



Post-Secondary Educational Experiences of Togolese Immigrant Women and Educational Attainment¹

Tela Bayamna²

Abstract

This is a research on the experiences of Togolese immigrant women in the United States to understand the interconnection, which exists between being African and a woman in the United States. Very few studies documenting the experiences of West African immigrant women are available. In this research, narrative inquiry methodology is used. A literature review was conducted on feminist theories of gender identity and intersectionality issues. Togolese immigrant women were aware that they have different identities. Their awareness provides evidence of how they embody intersectionality in their experiences. They experienced a silent intersectional discrimination. Language barriers were one of the most important challenges they faced in the United States. Togolese immigrant women should take ESL classes upon arrival in the United States. Educators working with Togolese immigrant women should consider the different identities Togolese immigrant women bring with them in school so that their interactions with them may impact their success.

Keywords: Gender roles, intersectionality, post-secondary education

Article History:

Received: November 20, 2021

Accepted: June 01, 2022

Recommended Citation: Bayamna, T. (2022). Post-secondary educational experiences of Togolese immigrant women and educational attainment. *International Journal of Excellent Leadership (IJEL)*, 2 (1), 13-25.

¹ This study, was derived from the dissertation titled “Post-Secondary Educational Experiences of Togolese Immigrant Women and Educational Attainment” by Dr. Tela Bayamna.

² Ph.D., French Faculty Withrow University High School, Cincinnati, Ohio, t.bayamna@gmail.com ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0002-4227-1242

Introduction

This topic results from my experience with gender expectations regarding education and family in Togo and in the United States as a graduate student and a working mother raising a family. Education, and specifically postsecondary education, is considered an essential component of sustainable development in Africa (Assie-Lumumba, 2007; Teferra & Altbachl, 2004). Women are recognized as key actors in the process of human development in Africa because of their responsibility for nurturing, upbringing, socialization, and education of their children (Browne & Barrett, 1991). However, social norms and values regarding gender expectations and identity impact educational outcomes. Additionally, according to Breuer, & Asiedu, (2017) gender discrimination “appears to negatively affect female international political self-efficacy primarily through women’s perceptions of social norms” (p.401). Tuwor and Sossou (2008) conducted a study on gender discrimination and education in West Africa and argue that, “girls in Togo are 20% less likely than boys to be enrolled in primary school, 25% less likely to reach high school and more than 50% less likely to enter University” (p. 370). Little research addresses the underrepresentation of women in post-secondary education in Africa and particularly in my nation of Togo.

Research on female education in Africa includes issues such as female enrollment, retention, and participation in education and identifies socio-economic factors as the main factors that hinder female participation in schooling (Asimeng-Boaheme, 2006; Hyde, 1997; Leaper, Farkas, & Brown, 2012; Tuwor & Sossou, 2008). Research findings on African immigrant women experiences and specifically Togolese immigrant women experiences in the United States have received limited attention. The following research question guided my study: How do Togolese immigrant women negotiate gender expectations about education, culture, and family in the United States?

Literature Review

Gender Politics in West Africa

The challenges that education faces in the 21st century in Africa include the low representation of women in more advanced levels of education, such as secondary education and higher education. In higher education, females tend to dominate in disciplines such as home economics, social science, and business studies, all of which prepare them for traditional female professions including catering, secretarial work, teaching, and social work, with important implications for postgraduate income disparities and social status (Daddieh, 2007). In a recent study Dieterich, Huang, & Thomas, (2016) highlight the low representation of female in education as well as in employment.

According to Arthur (2000), historically, many women, especially those in rural Africa, were denied access to primary and elementary education because of cultural norms, which constrained them to “taking care of children and elderly relatives”. Boys were given the privilege of being educated, and this preference prevented girls from participating and being included in education. Boys were expected “to carry the family name and legacy, inherit the family property, and manage the family business....Girls were often cast in the role of reproducers of future mothers and were groomed for marriage usually after the onset of puberty” (p. 16). Girls received training that tailored them toward domestic roles, such as “tilling the land and planting subsistence and cash crops with their mothers” (p. 16). Girls and women worked on harvesting and preparing produce for sale on market days. On the other hand, when boys complete elementary school, they may again be encouraged and given the financial support to pursue secondary education....The opportunities open to males to pursue secondary and tertiary education, unhindered by discrimination and sex stereotypes, ultimately position them to become favorable candidates for international migration. (Arthur, 2000, 16). This politics of socialization of children ensures that boys and girls grow up in an environment that is not advantageous for girls.

Families protect their girls from foreign influence so that they can help perpetuate the culture. In some cultures, daughters are married at puberty. Families are likely to withdraw their daughters from primary school as they approach puberty (Mazonde, 2001, 12).

The tradition demands that girls become married or undergo ritual initiations that prevent them from enrolling in school or continuing their education. Pregnancy and marriage channel females out of school at an early age, and parents who decide to keep their children in school, and particularly their girls, only do it when it is cost effective. For example, in Togo, “In 1970, the government introduced a six-year basic compulsory and free education for all children between the ages of 2 and 15 years” (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008, 366). After 15 years, education is not free in Togo, and parents choose to invest in the education of their boys rather than that of their girls, assuming that their girls will get married and their husbands will provide for them; therefore, investing in the education of their girls is not cost effective. Moreover, even when African women manage to complete their education, they still face oppression and discrimination in the workplace. The oppression and discrimination that women face in the workplace can be traced back to the colonial period.

Leaders that African universities produced during the colonial period worked for the benefit of the rulers in the West, and even after independence, the modes of organizational and intellectual life in African universities mirrored those of the West and did not reflect the realities and life in African countries. In colonial primary and secondary schooling, women were not educated in college preparatory curricula. Rather, they were trained to become good wives and good domestic workers. The discrimination against women is revealed in Okeke-Ihejirika’s (2004) scholarship where she explored the personal and professional lives of four educated women in Nigeria. Okeke-Ihejirika’s argues that, even with education, Igbo women in Nigeria face cultural barriers that prevent them from achieving their personal and professional goals. The stories of these women can apply to a wide audience in Sub-Saharan Africa, and many women can relate to their experiences. Women try to negotiate power and privilege in the society even with higher degrees, and they are oppressed in their fight for social justice because of the social expectations that put them in a disadvantaged position and privilege men. Their husbands may support their decision to be in school, but they do not care about how their wives cope with education and insist that they run the home smoothly at the same time. Domestic demands are some of the challenges highly educated women face in their educational journeys; these demands are also a major constraint to the professional advancement of wives and mothers (2004).

Gender Politics in Togo

According to Tuwor and Sossou (2008), formal education was introduced in West Africa after the advent of various colonial governments and foreign missionaries, and it educated females to become competent within their domestic roles. Females were trained to become good wives and mothers as compared with boys who were trained to “earn livelihood for themselves and their families” (p. 365). In Togo, in terms of household chores, “Being a wife bears on average much more housework than being a daughter” Dieterich, Huang and Thomas, (2016). In Togo, in terms of female education, separate schools were established for them and the policy behind separate schools for girls was to afford them a little education along the lines of that given in the primary schools with emphasis on sewing, washing, ironing, and personal hygiene. (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008, 366).

The education of females for domestic roles in Togo has its roots in formal education. Tuwor and Sossou’s (2008) findings are consistent with Teferra and Altbachl’s (2004) argument when they indicate that colonial authorities created school to train a limited number of African nationals to assist them in administrating the colonies. Regarding the executive secretary curriculum in Togo, Goura and Seltzer-Kelly (2013) indicate that despite the five decades since Togo achieved independence, the “curriculum still almost completely lacks Togolese references; much of the content of the curriculum is neither useful to, nor adapted for Togolese interests and social needs” (p. 50). In other words, the curriculum content does not reflect students’ lives.

The Educational System in Togo

Bafei (2011) indicated that the late 19th century is marked by the presence of European colonizers in their colonies, including Togo. Colonizers created schools in their colonies for the essential needs of administration and economic exploitation of the colonies. After the Berlin Conference in 1885, Germany took control of the coast until it withdrew from World War I in August 1914. France and Britain divided Togo, and France took a part of the territory called French Togo, and the British took the other part of the territory called British Togo. From 1920, the English language was forbidden in the French zone, and in 1922, French was imposed in schools as the official language of Togo, and public education was dispensed only in French, reflecting Western civilization. Togo kept the education system imposed by the colonizer even after independence from France on April 27, 1960. However, the current Togolese system is organized by the Education Reform of 1975, which dictates six years of elementary school, four years of junior high school, and three years of senior high school (Bafei, 2011). Each of the three stages of school in Togo (elementary, junior high, and senior high) ends in a national test. French is still the official educational language of Togo.

High school in Togo is designed to provide students with a fundamental education and a certain degree of specialization, which permits students to pursue higher education. In Togo, there are two major streams: general high school (lycee general) and technical high school/ vocational education (lycee technique) (Bafei, 2011). The general high school is organized in different cycles: the letters cycle (serie A), where students specialize in literary studies and philosophy, and the science cycles (serie C and serie D), where students specialize in science, mathematics, economics, chemistry, and physics. Students in technical high school specialize in technical fields in addition to their general studies. At the end of the second year in high school (called Premiere in Togo and equivalent to 11th grade in the United States), students sit for a national test. Students who pass the exam receive the BAC I (the first part of Baccalaureate) or the "School-leaving certificate part 1" (Bafei, 2011, 252) and have access to Terminal class (12th grade in the United States). In completing Terminal, students sit again for another national test. Students who pass the exam receive the BAC II (the Baccalaureate in Togo, equivalent to the high school diploma in the United States) or "the School-leaving certificate part 2" (Bafei, 2011, 252), and they are admitted into higher education. In higher education, the degree programs vary between 3 to 8 years in length (Bafei, 2011). Students who receive their high school diplomas can go to university in the country, to vocational schools, and universities abroad. The tests that students take at each level of education are standardized tests that students pass or fail. Students who do not pass their tests must retake their year and take the tests again.

In reference to gender politics in Togo, Goura and Seltzer-Kelly (2013) suggest that the curriculum in technical and vocational training schools entails specific gender norms. For example, in post-baccalaureate vocational educational programs, generally there is a predominance of male students, and engineering and industrial fields enroll very few female students. There are few female students in male dominated fields. This is in part the consequence of gender discrimination, as it has been established in schools since the colonial period. In 1986, at the beginning of the executive secretary program, the entrance examination and admission decisions disregarded gender, and still the majority of students were male (Goura & Seltzer-Kelly, 2013). The executive secretary program is a program in which curriculum is "comprised of two groups: the principals...and the subsidiaries. The principals are: computer science, typing, professional writing, administration skills, stenography, French, and English. The subsidiaries are: economy, accountancy, law, and statistics" (Goura & Seltzer-Kelly, 2013, 49). The educational system strove to close the gender gap by recruiting and training more females in the program, and it gave the impression that the goal of female emancipation was being realized.

Tuwor and Sossou (2008) add that with the advent of the education reform in Togo, the government created a law stipulating that all children between the ages of 2 and 15 must receive free education. This allowed nearly all primary school aged children to attend school and 27 % of students to attend secondary school. Despite the free education for all children to age 15, a gender gap still exists in

Togo with a current net enrolment of 67.7% for boys and 59.1% for girls at the primary school level and 67% for boys and only 33% for girls at the high school and secondary level (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008, 366). UNICEF strove to alleviate this gender gap in Togo through the African Girls' Education Initiative, which hired female daycare center personnel, provided materials and equipment, and partially paid school fees of about 60% of females and 25% of males to help them stay in school. Even though the initiative has contributed to an increase of female enrollment and demand for educational services in Togo, female participation in education is still an issue due to several factors including "the weight of tradition such as early and forced marriages of young girls to elderly men, girls' low self-esteem, a lack of female role models, and the trafficking of young girls to work as domestic servants" (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008, 366-367).

Education as Reminiscence of Colonization in Togo

Per Dowd (2003), in Togo students are often expected to memorize responses to the exam questions like students in China. This form of education is tied to colonial education because students are not supplied an environment that can stimulate their responses; students study in an environment in which the future is not different from the past. The examinations in Francophone areas reflect the strong influence of the French baccalaureate as a colonial precursor (Dowd, 2003). The administration of the tests in public and private schools is another aspect of Togolese schools that reflects the French model of examination even years after the independence of the country. Goura and Selter-Kelly (2013) indicate that: The criterion of knowledge is framed according to what is considered valuable for France, revealing the "copy and paste" model. Most critically, the entire system is focused upon preparing students to work in an economic system modeled along the lines 12 of the French system- even though this is no longer appropriate in the postcolonial era. (p. 50).

Teachers reproduce over and over in their classrooms what is considered knowledge in the French educational system. This educational philosophy does not allow students to learn something new or to contribute to knowledge in the classroom. During tests, students are required to regurgitate what has been given to them by their teachers.

Im/Migration and Female Im/migration

Im/migration. This study explores the experiences of Togolese immigrant women in the United States. Hagen-Zanker (2008) suggests that, "Migration is the temporary or permanent move of individuals or groups of people from one geographic location to another for various reasons ranging from better employment possibilities to persecution" (p. 4). Immigrants are referred to by the U.S. Census Bureau as "foreign born." The foreign-born population is comprised of those individuals who were not U.S. citizens at birth and includes naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, temporary workers, and foreign students. It excludes those born to immigrants in the United States, including illegal immigrant parents (Zeigler & Camarota, 2015). The United States has a diverse group of immigrants in terms of their national origins.

The U.S. Diversity Visa (DV) Program, created as part of the 1990 immigration reforms, facilitated the migration of approximately 20,000 Africans per year since its inception (Thomas, 2011, 8). Arthur (2000) surveyed African immigrants on the reasons for coming to the United States, and the four main reasons given were "the desire to pursue postsecondary education, to reunite with family members, to take advantage of economic opportunities, and finally to escape from political terror and instability" (20).

Female im/migration in the United States. When looking at migration from a gender perspective, neoclassical theorists assume that most migrant workers are men; women follow their husbands or fathers and do not migrate in their own capacities as workers (Oishi, 2002). Women are men's dependents, and they "migrate not only because of economic motives, but also to get married" (Hagen-Zanker, 2008, 12).

In their new environment, women are often required to learn a new language and incorporate a variety of added roles without relinquishing those that are already established. They are expected to maintain an African cultural continuity through their traditional roles, while espousing new ones to establish a balanced family and, often, a professional life in Western society. With regards to cultural continuity, African women are not expected to redefine their roles or become independent from their husbands in their host countries. These expectations lead an African immigrant woman to be confronted with “several problems in her role as mother-wife in a different cultural system. The process of integrating her new role as immigrant and mother with her minority status is complex and filled with stress” (Arthur, 2000, 112). Moreover, as they attempt to forge or negotiate entrance into mainstream society, African women are pressured to become acculturated or accept assimilation into the broader patterns of social roles in the host society. They are faced with the traditional gender roles that they have brought with them from Africa, and they have to confront gender discrimination and sexism as they seek incorporation into the work place. The resolution of these role conflicts ultimately determines which roles they will validate and which they will redefine (Arthur, 2000, 123).

Method

In this research, narrative inquiry methodology is used. A literature review was conducted on feminist theories of gender identity and intersectionality issues. The study expands existing literature on immigrant women in the United States, generally, and Togolese immigrant women, specifically. Thus, it gives voice and visibility to an underexplored population. The findings of this study are intended to guide Togolese immigrant women to negotiate gender expectations about education and family in the United States.

By exploring Togolese immigrant women’s experiences, I hoped to shed the light on the following question: What do Togolese immigrant women’s narratives tell us about how they negotiate gender expectations about education and family in the United States? In order to participate in the study, the research participants identified as Togolese immigrant women who are pursuing or have pursued post-secondary education within the past year and Togolese women who did not pursue post-secondary education in the United States. I gave consent forms (in English) to all participants prior to conducting the interviews in addition to a copy of the research questions used in the study. This allowed participants to consider and prepare their responses to the questions prior to the interviews.

I explained to the women to what extent Togolese immigrant women’s voices are not represented in research in the United States and how their voices will help fill this gap in the literature. I contacted the individuals about participation in the study via Skype and in person in order to answer any question they may have had before the study. I did not limit the participants’ age for this study, because I felt that, whatever age they are, their lived experiences would be interesting, especially since I placed them into their time, space, and place. I also felt that by not limiting the participant age, I would have a diverse range of experiences among Togolese immigrant women to report and analyze. I informed participants that, if they decided to participate in the research, I would interview them. Their participation in the research was voluntary, so they could withdraw at any time or decline to answer any question that made them uncomfortable. They also could terminate the interview at any time and subsequently reschedule or drop from the study without explanation. They could refuse to talk about any topic or end the interview session whenever they wished. There was no penalty for withdrawing. They were not asked to do anything that might expose them to risks beyond those of everyday life. I recorded our conversations, and the recorder was always in full view so they knew that I was recording. The participants were made aware that my advisor, my dissertation committee, and I may listen to the recordings. I asked them to contact me Tela Bayamna at bayamnt@miamioh.edu or my advisor Dr. Lisa Weems at weemslid@miamioh.edu if they had questions regarding the study.

I used pseudonyms with the agreement of the participants to protect their privacy. Personally identifiable information was not released in any form that would make research participants’ identities

easily traceable (unless there was written consent). No sensitive data files were left on the computer or in any office.

I chose narrative inquiry as the most effective approach to explore these experiences because it is a methodology that recognizes the importance of the cultural, the social, and the context. I turned to narrative inquiry to pay attention to the symbolic lessons about maneuvering with family regarding gendered expectations. Narrative analysis reveals "truths about human experience" (Riessman, 2008, p.10). Narrative inquiry is a method that allows us to understand experiences from the perspectives of those being studied and offers the promise of making significant contribution to knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Herman, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Richardson, & Warhol, 2012; Riessman, 2008; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011).

Five Togolese immigrant women were interviewed after being recruited for the study through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a method that "yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest" (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, 141). Four of the research participants pursued post-secondary education in the United States, and one research participant did not pursue post-secondary education in the United States. For the purpose of this study, post-secondary means participants continuing education toward associates, bachelors, and/or doctoral degrees. I collected data from a pilot study of two Togolese immigrant women: one of them was a woman who pursued post-secondary education in the United States and the other one was a woman who did not pursue post-secondary education in the United States.

The data from the interview of my pilot study were not included here as part of my findings, but they are discussed briefly in Chapter 5 in regards to how they guided me to know which of the questions I asked during the pilot study interviews were good questions to use in the full study and what questions I should add for this full study. In other words, the pilot study helped me work out some the procedural burden and collect preliminary data and decide if I needed to make adjustments before the full study. The participants' voices were collected through face-to-face and open-ended interviews. As an insider of the culture of the participants, I framed the questions making sure that they were culturally appropriate. In other words, I framed the questions making sure they took into account our shared norms. The first interviews lasted 30 to 90 minutes. I transcribed the interviews, read the transcription data, and looked for potential places for follow-up questions. The second interviews lasted 20 to 25 minutes. The second interviews were used to collect more information about the participants' experiences in the United States. Participants shared their experiences in the United States as well as the importance of having post-secondary education for better opportunities in the United States. All the Togolese immigrant women interviewed were born and raised in Togo before coming to the United States. Four of the participants lived in the Western Midwest region, one Togolese immigrant woman lived in the Eastern Midwest region of the United States. One hairstylist/nurse, one nurse, one corporate manager, and a team leader represented Togolese immigrant women who pursued post-secondary education in the United States. A sales associate represented Togolese immigrant women who did not pursue post-secondary education in the United States. All the Togolese immigrant women who participated in the study were married. Four of the participants were married with children. One participant was married without children.

All the interviews were conducted between May 2016 and March 2017. The interviews were conducted at different locations based on participants' preferences, including in their homes and apartments. English and French languages were used depending on the 34 participant's preferences. Four interviews were done in English, and one interview was done in French because it was the preference of the participant. I translated into English the interview done in French before transcribing all the interviews and searching for epiphanies that could reflect their life experiences in the United States. The transcription of the data was used as a tool to identify the themes and the insights that helped guide the analysis of the data.

Findings and Discussion

This study was conducted to understand how Togolese immigrant women negotiate gender role expectations about education, culture, and family in the United States. To analyze the question, I utilized a combination of African feminism theory and intersectionality theory. I chose intersectionality because I wanted a framework that would “enhance activist efforts in Africa” (Mekgwe, 2008, 22). From these frameworks, I analyzed the data according to this concept of bargaining with patriarchy. In this study, the participants struggled with gender expectations at home while working fulltime or part-time. Bargaining with patriarchy comes to light as a way of life for them in Togo and during their time in the United States. They were expected to be mothers and wives. They were expected to be the primary caregivers of their children regardless of their other duties. They accomplished their duties by bargaining with patriarchy.

Bargaining with patriarchy is the product of the patriarchal structure of the family, and once implemented in a family, it becomes difficult to change the lifestyle of the family. The result of the study shows that there is a consistency between participants’ experiences in the family with regard to bargaining with patriarchy in Togo and in the United States, with few differences between participants who worked fulltime and the one who worked part-time with their degrees, after pursuing postsecondary education in the United States.

As shown in Moore, Yass Owusu, Moore, & Knight (2021)’s study, bargaining with patriarchy is part of Togolese culture, and men expect women to always bargain. Generally, Togolese women bargain with patriarchy in ways that do not bring tension in the family. For example one of their participants argued that “Sometimes, I get upset, but what can I do? I just tell myself that it is God’s will for me to be in such situation.” (p. 08). In this study, the narratives of the participants tell us that they negotiated patriarchy to their advantage by compromising and coping with new situations. For example, one participant did not challenge her father’s decision to go abroad and pursue post-secondary education. After she got married in the United States and had a child, she compromised with the decision of her husband to stay home and care for their child.

While this participant described bargaining with patriarchy as advantageous, I see two drawbacks. First, I feel that when she decided to compromise with her husband and stay home to care for their daughter, the money her father spent for her education became a waste. She was not fully benefiting from her education by working part-time. Second, her decision to stay home and care for their daughter reinforces the traditional belief that there is no need for a girl to have college education because she will eventually get married one day and her husband will care for her, and it also goes in hand with the traditional norm that made females homemakers and males breadwinners. In Togolese families, how well women bargain with patriarchy determines how strong their relationship with their partners will be. On the other hand, another participant bargained with patriarchy by accomplishing the household chores without quarreling with her husband. She trained her son to help her accomplish the chores instead of asking her husband to help her. Her behavior reinforced the power of her husband as the head of the household and decision maker.

As African immigrants, it was not evident that Togolese immigrant women could completely adapt to a new culture. Arthur’s scholarship suggests that:

African women have rejected wholesale assimilation into the dominant culture. They are fiercely traditional and deeply committed to African values when it comes to household organization, child raising...and expectations about children. (Arthur, 2000, 118). The length of time Togolese immigrant women spent in the United States did not change much in the culture they brought with them from Africa. As we can see, each woman had her own way of bargaining with patriarchy. Some women “cope with” patriarchy, and some “go around” in their bargaining with patriarchy (Nnaemeka, 2004, 378). Few African feminists (Beoku-Betts, Davies & Graves, Ogundipe-Leslie) have incorporated an intersectional analysis in their studies to explore the experiences of African women. Like Beoku-Betts (2004), I use intersectionality as a framework to produce an understanding of Togolese immigrant

women's experiences in the United States. I agree with Crenshaw (1991) that the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism and classism, three elements that are structurally defined and institutionalized.

Crenshaw's understanding of the experience of Black women is consistent with Ogundipe Leslie's understanding of the experiences of African woman. Ogundipe Leslie (1994) posits that we have to be aware of the fact that an African woman has different identities. For example, an African woman is a woman, she is an African, she is a third world person, she is a mother, and a wife. I understand that in the view of Crenshaw (1991) and Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) different identities intersect in the experiences of Black women, and their analysis should not be done separately. Togolese immigrant women identified as immigrants, Black women, former postsecondary students, wives, mothers, workers, and females, and these social categories are part of their experiences in the United States. I considered these social identities in the analysis of the narratives.

The results of the study suggest that Togolese immigrant women were aware that they have different identities, and therefore, their awareness provides evidence of how they embody intersectionality in their experiences. For example, one participant's narrative about gender expectation illustrates that she was aware of the interconnections of identities in her life: You are the frontrunner. You have to multitask. You do everything at home. The man usually does not step in. Togolese immigrant women were at the same time wives, mothers, and women who worked for wages because of the job opportunities we have in this country, and they welcome these opportunities. Unlike the United States, Togolese women in Togo have limited employment opportunities, and they remain home as the homemakers of the family while their husbands earn money outside their homes as breadwinners.

Research participants emphasized the fact that they are mothers and wives and demonstrated an understanding of how their various identities interact to oppress them while they were fulfilling their gender roles. The participants did so by referencing the roles they accomplished as females in their houses. The findings in this study are consistent with Beoku-Betts' findings. One of the research participants in Beoku-Betts' study reflected: I could not perform to my maximum, because I was a mother and wife. My husband was supportive, but once he enrolled in school, things changed a bit. At the beginning of one academic year, I drew up a timetable to share household chores. I asked him what he would be able to do. He flared up and was very angry. He felt a woman should not dictate to her husband. He decided on his own volition to do the laundry, etc. I had to study hard, because with all the negative perceptions about me, I wanted to prove them wrong. I finished my Ph.D. in four and a half years.

Beoku-Betts' research participant provided in her narrative an understanding of what it means to be an African woman in a foreign country and the gender expectations in the family. Although African immigrant women add new roles to the roles they brought with them from Africa, they are expected not to disturb the patriarchal structure of the family or change gender roles even when their new condition requires it. In this sense we can understand Kila's narrative where she states that: It does not matter if you live over here. An African woman will always be an African woman, especially when you have married an African man. The duties in the house lay on you.

Togolese women are expected to conform to Togolese norms (cooking, cleaning, catering to the needs of their husbands, raising children) of being African women wherever they live in the world. When asked how they identify, one of the participants said she identifies as a "Black Togolese American woman." This identity illustrates the fact that the participant was experiencing an interconnection of identities. She had to grapple with intersectional effects of both the African culture she brought with her from Africa and the American culture she was learning. Both cultures were intersecting in her experiences, and their intersection led to her new identity. In other words, the research participant understood that she was not a Black American or any other race in the country. Rather, she understood that she belonged to a minority group among the other minority groups in the country. For example, the post-secondary degree she received in the United States put her into a specific social class or a

minority group of educated women. The research participant was negotiating her identity in her host culture. The negotiation of identity also emphasizes the fact that Togolese immigrant women were getting acclimated to their new culture, and they were less and less dealing with adjustment issues.

The findings in this study also indicated that research participants' parents did not have specific career aspirations for them. Although the parents did not have specific career aspirations for their daughters, they wanted them to be educated. The educational level of their parents, specifically their fathers, influenced the decision making about participants' educations. In this study, their mothers had completed at least primary school education or had not received their high school diploma. All the fathers had at least a high school diploma, and the highest level of education was doctorate. The level of education of their fathers and their support affected participants' achievement in education and their motivation to do well for themselves and their siblings who were looking up to them. Since the participants' fathers guided their education and they had a strong influence on them, it shows the power of patriarchy in Togolese families. Participants' mothers had less influence on them. After their post-secondary education, research participants secured paid employment, and their wages increased. The increase in the wages was influenced by their post-secondary education and the improvement of their language skills. Through their wages, they contributed to maintaining a strong family economy.

Regarding their adjustment in the United States, Togolese immigrant women mentioned the language barrier as the most important issue they faced. All the participants discussed their experiences with the language barrier. They commented on how the lack of language skills affected their abilities to communicate with people in school, as well as in the workplace. They also commented that they took ESL classes in the beginning of their stays in the United States, and these classes helped improve their language skills and also helped them become confident in pursuing post-secondary education in the United States.

One participant discussed her experiences with racist behavior in school and the ways in which she was affected by the issue. She felt that her identity as an international student kept her from being able to communicate with her instructors and accessing knowledge. She experienced isolation in her interaction with her instructors in the classroom. This experience is reported in Beoku-Betts' study addressing the experiences African women who pursued graduate studies in scientific disciplines at western universities between the 1960s and 1990s. In Beoku-Betts' study, one of the research participants commented on the doubts by White professors about their ability to do the work, feelings of exclusion, lack of support, perceptions about their inability to speak English, and negative perceptions of African societies. Another participant in the same study reflected: My graduate experience was very difficult. Being in a White institution, it was like, what is this girl doing here? I lost my identity. I became the Black girl. A lot of them assumed I couldn't understand English or [that I was dumb]. After the first semester, their attitudes changed. Like in Beoku-Betts' study, the research participants in this study did not mention that they experienced overt racism. Their awareness with racial stereotypes came from the fact that they felt excluded in the classroom and that they were not supported by instructors. They felt as the "other" in the classroom. I suggest that being the other is being taken as the stranger. It makes you become someone who has to deal with loneliness because you do not belong.

Togolese immigrant women's experiences of intersectional discrimination are reflected in Abra's narrative: I always still feel like girls have to prove themselves. Even though in the U.S.A, they cannot show it, as a woman you still have to prove yourself. You go to meetings and you have all of those big managers, they are all guys and they are just looking at you. On top of that, not being from here, it is a total different story, but you have to, again, learn.

The intersectional discrimination is salient, and as a woman, you have to make a choice of striving hard to rise to the top and show that you deserve to be there and your gender is not a handicap for you in performing your duties. Gender discrimination from community members was another issue one of the research participant's experienced in the United States. The struggles the research participant

encountered as a woman in Togo, a patriarchal society, prepared her to be able to face gender discrimination in the U.S. In response to gender discrimination from community members, the participants in my study became resilient and worked hard to succeed in their educations. Their narratives indicate to what extent it is challenging for African women to pursue post-secondary education as a mother and a wife in a host culture without the presence of extended family to help her with her duties as a woman.

Suggestions

The findings of this study suggest a number of recommendations and future directions for research. The results of the study suggested that language barriers were one of the most important challenges Togolese immigrant women faced during the first years of their stay in the United States. The findings have implications for college counselors. As Olivas and Li suggested, college counselors should avoid “reductionism in the counseling process. In other words, attempts should be made not to substitute cultural stereotypes for the phenomenological perspective of each client. The pursuit of cultural competency is an active and indefinite one” (Olivas & Li, 2006, 217). By cultural competency, I mean college counselors should understand the cultures of the international students with whom they work so that they can work effectively with them, because international students come from cultures other than their own.

The result of the study suggests that Togolese immigrant women should take ESL classes upon arrival in the United States, whether they are interested in pursuing post-secondary education or not, because it will help them improve their language skills, communicate with people in the country, find jobs, navigate the culture, and navigate their new environment. By taking ESL classes, Togolese immigrant women who want to pursue their educations in the country can get advice from the ESL instructors to know when, how, and where to go to further their educations. The language skills will ease their transition and the navigation of the educational system in the country. Even if it happens that Togolese women still experience difficulties after taking ESL classes in the United States or prior to their arrival, I feel that they can quickly overcome these difficulties compared to Togolese women who do not have language skills.

Educators working with Togolese immigrant women should consider the different identities Togolese immigrant women bring with them in school so that their interactions with them may impact their success. Educators can support Togolese immigrant women by collaborating with international colleagues to learn from them how to interact and educate Togolese women. Another tangible way that educators can support Togolese women is by having resources to be used to educate them. The participants in this study were all married. A study could be done using intersectional analysis to understand the experiences of single, African, immigrant women in the United States. This study might be a valuable study given the fact that single women might have some intersectional identities that we might not know of unless we read their stories.

The findings in the study suggest that the level of education of the father influenced the participants’ educational choices. In the study, the father had at least a high school diploma and the highest degree of education of the fathers was a doctorate in Economics. The fathers’ educational experiences and views on education helped them to be influential in the lives of their daughters. It is also important to know that, in the patriarchal system in Togo, men have more power than women in the families. This leads the influence of the fathers on the children to be greater than that of the mothers. A study could be done to understand the experiences of female whose fathers did not participate in education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that the experiences of Togolese immigrant women are the result of the interconnection of their identities in the United States. Togolese immigrant women have identified that there is benefit despite the trouble from studying and living in the United States. These benefits are related to the better paying jobs they had after receiving post-secondary degrees in the country. This suggests that they appreciate the host culture and indicate that they are gradually adapting to their host culture.

The challenges they have faced, the benefits they had through their education, as well as the bargaining skills they adopted for their survival in their host culture, led to their new identities. These new identities have certain benefits, while also creating new challenges. I suggest that the identity change is also the result of their exposure to the host culture. The level of bargaining can become uncomfortable for Togolese immigrant women when they live in the United States for a long time. When the new values they learn in the country intersect with Togolese values they brought with them, a new way of confirming their identity may arise to disrupt the bargaining relationship. I add that, while bargaining with patriarchy, women should be careful not to compromise their happiness. They should be able to make choices on their own instead of waiting for their partner to tell them what to do, because this situation helps reinforce patriarchal values.

References

- Arthur, J. A. (2000). *Invisible sojourners: African immigrant diaspora in the United States*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Asimeng-Boahene, L. (2006). Gender inequity in science and mathematics education in Africa: The causes, consequences, and solutions. *Education*, 126 (4), 711-728.
- Assie-Lumumba, N. T. (2007). *Introduction: General issues and specific perspectives*. In N. T. Assie-Lumumba (Ed.), *Women and higher education in Africa: Reconceptualizing gender-based human capabilities and upgrading human rights to knowledge* (pp. 1-14). Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire: Ceparred.
- Bafei, P. A. (2011). Education in Togo: From its creation until the period of socio-political and economic crisis of 1990. *International Education Studies*, 4 (1), 248-257.
- Beoku-Betts, J. A. (2004). African women pursuing graduate studies in the sciences: Racism, gender bias, and third world marginality. *NWSA Journal*, 16 (1), pp. 116-135.
- Breuer, A., & Asiedu, E. (2017). Can gender-targeted employment interventions help enhance community participation? Evidence from urban Togo. *World Development*, 96, 390-407.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991) "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color." *Stanford Law Review*, 43, pp. 1241-1299.
- Davies, C. B., & Graves, A. A. (1986). *Ngambika: Studies of women in African literature*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Daddieh, C. K. (2007). *Asymmetric relations and other gender issues in the Ghanaian higher education*. In N. T. Assie-Lumumba (Ed.), *Women and higher education in Africa: Reconceptualizing gender-based human capabilities and upgrading human rights to knowledge* (pp. 147-177). Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire: Ceparred.
- Dieterich, M.C., Huang, A., & Thomas, M. A. H. (2016). *Women's opportunities and challenges in sub-Saharan African job markets*.
- Dowd, R. (2003). How national competency exams affect international political culture. *Journal of Public and International Affairs*, 14, 1-23.
- Goura, T., & Seltzer-Kelly, D. L. (2013). Decolonizing vocational education in Togo: Postcolonial, Deweyan, and Feminist considerations. *Education and Culture*, 29 (1), 46- 63.
- Johnson, A. T. (2014). Performing and defying gender: An exploration of the lived experiences of women higher education administrators in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 42, 835-850.

- Mekgwe, P. (2008). Theorizing African feminism(s). *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, 22, 11-22.
- Moore, A. R., Yaa Owusu, A., Moore, S., & Knight, R. (2021). Caring for a Loved One with Stroke in Lomé, Togo: An Intersectional Framework. *Ageing International*, 1-15.
- Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa's way. *Signs*, 29 (2), 357-385.
- Ogudinpe-Leslie, M. (1994). *Recreating ourselves: African women and critical transformation*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Okeke-Ihejirika, P. E. (2004). *Negotiating power and privilege: Igbo career women in contemporary Nigeria*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Olivas, M., & Li, C. (2006). Understanding stressors of international students in higher education: What college counselors and personnel need to know. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 33 (3), p. 217.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Teferra, D., & Altbachl, P. G. (2004). African higher education: Challenges for the 21st century. *Higher Education*, 47, 21-50.
- Tuwor, T., & Sossou, M. (2008). Gender discrimination and education in West Africa: Strategies for maintaining girls in schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 12, 363- 379.
- Uchem, R. N. (2001). *Overcoming women's subordination in the Igbo African Culture and in the Catholic Church: Envisioning an inclusive theology with reference to women*. Universal-Publishers.