys and girls, as social actors are situated within transnational spaces. It also raises questions regarding why they are found where they are, and at the same time pays close attention to these individuals' displays of agency, which might operate on a number of spatial and analytical spaces. Meanwhile, the spatial and analytical spaces referred to range from bodies to social structures such as the family and communities within and across territorial borders. The advantage of the GGP framework rests in its capacity to help researchers determine meaningful and culturally appropriate measures and levels from which to carry out transnational analysis whether on individuals, groups, and organizations. In other words, using the GGP framework, migration scholars are guided in their research questions that determine the best approach for data collection and overall analysis in order to comprehend the complex phenomenon of gender in transnational realities. As a case in point, Sondhi (2013) effectively investigated the dialectical relationship between gender and international student mobility (ISM) in an empirical study that is acclaimed to fill the gap in ISM research conducted through a gendered perspective. This feat, Sondhi noted, would not have been achieved

without the GGP framework, which served as a tool for analyzing gendered processes in transnational migration.

### **3.2 Conceptual Grounding: Gender and Transnationalism**

Gender and transnationalism are two key concepts intrinsic to the GGP framework. Mahler and Pessar use each of these within the GGP framework based on specific meanings that they attach to them, since they tend to be defined and utilized in other ways by other scholars. For instance, Mahler and Pessar (2003) observe that “gender” is often used synonymously with “sex,” whereas, “gender” is a more complex construct than “sex” that is best used as a simple differentiating variable: male versus female. As a result, without an understanding of these concepts as specifically used by Mahler and Pessar it is not possible to fully appreciate the GGP framework as a whole.

Drawing on the impressive efforts of scholars such as Lorber (1994) and Hondagneu-Sotelo, (1999) to conceptualize gender, Mahler and Pessar (2001) suggest that gender is a product of human invention that “organizes our behavior and thought” (p. 442). It is an ongoing process, which is experienced through social settings that range from the family to the state. This understanding of gender adopted by Mahler and Pessar (2001) runs contrary to the notion that gender is a product of nature. According to Lorber (2003) and Parreñas (2009), conceptualization of gender as a product of nature is a means to perpetuate and maintain social differences. It is around this that power and privilege in the forms of unequally stratified status, rights and responsibilities are assigned to individuals. Meanwhile, viewing gender as a process is valuable in highlighting a “praxis-oriented” (Mahler and Pessar, 2001, p. 442) perspective whereby gender identities, relations and ideologies are regarded as fluid; that is “constantly recreated out

of human interaction, out of social life, and the texture and order of that social life and subject to change over time and different from place to place” (Lorber, 1994). In addition, it allows us to see gender as embedded in social institutions, which sets the foundation for analyzing structural and ideological factors that condition gender relations in societies.

Conceptualizing gender as a process therefore destabilizes the myth that is a product of nature, without undermining its power dimension in consonance with other axes of difference such as class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and other identities to create and perpetuate social differences among individuals (Mahler and Pessar, 2001). In summary, gender is a construct that creates social differences, and defines what it means to be masculine and feminine within a cultural milieu (Lorber, 1994). Men and women throughout their lives learn what is expected, see what is expected, and react in expected ways that maintain gender order as imposed and reinforced through cultural policing and sanctioning of errant behaviors in the society they belong to. Lorber (1994) notes that it is the gendered practices of daily living that reproduce a society’s perception of normative behaviours appropriate to men and women, which are justified by religion and cultural production and backed by laws.

As with gender, Mahler and Pessar’s (2001) use of the term “transnationalism” in relations to the GGP framework needs to be clarified with regard to definition and application to different spatial qualifiers such as “social field” and “context.” Drawing upon Glick Schiller’s (1999) definition that highlights both spatial and power dimensions of transnational processes, Mahler and Pessar (2001) employ the term transnationalism to discuss political, economic, social and cultural processes immigrants engage in, which

transcend beyond the borders of a particular state. This phenomenon significantly redefines the notion of society particularly in relation to immigrants (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). Examples of political, economic, and cultural processes and practices engaged in by transnational actors as uncovered in transnational research include sending and receiving of remittance between migrants and their non-migrant relatives (Collier, 2013; Lindley, 2009), the extension of care across transnational borders (Baldassar and Merla, 2014; Kilkey and Merla, 2014), immigrants' engagement in transnational political actions and nation-building (Morales and Pilati, 2014); and formation of hometown associations in host countries by immigrants (Portes and Zhou, 2012).

As it stands, we cannot understand the realities of such individuals by focusing only on what takes place within the boundaries of singular nation-states such as Canada, or Nigeria. Modern civilization has created conditions that make it possible for immigrants to live transnational lives, which supports multi-local engagements of individuals across two or more national boundaries. Studies have shown the movement away from home countries does not mean that immigrants break social networks, and disconnect from processes and practices rooted in their home countries. Instead, pluri-local, durable, and dense social spaces are created that allow transnational actors to engage politically, socially, and culturally in both home and host communities (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Vertovec, 1999; Pries 2001; Itzigson and Saucedo, 2002; Portes and Zhou, 2012; Strunk, 2014). For example, Nigerian immigrant associations in Canada engage culturally and politically with non-migrants in Nigeria. Transnationalism, in this example, supports the reconstruction of localities across nation-state borders, which creates simultaneity—the feeling immigrants get from living out of

two or more contexts at the same time (Mazzucato, 2008)—similar to the social existence of Nigerian immigrants in Canada.

Kearney (1995) opines that social, cultural, and political practices and processes engaged in by immigrants in transnational terrains are anchored in specific places and history, and connect individuals located in more than one nation-state, usually between the home and host countries. In addition, they are embodied in specific social relations such as marriage, and are acknowledged among particular categories of people situated in unambiguous localities at “historically determined time” (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998: p. 11).

### **3.3 Gendered Geographies of Power Framework**

Mahler and Pessar (2001; 2006) constructed the GGP model as a framework that is widely recognized as a guide by scholars in transnational studies. It recognizes the role gender plays in producing men and women’s experiences in transnational processes., and is valuable for analyzing comparative investigations and case studies across transnational spaces (Constable, 2006; Parreñas, 2009). GGP theorizes that the ability of people to act in transnational contexts is shaped and given meaning by the interplay of both the spatial and social scales of their performances, and the social location they occupy within intersecting hierarchies of power with regards to gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality, among others. Mahler and Pessar (2006) identified three layers to the GGP framework that include *geographies*, *social location*, and *agency*. A delineated understanding of each of these layers in the following paragraphs will build up to an appreciation of the framework as a whole.

The first analytical construct of the GGP framework is *geographies*, which refers to the multiple spatial, cultural and social scales from within which gendered actors “do gender” (Lorber, 2006, p. 470) across transnational terrains. These scales range from the intimate to the global—for example, the body, the family, a community, the state, an association, a race, an ethnic group, a generation, and a cohort. Geographies serve as practical measures to articulate social unit or units from which transnational migration studies can be carried out. These scales represent sites from which gender ideologies are reinforced through repetition and re-enacted between and among multiple scales (Mahler and Pessar, 2006).

In relation to transnational migration, Mahler and Pessar (2006) query whether the multiplicity and dispersal of scales across international borders engender increasing opportunities for the reinforcement of prevailing and culturally determined gender norms and ideologies, or do they produce opportunities for individuals to challenge prevailing notions of gender, and to accept competing ideologies of gendered existence encountered in host cultures, and try to perform and communicate new understandings across transnational terrains? In other words, do gender relations change among individuals engaged in migratory flows that bring them in contact with new gendered social, cultural, and spatial fields? Transnational studies provide mixed evidences that gains of immigration may be uneven and contradictory for men or women (Goldring, 2001; Hirsch, 2003; Constable, 2005; Burrell, 2014). Nonetheless, it is within the settings and conditions of specific or multiple spatial, cultural and social scales (see Fouron and Glick Shiller, 1998) within transnational contexts that gender is connected with other

hierarchies of power, such as class and race, in ways that either reaffirms, or reconstructs, or simultaneously reaffirms and reconstructs gender ideologies.

***Social location***, the second analytical construct in the GGP framework, provides a reference term to indicate the ways in which people are positioned within multiple, intersecting, and mutually-constituting hierarchies of power linked to gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, and so on (Mahler and Pessar, 2006). How individuals and groups are situated within hierarchies of power engenders unequal categorization of persons in social relations. In other words, it is individuals' positioning within intersecting spectrums of difference confers on them privileges and disadvantages to claim rights and accessing resources in social life and relationships. Mahler and Pessar (2006) suggest that individuals' positionings within social location are not fixed, because studies have shown that they can also be fluid and shift across transnational terrains (Constable, 2005; Rodriguez-Planas, 2012; Creese, 2011). For instance, Creese (2011) provides insight into the lives of African immigrants in Canada, whose racialized identities as second-class citizens without desirable social capital such as Canadian education, whiteness and accent, contribute to decrease their economic and class mobility post-migration. Meanwhile, simultaneously they occupy high social locations in their home countries.

Beyond showing the fluidity of immigrants positioning within multiple social hierarchies, social location can be scalar. This implies that immigrants have access to multiple settings, whether as a means of being or belonging (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004), which brings them in contact with the hierarchies of power and hegemonic cultures operating in these multiple and complex social terrains. Such contacts by

transnational actors engender opportunities for them to experience multiple layers of power in different contexts simultaneously. This is responsible for what can be observed as varying displays of agency as immigrants try to negotiate regulatory powers operating within multiple social hierarchies at the same time (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). Pessar (2008) advocates for more attention in how gender intersects with other factors to produce unique migration experiences and social positioning. This advocacy is based on the understanding that multiple dimensions of identity alongside that of gender operate simultaneously to shape people's position, and influence the way they think and act in transnational contexts.

*Agency* is the third layer of the GGP framework. Based on the work of Massey (1994), Mahler and Pessar (2006) foreground individuals' agency in their distinct social locations as the act of using personal will, resources and initiatives over forces and processes encountered within social hierarchies, while at the same time being influenced by these same forces and processes. Succinctly, agency as a third component of GGP examines the type and degree of agency people exert, given their social locations.

Technological advancement in communication and transportation has contributed to create both globalization and "time-space compression" of the world (Massey, 1994, p. 149). The implication of time-space compression in the context of transnationalism is that individuals are spatially spread out across the globe, but are simultaneously connected via space and time. This has contributed to individuals being situated within multiple social locations that determine their "access to power and its overflow interconnected between places" (Massey, 1994, p. 149). In relation to this, Mahler and Pessar (2006) argue that the processes and forces within the conditions that create these

kinds of links between spatially situated individuals are responsible for determining the type and degree of agency they display as they engage and move within transnational terrains.

In the context of transnational migratory flows, Pessar and Mahler (2001) argue that individuals are positioned differently within time-space compression to produce three types of actors depending on their social locations. The first category of actors includes those who have the resources and capacity to initiate and control the flows of processes and movement in transnational terrains; for instance, immigration agencies of states that make and implement immigration rules. A second category of actors are those that are able to move within transnational flows, and engage in processes therein, but do not have control over the processes. Good examples of actors within this group are immigrants with resources who are mobile across transnational terrains. The final category of actors includes those who do not move within transnational flows, but are impacted by the controls put in place by those who determine the flow of processes and movements; for example, a poor youth in a developing country with unrealized ambitions to immigrate to a western country due to lack of social and economic resources necessary to meet immigration requirements.

The categories of transnational actors show how the unique social positions of actors contribute to determine the quality of their agency and engagement in the time-space compression that sustains transnationalism. However, beyond an examination of the extra-personal factors—such as gender, class, generation, race, and ethnicity—intrinsic to social locations that shape individuals' quality of participation, Mahler and Pessar (2001, 2003, 2006) acknowledge that the quality of agency displayed by transnational actors is

also significantly impacted by inherent individual characteristics such as initiatives, which individuals use as resources in distinguishable extents to negotiate their engagement in transnational spaces. Initiatives are intrinsic resources that are apart from the external resources conferred on a person by virtue of their social location. Yet, by displaying these in varying ways and degrees, individuals can reconfigure their status in social locations.

Pessar (2008) asserts that before much of what people do in transnational terrain can be qualified as agency as defined in the GGP framework, they must be established in cognitive processing. Acts of agency that have been subjected to cognitive processing include imaging, planning, and strategizing; these are reliable and objective measures for understanding the actions of actors in a transnational “cognitive” terrain (Mahler and Pessar, 2001, p. 447). For instance, a young man in Nigeria might have sold his material possessions, yet his action in itself is inconsequential for the GGP framework. What will make it an objective measure of agency is if we can tie his actions to some cognitive processing grounded in transnationalism, such as the need to raise financial resources to help him immigrate to another country.

In summary, bringing the three building blocks of GGP discussed above to bear on transnational and migration studies, Mahler and Pessar (2001, 2003, 2006) provide a framework that “analyses people’s social agency—corporal and cognitive—given their initiatives as well as their positioning within multiple hierarchies of power operative within and across many terrains ” (p. 447). So far, a number of transnational studies have been conducted using this framework (Goldring, 2001; Fouron and Schiller, 2001; Brennan, 2001). For instance, Brennan (2001) used it to analyze the different gendered

positioning of German male sex tourists and female sex workers in Sosua, Dominican Republic. Mahler and Pessar (2001) recommend Brennan's (2001) work as an example for gaining insight on how GGP can be used in analyzing migration research.

Brennan (2001) employs GGP framework to show how the disparity in information regarding the true nature of life and opportunities in Sosua, and the geographical location between German tourists and sex workers in Dominican Republic positions these two groups of actors in unequal gender relations. Access to highly developed literature through the Internet provides German male tourists information about Sosua as a destination to fulfill sexual fantasies. Conversely, sex workers, mainly single mothers of rural origins in Dominican Republic seeking better opportunities through their engagement with western customers, do not have much information regarding the living conditions in Sosua before they migrate. They arrive in Sosua unprepared for the harsh realities of the sex tourism industry. Meanwhile, with access to geopolitical information and financial resources German tourists are advantageously positioned to access and exploit the fantasies of sex workers, who hope to use transient relationships with them as a means to gain access to western countries with wider opportunities than their home country.

Brennan's work enhances a GGP analytic by showing how the agency of social actors, grounded in their imagination, enables them to initiate transnational flows and movements even though they do not always get to move physically themselves. Brennan acknowledges the role of agency, through cognitive planning and strategizing reflected in the fantasies of sex workers, as gendered, interpreted and appropriated by female

participants in ways that promoted transnational connections between them and their German clients when the latter go back to their home country.

Following practical guidelines provided by Mahler and Pessar (2001) on how to utilize GGP as an analytical tool, the first step I took with my study was to identify and situate the social location of the eight Nigerian immigrant women who participated in this study, within geographies of nuclear households, extended family units in Nigeria, Canadian immigration system, and Canadian labour market. As their social locations within aforementioned geographies are established, I articulate their access to resources and power pre- and post-migration. This determines how gender roles and marital relations are negotiated with their respective spouses. It is also in situating their social locations that I will uncover and analyze transformation of gender roles and marital relations post-migration. Next, I examined the type and degree of agency displayed by these transnational actors in terms of their experiences of transformations in gender roles and marital relations. I also highlight how they see or imagine themselves post-migration as members of larger collectives in contact with family and kinship institutions across two national borders—Nigeria and Canada. These analyses are exhaustively presented in Chapters Five and Six.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Methodology**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the research philosophy and epistemology, research design, and strategy of the study. Issues relating to ethical considerations are also highlighted, as well as a detailed profile of participants.

#### **4.1 Research Philosophy**

A feminist researcher's views and the manner he/she makes sense of the world is shaped by a philosophical stance which contains assumptions guiding the choice of method and strategy adopted in conducting a study. Most importantly, the choice of philosophy holds epistemological and ontological implications for the research. Research epistemology is concerned with the question of what is or should be considered as acceptable knowledge in a particular field of study. Ontology, on the other hand, deals with the issue of the nature of reality in terms of whether it is objective or subjective. In addition, research philosophy determines the research question, the way in which the question is framed and the methodology that would best give insight or establish relationships among the concepts understudied (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

For the purpose of this research, I adopted a social constructivism approach founded on a feminist stance. Social constructivism is an interpretive approach to finding answers to research questions, based on the assumption that the natural world is not the same as the social world (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Social constructivism rejects the positivist view that social entities are pre-existing and the actors are under its total control. Rather, it argues that social actors shape the formal elements within social

entities through their actions. If indeed the social world is shaped based on the construction of the social actors, the best way to understand it is by attempting to understand the viewpoints and behaviour of the actors themselves (Hundleby, 2007).

Using a social constructivist perspective, I was focused from the start of the research process on trying to provide explanations on the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant women that participated in the study in Lethbridge. This goal was achieved by analysing the data collected through semi-structured interviews, informal interactions, and participant observations to draw out insights into the concepts covered by my research. Social constructivism allows the exploration of personal views of individuals, and though it might be time consuming it fosters new opportunities arising subconsciously among the participants where some subjective information stimulates further thinking on other important issues that were not previously considered (Das, 2008).

Finally, feminist perspectives influenced my social constructivist approach. My exposure to these perspectives allowed me to use it in a manner different from how it would be used by other social scientists. I let my subjectivity serve as a valid research tool geared towards breaking the wall of divide that exists between the traditional constructivist, who is presented as the “all knowing researcher” dealing with his “lowly research subject” (Vives, 2012, p. 63). I recognized that while the truths expressed in my participants’ narratives are not absolute and universally applicable, they are valid reflections of their realities. For this reason, they are in the best position to share their stories with me as all-knowing agents of their own lives.

## 4.2 Research Design

I invited ten Nigerian immigrant women living in Lethbridge to participate in my study by sharing their experiences through a series of non-formal interactions and one formal semi-structured interview for each, which were open and flexible. However, only eight volunteered to participate in the study. The criteria for their selection were: they must be permanent residents of Canada, married to a Nigerian man, preferably before immigrating to Canada; and finally they should have at least one child. These criteria provided the platform to explore how marital relations have changed between spouses within the two spatial contexts of Nigeria and Canada. My reasons for conducting semi-structured interviews were to place gender at the centre of the analysis, and to generate valid knowledge that displaces inadequate theories and false stereotypes about the lives of participants (Oakley, 1981).

Since arriving in Lethbridge, I have been involved with a Nigerian community group who are active in the church I attend, and came to know many Nigerian immigrant women. Participants were recruited from this group of Nigerian women. From this initial pool of personal contacts of Nigerian women in Lethbridge, I also contacted other participants through snowballing; which is both a nonprobability and convenience sampling method of participant selection (Miner-Rubino, Jayaratne, and Konik, 2007). I respectfully asked a few acquaintances already within my network to invite other Nigerian women in their own social circle to participate in the study. The advantages of using this sampling technique are that it was inexpensive and enabled me to connect quickly with potential participants.

An interview is a two way communication initiated by a researcher to get information from the participant. The responses to questions were recorded on a digital recording device and transcribed later for further analysis. The interview followed a semi-structured outline but was open to flexibility based on opportunities that arose to ask more in-depth questions. I engaged each participant to one formal semi-structured interview session lasting no more than one hour each. Afterwards I engaged in several informal interactions with them to clarify issues raised during our formal interview meeting where necessary. The disadvantage of using interviews is that it can be time consuming in terms of the process of getting access to respondents and arranging schedule. Also, it takes time to transcribe recorded data, which demands thorough thematic analysis afterwards (Reinharz, 1992).

On the other hand, the interview method afforded me the following advantages. I could build better rapport with my participants and get more insights into the research study, which encouraged the interviewees to be more open and relaxed. I was able to observe the body language of the interviewees in response to questions and determine whether to probe some issues further, or show discretion and divert to other questions. The use of skills such as rapport building, effective listening, and emotional sensitivity (Reinharz, 1992) were valuable during the interview sessions. In addition, effort was made to avoid intentionally, or otherwise, influencing responses that could affect validity of the research outcomes.

Although talking, which is central to the interview method of data collection, might appear to be a common activity within social settings, I was aware of the complexities and politics attached to the process due to my position. Positionality is an

important consideration in feminist research in order to avoid presenting a “view from nowhere” (McCarthy, 1994, p. 15). This is because, in relation to my participants, I occupy a space as an insider and outsider at the same time. My position as an insider and outsider comes with its own advantages and disadvantages as I carried out the research. As an insider, I am able to show empathy and cultural sensitivity to participants during the semi-interview process (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Pillow and Mayo, 2007) especially in the nature of information I seek from them. On the downside, it is often argued that similarity between the researcher and the participants may also lead to over-rapport during interview sessions (Reinharz, 1992).

Also, I organized my interview sessions with a view to have a truly collaborative encounter with participants considering that my location of difference could result in failed rapport and limited disclosure (DeVault and Gross, 2007). Doing this helped to bridge the gap between my insider and outsider positions. DeVault and Gross (2007) provide valuable strategies on how to attain a collaborative relationship with the participants. The first strategy is to sustain contact with participants over a period of time to build a give-and-take relationship. Also, I strategically disclosed personal information and openly addressed issues of difference with the participants. Furthermore, I shared my motivations for embarking on the research, so that the participants are invited as a valued individual to be part of a collective process of seeking meaning and creating knowledge (Reinharz, 1992).

In addition to conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with participants, I also engaged in participant observation. Participant observation involved gathering research data by immersing myself into daily activities alongside participants for an

extended period of time, as I observed their behaviour, and listened to what was said in conversations between them and others (Oakley, 1981). My motivation to combine the use of both semi-structured interviews with participant observation was to have a more objective view of participants' realities. This is because interviewees are people with potential for sabotaging the attempt to research them (Oakley, 1981). However, participating and observing participants as they perform daily activities contributes to building mutual trust between the researcher and participants (Oakley, 1981), thereby reducing the chances of sabotaging the research effort during interviews. I carried out a number of participant observations of the same women who I had earlier interviewed, and discreetly noted observations as I engaged with participants at social gatherings, in their homes, and in the community, as they carried out daily activities like shopping and making school runs.

### **4.3 Myself as an Insider-Outsider in the Field**

Feminist researchers embody a multitude of identities mediated by gender, class, educational background, race, geographical and ideological stance, and others (Obasi, 2012). The plurality of identities in one body affects my position in relation to my research participants. In comparison to my participants, I found that we shared similar characteristics such as race, gender, region, and marital status; yet we were different with respect to age, class, education, religion, immigration and citizenship status, and political ideologies, to mention a few. The possibility of having matching identities, while at the same time having those that do not match with research participants is known as the insider-outsider identity. This identity offered undeniable access to privilege and power during my fieldwork. It also presented certain epistemological challenges that could have

undermined the quality of the study if not handled carefully. The following discussions cover some of the challenges I faced as an insider-outsider in the field.

Going into the field, I very quickly recognized my position in relation to my participants. I understood the importance of being an outsider and insider at the same time and the challenges involved, which afforded me the opportunity to enter the field with a balanced opinion. I was able to use this to my advantage most especially during the research analysis stage because I was in a better position to place my subjectivity and objectivity side by side in making clear evaluation of the research data. This contributed to my enhanced understanding of the state of human conditions; in this case, the Nigerian women who participated in the research based on race, cultural orientation, and gender.

In addition, there was creation of a sort of fluid relationships with participants, which proved particularly beneficial during the interview stages. Due to the cultural sensitivity I displayed in the type of, and manner I framed the interview questions, I found out that many of them were quick and open in their responses. However, during a particular interview, I asked a participant about conflict in marriage. Her body language demonstrated that she found it difficult to speak about this perhaps because she considered it to be a sensitive matter as it is a cultural norm to give outsiders the impression that all is well in a marriage. I gave the participant some time to decide for herself if she wanted to speak on this or move on to the next question, but a surprising thing happened. She chose to speak but in a strange way her tone changed and she began to speak to me as if she were speaking to her own daughter. She was able to relate to our difference in age by taking on the role of mother advising her daughter on the reality of conflict in marriage and how to handle this. In this way, I concur with Sheriff (2001) that

the insider-outsider identity creates different spaces that allow for better interaction between feminist researchers and participants.

Other advantages of being an insider-outsider in the field was that I had easy access to participants from my community, and was familiar with culturally acceptable norms for relating with women in the Nigerian culture and so did not have to spend much time correcting relational mistakes. I was able to respectfully address participants according to the norm in our shared culture. Also, I was able to appropriately respond to their generosity as they tried to make me comfortable in their homes during our interview sessions without offending them. In one instance, a participant offered me a cup of tea before we started the interview. I was not particularly interested in drinking tea but felt it would be culturally offensive if I refused. So, I gladly accepted the drink, and took small sips throughout the interview session.

Notwithstanding the benefits highlighted in the foregoing, Sheriff (2001) highlights some of the challenges of claiming both the insider and outsider identities in one body. First, there is the creation of ambiguous boundaries in the research relationship. I often found that for a while after an interview, participants were unable to see the line where the researcher-participant relationship ended, even when I told them. It had to take a few contacts outside the research context for most participants to relate with me as naturally as they did before.

Also, I had to be aware of the power dynamics involved in my relationship with participants. My insider-outsider identity, reflected in my educational background and affiliation with the University of Lethbridge, placed me on a sort of higher pedestal of social location, which I felt made some participants uncomfortable. This could be

because participants are quick to perceive a researcher's credentials in relation to their own perception of self which motivates them to present their stories in a certain way depending on the desired effect they would like to elicit from the researcher (Vives, 2012). This argument is very true as I observed some participants with lower educational background in comparison to mine placing so much value on their personal sense of accomplishment as mothers and participants in the labour economy. They balanced our differences in educational attainment by emphasizing their maternal and economic accomplishment. They managed to equate any power imbalance in other areas of differences, which is in conformity with the feminist political agenda (Metso and Le Feuvre, 2006).

In going ahead with my research, particularly in the manner I navigated the field and related to participants, I was very concerned about the possibility of maintaining stable social relationships beyond my research given my insider-outsider status. I was also concerned about my ability to stay true to participant voice while presenting an objective research. Overall, reflecting on my performance during my fieldwork and the stable relationship I still enjoy with my participants, I would like to say that I was successful at negotiating the double-edged identity. Much of this success was achieved due to my adoption of certain culturally appropriate behaviours on and off the field. I was committed to being reflexive throughout the process even to the point of data analysis and reporting. I carried with me a critical attitude towards locating the impact of my behaviour, identity and subjectivity on the research design, data collection, analysis and presentation of data, which gave me a better insight into the context, relationships, and power dynamics germane to the research setting (Gough, 2003).

Furthermore, I put at the fore of my interaction my identity as an ethical individual and researcher. I was constantly aware of the fact that participants within and outside the research context constantly monitored my behaviour. And so, even in everyday interactions, I chose to maintain confidentiality and respect the opinions of others, which proved valuable in ensuring I gained the trust of my participants at every stage of the research.

#### **4.4 Research Strategy**

There are basically two types of research that I considered in the context of this study, qualitative and quantitative research. Though it is possible for me to combine elements from both types in a single piece of work with the aim of eliminating the bias of each approach, I chose the singular use of the qualitative method. My choice was significantly determined by the nature of my research question, which is also dependent on my chosen philosophical school of thought that the truth about the social world is out there and dependent on our social experiences. My gender had nothing to do with my selection of a qualitative method as many male positivist scholars have stereotypically linked qualitative methods to the female gender (Metso and Le Feuvre, 2006).

Qualitative research allows the researcher to focus on words rather than figures. This type of research is consistent with my social constructivist philosophy, and is purposely focused on inducing an understanding of the underlying reasons behind human actions instead of establishing cause-effect relationships among the subjects. Giddens (1984) argues that qualitative research moves away from the tradition of functionalism, by acknowledging human agency, by seeking to gather information that reflects the

extent to which a participant is knowledgeable about the conditions of their actions, and those they encounter in social life.

The most useful tool for me as a qualitative researcher was the use of words in the form of language, which were gathered from participants through interviews aimed at inducing an in-depth understanding of the social construct of power in marriage through rigorous thematic analysis of data. Pratt (2009, p. 856) notes that when a question demands an answer of “how” rather than of “how many,” then the best approach to use is the qualitative method.

Meanwhile, qualitative researchers are often criticized on the ground that their approach is riddled with subjectivity, and Metso and Le Feuvre (2006) come to their defense by arguing that there is no such thing as a truly objective research. This is because one way or another a researcher’s value system influences the process through even simple choices, such as the question asked. Another criticism leveled against the qualitative method of carrying out feminist research is that it could be difficult to use end results as a basis for generalization across diverse contexts. I acknowledge that this is a shortcoming of the approach but it can be minimized if there is transparency in the selection of research participants, as well as paying close attention to the description of the research process adopted throughout the study. Vives (2012) supports the use of the method by claiming that even though findings cannot be easily used to make broad sweeping conclusions about a population, situating the experience of participants makes it a truly feminist endeavour. It recognizes that participants’ situations differ in context and social system, even if there are similarities in variables such as gender, ethnicity and race.

#### **4.5 Recruitment Strategy**

I arrived in Lethbridge not knowing any Nigerians. Within the first week of living in the city I met another Nigerian family. They lived on the university campus just like my family and myself. It was through this first contact that I was introduced to a prominent female figure in the Nigerian immigrant community in Lethbridge. It was this woman who told me about the existence of a Nigerian immigrant Christian organization. She invited me to their weekly bible study, and there I met many other Nigerian immigrants. After my first attendance I made the decision to recruit research participants from these initial group of Nigerian. My initial contacts with this Christian group also introduced me to other Nigerian immigrant women that were not members of the religious association, but were willing to befriend me on our shared identity as Nigerian immigrant women. In addition, I relied on recruiting participants from my husband's social network in Lethbridge that were neither members of the Nigerian immigrant association or church group. Combining these recruitment avenues gave me the opportunity to access a wider pool of potential participants than would have been possible if I had used only one medium.

#### **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Anonymity of participants was protected from the start of the study until the completion of thesis. Each participant was given a pseudonym. However, because of the ethnographic nature of the study, there is the chance that some individuals from within the Nigerian community in Lethbridge may access this thesis from the University of Lethbridge and link participants' narratives to their true identity. Nonetheless, I tried to disguise any information that might obviously link narratives to participants. In addition,

all written and electronic records of interview sessions and participant observations were stored using these pseudonyms as codes to identify participants. Also, participants were informed in the letter of invitation and by word of mouth, prior to the formal interview sessions, that they could choose to retract any information shared during interview sessions if they felt uncomfortable about it being included in the final report. I also provided participants with my contact information should they wish to discuss such issues with me during the research.

The highest level of participant confidentiality was maintained during the study. All records pertaining to participants were held in a secured locker in my office at the university. I was the only one who had access to them but shared limited research information with my research supervisor for guidance purposes only. I transcribed the interview tapes myself in order to engage with data as well as ensure that no one else had access to the information contained in them. All transcribed data were stored in a password-protected file on my personal computer. The retention period for information gathered will be indefinite, which was stated clearly in the consent form. The indefinite retention time is to accommodate potential further research. Participants who wished to see the final transcript of their interview were given the opportunity, but no one came forward to ask about this up until the time of writing this thesis.

As a member of the Nigerian community in Lethbridge, I was aware that beyond this research I would still be in contact with most of the study participants. However, I recognized the need to disengage participants from the research after the study was concluded to bring closure to the researcher-participant relationship built over six months. My exit strategy included meeting participants on a one-on-one basis and

informing them of the successful completion of the project, and thanking them for their contributions to the research. I also extended invitation to them to attend the public presentation and defense of this thesis.

#### **4.7 Profiles of Respondents**

In this section, I present the demographic profile of the participants to demonstrate their diverse identities. Data relating to their age, length of marriage, educational status, number of children in the household, religion, personality and occupation are highlighted. I also discuss the contexts under which interviews took place, pointing out the material and power differences observed between the research participants and myself, which can variably impact the research process (Gilbert, 1994).

##### **4.7.0 Joyce**

Joyce is 33 years old; Christian and married for six years with three children. She and I are mutual friends based on our shared family history of migration. Both our spouses met as international students in the United Kingdom a few years back. We consolidated the relationship when Joyce and her family moved to a Canada few months after we did. Joyce is easygoing and socially adaptable with a flare for learning new ways of doing things, and relating to people. Before coming to Canada, Joyce had experienced several years of unemployment in Nigeria even though she had a university degree in food science technology. Among the eight women I engaged with during the process of conducting this research she is by far the most appreciative of the social opportunities she has enjoyed since arriving in Canada. For example, she values the opportunity to get a job as a retail worker despite the menial nature of the job by Nigerian standards (Yesufu, 2005). However, she has high hopes for herself and has recently enrolled in a local

college in order to retrain in a more lucrative career, and improve her socio-economic prospect in the future.

In choosing to interview Joyce, I was a bit concerned about how our friendship might affect the flow of rapport before the interview date. I conducted the interview in Joyce's home at a time when her two young sons were away in school and her husband was sleeping after his night shift to allow for adequate privacy. Normally, we conversed in our native language, which is Yoruba but I chose to use the English language during my interview with her for ease of transcription. Again, I was bit apprehensive about how this would affect the flow of discussion. I felt it might create a formal and restrictive atmosphere. Contrary to my concern, I found that this did not affect the smooth flow of our discussions. The atmosphere was rather relaxed, and she kept asking me if I understood her response to the questions I asked her. I tried to maintain eye contact, give nods, and mild acknowledgement sounds when necessary to reassure her that I understood what she was trying to say. Choosing to communicate in English with Joyce during the interview also helped to focus the purpose of our meeting. There was very minimal derailment to other matters outside the interview questions or the research in general, and this helped in ensuring we finished the interview in good time. After the interview, I observed her relationship with her spouse on a discreet level.

#### **4.7.1 *Margaret***

Margaret is 39 years old, married for 14 years with three children. Before she relocated to Canada, she ran a small-scale business; having obtained a university degree in Business Administration. She now works as a licensed practical nurse after retraining post-migration. I first met Margaret at a religious event during my first month in

Lethbridge. She and her husband are pioneer members of the Nigerian immigrant association in Lethbridge. The couple makes it their duty to welcome new Nigerian families coming to live in Lethbridge. She helps new immigrants in settling down by sharing practical information regarding such things as shopping for local food items in Lethbridge and accessing recreational facilities in the area. She is a very warm person who always has words of encouragement for new immigrants facing settlement challenges. She is also a socially tolerant person but can sometimes be very conservative due to her strong Christian background, which is often reflected in her speech and attitude towards certain aspects of the culture around her. For instance, she is very vocal about her intolerance of divorce among couples in her immediate environment.

I conducted the formal interview with Margaret in her home during the Christmas holiday. She had her three young sons at home at the time and I also brought my son along with me. We settled the children in the playroom and went to have the interview in her warm kitchen. She appeared relaxed and smiled often when sharing personal details about her marital relationship with her spouse. This gave me the impression that she was sharing these details with me based on trust. Halfway into the interview her husband came into the house and she signaled to me to stop the recording. After sharing pleasantries with her husband, she gave him a look to let him know we needed privacy. Her husband left promptly for the study room, which was far away from the kitchen. We resumed the interview and her relaxed countenance did not change much except on one occasion when she deliberately lowered her voice to say something about how she often gets her way during bargaining with her spouse.

#### **4.7.2 Betty**

Betty is a mother to four teenagers, and in her mid 40s. She has been married to her spouse for twenty-one years. Betty moved to Canada with her family four years ago, in order to give her children better educational opportunities. Although she trained and worked as a teacher in Nigeria, she has since retrained, qualified, and gained employment as a licensed practical nurse in Canada.

Betty is a Christian and an active member of the Nigerian community in Lethbridge. She can best be described as an animated and positive woman. She always has something to say at gatherings regardless of the gender makeup of the group. She is a strong believer in gender and racial equality. I have heard her speak on countless occasions at Nigerian immigrant community gatherings on the need for women to not tolerate discrimination based on gender and race. She is fond of sharing anecdotes from her life as a nursing student in a multicultural class in Lethbridge, and as a member of the minority group in her work setting to pass the message of anti-discrimination to others. Betty's intolerance towards discrimination comes from her non-traditional religious background. She often concludes her stories with the slogan that "we are all equal before God." Betty belongs to a liberal Christian denomination that is accommodating of egalitarian gender relations in social life. If you meet her on any given day she is always ready to pay a compliment just to make a person smile and appreciate them for who they are regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity.

For our formal interview I met Betty at her home on a wintry Sunday evening. We talked a bit about the weather and her job so as to ease the flow of conversation during the interview. She had started cutting a dress pattern before I came in and she continued

after I arrived so I joined her at her worktable. Even though she kept looking away once in a while to continue with her pattern cutting she did not fail to convey emotions through the tone of her voice. This gave me the impression that she was paying attention to the questions asked, and answering as honestly as she could. She also paused occasionally and used a lot of body gestures to convey intense emotions, such as her dissatisfaction with the Canadian idea of child rearing that gave too much freedom to children.

#### **4.7.3 *Hannah***

Hannah is 45 years old. She has been married for 15 years, with three children. She has lived in Canada for seven years. Hannah graduated with degrees in Linguistics and Psychology before immigrating to Canada. She worked as a human resource manager in Nigeria. In the last three years Hannah changed her career focus from administration to nursing due to her inability to get a job that matched her educational and occupational qualifications and experience obtained in Nigeria.

I first met Hannah at a bible study gathering of Nigerian immigrants in Lethbridge. At this time, she was in her final semester at the University of Lethbridge where she was studying to become a registered nurse. She is a very determined individual who sets her mind to accomplishing her goals. For instance, during her time at the university, her spouse also decided to retrain at a post-secondary institution in another city. This meant Hannah had to combine both her studies with the primary care of her three young sons while working part time in a local nursing home. This change in circumstance put a lot of strain on Hannah's time and energy yet she managed to complete her studies. In addition, she easily finds mutual ground to connect with individuals from diverse cultural and racial background.

My interview with Hannah was conducted over breakfast in her home. Her children were in a separate room while her husband was still in bed so we had enough privacy to discuss. She came across as a very confident woman, often repeating sentences to make her points clear particularly while speaking about her high socio-economic status in Nigeria, and her many disappointments in the Canadian labour market. Being a middle manager in the oil industry in Nigeria, she recalled that life was good for her and she missed it greatly. On arrival in Canada she had tried without success to get on the same career path before going to retrain as a registered nurse. She misses her luxurious life back in Nigeria, and she mentioned after the interview that she found her participation in the research quite therapeutic.

#### **4.7.4 Kate**

Kate is 38 years old, and works as a registered nurse. She has been married for seven years and has two young children. Kate moved to Canada four years ago with her family for economic and security reasons. She is highly educated with university degrees in computer science and nursing before she relocated to Canada. She has two years pre-migration experience working as a school nurse. Due to the devaluation of the degrees she received in Nigeria, she had to attend a Canadian university to get further training in nursing.

Kate is highly emotionally expressive. She is usually honest and open about how she feels about personal and non-personal issues. She and her family are committed members of the Nigerian community in Lethbridge. She is constantly advocating for new Nigerian immigrants not to isolate themselves but to be active members of the ethnic community in order to take advantage of social support provided by the group, which in

her opinion is vital for overcoming social and emotional challenges encountered as an immigrant in Canada.

I interviewed Kate in her home during the Christmas holiday. Her husband was out, while her two young sons were engaged with kids' programs on television. Her mother was also napping within earshot from where we sat to have our interview. However, Kate assured me that we had privacy since her mother did not speak or understand the English language, which was the language used in conducting the interview.

Kate expressed delight at the opportunity to participate in the research. One reason she gave for her sentiment was that having her mother visit her for a couple of months had prompted her on countless occasions to reflect on her own marital experiences and gain a clearer perspective of her realities by comparing it to her mother's, who is from a different generation. During the interview Kate made a few references to her mother's marital experiences in order to put hers into clearer perspectives during our discussion. She was therefore appreciative that she could voice some thoughts that had formed part of her reflection during our interview.

#### **4.7.5 Janet**

Janet is 40 years old, married for eight years and mother of two. She is highly educated with a university degree in agricultural economics obtained from a Nigeria. She used to work as a logistics manager before relocating to Canada. I came to know Janet and her spouse through my husband. He met the couple through his job as a social worker in Lethbridge. Janet is the only woman in this study that is not an active member of the Nigerian immigrant community in Lethbridge. More so, she is opposed to the idea of

immigrants belonging to ethnic communities, as she believes such alliances often have negative consequences for the integration process of immigrants and their families such as ghettoization and cultural intolerance. Due to her upbringing she believes that the only reasonable relationship that should exist between individuals should be egalitarianism. In her opinion most people within the Nigerian community are traditional in their view of gender relations and would not approve of her own stance regarding that aspect of social life. For these reasons Janet avoids ethnic alliances. The only reason why she is amenable to friendship with my spouse and I is because she perceives that we share the same views regarding gender relations, which she shared during one of our interactions.

Janet was a student at the University of Lethbridge when I interviewed her. Due to her very tight class schedule we agreed to meet for the interview session in a private reading room in the university library. She responded to questions in a straight forward manner, but did not give me the impression that I was taking too much of her time. She often paused after each response to ask if she was doing justice to the questions. I constantly reassured her that she was responding well, and felt that she was genuinely interested in participating in the research despite her busy schedule.

#### **4.7.6 Ellen**

Ellen is a middle-aged woman of 41 years. She has been married for 20 years. She moved to Lethbridge from Nigeria in the winter of 2010 along with her spouse and four teenage children. Although she holds a degree in public health administration from a Nigerian university, she now works as a childcare worker after acquiring a diploma in childhood education post-migration. She finds her current job fulfilling as it gives her the flexibility to spend more time with her children. Ellen's husband works in Nigeria, and

spends his time between Canada and Nigeria. This means that Ellen shoulders more responsibilities for managing the home and caring for their four children in his absence.

Inviting me into her nicely furnished home, Ellen enjoys a comfortable life. She is always gaily dressed and the centre of attention at ethnic gatherings. She admits that she loves to be socially active in order to overcome the stress and boredom of living in a small town such as Lethbridge. As soon as I arrived at her house for our interview she tactfully informed me that she planned to attend a social event as soon as we were done. Hearing this I quickly proceeded to begin the interview to save time. She responded to questions openly and honestly, giving lots of examples to buttress her opinions. She showed a personal commitment to help me with my research by promising to grant me another interview if I need to come back to confirm any missed detail.

#### ***4.7.7 Agnes***

Agnes moved to Canada with her husband and five children three years ago. She has been married for 22 years. Agnes used to be a science teacher with degrees in Biology and Education. She was also a small-scale business owner in Nigeria before immigrating to Canada. When she arrived in Canada, she felt her accent would be an obstacle for her to get a teaching job so she decided to retrain to become a licensed practical nurse. She is still attending a local college to get her nursing qualification, while working part-time as a retail clerk.

Agnes is 47 years old and the oldest of all the women that participated in my research. At social gatherings she often takes a conservative position regarding issues. With this in mind I went into the interview with a preconceived notion that her response will be very conservative as well. However, contrary to my opinion she was very open

and honest about her marital experiences, which exposed me to her less conservative nature. Agnes showed a lot of enthusiasm to participate in the research as she felt that talking about aspects of her life from before and after immigration would help her come to terms with some of the disappointments she has had to endure since immigrating to Canada, such as her inability to get a job commensurable to her pre-immigration training and experience. Her countenance lifted each time she recalled what her life was like back in Nigeria.

#### **4.8 Summary**

In this methodology chapter, I discussed the research philosophy, epistemology, research design, and strategy used in conducting my study. Issues relating to ethical considerations were also highlighted, as well as a detailed presentation of the profiles of participants. In the next chapter I will present and discuss the research findings relating to the motivation of participants to relocate to Canada as a family unit, which provides more understanding into the social location of participants prior to migration. Next, I elaborate in detail the settlement challenges encountered by participants post-migration and feelings regarding these. Finally, I highlight the strategies used by households to negotiate settlement obstacles mediated by their social positioning within the Nigerian and Canadian contexts.

## Chapter Five

### Migration, Settlement and Household Strategies

#### 5.0 Introduction

A Gendered Geographies of Power (GGP) framework provides the structure for the discussion presented in this chapter. The main focus here is to highlight the **social location** of participants within **geographies** of the Canadian labour market, extended family networks in Nigeria, and household pre- and post-migration. I situate participants in their social locations with regards to gender, class, migration status, and ethnicity. More specifically, reasons for household migration, socio-economic experiences of participants and their households post-migration, and how gender as a process is used to organize households' resettlement strategies are highlighted in this chapter.

As will be seen from discussions presented further along in this chapter and the next, there is a reflexive relationship between the social location of participants and the type and degree of agency that they display within the geographies they occupy as women, mothers, and wives. These geographies include the Canadian labour market, the host community, Nigerian immigrant community in Lethbridge, kinship and extended family networks in Nigeria, and nuclear households in Canada. Participants relied much on their social locations within these geographical scales to organize migration decisions and households' resettlement strategies in Canada. The discussions presented in this chapter form the basis for further presentation of findings regarding how participants exercised their agency in the negotiation of marital relations post-immigration in Chapter Six of this thesis.

Subsequent sections in this chapter present findings related to the motivations of participants to relocate to Canada as a family unit, which provide some insight into the social location prior to migration. Next, I discuss in detail the settlement challenges encountered by participants and their spouses in new geographies of Canadian labour market and host community, and their feelings regarding these in the light of their pre-immigration expectations. Finally, I present the strategies used by households to negotiate settlement challenges mediated by their social positioning within hierarchies of power operating simultaneously in both Nigeria and Canada. This includes the process of consultation used by couples to decide on particular strategies, which provides insight into the nature of marital relations among couples.

### **5.1 Motivation for Household Migration to Canada**

Migrating across state borders for a household is a significant transition that involves resources and willingness of family members to relocate. Resources in terms of time to fill out immigration documents, money to support household mobility and resettlement, and social capital, such as networks of acquaintances along migratory routes, are all needed for migrants to initiate the process of migration. Considering the cost of voluntary migration, all participants in this research expressed emotions that they were highly motivated to move their families to Canada. They were determined to do this even though they were aware that the transition process had the potential to disrupt the lives of family members in varying degrees. For instance, family members would have to contend with changes in weather conditions, adjust to a new educational system in Canada, and endure physical separation from families and friends in their home country.

The eight women who participated in this study migrated to Canada together with their nuclear household units. They indicated a combination of varying reasons that motivated them to embark on the journey from Nigeria to Canada. These include the opportunity to access better opportunities for children, desire for household economic improvement, maintenance of single family unit, expansion of cultural experience; need for personal safety and security, and provision of social benefits to the host community. I will discuss each of these reasons, highlighting gendered issues therein. At the end of the subsection, I analyze motivations and eventual migration of participants as indicating their agency. Whereby agency is the outcome of social processes and practices influencing what they perceive as appropriate gender roles for their social locations within the household and society; as well as being results of their cognitive processing—imagining, planning and strategizing—that lets them take ownership for the household migration decision beyond the limitations of their social locations.

**5.1.0 Access Better Opportunities for Children:** Consistently mentioned, as motivation for migrating by all participants, was the desire to provide their children with the opportunity to acquire internationally recognized education in Canada, and acquire Canadian citizenship as part of the better opportunities they sought for their children. Canadian education and citizenship for children are resources highly valued by participants such as Betty and Agnes based on these narratives:

*[...]our main reason for deciding to migrate wasn't mainly on economic aspect or point of view for both myself and my husband because we can say we were fairly okay. It was because of my kids, my children we wanted to give them Western education, a better education here. We don't want to hear about "today there is strike. (Betty)*

*Now, actually, what motivated us to get involved along the line [to relocate to Canada] was the fact that the educational system here was far much better than*

*what we have back home...the only reason why we are involved in this is just because of the children, we want them to have a better education, an education that is internationally, that will have international coverage so that they can move from one country to another. (Agnes)*

Participants rated the Canadian education higher and more globally recognized than what is obtainable in Nigeria. They noted the stable educational system in Canada guarantees that students at the post-secondary level of education go through quality training within a shorter period, which is not the case in Nigeria. The Nigerian public educational system has suffered deterioration over the years due to the reduced government investment in education, and mismanagement of limited resources by educational boards (Obi and Obi, 2014). As a result, public educational institutions in Nigeria are not as efficient as they should be. Recurrent educational stoppages as a result of industrial strikes are common in Nigeria. Consequently, it is often the case that students in Nigeria spend more years than anticipated at the start of their studies to complete post-secondary training programs.

Due to the identified lapses in the Nigerian public funded educational system, parents who can afford it opt to send their children to universities in western countries such as the USA, UK and Canada (Madiche and Madiche 2013). This was the option adopted by Agnes a few years before her family's eventual migration to Canada. She and her spouse sponsored one of their sons to attend a post-secondary institution in Canada as an international student. Along the line, the couple felt it would be reasonable to provide the same opportunity to all their other children in the future. With reliable information supplied by their social networks already living in Canada, Agnes and her spouse discovered that it was also economically sensible to migrate to Canada with all their children under the economic stream of the Canadian immigration point-based system.

This is because as permanent residents of Canada their children will be guaranteed access to education that is high in quality and affordable, relative to the fees paid for education by international students in Canada. Moreover, as Canadian citizens or permanent residents students are eligible for government financial support in the form of student loans, scholarships, and grants. The combined benefit of an internationally recognized education at reduced cost within a stable academic environment, made migrating to Canada as a household an attractive choice for participants.

Significantly, Ellen mentioned that the decision to migrate for the sake of her children originated with her spouse. She was aware of short-term personal sacrifices that would be involved with relocation such as disruption in her vibrant social life, yet she agreed to her husband's decision. This was based on traditional gender ideologies, a result of gender intersecting with ethnicity, operating in their marital relations, whereby a wife is expected to give her husband more room to influence household decisions. Consequently, her agency to object was initially limited by her social location as subordinate to her spouse. However, through her imagination she was able to turn around her husband's decision to become her own decision too.

A GGP framework recognizes the value of imagination and cognitive processing that shape the degree of agency individuals exert. By looking at the cognitive thinking behind actions of individuals, which could be viewed as evidence of lacking agency, we uncover a greater degree of agency being demonstrated. For instance, through her ability to think through her husband's decision, and imagine how it might affect her in the long run Ellen was able to take greater ownership of the migration decision, thereby demonstrating her agency to relocate. She did this by imagining how migration for the

sake of her children would further prove to them that she loved them and was “*sacrificing*” her wellbeing for theirs. She believed demonstrating love for her children this way would situate her in a better position to demand attention and care in her old age.

According to the Nigerian culture regarding parent-child relationship, adult children have a moral obligation to reciprocate care they get from their parents. This obligation is expected to begin as soon as adult children are economic independent, and are able to show care through tangible actions like providing for the basic needs of their parent. Hence, parents try to do all that they can for their children while they are young as a sort of guaranteed investment into their own future welfare. It is upon this that Ellen based her imagination, which allowed her to demonstrate agency to migrate. Consequently, while the migration decision might have originated with her spouse, it did not end with him. Instead she demonstrated her agency by imagining how the decision would benefit her in the long run, thereby owning the decision as much as her spouse.

**5.1.1 Household Economic Improvement:** During interviews with participants, I asked about the reasons for their decision to migrate as a household. In response, a few women—Betty, Hannah, and Agnes—dispelled the idea that they migrated only for economic reasons. For instance, consider the excerpt below from my interview with

Betty:

*Semedeton: So can you give me a brief insight into your pre-immigration background and why you migrated to Canada?*

*Betty: My main reason for coming down here with all my family (pauses and raises her voice a little higher, a proud look on her face and gesticulated for emphasis)...our main reason for deciding to migrate wasn't mainly on economic aspect or point of view for both myself and my husband because we can say we were fairly okay. It was because of my kids.*

Although, all the participants in this study migrated to Canada under the economic stream of the Canadian immigration point-based system, Betty, Hannah, and Agnes were quick to deny that they were economic immigrants in the real sense of being economically deprived in Nigeria, and were in desperate search of greener pastures.

By clearly stating they were not economically disadvantaged prior to migrating, these women were trying to elevate their ethnic identity as Nigerian immigrants. This is based on their perception that stereotypically, mainstream populations in their host community believed that migrants from continental Africa are from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds.

Meanwhile, a relatively small number of women in this study—Joyce, Margaret, and Janet—specifically indicated that their immigration decisions were driven by the need to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Canadian society to improve their economic status, not just for themselves, but also for the benefit of family members that depend on them for sustenance. Even though these women, prior to immigrating, belonged to the middle-class in Nigeria by virtue of their personal and households' economic endeavours, they were optimistic that by relocating to Canada, they would be able to access better opportunities. These would enable them to contribute more to the maintenance of both their nuclear family in Canada and extended family units in Nigeria.

The desire of these women to increase their financial support to extended family members in Nigeria is based on the reality that the lower class population in Nigeria, which is the majority, rely heavily on their middle class kinfolks to provide financial support to meet their social needs such as education, healthcare, and nutrition. This situation is aggravated by a lack of government commitment to support and provide basic

social welfare to the poor and disadvantaged population in Nigeria. Hence, the burden of care for poor and economically deprived relatives is placed on middle-class members within extended family units.

Joyce's narrative portrays the above situation and the subsequent push to migrate for economic reasons. Joyce had remained involuntarily unemployed following her graduation from the university, due to a high unemployment rate in Nigeria. The situation meant that she was economically dependent on her spouse. Even though her spouse was gainfully employed as a university lecturer, which afforded the household the chance to maintain a middle class lifestyle, she still desired to be financially independent. This was because other members of her extended family were equally unemployed and depended heavily on her and her spouse for sustenance. Joyce indicated that the care burden on only her spouse's income was much more than he could bear. If she was able to contribute financially to the household income then the situation would be better. Immigration to a western country in Joyce's view presented an opportunity for her to be economically empowered.

Joyce saw an initial opportunity to migrate out of Nigeria to fulfill her economic ambition when her spouse got a scholarship to continue his postgraduate education in a Southeast Asian country. However, the immigration policy in this Asian country did not provide Joyce the opportunity to seek employment outside the home as a student's dependent spouse. Consequently, Joyce became dissatisfied and encouraged her spouse to initiate the immigration application to Canada under a recruitment stream that would allow her to engage in the Canadian labour market. As much as Joyce desired to migrate to an economically viable context, she could not initiate the process since she did not

have the human capital required to make the application in her name. Her long-term unemployment placed her at a disadvantage. She did not have the professional experience to support an application under the Canadian economic migrant stream. Consequently, she had to rely on her spouse's social location to gain access to the Canada.

Viewing the reality of Joyce, Janet, and Margaret through the GGP framework, their access to reasonable economic resources positioned them favourably within their extended family units in Nigeria. These women were privileged to be respected and acknowledged among their dependent relatives because of their ability to extend financial assistance to them. The desire to continually fulfill their familial obligations to dependent relatives pushed them to seek migration options rather than remain in Nigeria. In these instances, there is a link between social processes, and agency foreground in cognitive processing, which motivated participants to relocate. The constant demand from dependent relatives initiated the idea of finding more lucrative means to meet their financial obligations. This was strengthened by the women's ability to imagine how their continued ability to support dependent relatives would continue to sustain and possibly enhance their privileged position within the family. Consequently, external forces combined with cognitive processing through imagination, produced agency demonstrated by actual migration from Nigeria to Canada.

Janet and Kate are disappointed on evaluating current outcomes against their pre-immigration expectations or imagination that they would improve their social location post migration by increasing their contributions to family welfare. Instead of migration positively impacting their social positioning within the hierarchy of their extended family units, they are subjected to increased financial demands due to inflated economic

expectations from extended family members back home. Dependent relatives believe that they have greater access to economic resources because they live in Canada. In a way, the need to relocate to Canada in order to provide for dependent relatives indirectly reinforced patriarchy on participants. This is because inability to satisfying familial demands relegates their importance within the extended family to the background based on their gender. The opinions of male relatives are favoured above theirs. In addition, their inability to physically control how limited remittances are spent in Nigeria further devalues their influence within the extended family. This outcome affirms Mahler and Pessar's (2006) assertion that individuals' locations within social hierarchies are not fixed but subject to shifts and fluidity across transnational spaces. The pre-migration social location of Janet and Kate within their extended families was linked to their class through greater access to economic resources. However, a negative change post-migration negatively impacted their social positioning within the social hierarchy contained in the extended family structure.

**5.1.2 Maintenance of Single Family Unit:** For Kate and her spouse, Canada was specifically the destination of choice. Kate's spouse migrated to the United States for economic reasons a few years before they got married. Even though he was an undocumented migrant living in the US, through telephone calls and irregular visits back to Nigeria, the couple was able to sustain their transnational relationship, which eventually resulted in marriage and the birth of their two children.

After the birth of the couple's first child, there was a lot of pressure from extended family members for the couple to maintain a stable household in one country to raise their child. However, Kate's spouse at this point felt that if he relocated back to

Nigeria, it would be a difficult readjustment process for him. Kate noted that he was already accustomed to better access to social amenities and public infrastructures readily available to him in the US, even as an undocumented migrant. Consequently, to avoid further separation, Kate decided to relocate to the US. This proved difficult to achieve since her spouse did not have the legal standing to make an application for his family to join him under the US immigration's family reunification stream. For this reason, the couple decided to consider the option of migrating to another western country that offered a similar quality of life as that available in the US, and had an immigration policy that was easier for the couple to navigate by following regularized procedures and processes.

Based on immigration related information available on Canadian governmental agencies' websites, and information provided by the couple's acquaintances residents in Canada, they decided to pursue the application to migrate to Canada. The Canadian immigration system, which is point-based for economic migrants, favoured Kate's family as both she and her spouse had the human capital such as English language proficiency, high educational attainment, and career experience, all of which characterized the type of economic immigrants Canada tries to attract (Creese, 2011). After the approval of their application Kate relocated from Nigeria to Canada. Likewise, her husband moved from the US to Canada, and the couple was able to provide a new home for their children.

According to the GGP framework, gender intersects with other factors within social hierarchies in ways that redefine status quo in social relations. In Nigeria, Kate lived in her parent's family home. Her immediate family members provided her with physical and emotional support while her spouse was in the US. Usually, this should not

be the case. Married women, according to the Nigerian culture, should live with their husbands, or his relatives, which is the norm when a woman's husband migrates. The latter living arrangement allows in-laws to monitor the sexual fidelity of lone wives. For lone wives it protects them from unwanted sexual advances from men. Meanwhile, living within own family home limits the degree to which their extended family is involved in spousal relations. Although I did not ask Kate why she lived with her parents instead of her husband's family, the fact that her family provided her the support she needed in her husband's absence placed them in a favourable social location as in-laws to influence spousal relations of their daughter, which would have not been if she lived with her in-laws instead. It was for this reason that Kate's family was able to exert much influence on the couple to find a means to establish a single-family unit. In this instance, Kate's gender as a wife intersected with her family's ability to support her during her spouse's absence in a way that redefined status quo concerning the degree to which they could influence circumstances in her marital relationship.

**5.1.3 Expansion of Cultural Experience:** Immigration involves both cultural and transitional stages (Koc and Welsh, 2011), which places immigrants in contact with situations that can produce adaptation and resistance to new habits, behaviours and cultural practices as they try to settle and integrate in the receiving country. From a very young age, Joyce had personal interest in exploring cultures different from her own. Immigration therefore presented the opportunity for her to have broader cultural experiences beyond that of her home country. She says:

*Actually, since when I was small I loved being out of my country because I saw so many things and I felt, "oh let me go out, let me see so many things, let me learn more and see so many things then" So as I was growing up the feelings try to grow the more that yes I still want to travel out of the country.*

Joyce was particularly enthusiastic about the opportunity to have experiences of different cultures she had only heard about from migrants, and popular western media—for instance, literature and movies.

By maintaining vibrant communication with a number of acquaintances that were living transnationally between Nigeria and other western countries such as the UK, US, and Canada, Joyce learnt from anecdotes and personal narratives about the tensions that could arise as a result of adapting or resisting cultural expressions of lifestyle, consumption and patterns of social relationships. Therefore, prior to migration she was equipped with partial knowledge—partial because what she knew was based on the experiences of other people—of the cultural experiences that accompany immigration processes and transitional stages. She therefore wanted to have a personal experience of the cultural practices and transitions involved in adaptation and integration in a western society.

**5.1.4 Personal Safety:** The United States Bureau of Diplomatic Security (2014) currently rates Nigeria among African countries with very high crime rates. This is fuelled by youth unemployment and social inequalities (Kakwagh and Ikwuba, 2010). With a grim reality, individuals perceived as being of relatively high economic means, such as participants in this study, are easy targets of criminal activities in Nigeria. After a traumatic experience of threat to her personal life, Kate, who identified as an individual not overly keen on emigrating from Nigeria, was motivated to leave to a safer environment. She said,

*I am a person that loves my community; my country is so precious to me because I have my people around me. The kind of support I had there was not to compare to the one I am having here in Canada now. But I had a terrible experience back*

*home. I was a victim of kidnapping and robbery case, which actually changed my thought and thinking and now I believe safety is something that is so paramount.*

Similarly, Margaret, Betty, and Hannah felt that immigration from Nigeria to Canada would give them the opportunity to bring up their children and pursue their personal ambitions in a safer environment where law and order are upheld.

**5.1.5 Provision of Social Benefits to Host Community:** According to Margaret, another factor that motivated her household's decision to migrate to Canada was so that they could extend their philanthropic endeavours to individuals living beyond the shores of Nigeria. Before relocating from Nigeria, Margaret and her spouse were involved in providing social support through the faith-based organization her husband worked for. Her husband was a clergyman in one of the dominant church groups in the country, and Margaret supported him in his role by participating in social and religious initiatives such as evangelizing and organizing a women's support group. Margaret and her spouse believed that social work such as religious-based charity initiatives should not only flow from western countries to developing nations, which is the usual trend. Rather, such initiatives should also flow from developing nations to western countries, to reciprocate the good gesture and work done by western social workers and volunteers in developing nations.

As residents of Lethbridge, Margaret and her spouse are active in the provision of religious-based, multicultural sensitive community support both in the African immigrant communities and other disadvantaged populations like troubled youths. The couple's social location with regards to hierarchy of power at the supra-national spatial scale, linked to religion and class, place them in a position to potentially impact their host

community in similar ways as missionaries from western countries to developing countries.

## **5.2 Settlement Realities: Downward Mobility and Class Dislocation**

During formal interviews and informal contacts, participants shared their settlement difficulties in Canada, particularly within the early years of relocation. These included difficulty adjusting to different weather conditions from Nigeria; feeling of cultural isolation; and absence of family and domestic support in the household. These challenges were isolated to a few participants, but a common challenging reality reiterated across the board was the experience of downward mobility and class dislocation. The latter experience was precipitated by structural features in the Canadian labour market, and reveal how socio-economic conditions of transnational living made participants feel they occupied opposite locations with regards to class structures operating in Canada and Nigeria at the same time.

All households represented in this study are by Nigerian standard members of the middle-class in that society. The sense of simultaneous living regarding class was based on marked differences in the way participants measured the notion of middle-class living in the Nigerian and Canadian contexts. Being a member of a middle class in Nigeria connotes that a person is financially stable, with the ability to spend personal resources to meet household needs while being in a position to share excess resources with dependent relatives. Also, it is reflected in the quality of consumable household items they are able to afford. Some indication of middle class living in Nigeria include, being able to buy new household items, acquiring imported clothing and non-essential food items, being able to afford holidays abroad, having paid domestic support in the household, sending

children to private schools, and patronizing private medical facilities (Leigh, 2014). Meanwhile, in Canada, participants' expectation of middle-class living was more attached to the individuals' ability to gain employment in skilled occupations, and rely less on the social system for provision of welfare assistance related to subsidized healthcare services, housing, childcare, and income support. Even though participants were not living in Nigeria during this conduct of this study, acquaintances in Nigeria still attached their pre-migration middle class status on them. And because many participants were yet to meet up to post-migration expectations of being a member of the middle class in Canada, they felt they were occupying two distinct social locations in the class structure of Nigeria and Canada.

Ellen, whose first experience of winter was a day after she arrived in Lethbridge, was unprepared for winter living. She contemplated going back to Nigeria because she felt she might not be able to adapt to the extreme cold temperature that characterizes winter. Likewise Betty, who had some experience of winter from her past travels, was slow to accept the fact that winter will be a normal part of life in Canada. Everyday tasks like driving in wintry conditions was a challenge for both women. Betty, who often has to drive outside Lethbridge for work would often give "testimonies" at immigrant community gatherings, praising God for protecting her in treacherous road conditions.

The feeling of isolation from individuals of similar cultural background was another challenge faced by participants such as Hannah, Kate, and Ellen who arrived in Lethbridge before 2010. Hannah noted that during the period, there were very few residents of African origin living in the Lethbridge area.

*Like when we came in 2007, it was even difficult to see a black man on the street, so when you see one you are excited and you are exchanging addresses. They*

*really want to get to know you, and I am sure the number of blacks then when we came was not up to like 4 or 5 families here. And I thank God the population has really grown. Anywhere you go you see a black person.*

With a small population of immigrant residents of African origin, there were inadequate number of business that specialized in providing goods and services suitable to meet the cultural needs of African residents in Lethbridge. For instance, there was no hair salon in the city that could provide braiding services for African women. This aggravated the women's feeling of cultural isolation. A week after Ellen arrived in Lethbridge, she had to cut her hair shorter since there was no affordable means of braiding it as in Nigeria. Meanwhile, as Hannah noted, the situation is quite different now. Today, individuals of diverse African ethnic backgrounds can be seen in public areas within the city, such as in the libraries, schools, and grocery stores.

Also, participants had to adjust to the absence of domestic support post-migration. Prior to migrating, Betty, Hannah, Joyce and Kate relied on domestic helpers and extended family members to provide support with childcare and domestic duties. This is a common practice among middle-class families in Nigeria. Domestic helpers and extended family members provide free to low-cost services to middle and upper class households. It is a status symbol used by economically privileged individuals to reinforce their high social status in a class-conscious society. However, after relocating to Canada, the women experienced a change in this aspect. In the absence of cheap domestic support, participants had to rely on a combination of childcare services provided outside their homes through day programs, in the form of daycares and after-school programs, and shared care for children by both parents in the household. The change in access to household support is a significant indication of class dislocation experienced by

participants after migrating, with consequences for gender roles reconfiguration between spouses. A more detailed discussion of this immigration outcome for gender roles transformation between spouses will follow in another section of this chapter.

Aside from these issues—difficulty adjusting to weather condition, cultural isolation, and loss of domestic support—no other issue affected the physical and psychological well being of all participants as much as their experience of downward social mobility and class dislocation. This common challenge was rooted mostly in the inability of participants and their spouses to enter into the Canadian labour market as skilled professionals within a relatively short period after migrating to Canada. Participants' narratives regarding their households' settlement realities revealed common experiences of discrimination and marginalization among immigrants in Canada (Yesufu, 2005; and Creese and Wiebe, 2012).

All women included in this study migrated to Canada under a common immigration program—The Federal Skilled Workers' Program (FSWP)—as either principal applicant, or dependent spouse. Under the Canadian immigration model, skilled workers from different parts of the world apply for permanent residency through the FSWP. Each applicant is assessed on a point-based system based on their educational attainment, work experience in the last 10 years in qualifying skilled professions, language proficiency in either English, or French, age, and health status. Extra points are also awarded for a dependent spouse's human capital attributes such as education and language proficiency. Within the FSWP selection framework, applicants have to demonstrate that they can easily integrate into the Canadian labour market, and by

extension the broader society, to be considered admissible into the country as landed immigrants (Leigh, 2014).

In the context of transnational migratory flows, the Citizenship Immigration Canada (CIC) controls the flow of processes and movement of individuals in the country. They determine the resources that qualify individuals to be able to move into Canada, and participate in social processes in new geographies such as the host community, and the labour market. The power to decide who can migrate or not, impacts the type of agency demonstrated by potential applicants who wish to have their permanent residency application approved. For successful applicants, gaining landing approval under the FSWP, they get validation for their credentials, in the sense that they have what it takes to successfully integrate in the host country.

As a result of the nature of the immigration application process, participants and their spouses migrated to Canada with a strong sense that they are highly skilled migrants, capable of making productive contributions to the Canadian labour market, if and when they choose to be a part of it. In addition, the information provided to potential immigrants on the Canadian government website regarding migrant settlement, led participants—including their spouses—to have high expectations regarding their ability to find suitable employment opportunities in the Canadian labour market. However, as their narratives reveal, this did not happen for any of them. Agnes noted,

*Now coming to Canada, before we left Nigeria the picture that was painted to us because by the nature of the immigration processes that we went through we thought after submitting all our credentials and everything based on our qualifications back home we thought that...what we thought will happen when we get here is that we all will just go into the labour market, present our certificates that we brought back from home, and then get good jobs that matched our qualification. But unfortunately, that was not the case.*

Instead of easily finding jobs similar to their pre-immigration careers, participants faced labour market barriers that included non-recognition and devaluation of foreign credentials, and lack of Canadian work experience. According to Creese (2011) and Leigh (2014), these are common challenges for highly skilled immigrants in Canada. Kate and Ellen shared their experiences of devaluation and non-recognition of credentials.

*I am a registered nurse and I got here all they could do for me is just is for them is to convert my RN [registered nurse] certificate to HCA which is Health Care Aid. So I worked as a health care aider, which is nursing assistant to some people. (Kate)*

*Back home I was a environmental health officer. Initially I thought that it is a thing that would be easy for me to just continue with your profession, but it was when I got here that I know that no you cannot. They say you are, they call them public health you need to go and recertify. I was like this is another long story, how will I do it? (Ellen)*

The inability to get jobs in pre-immigration careers was the same for these women's husbands. Participants learnt within a short time of unsuccessful job-hunting that they had to lower their employment expectations.

*I was in the HR position for a long time moving from one position to the other until I was the head of the HR department...So all my life everything has been in HR and I think it was actually something I really love to do. If I had my option here I would have love to continue with it in Canada as an HR person. But getting into HR was a bit difficult because when I got here I could not get the HR job; I had to go into administration. They are related but administrative is quite different from HR. (Hannah)*

Hannah arrived in Canada expecting that she would be able to find a job as human resource practitioner based on her pre-immigration work experience. Unable to secure an interview for such a position, she settled for an entry-level role in administration.

Relative to the GGP framework, recruitment processes within the geography of the Canadian labour market ensure that workers are ranked on a hierarchy of desirability

based on the country from which they obtained their credentials. Yesufu (2005) and Banjo (2012) suggest that individuals with Canadian education and work experiences are favourably positioned to have easier access to jobs that match their education and experience. Meanwhile those who obtain theirs from outside Canada, particularly from developing countries, such as Nigeria, are regarded as second best candidates. Such hierarchy with the Canadian labour market is discriminatory towards immigrants without Canadian credentials. This significantly impacted on the agency of participants in their job search initiatives.

Aside from Agnes and Betty who mentioned that their Nigerian accent discouraged them to look for jobs as teachers, none of the other participants mentioned that physical markers of race, such as their skin colour prevented them from getting jobs in their previous professions. From my interactions with participants, I would like to suggest that significantly, racism underlined participants' inability to easily integrate into the Canadian labour market, even though they were reluctant to speak about it. According to Block and Galabuzi (2011), non-white participants in the Canadian labour market experience higher levels of unemployment and underemployment than their white counterparts due to their vulnerability to employment discrimination and barriers in getting into professions and trades. This to a large extent is responsible for the over representation of non-white individuals, such as participants and their spouses in this study, in precarious employment that are temporal, and low paying. The make-up of Canadian society has increasingly become racially diverse that there is ongoing discrimination against racialized groups in the labour market. Participants' reluctance to couching their experiences under the broad narrative of racism seemed to be a coping

strategy to avoid confronting racism in their pre-migration context. Instead, by acknowledging their lack of Canadian experience and credentials as factors keeping them from getting the jobs they qualify for, they were affirming that there were opportunities for them to improve their social positioning, and empowering themselves to take possible steps to improve their chances within the Canadian labour market. Making attempts to acquire Canadian experience and credentials, by either retraining or recertifying, were more practical actions to navigate employment barriers than confronting physical markers of their race. Meanwhile, retraining and recertification were initiatives many of the Nigerian immigrant women in the study were not willing to consider in the short period following relocation due to the pressure to meet immediate settlement needs of their households.

Women's roles as co-providers for their household took precedence over satisfaction of their career goals through the acquisition of Canadian credentials. Instead, they demonstrated agency by engaging in "survival jobs" (Creese, 2011), which are low skilled occupations, in order to ensure the immediate economic sustenance of their households. Here we see how participants' social location as co-breadwinners in the household impacted on their agency to pursue goals that would improve their social location within the highly skilled labour market in Canada. Participants' experience in this regard exemplifies how individuals' social location in one social scale does not operate in isolation in that particular scale. Rather, multiple social positionings in multiple scales intersect with each other to influence different types and degrees of agency demonstrated across geographies.

It is noteworthy to state at this juncture that a majority of participants had acquaintances already living in Canada, with first-hand knowledge of the labour market barriers faced by immigrants. Yet participants came across as unaware of the challenges in the labour market prior to relocation. For instance, Kate, Joyce, Agnes, Hannah, and Margaret had friends and family members of Nigerian origin living in the Lethbridge area before they arrived in Canada. Through these individuals, participants were able to gather invaluable settlement information relating to housing, access to schools, and childcare. The resettlement support received from their social networks made Hannah and her spouse feel they did not need to consult with the immigrant-servicing agency working with newcomers in the Lethbridge area.

Regardless of the settlement support received from their social networks, limited information was shared with participants concerning access to highly skilled jobs in the labour market. From my observations within the Nigerian community in Lethbridge, I have found that individuals already living in Canada often try to avoid discussing their unpleasant labour market experiences with potential immigrants. This could be based on the need for such individuals to save face regarding their poor labour market experiences considering that they occupy high social location by virtue of their class in Nigeria, which is reinforced by their status as immigrants. Consequently, by opening up to social networks in Nigeria about personal socio-economic difficulties and downward class mobility post-migration they risk being displaced from their class location back in the home country.

Aware that the settlement process will take some time, participants came prepared financially. They all arrived in Canada with some funds to keep their families going for

the first few months until they found suitable employment. Participants had hoped that in a short while after arriving they would find highly skilled jobs to help them build and sustain a middle-class lifestyle similar to their pre-migration reality. However, with the barriers encountered in the labour market, participants and their spouses experienced varying degrees of downward social mobility. With no job, and in most cases settlement funds depleting faster than they had hoped, participants experienced significant degrees of financial anxiety. For instance, Agnes mentioned that she was in a state of constant panic.

*Almost \$10,000 we came with and by the time we settled down we were almost running out of cash. It was serious thing. I was, my heart was doing like this [gesticulating a pounding motion of her heart]. I was like, “How are we going to move ahead?”*

Agnes and Ellen obtained jobs as childcare workers. Margaret, Ellen, and Janet worked in cleaning and retail jobs at different times. Kate and Betty were employed as junior health and social care workers. Hannah got a job as an administrative clerk. These “survival jobs” were precarious in nature; offered little work-life balance; and provided little or no intrinsic value to participants (Yesufu, 2005 and Banjo, 2012).

As highlighted earlier, the experience of labour market challenges were not restricted to participants alone. Their spouses also had similar experiences. However, while all the women were willing to adjust their short term employment goals for the sake of providing some degree of financial security for their households, a few of their spouses were unwilling to make the same adjustments—with notable support from their wives. Kate, Betty, and Ellen’s respective spouses were resilient in their resolve to continue searching for professional jobs, with support from their wives. The resolve to continue searching for highly skilled professions is one type of agency displayed by these

women's spouses. Kate, Betty and Ellen felt that it would be socially degrading for their spouses' reputation if they went ahead to work in low-skilled occupations. In the long run, these men either went back to Nigeria to continue in their pre-immigration careers—as engineers in the case of Betty and Ellen, or spent effort and time pursuing Canadian credentials in a pre-immigration career like Kate. The decision of these men to be voluntarily unemployed in the short term, the long term strategies that were used to accommodate their situations, and the gendered impact of these on gender roles and marital relations in households are discussed in section 5.3.

In contrast to Kate, Ellen and Betty's spouses who avoided employment in low skilled jobs at all cost, the spouses of Hannah, Janet, Agnes, Joyce, and Margaret adjusted their short-term employment goals like their wives. These men found low paying jobs. Hannah's spouse who trained and worked as an IT engineering manager before leaving Nigeria, found a job as a low level IT salesperson. Janet's spouse, also an engineer, found work as a labour hand in a food-processing factory. Agnes's spouse, who attained the position of a well sought after insurance expert and consultant in Nigeria, found a job as a janitor. Joyce's spouse, who was a university lecturer, found employment as a retail worker. Margaret's spouse, who was a psychologist, also found work in a food processing plant as a labourer.

Aside from Joyce, who felt positive about having a job and gaining some level of financial autonomy after years of unemployment prior to immigrating, others were not as motivated about their employment experiences. These women did not feel they gained financial empowerment in Canada since they already had this in Nigeria. Instead, they expressed emotions that suggest their disappointment and loss of prestige with regards to

downward class mobility following poor labour market performances in Canada. Hannah described her survival job, and that of her spouse, as “*jobs that manage to pay the bills.*” Also, Margaret said they were jobs you engaged in “*for the sake of having a job.*” Similarly, Agnes described such jobs as lacking prestige and boring. From her view, they were jobs that she and her spouse could not mention in their social network back home, for fear that it would impact negatively on their social location back in Nigeria. However, regardless of their negative sentiments regarding survival jobs, participants continued to maintain employment for varying lengths of time. Apart from Janet who worked as a cleaner for only six months, most participants spent an average of 18 months and two years on such jobs. They did this to ensure the financial stability of their households.

Unable to sustain a middle class lifestyle without viable labour market performances, participants had to adjust their household spending accordingly. For instance, Kate and her family rented an apartment in a crowded apartment complex with no personal laundry facilities. Similarly, Agnes and Hannah patronized second-hand and thrift stores to purchase household items in order to manage their limited financial resources. Agnes noted that she and her spouse could not afford to extend financial support to dependent relations living in Nigeria. Living in lower class housing facility, buying second-hand items, and the inability to extend financial support to dependent relations were indications of downward social mobility for these women in Canada.

### **5.3 Household Strategies for Accommodating Settlement Challenges**

Following experiences of socio-economic tensions and downward class mobility due to unmet labour market expectations, participants and their spouses demonstrated varying types and degrees of agency. They chose strategic lines of action to deal with

realities of social dislocation. These strategies included career retraining and credentialing, and adoption of “astronaut” lifestyles for husbands (Ong, 2002). Significantly, participants and their spouses relied on their social location within other geographies—specifically in the Canadian social welfare system and Nigerian labour market—to access resources like student funding for those that retrained and pre-immigration career positions for astronaut spouses. These empowered their agency to negotiate settlement challenges.

**5.3.0 Career and Professional Retraining:** As highlighted in the preceding section, devaluation of pre-immigration occupational skills, experiences, and credentials were common barriers that prevented participants from getting jobs in their pre-immigration careers. Consequently, they had to adjust their short-term career expectations by accepting employment in low skilled positions. Participants generally felt obligated to engage in low skilled jobs for the purpose of ensuring the short-term financial security of their households. Ensuring family economic stability in the short term was more important than fulfilling career aspirations. This supports Dill’s (1998) argument that in times of economic difficulties, ethnic women feel greater responsibility for maintaining minimum levels of family subsistence in addition to their reproductive role in the family. To feel greater obligation towards family over self reinforces the traditional gender roles of these women as nurturers in households. Consequently, their agency to pursue personal career goals in the short term was curtailed by commitment to satisfy pressing family needs. For instance, Agnes noted that her spouse was emotionally affected by the discrimination they faced in the labour market. His sense of social dislocation was

aggravated by the dwindling settlement funds. As a result he constantly complained about their lack of good judgment in embarking on migration in the first place. Agnes said,

*There was a time myself and my husband were always at a logger head. [her spouse would say to her], 'You cause it, why me? You were the one that made us to come here. I told you I was not coming.' So you know when we first came, it was like that for the first few 6 months or so because I was not myself. There was no job; we could not get a job. The living condition here did not match what I had back home.*

Such marital disagreement because of financial uncertainty and anxiety became recurring events between Agnes and her husband. This consequently led Agnes to accept a low skilled job in order to supplement limited household resources and reduce the negative impact such anxiety was having on her husband.

Regardless of the best effort to sustain their families with low paying jobs, it was difficult for most households to maintain their pre-immigration living standards—even in dual income households. In addition, participants were less motivated because low skilled jobs offered minimal personal satisfaction and loss of dignity. For example, Janet, who worked briefly as a janitor soon after relocating to Canada, expressed dissatisfaction with the job. She said,

*We had to take up menial jobs where you have high school graduates, even those that did not graduate from the high school being your boss. And pushing you around or wanting to push you around, you know.*

Dissatisfied with downward social mobility and the loss of dignity that came along with underemployment experiences, six out of the eight women in this study exercised agency to improve their social status in the Canadian labour market by retraining in careers considered to be lucrative. The option of retraining held widespread appeal for participants. They expressed optimism that there were better opportunities for them in the

Canadian labour market if they could retrain in new occupations or get Canadian certifications in pre-immigration occupations.

*We [self and spouse] had to go back to school as soon as possible. I started, just like I said we came in February and I started school in September same year because of the discrimination we faced in terms of getting good jobs...we could not take it, and we just had to do what we had to do. We say that the way forward is going back to school in Canada, getting their [Canadian] certificate and that will open the door. (Janet)*

*Whatever we are making with only me working was not enough, that was the fact...which made things so challenging. Eventually my husband talked to me that we cannot continue this way, the only way to work and succeed in this country is like they want you to go through their education. So we decided to apply to the University for me to have Canadian education as a nurse, which I am into now. (Kate)*

The immigration status of these women gave them the right to access government support in terms of funding of educational initiatives. This demonstrates the observation by Mahler and Pessar (2006) that the social location of individuals within geographies confers on them privileges to claim rights and resources that guarantee their wellbeing in social relationships and processes. Canada has a reputation of having immigrant-friendly policies that guarantee financial support for settlement and integration. Permanent residents in Canada enjoy the same rights and access to social benefits as Canadian citizens (Reitz, 2012). Canadian immigration policy, unlike other western countries, adopts an integrated approach to immigrant integration (Reitz, 2012). Hence, as permanent residents of Canada, these women are entitled to financial support for educational advancement such as student loans. By claiming social benefits for education they were guaranteed to have enough financial resources that would cover tuition, and basic living expenses for the household. Agency to retrain was strengthened by

participants' social location in Canada with regards to immigration status, which gave them rights to claims financial support needed to get Canadian education.

Kate, Hannah, Agnes, Betty, Janet, Joyce, and Margaret went to postsecondary institutions in Lethbridge to pursue training in nursing. The common choice of nursing among participants that retrained is notably not coincidental. Banjo (2012) studied the appeal of nursing as a career among Nigerian immigrant women in Toronto who had trained and worked in other professions prior to migrating. This study revealed that the increase in seniors' population, who tend to live longer, drives a steady demand for qualified healthcare professionals. In addition, societal recognition of nursing careers as a highly skilled profession, available flexible employment options that guaranteed improved work-life balance, and the promise of an attractive salary based on stories of women who successfully retrained, made nursing attractive as a long-term career option for participants. Agnes and Betty reiterate the benefit of choosing nursing as a career option.

*Like for me now I had to change my line of, I have to move into the health line...if you really want to get a job that will keep you and the family going all the time then that is the only place, and that is why I have to go back to the college now to go and do something in the nursing line so that I can be able to get a better job so I can take care of my children and my family. (Agnes)*

*Well you know when we came in here, as a teacher they want you [me] to go for another almost two years course again in the college...I said instead of going for some years again, is it not better to go for something else? It is better I change my course and go into nursing, and you know with the accent problem you know if I finish to come and become a teacher it may still be difficult for me, so I decided to go into nursing. (Betty)*

Within the Nigerian immigrant population, there is the widespread discourse that nursing is a very profitable career, and that Lethbridge and its environs is a hub for retirement homes. Consequently, there is the constant demand for nursing staff. The demand for

health care professionals therefore causes employers to be less discriminatory in hiring practices, particularly regarding the English accent of potential employees as long as they have Canadian credentials. Hence, it is common to witness new immigrants in the area, particularly women, being advised by other Nigerian immigrants to change their career focus and retrain in healthcare professions.

The decision to retrain held implication for transformation of gender roles in participants' households. Relocating from Nigeria meant that participants were not able to have access to cheap domestic support in the daily running of their household, which had previously been accessible to them. The under-regulated nature of the Nigerian labour market allows individuals to enter employment contracts that provide less than minimum wage rates, with no benefits. This is advantageous for the middle-class population because they can employ domestic workers at relatively cheap rates to help with running their households. As a result, privileged women could easily delegate care and homemaking responsibility to paid domestic staff. This allows them more time and energy to engage in activities indirectly related to their traditional roles as nurturers and homemakers. However, without domestic support post-migration, participants needed to be re-domesticated to their traditional gender roles. This was a significant challenge for participants because in addition to being homemakers they also had to engage in paid employment and educational retraining. This had potential to be physically and emotional stressful for participants. Meanwhile, participants and their husbands negotiated the re-domestication of women by mutually sharing care and household chores. Husbands were more open to take on roles that had initially been outside their traditional gender roles.

This arrangement provided support for participants as they navigated multiple roles as mothers, wives, co-providers, and students.

Support for Agnes came in the form of her husband providing more domestic support at home. He also continued to work in a low-skilled job. This way, he was able to contribute to the household income, to supplement whatever Agnes received as living expenses from her student loan, in addition to income earned from her part-time job as a retail assistant. Among other women—Kate, Hannah, Janet, and Margaret—less traditional divisions of household labour also emerged in their households. Although interview responses did not show this clearly, it was common for spouses to prepare family meals, and help children with school assignments while their wives were either in school, or attending to part-time work commitments.

Darvispour (2002) suggests that immigrant men from traditional societies who experience downward social mobility tend to reinforce traditional gender role division in the home to compensate for their loss of economic autonomy. In relation to participants, I observed a degree of consensus from their spouses towards changes in division of labour at home. Perhaps socio-cultural factors such as cultural exposure made them more amenable to less delineated labour division in the household based on egalitarian ideologies. Also, husbands viewed active participation in domestic running of their households as a means to demonstrate appreciation for the sacrifices—which include readiness to retrain—made by their wives in ensuring that households succeed in their migration goals.

**5.3.1 Adoption of “Astronaut” Lifestyles:** As a means to negotiate socio-economic challenges and class dislocation in Canada, Betty and Ellen’s spouses adopted astronaut

lifestyles or became “astronauts.” “Astronaut”, as a nomenclature in the context of migration studies, is originally derived from the work of Aihwa Ong (1999), who observed a growing trend among elite Asian men who were constantly flying back and forth between work locations in their home countries and the USA, where their nuclear families maintained residency.

A similar trend was observed in my research. A transnational expression of family life emerged in Betty and Ellen’s households, whereby households were split between Nigeria and Canada. Betty and Ellen, along with their respective children remained in Canada on a permanent basis, while their spouses spent more time in Nigeria pursuing lucrative careers. The adoption of such a lifestyle was an economic and permanent migration strategy. This helped to reconstitute households’ social positioning with regards to class in Canada to their pre-immigration status, and also contributed to changes in gender roles between spouses in ways that empowered the positioning of lone wives in marital relations.

Betty and Ellen migrated to Canada as part of family units, made up of their spouses and children. The pre-migration intention of both families was to secure better opportunities for their children, and ensure an economically stable household with both parents living together. However, after arrival in Canada, both families experienced socio-economic difficulties. Betty and Ellen, alongside their respective spouses, were unable to get employment in their pre-migration careers. And as other participants found out, Betty and Ellen and their spouses realized that the way out of their labour market challenges was to acquire Canadian credentials through retraining or recertification. Both women’s spouses did not welcome these options. Both men had the option of going back

to their jobs in Nigeria since they had not fully disengaged from their jobs before they landed in Canada. This they intended to do as soon as they were able to secure suitable employment in Canada. This migration strategy worked in favour for these men because they remained active in the Nigerian labour market and could still claim rights to their jobs in Nigeria when they could not find any job in Canada. They had greater flexibility and mobility in comparison to households where both spouses had terminated their employment before migrating to Canada.

The decision of both men to return to their former jobs split both households across national borders of Nigeria and Canada. Notably, both couples engaged in joint negotiations to reach an agreement on the adoption of astronaut lifestyle by husbands. Marital negotiations were structured by traditional roles on gender roles between spouses. Both women felt obligated to stay behind to look after their children, which they considered to be intrinsic to their nurturing roles as mothers. Meanwhile, the choice of husbands to leave Canada was justified by traditionally accepted roles of men as breadwinners for their households. Although Betty's marital relations with her spouse were not predominantly based on traditional gender roles operating in their marriage, the desire to reduce the feeling of social dislocation shortly after migrating motivated the couple to use traditional ideologies to negotiate the decision of who stayed behind and who returned to Nigeria. Traditional gender role ideologies, therefore, became a resource for justifying agency of participants to stay behind with their children, and husbands to go back to their pre-migration jobs. Relative to the GGP, the reality of astronaut spouses confirms that social locations within similar geographies can shift across transnational terrains simultaneously. As immigrants in Canada, their lack of Canadian credentials

decreased their economic mobility in the Canadian labour market, whereas, with their Nigerian credentials they are on a high social location in the Nigerian labour market.

Based on Ellen and Betty's spouses' elite social location in the Nigerian labour market, both men are able to earn significant incomes. These were frequently sent as remittances from Nigeria to Canada to maintain a high standard of living. The ability of the men to provide a high standard of living for their respective households is evident in the material living condition of both women in Canada. As a case in point, Betty and Ellen live in large houses in upscale areas in Lethbridge—their houses were fully paid for from households' resources—and own luxury cars. Also, because of the transnational mobility of both men, their households enjoyed greater access to Nigerian goods like food items. Making several trips between Nigeria and Canada each year, astronaut spouses brought back Nigerian goods that would have been difficult or expensive to acquire in ethnic stores in Lethbridge. Comfortable living conditions and easier access to ethnic goods demonstrated that the households transcended beyond the social dislocation initially experienced shortly after relocating to Canada.

With the adoption of an astronaut lifestyle by their spouses, Betty and Ellen exercised varying types of agency to replace their loss of professional identity and geographical mobility as a result of staying behind in Canada to care for their children. Unable to return to a pre-migration business venture in Nigeria because of her commitment to care for her children, Betty went back to school to retrain as a licensed practical nurse. This gave her a sense of professional identity. Ellen, on the other hand, simply lowered her career expectations, and got a job as a childcare provider. This job did not offer much motivation for her in terms of having a sense of identity as a highly

skilled professional, even though she was satisfied that it gave her the needed flexibility to provide adequate care for her children. The difference in the type of agency displayed by both women in replacing their initial loss of professional identity and geographical immobility shows how individuals, who are equally positioned within social hierarchies demonstrate different types of agency based on varying personal resourcefulness and initiatives.

Due to their commitment to their children, Betty and Ellen had limited freedom of movement. They could not maintain the same level of mobility as their spouses who moved freely across transnational borders. In addition, they have to carry significant burdens as they manage the combined workloads of mothering and paid work commitments. Meanwhile, what Ellen lost in terms of restricted mobility and increased workloads, she gained in greater independence. The absence of Ellen's husband empowered her to make more decisions on behalf of her household. Ellen represented him in interactions with public agencies such as their children's schools and commercial vendors. Her spouse therefore depended on her for information regarding the progress of family members in Canada. This significantly improved her independence with regards to making decisions in the home without first consulting her husband. Ellen recalled a particular situation when she was able to demonstrate her independence in household decision-making, and said,

*Okay, like now I am here, my husband is back home. There are some decisions I usually make without his consent and I know it is for the good of the family. Like for example...there is one car in the garage, the second car we have. I just to say, "oh in this family we need a second car"...I just look online I saw the car and felt the car was very nice. I did everything almost finished before I now informed him, 'Oh my dear, I want to buy this, it just looks good' and he said, "Oh, it is nice." I went ahead I bought it. He just come and see it, and said, " oh this is the car you were talking about very nice" And if it were like before I cannot do that I would*

*still need to wait, wait, and wait for him to say let's do it, don't do it, this and that.*

As earlier mentioned, the adoption of astronaut lifestyles and the staying behind of wives was also a permanent migration strategy. Although this was not highlighted during our interviews, from informal interactions with participants, I learnt that the goal of participants goes beyond just relocating to Canada. It is also their expectation to be fully integrated into the society by attaining citizenship status for themselves and their children within a reasonable time period. Talking about countdown to citizenship qualification was common among participants including Betty and Ellen. Such discussions are sometimes laced with apprehension on the possibility of changing government rules that would negatively impact their qualifications to apply for citizenship. Hence, they express urgency with the need to qualify and apply as soon as possible. Pursuing this goal gave lone wives some leverage in the household. Their spouses were more inclined to value the sacrifice of lone wives because by staying behind they were contributing to the fulfillment of their families' long-term goal of integration in Canada.

According to information available on the CIC website (CIC 2015), the Canadian immigrant integration program is designed to allow adult immigrants over 18 years of age to apply for citizenship if they can prove that they have maintained continuous residency in Canada for at least three years (1095 days) in the past four years. Criterion for citizenship relating to the time spent in Canada is not attainable for astronaut spouses who frequently shuttle between Nigeria and Canada. Consequently, lone wives in Canada are better positioned due to their limited geographical mobility to apply for citizenship. As citizens, the women can extend citizenship privileges to their children who are under

18 years old. Acquiring Canadian citizenship improves the status of lone wives in the social hierarchies of nationalities. Their Canadian citizenship status allows them to have greater mobility than their spouses in the long-term. They would not need visas to travel to certain western countries like the USA and UK with Canadian citizenship, whereas their spouses require visas as Nigerian citizens to go to these same countries. The GGP implication of this is that by staying behind in Canada, lone wives were also able to improve their social location. They could meet requirements needed to attain a new identity as Nigerian-Canadians with certain knowledge to improve their wellbeing. This also demonstrates the fluid nature of social locations according to GGP framework.

#### **5.4 Summing Up**

The decision to migrate from Nigeria to Canada was a major transition for participants and their households. As they traded off their privileged social status in Nigeria, they were confronted with new ones in Canada. In transnational context that extends from Nigeria to Canada, they acquired multiple statuses across new geographies such as participants in the Canadian labour market, and residents with access to Canadian social benefits system, which presented new challenges and opportunities. Demonstrating different degrees and types of agency, participants drew upon resources available in one social scale like the Canadian welfare system, to negotiate challenges encountered in another, like the Canadian labour market, which resulted in creating new and better social standing across geographies they occupied as women.

Relative to the GGP framework, the findings presented in this chapter show how participants are situated in social hierarchies not only in terms of gender, but also with regards to class, and ethnicity. Gender and class stand out as main variables that

organized actions and relations, as demonstrated by settlement strategies adopted by households represented in this study. For example, in homes with astronaut husbands, gender ideologies were used to decide who went back to Nigeria and who stayed behind to look after the children. Bringing a gendered lens to analyze research data thus produced immeasurably enriched understanding regarding individuals' motivations for migration; their ability to migrate, as well as how they negotiate social networks and structures in their home and host countries. This justifies the call by Mahler and Pessar (2006) to see scholars place gender at the centre of transnational and migration studies. The chapter that follows will focus on how gender ideologies are transformed within the geographical scale of the household, with a focus on the role of participants' agency. Agency here is presented as a central component of GGP in the reaffirmation or transformation of gender ideologies operating in marital relations post-migration.

## Chapter Six

### Transformation of Gender Roles and Marital Relations

#### 6.0 Introduction

This chapter extends the data analysis and discussions on research findings based on the GGP framework, with specific emphasis on **social locations** of participants within **geographies** reconfigured by transnational conditions and processes, and **agency** exercised as they negotiate marital relations. Discussions presented here seek to capture how gender ideologies and relations are reaffirmed and transformed within spatial and social scales. I highlight the agency of participants with regards to their realities of marital relations in both pre- and post-migration geographies. Agency of participants is shaped by two components. First, by overlapping regulatory powers operating within multiple social hierarchies contained in geographies such as nuclear household, extended family networks in Nigeria, Nigerian and Canadian societies. Second, by cognitive processing of participants as they imagine alternative realities crafted by their transnational lives.

In simpler terms, I highlight how structures involved in transnational existence both in Nigeria and Canada present enabling and constraining conditions for exercise of agency by participants as they negotiate marital relations with their spouses. Importantly, the structural characteristics of transnational contexts are shown to overlap in ways that enable participants to assume different, and sometimes, simultaneous imaginations that influence agency. Further thematic discussions presented in this chapter show how participants adopted varying degrees of agency in negotiating both enabling and constraining structural conditions of their marital relations.

## **6.1 “Ori O Ju Ori ” and “Olori Ebi”: Ideologies that Determine Marital Relations**

“Ori o ju ori” and “olori ebi” are two Yoruba phrases to describe distinct ideologies that guide marital relationship between spouses. These are substantiated in couples’ pattern of bargaining in household decision-making. “Ori o ju ori” translates as “we are equal” and represents egalitarian gender role ideologies, while “olori ebi” means “head of the household” referring to traditional or patriarchal gender role ideologies. From the interview data and observations, these two divergent ideologies served as guiding forces that differentially marked the experiences of marital relations among participants. On one hand, Betty, Janet, and Agnes produced narratives that expounded on their realities of egalitarian marital relationships. On the other hand, Joyce, Margaret, Hannah, Ellen and Kate acknowledged that traditional gender role ideologies subsist in varying degrees in determining their marital negotiations.

The narratives of participants revealed two facts on the realities of marital relations. First, women who report having egalitarian relations with their spouses speak about their experiences of embracing egalitarian gender role ideologies before relocating to Canada. Second, participants who identify with traditional gender ideologies, also claimed differing degrees of egalitarian gender role ideologies were operating in their marital relations. In the case of these women, there is greater manifestation of traditional patriarchy operating together with small degrees of egalitarianism both in their pre- and post-migration contexts. The subthemes of egalitarian gender role ideologies are first discussed as they operate in the marriages of Betty, Janet and Agnes. Next I focus on the overlapping of traditional gender ideologies with egalitarian gender role ideologies as

they both operate simultaneously in the marriages of Ellen, Hannah, Kate, Joyce and Margaret.

**6.1.0 “Ori O Ju Ori”—Betty, Janet, And Agnes:** In the context of marital relations, women’s participation in household decision-making relating to mutual consultation with intimate partners indicate both gender equality and empowerment for women (Oduro, Boakye-Yiadom, and Baah-Boateng, 2012). Agnes, Janet, and Betty ascribed that egalitarianism—established prior to migrating to Canada—mediated their marital negotiations and bargaining with spouses over household decisions regarding the organizing the daily life of the family. These included financial and non-financial household decisions.

To foreground their assertions, I probed them about their personal understanding of what it means to engage with their spouses on egalitarian grounds since the meaning of empowerment in social relations varies meaning from woman to woman (Mohanty, 1995). From their responses, Betty, Janet, and Agnes portrayed egalitarianism in marriage as a type of relationship in which each party is accorded equal social status and rights to influence household decision outcomes; there is joint collaboration between husband and wife to protect the interests of one and another, with opportunity for compromise where there is conflict of opinion. According to Betty,

*See each other as being very important, and no one have a say it all in the home. The other person has a say and has the right to be heard out. At times he says he wants this, and I say I want that. Okay if you want this, explain to me why you want it” or if I want it I will tell you why I want it. So there is always give and take most times.*

Similarly, Agnes relates,

*“In a family where people think logically [reference to egalitarian relations] ...the man and the wife work together. They [husband and wife] work hand in hand,*

*and see what is, try to reason with one another to determine what is good for them in whatsoever decision that they have to make.*

Janet further states,

*[...] it is a matter of understanding one another. If you understand one another and you don't cheat on one another I don't think there should be any reason why there should be any cause for saying, who is in charge, who is not in charge. It does not make any sense. To me we have always been like that.*

Agnes, Betty, and Janet speak with clarity concerning their understanding of equality in their marriages. Egalitarianism to them involves companionship with their spouses, each party having freedom to speak their minds. Women have less tension contending with husbands to have their interest reflected in household decisions. For these women, egalitarianism as they experienced it in their marriages is synonymously linked to equality and capacity to exert equal influence in decision making in household decisions.

Regarding division of roles within egalitarian marital relations, Agnes and Betty note that while both spouses might have equal opportunity to influence household decisions, due to the division of gender roles along traditional expectations, each spouse builds competency to present better arguments in support of their opinions during marital negotiations. Sometimes, this might appear that one spouse has more influence in the marriage than the other. However, for the purpose of organizing individual contribution to the maintenance of the household, couples share household responsibilities. To do this, couples rely on traditional gender roles regarding men and women's natural capabilities. Consequently, women carry responsibilities for childrearing and homemaking, and men take responsibility for non-domestic matters like sustaining family rituals within the larger family network. In relation to GGP, here, we see the structural characteristics of the Nigerian society as a geography influencing the social practice of labour division in

households. As a result of adopting traditional division of roles from the geography of Nigerian society, husbands and wives acquire expertise in their areas of responsibilities. During decision-making, one spouse can have greater influence in decision outcome. Because they have better understanding of the dynamics involved in the area of household management that the decision will impact, s/he has potential to present convincing arguments to back their opinion. It might appear that there is unequal power distribution between spouses when they draw on their expertise as resources for making stronger arguments during marital negotiation. But Agnes using the word “*critical*” insists that regardless of responsibilities being shared along traditional gender roles there is no hierarchy of importance attached to each spouse’s ability to influence decision outcomes. Rather, responsibilities of both parties are equally important, and complementary in sustaining the wellbeing of the household. Where there is undue advantage for one individual to influence a particular decision-making area, the provision for compromise ensures that the opinions of both spouses are reflected in eventual decisions reached. Agnes and Betty speak further on this,

*Majorly in terms of some decisions that is **critical** I think I take the lead if it concerns the children because you know women by nature, I think they are more concerned with issues that concern child rearing, so I take [the lead] in most of the decisions concerning our children. I take most of the decision in terms of spending the money too. I think I know what is good for the family. But there are some areas that are [also] **critical**, maybe some fundamental areas like how do we... spend on the repairing the house; those ones are different things. (Agnes)*

*In most cases we will say that the husband have upper hand on making decision on the school of the child, but if it comes to something like consumption the wife might have the upper hand. And maybe if it is about daily running of the affairs of the home or taking care of the child, I think the woman is having an upper hand. It all depends on the decision that is at hand to make. So it all depends. It is kind of a win-win thing. But in some areas the man has an upper hand, and in some areas the woman has an upper hand. So you cannot say, “Oh it is always the man or it is always the woman.*

Based on the above narratives, both couples in Agnes and Betty's instances hold distinct advantages to influence gendered spheres of responsibilities in the household. However, in the context of family relocation to Canada, division of roles along traditional expectations has become less so. The adoption of resettlement strategies—such as retraining in the case of Agnes, and adoption of astronaut lifestyle by Betty's spouse—to negotiate settlement challenges have significantly transformed the division of household responsibility between spouses to reflect an egalitarian gender ideology. For instance, post-migration, Agnes' spouse took responsibility for childcare while Agnes was studying for her nursing career. Similarly, Betty's spouse did not raise any objections in allowing Betty have more freedom to control non-domestic spheres of the household when he relocated back to Nigeria. Betty had to expand her responsibilities in the home beyond childcare and homemaking to include other spheres of household management reserved for men under traditional division of roles. For instance, Betty worked independently with a realtor to search for and buy a suitable house for her family. This would have been her husband's responsibility if he permanently stayed in Canada. Due to the egalitarian ideology held by spouses in each woman's case, it was very easy for them to adjust to changes in gender roles post-migration.

During our interview, Janet mentioned an important point regarding the prevalence of egalitarian relations among couples in the Nigerian context. She noted that due to the favourable accommodation of traditional patriarchy in Nigerian society, couples are not free to openly display egalitarian relations to outsiders as it really operates in their marriages. Nigerian men are socio-culturally expected to have the upper hand in influencing decision-making in the home. To publicly reflect a marital relation

based on egalitarian ideologies, exposes such socially deviant couples to cultural policing from custodians of traditional gender ideologies. Consequently, couples in Nigeria sometimes hide the true nature of their marital relationship from outsiders that hold patriarchal values. Janet buttressed this point when she spoke about her relationship with her in-laws while she was still living in Nigeria. She stated that some of her in-laws—men specifically—were antagonistic towards her because of the egalitarian relations she openly maintains with her spouse. Meanwhile she observes that the same in-laws were also negotiating marital relations with their respective spouses on an egalitarian basis in the privacy of their households. Janet said,

*My in-laws they gave us a lot of tough time...I want to believe now based on this discussion that probably because of their own cultural belief...I know that they know that my husband believes a lot in me and they are not happy with that. So they have issues with that although I also know that those of them that are men and are married also consider their wives opinions and we don't say anything about that.*

Opeola (1995) argues that most Nigerian marital relationships in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are more egalitarian than couples would have outsiders believe. This is because egalitarian couples are aware of the traditional expectations for negotiating marital relations in Nigerian society. They are also aware of the constant cultural policing that goes on around egalitarian couples perceived by society to be deviating from the traditional norm, to redirect their agency towards patriarchal relations. The experience of cultural policing is a significant source of tension in Janet's relationship with her male in-laws.

Agnes, Betty, and Janet linked their experiences of egalitarian relations with their spouses to interconnected socio-cultural factors relating to the cultural exposure of couples. These antecedences shaped the attitudes and expectations of participants regarding gender relations, whether intimate or otherwise. Through childhood

socialization Janet internalized egalitarian ideology that helped shape her expectations and attitudes within marital relations with regards to equality and entitlement. She grew up in an egalitarian household where traditional attitudes towards gender relations were disregarded. This had such a strong influence on Janet who suggests that egalitarianism is the “*only logical*” pattern of relationship that should guide marital relationships. This ideological understanding in part contributed to Janet’s decision to marry late—she married in her early 30’s, which by Nigerian cultural standard is considered rather late for a woman (Adeyemi and Akpotu, 2004).

On the other hand, Betty’s account reveals that her adoption of egalitarian gender ideologies was a product of her agency. Foregrounded in cognitive processing, like in GGP, she used her initiatives and resources to negotiate a better status in marital relations that is beyond the limitations of prevailing traditional ideologies in Nigerian society. Like other participants, Betty grew up in a patriarchal environment but she learnt as a child that women could be privileged in society to live above culturally prescribed patterns of gender relations if they used intra- and extra-personal resources such as strong will, education, and economic capital to bargain for better social status within social relations. She witnessed women who used their socio-economic capital and strong personality to bargain for better status and rights within the larger family unit. A strong willed personality was valuable to such women in overcoming attempts to reinforce traditional roles over them. They resisted forces within social hierarchies that attempted to curtail their agency to renegotiate their social status and reinforce their subordinate status. Mahler and Pessar (2006) suggest that individuals can exercise agency in ways that allow them to act over forces and processes encountered within social hierarchies. Using

resources, initiatives and personal will are examples of ways an individual mediate realignment of privilege and status across spaces.

Understanding the capacity of an individual to use agency to renegotiate privilege and status within social hierarchies, Betty, following her graduation from university, began to imagine a different status for herself within social hierarchies, whereby she would be guaranteed greater gender equality and rights. She said she began to demand recognition within her family. Speaking on what determines individual status in social hierarchies of power she said,

*For me, like I said, it depends on the background where you are coming from...I am not too quiet a person. I want to be heard, I want to be listened to, I want to contribute, and I want to make a point. I am not the kind of woman that you will tell to sit in one place and will agree. If you tell me to do that I won't and it might bring problem... in my larger family, both from my maternal, where I come from and my husband's home everyone knows me there as the outspoken one. So you cannot just put me down. So I think it is just because of my level of education too helped me. So what do you want to tell me that I don't already know? What would you say, "Oh this illiterate woman what does she want to say?" I mean when I talk people are forced to listen, they don't have any other choice. They have to listen and by the grace of God the level he put me people just have to listen.*

Unlike Janet, who exhibited agency in ensuring that she married a partner that shared her egalitarian views, Betty entering marriage was not as particular in her choice of partner. Once, she announced at a gathering, that when making a choice of her partner she was only interested in marrying an individual who was a devoted Christian. Betty's spouse in the early days of their marriage leaned more towards traditional patriarchal views even though he showed egalitarian tendencies due to his education and multicultural exposure. Betty's spouse is highly educated, and exposed to egalitarian practices based on his multicultural engagements through work and travels. To a significant extent his cultural exposure motivated him to disregard extreme traditional

patriarchal practices like the right of a man to physically abuse his spouse, and the societal tolerance of polygamous practices. Regardless of his disregard of such traditional practices, he still held on to patriarchal culture that gave legitimate rights to male members to have more influence in the household. This was contrary to Betty's position, particularly as she felt a sense of entitlement to egalitarian relations considering her social location based on educational achievement.

Betty noted that being aware of the ideological differences between herself and her spouse, she had to exhibit some degree of initiative or agency to ensure he fully embraced egalitarian gender relations in their marriage. In the early years of their marriage she would often let him have the final say during marital negotiations whenever they were not able to reach a mutual agreement on any household issue. By doing this she deliberately acknowledged his position as head of the family based on traditional cultural expectations. Betty said,

*Like in my own home maybe at times if the head of the family [husband] will say, 'okay I have to take this decision' and maybe me as a woman will say, 'okay let us do it this way or that way,' and he says, 'no let us do it this way.' At times if [husband] you do it [his] way and [he] hit a rock [undesirable outcome], so maybe once or twice, and so the subsequent ones he will want to listen to the wife. He will want to hear her out. So by the time he makes one or two mistakes it becomes [the normal for him to ask], 'okay, what do you [as a partner or wife] think, what do you say?' Especially in the area where you have to stand and take a decision.*

Betty's initiative, as reflected in her narrative, contains significant element of cognitive processing on her part. Betty's agency to submit to her husband the right to make the final decision during marital bargaining, provided the opportunity for him to evaluate the efficacy of his ideological stance. This could be measured against the quality of outcomes that accompanied his decisions. Realizing that relying on traditional

patriarchy produced poor decision outcomes, he shifted his traditional position for egalitarianism that best suited the emotional and social goals of both spouses. Overtime, egalitarianism describes their marital relationship.

Like Betty, Agnes' cultural upbringing exposed her to traditional gender relations in marriage. Growing up in an era of economic restructuring, with the introduction of SAP in Nigeria, Agnes witnessed a dramatic change in women's participation in the labour market. The situation favoured successful women who were able to engender what Agnes termed as "*role reversal*." With significant levels of assertiveness—an example of intra-personal resource according to the GGP framework— these women were able to use their economic resources to earn respect and entitlement to privileged status within their marriages and in society. Based on her experience, she views women's social location to be a result of their access to resources combined with a personal assertiveness to be treated as equally influential in relationships as men.

By linking resources and economic activities to women's position within social relationships, Agnes adopted the mentality of male entitlement. That is to say, she accepted the cultural traditional ideology that privileged men's position in marital relationships and that women were economically subject to their spouses. Meanwhile, if a woman was economically independent then she was positioned to engage favourably in egalitarian relations in the household. It was with this mindset or understanding that Agnes married to her spouse. At the beginning of marriage, Agnes was a student at a postsecondary institution training to become a teacher. She was not economically engaged and therefore had limited access to financial resources. She had no sense of entitlement to egalitarian relations in her marriage then. However, Agnes's spouse had a

different understanding. Due to his western cultural exposure, he disregarded traditional patriarchal ideologies. Consequently, he introduced egalitarianism in the marriage and treated Agnes as his equal regardless of her economic status. Reflecting on how her spouse influenced the egalitarian relations in their marital relations, Agnes said,

*Maintaining marital cordiality [equality] depends on the couples involved in the marriage. Now like for my husband I think for him, actually it was not my own making or my own intention that we should have such a cordial relationship but because most of, right from the onset of our marriage maybe he has already made up his mind the kind of home he wants to have in his life...Some men are so different that they have made up their mind no matter what. There may be forces from outside from the family or whatever, but they will still stick to their gun, what they want is what they want for their home.*

Betty's narrative in comparison to Agnes' brings to light an important observation made by Vogler and Pahl (1999). They suggest that the socio-cultural factors of husbands were more significant in determining the ideology that will drive the pattern of bargaining in households. Based on the conclusion of Vogler and Pahl (1999), we can see that when Betty and her spouse held divergent ideologies regarding gender relations, it took some degree of agency on Betty's part to turn the tide around in her favour even though it involved submitting to her spouse's traditional ideological leaning. Until Betty's spouse fully embraced non-traditional ideology regarding gender relations in marriage, egalitarianism was not completely embraced in their relationship. Meanwhile, in Agnes's case, her spouse's ideological inclination influenced the adoption of egalitarian relations. Notably, there was no resistance to Agnes in comparison to Betty's spouse towards incorporating egalitarian views in marriage. This gendered difference in receptiveness to discard traditional patriarchy for egalitarian gender ideologies is understandable considering that women, more than men, are likely to benefit from such transformation in gender relations.

Overall, Betty, Agnes, and Janet feel positive about their experiences of egalitarian relationships with their spouses, which indicates that egalitarian relations among couples is a desirable relational reality for women. The manifestation of egalitarian relations in the marriages of these women has been a productive force for promoting marital cordiality. As egalitarianism gives room for couples to engage in open communication, each party is able to express their opinion and mutually reach a compromise that will appeal to both parties thereby reducing hidden tensions in the relationship. Finally, negotiating marital positions as equals helped participants and their spouses to make quality decisions concerning their households.

#### **6.1.1 “*Olori Ebi*” and “*Ori O Ju Ori* ”: *Intersecting Expressions of Ideologies***

Ellen, Kate, Margaret, and Hannah identified with traditional gender ideologies as operating in their marital relations. This defined their social status within the social scale of marriage with regards to rights and entitlement in influencing household decision outcome. They also claimed that differing degrees of egalitarianism were also operating in their marital relations. The simultaneous occurrence of opposite ideologies in marital relation is an interesting point. I could not find literature that frames the simultaneous embodiment of opposite ideologies. Significantly, traditional gender ideologies operated within marital relationships to determine the extent to which participants embraced egalitarian ideologies as an outcome of their agency. The social processes and practices participants encountered in the transnational geographies of Canada and Nigeria, as well as household settlement strategies adopted created opportunities for greater embrace of egalitarianism in households. Perhaps there is conflict between reinforcement of pre-

migration traditional gender role and transformation towards egalitarianism post-migration that drives agency of participants in having two distinct ideologies.

To show how two divergent ideologies existed side by side in participants' households with traditional patriarchal ideologies either through agency of husbands or wives measuring the degree to which egalitarian ideologies are embraced, I present discussions based on the realities two participants—Ellen, and Kate.

**6.1.1.0 Ellen—“You do not want to fail”:** During my interview with her, Ellen described the typical bargaining or negotiation of household decisions that takes place in her marriage:

*Back in Africa [Nigeria] we see our husbands as the head of the family...I will use this Canada as an example. When we were about to move. He brought the idea up like, you know as far as these children [are concerned], what do you see about their education? I say my own opinion; he now said what we are going to try to do is make sure they travel oversea to go and study. I agreed and supported what he really said...**my own as a wife is to submit** [emphasis mine] and everything just went good.*

During the same interview, Ellen also made the following comment:

*It is the husband that has the priority, that have the say of the family...I thank God for the civilization now we try to sit down like in a round chair. **We discuss together, we share our ideas and we now reach a compromise. But better still husband is the head of the family and he is the one that has the final say.*** [emphasis mine]”

Comparing the two statements above, Ellen makes contradictory claims to both traditionally determined gender relations and egalitarianism in her marital relations. First, she highlighted that her spouse had the upper hand in influencing decisions in the household; next she asserted her claim to egalitarian relations by saying that she and her spouse bargained over household decisions in an equitable fashion through “a round table” dialogue.

Ellen's narrative particularly where I have included emphasis, shows traditional gender ideologies working to determine her subordinate social location in marriage. This legitimated male control in the marriage. Her spouse puts out the invitation for her to make her personal contribution during decision-making processes. Examining this reality against her claim to egalitarianism, I would say that the egalitarian relations Ellen ascribed to is a product of male generosity. Her tangible capacity to influence decision outcomes in the marriage was not based on legitimate rights, rather it was moderated by her spouse as he deemed fit. He determined when he needed her opinion and also determined how much of her opinion would be incorporated into final decision outcomes.

In the post-migration context of Ellen's marriage there has been some shift in the level of influence she exerts in marriage. This to a large extent is due to the reconfiguration of family life to mitigate settlement challenges. As discussed in Chapter Five, Ellen and her spouse do not maintain a conventional household in Canada. Instead her spouse adopted an astronaut lifestyle, which is a transnational expression of family life (Hsu, 2002). The splitting of the household across two countries presented opportunities for Ellen to have more independence in negotiating family life on behalf of her household in Canada. Due to her stable residence in Canada, she was the family's main point of contact with institutions that provided various social services to family members in the new country. For instance, she engaged with educational and healthcare agencies that provided social support to her children. This gave her the privilege of having first hand information regarding members of her household. Her spouse therefore depended on her for updates on daily happenings in the household. In addition, the long absence of her spouse from Canada meant that she had to assume more responsibilities in

the household. Beyond providing care for her children and maintaining the domestic needs of the household, Ellen had to take charge of other roles in the household that would have traditionally fallen on her husband's shoulder if he maintained permanent residence in Canada. For instance, she independently bought a family car from a third party while her spouse was away. This, she noted would have been his responsibility if he was in Canada. The post-migration changes in family living arrangement loosened the "containment" (Pessar, 2008, p.2) of Ellen's traditional gender roles as mother and homemaker to include roles traditionally reserved for men.

Meanwhile, in return for her increased roles in maintaining the household in the absence of her spouse, Ellen's spouse "rewarded" her by letting go of some of his marital authority. I have used "reward" as a description to describe the shift in marital power quite deliberately. This is because in as much as Ellen gained independence from the adoption of astronaut lifestyle by her spouse, she was still aware of her culturally determined roles in the marriage according to the Nigerian culture. Ellen might physically be in Canada, yet she is impacted by the Nigerian culture regarding her status in marriage across national borders. This is what Mahler and Pessar (2006) regard as simultaneity of spaces according to the GGP framework. Removed from Nigeria, Ellen still carries Nigerian cultural expectations in her mind, which shaped her imagination regarding her status within marital hierarchy of power.

Ellen's imagination of her subordinate status in marriage according to Nigerian culture is reinforced by cultural policing of her agency to assume a different imagination of what her status could be with reconfiguration of status within the geography of Canadian society. During the period when her spouse was contemplating to return to his

job in Nigeria, a few individuals were against him doing so. Family acquaintances, notably men advised him not to relocate back to Nigeria without his family. This argument was often centred on the narrative that Nigerian women who lived alone in western contexts gained greater empowerment notably through better socio-economic opportunities available to them. This change in social positioning in society consequently fosters their agency to seek ways of improving their status within the hierarchy of marriage, which leads to loss of male control and power in the household. Within the narratives, lone women's demonstration of agency for transformation of marital positioning is equated with defiance towards their spouses. Ellen speaks more on the circulation of the narrative of lone Nigerian woman who become defiant to male patriarchy after migration:

*When we were coming here there is a lot of some, and I won't call it crisis...Friend problem, family problem like they say to my husband when he tried to leave us here, "oh you want to go and leave your wife in Canada, you want to come and stay in Nigeria. Later you will not be able to control her" Even in some experience [examples] some people are giving him. Even he has a boss they were working together and this problem happened. He too he sent his own family to UK, then she [his wife] was working in a very good place, and was earning good money that the man could not control her. And when we were coming that thing came up like [they say] by the time they travel that he [my husband] will not be able to control me. **But [to] the goodness of God that thing, I really put that thing at the back of my mind. I really, I am working on this thing like seriously like because you know men when they really trust, or they put all their life on you, if you really just do something to just disappoint them or just try to make them doubt it is going to be like a very big shock on them. [my emphasis]***

Based on the GGP framework, the defiance of lone wives can be explained as resulting from their dispersal within multiple scales—Nigeria and western country of residence. Each scale contains different prevailing gender ideologies. By comparing how the prevalent ideologies in each scale supports their status in marital hierarchy, they conclude that egalitarian ideologies rooted in their host country supports better positioning in social

relationships in comparison with traditional gender ideologies of their home country. Lone wives strategize, drawing on resources around them, to challenge reinforcement of traditional gender ideologies that limit their marital status.

Aware of the narrative of defiant lone wives, Ellen resolved within herself that even though she had the opportunity to have greater options to improve her status in marriage post-migration, she would maintain her cultural identity as a Nigerian woman submissive to the authority of her husband. This way, she aimed to produce a counter-narrative by showing that lone Nigerian immigrant women can successfully maintain their cultural identity as submissive wives in a western context. Consequently, Ellen would diligently provide frequent updates to her spouse on her engagements with institutions on behalf of the family, as well as other matters of interest regarding her management of the household in Canada. Doing this was symbolic in portraying to her husband that he still maintained his authority in the home, even though he was physically absent. Relative to GGP, Ellen's resolve to maintain her cultural identity is a demonstration of her agency. Although it can be argued that this exercise of agency is influenced by the social forces behind the narratives of deviant lone wives, seeking to reinforce gender inequalities across transnational terrains. Yet, as will be made clear, Ellen's agency transforms her marital status beyond reinforcement of gender inequalities.

As Ellen diligently submitted to male patriarchy in her marriage, trying to produce a counter narrative that her lone status does not have to make her a deviant from Nigerian culture, she was able to create options to gain greater marital empowerment in ways that was amenable to her spouse. Her approach did not make him feel threatened that he was losing some of his authority in the marriage. This encouraged him to

gradually share his marital power to Ellen. Consequently, there was improvement in her status in the marriage. Looking at the outcome of Ellen's exercise of agency by submitting to patriarchal authority through the GGP framework, it can be seen that there was a lot more initiative and resourcefulness displayed through her agency.

Even as Ellen experienced some degree of egalitarian changes in her marital relations, her spouse still moderated the balance of power in marital relations. It was not on a consistent basis that Ellen was able to exert equal leverage in marital relations. In times of conflict, when she and her spouse had different opinions concerning household issues, he was able to leverage on traditional ideologies to reinforce patriarchy to his advantage. Ellen provided more insight on this:

*Sometimes if we are discussing [to make a decision}, maybe I am trying to raise my voice [trying to forcefully exert my opinion], "This is how I want to do it." Maybe initially he has been saying, okay, but then [after raising my voice] he will say "no way, what you are saying, I cannot agree..." Like today, it happened today that the phone just cut off. We were talking like argument [over an issue], and I will just go silent. **I do have a silent time [time of reflection], and I will just quickly think, Oh, is he angry? Am I trying to be controller of the situation? I think, 'no, no'.***

Ellen's narrative above speaks volumes about the burden placed on women in traditional patriarchal relationships to ensure the maintenance of harmony in their marriages. Consequently, she took ownership for occasions when the traditional patriarchal status quo is disrupted, and leads to conflict in marital relations. Taking ownership means that Ellen feels responsible for the relational climate in her marriage. She noted that if she disregarded her culturally determined subordinate status in relation to their spouse's then she would be contributing to the escalation of conflict during marital negotiations. Ownership for the relational climate in marriage is a burden that is unduly precipitated by

the gender imbalance in traditional patriarchy, whereby women are blamed for relational disengagements (Nwosu, 2006).

According to GGP framework, what individuals do in social hierarchies cannot be understood apart from the cognitive process that motivated specific exercise of agency. The willingness of Ellen to take ownership for marital harmony is rooted in her cognitive process of imaging, planning, and strategizing on how to improve her status within the social hierarchy of mother-children relations. Going back to section 5.1 in the previous chapter, motherhood is a core and valued identity for most participants including Ellen. She appropriated the household decision to relocate to Canada as being grounded in her agency by imagining that her relocation for the sake of her children would improve her social location in mother-children relations in the long-term. Based on her strategizing for the long term, her initial loss of professional identity and sense of social dislocation were bearable circumstances, being a price to pay in order to improve her status in mother-children hierarchy of power. Ellen understands that the quality of her future as an aged and dependent individual lies in the success of her children. Her children are investments for her future. She expects her children to reciprocate her “sacrifices of motherhood” by shouldering the responsibility for her care when she becomes old and unable to care for herself. Still, before this takes place, she assumes responsibility to provide a stable conventional home for her children, where they will be guaranteed the love and care of two parents. This she believes would contribute to their life chances for success. Meanwhile, the guarantee of providing a two-parent household for children is only possible as long as she and her spouse continue to stay married based on harmony. Taking this mothering responsibility seriously, Ellen noted that she could

not afford to fail her children in this regard by her want for marital equality. Consequently, she deliberately suppressed her desire for greater marital power in instances when this need comes in conflict with the need for marital harmony.

Even though Ellen enjoys varying degree of leverage in marital relations as allowed by her spouse, she did not equate his inconsistent accommodation for equal relations to mean she had legitimacy to equality in the marriage—even if she asserts that egalitarian relations occur in her marriage. She maintains constant awareness of her subordinate status in marriage as determined by traditional gender role ideologies. As a result, she is often quick to reflect and apologize to her spouse for being overly assertive in pushing for her opinion to be recognized during marital bargaining that lead to misunderstandings between the couple.

Ellen's apparent submission to male patriarchy does not necessarily remove the anxiety for greater equality on a more consistent basis during marital negotiations. Rather, the anxiety enabled her to creatively find ways to increase her options in terms of her spouse extending more marital power to her more than he would ordinarily have done if he felt his authority was being threatened. Significantly, Ellen's narrative illustrates how evoking patriarchy by men in marriage is not an end in itself; rather it is a means for such traditionally inclined men to reinforce their authority in marital relations even though wives exert significant influence in the household. For such men, it is amiable for wives to wield momentous equality in marriage as long as they recognize their subordinate positioning, and acknowledge their husbands' generosity in being relaxed in their hold on authority in the household. In other words, women are compelled to see

equality as a privilege rather than legitimate entitlement based on their social location in marital relations.

**6.1.1.1 Kate**—*“I want my marriage, I want my home. I do not want divorce”*: In the first three years after her marriage, Kate and her spouse lived apart. She was a lone wife living in Nigeria and her spouse lived in the USA. During this period of separation, she and her spouse negotiated marital relations based on the traditional gender role ideologies. Kate said,

*Even though he wasn't with us when we were in Nigeria, ...he was away and still made decisions. Like he commands.*

Although the couple consulted with each other whenever there was an issue to be decided, Kate's husband still had the right for his opinion considered above his wife's if they had varying interests. To a significant degree he moderated Kate's influence in marital bargaining. Kate noted,

*In my husband's case he would still consult me. Bring the issue to me then seek for my advice. Sometimes I have my way, sometimes no. He will tell me the rationale why he is not going with my decision. So I would say in my own conclusion [my] husband is the one that would give final say. [I] do not have any objection to it. If [my] suggestion goes through with [him] fine, if not [then his] say is the ultimate and the final.*

Kate had been socialized to view traditional male patriarchy in the household as the norm in marital relations. The marital realities of significant social others such as her parents and older siblings reinforced her understanding of husbands and wives' positioning in marital relations. Kate said,

*I would say that culturally that [traditional patriarchal ideology] is what we met. I mean my parents taking them for example. My dad had final say in everything we do in my family. And taking my brothers, I am the last born of my family, looking round the whole, my brothers and sister's family it is the same thing. So it is something that is a norm, that is existing in Nigeria, I would say among the Yoruba in particular because that has been the normal thing. When it goes the*

*other way round we believe it is abnormal and people think and start looking at it in another way.*

Aside from childhood socialization within her immediate family, the nature of the environment Kate lived most of her life pre-migration also played a role in shaping her understanding of power hierarchies in marital relations. Following the GGP framework, Mahler and Pessar (2006) argue that structural characteristics of an individual's context have an effect on the quality of experiences and references the individual has access to in forming opinions about social life. Notably, Kate lived in a semi-urban part of Nigeria. The qualities of semi-urban milieus in Nigeria are characterized by small population sizes in comparison to large towns and cities, with a majority of inhabitants being local indigenes. Consequently, there is minimal ethno-cultural diversity in such places (Para-Mallam 2006). Religion to a large degree plays an important role in the organization of social processes and practices in semi-urban and rural areas (Grasmick et al, 1990), hence such societies, as Kate's pre-migration context are conservative in their views on gender roles in social relations, and less tolerant of egalitarian relations (Para-Mallam, 2010).

As Kate mentioned, members of the community acted as gatekeepers or cultural police to ensure that individuals adhere to traditionally prescribed patterns of gender relations. Gossiping and public shaming of women who were known to negotiate marital relations on egalitarian grounds were experiences Kate was accustomed to. It is the belief in such society that women should be responsible for preserving their culture. Consequently, women are blamed when couples adopt egalitarian values. Such women are linked with possessing diabolical means to persuade men to adopt egalitarian values in marriage.

However, cultural policing of marital relations of couples is not specifically a pre-migration reality. The condition of simultaneous living in transnational terrain makes it possible for cultural policing of marital relationships to still occur post-migration. Transnational processes and practices of communication between Nigeria and Canada make it possible for family members and individuals connected with the ethnic community to have insight into the marital relations of couples living in a different country. These expose couple's relationships to scrutiny by them. To avoid this, couples such as Kate and her spouse give outsiders the impression that they adhere to patriarchal values in marital relations. For instance, Kate mentioned that whenever their non-migrant relatives called her husband on the phone for financial assistance, he would oblige them to give him time to think about their request. Meanwhile, he would often bring such request to Kate for them to jointly deliberate on—although he would still moderate the degree to which Kate's contributions will be reflected in the final decision. To do otherwise, by saying to relatives that he would consult his wife regarding their requests for money before giving them a response, would open up the couple to scrutiny. This could predispose Kate to being the subject of gossip and shaming within the family circle in Nigeria. The negative consequence for Kate's reputation can quickly move from the level of the extended family to the larger society as such contexts are usually small and members are often connected through communal social process and practices, such as marriage and religious affiliations.

As noted earlier, as a consequence of her socialization, Kate was amenable to patriarchal bargaining with her spouse when they initially got married. However, as her spouse allowed her to have more opportunities to contribute equally to household

decisions, Kate began to see this alternative way of relating with her spouse as progressive for her social status in marriage. Her perception regarding this was largely based on comparison of her marital reality with the narratives of significant social referents like her mother and sisters. Although she agreed that their marital relationship was culturally appropriate, yet she perceived that patriarchy exposed women to inequalities and practices, such as psychological abuse from undermining the opinion of women, which can be detrimental to the overall wellbeing of women.

Negotiation of life post-migration presented opportunities for further transformation of gender roles and marital relations among couples. In Kate's case, there were chances for the couple to gradually embrace egalitarianism on a more consistent basis as much as it also gave room for her spouse to attempt to enforce traditional gender roles through cultural policing. Prior to migration, Kate's spouse was the main breadwinner for the family even though Kate was also working full-time. After migration, this arrangement at home changed. Due to socio-economic challenges encountered by the family in the settlement phase, Kate and her spouse had to depend on each other more than before in order to meet their immigration goals of economic prosperity.

Kate's pre-migration career as a nurse gave her an advantage in the Canadian economy relative to her spouse's work experience. Although she experienced devaluation in her credentials as a registered nurse in Nigeria she was still able to practice as a health care aid worker in Canada, while her spouse could not practice his pre-migration occupation due to regulatory restrictions of his profession.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, there was

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<sup>4</sup> Kate's spouse had to go through three years of rigorous training to get a license to enable him to practice pharmacy in Canada. During this period he was voluntarily unemployed so that he could provide domestic

transformation in gender role between spouses. Kate became the breadwinner for the family. As Kate studied and worked, her spouse took charge of running the domestic affairs of the household. Kate noted that he was very amenable to this less traditional arrangement. Due to his past migration experience in US, he was accustomed to men engaging in roles in the household that are traditionally reserved for women. He was efficient in carrying out household and care duties.

Regardless of gender role changes in the household post-migration, marital bargaining continued as it was pre-migration. Kate and her spouse still maintained marital negotiations based on traditional gender ideologies indented by egalitarianism as and when permitted by her spouse.

*Semedeton: Did you experience any changes in marital relations after you moved to Canada?*

*Kate: Personally to me nothing changes. The way we had been doing all these things [negotiating marital bargaining] is still the same. My husband still has final decision on whatever thing we do here. It has not changed it is still the same...He still has the final say. Issues come up, and we look at it together. If whatever opinion I have, if it is okay with him he will take it. If it is not he will tell me the reason why he is not taking it.*

Meanwhile, Kate noted two factors during resettlement that fuelled tensions within her to clamour for greater equality in marital relations that was not moderated by her spouse, specifically regarding financial management in the household. These included her increased contributions to household income, and the Canadian egalitarian culture as reflected by social agencies respecting women's equality. Her economic role in the household as breadwinner, coupled with her understanding that Canadian social institutions provided protection for women's rights in social relationships influenced her

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support for the household while Kate recertified in nursing, and he could also study for his professional recertification examinations and assessments.

aspiration for greater egalitarian relations with her spouse. These factors worked together to change her perception and response to marital inequality. Consequently, apathy towards inequality in her marriage gave way to some measure of resentment. Kate said,

*I was the one making money but I don't have any say in terms of what to buy, what to spend, how to spend it. No, everything still comes from my husband. He still makes decision on everything. I could recollect that time, there was a time I got benefit from work and I said, 'okay this money I am going to use it to buy clothes, I am going to use it to treat myself' and he said, 'no', he said there is no time for those things now. We have a long way to go, we have a lot of things to do and, **it was not okay with me because sometimes you just feel cheated and think, 'But I am the one making this money. [emphasis mine]***

The root of her frustration at the time came from awareness that there was a possibility that her marital relationship could be more egalitarian than it was. She expected that her increased economic contribution in the home should be a justification to enjoy equal influence in the household. Since traditional legitimacy to male authority in the household is linked to their primary breadwinning role, Kate believed she should be entitled to similar rights. Also, Kate indicated that she knew that the Canadian context offered “*better opportunities for women*” to have equal say in social relationships. While she did not specifically talk about the avenues where she learnt about the Canadian society providing greater opportunities for gender equality, it is safe to say that there is a probability that she perceived this from her first-hand exposure to alternative gender ideas through friendships with other women—immigrant and non-immigrants alike—who subscribed to egalitarianism, and from engagement with social services and agencies as they accord, or appear to promote equal rights to men and women alike.

As mentioned initially, Kate experienced negative emotions from her inability to translate her economic empowerment to expressions of tangible egalitarian relations with her spouse. While she noted that she would often discuss her frustrations with her spouse,

yet, it was still in his power to validate her perceptions. Sometimes he was positively responsive to her agitations and gave her greater leverage to influence current household decisions. At other times he displayed resistance, in which case she disciplined herself and “*accepts*” the situation reluctantly. Despite her frustration with instances of inequality, Kate maintained self-discipline to avoid “*blowing out*” or taking drastic actions like forcefully challenging her spouse’s hold on power in the marriage. She said,

*When we discuss some issues, when we bring some issues up and my husband says no to it, and I am not okay with that, it troubles me and I am like, I feel cheated this way. But because I want this marriage, I want my home; I don’t want divorce. I keep my peace.*

Although Kate’s silence could be interpreted as being passive to her reality of gender inequality, looking at it from the stance of GGP framework it is a demonstration of agency. Kate placed a high value on marital harmony, and is opposed to divorce due to her socialization in Nigeria. Divorce is seen as a negative occurrence in most Nigerian societies (Reynold, 2006). Kate had a personal goal before her marriage to ensure that as far as it was dependent on her actions, she was not going through marital situations that could be “*killing*” or bring physical harm to her person. She would try to endure whatever negative experience she faced, which included maintaining a subordinate position in marriage. Kate said,

*When I got married, there were so many things I put into my actions that was not before, like taking vows like I am going to be with him, he is going to be my head. Some people take all these vows in marriage and just let it go when things go wrong. But in my own case I have it at the back of my mind that this is the end of promise that I made that I am surrendering my life to him, he is in charge, he will make the right decision for me.*

Maintaining harmony was a goal that guided Kate’s agency as she negotiated marital relations in Canada, even when she experienced conditions that were capable of causing

tensions. In addition, Kate used her religious identity to strategically discipline her responses as she continually strives to maintain marital harmony. This, in her opinion, helped her to build capacity to be resilient in her accommodation of marital inequalities.

Kate said,

*I will say what make me different by that time to go by whatever he said is Jesus Christ, because I can have that opportunity to reply back and say, 'come on now, you cannot make such decisions'... I have a support, I have something to lean back on to say, 'Oh, where is my support coming from, my support is coming from the Lord,' So I can keep going. That will give me a sort of soothing word like, 'okay, don't worry girl, and keep going. I have something better for you' So that has been helping me so much.*

Kate's outward passiveness towards marital inequalities therefore became a form of agency to achieve her goal of a united family. By imagining, planning and strategizing, Kate refuses to take advantage of her social location in terms of her improved economic position, or protection before the law to improve her subordinate status marital relations. Rather she reaffirmed traditional gender ideologies so that marital harmony was maintained, which was a desired outcome for her.

Aside from maintaining marital harmony, the efficacy of Kate's agency to remain passive in the face of inequalities is paying off currently by influencing her spouse to ease his control over marital power. But again, like the example of Ellen, this could be an expression of male generosity, whereby husbands extend some rights to wives to increasingly influence household decisions without tangible disregard for traditional gender ideologies in marital relations. During a recent encounter at a women's meeting, Kate spoke about how her strategic act of being passive in marital relations was helping to change her position in marriage. She shared profound information about certain aspects of her marital experiences with everyone. Among other things, Kate spoke

proudly about how her acts of “*enduring*” inequalities in her marriage were paying off. Kate told us that her spouse was beginning to give her more opportunity to influence decision as a reward for being a “*submissive wife*.” She noted jokingly that the statistics of her ability to influence financial decision has improved from two to four out of ten instances. She ended by encouraging other women present at the meeting to “*submit to their husbands in order to dismantle inequalities*” in their marriages. By letting her spouse always take the lead he is gradually recognizing that she should have more influence in decision-making as a form compensation for being submissive.

**6.1.1.2 Redefining Marital Equality:** Kate and Ellen both had intersecting realities of traditional patriarchy marked with instances of egalitarianism determined by their spouses. To a large extent, their limited realities of marital egalitarianism mostly emanated from male generosity rather than tangible disregard for traditional gender notions by their partners. Male generosity came up in Kate’s narrative. Her spouse would often remind her of his benevolence in allowing her to express her views during marital bargaining. But he was not compelled to place equal value on her contributions. Kate said,

*He kept on reminding me about that, like, “okay, don’t get this thing into your head I am still the head of this family. Involving you in this decision, I am respecting you. [emphasis mine]*

Notwithstanding their experiences of patriarchy indented by egalitarianism at times, Kate and Ellen still ascribed to marital equality in the context of their realities. They redefined marital equality as their ability to engage in joint consultations with spouses even if opportunity to have equal influences over final decision outcomes is not guaranteed. In contrast, they viewed marital inequality as non-consultation of women by their husbands

whenever important household decisions were made. Kate and Ellen described men in such unequal relationships as “*authoritarian*” (Ellen) and “*wicked*” (Kate) to define their character, while at the same time being quick to dissociate their respective spouses from such a category. Ellen said,

*My husband is not somebody that would just say, oh, this is how I want you to do it. The man will have the final say on a good day in Africa...They are very authoritative. They can be like gods saying this is how I want you to do it, nobody can change them.*

Kate also said,

*In situation of some women that their husband cannot, the kind of husband that is easy to suggest to, or that will come, like in my own situation issues will still come to the center table. We discuss [things]...I have seen some men are so wicked, they maltreat their wives.*

However, both women demonstrated awareness of alternate definition of marital equality as both members of a couple having equal measure of rights to influence marital negotiations regardless of gender. In addition, it involved readiness for each member to reach a compromise whenever a consensus of opinions could not be achieved. In the light of both women’s understanding of alternate definitions of marital equality, it is plausible that both women consciously redefined the standards for determining what made up marital equality in an attempt to elevate their experiences as being superior in comparison to the experiences of other women who experienced stricter manifestations of patriarchy such as psychological abuse, and non-recognition of contributions to household decision making process. Ellen referred to these women as “figure heads” in the household with no real power to influence household management. Kate and Ellen demonstrated agency in defining marital equality in such manner that not only accommodated their limited experiences of egalitarian relations, but also elevated their realities of marital positioning.

## **6.2 Passiveness and Submission to Patriarchy as Substantial Agency**

Passiveness and submission toward realities of marital inequalities is a common theme in the narratives of participants. Early western researchers on the experiences of women from traditional societies have often portrayed them as passive victims of gender inequalities due to patriarchy (Hedge, 1996). The women's narratives of silence in the face of inequalities are often viewed as lacking agency. But Betty, Kate and Ellen illustrated strongly that silence reflected in passiveness and submission to traditional gender roles does not necessarily mean that they lacked agency to tackle gender inequalities in marital relations.

According to the GGP framework, all actions and inactions displayed by individuals in social relationships are demonstrations of agency. This is because before individuals decide to act or refrain from acting they have carefully imagined how actions and inactions will impact their goals in social relationships. Passiveness and submission to patriarchy at different times were personal choices of action grounded in cognitive processing of participants. They appropriated passiveness and submission in diverse ways based on their initiatives that would produce specific outcomes for them in marital relations. For Betty, it was a means to teach her spouse that his opinions in the management of the household were not necessarily the best, and better household goals were more likely to be attained if he placed equal importance on her views.

For Kate and Ellen, negotiating life in Canada created opportunities, such as exposure to egalitarian values in the host community, increased independence for Ellen as a result of her spouse's astronaut lifestyle, and increased economic contributions to household income for Kate. These opportunities enabled both women to think about

alternative ways of relating with their spouses aside from those prescribed by traditional gender ideologies operating in their households. Yet, alone, without agency, these opportunities could not enable any change in their status in marriage. Instead, as both women recognized these enabling opportunities, they had to use their initiative and resourcefulness to decide on appropriate actions to transform their status in marital relations. Consequently, they chose to remain passive and submissive to their respective husbands. These turned out to be transformative forces that creatively helped to improve their status within marital hierarchy by gradually dismantling the operations of traditional gender ideologies.

Overall, for these women, passiveness and submission to their husbands in the face of gender inequalities were subtle transformative forces that created better opportunities for them to improve their negotiation of power with their spouses. Betty's spouse realized that his wife's perception was equally as important as his own in the marriage. For Ellen and Kate, although passiveness and submission to patriarchy did not function to dismantle marital inequality in its entirety as in the instance of Betty, they were still substantive enough to create more opportunities for varying degrees of marital equality.

### **6.3 Experiences of Cultural Policing**

Cultural policing as used in this study refers to some control, or safeguarding of a particular culture to ensure that members sharing a cultural identity, such as ethnicity, behave in ways that are considered culturally correct based on the established ways of doing things (Sheriff, 2001). It is a matter of cultural preservation to ensure that members

of a group do not deviate from its norms. Members of the same ethnic culture refer to tradition to police the behaviour of others.

In marital relationships, cultural policing can be a challenging reality faced by individuals seeking to negotiate intimate relations in ways that are different from tradition. Persons who presumably benefit from retaining the status quo will often use cultural policing as a means to block change since any successful attempt to change traditional relations will result in rebalancing of power.

In the context of this study, it emerged that cultural policing moderated the agency of participants who embraced egalitarian values, thereby displaying resistance to traditional gender role ideologies. As seen from the narratives of participants such as Betty, Janet, Kate, and Ellen, these women experienced cultural policing as they tried to negotiate marital relations based on egalitarian ideals.

Janet was faced with cultural policing by her in-laws. Being an individual that significantly disregarded traditional gender roles, Janet's spouse was measurably amenable to the notion of egalitarianism in marital relations. Meanwhile, Janet's in-laws were more traditional in their outlook and openly opposed the egalitarian relations of the couple. As a result, Janet became a target for verbal abuse and gossip within the family for maintaining egalitarian relations with her spouse. Her in-laws opposed the couple's liberal relations and wanted to ensure the preservation of traditional culture since the wider family benefitted from it. For instance, it would be relatively easier for them to make requests for financial and material assistance from their "brother" if he was the sole symbol of authority in his nuclear household. They could make a more effective claim to his personal resources based on the familial relationship. The guarantee for assistance is

presumably threatened if both spouses have to consult with each other before help is extended to relatives. Janet is considered to have less affective ties to her in-laws since her affiliation to them is based only on marriage.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, in-laws were threatened by feeling that they had much to lose if their “brother” bargained their need for social support with Janet, who had less reason to be committed to them.

The case being as it was, notably Janet felt relieved by her household’s migration decision and eventual relocation to Canada. Due to the physical distance between Canada and Nigeria, Janet expressed freedom to negotiate marital relations on egalitarian grounds without much intrusion from her in-laws. This is not to suggest that the couple was isolated from their non-migrant relatives, but the transnational distance helped to reconfigure the balance of power as to who controlled communication and face-to-face contacts. Janet and her spouse were better positioned to determine how much transnational communication they wanted to keep with their non-migrant relatives. Face-to-face contact was dependent on the couple’s intentions. More than non-migrant relatives, the couple had the resources to travel to and from Nigeria for regular family visits, while non-migrant families depended on them to travel. As an illustration, in order for her husband’s relatives to visit her family in Canada, Janet and her spouse would have to be agreeable to financially sponsor their travel and accommodate them during their stay. Having control over communication and contact this way alleviates much of the stress endured by Janet as a result of her in-laws control pre-migration, particularly through verbal abuse. And, although having some degree of control over who among her in-laws she opens communication with limited her exposure to attempts to police her

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<sup>5</sup> Social affiliation through marriage is considered weak in the Nigerian culture as it is subject to precarious conditions, such as separation of a couple through death or divorce.

marital relations, yet she is not immune from other means of perpetuating cultural policing beyond her control like gossiping within the family. As the subject of family gossip, Janet is less disturbed since the gossip never reaches her.

Husbands who identify with traditional gender role ideology, even to a small degree, also perpetuated cultural policing of their marital relations. Notably, Betty, Kate, and Ellen's narratives revealed that they experienced this challenge at different points and in varying measures as they tried to use their agency to assert equal influence in marital bargaining. For Betty, this happened pre-migration before egalitarianism was embraced in her marriage. During marital negotiations, when both spouses had differing opinions, her spouse would remind her that he was the head of the family. His agenda for asserting this claim at such times was to make Betty back off from contending to have as much influence in the decision outcome as him. Similarly, Ellen and Kate's spouses also verbally asserted their male authority during bargaining.

To reiterate, the agenda of husbands who policed their wives was to enforce traditional gender roles and have more leverage in control over decision outcomes. In response to such policing, wives were compelled to be less assertive for equal influence in household matters of contention. However, being less assertive, or passive, to male control when negotiating incidences of cultural policing from spouses was grounded in active cognitive processing, it served different purposes for participants. For Betty, it was an initiative used to make her spouse see the value of considering her opinion in greater measure during marital bargaining. She noted that by being passive, she was giving her spouse the chance to make mistakes, which would help him realize that valuing his wife's

opinion was relevant in meeting family goals. This, in her explanation, helped to create more room for egalitarianism in her marriage. Betty said,

*In my own home maybe at times if the head of the family say, “Okay I have to take this decision” and maybe me as a woman will say, “Okay let us do it this way or that way” and he says, “NO let us do it this way” At times if you do it that way and you hit a rock, so maybe once or twice, and so the subsequent ones he will want to listen to the wife. He will want to hear her out. So by the time he makes one or two mistakes it becomes “Okay, what do you think, what do you say” especially in the area where you have to stand and take a decision.*

Being passive in the face of cultural policing by their husbands was a strategy to maintain marital harmony. To a large extent, Kate and Ellen valued marital harmony above marital equality for differing reasons. For Ellen, marital harmony at the expense of having marital equality was perceived to be a sacrificial notion of motherhood. This she hoped would bring her much benefit in the future, when her grown-up children are able to reward her for ensuring they had the best chances for success in life, specifically preserving a stable two-parent household. For Kate, marital harmony was perceived to guarantee continued marital status. In her view, marital tensions could result in divorce, which she frowned upon.

#### **6.4 Summing Up**

In summary, the insightful accounts of Nigerian immigrant women presented in this chapter showed two different realities of marital relations among participants in this study. On one hand, participants such as Betty, Janet, and Agnes have marriages based on egalitarian gender ideologies. For these women, the direction of their marital relations were precipitated by socio-cultural realities that related to both themselves and their spouses, such as disregard for traditional gender role ideology as a result of childhood socialization. On the other hand, we saw how two differing ideologies—traditional

gender role ideologies and egalitarianism—worked together within the marital relationships of Kate and Ellen to produce marital experiences tethering the lines of marital equality and inequality.

Within the realities of marital relations, Kate and Ellen had opportunities to further embrace egalitarian relations post-migration. Such opportunities were in part precipitated by conditions of the social structures in the new country, and outcomes of household resettlement strategies. Although the narratives of Ellen and Kate show transformation in gender roles and marital relations as outcome of negotiating marriage within complex transnational realities, it should not be assumed that such change involved a linear process, whereby change occurred as a result of moving from a traditional Nigerian society to an egalitarian Canadian society. Transformation of marital relations is not a given based on fixed variables, such as migration across two distinct societies. Instead, relocation presented opportunities for couples to adapt their relationships to the changing realities in ways that would best suit household goals. This could happen regardless of migration, as in the example of Betty whose marital relations was transformed many years before migrating to Canada. Circumstances, even within a singular context, could arise, which demands that individuals be responsive and adapt in ways that satisfy personal goals grounded in their agency. The ability of Ellen and Kate to demonstrate agency grounded in cognitive processes helped them turn opportunities post-migration into personal experiences of improvements in marital positioning, even though marital relations were not yet totally egalitarian for each of them.

So far, this chapter has highlighted the various ways participants have demonstrated agency in negotiating marital relations. Participants have used varying

degrees and types of agency to negotiate their status in marriage relative to their spouses'. These were demonstrated in participants' narratives on gender roles and their ability to have greater influence in specific decision making matters in the household; recognition of socio-cultural factors that shape attitudes and expectations of their roles and rights in marital relations; having varied personal definitions of marital equality; being passive and submissive at times to allow husbands to demonstrate greater marital power and yet using the same as leverage to sway decisions later; and avoidance of cultural policing by social networks in Nigeria by controlling frequency of personal contact and communication. Narratives of participants show that all these actions were clearly grounded in their cognitive processing of imagination, strategizing, and planning around personal goals in marital relations. By recognizing these varying initiatives, I complicate my argument by suggesting that there is no binary regarding agency. In other words, it should not be suggested that in any instance participants either had agency, or no agency as they negotiated marital relations. Rather, so long as their actions or inactions were grounded in cognitive processing, they still count as agency. What distinguishes the degrees and types of agency of each woman is the context of display, and the degree to which they were able to use external resources and intrinsic initiatives to achieve their personal goals in marital relationships.

As a conclusion to this chapter, I assert that agency grounded in transnational actors' cognitive processing can be a transformative force for altering social location of individuals in a manner that either reinforces or transforms pre-migration gender ideologies. Relative to GGP framework, social structures of individuals' context impact the quality of experiences and social references that become resources for imagining

possibilities and outcomes relating to their social location within geographies where power hierarchies operate. This can change, as demonstrated by narratives of participants, due to migration from one distinctively structured context to another; for example, from a traditional society like Nigeria to an egalitarian society like Canada. But, as indicated earlier, such transformation is not always a fixed process involving movement across distinct context. Meanwhile, change in environment due to migration expanded the experiences and social references of participants. However, this was not enough to transform marital relationships. Significantly, it is the demonstration of individuals' agency grounded in enriched cognitive processes that promoted transformation of their social status in ways that transformed pre-migration gender role ideologies operating in their marriages.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Evaluation of GGP Framework, Summary and Conclusion**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents an interrogation of Gendered Geographies of Power (GGP) as a framework for my research, showing how it worked and where my research contributes to supplementing it. Next, I discuss the research objective of my study, and a summary of research findings. Finally, I provide the conclusion of the thesis, and make recommendations for further studies.

#### **7.1 Beyond GGP**

GGP was the guiding framework for my research. I used it to tie the strands of migration status, class, and ethnicity of Nigerian immigrant women negotiating marital relationships in Canada. This study has proven to be a good example of how GGP framework can be used to develop, structure, and carry out a research analysis. The interrelated components of geographies, social location, and agency, grounded in social actors' cognitive processing and imagination as brought together by Mahler and Pessar (2001), provided the opportunity to present an elaborate analysis of gender as a process in the lives of Nigerian immigrant women in this study. This was achieved through the presentation of deeper insights into the experiences of gender roles and marital relations in the context of migration, placing at its core the hierarchies of power operating simultaneously in geographies of family and community, which contributed to the transformation of marital relationships in ways that improved the status of participants.

Gender, as a process, operated intricately in the domains of economic, socio-cultural structures and processes that produce reflexive relationships, which impacted the

lives and status of participants in social relationships pertaining to marriage and kinship networks, both in Nigeria and Canada. GGP was useful in uncovering and explaining the ways in which gender intersected with other axes of power that emerge from these structures and processes to determine particular experiences for participants within the social scales of marriage negotiated in transnational contexts.

As evident in the analytical chapters of this thesis, the intersection of gender with other axes of difference produced new subjective identities; for instance, immigrant woman, lone wife, and breadwinning wife, in a transnational context, which shaped participants' experiences of marital relations post-migration. It also informed the quality of their initiatives or agency used to navigate new subjective identities in the households they represented. This theme of changing subjectivities in this study reflects the possibility for transformation of individuals' social location within hierarchies of power such as marital relations.

Overall, GGP as a framework worked well in allowing analysis of participants' social agency within hierarchies of power operating within and across the home country and host society. I was able to examine the actions of participants as outflows of their agency grounded in cognitive processing or imagination in response to social forces—practices, processes and institutions operating across national borders of Nigeria and Canada. The structural properties of individuals' contexts impact the quality of their cognitive processes that are utilized as resources for imagining possibilities and outcomes for self in social relationships. As reflected in this research and other related literature on transnational actors, the experience of migration can alter or expand the social structural properties that impact the lives of migrants. For instance, by moving to Canada, Nigerian

immigrant women experience the introduction of new social structures based in their host communities. Alterations in this regard can better the lives of immigrant women through the creation of opportunities and enhance their initiatives, such that they exercise agency to change their social status and transform gender ideologies operating in social relationships prior to migration.

I believe that my study made significant contributions towards the enhancement of the GGP framework by demonstrating the efficacy of transnational actors' agency in transforming gender ideologies operating in social relationships. Migration presented participants with opportunities, such as independence to make decisions and greater economic interdependence between couples, and to improve their social location within the power hierarchy of marriage. Yet, these opportunities alone could not transform ideologies operating in marital relations even though they promoted better social status for women in marriages. Significantly, it was agency exercised by participants in the light of opportunities that was credited with transforming gender ideologies operating in marital relations based on their desired outcomes. In addition, this contextual study of Nigerian immigrant women in Southern Alberta shows how gender can be articulated with structures of differences operating simultaneously across scales and spaces. In addition, this intersectional study between gender and marital relations in transnational spaces clearly helped to contribute to the literature on Nigerian immigrant households in Canada, highlighting specific realities that motivated participants to use agency to transform traditional marital relationships post-migration.

## **7.2 Summary of Findings**

The objectives of this empirical study were first to examine the impact of migration and transnational living on the gender roles and marital relations of Nigerian women living in Lethbridge. Second, to explore the ways Nigerian immigrant women used their agency to propagate possible transformation in their gender roles and marital relations post-migration. In order to achieve these objectives, I raised questions that interrogated whether or not the experiences of migration, and promoted improvement in the gendered positioning of Nigerian women within marital relationships. As demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six, the rich ethnographical data revealed that the migration experiences of participants presented opportunities that improved their social location in marital relations. However, it was the demonstration of agency that transformed marital relationships.

Significantly, the socio-cultural realities of immigration provided opportunities to transform gender roles mostly in favour of participants in relation to their spouses. The decision to migrate from Nigeria to Canada was a major transition for participants and their households. As they traded off their privileged social status in their homeland in search of better opportunities for themselves and others—children and spouses—they were confronted with new challenges in the host society. They encountered socioeconomic challenges relating to difficulty using their pre-migration human capital credentials to get into professional careers in the Canadian labour market. This resulted to initial poor labour market performances among participants and their spouses, which led to downward social mobility and dislocations. As a means to address negative socio-economic experience, participants and their households adopted varying settlement

strategies, such as retraining in lucrative careers and adoption of astronaut lifestyles by husbands. These in varying ways resulted in improvement in the status of participants in their marriage.

Post-migration experiences presented enabling conditions from which participants could enhance their experiences of egalitarianism in marriage. On one hand, participants who had realities of egalitarianism in marital relations prior to migration perceived migration to an egalitarian society like Canada to be positive in their relationship with their spouses. It promoted greater interdependence and delineated gender role divisions in households. On the other hand, there were participants who indicated that two differing ideologies—egalitarianism and traditional gender ideologies—worked together within their marital relationships to produce marital experiences tethering the lines of marital equality and inequality. For these women, they enhanced the expressions of egalitarianism in their marital relationship by using their agency to leverage improved social status in marriage, post-migration.

Meanwhile, transnational connections to Nigeria, through maintenance of kinship and friendship based relationships in the home country, and husbands' desire to hold on to marital power worked together to try to curtail participants' agency to leverage their improved marital status to enhance egalitarian relations with their spouses. This was done through cultural policing of marital relations by social networks in Nigeria and husbands who had previously benefitted from traditional gender ideologies in the household. Yet, in spite of this challenge to the enhancement of egalitarian marital relations, participants turned initiatives of submission and passiveness that would have otherwise further subjugated their marital positioning, into creative options. This in turn, promoted viable

chances for their spouses to extend greater generosity in the sharing of marital power on equal basis. As a result of their initiatives, participants were able to improve the share of marital power in incremental measures.

Relative to GGP framework, the findings of this research show how the agency of transnational actors works to transform gender ideologies within spatial and social scales in two distinct countries—Nigeria and Canada. Participants' agency are shown to be not only affected by extra-personal factors such as access to resources, but also by initiatives, including the ability to imagine attainment of personal goals.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

The motivation to conduct a research on the experiences of Nigerian immigrant women in Canada was driven by a need to understand my personal narrative as an immigrant Nigerian woman negotiating marital relations in a transnational context. “Doing gender” in transnational context such as Canada has been argued to have the potential to change the lives of immigrant women from traditional societies in positive ways (Jibeen and Hynie, 2012; Ojong and Mathuki, 2010; and Pessar, 2005). Change in the contexts of these women's realities refers to the transformation of pre-migration traditional gender ideologies that perpetuate gender inequalities in social relationships to egalitarian gender ideologies post-migration that improve inequality gaps between men and women. The aftermath of such transformation is found to engender unprecedented consequences for marital relations through negotiations of social processes in the home country and the host community. As a result, my research was focused on the investigation of how transnational social processes and structures in the lives of Nigerian

immigrant women in a southern city in Alberta, Canada was contributing to changes in gender roles and marital relations after immigration.

In an attempt to investigate how the foregoing applies to Nigerian immigrant women in Canada, I conducted a qualitative research. I recruited eight Nigerian immigrant women, and gathered ethnographic data through interviews and observations in Lethbridge. Afterwards, I subjected these data to thematic analysis to draw out themes related to my research focus. The findings of this research, presented in Chapter Five and Six, highlighted motivations of participants' household relocation to Canada. These included access to better opportunities for children, household economic improvement, maintenance of a single family unit, expansion of cultural experience, need for personal safety, and provision of social benefits to the host community. Also, findings revealed that households experienced settlement challenges relating to labour market barriers in Canada. Participants and their spouse were not able to get professional jobs that matched their pre-immigration human capital credentials. This resulted in varying realities of downward social mobility. And so, in an attempt to address this negative settlement outcome, households resorted to strategies, such as educational retraining and adoption of astronaut lifestyles. These led to changes in gender role division in households, with significant improvement on participants' social location in marital relations. In isolation, improvement in marital status of participants did not translate to transformation of pre-migration gender ideologies operating in marriage. Instead, improved marital status presented the challenge of cultural policing for participants. To overcome experiences of cultural policing, participants demonstrated varying degrees of agency, such as passiveness towards inequalities and submission in marriage. These demonstrations of

agency were effective forces that transformed gender role ideologies operating in marital relations post-migration.

The findings of this research provide culture and context specific insights into the lived realities of Nigerian immigrant women in Lethbridge. Overall, they demonstrate, in accordance with GGP framework, that by using agency, participants were able to appropriate social-cultural realities of migration and transnational living for transformation of marital relations in ways that promote gendered wellbeing and positioning within their households. It is my hope that this thesis and its findings will be relevant in serving as a literature resource that will provide insight into how intersecting factors of gender, immigration status, and ethnicity combine to produce particular experiences of migration for Nigerian immigrant women in Lethbridge, and how this group of migrants use their agency to improve options for greater empowerment in marital relations.

#### **7.4 Recommendation for Future Studies**

Based on the limited number of participants in this study, it is not possible to apply results to the general population of Nigerian immigrant women in Canada. What has been achieved, at least, is the opportunity to have an insight into the experiences of a group of Nigerian immigrant women living in Southern Alberta. It provides understanding into the transformation of gender roles and marital relations in the light of complex processes in their social location after migration. In particular, it demonstrates how participants used their agency to negotiate marital relations to meet personal goals, either in the form of preserving their marital harmony, or taking steps to close inequality in their marriages.

The study was limited to a small city in Southern Alberta, a part of Canada considered conservative in values. Perhaps future research could be designed to compare the marital experiences of Nigerian immigrant women living highly urbanized cities like Toronto or Calgary to gauge traditional and liberal lifestyles. Comparing results of these studies carried out in such divergent contexts can potentially provide insights into how geographies impact the quality of agency exercised by Nigerian women as they negotiate gender roles and marital relations in Canada.

Finally, I recommend that this study could be improved upon if future research explores the marital experiences of Nigerian migrant women who come to Canada on a temporary basis as part of a family unit, for instance through such means as international student recruitment and asylum seekers. Based on the precarious migration status of these women—because there is the possibility that they could go back home after study or they could be deported if their asylum applications are rejected—they will be socially positioned differently from women with permanent immigration status in terms of opportunities and resources available to them to navigate transnational realities, with regards to social relations and networks. It would, therefore, be interesting to gain insight into how limitations ingrained to their immigration status affect women's agency to reaffirm or transform gender ideologies post-migration.

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