SEARCHING FOR KNOWLEDGE IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST: DIVERSITY, SOCIAL EQUITY AND THE AFRICAN GRADUATE STUDENT MOTHER'S EXPERIENCE IN US HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Diversity has become a buzz word in public discourse and in educational circles. Higher education institutions in the US have increasingly used this word as a cornerstone of their mission statements and have made increasing efforts to attract students from different backgrounds. As part of the increase in diversity efforts among US colleges, is a significant rise in the number of international students. Attracting international students has become a priority for U.S. universities regardless of size or location. This study examines the intersection between the structure of American educational environment and the blended identities of African Graduate Student Mothers. Within the context of contemporary diversity efforts in US educational institutions, this study examines both the structural environments and the socio-cultural constructs that affect the experiences of African graduate student mothers.

Based on a qualitative research interview design, a total of nineteen African graduate student mothers at a Mid-Western University in the US were interviewed individually and in groups over a six weeks period.

Results from this study show that apart from the difficult and often dehumanizing treatment African student mothers endure from immigration and consular officials in their various countries and ports of entry, they often find themselves at the margins of their various programs and departments with very little support if any. This is because most of them enroll into graduate programs after arriving as dependants of their spouses; a process that does not allow them to negotiate for departmental commitments and support prior to their arrival.

Not only do these women face racial discrimination from white professors, staff and fellow students, but they also experience discrimination and hostilities from African Americans

and other minority groups who see them as threats to the limited resources that are often set aside

for minority groups in such institutions.

To the memory of my mother whose dreams of further education were cut short by motherhood

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Chapter One

Introduction

Motivational Background: Where It Comes From

In 1995, Himani Bannerji described her experience as an immigrant student in a Canadian university in her book *Thinking Through* as follows:

"…Deprived of a general sense of social belonging, of being a comfortable user of the local cultural grammar, divided by my race, gender and Marxism, I was an outsider in and to my discipline and the classroom that I inhabited. Often I was the only non-white student in these classes. Other students would talk among themselves with ease and were willingly responded to by the professors even when there were disagreements…I was an outsider, and not much by the way of intellectual performance was expected of me…"

Many of us would like to believe that the increased diversity of the student population in American universities has raised awareness of the need to address issues related to difference; for example, to create curricula, implement teaching approaches, and ensure staff and faculty representation that is reflective of diversity and recognizes and values difference. This was the expectation I carried with me as I entered graduate school. I had hoped that places of higher learning would be sites that not only encouraged research on these issues, but more importantly, fostered and modeled best practices in terms of welcoming diversity and valuing different ways of being and knowing. From my observations as a graduate student, I began to wonder whether there were elements of Bannerji's experience that still resonate for many of the students on campus who are divided by their race, ethnicity, gender, language, beliefs, and ways of knowing. Do they feel they are rendered silent, deprived of social belonging, lacking comfort with the

local cultural grammar? Do they feel like outsiders and struggle to understand what is happening to them and whether they are alone in their experience?

These concerns about the inconsistent and varied practices of higher education I witnessed, and fueled in part by hearing stories from fellow graduate students about what Bannerji (1995) calls "the subtle, refined cruelty of intellectual racism and colonialism"(p.58), have informed the basis for the research I have undertaken.

Higher Education in the U.S.

Higher education has increasingly become international, and foreign students are among the visible elements of this internationalism. While the pattern of foreign student flows is complex and multidimensional, the primary demand for higher education is in the "third world"[1] where students seek to study in the industrialized nations. The domination of the world's research enterprise by a small number of major industrialized nations, the centralization of publication and data transmission networks, and the widespread use of English as the world's major scientific language (Altbach, 1991) have directed the flow of international students. This phenomenon also reflects the ebbs, flows, and policies of specific governments, the world economy and the economic and political conditions in specific countries.

A significant change in contemporary higher education is a substantial increase in the number of international students (IS) in the United States (Scott, 1994). Every year, students from around the world travel to the United States to receive an education at America's well-respected higher education institutions (Al-Mubarak, 1999; Chin 2005; Chin & Bhandari, 2006).

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[1] I use quotation marks to indicate my discomfort with the term "third world." Despite my personal discomfort with the use of the term, I still think it captures the relational nature of nations in the globalized world.

Attracting international students has become a priority for U.S. universities regardless of size or location. Higher education institutions have sought to use the internationalization of their student body as a conduit to achieving greater diversity and are often quick to point to the number of international students admitted as evidence of their commitment to diversity efforts. While the policy of contemporary higher education in the U.S. seems to welcome and encourage the presence of people from diverse backgrounds and interests, recent events in the U.S. and worldwide[2] have precipitated intense examination of the spectrum of multicultural methods and programs and have sharpened the focus on the immediate need to protect the concept of diversity while still negotiating its limits.

This study examines the intersection between the structure of American educational environment and the blended identities of African graduate student mothers. Within the context of contemporary diversity efforts in U.S. educational institutions, this study examines both the structural environments and the sociocultural constructs that affect the lived experiences of this group of students.

Problem Statement

Current research on international students' experiences pursuing higher education in the U.S. has yielded a large body of literature that tends to concentrate on one or more discrete elements of adjustment issues— coping strategies, social-cultural factors and university support

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[2]After the events of 9/11 in the U.S., the need to manage immigration and to keep racialized elements suspected of being prone to terrorism from entering became a priority security issue. The 9/11 attacks also provided the grounds for the general public to condone vigilance and suspicion toward certain racial groups.

systems without a meaningful integration[3]. International students are a diverse group, but they have often been spoken about in academic literature and in academic conversations as an entity, rather than as individuals with a range of personal histories and experiences, and a range of personal motivations and desires (Koehne, 2005). In most studies, the international student is always the site and object of analysis where the nature of their experience is located within the students' strengths and weaknesses. Most of these studies tend to address the factors of international students' experiences from a deficit view of international students as bearers of problems such as limited language proficiency, minimal independent and critical thinking skills, and needing to adjust to Western academic systems.[4] No study has examined the institutional conditions under which international students study and how these differentially impact their adjustments—educational experience, linguistic and sociocultural factors not withstanding. What is more, not a single study has particularly examined the implications of the structural environment of institutions on the growing number of graduate student mothers in our universities. In the U.S. Context, where higher education has historically been marked by racial segregation and other forms of institutional stratifications, we need to understand how students' experiences within and outside the school environment affect their engagement with and disengagement from that environment. I think there is something to be gained in attempting to understand the material and experiential realities of diverse student populations as they navigate their ways through our school systems.

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[3]See for instance, Martinez, 1991; Ming, 1991; Smith, 1991; McPherson & Pisecco, 2002; Ingman, 2003; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Trice, 2004; Yeh & Yang, 2003; Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005; Kim, 2006; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Liao, Finn & Lu, 2007.

[4]Carroll, J. & Ryan J. (2005). Teaching international students: Improving learning for all. New York: Routledge

Depending on the types of experiences these students have, as well as how they interpret such experiences, we can also better comprehend how their cultural identity is constructed and reinforced through their social interaction with certain groups of students. Documenting who they interact with, and why, is essential for determining whether international graduate student mothers are acquiring a full educational experience that entails development not just academically, but also socially.

Purpose of Study

The current study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by conducting a qualitative analysis of the dynamics of social interaction among African graduate student mothers attending a large predominantly white public university located in the Mid-Western region of the United States. The university will be identified under the pseudonym, Mid-Western University, throughout this dissertation. In empirical terms, the purpose of this study is to examine how social and institutional factors contribute to the process of social interaction among African graduate student mothers in this institution. Drawing upon recent theories of cultural and social capital, along with identity politics, this study explores the relationship between the structure of educational institutions, social interaction, and the impact on African graduate students' experiences. Of particular importance is the extent to which the organizational policies and practices of host institutions and departments shape the daily experiences of this group of international students and how they interpret and negotiate their experiences.

The larger aim of the study is to provide the empirical and conceptual foundations necessary for devising effective educational policies that foster more meaningful social interactions between international students and the American student population. The term "meaningful" in this study refers to the establishment of close friendships or bonds with specific

individuals. It can also refer to social or professional experiences that an individual perceives as enhancing his or her sense of identity.

Significance of the Study

Considering the changing demographics of contemporary higher education institutions in the United States, and the emphasis universities place on internationalizing and diversifying their institutions, it is important that we understand the differential experiences of our diverse student population in an effort to not only ensure a more inclusive education for all students, but to also maximize the sociocultural and intellectual benefits that come with a mutually interactive diverse population. Diversity policies that emphasize structural diversity, diversity-related initiatives, and social interaction *individually* without interweaving each aspect together, fail to accomplish the goals of a truly diverse university (Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999; Chang, 1999; Milem, 2003; Chang, Witt, Jones & Hakuta, 2003). According to Milem (2003) structural diversity refers to the numerical and proportional representation of students from different racial and ethnic groups in the student body. Diversity-related initiatives include university-sponsored programs, workshops, and activities that emphasize the importance of cultural diversity, where diverse interactions are characterized by students' exchanges with racially and ethnically diverse people as well as diverse ideas, information, and experiences (p. 132)

Furthermore, universities that promote "surface-level," or "inauthentic," social interactions where students are only brought together to celebrate or mark a designated occasion work against creating solidarities between Americans and the international community, thus acting as a facilitator or agent for self-segregation. Universities need to construct more effective strategies that encourage American and international students to socially interact in what Chang (1996) calls more "meaningful" ways. By "meaningful" he implies actively engaging in all three

elements of diversity. U.S. colleges and universities need to move beyond conceptualizing and promoting diversity only in terms of the number of international and minority students enrolled. Instead, higher education administrations must seek a more active role in constructing effective strategies that encourage all students to take part in diverse social interactions. The expanding global economy and the increasingly diverse American population demand that individuals of different racial, ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds be able to effectively communicate with each other both in the public and private sphere. Moreover, the effects of globalization call for colleges and universities not only to prepare students with technical knowledge and skills, but to also build global relationships among students of diverse nationalities. Meaningful social interaction between international students and the American student population is vital for building stronger ties with other countries across the globe. It is therefore essential to move beyond a narrow focus on American culture by emphasizing the cosmopolitan ideals of higher education institutions. The significance of this study therefore lies in three areas:

▪ Institutional level: this study adds to a deeper understanding of the nature of educational experiences of different international student populations and hopes to draw attention to the need for diversity in institutional policy and practice.

▪ For administrators, teachers, academic counselors and advisors working with international students, this study stands to add depth to their understanding and strategies in handling the multi-layered and complex experiences of the international students they work with daily.

▪ To the repertoire of literature on international students, this study adds another dimension to analyzing international students' experiences; a dimension that attends to various

interconnected and cumulative factors in international students' experiences and the distinctions in these experiences based on students' social categorizations.

In this first chapter, I have described the motivational background to my study, stated the problem, and given the significance of this research and its potential contributions to the field of higher education policy. In what follows, I outline the rest of the study to conclude this first chapter.

Outline of Study

In chapter two, I discuss the various sociopolitical and historical factors that influence U.S. immigration policy and how those affect international students in general and African graduate student mothers in U.S. higher education. The main argument in this chapter is that U.S. immigration policies have changed significantly over history toward an open and liberalized form. These changes have allowed people from different racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds (including African students) to enter the country. However, a closer examination of the flow and pattern of different groups of immigrants indicate that apart from the economic motivations that shape policy, other factors such as race, political and foreign relations play a significant role in determining who is allowed into the United States. Such factors not only shape immigration policy, but ultimately influence the structure of educational institutions and the type of experience different groups of students undergo.

In chapter three, I examine the concept of diversity and how it is practiced in U.S. Institutions, and the cultural representations and perceptions of international students within these institutions. Considering the emphasis and focus U.S. universities place on increasing the numbers of international students and other minority groups without a similar emphasis on making the necessary structural changes to encourage mutual interaction and respect between the

different students, and the general negative representation and perceptions about international students on university campuses, it is fair to argue that the form of diversity practiced and the rationale for internationalizing is influenced more by economic and political concerns, rather than the academic rationale articulated by mission statements.

In chapter four, I present a discussion of the theoretical framework that shaped the choice of research design and subsequent analysis in this dissertation. I draw upon post-colonial and anti-colonial lenses and a number of educational and sociological studies that discuss theories of cultural and social capital with regard to establishing social relations. The concepts are applied in the context of this study to describe specific social interaction tendencies and cultural exchanges carried out by African graduate student mothers. A conceptual model is used to theorize the impact that African graduate student mothers' national and cultural backgrounds, along with the role of the institution, have on their social interaction and cultural identity development. This framework brings together the idea of individual agency and the institution as contributing factors involved in African graduate student mothers' social experiences and identity formation.

Chapter five discusses the methodological approach and data collection procedures of this project. I have adopted a methodological approach that is informed by the ideals of Freire's (1970/2000) praxis pedagogy and knowledge that facilitates transformation and social change. I adopted a praxis framework in this study because it is an appropriate method that allows me to draw from multiple methodological approaches in examining the multi-layered lived experiences of African women in U.S. institutions. In line with praxis research, I explain my choice of qualitative inquiry and interview procedure in this chapter.

Chapter six lays out a thematic discussion of the interview data. Although the narratives have been arranged into themes for easy read, these themes are not mutually exclusive and

should be viewed as interrelated experiences. The narratives describe African student mothers' experiences from the beginning of their sojourns as dependants of their spouses through their transitions into graduate students. These range from humiliating treatments from consular and immigration officials to overt and subtle discrimination and racism and obvious structural arrangements that exclude them from active participation in their environments.

In chapter seven I draw on the theoretical lenses in chapter four to analyze the data and findings presented in chapter six. While the challenges African student mothers face in white dominated US educational institutions may be daunting, the participants in this study have found various means, from personal strengths and resources from their various communities to navigate through their sojourns.

Chapter Two

U.S. Immigration Policy and International Students

The aim of this chapter is to examine the broader context of immigration policy and theory in order to situate the experiences of African graduate student mothers in a macro-level socio-historical context. This chapter begins with a review of early trends in U.S. immigration policy and the events and conditions that marked their developments. The second part examines three major theories of immigration policy by showing how they relate to U.S. immigration policy in general and how those policies in turn impact international students' access to, and experience in U.S. higher education institutions. The central argument here is that, in spite of the general move in U.S. immigration policy towards an open and liberal system, certain groups of people (especially from the African continent) have consistently been limited in their entry. A constellation of socioeconomic and political factors play a significant role in this trend; but equally important is the racial history and its continuous impact on social relations among and between Americans and immigrants from Africa.

The issue of U.S. immigration policy has always centered on who should be allowed, or denied entry into the United States. Immigration control policy, as Meyers (2000) notes, is a crucial element in determining immigration patterns and flows. Given the large number of people who would like to emigrate to the industrialized countries for economic or political reasons, and the strictly limited opportunities to do so, it is the particular country's immigration policy that ultimately determines the scope of global migration. Concerning this point, Zolberg (1989) observes that "all the countries to which people would like to go restrict entry, so that, in the final analysis, it is the policies of potential receivers which determine whether movement can take place or not and of what kind" (p.406).

Indeed, over the past few years, several theories have emerged resulting from a plethora of studies on immigration policy around the world in an effort to explain why and how countries decide who comes in or is prevented from entry into the country.

Early Trends in U.S. Immigration Policy

Even though debates over the reception of newcomers into the U.S. were part of the political and social discourse before the country's declaration of independence (Hing, 1999), immigration laws did not evolve with any clear direction nor become a permanent fixture in the U.S. statutes until the mid-1800s. As early as 1751, Benjamin Franklin opposed the influx of German immigrants, warning that "Pennsylvania will in a few years become a German colony; instead of their learning our language, we must learn theirs, or live as in a foreign country." As anxiety about the social and political implications of immigration was beginning to mount, Thomas Jefferson argued against welcoming the "servile masses of Europe," fearing they would "transform the American people into a heterogeneous, incoherent, distracted mass"[5]. Despite all of these fears and anxieties toward the arrival of new immigrants, the general attitude of the country towards immigration was one of an "open door" immigration policy with almost no entry requirements or restrictions.

The first organized opposition to open immigration emerged by the 1840s with the creation of the American Party, better known as the Know Nothing Party, whose membership comprised of only native-born Protestant Americans. Alarmed by the influx of Chinese and other Asian immigrants in the early 1800s, especially following the discovery of gold in California, native White Americans started to call for an end to Chinese immigration. This demand appeared to have been made with the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Reimers, 1996),

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[5]Jefferson, Thomas (1982) Notes on the state of Virginia. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.(p. 85).

which both suspended entry of Chinese workers for ten years, and barred all foreign born Chinese from acquiring citizenship. The act also excluded convicts, lunatics, and persons likely to become public charges, and placed a head tax on immigrants (Reimers, 1992).

After several minor changes in immigration law between 1917 and 1920, the National Origins Quota Acts of 1921 and 1924 were enacted, which sharply curtailed immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe and halted Asian immigration (Meyers, 2004). According to Meyers, the economic recessions of 11.7 percent unemployment in 1921 and 5 percent in 1924, and large scale Eastern and Southern European immigration, facilitated the passage of the quota acts. During the interwar years several other restrictive immigration policies were also designed; varying only in terms of which groups of immigrants were perceived to be associated with the wars as threats.

Then in the Cold War era, an increase in social conformity, restrictions on freedom of expression, and an association of foreigners with external threats led to several restrictive policies, including the Internal Security Act in 1950 which facilitated the exclusion and deportation of foreign subversives, and required aliens to report their addresses annually. In fact, the Cold War fears led to social conformity and the silencing of dissenting opinions. As Kairys (1982) notes, "in the 1950s…the judiciary essentially collapsed. Unpopular ideas and associations again became illegal; dissenters were jailed and lost jobs and the courts abdicated in the face of a reactionary media blitz" (p. 57).

After the Second World War, however, the shortage of manpower, coupled with the growing demand for foreign workers and the prosperous economy with its concomitant low unemployment rates, pushed U.S. immigration policy towards liberalization (Reimers, 1992). Eytan Meyers posits that apart from the influence of domestic economic factors on immigration

policy, foreign policy considerations may have also fostered the liberalization of U.S. immigration policy. For one thing, the emergence of U.S. global hegemony in the immediate aftermath of the war shifted American foreign policy toward the containment of communism. Moreover, with its new position, the U.S. was more amenable to accepting refugees from communist countries to shore up its ideological commitment. In my view, however, the positive economic outlook in the country facilitated this shift. Regardless of what the underlying reasons were for the shift in immigration policies, the skill levels of immigrants have never been a major concern, or a key factor in determining immigrants' entry until 1965. It is important to note that the transition from an open door policy to a highly restrictive one, was the result of not only domestic economic problems, but also an upsurge in nationalism, growing anti-Catholic sentiment, the spreading of pseudo-scientific racism and cultural chauvinism, and a growing fear that outbreaks of political turmoil abroad might be brought to this country by immigrants.

The Immigration Act of 1965

The Immigration Act of 1965 marked a turning point in U.S. immigration policy. For one thing, it not only ended the national origin or racial quota system of immigration but also introduced a skill-based system that gave preference to professionals, scientists, and persons alleviating labor shortages. It further introduced the non-immigrant status for foreign-born nationals wishing to study in the higher education institutions in the country. Concerning this latter policy, Jagdish Bhagwati (1996) has noted that the introduction of the third-preference category for professionals with college degrees under the Immigration Act, capped until 1990 at 27,000 annually, with another 27,000 entering under the sixth-preference, was the most dramatic single departure, with non-immigrant or temporary visas available to many others. Several factors were significant in influencing these changes, not least of which were the healthy shape

of the U.S. economy in the 1960s (Reimers, 1982). Aside from the healthy economy, which certainly dampened opposition to immigration, the period was also marked by significant changes in the political landscape within and outside the country. By this time, a large segment of U.S. society had joined the massive Civil Rights Movement to end racial discrimination in public policy. In addition, the rapidly changing international community in which the U.S. sought to assert moral and political leadership exerted pressure for change. This culminated in the enactment of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which abandoned the national origins system, and with it race and ethnicity as considerations in granting access to the country. Milton Morris has noted that with the changes,

> "… the 1965 law brought immigration policy in line with changing national attitudes toward race and ethnicity and with the new international order in which many new non-European states were demanding to be treated as equals".[6]

This marked the beginning of African immigrants' independent entry into the U.S. like many other immigrant groups (Arthur, 2000).

Having given a brief background on the trends of U.S. immigration policy, the question that needs to be addressed is why and how the various policies came into being. To address this question, I turn now to a discussion of the general theories of immigration and how these have informed U.S. immigration policy. I also show how these policies affect higher educational policy as it especially relates to foreign students' access and participation. Suffice here to note that the Constitution of the United States does not mention education, let alone delegate power over it to the federal government (Hing, 1999). Any social issue that was not included or defined

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[6]Morris, M. D. (1985). *Immigration: The beleaguered bureaucracy*. Washington, D.C: The Brookings Institution. (p. 21).

in the Constitution by default was left under the control of state governments, and education is one such issue. However, as Kaplin and Lee (1995) indicate, it does not follow that the tenth amendment reserves all authority over education to the states or the people. In fact, many federal constitutional powers, they argue, are broad enough to extend to many matters concerning education. The federal government's power over immigration policy is an example. So, even though state governments and educational institutions within them may reserve the right to decide who to admit based on their admission criteria and other matters concerning schooling, the federal government reserves the power to decide whether or not a particular candidate gains entry into the country. Immigration policy and regulation is a federal government reserve, whereas educational policy and regulations lie in the hands of states and individual institutions. These divisions between state government prerogatives and federal government privilege within the context of U.S. immigration policy and higher education will be further examined in subsequent chapters.

The mix of these forces has shaped the gradual evolution of immigration policy in the United States and continues to do so. Undoubtedly, one of the most powerful forces to affect immigration policy according to Milton Morris (1985), has been the fear that immigrants will displace domestic workers, depress wages, and contribute to poor working conditions. That fear, in his view, lay behind the scattered anti-immigration riots of the middle and late nineteenth century and the strong nativist sentiments of that time and has increasingly influenced the character of immigration policy since then. As LeMay (1887) observes, pseudo-scientific arguments by nativist groups that the new immigrants were racially inferior and more likely to become criminals or diseased were given popular credence in books and articles written by historians, sociologist, and biologists. Such sentiment-motivated policies did not go uncontested;

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the National Origins Formula for immigrants' admittance into the country was attacked by liberals like Herbert Lehman and Hubert Humphrey in the Senate who described it as a racist philosophy:

> "It is a philosophy of fear, suspicion, and distrust of the foreigners outside our country, and of the aliens within our country ... This philosophy is founded on the assumption that America is under the constant threat of losing her Anglo-Saxon character because of immigration, and that the so-called bloodstock of America, described as Anglo-Saxon and Nordic, is the basis of America and must be preserved from contamination by foreign immigrants".[7]

Notwithstanding the above expression of support for immigration in Capitol Hill, it was still the state of the economy which in large part determined the degree of which ideological position would shape immigration policy at any given time.

With regard to international students, however, it is important to note that international students as a category of immigrants did not exist prior to 1965. Prior to this period, foreign nationals attending higher education institutions were admitted in the country first as immigrants or naturalized citizens before being enrolled into schools. There were cases where foreign nationals who were sent by their governments or organizations enrolled in higher education institutions, but this category of students was often given temporary resident status with no separate requirements or obligations other than the ones for the general immigrant group. In what follows, I discuss the major theories in immigration policy and examine how these influence international students' patterns and flows.

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[7]Congressional record, May 11, 1952, p. 5102.

Major Theories in Immigration Policy

Theories explaining immigration policy can be categorized into three major groups that Eythan Meyers (2004) describes as (A) those that focus on the economic competition between the native-born and the immigrants, (B) those that highlight the cultural discord between the two groups, and (C) studies that deal with the impact of international relations and multilateral agreements on immigration policy.

    A: Economic Competition

    This theory predicts a correlation between the economic cycle of a country and its immigration policies, with the central assumption that international migration is a mechanism to redistribute labor. The idea is that people migrate because of economic reasons; either the shortage of economic opportunities in home countries or the presence of better economic opportunities in receiving countries. It argues that labor immigration is a structural part of capitalism and serves the capitalist ruling class (Meyers, 2000). For this theory, as Meyers explains, capitalists have encouraged migration between countries of uneven development throughout capitalist development. Economic theorists of immigration view immigration policy as an outcome of the preferences of economic actors within the host society (Money, 1999). These preferences are attributed to the differential economic impact of immigrants on groups in the host society (Meyers, 2004). Theories of economic competition have often included Marxist and pluralist variants. The Marxist approach typified by Castells (1975), Castles and Godula (1989), and Nikolinakos (1975), among others, argue that economic factors and class-based political processes shape immigration policies. They assert that capitalists import migrant workers in order to exert a downward pressure on wages and thereby increase their own profits, and also to divide the working class. According to Meyers, recessions cause countries to accept

fewer immigrants; in other words, to restrict immigration while economic prosperity causes them to accept more immigrants or to have a liberal immigration policy. In times of recessions when people are unemployed and or earn lower wages, they tend to put pressure on their governments to restrict immigration. "Workers view the immigrants as competitors for scarce employment opportunities and as the cause for stagnant or declining wages because immigration expands the supply of labor" (Meyers, 2004. p.12).

The pluralist models, represented by such scholars like Zolberg (1981a), LeMay (1987), and Freeman and Betts (1992) also argue that policy making is the result of bargaining as well as of compromises between divergent interest groups, and assume that the state serves as a neutral arena for societal interests (interest groups and parties) and that the policies that emerge reflect the fact that one or more of these actors has succeeded in capturing the state (Joppke, 1999). For example, workers invest more resources into fighting immigration as the state of the economy gets worse, whereas employers who face a reservoir of workers willing to work for lower wages, limit their investment in immigration advocacy because the marginal utility of such an effort declines (Meyers, 2004). On the contrary, in times of economic prosperity, employers are desperate for additional manpower, which leads them to invest more resources into promoting liberal immigration policies. In response to these pressures from interest groups at different economic times, government either makes liberal or restrictive labor migration policies.

With regards to education, recession often means less financial support for educational and other social services, which then means that institutions have to look outside of the state to finance their activities. In the past, educational institutions have resorted to reducing or eliminating certain programs in order to keep up with dwindling funds but in recent times when

globalization [8] has made it possible to reach beyond the national boundaries of an institution, many higher education institutions have resorted to attracting foreign nationals (especially those with the means to pay for educational training) to offset such declines. For instance, in the face of dwindling public funding of higher education and declining home student enrollments, especially in post graduate studies in recent years, many higher education institutions in the U.S. have turned to internationalization of education services (with international students being a major component) as an alternative to eliminating programs.

Since foreign students are usually charged higher tuition (50 percent more in some institutions) than their native counterparts, it is not surprising that they have become a more attractive source of financing for institutions. For instance, whereas domestic undergraduate engineering students at the University of Illinois paid in-state tuition of $15,114 for the 2010-11 academic years, their international counterparts paid $31,756 for the same term. According to the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA) report in 2004, international students brought $13.3 billion dollars into the U.S. economy as money spent on tuition, living expenses, and related costs. The U.S. Department of Commerce data describes higher education as the country's fifth largest service sector export, as these students bring money into the American economy. In times of increasing decline of government support for higher education, foreign students are often a more attractive means for financing higher education—especially in

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[8]Bartell, M. (2003) notes that recent global, competitive environmental forces have created unprecedented challenges for higher education institutions to internationalize, owing to the instantaneity in communication and rapid advances in transportation which result in an increased need for intercultural and international understanding and knowledge.

the United States. While universities increasingly tag diversity as a major objective and benefit for increasing the numbers of international students, I argue throughout this study that economic interests and priorities precede any other reason any group of international students are admitted into U.S. institutions. This is because many foreign students find the quality of U.S. higher education and the variety of programs in them (which they may not have in their home origins) attractive. Easy access, along with high quality and variety in program choice, among other things, make U.S. degrees attractive to foreign students. However, this factor should not be viewed in isolation from other factors because they work in interrelated and simultaneous fashions. This factor does not fully explain the consistently few international students from African nations within U.S. institutions. African students, like other groups of international students, desire to pursue higher education in the U.S. but a constellation of micro and macro level factors (to be discussed in subsequent section of this chapter) make it more difficult for this group than other international students.

B: Cultural Discord Theory

The second factor that contributes to immigration policy is the opposition to large-scale immigration of dissimilar racial, ethnic, or cultural composition, compared to the racial and ethnic composition of the receiving society or of its dominant elements (Meyers, 2004 p. 13). Cultural discord theorists of immigration see racism as a spontaneous response to what is strange and unfamiliar (Husband, 1988). Indeed, racism is not just a reaction to what is strange, but is a system of behavior and beliefs by which a group defined as a race is oppressed, controlled, and exploited because of presumed cultural or biological characteristics (Blauner, 1972). In terms of immigration policy, racism should be conceived as a set of rules, laws, and regulations that control, exclude, and oppress foreign students based on perceived differences. Zolberg (1981a,

1983) contends that receiving countries reject groups who are thought to jeopardize national integration and regime maintenance.

This theory tends to emphasize the primacy of cultural values and often considers national identity a primary determinant of immigration policy (Money, 1999). For instance, Herbert (1990) and Leitner (1995) have argued that the unique history of each country, its conceptions of citizenship and nationality, as well as debates over national identity and social conflicts within it, shape its immigration policies. Nativist and racist arguments that have often been made during immigration debates in the U.S. perhaps can buttress such arguments. The recent discussions and debates over illegal immigration from the southern border, and the idea of constitutional changes with regards to offspring of illegal immigrants, attest to the cultural discord and national identity theory. Indeed, this focus explains the timing of immigration policies on the basis of social conflicts and debates over national identity. It relates variations in immigration and citizenship policies between countries of destination to their different conceptions of national identity or different characteristics (Meyers, 2000). The potency of this theory however lies in its ability to explain how major racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts within a society influence the attitudes of the contending groups towards the composition of immigration.

With regards to international students in general and African students in particular, the cultural discord theory of immigration explains to some extent the consistently low numbers of enrollment of students from certain cultural and racial backgrounds in U.S. institutions regardless of the economic or foreign relations positions of the United States. This point especially has a more complicated impact when it comes to foreign students in the United States. As noted earlier, foreign students are sought after by institutions during low economic and declining

financial support for education in times of recession, on the other hand they are often restricted in their ability to access other social services during their stay and education and native students often see them as competitors who take advantage of resources that otherwise should have been theirs. The general opposition to immigration of dissimilar racial and ethnic composition also affects the number of students institutions admit from certain regions. There is no gainsaying that students from Asian backgrounds have dominated the numbers of foreign students in U.S. institutions. Socioeconomic issues, war, or external threats notwithstanding, it is obvious that foreign students from African and or Arab backgrounds have significantly and consistently been in the minority among foreign students. How do we explain this disparity in numbers? Is it because Arab foreign students are less interested or able to pay for U.S. education? Could it be that race relations in the U.S. also inform how many foreign students from certain racial and or ethnic backgrounds are admitted? Joe Feagin (2006), in his theory of racial oppression, argues that the social foundation of U.S. society is historically marked by "White-on-Black oppression." According to him, White oppression of African Americans is archetypal because it is the original model on which Whites' treatment of other non-European groups entering later into the sphere of White domination has largely been patterned (2006 p. xi). Feagin further views the racial hierarchy in the U.S. to be based on a continuum that "runs from the privileged White position and status at the top to an oppressed Black position and status at the bottom, with different groups of color variously positioned ..." (p. 21). Feagin's argument seems to lend some support in addressing the questions above.

Much as educational institutions would act to advance their economic interest by attracting foreign students, it is clear from the regional or ethnic compositions of foreign students on university campuses that these institutions to some extent are influenced by the larger racial

and ethnic climate of American society. So, opposition to dissimilar immigrant composition may affect which groups of foreign students are allowed to study in higher education institutions.

C: International relations theory

The international relations perspective on immigration policy focuses on the impact of international relations and multilateral agreements on immigration control policy (see Zolberg, 1992, 1981b, Weiner, 1995, and Miller, 1986). International relations theorists of immigration argue that actual or potential conflicts among states, including military ones, have influenced immigration policies. This can be seen for example in the almost "door ajar" approach in U.S. immigration during the Cold War towards immigrants from communist countries like the Soviet Union, which many scholars believe was to show an ideological point. Although each of these theories contribute to our understanding of immigration policy, each theory on its own is not sufficient in explaining the complex and multiple factors that often combine to shape specific policies. For example, the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907 with the Japanese government, which ended Japanese immigrants' entry into the U.S., is often seen as a foreign policy consideration, but one cannot rule out the importance of the state of the economy and racist and nativist concerns. The recession in 1907 caused by the panic within the banking system, led to a sharp rise in unemployment, from 1.7 percent in 1906 to 2.8 percent. Within this context of economic hardship, citizens are bound to resent incoming groups perceived to be taking opportunities otherwise meant for natives. Governments are not immune to the popular concerns and interests of its citizens. Fear of political and social instability at the domestic level are usually taken into consideration in terms of foreign policy considerations and no government(including the U.S.) will place foreign policy over domestic issues and concerns in its immigration policy. Also, during economic recessions and or booms, certain groups of immigrants (especially those from White Anglo-Saxon Protestant backgrounds in the case of the U.S.) are still granted entry while

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others (see for example, U.S. policy towards Africans and others of African backgrounds; Haiti) are restricted often based on their racial configuration.

Wars:

Wars, external threats, and domestic threats linked to external sources often have a dual impact on immigration control. On the one hand, external threats cause the countries of destination to associate dissimilar immigrants with the threat and consequently to restrict immigration of dissimilar composition. Such threats, Meyers explains, also contribute to social conformity, which weakens the supporters of dissimilar immigration and facilitate the passage of anti-immigration measures. For instance, the 1901 assassination of President McKinley by a foreign born anarchist led to an association of immigrants with imported radicalism, a short lived anti-anarchist hysteria, and restrictions on immigration. Also, anxiety over Japan's emergence as a new world power contributed to the signing of the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1907. In 1993, when President Clinton asked congress for more money and new laws to restrict illegal immigration and to speed interviews of people seeking political asylum, he indicated that his decision to push for this legislation was prompted in part by the World Trade Center bombing, which demonstrated how porous the American immigration system is[9].

We also see this factor in 2001 when the 9/11 attacks caused several changes in U.S. immigration policy. In the wake of the attacks in 2001, foreign students from Middle Eastern backgrounds were immediately required to physically report to various immigration centers around the country for screening and fingerprinting, and those who were already out of the country had difficulty returning to their studies[10]. These measures were called for because all of

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[9]New York Times, July 28, 1993; Newsweek, August 9, 1993.

[10]The Chronicle of Higher Education

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the hijackers on 9/11, including two with student visa statuses were of Middle Eastern backgrounds, necessitating the tightening of screenings of prospective immigrants from the Middle East and more restrictive measures like the Student Exchange and Visitor Information System (SEVIS) program that were instituted to monitor and keep track of foreign students' attendance in school. The INS required all U.S. schools that issue I-20 forms (allowing foreign students to obtain visas for U.S. study) to enter all international students' information into this program.

On the other hand, Meyers (2000) notes that wars facilitate the establishment of migrant worker programs in what can be termed the "war-migrant labor link," in that they produce demand for manpower because part of the labor force is mobilized and another part employed in the war industries. With regards to education, wars facilitate the diversion of financial resources from social services including education. This puts pressure on educational institutions to find other sources of funding. In this global age with its high technological developments, institutions have tapped into the high demand for Western, especially American, degrees by foreign students in order to supplement their declining budgetary allocations from the government.

While it makes economic sense for educational institutions within the U.S. to turn to recruitment of international students to offset budgetary shortfalls, it is also clear that these actions are not blindly taken, but are also shaped by other ancillary concerns like the racial and ethnic climate in the country and foreign relations and national security concerns. With regards to African graduate student mothers, a major question to explore in this study is, "What is the nature of U.S. immigration policy and practice towards African immigrants and students in

general, and how does it shape the nature of experience for African graduate student mothers in

U.S. higher education institutions?"

Chapter Three

[11]Difference and Diversity

This chapter lays out the sociopolitical and cultural characteristics of U.S. higher education wherein African graduate student mothers pursue their studies. I review the state of internationalization in US higher education in order to lay the background to what I consider a competitive economic model of internationalization that now inform the practice of diversity in many universities including MWU. I also examine the concept of diversity and how it is practiced in U.S. institutions and the cultural representations and perceptions of international students within these institutions. Considering the emphasis and focus U.S. universities place on increasing the numbers of international students and other minority groups without a similar emphasis on making the necessary structural changes to encourage mutual interaction and respect between the different students, and the general negative representation and perceptions about international students on university campuses, it is fair to argue that the form of diversity practiced and the rationale for internationalizing is influenced more by economic and political concerns, rather than the academic rationale articulated by mission statements. I also describe the socio-demographic characteristics of African graduate student mothers, showing their similarities and differences to other female demographic groups in U.S. colleges. I argue that, although similar in demographic characteristics (i.e. age, children) to "non-traditional" students in U.S. universities, African graduate student mothers do not access the basic, albeit scarce, support and resources that are often provided to non-traditional students within these institutions, and despite the fact that they often meet the high entry requirements for international students' enrollment in

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[11]Versions of this chapter have been published in the Journal of Critical Educational Policy Studies, Lobnibe(2009)

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U.S. institutions, their step-wide (where they first arrive as accompanying spouses before transitioning into graduate studies) manner of enrollment often leaves them in the margins of their various programs with very little or no institutional effort to integrate them.

Internationalization and US Institutions

Internationalization is not a new term, nor is the debate over its meaning. Internationalization has been used for years in political science and governmental relations, but its popularity in the education sector has soared only since the early 1980s. Internationalization is a term that means different things to different people. For some people, it means a series of international activities such as: academic mobility for students and teachers; international networks, partnerships and projects; new international academic programs and research initiatives. For others it means the delivery of education to other countries through new arrangements such as branch campuses or franchises using a variety of face-to-face and distance techniques. To many, it means the inclusion of an international, intercultural and/or global dimension into the curriculum and teaching learning process. Still others see internationalization as a means to improve national or world rankings of their institution and to recruit the best and brightest of international students and scholars. Internationalization of higher education was originally conceived in terms of exchange and sharing of ideas, cultures, knowledge, values, etc. Formalized academic relations between countries were normally expressed in bilateral cultural and scientific agreements. Today, the agreements are often based on trade, economics, and politics, showing a significant shift from the original idea of academic exchange.

One of the leading rationales at the institutional level for internationalization is preparing graduates to be internationally knowledgeable and interculturally skilled to live and work in more culturally diverse communities both at home and abroad. The assertion university

administrators and international program officers often make is that the internationalization and recruitment of foreign students represents an interest in increasing opportunities to internationalize home campuses. It is impossible however to ignore the latest race for attracting international students and academics for "brain power" and for "income generation". Several institutions are investing in major marketing campaigns to attract the best and brightest talent to study and work in their institutions in order to supply the "brain power" for innovation and research agendas. In her study of trends in the internationalization of higher education, Jane Knight (2008) observes that the most important benefits of internationalization global institutions listed in order of relevance were: increasing international awareness of students; strengthening research and knowledge production; and fostering international cooperation and solidarity. What is conspicuously missing from this list is the economic benefits internationalization brings to host institutions. As noted in my introduction, international students contribute over $12 billion to the US economy (Altbach, 2004). But the economic benefits to host countries, both during and after programs of study, are rarely acknowledged, nor referred to in international student-related research. The original goal of helping students from developing countries study in another country to complete a degree and return home is fading fast as nations compete for retaining needed human resources.

Diversity in U.S. Universities: the Case of MWU

Most American colleges and universities have declared diversity to be an important part of their mission statements, especially since the U.S. is becoming increasingly diverse. Scholars such as Arthur Levine and Jana Nidiffer (1996) contend that, in order for higher education institutions to effectively prepare students to function within a multicultural society, the university must have strong diversity policies which promote social interaction among a diverse

student body. However, even though universities are declaring support for diversity, it is important to understand what type of diversity policies universities are creating to foster social interaction.

Conceptions of diversity that involve increasing enrollment patterns without emphasis on social dynamics lead one to question whether universities are truly accomplishing "diversity" if they are not taking steps to encourage social interaction among all students. Expanding upon Gurin (1999) and Chang's (1999) discussion of diversity, Milem (2003) argues that the concept of diversity should include three main elements: structural diversity, diversity-related initiatives, and diverse interactions. Structural diversity is "the numerical and proportional representation of students from different racial/ethnic groups in the student body" (Milem, 2003, p. 132; also, see Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999). The next aspect of diversity; diversity-related initiatives, includes university-sponsored programs, workshops, and activities that emphasize the importance of cultural diversity (Milem, 2003; also, see Chang, 1999). Finally, according to Milem (2003), "diverse interactions [are] characterized by students' exchanges with racially and ethnically diverse people as well as diverse ideas, information, and experiences. People are influenced by their interactions with diverse ideas and information as well as diverse people" (p. 132). Milem (2003) also highlights four educational benefits of diversity: individual, institutional, economic, and societal. Individual benefits involve the positive effects that occur in a student's college experience and future success as a result of a diverse campus setting. Institutional benefits, on the other hand, are the accomplishment of creating a diverse campus resulting from a university's active efforts to carry out diversity initiatives. Additionally, economic benefits are the positive effects of diversity that lead to developments in the marketplace. Lastly, societal benefits consist

of the influence that diversity within the college setting has on a person's life and their motivations to accomplish civic goals and take part in community actions after attending college.

Since the early 1990s, Mid-Western University has made significant efforts to improve the structural and diversity-related initiative aspects of diversity. Mid-Western University is ranked among the top-ten U.S. higher education institutions with a large enrollment of international students. Minority student enrollment at the university has also increased since the 1990s. The most recent fall 2009 data show African American and Hispanic student enrollment at over 1,000 respectively (*Mid-Western University Demographic Information*, 2009). Additionally, women currently represent close to 50 percent of the student population. In the area of diversity-related initiatives, the current *Mid-Western University Diversity Plan* (2004-09) lists a number of strategies and efforts put into effect to improve diversity at the university. Diversity-related initiatives are constructed around such areas as the recruiting and retaining of diverse faculty and students, and diversifying the curriculum as well as the leadership and organizational aspects of the university. While Mid-Western University has made significant efforts to increase diversity on campus, debates over structural diversity and diversity-related initiatives remain prominent at the university. Student protests in recent years suggest that improvements in these two areas of diversity still remain to be accomplished by the university. In the area of improving social interactions among the student body, the extent to which the university is creating meaningful social connections between students is also questionable. The university emphasizes on the structural and diversity-related initiative aspects of diversity, which are highlighted in the diversity plan, without an equal emphasis on creating the environment for diverse students' interaction. In addition, the narratives of the women in this study suggests that a disconnection

exists between the first two elements of diversity and the third in which students should also engage in "meaningful" social interactions with the diverse student body.

A growing number of scholars suggest that both minority and White students benefit from a diverse campus setting (Springer, Palmer, Terenzini, Pascarella & Nora 1996; Gurin, 1999; Chang, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Pascarella & Terenzini (2005), for instance, point out that "the weight of evidence is reasonably clear and consistent . . . that across racial-ethnic groups, having friends of another race and being a member of an interracial friendship group has significant and positive net effects on racial-ethnic attitudes and values" (p. 311; also, see Smith, 1993; Antonio, 2000).

The theoretical framework that scholars have developed to examine the benefits of diversity (i.e. all three aspects) within a college setting has focused primarily on the "cognitive and psychosocial" development of college students (Astin, 1993a; Villalpando, 1994; MacPhee, Kreutzer, and Fritz, 1994; Springer et al., 1996; Gurin, 1999; Milem, 1999; 2001). In particular, Gurin (1999) theorizes that college students tend to benefit cognitively and psychosocially from diversity in terms of experiencing a "greater awareness of the learning process, better critical thinking skills, and better preparation for the many challenges they will face as involved citizens in a democratic, multiracial society" (p. 134). His quantitative study on African American and White students' engagement with issues of diversity shows that, students who have "contact with diverse ideas, information, and people were more likely to show growth in their active thinking processes." This was represented by "increases in measures of complex thinking and social/historical thinking" (p. 138, also, see Coser, 1975)[12].

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[12]Active thinking relates to active learning which is one of two types of outcomes discussed by Gurin (1999), and it refers to the process by which "students become involved while in college, the engagement and

MacPhee et al. (1994) utilize a mixed methods approach to study the effects that a diverse curriculum and teaching approach have on a student's openness to diversity. Their findings indicate that both a diverse curriculum and innovative teaching methods changed students' views about different racial and ethnic groups, and the students also increased their critical thinking skills. Additionally, Springer et al. (1996) suggest that increasing interaction between minority and White students during their college experience leads to a reduction in negative views about campus climate. Gurin (1999), Coser (1975), MacPhee et al. (1994) and Springer et al. (1996) also focus on undergraduate college student experiences in order to discuss the "social and personal identity" development experienced by the typical undergraduate (age 18-22 years) who is considered to be at a stage of growth in which their experiences are essential in influencing the development of their identity (Milem, 2003, p. 134; also, see Erikson, 1946; 1956). Milem, (2003) for instance acknowledges that, "among the conditions in college that facilitate the development of identity is the opportunity to be exposed to people, experiences, and ideas that differ from one's past environment" (p. 134, also, see Gurin, 1999). Undergraduate college students' experiences in a diverse college setting are central to their identity formation; however, the development of cultural identity is not a static process that ends at a particular stage in life. An individual's sense of identity is multifaceted and continuously changing throughout the course of their life based on their experiences and social interaction with different groups of people. Moreover, while a principal goal of American colleges and universities is to prepare

motivation that students exhibit, the learning and refinement of intellectual and academic skills, and the value students place on these skills after they leave college. Democracy outcomes [the second type of outcome] refers to the ways in which higher education prepares students to become involved as active participants in a society that is becoming increasingly diverse and complex" (p. 136).

students for civic participation within the American democratic context (i.e. students are taught to become "good citizens" and to become involved in the development of their communities), scholars such as Bikson & Law (1994) maintain that higher education institutions are also responsible for preparing students with "cross-cultural competence" skills that will allow them to interact and communicate with people of different racial, ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds.

The idea of cross-cultural competence suggests that college students should be equipped with a high level of social, cultural, and communication skills if they are to succeed in the global workforce. Bikson & Law (1994) suggest that many corporations do not find employees who are well equipped with the cross-cultural competence skills that they require. They further imply that higher education institutions are not efficiently fostering a setting, which encourages all of their students to interact with individuals who are culturally different. Thus, they are ill prepared with the necessary cross-cultural competence that would allow them to function with other individuals in a business organization. As noted above, the current literature emphasizes the significant benefits associated with engaging in diverse social interactions. Much of this work consists of heavily quantitative studies that examine minority college students' social interaction on large college campuses. While quantitative studies are crucial to measuring the degree to which students socially interact with other groups, and the effect of their actions in terms of cognitive and psychosocial development, prior research has not adequately utilized qualitative methods that provide the interpretive tools necessary for considering the inter-subjective meanings that international graduate students themselves ascribe to their social interaction patterns or the role that the university plays in reinforcing their social interactions.

Diversity Politics and International Students in U.S.

As noted above, many higher education institutions have what they consider very comprehensive mission statements that stress their tolerance for diversity but as Sonia Nieto (2000) observes, tolerance simply represents the lowest level of multicultural education in a school setting. To tolerate difference in such settings means to endure them and not necessarily embrace them. In terms of policies and practices, tolerance may mean that linguistic and cultural differences are borne as the inevitable burden of a culturally pluralistic society.

Many universities including 'Mid-Western University, have made great efforts to develop and expand international activities, study abroad programs, and student and faculty exchange programs as part of their diversity efforts. But a close observation of how the different social groups function, the extent to which they are integrated into the larger community and the efforts of the universities in making sure that the diversity efforts go beyond a mere tolerance, suggests that the main object of these efforts is in the financial benefits host institutions derive from admitting international students. It is no secret that in most universities in the U.S. and elsewhere, international students pay almost two to three times the cost of tuition their domestic counterparts pay. As such, keeping the numbers of international student's enrollment high is a legitimate way to offset the continuing declining in government funding for higher education.

However, the general attitude in most higher education institutions toward international students can best be described as a "necessary evil" approach in which the economic—and to some degree the sociocultural—significance of international students is acknowledged with disinterest. It is not enough to simply accept that differences exist and then go about our business trying to ignore them or not let them bother us. Instead, when we engage in discussions around multiculturalism we usually wish to move the level of tolerance beyond a mere nod that "there

they are," to an affirmative nod that conveys a warmer regard, an embrace of some sort. Within

multiculturalism, respect demands that I treat others carefully, that is "with care," and that I do

not mock or denigrate their beliefs, customs, and very selves as a matter of principle. Respect is

more than mere tolerance and recognition, and seems to engage acceptance at the level of the

heart as well as the head. It entails some sort of relationship between individuals and/or groups

and as such it seems to call forth an interchange (Turgeon, 2007). In order to understand the

warmth of the welcome international students experience in U.S. institutions, it is essential that

one examines the insiders' cultural representation of "outsiders" and how the discursive frame

enables insiders to maintain and safeguard the physical and symbolic boundary of their society.

Cultural Representation of International Students

Gramsci (1973) and Hall (1996a, 1996b) stressed the importance of cultural frameworks

in giving meaning to different classes to enable them to make sense of the world around them,

and that in doing so, cultural frameworks assume a life of their own, capable of changing the

material and political world and thus contributing to reproducing it. In other words, the

objectified social world is represented through ideas, language, symbols, and culture, and in turn,

the representation provides the meaning of the social world. As Hall (1996c) puts it, "regimes of

representation in a culture do play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event,

role." In this way, contestations in the social world—whether based on class, gender, or race—

necessarily involve contestations in the symbolic order of representation. The study of frames of

representation incorporates many facets, including what Hall (1996c:442) called "relations of

representation" such as the "contestation of the marginality," as well as how "a set of ideas comes

to dominate the social thinking of a historical bloc" (Hall, 1996a:27). In short, unequal relations

in the social world are both reflected and constituted by unequal relations of representation.

Much of this representational frame is shaped by ideas, concepts, and norms which old-timers inherit and develop in their understanding of "others," that is, those who are deemed to be different by virtue of their birthplace, race, language, and other cultural idiosyncrasies.

Historically, the U.S. has maintained a racialized cultural framework to judge those being excluded or included as immigrants within its national borders. That cultural framework continues to influence the way international students are viewed in U.S. institutions. Even though the demographic landscapes of colleges around the country are changing: a welcome trend that indicates a growing embrace of diversity by colleges, John Garland (2002) observes that "higher education often focus on the formal aspects of diversity while permitting all of the substantive evils associated with chauvinistic attitudes to continue to thrive"[13]. He notes that the academy has focused on bringing more faces of color onto our campuses without paying attention to "the quality of their experiences, which includes stereotyping and other behaviors that have negative effects on people of color on our campuses" (p.38).

General perceptions of international students in U.S. higher education, for instance, is the idea that they lack independent skills and are "hard work" for teachers. In this context, higher education is largely constructed around the concept of independent learning that views the student as an active consumer of educational services, taking responsibility for his or her own learning as an autonomous and self-directed individual. This is particularly true in doctoral education in which as Johnson et al (2000) point out, the desired outcome of doctoral candidacy; the autonomous scholar is achieved by rejecting the emotions, embodiments, and human

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[13] In a response on the significance of racism in U.S. colleges, Garland agrees with Joe Feagin that higher education has a leadership role in the area of race relations but fail to lead. (See Feagin, 2002. The Continuing significance of racism: U.S. Colleges and Universities. Washington, DC. American Council on Education).

dependency. The idea of self-directed learning is often accompanied by claims about its capacity to promote "deep" as opposed to "surface" learning. Mclean (2001) for example notes that "Innovative, self-directed learning curricula, such as problem-based learning will certainly provide an academic environment that promotes [a deep learning] approach" (McLean, 2001, p. 401).

On the other hand, studies (Brookfield 1980, 1981; Tough 1967, 1979) have shown that there is strong reliance on external resources, both human and material, in the conduct of learning projects. In his study of how adult learners conduct their learning projects, Tough (1979) observes that the learning activities of successful self-directed learners (SDL) are placed within a social context, and other people are cited as the most important learning resources. He questions the conception of the self-directed learner as one who pursues learning with a minimum of assistance from external sources, arguing that, "it is evident that no act of learning can be self-directed if we understand self-direction to mean the absence of external sources of assistance" (p.7). He concludes that self-directed learners appear to be highly aware of context in the sense that they place their learning within a social setting in which the advice, information, and skill modeling provided by other learners are crucial conditions for successful learning. Despite the conflicting interpretations and understanding of what independent or self-directed learning entails, the image of the autonomous, "isolated," self-directed learner persists in higher education.

The model of the individual assumed in these discussions is not only masculine, but specifically western, White, and middle class; a perception that mostly excludes international student mothers who are perceived to come from "collectivist" cultures. Studies in cognitive psychology have emphasized the role of self as a link between the macro level of culture and the micro level of individual behavior (Erez and Earley, 1993). Anit Somech (2000) notes how those

in individualistic cultures are more likely to define themselves as independent, whereas those from collectivist cultures tend to emphasize the interdependent aspects of their selves. Drawing on interview data from her research on identities and cross-cultural work, she suggests that "these examples provide the basis for questioning whether the concept of an individuated self, capable of free choice and action is not a construct of western languages and cultures" (Sparrow 2000, p. 178).

Individualistic cultures, she argues, emphasize self-reliance, autonomy, control, and priority of personal goals, which may or may not be consistent with in-group goals. An individual feels proud of his or her own accomplishments and derives satisfaction with performance based on his or her own achievements. By contrast, in collective cultures, people will subordinate their personal interests to the goals of their in-group. An individual belongs to only a few in-groups, and behavior within the group emphasizes goal attainment, cooperation, group welfare, and in-group harmony. Thus, pleasure and satisfaction derive from group accomplishment (Triandis et al., 1985; Wanger & Moch, 1986). Accordingly, in individualistic cultures, there is a higher probability of sampling the independent self, while in collective cultures there is higher probability of sampling the interdependent self. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect the independent self to be more salient in individualistic cultures and the interdependent self in collectivistic cultures.

It is important to note here that in all of these discussions about the distinctions between independence and interdependence, the basic assumption has always been that western cultures are inherently individualistic whereas non-western cultures are naturally collectivist. This notion I believe, only considers the two kinds of selves as relatively consistent and stable structures within each culture. But the question arises as to whether the independent self and the

interdependent self have the same meaning across cultures. For example: does the independent self consist of the same schemata, images, and representations in individualistic cultures as in collectivistic cultures?

The findings in Somech's (2000) study demonstrate that regardless of cultural origin, people tend to define themselves mainly through independent cognitions. The difference between cultures therefore is expressed in the proportions of independent statements as compared with interdependent self. People in individualistic cultures tend to characterize themselves most often through pure psychological attributions which are context free. In collectivist cultures however, people use context-related statements even to define independent self. The self becomes most meaningful and complete when it is cast in the appropriate social relationship. This view features the person not as separate from the social context but as more connected and less differentiated from others (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Although the argument as to whether western societies are indeed individualistic or not is beyond the scope of this study, I would like to note here that whether or not one group acknowledges the social context in which they function does not preclude the fact that they all function in a social context. The difference here, I will argue, is the extent to which one group is willing to acknowledge that context versus the other.

African Students' Participation in United States Education

Compared to other regions, African students' participation in U.S. higher education can be described as a recent phenomenon that has been facilitated by various immigration policies over several decades. Africans voluntary migration to the U.S., more generally, and their students enrollment in U.S. higher education specifically is a product of the U.S. post 1965 Immigration Act that relaxed immigration of foreigners into the country. Beginning with the 1965

Immigration Act[14], which abandoned the national origins quota system of admitting immigrants into the U.S., African immigrants have benefited and their participation in migration to the U.S. steadily increased. While the policy led to an expansion of immigration into the country and the participation of other regions in U.S. higher education, it was not until the aftermath of the 1970s that a considerable number of Africans, predominantly male began to consider the U.S. as a destination for education (Zeleza, 1999). The Immigration Act of 1990 also contained provisions that made it possible to increase the total number of immigrants admitted on the basis of skills for employment. The majority of those Africans who benefited from this provision were college graduates who had the needed skills to be admitted. However, the voluntary migration of Africans to the U.S. is an arduous, complex, and varied process that is often characterized by multiple stages.

Unlike other immigrants coming into the U.S. from Asia, Europe, or Latin America who follow a direct migratory pattern, African immigrants follow a chain or multistage transnational migratory pattern; usually leaving Africa to work in other countries for a while, saving enough money to show proof of financial security at a U.S. consulate, and then undertaking the journey to the United States (Arthur, 2002). Although the various policies made it possible for all Africans to enroll into U.S. higher education institutions, the majority of Africans who studied in the U.S. and other western countries were male. The complicated nature of foreign travel, in addition to a constellation of cultural, socio-economic, and political factors both within Africa and in the U.S., made it difficult for African women to participate in foreign study. First, very

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[14] For a discussion of the significance of the 1965 Immigration Act on Africans' participation in U.S. migration, see Arthur, J. (2000) Invisible sojourners: African immigrant Diaspora in the United States. Westport, Connecticut. Praeger.

few women in Africa had access to the higher educational systems and training in their home countries until recently and the few who had access to higher education were reluctant to embark on foreign travel for higher education due to various financial, social, and cultural reasons. Recent technological developments and processes of globalization coupled with various immigration policies of host nations have made significant contributions towards recent increases in African women's' participation in foreign study.

Like their male counterparts, however, African women often enter into U.S. higher education in stepwise fashion, often starting by following their spouses (who are often students) and gradually enroll in higher institutions. While this manner of getting into U.S. higher institutions ensures that African women maintain their family units and still pursue their educational goals, I believe that this manner of enrolling into graduate education has significant implications for the nature of graduate experience, especially with regards to social interaction and networking; a point I shall return to in later chapters.

Once enrolled, African women in U.S. graduate schools are confronted with the realities of life in academia both as foreign students and immigrant mothers. To better understand the sociocultural context of the terrain and the nature of experience these students have as graduate mothers, it is prudent that we examine the literature on parenting within the academe, which is the focus of the next section in this chapter.

Parenting and the Academe

In recent times, the burden of childcare and family responsibilities for working women has become a major concern for policy makers worldwide. In particular, the subject has received much attention in light of the opening up of more opportunities to women among professions, which hitherto were viewed as the preserve of males. Some studies have identified childcare and

family responsibilities as obstacles to the advancement of women especially in such traditionally male-dominated professions like science and engineering (see Sheldon, 1990; MIT News letter, 1999; Valian, 1998). There is no doubt that this problem has even more profound implications for female graduate students with children who not only shoulder the bulk or the entire burden of raising their children and performing household chores, but work in addition to pursuing full-time graduate programs.

Despite the increasing number of women with children in graduate schools, there seems to be no specific research that focuses on how childcare and family responsibilities impact on such women who pursue graduate studies even in the developed countries such as the United States. Statistics on the gendered composition of graduate students never mention the issue of children among graduate students. In fact, it appears when the subject is mentioned as in Sheldon (1990), (but see also Bolton, 2000; Etzkowitz, 2001; Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988) the discussion is often subsumed under issues of class and gender. That apart, discussions about child care and work interface is often focused on women who have already joined the work force and are raising children. However, the need for a study that specifically focuses on how student mothers switch roles and the obstacles they face cannot be overemphasized given the fact that many women during their child-bearing and hence rearing years are now either pressured for economic reasons or choose to pursue graduate studies since that is the major conduit through which to take advantage of the opportunities that are beginning to open to women. As Etzkowitz (2001) has noted, youth is associated with high scientific achievement, which is key to academic success in graduate studies. At the same time, given the fact that this period mostly coincides with childbearing years, many women, particularly from Africa have no choice but to combine mothering and graduate studies. Even though childcare related responsibilities are issues that

impact every parent, these occur within different cultural backgrounds or milieu and should not be subsumed under the gender or class of the individual. In other words, discussing problems related to parenting and graduate school under broader issues of gender and class prevents a closer look at the complexities of childcare and how that affects women of particular sociocultural background. Besides, centering on the impact of children on the careers of women already in the workforce, it also presents a narrow view and limited understanding of the impact of children in the lives of many women whose reproductive cycles and life situations necessitate that they combine parenting with career training. For one thing, the negative effects of child rearing on women's careers does not just begin when the woman starts to work, although for those women who do have children after they had started their careers, the arrival of the child(ren) do make a difference in their career paths and choices.

Currently, two leading theories, not necessarily contradictory although sometimes perceived to be, attempt to explain the persistent gaps. The first theory, classically known as the "glass ceiling" theory, focuses on an alleged inherent pattern of discrimination, which bars women from top positions in academic and other institutions. The proponents of this theory analyze the ways in which women are persistently treated differently from birth. They claim that girl babies are smiled at more than boy babies to encourage pleasing behavior. The result is that girls are later discouraged from taking "hard math" classes and steered toward more "feminine" pursuits. Research findings on faculty committees at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the past few years have suggested that even the most successful, tenured women scientists at that prestigious university were systematically excluded from important leadership roles and treated differently when spaces and resources were allocated (Mason and Goulden 2002). One commentator described the slights as a "thousand paper cuts," both small and large, that kept

women in a subordinate position. It is not surprising then, that in the theoretical frameworks developed within this sociocultural milieu family issues are given peripheral attention.

The second school of thought known as the "work versus family" school, believes that it is the unbending nature of the American workplace, configured around a male career model since established in the nineteenth century, that forces women to make choices between work and family. Rather than a thousand paper cuts, it is the sixty-hour work weeks and the required travel that forces women with children to leave professions, including academia. Because the academic job market demands that workers relocate for their jobs, women with families face an additional difficulty. According to proponents of this theory, most women do not get as far as reaching tenure at MIT, but take a different route earlier. Ann Crittenden (2001) shows that in MIT, only seven of sixteen tenured women professors had children in 2000. This led her to suggest that most women scientists who have children do not make it that far. There has not been much data to back up these heated debates. Until recently, there has been very little research on career patterns of most women in the academe. While women in various fields and career stages at major research universities have gotten a fair amount of attention, women in smaller non-research-oriented universities have rarely been examined for work-family conflict. In addition, almost no attention has been paid to the growing number of women in graduate school who decide to combine parenting and studies.

Historically, the university, the faculty and the professoriate, were structured for the life of the male scholar, and things have hardly changed to adjust to the realities of the lives of females who, at the very same time that they're coming into their own as academics, have their biological clocks ticking. That the experiences of African graduate student mothers are unique

stem from the fact that, in addition to the challenges that students generally face in graduate

school, those from this group still have to contend with their identities as mothers and spouses

bound by the cultural expectations of their homes of origin, as they adjust to the socioeconomic

and cultural challenges that define them as foreigners and international students. As students,

most of whom live with their spouses or as single mothers, these backgrounds are bound to shape

the nature of their experiences in graduate school quite differently from that of other graduate

students.

African Student mothers as Nontraditional Students

African student mothers enter graduate school in mid-adulthood, distinguished by their

ages (35+) and other demographic features (e.g. children, married), a trait that makes them

comparable to other adult students often called nontraditional students. In order to understand the

myriad of issues associated with their experience in higher educational institutions such as Mid-

Western University, it is important to examine the literature on nontraditional students'

experiences in higher education. A peruse of the literature on nontraditional students indicates

that these studies fall into a certain pattern that I choose to describe as the dichotomy between

the private and public lives of the students and the conflicts that arise from the demands of these

separate spheres.

Different Worlds, Mutual Experience

Accounts of women's lives and experiences and related notions of female identity are

often structured by the juxtapositions of the public sphere with the private sphere. Higher

education has been structured and practiced based on an image of the ideal student as the

unfettered male (often white in the U.S.) who is believed to be capable of rendering undivided

commitment to academic pursuits (Leathwood, & O'Connell, 2003). In her study about mature

women, Edwards (1993) notes that concern among educationalists has not just centered on a

pondering of the effects of gaining an education upon these women's family lives but that their

family responsibilities are often regarded as interfering with their ability to study. In such cases,

mature women's experiences are often discussed in ways that situate their lives as externalities

and "bag and baggage" that impact negatively on their studies. Moreover, any problems the

women may experience in combining family and education are conceptualized in particular ways

which place the onus for dealing with them upon the women themselves. To her;

> The privacy of the private sphere as a concealed area to which access is restricted is
>
> something that retains a particularly strong currency in conventional wisdom. A domestic
>
> space in the form of a home is regarded as essential for family life, and there is a general
>
> acceptance that domestic problems, conflicts and tensions occurring in it should be kept
>
> within the family (p. 28).

The idea of a family sphere that is private and is women's special responsibility is both

deeply ingrained and emotionally loaded, to the extent that acute discomfort or guilt can be felt if

the norms are violated. This idea is further captured in the analogy of the greedy institutions that

straddle the worlds of family and education. Acker (1980) in a report on equal opportunities in

higher education remarks that both family and higher education are "greedy institutions." Louse

Coser had termed greedy institutions as those seeking:

> . . . exclusive and undivided loyalty, and they attempt to reduce the claims of competing
>
> roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries. Their
>
> demands on the person are omnivorous . . .. they exercise pressure on component

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individuals to weaken their ties, or not to form any ties, with other institutions or persons

that might make claims that conflict with their demands. (Coser, 1974, p. 4)

In western societies like the U.S., such pressures are further institutionalized such that women

with children who do not take on this special responsibility are regarded as deviant by the state

and can be punished, for instance, by having their children taken into state care or their

mothering supervised (Edwards 1993). On a similar note, Merrill (1999) observes that the

various ways in which mature women's multiple roles exert pressure on them "was partly

constrained and shaped by both university organizational arrangements and outside institutions

such as the family and work. Although higher education institutions accept the presence and

participation of students from different demographic and social backgrounds, the organizational

arrangements and culture of higher education in most cases are still based on the original notion

of the single, White, middle-class male student.

The extent to which these private and public spheres stay separate both in women's

activities and feelings is often hard to tell. For some women, the public life of work is seen as an

extension and complement of the private life. Like some of the women in Edwards' study, the

public life of work and school gives them the opportunity to put their private experience of

mothering and home making into perspective. The choice of work or courses in higher education

is informed by and extends from their life experiences as mothers and nurturing home makers.

This may be particularly so in the case of African women who are often socialized to see the

domestic role of mothering as part of their womanhood and the only legitimate duty for them

(Mikell, 1997). For these women being a wife and mother are more than merely roles. They are

core identities invested with blood, sweat, tears, and toil. They are therefore not things that

women can easily split off from the rest of themselves but are integrated aspects of their whole

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persona. But as Porter (1983) states, whether or not public and private boundaries are empirically real is less important than the fact they are real in their ideological consequences. Indeed, in an expressive sense there may be "boundaries to which people actually make reference and which are meaningful to them in their everyday lives" (Morgan, 1985, p. 153). Higher education institutions often structure their physical, academic, and cultural values to fit this idea of public and private dichotomy. Educational institutions separate formal educational knowledge from knowledge acquired through living by treating experience as a faulty representation of theory and theory as the "real reality." Merrill's definition of the nontraditional student may not completely describe the group of graduate students in this study in the sense that most, if not all of them would have to have met the basic requirements of a bachelor's degree or equivalent (with a certain grade point average) from an accredited institution before they are accepted into graduate programs. Her findings nonetheless speak to some of the issues that African student mothers confront in graduate school. The mature students in her study experience an organizational structure that is better suited to the needs and designs of eighteen year olds. Mature students in her view; "have to adjust to the institution and culture rather than the institution changing to meet their needs" (p. 118). A similar survey by McGivney (1996) indicated that,

> Although further and higher education now has large numbers of mature students, there is evidence that staff attitudes and institutional practices have not entirely caught up with the needs of this clientele. The research literature suggest that while there has been action to encourage application from nontraditional student groups, in some institutions the reception they receive is not always sympathetic and comparatively few measures have been introduced to assist them to cope with any problems they may experience. (p. 131)

For the women in several studies (Edwards, 1993; Merrill, 1999; Smithers & Griffin, 1986), aspects of their life experiences had motivated them to pursue higher education, which they had hoped would give them the opportunity to put their experience into perspective. Unfortunately, they came to realize that while aspects of their experiences, often related to their public world of work, are acceptable sources to draw on especially for discussions in the social sciences, their private world experiences as mothers bringing up children and running homes were rarely valued. The ethos and organization of higher education does not value family life experience as "acceptable academic channels" of knowledge. While the current pattern of studies about nontraditional students is very significant in understanding the experiences of African graduate student mothers, they fail to examine how global geopolitical and macro-economic factors shape educational policies and how these impact nontraditional students especially from diverse national, social, and economic backgrounds differently. Nontraditional students, like all other individuals, live in social worlds that are defined and shaped by national, regional, and global issues that ultimately translate into individual experiences. In other words, nontraditional students are also national and global citizens impacted by national and global events. This framework is particularly important in looking at the experiences of African graduate student mothers who are not only nontraditional students, but international students who are bound by the dynamics of foreign relations between their countries of origin and the host nation (here being the United States).

Chapter Four

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon post-colonial and anti-colonial

lenses and a number of educational and sociological studies that discuss theories of cultural and

social capital with regard to establishing social relations. The concepts are applied in the context

of this study to describe specific social interaction tendencies and cultural exchanges carried out

by African graduate student mothers. A discussion is presented on the different theories of U.S.

college students' interaction practices in connection to their academic and social outcomes.

Studies related to U.S. college students' identity development are also briefly introduced in order

to highlight key underlying assumptions associated with the interaction theories. In particular,

the assumption that marginalized groups of college students have to assimilate into the dominant

cultural norms and values of a higher education institution is challenged as a practice that

African graduate student mothers follow while attending a large predominantly White institution.

A conceptual model is used to theorize the impact that African graduate student mothers' national

and cultural backgrounds, along with the role of the institution, have on their social interaction

and cultural identity development. This framework brings together the idea of individual agency

and the institution as contributing factors involved in African graduate student mothers' social

experiences and identity formation.

Post Colonial Theory, Anti-Colonial and Anti-Racist Education

Theorizing about teaching and learning in an international setting must include the

consideration of historical, colonial, post-colonial and globalized relations."Post-colonial studies

have proved to be a resource for theorizing issues raised by the increased flow of international

students, including issues of power" (Kenway & Bullen, 2003, p. 5-6), and offers ways in which

to understand how "structures of power established by the colonizing process remain pervasive, though often hidden in cultural relations throughout the world" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin,1998, p. 1). I believe post-colonial critique and framework offers "the possibility of thinking our way through, and therefore, out of the historical imbalances and cultural inequalities produced by the colonial encounter" (Gandhi, 1998. p. 176).

The terms "colonialism" and "post-colonial" carry contested meanings and applications (Ashcroft, 1998; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Loomba, 1998). In this study, the term post-colonial represents both an interrogation of power relations in colonial and imperialist contexts, and ways to understand new and emerging international and national relationships. As Battiste (2004) notes,

> "Post-colonial" is not a time after colonialism, but rather for me it represents more an aspiration, a hope, not yet achieved. It constructs a strategy that responds to the experience of colonization and imperialism. As a critique, it is about rethinking the conceptual, institutional, cultural, legal, and other boundaries that are taken for granted and assumed universal, but act as structural barriers to many, including Aboriginal people, women, visible minorities, and others (Battiste, 2004, para 2).

In this study, post-colonial also represents a site for resistance and action providing "a location from which to adopt an activist position that pursues social transformation" (Viruru & Cannella, 2006, p. 177). In providing a conceptual terrain, which assists in a critique of power relations in international education relations, the post-colonial signifies an anti-colonial stance, and also includes sites of resistance, and possibilities that transcend the colonial condition.

While conditions of colonialism are commonly seen as unified practices of oppression and exploitation, many scholars have challenged that view by asserting that colonial conditions

and power were never the same and deployed in the same way. Thus colonial practices should be viewed not as a fixed set of homogenous forces but—similar to globalization—complex, fluid, localized, and with an uneven impact. In the discourse of colonization, relationships are most often expressed in terms of oppressor versus oppressed, exploiter versus exploited, dominator versus subjugated, and other sets of binaries. Post-colonial scholars reject these binaries as being an over-simplified representation of colonial relationships that fix the identity of the "colonized" as the inferior part of the binary (Hall, 1997; Said, 2000; Young, 2001). If colonial relations of unequal exchange and power appear to suggest a colonized population that is silent, compliant, and passive, post-colonial writers have shown how a more complex relationship was more likely the case, and was the basis for problematizing the binary.

As in globalization theory, this complexity allows for a more nuanced theorizing that includes the possibility of resistance. Post-colonial scholar Homi Bhabha(1994) has theorized this resistance and the subverting of colonial and imperial power in terms of ambivalence, mimicry, and translation. As Bhabha (1994) notes, relations of power and authority in the colonial context operate ambivalently. Ambivalence marks the way the colonizer perceives the colonized, it marks the instability of colonial power and characterizes colonial discourse in terms of inherent contradictions. Bhabha adapts this concept of ambivalence from psychoanalysis to explain the complex and simultaneous condition of both attraction to, and revulsion from, that marks the colonizer-colonized relationship. Building on Said's (1978) work, Bhabha notes that the ambivalence in how the colonized are perceived by the colonizer opens up the space for resistance, it marks the instability of colonial power and characterizes colonial discourse in terms of these inherent contradictions. It "produces the colonized as a social reality which as at once an

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'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 70- 71), the "'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision" (p. 67).

> "The Black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 82)"

If the colonized appears to the colonizer in this way, the colonized is never totally opposed to the colonizer, leading Bhabha to conclude that there is a simultaneous existence of resistance and complicity. Using this line of argument, Bhabha goes on to show how ambivalence also marks the boundaries created by colonization between the west and non-west. Colonial discourse on the one hand treats this boundary as fixed and non-permeable, with the non-west placed outside of it, and on the other hand regards the primitives as being fully knowable and thus malleable, placing them inside the boundary created by the discourse itself. Herein lies the limitation of colonial power in fixing the subjectivity of the colonized, as it fails to establish its hegemony. "The colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha, 1985, p. 150). This "fault line" breaks the authority of dominance as it gives rise to cracks in the dominance or authority through the contradiction of being completely known and unknowable, being outside and within a discourse, simultaneously. According to this account, colonial power will be disrupted with or without active resistance on the part of the colonized subject (Ashcroft et al., 1998).

Bhabha's work has been critiqued (e.g., Shohat, 1992; Dirlick, 1994) on the basis that the concept of ambivalence may gloss over, or even romanticize the position of the colonized thereby masking the debilitating effects of physical dominance and control. Furthermore,

ambivalence is dependent on the assumption that all colonial power, strategies of control, and the range of experience is uniform. It might also be seen to relegate resistance simply as a kind of passivity. Although this is a valid critique, the notion of ambivalence, in my opinion, does not claim to explain or theorize the variety and forms of colonial rule—such as the physical brutality, cruelty, and subjugation that marked some forms of colonial rule (as the work of Memmi and Fanon for example describe), without attempts to analyze the forms of discourse that operate among the colonizer and colonized in daily interactions. It does not "freeze" either colonizer or colonized into a specific role or kind of response. The value of Bhabha's concept of ambivalence in my framework is its contribution in seeing that the power relationship is not a simplistic binary of oppressor versus oppressed. The colonizer and colonized are dependent on one another, and colonial discourse is formed relationally.

Just as ambivalence creates the cracks in colonial power and discourse, Bhabha's concept of mimicry further illustrates the dynamics in power relations. The coercion to mimic maintains control. "Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*" (p. 88, italics in original), so that the colonized primitive can never be a copy of the original: *"almost the same but not quite ... almost the same but not W*hite*"* (p. 89, emphasis in original). The colonized recognize that the copy is far from the original, and this recognition that they will never be quite the same, maintains power with the colonizer. As Bhabha argues, however, "mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). The uncertainty in whether it is mimicry or mockery inserts more cracks in colonial authority. As a sign of agency, "mimicry' is also the sly weapon of anti-colonial civility, an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 149). This adds to the repertoire of strategies for resistance, and parallels the concept of indigenization in globalization theory, both forms of subversion. This conceptualization moves resistance from opposition to a

space of transformation. "The successful disruption of the territory of the dominant occurs, not by rejecting or vacating that territory but by inhabiting it differently" (Ashcroft, 2001b, p. 53).

Bhabha's notions of ambivalence and mimicry are useful for this study in analyzing the relationships between students and the institution. Resistance thus plays out in subtle forms. The idea is not to find the institution and those representing it as "colonial," but rather to identify sites of resistance and agency and the variety of strategies that might be available to students as they try to counter effects of containment. The characterization of colonial relations as being uniform, and the theorizing of resistance in terms of ambivalence and mimicry, have also been critiqued on the basis that it tends to ignore or misrepresent the reality of anti-colonial struggle such as nationalist and civil rights (Parry, 1994, cited in Loomba, 1998, ch. 2). Post colonial theory in general has been criticized by many scholars, notably, Pradeep Dhillon(1999) who has argued that although postcolonial theory seeks to resist western liberal discourse, it does so while being situated within the very structures it seeks to resist. " It is in the educational institutions of the western liberal state that postcolonial theorists through the practices of reading, writing and teaching hope to offer resistance to the congealing of Western discourse as discourse" (p 205).

While these critiques are useful in understanding the limitations of such theoretical constructs, they are not reason enough to reject them. Instead, it alerts the scholar and researcher to find ways of strengthening or complementing the theory with others. I have therefore chosen the anti-racist education framework to add intersections of gender, class, and location to the analysis. I draw on theories of race and contemporary forms of racism as complementary lenses with which to understand experiences shaped by difference. Anti-racist education and its frameworks offer ways in which to theorize intersections of difference, such as race, gender, and class, and understand how to interrogate and transcend such oppressions. I employ these

constructs in my study because I would like to investigate whether and how they might be embedded in relationships that constitute the African graduate student mother's experience of higher education in an international context.

The anti-colonial framework is a theorization of issues emerging from colonial relations. It emerges from an interrogation of the configurations of power embedded in knowledge production, evaluation, and dissemination (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001). In this framework, marginalized groups are seen as being subjects of their own experiences and histories (see Fanon, 1963; Memmi, 1965 and Foucault, 1980). In this sense, colonial is conceptualized not just as "foreign" or "alien," but rather as "imposed and dominating." Under colonial relations, certain groups of people were not only viewed as culturally superior to other groups of people, but also possessed the moral authority and political justification to deny and exclude individuals and groups deemed inferior from access to material, social, and political resources. An anti-colonial lens examines the nature and extent of social domination and the multiple places where power and relations of power work to establish dominant-subordinate connections (Dei, et al, 2006). Using the anti-colonial discursive approach means affirming the pedagogic need to confront the challenge of social diversity as well as the urgency of creating an educational system that is both inclusive and better able to respond to the varied needs of a diverse student population. This approach also means drawing on a critical analysis of the institutional structures of education. This framework is especially important in understanding the nature and extent of social domination African women experience, and how the relations of power and the institutional structures of U.S. higher education affect their experience.

Anti-racist education takes as its starting point the notion that racism and other forms of discrimination and exclusionary practices are entrenched in social and institutional systems. It is

concerned with an examination of the ways in which these inequalities are enacted and reproduced, and addresses ways in which systemic discrimination in all its forms can be combated. Emerging from a discourse on race, anti-racist education seeks to uncover the historical, political, and economic roots of racism (Dei, 1996; Dei & Calliste, 2000). It examines critically the daily practices of schooling, making a connection between difference, race, and the institutional practices of school. An analysis of power relations is a central tenet of anti-racist education, and thus, it examines all forms of social oppression including class, gender, and sexuality. Accordingly, anti-racist education is defined as "an action-oriented, educational, and political strategy for institutional and systemic change that addresses the issue of racism and the interlocking systems of social oppression (sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism)" (Dei & Calliste, 2000 p. 13, based on an earlier definition by Dei, 1996, p. 25).

The importance I derive from anti-racist education is its recognition of the intersections where inequity get played out. Rather than considering race as a matter of individual blame, it looks at sociocultural, political, and social factors. It lays bare and interrogates ways in which privilege becomes embedded in systems and institutions, and advocates for the participation of minority groups in matters relating to the governance of their lives in the community. There are points of intersection when race (and gender, class, etc), colonialism, and development intersect with internationalization. Following the mainstream early discourses of development, and the forms of international education that looked upon international education as the improvement of backward others, it is possible that elements of this kind of deficit approach may be entrenched in the institutional attitudes toward international students, as well as in the approach of faculty members, staff, and domestic students. Examples of this are skin color, and other markers of difference such as physical appearance, clothing, fluency in English, accented speech, and so on.

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Although race, class, or gender at any moment may feel more salient or meaningful in a given person's life, they are overlapping and cumulative in their effect on people's experience. From these theoretical lenses, it is necessary that individual students be considered the ultimate units of moral worth entitled to equal consideration regardless of nationality or citizenship, and that educators move beyond the mundane activities of academic interaction to examine the nature of the institutional structures, norms, and practices to ensure a more inclusive and responsive educational experience for its diverse student populations. The realities of female international students' experiences are often lost in sweeping assertions of increasing international students' success and progress in U.S. higher education. From post-colonial theory we are able to have an awareness of how economic dominance and control have shaped the ways in which we deal with one another internationally. By understanding the operation of those power relations we are able to form strategies of resistance. Anti-racist frameworks focus in on the particular intersections of difference which alienate and exclude people from participating fully in the communities to which they wish to belong.

Student Interaction Theories and Identity Development

The majority of theories of student interaction and cultural identity development are often conceptualized within a sociological and/or psychosocial framework. The focus has primarily been on the higher education institution, specifically the college environment, with respect to influencing student development (such as development in cognitive and psychological skills and student ability to persist within an institution). Furthermore, attention is given to undergraduate college students who often demographically represent the largest percentage of the student body. The college student literature also highlights American students' (White and minority groups)

social interactions in relation to their overall adjustment and ability to persist in their new college environment (Braxton, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Sociological theories put forth by scholars such as Tinto (1987, 1993), Pascarella (1985), and Weidman (1989) offer important insight on how to better understand student development and change within a higher education setting. These theories describe a number of factors relating to students' academic achievement, interactions with faculty and peers, and their ability to become involved in extracurricular activities in relation to their academic and social outcomes. From a sociological perspective, these factors draw attention to student development within a higher education context in terms of changes in their behavior, attitudes, skills, values, goals, and commitments. These theories on student interaction also tend to underscore the institutional role as central to student outcomes and development, only discussing students' pre-college characteristics and cultural background more generally as part of the process (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

For instance, Astin's (1991) input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model explains student change—i.e., their academic and social development—in terms of how much the student puts into their college experience and takes advantages of opportunities made available by the university. In this model, Astin highlights pre-college characteristics such as age, race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, traits acquired through family, and prior educational experiences as relevant to student development. Similarly, Astin's (1985) theory of involvement suggests that student involvement and willingness to take part in the opportunities provided by the institution is central to their persistence within the institution.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Astin's involvement theory implies that "the student . . . plays the lead role inasmuch as change is likely to occur only to the extent that

the student capitalizes on opportunities and becomes involved, actively exploiting the opportunities to change or grow that the environment presents" (p. 54). The activities and interaction opportunities provided by the institution are theorized in relation to the student's capacity and willingness to take advantage of such opportunities in order to enhance their development. If they are actively involved at the institution then they are perceived as integrating within the university and therefore undergoing a process of change or development. Tinto's (1975, 1987, and 1993) interaction model assesses student development by describing the institutional impact on student departure. In this model, Tinto explains how student interaction within the college environment is essential to their persistence. He maintains that students' pre-college characteristics are significant, yet he emphasizes that the institutional context plays an even greater role in shaping student development and their decision to depart from an institution. A student's ability to interact within the college setting implicitly assumes accepting the norms and values that are characteristic of the institution. If students cannot integrate themselves as part of the institution, it is suggested that they will not successfully engage in positive interactions, which increases the likelihood that they will withdraw from college.

Pascarella (1985) and Weidman (1989) put forth theories more explicitly focusing on college student social interaction, and they discuss pre-college characteristics to a greater extent as part of their model in comparison to other theories. Pascarella's (1985) general model draws attention to variables such as student backgrounds prior to entering a college, the composition of the institution, socially interacting with key members of the institutional structure, and time and value invested in academic development as principal factors affecting the intellectual and social outcomes of students. In general, student background characteristics and the structure of the institution are viewed as significant factors affecting student change and development.

The assumption made by each of the scholars cited above is that student development takes place by assimilating and acculturating into the dominant norms and cultural traits characteristic of the institution. This assumption has been critiqued by a number of other scholars, especially in connection to Tinto's interactionalist theory (Tierney, 1992; Hurtado, 1997; Braxton, 2000). The assumption is that minority student groups have to assimilate and acculturate to the dominant White student culture that exists at an institution in order to persist academically and socially. Similar to minority students, it is assumed that other marginalized student groups such as African graduate student mothers must also assimilate and acculturate in order to succeed and develop academically and socially at a predominantly White higher education institution. In his revised model, Tinto (1993) points out that there are multiple subculture communities within different higher education settings. Thus, it is important to move beyond this assumption of assimilation to understand how and why some students choose to seek membership in a subculture community within a college environment. Likewise, Hurtado (1997) agrees that it is imprudent to assume that minority students have to assimilate and acculturate into the White majority culture of an institution in order to persist.

Considering that not all higher education institutions are structurally White dominated, and taking into account the racial and ethnic demographic changes occurring in the United States over the last few decades, it is equally important to examine the role of the traditionally-defined "minority" as the structural "majority" within some U.S. higher education settings. Whereas such critiques may be valid especially within the context of increasing international graduate students' enrollments, I argue that African graduate student mothers still constitute a minority whether in relation to other international students or other American minority students in significant ways.

Social and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's (1980, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) theories of cultural and social capital take into account an individual's background and experiences as important elements motivating their everyday actions. His social reproduction theory, and his conception of different forms of capital, has its roots in Marxian views of capital (1933/1984; Brewer, 1984), which are linked to issues of social class, access to resources, economic exchange practices, capital accumulation, and production. Scholars that draw upon Bourdieu's theories of cultural and social capital tend to link these two concepts with the notion of economic capital. The concept of cultural capital applied in this study is linked to two key ideas discussed by Bourdieu (1983/1986). First, cultural capital in this study is defined as such properties that are "embodied" in an individual over the course of time and one's upbringing. It is not a "materialized form" of capital, but rather it exists in an "'incorporated' embodied form," meaning that it is something that is a symbolic resource and it does not exist in a tangible form.[15] In this context, according to Bourdieu (1983/1986),

> "the accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e. in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, *building*, presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs of time, time which must be invested personally by the investor" (p. 244).

This form of cultural capital is also very much related to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which he defines as a "system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions"

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[15]Bourdieu (1983/1986) suggests that cultural capital can be converted to economic capital under specific conditions (p. 243).

(Bourdieu, 1971, p. 71). This idea is also linked to the "embodied" meaning of cultural capital. Thus, this idea of cultural capital is drawn upon to underscore the important characteristics that African graduate student mothers learn from their social and cultural backgrounds that include: family upbringing, religious affiliations, and relations with peers, authority figures, and larger national and societal norms and values.

Second, the meaning of cultural capital in this study also comes from Braxton's (2000) interpretation of Bourdieu's theories. For Braxton (2000), cultural capital refers to common characteristics such as "informal interpersonal skills, habits, manners, linguistics, educational credentials, and lifestyle preferences" (p. 97). A third interpretation of cultural capital from Kincheloe & Steinberg (1996), which is very similar to Braxton's (2000) definition, is also incorporated which describes cultural capital as "dressing, acting, thinking, or of representing oneself" in certain ways that distinguish individuals and groups from others (p. 20). Together, these three meanings ascribed to Bourdieu's cultural capital concept are applied to describe the types of cultural resources that the international graduate students involved in this study invested in and also expected returns, in terms of reinforcing their sense of self. These definitions are selected because, in terms of describing the theoretical framework for the study in connection to the empirical data, these ideas are explicitly linked to the students' social interaction choices and the social construction of their cultural identity while attending Mid-Western University.

Bourdieu's idea of social capital is also applied in the context of this study; African graduate student mothers' social interaction practices with host nationals, co-nationals, and other international students in general are motivated through the establishment of social networks with individuals whom the students assess to have similar cultural capital resources. Bourdieu (1983/1986) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are

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linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (p. 248-249). To add to this definition, I also draw upon Lin's (1999) work in which he interprets Bourdieu's social capital concept as "captured from embedded resources in social networks" or "assets in networks" (p. 28). The creation of social networks results in the accumulation of resources that international graduate students gain while at the institution or later in their future careers.

Other sociologists have likewise characterized Bourdieu's social capital theory as involving the formation of social connections and networks (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). This terminology is useful in describing African graduate student mothers' social interaction practices; especially with respect to discussing how they invest in friendships to the extent that profit in the form of "information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement" is gained from their social investments (p. 31). Profits acquired from social networks with American and other international students contribute in the African graduate student mothers' identity development process.

The idea of social capital is directly aligned with the concept of cultural capital to describe African graduate student mothers' social interaction tendencies and cultural identity development process. Bourdieu's theories of cultural and social capital are used together, since the cultural capital that individuals possess influences the types of social networks they form. These theories help explain the process in which African graduate student mothers bring cultural capital resources with them to a higher education setting, and this allows them to connect socially with some students and not others on a college campus. This, in turn, facilitates different

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social interaction tendencies, giving individuals access or membership into a collective group. There are also resources gained from being part of a social network, which motivate one's social interaction. The conversion of cultural capital into social capital, and its reconversion back into cultural capital, is therefore an important aspect of African graduate student mothers' cultural identity development within the boundaries of a higher education institution.

Chapter Five

Methodology

This study examines both the structural environments and the socio-cultural constructs that affect the experiences of African graduate student mothers. It is guided by the research questions;1) What are the experiences of African graduate student mothers in a Midwestern university in the United States? 2) How might these experiences inform the design of learning environments and shape pedagogy in higher education? 3) How might they provide guidance to educators in how they teach universities and how they support students? Furthermore, the study provides insights on reconceptualizing the role of internationalization in diversity efforts, so that its practices can better serve students rather than an economic competitive model of internationalization. In exploring these questions, I have adopted a methodological approach that is informed by the ideals of Freire's (1970/2000) praxis pedagogy and knowledge that facilitates transformation and social change. According to Freire, praxis serves libratory education and is a "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (2000, p.51). The idea of research designed to be in the service of social change has led me to consider Patti Lather's (1986a) idea of research as praxis as an orientation for the design of this research. In line with this, I came to the decision to adopt a qualitative approach to research with a focus on feminist formulations of this methodological approach in this study. A praxis orientation is an appropriate frame that allows me to draw from multiple methodological approaches in examining the multi-layered experiences of African Women in US institutions. Because my subjects are women, I drew extensively on feminist research methodology as a tool to uncover the silencing and marginalization of their lives. I also recognized that these women are international students from countries that occupy peripheral geo-political positions in the global sphere. As students from

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'third world'/developing countries, the particular geopolitical relations between their home countries and the US are bound to affect the nature of their experience as international students. Hence, I employed an anti-colonial/post colonial perspective (discussed in chapter four) in order to examine how global geopolitics come to affect individual lives.

Why Feminist Methodology

Various feminists (Acker, Barry, & Essevold, 1991; Bloom, 1998; Collins, 1990; DeVault, 1999; Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987; 2005) have observed that adopting a feminist methodology when inquiring about women not only uncovers the silencing of women, but also simultaneously uncovers the relations of social and political powers that influence women's daily experiences. I have noted earlier in chapter three that in addition to the challenges of combining graduate studies with the obligations/complexities of raising children in a foreign country, African student mothers are vulnerable to the attitudes and prejudices extant in the host country. Besides, they also have to contend with their identities as mothers and spouses bound by the cultural expectations of their homes of origin as they adjust to the socio-economic and cultural challenges that define them as foreigners and international students. Lugones and Spelman (2005) assert that employing feminist theory to study women's conditions is significant because feminist theory "presupposes that the silencing of women is unjust and that there are particular ways of remedying this injustice" (p. 19). The process of uncovering women marginalization involves both the researcher and participants creating knowledge with an egalitarian and ethical process of negotiation, reciprocity, and empowerment.

An important benefit of using a feminist methodology is that researchers reflecting on their own experiences with regard to social and political relations that affect their lives wish to challenge, and even to change, the social and political structures that perpetuate their

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circumstances through that research. Lather (1986) has noted that, the "overt ideological goal of a feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (p. 571). This is important because as Harding (1987) points out, in feminist research, women reflecting about their own daily struggles and the forces that influence their lives seek ways to transform the structures that contribute to oppression. For the participants in my study, the process helped to raise their consciousness as they recounted the social, economic, and psychological changes in their lives (before and after arriving in the U.S.). Denzin (1989) has observed that all lives are products of their broader socio-political system, and so using this approach offered an opportunity for some participants to reflect on the "transformations" and tensions in their lives due to social, economic, and professional changes. For me, as I sought to create new knowledge about women, using the narratives of my participants, I was aware that my objective was not in looking for the "real truth" about their situation. Instead, I hoped to change their conditions by exposing the institutional and social forces that continued to influence their sojourn.

The use of women's experiences as a primary source of data is a common feature of feminist methodology (Acker, Barry, & Essveld, 1991; Bloom, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Mies, 1991). Bloom (1998), for example, has noted that "examining women's experiences as sources of research data asserts that women, as researchers and researched, are producers of knowledge" (p. 145). As I focus on the experiences of my participants in this study, I elucidate their ongoing subjectivities and the relationships between their lives, social values and institutional policies. As Mies (1991) declared, the emphasis on women's experiences as a starting point for generating feminist assumptions is critical for feminist methodology, because the term "experiences," "denotes more than specific, momentary, individual involvement. It denotes the sum of the

process through which individuals or groups have gone in the production of their lives; it denotes their reality and their history" (p. 66). Through the stories told, these women create a different way of looking at their circumstances; one removed from the image of the international student with initial adjustment problems that (with some support) evolves into a successfully adjusted graduate of western institutions. The daily experiences of these women communicate the ongoing process of economic, social, political, and institutional relations that influence individual lives. Findings from this study could be transformative because of the potential contribution to the literature on sojourners, as well as to policy debates regarding the nature of international students in higher education.

For these reasons, as Lather (1986) suggests, I perceive feminist methodology in research as *praxis*. From this perspective, reciprocity and mutuality are key elements that move research towards an emancipatory outcome, and hence, praxis (Lather 1986a, 1986b). While feminist research methodology illuminates the experiences of silenced people, validating these experiences is a form of empowerment. Reciprocity for Lather means building elements into the design in each step of the method that encourages mutuality. These strategies include interactive elements that allow for a more two-way experience for participants, a collaborative approach to interpreting data and theorizing from it, negotiation of meaning, self-disclosure by the researcher to allow for a greater engagement in the process as well as a diminishing of power relations between researcher and participant, and encouraging participants to reflect on and transcend their situations. I discuss how each of these elements is carried out in the next sections of this study.

Site of Study

Mid-Western University (MWU)[16] was selected as the study site, because it met specific demographic characteristics associated with the design of the study and the proposed research questions. In particular, it is a large public university consisting of over 40,000 students at its main campus location. In terms of the racial/ethnic background of the student population at the main campus, over 80 percent of the undergraduate student body is White, and between 30 to 40 percent of the graduate student body are internationals. Demographically, the White student population represents the largest percentage of the student body at the institution. Minority college students also compose smaller percentages of the student population at MWU. The most recent student demographic profile published in the *Mid-Western University Demographic Information* (2009) indicate that altogether (i.e., African-American, Asian American, Hispanic American, and Native American), the minority undergraduate student population represents just over 10 percent of the undergraduate student body, and the minority graduate population is just under 10 percent of total graduate student enrollments. Within the undergraduate minority student population, Asian Americans constitute the largest minority group at the MWU, followed by African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and lastly Native Americans. At the graduate level, African Americans are leading, then Asian Americans, Hispanics, and Native American students.[17]

MWU was also selected as the case study for this research project because it is among one of the top 10 higher education institutions in the United States hosting a large number of

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[16] pseudonym for the university/site of the study.

[17] The information from the Mid-Western University Demographic Information (2009) is cited here using the pseudonym for the university.

international students. Furthermore, based on data presented in the *Mid-Western University International Student Demographics* (2008) by the International Students Office, the University is reported as hosting well over 10,000 international students from over 80 countries at its main campus location in 2009. Of this number, African students (male and female) constitute about 200 students (about 7 percent of the international student population), making it one of the public universities with a large African student presence. Although this number of African students would be considered small compared to other groups of international students, it is a significant increase considering that ten years earlier, the number of African students enrolled in MWU was less than ten. In all, this is a small, but growing, demographic group and like many other minority student populations, their experiences are worth understanding if we have to provide a more inclusive environment for all who study in our universities.

In sum, MWU is a large higher education institution with a predominantly White student body and a large international graduate student population, which made it a prime candidate as a case study for this dissertation. Additionally, from a more practical perspective, the location of the university in the Mid-Western region of the country was ideal for my research purposes when considering limitations of financial resources to conduct the study.

Design of Study and Interview Protocol

Drawing from the above framework, I decided to apply a qualitative research interview design in conducting this study because such methods are most appropriate for understanding the interpretive meanings that African graduate student mothers ascribe to their social interactions. Qualitative interviewing has been reconceptualized in recent literature as being a conversation (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Warren, 2002), as an informal interactional process rather than a rigid question and answer structure (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). The discourse of the

interview is jointly constructed by the interviewer and respondent with the questions and responses formulated in, developed through, and shaped by the discourse between interviewers and respondents (Mishler, 1986). Emphasis is placed on listening and interpreting meaning rather than questioning: the researcher is encouraged to listen "so as to *hear* the meaning" of the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 8). As a result, I did not develop any structured protocol or questions with which to conduct interviews. Instead, I approached participants in order to have a conversation about the life of a graduate student mother in MWU. Kvale (1996) describes seven steps in qualitative interviewing: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. In many of the steps, in particular, thematizing and designing, Kvale stresses the importance of being open-ended and flexible. Rather than having rigid protocols and interview questions, for example, the researcher must be open to the diversity of meanings that might emerge in the interview, and be prepared to follow those cues. This approach is endorsed by Rubin & Rubin (2005) as well. The overall message is that of flexibility on the part of the researcher, recognition of the discursive nature of the interview, and the mutuality of the speech event.

However, this focus on interpretation does not mean a lack of attention to the structure or the design of the research. Taking cues from Kathleen Gerson, and Ruth Horowitz, (2002) the idea that "chronologically ordered questions provide a structure for recounting a coherent narrative and for remembering potentially important, but easily overlooked events and experiences" (p. 206), I decided to identify major themes about which my conversations with the students would center. I wanted to know why and how these women chose to study in MWU, what experiences they had in and out of school, and how they deal with family and graduate school. Along these lines, I asked open-ended questions that allowed participants to describe

their experiences in a chronological fashion, from when they left their home countries until the time of the interview. These themes (see discussion in chapter six) did not only allow for easy remembering and recounting of events by the women, but also ensured that our conversations did not veer into other tangential topics while still allowing flexibility in the process.

I shared my own experience with all of the participants prior to beginning the interview to explain why I was interested in this topic. Due to time constraints, unless participants requested more information about me, I kept my story at a minimum. But, in line with praxis research, I made sure that participants were welcome to ask and that I would be willing to answer any question about myself. On one hand, I believe this created a degree of comfort and context, and a relationship with participants (DeVault, 1999). However, I am also aware that the relationships researchers develop with their participants can create controversy, specifically regarding the generation of authentic responses. While researchers such as Segura (1989) emphasized the importance of building relationships with research participants, other researchers (e.g., Zimmerman, 1977) have asserted that their research benefited from the fact that there was no relationship between researchers and the researched. Following Segura's standpoint, I believe the creation of this shared communication enabled us to remove the sense of power and distance associated with "othering" participants (Fine &Weis, 1998) while conducting research.

Participant Selection

Making use of contacts is an accepted form of obtaining access to participants in qualitative research (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). Fontana and Frey (2005) suggest caution, however, noting that gaining the trust of the respondent is pivotal to the quality of data collected. Also, since respondents are not always comfortable in making their opinions known, especially about their personal lives, Fontana and Frey contend that respondents' trust is a very important

factor in creating candid responses. In recruiting participants for this study, I made use of my prior relationships and personal acquaintance with some members of this group and referrals from subsequent participants. My relationship with this group is based on collegial terms as fellow graduate students, which minimized the chances of any asymmetrical power dynamics.

As noted earlier, nineteen graduate student mothers were selected based on the research purpose and objectives. The majority of the women (12) studied in the fields of education and social science, and the other seven women represented the humanities, and applied science. There was no participant from the science or engineering fields in this study. These women came from different countries that represented three African regions; Southern, Eastern, and Sub-Saharan Africa and diverse social backgrounds. As noted in earlier chapters, the U.S. has not been a key destination for African students until recently when changes in immigration policy, among other factors, made it attractive. Even then, it is only a preferred destination especially for English speaking Africans. French speaking African students often prefer to study in France where the educational system is similar to the students' home country system.

Despite the fact that these women came into the U.S. at different times and from different countries, they seem to have several things in common; almost all of them (17) came into the country initially on their husbands' visas as accompanying spouses and gradually transitioned into graduate programs. The implications of this transition on how they experience graduate study are further discussed in the next chapter. Examining how everyday experiences were connected and maintained by social and bureaucratic institutions revealed the social, economic, and emotional situations that contributed to the women's experiences (Fine & Wise, 2005).

Protocol

I conducted individual and group interviews with a total of 19 women over a six week period in order to document both the individual and communal stories of their lives as graduate student mothers in a large predominantly white institution. Each group interview lasted an average of two hours and the individual interviews lasted an average of ninety minutes. These students represented a variety of disciplines including linguistics, animal science, education, and geography and originated from different regions in Africa.

Because of the nature of my research, it was important to collect data from multiple sources to ensure the reliability of the study's findings. Given that the stories they told are a result of their relationship with their social environment and the institutional structures that govern their behaviors, I also decided to review information about child-care related institutions such as the public health department, child-care resources office, and the international students' office of the university to supplement the data from the interviews. These offices were selected because they were mentioned by several women as resources or places they sought information on what to do at certain points of their sojourn. Personnel in these institutions declined to be interviewed, citing privacy issues. But one mid-level personnel, speaking on condition of anonymity at the child-care resources office did note that while their services are aimed at helping women with children in the university, female graduate students often do not qualify. Although their income levels qualify many of them for assistance, their work hours and class schedules often disqualify them. "You see," the personnel explained, "one has to be on a 5 to 8 hour work per day schedule in order to qualify, but most graduate students are on teaching assistantships where they only teach for two to three hours at a time for maybe two or three days a week." In following up with graduate mothers, many of them did not know that their work

schedules or structures often contributed to their disqualification for child care assistance. Some still believed that the 'citizenship status of their children' determined whether they received support. There were women who said they got approval for their 'American born kids' and not their foreign born ones when they had applied for support for all. These stories could not be corroborated, but what was clear from these discrepancies is the fact that there is no orientation for these women on what and how to go about childcare processes.

I transcribed the interviews (both group and individual) after each meeting, and subsequently sent a summary of the interview to each participant for comments. Requests were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to conduct the interviews. Accordingly, after approval from the IRB, signed consent forms were presented to each participant. When needed, I provided transportation to participants and we went to interview venues that were comfortable for participants which included cafés and university classrooms. At other times, I went to their homes. The choice of venue was based on convenience to participants; basically where they felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me. While all of the group interviews were conducted in public venues like classrooms, most of the individual interviews took place in the homes of the participants. The nature, strengths, and challenges of each form of interview is the focus of the discussion that follows.

Focus Group

Morgan (1996 cited in Morgan 2002) defines the focus group interview as "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher" (p. 141). Although some scholars make distinctions between different kinds of group interviews, the title is an umbrella term for variations in the actual form. The development of the focus group method arose out of perceived limitations of the individual interview format, in particular, the

influence of the interviewer on the interview relationship, and on the nature of closed-ended questions that marked the individual interview. Feminist, critical, and postmodernist ethnography have influenced both the development of, and a wider use of the focus group in research. The broad goals of feminist and postmodern approaches are, among others, interrogating power relations in research and the domains in which research occurs, to value and highlight accounts of the everyday lives of women and socially marginalized groups, and to lay bare the complexity of social phenomena.

In the focus group, although the emphasis is still on the moderator to both initiate and guide the participation of respondents, the degree of control varies in a range of informal to formal structure. I adopted a more informal approach in the first group interview after which I decided to change to a more formal method for the last two interviews. The participants' interests are the focus of the less structured format. Participants are encouraged to engage in the conversations spontaneously, although the moderator is expected to keep the conversations on topic. The choice of informal structure in my first group interview was influenced by my concern about exercising too much control over the process as a researcher and the desire to allow participants a greater role in the research process that was consistent with the goals of praxis research. This approach however did not work as well as I had anticipated. Although I had broad themes around which the conversations centered, a few women in the first group of six dominated the conversation to the point of veering into topics outside the set themes.

Feminist researchers like Madriz (2000) argue that the focus group is more effective than the individual interview especially among underrepresented groups, because it creates multiple lines of communication as participants are encouraged to talk amongst one another rather than directly with the interviewer, and allows for a greater measure of spontaneity. The main

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advantage of the group interviews for me in this study was the fact that it made it easier for participants to recall experiences and bring personal examples, both contradicting and confirming a point, thus expanding the scope of each topic. It is a very flexible format as well. It can be an important strategy in developing solidarity for social transformation, forms of resistance, and advancing the interests of the participants (Madriz, 2000). Morgan (2002) argues that the moderator plays a more important role in the research process than just guiding the conversations, as often, it is the moderator who recruits participants, draws up the questions, transcribes the data, and carries out the analysis.

The group interview as a data collecting method has received mixed reviews. One of the main debates is centered on whether it is more, or less naturalistic, and concerns the validity of the method (Morgan, 2002). The high profile of the moderator as directing the proceedings has added to this claim. Fontana and Frey (2000) provide a brief overview of challenges with group interviews. One of them is the already mentioned point of the interviewer/moderator having much control over what gets said and how. The moderator also has to pay attention to group dynamics, and keep one person from dominating the conversation, as well as encouraging everyone to participate. There is a danger of opinions developing into "group think" as the group moves towards an emerging dominant view. The group dynamics may prevent the exploration of sensitive topics and participants may be socialized into avoiding disagreeing in public, or going against a dominant view, or from sharing their opinions at all. Although this may be true in other forms and contexts of research among marginalized groups, I found out that the issue of a few outspoken individuals dominating the conversation and the group context limiting the exploration of sensitive issues were more relevant and applicable to my experience with this group.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews provide the opportunity to examine how large-scale social transformations are experienced, interpreted, and ultimately shaped by the responses of strategic social actors (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002, p. 201). The individual interviewing approach "offers the researcher access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher" (Reinharz 1992 p. 19). For my research, the individual interviews enabled free and reciprocated interaction between the participants and the researcher, and provided opportunities for clarification, discussion, and 'co-authorship' of new knowledge about the situation of the participants.

I characterize the interviews as conversations (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995, Kvale, 1996; Ibanez, 1997) in order to indicate my role as "passionate participant" (Guba & Lincoln, 2000, p. 115). The subject of women's experience of graduate education in a foreign country requires conversations about personal experiences that cannot be understood simply by using an approach that puts distance between the participants and researcher. Following the success of the first set of interviews which were group interviews, I made a decision to follow the group interview format as much as possible, with individual interviews filling in where requested, and where groups would not be possible. I considered myself more of an interviewer who participated in the conversations, rather than a moderator who elicited responses from participants. I maintained flexibility around offering the group interview or an individual interview, or both, to participants, and the availability of these options ensured that participants were able to choose a medium that was most comfortable for them. In all, seven women participated in the individual sessions.

In the spirit of praxis research, I had planned for a participatory analysis in the research design. As noted earlier, Lather's "research for praxis" calls for reciprocity and mutuality, and

possibilities for empowerment. The participatory analysis on the part of participants would allow for decreased researcher bias and interpretation, as well as engage research participants in the interpretive role in the research. As it turned out, this did not work well with the women in this study. For one, member checking alone proved to be a challenge as students were extremely busy with their courses, teaching, and child rearing duties. I dealt with this challenge by emailing to each participant my preliminary interpretations of our conversations for them to comment on. Some got back to me with comments immediately, others did so when the term was over and a few (2) had no objections or concerns about the interpretations, although I had to wait nine months to hear from them. For those who responded with comments, I adjusted some of the interpretations accordingly.

While it is ideal to have an interview where the respondent is seen as an equal partner in the process, whether this is possible in reality has been questioned (Dingwall, 1997; Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Viruru & Cannella, 2006). For one, reciprocity of perspective may not exist, and equality in an interview relationship is difficult to realize given that the final interpretation (at best) rests with the interviewer. However open, friendly, and participatory in design, the interview is designed, initiated, and somewhat controlled by the researcher, and has an expectation that the participant share personal and other information about themselves. This can also set up the participant to say only what is expected, or what they think is expected (Briggs, 2002).

In general, interview protocol and structures reflect Euro-Western ideas and processes (Smith, D., 1999; Viruru & Canella, 2006), "... no form of interview is benign or innocent" (p. 183). It is focused on individuality, that is, the individual knower, and collective views and ideas are "made invisible, and are essentially silenced" (p. 184). Another issue raised by Viruru &

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Cannella (2006) is the privileging of language by the research process, and the assumption that language is the best way of knowing people and their views. As language was (and is) used as form of control in colonial power it is important that this is recognized when research protocols and interview questions are set, and the interview gets underway. Viruru and Cannella (2004, 2006) further highlight the missing discourse of silence in interviews. Silence is generally interpreted as a person having nothing to say, being deficient and powerless. This reflects Western notions of speech and silence.

The consideration of respondents as active participants has led to the notion of research as praxis, as discussed above, and the empowerment of respondents to become change agents themselves (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Lather, 1986; Tierney & Dilley, 2002). The notion of empowerment itself is based on the assumption that respondents come to the interview situation powerless. As Gubrium and Holstein (2002) point out, "although the aim of empowering respondents is certainly attractive and to be encouraged in principle, interview participants are always already 'empowered' to engage artfully in a vast range of discursive practices" (p. 29) as already shown in my experience with the women in this study.

Chapter Six

Coming to America

This chapter is a discussion of African graduate student mothers' narratives about their experiences in a U.S. higher education institution. These narratives show how the ongoing process of economic, social, political and institutional relations influence individual lives. While these discussions are arranged according to themes for easy reading, they should not be understood as mutually exclusive.

The women who came forward to participate in this study were generous with their time, were somewhat surprised (and pleased) to be invited to participate in a study of this nature, and appeared to be eager to share their stories. One of the dilemmas of writing up their experiences has been balancing the reporting of their stories, in their voices, with the research task of presenting their stories through a thematic lens. The participants have trusted me to describe and represent their experiences, views, and opinions, and I hope I live up to that expectation. Following Gerson and Horowitz's (2002) idea that "chronologically ordered questions provide a structure for recounting a coherent narrative and for remembering potentially important, but easily overlooked, events and experiences" (p. 206), I have decided to organize the data according to the broad themes about which we conversed in the interviews. Our conversations often started with the mutual curiosity to know why we left our home countries and how we ended up in MWU. We explored why they decided to go overseas to study, their choice of MWU as a study destination, what the process of application entailed, their first semesters of studies at MWU, learning experiences in classes, courses that they experienced as favorable and/or negative, the barriers to learning, the factors that supported their learning, their social lives on

and off campus, being a graduate student mother and, overall, their assessment of whether and how internationalization was taking place, and how they rated their decision to study abroad.

Why Leave Home, Choosing MWU, and Getting Here?

For many of the women, (about 85 percent, or 15 students) the decision to leave home was due to family reasons: mostly the desire to join a spouse who had already been admitted into MWU either for studies or research. For others, however, an element of chance or accident, professional and academic growth, or the availability of scholarship or financial support lay behind their choice of destination.

Kara, a fourth year doctoral student of education, for instance, made the decision to join her husband who had decided to pursue a doctoral degree in MWU after completing a master's degree in another East Coast university.

Kara: "For me, the only reason I am in this country in the first place is because of my husband; the thing is, he had been at this university in the East Coast for three years to do his master's and I was home with the kids. In the three years, he only came home once, just for a month. So when he decided to do a PhD here, I decided that it was time for me to join him for the sake of our marriage and the kids. That is why I am here today."

JL: Did you visit him in the East Coast during his master's?

Kara: No. I tried three times to do so but was refused the visa. The first time, the consular said they were not sure my husband will come back home if I joined him and even though I explained that I wasn't joining him but just visiting and to come back because our kids were home, they still refused me. Then the second time, a different consular said there was not enough financial proof to tie us home. I did not understand that statement at the time, I thought they wanted us to show that we could take care of ourselves here (U.S.),

but now I know that it was basically saying the same thing the first person said. Then it was time for his graduation; when he wanted me to come and witness…long pause…this time the lady just said "I won't let you go there. You are a desperate woman." It was very difficult.

It was a similar story for Kadua who decided to join her husband, then a graduate student in MWU, after they had been separated for over a year. She had not considered joining her husband in the U.S. until problems at home got out of her control.

"There were too many problems at home with me and the kids and other extended relatives, so every day I was on the phone with him, and he with his family and other people…..just too much pressure, he could not deal with while over here, so in the end, we both decided it was best for me to quit my job at home and join him with our two kids."

Apart from the few women who initially came into the US as students or some other capacity, the rest of the women agreed that the reason they left their home countries was in order to join their spouses who were either studying or on some research assignment. Many of them had never traveled outside of their home countries prior to arriving at MWU. Some acknowledged that the possibility of furthering their education and the prestige of an advanced degree from the U.S. in their home countries were factors they considered in their decision to leave home. As Neema put it;

"I think the potential for me to further my education in the U.S. played a role in my considerations. Even though it was important for me to join my husband, I would not have left my career if I didn't think it was possible for me to pursue further studies".

JL: How did you know you could pursue an advance degree here?

NM: I always knew that once I had a bachelor's degree, there would always be that potential for

me to go further, the only thing that has always been a problem was how to finance it.

JL: So how did you figure out that you could finance further studies once you got here?

NM: My husband had told me that the Area Studies department needed people to teach our

language as TAs and so I could contact them to be considered once I enrolled. In fact, I was

lucky that before my admission came, they had already agreed to give me TAship so I started

right at the beginning of my program.

       For others like Lydia, enrolling in a graduate program was never part of the plan before

she arrived in the United States. She had planned to return to her country to pursue a degree in

law. She had written the entrance exams and only wanted to visit her husband whom she had not

seen in two years. But Lydia and her then three year old son were denied entry visas twice, and

only after the intervention of "a big-man" who had connections to a U.S. consular official in her

country did they finally get a visa. After they finally reunited here in the U.S. with that visit,

Lydia and her husband did not want to have to go through the ordeal of securing another visa:

> "My husband was in a program that was going to take at least seven years to finish, and
>
> from our visa experience back home; I did not want us to go through that over again so I
>
> just decided to stay for the duration of our visas. We also wanted to expand our family,
>
> and we could not do that by being apart."

      Academic or professional growth also played a role in the decisions of Zita, Nora, and

Kia. Zita initially came on a spousal visa to visit her husband who was then a PhD student in

MWU. While here, she decided to write the entry exams required for graduate study and applied

to three different programs in MWU. She was accepted into all three programs but only got

funding support from her current program in Psychology. Kia left home on a U.S. sponsored

scholarship to study for a master's degree in another university in the mid-west, after which she decided to continue with a PhD at MWU. She was not married at the time of leaving home and had no child. In her view, it probably would have been impossible for her to leave home on this scholarship if she was married.

"…see, I think not having a husband then, made it easy for me to accept the scholarship. Because I did not have to worry about losing him while I was gone. I wonder if my husband would have agreed to follow me here (U.S.) if I had one? Even then, I had to be brave to resist my parent's skepticisms about me never going to find a husband if I went to the 'White-man's- country' to get a big degree."

After her master's degree Kia decided to apply to a number of universities in the Midwest and East Coast for a PhD program in her field of applied sciences. She chose MWU among other universities to apply to because, in her view, these schools were not only good schools, ranking high among U.S. schools, but also had large international student populations which showed that they were "a bit diverse." MWU emerged as a final choice of destination because, "When I compared the funding/financial assistance each school offered and factored in the cost of living for those cities; in the end, I picked MWU because it met the major factors I was looking for in a graduate school."

The decision to leave home is not devoid of challenges as indicated by Kara's experience. Challenges ranged from securing travel documents and visas as already indicated above, to dealing with recalcitrant immigration officials at various ports of entry. They all had varying experiences dealing with U.S. consular officials in their home countries, and they all agreed that there was no consistent criteria for judging who gets a visa or not. As one put it,

> "I think that one's chances of getting a U.S. visa just depends on the mood of the individual consular official at the time...so if the person you are meeting just had a rift with a colleague, or simply woke up from the wrong side of their bed, you could be denied a visa and there was nothing you could do about it."

Tal, a graduate student in the humanities who joined her husband (then a student) with their two children had this to say about the process of getting a visa to come to the U.S.:

> "You see, after we agreed for me to join him, the kids and I started the process of getting the visas. It was difficult to find the same day for visa interview for all of us, so the kids had their interview first and two days later, I had to go for mine. The kids were issued the visa, but when I got there, the lady who interviewed me asked why I used a different last name than my husband's. I told her it was because I had my passport before I got married to him and after several irritating and private questions, she said she was not sure our marriage was legitimate. Even though I gave her our marriage certificate and told her we had two children who were already given visas, this woman denied me the visa...just like that (snaps fingers) and told me to wait for a couple weeks to reapply."

Although Stella did not experience the kinds of difficulties that Kia and Tal had, she admitted to knowing several African students who had been issued visas after they had been denied several times.

> "I think I have been lucky on the visa front. I have never been denied one, but almost everyone I know from my own country (Sub-Saharan country) has been denied a U.S. visa at least once before."

Unlike many of the women interviewed, Stella came into the U.S. on a fellowship sponsored by a U.S. agency. It is quite understandable that she experienced fewer problems in securing a visa.

Although Leena had a pretty smooth and painless experience getting a Visa to study in the U.S., her biggest challenge was getting her parents' approval to leave for an advance degree in a foreign country while she was still unmarried.

"…I tell you, getting my parents to understand why I would want to study abroad was the most difficult thing for me to do. I had to bring in my pastor and other church elders to intervene."

In the cases of Fausia, Sonali, Lydia and Ocholi, dealing with immigration officials at ports of entry marked their introduction to "meanness" in the US. For Sonali who travelled through Amsterdam, her ordeal began in Amsterdam where she was stopped several times by security and her luggage searched "carelessly as if I was carrying some dangerous material". She was later detained by customs for an hour and released to join her flight to the US. She had imagined that the customs/security at the port of entry in the US would be worse; so it was a pleasant relief for her when the agent at the US entry point handled her with "so much kindness".

> "…he had already seen that I was very nervous, so he said 'relax maam and welcome to
>
> the US'. He then asked if this was my first time here and I said yes and he said something
>
> like 'I hope you enjoy your visit…it's blurry now, but he was really nice to me"

Even though this official proceeded to ask the same questions Sonali had been asked in Amsterdam, she did not feel like she was being handled like a criminal. Fausia and Ocholi also experienced arrogant and degrading treatments in the hands of immigration officials both in the US and other European airports in their initial travel. But they both agreed that European officials were more "nasty" in their behavior than US officials. Several other women agreed with this observation during the group interviews. A couple of women who had the opportunity to visit Britain, France and Spain (all European countries) at the time of these interviews shared the view that "Europeans generally have a demeaning attitude towards Africans". This seems to be a

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common opinion among Africans from what I gained from casual conversations, although there

is no way to ascertain the validity of such views in this study.

 Apart from the few women who came to the U.S. directly to study on student visas, all others

had to make a transition from being accompanying spouses into graduate study.

Enrolling in MWU: From Accompanying Spouse to Student

Many of the women in this study came into the U.S. as accompanying spouses of their

husbands before they enrolled in graduate study. Thirteen out of the nineteen women interviewed

came into the U.S. initially as accompanying spouses on the F-2 visa category. This visa is a very

restrictive category that confines its holders (immediate family of the non-immigrant student) to

the domestic household. F-2 spouses can neither work nor study while on this status, and in

many states they cannot acquire drivers' licenses due to their inability to acquire social security

numbers. However, if they qualify for F-1 status, they can apply to change status to F-1 so they

can go to school. While in status an F-2 child can attend elementary or secondary school

(kindergarten through twelfth grade) without changing to another status.

M. Kim (2006) has argued that the policies of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration

Services are primarily responsible for the barriers that spouses of international students face to

their economic and social well being. She maintains that the immigration policies which

categorize them as "dependents" are rooted in the eighteenth and nineteenth century property

ownership rights. In her view "political rhetoric on citizenship and economic independence was

linked with political freedom and became gender specific so as to establish the prerogatives of

White masculinity; at the same time, all women and Blacks were perceived as dependents" (p.

163). Therefore, for Kim, since large numbers of international spouses are women, their

restriction into the private sphere seems apparent to a casual observer as being simply each

sojourner's individual circumstances. For many of the women who arrived on this visa category, the restrictions associated with their status were the reason they enrolled into graduate study earlier than they had planned. For Zita, Tal, Lydia, and Ocholi, raising their young children was their first priority when they arrived; going into graduate study was a distant plan. But as Zita noted, "To live on F-2 visa is like being in prison; you can't work, you can't study and you can't even drive." Once they realize the burdens of their lives as dependents on F-2 visas, many take the steps to change their status. For those who have the prerequisites to study, enrollment into graduate study becomes the most viable option.

Once they decide to enroll into graduate study, the requirements they have to meet are not different from all other international students enrolling into graduate programs. Like all other international graduate applicants, the entry requirements for African student mothers' enrollment into graduate study involve a bachelor's degree from an accredited university, a good score in a language proficiency exam (for students whose first language is not English), and a good score in a subject related general Graduate Record Exam (GRE). Once accepted, the international student has to show proof of finances enough to cover at least the first year of graduate study in the United States. A document I-20 is issued to the student along with the letter of admission, with which the student now applies for a non-immigrant academic visa in their home country.

For many student mothers at this point however, the process takes a different and expensive twist. Because they are already in the U.S. by the time of their admission as dependents of their spouses on F-2 visas, they often have to travel back to their home countries in order to apply for a change of status before they return to study. This is particularly the case for those student mothers who have to take up teaching, research or graduate assistantships immediately after admission. For those who don't have assistantships, this change of status could

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be done by applying to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS); a process that takes an average of three months to be resolved. Because of the length of time it takes for DHS to process such changes, many mothers often opt to travel back home to effect the change with hopes that once they return, they can take up assistantships should such opportunities come up. But as Zita, Mia and Nkeze acknowledged, the desire to get out of their dependant status so that they "can at least drive their kids to school and do groceries shopping

" on their own has been the major reason for many to take the travel option. However, the risks of being denied a change of status is often higher when these women travel back home, and there were three of the women (Nadia, Mia, and Nkeze) who had been denied that change of status in their countries before.

Program Structure: Support and Barriers to Learning

This is used here to describe students' views about the nature of communication between them and their programs and departments regarding course expectations and their understanding of the norms and rules within their various programs. As the women in this study referred many times to "fitting in" or not, or of becoming part of the "culture" of the department they were in, it is important to be able to describe the variety of relationships that mark the African graduate student mother's interactions at the university. One of these is the learning identity of the student: what are the ways in which the African graduate student mother experiences learning at the university, what are the factors that enhance and influence this in positive ways, and what are the barriers? The purpose of exploring this topic is to understand how African women experienced the instruction in the courses they took, and how they perceived it impacted their learning. What I attempt to investigate are the conditions and environment of learning and teaching from the

perspective of the African graduate student mother, and how those perspectives can influence and shape how we design, or approach the internationalized learning.

The most difficult factor of norms, rules, and regulations is an amalgam of several different responses all highlighting the difficulties associated with operating on a day-to-day basis in a foreign culture. For example, during one of the focus group meetings, several women commented that the classroom atmosphere in the U.S. is much more informal than they were accustomed to. Specifically, students observed that U.S. students speak out more frequently, often without being called on, and interact with their professors using more familiar terms. Most of the women agreed that, because these behaviors would be unacceptable in their home countries, it is difficult to violate these ingrained beliefs and fully participate in the classroom discussion.

Understanding the structures of their various departments; who to contact regarding issues like funding, meeting milestones, etc., have been very problematic for many women. In many graduate programs, issues concerning students' funding, preparing to meet milestones, and other related concerns are often handled by the students' academic advisors, and some advisors do a good job shepherding their students through these issues. For such advisors, who are often rare, students are not short of words to express their appreciation. In general, graduate programs often assign advisors to incoming students based on their stated interests, among other things, but the expectation is that once students settle into the program, they will eventually select a permanent advisor to direct the rest of their study. In some programs however, a graduate director is often appointed to guide all incoming students until they are able to choose their individual advisors. For those women who belonged to programs where this was the case, they acknowledged that this format gave them the time and made it easier for them to eventually

choose a professor who was a "good fit" to guide their study whiles still able to meet initial course requirements and "not lag behind". As Nadia and Nkenzie explained, the format where new students are assigned advisors 'even before they arrive' is 'very intimidating'. "…in this case, if it turns out that your "assigned advisor" is not compatible to your personality, it is very hard to change to another one". On paper, students are allowed to change to any professor as an advisor, but as Nkenze notes, "we all know that some professors have bad egos and often see such changes as an affront to their image". They go on to cite several examples of students who changed from their "assigned advisors" and had tremendous difficulty finding a new one because other professors in their view, did not want to offend the "abandoned advisor".

Sonali and several other women indicated how difficult it was for a graduate student to find a new advisor or constitute an academic committee after switching from a previous one, especially when the previous student-advisor relationship did not end on a happy note.

> "Many professors will ask who your initial advisor was before they agree to take you in as 'advisee'. So if especially your previous advisor is 'powerful' in your department, then you are more likely going to have problems".(Sonali, 12/12/09)

The "good advisor" label is not specific to any one professor. From the narratives of the women, it was clear that how well the student-advisor relationship turns out depends in many ways on the nature of the "chemistry" between the student and professor. A professor could have an excellent relationship with one student and a terrible one with another. Although the women could not understand the factors that led to positive professor-student relationships, many of them believed that their parental status was by far the most negative factor in the professor-student relationship. As Nadia observes, "For women, many professors believe that when you have children that means you are not serious about your career." Sonali talked about how her

former advisor reacted when he got to know she was expecting her second child; "He just said, 'What did you do that for'…pointing to my stomach. It's so humiliating." Although some research (Mason and Gouldin 2003, Mason, 2002) has documented the impact of children on women's careers in academia, very little if any, has been done about women in graduate education as mothers. This might be because, many western women have come to accept the fact that children are a hindrance to their career advancement and often delay childbirth through their graduate school years, or forgo it altogether. Besides, western women are fortunate to have educational structures that allow them to get into graduate school while still in their early adulthood, hence their ability to delay childbirth at this period. For African women however, social norms at home make having children an imperative and as one woman noted, "our children are our social security". By the time African women enroll into graduate school, most of them are often in their late adulthood as evidenced by the average age of the women at 36. Although African norms and culture restrict childrearing to women, women who try to balance parenting and careers, especially at the graduate school level are rather valued and often admired by all as hardworking and determined. So it is very shocking for these women to comprehend the idea that they are not serious about their careers because they are raising children. Nadia pointed out this irony thus;

"In my country, a woman with high degrees without a child is called selfish and a witch to be ridiculed, but here I am working my back off to build my career and raise my kids and being considered 'unserious about my career'. I don't know how they define seriousness".

Figuring out differences in expectations, standards, and technology were common issues among graduate student mothers. For some, learning and instructions were effective, albeit

challenging, while others felt course work and classes were just "a joke." Challenges were mostly related to technology use, familiarity with vocabulary and jargons of their fields, and presenting in class. Many had never used a computer prior to arriving in the U.S., and the only knowledge of technology prior to enrolling for Lydia, Ocholi, Sonali, and Kia was how to send emails. Typing was a problem for all the women at first.

"…when I started, I could only type with two fingers and had to look from one end of the keyboard to the other to identify the keys" (Sonali, 12/10/2009).

All of them had reported tremendous progress in technology use, but most of them still acknowledged that they spent a lot of time dealing with the mechanics of using technology. "I still cannot type with all my fingers," said Nwanko, and Stella agreed that "…it takes me long to type out my papers and formatting stuff is still a challenge." Although all the women in this study indicated excellent grades in their course work, there were mixed reactions in terms of how much knowledge was gained from the courses. Lydia, Ocholi, and Mia, who were all doctoral students in education, expressed profound disappointment in the structure and content of some of the courses they took. They described classes (especially in seminars) where professors assigned readings but did not do the readings themselves and came to class totally oblivious of the content of the readings. Students in such classes quickly realized that and also came to class without reading. Discussions then centered on unrelated topics and tales about personal experiences. In the end, such classes disintegrated and attendance trickled to just a few loyal students. These women were frustrated that they often spent time to do diligent reading only to realize the rest of the class did not read and had nothing worthy to share from the readings. They were equally disappointed that the professors in such classes often gave "A" grades to everybody in the class, making them to wonder if such professors even read their term papers in the end.

Nelly had similar comments to make about her experience of teaching and learning. She, too, spoke of not knowing "the rules of the game" of graduate school: "how much to read, how to read, the seriousness. What is the level of discussion?" She also expressed frustration about spending a great deal of time doing detailed reading of the texts. She would arrive in class and observe that other students had not read the material in such detail, but had focused on one point or another, and would speak as though they were familiar with the whole article. But when the discussions progressed beyond the opening remarks, the students will either digress into other issues often not related to the topic or the class would just be boring. The professors did not, in her opinion, take charge enough. Professors were there, in her view, "because they were experts in their subjects, and should have more to say in the class."

Mia also stated that what you get from a particular course greatly depended on the professor. She gave examples of other courses she had enrolled that were challenging and engaging.

> "You really could not 'cut-corners' in these classes. If you didn't do the reading well, you will be exposed in class. This course in sociology I took was really tough…there was a lot to read and the professor made sure we wrote weekly response papers which he read and will follow up in class for each student to explain. You have to know what you are talking about…it was not the kind of class you just skim through the reading and come and talk about nothing. I really had to be on my feet in that class but at the end of the class, I felt I had learnt a lot and earned my grade" (Mia: December 14, 2009).

Interacting with peers was difficult for most women. What affected graduate mothers more were unfriendly and disrespectful relations and encounters with other students. Nbu, Mia, and many others felt judged by their peers as being inadequate. They talked about instances

where classmates would meet them some time after a course and express surprise that they were still in the program. "It seems they always expect you to quit because you could not express yourself well…" While such attitudes from peers are upsetting, it is the attitudes of some professors that really troubled most graduate mothers. "It is shocking that professors are the first to write off international students as intellectually inferior because of their inability to verbally express themselves," Nbu noted. Another woman added that professors should know that some people write better than they speak, and this is particularly so with many African women who are often not accustomed to public speaking back home. Mia explains the impact of a professor's negative views or judgments on individual students this way:

"A professor has power…the power to decide what grade you get if you are in his class… their words can affect your confidence, so it is important for them not to judge before they get to know you."

Tal also talked about how, in her social science class, a professor expressed surprise at her language after grading her mid-term paper;

"I actually write better than I speak because my minor at the university was English language. As for presentations, I get a bit nervous here (in the U.S.) because of the way I pronounce (accent)."

I wanted to find out in what ways, and to what extent, language affected the learning experiences of these women. Popular perceptions about international students are that their level of language preparedness was insufficient to the tasks they were to engage in. The data shows that language proficiency was especially lacking among students from French-speaking African countries, more so than English-speaking African students. Regardless of the number of years spent studying English, and despite adequate TOEFL scores, comprehension of lectures was

reported to be very difficult for students like Wemba and Nani who did not come from English-speaking countries. Wemba noted that,

"Speaking up in class is especially difficult and anxiety arousing when you are unfamiliar with the language ... I am often unsure of the meaning of the question or of the type of response that is expected until other students volunteer answers."

In the focus group, a few women linked the language difficulty to their choice of seats in class. Nani reported that in the beginning, she made a point of sitting at the back or extreme corner of the class to avoid being called upon frequently to comment on issues in class.

Understanding accents in English was a problem mentioned by several women, and from different perspectives. Sonali mentioned that people found it difficult to understand her, and she had to be conscious of the way she spoke. Mia, Kia, and Ocholi talked about how they struggled to understand their professors in the beginning because of their accents. In Nadia's words,

"Some spoke too fast for me to understand and I did not want to keep asking for them to repeat what they say…sounds rude for me to do that."

While language was a major issue for the initial experience of the few women from French-speaking countries, it was not so much of an issue for English-speaking Africans. However, all the women agreed that understanding the culture and expectations of their various programs was a challenge they had to overcome. As one woman noted,

"Even if you spoke fluent English, you still had to learn about the way things work in the system, such as how to write term papers and the jargons of the discipline to use…these things are so different from what we know back home."

Financing of Graduate Study

Despite cursory mentions of financial or funding issues among students in the discourse and literature on international students, I found that funding was central to the graduate student mothers' ability and decision to pursue further studies. The matter of money and funding was a decision making factor for all the graduate student mothers who would otherwise not be able to afford their studies away from their home countries. Scholarships and financing were part of the entrance package offered to three of the women in the science and applied science programs. Some of the women in humanities and social sciences received guaranteed funding in the form of RA-ship. Others relied on TA, RA, and other on-campus work to finance their studies. The education students (nine in total), except for the sole example of Nbu, were not guaranteed funding, and many had to rely on TA positions in the African Studies department for funding. This did not occur until after they had enrolled and were more comfortable with their setting and their program of study. All of them had enrolled at a time when working off-campus was prohibited for international students.

For many of these women, teaching assistantship (TAship) at the African studies department meant that they were responsible for designing and executing their own courses, often in a designated African language because these language courses do not have full time professors to teach them. These responsibilities, while challenging, are often embraced by these women who find their eventual success in teaching very fulfilling. Some maintained that each term they successfully taught their classes, they were more motivated to persevere in their own research. They tell themselves that "if I can survive the challenges of teaching full course loads, then I have it in me to finish my studies". Even though all the women TAs were very grateful to have their assistantships, but for which they would not be able to afford graduate study, some did

acknowledge that the workload did not commensurate with the stipends they received. As one woman note; "they call us TAs, but we are not assisting anybody and they say we have 50% time, when we do the work load of an assistant professor". Another mother argued that graduate students who taught individual courses in some departments were labeled "instructors" and paid stipends higher than TAs. I had no way of verifying this assertion, but other mothers confirmed this notion and even suggested that African mothers were denied this label because of their "foreign student status".

One woman noted that "if we were Americans, they would have called us instructors instead". She gives an example of her colleague in her program of study (withheld here) who found herself teaching a class that had no instructor. Once she was in charge of the whole class and because she was a citizen, the department decided to change her appointment from TA to instructor. Kia mentioned an example of another African woman(whom I personally knew) who used to be a TA in her department when she was still on F-1 non immigrant student status, but got her appointment changed to instructor when she finally changed her status to a 'permanent resident'. We all knew she was an instructor in her department at the time of this interview, but it was not clear to me whether her 'upgraded role' was made possible because of her immigrant status or some other reason and since she was not part of this study, I could not verify the claim. Suffice here to say that there was consensus among a large section of African student mothers that the university and or the area studies program was underpaying and or overworking them because they were foreigners. As some mother stated; "it just doesn't add-up if you think of it…in other departments, you TA two class sections for a 50% appointment, but over here, we are made to teach three classes for the same time".

Parenting and Studying: Strategies, Support and Barriers

The concept of childcare or baby-sitting as practiced within the U.S. was found to be connected to some of the problems that confront African student mothers pursuing graduate studies at MWU. Contrary to childcare practices in Africa, those in the U.S. whereby one puts the child under the care of "a total stranger" for half or all day turn out to be somewhat discomforting to most of my respondents. As one woman pointed out to me,

> "It is not so much of the money I have to pay as it is about the fact that I feel very uncomfortable that my baby is in the hands of someone I hardly know. I never feel comfortable during school until I pick up my child."

This discomfort is worsened by the publicity and media highlights of complex cases of child abuse in the media, most of which are uncommon in Africa, and thus frightening to them. As another student mother put it, "... it frightens me to take my child to any baby sitter around, especially with all these stories in the air about how some baby sitters treat children who cry a lot." Another participant related her story about how she almost sent her baby to the hospital for a checkup when she picked her up;

> "You know what, one time I heard this news about a childcare provider who had dosed some one's baby with 'pop' so the baby could sleep for long and my baby cries a lot. So, on this day, I went to pick her up and she was asleep. I picked her up and after 30 minutes of efforts to get home, she was still sleeping. I almost called the police to report. I was actually scared that she slept so much because this was not usual of her."

This uneasiness is mostly due to the fact that these women come from sociocultural backgrounds that rely on extended relations and other family members for support in caring for children. For example, one woman recalled that before coming here she used to leave her

six-month old son with her mother for three or sometimes four months while she was in school until she finished but was never bothered at all, because she "knew his grandmother would even take better care of him" than she did.

Besides, African social norms emphasized womens' place in the home as caretakers of their children and as performers of other home-based chores (Hansen 1992). Not surprisingly, these women shoulder the greater responsibilities of family care even if their husbands are around. In addition to their work as teaching or research assistants, graduate student mothers add the universe of domestic obligations to their already bulging portfolio of academic demands, which obviously leave no time for extra reading and other forms of socialization. Feelings of fatigue and exhaustion from the load of work and isolation were common experiences among the women. This problem is clearly captured in Kia's summery of her daily schedule;

> "You can imagine that I wake up as early as 2 a.m., prepare to teach and or grade papers of a class of about forty students, get the children ready for school, go for my own classes …and eventually retire to bed at about twelve midnight almost every day. In fact, sometimes I wonder where I get the strength to go on."

Similarly, Tal noted that, "…out of the twenty-four hours, mine is only three hours for sleep. I can hardly afford to go out to meet old friends much less make new ones."

Even though most of the women are aware of the availability of support services and resources such as counseling and stress management centers, not many have sought assistance from them in grappling with their problems. This is because of the unfamiliarity of such support services, which are taken care of through the kinship networks and other cultural support systems that exist in many African societies.

At the time of these interviews, none of the women had children in the teen years but many did hint at the anxiety of raising their children into the teen years in an environment many considered too volatile. "I worry, I worry a lot about being here when my kids are in their teens," Kia noted. She gave examples of some African families who are struggling to deal with their teen children who in her view have "picked up the American ways." Asked what these "American ways" were and whether similar issues are not found among teens back home, Nadia explained that issues like drugs and guns in the high schools are not common issues among high school kids in her home country.

> "These (drugs and guns) are not easily available to kids in high school in my country because most of the high schools are boarding schools with strict rules and kids can't afford the cost of such items…"

In Nadia's view, because children in high school often do not have their own means of earning incomes, they are unable to afford "extras" like drugs, and even where they could afford; the strict monitoring systems of boarding schools serve as deterrents for such activities.

Another issue in this project was that the ability of student mothers to effectively balance their family responsibility was influenced by the economic situation of the student, and the family for that matter. I found that these women face special problems from the outset due to lack of essential support. First and most important, they suffer from under capitalization. There were great variations between women who were single mothers and those who lived with their husbands in this regard. Students who live with their husbands (who in most cases are also students) admitted that the two sources of income when combined made a lot of difference, which ultimately eased a lot of problems associated with graduate school.

More generally, the economic situation of the student mothers I spoke with was such that almost all of them depend on teaching or research assistantship, ranging from 20 percent to 50 percent FTP, with annual stipends not exceeding $12,000 as their main, or sometimes only, source of income. The level and source of income became a determining factor in how women switched their roles as mothers and students. I was told that this factor largely impacts their ability to afford the cost of childcare services even if they wanted to engage such services. As Nola indicated, "Well, there are babysitters and other day care facilities around but how much money do I get from this assistantship to be able to pay for them and still keep body and soul?"

Indeed, because stipends from these teaching assistantships are often low, most of the student mothers are forced to take up more teaching hours, as in the case of another woman who observed that; "I could have opted to work fewer hours so I can have more time for other things but with my two kids, even this percentage assistantship is not enough." Consequently, the heavier workload of students makes it difficult for them to find time for their own coursework or dissertations. Sonali, who was an advanced student at the time of interview stated that, "Sometimes I forget that I have something like a dissertation to write." Another woman attributed the delay in finishing her dissertation to obstruction from her teaching assignments, which in her view were still not commensurate with the stipend she received. As Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) note, the cost of childcare for many ordinary working mothers in the U.S. are often higher than one salary can sustain, especially if the woman student buys as much time as she needs, which she frequently does not do. The lack of money to buy time and release energy therefore can be a serious handicap. For instance, Tal stated that, "If I manage to attend my class and do my teaching, the rest of the time I have

to be here to take her [daughter]…I could spend a little more time on my school work if I had some place to leave her but how do I do that when I cannot afford to pay?" Apart from the fact that these teaching workloads are heavy and come with little stipends, they are often not consistent or guaranteed appointments from the university.

For some of student mothers, however, the contributions from programs like the Child-Care Resource Services run by the Department of Human Services in which working mothers and mothers in certain educational programs receive financial assistance to pay for childcare have been very helpful in securing childcare services for them. One student mother observed that "this childcare resource thing is really like a second grandmother for me. I don't know how I could have afforded 200 dollars per week from these peanuts I earn from my assistantship." But here again, it is not opened to all manner of working mothers, especially foreign graduate students, and many of the women I interviewed in this project were not eligible for such a program in MWU.

Educational or Academic:

It is often said that for every one unit of course work, three times the number in hours of reading per day is required for good performance in graduate school. Granted this is the case, it means that the African student mother requires not less than ten hours of reading every day in order to perform well in graduate school. It is mandatory for all international students to register not less than three units in a term to maintain student visa status. With the universe of domestic obligations, work demands as teaching and research assistants, and lack of money to buy time from childcare, the possibility that these women are able to find ten hours in any single day to devote to private studies is far from reality. As Nadia observed, "...the twenty

four hours in a day are not enough for people who only work and school how then can I with all my domestic troubles, afford ten hours of reading a day?"

This is not to say, however, that one needs less than ten hours of reading a day to do well in graduate school. But if it were almost impossible to find ample time for studies, one would wonder how these women are performing in their academic studies.

Finding an appropriate time for private studies also became a great challenge to many of the women in this study. For some, studying at night after the children have retired to bed is the most suitable time. As one put it "…graduate studies for me is some kind of …business you know; the whole day, besides the time spent in class, I also spend time in getting my children ready for the different activities of the day, getting the house clean, groceries… and I only get to do my private studies after they have been put to bed." Similarly, another woman stated, "Unlike other graduate students, my study time begins after my children are in bed; sleep is a luxury." But for others, especially those living with their spouses, it is difficult to maintain a night time study period since they must also fulfill other conjugal obligations.

As Etzkowitz (2001) attests, part of the difficulty women experience in defining their performance as adequate to the task is due to their isolation. In this regard, the importance of programs like presentations, lectures, and conferences cannot be overemphasized. Apart from their contribution to students' repertoire of knowledge, such programs also serve as platforms for networking and interaction, necessary for students' future success in the job market. For most African student mothers in MWU, however, the inability to buy time from childcare, coupled with their heavy and tight domestic and teaching schedules, make it almost impossible for them to attend some of these programs. This is evident in the words of Fousia who explained that, "as a mother, participating in programs like seminar presentations and

attending conferences just because they will be helpful for you in the cause of your program is some kind of a luxury unless you are doing a presentation personally. You simply cannot afford to attend a presentation at 3:30 after your class at 3:00 when you have your baby waiting to be picked up at 4:00…" In a similar light, Stella thought that:

"Everything you have to do concerning your program has to be kind of absolutely necessary; it has to be such that you cannot continue your program without it but attending conferences or things like that, even though that will help greatly in ones program and in the future, one can afford to sacrifice that sometimes when the need arises."

It is in this regard that a "push" or support from student advisors and mentors is very necessary. The reality of graduate school is such that in most cases female graduate students are often left to be the rugged individualists, having to fend for themselves (Etzkowitz 2001). This rugged individualism puts more stress on the graduate student mother who is already stressed by the sheer volume of her studies, childcare, and family duties. Without a support network of people with more experience, it is even more difficult for student mothers to sustain their family responsibilities and the high demand of graduate academic work.

As Fish (1993) indicates, "We graduate students, with our greater investment in academic life, sometimes require tangible evidence of our mentors' faith in us. That might mean being invited to a dinner, included on a panel, or treated with seriousness and respect" (p.187). This is particularly true in the case of the African student mother whose self-confidence may already be on the down side because often the consequences of social isolation and loneliness have been attributed to inherent deficits within the women themselves, to which many of the

women I interviewed agreed. The experiences of separateness and stigma make more understandable the tendencies for self-blame, lack of self-confidence, and fear of risk-taking.

The intense nature of work in graduate school leaves little or no room for childcare. This compels many women to make a choice between graduate studies and raising families. Given these alternatives, many women have chosen to either delay childbirth or abandon the idea all together in order to pursue their dreams or goals of higher education. It is no wonder, then, that graduate study is sometimes considered to be for childless women. Many women have, however, come to the realization that delayed childbirth with its associated complications are undesirable and yet, refusing to give birth denies one of the motherly satisfaction and social acceptability, especially in contexts like Africa where children are considered markers of women's social and perhaps economic prosperity. Childcare programs, by alleviating some daily tasks of women, allow them to contribute in other ways to their own economic, academic, and social betterment (Sheldon1990). Unfortunately, these are often not available, or where they exist as in MWU, unaffordable to many graduate student mothers.

Chapter Seven

The Belly of the Beast

Students and the institution

African graduate student mothers' first contact with the university is from the perspective of "customers" selecting their university. They are treated well, courteously, and supported to enroll at MWU. Then, as they arrive on campus and over the course of their studies, they bump up against various rules and regulations regarding their learning, and some invisible barriers about course selection, poor teaching practices, and so on. When they need support to navigate these unexpected challenges, there is none. The women, like other minority groups of students, are recognized as bearers of culture who will contribute toward the diversity of the campus. From this perspective, they are unknown and mysterious. On the other hand, they are malleable and knowable and there to be improved, resulting in ambivalence in the university's regard of them. The women also develop ambivalence towards the university: we are able to see both deference and resistance. Deference is expressed in how the women excuse the behavior of instructors, grading practices, and poor relations ("Maybe I am too sensitive," "It's probably my fault," and "I should have known better not to trust"). Resistance can be seen in the everyday acts of the mothers who go about their studies and duties, with "eyes and ears wide open," completely aware of the ways in which they are constrained, and finding their way to overcome their challenges.

A pattern I noticed was a tendency to blame themselves, or apologize for their reaction to some of the problems they encountered. This is because of the reinforcement of the view that difficulties encountered "must be" the result of individual student problems relating to acculturation, or personality, and so on. The women were very lucid in their views of

internationalization, and were of the opinion that it should occur through the interaction of students. This was not, in their view, happening at MWU. There was a lack of mutuality and reciprocity that would make the university and the relationships within it reflect the values of diversity, multiculturalism, and internationalization. A fairly common theme that emerges across the narratives is the absence of consistent interaction and socialization with domestic students. There is little of the mutuality and reciprocity that the women came to expect from an internationalized experience.

Identity and African Women Interactions

The implications for internationalization of higher education lie in examining how African student mothers understand the global and national identity assigned to them, and whether and how these differ from how they see themselves. Do African student mothers perceive a distinction between how they see themselves and how others identify them? Or do they identify increasingly with a national identity as the only identity they can inhabit in their role as international students? Are they able to resist the ways in which they are identified, and how are they able to do this? What is the nature of the tensions that arise from the disparate images of national identity that are assumed to be a "true" state of their identity, and other aspects of their identities?

Identities, as Rizvi (2005) maintains, are defined against "encroaching forces of globalization" (p. 331). With the emergence of "new cultural space" of the conditions of globalization, "social identities are no longer tied unambiguously to territories" (Rizvi 2005, 337). Caglar (1997) referring to the extent of migration patterns, comments that people define themselves "in terms of multiple national attachments ... that encompass plural and fluid cultural identities" (p. 169). Identity is formed in relation to others. The opinions and regard of others

towards us and the nature of our relationships with others shape our views of self. This becomes particularly important when this relationship is influenced by power.

> Identity is very powerful in helping us understand not only ourselves, but our place in society and how we connect with each other as a way to understand our collective destinies. Identity is powerfully linked with knowledge production. Who we are, the journeys that we've gone through, how we understand the self are all implicated in how we understand the society in which we live (Dei, and Gismondi, 1999, p. 5).

African women in US institutions are forced to come to terms with Africanity for the first time and often have to contend with the burden of representing "all things African" in discussions and other social contexts. On the continent, most people in rural areas live under ethnic categories. Some educated, middle class, or urban dwellers may see themselves as members of a nation. It is in the U.S. (and other western contexts) that a Nigerian Ibgo, a South African Zulu, and a Kenyan Kikuyu suddenly and unequivocally become Africans.

The condition of Africanity both marginalizes and expands the African woman's horizons at the same time. She is no longer an Acholi or a Ugandan but an African—a member of that mythical race created by the White imagination as a foil and a justification for the holocaust of slavery and colonial exploitation (Nesbitt, 2002). She is not only responsible for Somalia, Congo, and Sierra Leone but also tied inexplicably to the inner city street harlot and drug addict. In the likely encounter with a police profiler, skin color will trump national origin every time. Color also trumps education, erudition, and accomplishment. Thus, African student mothers must negotiate new identities that can no longer depend on the security of nationality and ethnicity but are not exactly African-American either. Some have approached this by carefully avoiding clothing that expose some body parts or look "too sexy" and emphasize their "Africanness" by

wearing garments made from "home." Doing so however, also exposes them to what Nbu describes as "vilifications from our African American brethren" and others who consider Africans as backward and barbaric. Furthermore, by being constructed as able to represent their culture in their person, it homogenizes the culture, as well as placing on the African woman what Brah refers to as the "burden of representation."

The work of scholars such as Dei has resulted in our understanding that identity is a site of positioning, struggle, and contestation. "Race, articulated through the codes of nation, culture and identity, divides those who belong from those who are made other" (Yon, 2000, p. 12). Dei and others (Dei & Calliste 2000,Yon, 2000) have illustrated in their research with minoritized groups how race is used to create a discourse affixed to human bodies, making race a discursive category. Although race is theorized as a discursive site, race can also "fix" identity as a marker of immutable physical difference. What possibilities are there for transcending such positioning?

Similar to the experiences of Black American students in White colleges discussed by Joe Feagin, and his colleagues, African women often find themselves in situations where they have to act as "defenders and explainers of their group"(Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996). When American (mostly White) professors attempt to include minority students into class discussions, it is often done in ways that place enormous pressure on minority students to represent their entire social group as one African woman notes:

> "I had this class where the professor will always ask me how people in Africa do this or that….even when the issue is basically a general idea. I find it ridiculous that this woman (professor) would think that there is an African version to everything. I had to point out some day that examples I may give cannot even be representative of my country let alone the entire continent"(RI: 12/11 2009).

The university environment is a microcosm of the structures of and discourses on cultural relations prevailing in the wider social arena. Accordingly, "citizenship" in the university is accorded to "real" Americans, the locals who are culturally neutral. Students like African women in this study who have culture, are visibly different and seen as "foreign" are not really a part of the university. They should be "accommodated" but they only aspire to citizenship in the university community. They are not able to have citizenship by virtue of their visible difference. Cultural and racial difference impose limitations on agency as stereotyping, exclusion, and other forms of discrimination create views of the self that are difficult to transcend. African women are often less prepared for the pervasive racism and second class status that they have to overcome in U.S. institutions.

Systemic Racism and African Women Interactions

White domination is often rationalized by the belief that the inferiority or superiority of a group's abilities, values, and culture are linked to their physical characteristics such as skin color (Feagin, and Sikes 1994; p. 4). Being Black, African student mothers cannot escape the negative stereotypes among White professors, staff, and students about Black inferiority so engrained in the U.S. society. Such perceptions are often revealed in the differential treatment and responses toward African students by professors especially in classrooms, overt comments about African students being "affirmative babies"; meaning they were admitted not on the basis of their qualifications, but because of the institution's response to demands of affirmative action. In their analysis of Black students' experiences in predominantly White colleges and universities, Feagin, Vera and Imani (1996) observe that "the subtle and overt distinctions that are made in everyday interactions define the character of the social position one occupies in interaction with others" (p.94). In my interviews with African graduate student mothers, this theme was echoed by many.

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An African woman describes her experience of indifference and marginalization in a graduate seminar taught by a White professor.

> "I took this seminar on research methods with this guy….it was just three of us out of 11 students that were not white. The two of us who were Black, one was an African American guy and the other student was Asian looking, she could have been bi-racial…I don't know that for sure, but I could tell by her Americanized accent that she probably was born here or grew up here…but anyway, it was just the three of us from non-White backgrounds. For the first six to eight weeks, I realized this man ignored every comment or contribution I made in class. Any time I raised a point, he will just keep quiet and either ask another student or move the discussion on to another focus. At first, I thought that was just his policy not to affirm or dispute any point of view that students raised, but as the class progressed, I noticed he would heartily commend the good points that the other White kids made but when I make a point, everybody acted like I did not exist in the class. But when the same point that I raised earlier is mentioned later by another student, the professor will make comments like, 'That was insightful.' At first, I thought maybe it was because I spoke in an accent that may not be understood, but as time went by; I just noticed it was a deliberate action to make me feel invisible." (R.I., 12/11/2009)

This student went on to explain how she had to interrupt the discussion one day after a point she had made was ignored by the professor, only for another student to state the same point shortly after and received positive compliments by the professor.

> "…. But a few minutes later, another White girl basically repeated verbatim, what I said earlier, and this man went ecstatic with praise for the great insight the girl had…I just couldn't ignore it anymore." (R.I., 12/11/2009)

To some White professors, the African woman in graduate school is nothing more than an accident of some diversity or affirmative action policies. Unlike African American women who are viewed as domineering, African women are perceived by White professors as timid and subdued creatures who lack self confidence and initiative; two key ingredients necessary for a successful graduate study. A senior faculty in the college of education once told me during an interview for a research assistantship he advertised that he finds it difficult to believe that African women can be self-directing since they have lived all their lives under the yokes of their fathers and husbands.

"…. You know this job requires self initiative and motivation (he said) and I find it difficult to imagine that the spirit you show here today can be sustained….I hardly come across African women and ….I think it's a total waste of resources to fund such women since their only purpose is to serve their husbands and give birth to countless children."

It may well be that this particular professor is just downright nasty and his actions may not reflect the majority who work with African students daily. But even the attitudes of well meaning professors sometimes convey nothing more than a lack of interest. Describing some of her experiences, Acholi, a fourth year African student mother of three notes;

"You know, sometimes I don't know what to call the reaction that I get when I meet with some professors. You probably have faced such a thing before…where you go to meet with a professor, and after saying what you want to say for about 3 minutes, you get this attitude of 'What did you say?' ... It looks like as soon as you start to speak, they tune off their ears and minds… In total black-out until you are done, then they turn back on as if they just recovered from some trance."

This "zoning out" attitude, as some of us call it, has become a common experience for many African women in U.S. graduate schools. What is interesting in the case of these women is the fact that their experiences are not only limited to their interactions with Whites. Other non-European international students have come to share in the racial frame of Blacks as intellectually inferior to others. One of my respondents shared her story about her friendship with an Asian international student who asked her why African students are not into the "smart courses" like engineering and science.

> "I once had a Chinese course-mate ask me why African students are not as 'smart,' even though I had just finished rewriting her essay for her research specialization. I asked her what she meant by Africans not being smart and she pointed to the fact that there are no Africans doing the 'hard subjects' like engineering and science. I got so upset that day…." (R.2. 12/13/2009)

Another woman also noted that,

> "Even though we outperform them wherever we are, they still think they are better than us. I don't think it's a numbers problem… we could fill all the so-called hard subjects but there will still be something wrong with us."

One observed that, "Those subjects are called hard and smart because we (Africans) are not there… if we get in there, they will no longer be smart or hard."

Although these accounts may point to individual prejudices and bigotry, it is obvious that such feelings, biases, and stereotypes are widespread and ultimately influence the individual's ability to form meaningful alliances with others within the institution.

Systematic Discrimination and African Women.

In many ways, the women in this study were visible in ways they did not wish to be seen, and are rendered invisible when they seek recognition and belonging. The contrast between who they think they are, and how they are treated, creates dissonance in how they perceive themselves throughout their study. Some resist by withdrawing, and others endure the suffering silently. In their work on how Black middle class experience life in White working environments, Feagin and Sikes (1994) observe how subtle forms of exclusion work to bar Blacks from professional positions. Quoting Thomas Pettigrew, they note, "Racial discrimination is basically an institutional process of exclusion against an out-group on largely ascribed and particularistic grounds of merit" (p.19). While Whites may have the power to discriminate as individuals, they argue, much of their power to harm comes from membership in White-dominated organizations and social networks.

In one respondent's statements in their work, he notes that;

> "You may move into an environment and not know the rules, and therefore not know how to play the game and not know how to succeed….the barriers and obstacles are often that people will not allow you into the inner circle. ….the students who get the best grades are the students who know how to talk to the law professors. They know how to call on their fathers, brothers, and uncles to introduce them into the profession…."
>
> (Feagin and Sikes, 1994. p,141)

Like the respondent quoted above, African women experience similar exclusion from the inner circles within and outside of their departments. For these women however, the discrimination and racism they face is not only in the hands of White professors, students, and staff, as one respondent notes, "You would think that it is only Whites who are always racists, but I can swear

that the African Americans and Latinos are more vicious and blatant in their disdain for us than the Whites".

This particular student goes further to explain the difference between "White racism" and "Black racism" toward African students.

"The difference is that, for White professors and students, you are often seen as not smart enough to be in graduate school; let me even say that you are not considered to be human, you don't exist!...and when you have an occasion to prove that you might even be smart, you are still a backward person in their mind. But for the African Americans, you are often seen as a threat to their material and economic resources. You often hear comments like 'We (African Americans) fought for affirmative action only for you (Africans) to come and enjoy after you sold us (African Americans) out as slaves.' So because they believe that the benefits of what their ancestors toiled for should be reserved for only African Americans, they feel resentment that we are here today and some even think that we are better treated by the Whites than they are." (R.2.: 12/19/ 2009)

It seems to me from the accounts of these women that while African women may experience discrimination from both White and Black American professors and students, the reasons or motivations behind these actions differ between Whites and Blacks. On the one hand, Whites view these women as inferior and not graduate material to work with. On the other hand, Blacks see them as competitors over resources and opportunities they (African Students) do not deserve. Among other international students also, they are perceived as inferior; a view similar to the White group. All of these perceptions and actions overall have been shaped by the colonial experience and the discourse that present the African native as barbaric and backward—they can be trained in useful skills to do certain tasks, but can never be smart enough to shed off the

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backwardness. Recent writings by African American scholars like Henry Louis Gates Jr. on the other hand have also presented the native African as an accomplice in slavery. What readers of such writings forget, as one woman pointed out to me, is the fact that not every African arriving in the United States is a member of the tribes or kingdoms that profited or participated in slavery. How this affects these women in how they network is the focus of the ensuing section.

Networking and African Women

Graduate study in the U.S. is structured in such a way that individuals have to form or belong to some kind of group in order to survive. From class discussions or assignments, to research assistantships and forming academic committees, students have to form alliances with other individuals in order to succeed. Unlike African American students in predominantly White institutions, African women do not usually have such avenues or organizations like study groups, sorority groups, or black cultural houses in which to interact, network, and develop effective coping mechanisms for their environment. In a situation where professors hold negative stereotypes about certain groups of students, it becomes difficult for such students to get closer to professors and for the professors to know the actual strengths and weaknesses of the students.

A general tendency in networking, however, is for individuals to interact and share sentiments with others who have similar characteristics (Lin 1982). Although African students in general are viewed in U.S. institutions as a group, they vary greatly in language and cultural and almost every other demographic feature except the color of their skin (which is also questionable). In fact, when it comes to similar characteristics and the principle of homophily, African women are no more similar among themselves than they are to other racial groups in the U.S. Therefore the idea that they are more likely going to network with other African students is a farfetched one. A sixth year graduate student succinctly describes this experience thus;

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"It is not easy to discuss such painful experiences with other African students because,

we all come from different countries in Africa and you know we also have our own ethnic

tensions that we bring along to this country."

In most cases, the individual's encounter with racism is often viewed by others as a personal

weakness of the person and may lead to further isolation and humiliation by other African

students. Overall, U.S. higher education institutions are beset with racial and other forms of

stratification which affect the nature of interactions between groups of individuals. The

limitations in mutual interaction in turn influence the nature of ties individuals form which often

turn out to be homogenous (comprising members from similar racial-ethnic and often gender

backgrounds).

However, human agency may be frail, especially among those with little power, but it

happens daily and mundanely, and it deserves our attention. As Holland et al (1998, p. 5)

observe, humans' capacity for self-objectification—and through objectification, for self

direction—plays into both their domination by social relations of power and their possibilities for

partial liberation from these forces. As I listened to their stories, one of the strong impressions

the student mothers left on me was a sense of their strength and resilience. Even when the

women were talking about difficult circumstances and appeared to be vulnerable, and at times

sad, they did not convey a sense of weakness or of victims. Their silence did not appear to come

from voicelessness or lack of agency, but rather from choice. As some of them observed, they

drew strength from knowing that their experiences were only temporal and would end when they

graduated and went back home. Others balanced out the poor classroom relationships by seeking

social connections outside of the classroom; mostly among parents of their children's friends.

Another one of the ways in which I understand this growing agency is the strategy of transformative resistance used by the students, which, as I explained in Chapter 4, is not simply opposition to barriers or constraints. Resistance is developed in choosing a variety of strategies to deal with the situation; "*better* to be silent," "I want to show my idea was right," and "I just work hard to excel…to prove them wrong." Even among the women who did not express or display active strategies or improvisation, there was a sense among them that the very condition of occupying difficult spaces, the dissonances between their expectations and the reality led to a "new" realization. Their self-awareness and understanding was part of their becoming international, albeit in unexpected ways.

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