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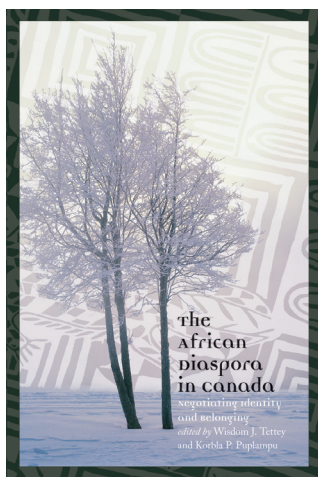
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## THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN CANADA: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY & BELONGING

Edited by Wisdom J. Tetley & Korbla P. Pupilampu

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## THE GENDER DIMENSIONS OF THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE: The Case of African–Canadian Women in Edmonton

*Adenike O. Yesufu*

### INTRODUCTION

IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE that the experiences of immigrants vary from group to group. However, very little distinction is made among the various ethnic groups; all are lumped together as *visible minorities*. As a group, Canadians of African descent, specifically continental Africans, have received limited attention in both academic and popular writings, and their experiences tend to be homogenized under the category of Black (see Cassidy, Lord, and Mandell 2001). In the same vein, many analysts have homogenized the experiences of African-Canadian women under the broad rubric of *women of colour*. African women are thus lost in a maze of data describing the experiences of women of colour. There are few studies on the labour market experiences of continental African women in Canada (see Elabor-Idemudia 2000, 1999; Moussa 1993).

In 1999, six Black female researchers, including the author of this paper, set out to investigate the experiences of Black women in Edmonton as

a basis for understanding the broader experiences of Black women in Canada. The research specifically sought to examine the relationship between their educational training and their economic status in Canada. A major objective was to identify and systematically document the barriers to education and employment faced by Black women in Canada. The study involved all categories of Black women: Black women from Sub-Saharan Africa and from the Caribbean, and Canadian/American Black women. Recognizing the differences among the groups of women after the initial administration of the questionnaire, focus group discussions were conducted with the various groups of women to elicit deeper meaning and understanding from them. During the course of that research, I conducted two focus group discussions specifically with the Black women from Africa on their experiences in Canada. This paper presents discussions from the focus groups.

The findings from the focus group discussions show considerable difficulties for the women in finding jobs appropriate to their skills and qualifications. Many of the women attribute their failure in the job market to their minority status and the fact that some of them obtained their credentials from African institutions of higher education. The narratives also illustrate difficulties in securing jobs even after they undergo further training and receive accreditation from recognized Canadian institutions. As bread-winners for their families, these women accepted any job that would “simply pay the bills” so that, in some cases, their student-husbands could pursue their education.

These women’s experiences have significant implications for the ongoing debate about the lack of recognition of foreign degrees in Canada, the racialized identities that could determine employability, and the stability of the family. The study is divided into three major sections. The first section provides a brief historical overview of the experiences of African-Canadian women in the labour market. The second addresses the nature of the research process, while the third reports and discusses the findings of the study. Based on these findings, the third section also offers some policy options before proceeding to a summary and conclusion.

#### THE CANADIAN LABOUR MARKET AND CONTINENTAL AFRICAN WOMEN: AN OVERVIEW

Despite Canada’s policy of multiculturalism, meant to promote the equality of all people irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, or social class, the reality shows otherwise. For example, studies on women of colour (read as Black in this chapter) as a whole have indicated their over-representation in low-end manufacturing and service sectors in comparison to Canadian-born women (see Leah 1991; Boyd 1986; Ng 1988). Comparatively few women of colour have attained the expected economic autonomy their educational attainments should command. Thus, middle-class *colourless women* (read as

White) continue to reap most of the benefits of the feminist revolution compared to their counterparts of colour (Elabor-Idemudia 2000; Bannerji 1993; Schecter 1998).

African-Canadian women, like other Black women and women in general, play very crucial roles in keeping together families and communities. In writing about Black women's history, African women are usually left out of the picture (Cooper 2000). African women thus constitute a minority within a minority, and they have long endured discrimination and exclusion in Canada. They continue to be exploited as cheap domestic labour, and they also experience racism (see Cassidy, Lord, and Mandell 2001). African women, like other Black women, are in many cases, found at the very bottom of the labour force. They seem to face double discrimination, both as women and as Blacks. Often, their immigrant status does not improve the situation. On the whole, African women encounter discrimination with regard to accessing social services and resources, asserting their legal rights, and securing economic autonomy. Certainly, there is an urgent need to explore the specific experiences and the challenges that continental African women face in Canada.

There is no question that education and training are required in order to be gainfully employed or to permeate the professional enclaves. However, the preliminary investigation that preceded this research suggests that a significant number of African-Canadian women were highly educated with extensive experience in their fields of specialization. Yet their economic status in paid work and in the overall society did not reflect their educational credentials. Overall, Black women are at the bottom of the income ladder, earning 27 per cent less than other female and immigrant populations (Calliste 1991).

In other words, despite a history that covers many years of settlement in Canada, African-Canadians, even those with Canadian citizenship, have not shed the stereotypical images of immigrants; perpetual outsiders and visitors to a foreign land (Ghosh 1996). The images are often frozen in time and space, and apply to subsequent generations of Canadians of African descent. These images and the related practices continue to exist despite the supposed integration and tolerance encouraged by Canada's *Multiculturalism Act* of 1988. Despite the prevailing stereotypes, the high educational level among African-Canadians shatters the pervasive stereotype of the "backward, savage, primitive" Africans (House-Midamba 1991).

#### THE RESEARCH AND GENERAL PROFILE OF AFRICAN-CANADIAN WOMEN

The specific objectives of this study were to identify and systematically document the barriers to education and employment faced by African women in Canada and to assess the impact of these barriers on their pursuit of economic autonomy. The study was also conducted with a view to making

recommendations for viable strategies that could enhance the economic autonomy of African women in Canada. As mentioned earlier, the current study centered mainly on the two focus group discussions with fifty Black women of African origin living in Edmonton. The two focus groups were made up of randomly selected groups of twenty-five women each. The focus groups allowed for a rich sharing of experiences among the women. Participants found themselves in a conducive atmosphere where they felt free to revisit old memories, evaluate their present status, and pose questions about their future. They shared experiences that offered considerable insights into their initial aspirations and present frustrations in the struggle to attain economic autonomy in Canada.

The African women who participated in these group discussions came from various parts of Africa: some from East African countries, such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda; some from Central African countries like the Congo and the Cameroun; some from the Horn of Africa, specifically Ethiopia and Somalia; and still others from West African countries, namely Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The majority of the African women who participated in the focus group discussions immigrated to Canada as adults. A large percentage of them were married with children and came to Canada with their husbands. Many of the women have children born in Canada. Hence, with little or no roots in Canada, most of these women have made Canada their home.

## FINDINGS OF THE GROUP DISCUSSIONS

### *General Expectations and Educational Background*

Virtually all the participants came to Canada with very high expectations in terms of the prospects their new home initially held for them. They saw Canada as a land of opportunity where they would be able to pursue higher education in fields of their choice. Their education and training, they assumed, would propel them to the highest echelons of their professions. But upon arrival in Canada, they were confronted with a *catch twenty-two* dilemma. They were deemed not to have the needed Canadian training for jobs, and since nobody would give them jobs to obtain the needed Canadian experience, they were left in a quandary. Experience prerequisites continue to push a good number of the African women into training and retraining for Canadian jobs. Perhaps their initial expectations flowed from their educational backgrounds and from the perception of Canada abroad as a meritocracy and a land of opportunity.

Overall, the African women who participated in this study could be described as well educated. Over 80 percent of the respondents have post-secondary education. Thirty percent of those have earned bachelor and higher degrees at the tertiary level. Less than 3 percent were without a high school diploma. It is also

important to stress that over half of the women acquired their highest level of education in Canada. Only about 37 percent of the women in the group obtained their credentials from African institutions.

The general theoretical argument is that education and training are required in order to be gainfully employed or to enter the professional occupations. Data from the participants in the focus groups indicate that the women were educated and skilled, and had extensive experience in their fields of specialization. Their incomes, however, did not reflect their training and experience. Many of them had an annual income of under \$15,000, and the rest earned incomes under \$30,000. A number of the women who participated in the focus discussions were highly qualified in their fields of specialization but were generally under-employed. For example, there were lawyers, accountants, computer programmers, high school teachers, secretaries, and engineers who were working as housekeepers and nannies and in other menial, low-paying jobs with no job security and no opportunity for advancement.

### *Barriers to Labour Market Participation*

African women are confronted with several barriers to labour market participation. The major problem is the question of foreign educational credentials in Canada. This is a serious challenge to these African women, even though only 37 percent had educational credentials outside Canada. For the over 50 percent who had educational credentials from Canadian institutions, the earlier foreign degrees did not put them in a better position. There are a number of academic assessment centers in Alberta that evaluate credentials obtained outside Canada, for example, the International Qualifications Assessment Services. However, many Canadian employers are not impressed by the evaluations provided by such institutions, because they often accept the prevailing stereotypical aspersions cast on educational credentials from certain regions of the world, including some countries in Africa. For Julia, stereotyping was a factor in the unwillingness of some employers and instructors to recognize educational credentials from the African continent:

Hopefully, people will begin to know more about Nigeria or about Africa and begin to see that when you come in with a bachelor of science degree, it's the same thing as a bachelor of science degree in Canada, and it's not inferior. But a lot of it is ignorance. The employers don't know what you can do, and they're not prepared to give you a chance. Occasionally you might be lucky to get somebody who is willing to give you a chance.

It is arguable that such discriminatory treatment stems from ignorance. However, in a racially segregated labour market, such assessments attached to an applicant's credentials do not improve one's chances of being seriously considered for a job.

Most of the African women came to Canada under the family class, in many cases to join their husbands who came to study in Canada. They came with young children or started a family in Canada. Usually, their husband's aspirations as the head of the household and their children's welfare took first priority in their lives. Even for the few who came with tertiary educational credentials, their plans for retraining took a back seat to these priorities, which also dictated the nature of employment opportunities they could seek in the interim. In addition to their domestic responsibilities, many provided significant financial support to the family, especially the more recent immigrants for whom there was no established male breadwinner. Those who were able to weather the vagaries of employment in Canada had to slot themselves into racially segmented and gendered occupations in nursing, home care services, childcare, and house cleaning.

Higher education did not necessarily help the majority of the women get jobs in their occupation. Those who came to Canada with higher qualifications and years of experience in their profession pointed out that such assets hardly commanded them highly paid employment. Those with a strong support base in the family and community opted for retraining, while the rest found themselves less prepared for the struggle and settled for lower paying jobs. Those without the necessary social support either gave up totally on paid work or sought alternative economic opportunities far below their initial expectations. Many decided to be self-employed.

Those who were not self-employed found that their capacity to access available jobs was often determined by social trends. Occupations such as nursing and childcare recorded significant shortages, thereby opening the door for minority applicants. The women explained that Black women in general, and African women in particular, who came into these occupations fared better in terms of accessing and advancing in jobs. One reason was that most of these jobs were available on a part-time basis and so came without benefits. In an atmosphere where job opportunities were scarce, the women accepted the few that came along.

In general, the focus group discussions revealed considerable frustration in their search for gainful employment in their occupations in order to attain economic independence. With an average age of thirty-five, most of the women would normally be approaching the peak of their careers. However, a significant number were still looking for work in their fields of specialization years after their arrival or retraining in Canada. For some, Canadian education and training opened doors to better job opportunities, but for Mary, additional educational qualifications did not automatically open doors to a professional occupation:

Before I went to NAIT [Northern Alberta Institute of Technology], the only thing that I could do is work in a daycare ... I also worked as an



aide in the hospital. That was the only thing I could do. But after I went to NAIT, the door opened a little for me, because I now had something Canadian to show them, so that sort of opened the door a bit.

Those who retrained earned the needed Canadian training but still faced the challenges of acquiring Canadian job experience. Gladys and her husband found the catch twenty-two difficult to live with:

So both of us retrained and came back, but suddenly the jobs that were all over the place were not there any more. We went for a number of interviews, even as a bank teller in a bank. You go for an interview, and you do very well in the aptitude test.... They call to say, "Sorry you didn't get the job." May I ask why? "Oh we took somebody who was better suited for the position." And that doesn't tell you anything.

Obviously, Canadian training does not necessarily open the door to Canadian experience. As most of the women strongly argued, African immigrant women must deal with both the hostilities that are visited on newcomers, as well as the systemic discrimination that Canadian Blacks have always lived with. It is therefore not surprising that many Black women gave up their dreams at some point and settled for less. Often, the only jobs available were at the lower ranks. Some of the women in the study had been looking for jobs in their fields for more than ten years. Over this period, they worked exclusively in jobs unrelated to their previous occupations.

Only a few of the women managed to secure jobs in their areas of specialization. These women reported difficulties in advancing their professional and economic status. This was especially true for women working in the public sector, who described the process of promotion and mentorship as a *big boys club* where they stood twice disadvantaged as females and as Blacks. In such an environment, the ability to access training for promotion was also problematic:

Because of the in-crowd, big boys club mentality, you cannot cross that barrier. They see Black women only in a service-oriented position, and they cannot see you in upper management.

Despite the barriers these women faced in the pursuit of economic autonomy in Canada, on one hand, they continued to believe in education and training as keys to getting into professional jobs. On the other, they also argued that educational qualifications do not necessarily guarantee a job for Black women in the competition for paid employment. In many cases, discriminatory practices against visible minorities are structurally ingrained, and any attempts to restructure would require very serious and concrete steps.

### *Work Patterns -*

About 80 percent of the women were wage earners. Some were self-employed and sold various products. Some of them had small-scale hair salons or janitorial/cleaning services. The majority had worked as cooks, waitresses, janitors, housekeepers, childcare givers, clerks, sales agents, and community healthcare providers. For most, these business ventures were geared primarily towards family subsistence. Although managing a business was very time consuming, demanding, and stressful, they were relieved at the end of the day when the family had food on the table, and the bills were paid.

Self-employment was the reluctant choice for some of the women. Most of them saw self-employment as *doing something*, and recognized that it was not the best substitute for professional activities in one's area of specialization. A remarkable finding was that the self-employed women did not seek any public or private financial assistance outside the family. Nine of the twelve women who were self-employed indicated that their businesses were financed through either personal capital or private loans from family members and close friends. Upon further probing, it became clear that a good number of the women were unaware of funding sources outside the family unit. Saddled with the burden of family survival, the women did not have time to pursue funding from other sources. Thus, with little public or community support, most of the self-employed businesses relied on financial support from immediate family or close friends.

The focus group discussions revealed that the women were less likely to be dependent on public assistance through transfer payments. The women's discussions displayed a strong sense of self-worth and pride (this might account for their willingness to forge independent economic arrangements outside the public sphere). Their source of self-worth and pride can perhaps be located in their pre-Canadian life experiences. Given their educational background, some of the women left behind an already established life and history, a life in which they were both independent and self-reliant. Hence, they were less likely to apply for social welfare handouts even when entitled to it. These African women claimed they would prefer to risk their health doing two or three jobs to keep their families afloat, rather than queue for handouts from government. Even for women with husbands in school, dependence on public support was an option they would consider only as a last resort.

The choice the women made to rely on private, rather than public, sources of financing for their business or support undermines the generally held belief that immigrants are heavily reliant on the social safety net for their economic and social survival. If the experiences of the women in this study group can be confirmed in other studies, it would demonstrate that the notion of immigrants being the greatest beneficiaries of the social safety net is just another myth about immigrants in Canada.

## DISCRIMINATION BY EMPLOYERS, RESOURCES, AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

The majority of the women claimed that they were discriminated against based on their race. Their experiences clearly show that even as they were striving to meet Canadian requirements in paid work, the attitudes of employers significantly affect their prospects. Discriminatory practices are subtle and attitudinal in nature in most cases. For example, the women explained that they always had to carry the label of outsiders invading an environment where they were not equipped with the necessary identities. Even in institutions where employment equity policies were supposed to be in place, they noted that Black women were still not able to access jobs in the higher levels of the organizations where they worked.

In the midst of what were obviously frustrating working conditions, some of the women reported satisfaction in their jobs. This is surprising, given the fact that more than half were employed in the service sector in occupations unrelated to their training and previous experience. When questioned further about what seemed a facade of general satisfaction, several themes emerged. It appears that despite the challenges of the work environment, the fact they were working and contributing to the family's wellbeing was a source of satisfaction.

However, almost all the focus group members made allusions to their high level of dissatisfaction in Canada. They construed those levels as a major determinant of their emotional health. Although this study did not set out to investigate the women's emotional health, it is important to mention the feelings of disappointment clearly etched on the faces of the subjects during the focus group discussions. Two major issues underpin those feelings: inadequate access to information and the lack of social support. Repeatedly, the women described their unsuccessful attempts to seek information to enable them to settle into their new environment, even though, as stated earlier, they were ignorant of funding sources outside the family network. Most of the participants came to Canada under the family and independent classes. In the former class, for example, there is an assumption of financial guarantees. They are not expected to work outside the domestic sphere and are thus confined to the realm of childcare and housework. That policy "in effect, reproduces traditional gender ideology with regard to the sexual division of labour. The sponsorship agreement of ten years [implicit in the family class] puts these women into a dependency relationship with their male principal applicants. Their dependent status is maintained and perpetuated by various institutional processes which have negative implications" (Elabor-Idemudia 2000, 91). Their domestic status and obligations often forced them to place their professional aspirations on the back burner, making their husband's and children's futures their first priority. Together with those who came under the independent class, the barriers in the labour market shattered their initial aspirations over time. Most of them

shared their frustrations as they tried to reconcile their aspirations with the realities of being an African immigrant in Edmonton. Apparently, an immigrant woman's best bet is to seek out available resource centres upon arrival. Such centres provide a head start in what is certainly a long journey. Women who were able to access the relevant information and help found it made a big difference in their confidence levels and their ability to find work.

The women also indicated a need for social support, especially for new immigrants. For women with younger children in need of pre- and after-school care, juggling paid work and childcare has been a very trying experience, one that also limited the range of economic opportunities they could explore. Since some of these women did not come to Canada with landed immigrant status, there was little or no social assistance. International students often do not qualify for any significant childcare subsidy. However, those with landed immigration status at the point of entry to Canada saw a rosy economic future in terms of employment opportunities, but they soon realized that progress in working towards that future was elusive. The lack of childcare subsidies and a social support network basically crippled any attempts to make headway in expanding or advancing their employment opportunities. It is also important to contextualize some of the above experiences. The fact remains that it is not easy to navigate one's way in a new environment. However, the initial and subsequent settlement pains for the women were worsened by their racialized ethnic identities.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the experiences of African women in Canada using a purposive sample drawn from the City of Edmonton. The focus group discussions provided the opportunity to explore the African women's aspirations and to highlight the barriers they face in Canada. Their attempts to gain access to meaningful and appropriate employment to attain economic autonomy have not quite been successful. Their levels of education, training, and employment experiences in their countries of origin, as well as in Canada, did not enhance their chances, as they had previously expected.

The focus groups discussions turned into a powerful medium where many of the women got to know about each other's existence, shared common problems, and compared coping strategies. They subsequently began to explore various ways they could provide support, both individually and as a group. In the discussions, the women spoke as a group and as individuals. They shared common experiences that illustrate their resilience in a struggle many women in the mainstream cannot even relate to. The focus group discussions revealed their frustrations with life in Canada, as well as their resolve to continue the struggle, at least to help their children earn a better place in the future. The majority of the women had not fared as well as they had expected in their new

home. This study's findings reinforce the need to further explore and document the experiences of various other immigrant groups if the broader society is to better understand the unfolding dilemmas, tensions, and problems of settling in Canada.

Canada has introduced various measures over the years to improve the prospects of those affected by racial discrimination. Legislative instruments and policies, for example, the *Multiculturalism Act*, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Employment Equity Act*, and other anti-discrimination laws have not addressed the myriad difficulties the women expressed in the focus group discussions. A major problem is the existence of attitudinal, structural, and systemic issues, giving the impression that there are still numerous individuals and organizations who would prefer to maintain the status quo with its inherently unequal structures and practices.

While the majority of the women eke out a living, they usually work in occupations far below their levels of training and/or previous experience. The reasons for this downgrading of occupational status or lack of opportunities for finding employment in their occupations are: the lack of recognition of foreign education, training, and experience; discrimination and stereotyping by employers; and inadequate access to information about life in Canada. The difficulties in the accreditation of foreign credentials continue to limit the ability of African professional women to contribute effectively to the economy of the place they have adopted as home.

This research was conducted with an eye to effecting change within both the public and private sectors and in non-profit agencies. To ensure this, direct interventions are needed at the institutional and community levels. At the institutional level, considerable effort must be geared towards training Canadian employers in cultural sensitivity so as to change their attitudes regarding minorities. There is a need to focus on measures that will promote employment equity in all employer communities. The larger policy question is about the process of evaluating foreign degrees. As indicated earlier, there are institutions that evaluate foreign credentials. The problem is that some employers do not accept the legitimacy of the evaluations because of stereotypical values and attitudes. Perhaps public sector institutions can take a leadership role in this regard by highlighting the legitimacy of the accreditation process and hiring some of the people with foreign credentials. This would have a demonstrable effect on private sector institutions.

There are some conceptual difficulties that require clarification at the level of policy. This starts with the struggle to name and define the African woman. Power relations are embedded in the terminology, a reflection of social and political realities (Agnew 1996). For the African women, the term *visible minority* is ill defined and refers to an inferior and inadequate state. The term *Black woman* recognizes the history of slavery, a condition that does not apply to her. For the African women, these terms do not represent the reality

of their situations. The African woman's lot and history is different from the Caribbean woman, from other Black women in the diaspora, and even from Canadian-born Black women. These terms only serve to perpetuate the perceived inferiority of all non-White women. The African woman is not poor and deprived when she arrives in Canada, considering the substantial costs of migration. Many African women arrive in Canada educated and endowed with the ability to provide for themselves and their families. They usually have a history of some level of financial comfort. As soon as they arrive in Canada, their previous history and experience are eradicated, and they become inconsequential within the system. Thus begins their marginalization and the patronizing attitude of the mainstream. Their emigration from a Third World country should not confer on them a homogeneity with women who are separated from each other by different histories of colonialism and class membership (Agnew 1996). There is no common identity to justify the inclusion of African women in the various categories described, except to be recognized as African women. Given the unique experiences of the women in the focus group, it would be necessary to recognize their differences vis-à-vis categories like *non-white*, *racial minority*, *women of colour*, and even *Black women*.

The study has confirmed that the experiences of African women in Canada are quite different from those of other Black women. All Black women have tended to be lumped into one basket, yet their needs are different. The cultural differences within the broader Black communities would have to be recognized. Since there is nothing like a Black community in Canada, lumping all Black people into one category and expecting common experiences will only continue to negatively impact policy measures to address the concerns of the women in this study. To be defined as Black, it seems, is to accept discrimination and an inferior position in society. From positions of relative independence, the transition of the African women in this study to being a member of a visible minority, with its implicit powerlessness, is difficult to deal with, especially within the context of racialized identities. Racism, in its brutality and lack of honesty, continues to be a reality in Canada for racialized bodies (Akwani 2002).

At the broader level, it seems that some sections of the Canadian society would wish the African to be a more subdued person, to be eternally grateful for the privilege of being allowed into Canada, and to appreciate the illusion of opportunities of a better life. It is always very difficult for some Canadians to accept Africans as Canadian citizens, hence the *twisted eyebrow* when an African announces him/herself as a Canadian. This has made it more difficult for the Africans, particularly the African woman, to bond with any community. The African lives in virtual isolation, estranged from the others who see her/him as *inferior* and as coming from a continent in shambles. The larger mainstream society relates to him/her as a colonizer would relate to the colonized.

In the absence of strong inter- and intra-community bonds and the lack of institutional support, the African woman continues to struggle, suffering in silence, even smiling in suffering. She continues to absorb the misery of racism and the gradual erosion of her core identity. Therefore, a more inclusive atmosphere, one where African women can interact and compete with others without fighting to be recognized as equal citizens at every juncture, should be established. The development of strategic alliances, not only among various African women groups, but also with other women's groups, especially racialized groups, would provide the context for capacity building and an atmosphere in which women can support each other, talk about their concerns, and share resources for improving their situations.

There is also a need to support a fair representation of African women in training and employment preparation. There should be representative interventions for African women in general with various government and other policy-making bodies that maintain strategic partnerships with agencies and institutions best able to deal with African women's specific concerns. There is a need for strategies directed at a more equitable distribution of rewards and opportunities. African women are under-represented in higher paying occupations; especially upper- and middle-level management in Canadian organizations. Breaking the barriers to these upper- and middle-level occupations can expand opportunities for African women who, according to this study, are usually well educated.

As shown by this study, a small percentage of African women who participated in the group discussions are self-employed. Obviously, this small minority found self-employment, despite its limitations, an option that aligns better with their perceived domestic responsibilities. It is also very likely that better access to credit may encourage other African women to become self-employed. For many African women, a woman's place is in her business, and many have been successful at doing just that. For example, the market women of Africa have been a known phenomenon since the colonial days (see Clark 1994). With a conducive system, they could contribute to the economy of Canada in more ways than the system can imagine.

Finally, success for African women cannot be achieved without the considerable commitment of both public and private groups, commitment that should be reflected in policies, programs, and practices. Political authorities should begin to demonstrate some significant awareness regarding the special and peculiar plight of all immigrant women by paying attention to the differences that exist among them. Canada needs to wake up to the needs of the people it has so *graciously* brought into the country through a very long, tedious, and expensive immigration process. The significant efforts and financial resources expended on encouraging people to migrate to Canada should not be allowed to go to waste.

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