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**CONFLICTING GENDER, KIN, AND COUPLE DYNAMICS OF  
NIGERIAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN CANADA**

**by**

**AKINNIYI GODWIN OPEOLA**

**A Thesis  
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Arts at  
the University of Windsor**

**Windsor, Ontario, Canada**

**1994**

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is two-fold: first, it is an effort to understand how Nigerian immigrant families have improved their economic status and live up to their financial obligation to their relatives. Secondly, it intends to see how women's status changes by way of participating in family decision making once they become income earners.

The structure of the Yoruba traditional family and its dynamics are examined. Then, the modern family forms in Nigeria such as the modified extended family and the nuclear family forms are discussed.

The researcher chose to present a survey of literature reflecting two major areas: mainly, the economic impact of migration on the immigrants and the effect of migration on marriage, gender, and family pattern of immigrant families.

In-depth qualitative interviewing consisting of open-ended questions was used by the researcher to gather data on 30 couples' viewpoints on their socio-economic situations in Canada. The first hypothesis which states that Nigerian families who have achieved a higher economic status in Canada with economic commitment to their extended families are better able to assist financially those relatives in Nigeria than when they were there with them is supported by the data collected.

It is found that having a well-paying job is crucial to

fulfilling their financial aspirations. The higher the income the better it is for immigrants to support their relatives in Nigeria financially. A significant number of 44 respondents out of the 50 working respondents said they are living up to their financial obligation to their relatives. However, there are 3 employed respondents who lack a financial commitment to their relatives and 5 employed respondents who seem to show little or no financial concern for their extended family members. The second hypothesis in respect to career women gaining more participation in the household decision making is partially supported by the data gathered. It is found that only 21 women out of the 27 employed women are egalitarian with their spouses in family decision-making. The remaining eight women differ on the amount of sharing they have with their husbands.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem.

Migration is a common phenomenon today in Africa. In Nigeria, migration is not a recent occurrence; it occupies a significant place in the history of Nigeria that goes back for centuries. Nigerians migrated before, during, and after colonization regardless of the natural and political obstacles that confronted them. However, the emigration of Nigerian (i.e Yoruba) families to Canada creates a sequence of structural changes in the classical or modified extended family that they left behind. It disrupts the established social structure in the communities of origin. In other words, the network system of the extended family is altered with this overseas movement by one or more family unit(s). Immigration also plays its part by introducing new and often times conflicting ethnic and cultural elements into the social groups at the place of settlement i.e Canada. This migration makes social adjustments inevitable on the part of both the groups losing members and those receiving additions.

The principal concern of this thesis is to find out how well the immigrant families in this study have been able to fulfil their financial roles (if any) to their parents and extended family members in Nigeria. In other words, it seeks to investigate how migration has been able to strengthen or

weaken their financial obligation and status in their extended family. This thesis also intends to examine the nature of relations that exist within the Yoruba families in Canada and what impact this has on their marriages.

The opening section of this study is devoted to explaining the structure of the Yoruba family and other ethnic communities in Nigeria. One of the issues addressed is the economic and political significance of the extended family form which was prevalent in Nigeria and the degree of co-operation and interaction that exists among the members of each family. Other aspects discussed in this section are the marriage forms, how they are consolidated and the roles that are socially expected of spouses. The changes that are brought about in the family structure as a result of westernization and migration are also discussed.

Furthermore, the negative and positive effects of international migration on Nigerian immigrant families in Canada are examined. In doing this, the study proceeds by exploring, in a general context, the impact of migration on marriage, gender, and family pattern. The essence of this is to find out how coming to Canada has affected and shaped their lives and the lives of their families.

The research for this thesis was conducted through interviews of Yoruba families living in Ontario. Thirty Nigerian couples were interviewed and each interview took 30-

40 minutes. The respondents were selected through the African Association of Windsor and Nigerian Organization of Toronto.

### **Traditional Yoruba Family**

The Yorubas are the majority people of the south western part of Nigeria. The family in the Yoruba ethnic group is basically extended and this also applies to other ethnic groups in Nigeria. The earliest form of family is referred to as a traditional extended family system (Oke, 1986) that comprises a father, wives, children, and extended family members (i.e kin group) which often include the spouses' parents. Such a lineage-based family is composed of individuals with strong obligations to give moral support and economic assistance to kin, while maintaining their social ties within the customary residential unit of a compound based lineage. Seeing a family as an embodiment of roles is illuminated by Oke (1986: 187): "it is the responsibility of each member of the family to work toward maintaining the interests and solidarity of the family."

Each residential unit within a family compound is headed by a male who is also the husband/father in the unit. The headship passes from father to son or sometimes to the next male heir. According to Eades (1980: 53):

the main authority within a compound or descent group lies with the elders and the head is normally the eldest male member.

This is true of the family life in Nigeria's traditional setting, as the sole authority belongs to the father. The extended nature of the Yoruba traditional family is of economic and political importance to both the head of the family unit and the members.

The primary occupation of Nigerians is farming which employs a good percentage of able-bodied men as farmers while a few people are craftsmen (Eades, 1980). Though men are often seen as primary farmers, some women have plots of land (inherited from their parents or allocated to them by their husbands) on which they plant crops such as cassava, maize, and cowpeas which are traditionally viewed as women's main staple or female-grown crops (Mbilinyi 1990, p. 115; Whitehead 1990, p. 55; Blumberg 1988, p. 129). Women's work on the farms is largely invisible as agriculture development experts and extension workers (often with a mind-set of "farmer and his wife") make contacts only with the men (Blumberg, 1988).

This misinterpretation reinforces women's subordinate position and the exploitation of their labour in the production of food. Despite their significant contribution to food production as "independent women farmers" (Whitehead 1990, p. 59) in the spheres of cultivating, "postharvest processing, raising kitchen gardens, small barnyard animals, supplying water, firewood, and foods for the household and its animals" (Blumberg 1988, p. 120) women are still largely seen by agriculture officials as homemakers (Dennis, 1991) who

simply support their husbands to do simple farm work such as tending and harvesting of crops. Tepperman and Wilson (1993: 81-82) note that the more fields that a family can tend the higher per capita production is likely to be. In the traditional society, having multiple wives and many children is a distinct way of showing not only one's prestige but one's wealth and power. As put by Burns (1963: 265), "polygyny is an old-established custom throughout Nigeria and to the African it appears not only a reasonable but almost an essential institution."

In essence, for a traditional family, children are not viewed as a financial burden in Nigeria but add to the wealth of the father and in the long run to the mother's advantage, so there is no economic disadvantage to having large families. Apart from their economic value, having many children is seen also as an insurance against mortality (that was prevalent in the past) as this is the only way to ensure that enough children survive to make the family economy viable. According to Cowan, Field, Hansen, Skolnick, and Swanson (1993: 55) "agrarian parents under conditions of high mortality, have many children for economic returns in the form of child labour and support in old age."

#### **Structure of the Yoruba Traditional Family**

Nigeria is dominated by a patrilineal society. This means that names, properties, duties, and obligations descend

through the paternal line. Apart from being patrilineal with regards to descent, the Yoruba family is also patriarchal (Oke, 1986). In other words, authority is held by the eldest male in the family, usually the father. As apparent in the traditional Yoruba family structure, patriarchy is associated with gender relations in which women and their labour are controlled by men. In the traditional Yoruba society, women are economically dominated and ideologically subjugated by men.

A very important aspect of the Yoruba social group is seniority -- a strict age hierarchy is maintained. Members in a family compound are ranked by seniority which is determined by their birth order. In the case of a married woman, her seniority in her natal compound is defined by birth order but by order of marriage in her husband's compound (Eades, 1980).

Also central to the traditional Yoruba family is the support network that has served as a bedrock for the continuity of the system. Assistance, both financial and moral, is given to the family members who need it to further their studies or to start out in a trade (Oke, 1986). It is this act of support, the high degree of co-operation and understanding that exist within the family which also keep it together, that is of special importance to this thesis.

## **Effect of Industrialization on the traditional Yoruba family**

Urbanization and industrialization are the key factors responsible for the structural changes that have taken place within the traditional extended family. This has resulted in the emergence of other family forms such as the modified extended family which is a middle-class urban family pattern of related nuclear families participating in a kinship structure based on ties of affection rather than ties of tradition. Also the nuclear family which essentially comprises the parents and their children (if any), can be found in Nigeria today.

With this development, many extended families have become less broad and have grown much less intact over time as they have taken other forms. However, despite the structural changes, one major element that still remains intact and functional within the structure of the modern family forms is the support network (Oke, 1986). Though the family compound based on lineage has diminished, low-income individual households, be they a modified extended or nuclear type, often have a need for a broader support network and in some ways seem to be reformulating those ties. In other words, modern family forms can be seen as an individual project tailored and structured to individual economic needs and survival. Various modes of adaptation to economic conditions and diverse categories of family structure of the present day Yoruba will be discussed in the next section.



## Summary

Discussed in this opening section is the statement of the problem which intends to understand how well the immigrant families, in the study, have been able to meet their financial obligations to their relatives in Nigeria. Another issue addressed is the structure of the traditional Yoruba family which is patriarchal and patrilineal in nature. The effect of industrialization on the Yoruba family is also discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

### MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Migration has always been a significant feature of Nigerian history especially that of the Yorubas in the rural society. The Yorubas are noted for migration from one village to another in search of a better or unused land on which they could grow cash crops such as cocoa, rubber, cassava, yam, peanuts, and most importantly oil palm, the leading cash crop of the area at that time. This aspect is emphasised by Cowan et al (1993: 48) that "families in the agrarian past were not as geographically stable as they were assumed to have been, mobility was common as people moved in search of land, work, and opportunities." Eades (1980: 65) also mentioned that "migration is very common and a large proportion of Yoruba farmers move away from their home areas and into other forms of work at some point during their working lives."

As the socio-economic climate of Nigeria began to change, the economic infrastructure of roads, railways, storage facilities and docks, which were centered mainly in Lagos at first, provided new opportunities other than farming (Kemp, 1989). Industries got a kick start in Nigeria in the late fifties (Kemp, 1989) and this enticed a lot of able-bodied men (sometimes, with their wives accompanying them) on the farm from the villages to the industrializing cities of Lagos and

Ibadan (Onah and Iwuji 1976, p. 123) to take up paid jobs as factory workers or as labourers at the railway construction line. Because members of the traditional families migrated to urban areas their economic survival was no longer dependent on "a joint economic unit" which has been the crux of the traditional extended Yoruba family. Rather individuals relied on earned wages which subsequently help at revitalize the rural economy.

Also the exodus of people (mostly men and sometimes family units) to the big cities resulted in family restructuring (Nwosu and Igben 1986, p. 208-215) and also gave birth to other forms of family life (mentioned earlier) such as the modified extended family and the modern nuclear family. Besides these two family forms, there are other forms of family arrangement that people (especially city dwellers) formulate or adopt as a solution to their social situations. There is no doubt that "many aspects of current family life and demographic trends...in marriage, child bearing, and divorce are forms of adaptation to changed economic situations and to the demands they put on people" (Cowan et al. 1993, p. 31). Both modified extended family and nuclear family forms that characterized the cities are offshoots of the classical extended family which could be found in the villages and in the rural parts of some towns.

### **Modern Family Forms**

In the modified extended family form, the husband typically secures a position in a factory or a company as a casual labourer or a clerk depending on his level of education, and the wife is usually a petty trader in the countryside or helping out her husband's relative on the farm (Whitehead, 1990).

Another form or variation within the first category is implicit in a situation where the husband moves with his own family of procreation to the city. The husband is the wage earner while the wife sells provisions in the city market and at the same time performs the role of a mother as a primary function (Lacey 1986, p. 1-18).

The second category could be referred to as a modern nuclear family or dual-career family, in which case both the husband and the wife work outside their matrimonial home to make a living. Its emergence in the Yoruba culture could be associated with urbanization and industrialization.

The first category of family evolving out of this social trend shares some of the characteristics of the traditional Yoruba extended family in terms of roles that accrue to the husbands and wives even though both the household type and composition are different as the latter is more expansive and larger in size. However, this development did not destroy completely the family bonds and kin relationship that these urban dwellers have. It is evident that locality-based,

close-knit networks of related families still exist especially in old-established, low-income working class communities such as Ajegunle, Oshodi, Yaba, Aperin, etc.

Some of these city dwellers give support financially, culturally, and emotionally to their siblings and other relatives both in the cities and in the villages. Even though in the city, there are no family compounds in the real sense, one could infer that the clustering pattern of the kin and extended family members in a locality of an industrial city suggests social immobility which could be associated with poverty and a disadvantageous class position of such families.

Occurring alongside this is the second category of nuclear family or middle class family i.e dual career couples who work in the government parastatals or multinational corporations with branch offices all over the country. Due to the nature of their job, some are often transferred from one branch of the company to another and therefore kin are widely dispersed. Nonetheless, they do have ceremonial events such as christenings, burial ceremonies, celebrations like weddings and birthdays and family meetings which often bring various branches of the family together (Elliot, 1986).

Financial aid and assistance can be provided to extended family members regardless of distance but the degree of such assistance varies according to each nuclear family's discretion. Some families make it mandatory and limited to members of their families of orientation while others extend

such assistance to distant relatives. As rightly pointed out by Oke (1986), it is evident that in Nigeria the extended family is not completely altered to appear as the nuclear family. More accurately, the extended family unit as a group, is greatly diminished in size. In urban Nigerian settings, some extended kin members may still be included in the family unit. The range of the relatives which may be included in such a unit is however more limited than in the traditional setting (Oke, 1986).

Some families adhere to the traditional family values and respond to kin's demands in many ways. As explained by Oke (1986), each individual family's response to the demands and expectations of its extended members varies. It should be obvious from the foregoing that the nuclear family, as it is conditioned in Nigeria, varies in composition, structure, and the relationship it maintains with its kin group. One important point is that "there has been no progressive and unilinear disintegration of extra-nuclear kin bonds but rather fluctuating and subtle shifts of emphasis" (Elliot 1986, p. 50).

### **International Migration**

The issue of migration as it affects Nigerians cannot be complete without making a reference to international migration which is now on the increase more than ever before. Nigerians are found in every corner of the world; they are scattered far

and wide. In the literature, three major factors are noted as responsible for this wave of migration. There are people who fled their home as a result of religious persecution. Others left to avoid political oppression. Some also left for economic reasons (Li 1988, p. 5). Because of one or a combination of these factors, thousands of Nigerians are currently residing in other parts of the world including Canada.

However, what seems to be the principal motive behind the Nigerian migration scenario is the economic factor. (Makinwa-Adebusoye 1987, p. 1258-1264). As noted by Meir (1979: 69):

there are two principal economic factors involved in the decision to migrate. The first relates to a core-social real wage differential that prevails from different skills and educational categories of workers, and the second is concerned with the degree of probability that a migrant will be successful in securing a high paying job. It is well recognized that the decision to migrate is often tied to economics more so than any other consideration.

The same point was emphasized by McDonald (1979: 65) that "the decision to migrate is often tied to economics more so than any other consideration. The migrant is often in a situation in which he views the pending change of residence (whether to another country or rural to urban) as an opportunity to improve his income stream directly or indirectly through the acquisition of additional education skills."

While the desire to escape from persecution still operates in a few cases, there is no doubt that hard times or economic hardship has contributed substantially to the incessant flow of Nigerians to western countries such as Canada.

#### Summary

This section begins with a discussion of the migratory life of early Yoruba people in the village. The section also examines the effect of economic development on the family structure. A shift from purely agrarian economy to a mixed economy in the late fifties with the introduction of industries which created jobs for most men on the farm set the pace for a change in the family structure. This results in modern family forms such as modified extended family which are discussed in this section. The issue of International migration as it impacts on the extended family network including its economic importance are major topics of discourse in this section.



## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature is conducted in two stages. First, the impact of international migration on the socio-economic situation of immigrant families is reviewed. Then, the impact of migration on marriage, gender, and family pattern of immigrant families is examined. However, it is important to mention that very little work has been done on these specific issues in regard to Nigerian immigrant families. In light of this limitation, the references cited in this review are mainly in the most general form. Previous studies (Pessar 1990, p. 91-114; Gordon 1990, p. 115-136; Richmond and Mendoza 1990, p. 73-90; Meadows 1989, p. 96) done in this area have shown that international migration has a tremendous impact on the migrants. Ogden (1984: 38) classified such effects as "demographic, economic, social, and cultural." The effect of migration on both the donor and the host country is two-sided. Prominent in the literature is this salient issue about the effects of immigration. It is believed that emigration has both a negative and positive impact on the sending countries. Some of the researchers (Forsythe 1979, p. 74) seem to suggest that emigration of certain professionals is extremely detrimental and far outweighs any marginal benefits that accrued from emigration.

Papademetriou (1979: 64) argues that "the overall actual gains for the sending countries are only marginal when juxtaposed to the benefits the receiving country reaps through labour and professional skills of immigrants." On the other hand, Diez-Canedo, 1979; Glaser, 1979; and Cruz, 1979 believe that it is beneficial to the sending countries through the alleviation of unemployment. They also view remittances to the home countries as benefits to the economy.

It is the issue of remittance that this research intends to explore. In doing this, the study expects to find out how Nigerian immigrant families in Canada have been able to improve their economic status and live up to their financial expectations which appear to be a main reason they moved to Canada in the first place.

Some Nigerian families (in Canada) with good jobs, in higher level occupation, have prospered and are better off economically than ever before. Some have advanced rapidly and achieved considerable success in their occupations. Nevertheless, many have suffered terribly in the process of settling down and adjusting to the differences, sometimes with long lasting and tragic effects. Some face hardship and grief as they search endlessly for jobs. Sometimes, the best they can get are low-paying factory jobs which does not pay their bills. According to Sen (1977: 21-32) what seems to be the major barrier to skilled immigrants in getting jobs commensurate with their qualification is: the problem of a

deficiency in the immigrants' training and the lack of Canadian experience in the skilled occupations, thereby necessitating the migrant seeking employment in low level occupations for which they are over qualified. Contrary to this view, some researchers (Elliot and Fleras 1992, p. 72; Ramcharan, 1982) claim that the situation is expressive of discriminatory practices against immigrants. In the light of these diverging views, the thrust of this study will be to go beyond the descriptive explanations typically offered for such findings and attempt to understand the effect of migration on Nigerian immigrant families by utilizing an empirical research method.

It is my assumption that some Nigerian couples in Canada have benefitted at one stage or another in their lives from the financial and moral support of their family and sometimes from their extended family members to whom they are obligated. It is the expectation of their kin members and siblings in Nigeria that these families in Canada would in return help the other members of the family that are left behind with financial assistance when the need arises. Sometimes, the expectation or motive is that the couple sent abroad (in this case, Canada) would gain a foothold and pave the way for others to join them in Canada. Often times, the onus is on these couples to remit money to Nigeria for the purpose of sending their younger siblings to school or launch him or her in a trade. These financial obligations almost always extend

to other members of the extended family as well. In this respect, it is logical to presume that those in upper level jobs with financial stability are suitably predisposed to maintain economic ties with their extended family members. Their ability and strength in doing this is, however, dependent on their employment opportunities and their willingness to support their relatives in Nigeria.

In this research, much of my focus will be on Nigerian couples from the Yoruba tribal group who migrated here voluntarily. As mentioned earlier, this type of migration is often economically motivated (Wood, 1982). Put another way, the migrants involved are seeking income advancement and a better living standard, a better way of life different from what they have experienced in their home country.

#### **Impact of Out-migration on Marriage, Gender and Family Patterns**

Many studies (Elliot and Fleras 1992, p. 250; Richmond and Mendoza, 1990; Kranter and Davis 1978, p. 52) have shown the impact of migration on women is debilitating and that it deprives them of economic power (i.e income) and employment status due to factors such as lack of English/French knowledge, lack of occupational skills or training, and adherence of some immigrant women to patriarchal traditional male-female ideals. However, Pessar (1990: 99) contends that a good proportion of immigrant women are engaged in wage work

as domestics or janitors in factories. This notion is also shared by Bonnet (1990: 141) stating that "female immigrants (whether married or single) work as domestics, hospital aides, cooks, or seamstresses in the garment district, to name a few occupations - all are, however, jobs that require long hours for little pay."

Furthermore, researchers' opinions on the impact of migration on marriage and family relation are polarised into two distinguishable forms. There are those who argue that migration has increased the intimacy between the husband and wife as they tend to grow closer to each other and do most things together. In Ramcharan's (1982: 40) account of migration impact on West Indian immigrants in Canada, he notes that "the migratory experience is likely to have had a positive effect on the stability of their marriage patterns." In other words, it is assumed that migratory experiences shared by couples often contribute to their marriage stability. However, in Pessar's view (1990) this may not always be the case as women's participation in the labour force often results in unanticipated changes concerning the power relations between immigrant couples. This development could cause havoc to their marriage or lead to family disorganization if the husband is not prepared to renegotiate their marital power within the family and maintain a balanced relationship. Pessar (1990: 98) argues that "the changes in most immigrant households generally involve a movement away

from patriarchal relations and values toward greater egalitarianism." He further clarifies that "there has been a movement away from the hegemony of one sex over decision making and control of domestic resources to a more egalitarian division of labour and distribution of authority" (Pessar 1990, p. 98).

The variables indicating this change are notable in areas such as -- beliefs about household authority, household decision making, and the allocation of household members to work. Pessar's study (1990) on Dominican immigrant families in the United States reveals that the concept of single-mate pattern of relation and male patriarchal authority becomes fluid as immigrant women become salary earners which makes them copartners in the running or "heading" of their households. This development constitutes a dilemma for some male immigrants (or immigrant husbands) as they find it difficult to do away with their traditional patriarchal ideology and share domestic authority and chores with their wives. This concern, if not resolved, sometimes leads to marital disharmony, disruption, or marriage dissolution. This situation is best explained by Gordon (1990: 115):

Men who do not usually perform household chores prior to migration, find that they must contribute in this area as well as to the usual tasks of income earning. But the women are also income earners. Immigrant males reported that they found immigrant women more demanding of their men in domestic and interpersonal relationships.

Migration also has an impact on the family pattern of immigrant families (Ramcharan 1982, p. 39). Most immigrants from the lower class or lower-middle class come from large families with many siblings and extended relatives. These people might have been shaped by the household environment in which they grew up and have been imbued with polygamous ideology to the extent of influencing their decisions to follow in the footsteps of their parents. However their coming to Canada and their awareness of the socio-economic realities here might change this formed opinion or aspiration. As reported by Pessar (1990: 98) and Ramcharan (1982: 40), immigrant families tend to have smaller, nuclear families in the host country regardless of their family backgrounds or orientations. As quoted by Ramcharan (1982: 40)

S. Patterson, in discussing the family patterns of West Indians in England, suggests that the mere presence of local mores that frown on cohabitation is sufficient pressure to coerce the migrant to adopt the host country's family and marital patterns, rather than be termed deviant. Also, pressure from associates, peer group, priests, or even from their own children can force the couple to become legally married. J. Chambers in analysing family patterns of West Indians in Canada found that invariably the marital pattern of middle and upper-class West Indians was that of the Canadian norm.

As proposed earlier, most Nigerian immigrant families, who came to Canada voluntarily, see migration as a means to improve their economic and social status. It is therefore the main aim of this thesis to see if migration improves the economic status of Nigerian immigrant families vis-a-vis their

status prior to migration and how financial obligations to their families in Nigeria change once they settle in Canada. Also crucial to the objective of this research are immigrant's social problems relating to impact of migration on marriage, gender, and family pattern.

However, what seems to be lacking for most people in Nigeria is adequate information about the social structure here in Canada. There is little knowledge about the agony and troubles that a foreigner encounters abroad. A great number of Nigerians are still subject to naive perception and a distorted picture of wealth and pleasures associated with western countries including Canada. However, the reality, the bitter truth is not completely eclipsed from them...it is not far from their own experiences. Excluding the relative social peace, tranquility, and economic prosperity that prevail in Canada, it is basically a story of strife and struggle for survival, which seems to characterize human society.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviews the previous studies that had been done in the area of immigrant families in Canada. It discusses the motives behind migration and considers the impact of out-migration on marriage, gender, and family patterns of immigrants. The advantages and disadvantages of international migration and the opinions of previous researchers on this issue are also reviewed.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **Purpose**

This research is an effort to understand the successes, challenges, and obstacles that confront Nigerian immigrant families in Canada. In doing this, the researcher intends to find out about the economic achievement of the sample subjects in Canada and the spill over effect of this on their family members in Nigeria. Another aspect of this research is to see how the participants in this research have been adjusting their relationships to their new environment.

#### **Concepts**

For the purpose of this research, a set of concepts used are defined below in order to give a clear understanding of what is intended whenever we come across them in this study.

**Traditional extended family** as defined in this study comprises husbands, wives, children, and extended family members which often include the spouses' parents living together in a big family house.

**Modified extended family** is a family form that embraces a couple, their children, and a few members of traditional extended family living under the same roof.

**Nuclear family** is a form typical of the present day Nigerian families in the big cities. It often consists of a dual-earner couple living in a house or an apartment but usually maintaining a cooperative relationship with fellow neighbours and supporting one another in their various endeavours.

**Internal migration** refers to the movement of people from one area of the country to another often done for the purpose of trade, farming, and establishing a new social community.

**International Migration** here means the movement of people from their country of origin to another in search of peace and economic improvement/advancement. In this study, the researcher is concerned with the movement of Nigerians from Nigeria to Canada.

**Egalitarianism** refers to a family relationship where husband and wife jointly participate in making decisions that affect all facets of their marital life.

### **Research Question and Hypotheses**

The general research question related to this study is: What is the effect of migration on Nigerian immigrant families in Canada concerning their economic status and family relationships. My presumption relating to Nigerian families living in Canada allows me to generate these hypotheses:

a). Nigerian families who have achieved a higher socio-economic status in Canada with economic commitment to their

extended families are better able to assist financially those relatives in Nigeria than when they were there with them.

b). Women income earners enjoy increased domestic authority in decision making regarding their family affairs and personal issues, leading to more egalitarian power relations.

### **Research Design**

The research design selected is in-depth qualitative interviewing consisting of open-ended questions ( see appendix A). This approach allows one to understand informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words. (Bogdan and Taylor, 1984). In this light, I have been able to obtain first-hand information about the respondents' feelings, thinking, and position on the issues at hand.

### **Sampling Procedure**

The research interview was conducted with a stratified sample of sixty respondents i.e thirty couples from the Yoruba ethnic group in Windsor and Toronto, Ontario. The sample is unrepresentative within the sampling category as I focussed on an handful of Nigerian immigrant Yoruba families. However, included in the sample were newly arrived couples (i.e couples who got here in the last five years) and those who have been here for many years i.e five years and above, in order to maximize variation in the sample

This provides a full range of their endeavours and experiences and the impact of these on their lives. In other words, such a mix of "recent immigrants" and "established immigrants" provides an image of different types of experiences and diversity in points of view. Each partner in a relationship was interviewed, in English, and this elicits various dimensions of their relationship and also the dynamics involved.

#### **Data Collection Procedure**

The sample for this study consisted of sixty respondents. Each respondent signed a consent form (see Appendix B) which was co-signed by the researcher. This agreement ensured that the respondent's identity and the information obtained in the course of the interview will remain anonymous. For the sake of simplicity and in order to be time efficient, the interview was composed of two sets of open-ended questions. The first set deals with the family structure from which the respondent originates and the financial obligation attached to this link. The second set contains questions that seek to understand how married partners relate to each other and what aspect of their lives have been affected by the new culture and value system they confront daily.

Seventeen couples were interviewed on different occasions at the Nigerian Association temporary building on Eglinton Avenue West in Toronto and each interview took 30-45 minutes.

The respondents agreed to participate in this study after I met with them and explained the research objective. Appointments were also arranged to get the respondents interviewed. This was a lot easier for me because all I had to do was to wait for them at the centre and get the interview done. A good number of my respondents preferred being interviewed in their houses.

Eight Nigerian couples were interviewed in their various houses, mostly in the Scarborough and Don Mills areas of Toronto. The remaining five couples who volunteered for the interview were chosen in Windsor. Even though an interview guide containing open-ended questions was used to ensure that key topics are covered, respondents were allowed to talk at length on what is important to them before focussing on the research interests. Moreover, the findings of this research depend on the perception of the respondents. What I have done in this study is exploratory and the respondents have been able to explain their socio-economic situations in Canada as perceived by them.

### **Instruments**

The instrument used for this research as mentioned earlier is qualitative interviewing. As earlier mentioned, an interview guide was used as a list of general areas to cover with each informant. The data collected were recorded in field notes during the interviews. Moreover, the essence of

using an open-ended questions is to gather an "authentic" understanding of informants' experiences in Canada.

### **Limitation**

The data used in this has been collected from a small sample of 60 respondents. This is not large enough to make generalization about Nigerian immigrant population in Canada. It is my belief that a larger sample is more likely to provide a broader scope and perspective on Nigerian immigrant families' socio-economic dynamics.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher has stated the purpose of the research and the concepts utilized in the study. The research question and related hypotheses are also outlined. The research design employed in this study is considered by the researcher to have provided more insights into the lives and experiences of Nigerian immigrant families in Canada. It is the researcher's belief that respondents have been faithful and truthful in their accounts.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Sixty respondents participated in this research. Thirty-eight respondents came from extended families and have some links to the village. Seventeen respondents came from nuclear families. The remaining five respondents indicated that they were brought up by people other than their parents. Three men said that they lived with their married sisters. They all had post-secondary education even though not everyone of them went to a University. A total of twenty respondents had their university education before coming to Canada, thirty-six went to colleges and polytechnics, while four attended trade centres. All of those four respondents who went to a trade centre are women. Twenty more respondents attended Canadian universities and colleges. Sixteen people out of the twenty respondents who had their University education in Nigeria went on for further training in Canada.

Explained below are characteristics typical of the total population, followed by an analysis of the data related to the original research question and hypothesis.

**TABLE 1**  
**FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION**  
**EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF RESPONDENTS**

<u>SEX</u>	<u>EMPLOYED</u>	<u>UNEMPLOYED</u>
Male	23	7
Female	27	3

N = 30 male and 30 female

If the two sexes are combined, then we have 50 (83.3%) of the total sample employed, and 10 (16.66%) unemployed. Ten of the women in this study got their present job in the last three years whereas only 5 men reported the same. Even though some of the women interviewed mentioned that the job is not paying much but in most cases they are full-time jobs. This seems to indicate an increase in employment opportunities for women as compared to men in such areas as service sectors, food industry, and health care industry.

Moreover, a good number of these informants believe that their socio-economic life has improved for the better since they arrived in Canada. The number of such respondents in this situation is similar to the number employed. Even though five of them claimed that they could not help their relatives in Nigeria as much as they wanted, they still feel they are economically better off considering what they have been able to achieve materially. Apart from the material achievement,



some said they feel a lot more comfortable and secure here than in Nigeria. They see themselves as being able to afford many material things that were out of their reach in Nigeria. They all thought the greatest benefit that has come their way since they arrived here is the security of life and property that exist here.

It would not be out of place to suggest that the socio-economic life of an immigrant family, if not of every family, is determined by its employment status. Jobs provide the income with which the family thrives and improves its economic well-being. Highly paying careers provide more money and this allows people in such jobs to be able to live up to their obligations compared to those who are average workers in low paying jobs. In other words, immigrant families with higher incomes are those who said they are fully helping their extended family members back in Nigeria while those on middle and lower level incomes expressed their inability to help as much as they intended to.

In my research study, three key recurring themes were encountered. First, there is a theme of employment. Secondly, there is egalitarianism, and the third theme is traditionalism (in respect to the respondents' patriarchal background and beliefs). It is worth mentioning that the interviewees fall into either side of each theme. Each of these themes will now be examined and the Nigerian immigrant

families that fall under these themes as revealed in the interviews will also be discussed.

### **Employment**

In light of my research interest which seeks to understand the economic situations of Nigerian immigrant families in Canada and how well they have been able to support financially their relatives back in Nigeria, getting a good, high-paying job is crucial to achieving this goal. The resulting pattern is that some Nigerian immigrant families are gainfully employed in various places of work while others are unemployed due to factors that will be outlined shortly. For those who are employed, informants' experiences and personal assessment of their economic situation varied according to employment status. For the employed immigrant, it was a story of success as things have been working for them almost as expected. Fifty respondents, male and female alike, fall in this group. One person, a computer programmer with the Royal Bank who also renders consulting services said, "My life has changed for the better since I got here especially since I got my present job." The same respondent explained further, "My financial support for my parents in Nigeria, and our last born who is still in school, has been steady." When asked what he meant by that, he replied "I mean I can now afford to send money home every three months." This money (i.e remittance), according to him, is often spent by his parents for their

upkeep and part of it also goes to the family's last born who is in a Nigerian University.

This story of support by immigrants in terms of sending money home to help their parents, or/and siblings, and sometimes, including relatives is common with those holding a higher-status job, whose occupational rewards are high. However, the level of support being given to their individual families varies according to the amount of money they make in terms of salaries or wages. The study shows that those making just about enough money for their own survival could not afford to send money home on a regular basis. An interviewee expressed his views on this: "There is no doubt that the financial responsibility of my extended family rests on my shoulder and I'm quite aware of their needs but it is hard for me to measure up to that expectation ... I mean things are tight for me financially." He said he had a variety store before but because of the economic slump, he had been bankrupt and so there has been a cutback on all of his obligations. Stating further that his wife has been a source of help in paying bills and giving him some words of encouragement now that he is down. Nevertheless, he said he is more happy and comfortable than when he was in Nigeria.

In other words, what we are seeing here is three different sets of people on one side of the income category: Those on a high scale salary who can be classified as upper class i.e those who are professionals and managers, those on

a middle level salary (i.e middle class) such as technicians, and those on a lower level salary (i.e lower class) such as sales clerks, waitresses, and seasonal workers, who barely make enough money for their own survival. Even though the three sets of people are employed, their level of financial support to their families differs by class and varies according to their salary levels.

Also encountered in this research are those who are employed and also earning a good salary but are not expected by their family members to shoulder any financial responsibility on their behalf. As one informant puts it, "I have never been bothered by my parents or siblings to send money to them. It is not compulsory for me to do that because we are all grown up and making our living. My eldest brother is a surgeon like myself, my immediate brother has his own business in Nigeria, and we are all happily married. My parents have asked me to come back home but I just like it here. Every year we all go back home [referring to his wife and two sons] to celebrate Christmas with my family and my wife's parents."

There are also Nigerian immigrants who showed a casual attitude toward their relatives back in Nigeria, as revealed in this comment, "I really don't care much about sending cash home because here I have to struggle it out all by myself with no help from nobody and now that I'm married my primary

concern is to survive here. I'm sure they would survive over there too."

On the other side of the income category are the unemployed. Here, we have Nigerian immigrants who could not live up to their families' expectations for financial support. Some even felt they are not living the lifestyle they expected because they make no money or not enough money to afford their needs. One respondent said, "I have not had a permanent, stable job for the last six years and I have been hopping from one job to another hoping to get a job with a good pay." This, he said, is hard to come by for him.

I felt it would be much easier here, at least so it used to be, but now everything has changed. What is most painful is my inability to send money to my people. They all need my help but I can't help them now. Maybe tomorrow will bring a good job and a lot of money and I can re-organize my life. Otherwise I'm done like a dinner.

When asked his educational background, he said he trained as a surveyor in Nigeria but it was difficult for him to get a job in that field. So according to him, he has worked in various jobs, such as a line worker at Chrysler, factory worker and has also been sent to many places of work by employment agencies. He commented that he is seriously thinking about going for further studies now that he has been briefed about various programs run by an employment centre and Jobs Ontario Training fund to help job seekers update their skills, pick up new ones, and get back to work.

A similar view came from another respondent who has been here for almost twenty years. His case was a little different because he said there was a time when there were plenty of jobs for all, skilled and unskilled, to do. Now jobs are scarce and he is "stuck" with cab driving. He said he started driving cab as a part-time job when he was at the University of Windsor and since then he has been a cabbie.

I have applied to so many places for jobs related to my discipline --- political science, but with no luck. Maybe if I had put more pressure at my graduation I would have got myself into one career or the other but nobody knows it would get this difficult. Years back, I was doing great with my cabby job, making good money and travelling to Nigeria every two years, just to tell you how good the economy was in the late 80's but it is really bad now. All the same I thank God I'm still surviving. Now with the economic recession, I don't make much money as I used to and that has affected my finances. My wife and children have returned to Nigeria after her fruitless effort to secure a job as a nurse. She did not pass the exam and so she was not allowed to practice. To her, working as a nurse aide here is frustrating and sort of kill her morale. But she is now working in the hospital where she left before coming here as a nurse and also owns a supermarket. The little money I make here is used to boost our business in Nigeria and part of the profit that comes from it is used to help our relatives who are in need.

The 10 unemployed respondents said the reasons for being unemployed are because most employers do not accept their credentials from Nigeria and they often hold that respondents need to upgrade their skills and get Canadian certifications in order to meet the employer's needs. Further research on Nigerian immigrants' employment problems is required to

explore the issue of racism as it affects their situations which this study has no way to get at.

### **Egalitarianism**

One interest of this research is to understand the internal dynamics within the Nigerian immigrant families. This has to do with finding out how husbands and wives relate to one another and to see who undertakes decision-making. This tests the second hypothesis formulated earlier which proposed that women income earners enjoy increased domestic authority in family decision-making leading to more egalitarian power relations.

There are 22 couples where both members agreed their relationship is egalitarian. Twelve of these 22 couples said they are egalitarian in their family relationships since they arrived in Canada compared to 10 couples who said they had egalitarian norms from the time they married in Nigeria. There are also 8 couples where both members agreed their relationship is non-egalitarian. In each of these families the husband said he had more say about important family decisions affecting their relationship and this is supported by the wife. In other words, the eight couples retain the traditional patriarchal relationship in their families. They seem to have accepted it as an approach that suits their lifestyles and that keep them at peace with each other. Nevertheless, two of the women seem desperate to break away

from it but said they "fear such a step if taken might destabilize their marriage."

TABLE 2

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION

EMPLOYED & UNEMPLOYED MEN IN RELATION TO EGALITARIANISM

Male/Husband: 30

	<u>EMPLOYED</u>	<u>UNEMPLOYED</u>
Egalitarian	17 (74%)	5 (71%)
Non-egalitarian	6 (26%)	2 (29%)

According to table 2, twenty-three men are employed. Seventeen of them agreed with their wives that they are egalitarian in family relations while the remaining 6 men and their wives (26%) are non-egalitarian. Five unemployed men out of a total of seven also agreed with their wives that they are egalitarian.

TABLE 3

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION

EMPLOYED & UNEMPLOYED WOMEN IN RELATION TO EGALITARIANISM

Female/Women: 30

	<u>EMPLOYED</u>	<u>UNEMPLOYED</u>
Egalitarian	21 (78%)	1 (33%)
Non-egalitarian	6 (22%)	2 (67%)



Table 3 shows that a total of 27 women are employed with only three unemployed women. Twenty-one employed women are egalitarian with their husbands while 6 employed women said they do not espouse egalitarian norms in their families. One woman from the three unemployed wives said she has an egalitarian relationship with her spouse.

This study reveals that there are immigrants who fit into two different categories regarding egalitarian relations in the family. On one side of the category are immigrants who share between themselves in the family decision-making process and negotiate on what is to be done, and how it will be done within their families. On the other side are families whose household inner workings and decisions are not shared. Couples who are employed seem to maintain a more egalitarian relationship than those who are unemployed. It is also noted that highly educated couples (i.e those with University degrees) who are less egalitarian in their relationships when in Nigeria seem to develop more of an egalitarian traits in Canada. This is often attributed to the social environment that fully supports this family sharing. One female respondent stated:

we have never been this close in sharing our ideas and in negotiating to come jointly to a decision on family issues. It is exciting to have a husband who cares about your ideas and who also wants to work with you on various matters.

The effect of education on egalitarianism as it relates to a few subjects is discussed further in the next section.

Quite a good number of my respondents fall under the positive side of egalitarianism in spite of the fact that some of them have been exposed to patriarchal structure in their early days. A respondent stated that:

we don't allow superiority in this house. I cook and do house cleaning as good as my wife. I have been doing that before we met and I still do it depending on our work schedule. If we have any important issue to talk about, we always arrive at a joint decision supported by two of us. In short, I don't control her and she doesn't control me either and we have grown accustomed to each other over the years. I realize there were occasions I have advised her not to do or go somewhere but I always gave reasons to support my opinion and seeing them as logical she often yield to it. Sometimes it is the other way round and I did take her advice too.

Another informant said,

My role has certainly changed because of the differences in both cultures and I can understand that. What we do individually or collectively as a family is what we both agree upon. Although, if she realizes that I have experience or more informed than her in certain areas she readily accepts my suggestions otherwise we share domestic authority.

He said that they both have equal say about important decisions affecting their relationship. He mentioned that he bought the furniture but there are other home furnishings that she bought. He has his own car, and she bought one too but they consider both cars as family cars --- they use one in summer and the second in winter. "I pay for the rent but she takes care of groceries and sometimes I help out with that too. Our vacation is often spent here or in Nigeria and we

have a common interest in Nigeria being our birthplace and where we have our relatives."

When asked if it would have been better had they been in Nigeria, he replied that he did not think so.

Our interaction with each other would have been the same except that there are many things I do which someone else, such as a younger brother/sister or a househelp would have done .... I'm referring to situations when I have to take out gabbage and do some cleaning around the house. I guess only the very rich keep househelp in Canada but in Nigeria I could easily afford one.

One informant said he does not like the idea of sharing authority with his wife. He believes there cannot be two masters in the house or there will be chaos. "I still make very important decisions that I think are crucial to the family but I do talk about it with my wife. There are certain things that my wife decide upon like what we should buy for grocery and she often gives advice on what we might need to buy for house decorations, children's well-being, and matters regarding our various projects in Nigeria." His wife indicated that her husband likes to be in control as far as decision making is concerned. "I have known him since our high school days and I know how to handle him. This aspect of his behaviour has never been a threat to our relationship even here in Canada." He buys the household furniture. He pays the money for the family car and she helps him by contributing to their house mortgage. Because he works two jobs, he is always on the move so the responsibility of childcare falls

more on his wife's shoulder "but on most weekends I play with them or take them out for a ride or a walk."

One respondent who works as a construction technician replied, "I believe domestic authority is something to be worked out by the husband and the wife and this often seems to be a workable structure for individual family irrespective of what is happening outside their matrimonial home." He further mentioned that he believes in sharing authority with his wife regarding issues related to their family.

If I consult her about a plan and she feels uncomfortable with it then we look at other options available to us or that we can think of. I pay the mortgage on the house but she takes over the rest of our living expenses. The remaining portion of my income goes to the cost of the house we are building in Nigeria. I also send money for the upkeep of our first daughter who is schooling in Nigeria and living with my mother.

#### **Traditionalism: Patriarchy**

The third theme is related to the former one and this is the concept of traditional ideology. This ideology has a lot to do with male domination over women. It also perpetuates the belief that women are subordinate to men and whatever the latter says is the rule. Since this culture is imparted to children at the early stage of their lives and also goes a long way in shaping their beliefs, both men and women seem to adhere to it. Many women are brought up in this kind of environment and this is reflected in their relation to their husbands even when they find themselves in a different culture.

A male respondent's response to question regarding childcare and housework responsibilities was that:

Most of the household items, I bought them and I pay for the rent, our car is paid for in full and because she is not working right now she takes the responsibility of looking after our two daughters -- the first born is three years old and her sister is one year old. My wife is a hardworking woman, she takes very good care of the children, the house and myself. She is just like my mother. She responds to my needs without hesitation or argument.

He further stated that as the head of the house some decisions are made by him and his wife also agrees to this. When asked to give some examples, he said most of the decisions are in the area of finance and money matters. Sometimes, most of these women do not want to experience feelings of guilt or anxiety due to their participation in behaviour or endeavours which are contrary to internalized traditional values.

Another respondent states that "a responsible wife is supposed to perform some specific duties around the house regardless of where they reside." "I married a Nigerian lady from my own culture all because I want to maintain my cultural identity. My wife has to be ready to cook for me at least twice a day. In Nigeria, a wife will cook three times a day. My wife should be able to vacuum and maintain our home in a perfect condition. If I happen to find a free time, I could give a helping hand but these are not tasks to be done in turn." The same respondent informed me that he used to do these things around the house but that was when he had no job

and "I can't just sit around all day when my wife has gone to work. Now that I have a good job, I guess it will be insulting for me to perform those tasks and of course I don't want to be taken for a ride." His wife, though, was not enthusiastic about this attitude of her husband but she said, "keeping my marriage is more important to me."

This study shows that a few Nigerian immigrant wives believe and uphold this male ideology while a good proportion do not subscribe to it. One of the female respondents said it is the duty of the wife to cook, take care of the children and the house. This, however seems to be the traditional role expected of women which is not a welcome idea by most Nigerian immigrant couples. In my interview with the woman, she said that being obedient and respectful to one's husband are part of the virtues she learnt when she was growing up.

I grew up in a family of six children with only two of us as female, and we have to help our mother perform the house duties while the boys were working in the yard or away with their friends. So I'm used to doing all these things and in comparison, I don't see my present family as big as that of my parents since we don't have any relatives living with us.

Moreover, a good number of Nigerian immigrant women that took part in this interview believe that gone are the days when men sit down and women do everything for them. One woman says "everything has to be 50-50, if I contribute financially to the running of the house and I work just like him, then all

other things regarding our marriage has to be shared equally whenever that is possible."

It is not surprising to see some of the subjects, brought up in the traditional way enriched in cultural values, behaving in a way contrary to this foundation. Every culture is unique and has its own idiosyncratic features. This often justifies the relativity of human behaviour. Our beliefs and behaviour are, however, formed and learned in the early socialization we had at childhood. This view is buttressed by Peters (1984: 175) that "a child's identity is fostered by the early socialization within the family, where particular values, beliefs, habits, behaviours, and preferences are learned."

One would expect, in a logical way, that a child who receives his/her early socialization in a modified extended family or a nuclear family where traditional patterns of role expectations and behaviour regarding decision making are upheld would transmit the same values on becoming a married person. Contrary to this assumption, this research has subjects who modified their early socialization beliefs and behaviour as a result of their contact with the new culture they encountered either in Nigeria cities or in Canada. In other words, some of these respondents are influenced by the new social environment in which they live, and this is reflected in their behaviour.

### **Discussion of how these Themes overlap in specific Families**

Even though some Nigerian immigrants in Canada attempt to retain family and cultural traditions while becoming a part of the dominant society both economically and politically, others accept the new culture, at least in part, while still others appear to relinquish quickly the old ways to welcome the more "democratic", family life in Canada. One important intervening variable is education. It has been noted that the more educated the couple, the easier it is for them to adjust to the new culture and increasingly espouse egalitarian beliefs. The effect of this variable on a few subjects is discussed below.

One Nigerian family in which both the husband and wife hold master's degrees explained that it is easier for them to cope with the new family life that they found themselves, concerning the husband-wife relation, because of the supporting social environment. Another factor that contributes to their smooth adaptation is their association with native-born Canadians who continue to serve as agents of cultural orientation in their lives. Being a career couple also makes a big difference as they spent a lot of their time with their co-workers and contemporaries who were born and raised here and this interaction has influenced their "traditional" beliefs toward family life. As explained by the husband,

I think and see things different today as compared to eight years ago. It seems I'm more liberal now



concerning my perspective on family affairs. Those traditional roles that are reserved for women to perform in Nigeria, I can assume here in Canada with little or no enquiries from neighbours. Here I don't feel shy working in the kitchen or ironing my wife's dress and performing other domestic chores because it is most likely that your neighbour is doing the same so I don't feel like the odd one out.

The Nigerian association in Toronto and African organization in Windsor formed by the immigrants seem to maintain all aspects of their cultural orientation in terms of their heritage but also promotes equality in marriage and adequate involvement of both husband and wife in family decision-making.

Additionally, there are three Nigerian couples whose family relations are not affected as a result of their migration to Canada. These couples came from rich families and are brought up in environments that are less emphatic on traditional sex roles, promoting greater equality of men and women. Both husband and wife in each family said they do not experience any drastic change in their relations. They indicated that they have always been sharing things and taken decisions regarding their family lives together. In other words, it was not that they picked up this attitude in Canada but it has been part of their upbringing, belief, and marriage.

One of the women said:

I met my husband here and within a few months I understood that he has a similar background as mine. He often asked for my opinion on various

matters since the time we were courting and that tells you that he respects my views. I chose which movie to see and often help him pick which clothes to wear. In fact when we got married, he did not change his behaviour to me and that is why we have been so happy together. All our decisions are taken jointly, sometimes he even asks me to take appropriate action on family issues or do things the way I want and he appreciates whatever I do.

The woman also mentioned that she thinks the problem with some men is that they feel insecure when their wives are doing well economically in their jobs or business. She said "men are often reluctant to take advice from their wives when necessary and also afraid to share authority with them for fear of losing their dignity or self esteem but I'm fortunate to meet an understanding man of my taste and liking." In this case, both husband and wife grew up on values that are less traditional and see men and women as co-players in the family, so it is easier for them to put this into practice/play in their dealings with each other.

The second couple got married in Nigeria. The husband grew up on the farm and the wife comes from an upper middle class family. She had travelled a lot with her father who was a former diplomat and had served in various missions abroad. She holds egalitarian beliefs and she has been exposed to this all her life. In contrast, her husband was not brought up in this kind of environment neither does he have such experience while growing up because he comes from a polygamous and extended family where sex roles are strongly upheld. He however, said that he did not enjoy the social environment

when he was growing up and decided not to adopt his father's marital lifestyle.

I am naturally a one-man-one-wife person and when it was time for me to get married I chose her [referring to his wife] because we get along fine. We met in the University while we were doing our undergraduate degrees and we were like twins right from our University days in Nigeria. Now that we are married, I can't see the reason why I should control or lay down the rules for her. She is just as pleasant and experienced as myself and as a result of that every issue concerning our marital life is negotiable.

The third couple also got married in Nigeria where they were both secondary school teachers before leaving for Canada. The wife said that she worked as a teacher in an elementary school here before starting a family business, making and selling ice cream and snacks. The husband is at the moment undergoing a doctoral program in Theology and also helping out with her wife in their business. They said they have been very close and do things together ever since they met each other. When we were in Nigeria, said the husband,

I was teaching in a village and her school is in the city. Sometimes, I will stay in the village for two weeks before I returned to the city for a weekend and she performed most family functions on my behalf during that time of my absence. She is very capable, strong, and enterprising. I don't have to take on the responsibility of making every decisions in my family, as a matter of fact, she does most of it.

What can be identified in the account of the three families mentioned above, apart from being conditioned by the dictates of the economic reality, is the attitude of sharing

which they developed as a way of life. According to them, this sharing of family authority and other family related issues between the husband and wife started in Nigeria. One thing that can be drawn out of these bits of information is the partners' recognition of sharing in every aspect of their lives as not only important but also foster a more cordial and intimate relationship. For some Nigerian couples such as those reported above, the egalitarian family relation is not new to them in Canada as they practiced it before in Nigeria. It is interesting to see that five respondents who said that they grew up on the farm maintained egalitarian relationships with their spouse. However, these five respondents had lived in the city at one time or the other before coming to Canada and four of them had higher education. They considered themselves as middle income earners who have been exposed to varied family lifestyles. Nevertheless, there are respondents who have these values but still adhere to the traditional ideal which reserves certain areas of decision making exclusively for men. This is where the individual interest plays a determinant role. Sometimes, regardless of their background and depending on their exposure, and secondary socialization, some respondents modify their ideologies and beliefs to reflect more or less egalitarian beliefs.

## Cultural Transformation

A crucial point is that it is not enough to have a high paying job. The need and willingness must be there to support extended family members. As the study reveals, some informants are well off because they have good jobs and make good money but lack family commitments that are typical of others. A reason commonly given by the informants to account for this situation is related to the type of family they come from. Very few from rich families have no obligation to send money to their families or any of their siblings and even if they do, it is often symbolic of an important occasion or event in the life of their family members. Secondly, some do not respond to their extended family needs simply because they care less and could not see the reason why they have to take up such responsibilities. This kind of attitude is unexpected of a typical Nigerian because of the culture which emphasizes the spirit of brotherhood/sisterhood. Nigerians often refer to themselves as being their "brothers' keepers", with a subtle implication that when one is in need, the other, who perhaps is privileged, is morally obligated to actively support him or her. To behave differently means a transformation of this cultural value, which may indicate an exposure of such a person to other cultural values which emphasize individual accumulation.

An example of this is given in the case of a respondent in Toronto who is by profession a real-estate agent. He said,

"I consider myself to be lucky because I make pretty good money. I can't see how I would make just half of the amount in the present day Nigeria." Later on in the interview, he said he has not gone to Nigeria in 13 years but once in a while he sends money to his family members in Nigeria through his friends when they go for a visit. He stated further "I assume, learning from my brother's experience, the more money I send, the higher the demand from them and because I'm from an extended family, I want to keep away from trouble." Another respondent (a government worker) and his wife (a school teacher) gave a similar view that they cannot satisfy everyone in their families by sending them money.

If we are going to be doing that, then we would have nothing for ourselves to live on. Six years ago when we went, my wife, our two children (now three in number), and myself, we helped in the little way we could but the support is not enough. The fact that no one believed that I try to help them financially discouraged me including my wife and since then I have not been sending money. Now my children are growing up, the first born will enter College next year and we plan to give him the best that we could to see him through. That is where I'm putting my hard-earned money.

The second hypothesis developed in this study in respect to career-women gaining more participation in the household decision making is seen to be partially supported by the data gathered. As earlier mentioned, a total of thirty married women were interviewed and twenty-seven of them are employed. However, twenty-two of the women said that they share domestic authority with their husband and this corresponds with their

husbands' responses including one unemployed wife. The remaining eight women differ on the amount of power they possess with their husbands. Nevertheless, they believe that they are co-participants in decision-making on issues concerning their families but with a few reservations in the areas that men have prerogative. Such areas, according to them include the issue of budgeting i.e how much money is spent, and on what, every month. Some of them said if their husbands don't like a particular group of people, they want them to stay away from such people. They also mentioned that their husbands prefer, most of the time, to have them cook for them even if it means preparing it in advance and having it refrigerated so as not to interfere with their schedules.

These latter expectations are pointers to the traditional roles expected of women. However, the women expressed that in comparison to their former traditional roles in Nigeria, the present expectations are not of the same magnitude. In other words, traditional role expectations in Yoruba families in Canada, when it is present, are not rigid and well-established to the point they are carried out to the letter. This is because the culture is different here and that the women are only responding to their husbands' demands because they were brought up that way. One of the interviewees said,

it does not mean that I can't say no. For instance, if I'm too weak or sick, he will have to bear with me and get it done himself somehow. The thing is such an excuse (whether genuine or not) is acceptable in this society and people will

understand but it might be a bit difficult to get a listening ear at home.

The twenty-two women (as compared to 18 men) who said that domestic authority is shared equally between their husbands and themselves were exposed to western ideals when growing up. One of them came to Canada when she was only 8 years old. She grew up here as a child, went to school here and got a job until her marriage to a Nigerian immigrant man she met in Toronto. The fact that she was exposed to the western ideal of an egalitarian system of decision making might have played a role in her dealings with her husband. She feels that husband and wife should have an equal stance at home. Another woman interviewed, who works in a bank, got here at the age of 12 and had her college education here. In her view, she said,

It is ridiculous to know that some men still want to dominate, control, and exercise authority over women in this jet age. I have always told my husband that it is one attitude that could break us apart and I'm lucky that he is just the right man for me. We negotiate things and do things together. When I do or say something, he does not condemn it, instead he tries to see the good in it and gives his suggestion regarding any improvement that might be necessary and that is not done in a top-down fashion.

Five of the women said they grew up in the village but worked in the cities before coming to Canada. The other female respondents were raised in a western family settings in the cities. One was born in England when her parents were studying there and returned to Nigeria with them at the age of



three. She got married while she was in Nigeria and came to Canada with her husband. Even though her youth was spent in Nigeria, she has a western attitude that condemns male superiority over female. She said her marriage is a union of two friendly people who are equal in the relationship established by them. So, "we do whatever needs to be done in the house and make decisions in a manner that does not create subjectivity of one to the other."

As previously suggested in this study, just as we can find women who adhere to traditional sex-roles and accord their husbands with the right to absolute domestic authority, so there are women who detest this practice and do not believe in it. Everything comes down to the orientation experienced by one and the exposure that goes along with that. In other words, individual orientation plays a large part in one's relation to his/her spouse, nevertheless, one can not ignore the influence of life experiences, which result from one's exposure to other cultures, on one's marital behaviour.

Even though, there are 10 respondents who are unemployed, the remaining 50 respondents acknowledged the general progression in the quality of their lives. For those who have a well-paying job, they attested to their economic success and their ability to help their extended family members financially. Besides, the ten respondents who said they are unemployed and whose expectations are disappointed, the remaining 50 respondents showed some signs of improvement in

their lives. This is evidenced by their personal accounts in respect to their achievements. A total of 44 respondents said that they are sending money to Nigeria to support their relatives. Four of them also carry on a small-scale business in Nigeria and 9 of them have their own houses in Nigeria while 3 families said their houses are under construction.

The research has also brought to light the social problems and the obstacles that impede their progress. There are 10 respondents who are unemployed, and eight people said they are under-employed as they are engaged in jobs that do not reflect their educational qualifications. In other words, the job expectations of some immigrants are not met as they could not secure jobs in their area of specialization. Many factors seem to contribute to this. One is a high unemployment rate which prevents many qualified job seekers from entering the labour force. There is also the notion of retraining which is needed by some immigrants to get them the technical skills that are relevant to the needs of employers. Another critical problem faced by a few Nigerian immigrants whose wives are working is related to the psychological depression they suffer as they cease to be the sole decision maker in their families. Women's participation in the work force and the social environment's support of egalitarian relationships have increased their participation in the family decision-making.

As mentioned earlier, socialization plays a big role in how people respond to different social and cultural values of

their environment. A Nigerian brought up in an environment that promotes egalitarian norms is more likely to exhibit such influences in his/her activities even if she/he has never come abroad. On the other hand, we have people who were born here but the environment in which they grew up encouraged and emphasized their home country's culture. It is therefore logical that such people might portray certain behaviours that put them closer to their parents' traditional culture. However, there is no doubt that the culture in which we live plays a role in reshaping or modifying our long-standing ideology. The women who felt their husbands should play specific roles and make certain decisions exclusively, also mentioned that a considerable amount of such traditional privileges for men has been lost since they got to Canada and they could notice a change over the years as their husbands become more co-operative and attentive to the women's suggestions and decisions.

One particular inference that could be made out of the data is that women seem to gain more power in decision making as they participate increasingly in the labour force. It is also apparent that two-income families are better off financially than one-income families especially when the husband/wife is in a low-paying job. Men also realize the importance of having working wives whose income would provide economic gains for the family units. This results in a substantial improvement of the family's economic resources.

This arrangement alone brings both the husband and wife closer in the running and planning of their family lives. The changes noted by the wives concerning the marital relationships they have with their husbands denote a shift from the typical patriarchal relationship toward a more egalitarian family life. Such changes do vary from one family to another and also in the way they are perceived positively or negatively.

It is evident that dual-earner couples approach more egalitarian norms than single-earner couples. Husbands often have to live with the changes that they encountered here by agreeing to their wives' employment because this goes a long way in contributing to the financial resources of the family, though it sometimes increases the wife's participation in decision making. The same situation applies to women who do not receive pay cheques but are in business selling different goods. A woman who participated in this study said that she makes a lot of money selling local Nigerian foodstuff and clothing to the African community in Toronto, and sometimes people in other cities request these food items. "I have a say in the family just as my husband, because we both struggle to keep it alive. When he alone was making the money, I can't talk much, but now I can see the two of us working hand in hand because I'm making money too."

It seems evident that money making ventures of some sort are necessary for women to achieve equality or a reasonable

level of participation with men in decision making. It is also noted that as women continue to engage in money making activities, and in the process secure economic independence, the easier it becomes to break away from the influence of traditional norms or ideology. Besides this, women's employment has provided them with a sense of achievement and personal satisfaction (Walshok, 1979). This may be due to the influence of the women's rights movement in Canada, which encourages women to pursue personal satisfaction and to depart from traditional norms.

It is also noted that the women's interest to stay here grows stronger than the men's as long as they are making money and able to pursue personal goals. One of the female respondents commented that she would like to stay here because she does not have to live with the dictates of her husband and his family members. "We do what is in the best interest of both of us without my in-laws interfering in our decisions." However, unemployed wives often feel bound by the rules of their husbands and often ready to yield to their wishes. This is because they lack economic power and their being in Canada notwithstanding, they still live in the closet of traditional norms.

There seems to be a relationship between being employed and maintaining an egalitarian marital relationship in terms of husband and wife being equal partners in decision making. Even though this sort of relationship is sometimes difficult

to achieve in practice, some of the respondents believed that they exhibit an egalitarian system of decision making. Though, this is not completely new in the lives of some couples, the social environment here is a buffer to it as compared to ever present antagonising spirit of some family members in Nigeria.

Needless to say, the majority of women respondents enjoy this system and express their satisfaction with it. A good proportion of the employed women, either on salary or managing their own business in comparison to unemployed women, take more decisions about how they spend their time and with whom. Both on the job and at home, they are now making their own choices to a considerable degree and shaping their own lives with only a friendly advice from their husbands. In addition, because of the importance of valuable economic contribution enjoyed by the family from women's employment, men tend to approve of their wives' comments and involvement in decision making. However, some men expressed their dissatisfaction with the notion of women having to share family authority with them. An informant who is unemployed but has a working wife (she works as a cleaning staff member in St Clair College) was resentful of the changes that has been happening in his marital relationship. He said he feels so uncomfortable when his wife performs things that are supposed to be done by him as a husband. "It is obvious that the economy is absorbing more women than men, and this erodes men's authority in their

homes, or tell me, how do you instruct your wife if she is the one who feeds you?"

From the foregoing, it is obvious that unemployed husbands who cling to traditional norms often suffer more psychological depression especially when their spouses are working. When husbands do work, they often see women's employment as beneficial in raising the family's income and also tend to hold less sway on family authority and control. It is noted that the length of time spent in Canada does not seem to have any greater impact on the respondents' behaviours regarding egalitarianism. Some newly arrived Nigerian immigrant couples (who arrived here in the last five years) espouse egalitarian ethics as much as those who have been here longer. What seems to be encouraging couples to this egalitarian marital lifestyle that some have never experienced before is the economic reality of the "new society" including the social environment that is supportive of equal participation of spouses in family decision-making.

Besides making economic contributions to the family, women in the study more often than before seem to regard work as a matter of self-satisfaction. In other words, they seem to see it as a way of satisfying their individual needs and achieving personal goals. For most of the women, it looks like a quiet revolutionary change. Most of the men informants are following the lead in embracing these new values. The result is, a palpable shift towards greater diversity in

styles of living and working --- a situation where more men are accommodating to, or becoming more tolerant of, their wives' active involvement in family decision-making.

### Summary

In summary, three themes emerged from discussion and are used in analyzing the data. The themes are: employment, egalitarianism, and traditionalism. It is found that employment is crucial to immigrants in providing financial support to their extended family members. The higher the salary, the better it is for the immigrant to support his/her relatives financially provided s/he is intent upon doing so.

Even though, the early socialization received by individual often shapes his/her behaviour, one important factor that is critical to developing an egalitarian trait is education. Well educated, dual-earner Nigerian immigrant families who hold less or non egalitarian beliefs before coming to Canada find it easier to adopt more egalitarian practices because of the supporting environment in which they live.

Moreover, out of the 60 respondents only 10 are unemployed. Twenty-three male respondents are employed while 27 female respondents are gainfully employed. It is also found that as more women enter the labour force and start earning income, the degree of participation in the family decision-making increase tremendously. Women respondents said



as soon as they become income earners, their opinions and ideas seem to get into conversation faster. Therefore, the first hypothesis was supported by the data while the second hypothesis was partially supported by the data gathered. Even though, a total of twenty-two women (twelve of whom developed an egalitarian trait in Canada) expressed greater equality in family decision-making with their husbands, the remaining 8 women differ on the amount of sharing that they have with their husbands in family decision-making.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

This study was initiated to gain additional knowledge about how Nigerian immigrant families in Canada are keeping their financial obligations to their relatives, thereby maintaining the link to Nigeria, and also the family dynamics that they experience in Canada. I have concerned myself with the task of finding out whether or not their economic expectations are being met and how this has impacted on their financial obligation to their extended family members (if any). Secondly, I have sought to find out how women's status changes with employment by way of increased participation in family decision-making. The study found that a career woman has a greater chance of taking part in the family decision making process.

In the opening chapter, the structure of the Yoruba traditional family and the effect of industrialization on the Yoruba family was examined. In the second chapter, I have discussed the modern family forms that are springing up in Nigeria and the effect of international migration on Nigerian migrant families.

The third chapter deals with the review of literature and this provides an insight into previous studies on socio-economic situations of immigrant families. However, the

earlier studies provide only general information on immigrant families, with very little work on the socio-economic situations of Nigerian immigrant families in Canada.

As stated earlier, this study reveals that 50 out of 60 respondents are gainfully employed and are better off economically than when they were in Nigeria. Forty-three of the working respondents send money home to their extended family members, and four unemployed respondents also said they send money to their dependent relatives in Nigeria but such support is not regular. Thirteen respondents said they are not sending money to Nigeria for reasons such as: lack of money because they are unemployed, lack of commitment to relatives, and having a casual attitude toward providing financial support to extended relatives. It is worth noting that all respondents said that they have gained a lot of life experiences and have improved themselves materially since they arrived in Canada. Both the employed and unemployed respondents declared that their lives and properties are a lot more secure in Canada than in Nigeria and that they have peace of mind in carrying out their daily schedules.

It is noted also that respondents' level of economic achievement depends on the type of job they do and their income level. Consequently, respondents' ability to assist their relatives financially is often dependent on this economic success. Respondents who are middle-level to senior-level officers in their jobs seem to be finding it a lot

easier financially than those in a low-paying jobs. An exception to this division is related to the five respondents who have businesses of their own and who said they are financially stable. Those who have good jobs and who are willing to assist their relatives often find it easier to uphold their financial obligation.

This study shows that maintaining an egalitarian relationship is not an attribute that is limited to respondents who come from nuclear families and whose parents belong to the upper class and middle upper class as in the case of the surgeon and the diplomat's daughter respectively. There are respondents who did not have this type of background but still maintain egalitarian gender relations in their families. The study reveals also that immigrant families become more egalitarian in husband and wife relationship and in making decisions that affect their marital lives. Variables that seem to be promoting egalitarian attributes in immigrants' family relations are: education, employment and the social environment.

It should be mentioned also that more women (twenty-two in all) are gaining increased participation in family decision-making especially when employed even though six employed women and two unemployed women said they espouse non-egalitarian relations with their husbands. Men appear to be redefining their roles within the family by being more accommodating and attentive to their wives' opinions and suggestions.

This study has been able to highlight not only the improvement in the socio-economic situations of Nigerian immigrant families in Canada but it has also brought to light certain areas, in the life of the population under study, that need to be addressed. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher will make recommendations with regards to possible ways of reducing the unemployment situations of some respondents and other social problems that they encounter.

I would suggest that immigrants take refresher courses in the area of their specialization or go for retraining whenever this is necessary to get them the job that they want. It is also important that immigrants seek actively the job of their desire by matching the desire with the right skill for the job and maintaining a positive attitude in their job search. I will also suggest that Nigerian Association provide more services to immigrants to help them in adjusting to their new environment. I believe this would minimize the effect of culture shock that many immigrants encounter and it will also prepare them for possible changes that might occur in their family relationships. Last but not the least, I would like to see various government provisions directed to creating more jobs for the minorities actively implemented by the private and public establishments.

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Guide

1. How long have you been in Canada?
2. Why did you come here? What are the motivational factors?
3. Could you tell me your immigration status in Canada?
- 4a. What is your profession? What is your employment situation?
- b. If unemployed, are you thinking about going back to School to learn a new skill? Has your educational status improved since you got here?
5. Has your financial status improved since you got here?
6. How large is your family in Nigeria i.e the family of orientation? Are you a member of a joint/extended family?
7. How often do you communicate or have any kind of contact (by mail, phone, visits, etc) with your family members back in Nigeria?
- 8a. Are you obligated to aid them financially?
- b. If yes, is your support extended to others in your family beside your parents and siblings? Do you have any other dependents? Specify relationship.
- c. If no, could you explain why there wasn't that expectation?

- d. What other form of assistance do you give to your family members? Are you sending any of them to school by paying tuition?
- e. Do they consider themselves better off financially since you began to give them support? To what degree has this improved their lives?
- f. Does your remittance satisfy your dependents/family members? If not could you indicate the reasons for their dissatisfaction?
- g. Have you helped any of your siblings or relatives come to Canada or go to any other western country?  
Do you have any of them living with you?
- 9. When and where did you marry?
- 10. What is the composition of your family in Canada? How many children do you have? Do you plan to have more?
- 11. Does your transition to Canada create any sense of dissatisfaction in your marriage?
- 12. In what way has your role changed relative to your spouse in terms of making important family decisions and sharing domestic authority with your spouse since you arrive in Canada?
- 13a. Who usually has more say about important decisions affecting your relationship, you or your partner?
- b. Who bought household items such as furniture and home furnishings?
- c. Who bought your family car?

- d. Who pays the rent or mortgage?
  - e. Who usually has most influence on how much money to spend on groceries?
  - f. Who usually has most influence on where to go on a vacation?
  - g. Who takes more responsibility regarding childcare, housework performance, and household financing?
- 14a. Would it have been different in any way if you were to be in Nigeria together as husband and wife?
- b. If yes, how?
15. What are the things you dislike in the Canadian system or norms? What are those you like?
16. Would you have remained monogamous if you were in Nigeria?



APPENDIX B.

CONSENT FORM.

This is to confirm that all information obtained in the course of the interview will remain anonymous and confidential. Participation is completely voluntary and no identifying information that may reveal your identity will be used. An alternate name will be chosen if you are referred to in the thesis. You will be asked a set of questions pertaining to your family orientations, educational background, your economic and social situations in Canada. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded. Only the individual conducting the interviews, namely Godwin Opeola, will transcribe them for the purpose of the research, and the tapes/transcripts will be destroyed after completing the research. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at (519) 255-9587 or the Departmental Ethics Committee, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Windsor, 401 Sunset Avenue....(519) 253-4232 ext. 2190.

There are two copies of this form. Please sign both and keep one for your future reference. Thank you for your cooperation and participation.

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Respondent

Godwin Opeola

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